

PIBC's Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project – A Focus on You!

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Author's Note: this is the fifth article in *Planning West* reporting on the status of PIBC's Professional Governance Research and Engagement Project.

Since the Fall of 2024, PIBC and its RPP Regulation Subcommittee has been actively engaging with our membership about professional governance. This follows from the PIBC Board direction in December 2023 to undertake outreach and education about the *Professional Governance Act* (PGA) and its opportunities and implications for PIBC and its membership. This includes engaging PIBC members about professional standards and the PGA, presenting research and analysis on issues identified, and addressing potential opportunities and tradeoffs.

The primary purpose of the PGA is to set out a governance framework for self-regulating professions that protects the public interest from, and reduces the risk of, unethical and incompetent practice. So far, six professions

have been regulated under the PGA, including architects and engineers; but does not yet include planning professionals. No action has been taken by either PIBC or the provincial government that would lead to planners being regulated by this legislation. The current project is in no way intended to result in a decision on whether the planning profession should be regulated under the PGA; but rather to gather and analyze information regarding the pros and cons of such a move should it occur, and to provide a comprehensive review to the Board to further inform future decision-making.

A comprehensive approach to professional governance was developed to engage and educate the membership, including numerous activities that have now been completed:

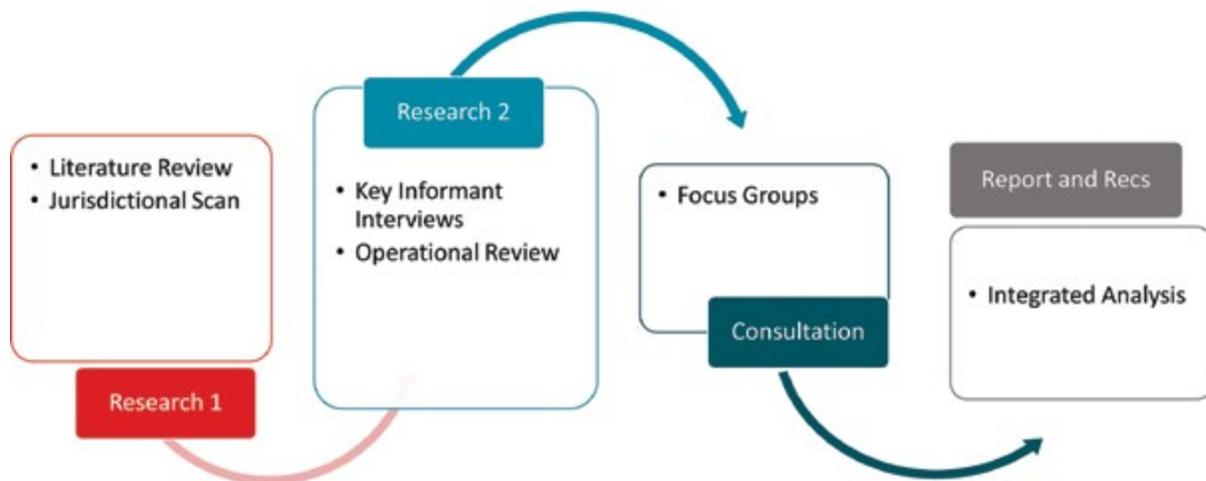
- ✓ Initial engagement survey with PIBC membership;
- ✓ Discussions with other organizations operating under the PGA or similar legislation;

- ✓ Publication of articles in *Planning West* (see Fall 2024 and Spring, Summer and Fall 2025 issues);
- ✓ Initial webinar introducing the Project;
- ✓ Session at the annual PIBC conference; and
- ✓ Consultation with PIBC membership through focus group sessions.

As previously reported, PIBC retained the services of The Regulator's Practice to undertake a strategic assessment of professional governance for the planning profession in BC. Their work includes background research, preparation and facilitation of nine focus groups, and an overall synthesis and integration of all research and information gleaned from the membership and elsewhere (see **Figure 1: Focus Group Process**).

Focus groups were completed in the Fall of 2025. A request for participation was issued to the PIBC membership in September, resulting in 93 responses. In the end, 69 members participated in a total of nine focus groups.

Figure 1: Focus Group Process



The majority of participants came from the Okanagan, Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, but also included five planners from the Yukon (see **Figure 2: Focus Group Demographics**).

Why conduct focus groups as part of this project? The groups provided an opportunity to hear directly from planners to gauge the level of knowledge about the PGA, and to identify those topics of importance to the membership. They are not unbiased activities, but rather a qualitative research method where participants can express their current points of view. And while the majority of participants indicated a limited knowledge of the PGA, and so comments may not be directly related to the PGA, the fulsome discussion that occurred within the groups showed what the issues are from a ‘front line’ perspective. The focus groups provided valuable qualitative input to help inform future decisions of the Board regarding the PGA and PIBC initiatives.

Going into the focus groups, several topic areas were identified to help steer the discussion. We wanted to hear from the members about the public interest mandate and prevention of risk of harm to the public; reserved practice and what that means for the planning profession; changes to government oversight; and potential operational changes for PIBC and the impact on members and administration. While these topics were covered in all groups, some particular areas received more attention than others.

Public interest and risk of harm was a topic of much discussion across all nine focus groups. Specifically, the issue of ‘risk of harm’ was considered to be usually of a longer time frame - within the scope of planning decisions, as compared to an engineering project, for example. Participants also identified that some aspects of planning, such as transportation policy or development planning affecting floodplains or climate change considerations, would have a greater impact on the

public interest and risk of harm than other types of planning.

A challenging discussion took place regarding the idea of reserved practice. Participants did discuss reserved practice in depth but recognized that it would be difficult to define given the broad scope of planning practice. The bulk of the discussion focused on unintended consequences of reserved practice, potentially resulting in creating exclusivity, diminishing diversity within the profession, and negatively impacting smaller communities with limited resources.

Participants did voice concern that the change to government oversight would limit the advocacy work undertaken by PIBC. The greatest concern, relating to the change in regulation and membership, was that the planning profession could become more exclusionary, and this might affect PIBC’s commitment to diversity and reconciliation, particularly with respect to First Nations.

Figure 2: Focus Group Demographics



Figure 3: Focus Group Summary



There was limited discussion regarding any operational changes to PIBC that may occur should the planning profession fall under the PGA. What conversation did take place focused on the potential for fee increases, with approximately 70% of participants concerned about cost increases. The remaining 30% saw possible fee increases as the “cost of doing business,” with fees ultimately passed along.

In the end, one focus group indicated full support for the planning profession falling under the PGA. Participants felt such a move would increase public trust, garner greater respect and recognition as a profession, and result in greater accountability. Six of the nine focus groups indicated a preference to retain the status quo and not seek regulation under the PGA. These participants indicated that planners already act in the public interest, and it would be too complicated to define ‘planning’ and establish a scope for reserved practice. The remaining two focus groups felt they needed additional information prior to indicating a preference for inclusion under the

PGA (see Figure 3: Focus Group Summary).

Overall, the participants were very engaged in the discussion and indicated the groups had been a positive experience. They also expressed their satisfaction with PIBC, stating that they believe the Institute supports members in both this project and other initiatives. And PIBC would like to take this opportunity to thank all the participants for their input through the focus group sessions.

At the time of writing, the expectation is for the consultant to deliver a strategic assessment report in January that presents an analysis of the high-level pros, cons, and tradeoffs of professional governance options, and includes an analysis of information gleaned from the focus groups. PIBC will conduct a second member survey and webinar in February; and then the Board will take the entire body of information generated to determine the appropriate path ahead.¹

The project webpage (www.pibc.bc.ca/professionalgovernance) continues to be updated to make information available to the

membership, providing FAQ resources, PGA information, the project Work Plan, Planning West articles and more. So please stay up to date with this web page and take every opportunity to provide feedback through the engagement activities.

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¹The Planning Institute of British Columbia is aware of proposed Bill M216 Professional Reliance Act that is under consideration by the Province. At the time of writing, Bill M216 has received second reading and now sits with the Select Standing Committee on Private Bills and Private Members’ Bills for consideration. This proposed Bill may have an impact on future decisions regarding this professional governance project.



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