

A Snapshot of On Co-op's Advocacy and Government Relations Initiatives over the Years 2004 - 2013

2004

- On Co-op meets with 36 MPPs across Ontario to discuss the proposed *White Paper on Co-operative Development in Ontario* (WP) and holds a roundtable discussion at Queen's Park.
- 4,000 questionnaires are distributed to co-op representatives, leaders and stakeholders in an effort to request participation in the development of the WP.
- 8 regional meetings are facilitated across the province to discuss its contents. The WP's objective was to outline key recommendations areas of action—on the part of Government and the co-operative sector. It stressed that immediate challenges needed to be addressed in order to ensure the sectors ability to thrive and grow.

2005

- In 2005, On Co-op finalizes and launches the *White Paper*, a document which has propelled our Government Relations ambitions to this day, at Queens Park. To summarize its key recommendations:
 1. Establish a joint Government-Co-operative sector agency in Ontario. Specifically recommended: a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat modelled after its federal counterpart. (For function and responsibilities see the WP).
 2. Establish a joint collaboration between FSCO, the Ministry of Finance and the co-op sector for the purposes of reviewing and overhauling the *Ontario Co-operative Corporations Act*. In particular, investigate opportunities to enhance co-operatives' ability to attract investment and facilitate research around co-operative development in Ontario. For proposed amendments see the WP.
 3. Support its regional and provincial association, support and reinforce new and emerging co-operative sectors, foster a comprehensive public education program and greater co-operative business training. As a result of this objective, On Co-op would eventually – and independently - establish two brand new initiatives: the award-winning *All 4 Each* curriculum project and the Co-operative Management Certificate (CMC) program.

2006

- On Co-op distributes print and electronic versions of the *White Paper* to all MPPs. We also organized 16 meetings with MPPs throughout the year to promote the WP.
- After much preparation, On Co-op and MPP Ted McMeekin of Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale, propose Resolution 33 to the Ontario legislature (supporting the creation of a provincial Co-operatives Secretariat, key finding #1 of the WP) - which was *unanimously passed* on Dec. 14th. However, no immediate action was taken on behalf of the legislature to implement the Co-operative Secretariat, inspiring much of On Co-op's 2007 efforts. Not long afterwards, Ted McMeekin becomes the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Understandably, his position/responsibilities grew to such an extent that he was unable to advocate for the co-operative sector as he once did, but he remains a strong supporter of our movement to the present day.
- Noting the value of fostering relationships with MPPs, On Co-op works to identify and develop co-op advocates to aid future Government Relations strategies.

2007

- Learning from the success with Ted McMeekin, On Co-op develops and launches a series of MPP lobbying toolkits on its website, in an effort to increase advocacy participation among its members and the wider co-op sector.
- An extensive database is also developed to help co-ops and credit unions identify their electoral riding, their MPP, and other nearby co-ops and credit unions to collaborate with (this database can be accessed through “Find a Co-op” on the website menu).
- On Co-op produces and distributes an electronic Survey to all 107 MPPs in an attempt to identify who is familiar with or supports the notion of a Provincial Co-operatives Secretariat.
- On Co-op launches the “Identifying Co-op Champions” campaign—personally contacting over 500 co-ops and credit unions across the province (by phone) to try and increase awareness among the sector on the importance of advocating for the Co-op Secretariat, including a request to promote this “ask” at their riding's pre-election all-candidates meeting. Despite our efforts, only 11 co-op advocates across the province attend an all candidates meeting.
- To make the voice and interests of the co-operative sector even clearer and easier to advocate, On Co-op presents and distributes a detailed proposal in both official languages at the Queens Park reception, entitled *Shaping a Provincial Co-operatives Secretariat: Moving forward on the White Paper on Co-operative Development in Ontario*.
- 16 meetings with MPPs are held, and key meetings with both the Deputy Minister and Assistant Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT) take place.
- MEDT later invites On Co-op to a committee meeting where we present on the “Power of Co-operation” along with various leaders from the co-op and credit union sectors.
- Collectively, these actions strive to complete the push for the provincial Co-operative Secretariat that took root in 2006.

2008

- All 107 MPPs receive their first ever hard copy list of the co-ops and credit unions located in their riding, as well as a one-page fact sheet describing why co-ops should matter to them.
- On Co-op issues a welcome letter to the 17 newly elected MPPs and organizes initial meetings.
- Another 7 meetings are held with MPPs and key Ministers.
- Ted McMeekin arranges a meeting with the new Minister of Education and Training regarding On Co-op’s ambitions for public education and business training, which is also attended by representatives from OISE.
- On Co-op submits a pre-budget submission to the Ministry of Finance that reaffirms the need for a public-co-operative partnership.
- The provincial Secretariat proposal of 2007 is updated, improved, and re-launched at the Queen’s Park Reception.
- On Co-op generates the *Report on the Co-operative model on Business Enterprise in Ontario: Applications, Successes and Challenges* and submits it to MEDT. The report includes: an accurate statistical picture of Ontario’s co-operative sector to establish our presence, a comparison of provincial support provided to co-ops across Canada, an exploration of challenges limiting co-op development in Ontario, case studies that demonstrate the viability and success of co-ops in various sectors, and research that demonstrates the comparatively outstanding survival rate of co-operative businesses. In reference to Government Relations specifically, the report established:

1. That the Ontario co-operative sector, in comparison to the other provinces in this analysis, has very little support in the form of funding, human resources and government, despite having the second largest co-op sector in the country. This lack of recognition and support has contributed, in large part, to the Ontario co-operative sector's inability to operate and develop to its *full* capacity. On Co-op has made a detailed comparative chart of these findings available.
2. Although the *White Paper* established many core issues facing the sector, there are others worth noting, including a lack of media coverage on the success of the co-operative sector in Ontario and insufficient information distribution regarding the co-operative option through business support centres and resources (online Government resources for starting a business, Small Business Enterprise Centres, Community Futures Development Corporations, etc.)

2009

- On Co-op and its Government Relations committee develop a "13 point Government Wish-List."
- The list is eventually reduced to six key points at the request of the MEDT, but little progress is made despite continuous follow-up efforts.
- On Co-op co-ordinates a meeting with MEDT and a representative from Quebec's Direction des Co-operatives (MDEIE) to highlight the strength and benefits of a public and co-operative partnership in Quebec and how this could translate to the Ontario context.
- At the General Members meeting, On Co-op holds a "5 Year Report Card on the *White Paper*" roundtable with attendees to evaluate our successes and challenges to date.
- A Queen's Park reception and another 10 meetings with MPPs and Ministry staffers are held.
- On Co-op submits and presents a pre-budget submission to the Ministry of Finance that reaffirms the need for a public-co-op partnership.
- On Co-op introduces a Province Wide Petition, the main "ask" of which was for the Government "to create an environment that encourages the development of co-operatives, allowing them to compete on equal footing with other forms of business enterprise." The petition accumulated roughly 3,000 signatures over three years before plateauing. As a result, it was not presented to the Ontario Legislature as originally planned. The requirement for handwritten signatures was suspected to have been a barrier to the petition process, as was the lack of volunteers and human resources to adequately promote it across the sector.
- The Co-op Advocates program was initiated, which sought 1 co-op representative per electoral riding who could advocate to their local MPP. Of 600 potential candidates, only 10 were willing to commit to the position. Concerns of potential representatives included being uncomfortable with fulfilling an advocacy role and the extent of the time commitment and responsibilities.
- The e-Advocacy tool was created and added to the On Co-op website. This tool allowed co-ops to drop in their information and send a pre-composed letter to MPPs at the click of a button. Usually engaged around election time, this tool is currently inactive and is likely to remain so until the database is updated for a future election.
- Key individuals from the renewable energy co-operative sector participate in hearings during the development of the *Ontario Green Energy Act*. The Act allowed eligible renewable energy companies to forgo the 50% rule applied to co-operatives (for more on the 50% rule visit our Regulations page). On May 14th the act was passed.

2010

- On Co-op organizes a sector-wide consultation regarding two proposed amendments to the *Co-operative Corporations Act*: Par Value Shares and the 50% rule. (For details visit our "2010 Ontario Co-operative Consultation" page in the Regulation link).

- On Co-op also launches a CEO letter writing campaign to demonstrate the need and support for a government-co-operative partnership to the Minister of MEDT, resulting in our first ever meeting with the Minister herself (Sandra Pupatello).
- On Co-op initiates 5 other meetings with Ministry staffers in addition to hosting the annual Queen's Park reception. At a meeting with the Minister of Finance, the Assistant Deputy Minister agrees that the 13 Point Wish List was practical and agrees to address the issue with the Minister.
- On Co-op submits and presents another pre-budget submission to the Ministry of Finance that reaffirms the need for a public-co-op partnership.

2011

- On Co-op analyzes participation in past events and initiatives to identify MPPs/ridings that would be more susceptible to the advocacy process.
- We also attempt to build on our list of co-op advocates to attend and participate in pre-election meetings. The riding list is updated, as is the online co-op advocacy resource centre.
- A new e-Advocacy tool is introduced and is strongly promoted via newsletters, e-blitzes, phone calls and free training. Despite these efforts, volunteer advocacy remains low.
- An executive brief is developed (in preparation for IYC) that asks Government to support the UN declaration and create a supportive environment for the development of co-operatives. The brief, entitled *Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better Ontario*, highlights 5 key recommendations and the win-win benefits of a collaborative partnership between the co-op sector and the province. The brief is later distributed to MPPs as a reference point for future meetings. (The full document can be found under "downloads" on this page).
- Another electronic survey was developed and distributed to gauge MPP's familiarity with the co-op sector and secure written commitments from them to meet with On Co-op after the election.
- 8 MPP meetings were held in addition to another meeting with MEDT.
- On Co-op submits and presents another pre-budget submission to the Ministry of Finance that reaffirms the need for a public-co-op partnership.

2012

- On Co-op hires a part-time Government Relations contractor for a 3-month intensive consultation. This project was meant to:
 1. Identify key individuals best equipped to deal with policy and GR issues within in each co-operative sector;
 2. Survey these individuals to identify the top 3 key policy and GR issues within their sector;
 3. Track this information in order to compile a sector-wide list of priorities;
 4. Update (or develop as required) and promote On Co-op's advocacy tools to our membership;
 5. Create a comprehensive report based on the feedback (which the board can use to evaluate and determine next steps).

Part way through this initiative the new hire had to back out in order to fulfill other career commitments and the project was not completed.
- A Queen's Park Reception is held to officially launch the International Year of the Co-operatives, familiarizing MPPs with the logo, banner, and mission of IYC 2012.
- On Co-op receives congratulatory letters in recognition of IYC from Premier Dalton McGuinty and a handful of MPs.

- On Co-op submits and presents another pre-budget submission to the Ministry of Finance, reaffirming the need for a public-co-op partnership.
- **Despite the UN declaration urging governments to support co-operatives, the Federal Government cut the Co-op Development Initiative (CDI) fund. The future development of Ontario co-ops is placed within the hands of the sector.**
- This year marks a significant transition year for On Co-op's Government Relations strategies.

2013

- Previous attempts to embody a government-co-op partnership through a Provincial Co-op Secretariat have been largely unsuccessful. As a result, On Co-op redirects its efforts into cultivating partnerships with key ministries and regulatory bodies, such as the Ministry of Finance and FSCO, the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment, and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.
- The Regulations and Legislation Committee further expands their review of the *Act*, with a particular emphasis on regulation.
- A future sector-wide consultation also begins development.

For more information on our current and future initiatives visit "Our Objectives" page.