NEW AND RESTORED COOP FEATURES: E-CARDS, GUESTS, YOUTH COMMITTEE

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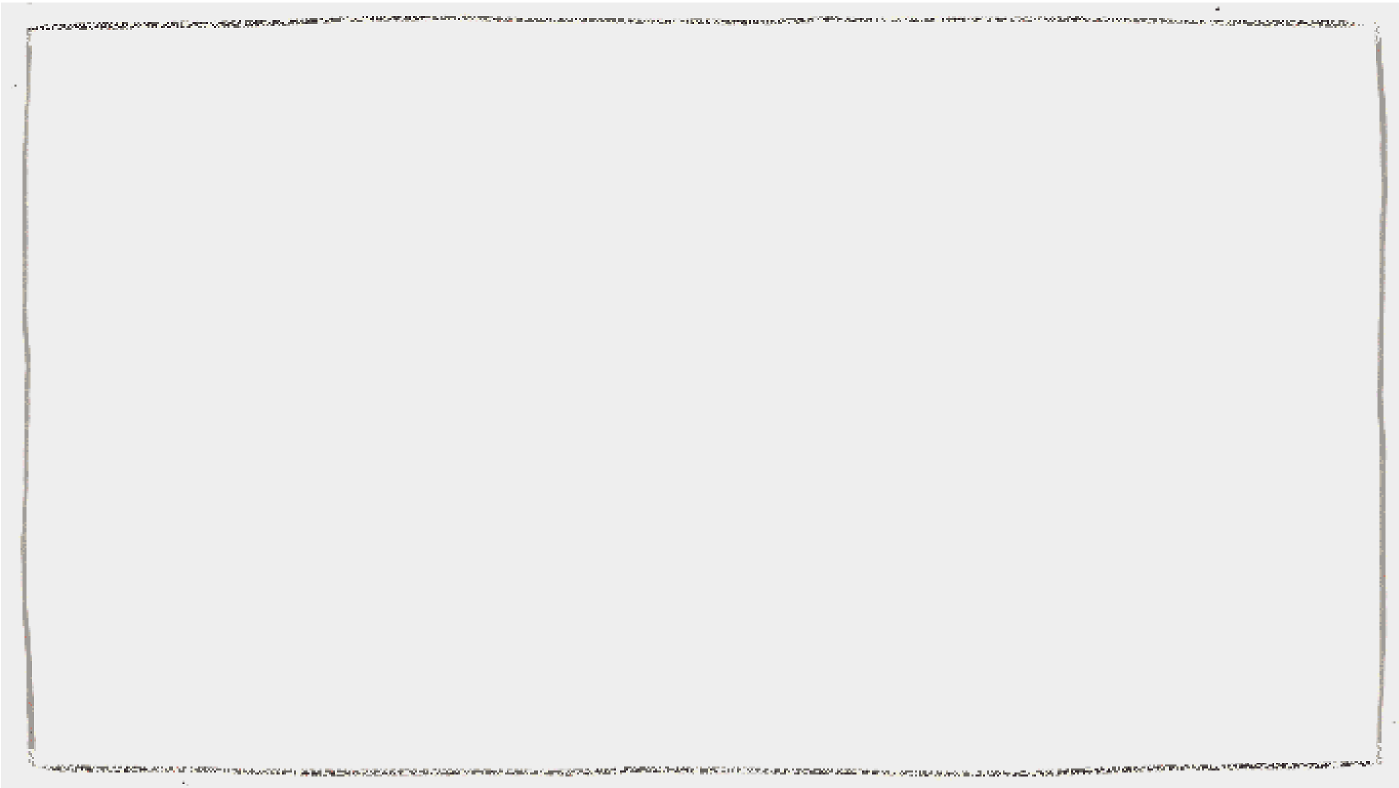

Illustration by Caty Bartholomew

By Hayley Gorenberg

Recent changes at the Coop—from electronic entry cards, to a retooled guest policy, to a brand new Youth Committee for young adult members—aim to streamline member experiences and address "pain points." Here are details of the changes:

NEWFANGLED CARD GIZMO FOR ALL!

Flashing a Coop barcode for entry recently got easier for everyone.

Every Coop member can now use their Member Services account to access their barcode and enter the Coop to shop or work. (Any member who has yet to set up the account can register and sign up, as long as they have an email on file with the Coop office.)

As of April 30, 2024, the feature became available to all members, regardless of their smartphone platform or device—a much more egalitarian system than the iPhone-only option that existed for years— courtesy of one member's donated programming. While the intent was to help, "It's a nice idea to move away from this thing we never asked to be made and had no control over," said General Coordinator Matt Hoagland.

> "A COOP CARD IS PROBABLY THE BEST THING YOU CAN CARRY IN YOUR WALLET IN THE EVENT YOU LOSE YOUR WALLET," SAID GENERAL COORDINATOR MATT HOAGLAND.

The web-based feature does not have wallet integration yet, but Hoagland contemplates that aspect in the future. A screenshot will work for entry, and there's also a print-at-home option. Those conveniences are more reliable than the MacGyver tricks some members have tried where they photograph a physical membership card, and then try to scan an expanded image of the barcode.

Further advantages include no need to replace lost cards anymore, which Hoagland noted "cuts down on plastic use, and saves you $3.50 and trips upstairs" to the Coop office.

That said, members can still use their physical cards, and Hoagland is a fan for one particular reason. "A Coop card is probably the best thing you can carry in your wallet in the event you lose your wallet," he said. The Coop's contact information leads to calls from good samaritans throughout Brooklyn—and even from other states.

He estimates the Coop gets a few such calls a month, with variations on the theme, "Can you contact this person, and let them know I have their wallet?" The Coop takes the name and number of the caller and relays the information to the member. "We don't give away your information," Hoagland said. "We get in touch, and hopefully everything works out. I haven't heard that it hasn't. Typically, people are happy to help their fellow human.”


NEXT MEMBER

Photography by Michael Berman

BE OUR GUEST! (AGAIN!)

The pandemic-era restriction on Coop guests lifted May 1, 2024. Now, members can bring folks to browse the store (and perhaps tempt them to join) on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Due to capacity limits on busier "carrot tag" days, guests are not allowed on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays.

The retooled policy allows members four guest passes over the course of a year—sprinkled throughout, or used all at once. Unused passes do not roll over to the next year, and members who are on a leave of absence, are dormant, or whose status does not allow access to the Coop cannot enter as a guest.

Members still check in their guests at the second-floor service desk or membership office, where visitors show photo ID. The check-in includes a review of the Coop's database, "making sure the guest is not a member who was put on hold or possibly left under bad circumstances," said Coop Membership Coordinator Karen Mancuso. She added, "There are members who have been kicked out of the Coop for disciplinary reasons."

Guests receive a sticker to wear on the floor, indicating they are guests, and must comply with the rule that only members shop. The sticker makes improper shopping even clearer, and Mancuso and other Coop staff hope it will reduce instances of that infraction, since enforcing the rule is "never fun for us," Mancuso said, adding, "but it's part of our job."

Most guests are visitors from out of town or people who want to join the Coop. Mancuso summarizes the essence of the revamped policy that lets members bring guests to our collaborative venture: "You want to show [the Coop] off!"

YOUTH COMMITTEE ADDRESSES AWKWARD YEARS

After more than 15 years of "bubbling" tension over young-adult members of Coop households whose undone shifts often undermined their household's standing, the January General Meeting voted to assign members aged 18–22 years to a Youth Committee—with no associated work shift.

Going forward, these young people—typically college-aged—won't be "dragging down their households onto work alerts as they get their footing," said General Coordinator Ann Herpel. "It's a pain point for them. These can be tension-filled conversations with members about their young adult in their household."

Membership Coordinators confronting frontline member issues originated the proposal and brought it to the General Coordinators after tough exchanges in which members learned their child was supposed to join at age 18 and the older adults in the household didn't want them to. "It became a point of conflict," said Herpel. While "some parents were fine and [their 18-year-old] would sign up, a lot wouldn't—or a lot would sign up and immediately go on leave." Or, they would depart for college, return for winter break, and look to come off leave for a couple weeks, and then seek to return to leave status when they went back to school. The tracking was a chore.

The work-exempt Youth Committee does not feature an option to "work ahead" and bank shifts before age 22, though young people can work for other members, "just like any member can work for someone else," Herpel said. Youth Committee members can attend the GM and participate in the Coop's decision-making process. At 22, the young person moves into the working pool, unless they leave the Coop.

Youth Committee members are not the youngest people shopping at the Coop. For many years the store has offered a "child-of" card, where a child of a Coop member could get their picture taken. While child-of cardholders don't get their own member numbers, they do receive a card with their picture, identifying them as the child of a parent who is a member, and the card includes the adult member's bar code.

A child under 18 with a card can shop independently without the adult member present. The card expires on the child's 18th birthday. Herpel is aware of a child-of card issued to a Coop kid as young as 6. "I think it's kind of a novelty, in a way," she said.

Child-of cards are also used by Coop children ages 14–17 years old, who can work shifts for others, as long as they have secured working papers from their school. In those instances, the child-of card specifies “working papers on file,” in accordance with state law.