

PEO AT FOREFRONT OF REGULATORS' POLICY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

The second annual regulators' policy conference this fall highlights the engineering regulator's efforts to engage like-minded organizations to improve governance and keep tabs on a rapidly changing regulatory environment.



By Michael Mastromatteo

PEO continues to reach out to other bodies regulating professions to enhance policy development and gain new insights into an evolving self-regulatory landscape.

The latest example is an October 26 policy conference, organized by the PEO-led Ontario Profession Regulators' Policy Network (OPRPN), a voluntary association of the bodies authorized by statute to regulate a profession in Ontario. The network's purpose is to promote regulatory policy excellence among self-regulating professions through self help, training and development, and information-sharing of strategies and best practices.

In addition to beginning to develop the network in 2005, PEO has developed a training manual other regulators can use to beef up policy development and governance activity.

Although PEO has long had informal interaction with other regulatory associations, the network is the first real effort to bring some structure to policy-making for regulatory bodies.

Jordan Max, PEO policy manager, says the network balances individual autonomy with regulatory best practices.

"Under PEO's initiation, the OPRPN began four years ago in November as a proposition that Ontario's profession regulators could gain from working with each other and sharing information and best practices and, in doing so, could raise the bar for profession self-regulation in Ontario as a distinct regulatory sector, while respecting each body's autonomy," Max said September 21.

The original meeting in November 2005 included representation from regulatory bodies of several senior self-regulated



professions, including the Law Society of Upper Canada, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Ontario Association of Architects, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, the College of Nurses of Ontario, and the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

COMMON INTERESTS

While regulatory organizations such as PEO have mandates specific to their profession, they also have common concerns. At the initial meeting in 2005, participants discussed areas of joint interest. Among them were providing better access to the profession (especially for internationally educated applicants), government incursion into the regulatory realm, lay representation on governing councils, continuing professional

development for members, and determining how the public interest is served via self-regulation.

Participants also debated the thorny issue of advocacy for self-regulating organizations, and how a regulator's regulation-making authority impacts on overall governance.

Max says the policy network covers the entire spectrum of profession regulators, both health and non-health, large and small, well-established and relatively new. "Although we have different governing legislation, our basic functions and challenges are similar, and policy-making is the engine that drives change within our organizations," he adds. "We also have the same overseer looking over our shoulders, namely the provincial government, and so we somewhat nervously watch what happens to each other, because we know we might be next."



We have recently welcomed the newest regulatory colleges in their transitional state to allow them to benefit from our collective experience at the ground floor.”

OPRPN members have met three to four times a year since 2005. Issues coming to the fore over that time have included the *Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act*; defining the public interest; balancing competition and regulation; policy development processes; performance measurement; professional standards and guideline development; and quality assurance.

The network has also examined recent legislation impacting on health care.

MOBILITY CONCERNS

Other more recent areas of common concern for regulators include providing greater mobility for licensed members from province to province, and ensuring that regulatory associations undertake more effective stakeholder consultation as a demonstration of transparency and accountability in all operations.

“For the most part,” Max adds, “our presentations have been peer-led, rather than relying on outside experts, based on the belief that Ontario’s profession regulators have tremendous staff and volunteer talent and experience to share.”

Charlie Morrison, director of policy at the OCT, is a member of the OPRPN steering committee. A founding member of the network, Morrison says the OPRPN is an ideal forum for regulatory bodies to learn from each other and to pool resources.

“From a policy perspective, the network has provided a chance to gather information about best practices in the field and sector—to create a bigger regulator’s policy toolkit, as it were,” she says. “It’s also provided me with up-to-the-moment information on various government initiatives and how Ontario’s different professions and regulators are dealing with developments and environmental change. Finally, it’s been a great opportunity to improve the ties between policy functions at Ontario’s professional regulators.”

The October 26 gathering will highlight regulators’ efforts to engage more stakeholders in regulatory policy development. A major motivator in the stakeholder engagement theme comes from the provincial government’s Bill 179, the *Regulated Health Professions Statute Law Amendment Act, 2009*, which aims to improve relations among health-related regulatory colleges, key stakeholders and members of the public. Although the legislation is directed initially at health organizations, there is recognition among other regulators that it could be a model for the ways they will be required to work with their stakeholders.

Keynote speakers for the conference include Richard Steinecke, a Toronto lawyer who has developed special expertise in regulatory and privacy issues, Kevin Wilson of the Ontario Ministry of Labour, who will discuss policy outcomes, and Karen Wiancki of Planning Solutions Inc., who will focus on more effective stakeholder engagement.

Representatives of the Professional Associations Research Network, as well as from some of the health-related regulatory colleges, are also scheduled to present at the OPRPN conference.

In an interview with *Engineering Dimensions*, Wiancki expanded on stakeholder engagement as an emerging trend for self-regulating professions. She says engagement today means more than consultation, and that it provides a better foundation for developing policy in an increasingly complex regulatory milieu. Inviting input from all stakeholders also satisfies government expectations that self-regulated professions “democratize” much of their proceedings.

“From an engineering governance perspective, engagement allows you to look at issues from a different lens,” Wiancki says. “When you engage with your own constituents and stakeholders, you look from the inside out. When you engage with your clients and your partners, you have the ability to look from the outside in. It gives you a different, multi-faceted lens, and it allows you also to create a sense of shared ownership and to build social capital. Years ago, we focused only on an economic bottom line. By moving toward an engagement paradigm, you are building a sense of shared ownership. You are creating an atmosphere of trust and you are looking at genuinely partnering with people on issues that matter to them.” Σ