

MEMBER SUBMISSION: TIME TO ADOPT THE HYBRID GM MODEL!

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Like so many other Coop members, I joined the Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) not simply for the food, but because I am committed to its premise: that member-owners support each other, and do so by collectively making decisions within the organization built by our labor. In that spirit, we need to update our protocol for convening the membership in a way that invites broad participation. When, in a Coop of over 16,000 members, monthly GMs regularly attract anywhere between 160 and 240 attendees, that signals a poorly functioning system. When votes on matters that are especially consequential to the Coop require unusual and arduous arrangements just for members to participate, that signals an inadequate system.

Requiring members to show up in the flesh made sense when our bylaws were written. We now have 21st-century technology that we used effectively for our meetings during the pandemic. While many have welcomed the return of physical GMs, the fact that these are becoming *mandatory* for those wishing to participate in Coop governance simply makes no sense to others of us.

As a father of three who was fortunate to work from home when COVID-19 hit, I discovered that work-from-home option made a huge positive difference. I'm thankful that my employer has remained flexible. The failure of the Coop to do likewise reminds me of those authoritarian bosses who make everyone return to the office on the theory that "COVID is over" (although, given the recent summer "surge," it clearly isn't). Our unbossed Coop is supposed to be a place where we seek to accommodate members' personal circumstances to the fullest extent possible. In fact, we currently require masking in the store two days per week to increase accessibility for members who need or want to minimize their risk of infection.

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Those utilizing the in-store masking provision are among those likely to benefit from the hybrid GM model. A member I know who is getting chemotherapy has recently attended several GMs while wearing a top-quality mask. With COVID-19 infections soaring, she's not comfortable continuing to do so. Parents are another group that stands to benefit. A recent GM included a discussion seeking "solutions for working families" in the absence of Coop childcare. Hybrid meetings would significantly help to ease their burden.

Hybrid meetings will be eagerly welcomed by those who can't fit the required travel time into packed work schedules, or feel unsafe trudging park paths in the dark, or lack convenient transportation, or live far away. Our current model restricts participation to members in largely unburdened circumstances. Hybrid GMs would much more accurately reflect what we proudly call "the will of the membership."

Let's remember that we are the Park Slope Food Coop—the vibrant organization that serves as an international model for what cooperation can accomplish. We can do this. We have to do this, to remain faithful to our democratic principles. So, let's do it! What are we waiting for?