

Set-up a youth council

A Youth Council is an organised group of youngsters who represent “the voice” of youth in the cooperative, they provide recommendations and guidance around issues affecting young people. The youth council is mainly internally oriented, which means it focuses mainly on cooperative affairs. They make sure that the cooperative, in its activities, external communication and lobby, is also taking into consideration the interest of young farmers. The youth can implement and participate in agricultural initiatives, which are in line with the goals of the cooperative.

Be aware that you can replace the word “youth council” for “youth group” if your organisation is not ready yet for an official youth council.

Bottom-up or top-down approach

Some cooperatives set up a youth council initiated by the management of the cooperative. Other youth councils start to exist because some youngsters initiated it themselves and they got support from the cooperative's management. Both ways of setting up a youth council can work out, as long as it is not one-way traffic.

Young members and the board/management of the cooperative need to work together and be supportive, to ensure that the youth council significantly contributes to the cooperative in the long-term and vice versa.

Find out the youth members (young farmers of the cooperative) needs

This is very important; they are the ones who help you decide where your focus should be. You can set-up meetings and invite the young members of your cooperative. It gives you and the management a chance to get to know your young members and their challenges. You can also decide to go on field trips and talk with several young members. Be sure that, you also include members you don't visit, for example by using an online survey or a “call round”.

Why do you set up a youth council?

Why did you start a youth council or group? What is the bigger cause you want to contribute to? If you want to make a difference and let the youth have a voice, then organise yourselves. Always build up a youth group within the main cooperative/organisation. Find out what the key areas are, where the youth can add value or help. Embed your group within the structure of the cooperative, make sure you have a voice, a mandate, an official place on the board. Make this place a competitive one and don't just give it to someone, give it value.

Registering your youth council will strengthen your group. If you want to make a difference you need to have an official voice. It makes you more attractive to join because you are your authority. Besides that, being registered also gives you opportunities to ask for grants.

Which brings us to the next point; build your projects, this gives you the capacity to mobilise many more members. Don't wait for the cooperative to give you orders but make up your plans and show them to the board of the cooperative. If you want to make a difference, you want to empower youth to become active, to create a place for them to have influence, to create shared projects and to have a voice. Together you are stronger!

If you want people to join or follow you, you have to have a clear message about what (activities) you do and why (mission) you do it, let's create that now!



Example mission: there is a massive amount of unemployment under youth in our country, we want to show that agriculture can help to solve part of that problem.

Example purpose: the youth council will advise the cooperative in designing policies that make it more attractive for young farmers to join the cooperative, or that are beneficial when they want to start up their farming business. Young farmers will be given trainings in technical skills and an introductory course (about cooperatives) will be organised for (new) young farmers to empower and involve existing youth members within the cooperative.

Create a group agreement

Whether you decide to make your youth council official or youth wants to get organised with your youth group, we advise creating an official "group agreement", to align everyone in the same direction. In the Youth Council group agreement, you should describe at least the following subjects:

Name

- Give your group a name, important for communication inside and outside the cooperative.
- Where is your group located?

Purpose

- See above for mission and purpose.
- Check if it connects to the BHAG of the cooperative.

Management Committee

- Selection criteria of the youth council/group: size, age, diversity, background, experience, motivation. And the kind of members we are looking for: youngsters that will likely be the farm successors, youngsters that already have their own farm, or youngsters that work at their parents' farm.
- Number of people in the youth council: You can think of a percentage of your young members to represent the group of youngsters. Another way is to let a number of youngsters represent youth for a different region or district your cooperative operates in.
- Duration of terms: commitment timeframe of participants; how long are you expected to stay and how long are you allowed to stay in the youth council's board?
- Time investment: Frequency and duration of meetings. Activities required of Youth Council members. Youngsters need to invest time in the youth council. So, you should make sure they are motivated to commit their time to the youth council. Moreover, your cooperative will also need to commit time to the youth council when it comes to coaching the council, visiting meetings and help to create activities and projects.
- Individual roles and responsibilities of the youth group members, e.g.:
 - Chair/President; schedules board meetings, day-to-day responsibilities according to the youth projects within the coop/organisation, carrying out the goals and policies, attendance of all (cooperatives') board meetings, reports on the progress of the cooperative/organisation, etc.
 - Vice-chair; chair on special subjects as designated by the board, assists the chairperson in the day-to-day management of the organisation. If for any reason, the chairperson cannot fulfil his/her duties the vice chair shall become the chairperson until the next regular bi-annual election.
 - The Secretary; keeps records of all committee's actions, takes minutes at board meetings and general meetings, handles all general electronic or standard correspondence between individuals and the youth council.
 - The Treasurer; gives a financial update at each board meeting, is in charge of all finances of the association, prepares the budget and is responsible for the accurate accounting of the group's activities, takes care for resource mobilisation in collaboration with the chairman.
 - The Coordinator; ensures meetings are effectively organised, guarantees welfare of the members during meetings are met, safeguards the member needs of the young farmers will be taken into consideration at all times, communicates and networks on behalf of the association inside and outside the coop.

Membership

- Who are the members, who is the youth we want to create opportunities for?
- How do we take care of the needs of the youth members?
- How often, how and where do you organise meetings, meet-ups, individual conversations or events for the youth?

Organisational structure

- What is the role and place of the youth council within the coop, what is the place in the organisational chart?
- Do the youngsters only have an advisory role within the cooperative, or do they also have decision-making power? How?
- Describe how you want to work within the board, what do you expect from each other, what do you expect from the coop. Look back at the exercise young & old in the kick-off Youth workshop.

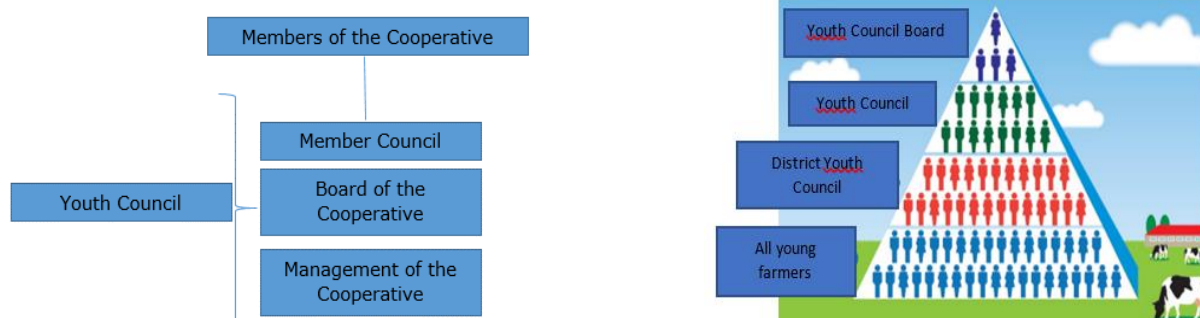
About the place of the youth council within the organisation

To get an idea of how a youth council can be embedded in the organisational structure, look at the figures above. The first example is based on the structure of a Dutch cooperative that has a youth council. In this particular example, the youth council has an advisory role towards the member council, the cooperative board and its management. Depending on the number of youngsters that is part of the youth council, it can have a separate board.

The second example shows what the internal structure of a youth council can look like. As presented, the youth council can be organised like a pyramid. The example is taken from the youth council of FrieslandCampina, which is a Dutch dairy cooperative with more than 19.000 individual members:

- All young farmers who are (potential) members of your cooperative.
- In the case of FrieslandCampina, there is an extra layer (marked red) which represents the district youth council. As the cooperative operates in 21 districts, they chose to let 4 youngsters represent each district.
- For every district, one of these four youngsters will have a seat in the national youth council.
- Some youngsters from the youth council are selected to represent all young members in the youth board.

Depending on the size and working area of your cooperative, you could choose to have just a youth council with a youth board, as shown in the two upper tiers of the pyramid.



Meeting requirements and procedures

Who is planning the board meetings, how often to plan them, do we have a fixed agenda, is there a mentor needed/available, how do we involve the board of the cooperative, how do we decide what to talk about, etc.?

Budget

Start with making a budget for the daily costs of the youth council and also think about possible sponsors.

	<i>Estimated Costs</i>	<i>Possible sponsor</i>
Meeting space		Coop, Restaurant, School
Materials		
Communication & PR		
Coach/Advisor/Trainer		
Travel costs		
Food and drinks		Restaurant, Supermarket
Meetings with members		
Event		
Exchange		
Workshop		
Etc.		

Other things to consider

Policies around equal opportunities, volunteering policy, insurance for group activities, getting a group bank account (and signatories).

Formalisation

Last but not least, one should take abovementioned points into consideration when formalising the youth council in the cooperative's governance structure. You should think about whether and how to change or create by-laws.

Long- and short-term goals

What can the Youth Council do? Some ideas:

- *Interest youngsters to become a member farmer;* members of a youth council can function as a role model towards other young farmers, to also become a member of the cooperative and have a voice within the organisation. E.g. they can organise events to reach other youth, organise exchanges or field trips to inspire youngsters.
- *Identification of youngsters and successors;* as a cooperative you can get more insight into the (potential) young members of a cooperative and the young successors of your member's farms. Having identified this group of youngsters, means you have a database with potential members, employees and management/board members.
- *Training of potential board members;* to ensure continuity within the cooperative, it is of vital importance that you have well-functioning board members. Many cooperatives are facing the challenge of finding new board members. A youth council can function as informal training, while the cooperative can also offer youth formal education through for example a leadership training.
- *Initialize projects for (potential) young farmers;* these projects can be about anything that is related to your cooperative, working together on a mutual goal can bring much energy, inspiration, new members, (job) opportunities etc.
- *Advisory function to the board of the cooperative;* have an advisory role towards the board and the member's council to bring a different perspective on issues. This might mean that the youth council does not have any decision-making power. Giving youth decision-making power or not; as a cooperative, you can decide either way. Both options have pros and cons and it is up to you what fits best your situation.
- *Training youth members to sustain their cooperative in the future.* Through a youth council, different kinds of trainings can be developed. One way is to make the youngsters more knowledgeable on technical aspects of farming, by giving them trainings on how to enhance the quality of the product. Another way is to provide trainings on leadership skills or presentation skills, to develop themselves as entrepreneurs. Moreover, you will need people that are able to take up leadership positions within the cooperative in the future, who know the ins and outs of farming on one hand and the cooperative on the other hand.
- *Enhance commitment of youth members to the cooperative;* when youngsters are getting more involved in the cooperative and they are being heard, it will most likely strengthen their commitment to the cooperative.
- *Motivate other youngsters to become a farmer;* through a youth council, you cannot only bring the message across other young farmers to become a member farmer. Youngsters within the cooperative can also function as a role model towards other young people, showing them that farming is a business. In the end, farmers are needed to feed the growing world population at large, but also to ensure that your cooperative can sustain.

Create long- and short-term goals:

- What do we want to see as a result of our actions within now and 3 years?
- Look at your mission and purpose, and at the future plans from your presentation; create a 2/3 SMART long-term goals, what do you want to have reached within 3 years?
- Put the goals in order of importance.

What will help us to move in the direction of long-term goals?

- For every long-term goal: describe SMART what you want to have reached within 1 year.
- Brainstorm the actions you have to do to undertake the coming year to (start to) make this happen.
- Put names and dates at the actions.

Example members' needs:

- *Training in agricultural skills*
- *Help to get loans*
- *Influencing the whole chain*
- *Getting a better price for the products*
- *Example cooperative board's needs:*
- *Increase the amount of young members*
- *Increase the income of all members*
- *Youth needs to think with the board about technical solutions*

Make sure the activities are SMART and FUN:

- *Field trip or exchange visit*
- *Training*
- *Advice the board on things that matter*
- *Youth council, board, (local) government, funding, project idea meetings*
- *Create attention for youth related issues with farming/agriculture*
- *Practice public speaking*
- *Create newsletters*
- *Bringing in experts*

Plan some QUICK WINS (super nice activities with concrete results) to keep the energy high!

Important

- **Stay close to all youth members:** how are you going to reach out to the youth, to find them? Once you have found them, how are you going to communicate with them. Which topics do they care about, but also the other way around; tell them actively what you are doing (which topics are discussed at member meetings, management meetings and board meetings) and what you have achieved?
- **Networking:** a Youth Council should reach out to others as much as possible. Partnerships are an important part of your Council's overall success. Partners can assist with activities, spread information, pursue sponsorship, offer advice and recruit new members. Make your network visible. Everybody has connections somewhere; in companies, radio stations, schools, municipal council, restaurants, supermarkets, etc. Tell them what you are doing so you can ask them something specific one day.
- **Board:** be sure that you stay in good contact with the board of the cooperative at all times. They need to know what you are doing and which progress you make or challenges you face. Check if your plans cover the needs of the board, the youth members, as well as the trends and the needs of the government/country.
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Tip: although it takes time to set goals and develop a mission statement and structure, a balance between process and outcome must be struck. Let your group establish a pace at which it can work effectively. If everyone is busy and it moves too slowly, they may lose interest, so also try to create quick wins all year-round.

Final remarks

There are many examples of well-functioning youth councils from Agriterra. Some of these cooperatives took them years to reach the point where they are now. As a new Youth Council, you should realise that you have to look for options that are realistic in your situation and context, together with Agriterra's business advisors. The action plan for youth participation should not only be achievable, but also realistic. The bottom-line is that the importance of youth participation is acknowledged by the cooperative and that youngsters get a platform to give their advice, share their voice and if possible, create new opportunities for young member farmers.



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