

# **Making it work:**

## **Volunteers for self-government**



By Karen Hawthorne

In PEO's policy governance structure, it's the volunteers on Council, informed by the work of still more volunteers on committees, task forces and in chapters, who make the key policy decisions that drive the organization.

**W**hen it comes to calling the shots at Professional Engineers Ontario, the regulator's governing volunteers have final sign-off. Staff members simply carry out the policy decisions and directives of Council, a group of dedicated volunteers who might not take home a PEO paycheck, but who nonetheless put in long hours for the greater good of regulating the profession in the public interest. Either elected by PEO members, or appointed by the Lieutenant Governor-in-Council to serve on PEO Council, these volunteers have the final say, within the bounds of the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA). Council meets at least four times a year over a day and a half at PEO's Toronto offices.

#### A call to duty

Volunteers in a self-governing body represent a special breed. While members of the public may step up to canvas for the Canadian Red Cross, or help prepare meals for the homeless at a shelter, PEO volunteers come primarily from among its P.Eng. licence holders, to develop and maintain a high standard of engineering practice to serve and protect the public, and to ensure PEO's licensing, registration, complaints, discipline and

enforcement processes and procedures are fair, transparent, objective and consistent.

PEO's more than 20 active committees and task forces are formally established with an appointed chair, a staff advisor and rules of order to follow. Appointments are made annually and volunteers are often recruited according

and applicants at PEO headquarters in Toronto. For example, the Academic Requirements Committee (ARC) is a legislated committee that reviews the academic qualifications for licensure of referred applicants who are not graduates of an accredited engineering program, to determine whether the applicants' qualifications meet pre-

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to their relevant skillsets. If members volunteer without a specific task in mind, PEO will find the best fit for their experience and credentials.

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scribed academic requirements, and to recommend an appropriate course of action. This committee, comprising volunteer P.Engs and engineering professors, meets about six times a year at PEO, usually on a Friday during regular business hours.

Similarly, the Experience Requirements Committee (ERC), another legislated committee, reviews the experience of applicants for licensing who are not graduates of an accredited engineering program, to determine if that experience warrants relief from examinations assigned by the ARC. This committee meets as a whole twice a year in the evening, and interviews licence applicants in two-person panels during the day. Each member of the ERC can expect to serve on interview panels about four times a year.

While ARC and ERC make decisions that are independent of Council, other

### Networking opportunity

PEO's geographically based chapter system also depends on a network of more than 400 volunteers working within their local areas to conduct chapter business, programs and events. The chapters afford members the opportunity to get involved with their local professional engineering community, and learn more about PEO. Chapter Executive members often move on to volunteer for PEO committee work, and eventually to seek a seat on Council.

As for the next wave of professional engineers, Ontario engineering students can participate in PEO's Student

### Volunteer timeline

Established by volunteers in 1922, PEO has since evolved a system of volunteer engagement so extensive that an Advisory Committee on Volunteers (ACV) was established in the early 1990s to monitor the volunteer needs of the organization, and to act as a resource on the topic for Council.

To streamline the system, a new committee structure was introduced and approved by Council in January 2004. The new structure organizes the committees into "functional types." Committees considered to be Operational on Regulatory Matters are the ARC, Consulting Engineer Designation Committee, ERC, Registration Committee, Complaints Committee (COC), Discipline Committee (DIC), and the Joint Practice Board (JPB).

Other categories of committee include: Advisory on Operational Matters, Advisory on Regulatory Matters, Advisory on Policy Matters, Fiduciary Committee, Governance Committee, and Special Committee. The categories of committee report to Council, the ultimate authority, through three possible routes (or responsible authorities): either directly, through the Executive Committee, or through the CEO/Registrar. Distributing authority in this way is intended to streamline the activities of Council to make the best use of its—and committee members'—time and effort.

Other ideas to improve PEO's use of its volunteer resource include a screening process for potential volunteers to help ensure that volunteer talents and expectations match needs and committee operations, volunteers' self-review to determine their effectiveness on the committee or task force on which they sit, and an evaluation tool for committees to benchmark their achievements and effectiveness.

"Today's group of volunteers is extremely committed, given competing time restrictions, and work and family commitments," says Chessell. "They are representative of the province, in terms of ethnicity, gender, and international graduates. That's important because we operate as a provincial organization in regulating the profession." ❖

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committees advise Council or do detailed work on Council's behalf, for an eventual decision by Council.

The Environment Committee (EVC), for example, advises Council on environmental issues and provides a review of proposed environmental legislation for possible impact on the regulation of professional engineering. This committee meets about 10 times each year during the daytime, and includes consulting engineers with experience in the environmental field, among others.

Membership Program, while applicants to PEO may choose to get involved in its Engineering Intern Training (EIT) program.

"This is the way PEO has been set up to do its business," says Tom Chessell, manager, volunteer management. "The role of a member in a self-governing body is to provide guidance and decision-making. This has been the tradition at PEO, as set up through the governing legislation. Basically, it's P.Engs making decisions about P.Engs."