

# Guide

## Work/family/participation balance

For housing co-ops



LES COOPÉRATIVES D'HABITATION  
présence des femmes  
pouvoir des femmes

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# Introduction

**W**ork/family/participation balance is given little or no consideration in housing co-ops. In fact, women co-op members consider the issue to be one of the main barriers to fully participating in their living environment. This applies even more to young families, single-parent families and caregivers, who have a strong presence in cooperatives.

The lack of consideration for the multiple family realities, mostly borne by women, has different consequences for all cooperative members:

- Frequent exhaustion among women, mothers of families, who combine cooperative responsibilities domestic tasks, for which they still hold more than their share of responsibility
- The withdrawal of women with young children, especially from positions involving more responsibility (e.g., Board member) due to lack of time
- Tension within the co-op, e.g., intergenerational tension due to the fact that retirees have more time to give than families.

A dozen women from the Bois Ellen Solidarity Cooperative met in the fall and winter of 2018 and 2019 to discuss this topic and develop tools and strategies to support family participation. Accompanied by project officer Katherine Ruault of the *Présence des femmes, pouvoir des femmes* project, they set up a family committee in their cooperative and shared with us several ideas for improving the work/family/participation balance.

This guide is a continuation of the work carried out at Bois Ellen and is intended for co-ops and their members who are concerned and eager to change the way they do things to support family participation and maintain the intergenerational link. In it you will find a compilation of resources, practical tools and good practices suggested by volunteers we have met since the beginning of the “Women's presence, women's power” project.

# Work/family/participation balance: a person's ability to succeed, and grow while fulfilling their family, social, work and cooperative aspirations\*

# 13%

of households are composed  
of **couples with children**

**"For full-time workers, it's a very heavy commitment. A choice has to be made between involvement in the cooperative or family time."**

A female resident

# 16%

of households in  
housing co-ops  
are **single parent families**

**"The time I was least involved was when I was a single mother!"**

A female resident

of which

# 87%

are headed by  
**women**

**"I often meet women who are burned out, they give so much at the price of their personal life."**

A female support worker

Statistics and personal accounts were taken from the needs assessment report for the project "Les coopératives d'habitation : présence des femmes, pouvoir des femmes."

\*Definition inspired by that of the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale (AFEAS)

# Ressources

## Family caregiver groups

- L'Appui, Info-aidant: 1 855 852-7784, [www.lappui.org](http://www.lappui.org)
- Regroupement des Aidants Naturels du Québec (RANQ): [ranq.qc.ca](http://ranq.qc.ca)

## Family organizations

- La Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec (FAFMRO): (514) 729-6666, [www.fafmrq.org](http://www.fafmrq.org)
- Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille (FQOCF): 1 866 982-9990, [www.fqocf.org/](http://www.fqocf.org/)

## Women's centres

- L'R des centres de femmes du Québec: (514) 876-9965, [rcentres.qc.ca](http://rcentres.qc.ca)



# Ideas

## Family activities

- Organize social activities for kids (movie night, homework help, treasure hunts, theme day, camping, etc.).
- Organize intergenerational or knowledge sharing activities for children on pedagogical days.
- Involve kids in choosing family activities (children's general meeting, family or youth committee).

## Organize common living arrangements

- In a general meeting, decide on the schedule for common spaces based on the needs of each group in the co-op (play time for kids, social activities for families, quiet times, homework help, etc.).
- Adopt a democratic system for sharing co-op tasks that allows members to choose the tasks that suit them best. (For instance, parents or people with atypical schedules may prefer tasks that can be done on a flexible schedule.)
- Hold meetings in a common room of the cooperative.
- Institute a day care service or reimburse babysitting costs for committee, Board or General Meetings. (See Appendix B for a sample reimbursement policy)
- Include daycare as a task in the co-op (during co-op work bees or meetings, caring for children or people needing assistance would be counted as participation in the cooperative).
- Or, exempt people from certain tasks when they are responsible for childcare, e.g., during a work bee.
- In line with this, establish a budget that takes these kinds of measures into account.
- Take the time to consult members and create opportunities for discussion on the issues of work/family/participation balance and members' needs and come up with solutions. (See the work/family/involvement balance questionnaire in Appendix C)
- Form a Family Committee (Voir en annexe A un mandat type)

# good practices

## Democratic life for kids

- Get children involved in the life of the cooperative
- Start a youth committee or hold a children's general meeting.
- Organize a kids activity on "living and playing cooperatively" to teach them about the ins and outs of living in a co-op.
- Allow children to participate in committee and Board meetings.

## Consider parents

- Choose meeting times and days that suit young families and single mothers, or alternate meeting times to include members with atypical work hours or other exceptional circumstances.
- Set committee and general meeting dates well in advance to facilitate work/family involvement/participation balance.
- Arrange meeting spaces to be welcoming to children (game table, clearly indicate that children are welcome, etc.).
- Accommodate parents with young children (e.g., don't pressure them to stay for the whole meeting, flexibility on arrival and departure times, demonstrate flexibility and understanding, have an area for breastfeeding, etc.).
- Organize activities for kids to free up parents.  
For example, organize an evening of board games and hold a committee meeting at the same time.
- Hold an information or awareness activity on the reality of people who are responsible for children or others and discuss measures to facilitate their participation.

# Family committee

## Role and mandate

### Composition

The committee is composed of at least three (3) co-op members and residents. Anyone who wants to join is welcome and can become a committee member. Children of members are also welcome to join the committee.

One member of the Board of Directors is a member of the committee. In addition to its members, the committee can call on other people to assist with specific tasks; these individuals are not committee members unless they participate in committee meetings

### Mandate

At the first meeting, the committee appoints one member to head up the committee. Members decide on the committee head's specific duties and the tasks of the other members.

### Committee Responsibilities

The committee reports to the Board of Directors.

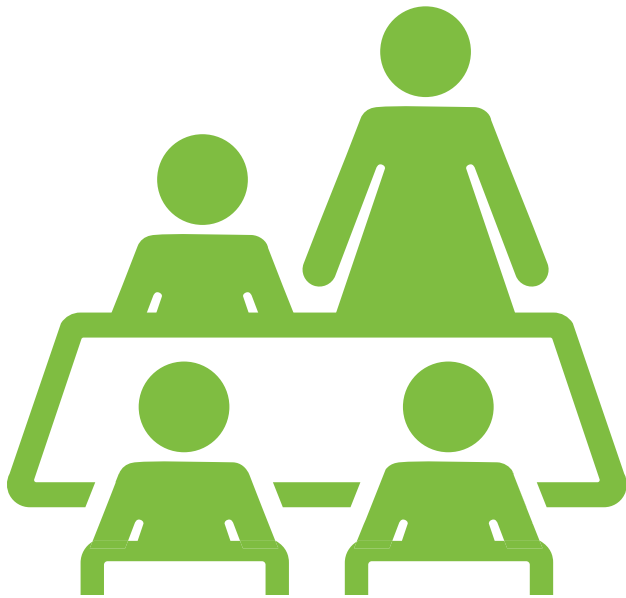
It is responsible for:

- developing tools to promote work/family/participation balance in the cooperative
- transmitting any recommendations they have to the Board and other committees as needed concerning the inclusion of families and children in the cooperative
- working with the participation committee to increase families' participation in co-op life
- organizing social, support or other types of activities for families and children
- working with the recreation committee to jointly organize activities (e.g., intergenerational activities, the organization of family activities for parties organized by the recreation committee, etc.).

To carry out its mandate, the committee:

- makes recommendations to the Board concerning all policies or procedures to help it fulfill its mandate
- applies and evaluates existing policies and procedures and makes recommendations to the Board to improve policies and procedures in the cooperative's general interests
- formulates its action plan at the start of its mandate and evaluates its work at the end, including member participation in tasks and responsibilities; makes recommendations to the Board
- uses adequate work tools that have been validated by the Board (complaint forms, grievance procedures, code of ethics, etc.).





## Meetings

The committee will meet at least once a month or more often if necessary. The date of the next meeting is decided at the meeting and posted on the committee's bulletin board. Depending on the wishes of committee members, young families' attendance can be facilitated by setting a meeting schedule at the beginning of the year. Based on the constraints of young families, certain accommodations in locations, schedules, and participation may be made (e.g., ending a little earlier and announcing it at the beginning of the meeting, sharing comments and opinion by email if unable to attend the meeting, etc.).

Also, in the spirit of work/family/participation balance and considering children's needs, children may also come to the meetings. Depending on the committee's financial resources, reimbursement for babysitters may be offered.

## Reports

The committee keeps an up-to-date register of meeting reports.

Meeting reports should include: meeting locations, attendance/absence list, topics and action on these topics. Attached to meeting reports are any photocopies or excerpts of documents that were used as a basis for discussion and decision (policy excerpt, correspondence, jurisprudence, etc.). The Board of Directors may consult the meeting register.



## Confidentiality and conflict of interest

Committee members respect the confidentiality of any files the committee discusses. These files may contain personal information. If personal information must be disclosed to the Board of Directors, the Board is also required to adhere to the principle of confidentiality.

A committee member who is in a situation of conflict of interest must declare this situation to the committee and withdraw from the discussions and decisions on this subject.

## Tasks of committee members

Committee members share roles to ensure the committee's smooth operation. The following tasks will be distributed at the meeting:

- prepare meeting agendas
- issue reminders about committee meetings
- chair meetings
- submit reports and recommendations to the Board
- see that the action plan and annual work schedule are decided on and carried out
- ensure harmonious functioning of the committee and the inclusion of every member in accordance with her or his abilities
- find people to help out with certain activities organized by the committee
- take notes, writing meeting reports and attach the relevant documents
- keep an up-to-date record of cash receipts and disbursements
- check income and expenses and ensure a balanced budget
- present an activity report to the annual general meeting
- organize activities the committee has decided to hold and complete all the tasks involved in holding them.

# Checklist

Tasks of the Family Committee	Member	Member
<b>1.</b> Prepare meeting agendas, send out meeting notices and reminders		
<b>2.</b> Liaison with the Board and reserve meeting room		
<b>3.</b> Chair meetings of the family committee and ensure that everyone feels welcome and included		
<b>4.</b> Ensure follow through on the action plan		
<b>5.</b> Take notes and keep the committee archives		
<b>6.</b> Update the committee bulletin board (make posters for meetings and activities)		
<b>7.</b> Mobilize other families in the cooperative		
<b>8.</b> Responsible for meeting materials		
<b>9.</b> Responsible for a specific activity		
<b>10.</b> Responsible for the budget		
<b>11.</b>		
<b>12.</b>		
<b>13.</b>		
<b>14.</b>		
<b>15.</b>		

# Reimbursement policy

## Childcare costs

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (in block letters), took care of \_\_\_\_\_ (number) children whose parents are \_\_\_\_\_ for a committee, Board of Directors, or general meeting held on (date) the duration which was \_\_\_\_\_ (number) hours.

I am claiming a childcare cost\* of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

**\* Hourly rate<sup>2</sup>:**

- 1–4 children: \$12
- 5 or more children: \$14

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### RESERVED FOR TREASURER

Cheque no.: \_\_\_\_\_ dated \_\_\_\_\_ in the amount of \$



## Childcare costs

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (in block letters), took care of \_\_\_\_\_ (number) children whose parents are \_\_\_\_\_ for a committee, Board of Directors, or general meeting held on (date) the duration which was \_\_\_\_\_ (number) hours.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### RESERVED FOR TREASURER

Cheque no.: \_\_\_\_\_ dated \_\_\_\_\_ in the amount of \$



<sup>2</sup>Note that the FECHIMM's women's committee decided to set an hourly rate of \$15.

# Questionnaire

## Work/family/participation balance

Name of the coopérative : \_\_\_\_\_

It can be difficult to balance family life and the responsibilities of living in a co-op. To learn more about your needs and your reality, we are asking you, along with all the members of your co-op, to fill out this survey and return it to (insert location chosen). Rest assured that all your answers will remain confidential.

**Thank you in advance for your valuable contribution to this project!**

For more information, contact us at: (insert an email address or telephone number)

<p><b>1.</b> What is your age group?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Under 25  <input type="checkbox"/> 26–35  <input type="checkbox"/> 36–45  <input type="checkbox"/> 46–55  <input type="checkbox"/> 56–65  <input type="checkbox"/> 66 and over</p>
<p><b>2.</b> Do you have any children? If so, how many?</p>	
<p><b>3.</b> If so, what are their age groups?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Under a year  <input type="checkbox"/> 1–5 ans  <input type="checkbox"/> 6–12 ans  <input type="checkbox"/> 13–7 ans  <input type="checkbox"/> 18 and over</p>
<p><b>3.1</b> Do your children have any specific needs?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes  <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>4.</b> Are you a family caregiver?*</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes  <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>4.1</b> If so, how many hours a week do you spend caring for a loved one?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 3 hours or less  <input type="checkbox"/> 4–10 hours  <input type="checkbox"/> 11–19 hours  <input type="checkbox"/> 20 hours or more</p>
<p><b>5.</b> Do you have trouble balancing your family schedule and your participation in the co-op?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Often  <input type="checkbox"/> Sometimes  <input type="checkbox"/> Rarely  <input type="checkbox"/> Never</p>

\*A family caregiver is someone who assists a loved one who requires support due to his/her age, illness or disability.

<p><b>6.</b> What concerns do you have about balancing family and cooperative responsibilities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Coordinating the co-op meeting schedule with my family obligations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Fear of falling behind in my tasks if I am absent for a family or health reason</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Spending enough time with my family</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Having a space where my children can play and do activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reducing my stress level and the constant feeling of being in a rush</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Finding daycare for meetings or co-op activities</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Having more responsibility in the cooperative than I can manage</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Other:</li> </ul>
<p><b>7.</b> Are there any mutual aid practices, formal or informal, already in place in the co-op to make your family life easier?</p>	
<p><b>8.</b> What measures would you like the co-op to put in place to facilitate your co-op/family balance?</p>	
<p><b>9.</b> Would you like to become involved in a family committee? If so, leave us your contact details!</p>	

**Thanks for participating!**

# Thank you

To the women volunteers  
of the Bois Ellen Solidarity Cooperative  
who took part in the project

## Credits

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Since February 2017, the FECHIMM, Comité logement Lachine-LaSalle (CLLL), Groupe de ressources techniques (GRT) Réseau 2000+ and the Table régionale des centres de femmes Montréal/Laval have led the project, « Les coopératives d'habitation : présence des femmes, pouvoir des femmes. »

Funded by Status of Women Canada, the goal of this three-year project is to enhance women's participation and empowerment in housing cooperatives.

