

CURE's 2023 Electric Cooperative Scorecard | Survey Criteria

→ INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

In August of 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act was passed and among its many provisions, are \$9.7 billion for cooperatives to improve their infrastructure and develop more renewable energy mixes. Co-ops and their member owners have a lot to gain from the programs receiving funding catered towards rural places and making their grids more resilient. This is a new criterion CURE adopted for this cycle of scorecards due to the funding's significance and how it could benefit member-owners. This is a broad criterion wherein; we simply expect co-ops to have generated some degree of communications geared towards member-owners about what the IRA means for co-ops.

→ ELECTRIC BILL EXPLANATION

Electric bills can be complicated, with jargon and fine print. Being transparent with co-op members about their bills is a key precursor to enabling co-op members to evaluate and participate in decisions around this core aspect of their co-op's business.

→ ENERGY SOURCE MIX

Should co-op members be able to provide input on what mix of energy sources their electric bills are paying for? To do so, members need information on their co-op's energy portfolio. Although local co-ops in Minnesota are "distribution" rather than "generation" electric cooperatives, it is their local co-op that residents look to for information.

→ CO-OP BYLAWS

The bylaws for a co-op are the rules for governance, membership, and operations, so these are obvious documents member-owners need to be able to access. When we last completed this survey, we expected this to be a category that most co-ops would pass. Indeed, it is the only one of the nine that can be found on most co-op websites in Minnesota. The fact that nearly a third of the 44 co-ops in the state *do not* post their bylaws online is surprising and concerning.

→ BOARD MEETING MINUTES/NOTES

Significant policy discussions and decisions often take place at co-op board meetings, so ensuring members can easily find out what happens at each meeting is important to democratic control. Here is [one example](#) of a common way co-ops post board meeting summaries, and we also counted a "yes" even for co-ops whose sites were out of date on posting board notes, but at least had some uploaded. Most co-ops, even when they did post notes, only included them in their newsletter archives.

→ MANAGER/DIRECTOR SALARIES

Compensation for leaders is another part of co-op policy that members can have a say in. As nonprofits, cooperatives report the compensation of their directors and key employees each year on IRS Form 990s, which are public. In the interests of transparency and member education, co-ops could make it easy on their members to find this information by posting their 990s or leadership compensation information on their websites — rather than keeping it off and expecting members to search internet databases on their own. In our last survey, we found [one co-op in Minnesota](#) out of 44 that links to its 990 at the bottom of its website's "About" page.

→ HOW TO VOTE IN CO-OP ELECTIONS

This one doesn't need much explanation as to why it matters for democratic control. While co-op bylaws may contain information on voting, we expected co-ops would want to highlight voting information separately, prominently, and permanently on their websites rather than expecting members to hunt for it in dense bylaws or other documents – so that is what we looked for. Only nine co-op sites out of 44 featured information on how voting is done. However, many of the co-ops we listed as “yes” only included this information in their newsletter archive.

→ HOW TO RUN FOR CO-OP BOARD

Running for a seat on a co-op board of directors can be intimidating for a co-op member who has never run before, and one way to encourage this aspect of co-op democracy is to be open and upfront on the co-op website about running for office. This is another area where co-ops that do provide some information often do so through an FAQ section or listing it in the newsletter archive.

→ BOARD MEETING DATES

Inviting members to attend board meetings—providing them with advance notice of meeting dates, times, locations, and agendas – is key to facilitating member input in decision-making. For our report card we looked to see if co-op websites at least provided upcoming board meeting *dates*; while [Connexus Energy](#) provided a great example for other co-ops to follow, many other co-ops included this information only in their newsletter archive.

→ BOARD MEMBER CONTACT INFORMATION

Last, but certainly not least, we reviewed websites for whether co-ops provide phone numbers or email addresses for members to be able to contact their elected representatives – certainly, another important way to facilitate member input. This is another basic area of improvement needed at about two-thirds of electric co-ops in our state.

Thank you for taking the time to respond to CURE's electric cooperative survey. We will note survey participation and notify all cooperatives upon the report's completion. Our report will be made available at www.cureriver.org. The submission form can be found [here](#).

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