NOVEMBER GENERAL MEETING

December 20, 2021



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Sara Ivry

November's General Meeting kicked off with the persistently pressing question of new member recruitment, key to the Coop regaining financial stability in the wake of pandemic-related losses.

Members asked: When and how will member recruitment happen? What can general membership actively do to convince non-members to join its ranks? Given that some 4,300 members left the Coop since the pandemic hit, is there an optimal number of new recruits? And what will be done to ensure that new recruits represent a diverse population?

“I’m happy to announce that in fact, yes, we started—we launched a join button on the website last night,” said Joe Holtz, the Coop’s general manager and treasurer, regarding renewed recruitment efforts. “That’s the biggest financial news of the day,” he said later.

“We’re having people self orient and self certify that they oriented,” in what Holtz called a new member soft launch. The Coop announced this soft launch on its Twitter and Instagram accounts. In addition, it plans a member email blast, according to General Coordinator Ann Herpel.

In this new orientation process, at the end of their self-guided orientation, would-be members schedule an enrollment appointment at the Coop. To start, there were roughly 100 appointments a week available said Holtz, who is optimistic there will be about one thousand new members by early 2022.

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“Our financial sustainability depends on higher sales volume,” Holtz said, and membership is intrinsic to that achievement. He noted that historically membership grew thanks to word of mouth. He did not mention specific proposals on active recruitment.

Other questions followed. Mitzie Rothzeid asked about including the names of primary

Coop staff and general coordinators along with their specific areas of focus on the Coop's website. "It would be great if staff would wear name tags on the floor," she said, as it "would create better dialog."

Another member wondered why the General Meetings are not being held in person, given that other institutions, such as theaters, museums, and schools have both resumed normal activity. Rachel Porter also suggested the Coop ease some Covid restrictions.

Herpel said that the school where the Coop typically holds its meetings has yet to resume renting space to outside groups.

Holtz offered highlights from his treasurer's report examining the Coop's financials for the 40 weeks ending November 7. Among them: the Coop received a $682,000 check from the IRS for employee retention credits. The aforementioned price increase mitigated the Coop's weekly losses by some $25,000. An increase in accounts payable resulted in a $221,000 cash increase. And the IRS allowed another four-week deference for paying a $60,000 pension expense.

General Coordinator Joe Slzadek reported that as of the end of November, the Coop shortened the member work cycle from six to five weeks and that it extended its hours until 8:30 p.m. [Editor's note: It was later determined that these extended hours will not begin until sometime next year.] He noted that the Coop faces challenges getting members to sign up for early morning receiving and cleaning shifts, and announced limited shopping hours over the holidays. On Christmas Eve and New Years Eve, the Coop will close at 5 p.m., and it will be closed entirely on Christmas Day.

He weighed in on supply chain concerns, raised at October's meeting, and said that such recent issues had to do with suppliers not having enough trucks at their disposal in September and October. The Coop, he said, found other suppliers and is juggling among them to ensure that shelves are stocked as best as possible. During the early

days of the pandemic, it was hard to keep shelves stocked because of labor challenges.

Making sure shelves are stocked, Slzadek said, requires “a perfect flow of items coming up from the basement to the floor.” He said that sales data suggest there may be ways to automate some aspects of stocking activity and that the Coop plans to investigate this next year.

Members from various committees weighed in with their reports. Michael Szeto, a member of the Dispute Resolution Committee, said that most of the disputes that had come before the committee in the past year had to do with public health protocols, like mask-wearing.

Helen Beichel, from the International Trade Education Squad, talked about the need for the United States to pressure the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland to waive intellectual property rights so that vaccine production can be sped up and made more affordable and accessible.

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Allie Esslinger was elected as a new member of the Agenda Committee.

How many committees are there exactly at the Coop and what do they do? That question undergirds a proposal Rachel Porter made that would try to ensure committees are effective, accountable, and overseen by Coop staff so that their work remains relevant and responsive to the needs of the general membership and staff.

Her proposal would require committees to make general meeting reports at regular in-

tervals, make membership requirements transparent and public, impose possible membership term limits, and list themselves on the Coop website in addition to stating what they do and who serves on them.

Finally, Susan Metz was set to present her proposal on having squad leaders return to work but moved to table her proposal until a general meeting in early spring. Placed last on the meeting's agenda, Metz felt she had insufficient time to discuss her proposal and preferred to do so at length in a future meeting rather than rush through now.

Sara Ivry is a writer, editor, and podcaster. She lives in Clinton Hill and has been a Coop member for more than a decade.

