





Governance

striving

for new

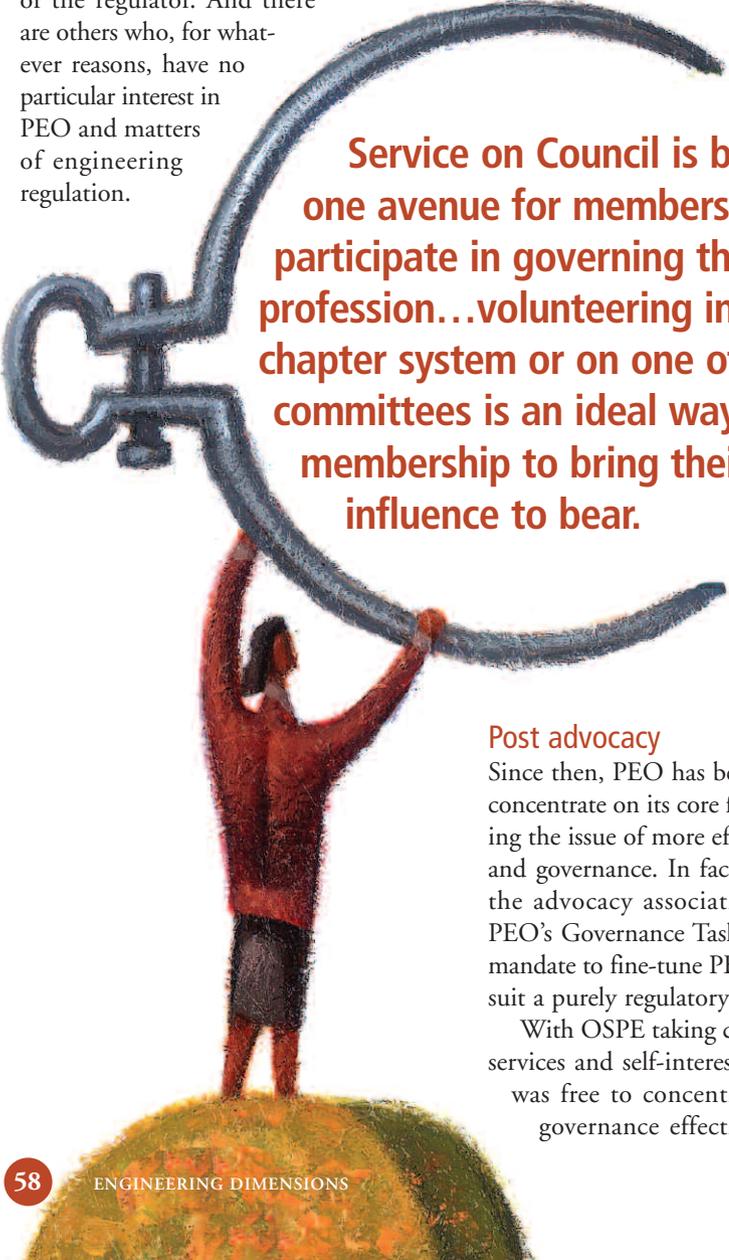
relevance

Divesting its former member services function continues to have some impact on PEO and its governance structure. With the opportunity to concentrate resources more directly at licensing, complaints and discipline, and enforcement, PEO is looking to attract those interested in serving their profession in these core areas.

BY MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO

Letters to the editor of *Engineering Dimensions* occasionally question the magazine's relevance to the individual engineering practitioner in Ontario.

Perhaps some of this feeling is due to confusion and misunderstanding as to the role of PEO. While most members have some understanding of PEO's mandate of regulating the practice of professional engineering in the public interest, upholding standards for admission and licensing, and enforcing the licensing and title provisions of the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA) against anyone practising engineering without a licence or leading others to believe they're entitled to do so, there are some who seem to expect more of the regulator. And there are others who, for whatever reasons, have no particular interest in PEO and matters of engineering regulation.



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Post advocacy

Since then, PEO has been better able to concentrate on its core functions, including the issue of more effective regulation and governance. In fact, the creation of the advocacy association jumpstarted PEO's Governance Task Force, with the mandate to fine-tune PEO governance to suit a purely regulatory body.

With OSPE taking charge of member services and self-interest advocacy, PEO was free to concentrate more on its governance effectiveness, strategic

priority setting, and the communication of its core role to all stakeholders.

Much of the initial work for the Governance Task Force involved defining roles and responsibilities of those involved in PEO governance. In an executive summary of one of its early reports, Governance Task Force Chair David Adams, P.Eng., now PEO President-elect, stated the task force's central aim as defining the roles and responsibilities of PEO Council, committees and staff, and the role of members and chapters in the creation of strategic policy.

Later task force reports highlighted the need for a change in the way committees and staff members operate and interact with each other. There were also calls for Council to better fulfill its policy governance role and to provide "enhanced coordination" of PEO's regulatory policy formation and regulation setting.

In this regard, PEO's review of governance was influenced by the work of US-based consultant John Carver, who established new parameters for more effective organizational administration, in particular for organizations operating under an elected board of directors.

Under the Carver Model, a board of directors is responsible in broad terms for both the governance and operation of an organization. Meanwhile, the CEO/Registrar is responsible to the board for overall management and policy implementation. Sometimes referred to as the "policy governance" approach, the model leaves Council to concentrate on strategic and policy objectives, while leaving the CEO leeway to determine the best means of realizing those ends.

Based on the work of the Governance Task Force, PEO Council approved a plan to regroup PEO's then 29 committees into three reporting categories: those reporting to Council; those reporting to the Executive Committee; and those reporting to the CEO/Registrar. In addition to this new reporting stream, the governance review led to the standing down of some committees whose work overlapped with that of other committees, or was no longer supported in a policy governance mandate.

Nevertheless, the governance review confirmed the central role for committees and

task forces of volunteers in the overall operations of the regulator. While many of the committees lack executive or decision-making authority, their work forms the basis for much of the policy-related activity that Council eventually approves.

In terms of current governance mechanics, PEO is governed by a 29-member Council as defined in the PEA, of whom 17 are elected by members at large. This group of 17 includes two Councillors from each of the five regions in the province, three Councillors-at-Large, a Vice President, a President-elect, a President, and a Past President. An additional 12 Councillors are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario; five of them are non-engineers.

The 10 Regional Councillors and three Councillors-at-Large are elected for two-year terms, which are staggered to ensure continuity.

The role of all PEO Councillors—elected or appointed—is to manage the affairs of the regulator and supervise the work of the CEO/Registrar. Council members are also expected to participate in strategic planning and developing and implementing corporate policy. In keeping with their fiduciary duty as directors of the organization, Council members are expected to become knowledgeable of the business and financial affairs of PEO, and to assume a proper duty of care, diligence, wisdom and loyalty.

Volunteer influence

However, service on Council is but one avenue for membership to participate in governing their profession. While representative democracies accept the voter deferring his or her voice to an elected official, volunteering in PEO's chapter system or on one of its 22 committees is an ideal way for membership to bring their influence to bear on the profession.

PEO's 37 chapters are a channel to help bring local or grassroots issues to the attention of PEO Council for consideration and debate. Councils over the years have reiterated the importance of chapters in identifying member priorities and bringing ideas forward for consideration. Chapters also play a key role in representing the regulator in the local community.

Members' volunteer spirit can also be accommodated via PEO committee work. Since the founding of PEO in 1922, committees have played a central role in the regulator's activities, and several have their compositions and mandates defined by the PEA or Regulation 941. In addition to the various standing committees, special needs task forces are also a part of PEO governance. These task forces, such as the Licensing Process Task Force, are appointed by Council and exist only as long as necessary to complete their work.

To become involved in a PEO committee, a member must usually express some interest, although in some cases members having special expertise are asked to consider serving. Appointments to committees are approved by Council on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Volunteers, aided by Tom Chessell, PEO's manager of volunteer management. Committee members are appointed annually, with a typical committee member serving about three years. Ideally, there is some turnover in each committee every year to enable new members to become involved. Committee chairs generally serve a two-year term.

Time for a fresh look?

Recently, PEO Council declined to approve a proposal for a revamped Council structure. The proposed changes, which were the subject of a member survey over the summer, included a smaller Council, a longer term for the President, and an expanded role in the electoral process for chapters, perhaps at the expense of participation from those who do not attend chapter meetings or the PEO Annual General Meeting. Although the proposal was defeated, members who replied to the survey did indicate some support for governance reform.

Whatever the ebb and flow of PEO governance reform, there remains a core of about 700 Council members, and committee and task force volunteers actively involved in governing the profession. Another 400 or so volunteers are active within the chapters across the province.

The central role of the volunteer in PEO puts some onus on individual members to consider how they might

serve their profession. While relatively few of PEO's 70,000 members will ever get an opportunity to serve as a member of Council, involvement on a volunteer committee early in one's engineering career is a good training ground for future work on Council should one be so inclined.

This training ground approach is favoured by a number of past PEO Presidents, especially Bob Goodings, P.Eng., who never misses an opportunity to celebrate the Council experience as a means of personal and professional growth, recognizing that PEO could gain a steady stream of recruits into leadership positions if it made committee and Council work more appealing to membership, and, at the same time, overcome the perception that a small group of insiders runs the show at PEO.

While it is fashionable today to treat political activity and governance issues with a degree of skepticism, there is something to be said for an informed, committed membership as a counterbalance to administrative lethargy. In an effort to keep the regulator as relevant and responsive as possible, PEO is striving towards a new relationship with its diverse community of P.Engs. ❖

