



## Section 2.08 DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT

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Government is an important part of business in Ontario and even though your club may be a not for profit volunteer run organization, it is still a business. It is therefore important to all tennis clubs to learn how to manage the relationship with government effectively.

Almost every community club we have seen has dealings with some level of government. In most cases, these are primarily with the local municipality through which the club obtains a user permit for what would otherwise be public courts. Often, capital improvements need to be approved by the municipality.

Another example of a situation which might require a good working relationship with the local government comes up from time to time, usually when the municipality is in the midst of a labour dispute. It would appear that every municipality in Ontario has a contingency plan which involves the use of tennis courts as temporary garbage storage sites in the event of a strike in the sanitation department. Those of us who rely on these facilities for our recreation have a vested interest in educating and lobbying local officials regarding plans of this nature.

These are but a few examples of why it may be important to your organization to establish and maintain a good relationship with government. In general, local governments control resources and make decisions which impact on the operation of our clubs. For this reason, anything we can do to educate these decision makers about our operations, and our importance to the community, will serve the delivery of organized tennis in Ontario.

Governments already do a great deal for tennis clubs in Ontario. As noted above, most of the tennis courts in the province were initially built by local governments. These courts are in many cases used by Community Tennis Clubs. Local governments also provide introductory lessons through the Parks and Recreation Department which help to fuel interest in the game and lead people to your club.

On a larger scale, the provincial government funds many of the OTA's programs so that they can be delivered to the local membership in a cost-effective manner. Tennis Canada likewise receives support from the federal government for some programs and initiatives.

Unfortunately, governments do not currently have the same levels of discretionary funds that they have had in the past. For this reason, there has been a decline in government support as well as considerable uncertainty with respect to ongoing financial support at both the federal and provincial levels. The other consideration with respect to using government funds has to do with the level of freedom in how these funds are applied. At times, a political change can lead to changes in policy as to the types of programs and initiatives which can be funded.

Other local level funding opportunities exist for sport and recreation activities in Ontario. For information on these, we suggest that you contact your regional office of the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation. Again, these types of funds are becoming more scarce.



However, it does not hurt to investigate funding opportunities particularly if your club is embarking on a major capital project or new initiative. An example of a funding opportunity lies with the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Please visit their website at [www.trilliumfoundation.org](http://www.trilliumfoundation.org) for more details.

For the most part, local clubs deal with the municipal government and establishing this relationship should be of primary concern. We would therefore like to suggest a few techniques which might help you to establish a strong relationship with the local municipal government. As well, in the event that an issue arises which impacts your club in a negative way, we have suggested a few methods of dealing with the local officials.

**Education within the municipality.** The more local politicians and bureaucrats know about your organization and community tennis in your municipality, the better. Invite your local alderman or counsellor to a major club event such as your opening social. As well, invite a representative from the local government to your club's annual general meeting. Both of these will serve to establish the relationship and demonstrate to the local officials that you run a good operation.

**Quick and timely responses to requests for information.** Community clubs are often required to submit specific paperwork to the municipality to receive a user permit for the courts. Any and all documentation should be complete and forwarded in good time. As well, you may receive questions from time to time with respect to the operation of your club. Again, we suggest that a quick response is in order.

**Ensure that any special initiatives which the club undertakes are communicated to the local officials.** As an example, if there is a special program for underprivileged children, then make sure the municipality is aware of it. It may not seem modest but it is important to "blow your own horn" from time to time. The same would apply to a special program for seniors, an initiative to get tennis introduced at the local elementary school or any other local level program to bring more people from your community into tennis. After all, if you hope to work with your municipality on future club improvements, you need to ensure that your club is a going concern and warrants such a partnership.

**Ensure that you are aware of the local issues and how they might impact your club.** We noted above the scenario where tennis courts could be used to store garbage during a labour disruption. Early action could avoid that.

**Do not hesitate to make representation to committees** if the issue has impact on you. This is all part of being heard by government. If you fail to make your position understood, you have no one to blame but yourselves if a decision is made which does not account for your needs. In jurisdictions where more than one community club exists, a coordinated group effort involving several clubs could well be in order to ensure that local officials get a clear understanding of the "scope" of an issue and a consistent message about what is best for the tennis clubs. Often, an OTA regional organization can play a big lead role in making this happen. The volunteer Chair



of your region will want to know when local issues arise for clubs in their region. If you are not already aware of whom the Chair is in your region, you can obtain this information by contacting the OTA office.

**Always be ready to negotiate.** Remember that governments have a great many interest groups to consider. Hard, inflexible positions force confrontations. In a confrontation, your club is not likely to win. Therefore, you must be willing to work with local officials to find solutions to problems which work for a number of groups. These are the types of solutions which are most often accepted by government.

To this end, do not hesitate to **form coalitions with other groups** in the community. This will add strength to your position as well as increase the probability of finding a solution which works for a large portion of the population.

When all else fails, **mobilize the community.** Remember that your members are the people who have put the local officials into office. A well-coordinated e-mail or letter writing campaign can often create a great deal of "noise" at city hall.

As a final note, we invite you to contact the OTA office if you require assistance dealing with a local municipality. Depending on the situation, we may well be able to assist you with specific information, suggested strategies, the name of another club which has gone through a similar experience or a letter of support. Even if we cannot be of specific assistance, we like to be aware of the nature of the relationship between our member clubs and the local municipalities.

Hopefully, most of these techniques will never be necessary. If you concentrate on the education, service and communication processes to build a strong relationship, you will be well on your way to ensuring that confrontations with local government never occur.