

# PEO Volunteer Leadership Conference 2020

Protecting the Public Interest: staying aligned with our North Star during rapid change  
Summary Report, Virtual Conference, June 11/12/13, 2020

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## Conference Goal:

- *Help enhance PEO's ability to **protect the public interest within a rapidly changing world** by supporting the development of a longer-term vision for the organization.*

## Highlights of PEO member discussions:

- ***The PEO is falling behind in its responsibility to protect the public interest** due to a failure to incorporate the complex impacts of digital and emerging technologies on the public interest into its understanding of engineering and engineering regulation.*
  - ***The PEO needs to develop a clear vision for moving ahead** that: 1) creates a framework for how it will engage with digital and emerging technologies in a way that protects the public interest; and 2) establishes a flexible and timely process to address new technologies that in future may impact the public interest in unforeseen ways*
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## Conference Experience

- This first-ever virtual PEO-VLC used Zoom for video conferencing and a shared Doc to capture notes from the virtual breakout rooms and plenary sessions.
- The conference agenda was repeated over 3 days with a maximum of 40 participants a day to allow for small breakout group discussions
- **101 PEO members participated in total** over the three days, with a good mix of council (21), committee (26), chapter (45), staff (7) and guest (2) participation.
- Each day featured virtual breakout rooms with dedicated facilitators trained to **maximize engagement and sharing**.
- Participants engaged with failure scenarios, a case study, future newspaper headlines, and brainstorming in order to **explore a range of possibilities for the PEO**.
- 91% of post-conference survey respondents said they would register for another PEO virtual conference like this one.

## Discussion themes

Themes were collected primarily through the Google Doc used to capture notes throughout the three days of the conference and through the conference feedback survey.

- Strong support for continuing a **visioning process for the PEO** that engages a broad range of stakeholders (within PEO, professional bodies, government, industry, general public), and that this should happen in addition to ongoing governance and operational improvements.
- Most volunteer leaders believe the vision needs to address how to protect the public interest **in relation to digital technology and to social issues**; however, the wide range of opinions on how to do so and where the boundaries are underscores the need to bring those voices together into a coherent and broadly supported vision

- Leaders have a keen appreciation of the rapid pace of technological change and a sense that PEO is falling behind. They want a vision to **help PEO remain relevant** and to **provide a path for ongoing evolution**.
- A majority stressed the **opportunity for more collaboration with key stakeholders**, and many also stressed the need for **stronger public engagement**.
- The **virtual format was a success** and offers insights that will allow future options for fully virtual and mixed offerings.

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**Recommendation for Next Steps to PEO Council from PEO VLC 2020:**

*PEO council should immediately undertake a **robust visioning process** that:*

- 1) creates a framework for how the PEO will engage with digital and emerging technologies in a way that protects the public interest; and*
- 2) establishes a flexible and timely process for the PEO to address new technologies that in future may impact the public interest in unforeseen ways.*

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**General Recommendations for a Visioning Process from PEO VLC 2020:**

Informed by the consultants who helped design and facilitate the VLC 2020 conference (Engineering Change Lab and MaRS Discovery District), who have significant relevant experience.

- Leveraging PEO’s legislated legitimacy and other strengths, **PEO should take leadership in launching a coalition effort** to review questions around the public interest related to the practice of professional engineering in a rapidly changing world.
- The PEO should employ practical models and experienced service providers to **engage other key stakeholder organizations** from within engineering and key adjacent communities.
- The PEO should employ practical models and experienced service providers to help **seek public input to inform and lend legitimacy** to efforts (e.g. the patient advocacy committees model from healthcare).
- The PEO should consider a “**case law**” **style approach**, where tangible examples are used to establish the responsibility of professional engineering, other orgs/institutions within the engineering community, and key collaborators beyond the engineering community (i.e. industry, government, etc...)
  - Proactively identifying and debating new cases in order to evolve the PEO’s stance and inform/engage the public could become a **core function of the PEO volunteer community** in the future.
- This process should **continually evolve to proactively sense and anticipate newly emerging public interest questions**, and the implications for PEO .
- Such an approach should be informed by **Offices of Technology Assessment** that exist in other countries to help proactively inform the government about potential public interest questions around emerging technologies / engineering.