

Internationally-trained professionals: Join an association!

By Wendy Terry

An easy way for newcomers to find Canadian-born professionals who work in the same field is to go to the nearest public library and ask for the Associations Canada Directory. You can join these membership-based associations without being licensed or having Canadian work experience. Your international credentials and work experience are enough for you to join.

By joining an association, you can network with colleagues working in your field and perhaps find job leads through attending events like annual conferences, monthly speakers, dinners etc. and through their on-line job banks. You can showcase your experience by writing articles for their newsletters or giving an after dinner presentation at a monthly meeting. Because your peers are interested in how things are done in your country, just as you are interested in how things are done here, you have the basis for many good conversations.

The cost is minimal compared to the value in networking—about \$80 to \$140 per year. Don't worry about your English. Professionals in a common field find ways of communicating even if one is speaking Chinese and the other English.

Here are some examples of associations you could join. Most internationally-trained engineers have heard of PEO, the Professional Engineers of Ontario. In fact, most grimace when you mention PEO because it is the licensing body for engineers and often seems like a road block for internationally-trained engineers.

However, many internationally-trained engineers have not heard of the Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering. (www.csche.ca), the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers.-Toronto Chapter (<http://toronto.ieee.ca>) or the Canadian Society for Civil Engineering (www.csce.ca), or the Canadian Society for Mechanical Engineers (www.csme.ca)

Each association is organized in a slightly different way. For instance the Canadian Society for Mechanical Engineering is mostly

focussed on university membership and does not have many programs for individual members. But IEEE has a lot of programs that individual members can attend, as does the Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering and The Canadian Society for Civil Engineering. Each has a local chapter/section so you can find a group of members in Toronto even if the association is called Canadian or in the case of the Electrical Engineers, International.

They all have contacts for specialities, often listed under subject divisions. Clicking on the Canadian Society for Chemical Engineering Web site leads you to the Chemical Institute of Canada where the following subject divisions have contact names for Analytical; Biological/Medicinal; Biotechnology; Business and Economic Management; Macromolecular Science and Engineering; Materials; Organic; Physics; Theoretical and Computational; Catalysis; Chemical Education; Environment; Inorganic; Process and Safety Management; Rubber Chemistry; Surface Science; Systems and Control.

Similarly the Toronto Section of the Institute for Electrical and Electronic Engineers lists these specialities under Chapters and gives a contact name. They include: Circuits and Devices; Communications; Computer; Dielectrics and Electrical Insulation; Electromagnetics and Radiation; Engineering in Medicine and Biology; Engineering and Human Environment; Industry Applications; Instrumentation and Measurement; Power Engineering; Signal Processing; Signals and Computational Intelligence; Solid-State Intelligence

Not only do these membership-based associations have local groups and speciality groups, they have committees. The Canadian Society for Civil Engineering lists four: Infrastructure Renewal (there was a recent Toronto Star Article on the need for millions of dollars worth of repairs to Toronto's infrastructure); Innovations and IT; International Affairs (a committee where a internationally trained professional could make a valuable contribution), and Sustainable Development (the new focus of both the Liberals and Conservatives). By volunteering on committees you deepen your professional contacts.

Other committees that each association would have are Membership, Finance, Speaker's Program, Annual Conference, Professional Development, Magazine or Newsletter. By volunteering on these committees you again deepen your professional contacts.

Joining a professional association is one of the most effective ways of networking.

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