



Co+op Explorers Free Fruit Program

Background

Co+op Explorers is the result of NCG's efforts to leverage strong existing programs and initiatives at individual co-ops, and make them available as turnkey programs on a national basis. In a 2012, a survey was sent to a sample of co-op marketing contacts asking which programs from other co-ops they'd be excited to execute in their store, if given turnkey materials. A kids' club/free fruit program rose to the top of the list of responses, and NCG used existing programs from Neighborhood Co-op Grocery, PCC Natural Markets, Sno-Isle Natural Food Co-op, Skagit Valley Food Co-op, Concord Food Co-op and Co-op Food Stores as the basis to create Co+op Explorers. The Advising Branding for Co-ops (ABC) Committee also contributed to the direction of this program.



Program Description

Co+op Explorers is a free fruit program for NCG co-ops. The benefits of a free fruit program include promoting healthy eating for kids (and appreciation by parents and the larger community) and a more engaging and fun shopping experience for both parents and kids. The program is intended to be a function of marketing/outreach.

In the future, NCG may expand Co+op Explorers to brand other kid-focused programs, such as kids' cooking classes, kids' gardening, composting events, etc.

Recommendations and Implementation

Overview

What fruit should be used?

We recommend using bananas since they can be eaten easily by the widest age range, are relatively inexpensive and are typically available year round. We also recommend apples as an optional additional fruit, though offering (higher cost) apples will increase program costs. If co-ops wish to offer further options, we recommend keeping the selection limited to make the program easier to implement. Other options might include oranges and/or one seasonal fruit that can be eaten out of hand while parents shop.

Establishing and communicating to parents/kids the type(s) of fruit that will be available for this program is important to ensure that this program can be run with ease and limited labor hours.

Who can participate in the program?

We recommend limiting the program to kids ages 12 and under for maximum benefit. Based on other co-ops' experience, the program loses its luster for kids older than 12. Only children present in the store can participate



and they must be accompanied by a parent shopper or other supervising adult shopper. Limit of one piece of fruit per child per day.

When is the program available?

During all shopping hours.

Signing up Co+op Explorers

In order to participate in the program, parents need to sign up by providing parent name, their child's name, child's birthdate (optional), their member number (if applicable), and parent email address* (optional).

Once kids are signed up, each child should be given their very own, super official Co+op Explorers card, which they can sign on the back. Kids do not need to bring in their card to participate in the program when they shop, but they are welcome to do so!

Co-ops may want to provide kids with Co+op Explorers Fruits and Veggies Passport when they sign up for the program. Note that passports are designed for a kids ages 5-9.

*The purpose of collecting a child's birthdate and parent's email address should be specified and we recommend this information be tied to future offers. For example, co-ops may wish to use this information to email a free coupon for a child's birthday treat or may wish to email Mother's Day or Father's Day promotions.

Free fruit in-store

Once Co+op Explorers are signed up, they are eligible to participate in the free fruit program. Kids, with a supervising adult shopper, simply take a piece of fruit from the co-op's designated free fruit area and put on a Co+op Explorers sticker so that staff know they are participating in the program and can track participation when ringing up groceries.

Fruit should be located in an easily accessible location (we recommend a fruit basket) near the entrance of the store so that participants have access to fruit upon entering. We recommend against having kids select their fruit from the main produce area to prevent over-handling and rough treatment of fruit.

Program Promotion

Promote the program through NCG provided materials

A wide variety of marketing materials are available to execute the program. Posters, shelftalkers, table tents, newsletter copy, ads, web banners, coloring pages, social media images, etc. are available for download on NCG.coop's [Co+op Explorers page](#). Member cards, stickers, tattoos, recipe cards and passports are available for purchase in the [NCG store](#).

A full list of materials with thumbnails are available in the Marketing Materials Catalog.



Co+op Explorers Fruit + Veggies Passport

Link to articles

Link to articles on StrongerTogether.coop focusing on kids' health.

Promote through staff

Have staff approach kids (alongside parents) periodically to ask if they are a Co+op Explorer yet.

Promote through outreach

Bring Co+op Explorers cards to outreach events to sign up new kids and promote the program. The program makes a great conversation starter and has been quite popular with parents and the community, so play it up!

Use Co+op Explorers Fruits + Veggies Passports in outreach activities. Passports are designed as an at-home activity. They can be given away as freebies when kids sign up for Co+op Explorers or as part of co-ops' outreach programs.

Co-ops may wish to tie the passports into their promotion of local produce, though please note that not all the items in the passport will be local.

Co-ops may wish to craft rewards or prizes for kids who show a designated person or persons completed passports. Prizes could include things like:

- Free apple per month or fruit of your choice to take home and enjoy
- Visit a farm (co-op vendor)
- Come to a cooking or canning class with, a supervising adult, for free
- Get their profile photo posted in the store, newsletter, website or in social media, with their guardian's consent
- Others as determined by individual co-ops

Use coloring sheets and recipe cards in outreach activities.

Assorted coloring sheets are available to support the Co+op Explorers program.

Use recipe cards for kids cooking classes, to accompany food sampling or simply as an in-store resource to support the program.

Program Execution

Designate a sign up area in your store.

This may be the customer service desk or other.

Designate a free fruit area in your store near the entrance.

We recommend placing the fruit in a labeled Co+op Explorers fruit basket in your designated spot. Depending on your store layout, this could be in the in the produce area or at the customer service desk.

(A fruit basket that works well can be purchased from [Hubert](#) and can be shown at Common Ground Food Co-op, right.)



Fruit basket from Hubert at Common Ground Food Co-op



Request that Co+op Explorers participants wear stickers...

each time they take their one piece of free fruit per shopping trip per day so that staff know they are participating in the program. Make stickers readily available in a small basket next to the fruit with a reminder to “take one.”

Determine who will manage the program on the floor.

Ensure there is a staff person available at all times who can sign up new Co+op Explorers, answer questions and restock the designated Co+op Explorers fruit basket, when needed. Ensure that other staff on the floor understand how the program works and can answer questions, and maybe even sign up new Co+op Explorers.

Stocking the fruit and tracking program participation.

We recommend co-ops use their POS systems to track costs and participation:

- Create a single PLU for Co+op Explorers fruit with a retail of \$0.00, which would apply to all fruit used in the program, whether only bananas or additional fruit as well. The PLU will be used to “ring up” at zero cost each free fruit item consumed when Co+op Explorers accompany their parents in the checkout line. Participants in the program are encouraged to wear their stickers and parents are encouraged to mention that their child ate free fruit, so cashiers know to track participation. Cashiers may also want to automatically inquire whether the child participated or would like to as another awareness building tool.
- Create a Co+op Explorers account in your POS system so that fruit used to supply the program can be charged (wholesale) to this account.
- Shrink not accounted for. This simple system does not capture shrink costs.

Co+op Explorers expenses

Co+op Explorers expenses should be charged to marketing/outreach.

Co+op Explorers Cost Info

The cost to execute Co+op Explorers will depend on how many participants sign up and how frequently they come to shop with their parents. NCG has provided a spreadsheet to help you estimate the program costs: [Co+op_Explorers_Cost_Estimate.xls](#)

Co+op Explorers card, sticker, tattoo and passport costs at NCG.coop

- 100% recycled PVC member cards (same as gift cards): \$32/100
- 3” round stickers: \$22/1,000
- 1.25” round temporary tattoos: \$5/100
- 3.5” x 5” Passports: \$39/50
- Recipe cards (11 recipes) \$200/1,100