

THE COOPERATOR

News and updates for leaders of resident-owned communities

New, online collaboration software coming soon to Midwest ROCs

G Suite offers board members a 'one-stop shop' for all ROC-related correspondence, document management, and more

If you serve on a ROC Board of Directors, you know the job comes with a lot of paperwork and correspondence. Monthly minutes, financial statements, bills, policies, procedures, resolutions, community rules, bylaws ... the list goes on. Board Members often report that one of the most challenging parts of serving on the Board is simply keeping track of all these documents!

To help ease the burden of document management and improve day-to-day ROC-related communication, the NCF Technical Assistance Team is instituting a new, standard communication and document sharing platform for all ROCs in the Midwest. The platform, called G Suite, will be introduced in each ROC beginning in summer of 2018.

As the name implies, G Suite is a "suite" (or package) of software applications created by the tech company Google. The applications included in the suite are: Gmail (email), G Drive (document storage and sharing), several document creation applications (Google Docs, Google Sheets, and Google Slides), a video conferencing application, and a calendar and contact directory. Users can access all these applications with a single username and password.

NCF has acquired licenses for the G Suite software for all the resident-owned communities NCF supports. In the coming weeks, the NCF Technical Assistance Team will be introducing the software in each ROC. Each Board will receive comprehensive training on the new software to help make the transition easier. NCF is excited to implement this new benefit to our client communities.

In advance of the ROC-wide implementation, the TA Team would like to outline some of the key benefits of the G Suite platform.

Everything you need, all in one place

One of the best parts of G Suite, is that each Board member will only need to remember one email address and one password. Once a Board Member logs into their account, they will be able to access email, calendar, word processing tools, and video conferencing software all in one place!

24/7 access to your ROC's governing documents

G Drive will allow board members, onsite management, and Technical Assistance Providers to access,

CONTENTS

Managing Accounts Receivable, 3

Community Event Planning, 4

Making Board Meetings Meaningful, 5

ROC Leadership Institute, 6

edit, and collaborate on reports and documents in real-time. As long as you have access to a computer or smart phone and an internet connection, you will be able to access your ROC's minutes, governing documents, financial reports, and work plans wherever you are, whenever you want.

G Drive in action: The Co-op Board used to rely on a traditional paper filing system to keep track of ROC policies, which meant Board Members had to walk to the onsite office every time they wanted to view the most current policies. With G Suite, the Board now keeps policies in a shared G Drive, which Board members can access whenever they want from their own smart phone or personal computer.

Continued on page 2

Get to Know the G Suite Applications



Gmail is an email platform similar to platforms like Yahoo mail, Hotmail, etc. Gmail allows you to send and receive correspondence via an internet connection.



Google Drive or "G Drive" is a document storage and synchronization service similar to Dropbox. It allows you to store files and access them across multiple electronic devices.



Google Spreadsheets or "G Sheets" is a web-based application that allows users to create, update, and modify spreadsheets and share the data live online. G Sheets is similar to Microsoft Excel.



Google Docs or "G Docs" is a web-based word processing application that allows users to create, update, and modify documents and share the documents live online. G Docs is similar to Microsoft Word.



Google Calendar is a web-based time management and scheduling application. Google Calendar allows you to quickly schedule meetings and events and share the appointments with others.



Google Contacts is a contact management tool that allows you to quickly and easily organize and review your contacts and create contact lists. Think of it like an online Rolodex.

G Suite from page 1

Free and Easy-to-Use Word Processing Software

Most ROCs which have an onsite office and computer have Microsoft Word and Excel software. Word and Excel allow users to create reports, newsletters, and other business-related documents. Word and Excel require consistent software updates and can be costly to purchase. G Suite comes with its own versions of Word and Excel called Google Docs and Google Sheets. Docs and Sheets are both slightly simpler to use than the Microsoft software, they do not require constant updating, and best of all, they are free.

Google Docs in action: the Co-op's Secretary does not have Microsoft Word installed on her home computer, which means she has to come into the onsite office every time she wants to write up the Board Meeting Minutes or create the monthly newsletter.

With G Suite, the Secretary can now login to her G Suite account from her home computer and create the minutes and the newsletter using Google Docs. When the minutes are done, all she has to do is send an email to the Board and tell them to login into their G Suite accounts to view them.

Professionalize your business with branded email addresses

As part of the implementation of G Suite, NCF will create ROC-specific email addresses for each Board. These email addresses will allow Board Members and staff to keep their personal or work emails separate from their ROC business. Using Park Plaza Co-op as an example, here is what the email addresses would look like:

- president@parkplaza.org
- vp@parkplaza.org
- secretary@parkplaza.org
- treasurer@parkplaza.org
- management@parkplaza.org

The new email address system will ensure continuity between incoming and outgoing Board members. Even if Board Members come and go, the email address for each position on the Board will stay the same.

Gmail in action: Let's say that Park Plaza Cooperative's Board Treasurer decides to retire from the Board. The Board will simply ask the Co-op's TA Provider to reassign the treasurer@parkplaza.org email address to the new Treasurer once he or she is elected. The TA Provider will transfer the ownership of the email address and the new Treasurer will instantly be able to login and access all the Co-op's financial correspondence.

Stay tuned for updates from your ROC's TA Provider for information related to the G Suite roll-out in your community.

Consistency is key when it comes to managing Accounts Receivable (A/R)

One of the core responsibilities of a ROC's Board is to keep their Accounts Receivable low (aka: A/R or delinquent accounts). While every ROC budgets for some losses over the course of the year, the A/R list should be monitored closely each month as it can easily start to grow and put the ROC in jeopardy.

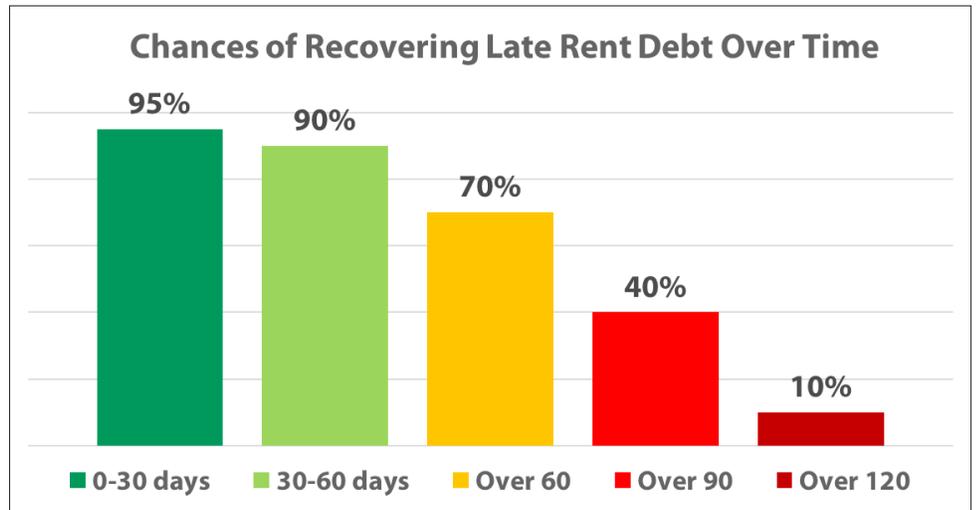
In the August edition of *The Cooperator* (Issue 5) NCF explored budgeting. NCF recommended that if a community brings in \$200,000 per year in lot rent, it should budget for no more than \$4,000 (two percent) of bad debt write-off's per year. Even with budgeting for bad debt, no one wants to lose money, so how can ROCs avoid income lost to A/R?

The good news is that there is a science to collecting money, and all businesses face the same issue, so ROCs have tried-and-true guidelines for managing their A/R.

The most important take-away from all the research out there on A/R recovery is this: Every day your business does not get paid rent, the chance of collecting that money goes down. Studies indicate that businesses stand a 90 percent chance of collection within the first 60 days of delinquency, but this figure drops dramatically as time goes on (see graph to the right).

Managing A/R requires that Boards are proactive and organized. Here are some tips to managing A/R:

1. Institute a \$20 discount for early payment. Offering a carrot rather than a stick can lead to an in-



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Studies indicate that businesses stand a 90 percent chance of collection within the first 60 days. The likelihood of debt recovery drops off dramatically after that point.

crease in timely rent payments and it builds good will with residents.

2. Communicate Immediately. Early contact with late payers shows residents the Board is organized and attentive. Residents expect any other business to follow up immediately if they do not pay a bill—ROCs should set similar expectations. There is no need to let the late payer drive the conversation, so make sure Friendly Reminders, Late Notices, and Demand Letters go out to late payers on a set schedule.

3. Go by the book. Make sure the ROC's designated A/R person follows the steps outlined in the ROC's Collections Policy, makes sure all agreements and payment plans are made in writing, and applies the policy to all residents equally. The policies ROCs have in place are specially designed to manage A/R, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Following a consistent col-

lection process removes ambiguity for residents about what action the Board will take, which encourages residents not to take the process personally and can prevent eviction, because early action allows residents more time to catch up when they fall behind.

One of the difficult aspects of managing A/R is managing social dynamics. Board Members may avoid dealing with A/R for fear of being seen as "Ebenezer Scrooge." If this feeling creeps up on you, remember: the Membership elected you to protect the community against financial threats, and unmanaged A/R is one of the biggest financial liabilities to a ROC. Boards show their communities the greatest respect when they govern fairly and consistently.

Got cabin fever? Get cold weather off your mind by planning community events

Social events are an important part of building community in a ROC. February is the perfect time to begin organizing community events for the spring and summer, because it gives planning committees plenty of time to pull together the resources needed for successful events and gives residents plenty of advance notice so all can attend.

NCF has compiled some of our favorite event ideas from the communities we work with to help ROCs get started planning their own events.

Coffee and Crafting. This could be an evening event for kids and adults. Provide some coffee and tea and ask a local bakery to donate some donuts or pastries. Provide low-budget craft supplies for a kid-friendly art project and/or invite residents to bring a craft they are already working on.

Root Beer Floats and Bingo. Who doesn't love a good game of Bingo? Ask residents if anyone has a bingo set the ROC could borrow for a night, or purchase a bingo set for [about \\$25 online](#). Want to give out prizes for bingo winners? Ask players to chip in \$2 or \$3 at the door to fund prizes for winners, or ask local businesses for donations.

National Night Out. Every first Tuesday of August, neighborhood organizations around the nation organize block parties and social gatherings. If you register your NNO event with your local municipality, the City may arrange to have your event visited by the local fire or police department. Local elected officials often visit NNO events as well. Visit natw.org/about for more information about hosting a NNO in your ROC.



Did you miss the last issue of *The Cooperator*? Check out the archive on the NCF website for all past issues. Visit northcountryfoundation.org/the-cooperator.

If a ROC has as budget for social gatherings, Boards may consider purchasing some equipment to help manage events more efficiently. Before you go out and buy anything, compile a list of items the ROC is looking for and ask around the community to see if anyone has extra items on hand to donate. Here are a few ideas of equipment to start collecting:

- **Folding Tables and Chairs.** ROCs can save money on renting folding tables and chairs by either buying their own or collecting them over time. Just make sure you have a good place to store them before you start collecting.
- **Coffee maker(s) and carafes** are great to have on-hand for Board meetings or other community get-togethers.
- **Water coolers and chest coolers** make beverage delivery a breeze. Plus, using water coolers and paper cups cuts down on plastic bottle waste.
- **A microwave.** Warm food gone cold? A microwave can be handy in a pinch to warm up food or beverages during an event.
- **Yard games (like corn hole or croquet)** are great to have on-hand for summer barbecues. If you have any wood working enthusiasts in your ROC, corn hole boards are a great, quick project.
- **Refrigerator and/or Freezer.** ROCs can find used refrigerators and freezers on Facebook Marketplace or Craigslist. Make sure appliances are in good working order before accepting donated items.



Making board meetings meaningful

Productive board meetings don't just happen; they're the result of planning and effort. In this first in a series of three articles, NCF will share a few simple tips on how you can realize more value from your board meetings.

Keep an Annual Board Calendar

Have you developed and do you follow an Annual Board Calendar? The calendar should contain items that go on each month's board meeting agenda. A calendar takes the guesswork out of having to make up the agenda each month, and ensures that you don't miss important tasks. If you don't have a calendar, your NCF coach can help.

Know Your Old Business

Developing a board agenda actually begins at the end of the previous board meeting. Board meeting minutes should identify unfinished business to be carried forward to the next board meeting—these notes will help you construct the agenda for the next board meeting.

Publicize the Meeting

If you want better attendance at your board meetings—from both directors and members—you need to publicize the meeting date, time, location and agenda. For directors, send an email or text message a few days in advance as a reminder. For members, post the meeting information in a public place, with a reminder that “All members are welcome to attend.”

Believe!

Believe that your board meetings are valuable ... and that attitude will rub off on other directors and members. You get what you give. Whenever talking with members, talk positively about the work of the board and encourage them to attend a board meeting. If you're not satisfied with the process or product of your meetings, take steps to change; again, your NCF coach can help.

Next issue: How to run a meeting.



ROC Summit

Exchange ideas. Share wisdom. Build leadership.

Saturday, May 19, 2018

Oak Ridge Hotel & Conference Center
Chaska, MN



**REGISTRATION
IS NOW OPEN!**

Register online:
northcountryfoundation.org/roc-summit

Or, register by phone:
612-767-2122

ROC USA expands Leadership Institute

Since 2009, ROC USA has partnered with NeighborWorks America to offer the [Community Leadership Institute \(CLI\)](#) to leaders of resident-owned communities. These national training events, which many leaders from Minnesota and Wisconsin ROCs have attended in the past, aimed to strengthen the voice and skills of volunteer leaders from ROCs across the nation.

ROC USA announced earlier this year that they will be expanding the Institute in order to accommodate a greater number of attendees and to enhance the event programming.

The newly-named ROC Leadership Institute (ROCLI) will take place Thursday, June 7 through Saturday, June 9, 2018. The Institute will be held at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), just a short 20-minute drive from the Manchester-Boston Regional airport. ROC USA hopes the new location will improve accessibility to attendees who may be intimidated by navigating larger metropolitan hubs like Los Angeles or Orlando, where previous CLI events have taken place.

ROCLI, similar to past CLI events, will provide a framework for peer-to-peer learning and a forum for discussing community issues. This time, however, the workshops and learning labs offered will focus exclusively on ROC-related issues and topics: board governance,

community management, financial health, etc.

Attendees will have the opportunity to enhance their leadership experience, build relationships with peers and national partner organizations, and bring back skills gained from the Institute to affect positive change in their own communities.

"The one thing I learned [at the CLI] is that ROC USA is so widespread. I didn't realize [resident-owned communities] covered so much ground. Now I don't feel like Montana is all alone in this project."

—Bernie Leichner, Mountain Springs Villa,
Red Lodge, Montana

Participation in ROCLI costs ROC leaders nothing. ROC USA covers all room and board, flights, and travel to and from the airport.

ROC leaders are encouraged to apply for the Institute online and with other leaders from their community. Watch for a notice from ROC USA in mid-February with application instructions. Applications are due March 15.

Please be aware that even with increased capacity of the Institute, the application process is still competitive. Approved applicants will be notified by April 6.

Capitol Corner

Starting February 20, 2018, the Minnesota Legislature meets only for six weeks – it will be a very short session, so any policy efforts must be strong and quick to have any shot at success this year.

NCF has two main legislative priorities this year:

- (1) Restore renters' credit to manufactured housing cooperatives in Minnesota;
- (2) Introduce new public funding resources for replacement and improvement of infrastructure in resident-owned communities.

Manufactured Housing Tax Fairness, HF661 (Peterson) / SF741 (Koran), would restore the renters' credit to all eligible households in ROCs. With new commitment from a former key Senate opponent, this

bill may at last pass.

Expanded access to infrastructure funding could be accomplished several ways. NCF is working on three bills (proposed law changes) to address the issue.

NCF encourages ROC boards to invite legislators for site visits after Session. The closer you are to your elected officials, the greater your influence, and more likely you can win gains for your ROC members.

Any phone calls and letters to legislators in response to requests by NCF staff can help move either of these initiatives forward. Thank you for your leadership!

