

**1,300**

**co-ops & credit unions**

**1,400,000**

**members**

**15,500**

**employees**

**49,000**

**volunteers**

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**VOICE**

## Let's Get the Word Out: Co-op Enterprises Build a Better Ontario

Two thousand and twelve is a big year for the co-operative movement. The United Nations has declared 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives, recognizing the social and economic contribution of the co-operative movement. Governments around the world are being urged to support the development of co-operatives.

This world-wide attention is the ideal time for Ontario to take action on behalf of our co-operative sector. The Ontario Co-operative Association, representing 1,300 co-ops, is asking the province to support the United Nations declaration by taking measures that will lead to a more supportive environment for the development of co-operatives.

During the provincial election on October 6, 2011, every co-operative in the province, including On Co-op, will have the opportunity to ask our elected officials to take a stand and make a difference for Ontario co-ops by appointing a dedicated body within government to facilitate further co-operation between our sector and the government.

**As a leader, stakeholder, member or employee of a co-operative, you can help us make a change.**



**Resolution #33 was unanimously passed in legislature on Dec. 14, 2006, but to date, a collaboration between the public and co-operative sectors has yet to be established.**

## Our Continuing Effort

**The opportunity for a partnership between the Ontario government and the co-operative sector has been a long time coming.**

We began advocating for a collaborative partnership in 2004 with a report based on sector-wide consultation, entitled *Capturing Co-operative Opportunities: A White Paper on Co-operative development in Ontario*.

A year later, Ontario's co-operatives found support with MPP Ted McMeekin, who proposed Resolution #33, which called on the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT) to investigate and establish a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat. The resolution was unanimously passed in legislature on December 14, 2006, but to date, a collaboration between the public and co-operative sectors has yet to be established.

**But we have persisted and our efforts are slowly paying off.**

We claimed further ground in 2009 with the passing of Bill 218. The bill resulted in seven of 21 pending amendments to the *Co-operative Corporations Act*. That same year the *Green Energy Act* was passed, which brought with it many positive implications for Ontario's renewable energy co-operatives.

In 2010, a meeting with Minister Sandra Pupatello led to the appointment of a representative from the co-operative sector to the board of MEDT's Small Business Agency of Ontario. A "co-op liaison" was also established within the ministry's small business division. Co-op is also working with MEDT and Industry Canada to incorporate information and expertise on the co-operative business model into their network of Small Business Enterprise centres across the province. And co-operative information is being uploaded to the Service Ontario website.

**We need a commitment and a lasting partnership with the province.**

## What is Still Needed

We still have a long way to go. Ontario's co-ops are still struggling with investment, public knowledge, effective legislation and regulation. To compete on an equal playing field with other forms of business, our province's 1,300 co-ops need further assistance from the provincial government.

### **We need a commitment and a lasting partnership with the province.**

We believe that the creation of a champion for co-operatives within the provincial government is the first critical step toward a mutually beneficial policy that will help Ontario co-operatives succeed.

The champion would be responsible for creating policy objectives that raise public awareness of the co-op business model, and could be a minister or official within a secretariat, agency, co-ordinating body or inter-ministerial group.

This partnership would open dialogue between the government and the co-operative sector. It would help create a supportive and transparent infrastructure with increased flexibility and fewer barriers for co-op businesses. It would help remove red tape and put co-operatives on an equal playing field with other types of business enterprise.

**Most importantly, it would contribute to a stronger economy and a better Ontario for all of us.**

**Help us encourage the Ontario government to create a more supportive environment for the development of co-operatives!**

## What you can do now

**There are many things you can do to help us encourage the Ontario government to create a more supportive environment for the development of co-operatives!**

- Build on the momentum of the United Nation's declaration of 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives. Host an IYC event at your co-op and invite your MPP to attend. Create a photo opp and write your local paper about it!
- Demonstrate that co-operatives have a unified voice and can effectively raise the key issues facing the sector. Join our online e-advocacy campaign!
- Show the government how we have contributed to the social and economic fabric of our communities. Attend an MPP meeting with On Co-op or organize your own, and invite other local co-ops to attend with you! Or attend an all-candidates meeting in your riding and ask them to support the co-ops in their riding!

**Ontario needs co-operative business. It's time to show our government why.**

On Co-op has created a series of easy-to-follow steps for contacting your MPP and putting forward the co-op sector's request for a co-op champion within government *and* at the same time, promoting and discussing your own co-operative.

**Visit our new Co-op Advocacy site at [ontario.coop/government](http://ontario.coop/government) to learn more about our advocacy efforts and the ways that you and your co-op can get involved.**

**Or contact Audrey Aczel, Public Affairs Manager, at 1.888.745.5521 or at [aaczal@ontario.coop](mailto:aaczal@ontario.coop).**