

Why Should You Get Involved?

As a provincial co-operative association, On Co-op is itself a non-partisan organization. However, we recognize that we live in an environment that is highly influenced by government and politics. Consequently, we also recognize the need to **INFORM, INFLUENCE, and EDUCATE** political parties and the government about the co-operative sector.

In a non-partisan way, we lobby the government with respect to issues of concern to us, provide public policy makers with information, and participate in various events organized by the different political parties. However, we can't do it – and shouldn't do it - alone! We require the help of local co-op champions in each riding to support our efforts and build ONE VOICE for the co-operative community.

Making the decision to get involved and help lobby the government is the first step. Once you have done this, you need to know how to approach members of government, effectively and efficiently, in order to turn your concerns and issues into action. We created this toolkit to help you achieve this goal.

About the toolkits

These toolkits are guides to help you in lobbying on behalf of the co-op sector, for your own individual lobbying efforts, and as a means to making the process of meeting with MPPs, Ministers and their staff less intimidating and more effective. You can use all or parts of this guide, depending on whether you are attending a sit-down meeting with an MPP at their constituency or Queen's Park office, an all-candidates meeting in your riding, or other political events. Simply adopt our suggestions on the following pages to suit your own issues and needs as necessary.

Toolkits in This Series

Toolkit #1: Meeting MPPs at their Queen's Park and Constituency Office

Toolkit #2: Attending Events with MPPs and Government Officials

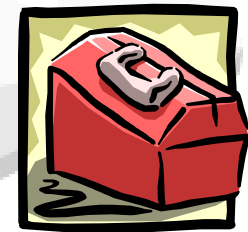
Toolkit #3: Initiating Communication, Relaying Your Key Message & Rallying Support

Note: If you have questions about this guide, or need assistance with a government relations matter, please contact us at On Co-op. We'll be happy to help you in any way we can!



Ontario Co-operative Association
#101-450 Speedvale Ave. West
Guelph, ON N1H 7Y6
Phone: 888-745-5521
Fax: 519-763-7239

On Co-op Toolkit for Local Co-op Advocates



Toolkit #1: Meeting MPPs at their Queen's Park and Constituency Office

Attending On Co-op Meetings with MPPs at their Queen's Park or Constituency Office



Purpose: To attend an On Co-op meeting with an MPP, as a representative of the co-op sector's member of the MPP's individual riding.

Goals: 1) To educate MPPs on the strength and diversity of the co-op sector; 2) Call attention to Resolution #33, for the creation of a provincial Co-operative's Secretariat; 3) To try to gather the MPP's support and commitment for this cause.

Setting up the meeting: On Co-op's Public Affairs Manager will set up the meeting. Often, the meeting takes place at the MPP's constituency office. This enables us to showcase co-ops located in their riding, and is often a requirement for the MPP before they even accept an invitation to meet. Ideally, more than one co-op would be represented at this meeting; however, this depends on availability, as well as office space. It is not always possible to set a date that is mutually convenient for all those involved.

Preparing for the meeting:

Know your MPP! Google their name on the Internet. Read up on the Ministry they may belong to. Find out if any members of your co-op know the MPP and his/her areas of interest. Is the MPP familiar with co-ops and if so, do they support co-operative issues? **This is key to prepare your approach and questions.**

Read the *White Paper on Co-operative Development*, and be familiar with its key recommendation. It is also a good resource on co-op facts, stats and history. On Co-op can send you the full or one-page summary versions electronically, upon request.

Know the issues you are going to discuss, so that you feel confident and comfortable in your role as a representative of the co-op sector.

Prepare a package of background information on your co-op, in the form of pamphlets and/or fact sheets, that you can refer to in the meeting and leave with the MPP for future reference.

Meet with the other attendees for a brief discussion prior to the meeting date (this can be done via phone conference), to be organized and determine who will address what issues.

If you have **any questions** about the meeting, or need further assistance, please contact Audrey Aczel-Castillo, Public Affairs Manager, On Co-op.

At the Meeting:

You are not there to raise new issues or discuss issues of importance to your specific co-op or sector, but to help support the "ask". As such, you can offer an example of why and how your sector would be best served by a Co-operative Secretariat. Remember, **you are there as a representative of your sector, to raise the key issue so that it is noticed.**

If your MPP is not familiar with your co-op or the sector, educate them with a few quick facts. You can even **add a "human element"** by mentioning how it has benefited the community or their constituency in a positive way.

Use a **focused approach** and be **specific** when talking. Keep in mind that you usually have about thirty minutes to discuss the issues, and time goes by quickly! You don't want to bombard them with lengthy, complex questions, or stray from the issues at hand. If you do, the meeting will have lost its primary purpose, and

your goal of raising awareness for the key issue – and possibly getting their support – will be lost.

Think of the meeting as a one-time opportunity to present your point, with the goal of getting some kind of commitment from the MPP to further your cause. Present your points carefully to achieve this goal.

Be wise with your words and mindful of any questions you ask. You must be in a position to respond to any rebuttal or questions geared to you, in an intelligent and knowledgeable manner. As such, **never guess at an answer** – rather, tell them you will investigate further and follow-up with them. And do follow-up!

In closing the meeting, **thank them and their staff for their time** and interest in your issues.

Leave them with the **background material** that you have prepared, along with your business card for future reference.

Following up to the Meeting:

Shortly after the meeting, On Co-op may contact you to request your feedback and provide answers to a few questions about the meeting. **Please respond with your thoughts on how the meeting went, as your opinions are important to us.** This is also the only way that we — as the provincial association that represents the interests of the entire Ontario co-operative sector — can improve upon our on-going government relations work and our lobbying efforts. In sum, **it can help make our future meetings with MPPs and government officials more effective, thereby aiding us to achieve our collective goal!**