



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 seventh issue gives an overview of the steps in the election process. For details on each step check out the first six issues of this series.

Issue #7: Housing co-op elections step-by-step

The election committee

The election committee should be a permanent committee appointed by the board of directors. It operates year-round, although most of its work takes place in the lead up to the election. In between elections, the committee:

- Arranges education opportunities for the members about their role in governance and the role of the board
- Works to promote a culture that values leadership in the co-op
- Encourages the development of future co-op leaders
- Keeps track of director terms and when director positions are up for election.

Setting dates and procedures

Board elections are held at member meetings. This is often at the Annual General Meeting but they can be held at other meetings. Several months in advance, the following things need to be done. The election committee and board may work together on these items:

- Set the date of the election meeting
- Determine the nomination deadline
- Decide whether the election meeting will be in-person, virtual or hybrid
- Set out how members can vote in advance of the election meeting, if they want to
- If the meeting will be virtual or hybrid, set in place an electronic voting process for members who attend the election meeting electronically.

Nominating candidates

Once the election meeting date is set, the committee starts the process of getting nominations. Nomination forms are distributed and members are encouraged to nominate candidates and to consider running themselves.

Getting to know the candidates

An important part of the election is learning about the candidates. This can be done by

- Collecting profiles of the candidates and distributing them to members
- Holding a meet the meet-the-candidates event.

Voting

Co-op members vote for the candidates they want to be on the board. Members can vote

- At the election meeting, or
- If attending the election meeting electronically is an option, they vote using the electronic system set in place by the co-op, or
- In advance of the election, if they want to

Counting

Once all the votes are cast, the election committee oversees the counting of the votes. According to the Co-op Act, the counting must be done at a legally constituted membership meeting with quorum.

All the votes cast in advance and at the election meeting (including any electronic votes) are tallied. The results are announced to the members at the election meeting.

The new board meets

The new board holds its first meeting shortly after the election. Typically, at the first meeting, the new board will organize itself by electing the President and other signing officers, as well as determining the responsibilities of individual directors and any board subcommittees. The old board remains in office until the first meeting of the new board.

A final word

It is hard to overstate how important good elections are to the governance and running of your co-op. Members electing the board is a foundational principle in co-ops. A good election process will lead to having a better board, which results in good governance and ultimately the success of the co-op, both as a business and as a community. So, let's make the most of your housing co-op's elections.

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