

## COUNCIL ELECTIONS: WHAT'S NEW FOR 2024

PEO is implementing several policy changes to increase the transparency and fairness of Council elections.

By Adam Sidsworth

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In a move to increase the transparency and fairness of PEO Council elections, Council endorsed key reforms recommended by the Governance and Nominating Committee (GNC) at its June meeting. The changes are effective for PEO's 2024 elections cycle, which begins this month.

The changes include substantive updates to key PEO elections policies. Specifically:

The Nomination and Voting Procedures, which was renamed from the Voting Procedures to better incorporate both the nomination and voting procedures, has had key changes. Notably:

- Licence holders can now opt for telephone communication in addition to electronic communication;
- The chief elections officer can consider exceptional circumstances or undue hardship in relation to the deadline for nomination forms;
- PEO's mandatory compliance training for volunteers, which was approved by Council in 2020, is now mandatory for candidates who are successfully elected to Council; and
- All candidates must complete the "Boards Basics" orientation by December 31, 2023.

The Election Publicity Procedures have been changed. Among other things:

- The chief elections officer can now review all candidates' election materials to be published in various PEO media, including *Engineering Dimensions*, to determine if the materials are compliant with PEO's electoral procedures and any applicable legal requirements. Furthermore, there is a process for the chief elections officer, in consultation with PEO's chief legal officer, to reject the material; and
- Individual PEO councillors' endorsement of candidates is no longer restricted, as it is difficult to enforce and could complicate the election process. However, PEO's chapters are still restricted from endorsing or not endorsing candidates.

The Nomination Form has been updated to include:

- Nominees must declare that they have read the Code of Conduct for Councillors. This replaces the former requirement that nominees read and understand the first two sections of the *Council Manual*, which was a more cumbersome requirement;
- The word "volunteer" has been added to the Nomination Form, and the phrase "for the volunteer position of" has been added to the Nomination

Acceptance form to clarify that all Council positions are voluntary; and

- The line requiring candidates to accept the results of the election as verified by the returning officers has been removed.

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**—SHEETAL RAWAL, JD**

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### PEO'S CONTINUOUS GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT

The impetus to update the 2024 elections process and materials lays in PEO's 2023–2025 Strategic Plan, which includes a goal to "implement a continuous governance improvement plan." As part of this goal, the GNC was tasked with reviewing the elections process and providing recommendations for change.

The GNC, with the expertise of staff, subsequently explored PEO's electoral obligations under the *Professional Engineers Act* and its associated regulations and bylaws, as well as PEO's commitments under its Anti-Racism and Equity Code. The GNC used as a guiding template Elections Canada's Electoral Integrity Framework, which conceptualizes electoral integrity. Previous recommendations from the now-stood-down Succession Planning Task Force, which drew from the report of an external consultant, also informed some of the recommendations.

"The GNC was tasked with looking at how to enhance public confidence in the elections, so the GNC looked at the elections process, from nominations all the way to the voting," says Sheetal Rawal, JD, research and policy analyst, special projects at PEO. "We used Elections Canada's Electoral Integrity Framework. It is an approach that uses six principles of integrity in elections: accessibility, transparency, reliability, security, independence and fairness."

At its January and February 2023 meetings, the GNC devised 11 recommendations, which were the source of many of the changes that were implemented for the 2024 elections cycle.



The 11 recommendations, presented to Council at its February meeting, include:

1. Survey licence holders to gain insight into their perceptions about voting, running for election and other elections-related issues;
2. Implement a board basics program for prospective candidates to complete in order for their nomination to be valid;
3. Develop narrow eligibility criteria for prospective candidates;
4. Explore how to ensure candidates have relevant skills and attributes that meet Council's requirements;
5. Clarify the role of the chief elections officer, including in relation to candidate material;
6. Gather information and report back what measures are in place to ensure PEO elections are secure;
7. Conduct an environmental scan of other regulators to see how they deal with violation, sanction and disqualification during an election, with a view to address a policy gap;
8. Review existing communication materials and develop an elections communications strategy with a view to electoral integrity;
9. Conduct a global review of election process-related documents to ensure predictability, consistency and reliability;
10. Review the Central Election and Search Committee, Regional Election and Search Committee and GNC so that roles and responsibilities are clarified and gaps, inconsistencies, areas of concern and possible reforms are identified; and
11. Research what currently guides staff, councillor and volunteer actions during elections and develop guidelines regarding principled and ethical conduct during elections.

The 2024 elections cycle begins this month, with the nominations scheduled to run from October 16 to November 24. Voting commences on January 12, 2024, and closes on February 16, 2024. Candidates who are successfully elected to Council will begin their term at PEO's 2024 Annual General Meeting, which will be held in the spring.

Find the 2024 Nomination and Voting Procedures and Elections Publicity Procedures on page 20 of this issue. [e](#)