

# Solidarity Economy Principles & Practices

*The themes and principles below are meant to be guideposts for the SE movement, and each principle has associated recommended practices that can be markers of growth. We recognize that every SE entity has its own individual challenges and strengths, and we are all in a process of continual change and becoming. It may not be possible for every SE entity to follow every principle and practice listed below at all times, but we hope they provide inspiration for directions to grow and spaces to cultivate within our movement.*

## **THEME: Collective Care, Relationships, and Accountability**

Relationships based on trust and mutual respect which recognize and honor our inherent interdependence are the core of Solidarity Economy work. In order to build a radically different economy, we must practice a radically different culture: caring for each other in good times and in hard times, through disagreement and through conflict. As SE organizers, we commit to struggling for freedom together, and learning to face conflict and challenges directly. This means that we don't exclude people from organizations or movements except as a last resort. We set healthy boundaries and we don't let harm slide. We pay attention to our collective needs and support each other to stay true to our shared values.

### **PRINCIPLE: We value relationships over transactions and single outcomes.**

- **PRACTICE:** Each level of SE work (global, national, regional, local, individual organizations) has its own sphere of work and responsibility particular to that level. Organizations should strive to collaborate and support each other in their work rather than compete. Decision-making and organizing work should be done at the most local level possible. All levels of work should be connected (i.e. the local should connect to national, and national or global should elevate the decisions and work of the local).
- **PRACTICE:** National SE policy advocacy should *always* include local associations and grassroots members who live and work within the districts represented by SE legislative champions. Even if a group does not have capacity, an invitation should be issued out of respect for the relationship and grassroots needs.
- **PRACTICE:** Spokespeople at any level should have clear accountability within movement networks and organizations. Organizations can provide formal training and acknowledge that this role is challenging and important.
- **PRACTICE:** SE practitioners who interface with media must commit to elevating a wide variety of examples - not just the usual suspects. Those with frequent access to the media should look for opportunities to pass the opportunity on to others, especially those most impacted by the work and those who do not have the same opportunities for visibility.
- **PRACTICE:** Build communication structures and feedback channels that are mutually beneficial and supportive of multiple levels of SE work. Such structures should build clarity around who is taking responsibility for what part of the work, and should serve as the basis for developing policy platforms.
- **PRACTICE:** Slow down. We move together in intentional alignment rather than giving in to opportunism. We should make sure those most directly impacted are leading. We should create accessible governance mechanisms and provide language and physical access accommodations. This is important at all levels but especially nationally, where federal policy shifts impact all the groups on the ground.

- PRACTICE: Regional or local associations should pass resolutions or endorse specific strategies and priorities in their own work, thereby providing guidance to national organizations.
- PRACTICE: Build and honor peer networks. Prioritize resourcing these spaces with time, money, and support. Anti-individualism means that in a single organization it is insufficient to have just one member responsible for all peer networking. These relationships need to be deeper and spread throughout the organization, and for people to feel supported by each other both within and outside their group.
- PRACTICE: We honor cooperative principle #7 Concern for Community. We gauge whether something is a good decision not only short-term but for the long-term by asking: 1) Will this be good for all people? 2) Will this be good for future generations? 3) Will this be good for the Earth?
- PRACTICE: We do not undermine the work or resources of other organizations in the movement. Constructive criticism and dialogue is necessary. Constructive engagement is necessary if a person or organization acts in a way that is harmful to the common aim or to a companion organization.

**PRINCIPLE: We commit to reflecting on how we are collectively living up to our values and practicing accountability together.**

- PRACTICE: Ella Baker provides us with a good example in her organizing with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) where she advocated for dedicated annual spaces to hash out tensions and have principled debate and decision-making. Differences in strategy and tactics were considered points of discussion and required political education and context to understand. *(For more on this, check out Barbara Ransby's [biography of Ella Baker](#).)*
- PRACTICE: Each organization needs to articulate which changes it hopes to make in the world and how its actions contribute to that. *(For a good example, check out the Sustainable Economies Law Center's [Mission, Theory of Change, and Financial Transparency](#) page.)*
- PRACTICE: We share information about outcomes with each other, what worked out as planned and what did not, so that we can all learn and advance together.
- PRACTICE: Approach conflict as a movement condition and not an individual failing. Check out this [AORTA Collective resource on Conflict in Movement Organizations](#) for support.

**PRINCIPLE: We study and respect the traditions, ancestors, and legacies of cooperative, solidarity economy, and social movements.**

- PRACTICE: In the case of cooperatives, we uphold and honor the cooperative identity by holding groups which claim to be co-ops accountable to the International Cooperative Principles and SE values, legal definitions pertinent to co-ops in their territory, and apply the same standards which are widely adopted globally to determine whether a group is a co-op.
- PRACTICE: We protect our SE movement from “faux-ops” who seek to claim the Cooperative Identity or SE identity without any of the practices or principles that entails. For example, when large corporations use the co-op name to sell something, without any democracy or collective ownership in their operations, we organize to protect the co-op identity. Similarly, if a group attempts to claim the term Solidarity Economy, without relationships to movements or embodying SE values, principles, and practices, we invite them into relationship and accountability.

- PRACTICE: All of our traditions and legacies have practices for supporting start-up groups. In the cooperative tradition, Rochdale Principle 6: Cooperation Among Cooperatives, has guided existing co-ops to help new co-ops form. Tensions can arise when start-ups claim an organizational identity they aspire to, but do not yet hold because they have not matured fully into that kind of organization. When this happens it benefits the whole movement for older groups to build a relationship to the start-up and support their development.
- PRACTICE: All people have ancestors who practiced cooperation, but we vary widely in our ability to access that knowledge and history. We respect and uplift the work of individual communities to access their own traditions and knowledge of SE as practiced by their ancestors. When that knowledge is shared with those outside of the community, that is a gift and should be met with respect and gratitude.
- PRACTICE: We avoid conflating models with each other, or pitting them against each other, or holding any one model up as The Way.

**PRINCIPLE: We embrace conflict as generative and clarifying.**

- PRACTICE: Groups at all levels should have proactive, well-defined processes for addressing and repairing harm, and addressing conflict between organizations or individuals. This includes transparent processes for safely reporting and addressing harm. *For example, check out [this guide to member conflict and harm resolution from the national membership organization, Resource Generation](#); this shareable template for [Communication and Conflict Resolution Profiles](#) that you can have individuals fill out during calm times as a tool for when conflict does emerge brought to you by Sustainable Economies Law Center and Arizmendi Cooperatives; or this [Conflict Engagement Policy](#) from Sustainable Economies Law Center.*
- PRACTICE: Groups should prioritize conflict-resolution by including it in their budgets, reserving time in retreats and meetings, engaging in training for members, etc.). *For example, Soul Fire Farm “uses a peer-to-peer “Real Talk” process to give one another direct feedback on a monthly basis. When conflict arises, we use a Courageous Conversation protocol, which we learn and practice during our annual staff orientation. A witness or mediator is present if desired by anyone involved in the conflict. Our team creates and upholds safe & sacred space agreements that call for nonviolence and a trauma-informed response to harm. We are committed to transformative justice, and have a professional facilitator available for meditation and healing as needs arise. We are inspired by the work of adrienne maree brown “we will not cancel us” and are committed to giving and receiving constructive feedback in ways that uphold our precious comrades, collective work, and institutions. We also welcome community members to offer us feedback at any time using this form: <https://bit.ly/SFFfeedback>.” This information comes from a [Soul Fire Farm Facebook post](#).*
- PRACTICE: Groups at all levels should have clearly defined standards of behavior that everyone must agree to prior to joining the group and that are a requirement for ongoing membership. These must include protections for people from oppressed groups being targeted by people from dominant social groups.

**THEME: Shared Resources & Shared Vision**

The dominant culture tells us that there is not enough to go around. We are pitted against each other and compete for scraps while the main course is kept out of our reach. If we want a Solidarity Economy, we must reject the myth of scarcity and embrace the possibility of abundance. By practicing the values we wish to see reflected in our culture and society, including sharing resources and planning collectively within our movements, there will be more than enough to go around. Even as we make agreements with more

powerful entities like governments and foundations, we support each other to maintain our sovereignty and stay true to our values.

**PRINCIPLE: We create abundance by cooperating to access resources across all levels - internationally, nationally, regionally, and locally.**

- PRACTICE: We can and should present ourselves to funders and investors in a unified way as a movement. Educate those who wish to provide resources to SE work about our shared values and principles. We must be explicit about what we mean by SE and the movement we are trying to build.
- PRACTICE: Conduct joint funder briefings and funder education initiatives, shared resource mapping, and clearly articulated theories of change that we share with each other and our potential supporters.
- PRACTICE: We can and should organize funder collaboratives (where foundations jointly pool resources for solidarity economies) with attention to the breadth of solidarity economies, taking care to avoid promoting any one model, tool, or project over another, and framing the work in terms of the economic, social, and racial equity we seek to address within our movements.
- PRACTICE: National organizations can fundraise with the explicit purpose to distribute funds to the grassroots membership using an equity lens. We can do this through shared grantmaking/participatory budgeting approaches using a process that gives members decision making power. *(For example, the coalition NY Renews raises funds that are then distributed to their steering committee and hold a regrating process for the rest of the membership. This provides resources for everyone to participate in the coalition's internal and external work in their own location and with their own communities.)*
- PRACTICE: Regularly host movement strategy sessions with the groups in your area or sphere. Part of this should include a gap analysis to identify what we need to build movement and economic power in collaboration with groups on the ground.
- PRACTICE: Engage in participatory budgeting whenever possible inside our own individual organizations and more widely within our movements. The space in between our organizations and silos must be bridged. Our organizations and networks could all be contributing to common pools of money to put towards shared initiatives.

**PRINCIPLE: We share information with each other. Financial and data transparency are essential to our democratic practices and to learning as a movement.**

- PRACTICE: Funding sources and their uses should be transparent to the membership of any SE organization. *For example, networks and federations can share their budgets with members at their member meetings along with information about where they money is drawn from, any restrictions placed on it, and expectations for its future flow.*
- PRACTICE: Data about our movements should be shared (with consent) in ways that promote learning while anonymizing specific data points when that's important. *For example, SE groups that conduct surveys can share information with each other, and allied researchers, via the [Data Commons Cooperative](#). Groups can choose what information to restrict and where special permission is required.*
- PRACTICE: When we are seeking publicity for our projects, we will strive to tell the messy truth whenever possible, and when the story gets ahead of the reality, we commit to slowing down and catching up. *For example, the founders of Renaissance Community Cooperative in Greensboro, NC held a webinar to discuss what happened after the coop closed, offering their hard-won wisdom to the SE community.*

- PRACTICE: All SE entities and their associations, including their subsidiaries, should conduct regular social/democracy audits (e.g. every 1-5 years). This should be conducted by a member-elected committee aligning intentions and values with impact by using metrics for environmental impact, social impact, and community well-being. In Latin America this type of committee is called [Consejo de Vigilancia](#). See [Cooperatives for Sustainable Communities](#) for a variety of social audit tools. The UN published a [guide on social auditing](#), and the [SA 8000](#) is a very formal international tool.

**PRINCIPLE: We invest in Solidarity Economy and cooperative entities directly.**

- PRACTICE: Prioritize direct financial gifts to models and practitioners on the ground without strings attached whenever possible.
- PRACTICE: When direct gifts are not possible, prioritize forgivable, zero-interest, or low interest loans whenever possible.
- PRACTICE: Prioritize direct investment in the models and practitioners on the ground whenever possible instead of channeling funds through third party organizations such as loan funds. When investing in a loan fund, make sure it is member controlled, like [Seed Commons](#) or the [Buen Vivir Fund](#).
- PRACTICE: Prioritize building trade networks amongst SE/Coop entities. Look for ways to meet your individual and group needs by cooperating with other SE or Coop entities, whether that's looking for a new vendor for your group or creating something new. For example, some groups form purchasing coops with other groups so they can access goods at a lower cost.
- PRACTICE: For individuals or groups with wealth or class privilege, consider making a significant redistribution of your wealth through direct gifts, as well as taking on higher financial risk to ensure that SE projects can offer higher returns (if applicable) to poor, working and middle class folks.

**THEME: Liberation Culture**

We believe Fannie Lou Hamer: “Nobody is free until everybody is free.” Our commitment to building a Solidarity Economy is about the liberation of all from systems of domination. We must attend to the ways that those systems operate within us and within our organizations and enterprises, or else we risk replicating the very things we are working to transform. We commit to addressing the harm created by systemic oppression, including the ways we and our communities are both harmed by and benefit from dominance, privilege, and oppression. We understand this work takes place on a scale from the local and interpersonal level to that of global networks.

**PRINCIPLE: We build movements, not projects. Even as we organize to build our co-ops, land trusts, and other enterprises, we do so not only for their own sake, but also connected to the larger goal of social transformation.**

- PRACTICE: Not every organization or project needs to last forever. We listen and accept when a project is no longer needed. We lean into this by encouraging evaluation of a project's impacts and possibilities given the conditions.
- PRACTICE: We approach our projects and organizations as community organizers, not as economic development or financial professionals. We see solidarity economy tools as a way for oppressed people to develop their power, not for their own sake.

**PRINCIPLE: We build relationships on solidarity and cooperation, not competition, because despite our particularities we are all in this together.**

- PRACTICE: We participate in social, political, educational and economic activities with allied groups in order to know one another, build trust and practice solidarity. This includes joining federations, coalitions, and other formations for political and economic power.

**PRINCIPLE: We shift culture with our language, practices, expectations, and pedagogy.**

- PRACTICE: Anti-oppression can be a systemic approach to identifying and shifting issues. One tool you might use is [AORTA's Continuum for Becoming a Transformative Anti-Oppression Organization](#). Set aside time to review, reflect, and plan for this journey.
- PRACTICE: Our organizations should have an ongoing commitment to language justice, the idea that we should respect the human right of being able to communicate in the language we prefer and feel most powerful using, rather than forcing everybody to default to Standard English. This most often looks like acknowledging diverse language needs and providing interpretation and translation to meet these needs.
- PRACTICE: Use ritual to create repeated, lived experiences for people that reinforce cooperation and solidarity.
- PRACTICE: Examine language, use of metaphors, and styles of communication for cooperative vs. competitive and liberatory vs. oppressive content.

**PRINCIPLE: We respect nature because we are nature. We organize as though our survival as humans is based on clean water, clean air, healthy soil, and respect for all living beings.**

- PRACTICE: Commitment to ongoing education/knowledge-building about a just transition away from an extractive economy and toward regenerative practices and systems. This zine from Movement Generation may be a good starting point ([English](#) / [Spanish](#)).
- PRACTICE: Include your impact on the planet in your group's reflections and strategic planning. Growing positive relationships to land, air, water, and living beings is just as important as minimizing negative impacts, so be sure to focus on both.
- PRACTICE: Be an advocate for climate and environmental issues in your community. Sign on to letters, join coalitions, and participate in actions. You could even give staff or members specific time to dedicate to this work. *For example, if your group is a business you could consider joining American Sustainable Business Council to be a voice for businesses opposed to fossil fuels, or raise awareness and move resources to a particular environmental fight, etc.*
- PRACTICE: For those doing food or land-based work, consider aligning with the methodology and principles of agroecology. Here's [a report by Why Hunger](#) with more information about agroecology and their People's Agroecology Process.

**PRINCIPLE: We make robust commitments to racial justice within and outside our organizations by moving beyond performance to actually shifting power and addressing legacies of harm while creating opportunities for repair.**

- PRACTICE: Acknowledge the Native Peoples where you are working. Understand and honor the treaties, and build relationships with Native nations and communities in the territory where you are located.
- PRACTICE: Pay a land tax annually. This is a practice of identifying whose land you're on and regularly making financial contributions to support those who were displaced or remain on the land fighting for survival. In some areas there are organized land tax projects (such as [Sogorea Te Land Trust](#), [Real Rent Duwamish](#), etc.) but even if they do not exist you can do your own research to identify traditional Native leadership and lend your support. [Native-land.ca](#) can help you start that search.
- PRACTICE: Offer scholarships to Native and Black people and provide services that are pro bono or reduced cost to Native and Black groups.
- PRACTICE: Engage in land back when and where possible. This does not always look like transferring legal ownership of a property, though it can mean that. Land back can encompass agreements to allow Native groups access to spaces for their work, ceremonies, and households. It can also mean supporting Native advocacy to protect or access sacred lands or to stop dangerous pipelines, mines, power plants, transmission lines, waste facilities or other extraction projects.
- PRACTICE: Acknowledge and reckon with the history of enslavement and the legacy of anti-Blackness that remains and how it shows up in our organizations. This includes resourcing BIPOC people in our organizing to address internalized oppression. This toolkit on [dismantling anti-blackness in organizations by the AORTA collective](#) may help.
- PRACTICE: Support reparations, land back, and repatriation. This might include joining with other organizations to advocate for reparations, educating your group about the ways your work is implicated in enslavement, segregation, genocide, and dispossession of Black and Native Peoples, and deepening your own knowledge about what reparations and landback mean. *For example, check out the [Movement For Black Lives Reparations Toolkit](#) to learn more about the difference between reparations and redistribution, and NDN Collective's [Landback](#) campaign. We also strongly encourage you to look for reparations and landback work rooted locally where you live.*
- PRACTICE: Invest in SE efforts led by and for Black communities, especially in the US-South.
- PRACTICE: Create inclusive cultures where white supremacy and racism are named and addressed. Whether your group is multiracial, folks of color, or white folks, racism and white supremacy are impacting your culture and dynamics. Make regular space to talk about and grapple with that and budget time and space to train folks who need support to grapple with it.
- PRACTICE: Consider your internal policies – including compensation, time off, etc. – through a lens of historic and current inequities. Make sure that those impacted by those decisions have shared power in the decision-making process.
- PRACTICE: Know the lineages of your work. Know who developed the kind of work you're doing, who is owed respect, who the ancestors and elders are in your space. Come to understand your place as a lineage holder.
- PRACTICE: Support organizing for immigrant justice. Acknowledge that many immigrants are building solidarity economy movements under an atmosphere of constant threat, including that of detention and deportation, and support efforts to dismantle these hostile conditions, including within our organizations.

- PRACTICE: Support efforts to abolish systems of punishment including jails, prisons, detention centers, policing, immigration enforcement, and surveillance. In addition to being in solidarity with those efforts through attending rallies or responding to calls to action, find ways to remove your participation in carceral systems, dynamics of exclusion and punishment, and hold open conversations in your group about where you can practice non-compliance. For example, some radical mental health organizations refuse to alert officials when people express certain kinds of distress, including suicidal ideation, instead relying on community and relationships to ensure safety.
- PRACTICE: Learn anti-oppression facilitation that supports the voices of all rather than domination by a few, and commit to ongoing check-ins with how you're addressing oppression inside the organization. AORTA offers some great trainings: [www.aorta.coop](http://www.aorta.coop).

**PRINCIPLE: We acknowledge the history of patriarchy and misogyny as a root of capitalist exploitation and we seek to address these behaviors as they appear in our organizations and ourselves.**

- PRACTICE: Gender-based caucuses for study, reflection, and workshopping behaviors are useful for any level of SE organizing. For an example, check out the [Everyday Solidarity for Everyday Sexism](#) work in NYC.
- PRACTICE: Monitor and address pay disparities that arise from gender and be mindful of the ways we can value traditionally unpaid labor and care work.
- PRACTICE: Monitor and address labor disparities that arise from gender. For example, co-ops can audit the labor that falls outside individual job descriptions that is essential for a healthy group. This is often care work that is invisible and unpaid, but crucial to the functioning of the organization.
- PRACTICE: Normalize the use of [pronouns](#), gender inclusive restrooms and uniforms, and require an understanding of basic concepts of gender identity for staff and members. Resource this work with workshops and cultural competency trainings led by women, trans, and gender non-conforming people.
- PRACTICE: Participate in gender history events, and gender justice advocacy as part of a commitment to building an inclusive culture inside and outside your organization.

**PRINCIPLE: We support workers' rights and the liberation of poor and working people.**

- PRACTICE: Support unions in our workplaces. *For example, many worker co-ops choose to join unions in solidarity with workers in their field. This also gives them access to benefits and services, such as a grievance process. All groups that have a formal workplace can benefit from union affiliation.*
- PRACTICE: Develop strong worker support processes and structures like steward councils, mediation practices and educational programs within cooperative and SE enterprises/organizations.
- PRACTICE: Never cross a picket line. If you have a vendor or ally group where workers are on strike or picketing, respect that need and let the vendor or ally know you support the workers and will get your goods or services elsewhere.
- PRACTICE: Symbolically and materially support worker self-organization (e.g. sign petitions, contribute to strike funds, look to fulfill specific requests of organizing committees)



- PRACTICE: Develop a culture of talking about the impacts of classism in your group. Train members of your group to learn about how class dynamics work using tools from [Class Action](#) or others. As you learn together about the impact of classism, change your policies and structures to accommodate people from poor and working class backgrounds.
- PRACTICE: Mitigate class bias in your hiring process as much as possible. Some examples: include pay rates and benefits details upfront in job postings, create job descriptions that don't pose unnecessary qualifications (e.g. requiring formal degree when equivalent experience or the ability to learn a core task would suffice), anonymize applications before reviewing, use the same structured interview questions for all candidates.
- PRACTICE: Sliding scale pricing allows us to create access for all. Check out examples of sliding scale at [Accountability Mapping](#), [Ride Free Fearless Money](#), [Little Red Bird Botanicals](#), and the gift economy work of [East Point Peace Academy](#).

**PRINCIPLE: We incorporate disability justice principles into our organizations and incorporate access as a value, practice, and culture.**

- PRACTICE: Learn about the [10 disability justice principles](#) from Sins Invalid and discuss incorporating them with your organization.
- PRACTICE: Design your group's work with access in mind. If you are offering services, determine if they are available to disabled people, and if not, identify ways you can practice accessibility in your offerings. There are many checklists on the Internet to help you evaluate how accessible your website and marketing is, how to hold accessible events online and offline, and ways to build relationships to disabled people. Consider disability when you're designing your hiring, training, and membership onboarding processes, and create policies that are disability-friendly. There are many trainings and resources available to help you on this journey, just remember that access is a practice, not a destination.
- PRACTICE: Use the [Disability Justice Audit Tool](#) to explore your organization's relationship to access and disability justice.

**PRINCIPLE: We move with reverence for life and intentionally make room for joy, pleasure, grief, and connection.**

- PRACTICE: Incorporate [cultural organizing](#) practices into the processes of your organization. Check out [Spirit House](#) as an example. The [US Department of Arts and Culture](#) is also a great source of inspiration.
- PRACTICE: Incorporate ritual and embodied practice into regular meetings, events and organizational process. Rather than incorporating these as an add-on or afterthought, explore how shared ritual and practice can strengthen your work and invite different kinds of intelligence.
- PRACTICE: Make intentional time and space for celebration of wins and grieving of losses, big and small.
- PRACTICE: Hold a voluntary virtual "open mic" space for folks to share a poem, story, song, game, etc. Incorporate poetry, storytelling, music, dance, and play into your regular meetings.
- PRACTICE: Notice when you are talking about longings to be in deeper relationship with your

community, with the land and the more-than-human world, or with yourselves. Explore how you can act on these longings. Spend some intentional time outside during a long meeting. Host a neighborhood gathering just to hang out. Incorporate time for personal practices into the processes of your organization.

- **PRACTICE:** Create gratitude practices. One democratic school in Germany hosts an end of week meeting where the mic is open for any student, teacher, or staff member to express gratitude for somebody else that week. In some food co-ops the membership directs a portion of their financial surplus to movement organizations that rely on donations, as a way to say thank you. In one self-managed organization, staff are given a small sum of money annually to spend thanking somebody in their life, and the only string is they have to come back and tell the group what they did. Find what makes the most sense culturally for your community.

## **THEME: Democracy & Process**

The solidarity economy can't exist without democracy. Unfortunately, more often than not, our organizations, enterprises, and coalitions fail to practice internally what we demand externally. This leaves us unpracticed and unprepared for power. If we want to build a stronger movement, we must figure out how to come together in groups and make all manner of decisions through a process that shares power and decision making between all stakeholders. Doing democracy is not easy, and sometimes it requires us to slow down at first, but democracy is necessary for robust, strategic, and sustainable decisions in the movement. Democracy also allows us to create a microcosm of the world our movement is trying to build.

**PRINCIPLE: We practice democracy in all aspects of our work. Democracy is defined here as the whole body deciding how power is shared and where decisions or work can be delegated.**

- **PRACTICE:** Strategic Planning should always include meaningful member input and approval.
- **PRACTICE:** Organizational mission, vision and values should be reviewed by the membership regularly (e.g. every 1-5 years). This could be done in the context of a Social Audit of the organization (as in the above practice under financial and data transparency).
- **PRACTICE:** Leaders should be evaluated each year based on their performance in the service of organizational mission, vision and values. A committee of members could perform this function.
- **PRACTICE:** The organization should create formal ways to recognize and appreciate the many perspectives and contributions made by members.

**PRINCIPLE: We make decisions and organize work at the most local level possible, by those directly impacted by the decisions.**

- **PRACTICE:** National, regional, and local SE organizations need to make all organizational documents, including budgets, meeting minutes, bylaws, strategic plans, etc. should be available to all members and easily accessible. Members should have the right to decide what information is available and at what level of detail. Internal transparency is distinguished from general "public" transparency. *(An example of this work is the Chantier in Quebec, which has built regional networks and movement capacity to engage in long-term strategy development and implementation as a network of networks.)*
- **PRACTICE:** It's insufficient to just elect a board and call it democratic, if decisions have impact in a community that community needs to have a meaningful say in what those decisions are. It should go beyond "input" to actually having decision-making power.

- PRACTICE: Don't be afraid to experiment! Exercise democracy in varied and creative ways; both impromptu and defined process.
- PRACTICE: Each historical moment of the organization should be carefully documented and archived, so that we can learn from our successes and missteps. Investing in documentation also ensures that the power that comes from information is better distributed within and between our organizations. It also makes our organizations more resilient to leadership transitions.

**PRINCIPLE: We see our solidarity economy enterprises (both formal and informal) as autonomous, sovereign self-help organizations democratically controlled by their members in keeping with International Cooperative Principle #4.**

- PRACTICE: If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their autonomy.
- PRACTICE: Challenge the ways that state and philanthropic funding operate so they are more responsive to our needs.
- PRACTICE: Challenge “charity” approaches, invest in building power and agency for member and community self-determination. Never do for an SE organization what the members inside it can and should do for themselves. Instead, support them with guidance and solidarity.
- PRACTICE: Organizers, developers, funders and incubators should always include explicit exit plans for themselves while working with new entities so that the new entity can move on to exist independently and sustainably after the initial support or investment.
- PRACTICE: In worker co-ops specifically, honor the Mondragon principle of *sovereignty of labor over capital*, which means the interests of the workers are considered primary, especially when making financial decisions.

**PRINCIPLE: We take into consideration the impact that our decisions have on the broader community, future generations, and the earth.**

- PRACTICE: Solicit input from the broader community of stakeholders by conducting community meetings, interviews, or surveys, or even inviting folks to sit on our board or on an advisory group. This won't be necessary for every decision but when we have a big choice to make we can make room for the perspectives of those impacted. This is in alignment with the International Cooperative Principle of Concern for Community, and should be exercised with discernment, as not every decision requires input from every person.
- PRACTICE: When designing the governance of an enterprise, consider whether the board includes representation from all the key stakeholders, including those in the broader community who may not be directly involved in the enterprise but who may be impacted by it. Representation may be strengthened by reserving seats on the board for different constituencies and designing democratic processes for those constituencies to vote on who is representing them. Some examples include multi-stakeholder cooperatives or social co-ops where both the providers and recipients of social services are equal members of the cooperative.
- PRACTICE: From [Reinventing Organizations by Frederic Laloux](#) – consider the “empty chair” practice of

having an empty seat to represent the organization's purpose, and in any meeting any participant can sit in that seat to observe the discussion and reflect on whether the discussion or decision serves the organization's purpose. This could be expanded to include an observation from the perspective of land, water, or another non-human who we want to consider in our decisions.

## **THEME: Education & Leadership Development**

Our movements for freedom thrive when we share and develop knowledge together. We learn from what we have in common, and we learn just as much from our differences. We value deep collective study, and we honor what we have observed and experienced ourselves. This empowers members to contribute effectively to the development of their enterprises/organizations, and to inform the general public (particularly young people and opinion leaders) about the nature and benefits of solidarity and cooperation. We also know that our movements are more resilient and powerful when we are leaderful, instead of dependent on a small number of overworked and burned out individuals. To get there we have to prioritize developing leadership within our organizations and across our movement.

### **PRINCIPLE: We commit to the ongoing education of ourselves and our members following International Cooperative Principle #5 - Member Education.**

- **PRACTICE:** Learn how to best label and contextualize your work. Cooperatives are well known and there is a tendency for everything SE to get labeled as a co-op, but that diminishes the unique contributions of organizing that does not fall under a co-operative label. Groups engaged in SE work should consider carefully which label to apply to their work by learning about co-operatives and their unique rights and responsibilities (including legal formations and traditions) and learning about or exploring the history of collectives. If you are in a group that is democratic, but does not adhere to the Co-op Principles and Values and is not incorporated as a co-op, consider what you need to do to move your group towards actually becoming a co-op. If you do not wish to be a co-op, consider the potential harm claiming the identity causes and be aware of the legal liability you face in some states for applying that term to your work.
- **PRACTICE:** Educational activities should happen regularly within every SE entity. Promulgate clear principles & revisit/revise periodically. This should include political education as well as ongoing training in all aspects of the work you are doing together.
- **PRACTICE:** Education should always be integrated into our networking and organizing since it is about transforming our understanding and capacities for collective & cooperative action.

### **PRINCIPLE: We value collective learning to examine, adapt, and improve in response to challenges, opposition and new ideas.**

- **PRACTICE:** Convene regular member meetings and informational forums to discuss and debate issues arising in our organizations.
- **PRACTICE:** Share research, data and educational materials freely within our networks.

### **PRINCIPLE: We democratize educational practices. Everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher.**

- **PRACTICE:** Use context specific popular/participatory education methods. There are many traditions to learn from but the most common in the US is based on Paulo Freire:  
<https://www.freire.org/concepts-used-by-paulo-freire>.

- PRACTICE: Prioritize peer support and education, utilizing the knowledge/expertise of practitioners.
- PRACTICE: Use study groups as a way to learn new things together and build relationships.
- PRACTICE: Develop a shared definition about this work - not necessarily using the same words, but being clear about what is SE vs what is something else. This should be debated at all levels and renewed on a regular basis.
- PRACTICE: Support democratic schools that include students in decision-making and explicitly move away from punitive models that insist on rote learning and rely on grading.

**PRINCIPLE: We continually build new leadership within our organizations.**

- PRACTICE: Utilize ladders of engagement, which are ways to specifically tier learning that allow people to take on more leadership and responsibility as they gain a deeper understanding of the work.
- PRACTICE: Commit to ongoing leadership development and succession planning for all management, board, committee and leadership roles.
- PRACTICE: Develop and support mentorship programs within and among organizations.
- PRACTICE: Invest in training and support to develop democratic self-management practices. These are learned skills that allow us to respect ourselves as adults who can be trusted, rather than the paternalistic view of workers as lazy children who must be supervised for their own good. For examples of self-management practices, check out *Reinventing Organizations* by Frederic Laloux. Structures like regular peer reviews to provide feedback, checking in on tasks as a core part of group meetings, creating clear policies for what to do when somebody isn't meeting group expectations, and having a shared project management system can all support self-management. You can find more examples in the [Nonprofit Democracy Network's google drive](#).