



Sponsored Membership Policy - Feb 2024

Background

Pigweed Food Co-operative, trading as Thoughtful Foods, is a not-for-profit, volunteer-run, food co-operative. Our overall aim is to provide affordable, minimally-packaged, and ethically-produced wholefoods and household products. To make these products as accessible as possible, we offer membership benefits and volunteer discounts. We aim to support our members and the broader community to access vital goods irrespective of other challenges they may face (while noting we are not a charity).

We recognise that many of our members experience hardship. However, we also recognise that exceptional circumstances may arise such that individuals, families, or households may require financial support in order to become a member. In these instances, a sponsored membership may be applied.

Principles and Related Thoughtful Foods' Policies

The aim of this policy is to support prospective members who experience extenuating circumstances. In accordance with our Safer Spaces and Privacy policies, the specific details of their extenuating circumstances should be shared with the minimum people possible to assess their application for sponsored membership. Where possible, their circumstances should be discussed in a de-identified manner.

It is a requirement of our constitution that all members are active shareholders and have paid the annual membership fee. We use the revenue from membership fees to pay for our insurance. For these reasons, although we recognise that extenuating circumstances are necessarily subjective and

All policies and processes undergo routine review two years after endorsement

dynamic, we may not be able to offer sponsored memberships to all prospective members who feel they require this assistance.

Definitions

Sponsored membership

Where the membership fee and/or share for a prospective member is not paid directly by the prospective member at the time of joining the co-operative. Their membership may be funded through donation by other members.

Exceptional circumstances

These may be highly individualised and reflect situations that prospective members wish to keep private.

Exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following situations and/or circumstances:

- Surviving domestic violence
- Surviving of other forms of abuse
- Severe housing insecurity
- Unexpected natural disasters
- Financial situations that impede volunteering

The last situation - experiencing financial situations that impede volunteering - may be considered in circumstances where an existing or prospective member or volunteer is eager to volunteer but cannot currently pay the membership fee. In this case, their membership may be sponsored for an interim period so they can continue or start volunteering. The prospective volunteer may agree with Thoughtful Foods to 'pay it forward' in the future - either by committing to volunteering for some time, or agreeing to sponsor someone else's membership when they are able.

Circumstances that are not considered exceptional include:

- Being a full-time student
- Being eligible for government concessions.

Process

- The availability of sponsored membership will be included on our website to enable prospective members to apply. This is also included in

Coordinator and volunteer training resources so that any enquiries during opening hours can be appropriately directed.

- Prospective members who require assistance with suspended membership should contact the Systems and Operations Coordinator in the first instance, via e-mail to office@thoughtfulfoods.org.au
- If their circumstances fall into the categories of exceptional circumstances described above, prospective members are generally eligible for a sponsored membership. The Systems and Operations Coordinator will refer de-identified details to the Chair of Directors to confirm the eligibility. If there is consensus between the two, the Systems and Operations Coordinator will process the membership. If there is any disagreement about eligibility, the de-identified circumstances will be discussed by the Director Collective. This can occur at their next meeting, or if timing is urgent, an out-of-session decision can be made.
- If their circumstances appear to genuinely constitute exceptional circumstances but do not fall into the categories described above, their de-identified circumstances will be discussed by the Director Collective. This can occur at their next meeting, or if timing is urgent, then an out of session decision can be made. If there is consensus that these circumstances are exceptional, then they will become eligible for a sponsored membership.
- Decisions about an application for a sponsored membership must be made within a month from the receipt of application. Ideally, to support the prospective member, this decision should occur within two weeks.
- Where required, a call out for Sponsored Membership will be promoted in the Bulletin and Thoughtful Foods' social media to request a donation from the broader community to fund a prospective member in exceptional circumstances. These funds can be received through an EFTPOS transaction in-shop.
- Members who receive a sponsored membership will be contacted on an annual basis, at the end of the financial year, to consider whether their circumstances may have changed such that a sponsored membership is no longer necessary.
- Where prospective members are deemed ineligible for suspended membership, they should be routinely referred to the following resources:
 - [OzHarvest Market](#)
 - [Eastern Suburbs Community Food Access Guide](#)
 - [Food Hub](#) (UNSW)
 - [Foodbank](#)
 - [Addison Road Community Organisation](#)

Endorsed by:

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Signature Directors

Reviewed and adopted: 28 February 2024

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