GTCS
God's Treasury Cooperative, Thrift and Credit Society.

STARTING A

# Cooperative Society in Nigeria

## The Practical Checklist

*Everything you need to plan, prepare and put in place—from the initial idea through registration, launch and ongoing compliance.*

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**God's Treasury Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society (GTCS)**

WELCOME

# Before You Register a Name

Starting a cooperative in Nigeria requires more than registering a name. You need a properly constituted membership, a clear economic purpose, a governance structure, adequate starting capital, operating policies, and a system for managing members' contributions, loans, savings and other financial activities.

This practical checklist takes you from the planning stage through registration to the start of operations. Work through it with your founding members. Tick each item as you complete it, and keep this document with your registration file.

**READY?**

Click any checkbox ☐ to mark it as completed. The document is fully editable — add your own items, notes and deadlines.

Requirements differ from state to state. Use this guide as a planning tool, and confirm the applicable requirements with your State Director or Registrar of Cooperative Societies before submitting your application.

## THE JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PLAN | MOBILISE | GOVERN | REGISTER | SET UP | LAUNCH |

*See section 15 for the expected output of each stage.*

## 01 Establish the cooperative's identity and purpose

- ☐ Decide on the name of the cooperative.
- ☐ Identify the target membership group.
- ☐ Define the primary purpose of the cooperative.
- ☐ Define the benefits members will receive.
- ☐ Identify the economic needs the cooperative intends to address.
- ☐ Establish the cooperative's vision, mission and objectives.
- ☐ Decide on the type of cooperative: multipurpose, thrift and credit, agricultural, housing, consumer or another approved type.
- ☐ Determine whether it will operate within one state or across multiple states.
- ☐ Define the geographical area of operation.

**IMPORTANT**

Your cooperative's objectives should be specific. For example, a thrift and credit cooperative may provide members with a structured savings platform, access to loans, financial education and opportunities for collective investment.

## 02 Membership requirements

- ☐ Identify the minimum number of founding members required by the relevant state or federal cooperative authority.
- ☐ Collect residential addresses and other required personal details.
- ☐ Recruit interested founding members.
- ☐ Establish membership registration fees.
- ☐ Establish membership eligibility criteria.
- ☐ Determine the minimum shareholding per member.
- ☐ Collect members' full names and contact details.
- ☐ Determine the minimum monthly savings or contribution.
- ☐ Collect valid identification documents.
- ☐ Prepare a membership register.
- ☐ Obtain passport photographs where required.
- ☐ Obtain written consent from founding members.

## 03 Governance and leadership structure

*Establish who will manage the cooperative and how decisions will be made.*

- ☐ Identify the founding officers.
- ☐ Establish a Supervisory or Audit Committee.

- ☐ Elect a Board of Directors or Management Committee, as prescribed by the applicable law.
- ☐ Appoint a President or Chairman.
- ☐ Appoint a Vice President or Vice Chairman.
- ☐ Appoint a Secretary.
- ☐ Appoint a Treasurer.
- ☐ Appoint a Financial Secretary, where applicable.
- ☐ Establish a Credit Committee if the cooperative will provide loans.
- ☐ Define the responsibilities of each officer.
- ☐ Establish leadership tenure and election procedures.
- ☐ Establish procedures for removing or replacing officers.
- ☐ Establish conflict-of-interest rules.

## 04 Legal registration and documentation

- ☐ Conduct a name search and confirm the proposed name is acceptable.
- ☐ Obtain the appropriate cooperative registration application forms.
- ☐ Prepare the cooperative's proposed constitution or bye-laws.
- ☐ Prepare the list of founding members.
- ☐ Prepare minutes of the inaugural meeting.
- ☐ Prepare the resolutions establishing the cooperative.
- ☐ Prepare the names and details of elected officers.
- ☐ Prepare the business plan or feasibility report, if required.
- ☐ Prepare the proposed registered office address.
- ☐ Pay the applicable registration and administrative fees.
- ☐ Submit the application to the appropriate Director or Registrar of Cooperative Societies.
- ☐ Respond to any queries or corrections from the registration authority.
- ☐ Obtain the Certificate of Registration.
- ☐ Obtain any additional registration particulars or documents issued by the authority.

### 2026 UPDATE · NATIONAL COOPERATIVE SMART REGISTRY

The Federal Government, working with the Cooperative Federation of Nigeria and Seamfix, is rolling out the National Cooperative Smart Registry (NCSR), a national digital platform for registering and verifying cooperatives and their members. Each society receives a Cooperative Verification Number (CVN), and each verified member receives a Cooperative Member Identification Number (CoopID), subject to the applicable identification and verification requirements. The NCSR supports, rather than replaces, registration by your state's Department of Cooperatives.

Ask your state cooperative office how the NCSR applies to you, and confirm current fees and name-reservation periods on the official portal before paying anyone.

**HOW MANY FOUNDING MEMBERS?**

The Nigerian Cooperative Societies Act provides for a minimum of ten qualified members for a primary cooperative society. However, state legislation and registration requirements may prescribe additional conditions. Confirm the applicable requirements before recruiting founding members. Lagos State, for example, requires at least 20 members for a savings and credit society. Confirm your state's requirement before you start recruiting founding members.

## 05 Constitution and bye-laws

*The bye-laws are among the most important documents of a cooperative. They govern how the society operates and protect the interests of members.*

- ☐ State the official name and registered address.
- ☐ Define the objectives of the cooperative.
- ☐ State the conditions for admission of members.
- ☐ Define members' rights and responsibilities.
- ☐ Establish share capital requirements.
- ☐ Define savings and contribution arrangements.
- ☐ Establish withdrawal procedures.
- ☐ Establish loan eligibility requirements.
- ☐ Define loan limits and repayment periods.
- ☐ Establish interest or service charge policies.
- ☐ Define procedures for loan defaults.
- ☐ Establish guarantor requirements.
- ☐ Define procedures for suspending or terminating membership.
- ☐ Establish procedures for settling disputes.
- ☐ Define the distribution of surplus or dividends.
- ☐ Establish procedures for conducting elections.
- ☐ Define the responsibilities of the Board and committees.
- ☐ Establish financial reporting and auditing requirements.
- ☐ Define the process for dissolving the cooperative.

## 06 Financial structure and capital requirements

*Before launching, establish how the cooperative will raise money and manage its funds.*

- ☐ Determine the initial share capital.
- ☐ Determine the minimum compulsory monthly savings.
- ☐ Establish a registration fee.
- ☐ Establish a minimum share subscription per member.
- ☐ Decide whether members can make voluntary additional contributions.
- ☐ Determine the percentage of funds allocated to lending.
- ☐ Establish a reserve fund.
- ☐ Determine how surplus income will be distributed.
- ☐ Prepare a first-year financial projection.
- ☐ Prepare an operating budget.

- ☐ Establish a loan fund.
- ☐ Establish a cash-flow management system.
- ☐ Establish an emergency or contingency fund.
- ☐ Determine the financial reporting period.

## 07 Banking and financial management

- ☐ Open a corporate bank account in the registered cooperative's name.
- ☐ Create individual members' savings accounts or records.
- ☐ Obtain the required registration documents and tax identification details.
- ☐ Create a share capital register.
- ☐ Establish authorised bank signatories.
- ☐ Create a loan register.
- ☐ Establish a dual-approval payment system.
- ☐ Create a repayment tracking system.
- ☐ Create a system for receiving members' contributions.
- ☐ Establish monthly bank reconciliation.
- ☐ Establish a receipt and payment documentation process.
- ☐ Establish monthly financial reporting.
- ☐ Create a cashbook.
- ☐ Establish internal controls to prevent fraud and misappropriation.
- ☐ Create a general ledger.

## 08 Loan management and credit policies

*If the cooperative will offer loans, it needs a properly documented credit management system.*

- ☐ Develop a loan application form.
- ☐ Establish procedures for loan disbursement.
- ☐ Establish loan eligibility criteria.
- ☐ Create a loan repayment register.
- ☐ Determine the maximum loan amount per member.
- ☐ Establish procedures for following up on overdue loans.
- ☐ Determine the loan-to-savings ratio.
- ☐ Establish a loan recovery policy.
- ☐ Establish guarantor requirements.
- ☐ Establish provisions for bad and doubtful loans.
- ☐ Develop a loan assessment and approval process.
- ☐ Establish a process for restructuring loans where appropriate.
- ☐ Establish repayment schedules.
- ☐ Create a credit risk assessment framework.
- ☐ Define applicable interest or service charges.

## 09 Office, technology and administration

- ☐ Secure a verifiable registered office or secretariat address.
- ☐ Establish an official email address.
- ☐ Obtain an official telephone number.
- ☐ Create an official website, where necessary.
- ☐ Develop a membership application form.
- ☐ Develop a member onboarding process.
- ☐ Establish a digital membership database.
- ☐ Implement accounting software.
- ☐ Implement savings and loan management software.
- ☐ Establish secure access controls for financial records.
- ☐ Create a document storage and backup system.
- ☐ Develop official letterheads and receipts.
- ☐ Obtain an official cooperative seal where required.

## 10 Policies and operational documents

*Prepare these documents before accepting substantial member funds.*

- ☐ Membership policy
- ☐ Savings policy
- ☐ Share capital policy
- ☐ Loan policy
- ☐ Loan recovery policy
- ☐ Financial management policy
- ☐ Investment policy
- ☐ Risk management policy
- ☐ Conflict-of-interest policy
- ☐ Fraud prevention policy
- ☐ Data protection and privacy policy
- ☐ Complaints and dispute resolution policy
- ☐ Staff recruitment and remuneration policy, if applicable
- ☐ Procurement policy
- ☐ Records retention policy

## 11 Post-registration compliance

*Registration is the beginning of the cooperative's legal and administrative responsibilities, not the end.*

- ☐ Obtain and securely store the registration certificate.
- ☐ Obtain the approved bye-laws.
- ☐ Complete the NCSR registration or verification process, as applicable.
- ☐ Prepare annual financial statements.
- ☐ Conduct statutory audits.
- ☐ Submit annual returns and other required reports.

- ☐ Register for applicable tax obligations.
- ☐ Renew any applicable registrations or permits.
- ☐ Maintain an updated membership register.
- ☐ Comply with the applicable state cooperative legislation.
- ☐ Maintain proper accounting records.
- ☐ Maintain records of elections and resolutions.
- ☐ Hold regular management committee meetings.
- ☐ Ensure that members receive periodic financial reports.
- ☐ Hold Annual General Meetings.

**EXAMPLE**

Lagos State specifically lists annual statements of accounts, annual returns, regular meetings and Annual General Meetings among a cooperative's post-registration obligations.

## 12 Staffing and operational team

*Depending on the size of the cooperative, you may need:*

- ☐ General Manager or Cooperative Administrator
- ☐ Membership and Customer Relations Officer
- ☐ Accountant
- ☐ Internal Auditor or Compliance Officer
- ☐ Account Officer
- ☐ IT and Database Administrator
- ☐ Loan Officer
- ☐ Recovery Officer

**TIP**

Some of these positions can initially be handled by elected officers or outsourced professionals.

## 13 Documents for your registration file

*A consolidated checklist of the documents your registration file should contain.*

| # | DOCUMENT | DATE OBTAINED | READY |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Proposed cooperative name | | ☐ |
| 2 | Founding members' register | | ☐ |
| 3 | NIN details of required applicant(s) | | ☐ |
| 4 | Members' identification documents | | ☐ |
| 5 | Inaugural meeting minutes | | ☐ |
| 6 | Application letter | | ☐ |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7 | Registration application form | | ☐ |
| 8 | Proposed constitution or bye-laws | | ☐ |
| 9 | List of elected executives | | ☐ |
| 10 | Passport photographs, where required | | ☐ |
| 11 | Proposed office address | | ☐ |
| 12 | Business plan or feasibility report, where required | | ☐ |
| 13 | Financial projections | | ☐ |
| 14 | Registration fee receipt | | ☐ |
| 15 | Certificate of Registration | | ☐ |
| 16 | Approved bye-laws | | ☐ |

## 14 Official registration resources

*Start with these official sources rather than relying solely on agents or third-party registration consultants.*

| RESOURCE | WHAT IT IS FOR | WHERE TO FIND IT |
|---|---|---|
| **Your State Department of Cooperatives** | Primary registration, bye-law approval, supervision and annual returns. | The cooperative directorate in your state ministry |
| **National Cooperative Smart Registry (NCSR)** | National digital registration, verification, CVN and member CoopID. | Ask your state cooperative office for the official portal |
| **Nigerian Cooperative Societies Act** | The federal law on registration, membership and members' rights. | placng.org/lawsofnigeria |
| **Lagos State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives** | Lagos registration guidelines and post-registration obligations. | mccti.lagosstate.gov.ng |

**ONE IMPORTANT DISTINCTION**

A registered cooperative is not automatically a licensed bank or deposit-taking financial institution. If your business model extends beyond member-based cooperative savings and lending into public deposit-taking or banking services, obtain legal and regulatory advice before commencing those activities.

## 15 Recommended implementation sequence

*Approach the project in six stages.*

| STAGE | MAIN ACTIVITY | EXPECTED OUTPUT | DONE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Planning and feasibility | Cooperative business plan | ☐ |
| 2 | Membership mobilisation | Founding membership | ☐ |
| 3 | Governance development | Executives and committees | ☐ |
| 4 | Legal registration | Registration certificate | ☐ |
| 5 | Financial and technology setup | Operational systems | ☐ |
| 6 | Launch and operations | Active cooperative | ☐ |

## 16 Additional checklist for a thrift and credit cooperative

*If your cooperative will mobilise members' savings and provide loans, pay particular attention to these:*

| | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Members' compulsory savings structure | ☐ Loan repayment and recovery process |
| ☐ Voluntary savings structure | ☐ Delinquency monitoring |
| ☐ Share capital structure | ☐ Members' individual financial statements |
| ☐ Loan eligibility and affordability assessment | ☐ Liquidity management |
| ☐ Loan-to-savings ratio | ☐ Investment of surplus funds |
| ☐ Guarantor framework | ☐ Financial audit and accountability |
| ☐ Loan interest or service charge structure | ☐ Members' access to their financial information |

**GOLDEN RULE**

A cooperative should never depend on new members' contributions to repay old members' loans. Its lending must be supported by sound financial management.

PLANNING WORKSHEET

# Know your starting point

These details determine your registration requirements and the documents you need. Complete them with your founding members before your inaugural meeting.

## 1 Where will the cooperative be registered?

☐ Lagos ☐ Ogun ☐ Oyo
☐ Rivers ☐ Abuja (FCT) ☐ Edo
☐ Delta ☐ Anambra ☐ Enugu
☐ Other state: _____

## 2 What type of cooperative are you establishing?

☐ Thrift and credit ☐ Multipurpose ☐ Investment
☐ Agricultural ☐ Housing ☐ Consumer
☐ Other: _____

## 3 What is the intended geographical scope?

☐ Within one state ☐ Across multiple states ☐ National membership

## 4 How many founding members do you currently have?

☐ 10–20 ☐ 21–50 ☐ 51–100
☐ Above 100 ☐ Still recruiting

## 5 What is the primary objective?

☐ Savings and loans ☐ Savings, loans and investments ☐ Business financing
☐ Community wealth creation ☐ Multiple services

## Notes

# About GTCS

God's Treasury Cooperative Thrift and Credit Society has served its members since 2013, helping ordinary people save with discipline, access fair credit and build wealth together. We share this guide freely because strong, well-run cooperatives strengthen whole communities.

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## FREE RESOURCE

You are welcome to print, copy and share this guide with anyone starting a cooperative. It may not be sold.

### Disclaimer

This guide is general information to help you plan. It is not legal or financial advice. Cooperative laws, fees and procedures differ between states and change over time; always confirm current requirements with your State Director of Cooperatives or a qualified adviser. Information correct as of November 2026.