



Ontario Professional Foresters Association and Professional Development

ONE OF THE EXPECTATIONS OF A LICENSED profession is that it has a quality assurance program in place that is focused on helping its members maintain their professional competency. The *Professional Foresters Act* in Ontario describes that requirement as follows; “the principle object of the Association is to regulate the practice of professional forestry and to govern its members... in order that the public interest may be served and protected.” The Act authorizes Council to pass bylaws “prescribing a quality assurance program” and “prescribing a continuing education program.”

It is a goal of the Ontario Professional Foresters Association (OPFA) to adequately ensure that each registered professional forester is maintaining relevant professional competencies to protect the public interest. The intended outcome of a competency support program in the OPFA is that the public is assured that:

- The practice of professional forestry is being carried out at a consistently high standard.
- The OPFA is carrying out its responsibilities in ensuring that each active member is competent to practice their scope of professional forestry.

As a result, OPFA membership is considering amendments to the OPFA's bylaws, in part, to find out how the OPFA can assure the public that their interests are protected with respect to our competency to act as stewards of private and Crown forests in Ontario. In the fall of 2008, OPFA started to develop a competency support system to help members make such assurances to the public interest, in a manner that members find useful in their own professional development efforts.

Today, we think we've done it. We have a draft guide describing a methodology for members' use in planning and monitoring their individual competency maintenance, where reporting on the last year's continuing education efforts is a by-product rather than the objective. The new objective is to enable members to identify their personal practice focus, and through focused learning, speed their professional development.

There are four components to the competency assessment and professional development protocol:

1. A personal practice focus;
2. A learning plan;
3. Continuing education; and,
4. Archiving and reporting.

All documents are suggested to be periodically revised. For example, the personal practice focus should be revisited at least every three years or whenever a change in the course of a member's career occurs. Learning plan and continuing education documents should be updated annually.

Component One: Personal Practice Focus (PPF)

The personal practice focus (PPF) catalogues areas of existing competency, and is a tool to help members identify what new or improved knowledge, skills and experience would facilitate career development.

There are three elements to a personal practice focus, presented here as questions:

1. What are my current competencies? You might opt to update a resume, draft a job description, or address the following supporting questions:

What DO I know or am able to do?

What MUST I know or be able to do?

What do I consider to be my specialty?

2. What competencies should I build or strengthen? You might opt to identify new knowledge or skills you anticipate needing for your current job, for professional interest or for career progression. You might also consider refreshing knowledge and skills in order to do something better or to learn the latest state of practice. The following supporting questions can help frame this assessment:

What do I WANT to know or be able to do?

How is my job changing?

What are my short, medium, and long term career goals?

3. How do I plan to build or strengthen key competencies? You might opt to identify strategic actions you feel are necessary to continue competent practice in your job, and/

or to facilitate achieving your career goals (e.g. improve my knowledge of silvicultural practices). This element need not identify specific courses or activities—this will be addressed as part of a learning plan.

Component Two: Learning Plan

The learning plan is a tool to help members maximize the effectiveness of continuing education, by identifying in advance (where possible and where appropriate), what courses and activities can help build or strengthen the competencies needed in current practice and/or for career progression.

Component Three: Continuing Education

The core purpose for having drafted a PPF and learning plan is to help members identify their own continuing education needs, so that they might efficiently and effectively develop and maintain the competencies identified as being important. Randomly pursuing training opportunities as they present themselves, simply to meet and report the minimum hours the OPFA requires, serves no purpose for the OPFA or for members.

Component Four: Archiving and Reporting

Members are required to archive what continuing education activities they've completed, and to report their total education hours for each year. Moreover, members are now asked to archive their personal practice focus and learning plan, and to report on their status.

This work to-date covers only the first four of seven components of the OPFA's competency support program. Based on member feedback, the committee will recommend refinements. We will then embark on forming recommendations on whether and how to implement the remaining components, which, depending on the adoption of the new bylaw may include: peer rereview; audit, and professional assessment.

OPFA regulates forestry in the public interest within Ontario