

Tough Decisions and a New Planning Approach Build Improved Self-Regulation

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A busy, challenging, and engaging six months have passed since I was appointed Interim CEO of APEGA. I have experienced and learned so much from so many — Members, staff, Permit Holders, Council, sister regulators across the nation, and the regulators of other professions.

Through it all, I have developed a broader and more nuanced understanding of self-regulation. Our effectiveness as the regulator of engineering and geoscience goes beyond the operational activities of staff. It fully relies on the actions of you, our Members, through engagement in your professional practice, your commitment to volunteering with APEGA, and your dedication to serving the public interest.

I'd like to single out those of you who serve on our statutory boards and Council. Thank you for your countless hours in service to the professions. We needed you before, we need you now, and, as I hope this column demonstrates, we'll need you even more in the future.

During my time so far as the Interim CEO, the other senior leaders and I have applied ourselves to some serious and impactful business. Next year will see the launch of a strategic plan that will strengthen APEGA's ability to improve our effectiveness and be a better regulator. I have been involved in the development of many a strategic plan and business plan, both at APEGA and in my prior work experience, but the last go-around has been by far the most challenging and exciting.

Let me introduce you to the highlights of the new APEGA Strategic Plan, how we've used it to develop the business plan, and what that means to you, our Members. The strategic plan fully supports APEGA

becoming a more effective and proactive regulator through:

- **Organizational Excellence** — enable APEGA to deliver excellent organizational performance and results
- **Professional Development** — advance the professional competency and conduct of individual Members
- **Professional Practice** — increase Permit Holder and Responsible Member engagement to enhance the practice of the professions
- **APEGA Centennial 2020** — increase Member engagement and pride in the professions

It's good stuff. But as APEGA's senior leadership worked towards building the 2017 business plan and budget, it became apparent that the strategic plan was overly ambitious, especially for the coming year. We found that a shortage of operational processes and management systems would impede us as we moved forward. For APEGA to successfully execute the plan, an organizational reset is essential. The year 2017, we determined, needs to be about strengthening the foundation of APEGA in two places: our operations and our statutory obligations as a regulator.

A fundamental initiative will be the development of an operational management system that builds rigour into policy and process. Foundational strength will also come from improving APEGA's financial management and information technology systems. In strengthening our statutory functions as a regulator, we will focus efforts on improving the effectiveness of the APEGA Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program through more robust administration and

auditing. This will allow APEGA to hold Members accountable to their professional development obligations.

We will also focus on professional practice, putting more structure and consistency into practice reviews and practice standards, guidelines, and bulletins. Our ability to protect titles and right-to-practice will be enhanced, building the public's confidence that individuals and companies identifying themselves as practitioners of engineering and geoscience have been evaluated and licensed through Alberta's engineering and geoscience regulator.

A NEW APPROACH

These are important and sustainable plans. They will truly set us up for success as a better and more effective regulator. But this work will take time, effort — and resources. As I mentioned in my last column, we need to increase Member dues to support such vital work. Our challenge is, how do we do so in light of the tough economic times many Members are enduring?

Your Council has provided invaluable leadership in this area. Although fully supportive of the business plan that APEGA staff put forward, Council challenged us to act on it within our means. Council wants to ensure that the financial impact on Members is minimized.

This has caused a fundamental shift in our approach to what we do, how we do it, and the resources we do it with. It has caused APEGA's senior leaders to examine our organizational structure to determine if it aligns with the vision to make APEGA a better and more effective regulator — to figure out how to live within our means and

still deliver the intended outcomes of the 2017 business plan.

This has been no easy feat. Senior leaders have stretched themselves to approach planning and budgeting in a new way. This has been transformational, and it positively sets the stage for our future.

We've made tough choices. We have significantly cut costs in all areas and restructured parts of the organization. Some of the programs we know and love, like our mentoring conference and our Christmas receptions in Edmonton and Calgary, have been stopped. Our Summit Awards will now be presented at a modest event. We are changing *The PEG* to a digital-only format, because of the money we will save. We have had to adjust our staffing, and for the second year in a row we have frozen salaries.

Despite these changes, we will continue to deliver valuable services to Members. Yes, things will be different. But we will still endeavor to give excellent customer service, as we do our best to enrich the Member experience while executing our business plan.

Council has decided to provide a second consecutive year of dues reductions for our unemployed Members. We're doing this even though we know that our membership numbers may decrease in 2017, given that the economy does not appear to be picking up. We are also looking at cost recovery in as many APEGA programs as possible.

Nonetheless, we will maintain an ambitious and purposeful business plan — a plan that we need to execute in 2017 to strengthen our foundation as an organization and as a regulator.

In the end, we still need to increase Member dues. You may recall that the December 2015 CEO's Message mentioned a potential increase of \$200-\$300 over several years. But senior leaders have worked hard to put before Council a Member dues increase with as small an impact as possible.

Starting January 1, 2017, dues will increase by \$36 to \$360 plus GST. With the plans we have in place, it's likely that a similar increase will be needed for 2018. For future years, Council is evaluating whether ongoing, incremental dues increases — within a preset range or amount — will be required.

About \$9 of the 2017 increase will finance a second year of dues reductions for unemployed Members. We will also be changing the fee model for our Permit Holders, basing a company's fee on the number of APEGA Members

it employs. This is fairer and more rational than a one-size-fits-all fee.

APEGA really is setting out to deliver on Council's Strategic Plan. It's just that we're looking at one limited and very focused slice of it in 2017. This will strengthen the foundation for us to achieve the strategic plan's ultimate goal — to be a better and proactive regulator.

What specifically does that ultimate goal look like? That level of detail simply doesn't exist yet. But we envision changes that will hold Members more accountable for their practices than they are today, and provide them with new opportunities for engagement through various volunteer opportunities to ensure the integrity of our professions. These two things are the essence of fulfilling our self-regulatory obligations. Consistent demonstration of effective self-regulation instills pride in our professions, and we can all stand a little taller because of it.

A GAME CHANGER

Now you know about the effort, time, and thought we've put into strategic and business planning. But there is only so much APEGA staff can do. We have pursued a balanced approach in charting our course for 2017 while facing many uncertainties. The rest is up to you.

Ask yourself: What are you doing, every day, to serve the public in your professional practice? How are you holding yourself and your peers accountable to the obligations you have committed to as a Professional Engineer or Professional Geoscientist? And what will you do to stay engaged with APEGA and ensure our privilege of self-regulation continues to serve society?

At the end of one marathon planning session, a fellow APEGA leader said to me: "I think we're onto something here — I see this as a game changer for APEGA. I see a positive change coming."

I couldn't agree more.

Questions or comments?

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