



# Making the most of your housing co-op's elections

## A guide for Ontario housing co-ops

Elections are a key feature of housing co-op governance. Democratically electing a board of directors to assist the membership in governance makes co-ops different than other types of housing. Recent changes to the Ontario Co-operative Corporations Act have changed the way elections must be conducted.

*Making the most of your housing co-op's elections* is an educational series to help your co-op have the strongest and well-planned elections possible. Each issue in the series is designed as a stand-alone resource that covers a specific part of the election process.

This sixth issue looks at how you conduct the election. Your election committee has done good work preparing for the election. They've sent out lots of information about the election, recruited a good slate of candidates and introduced the candidates to the membership. Now it is time for members to choose the board and elect the people they want to lead the co-op for the next year. Having a smooth election process that members trust goes a long way to making the most of your election.

### Issue #6: Conducting the election

In years past, members only voted in the board elections at the election meeting. However, the changes to the Co-op Act now require that co-ops allow members to vote in advance of the election meeting. This means changes to how your co-op conducts its elections. Members can cast their vote at the election meeting as they always have, but now you also need a process that allows members to vote in advance of the election meeting if they choose. This means your co-op can't accept nominations from the floor during the election meeting.



## The ballot

You should use the same ballot for advance voting and the election meeting. The ballot should list the names of all the nominated candidates, a space for members to mark their choices and instructions on how many candidates to vote for. A sample ballot is attached to this tip sheet. Number each ballot, starting from 1, but don't keep track of which ballot members receive. This allows you to ensure the ballot is official but will keep voting anonymous.

## Advance voting

Early in the work of the election committee you would have set up a time and location for advance voting. Make sure you publicize the time and location where members can vote in advance. Check your by-laws for any specific details about how the advance vote is conducted in your co-op.

- Make sure there is an authorized election person available during the whole time when members can advance vote
- When members come to vote, give them an official ballot and have them sign beside their name on the membership list to indicate they voted in advance. (Tip: use a different colour pen for advance voting than you use at the election meeting.)
- Remind members voting in advance that they will not be able to vote at the election meeting. If they want to vote at the election meeting they should not vote in advance
- The member goes to a private location in the advance voting area and marks their ballot
- The member places their ballot in the sealed ballot box
- The ballot box is not opened until after the voting has taken place at the election meeting.

## Voting at the election meeting

The process at the election meeting will be a bit different than before because nominations are not accepted at the meeting. The election committee will

- Announce the candidates nominated
- Give instructions for voting
- Members will receive a ballot at the election polling table. Each member will sign beside their name on the membership list to indicate they voted at the election meeting. (Tip: use a different colour pen for the election meeting than you used for advance voting.)
- Before handing out ballots, check the membership list to make sure members who voted in advance do not receive a ballot at the election meeting
- Have members place their ballot in the sealed ballot box when they are done.
- Once members have had enough time for voting, close the voting time and take the ballot box to be counted.

## Electronic voting

Under the Co-op Act, co-ops can decide whether members can attend the members meeting by electronic means. If members can attend an election meeting electronically (virtually), the co-op needs to have a way for them to vote electronically.

There are a number of electronic voting options available that a number of co-ops have found to be good options for their members. The advantage of these platforms is that they track who has voted, count and confirm the results and ensure it is accurate. There is some cost involved but the simplification of the voting process can offset the cost.

Depending on your co-op's by-laws, the co-op or the board can decide to conduct voting, in advance and at the meeting, by using only an electronic voting platform.

The box below contains a list of some electronic voting platforms. If your co-op is interested in electronic voting, you should research these and other platforms and check with other co-ops that have used the platform to be sure it will meet your co-op's needs.

Voting Platform	
Election Runner	<a href="https://electionrunner.com/">https://electionrunner.com/</a>
Election Buddy	<a href="https://electionbuddy.com">https://electionbuddy.com</a>

## Counting

The counting of ballots can happen while other business is being conducted at the meeting.

- Working in teams of three, empty the ballot box and assemble the ballots in groups of ten.
- The total number of ballots should equal the number of ballots handed out.
- Use ballot tally sheets to count the votes for each candidate.
- One of the team members will read the ballots and the other two team members will each record the vote on the tally sheet.
- After every group of ten ballots has been counted, stop and compare the results each recorder has listed. If there is a difference, recount the last batch of 10 ballots.
- Keep an eye out for spoiled ballots. A spoiled ballot is any ballot where it is not clear who was voted for or if the number of candidates voted for does not equal the number of positions up for election. Set any spoiled ballots aside.

- After all the votes are recorded, add up the totals, including any electronic votes, and determine which directors have been elected.
- Put all the ballots and tally sheets in a sealed envelope. They can be destroyed after the period for a recount has passed. (The model Organizational By-law states that a recount must be requested within seven days of the election meeting. See 8.3 for more information about recounts.)

## Announcing the results

When you return to the election meeting from the counting room, you will announce the results of the election. Check your co-op's by-laws to see if it says anything about what information is to be reported. If nothing is listed, it is generally a good idea to report the following:

- Number of ballots cast
- Number of spoiled ballots
- The names of the candidates elected.

After announcing the results, thank all the candidates for putting their names forward to run for election. Electing the board is the most important governance task in the co-op and they have been willing to serve on the board and give the members a choice in who to elect. And thank the members for their participation in the core co-op principle of democratic member control.

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**Sample ballot**

# Board of Director election

Co-op Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Official ballot # \_\_\_\_\_ Please mark you ballot with an **X** for each candidate you vote for. You must vote for \_\_\_\_\_ candidates. Your ballot will be considered spoiled if you do not vote for \_\_\_\_\_ positions.

Name of Candidate	Vote X Below

Tear off here at dotted line:



Ballot # \_\_\_\_\_