

1,300

co-ops & credit unions

1,400,000

members

15,500

employees

49,000

volunteers

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. On 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 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 aaczel@ontario.coop.