



OCA Board Member Profile



Maureen Gillespie, Board Chair (as of October 15, 2019)
Representing The Co-operators on the Board of OCA

1. Tell us a bit about yourself (i.e., your background (where you grew up, education, children, which co-operative you work for, your position, etc.)

I work for The Co-operators Group and have for the past 33 years. Currently my role is Vice President of Strategic Initiatives and Change Management which puts me at the forefront of many new and exciting initiatives for my organization. I grew up in Moncton, New Brunswick, graduated from the University of New Brunswick with a Bachelor of Education and taught school for 4 years before relocating to Ontario. I've lived in both northern Ontario (Sault Ste. Marie) and southern Ontario, but I'm still a Maritime girl at heart and would love to retire by the sea someday.

2. How long have you been involved in the co-operative movement, and what do you love most about it?

I learned about the co-operative movement from my parents who were members of the local Coop grocery store. I remember my mother handing the cashier her “coop card” and explaining to me that the store “paid her” based on how much she shopped there and thinking that was a very cool concept. My career at The Co-operators started while still at university where I worked as a summer student at The Co-operators office in Moncton. Although I took a break, I found my way back to The Co-operators and have never regretted my career choice. Seeing how the co-operative values are reflected in the way we run our insurance business has always made me very proud.

3. If there is one thing you would want people to know about co-ops, what would it be?

I think co-ops are one of the best kept secrets. It shouldn't be a secret and we need to shout about our values from the rooftops. Particularly the value of concern for community. These co-operative values are the underpinning of how co-ops do business and the decisions they make. In today's world, people are longing for authenticity and want to do business with organizations that are different, truly put communities first and live their values. This is real for co-ops, more than just the flavour of the month and exactly what our communities need.

4. Why is your co-operative a member of OCA?

The Co-operators is owned by 45 member organizations across Canada, all of which are cooperatives. Supporting the OCA and other provincial co-operative associations helps to support our member owners and contributes to a strong co-operative sector which is very important to us.

5. What do you think are some of the benefits of being a member of OCA?

The OCA helps coops have a strong voice especially with government. It's still surprising to me that governments (both provincial and federal) don't have a good understanding of the co-operative business structure and how co-ops can help governments achieve their goals. We also advocate for improved education on the cooperative business model in schools and universities to inspire young people to consider coops as a viable and sustainable business model. Our Co-op Business Development team does great work in this area as well. Our Co-operative Young Leaders camps are a great way to instill co-operative values in youth who are our leaders of tomorrow.

6. Why did you decide to join the OCA board as a Director?

The Co-operators offers 2 paid volunteer days every year to all employees. It's a wonderful program that inspired me to make a commitment to volunteer more regularly. In addition to other volunteer activities, I wanted to volunteer in the co-operative sector and learn

more about co-ops at the grass roots level. The opportunity arose to join the board representing The Co-operators and I was thrilled to have the opportunity. I have been on the board now for 3 years and I chair the Education Committee.

7. How has your past experience helped you in this role?

My education and background in Education has certainly helped me on the Education Committee. And my business experience in the insurance and financial services sector with The Co-operators helps me bring a business perspective to the board.

8. What do you think are some of the opportunities and challenges facing OCA in the next 3 - 5 years?

Building stronger awareness and understanding of the cooperative business model, particularly with governments, is critical. Our advocacy work focuses on putting co-ops on an even playing field with other businesses and removing barriers to allow coops to grow and thrive. To remove these barriers that exist today we need stronger government understanding and support of the co-op model. Funding is also always a challenge for the OCA in that we have so many ideas and plans, but not enough funds to make some of our great ideas a reality.

9. What is your vision for OCA?

To play a leadership role in improving the public's awareness and understanding of co-operatives, the uniqueness of the co-operative model and how it can contribute to strong communities. To have people choose co-ops to do business with whenever they have that choice.

10. Share a fun/silly thing that not many people know about you!

My secret guilty pleasure is organizing! I like nothing better than to organize a closet or junk drawer. While I find it relaxing, my family doesn't share my passion and so usually on a lazy Saturday morning with nothing to do and I say "let's organize the linen closet!" Needless-to-say I'm met with moans and groans and left to enjoy this activity on my own. Call me if anyone needs help getting their garage organized! 😊