



Advocacy and the OAA: How it's Done – Part 2

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As the last post ([Advocacy and the OAA: Colouring Between the Lines](#)) detailed, the OAA must operate within the mandates enshrined in the *Architects Act*. But when something is within the public interest and promotes a public appreciation of architecture and the allied arts and sciences, how exactly does the OAA perform this advocacy role?

The OAA actively monitors established and emerging issues to consider potential impacts or opportunities for the profession. It actively tracks issues through:

- robust media monitoring;
- constant legislative and regulatory monitoring;
- intelligence gathering from our Local Architectural Societies; OAA Committees, Working Groups and Task Groups; and member networks;
- membership in the Construction and Design Alliance of Ontario (CDAO);
- networks with governments and other professions;
- various committees and working groups at the municipal, provincial, and federal level; and
- feedback coming directly from our membership.

Where internal resources are available, the OAA actively considers each issue and determines an appropriate response.

Depending on the subject matter, the initial review and recommendations may come from any number of the OAA Committees and Task Groups (or Societies) or from OAA Council itself.

The most prominent way the OAA performs advocacy is through written letters and submissions to government. All correspondences from the OAA are then archived into the [Government Relations Portal](#), a dedicated section of the website that is available to members and the general public in the interest of full transparency. The OAA typically follows up with various officials, offering to meet to further discuss the OAA position.

In some instances, this is either combined with (or replaced by) advocacy efforts from the [CDAO](#), an organization the OAA co-founded with other members of the construction and design industry. If the issue remains ongoing, the OAA will actively watch for future opportunities to communicate its position until a successful resolution has been obtained. Where required, the OAA is registered as a lobbyist, though the Association is always clear that we lobby *for the public interest*.

A question arises as to how the membership itself can become involved on key issues? There are generally three ways the OAA may solicit member engagement.

Passive Reporting

In virtually every instance where the OAA identifies a way for members to participate or provide feedback directly, the OAA reports these opportunities to the membership. These opportunities—such as meetings, government consultations, and surveys—are sent through to OAA Communications and, at a minimum, tweeted to our more than 7000 followers. Many of these opportunities are also included in the *OAA News* e-newsletter, posted to the OAA Website, and broadcast over other social media channels. Localized opportunities are often shared with the Local Architectural Societies who may communicate it directly to their membership. In some respects, these Societies have more flexibility to take positions on architectural issues, but must be mindful they are official branches of the OAA and their conduct must also be consistent with the mandate in the *Architects Act*.

Actively Encouraging Members to Respond

This next level could be characterized as a more active push for members to respond. The approach is similar in the methods through which the OAA would identify and communicate the opportunity. However, the messaging would specifically flag heightened significance (or concern) to the profession. At times, the communications may include the OAA's own submission(s), which members could use as a reference. However, the OAA will not attempt to influence a member's personal response. This moves the OAA toward a grassroots lobbying approach, but it is not viewed as particularly problematic since members are always free to respond as they see fit.

The OAA may solicit participants for in-person consultations, either from Council, Committees, or directly from the membership via an open call. Participants may be encouraged to report back on their findings. Societies may play a critical role in this level of outreach.

Directed Member Communications

This final level could be viewed as the OAA seeking to influence or direct members' messaging to government (e.g. a ghostwritten letter campaign or petition). In very rare instances, this too has been done but only ever extremely carefully. An example would be the grassroots campaign to get the Ontario government to write architecture into the province's first Culture Strategy. While the province focusing more on the ties between architecture and culture could create indirect benefits to architects or architectural practices, this campaign was viewed predominantly to be in the public interest, and clearly within the secondary interest about promoting a public appreciation of architecture.

This last level of engagement may be an area where members wish to see the OAA do more, but it is also where we are the most limited.

The OAA receives, at times, lobbying communications from other professions consisting of things like petitions or ghostwritten letters by organizations for members to copy and paste. In some instances, these organizations have corralled their membership to take a particular position and respond. However, it is important to note most of these communications do not come from self-regulating professions. These associations have no obligation to serve and protect the public interest—certainly not a legislated one—and nothing prevents them from lobbying to benefit individual or business interests.

Of the nearly 70 self-regulating professions, only one appears to have a legislated object to “promote and protect the welfare and interests of the Association and of the...profession”. With the exception of that lone self-regulatory body, the rest of the regulators are all legislatively compelled to act with a higher purpose than these advocacy and lobby groups.

But there is good news even in respecting these limitations. The OAA has had an impressive track record in securing legislative and regulatory reforms and/or warding off negative proposals. The secret lies in the OAA always issuing clear and rational recommendations that put the public interest first. Indeed, the OAA has gone head-to-head against other non-regulated groups who have used grassroots lobbying campaigns and has consistently come out on top in each one of these disputes. And government officials in countless meetings have thanked the OAA for its respectful and professional approach.

Because of this approach, the OAA is often proactively consulted while policy is being developed, saving us from the complicated process of having to fight for legislative or regulatory reforms after they have been introduced or, worse, passed. Whenever possible, these successes are communicated to members, such as was the case for securing an exemption for architects in the [Home Inspection Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 5, Sched. 1](#). Sometimes, confidentiality waivers prevent these “wins” from being shared.

One last area to cover concerns federal affairs. As a provincial body, the OAA focuses almost exclusively on provincial matters. In rare instances, the OAA will engage with the Canadian government if federal policy will directly affect the practice of architecture in Ontario. The OAA sits on the Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) *Supplier Stakeholder Network* for the Ontario Region. Often, the OAA will perform a combination of membership engagement (passive reporting) and alerting the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC), who, as the federal advocacy body for the profession, are typically better suited to respond. On a narrower subset of issues concerning regulating the practice of architecture, the OAA may also work through the Canadian Architectural Licensing Authorities (CALA).

For a snapshot of the advocacy work undertaken by the OAA, members are encouraged to review the [Government Relations Portal](#) while being mindful its content only represents the proverbial tip of the iceberg. There are countless correspondences, calls, and meetings underpinning all this work.

With that said, if you feel there is an issue that may have been missed that clearly falls within the OAA's principal mandate to serve and protect the public interest, members are always encouraged to contact me at the address below.

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