

THE ROLE OF CHAPTERS AND COMMITTEES IN PEO GOVERNANCE

By Changiz Sadr, P.Eng., FEC

PEO WAS established in 1922 as a self-governing and self-regulating entity to protect the welfare of the public under the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA). Back then, PEO delivered its mandate via a council of elected representatives and a limited number of committees. Its chapter system, which provides a crucial communications link between members-at-large and PEO council, wasn't established until many years later.

Today, PEO consists of 36 chapters across Ontario, two regional offices, a number of established and ad-hoc committees, task forces and working groups, and a council as the highest decision-making body. Some of PEO's committees are mandated by the PEA to assist the association in developing specific policies and guidelines and to run the association's core business, including its licensing function. Task forces are created temporarily to deal with special projects or issues.

Any self-regulating organization looking to improve its governance structure, and to be fully accountable to its stakeholders, has an obligation to include its members in policy development and decision making. While council remains the ultimate decision-making body, PEO's committees and chapters have no small level of influence in overall operations.

BOARD COMMITTEES

PEO's board committees have a fiduciary and/or oversight role in PEO operations. They operate on a council-year basis—from the date of PEO's annual general meeting (AGM) in the spring to the AGM the following spring. The majority of committee members are sitting members of the current council, and members are selected either by position, election or appointment at a council meeting. PEO's board committees include:

- Executive Committee;
- Finance Committee;
- Human Resources Committee;
- Legislation Committee;
- OSPE-PEO Joint Relations Committee; and
- Regional Councillors Committee.

OTHER COMMITTEES REPORTING TO COUNCIL

These committees share some of the same characteristics of board committees, such as their duty to report to council, but their membership is open to the general membership. Some of them have a limited number of members while others have more than 100 members. Current committees in this category include:

- Academic Requirements Committee;
- Advisory Committee on Volunteers;

- Awards Committee;
- Central Election and Search Committee;
- Complaints Committee;
- Complaints Review Councillor;
- Consulting Engineer Designation Committee;
- Discipline Committee;
- Education Committee;
- Enforcement Committee;
- Equity and Diversity Committee;
- Experience Requirements Committee;
- Fees Mediation Committee;
- Government Liaison Committee;
- Licensing Committee;
- PEO-OAA Joint Liaison Committee;
- Professional Standards Committee and subcommittees;
- Registration Committee;
- Regional committees; and
- Volunteer Leadership Conference Planning Committee.

TASK FORCES

These committees are temporary, set up for a specific timeframe and are terminated when their mandates are accomplished. The current task forces in operation are:

- Continuing Professional Competence Program (CP)² Task Force;
- Council Term Limits Task Force;
- Emerging Disciplines Task Force;
- PEO National Framework Task Force; and
- Repeal of the Industrial Exception Task Force.

REGIONAL OFFICES

PEO's regional offices were established as centres of activity to provide administrative support to PEO chapters, promote the value of licensure to university students, and support PEO's Student Membership Program in engineering schools. PEO regional offices are:

- Northern Regional Office, located in the engineering department of Lakehead University in Thunder Bay; and
- Western Regional Office, located in the engineering department of Western University in London.

CHAPTER SYSTEM

Chapters are made up of PEO members and engineering interns in cities across Ontario and, at the grassroots level, are the main contact for the general membership and the public. Each chapter is governed by its own board of executives, comprising five officers (chair, vice chair, treasurer, secretary, and past chair) and a number of executives, that

GOVERNANCE

meets several times a year. Chapters carry out a broad range of activities and functions, including but not limited to organizing licence certificate presentation ceremonies, hosting technical seminars and social events, providing a forum for members to exchange knowledge and ideas, and offering professional networking opportunities for members.

Another subtler objective of the chapter system—one that has been coming to the fore over the years—is to act as a training ground for the development of future leaders for PEO council and committees. In many instances, chapter volunteers acquire administrative, decision-making and governance skills that are extremely valuable not only to the individual, but to PEO as an organization.

PEO's 36 chapters are located within five distinct regions. They are:

- Eastern Region: Algonquin, Kingston, Ottawa, Peterborough, Quinte, Thousand Islands, and Upper Canada chapters;
- East Central Region: East Toronto, Lake Ontario, Scarborough, Simcoe-Muskoka, Willowdale/Thornhill, and York chapters;
- Northern Region: Algoma, Lakehead, Lake-of-the-woods/Atikokan, North Bay, Porcupine/Kapuskasing, Sudbury and Temiskaming chapters;
- West Central Region: Brampton, Etobicoke, Kingsway, Mississauga, Oakville, Toronto-Humber, and West Toronto chapters; and
- Western Region: Brantford, Chatham-Kent, Georgian Bay, Grand River, Hamilton-Burlington, Lambton, London, Niagara, and Windsor-Essex chapters.

Chapters' mandates are defined through five "essential purposes" as follows:

1. Presence: Enhance public awareness for the engineering profession in the local community;
2. Communication: Facilitate two-way communication with the licence holders and PEO council, and report non-compliance issues;
3. Grassroots participation: Promote participation of licence holders in chapter and other PEO activities, and encourage licence holders to take an interest and participate in PEO governance—voting in PEO elections, through conversations, coming out to town hall meetings, asking questions, etc.;

4. Recognition: Recognize individual members for their support of the profession, firms for their support of chapters and of the profession, and chapters for exceptional leadership and programming; and
5. Governance: Encourage P.Engs to participate in regulatory roles, and enforcement and discipline activities at PEO.

With an annual budget allotted by PEO, the chapters can focus on core activities like chapter AGMs, licence presentation ceremonies, producing a regular newsletter for their local membership, and optional activities like mentoring programs and student outreach activities. All activities must meet the above-mentioned essential purposes.

Optional activities are what chapters decide to deliver based on their specific geographical areas and members' demands. With these activities, chapters extend PEO's reach throughout Ontario and, in some cases, they have inspired PEO headquarters to expand on those activities. For example, the Engineering Project of the Year Award that the York Chapter launched in 2012 has now been adopted by PEO's Awards Committee. PEO's Mississauga, Brampton, Oakville, Scarborough and York chapters conducted a pilot mentoring program, which resulted in the establishment of the Licensure Assistance Program and is deployed by about 20 chapters. In addition, the Oakville and York chapters initiated full-day industrial and technical symposiums that attracted hundreds of people from the membership, industry and academia.

PEO has a regular staff of about 100, and close to 1000 volunteers who participate on committees, task forces, council and within the 36 chapters, combining to carry out the mandate of the association. All told, committees and chapters play an important but easily overlooked role in ensuring the smooth operation of PEO governance and administrative enhancement. Σ

Changiz Sadr, P.Eng., FEC, is chair of the Regional Councillors Committee, senior East Central Region councillor on PEO council and a member of the Executive Committee.

WHO WILL YOU NOMINATE?

The Ontario Professional Engineers Awards recognize professional engineering excellence in innovation, leadership and entrepreneurship, and honour contributions to society as well. In addition to these individual tributes, an exciting new award category was added in 2015 to recognize a project or achievement by a team of professional engineers that has had a significant impact on society, industry or engineering.

OPEA eligibility requirements and nomination forms are available at www.peo.on.ca.

The nomination deadline is **Wednesday, February 22, 2017.**