

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

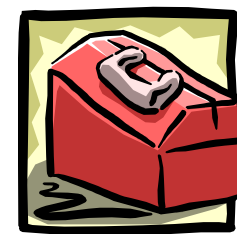
Toolkit #2: Attending Events with MPPs and Nominated Candidates

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 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 #2:

A Guide to Attending Events with MPPs And Nominated Candidates

Attending Community Events with MPPs and Nominated Candidates



Preparing for the meeting:

Research the MPP/candidate you want to meet — know in advance what issues are important to them and a bit about who they are. Google them and/or go to the Ontario Legislative Assembly website at www.ontla.on.ca.

Prepare some quick facts about your co-op and how it has impacted their community in a positive way. In other words, *why your co-op should matter to them*.

Stay focused and be brief – the fewer points you have and the more specific you are, the better. Remember you are there to raise what's most important, which is the key message...

Determine the key message/ask — What are you trying to convey? Why should *you* matter? All the attending representatives from your co-op should have the *same* message. Remember, time is of the essence at these events, as the MPP's or candidate's attention will be split between you and numerous people representing their own organizations, and with their own issues to raise. **Your job is to get the message across, and theirs is to circulate!**

Find strength in numbers — Talk to other members of your co-op and find out if they are willing to attend with you. Senior staff or board members are particularly effective in revealing how a local co-op has impacted their lives and/or that of the community.

What to do... What not to do...

And... What to expect:

DO...raise the visibility of the co-op sector, within the framework of the existing platform or party stance. **Don't** raise new issues. In an election year, the goal of attending these events, be they political events, fundraisers, On Co-op's Queen's Park reception, or the all-candidates meetings before an election, is NOT to raise new issues. Their party's political platforms are already established at this point. .

DON'T...ignore political staffers or executive assistants who may be present at these events. They may be policy advisors or someone who is in a position to open doors for you in the future.

DO...educate them about your co-op. The MPP or election candidate may not be familiar with your co-op, or the co-op sector in general. Educate them by telling them briefly about it and how it has changed your life in a positive way, or benefited the community in a specific way. This adds a vital human and emotional element to your discussion.

DO...use a very friendly, focused and specific approach when speaking. MPPs and candidates don't want to be bombarded with lengthy, complex diatribes or questions that will take up too much effort or time (1 or 2 questions is best). **Don't** monopolize their time.

DO...raise the key issue or ask to ensure it gets noticed. You are there as a representative of the co-op sector, so don't lose sight of your goal!

DO...respond to any questions directed at you in an intelligent and knowledgeable manner. **Don't** guess at an answer — tell them you will investigate and follow-up with them in the near future — and then do it!

DO...leave them your business card, some background material on your co-op, and a list of all the co-ops in their riding. This will serve as a great reminder of your co-op and the issues that you are raising.

DO...thank them for their time and attention, and tell them that you will follow-up in the near future. *Remind them that co-ops are eager to work with government, as they share similar goals, and that a collaborative partnership will help strengthen their community and the province as a whole.*

Following up to the meeting:

Shortly after the event, follow-up with a formal "thank you" letter addressed to the MPP(s) and or candidate(s) you spoke with. Thank them for their time spent with you, their attention and (hopefully) interest and support in your co-op and the issues that were discussed. *This is yet another opportunity to emphasize the benefits of a co-operative and government partnership and working toward shared goals.*

Inform your co-op, your local co-op federation and On Co-op of the results of the meeting — how it went and what, if any, commitments they made to you. Send On Co-op a brief e-mail summarizing your results. Sharing information is an important step in furthering key issues that most co-ops have in common.

Follow up with your MPP about a month after your meeting, to remind him/her of any commitments that they made to you and what they may have done. This is key, as they have many diverging issues and priorities to deal with, so keep yours at the forefront by demonstrating you are serious and actively involved in change.