

NCG's Preferred Practices: A Growing Resource Library

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Since late 2015, National Co+op Grocers (NCG) has been publishing short, targeted resources that can help retail co-op staff efficiently and effectively manage various procedures and aspects of their responsibilities. We call these “preferred practices” and are slowly building a growing library with items that can help staff in a wide range of positions.

What is a preferred practice?

The member and associate co-ops that make up NCG's constituency operate using a wide variety of practices and systems. To some extent, this is a natural result of the way our food co-ops have developed—as independent, locally owned organizations. While U.S. food co-ops have long been committed to sharing ideas and resources with one another, their roots as well as their independent natures have led to many unique and diverse ways of operating.

While this diversity can sometimes contribute to innovation and important individual differences, some practices also contribute to inefficiencies and reduced productivity at the retail level. In the increasingly competitive market that co-ops operate in, NCG is working to do all it can to remove any barriers to increased productivity and efficiencies for co-ops.

One way that NCG does this is through publication of “preferred practices.” These cover short, written, retail operational procedures and aim to streamline systems, provide guidance, and improve performance. By providing simple, succinct documentation as well as support resources to co-ops on all aspects of their operations, we help avoid “reinvention,” support productive training and systems, and drive down overhead and operating costs.

An additional benefit of NCG's preferred practices is more consistency in co-op operational systems. This makes it easier for co-ops to share systems that can be readily applied from one co-op to another. It also means that when NCG needs or wants to provide support to a co-op (due to operational challenges or a desire to expand), NCG staff won't have to focus on more “remedial” improvements to co-op procedures. More consistency also supports NCG's ability to design programs and services and helps ensure that the experiences of NCG's member and associate co-ops in executing NCG's programs require less tailoring and adaptation.

What preferred practices are already available?

To date, NCG has published over 40 preferred practices guides. These are available only to NCG member and associate co-ops through the ncc.coop website. They cover a wide range of topics—the following is just a sample:

- **Finance and accounting:** financial controls, handling monthly payroll accruals, and producing monthly financial statements;
- **Marketing:** advertising and direct marketing, branding, customer market analysis, PR and media readiness, product guidelines, social media, and website management;
- **Meat:** cutting tests, meat grading, receiving and storage, seafood merchandising, shelf-life, and slacking of frozen product;
- **Prepared foods:** managing shrink, operating basic and signature sandwich programs, and using produce and meat culls;
- **Produce:** culling guidelines, managing ethylene, options for culled product, and using culls in prepared foods.

NCG continues to develop and publish preferred practices in all areas and welcomes suggestions or requests for topics to be covered. At this point, we expect to publish further preferred practice resources in 2017 to support successful meat and produce departments as well as owner drives and direct mail campaigns. We anticipate publishing titles to support consistent financial reporting, including conducting quarterly inventory as well as preparing separate financial statements for each of the co-op's business units. □

