A Common Language for a Shared Cooperative Story

A Working Communication Guide to the NRECA Lexicon
reading this playbook.

**six areas of insight**

- co-op 101
- the co-op advantage
- cost conversations
- renewables
- electrification + infrastructure
- cybersecurity

**what’s included**

Each of these areas has a dedicated section that addresses key concepts including:

- **Consumer context** – insight into how consumers feel today
- Language to **use**, language to **lose**, and **why**

**where it comes from**

The recommendations are derived from extensive lexicon research:

- Conducted on a national scale
- Using a mix of emotion-based qualitative and statistically significant quantitative measures
- See the **Appendix** for more details on methodology
the power of a shared language.

As an industry, we share common goals to help bring about an energy future that is smarter, cleaner, and stronger.

Yet we do not speak with a common voice.

The purpose of this handbook is to help the co-op family communicate our vision of the future with a common language that is...

+ **plainspoken**, so the average person can understand
+ **personal**, so consumer-members understand the value we bring
+ **positive**, by emphasizing what we are for, not against

While you’re likely already using some of this recommended language, this playbook serves as a single resource across the industry to underscore the importance of speaking with one voice.

Part of our strength comes from the fact that every co-op is different. But when we speak with one voice, we can build awareness, understanding, and support for our efforts.

**NOTE:** Change is challenging. Some of the language here will feel familiar. Some will feel new and uncomfortable. That’s ok. Try it out anyway. In almost every case, you’ll see we’re not actually recommending changing **what** we say. We’re just changing **how** we say it.
co-op 101+

the co-op advantage
cost conversations
renewables
electrification + infrastructure
appendix
Even at the most basic level, the terms we use to describe ourselves, our work, and our industry vary widely. What matters most is that we communicate consistently so that members and other stakeholders start with a basic understanding of **who we are** and **what we do**. Then we can build additional concepts on this foundation.

**essential terms to use.**

+ **we are** electric cooperatives
  - not *utilities* or *companies*
  - no need to use extra words like *membership*

+ **community-focused** organizations
  - *community* is the core co-op advantage that connects with consumers

+ who work to efficiently deliver **affordable, reliable, and safe energy**
  - a compelling goal consumers can *agree on*

+ to our **consumer-members**
  - not *owners*, which consumers strongly feel is an overstatement
Consumers consistently say the word “utility” sounds old and expensive.

Lucky for us, the term “electric cooperative” has no such problems—and in fact has remarkably strong positive connotations for consumers.

With these associations, there’s almost never a need or reason to refer to ourselves using a term other than “cooperative.”

**Q. Which of the following sounds like it would be _____?**

- The Lowest Bills: 60% An electric cooperative, 16% An electric company, 14% An electric utility, 10% An electric provider
- The Best Customer Experience: 57% An electric cooperative, 12% An electric company, 18% An electric utility, 12% An electric provider
- The Most Innovative: 43% An electric cooperative, 17% An electric company, 26% An electric utility, 14% An electric provider
- The Most Reliable: 40% An electric cooperative, 24% An electric company, 22% An electric utility, 13% An electric provider

**Q. Based on the name alone, which would you most want to have deliver your electricity?**

- Electric cooperative: First Choice 37%, Second Choice 24%
- Energy cooperative: First Choice 32%, Second Choice 25%
- Public power provider: First Choice 18%, Second Choice 16%
- Consumer-centric utility: First Choice 14%, Second Choice 17%
- Investor-owned utility: First Choice 6%, Second Choice 11%
who we serve

+ Calling people “owners” and “member-owners” **overstates** the relationship they feel they have with their co-op
+ They think of themselves as consumers first, and language that starts from that mindset is **more comfortable and credible**
+ However, **membership is intrinsic to who we are** and is a distinct differentiator, so calling them “consumer-members” or “members” retains that advantage.

**Q. How would you describe your relationship with your co-op?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Choice</th>
<th>Second Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer-member</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member-owner</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer-owner</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**we say**

× member-owner

× owner

**they hear**

“I don’t see myself as an owner… I’m just a customer who pays their bill every month”

- Billings, MT

**instead say**

✓ consumer-member

✓ consumer

✓ member
No two co-ops operate in communities that are exactly the same—and no one word can perfectly describe all of them.

However, when we talk about co-ops broadly, at a national level, saying we work in **rural areas** is the best umbrella term.

As a term, it’s familiar to our audience, and as a mission, bringing energy to rural areas sounds urgent and worthwhile.

“Raise of hands, how many would say where you live is rural?”

Q. Which of the following should be the central role of a cooperative?

*Across the nation, the job of electric cooperatives is to provide energy in...*

- **43%** Rural and ex-urban areas
- **30%** Smaller communities
- **27%** Places that larger energy companies will not serve
co-op 101

the co-op advantage

cost conversations

renewables

electrification + infrastructure

appendix
The good news is that consumers today are starting with generally positive feelings about their local co-ops.

89% nationwide feel very or somewhat positive toward their own co-op.

"Co-ops have our best interest at heart and want to strengthen our community."
- Online Group, PA

"Co-ops are good for the local economy, always reinvesting in the community."
- LaGrange, GA

And because of how we were founded, how we operate, and the role we play in our communities, we have great stories to tell.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>democracy</th>
<th>“One big advantage is in how we’re member-driven, and they have a say.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– NRECA communicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nonprofit</th>
<th>“We are not-for-profit, and that’s absolutely core to who we are.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– member co-op communicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>heritage</th>
<th>“It comes down to our history of making the ethical decision.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– member co-op communicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>community</th>
<th>“So much value of co-ops is in how they’re locally owned and locally governed.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– member co-op communicator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but not all of our stories resonate

The **not-as-good-news** is that just because we know we have a good story to tell, doesn’t mean that it’s going to connect with consumers.

Members interpret our messages through the lens of their own experience, and the impact that message has on them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>we say</th>
<th>they hear</th>
<th>because</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“our leadership is democratically elected by the members”</td>
<td>“The only time everyone has a voice is when something’s not working”</td>
<td>It’s <strong>not consistent</strong> with their experience today. Many simply don’t vote. And even those that do don’t feel a vote gives them meaningful control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“you have a voice”</td>
<td>“I just don’t believe that you can have a company that is not for profit.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Sounds nice, but CEOs are getting paid, higher-ups are getting paid.”</td>
<td>It’s <strong>not credible</strong> with what they believe about companies today. They’re convinced that someone, somewhere is still trying to make money off them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“not-for-profit”</td>
<td>“I don’t care about the history.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“members are the only shareholders co-ops answer to”</td>
<td>“It doesn’t say anything to me about my co-op today.”</td>
<td>It has <strong>no direct benefit</strong> to them today. They appreciate our heritage, but unless we can show them how it impacts them today, it doesn’t mean much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“As recently as the 1930s, the countryside of the United States had no electric power”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We turned the lights on”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
one core message connects: community

When we tell the co-op story, the **most powerful advantage** we can lean on is the idea of community.

- “I like that it comes back to local people.”
  - Billings, MT
- “Those in the community are in the same boat as you. When my power goes out, so does theirs.”
  - Online Group, PA
- “They’re in our community and they’re our neighbors.”
  - Billings, MT

Consumers believe it when we say we’re **community-focused**.

And just as importantly, they see how it’s a meaningful benefit if their co-op knows, cares about, and understands the community.

- **consistent** with their experience
- **credible** today
- **has a compelling consumer benefit**

And when we frame them the right way, we can actually use our other key messages to **support our community story**.

instead of saying what makes us GREAT is

- democracy
- nonprofit
- heritage

say what makes us part of the COMMUNITY is

- led by consumers like you
- belong to the communities we serve
- built by the communities we serve

NRECA
America's Electric Cooperatives
## telling the community story: making our messages matter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>when we talk about</th>
<th>- use less language like</th>
<th>and more language like +</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>democracy</td>
<td>✗ you have a voice</td>
<td>✓ leaders are members and consumers just like you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ member-driven</td>
<td>✓ we listen to the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ town hall meetings</td>
<td>✓ we understand the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ elections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ decide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonprofit</td>
<td>✗ nonprofit</td>
<td>✓ belong to the community we serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ not-for-profit</td>
<td>✓ share excess revenue back with the people we serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ capital credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ no outside investors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ in your interest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heritage</td>
<td>✗ turned the lights on</td>
<td>✓ built by the communities we serve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ 75 years</td>
<td>✓ no two co-ops are exactly alike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ electrified</td>
<td>✓ every co-op is shaped over time by the community it serves, each with specific needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ always</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>anyone can claim it</td>
<td>uniquely ownable by co-ops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ supporting local businesses</td>
<td>✓ co-ops were founded to bring energy to your area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✗ partnering with civic and charity efforts</td>
<td>✓ many employees of a co-op come from the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ each co-op is different based on the unique needs of each community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
making democracy matter

+ Our survey participants were relatively active members of their co-ops
  • 39% percent had voted in their elections
  • 21% had attended a meeting
+ But even for these active consumer-members, the ability to vote doesn’t matter as much as the simple fact their leaders are local people

Q. Which of the following would make you feel the most confident that the leadership of your electric cooperative will act in your best interest?

40% They are members and consumers just like you
23% They’re local people who are part of your community
18% They are democratically elected by their members
6% You can speak to them directly through co-op meetings and town halls

emphasize local, personal leadership

more than democracy or control

“I don’t vote. I am one person in this co-op, my vote or voice is not important.”
- Billings, MT

“Look at our government officials. If they lived in our communities they couldn’t act the way they do.”
- Online Group, PA

“I’d like to say I will attend a meeting… but I probably won’t.”
- LaGrange, GA

✓ “A co-op doesn’t just serve a community. It’s part of the community.”
✓ “The people who work at your local co-op also call this place home. When you call for customer service, it’s likely someone who lives in your community will respond to your request.”
✓ “Because we personally know the people our services affect and see them every day, we take it seriously.”

+ language to use
When you just use the word nonprofit, they’re convinced someone, somewhere is still turning some kind of profit. 

So if you clarify that it’s actually them who profits, their interest grows.

Similarly, using industry jargon like “consumer-owned” or “member-owned” actually dampens the value of this powerful concept. Spell it out in plain language to increase the impact.

Q. I would most want to get my electricity from a company that...

- Belongs to the people it serves: 21%
- Is consumer-owned: 57%
- Is member-owned: 22%
making heritage matter

+ To make heritage matter, you have to **make it relevant** today
+ Instead, say a cooperative is **uniquely suited to understand** and serve that community in the way that makes the most sense because it was built by people in that community

+ **language to use**

  “No two co-ops exactly alike. That’s because every co-op is shaped by the community it serves, each with specific needs.”

+ When we need to say more about our heritage, always frame the language in terms of present and future benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- looking backwards</th>
<th>looking forward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>× “As recently as the 1930s, the countryside of the United States had no electric power.”</td>
<td>✓ “Without co-ops electrifying towns across America, many of our local economies simply would not exist. They create jobs, fuel growth, and power the lives and economies of communities across America.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cooperatives should cooperate, too

+ Focusing on community can make a co-op sound **small**
+ That’s a positive attribute, but a weakness when it comes to large-scale, complex challenges like cybersecurity
+ To address this, we add one key element to the message: **cooperatives also cooperate** with each other, at both a local and national level

“**When you talk about a smarter grid it suddenly becomes about being big, going against everything else they are saying.**”  
-Billings, MT

“In smaller communities, it is important that co-ops work together because no one can do this by themselves... it’s how we keep moving forward.”  
-Billings, MT

“I like how co-ops are collaborating and not leaving the smaller co-ops out there to fend for themselves.”  
-LaGrange, GA

“A co-op is not just one person… we all work together and join forces.”  
-LaGrange, GA

+ The best collaboration is **sharing knowledge** and **pooling resources**
+ This is especially true on technological issues like cybersecurity, where shared investments in tech and infrastructure are especially resonant

| 26% | Develop new technology that might be too expensive or complex for a single co-op |
| 24% | Invest in equipment or infrastructure that benefits multiple co-ops in a region |
| 22% | Learn from each other |
| 18% | Have a national voice for issues that benefit small and rural communities |
| 10% | Set standards and industry-wide best practices for things like cybersecurity |

Q. I want my electric cooperative to work with other cooperatives in the area and nationwide so they can...
we are led by consumers like you
who understand and listen to the community.

we belong to the communities we serve
so any profits are shared back with the members.

we were built by the communities we serve
so each cooperative is different depending on its
community’s specific needs.

and across the country,
local cooperatives work together to
develop new technologies and infrastructure,
learn from each other, and keep the grid secure.
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the co-op advantage
cost conversations+
renewables
electrification + infrastructure
appendix
They don’t understand rates today, or spend much time thinking about them

Any conversation on this topic has the potential to quickly **spiral toward the negative**

"My bill doesn’t really explain what it means. I’ve asked and they couldn’t explain it either.”  
- LaGrange, GA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>consumer-members today...</th>
<th>so when you talk about rates...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>don’t understand how rates work</td>
<td>be dead simple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aren’t REALLY interested in learning more</td>
<td>don’t try to forcibly educate them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don’t care about our struggles</td>
<td>focus on the impact for them, not implications for us</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### keep it simple

+ When you describe a specific rate, **the clearer you can make it, the better**
+ For example, a “fixed” or “flat monthly charge” is better-received than a “service charge”
+ Members want their monthly statements to be **easy to read and simple to understand**
+ When possible, use the **familiar** term “bill,” but “rate” works when necessary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- you say</th>
<th>they hear</th>
<th>+ instead say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>× infrastructure</td>
<td>“I have no idea what a customer charge is. It sounds like I’m paying to be a customer.” - LaGrange, GA</td>
<td>bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× charges</td>
<td>“I thought I was just paying for power. I’d think they factored everything else into my rate.” - LaGrange, GA</td>
<td>rate (when necessary)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× what I pay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× price</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### don’t try to educate them

+ Calling them capital credits is **needlessly confusing**, especially when just saying credits captures the benefit just as well

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>- you say</th>
<th>they hear</th>
<th>+ instead say</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>× service charge</td>
<td>“It’s a little fuzzy but on my bill, they call it capital credits. When I read it, it doesn’t make sense.” - Billings, MT</td>
<td>flat monthly rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× customer charge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× infrastructure charge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× access charge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× capital credit</td>
<td>“Is a capital credit, just a credit or money back? We need clearer information about this.” - LaGrange, GA</td>
<td>credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× dividend</td>
<td></td>
<td>cash back over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
focus on the impact for them, not us

- When you need to increase rates, don’t focus on the problem it solves for **us**
- **Frame the “why” in terms of the benefits** they’ll receive—saving money long term is a compelling reason to make an investment today

### how NOT to frame infrastructure updates + rate changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Higher Prices</th>
<th>Lower Prices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increasing cybersecurity</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving safety</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving reliability</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### how TO to frame infrastructure updates + rate changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Higher Prices</th>
<th>Lower Prices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adding more energy from clean energy sources</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements that will save you money over the long-term</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- And when you explain flat or fixed costs, you need reasons that will resonate
- Again, keep it simple—and lean into **community-focused language** like “we all share”

**Q.** What do you think is the fairest explanation for why this flat cost exists?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td><strong>We all need a reliable energy grid, so we all share in the costs of building and maintaining it</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>32%</strong></td>
<td><strong>Every member pays a base cost to be part of the co-op</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>23%</strong></td>
<td><strong>The monthly cost on your energy bill ensures you’ll always have power when you need it</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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When you talk about renewables, people assume you primarily mean wind and solar.

Even so, they severely overestimate how much energy we get from these sources today: over 75% believe renewables provide at least 20% of the U.S. energy.

**Q. What percentage of the energy in the US today do you think comes from renewable energy sources?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Less than 10%</th>
<th>10-19%</th>
<th>20-29%</th>
<th>30-39%</th>
<th>40-49%</th>
<th>50-59%</th>
<th>More than 60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Result</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Q. Which of the following would you define as renewable energy sources?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Source</th>
<th>Total (n=500)</th>
<th>Moderate (n=155)</th>
<th>Somewhat Conservative (n=146)</th>
<th>Very Conservative (n=104)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coal</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear energy</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural gas</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geothermal energy</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hydroelectricity</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wind energy</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solar energy</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across the political spectrum, there’s an appreciation for renewable energy—with all but the most conservative seeing the value of an increase in renewables.

**Q. Which of the following statements most accurately describes how you feel?**

I would like to see my electric co-op…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Total (n=500)</th>
<th>Moderate (n=155)</th>
<th>Somewhat Conservative (n=146)</th>
<th>Very Conservative (n=104)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase its use of renewable energy sources</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to use the amount of renewable energy sources it does today</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease its use of renewable energy sources</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the community renewable story

+ Most members want to be reassured that we’re approaching renewables in a **sensible way**, and not just doing it to get bonus points
+ Knowing every co-op is different, and approaches renewables in **the way that works best for them**, gives consumer-members more confidence

“**We live in Montana, the weather is unpredictable. I appreciate knowing my co-op is investing in renewables that make sense for us.**”
- Billings, MT

“**Co-ops are communities, so a communal-minded approach to renewables makes sense. In your area you have options, and more control.**”
- LaGrange, GA

+ example language to use

✓ “A ranching community in Montana and a farming community in Georgia use energy in different ways and at different times”

✓ “There’s no one model for how America’s community should use energy. So there’s no one-size-fits-all solution for how to provide it”

✓ “Maybe it’s a windy region where wind power makes sense, but solar doesn’t. Maybe it’s a place with harsh winters where affordable heat is critical. Because the community gets to decide how their co-op runs, each co-op can work in the most sensible way for its members.”
balancing priorities

But when forced to choose, consumers still recognize the relative importance of a balanced energy mix and 24/7 energy sources.

Q. Which is more important to you? Having access to...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Energy Source</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewable energy sources</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A balanced mix of renewable and traditional energy sources (like coal and natural gas)</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/7 energy sources</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ language to use

✓ a diverse energy mix includes 24/7 energy sources like natural gas and coal
✓ cooperatives are committed to a more balanced energy mix
✓ co-ops continue to explore ways to make renewables more predictable and reliable

+ One of consumer-members’ biggest limitations and concerns with renewables is price
+ **50% don’t want to hear they’ll have to pay more than they do today**, and even those who are willing to pay more aren’t willing to pay much more.

Q. How much more, if any, per month would you be willing to pay to get more of your energy from renewable energy sources?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Payment Amount</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would pay no more than I currently pay</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would want to pay less than what I currently pay</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cooperative solar

+ The right frame acknowledges cost concerns about renewables to help establish that rooftop solar, while a valuable approach, has limits.
+ And it fully captures the benefits of cooperative solar as a cost-effective, efficient way to bring the benefits of solar to everyone.

Q. Which sounds like the best way for your electricity provider to bring you the benefits of renewable solar energy?

| 52%  | cooperative solar |
| 34%  | community solar |
| 15%  | private solar |

- utility-scale solar
- community solar
- rooftop solar

- Increases the use of solar
- Brings benefits of solar to everyone who wants it in the community
- Without having to shift costs or raise them across the board
- Increases overall cost

“Solar power may be worth the investment, but it’s hard to afford the initial cost.”
— Billings, MT

“I’d consider putting solar panels on my home, but it is just too expensive.”
— LaGrange, GA
co-op 101
the co-op advantage
cost conversations
renewables
electrification + infrastructure
appendix
**electrification context**

**“Beneficial what?”**
- LaGrange, GA

+ Unfortunately, the word **electrification means absolutely nothing** to consumers today
+ Even once you get past the initial barrier of ignorance, they’re inclined to **doubt our motives** and **question our examples** when we try to educate them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>you say</th>
<th>they hear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>× switch to electric appliances</td>
<td>just to make more money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× consider an electric vehicle or mower</td>
<td>not practical for most rural areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>× switch your old water heater out</td>
<td>not always an improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for a newer electric water heater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ They don’t understand the term, and they don’t connect with the specific steps of how to get there, but they are excited about the ultimate **purpose** of electrification

---

**Q. Which of the following do you think your electric co-op should make a higher priority?**

- **Improving energy efficiency**: 65%
- **Efficient electrification**: 18%
- **Beneficial electrification**: 9%
- **Helping members go electric**: 8%

---

"**Electric is more efficient and affordable. I have electric and my bill isn’t too high.**"
- LaGrange, GA

"**I think going electric will be better for all of us.**"
- Billings, MT
efficient electric

reframe to emphasize the goal, not the process.

beneficial electrification

efficient electric

how we define it

+ The words smart, efficient, and clean consistently resonate with consumers
+ Talking about efficient electric initiatives the right way lets us talk about all three

efficient electric

the idea that using smarter electric appliances instead of older, gas powered ones can make us more energy efficient today, and can allow more of our energy to come from clean sources over time
Based on name alone, consumer-members would much rather hear about **community grids** than microgrids.

**microgrid**

“*It’s about a community being self-sufficient.*”
- Billings, MT

**community grid or community microgrid**

**how we define it**

**Q. Which of the following best describes the main benefit of a microgrid?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25%</td>
<td>It allows communities to be more energy independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24%</td>
<td>It’s self-sufficient while also having access to the larger power grid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19%</td>
<td>It’s a solution for smaller communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td>It lets a community choose its own energy sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>It provides backup power in case of an emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7%</td>
<td>It increases the resiliency of the grid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**community grids**

allow communities to be more **energy independent** and **self-sufficient**, while still having **access** to the larger energy grid.
Q. Which of the following is the most urgent issue?

Protecting the energy grid against...

- Hacks: 13%
- Breaches: 20%
- Threats: 21%
- Cyberattacks: 46%

Q. Which of the following sounds like it is the least vulnerable to cyberattacks?

- A resilient grid: 7%
- A reliable grid: 7%
- A strong grid: 9%
- A safe grid: 10%
- A smart grid: 18%
- A secure grid: 50%

If you can only say one thing, focus on **the way we work together** as an industry.

Q. Which of the following BEST demonstrates that co-ops are prepared for and protected against cyberattacks?

- Share information with each other, the industry, and industry partners: 25%
- Pool their resources to share the experience and expense of protecting the grid: 12%
- Learn from every attempted hack: 12%
- Receive high scores for reliability and outage restoration from customers: 13%
- First to use national cybersecurity self-assessment tools: 24%

**language to use +**

- Co-ops **share cybersecurity information** with each other and industry partners.
- Co-ops **pool their resources** to share in protecting the grid.
co-op 101
the co-op advantage
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electrification + infrastructure
appendix
co-op storytelling essentials

we are electric cooperatives

community-focused organizations who work to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable, and safe energy
to our consumer-members.

we are led by consumers like you who understand and listen to the community.
we belong to the communities we serve so any excess revenues are shared back with the members.
we were built by the communities we serve so each cooperative is different depending on their community’s specific needs.

and across the country, local cooperatives work together to develop new technologies and infrastructure, learn from each other, and keep the grid secure.

cost conversations

• be dead simple
• don’t try to forcibly educate them
• focus on impacts to them, not implications for us

renewables

• consumers like hearing progress
• always talk about what we’re for—not what we’re against
• call out that every community is different, no one right way

beneficial electrification + infrastructure

• they agree with goal, but don’t understand the approach
• focus on impacts, like efficiency and clean sources

cybersecurity

• we have a strong message if we focus on cooperation

key terms to use

rate or bill
flat monthly charge
credits

cooperative solar
private solar
24/7 energy sources
balanced energy mix
cleaner sources
smarter
more efficient
efficient electric
community grid

protect against cyberattacks
working to create a secure grid
sharing information
pooling resources

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co-op 101

coop advantage

topic

principles

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Methodology</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collect</strong> language and ideas to test today through 8 interviews with NRECA stakeholders and co-op communicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Develop</strong> a range of messages that capture the different words, approaches, and ideas we need to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Test</strong> the messages using Instant Response dials in three 2-3-hour groups with co-op members, in MT, GA, + PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total n = 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confirm</strong> and refine our findings through a nationwide survey with 500 co-op members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategize</strong> to build a clear and actionable language strategy for what language works, what doesn’t, and why</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>