

The Process of Mobilization and Establishment of a Food Cooperative

ASSESSMENT TOOL

KNOWLEDGE TRANSLATION

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This document is part of the [*Toolbox for Carrying Out a Food Access Diagnostic and Evaluating the Effects of a Food Cooperative*](#) developed as part of the EffICAS study conducted by the Institut national de santé publique du Québec. One of the toolbox's objectives is to help stakeholders reflect on the process of establishing a food cooperative, whether in progress or already completed.

More specifically, this tool can be used to document and assess ongoing or completed processes of intersectoral mobilization and establishment of a food cooperative. This can be useful for improving a current process, or for doing better next time.

Intersectoral mobilization is necessary for establishing a food cooperative, since the levers for acting on the food environment are held by various players in society (companies, ministries, municipalities, health sector, schools, etc.). In concrete terms, citizens and professionals from the municipal and public health sectors, social economy organizations, granting agencies, and others are called upon to pool their expertise and resources.

SOURCE

This tool for evaluating the process of mobilizing and establishing a food cooperative has been adapted from the interview guide used with key informants in the EffICAS research project.

The guide used in EffICAS study was developed by the research team, drawing on Billion's work (Billion, 2018) on the role of actors in trade and distribution in processes of territorial food governance, as well as that of Fortier (Fortier, 2002) on intersectoral collaboration. Sections relating to the local context of food security have been added by the EffICAS team to explore the role of food cooperatives in this regard.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Open-ended questions guide discussion with actors involved in the process of intersectoral mobilization and of the establishment a food cooperative. These individual interviews can be carried out during the development of the cooperative project to identify areas for improvement or after the fact to identify better ways of doing things.

In this interview guide, the initial needs of the communities that led to the development of the projects are discussed, as are the process of establishment and the steps to be taken, as well as intersectoral mobilization. Discussion points on the facilitators and obstacles, the impact of the initiative on the community and citizens, and the measures put in place to ensure the cooperative's sustainability are included.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. The stakeholder's role

- What are or were your ties to the cooperative project?
- What was or is your role in this project?
- How long have you been involved? During which phase were you involved?
- Why did you get involved in the project?

2. Project start-up and characteristics

- What needs did the project address? How were these needs identified?
- Why is the cooperative project important for the community or municipality?
- How did the initiative begin? Who initiated the project?
- What did the project consist of initially?
 - Are goods and services other than food offered at the cooperative? Was this part of the original project?
 - Why did you choose the cooperative model?
 - What is the current or planned food offering at the cooperative?
 - Convenience store, small grocery store, grocery store, etc.?
 - How and why were or will these food items be chosen?
 - How and why did you choose this building or lot for the cooperative?
 - Does the cooperative have or will it have salaried employees or volunteers?
- Is the completed or in-progress project different from what was originally planned? In other words, did you do what you set out to do?
- How will the target audience be reached or has the initial target audience been reached by the project?

3. Project creation process

- How did or does the process of creating the project unfold?
- What are the major milestones achieved so far, and which ones are still to come?
 - For example: public survey, creation of a provisional committee, feasibility study, business plan, financing, formation of the board of directors.
- Do you have access to a guide outlining the various steps to be taken or to help you navigate the process of establishing a cooperative (information and ways of doing things)?
- Do you have support from people outside the project? If needed, who can you contact to get support?

4. Community mobilization

- What's been or is being done to mobilize citizens around the project?
- What elements of the context in which the project was created influence or have influenced this mobilization?
- Have the needs identified been raised by the community?
 - For example: community surveys.
- What is or was the role of the local population in the project creation process?
- What is the number or percentage of residents in the area who are members of the cooperative?
- Would you like to see the community more involved in the project? If so, how can it be better mobilized?

5. Concerted action

- Who are the partners and collaborators involved in the project (professionals, organizations, municipality, RCM, etc.)?
 - Have public health stakeholders been involved in or approached about your project?
 - Do actors in local production and distribution collaborate or have they collaborated with the project?
 - Have new partnerships been developed or are others being developed?
- What is or was the level of involvement of partners and collaborators in the project?
- How did the concerted action unfold between the partners? How do the partners work together?
- Has the project created new links between the various actors?
- Are there other actors who didn't collaborate? If so, how do you think their contribution could or might have benefited the project, and how could or might they have been involved?

6. Facilitating factors

- In your opinion, what are the most important reasons for the progress or successful implementation of the cooperative project?
 - For example: political climate, role of the media, external support, social networks, leadership, adaptation, knowledge, low resistance to change, strategy, capacities and skills, funding, shared vision.
- For the steps already completed, what elements could have helped you develop your project more easily or more quickly? And what about for the steps still to come?

7. Barriers

- What are the main barriers or obstacles to your project? How have you managed to get around them so far?
- What measures could or should be put in place to limit these barriers and further support your cooperative project?
- How can we avoid these barriers next time?

8. Project sustainability

- How can we ensure the cooperative's long-term viability?
- What mechanisms and resources are in place to achieve this, or should be in place?
 - For example: recruiting new project leaders, ongoing member training, partnerships.

9. Actual or anticipated impact of the cooperative on the community

- How can or does such a project benefit its community?
- What are the cooperative's real or anticipated impacts on citizens' eating and well-being, community vitality, and the region's economy?
- Apart from being a business, does the cooperative have, or will it have, an additional role in its community?

10. Others

- Are there any other points to raise about the cooperative project?
- Do you have any advice on best practices for a group of people wanting to set up a cooperative in their community?
- What lessons can be learned from your experience?

IDENTIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT

Many people involved in the cooperative's development can be approached for an interview. It's a good idea to select people from a wide range of backgrounds, so as to gather a variety of viewpoints and gain a better understanding of each person's reality and issues. For example, in the EffICAS project, interviewees came from cooperative project committees and boards of directors, as well as from the municipal, public health, and social economy sectors.

Following contact with a potential key informant, it is advisable to obtain their written consent for their comments to be recorded and used anonymously as part of the project. If desired, financial compensation (e.g., a gift card) can be offered to thank them for their time. It is advisable to schedule ten interviews or so in total. Once the interviews have been carried out and their content analyzed, the question of whether data saturation has been reached—meaning the point at which carrying out any further interviews will provide little or no new insight—can guide the decision as to whether to carry out further interviews. Since this process involves people, we suggest you find out whether you need the approval of an ethics committee.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Depending on preferences, interviews can be conducted in person, by videoconference, or by telephone. To facilitate the process, it is useful to record the interviews, with the consent of the key informants, so that exact terms can be replayed and transcribed. The use of videoconferencing software is advantageous in a number of ways: you can meet someone from another region without having to go to them, eliminate travel and its associated costs, and you can sometimes record the interview.

As the interview is semi-structured, it must be adapted to the key informant and his or her comments. This guide is intended to support the interview, and it is neither necessary nor expected that all questions be asked. Planning a time slot of 60 to 90 minutes will allow to cover many of the themes in the guide, and is the ideal maximum length for this type of interview.

PROCESSING, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

To facilitate analysis and interpretation of the comments made during the interviews, it is best to transcribe and code them in qualitative analysis software.

Transcription

This is traditionally done after listening to the conversation and transcribing the words exactly. If you plan to outsource this task, budget for it.

Coding

Software for coding the text of the interview is often used to analyze qualitative interviews by theme. In the absence of qualitative analysis software, if the number of interviews is small, it is possible to do this manually using word processing software (such as Word), but this can take a certain amount of time; Coding itself is a time-consuming process, regardless of the method used.

As part of the EffICAS project, an inductive analysis was carried out, using a constant comparison method, to compare new data with emerging theories. In concrete terms, this means that previously identified important themes have been associated with passages in the verbatims. Then, for each theme, the coded passages were analyzed to identify general findings, concordant and divergent statements, and contextual differences. New themes were also added as the interviews progressed, because of their relevance to the subject.

To ensure anonymity when publishing results, it is suggested that fictitious first names be used when reporting quotes, and that the words reported do not allow informants to be identified. If anonymity is not desired, be sure to obtain the informants' consent.

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