



SOPO

atlanta's non-profit
DIY bicycle shop

SOPO Volunteer Orientation Guide

Mission

To create equitable access to cycling by providing affordable bicycle maintenance, services and education.

To achieve our mission, we operate a community bicycle repair shop. The shop provides a central forum for sharing equipment, materials, and expertise, and facilitated affordable, practical, hands-on support for cyclist of all ages and skill levels.

Organization

SOPO is a nonprofit, volunteer-owner cooperative.

What is a cooperative (co-op)? From Co-ops 101: "A cooperative is a business owned and democratically controlled by the people who use its services and whose benefits are derived and distributed equitably on the basis of use. The user-owners are called members." A cooperative is a type of business that abides by 7 principles:

1. Voluntary and open membership,
2. Democratic member control,
3. Member economic participation,
4. Autonomy and independence,
5. Education, training, and information,
6. Cooperation among cooperatives, and
7. Concern for the Community

SOPO is a 501(c) nonprofit organization, registered with the State of Georgia and Internal Revenue Service as a charitable, tax-exempt organization.

Principles/Values

The primary principles/values of SOPO are:

1. Promote sustainable transportation, especially riding bicycles.
2. Increase self-empowerment through the hands-on, do-it-yourself models, and each one teach one transfer of skills and knowledge.
3. Engage the community through a cooperative model of sustainable development on a non-hierarchical basis.
4. Provide equitable, affordable and practical services with a priority to those in need.
5. Create a safe space based on mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance.

6. Operate with transparency and accountability in all aspects, including, program planning and operations, finances, etc.

History

The Problem and Need

The concept for the organizations was developed among 60 community members who needed a quick and affordable way to maintain their bicycles. Many of the community members were young people, students, and/or service industry workers. Many of them relied on their bicycles as their primary mode of transportation for economic and environmental reasons. Repairs at ordinary bicycle shops were too costly and slow. Members of this community preferred to maintain their own bicycles, but not all had their own set of tools or all of the knowledge necessary. They needed a way to bridge this gap, and they knew that they could do it together.

Solution and Beyond

These community members decided to create their own solution: a collectively owned and operated bicycle repair shop. They realized that, by pooling their resources, everyone could have access to a shared set of tools, and everyone could benefit from the collective knowledge and expertise of the group.

At the first general interest meeting, community members shouted over each other their bigger dreams for special programs, and community building and social change possibilities. They know that by coming together in a hands-on learning and resource-sharing environment, people could build relationships with each and cultivate a growing and sustainable grassroots movement. They saw operating a community bicycle shop as an opportunity for civic engagement and an opportunity to use their empowerment as a vehicle for change.

Early SOPO

Before SOPO acquired its shop space in East Atlanta, volunteers operated a mobile repair shop, visiting different communities and building relationships. The East Atlanta Kids Club decided it wanted the shop to be permanently located in their neighborhood so kids could use it regularly.

The East Atlanta Kids Club and SouthStar Community Development Corporation worked with a neighborhood redevelopment corporation to find a shop location. Sopo Bicycle Cooperative moved into its shop location at 465-C Flat Shoals Avenue SE, Atlanta, GA 30316 in October 2005, and stayed until 2012.

SOPO in Action

SOPO provides affordable maintenance services and education during open shop hours, and through our special programs. People come to the shop to fix bicycles and build bicycles (both their own and those for sale at the shop), donate materials, help others, help clean up, meet new people, buy bicycles, and get tips on how to cycle safely around Atlanta.

Do-It-Yourself Bicycle Repair Shop

The shop is open to public for general maintenance and repairs.

Shop Rules

- Be nice.
- Be chill – no yelling, fighting, or being disruptive.

- Clean up after yourself.
- Don't take tools out of anyone's hands.
- Use the tools appropriately, and use the appropriate tool for the job.
- Keep it rated "G" - no cursing, flirting, being rude, drinking, smoking, etc.
- Don't steal.
- Don't hoard parts from the shop – shop materials are for in-shop use only.
- Youth ages under 18 old must be accompanied by an attentive adult.

How the DIY Shop works

No experience necessary.

People come in at all levels of bicycle repair skills and interest. Neither people who drop in nor volunteers are required to have maintenance experience or expertise. What is required is the willingness to contribute to a safe, positive learning space, which means setting a good example with personal behavior and helping others do the same. Our goal is to pair people who want to learn with people who want to share knowledge. Ideally, people who spend time learning with us will return to the shop with the purpose of helping others.

Creating a safe, positive, and hands-on learning environment

When a volunteer is helping a shop visitor, the volunteer should allow the visitor to do most of the work. The volunteer may demonstrate a repair, and then hand the tool to the visitor. The volunteer should never tell anyone that what they are doing is wrong, and a volunteer should never take a tool away from anyone, but instead, use helpful language to encourage a visitor towards the proper action. A volunteer may suggest that another tool may be more effective for a particular job, or a volunteer may describe or demonstrate proper tool usage.

SOPO has tools for just about every repair job on a bicycle. The specialized tools in the shop should only be used or demonstrated by a volunteer mechanic who has experience using them. Tools should always be put back in their rightful storage place.

Visitors are helped on a first come, first served basis.

All shop visitors must sign in and state their business at the shop.

Anyone can be asked to leave for violating any shop rule.

Adult supervision required

Children must bring adult supervision. Adults who bring their children and leave them unattended will be asked to leave (with their children). There are too many sharp objects in the shop. It's just not safe.

Group youth activities

If a teacher, counselor, or organizer of young people, would like to bring their kids to the shop to participate, they must contact a SOPO Board Member or e ahead of time so we can talk about how to make that work.

SOPO is not responsible for lost or stolen items. No one should bring valuable items to the shop, and especially not leave them unattended.

How to help people with bicycle repair

Helping each other with bicycle repair is what SOPO is about. We use the following methods and guidelines for teaching:

DIY (DO IT YOURSELF)

Shop participants should physically complete their own repairs. There are a few ways to teach someone a repair that allows them to do it on their own:

- Demonstrate the repair first and allow the person you're helping to repeat the activity. You can undo the repair you have done, or if you have a fixed a paired part (like a break), allow the person to repeat the repair on the other one.
- Describe the repair while the person you're helping is completing the activity.

BE KIND AND RESPECTFUL WHEN YOU ARE TEACHING

Our mission is to teach people of all skill levels how to repair their bicycles. SOPO doesn't expect people who come into shop to have any prior knowledge of bicycle repair or tool. When you are showing how to do a repair, try to explain things in a way that is easy to understand, without being condescending – it can be really intimidating to learn new things in a new place with people you don't know. Remember that not everyone knows what the parts of the bicycle are, or what a specific tool is called. Part of teaching is building on prior knowledge, so go ahead and ask, “on a scale of 1 to 10, what's your bicycle repair knowledge?” and go from there.

USE THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Every type of repair requires the use of at least one specific tool. In other words, there is a right tool for the job. You may observe people using tools other than the right tool. You are encouraged to suggest to these folks that they can use the more appropriate or efficient tool instead. Avoid telling people that they are doing something wrong or incorrect. You are also encouraged to remind people how to use tools properly if you observe improper tool use.

Even people who self-identify as experienced mechanics will sometimes choose an inappropriate tool for the job they are doing. We, as volunteers, have a responsibility to protect the shared tools in our shop and look out for everyone's safety. So, if you are sure there is a better tool for the job, be confident in suggesting it, even to someone who claims to know how to do their own repairs. When tools are used improperly, the most common result, before a broken bicycle or part, is a broken tool. We must be mindful of proper tool usage in our shop and wherever we let people use our tools.

DO NOT TAKE TOOLS OUT OF PEOPLE'S HANDS

Unless they are using it in a threatening manner, if someone is using an improper tool, you may suggest that there is a better tool and ask politely that they stop using the improper tool.

KEEP IT POSITIVE

We avoid using negative words or ways to describe actions. We like to maintain positive attitudes while in the shop, even if we've had a bad day. If we do our best to keep our words, behaviors and attitudes positive, it's easier for everyone to have a good experience in the shop.

YOU DON'T NEED TO BE AN EXPERT TO BE A TEACHER

Go ahead and jump in. It's okay if you don't know something, to say, "I don't know." Try to find the answer. Get a manual, search online, or ask another volunteer for help. Know it's okay to learn alongside the person you're helping. When in doubt, ask before you act.

The Physical Workshop

Arrival

When you arrive, notify the shop manager that you've arrived, sign in and put on a volunteer badge (this helps identify you as someone who can help). If you are prepared to help with repairs, you may look around for people who appear to need help, or ask the shop manager if there's anyone in need. If you would rather not assist with repairs, check with the shop manager for other projects.

Other projects

You are encouraged to strip parts off "bad" bicycles or build nearly completed bicycles if you are in the process of learning maintenance skills. Ongoing and daily projects including picking up and putting away tools and parts, sorting the "To Be Sorted" bin, cleaning out parts bins, and other kinds of cleaning and tidying activities you see. You may also observe some new task we haven't thought of yet. Please feel free to take the initiative to improve the shop after you check in with other volunteers about it.

Tools

There are basic sets of tools on each service station and in tool chests around the shop. Please encourage people to put tools away when they are done. If you aren't sure how to use a tool, always ask a volunteer or manager before using it.

Parts

Bicycle parts are located on the large shelves along the used parts wall. Used tubes and rags are located in their own bins.

Cleanup

It is best to get in the habit of putting things away. Tools and parts should be put away when you or anyone else is done with them. Clean the grease off of tools with a rag. Many tools get shared during shop time, and many people may look through the same parts bin. Ask to see if anyone is still using the tool or bin, before replacing it.

Last Call

Regardless of who took a part or tool out, everyone should contribute to cleaning up at the start of Last Call. Last Call happens around 30 minutes before the end of shop times. People should wrap up their projects and begin to clean up.

Bicycles and frames

Bicycles and frames are located in a few areas of the shop. These include available and unavailable bicycles. If you observe a shop visitor looking through the unavailable bicycles, ask if they need help finding something. Often, they are unaware that these bicycles are unavailable.

Recycling and other environmental issues

As an environmentally conscious organization, we recycle what we can and use our consumable items wisely. We collect scrap metal and rubber (used tubes and tires) in a container in the shop. We provide a number of grease and degreasers. Many shop visitors are unclear about the purpose of these products and how to apply them, properly.

Bicycle life cycle

We accept donations of all kinds. (e.g., monetary donations, old but still good bicycles and parts, bicycle accessories, shop supplies, tools and food)

Donation Structure for Open Shop

- \$25-\$50 per bicycle frame, unless otherwise marked
- \$8 per part
- \$10 per hour for use of tools and shop supplies
- \$25+ per bicycle. Priced individually

Donations do not have to take the form of money. We accept volunteer commitments, in-kind donations, treats for volunteers, or whatever a shop visitor has to offer. No one is turned away for lack of cash or resources. Almost everyone gives what they feel is fair, and some folks check in with the manager to talk about their financial ability in private, so try not to make assumptions about anyone.

Better behavior in the shop.

Your positive example, no matter how small a gesture, is a valuable teaching tool. We strive to maintain a safe space for all people and an environment that is free of intimidation and judgment. Never speak negatively about someone's bicycle. We want to keep bicycles working and people riding. Someone's bicycle is often their only source of mobility that isn't walking, so we respect their need to keep it running, no matter what the condition.

As a Volunteer, you are encouraged to help shop visitors avoid abusive or offensive language and behavior. We avoid putting down people for any reason related to identity, demographics, or social status. If such behaviors occur, you may speak up kindly or find the active shop manager. In particular, we should avoid innuendo and derogatory or culturally so-called language.

Please be mindful of your attitude and remember that we're trying to keep it positive in the shop at all times. We hope that the shop is a happy place that cheers you up when you're having a bad day. If you can't shake off your bad mood, try not to spread it to others. Also, please remember that everyone has a different level of what they think is appropriate humor. Keep this in mind when you make jokes around the shop, and if someone asks you not to make jokes about something, or thinks you've crossed a line, please respect their feelings and keep the atmosphere friendly.

A major SOPO goal is to maintain the shop as a safe and fun space for anyone who drops in.

The shop rules outline the basic premise: that you ought to be nice and chill out while you're in the shop.

If a volunteer doesn't feel like they can confront the offending person, the volunteer should seek out support from other volunteers. If it isn't handled by anyone during that shop session, the issue should be taken to the board, and a board member must confront the offended.

Dealing with particular – isms

Gender/Sexuality

Avoid:

- flirting with shop visitors
- assuming women cannot fix bicycles
- assuming someone's gender identity based on their appearance
- deferring to the male component or not acknowledging the female component of a hetero-couple

Class, Race, Age, Ability (or any other demographic factor that might make someone a little different from someone else).

Avoid:

- assuming that people cannot fix bicycles (or that they can)
- talking about anyone in front of them as if they are not there, even if you are frustrated with them

Being a Volunteer

In order to be a Volunteer, we ask you to:

1. Complete volunteer orientation
2. Enforce shop rules and guidelines for better behavior in a positive way
3. Be present at some monthly meetings if you are interested
4. Put in some time by; staffing the shop, volunteering at events, making promotional items, staffing a workshop, parting out bicycles or helping out with special projects.

What Can You Do as a Volunteer at SOPO?

There are a lot of different ways to fill your volunteer hours. Some of these categories and areas overlap.

In the shop, you can be a:

- Mechanic
- Greeter
- Cleaner and Tidier

Outside the shop and shop hours, you can be a:

- Committee Member
- Convoy for donation pick ups
- Fundraiser
- Media/PR Volunteer
- Designer and Marketing Assistant
- Racks Installer