

COORDINATORS' CORNER: CLARIFYING OUR POSITION ON HYBRID MEETINGS

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Illustration by Erik Schurink

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By the General Coordinator Team

Over the past several months, discussions surrounding hybrid General Meetings (GMs) have led to accusations that the General Coordinators (GCs) are against hybrid meetings and, therefore, against increased member participation and democracy. That is simply not true.

We are not opposed to hybrid meetings. What we are opposed to is implementing a major governance change without a clear understanding of its impact. We urge all members to take a careful approach to this issue and first prioritize a study of hybrid meetings before implementation.

To further clarify our position, here are three separate excerpts from a recent *Line-waiters' Gazette* article by the GC Team titled, "Coordinators' Corner: Our Coop at Risk.":

We are not opposed to studying and considering other formats for the General Meeting, including hybrid meetings.

While hybrid meetings could enhance accessibility and participation, such a significant governance change requires careful study. It has been the Coop's decades-long tradition to form a committee to study any proposed changes to Coop governance before bringing the changes to a GM.

Before voting, members need answers to important questions: How will member privacy and security be protected? How will the potentially high costs of well-executed hybrid meetings be managed? What impact will hybrid participation have on the GM's deliberative process? What other logistical challenges do hybrid meetings present, including ensuring that members attending in-person and those attending virtually have equivalent experiences? Until these concerns are addressed, this proposal should not move forward.

CALLING FOR A STUDY ISN'T A DELAY TACTIC, BUT A RESPONSIBLE STEP TO ENSURE THAT HYBRID MEETINGS, IF IMPLEMENTED, ARE BOTH EFFECTIVE AND EQUITABLE.

WHY STUDY HYBRID MEETINGS BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION?

For over 50 years, our governance model has helped to avoid making hasty decisions that could have an outsized impact on the Coop. Some examples include:

- Acquiring a second location. This discussion item had a great deal of support. However, after the conclusion of a lengthy study and submission of a final proposal, the item was voted down at a General Meeting in 2023.
- In October 1994, the GM voted to create a Committee that would study Coop governance and come up with proposed changes that would be in compliance with New York State laws.
- In 1985, the General Meeting voted to create the Ad Hoc Governance Committee to study possible alternative governance systems for the Coop to adopt.

Conducting a study prior to implementing hybrid meetings would keep with a decades-long tradition of carefully scrutinizing any major Coop changes prior to implementation and should provide answers to reasonable questions and concerns that members have, including:

EQUITY ISSUES

How will the Coop ensure:

- Remote and in-person attendees have an equivalent GM experience?
- All GM attendees, remote and in-person, have an equal opportunity to speak, engage and vote?

SECURITY & ELIGIBILITY

How will the Coop ensure:

- Only Coop members attend, listen and vote remotely, as required by our policies?
- Screen captures and recordings by members do not occur?

DELIBERATION & ENGAGEMENT

- How do we prevent members from logging in solely to vote, without engaging or hearing the discussion?
- How do we preserve the deliberative nature of GMs?

COSTS & LOGISTICS

- What are the financial and technical requirements for facilitating high-quality hybrid meetings, and how will those costs be managed?

ATTENDANCE

- Will some members and committees be required to attend in-person, or will attendance be optional, potentially leading to minimal in-person participation and wasted resources for in-person setup?
- During the final months of fully remote General Meetings—when access was available to all members—attendance was very low, averaging fewer participants than current in-person meetings. How do we ensure hybrid meetings do not face the same issues?

A DELAY TACTIC?

Calling for a study isn't a delay tactic, but a responsible step to ensure that hybrid meetings, if implemented, are both effective and equitable. Important questions left unanswered before a vote still need to be addressed before implementation. That's why we strongly recommend that a committee of members evaluate these concerns in advance. By doing so, if hybrid meetings are approved, this critical work will be

completed beforehand, rather than becoming solely the responsibility of Coop staff, who may not have the capacity to take it on immediately after the vote.

SAFEGUARDING OUR COOP'S FUTURE

Our goal remains the same: to preserve the Coop's ability to thrive for years to come. Taking a careful and deliberative approach to a major change like instituting hybrid meetings isn't resisting change—it's about ensuring that a change preserves and strengthens, rather than weakens, what we have built together.

Join us in safeguarding our Coop's future:

- Support studying hybrid meetings before implementation.
- Engage in respectful, informed discussions about governance changes.
- Attend GMs and participate in shaping the future of the Coop.