

COUNCIL APPROVES CESC RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ELECTION PROCESS

487TH MEETING, SEPTEMBER 26 AND 27, 2013

By Jennifer Coombes

THE SEPTEMBER MEETING opened with a Thursday evening plenary session to discuss issues regarding PEO's council elections. The session began with a presentation by a representative of Ipsos-Reid, the company that surveyed PEO members in late June and early July about council elections. The survey was conducted in an attempt to uncover the reasons behind the record low voter turnout (8.9 per cent) in PEO's 2013 council elections, as well as to consult the membership about broader election issues and processes, and PEO council. It was sent to all licence holders for which PEO had an email address (63,987) with 7401 responding. Highlights of the survey's findings, include:

- PEO's membership is uninspired and is looking for new ideas and new candidates, including younger and/or female candidates;
- Non-voters are a particularly disengaged group, reporting they do not vote because they feel no pressing issue, lack knowledge of candidates, forgot, or were too busy;
- The electronic voting process was well received, with only 4 per cent having difficulties and 5 per cent feeling uncomfortable with it;
- 88 per cent of voters familiar with the voting process reported being satisfied;
- Electronic voting has the potential to increase voting likelihood; and
- Electronic voting had a negative impact on former mail-in ballot voters.

Following the presentation, councillors were invited to discuss and vote on several issues related to the election process.

Council approved the following during the evening:

- continue to conduct PEO elections by electronic means only (Internet and telephone);

- amend the regulations to prohibit a former PEO president from running for president again for four years from the time his or her term expires;
- provide candidates' election publicity material to voters with the voting instructions;
- randomize candidates' names on the elections website each time a voter logs in to vote; and
- reappoint Catherine Redden as chief elections officer.

Council also approved the following recommendations made by the 2013 Central Election and Search Committee (CESC), based on the Ipsos-Reid survey and consultations with key stakeholders in the election process, including returning officers, the official elections agent, the acting CEO/ registrar, and the chief elections officer:

- prohibit PEO staff from handling and resolving complaints and questions;
- include "where to get help" information on voting instructions and better align candidates' names on the ballot;
- amend regulations such that only members who have served for at least two full years on council are eligible for nomination as president-elect. In the case of vice president, the member must have served at least one year on council;
- examine ways council could be more relevant to the membership;
- engage a communications specialist, to be overseen by the CESC, to develop a communications plan for increasing awareness of and participation in the 2014 council election, particularly targeting licence holders who don't typically vote;
- offer incentives for voting (e.g. entering voters in draws for prizes);
- authorize the chief elections officer to direct the voting site to indicate that a candidate has withdrawn from an election;
- continue to choose a chief elections officer who is a non-engineer and has experience addressing complicated issues;
- publish no election-specific articles, including letters to the editor, president's message, etc., in *Engineering Dimensions* during the voting period;
- clarify voting instructions in as many places as possible, including *Engineering Dimensions*, elections website and on printed instructions;
- add to the published election procedures that candidate mass mailings for campaign purposes (email or standard mail) other than PEO-sponsored eblasts are not condoned by PEO;
- establish a PEO help desk for use by potential voters and display the help number prominently on the voting instructions;

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- indicate on voting instructions that it is not necessary to vote for candidates for every council position to participate in the election process;
- task an appropriate committee to define a “member in good standing”;
- state in the procedures that nomination papers must be submitted only by email or fax for tracking purposes;
- state in publicity procedures that candidates may not use the PEO logo in their material;
- state in publicity procedures that links to PEO publications in candidate materials are not considered to be links to a third party;
- add to procedures that chapter executives must allow equal access to candidates at chapter annual general meetings, and must provide or withhold consent for candidates to attend meetings equally for all candidates;
- amend the protocol for all candidates meetings to include a deadline of noon on the day of the meeting for candidates to submit their material to be read by the moderator;
- inform candidates of protocol for all candidates meetings; and
- task the CESC with investigating the feasibility of holding the all candidates meetings in a debate format.

CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Council unanimously supported, in principle, the development of a PEO continuing professional development program and referred a report by the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers’ Continuing Education Working Group to the Professional Standards Committee (PSC) for comment. The report proposes a mandatory program modeled on the program in place for Alberta’s engineers and aligns with the Engineers Canada Canadian Framework for Licensure. The PSC will review and comment on the June 19 report *Continuing Professional Development, Maintaining and Enhancing our Engineering Capability*, with input from PEO’s membership, as well as considering other recommendations for a professional development program. The committee is scheduled to report its findings and proposed action plan at council’s February 2014 meeting.

Currently, PEO has no mandatory professional development program and is the only

Canadian engineering regulator without one. In 2009, PEO council approved requiring licence holders to declare each year that they will maintain competence in the professional engineering services they provide. However, this motion has not been implemented.

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING ASSESSMENTS OF EXISTING BUILDINGS

Council has authorized the PSC to proceed with the development of a guideline for structural engineering assessments of existing buildings and other structures, and a performance standard for structural engineering assessment of existing buildings.

With the Elliot Lake Inquiry ongoing, PEO has received inquiries on the best practices for assessing existing buildings and other structures, and the inquiry itself has revealed misconceptions concerning engineers’ responsibilities when performing this type of work.

A subcommittee of the PSC will carry out the work in consultation with practitioners and others, including members of the public. The draft documents, when completed, will be posted on the PEO website for general consultation.

COUNCIL WORKSHOP OUTPUT FINALIZED

At its September meeting, council unanimously affirmed the 2013 Council Workshop Report, which establishes council’s priorities for 2013-2014. These priorities are, in order of importance, to clarify PEO’s Code of Ethics, to develop a white paper about the impact of globalization, and to educate council on quality assurance.

ENGINEER-IN-RESIDENCE

The Engineer-in-Residence (EIR) program matches volunteer engineers with elementary and high school classrooms in Ontario to provide hands-on science, technology, engineering and mathematics programming for students. At its July 2012 meeting, council asked the Education Committee to review the EIR program, including options for how it might be overseen to provide accountability and effective delivery. In March of this year, the committee reported on options for the program, which were that its administration remain with The Impact Group (TIG), the company that has delivered the program since its inception, that PEO seek other service providers, that the program be brought into PEO to operate, or that the program be discontinued. The committee’s recommendations were that PEO remain the program sponsor and TIG the service provider, but under an updated contract. After discussion, council referred the issue back to the committee for further deliberation based on the council discussion.

The committee reported back to council at its September meeting, at which council approved the committee’s recommendations that it terminate the current contract with TIG on December 31 and issue a request for proposal for potential service providers for delivering the program. TIG and any other company or organization wishing to deliver the EIR program on PEO’s behalf will have an opportunity to respond to the RFP. Council has authorized up to \$15,000 for legal counsel to develop a contract with the successful proponent. Σ