

# Co-op Advocacy

## Building relationships with the provincial government to increase the visibility of Ontario's co-operatives



FACT SHEET

### Let's Collaborate to Advocate!

The Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA) works on behalf of Ontario's whole co-operative sector to promote the advantages of the business model, and make meaningful change to legislation and regulation to improve the conditions for co-operative businesses in Ontario.

Our organization does our best work when we are collaborating with our members on messaging and relationship building. There are many ways to get involved and work with OCA to meet our co-operative sector's advocacy goals.

Review these ways to formally engage OCA or contact us directly.

### Engage OCA

Whether you have a local concern, interest in a government granting opportunity or an issue with the provincial legislation, OCA is here to help.

The first step is to reach out to our **Member Relations Manager** to discuss your specific advocacy needs. Our organization has resources to help with a wide variety of issues.

The **Government Relations Committee** is another way to engage our organization and work on behalf of the co-operative movement. The committee reviews the issues facing Ontario co-operatives and develops

strategies to address them. Our meetings include professional development for the committee members to remain current on the sector and advocacy techniques, updates from committee members on opportunities for advocacy and government insights and roundtable discussions to develop plans to address advocacy needs.

OCA has **educational opportunities** throughout the year where members are invited to attend webinars on advocacy related topics. These information sessions are connected to the current political climate

and include preparation for OCA lobbying events, election strategy, relationship building, successful meetings and message development.

There are **three formal opportunities annually for you to accompany the OCA at Queen's Park**. These include two breakfast meetings held in the fall and winter with MPPs to update them on co-operative related opportunities and concerns, as well as an annual spring Queen's Park Reception to introduce MPPs, Ministers and their staff to co-operative advocates. All three meetings provide an opportunity for you to network with them and share co-operative stories in a supportive environment.

OCA meets **monthly with MPPs** in their offices either at Queen's Park or in their constituency offices to address co-operative issues specific to individual ridings. These are opportunities to develop relationships with MPPs and their staff, and to ensure they have an understanding of the co-operative sector's contribution to their communities. OCA welcomes all members within the riding to join these meetings, to share local stories and address local issues.

### Co-operatives by the Numbers

Do not underestimate the power of our sector and our collective voice! The Ontario co-operative sector represents:

- 57,000 direct and indirect jobs
- \$3.3 billion in income created for Ontarians
- \$6 billion in value created in the economy
- \$1.3 billion generated for government services
- 49,000 volunteers

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### How Advocacy Helps Your Co-operative and the Ontario Movement

Decisions are made each year by your elected officials that continually change the business environment in Ontario. Changes to business regulations from accounting requirements to environmental policy and taxation can have a major impact on our co-operatives. Sometimes decisions get made to positively impact one business sector that have unintended consequences to another.

It is important to develop positive relationships with Members of Provincial Parliament and their staff ahead of changes to legislation or regulation that may impact the co-operative sector. This will help us rectify issues quickly when they occur. In some cases, a positive relationship with government will create opportunities for consultation that prevent unintended issues altogether.

#### Staying Power and Trust

- The oldest co-operatives in Ontario, Vineland Growers Co-operative and Guelph Campus Co-operative, were formed in 1913 and still operate today.
- Twice as many co-operatives remain in business after 10 years as other business enterprises.
- More than 2 out of 3 Canadians agree that co-ops are a trusted place to do business.

#### The Goals of the Ontario Co-operative Movement

When the Ontario Co-operative Association meets with MPPs and their staff, our goal is to educate first. Most MPPs do not understand the depth and breadth of the co-operative movement and our positive social, economic and environmental impact in Ontario.

When MPPs better understand co-operatives, we are then able to begin a dialogue with a goal of improving the business environment for our members. This includes changes to the *Ontario Co-operative Corporations Act* to remove red tape, the inclusion of co-operatives in government investment and granting opportunities, and advocating for an improved business environment.

It is important for member co-operatives that experience challenges in their interactions with government, or that would like to access opportunities through government, to contact OCA. It is more likely that an entire co-operative sector will benefit when we solve problems collaboratively.

#### The Importance of Relationship Development

When working with government, wherever possible, it is important to establish a relationship with your MPP before advocating for a particular issue. A positive working relationship is established through

community engagement – supporting the MPP's local events, inviting them to local co-operative celebrations or finding opportunities to meet your MPP in a casual environment. All co-operatives in Ontario can support the work of the movement by introducing MPPs to their thriving local businesses that are making a difference in the community.

#### The All-Party Co-operative Caucus

The Ontario Co-operative Association is developing relationships at Queen's Park through the Co-operative Caucus. The Caucus has three chairs — one from each political party — that discuss and find solutions to co-operative issues that all three parties will support. The Caucus meets two times annually, after our Queen's Park breakfasts, to address the needs of the sector. Typically over 25 MPPs attend. All co-operative members of OCA are welcome and encouraged to attend Caucus meetings to connect with MPPs.

Please contact OCA for upcoming meetings and educational opportunities. We will have a big impact when we co-operate to advocate!

**"The intersection of your commitment to your members and their commitment to their constituents is rich soil for growing a constructive relationship."**

– Kevin Dorse, Canadian Credit Union Association: "Grassroots Advocacy for Credit Union Leaders," *Credit Union System Brief*, December 2013

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT

Ontario Co-operative Association  
30 Douglas Street  
Guelph ON N1H 2S9  
Phone: 519.763.8271  
[info@ontario.coop](mailto:info@ontario.coop)  
[ontario.coop](http://ontario.coop)

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