# PEER EVALUATIONS: GETTING BETTER EVERY YEAR

## WHY EVALUATE?

Evaluations are a phenomenal way to grow and strengthen your co-op or organization annually, by supporting the growth of the individual members. When run well, evaluations can help to build group trust, grow a culture of direct and open communication, foster accountability and responsibility for actions and behaviors, and inspire and energize. They can also increase consistency and quality of products and services offered by the co-op, support the development of clearly articulated and documented expectations (if they are not already present)
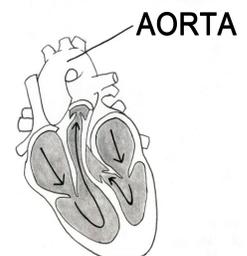
Evaluation systems:
- create a structured way to communicate feedback, both positive and negative.
- facilitate goal setting for workers.
- help to collect and synthesize information.
- provide an opportunity to check in on job fit.
- assess performance over a specific period of time.
- help support change and growth.
- are regularly scheduled, not responses to specific events.
- are assessments that result in goals, not punitive measures.

Common trends we see when evaluations are not present, or are not set up to meet the needs of the group are:
- escalating interpersonal conflict and tension, due to a lack of structured ways to provide feedback, request changes in actions or behavior, or support growth.
- decreased energy and moral, increased burnout due to a lack of structured ways to communicate appreciation.
- silence or passive aggressive comments between workers.
- feelings of stagnation, lack of growth, or resignation.
- increased turnover.
- decreased organizational structures to support worker growth and development. (Setting explicit goals for workers tends to encourage a co-op to then put in place structures to support the achievement of those goals.)

"Evaluation policies are different than: grievance policies; sexual harassment policies, hiring/firing policies, conflict resolution/mediation policies, safety procedures, customer feedback, etc. If there is a problem in your workplace, be sure you are using the right procedure for the right issue."

*From the DAWN Systems of Accountability and Evaluations Toolkit, 2014*



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# STEPS TO CREATING OR REFRESHING YOUR EVALUATION SYSTEM

**Form a coordinating body.**
Identify the group of people responsible for ensuring evaluations are conducted, engaging participation in peer evaluations, and coordinating the evaluations process. This is often a committee (the evaluations committee). Depending on the size of your organization, it may be an HR or personnel staff team. In the case of smaller organizations (less than 10 in size), this responsibility may fall to the group as a whole.

**Get that body trained.**
Ensure that your coordinating body budgets in time and/or financial resources to research and build their job skills. This may involve calling other organizations, reading and research, or enlisting outside support or consulting, and/or hiring an outside trainer.
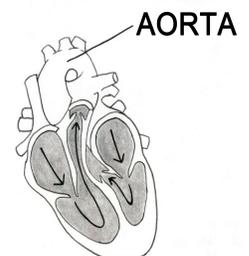
**Build group trust and buy-in.**
- Create a committee charter, description, or statement of purpose that you can share with the whole group. Transparency about what your responsibilities are and goals are as a body helps to build trust and encourage feedback when needed.
- Remember, the job of the coordinating group is to uphold the goals and values of the group, and to ensure that people engage with evaluations in a way that is constructive, in line with the goals of the group, and in a way that will increase the efficacy and usefulness of the evaluations.

> **Sample Committee Description**
> The Evaluation Committee provides a vessel for members to assess, evaluate, and communicate with one another on paper and distills the group's feedback into concrete goals, in order to support the growth of individual members and act as a tool for positive change towards a better bakery. The committee honors confidentiality and holds the information it has access to with respect and integrity. In order to do this, the committee: maintains regular committee meetings; ensures that member evaluations happen; synthesizes the evaluations of the group into main goals and key trends; ensures that evaluations are conducted in a fair manner; ensures all members have the opportunity to be evaluated, as well as to participate in the evaluation process for others.

- Build up the evaluation form and process/flow in communication with and through a group process. This is especially important if people are nervous, hesitant, or resistant, or if you have had evaluations in the past and they did not go well, resulted in conflict, caused harm, etc. Your primary job is to build trust with, and buy-in from, the group before embarking upon a new round of evaluations.
- Be willing to go slow enough for this trust building and buy-in to happen. If you move too quickly and don't have group buy-in, or the group's trust that this time can (and will) be different, it can undo all the great prep work you've already done. Your goal is for the first evaluation you run to go really, really well. This will help to deescalate any anxieties, concerns, or fears still remaining in the group, and further help to build trust.

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**Facilitating a group process to build trust and buy in**
This is best done in a business meeting. Below is a sample facilitation guide for a group between the sizes of 10 and 80, to get you started. You can change up the approach and times to best fit your group's needs.

Remind the group that your job as a committee is to develop and implement an evaluation process that best meets the values, goals, and needs of the group. In order to do that, you need to have a good sense of what those are.

<u>Ask the group to start off by talking about values and goals in pairs.</u> [10 minutes]
- Each pair's goal is to come up with three values and three goals.
- If people have a hard time differentiating between what is a value and what is a goal, tell them not to stress about it-- you can help figure out which sheet things go on during the report back. The main goal is to hear what the values and goals of the group are.
  - Sample values: transparency, connection, growth, support, consistency, solution-based, constructive
  - Sample goals: build group trust, support each other in growing and getting better, inspire and energize, build consistency of product, get stronger as individuals and as a business, work towards consistency
- Remind the group that the goal of this is to figure out the values and goals of the group-- this isn't the time to focus on individuals.
- Check in with pairs after five minutes and ask them to show you how many more minutes they'd like by holding up their fingers (1-5. 1 finger = one minute, 5 fingers = 5 minutes). Give them up to 5 more minutes, depending on what they need.
- Refer to these questions, which should be written up on a piece of paper for the pairs to refer to during their conversations:
  1. What <u>values</u> do we have in doing evaluations?
  2. What are our <u>goals</u> in doing evaluations? / What do we hope to accomplish by doing evaluations?

<u>Debrief as a whole group.</u> [10 minutes]
- Have the groups report back the three values and three goals they came up with. (Again, don't get bogged down/waste time parsing out what is a value and what is a goal).
- Ask clarifying questions when you need more information about what the group means by a word that is vague, potentially passive aggressive, unclear, etc.
- Be sure to synthesize and re-frame things back in the positive before writing them up. (For example reframe the value of "people aren't rude/disrespectful/aggressive" to "respectful communication.")
- If you hear fears being unearthed in the process of sharing goals and values, identify them. (You can use "It sounds to me like you're also identifying a fear, that people will be reactionary.") If that speaker agrees to the fear you identify, write it up on the fears sheet.
- Before moving onto fears, read off all the values and goals and make sure there are
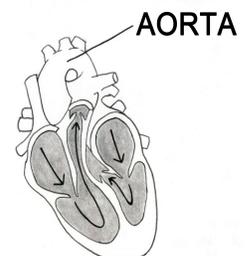
no additions.

Catch any remaining fears. [5-7 minutes]
- Read off the fears that you have already written up during the previous segment and then ask the group to add in any additional fears. Write up the fears as people share them.
- Be careful to not allow the sharing of fears to drift into a passive aggressive way to express frustration or concern about individuals. Also don't let the group linger too long on fears-- that can build feelings of hopelessness. It's ok to cut this off after the time is up. Your goal is to ensure the coordinating body is aware of the main fears of the group so that you can address them.
- Remind the group that part of your job as a coordinating body is the create a process that will make it least likely for these fears to come true. The group doesn't need to worry about any of these right now, or worry about how to address them. You will take the values, needs, and fears, and discuss how to address them in your next meeting.
- Also remind the group the next step: you will bring a draft of a proposed evaluation process and/or a proposed evaluation form for the group to look over, ask questions about, and provide feedback on.

- Take all the information the group provided you to your next meeting, and use it to inform the evaluation process you develop.

**Questions to answer when developing your draft form and process:**
- How many people will be evaluated at a time?
- How frequently will each person be evaluated?
  - We recommend no less than once every 2 years, and ideally around once every 12-18 months. Longer than that, and enough time goes by for resentment and tensions to build up.
- Who will evaluate each person? Options include:
  - have people evaluated by just those in their department.
  - all worker-owners of the co-op.
  - include evaluations by clients or members of partner organizations, or other people outside the business that people work with regularly
- Will we pass along all evaluation forms, or synthesize them into one report?
- How will we synthesize feedback into clear direction or goals for the next evaluation period?

- Return back to the group with this process. Present the form and process you create to the group in a meeting. Take a few minutes to explain to the group why you've decided to structure it this way, share your reasoning. Afterwards, open up first to questions, then feedback. If there is feedback that necessitates a change, or conflicting feedback, let the group know you'll incorporate the feedback and bring another version to the group. Usually this process does not take more than one or two back-and-forths, and the time spent at this stage integrating feedback can save you so much strife in the future, as it truly does help you create the process
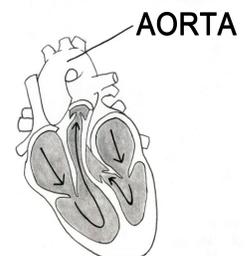
that is best for the group.

- Conduct a training for all people who will be evaluating. (In a peer evaluations system, this is everyone.) This can be short (30-60 minutes). This training should address: the common pitfalls that arise when evaluating people and well as how to avoid them; how we can be unconsciously be guided by bias with regards to race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc; remind the group of the group's goals and values for evaluations; go over why and how evaluations can be valuable to a co-op, as well as how they can go awry and how to avoid that.
- Conduct your first evaluations on yourselves. This help to build trust-- you are your own guinea pigs. You learn on yourselves, get an embodied understanding of how the process feels, and can make changes as needed. You can then assess if any adjustments need to be made to the evaluations process before starting the process with the rest of the group.

**How to evaluate? Paper? Online?**
Use the method that is most likely to result in a high participation rate for your group. If you are a paper group, use paper. If your group is an online group, use an online survey.

Beyond participation, the other factor to consider is size. For small groups, it may be possible to share evaluations in a face to face meeting, if people feel comfortable and able to do so. However, if the group needs support in developing direct communication skills, this may not be your best fit, even if you are small in size.

An online survey can save you time in compiling responses. There are a lot of online survey systems you can choose to use that will compile data for you, which can save you time. You can also have a paper option available for those that do not feel comfortable/able to fill the form out online. This can help increase participation. The coordinating group will then have the task of inputting the paper forms into the online survey system.

**Can people's responses be anonymous?**
We recommend against total anonymity. Having people's names on the evaluation forms does a few things:

- It keeps the evaluation forms from being a free-for-all ranting/complaining space, because we are all responsible for what we say in our evaluation forms.
- It allows committee members to follow up with people when what they say is vague, unclear, or confusing, so that they can be sure they understand what that person is trying to say.
- It allows committee members to follow up with people when they don't see any guidance or examples of how a person can grow or change their behavior to address concerns raised. This in turn helps the group as a whole to provide guidance, support, and direction to each worker.

That said, you may choose to have the evaluations coordinating team read all responses and synthesize them into on report to be presented to each worker. Reasons you may want to do this:

- You have a bigger co-op, and it could feel onerous for each worker to receive and read 30 different evaluations.
- You want to minimize confusion. With many responses, people may give conflicting feedback.
- You want to be able to provide clear direction, based on what trends you see arising in the group's responses as a whole. You may also want to limit the number of goals for the next evaluation period to a manageable amount (3-7), and have them reflect the most clear trends
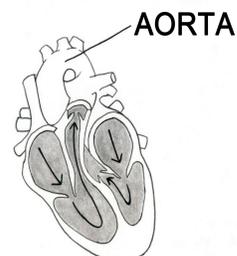
coming from the group.
- People can sometimes better hear feedback when it is in a synthesized format, rather than connected to the particular individual personality that offered it. If there already exists tension between people, they will have a hard time hearing constructive feedback, even when it is respectful, constructive, and growth-oriented.

Either way, you can still set up your process so that the committee reads the evaluation responses first, and then  follows up with people when:
- what they say is vague, unclear, or confusing;
- they don't provide any guidance or examples of how a person can grow or change their behavior to address concerns raised
- they have communicated in a way that is aggressive, harmful, or may escalate conflict.

**What happens if this process catches conflict, or if conflict comes up in evaluations?**
- If any conflict surfaces in this process, the job of the evaluation coordinating team is to pass that along to whatever body within the co-op handles conflict. It is not the job of the evaluation coordinating team to address or mediate conflict.
- The great thing about developing a strong evaluations process is that it encourages the group to build up stronger and more robust systems in other parts of the co-op, such as conflict resolution.
- Another great thing is that regular evaluations provide a structured way for everyone to communicate with each other regularly, and for each person to develop goals to work on annually to grow as coworkers and owners. Over the long term, this helps to decrease unhealthy conflict in the co-op.

**Self Evaluation**
We recommend developing a process where the person being evaluated fills out their self-evaluation form first, and that form is shared with everyone, so that they can read it before evaluating that person. We have seen this helps to deescalate conflict. It gives everyone a sense of what things that person is already aware of, and what they are not already aware of.
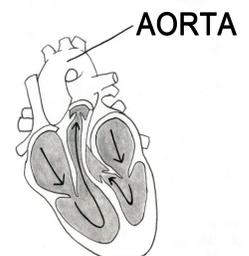
# PRESENTING AN EVALUATIONS SYNTHESIS

These tips are for those groups who choose to have the evaluation team or coordinating body read through all the responses, synthesize them, and then present the synthesis to the person being evaluated.

**Start off with the following information**
- This many people responded.
- Our job is to represent to you the words of the group. We are not your "evaluators." We are the committee tasked with synthesizing and presenting the evaluations of the group. We will do our best to represent the evaluations of the group to you.
- Share your format and process: We will read aloud the evaluation sections. After each section, we will pause. You are welcome to ask any questions, share thoughts and comments, or take any notes you want. We will do our best to answer all of your questions and clarify anything that is confusing. At the end, we will have time for more questions, discussion, and responses.
- Remind them of your co-op's goals for evaluations processes. (You may want to print this list out and have it as the top sheet of the synthesis.)

**Tips and things to remember.**
- Everyone should have a printed copy of the synthesis to refer to.
- Have two people present the evaluations. This way you have more than one person from the committee present to see how the conversation goes. Any more and it can feel unnecessarily intimidating to the person to whom you are presenting.
- Remember, for most people this is a stressful thing, especially when it hasn't been done in your co-op for a while. It is totally ok for them to have emotions and reactions. And they may get emotional even if the evaluations is very positive. If they get emotional, allow space and time for them to get grounded before moving on.
- Also remember that everyone has different ways of dealing with feeling stress or feeling uncomfortable. Some people get defensive, others crack jokes, others shut down. Keep an eye one people's body language and tone, and pause or check in when needed.
- Everyone should have a similar experience in their presentation-- be aware of your tendencies to talk to or treat people differently.
- Your job is to represent the evaluations of the group. Do not add in your own additional thoughts and feelings-- you are not the evaluators (any more than anyone else), you are the committee tasked with synthesizing and sharing the group's evaluations.
- Stay away from terms like "always, never" etc.
- Be prepared as a team. Don't wing it. If you are not ready and did not get a chance to prep and review in advance, reschedule your meeting.
- Stay fully present. Keep your cell phones off and away.
- Keep it private: do not present evaluations in a public space in the co-op, or at a cafe. Go somewhere that is not public.
- Keep your emotions out of the conversation. If someone chooses you to be on their presentation team and you don't think you can do that, respectfully decline, saying you don't

feel you are a good fit in this instance. This is better than bringing your own emotions, frustrations, etc into the presentation.

- When they are responding, commenting, or asking questions, don't rush them, interrupt them, etc. Remember this process is ultimately to help them and the co-op grow and get better.
- Sit together in a circle, rather than in an "us" facing "you" set up.

# COMMON EVALUATIONS PITFALLS

**Overweighing Recent Occurrences**
Beware just evaluating someone on what has happened in the past week, or month, whether it is good or bad.

*Antidotes:*
- Take time to reflect over the **entire evaluation period**, not just the last few days, weeks, or months.
- Focus on **patterns of behavior**, rather than individual incidences. How have you seen this person's behavior change, grow, or develop? What patterns stand out?
- If you create goals for each member for the evaluations period (which we encourage you to do!), **place the goals for the previous evaluation period at the top of the evaluation sheet**. This helps everyone assess how successful a person was at meeting their goals.

**The "Halo" Effect**
Beware rating someone high on everything because you like their personality, or think they're good "in general." Similarly, beware rating someone low on everything just because you don't like them, don't get along, or in general think they're a "bad worker." Additionally, the halo effects applies to when you rate someone negatively because they are not strong at one thing, or positively because they are strong in one area-- this most often happens when the particular area of strength or weakness is very important to you. So, if showing up on time is very important to you, you may have a tendency to rate someone overall lower if they are consistently late, even if they are actually performing well in other areas.

*Antidote:* **Consider each of your listed criteria separately**, and not the person's personality, when evaluating. Someone may excel in working together as a team, and still have real improvements to be made in another area.

**All or Nothing**
Beware the tendency to rate a person only "1" or "5" (on a scale of 1 to 5). Often a person's performance is somewhere in between.

*Antidote:* Be sure to **use the whole rating scale** you're given, not just the ends. Pull yourself out of the binary good/bad style of thinking and really reflect upon where the person lies in the scale, so that they can get the best information about their performance possible. Look to see: Are your ratings distributed across the number spectrum? Or are they "all or nothing?"

**All in the Middle**
Similarly, beware the tendency to stick only to the middle of the scale. Sometimes people feel bad about rating someone low, or hesitant to give them a great rating. It's ok to do both!

*Antidote:* Be sure to **use the whole rating scale** you're given. Look to see: Are your ratings

distributed across the number spectrum? Or are they "all in the middle?"

**Vagueness**
Beware vague feedback, whether positive or negative. Specific feedback is useful. If you give feedback that is too vague or general, the person you are evaluating will have a hard time making the improvements you're asking for.

*Antidote:* **Give specific direction** about expectations and needs for improvement, as well as suggestions for how that improvement may look.

**Complaining**
Beware the tendency to use evaluations to complain about what about a person's work style is not working for you. Without clear direction of how you want to see behavior change, the person will only know what not to do, but not how to change.

*Antidote:* With any constructive feedback, **provide clear positive requests for change**. What do you expect of the person? How do you want them to do things differently in the future? What changes in behavior will help to address your concerns? How can they do better over the next evaluation period?

**Lack of Uniform Criteria**
This can be a challenge for co-ops in particular. If the person being evaluated is gets different feedback from different members, then it's very confusing and difficult for them to know which expectations to hold to. Also, different raters may use the rating system differently. (One person's 2 may mean something different than another's.)

*Antidotes:*
- Take the time to **synthesis feedback** into **one clear set of expectations and goals**, as well as to gain clarity on what each of the gradations in your rating scale means.
- Rather than using a number rating system (1-5, for example), **use a system with words**, **or describe what each number means**, so that people have a shared understanding of the rating scale itself. For example:
  - needs major work
  - needs improvement
  - ok
  - good
  - fantastic

# EVALUATIONS, GENDER AND RACE

**Gender**
"A NEW study by the linguist and tech entrepreneur Kieran Snyder, done for Fortune.com, found two differences between workplace performance reviews given to men and women. Across 248 reviews from 28 companies, managers, whether male or female, gave female employees more negative feedback than they gave male employees. Second, 76 percent of the negative feedback given to women included some kind of personality criticism, such as comments that the woman was "abrasive," "judgmental" or "strident." Only 2 percent of men's critical reviews included negative personality comments.

The study speaks to the impossible tightrope women must walk to do their jobs competently and to make tough decisions while simultaneously coming across as nice to everyone, all the time…..If a woman wants to do substantive work of any kind, she's going to be criticized — with comments not just about her work but also about herself."

*From Learning to Love Criticism, Tara Mohr, New York Times, Sept 27, 2014*

**Race**
"The most concrete data available on the CFPB's (Consumer Federal Protection Bureau) employee evaluations relates to 2013. The agency rated its more than 1,100 staffers on a scale of 1 to 5 and grants greater benefits, including raises and bonuses, to those who receive higher scores.

White employees scored markedly higher than minorities. Overall, 74.6% of whites received ratings of 4 or 5, versus 65.5% of Asians, 65.2% of Hispanics and 57.6% of African-Americans, according to an internal CFPB report obtained by American Banker.

*From "CFPB Staff Evaluations Show Sharp Racial Disparities," by Rachel Witkowski in American Banker, March 6, 2014*

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Researchers.. observe that the pool of unemployed black workers is likely to be seen as less skilled because of more consistent or prolonged unemployment. That can make companies less likely to hire them, and more skeptical once they do. This leads employers to invest more heavily in monitoring black employees. Because black workers are more closely scrutinized, it increases the chances that errors—large or small—will be caught…..
…Once fired, black workers return to the pool of unemployed—where they will once again have a difficult time finding work, prompting their next employer to be wary as well.  In the meantime, white workers are less scrutinized, and as a result, they enjoy a longer tenure on the job, which leads to a stronger work history, more skills, and higher wages.
*From  "**Black Workers Really Do Need to Be Twice as Good"** Gillian B. White  -The Atlantic, Oct 7, 2015*

**The take aways from these disturbing facts?**
 • It is very likely that trends like to also occur around things like sexual orientation and class.
 • Evaluate performance, not personality.

- Make your evaluations criteria based. Clearly shared and understood criteria help everyone minimize the degree to which unconscious prejudice makes its way into evaluations.

# SAMPLE PEER EVALUATION FORM

**Person being evaluated:**
**Person evaluating:**
**Date:**

**Goals from previous evaluation period:**

N/A      I don't have enough information to answer that question
1         Needs Major Work
2         Needs Improvement
3         OK
4         Good
5         Fantastic

## CORE STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

|  | N/A | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Timely and reliable communication |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Anticipates organizational needs |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Follows organizational processes and protocol |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Strives to create harmonious working relationships |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Receives and integrates constructive criticism |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Offers supportive yet constructive feedback to co-workers in appropriate manner |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Volunteers for tasks |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Follows through |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Helps others with work |  |  |  |  |  |  |

Comments:

## JOB SPECIFIC DUTIES

|  | N/A | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Anticipates project needs |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Takes initiative |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Creative problem solving |  |  |  |  |  |  |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Successfully works collaboratively | | | | | | |
| Creation and use of project timeline | | | | | | |
| Ability to prioritize and utilize good time management skills | | | | | | |
| Dependable to get work done | | | | | | |
| Flexible | | | | | | |

Comments:


PEER EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Areas of strength
1.

2.

3.

Areas for growth, with direction on what change could look like
1.

2.

3.

Appreciations/Shining Stars




What advice would you give this co-worker?