



Co-op Advocates: A Step in the Right Direction

The Issue

Despite all their successes and 140 year history, Ontario's 1,300 co-operatives are still facing challenges in terms of regulation, lack of capital investment and limited public knowledge and understanding of the co-operative model, which greatly hinders their full potential and future growth. In order to address these and other challenges, On Co-op, together with its sector representatives, have been advocating for the implementation of a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat since 2004.

We found tremendous support from former Minister Ted McMeekin, who proposed Resolution #33. Unanimously passed in the legislature in December 2006, the resolution called for the investigation and establishment of a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat. It was a great accomplishment, but after **four years** and almost **100 meetings** with MPP's, Cabinet Ministers and their staffers, nothing has changed. We need your help to move the resolution forward. What better time to do this than in a pre-election year?

Let's Move Forward

As a stakeholder of an Ontario co-operative, we are seeking your support through becoming a co-op advocate in our campaign for the establishment of a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat.

Importance of Co-op Advocates

Advocates show that co-operatives have a unified voice; a voice that understands the need for having co-op representation within our provincial government. They raise key issues and challenges facing the sector, as well as create opportunities for our government to understand our contribution to the social and economic fabric of the province, and the importance of a mutually beneficial partnership. Through various efforts, advocates put a *real* face to the Ontario co-operative sector. There are currently co-op advocates covering 21 electoral ridings, and our goal is to have at least one in each of the 107 ridings.

Role of the Co-op Advocate

We need advocates to represent the co-op sector, as well as showcase the added-value *your* co-operative brings to the community in which it exists, by:

- Meeting with the elected provincial Member of Parliament in your riding;
- Inviting your MPP to tour your co-operative;
- Participating in our letter-writing campaigns; and
- Attending the annual Queen's Park Reception.

Time Commitment

We understand that our advocates are busy people. The time commitment is therefore minimal. Other than the actual time required to attend the meeting with the MPP at their constituency office - which is usually no more than 30 minutes – On Co-op will do most of the work for the advocate. We will contact the office, set up a mutually convenient time, forward any background materials to the MPP prior to the meeting (as well as to the advocate), confirm the meeting time and logistics with all parties, and co-ordinate any follow-up required after the meeting. All we ask is that advocates take the time to

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become familiar with the key issue(s) they will be discussing and take a few minutes to learn something about the MPP they are going to meet. In most cases, a representative from the Government Relations Committee will also attend the meeting with the co-op advocate.

Background Information

Many other provinces have co-operative representation and support within their provincial governments. In Quebec, for example, the Ministry of Economic Development, Innovation and Export budgets \$5.4 million annually to the development of their co-operative sector. Even Newfoundland and Labrador, with 95 co-operatives, receives \$120,000 yearly from their government! There is no denying that with the kind of provincial recognition and support enjoyed by co-operatives throughout the country, our co-operatives could also thrive and further contribute to the social and economic well-being of Ontario.

Through our meetings with government officials, we have discovered the provincial government wants short-term solutions to the social and economic challenges facing Ontario. Although many acknowledge that co-ops can be a part of this solution, they have not yet embraced the benefits of a partnership with our sector for the long-term stability and growth of Ontario.

Get Involved

Ontario's co-operatives invest and reinvest in people and our communities. **Isn't it time our government invested in us?** We cannot do this alone. Become a co-op advocate – meet with our elected representatives and be the voice of the co-operative community!

If you are interested in becoming a co-op advocate, to receive a copy of the executive proposal “Shaping a Provincial Co-operatives Secretariat: Providing Innovative and Sustainable Solutions to Build a Better and Stronger Ontario,” or for more information on how to effectively meet and communicate your message to government officials, visit On Co-op's Government Relations page online at <http://www.ontario.coop/Government> or contact Audrey Aczel, Public Affairs Manager, at 519.763.8271 x.24 or via email at aaczel@ontario.coop.

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