

The Importance of Cooperation and Cooperatives

Cooperation is a very important aspect of life, whether it be in a professional or causal setting. In certain instances, cooperation is very much needed. I personally struggle to work in team settings during school due to the fact that I am always left to do the work for everyone while they're on their phones and talking the entire time. I want project partners that are willing to cooperate and work together. That is why the foundation of the cooperative business model is so important. When it comes to cooperation, you need everyone to work together, not just a few people at a time.

That is why the electric cooperative business model is so effective. Many cooperatives offer services to rural communities that larger businesses weren't willing to work with due to it not being very profitable. Those rural families came together and created their own means of gaining what big businesses weren't willing to provide. For example, 86 years ago, many businessmen, farmers, and women came together in the Jump River area to create the Jump River Electric Cooperative. All of those rural citizens worked together to create a foundation for a Rural Electrification Administration (REA) that still stands strong today. No one had a lot of money, and every member served without pay and compensation. They fought through many trials, but Incorporators and local citizens kept fighting together with determination, and in the end, they finally got the electricity they had been rallying for. That is why cooperation is so important. If all of those earlier Jump River citizens hadn't come together when they did, they may have ended up getting electricity many years later, or maybe not even at all. It was through the determination and cooperation that everybody showed that they got what they wanted in the end. But the challenges they faced didn't end there.

Just like in any business setting, you're going to run into many issues. They may seem like they've all been resolved, but as time moves on, you're going to run into different ones. As the electric industry evolves, our electric cooperatives need to grow and evolve too. Doing so, they may run into a few issues. One of those issues is demand. Demand for electricity is always changing, but it's growing very quickly. In 2024, demand for electricity grew by 2.5%, and now it is estimated to grow by 3.2% in this next year. It's also hard for co-ops to rely on intermittent electricity sources due to buildings that may need 24-hour electricity in their area. But now, we mostly rely on baseload power created by burning fossil fuels. But as Americans use more electricity, baseload power sources such as nuclear power plants and coal have been converted to use natural gasses that are cleaner to use. As we use more electricity, our natural energy supply is drying up and due to public debate policies about energy and climate change, many U.S. states are to face high risks of blackouts between current time and 2028. Now that renewable energy has become more popular in current years, it will start playing a more crucial role in the near future. Electric Cooperatives have faced many challenges due to the high demand of electricity, but they still fight to serve their members fairly.

Electric cooperatives serve their members so well, not only because they care about their members, but because members have a voice within their local co-ops. Cooperatives are owned by the members that use the services it provides and are very member focused. The board of directors that run meetings live in the communities that the cooperative serves; meaning, they can give feedback about what needs to be changed or what's working well. Each member gets a say in what happens. My local electric co-op, Jump River Electric Cooperative, has the motto, "Working together... Working for you." Not only because they're member focused, but because they're a not-for-profit cooperative. All the money that they earn go back to the members they

serve. Electric cooperatives serve their members so well because the cooperative is their members. Cooperation is very needed because of this.

If it weren't for the early Jump River citizens working together and fighting for electricity, my area may not have thrived as well as it did at the time. Even through all of the challenges over the years, electric cooperatives have found resolutions and continue to do so in the ever-changing electric industry. They continue to improve, not only because they care about their members, but because the cooperatives are their members. If it hadn't been for the cooperation everyone has shown through the years, cooperatives may not have thrived as well as they did or as well as they currently do. Cooperation is very important in life, and cooperatives are proof of that.

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