

## 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 Ontario co-operative sector.

In a non-partisan way, we advocate on behalf of the sector on issues of concern to all of us, provide public policy makers with information, and raise awareness for the strength and diversity of the Ontario co-operative sector. However, we can't do it alone! We require the help of co-op advocates across the province and in each riding, to support our efforts and build ONE VOICE for the co-operative community.

Making the decision to get involved and become a Co-op Advocate 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 help turn your ask into action. We created this toolkit to help you achieve this goal.

### About the Toolkits...

These toolkits are guides to help you in advocating with On Co-op on behalf of the co-op sector, and can be adopted for your individual advocacy needs and efforts. They were designed in order to make the process of meeting with MPPs and other government officials less intimidating and more effective.

You can use all or parts of this guide, depending on whether you are attending a meeting with an MPP at their constituency or Queen's Park office, a political event or fundraiser, or even if you invite them on a tour of your co-op. Simply adopt our suggestions on the following pages to suit your own issues and needs as necessary.

#### The Toolkits in This Series...

**Toolkit #1:** Meeting MPPs at their Constituency Office

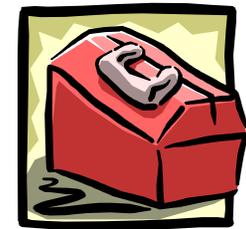
**Toolkit #2:** Attending Events with MPPs and Nominated Candidates

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! Or, visit [www.ontario.coop/government](http://www.ontario.coop/government) to access our many resources and tools, and to learn about other ways to get involved in Co-op Advocacy!



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# Toolkit for Co-op Advocates



## Toolkit #1:

# A Guide to Meeting MPPs at their Constituency Office

# Attending On Co-op Meetings with MPPs at their Constituency Office



**Purpose:** To attend a meeting with an MPP, organized by On Co-op, as a representative of the co-op sector and a constituent in the MPP's riding.

**Meeting Objectives:** 1) To educate the MPP on the strength and diversity – as well as the successes and challenges of the co-op sector; 2) To ask for the MPP's commitment towards creating a partnership with government, that would create a more favourable environment for the development of co-operatives—and therefore have a positive social and economic impact in their community and; 3) To request advice from the MPP on how to move forward with this goal.

**Setting up the meeting:** On Co-op will organize the meeting at the MPP's constituency office (usually on Fridays if the house is sitting, or any day of the week if they are not). Having a constituent present is often a requirement before an MPP will even accept an invitation to meet. We do our best to set a date that is mutually convenient for all those involved, but this takes time, patience and flexibility!

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## Preparing for the meeting:

**1. Get to know your MPP!** Google them on the Internet. Read a local paper and learn about the issues in your riding. Find out if any members of your co-op know the MPP, their personality and areas of interest. Is the MPP familiar with co-ops? Do they support co-operative issues? This is key to preparing your approach and questions you may have.

**2. Visit our website** at [www.ontario.coop/](http://www.ontario.coop/) government and become familiar with our advocacy work. Our [Executive Brief](#) outlines our key recommendations and the win-win benefits of a partnership with government. The original [White Paper](#) provides great background information as

well as a number of useful co-op stats.

**3. 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.

**4. Prepare a package** of background information on your co-op, such as organizational material and fact sheets, that you can refer to in the meeting and leave with the MPP for future reference.

**5. Debrief** with On Co-op prior to the meeting via a short phone conference, to review the

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## At the Meeting:

Politicians respond to friendly attention and recognition, so begin by thanking them for taking time to meet with you and for the work they have done in the community.

In meetings organized by On Co-op, you are not there to raise new issues or discuss issues of importance to your specific co-op, but to help support the key ask. **As a constituent and representative of the co-op sector, your role is to showcase your co-op and what it brings to the community;** the successes you've had, and perhaps some of the challenges you face. You are there to make the issue "personal" and to humanize it. On Co-op's role is to explain the benefits of a partnership, and how that would positively impact not only the community, but the province as a whole.

If your MPP is not familiar with your co-op or the sector, you can educate them with a few quick facts....1,300 co-ops, 400 locations, 1.4 million members, \$30 billion in assets, etc.

Always use a **focused approach** and be **specific** when talking. Constituency minutes last

about 30 minutes, about half of which is spent on introductions and "small talk," and the other on addressing the issue and getting feedback - time goes by quickly!

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. So present your points carefully to achieve this goal.

**Be wise with your words** and remember that we are there to *seek* advice, not to *give* it. Our goal is to offer solutions, and not to recite problems. Listen attentively to what they have to say. You should also respond to any rebuttal or questions geared to you in a friendly and knowledgeable manner. As such, never guess at an answer – rather, tell them you will investigate further and follow-up with them after the meeting. And do follow-up!

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

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## Following up to the Meeting:

Shortly after the meeting, On Co-op may contact you to request your feedback and thoughts about the meeting. **Your opinions are important to us** and helps us to continuously improve our government relations work and advocacy efforts. It is by making our future meetings with MPPs and government officials more effective, we will get closer to achieving our collective goal.

And don't forget to send your MPP a brief thank you letter or email, reiterate your key points, and follow-up on any specific questions they may have had!