



Columinate

Catalysts for Common Good

**“Supporting your GM in a Pandemic” webinar, 4/30/20
with Michael Healy & Brittany Baird
Chat Log Summary**

The complete chat log can be viewed in the webinar recording, but we are providing this summary to share a quick view of questions and ideas from participants during the session. Please see the recording for the complete discussion of ideas and questions by the presenters.

Many participants identified their home co-ops, which included:

Astoria Co+Op Grocery, Oregon	NCG
Berkshire Food Co-op, MA	Ocean Beach People’s Organic
Buffalo Mountain Co-op in Hardwick, VT	PFC Kalamazoo, MI
Chatham Marketplace in Pittsboro, NC;	River Valley Co-op
Chequamegon Food Cooperative, Ashland, WI	Roanoke Co+Op, Roanoke, VA
Columinate	Rutland Area Food Coop, Rutland Vermont
Community Food Coop Bellingham	Santa Monica co-op
DNF, Durango, CO	Seward Co-op in Minneapolis, MN
First Alternative Co-op, Corvallis, OR	Skagit Food Coop, Mount Vernon, WA
French Broad Coop	South Philly Food Co-op
Friendly City Food Co-op, Harrisonburg, VA	Twin Cities Coop Partners
GreenStar Cooperative Market, Ithaca, NY,	Ukiah Natural Foods
Hendersonville Community Co-op in NC,	Urban Green, RI
Medford Food Co-op in Oregon	Valley Food Co-op in White River Jct., VT
Middlebury Natural Food Co-op, Middlebury, VT	Wheatsfield Coop in Ames, IA
Monadnock Food Co-op in Keene NH	Wheatsville Co-op in Austin, TX
	Wild Root Market, Racine, WI

On frequency/type of information and reporting:

- We have delayed all B reporting except financial during the pandemic
- We suspended normal policy monitoring.
- We suspended policy monitoring for the GMT but the board is still monitoring its own policies. We’ve had a couple extra "check-in" meetings via Zoom with the GMT at their request. To stay informed and give them support. (GMT=General Mgt. Team)
- Our Board voted to postpone our full Strategic Plan update one year and develop an alternative plan to add a few goals addressing immediate issues - FULL SUPPORT from staff and Board! Good feeling teamwork!!

- We resolved to suspend GM compliance with several of the quantitative targets in our B policies, which were designed for a growth scenario rather than maintenance/preservation of the business.
- do boards work collaboratively with GM if GM is struggling to deliver a plan?
- Is it reasonable for the board to ask the management team if they have a plan for if an employee gets Covid?
- If you have policy on GM's fair treatment of staff, asking to report on wellness and safety, and even hazard pay, is within bounds.
- How can the cadence of communication to GM be managed to not distract?
- Our GM has already shared plans with the Board on staff adjustments, protocols if anyone becomes ill, etc. Bless him.

On Staying Informed and Being Prepared:

- Also pay attention to local and regional news, in addition to state
- We have a sub-committee on our board that is having bi-weekly update conference calls in between board meetings to stay informed. As the board chair, I've had additional calls with our GM to provide additional support.
- Our board drafted proactively borrowing resolutions so that we can engage PPP/EIDL as soon as we need to (as an idea for readiness)
- We just approved our ppp loan app. yesterday with an impromptu virtual mtg.
- We set up 2 board committees, one on staff appreciation (doing a thank you vid of board, mgmt, vendors) as a first project and a Member Linkage Committee to explore how we can strengthen our sense of community and communication during this isolation period (looking into a volunteer grocery delivery system as a first step)
- Our board called an emergency meeting to discuss PP loan. We did this within a few hours.
- Our board has had additional briefing/discussion sessions with the GM via Zoom to discuss with issues as they come up, and attendance has been excellent despite short notice. We adjusted early to Zoom
- If a board makes a decision without a meeting, how should that happen. Should information go from the GM to a committee who discuss it and make a recommendation to the board or should all information go to the board as a whole, who discuss it and make a decision together

On Staying Steady and Adapting as Needed:

- We moved our regular Board Meetings online, and we have been using Boardable (our board management platform) when we need to make official decisions between meetings.
- Our chair canceled our March board meeting because the GM had so much work. I wish we had gone ahead and met without him because 60 days of poor communication can create anxiety in board members and stressed board members can't be supportive board members.

- Our board meetings have been cancelled since pandemic because GM so busy. Makes it hard to be supportive...
- We're zooming our meetings, and already have a system in place to hold an emergency vote without a meeting via email; can usually get the job done within a day.
- We have moved to online board meetings via zoom at our already scheduled monthly day and time.
- We're using Webex for our annual meeting, b/c it's free for the features we need, and it has a good security reputation.
- I think that for us, the work over years as a board exercising Policy Governance has laid a broad foundation that has helped keep distractions to a minimum. Our GM's decisions have been right and well in line with what our values and principles are.
- How about an annual meeting that is now in limbo? Any creative solutions out here?
- We're in the same situation. One option: Host virtual annual meeting in the short term to fulfill obligation to hold meeting and update owners, with expressed hopes/plan to hold an in-person annual meeting later in the year as well to provide something to look forward to!
- Our AOM (annual owner meeting) was cancelled so the election was too. Those on the Board who would have rotated off were ready (and able) to extend their board term.
- Suggested resource – Food Co-op Initiative recently hosted a webinar on legal considerations for postponed or virtual elections and annual meetings, available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1sGTBF4nZfZm7CJ71ueHiZYzmYWE7eoe>

On Communicating with Members

- Our membership has been communicated to several times a week with notices about what's on the shelves. We have a marketing person to drive this, takes it off GM plate.
- How can we help facilitate communication with the members, without creating more work for the GM and staff? We've gotten the feedback that communication creates more work for them because they feel obligated to respond
- Around communication to membership, how to best support? We've had to make some difficult decisions including temporary closing of one of three stores. Thoughts on how to best lead, or support in the communication to membership (as a board)?
- Our challenge has been how much to channel member questions to the GM. We have an email address for just the board, which members often use to ask managerial questions. We didn't want to just forward those directly to the GM during the time he was trying to get the whole system online. But it's difficult to figure out.
- We're trying to present a digest for the GM to address, instead of just forwarding every question to him.
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- Some of member-owners address operational questions to the board. We would be happy to field them, but also have learned that we're not supposed to step on GM's toes. we're trying to put them together as a digest. But now that he's less pressed, we're forwarding to a particular email address that he asked us to use.

On Other Ways of Being Helpful:

- We are lobbying our elected representatives for inclusion of the "heroes fund" in any upcoming stimulus package. it may not happen, but we can participate as board members.
- I and another Board member provided face masks for the entire staff-- they are not available for purchase through the usual supply chain.
- Yes, one of our board members facilitated getting a few community members to sew masks for the rest of the staff.
- What I'm hearing is essentially "don't make it hard for the GM". I don't think other corporate boards are having this same conversation. It shows me the big differences between food coop boards, who are volunteer based and not industry experts, and for profit-corp. boards who serve more as assets to the GM.
- Our GM is asking us to help with advocacy. We have researched and written letters advocating support from city and gov. sources.
- Our Board jumped into helping coop members by offering to shop and deliver groceries until we could develop our own system. Now we have curbside 5 days/week and the BOD has 2 days of delivering to members who can't get out and about.

On Showing Appreciation

- Our board also sent a letter to the staff to acknowledge how hard they were working in those first few weeks of the shutdowns when it was new and constantly changing.
- Our GM and team put together an online "tip" process for members to demonstrate appreciation for all staff with currency. My ideas were preempted by the Pandemic protocols and this helped to cut through the logistical problem of doing this dropping one thing off the GM's plate.
- Our board has a running google doc where we paste in accolades from the community for the Co-op staff. The GM has access to document and periodically posts messages inside the store. (We have gone to online shopping, so customers and staff members can no longer interact.)
- A couple of us solicited notes of appreciation from the community. We put together a document of nearly 50 notes from member-owners, which we shared with our GM so he can share with the staff.
- We instituted Hero Pay in late March, retroactively to March 8. The increase equaled about 15% per hour for staff and we did the same % for the GM.
- At our last (virtual) meeting at the suggestion of our wonderful VC we each held up one word (decorated on a sheet of paper) that we felt captured something of the qualities our GM had. And each then said something about why we chose the word. GM was very moved.
- Taking unspent CCMA (Consumer Cooperative Management Association) funds to give flowers from one of our farmers to all staff with thank you note from directors
- Our Board used their April compensation to give staff money on their accounts.
- We also had an anonymous owner donation for \$10 to all staff and directors.

- We coordinated an effort to provide all staff members with masks made by a local sewing center. This helped them to feel that we deeply care about them and their safety and that of our members and community.
- About asking first, before assuming something. There was a question about allowing tips for the staff, but our GM had already thought through the ramifications for others in the community who didn't have employment.

Closing Thanks and Farewells:

- Do something like this once a month! This is such a helpful, unifying process, to know all these Coop representatives are here together and learning from each other!
- Good luck, everyone! Thank you for your hard work on behalf of your cooperatives!
- Thank you very much—this was so thoughtfully shared and presented. I really appreciate your wisdom and guidance.
- This has been great! Thank you!
- This definitely filled a niche which was the white elephant in the board room, thank you
- Thank you so much. So many great ideas from you, the presenters, but also all the other participants.
- Appreciative of suggestions for how to express thanks to GM and staff.
- Thank you so much for this webinar. It covered a lot of the things I have been feeling as a GM and I feel that this is all on-point for actually helping the GMs!
- *[Many other participants offered thanks and good wishes to all!]*