



Start a Car-sharing Cooperative

A Guide for Relocalizing our Communities

The Relocalization Network

Car-sharing Co-operative • synopsis and roles

Synopsis

In a car-sharing co-operative, members own a number of cars collectively instead of each owning a vehicle separately. Car-sharing allows members to forego the large personal expense of owning and maintaining a private car, while enjoying access to a car when needed. Car co-ops have long been popular in some Western European countries, and have started to catch on in the U.S. and Canada in recent years. They can vary in size from a few friends sharing a car to tens of thousands of members sharing a large fleet of vehicles.

Roles

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Board of Directors | Elected to make decisions governing the co-op |
| Bookings Representative | Oversees phone or web service that members contact to book a vehicle |
| Administrator | Responsible for obtaining insurance and coordinating the billing, maintenance and pick-up of services |
| Car Obtainer | Buys or leases vehicles for the co-op fleet |
| Members | Book and drive the vehicles |

Time Frame

2 months - 1 year

Tools

- Web or phone service for booking a vehicle
- A reliable fleet of vehicles
- Lock boxes, keypads or computer systems for members to access cars
- Car pickup locations throughout the city that are accessible to all members
- Central location for co-op meetings and administration
- Garage and body shop for regular car maintenance



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Car-sharing Co-operative • project outline

Project Outline

1. The first step is to decide on an ownership and organizational structure for the car sharing program. The co-operative option provides democratic input for all members, joint ownership of the cars and increased desire for participation. An elected board of directors can function as the major decision-making body, while regular member meetings can provide members with the opportunity to shape the direction of the program.
2. Decide on the size of the co-operative, the future ambitions, the underlying principles, and the criteria for membership. Common criteria include a minimum age requirement of twenty-five and possession of a full license and a solid driving record.
3. The needed funding to start the co-op and obtain vehicles can come from a variety of sources. Government grants, foundation grants, personal investment and membership dues can provide start-up capital. Sufficient funding is needed to provide enough cars from the start to ensure reliable and convenient service to members. This will attract future members and allow for the expansion of the program.
4. The best option for obtaining vehicles is to use co-op funds to buy new or used cars which are then collectively owned by members. It is possible, however, to work out lease programs with some car dealerships if there is less start-up capital available. Size, fuel-efficiency, cost and reliability are all factors to consider when deciding on the type of cars to purchase. In some cases, choices will be limited at first due to funding considerations.
5. Obtaining affordable and comprehensive insurance is often the biggest obstacle faced by new car sharing programs. Local laws and conditions governing insurance for car sharing programs vary extensively, even within countries. You will need to do thorough research on insurance companies and local regulations. Comprehensive, collision and liability coverage are all necessary for car co-ops.
6. It is essential to establish a booking system that is fast and easy to use. Bookings may be done over the phone, on the Internet or using a combination of both. Members should be able to book a vehicle a short time before they intend to use it.
7. Member access to the vehicles is another important consideration. Numerous existing co-ops use lock boxes and/or door mounted keypads that each member can open. As available funds increase, in-car electronic systems can provide faster, cheaper and more convenient booking and access potential.
8. Develop a comprehensive billing system. Pricing systems are usually based on an hourly rate and a charge for distance traveled. Daily or discounted rates may be made available. Possibilities for billing include sending out invoices and waiting for payment or billing members' credit cards directly.



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Car-sharing Co-operative • resources

9. Vehicles must be kept in excellent condition to ensure reliability, to send a clear message to members on how to treat the vehicles and to serve as advertisements for the co-op. You will need to schedule regular car maintenance checkups and cleanings. These should be paid for out of the overall budget. Build a relationship with a garage or body shop to provide incentives for discounts.
10. It is essential to create a system that will keep all the cars stocked with gas. Car sharing programs differ in the way that they deal with this issue. One method is to have members fill the car they are driving when it nears a half tank. The receipt is left in the car, collected by co-op staff and reimbursed at a later date. The cost of gas is, therefore, passed onto members in an equitable manner as it is incorporated into the price they pay according to the distance they drive.

Resources

CarSharing Network: www.carsharing.net

European Car Sharing: www.carsharing.org

Cooperative Auto Network (Vancouver, BC): www.cooperativeauto.net



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Get Involved

Relocalization Network Team

Post Carbon Institute

network@postcarbon.org

Tel. +1 604 736 9000

#201 - 640 West Broadway

Vancouver, B.C., V5Z 1G4 Canada

www.relocalize.net

www.postcarbon.org