

A Look Back at 2019

2019 was a busy time for the small but mighty staff team at OCA! We focused a lot of time and effort to make significant strides in our government relations work. Most recently, the Province committed to making the required changes to co-operative legislation - something we've been advocating for, for fifteen years! We continued to help develop new and support existing co-operatives through our advisory services. We made improvements to systems that have simplified and streamlined processes for our members, as well as increased efficiency internally. We continued to spread the word about co-operatives through the Ontario media, while keeping the sector informed. And, we had another successful year educating adults on co-operative governance, as well as youth on the co-operative model and principles.

Read on to learn some of the highlights from the past year in each of our key strategic areas...



GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

- The Provincial Government completed its consultations with the co-operative sector on the *Co-operative Corporations Act*. Over 80 co-ops provided a submission to the government!
- We contacted all Ontario co-operatives that have submitted Offering Statements with the Financial Services Commission of Ontario (FSCO) to support our recommendation to not moving to the Ontario Securities Commission (OSC) and the negative impact it would have on a co-operative's ability to raise capital.
- We announced that the list of active co-operatives was launched on the Service Ontario website.
- The Ministry of Finance confirmed that the Provincial Government will *not* proceed with moving co-operative Offering Statements to the OSC, but transition the responsibility to the Finance Services Regulatory Authority's (FSRA) articles.
- While the changes we advocated for in the January consultation didn't make it into the 2019 Ontario Budget, the government committed to consider the feedback from co-operatives received through the consultation process, and work with our sector to propose amendments to the legislation.

- We hosted our annual spring Co-operative Queen's Park Reception. Over 100 co-operators attended as well as 32 MPPs and government staff, to celebrate the amazing contributions of Ontario's co-operatives.
- The Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner joined the Co-operative Caucus, officially making it the first All-Party Co-operative Caucus in the province!
- FSRA replaced FSCO to oversee the capital raising requirements for co-operative corporations in Ontario effective June 8, 2019.
- The Provincial Government's Fall Economic Statement announced their commitment to modernize co-operative legislation! The improvements will eliminate the requirement to do 50% of business with members to allow co-operatives to compete and innovate on a level playing field with all businesses in Ontario. The updates to audit rules will reduce administrative burdens on community-owned co-operatives and allow their income to fund increased services.
- Our Executive Director Erin Morgan addressed the Standing Committee on Finance and thanked the Provincial Government for their commitment to modernize co-operative legislation, as detailed in Bill 138.

[VISIT THE GOVERNMENT RELATIONS PAGES ON OUR WEBSITE TO
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CO-OPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT

- We applied for and received a Libro Prosperity grant for \$20,278 to establish a “Co-operative Business Succession Incubator.” The initiative will provide training support and consulting to retiring owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), to convert their businesses to employee or community-owned co-operatives.
- We successfully helped transition a local company into a worker co-operative! Arise Architects Co-operative has become the first worker co-op architectural practice in Ontario.
- We answered 220 inquiries through our 911 and 411 co-operative development advisory services.
- We assisted 8 of the fifteen new co-operatives that incorporated in Ontario.
- We partnered with Dr. Simon Berge at the University of Winnipeg for a SSHRC Partnership Engagement Grant application entitled “Business Succession Planning: A co-operative approach.” If successful, the goal is to develop an integrated educational strategy for SME business owners and employees that will assist in creating succession plans to ensure the ongoing operations of their businesses thus preserving jobs and vital services.

- We submitted an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant to set up a co-op business succession incubator in Guelph.

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MEMBER RELATIONS

- We implemented a new online member portal that allows our members to login and manage their account. The new system also enables members to register for events online, complete a sponsorship form, and process their membership dues.
- We launched our brand new Sponsorship Package to highlight which programs and initiatives require support beyond what our members' dues cover. The new online module streamlines the sponsorship process into one cohesive package.
- We held our Annual General Meeting at Springfield Golf & Country Club during Co-op Week. Sixty members attended and elected our new Board of Directors, and approved a proposed change to our Bylaws. They participated in a Government Relations update and discussion prior to joining us for a networking lunch.

- We recognized and celebrated three leaders of the co-operative community with a Co-operative Spirit Award – Kerr Smith of Gay Lea Foods Co-operative, Kelly Storie of La Siembra Co-operative and FirstOntario Credit Union!
- We had a 78% engagement rate of members who attended a meeting or event that we hosted or partnered on throughout the year.
- We welcomed 9 new organizations to the membership!

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COMMUNICATIONS

- We sent out ten media releases to Ontario news media and various trade publications, to raise the public profile of co-operatives in the province. The releases were included in 794 different publications and received 7,957 views!
- We sent out 12 newsletters to our 3,700+ subscribers, providing them with news and updates on our programs and initiatives, as well as links to articles, jobs and events in the Ontario co-operative sector.

- We continued to post news and information on our Facebook and Twitter pages, totaling over 400 *unique* FB posts and 350 tweets.
- We developed and launched our Annual Report for the 2018-19 fiscal year, highlighting our success and challenges over the past year, and recognizing all the individuals and organizations that are part of our membership, sit on our committees, volunteer with us, and that support us with funding and sponsorships.
- We promoted the economic impact of co-operatives across Canada via social media.

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CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION

- We hired a new program Director for the Co-operative Young Leaders (CYL) program, Carol Fleming.
- We hosted two sold out “Leadership in Governance” workshops in partnership with Gay Lea Foods Co-operative. *Based on their award winning Leadership in Governance Training Program, the one-day interactive sessions were designed specifically for co-operative*

Directors and management with a responsibility for governance of small and medium-sized co-operatives as well as newly incorporated co-operatives.

- We began to develop an onboarding module to help educate employees in the co-op sector about the co-operative model and principles.
- 89 youth who represented 25 co-operatives and 26 volunteer facilitators who represented 10 co-operatives, participated in the CYL summer program held at the Co-operative Education Centre in Aylmer ON. Youth participants learned about the co-operative principles, practiced their communications and leadership skills through various co-operative activities, and designed an amazing piece of art to commemorate their week (see article below).
- Under contract with the Directors' Forum, we helped organize a series of governance workshops for Board Directors of Ontario's credit unions and caisses populaires. Over 120 directors attended the 35th annual fall conference, held at the Hilton Mississauga/Meadowvale.

[VISIT THE CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION PAGES ON OUR WEBSITE TO
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2020 is already shaping up to be another busy year with some exciting plans and initiatives in the works...stay tuned for more information in the New Year!