EAST END FOOD COOP

STRATEGIC PLAN

Fiscal Years 2026-2028

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Executive Summary

About the Strategic Plan

The East End Food Co-op's Strategic Plan guides all of our activities, laying out what we seek to achieve—our Ends—and the strategies we believe will best accomplish those Ends. The work of reviewing and renewing this document involved the Board, the GM, the heads of each department in the store, and thorough discussion during "visioning sessions" over the last few years with staff and membership regarding expansion initiatives and where our priorities lie. Additional member, staff, and board engagement with the process was conducted in May of 2025 to ensure that the plan reflected the collective voices and perspectives of our community.

Notably, we found ourselves returning again and again to the importance of partnerships to achieve our Ends—partnerships between our members, board, and staff; and between our store and our wider community of shoppers and producers. In the fall of 2024, EEFC completed a long-term lease extension with our landlords to remain at 7516 Meade Street through 1/31/29, along with a right to renew through 1/31/34, to be decided by the summer of 2028. This informs our timeline for both our short-term organizational operational goals and our longer-term expansion goal of owning a building in the East End, finally obtaining our "forever home."

This process led to the creation of five organizational goals that form the foundation of this strategic plan and will guide to work of the Co-op over the next three years:

1. Position EEFC as integral and prominent in the lives of customers, members, and vendors within the changing grocery landscape (Market Relevance)
2. Develop and grow local and regional food systems (Food System Development)
3. Ensure financial viability and operational bandwidth for long-term success and community impact (Financial Viability)
4. Cultivate agency to position EEFC for long-term stability and independence (Expansion)
5. Increase member enrollment and deepen member engagement (Member Engagement)

These **goals** (topline three-year outcomes) are supported by detailed objectives (actionable progress towards goals), and supporting implementation plans (to chart detailed progress toward goals).

About the Co-op

The East End Food Co-op is a 40-year strong, community-owned, full-service natural & organic grocery store with over 17,000 member owners, 70 employees, and a ten-member board overseeing cooperative, democratic governance. A co-op is a business voluntarily owned by the people who use it and operated for the benefit of its members. Members pool resources to bring about unattainable economic results by one person alone. These member-owned, member-governed businesses operate according to common principles agreed upon by the international cooperative community.

Equity, Belonging, Inclusion, and Accessibility

At East End Food Co-op, we believe that a just, resilient, and thriving local food system must be rooted in equity, belonging, inclusion, and accessibility for all people.

As a cooperative, we are guided by the principle that everyone deserves access to healthy, sustainable food and a voice in shaping the systems that nourish our bodies and communities. We recognize that historical and ongoing systems of oppression—racism, ableism, classism, and other forms of inequity—have created deep disparities in who has access to good food, safe spaces, and opportunities to thrive. We are committed to challenging these barriers within our co-op and in the broader food system.

We strive to cultivate a co-op community where all people feel welcomed, respected, and valued—regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, income, age, ability, religion, or background. We acknowledge that belonging is not something individuals must earn; it is something we are responsible for building and protecting together.

This work is ongoing, imperfect, and essential. We embrace it as a lens through which we do our work, and central to our mission as a community-owned grocery store. And, as part of a larger movement to transform the food system into one that truly works for everyone.

Co-Op Goals and Objectives

The East End Food Co-op's strategic plan is organized by goals, objectives, and actions.

Goals are the topline outcomes that EEFC will work towards in the next three years. They include specific actionable objectives, listed below and detailed in the accompanying implementation plans, to provide concrete actions to build progress towards goals. Objectives answer the question, "What does success look like for this goal?"

The five organizational goals and objectives are outlined below with example outcomes that are further developed in the implementation plans:

Goal 1 (Market Relevance): Position EEFC as integral and prominent in the lives of customers, members, and vendors within the changing regional grocery landscape.

Vision:
With an increase in local competition coming in 2025, the rising cost of goods, and significant increases in labor and other operating costs, EEFC needs to focus on positioning ourselves as integral to the lives of our customers, members, and vendors. At our core, our Co-op exists to provide our community with access to healthy food. In order to deliver on that promise we need to secure our place in this newly more competitive landscape. Every choice we make in operating the Co-op will be in support of this goal.

Objectives:
In order to achieve this overarching goal, we have identified the following core objectives:

- Distinguish EEFC as the premier place for sustainable, accessible, and high-quality foods/goods in the Pittsburgh region.
- Provide a vibrant, fun atmosphere with exceptional customer service from a knowledgeable, well-trained, and engaged staff.
- Ensure that EEFC's physical space evolves to meet the needs of the community.

Example Outcomes:
As we work to meet the objectives, some key outcomes may look like:

- More robust "Everyday Low Price" programs, Co-op Basics, and Co-op Deals that include interactive opportunities.
- New and updated customer service training for all staff.
- Designs for a new seating area that potentially includes liquor sales.

- A new and improved hot bar for grab-and-go hot food.

Goal 2 (Food System Development): Develop and grow local and regional food systems

Vision:
Our community has a resilient local and regional food economy, supported by our Co-op and our community partners. As an organization, our greatest contribution to our food system lies in growing the market for local, independently owned, and/or cooperative businesses. In order to achieve this growth, we must collaborate with various partners to create a resilient local and regional food economy.

Objectives:
In order to achieve this overarching goal, we have identified the following core objectives:

- Increase the quantity and diversity of locally and regionally produced foods with special attention to minority and women-owned growers.
- Continue to support local food incubators to nurture and educate new food entrepreneurs/producers.
- Expand and strengthen relationships with independently and cooperatively owned producers and distributors.
- Collaborate with local partners to support wholesale buyers in purchasing more regional and local products.

Example Outcomes:
As we work to meet the objectives, some key outcomes may look like:

- A new Provisions program (as developed by Orcas Island Co-op in the Pacific Northwest) is designed to support the distribution and sale of organic and sustainable goods to local businesses.
- Local food producer workshops are held, aimed at uplifting producers and their products at EEFC and the greater market.
- Increased local food products on EEFC shelves.

Goal 3 (Financial Viability): Ensure financial viability and operational bandwidth for long-term success and community impact

Vision:
We cannot achieve any of our Ends or strategic goals if our business is not financially viable and sustainable. Each and every effort at all levels of the organization is to improve our financial standing. Because we operate on thin margins and our goals go beyond that of a

traditional grocery store, we must use every tool at our disposal. This includes encouraging investment from our membership, providing exceptional customer experiences, investing in our equipment and facilities, and identifying new products/revenue streams wherever feasible.

Objectives:
In order to achieve this overarching goal, we have identified the following core objectives:

- Expand high-margin categories, including the café/prepared foods, to increase storewide profitability.
- Increase net income to solidify EEFC as a sustainable regional asset.
- Improve operational efficiency to enhance customer experience and product availability.

Example Outcomes:
As we work to meet the objectives, some key outcomes may look like:

- Redesigned Cafe with expanded hours, hot food, and beverages.
- Better shopping flow throughout EEFC.
- More effective and streamlined back-of-house operations, such as consolidated shipments and distributions.

Goal 4 (Expansion): Cultivate agency to position EEFC for long-term stability and independence

Vision:
It has long been a goal of Co-op membership and leadership to own the building we occupy, whether it's 7516 Meade Street or elsewhere. Throughout many different expansion discussions, over many years, this has been one of the top priorities. Not the only top priority and not the #1 priority. As we have seen commercial real estate become more expensive and less available, this in turn has impacted the costs of occupancy: rent, utilities, insurance, taxes and more. In 2024 our Board of Directors and Interim General manager worked diligently in the pursuit of a satellite location for our Co-op. Many lessons and insights were learned during this process and it became clear that the most viable and sustainable vision for expansion is to purchase a building in which we can grow our business and grow equity for our membership. We have seen multiple projects fall through over the last several years. It is our duty as the fiduciaries of our Co-op to invest in our space and in our workforce over the life of this lease and simultaneously be pursuing a forever home for our "mothership" in the East End of Pittsburgh.

Objectives:

In order to achieve this overarching goal, we have identified the following core objectives:

- Re-align expansion vision and build consensus between the Board, Management, Membership, and Staff.
- Explore all possibilities to maximize current lease space, including but not limited to renovations.
- Develop and implement a formal process to evaluate expansion opportunities reflective of the current market

Example Outcomes:
As we work to meet the objectives, some key outcomes may look like:

- A continued commitment to centering the ideas and feedback of the Board, Management, Membership, and Staff.
- Completed Market Study to guide the expansion process.
- Internal operations reflect excellence, so EEFC is poised for expansion.

Goal 5 (Member Engagement): Increase member enrollment and deepen member engagement

Vision:
Co-op membership is core to our identity and the vitality of the organization. We know that when the membership is engaged and thriving then the overall co-op will be thriving. To this end, it is essential for the Co-op to continue to listen to and engage our membership in meaningful and authentic ways.

Objectives:
In order to achieve this overarching goal, we have identified the following core objectives:

- Continue to engage members through tried and true strategies.
- Pilot events and programs that foster community and inclusivity through membership.
- Establish goals and define success metrics that reflect EEFC's vision for membership.

Example Outcomes:
As we work to meet the objectives, some key outcomes may look like:

- Expanded events and engagement opportunities, including food/cooking, based on member feedback.
- A change to a system of Patronage Dividends to repay member investment
- A “Food For All” program of needs-based discounts, including lowering any financial barriers to membership

- Reimagined marketing/outreach to members
- Updated goals and vision for EEFC membership.

Financial Projections

To be determined at a later date.

Recommendations for Implementation

The following recommendations for implementation are included to ensure that the plan can move from the idea generation phase to meaningful implementation based on clear systems of accountability.

The final strategic plan is simply a roadmap and there will inevitably be both obstacles and opportunities that crop up during the next three years. Implementation has its best chance of success when everyone understands their role in making the plan a reality. Combined with detailed implementation plans, EEFC is well positioned to implement this strategic plan. Potential roles of implementation include:

- ***Staff*** play a central role in advancing the ambitious implementation plans to drive progress towards implementing the strategic plan at the ground level. Staff should be the first to raise issues or implementation concerns if they appear. It is imperative that leadership continue to monitor staff capacity throughout implementation.

- ***Board*** are important accountability and strategy participants in the strategic planning implementation process. Board should quickly learn the new goals by heart and be ready to enthusiastically share the Co-op's vision for its future with anyone who will listen. Board will advocate around the strategic planning goals, participate in the Steering Committee, and ultimately be tasked with ensuring successful implementation. The Board should regularly seek strategic planning updates (at every Board meeting) from the General Manager.

- **Membership** is the backbone of the Co-op and is instrumental in ensuring that the strategic plan is meeting the community's needs. Membership should be

knowledgeable and articulate about the pathway forward for EEFC. Strategic plan updates will be provided to membership at the Annual Meeting and throughout the year as significant progress is made.

Appendix A: Overarching Goals and Objectives

Goal 1 (Market Relevance): Position EEFC as integral and prominent in the lives of customers, members, and vendors within the changing regional grocery landscape	
Objective 1	Distinguish EEFC as the premier place for sustainable, accessible, and high-quality foods/goods.
Objective 2	Provide a vibrant, fun atmosphere with exceptional customer service from a knowledgeable, well-trained, and engaged staff.
Objective 3	Ensure that EEFC's physical space evolves to meet the needs of the community.
Goal 2 (Food System Development): Develop and grow local and regional food systems	
Objective 1	Increase the quantity and diversity of locally and regionally produced foods with special attention to minority and women-owned growers.
Objective 2	Continue to support local food incubators to nurture and educate new food entrepreneurs/producers.
Objective 3	Expand and strengthen relationships with independently and cooperatively owned producers and distributors.
Objective 4	Collaborate with local partners to support wholesale buyers in purchasing more regional and local products.
Goal 3 (Financial Viability): Ensure financial viability and operational bandwidth for long-term success and community impact	
Objective 1	Expand high-margin categories, including the café/prepared foods, to increase storewide profitability.
Objective 2	Increase net income to solidify EEFC as a sustainable regional asset.
Objective 3	Improve operational efficiency to enhance customer experience and product availability.
Goal 4 (Expansion): Cultivate agency to position EEFC for long-term stability and independence	
Objective 1	Re-align expansion vision and build consensus between the Board, Management, Membership, and Staff.
Objective 2	Explore all possibilities to maximize current lease space, including but not limited to renovations.
Objective 3	Develop and implement a formal process to evaluate expansion opportunities reflective of the current market
Goal 5 (Member Engagement): Increase member enrollment and deepen member engagement	
Objective 1	Continue to engage members through tried and true strategies.
Objective 2	Pilot events and programs that foster community and inclusivity through membership.
Objective 3	Establish goals and define success metrics that reflect EEFC's vision for membership.

Appendix B: Feedback Session Overview

On May 20th (8 people) and May 27th (12 people), 2025, East End Food Co-Op hosted two feedback sessions for members to provide input on the 2026-2028 Strategic Plan. Using this At a Glance document to guide the discussion, attendees were prompted to ask open-ended questions to spark conversation and answer the following questions for each goal: What are you excited about? | What questions do you have? | What is missing?

The EEFC General Manager and the Procopia team facilitated these sessions. The results are as follows:

Goal	What are you excited about?	What questions do you have?	What is missing?
Goal 1 | Market Relevance Position EEFC as integral and prominent in the lives of customers, members, and vendors within the changing regional grocery landscape	- Increased local food products - Seeing identity, shelf arrangement, and buying policies get restated around sustainable, accessible, and high-quality. - Cafe Seating & Hot Bar - Return of the hot bar and seating area. - "Well-trained & engaged staff"	- Is the changing regional landscape missing sustainable, accessible, and high-quality offerings? Really? Is that landscape missing engaged staff? - Liquor sales vs liquor consumption sales. Different permits? Difficulty of licensing? - Is there some item/product that could be only available at the co-op?	- Improvements as suggested by staff. - After hours for members with local musicians. - Would love to see online bulk shopping through a complete catalog of options. - Emphasize the resources of the bookstore, gifts, and more!
Goal 2 | Food System Development Develop and grow local and regional food systems	- Opportunity for small local businesses to purchase from EEFC.	- How much opportunity do we have for further expanding hyper-local produce? - The provisions program sounds great - What are the other barriers to significantly moving the needle on increasing local food products on shelves?	- Pitch/prioritize local produce instead of out-of-town options
Goal 3 | Financial Viability	- "Redesigned cafe with expanded hours, hot food!"	- Given that our ratio of revenue/sq foot of retail space - how much	- Attention paid to other departments beyond the cafe.

Ensure financial viability and operational bandwidth for long-term success and community impact	- Restarting hot foods at the cafe - one gf/vegan soup every day would be great!	opportunity do we have to further increase revenue in our current space? - What are the plans for more financial transparency? (with staff and buyers?	
Goal 4 | Expansion Cultivate agency to position EEFC for long-term stability and independence		- I'm concerned about survey fatigue and don't think new surveys will give new information - what are you hoping to learn?	
Goal 5 | Member Engagement Increase member enrollment and deepen member engagement		- Could the co-op sponsor a gleaning event with a local apple orchard? - Is there an intention to reach out to staff to teach special events that are member-facing? (paid events in conference room)	- Encouragement of deeper engagement through substantive community meetings and an agenda. (and more social events) - Would work on developing more opportunities for member-owners to participate in ongoing programs/activities. (in contrast to one-off programs) - Local musicians - guitar, banjo playing, quality for ambiance. - Member engagement - carrying items that members want show. - A well-trained staff keeps members coming back. (i,e. Trader Joe's) - So, membership is about events? That is missing the OWNER aspect of member-owner. - How often does the cooperator come out?

Appendix C: Additional Strategic Ideas

Throughout the strategic planning process, many ideas and goals for the future of the East End Food Co-Op have come to the forefront. Below are ideas that may be revisited in the next strategic plan or addressed at a later date:

- Add a crosswalk in front of EEFC and tap the DoMI as a resource.
- Consider solar panels and other site-specific climate resiliency efforts
- Hold a second annual membership gathering or large holiday party for members
- Host after-hours music nights with local musicians at EEFC
- Tracking and evaluation of membership events
- Increased focus on engaging potential board members
- Create rubric to determine success of member engagement