

THE CASE FOR A CANADIAN TRADE ASSOCIATION FOR ACOUSTIC CONSULTING COMPANIES

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1 Introduction

The demand for acoustic consultancy services in Canada has been steadily rising over the past several decades. This increased demand for our professional services has likely been spurred by new or updated noise regulation, contractual acoustic requirements for Public Private Partnership projects, and perhaps a greater awareness of the value of noise and its effects on health, in general.

The authors of this paper and their respective consultancy firms advocate the case for the creation of a trade association to represent and promote our growing industry and to protect the public. Similar trade associations for acoustic consulting companies exist in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. These associations include the US National Council of Acoustic Consultants (NCAC), the UK Association of Noise Consultants (ANC) and the Association of Australian Acoustical Consultants (AAAC). Reference is made to these associations in discussing the benefits of the proposed Canadian trade association for acoustic consulting companies.

2 Benefits of Association

2.1 Protection to the Public

One of the primary objectives of the proposed association would be to protect the public from unqualified practitioners. This objective can be realized by screening applicant member firms according to the qualifications of the principals, partners and directors (hereafter referred to as principals to avoid unnecessary repetition) taking technical responsibility for firm (office, or division as the case may be for larger corporations) and general staff. The ANC, for example, requires that the principals of the firm be competent, practicing acousticians. The ANC also requires that at least 50% of technical staff hold graduate status and hold Corporate Membership in the Institute of Acoustics (IOA) or equivalent. Both the NCAC and AAAC take a similar approach in accepting member firms by reviewing the qualifications and experience of firm principals and by requiring that principals hold full membership with their respective national acoustic academic associations.

However, the AAAC goes one step further in requiring that consultancies also demonstrate ongoing economic and professional viability by having been in practice for at least two years. In the author's opinion, and within the Canadian context for the proposed trade association, it would make sense for acoustic principals to hold registration with the relevant provincial Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists or by demonstration of relevant experience and ethical conduct (to be evaluated by a committee) in addition to holding membership with the Canadian Association of Acoustics (CAA).

A suitably drafted Code of Ethics for the proposed association would also serve the public well by requiring member firms to practice with the highest ethical and professional standards. While the details of the Code of Ethics are yet to be established, the authors envision clauses in relation to professional standards, client confidentiality and disclosure, competence, conflict of interest and fair competition (particularly in relation to the review of another member's work).

In Canada, it is quite common for municipal, provincial, national jurisdictions or Crown authorities to source a single consultant to propose guidelines and/or legislation for the control of noise in buildings and the environment. New regulation can have a profound influence on both our practice and the community. In a similar fashion to both the ANC and the AAAC, and in line with the proposed trade association's mandate to protect the public, it would be ideal for the association to also liaise with these authorities to comment on proposals for new guidelines, standards and legislation. This would provide an opportunity for all member firms to provide feedback on proposed legislation.

2.2 Advancing the Industry

While acoustic consulting firms compete with each other for market share, it is important to recognize that all firms have a common interest in seeing an overall increase in the market itself. That is, all members have an interest in seeing a greater demand for acoustic consulting services. Aside from public protection, the proposed trade association can assist in advancing this demand.

The introduction of new or updated regulation is an effective means of stimulating an increase in industry demand. Currently, the National Building Code provides a minimum requirement for the control of airborne sound transmission within residential multi-family buildings. Unfortunately, there are no code requirements for the

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control of structureborne sound transmission, interior noise resulting from both internal and external sources of noise or to control noise from building services to neighbouring properties. Local by-laws that attempt to fill some of these gaps are inconsistent and often weak or unenforceable.

In response to a similar building code situation in Australia, members of the AAAC implemented the Star Rating System [1] to promote a better standard of acoustic quality in multi-family buildings. The authors envision the development of a similar Canadian building acoustics rating that could be promoted to local planning authorities. In the authors' opinion, however, it would be prudent to devise an acoustic rating system that reflects the manner in which a multi-family building is marketed (e.g., luxury, comfort, standard).

Rating schemes and general guidelines could also be developed and promoted for other applications (e.g. schools, hospitals offices etc.).

2.3 Guidelines for Professional Practice

There are many instances where acoustic consultants must reference acoustic criteria from international publications or from jurisdictions outside of their project's jurisdiction. For example, when assessing noise bylaw compliance on behalf of a municipality that has not adopted quantitative noise bylaw limits, consultants may need to reference noise limits adopted by other municipalities, potentially outside of the province. In certain instances, municipal noise limits may not be appropriate, and in this case the consultant would need to reference guidance offered by international publications. It would be preferable to reference a Canadian organization that has either published a relevant guideline or endorsed one that has been approved by the membership. Both the AAAC and the ANC have published guidelines for a variety of applications.

2.4 Market Reporting

Little to no information is available on the acoustic consultancy market in Canada. As one of the main objectives of the trade association would be to promote the industry, it would be useful for the association to keep track of and publish market information to member firms. Revenue information, ideally broken down in specific fields of practice (e.g., building acoustics, environmental) could be offered by member firms via a third party independent accounting firm (i.e., a firm not employed by either the association or by the reporting member firm) in a manner such that the association, or its members, would not be able to determine the revenue of a specific reporting member firm.

3 Implementation

3.1 Interest Discovery

On September 23, 2016, during the CAA Acoustics Week in Canada Conference in Vancouver, a presentation on the subject of the proposed trade association will be provided

by Steve Meszaros of RWDI Air. Following review of this paper, and the presentation, the association proponents would encourage interested parties to sign-up as potentially interested members.

3.2 Founding Committee

Subject to the feedback received at the conference, and the number of potentially interested member firms, a founding committee would need to be established. Ideally, the committee would comprise 3 to 5 individuals each representing a different member firm. In consultation with the Canadian Acoustical Association (CAA) Board of Directors, the founding committee would be tasked with the following:

- Naming the association
- Incorporating the association
- Formulating the Constitution and Code of Ethics
- Developing application criteria for corporate members
- Marketing the association (website, logo etc.)
- Devising the initial membership fee structure and developing other funding strategies to support the association (associate membership, sponsorships, etc.).

4 Discussion

It should be borne in mind that membership in the trade association would be, at least initially, corporate in nature, and not individual. Over time, the proposed trade association may be able to provide licensing registration to qualified individuals. Alternatively, the trade association may liaise with provincial engineering associations to officially recognize the discipline of acoustic engineering and to develop specific qualification requirements for individual practitioners.

The authors would like to reiterate that the proposed association should, by no means, be seen as a form of competition to the CAA. On the contrary, both organizations may stand to benefit from each other. At this point in time, the idea for the trade association is in its infancy. However, the proponents would anticipate that the CAA would hold an honorary membership within the trade association that would carry the same voting privilege as a corporate member.

The creation of the trade association for acoustic consulting companies in Canada would be an important step within our industry. The association would reflect recognition among members that, while we compete with each other within the market, we share common interests in public protection, the advancement of the industry and in the pride of our services to the community.

References

- [1] AAAC. Guideline for Apartment and Townhouse Acoustic Rating. September 2010.