

James Hiebert

Why are you interested in joining our board?

Co-ops have been part of my life since childhood, from bulk food orders with other families to food, car, gear, and community-supported agriculture co-ops throughout adulthood. I've benefited from co-operative models for most of my life, and I want to continue giving back to a movement that has supported me and my communities.

After serving my first term on the Kootenay Co-op board, including two years as Treasurer, my interest in continuing has only deepened. I've seen firsthand how important steady, thoughtful governance is to the long-term health of a member-owned business. The Co-op is not only a grocery store; it is a community institution, an employer, a supporter of local food systems, and a practical expression of shared ownership.

I'm standing for another term because I want to continue helping steward the Co-op's long-term viability, resilience, and service to member-owners.

What do you see as the most important role of our Co-op in our community, now and in the future?

Much of my career has been spent analyzing future climate change scenarios and their potential impacts on British Columbia. Food and agriculture are already affected by climate, and those pressures will continue to grow. In that context, I believe the Kootenay Co-op has an enormously important role to play in supporting the resilience of our local food system and strengthening the relationships among members, staff, local producers, suppliers, and the wider community. At its most basic level, the Co-op provides access to healthy, nutritious food. But its role is larger than that. By working with and supporting local farmers and food producers, promoting sustainable practices, and keeping more economic value circulating locally, the Co-op can help build a stronger and more resilient regional food economy.

Looking ahead, I think the Co-op's role will become even more important as communities face rising costs, climate disruption, supply-chain uncertainty, and pressure on local food systems. To serve that role well, the Co-op needs to remain financially strong, strategically focused, and accountable to its member-owners.

What personal values will you bring to our board?

I bring values of stewardship, accountability, fairness, collaboration, and long-term thinking.

I value the collectivism that established and has maintained the Kootenay Co-op as an important community asset. I also value the democratic governance that gives member-owners a voice in shaping the Co-op's direction. That ownership model is meaningful to me, and I believe directors have a responsibility to steward it carefully on behalf of current and future members.

During my first term, I came to appreciate even more deeply that good governance requires both care and discipline. It means preparing well, asking thoughtful questions, weighing evidence, listening respectfully, and remembering that the board's role is to govern rather than manage. It also means supporting staff and management while maintaining appropriate oversight.

In my professional capacity as a manager, I prioritize a workplace culture built on mutual respect, collaboration, fairness, and opportunities for growth. Those values also shape how I approach board work: with respect for different perspectives, care for the people affected by decisions, and a focus on the long-term health of the organization.

Occupation (current and/or former)

Lead, Computational Support; Pacific Climate Impacts Consortium

How will your personal or professional skills and experience benefit our Co-op?

I bring a combination of governance experience, financial oversight, strategic planning, risk management, and professional leadership.

During my first term on the board, I served for two years as Treasurer and helped steward the Co-op's resources during a period in which we greatly reduced our debt and significantly strengthened our liquidity. That experience gave me a deeper understanding of the Co-op's financial position and reinforced the importance of disciplined oversight, long-term planning, and balancing immediate operating realities with future resilience.

I also contributed to the overhaul of the Co-op's strategic plan and the strengthening of our risk management framework. Those processes are important because they help the board and management clarify priorities, anticipate uncertainty, and make better decisions over time.

Professionally, I serve in a senior management role at a not-for-profit organization studying the impacts of climate change on British Columbia and Canada. That work is mission-oriented, collaborative, and complex. It involves planning, budgets, teams, partnerships, long-term service delivery, and decision-making under uncertainty. I believe those skills are directly relevant to board service at the Co-op.

With a stronger financial position, an updated strategic plan, and a more developed risk management framework, the Co-op is better positioned to strengthen its core operations and consider future opportunities carefully, responsibly, and in alignment with its values.

Do you have experience in the areas that the board seeks this year - HR, law, leadership?

My strongest experience in these areas is leadership, including roughly 15 years of management experience in a mission-driven organization.

Professionally, my responsibilities have included hiring, supervision, performance reviews, organizational planning, budgeting, policy development, and supporting staff through changing demands. That experience has given me a practical understanding of how organizational decisions affect people, workplace culture, and long-term capacity.

I have also developed leadership experience through my service on the Kootenay Co-op board, including two years as Treasurer and participation in board and committee work related to strategy, finance, and risk. This work has reinforced for me the importance of asking careful questions, respecting the distinction between governance and operations, and supporting management while maintaining appropriate oversight.

I also believe that strong leadership includes knowing when to rely on appropriate external expertise. The board regularly works with professional advisors and consultants when specialized knowledge is needed, and I see that as an important part of responsible governance.

What skills or experience do you have in working cooperatively or collaboratively?

Much of my professional and volunteer work depends on collaboration. In my professional role, I work with scientists, software developers, managers, funders, partner organizations, and users who often bring different needs and perspectives to shared problems. In that environment, progress depends on clarifying goals, understanding constraints, building trust, and finding practical paths forward together.

Working in the not-for-profit sector is mission-oriented, and I know that none of us can accomplish our collective goals in isolation. The strength of our collaboration and shared purpose is often our biggest asset.

My first term on the Co-op board has reinforced that same lesson. Board work requires listening carefully, making space for different viewpoints, asking useful questions, and supporting decisions once the board has made them. It also

requires a clear understanding of roles: directors, management, staff, and members all contribute to the Co-op’s success in different ways.

I try to bring a cooperative style that is thoughtful, prepared, constructive, and respectful. I am comfortable with disagreement, but I believe strong collaboration means staying focused on shared purpose and making decisions in the best interests of the Co-op as a whole.

