

2012-2013 MEC Correspondence re "We Want Our Co-ops Back"

This is an archive of email correspondence of Mountain Equipment Co-op staff (and board) with Mark Latham, regarding the co-op principle of democratic member control, and changes in MEC's rules. The discussion originated with Mark's blog post on March 4, 2012 and subsequent posts -- see <http://votermedia.blogspot.ca/search/label/MEC>.

From: Mark Latham

Sent: September-17-2012 5:02 PM

To: Kathryn Fletcher; David Labistour; Shauna Sylvester; Melissa Purich

Subject: Re: MEC and democracy

TO:

MEC Board c/o Kathryn Fletcher, Board Coordinator

David Labistour

Shauna Sylvester

Melissa Purich

I've expanded my earlier blog posts on these issues into the attached paper and spreadsheet. I'd be happy to get any feedback on it, including corrections, other perspectives, advice etc. Today's blog post below, and earlier email thread.

-- Mark

Monday, September 17, 2012

[We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA](#)

Today I released the first draft of my paper [We Want Our Co-ops Back](#), along with a spreadsheet [Co-op Democracy Scorecard](#). From the paper:

We can reform all our large voter organizations, including democracies and corporations, by starting with reforming our co-ops (including financial co-ops such as credit unions). Most large institutions lack effective democratic control by voters. Even though citizens of democracies can vote, corporate shareowners can vote, and co-op members can vote, those voting rights are ineffective if voters lack the information, insight and nomination rights necessary to elect the best leaders. This paper outlines how we can better implement the fundamental co-op principle of democratic member control, even when co-ops grow very large. Later we can apply these ideas to our democracies and corporations.

This paper proposes rules to improve the democratic accountability of co-op leaders to members, organized in nine topic sections. To contrast these proposals with existing rules, I cite examples from three Canadian organizations where I am a member: Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Vancity Credit Union, and the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA).

I welcome your comments!

Posted by Mark Latham at 12:42 PM

Labels: [CIRA](#), [Cooperatives](#), [Credit Unions](#), [Democracy](#), [MEC](#), [Vancity](#)

On Wed, Sep 19, 2012 at 10:41 AM, Kathryn Fletcher wrote:

Hello Mark, and thanks for your email.

I've forwarded it on to Shona McGlashan, she is our new Chief Governance Officer and she will respond to you directly.

Best regards,

Kathryn

Kathryn Fletcher

Project Manager, Governance
Mountain Equipment Co-op

from: Mark Latham
to: Kathryn Fletcher
cc: Shona McGlashan,
Shauna Sylvester,
David Labistour,
Melissa Purich
date: Mon, Dec 3, 2012 at 3:39 PM
subject: Re: MEC and democracy

TO: MEC Board c/o Kathryn Fletcher, Board Coordinator

Dear MEC Directors:

I realize that my attached paper "We Want Our Co-ops Back" raises a wide range of issues regarding member democracy at MEC, and I'm looking forward to hearing from Shona McGlashan about them. But I think it would be helpful to focus on two key questions, which are important enough to deserve decisions from you, the MEC Board:

Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum? Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? For both these questions: If so, when? If not, why not?

As I have shared my questions and concerns with MEC members, I likewise plan to share your responses with them. The straw poll taken at the MEC 2012 AGM indicated member support for having an online forum.

I look forward to continuing our exchange of ideas on how to improve MEC's governance.

Sincerely,
Mark Latham

from: Kathryn Fletcher via votermedia.org
to: Mark Latham
date: Mon, Dec 3, 2012 at 4:05 PM
subject: RE: MEC and democracy

Hi Mark,

Thanks for your email, and for your questions. The Board is meeting this coming weekend (December 8 and 9) where the 2013 election, and its communication plans, will be under discussion. We will be in a better position to update you following that meeting. Thanks for your understanding.

Best regards,
Kathryn

Kathryn Fletcher
Project Manager, Governance

from: Mark Latham
to: Kathryn Fletcher
date: Mon, Dec 3, 2012 at 4:09 PM
subject: Re: MEC and democracy

Thanks Kathryn. I look forward to hearing from you when the Board has had a chance to review those issues.

-- Mark

from: Shona McGlashan
to: Mark Latham
date: Mon, Dec 24, 2012 at 9:43 AM
subject: MEC governance

Hi Mark

Thanks for sending your article, We Want Our Co-ops Back. Sorry for the delay in responding – the Board made some decisions on the format for next spring's elections this month and I wanted to wait until those had been finalized before I spoke with you. Among other innovations we will be trialling an online forum as part of the 2013 elections. This won't be quite the same as the CIRA candidate forum, and I would be happy to discuss it further with you.

I understand you've also met with our Board Chair Bill Gibson to discuss Board governance. If you're in Vancouver, perhaps we could set up at time to meet for a coffee early in the New Year. If that's not convenient for you, let's schedule a phone call.

I hope you have a happy festive season and I'll look forward to discussing ways to enhance co-op voter engagement with you in January.

Regards,
Shona

Shona McGlashan
Chief Governance Officer

from: Mark Latham
to: Shona McGlashan
date: Thu, Dec 27, 2012 at 8:50 AM
subject: Re: MEC governance

Thanks Shona for your reply. Good idea to meet for coffee in January -- let's choose a time and place.

My schedule is generally flexible, so how about if you suggest a couple of dates/times? We can meet near your office if you like, or anywhere downtown / Yaletown / West End / Gastown.

Looking forward to our discussion. I hope you're enjoying some holidays, so won't necessarily expect an answer this week.

-- Mark

from: Mark Latham
to: Shona McGlashan
date: Tue, Feb 12, 2013 at 2:13 PM
subject: Re: MEC and democracy

Hi Shona --

I hope 2013 is going well for you. Thanks for meeting with me last month.

I appreciate your offer to send a written response to the questions I had sent to the MEC Board. They are in the December 3 email below, and copied here:

"Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum? Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? For both these questions: If so, when? If not, why not?"

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Regards,
Mark

from: Shona McGlashan
to: Mark Latham
date: Tue, Feb 12, 2013 at 2:27 PM
subject: RE: MEC and democracy

Hi Mark

Thanks for the reminder. I have not forgotten you, but what with vacation and a conference, I have only spent eight days in the office since we met last month! I am still working on the written response. To clarify, are you looking for a response to all the points in your paper, or just the ones about the online forum and VoterMedia-type tool you outline below?

Thanks,
Shona

Shona McGlashan
Chief Governance Officer, MEC

from: Mark Latham
to: Shona McGlashan
date: Tue, Feb 12, 2013 at 2:39 PM
subject: Re: MEC and democracy

Thanks Shona for your prompt reply. I raised so many issues in the paper that I don't want to ask for responses for all or even most of them in the near term. That's why I thought it would be helpful to focus on just a couple of questions that seem high priority to me. So for now I'll be happy if you just respond to the few I highlighted in my email, about the online forum and votermedia-type tool.

Later on, I hope that you and/or the board and/or others would see it as worthwhile to respond to some other issues raised in my paper. I think there is a range of issues there that are worthy of consideration and discussion. But that should depend on your assessment of importance compared with other work you

have on your plate.

I hope that's a helpful response to your question.

Regards,
Mark

from: Shona McGlashan
to: Mark Latham
date: Tue, Feb 12, 2013 at 4:00 PM
subject: RE: MEC and democracy

Thanks, Mark. That is indeed helpful and will certainly speed up the response.

Shona McGlashan
Chief Governance Officer, MEC

from: Shona McGlashan
to: Mark Latham
date: Mon, Feb 25, 2013 at 4:10 PM
subject: Response to questions to MEC

Dear Mark

Thanks for your questions about MEC's membership engagement around the elections, and your patience waiting for a response. Your questions were:

"Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum? Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? For both these questions: If so, when? If not, why not?"

This year, for the first time, MEC has created an online discussion forum for members to talk about special resolutions proposed by the Board and by members. We'll be assessing how well it went following the end of the election period, and considering how we can build on and improve it. This may include the creation of a year-round member forum; I simply don't know at this point.

At the moment we have no plans to create a competition for allocating funds between blogs to discuss election candidates. We are watching with interest how your system works in the UBC alumni society and we'll also keep an eye on any other organization that adopts it. For now, we are concentrating our resources on the "your vote, your cause" campaign, which we hope will achieve the dual objectives of engaging more MEC members in our elections as well as supporting three great causes that align with MEC's values.

I know that as someone with a keen interest in coop governance, you will be looking closely at the Board-proposed special resolution. Feel free to call me if you have any questions or would like to discuss it further – otherwise, I'll look forward to seeing you at the AGM on April 25.

Regards,
Shona

Shona McGlashan
Chief Governance Officer