

# EQUITY AND DIVERSITY—TALKING THE TALK, JOINING THE WALK

By Ann Holmes



PEO COUNCIL ADOPTED the equity and diversity (E&D) policy in February and now it's time to put it into action. A plan for implementation is being developed by PEO's Equity and Diversity Committee (EDC) and will be communicated to members and stakeholders. All of this will take a lot of effort on the part of EDC members, who have demonstrated their continued leadership and commitment to moving the process forward. Here are some of their views on how to ensure positive results in implementing the policy.

When asked about his personal vision for the E&D policy, committee member Rishi Kumar, P.Eng., observed that action must begin within the organization to ensure the policy is well understood before reaching out to stakeholders. Kumar hopes councillors and senior administration will treat the policy as a serious document and work on its implementation. "PEO must think about how far we can go in accommodation. The degree of movement requires a critical balance," he says.

Several members spoke about their hope that the policy will be the catalyst for linking with stakeholders in many different settings. Vera Straka, P.Eng., says: "The policy raises the profile of the professional image of engineers." She hopes PEO will liaise with the Council of Ontario Deans of Engineering to reach out to universities. She also sees the potential for PEO's actions to influence the profession and smaller companies that may not have the human resources capacity to develop their own policies. She notes that implementation will help raise awareness in engineering firms.

Shaun Rose, P.Eng., spoke about the possibility that stakeholders will become empowered to raise issues, knowing their licensing body is behind them. He notes that implementation will require PEO to achieve the delicate balance between objectivity and fair practices. According to Rose, the policy sets a foundation for PEO to address E&D issues, and to begin an exploration of what it would take to make people feel truly welcomed.

EDC members are proud of PEO and what implementing the policy can mean for it. Rakesh Shreevastav, P.Eng., says: "As a proud Ontarian, I see this as an example of best practice in organizational leadership, embracing the values of mutual respect and dignity for all persons."

What concrete outcomes do EDC members want from implementing the policy? It is clear from their answers that committee members are engaged, committed and looking to affect positive change. Words such as "embrace," "ongoing," and "analyzed" were used to describe the results that are being anticipated. Having led this process since the development of the original position paper, Márta Ecsedi, P.Eng., FEC, chair of EDC, expects that councillors and committee chairs will embrace the policy and be proactive in taking measures. She also hopes PEO's processes will be analyzed for diversity sensitivity. Other members described the following expected outcomes:

- All employers will take E&D training. There will be engineers of many diverse backgrounds on council, and there will be ongoing reduction of complaints;
- We need to develop benchmarks and metrics to measure the success of implementation, as well as an education package about E&D, including a presentation that can be delivered to chapters, engineering firms and students;
- Information sessions will be held. Input will be solicited

from diverse groups. There will be a positive impact on recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers; and

- The policy gets used and is regularly reviewed so it stays current and applicable. Other policies are reviewed through the lens of the E&D policy.

Over and above their work on planning for policy implementation, committee members' commitment to broader action is clear. Those interviewed spoke about integrating concrete elements of E&D into their existing involvement outside PEO by being role models of behaviour compliant with the policy. Specifically, Rose says he plans to get the word out and share information, including discussing the policy in the workplace, "because the workplace is where I have heard stories about situations the policy is meant to remedy." Ecsedi plans to expand the EDC and train its members in E&D awareness-raising so they can spread the word and act as peer trainers. Kumar will integrate E&D principles into his presentations to schools and at trade shows. Shreevastav will act at the grassroots level in his local chapter and Straka will promote policy implementation to students and faculty at her university. Rose wants to find out how best to integrate E&D into leadership training for chapter executives.

Finally, Ecsedi offers a commitment and a challenge to PEO members: "I will set an example by walking the walk. I will ensure members have information and are familiar with the policy so they can join the walk."

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