2012-2013 CIRA Board Correspondence re Accountability to Members

This is an archive of email correspondence of the Canadian Internet Registration Authority board with Mark Latham, regarding accountability to members, and changes in CIRA's rules. The discussion originated with Mark's blog post on September 18, 2011 and subsequent posts -- see http://votermedia.blogspot.ca/search/label/CIRA.

from: Mark Latham <mark[at]votermedia.org>
to: CIRA <board[at]cira.ca>
cc: Byron Holland <ceo.cira[at]cira.ca>, CIRA <governance[at]cira.ca>
date: Mon, Sep 17, 2012 at 4:46 PM
subject: We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA

   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.
   -- 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

from: Mark Latham <mark[at]votermedia.org>
to: CIRA <board[at]cira.ca>
cc: Paul Andersen [CIRA Board Chair], Byron Holland <ceo.cira[at]cira.ca>, CIRA <governance[at]cira.ca>
date: Mon, Dec 3, 2012 at 3:39 PM
subject: Re: We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA
TO: CIRA Board
Dear CIRA Directors:
I realize that my attached paper "We Want Our Co-ops Back" and spreadsheet raise a wide range of issues regarding member democracy at CIRA. I think it would be helpful to focus on two key questions, which are important enough to deserve decisions from you, the CIRA 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 CIRA members, I likewise plan to share your responses

with them. I look forward to continuing an exchange of ideas on how to improve CIRA's governance.
Sincerely,
Mark Latham

from: board[at]cira.ca
to: Mark Latham <mark[at]votermedia.org>
cc: Paul Andersen
date: Wed, Dec 5, 2012 at 12:50 PM
subject: RE: We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your interest in CIRA's governance as expressed in your email of December 3, 2012. I understand from your email that you would like the following two questions answered:

1.   "Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum?"

2.   "Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, where members vote to allocate award funds?"

I'd first like to note that your comparison of CIRA to co-operatives is problematic. While there are some similarities between co-ops and not-for-profits, there are some fundamental differences. These differences aren't just legal, but go to the very raison d'être of each. While a co-op is created to provide benefits only to its members, a not-for profit, such as CIRA, serves a community broader that its own members.

CIRA's primary mission is to ensure that the .CA (Registry and DNS) operate efficiently and effectively for the benefit of all Canadians. Secondly, CIRA also provides support for the development of Internet-related activities as an important but secondary activity when resources are available.

CIRA provides domain names to Canadian's one and all, regardless of whether or not they are .CA Members, compared to MEC who provides products and services only to their members, CIRA serves the broadest possible community, all Canadians.

With that said, here are the answers to your two questions:

1.   "Do you plan to create a year-round online member forum?"

We have no plans to do so at present. CIRA has numerous open and active communications channels through which we not only share information, but encourage .CA Members and other engaged Canadians to share with us.

First and foremost we actively engage our Members through the election process that supports the Governance model for the organization. This as you know involves active participation in the election of our Board members. It is worth noting that recently we have also expanded the engagement of Members by developing a broader on-line audience for our AGM.

In addition, we are active in many social media environments (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+) and do engage with followers on a daily basis on these networks. Lastly I have a blog (cirablog.ca) where I often write about governance issues where I encourage participation and engagement, and we always welcome and respond to email from our .CA Members.

We also host the annual Canadian Internet Forum (CIF), where all Canadians are encouraged to speak with us about how they would like to see the Internet develop. The CIF national event is held in February,

followed by an online, moderated discussion forum.

2.   "Do you plan to create a competition for informing members, where members vote to allocate award funds?"

CIRA does not "award funds." Our mission is to operate the .CA registry, a critical piece of Canada's digital infrastructure, and we do so in a 100 per cent uptime environment. As noted above, CIRA has over the past few years, conducted certain activities in support of Internet-related activities in Canada. To this end, we have in the recent past, provided limited funding to certain partner organizations and their projects that enhance and develop the Canadian Internet community.

We will also continue to represent .CA at the international level where we contribute technical resources, experience and financial support to ensure the Internet continues to develop for the good of Canadians and the world's population.

I hope this addresses your concerns. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,
Byron

from: Mark Latham <mark[at]votermedia.org>
to: Byron Holland <ceo.cira[at]cira.ca>
cc: board <board[at]cira.ca>, Paul Andersen
date: Fri, Dec 7, 2012 at 2:07 PM
subject: Re: We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA

Thank you Byron for your prompt and thoughtful reply.

Since I addressed my previous emails below (Sept 17 and Dec 3) to the CIRA Board (board[at]cira.ca), did all Board members receive them? Has your response (from board[at]cira.ca) been reviewed and approved by the Board? Or will the Board respond separately?

I agree with you that there are important differences between CIRA and co-ops. But the issues I'm focusing on -- accountability of elected leaders to voters -- seem similar enough in both types of organization that lessons can be learned and shared. I'm not the only one who thinks so. The chair of CIRA's Governance Committee attended Mountain Equipment Co-op's AGM this year to study and compare their governance systems and processes.

I also agree that CIRA should serve all Canadians, not just those who register domains, even though registering a domain is a requirement for CIRA membership and thus for voting in CIRA director elections. Since voting in director elections is a key part of maintaining the accountability of CIRA's Board, do you think it would be a good idea to drop the domain registration requirement, and let any Canadian become a member of CIRA and vote in director elections? That would help ensure Board accountability to those they are supposed to serve.

Meanwhile, I think it's important to make sure those who can vote in CIRA elections are well informed. The questions I am asking the Board are aimed at that goal.

Re your response to question 1:

Thank you for outlining the ways CIRA engages Canadians on internet issues. I agree that CIRA's extensive use of communication channels to encourage discussion is laudable. It's great how your blog is open for

discussion, and I've participated there as you know.

I'm especially impressed with how you enable on-line participation in the AGM, including voting. I've attended the AGMs of quite a few organizations (including publicly traded corporations), and the 2012 CIRA AGM is the best I have seen, for facilitating voter participation both in person and on-line.

After reading your email, I took another look at the discussion forum that followed the 2012 Canadian Internet Forum (CIF), at http://cif.cira.ca/en/. Although the in-person CIF was on February 27, 2012, the online discussion (now relatively inactive) still seems to be open for new comments and topics. Is the CIF online forum going to be open year-round? If so, it would seem to fulfill my suggestion on this question.

Re your response to question 2:

Even if CIRA has not awarded funds in the past, the CIRA Board could choose to let CIRA members allocate funds to information providers in the future, so I look forward to the Board's response on whether they plan to do so.

The amount of funding required can be as little as $10,000, so it would easily fit within the CIRA budget for member engagement and election information. In effect, it would let us CIRA members hire independent competing consultants to inform us. Compared with the $3 million CIRA now spends on consultants selected by the Board and management, this small budget for member-hired consultants is miniscule. It would not hamper CIRA's primary mission; rather, it would enhance the fulfillment of CIRA's missions by better informing those who elect CIRA's Board.

I appreciate your responsiveness to my queries, and look forward to continuing this discussion for the benefit of our Canadian internet.

Regards,
Mark

from: Mark Latham <mark[at]votermedia.org>
to: board <board[at]cira.ca>
cc: Byron Holland <ceo.cira[at]cira.ca>, Paul Andersen
date: Tue, Feb 5, 2013 at 7:39 AM
subject: Re: We Want Our Co-ops Back @MEC @Vancity #CIRA

TO: CIRA Board

Dear CIRA Directors:

Byron has answered a couple of my questions (see past emails below), but most remain unanswered, so I hope to hear from you on these:

Since I addressed my previous emails below (Sept 17 and Dec 3) to the CIRA Board (board[at]cira.ca), did all Board members receive them? Has your [i.e. Byron's] response (from board[at]cira.ca) been reviewed and approved by the Board? Or will the Board respond separately?

Do you [i.e. the Board] plan to create a competition for informing members, in which members vote to allocate award funds? If so, when? If not, why not?

Regards,
Mark