



Language Considerations for Indigenous Cooperatives

When implementing the cooperative model, it's important to look at the language we use. Some terms have different meanings in different cultures, and to achieve clarity and respect we often must adjust our language. The state of Montana is home to 12 federally recognized tribes and seven tribal reservations, each with a unique culture and history. While there are some general terms that should be reconsidered or reimagined, every community has different needs and considerations.

Membership and Ownership

Membership to a cooperative is different than membership to a tribal nation. Indigenous people are members of their nations by birth, while cooperative members must pay a membership fee and participate in leadership and governance of their cooperatives.

Tribal governments own many assets, such as business vehicles and land, that benefit the tribal members. Ownership in a cooperative is different from ownership of a tribal asset. Simply using the terms "member/membership" and "owner/ownership" can be confusing.

Some alternatives are producer-owner, consumer-owner, worker-owner, partner, subscriber, voter, associate, shareholder, and stakeholder.

Patronage

As the model we use for forming cooperatives is Eurocentric, being based on the Rochdale Principles established in Rochdale, England in 1844, "patronage" is a similarly Eurocentric term. To some, it may suggest privilege or hierarchy.

Arctic Co-operatives Limited in Canada uses the term "dividends" instead of "patronage" to refer to the returns member-owners receive. Some possible alternatives to patronage in the sense of patronizing the cooperative are sponsorship and engagement.

Household/Dwelling

Many households on reservations and in tribal communities are multi-generational. A cooperative might grant membership benefits to a member's family or household—in your community, does this mean immediate or extended family? Does this mean a single-family unit within a household or the entire household?

The Bottom Line

While these terms are *in general* useful to reconsider, the bottom line is that every community is different, has its own needs, and deserves its own considerations. The best thing you can do is *ask* your fellow community members—what words feel best? What terms are the most clear and respectful to you?

Indigenous Terminology

From Minnesota Indigenous Business Alliance¹

Indigenuity

The practice of applying Indigenous intuition to inventiveness, creativity, imagination and innovation.

Indigenomics

The practice of bringing the Indigenous perspective, culture, traditions and ways of being to economic and social development.

Indigepreneur

An Indigenous visionary and entrepreneur who identifies a problem and creates a solution, striking out to make a better life for their family and community.

Indigenize

The practice of identifying opportunities where Indigenous worldviews, knowledge and perspectives are expressed.

Indigenization

Make Indigenous; subject to native influence.

Indigenization

The practice of infusing Indigenous worldviews, values, peoples, and protocols into an organization or business so it is completely a creation of Indigenous imagination and passion.

Buy Native

The intentional practice and preference of purchasing goods and services from a native entrepreneur or artisan.

Ally

The practice of uniting and connecting in a personal relationship that opens doors and venues where Indigenous peoples speak for themselves.



ⁱ Beginning the Cooperative Journey Together: A Guide to Indigenous Community Cooperative Development. MNIBA, 2020. <https://www.cdsus.coop/beginning-the-cooperative-journey-together/>

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