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GUIDE & FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

PRACTICE CONSULTATION SERVICE

“A confidential support service designed to help BC architects build, operate and evaluate successful architectural practices that meet or exceed the standards we set as a self-regulating profession.”

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1. **What is the AIBC Practice Consultation Service?**

The Practice Consultation Service (PCS) has been developed as a support service designed to help MAIBCs (i.e. Certificate of Practice holders or 'firms') in three ways:

1. to build and operate successfully managed architectural practices;
2. to meet or exceed the standards we collectively set as a self-regulating profession; and
3. to implement recognized 'good practices' that lead to effective, efficient, strong and profitable firms.

The AIBC expects the PCS to be a comprehensive service that actively supports practices in meeting and exceeding standards.

The PCS is important to help our members enjoy the ongoing trust and confidence of the public, government and industry.

The PCS is a significant addition to an architectural firm's own continuous improvement program – an internal plan for quality control.

The PCS works with each practice to help identify strengths as well as areas for improvement, and provides specific observations, suggestions, recommendations and (on occasion) requirements. It identifies available resources to support the practice in introducing positive change.

The process is interactive. MAIBCs are expected to take the PCS report seriously, and implement any recommendations or requirements.

2. **What is a Practice Consultation?**

It is a snapshot of a member's practice at that point in their career. It is an educational process and a professional development tool that promotes excellence and high standards.

3. **Why is the AIBC developing and delivering this service?**

For two reasons: to serve MAIBCs and to serve the public interest.

Serving and Supporting our Members and their Firms:

The PCS provides ongoing assistance in building and maintaining strong practices that are viable in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

The PCS is part of the AIBC's practice support system, including (among other elements) the mandatory Continuing Education System. Both are designed to help:

- position successful practices to deliver high quality design and services; and
- establish high quality design and services that will be *valued* by clients and the public.

Serving the Public Interest:

Architecture is a self-regulating and self-governing profession in British Columbia. That means the rules within which architects practise are developed by the profession itself. To ensure that we retain this privilege, our profession must fulfill its responsibility to regulate the practice of architecture and govern its members in order that the public interest may be served and protected.

We must fulfill that mandate, and be seen to be fulfilling it, in order to maintain the continued trust of the public and the government that affords us the privilege of self-regulation. The PCS helps demonstrate to the public — including clients, building officials and other design professionals — that the AIBC continues to be serious about self-regulation.

The PCS is complementary to the AIBC's Professional Development Program's mandatory Continuing Education System (CES) and will earn Learning Units (LUs) for the participating architects.

4. **Why will the PCS become mandatory?**

The public and industry expect that a self-regulating profession will operate programs to assure that standards are being met and the public interest is being served and protected.

This expectation is evinced by the inspection and quality assurance programs now in place in most other self-regulating professions and their organizations, including the OAA, OAQ and APEGBC.

The PCS will become mandatory in due course in order to meet the public and industry expectation, and to assure that MAIBCs (i.e. Certificate of Practice holders or 'firms') keep pace with or exceed the standards of excellence set within the design professions and among self-regulated professions generally.

5. When will the PCS become mandatory?

The PCS was launched on a voluntary basis at the AIBC's 2007 Annual Conference. Several reviews have now been completed and additional consultations are in progress. At this time, firms are encouraged to participate on a voluntary basis.

Mandatory participation is anticipated no earlier than Fall 2010 after at least two full years of positive experience with the voluntary program; with members'/ firms' support; and the necessary authority (bylaw or statute amendment).

6. What are the specific objectives of the Practice Consultation Service?

1. Encouraging and supporting the use by MAIBCs of recognized "good practices" to build successful, strong, architectural firms

- Reviewing key business, professional and management practices
- Identifying strengths
- Identifying opportunities for improvement
- Identifying 'good practices' that can lead to improvement and result in a more successful firm better able to meet the needs of clients

2. Helping architects manage risk in the interest of the practice, Clients and the public

- Reviewing key processes and procedures; proposals; client qualification; terms of engagement; agreements for services; dealing with authorities having jurisdiction
- Reviewing project drawings, documents and files
- Reviewing nature of agreements for services
- Identifying issues that could lead to legal claims against the practice
- Recommending changes to minimize risk
- Advising on implementation of those changes including listing useful resources

3. Assuring that all architectural practices meet a framework of standards set by the profession

- Identifying areas of a practice where a firm may not be meeting the standards
- Providing advice on any changes necessary to meet the standards
- Identifying resources useful in implementing the necessary changes
- Confirming that the recommendations and requirements have been followed within a mutually agreed period of time and that the practice has met the standards

7. What is the Practice Consultation Assessment Framework of Standards?

The Practice Consultation Framework outlines the areas of architectural practice that will be assessed during the PCS process.

Procurement Management:

<u>Sub-Category</u>	<u>Details</u>
Marketing & Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • activities • marketing strategy/plan • using targeting channels • promoting/ positioning to obtain business
Go/No Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying potential new clients/projects • analyzing project merits and risks • knowing technical/ business goals of practice • using go/no go checklist (or similar decision tool) • matching client needs and practice needs/capabilities
Proposal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing/following up on proposals • based on client's needs, specified requests and client consultation • using the practice's proposal development strategy
Development and Negotiation of Services and Fees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scope of services • commensurate fees • based on client's needs and the practice's fee development system • structure in the interests of the practice, client and public
Agreements/Contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing/maintaining/monitoring • based on AIBC bylaws, policies, guidelines and Tariff; Canadian Handbook of Practice (CHOP) • based on standard AIBC or other acceptable (e.g. RAIC; CCDC) agreement/ contract templates/documents • protecting the interests of the practice, client, and public

Financial Management:

Business Plan

- developing/maintaining/ following/monitoring
- applying knowledge of the practice, the market, and guidelines for business plan development
- supporting sustainability and profitability of the practice

Insurance

- maintaining insurance coverages (including Errors & Omissions; General liability)
- appropriate; based on insurance advisors advice
- protecting the practice, its people, property, information, and the public

Bookkeeping

- maintaining books of account employing appropriate accounting procedures and audit controls
- based on generally accepted accounting principles

Invoicing

- charging the client according to the terms of the agreement(s)
- using standard invoicing procedures
- facilitating timely remuneration for services

Accounts Receivable/ Payable

- managing accounts receivable and payable
- using standard AR/AP procedures according to the policies and recognized cash management practices

General Management:

Communications

- developing/maintaining/monitoring standardized communication systems
- using consistently applied procedures and formats
- maintaining records of important information
- facilitating organized storage and retrieval
- presenting the practice in a manner consistent with internal policies and expertise

Quality Assurance

- employing quality assurance processes
- based on an assessment of past procedures and identified internal needs
- maintaining high quality service
- reducing the risk of litigation
- supporting sustainability and profitability of the practice

Tools and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • obtaining/maintaining/employing tools and resources appropriate the practice's needs and service provided • using a combination of office systems and external sources • supporting the activities of the practice
Human Resources Management:	
Continuing Education and Training Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring/advocating/investing in continuing education and training for all AIBC members of the practice • based on an analysis of the needs of the individual, the practice and emerging issues in the profession/business • maintaining currency, competency, competitiveness and high quality services
Supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing/maintaining supervisory practices and for all staff based on internal policies, procedures and applicable legislation • facilitating consistent and effective human resources management and quality assurance
Recruitment/ Selection/ Performance Appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing/maintaining/implementing recruitment, selection and performance appraisal procedures • using knowledge of applicable Human Rights Codes and personnel management best practices • attracting recruits • assessing individual performance
Applicable HRM Law/Legal Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aware of and complying with laws pertaining to HR management • operating within the law (including BC Employment Standards regulations)
Legislative Compliance:	
Professional Conduct/ Business Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all members conducting business and representing themselves and the practice professionally and ethically in accordance with the <i>Architects Act</i>, <i>Bylaws</i>, <i>Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct</i>, and standards set by the profession • protecting the integrity of the profession, the reputation of the practice and the public interest
Applicable Law/ Legal Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • aware of and complying with laws pertaining to the jurisdiction of the practice

Project Management

- developing/maintaining/implementing project management systems and procedures using internal and external resources and best practices
- managing architectural projects effectively, on schedule and on budget

Traditional Services:

Pre-Design and Programming

- investigating, reviewing, and assessing client and external requirements
- using the procedures recommended or established by the profession
- providing quality pre-design and programming services

Design

- preparing designs in response to requirements/needs established by the client or identified during the pre-design and programming stage
- using procedures recommended or established by the profession
- producing a design that meets the client's needs and provides a basis for construction documents and completion of the project

Construction Documents

- appropriate to the project based on the design stage, applicable law, current building science, best practices and the procedures recommended or established by the profession
- facilitating the construction of the project
- appropriate coordination and quality assurance protocols

Bidding, Negotiating, Contract Award & Execution

- based on applicable law
- using the procedures recommended or established by the profession in order to engage contractor(s)

Contract Administration

- administering the construction contract in accordance with the terms of the contract and the procedures recommended or established by the profession
- facilitating construction of the project in accordance with the terms of the contract
- appropriate field review and quality assurance protocols

Post-Construction Services

- advising the client on the need for post-construction services
- offering to provide those services according to the needs of the client and the procedures recommended or established by the profession
- meeting the post-construction needs of the client
- closing out the project by comparing the financial and time schedule realities of the project with initial estimates and by reflecting on any claims or litigation against the practice arising from the project in order to assess the extent to which the objectives of the client and the practice were met

8. **Is the PCS going to critique my practice's designs?**
 - No, that is not the PCS focus or objective.
9. **Is the PCS going to review my construction drawings and details for proper technical applications?**
 - The review of construction drawings is focused on the completeness of the documents for the intended purpose.
 - The Practice Consultant may question the content or intent of specific details in your construction documents for determining the appropriateness of the technical issue.
10. **Am I encouraged to show the Practice Consultant what contracts I have been using for architectural services, under related terms and conditions?**
 - Yes; terms and conditions of engagement are important.
11. **Does the Practice Consultant need to see my accounting or tax records?**
 - No; you are encouraged to get good financial advice elsewhere.
12. **Is the PCS process a Quality Assurance check of practices?**
 - Partially, and in a positive fashion. One PCS objective is to provide an assurance to the public that our profession is conducting itself in accordance with industry standards that will "protect and serve the public".
 - A component of the PCS service is the review of what "quality control" measures are being used by the practices. In doing this we can comment on ways of improving a practice's current quality control program.
13. **Does the PCS review mean that my practice will meet the ISO 9002 standards?**
 - No, the PCS program has no relationship to any of the protocols used by practices to qualify for ISO 9002 standards.

14. What are the professional standards by which my practice is being reviewed?

- The professional standards come from many sources and so exist as a ‘framework’ including, but not limited to, the *Architects Act*, *Bylaws*, *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*, *Canadian Handbook of Practice* (“CHOP”) and AIBC Practice Notes and Bulletins.
- The professional standards also include good architectural practices regarding project management, quality control, quality assurance, risk management and sound business practices.
- Some professional standards are found in industry standard documents which are used by the architectural profession (e.g. CCDC construction contracts; guides; AIBC Bulletins and Practice Notes; AIBC and RAIC consulting contracts; building codes).
- There are also legislative requirements, mainly Acts and regulations. (e.g. Builder’s Lien Act; Employment Standards Act; Worker’s Compensation regulations; the BC Building Code, including its provisions for professional services and letters of assurance).

15. Where can I get a copy of the professional standards?

- All licensed architects in British Columbia should have in their office or be able to access the various publications and documents from which the “professional standards” are derived. See websites for the AIBC, RAIC, CCDC.

16. What happens if a practice is found not to meet these professional standards?

- The Practice Consultant may advise practices on issues which relate to the regulatory and liability aspects of the profession.
- If the PCS identifies, either through your self-assessment or through the on-site consultation, that your practice is in contravention of the *Act* or *Bylaws*, you will be informed in writing and given advice on how to make the necessary improvements.
- This advice must be noted and addressed by the practice within a reasonable timeframe.
- Practices wherein the Practice Consultant notes these types of issues may merit a follow-up or reassessment.

17. **If my practice is found not to meet the standards set by the AIBC, will punitive action be taken by against my practice?**
- No. The PCS program is designed to assist architects with their practice, not to punish.
 - The Practice Consultant will advise the architect of any issues. Only those in contravention of the *Architects Act* or Bylaws will need to be corrected.
 - In some cases, the Practice Consultant will follow up with a reassessment to confirm that these issues have been addressed.
 - If regulatory matters are not addressed in a timely fashion by the practice, the Practice Consultant will forward the matter in accordance with standard AIBC protocol and PCS policies and procedures.
 - The Practice Consultant will also advise you of non-regulatory “standards” and provide you with a list of resources, giving you mechanisms to make improvements to your practice.
18. **What if a Practice Consultant finds an architectural firm that clearly has undue risk and liability issues in its practice?**
- The PCS program is designed to assist architects with achieving and maintaining safe, low-risk practices.
 - The Practice Consultant will advise the architect of any known liability issues which must be addressed.
 - In some cases, the Practice Consultant will follow up with reassessment within a reasonable timeframe to confirm that the issue has been addressed.
 - If such issues are not addressed in a timely fashion by the practice, the Practice Consultant may forward the matter to the Director of Professional Practice for further review.
19. **Should my lawyer be present when the PCS on-site consultation takes place?**
- No; the PCS program is designed to assist and provide architectural guidance to practices.
 - The only person the Practice Consultant will meet with to discuss practice-related issues is the principal(s) of the practice.
20. **Should I have my accountant available when the Practice Consultant comes to visit our practice?**
- No, similar to question 19, above.

21. How will the PCS apply to a practice that does not normally provide some of the professional services that are part of traditional practice?

The PCS applies to all architectural practices (Certificate of Practice holders), and the service has been specifically designed to be of assistance to any practice.

In today's world, the definition of 'architectural practice' is much broader than it once was. Specialization, entrepreneurship and innovation have had, and will continue to have, an impact on practice. Many architects operate practices that focus on delivery of professional services other than those that have 'traditionally' been considered part of the practice of architecture.

Some practices may not be providing such traditional services as predesign, design, construction documents, bidding, contract administration and general review and post-construction. Others have gone beyond the building industry to create new types of practice.

Architects also work in such positions as: project manager, project director, development manager, urban designer/ planner, environmental planner, critic, graphic designer, heritage planner, programmer, industrial designer, developer, construction manager, building inspector, CAD coordinator, renderer, computer analyst, interior designer, market researcher, landscape architect, corporate consultant, conservator, professor, publisher and set designer.

The PCS includes an emphasis on the so-called 'traditional services' because the majority of AIBC members are still engaged in traditional architectural practice. However, the program has been developed with flexibility in mind to ensure that most of the areas of professional practice included in the PCS are general and readily applicable to any practice. The PCS focuses on seven major areas of the practice. Several of these areas are business related; some are marketing and procurement issues; others are on insurance and human resource issues and others deal with quality control, quality assurance and risk management. Overall, the program provides to the profession a flexible and beneficial resource.

Where a practice does not provide a service that is the focus of an element of the PCS, it is considered 'Not Applicable'; it is not considered in any way a 'negative' in the process.

22. **I only run a part-time practice – can I participate in the PCS process?**
- Yes, any holder of a Certificate of Practice in British Columbia is eligible to participate in the PCS program whether it is a full-time or a part-time practice.
23. **Since I run a part-time practice, can the Practice Consultant meet with me on the weekend - Saturday or Sunday?**
- No, the Practice Consultant is available during normal business hours from Monday to Friday.
24. **I work out of my basement and do not have a room for the Practice Consultant to review my project drawings and records. Can we make alternative arrangements for the PCS consultation?**
- Consultations are expected to take place where your practice is located.
25. **Is a practice whose office is outside the province of British Columbia required to undergo the PCS program?**
- At this time, the AIBC will not be reviewing practices outside the province of British Columbia.
 - Practices outside the province of British Columbia may be eligible for the Practice Consultation Service review at a later date.
26. **What are the protocols for practices with branch offices?**
- Each architectural firm with a Certificate of Practice, which offers architectural services to the public, is subject to the PCS process as an individual practice. There are no separate consultations for branch offices.
27. **How will this affect me?**

All AIBC members will need to be knowledgeable about the PCS and its objectives, because:

- **Every architect is potentially the principal of a practice (or Certificate of Practice holder) if not one already;**
- **Every intern architect or student is potentially the principal of a practice (or Certificate of Practice holder) in the future;**

- **Every member is an advocate for the profession, and should be communicating and demonstrating the benefits of the PCS and other AIBC programs and services, such as the mandatory Continuing Education System, every day in practice.**

The PCS, like other AIBC initiatives, is designed to benefit the profession collectively - all members - by helping to raise the value placed on architects and architecture by clients, the public, government and allied professionals.

Principals of Architectural Practices:

Principals (Certificate of Practice holders) are responsible for ensuring that the practice meets the standards set by the profession, and also for the success of the business. The PCS will help them fulfill both of these responsibilities.

The PCS requires that the appropriate principals participate in the Service. Because the PCS is focused on Certificate of Practice holders, the firm will be asked to identify a principal to complete specific tasks such as the self-assessment form or participating in the on-site interview.

Architects who are not principals in a practice:

These MAIBCs also have a responsibility as licensed professionals to ensure that the practice meets the standards we set together as a profession, and contribute to the success of the business. The PCS is of direct benefit to them in those roles.

In many cases, architects in addition to the principals of the practice will be directly involved in the PCS process. Staff architects may be called upon to participate in coordinating documents for review and/or participating in the on-site interview.

Architects employed in other than architectural practices:

These members have a responsibility to apply the standards of the profession in their work, where the standards are relevant. Elements of the PCS apply to any business, especially professional service firms.

Intern Architects, Architectural Technologists, and student associates:

Intern Architects, Architectural Technologists, and students need to understand the standards we set as a profession, and how those are applied in practice.

In some cases, Intern Architects, Architectural Technologists, and students may be invited by the principals of the practice to help prepare for participation in the PCS or to take part in certain elements of the process with their supervisors.

28. How does the PCS work?

The service has been designed as a collaborative process that involves you working with a Practice Consultant to help you evaluate your practice, identify areas for improvement, and identify resources to help you implement change.

A Practice Consultant will contact you when your practice has been selected to participate and will then guide you through the process from start to finish. It is anticipated that every architectural practice (Certificate of Practice holder) will participate in the PCS on a cycle or other basis to be determined as the process develops.

Staged Implementation

The AIBC is currently providing an opportunity for MAIBCs (Certificate of Practice holders) to benefit from the PCS sooner by volunteering to participate, rather than waiting to be selected through a future mandatory process. If more firms and members volunteer than can be accommodated, names will be selected based upon a first-come, first-served procedure. Firms that volunteer help the service grow and develop. They will also be moved to the end of the cycle for their next practice consultation, in the event that the PCS becomes mandatory (cf. Q57).

Consultation Process

The process would begin with you evaluating your own practice by completing the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form on the AIBC Web site. This part of the process would immediately identify areas of strength in your practice, and areas where you could begin to improve your procedures.

Practices are encouraged to suggest additional feedback and resources to benefit their colleagues who use the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form.

The Practice Consultant will also review the results of your self-assessment as part of the preparation for the On-site Consultation. (You will also receive observations and recommendations on your self-assessment in the final report received at the end of the PCS process.)

To complete the On-site Consultation component of the PCS, the Practice Consultant will visit your practice and review some of your project files in a standardized, objective process that would help you identify additional areas for improvement. While in your office, the Practice Consultant will also conduct a structured interview including but not limited to standard interview questions to help identify room to grow.

The final report you will receive contains observations and comments, specific to

your practice, and will address the results of the self-assessment and the on-site component of the PCS. When shortcomings may be identified that suggest a breach of the *Architects Act, Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* and/or Council Rulings, the Practice Consultant will set out a time-frame during which added information must be provided or shortcomings remedied.

The Practice Consultant will contact you for a brief follow-up to the Consultation.

Your firm will be contacted to coordinate your next Practice Consultation as the PCS cycle proceeds. As noted above, the members and firms who volunteered in phase one to be reviewed will be moved to the end of the cycle for their next practice consultation.

29. **What are the components of the Practice Consultation Service?**

There are three principal components:

1. Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form

2. On-Site Consultation, which includes:

- **Document Review**
- **Structured Interview**

3. Final Report - Observations and Recommendations

The Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form

This form is a web-based questionnaire, accessed through the AIBC website: [http://www.aibc.ca/member_resources/practice/pdf/4.1%20PCS%20PSARF%20\(FI%20NAL-11.01.07\).pdf](http://www.aibc.ca/member_resources/practice/pdf/4.1%20PCS%20PSARF%20(FI%20NAL-11.01.07).pdf). It is a self-assessment tool developed by the AIBC to assist your practice in evaluating the firm's effectiveness.

The specific questions cover seven areas of architectural practice:

1. Procurement Management
2. Financial Management
3. General Management of the Practice
4. Human Resources Management
5. Legislative and Regulatory Compliance
6. Project Organization and Management
7. Traditional Services

At the same time as you submit the results of your self-assessment, you will be requested to submit other, necessary information about your practice, including

identification of principals and staff, description of the nature of the practice, a list of recently completed projects, and a list of work-in-progress.

The On-site Consultation

After the selected practice has completed the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form and submitted the results to the Practice Consultant, the Consultant will contact the practice to schedule the visit to the practice to complete the On-site Consultation.

The On-site Consultation is made up of two parts – Document Review and Structured Interview.

Document Review

This is the examination of documents and files for projects recently completed by your practice. The Practice Consultant will select them from a list you would have forwarded in advance.

The documents will be reviewed from three perspectives: Practice Management, Project Management and Service Delivery. The Practice Consultant will use a standard form to guide the review to provide consistency and objectivity.

Document Review might include these queries: What is the nature of a client/architect contract? Is there a Work Breakdown Structure, or something similar, guiding management of the project under the contract? Is there a project progress checklist or some other, appropriate quality assurance tool in use? What is the nature of the construction contract? Are bidding and contract award protocols established and followed? What processes are in place for construction administration? Where the practice was contracted to certify payments and substantial performance, have proper procedures been followed?

The Practice Consultant will review construction documents produced for the projects to determine, for example, if the practice has included sufficient information and detail to clearly and comprehensively describe the project, including the systems, assemblies and interfaces therein.

Structured Interview

The Practice Consultant will interview those in the firm who are responsible for the practice and the selected projects. A series of standard questions has been-created during the development of the PCS, and adjusted to reflect the valuable feedback received from members.

There will be questions about handling of communications in the practice and maintenance of records. For example, a question of current interest is, "Are records

kept of e-mail correspondence? How?" It has long been established that detailed records of discussions and decisions are of huge value in defending claims against the practice. Since much of that process now occurs electronically, an obvious and vital issue is whether the practice has developed a systematic way of maintaining records of e-correspondence.

Final Report - Observations and Recommendations

The process would conclude when you receive the Final Report from the Practice Consultant, including observations, comments; recommendations and any requirements.

The report would reflect your self-assessment, as well as the observations of the Practice Consultant during the visit to your practice.

In the report, you'll find that the Practice Consultant will have:

- Pointed out some of the strong aspects of your practice
- Identified areas where you can improve
- Made specific recommendations on how you can improve your management, professional and business practices
- Provided a time period by which any requirements must be put in effect; and
- Advised you of specific resources that have been identified which will help you begin immediately to implement improvements

You'll find that many of those resources are documents you already have, such as the Canadian Handbook of Practice and AIBC Bulletins and Practice Notes.

In addition, you would be directed to items on a comprehensive list of useful resources available from others. These have been sought out by the AIBC on your behalf to address aspects of practice covered in the PCS. The list would continue to grow, in part based on suggestions from MAIBCs who have come across a valuable resource.

The Practice Consultant would follow up to ascertain that any requirements have been implemented. A dialogue would be possible between you and the reviewer to ascertain that you clearly understand what is required.

30. What is the minimum notice required for a Practice Consultant to give to a practice to conduct an on-site consultation?

- As per the PCS Policies and Procedures, a minimum notice of 30 days will be provided to the practice.
- The 30-day period commences from the date of the “Letter of Notification.”

31. What happens when a practice does not complete the self-assessment by the scheduled date?

- Practices are encouraged to complete the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form (PSARF) and the Practice Information Form (PIF) within the allocated 15 working days of the date noted on the “Letter of Notification.”
- Practices that have not submitted their forms by the twelfth day will be reminded to submit the requested forms and information on the specified date.
- Failure to submit the requested information by the specified date may result in the need to reschedule the on-site consultation.
- Rescheduling of the on-site consultation can result in extra costs and expenses for the PCS program.

32. How are the projects to be reviewed selected?

- Three projects are selected from the Practice Information Form that is submitted by the architect to the Practice Consultant along with the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form (PSARF).
- The Practice Consultant reviews the submitted project list and selects projects that are representative of the practice’s present portfolio and will have adequate documentation to assess how the practice has managed their projects from initial contact to the post-construction review.
- In non-traditional practices, we would review those projects which will give us a representative example of your business and project management practices during the life of the project.

33. What criteria are used to select the projects to be reviewed?

- The projects selected ideally would have been completed (Substantial Performance for a traditional project) in the last three years.
- The projects selected are those that are representative of the type of work that the practice is presently pursuing.
- The projects selected will be expected to have adequate documentation for the Practice Consultant to assess the practice’s procedures and processes.
- The projects would be representative of typical projects in the office which underwent the practice’s quality assurances and risk management programs.

34. I run a non-traditional architectural practice; I only do feasibility studies for new schools and prepare Design-build proposal packages for School Boards. What would the PCS consultant review in that case?

- In non-traditional practices, we would review those projects which will give us a representative example of your business and project management practices during the life of the project.

35. How much time will I have to commit?

The time required to complete the PCS process would vary. It would depend on the size of your practice, the number of people you involve in the PCS process, the range of services you offer and other factors.

The following anticipated timelines are approximate:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| • Complete the self-assessment | 2 to 3 hours |
| • Organize and tag documents for review | 2 to 4 hours |
| • Participate in the on-site consultation and the structured interview | 3.5 hours (avg. firm) |
| • Communication throughout the process | 1 to 2 hours |
| • Implementing mandatory recommendations and follow-up dialogue in review | variable |
| | <hr/> |
| | 1.5 – 2 days |

The time you must invest would also depend heavily on your preparation.

- The on-site consultation generally is a full day. It may take longer or involve multiple visits if your documentation is not prepared ahead of time.
- The on-site consultation consists of two parts: the document review and the structured interview.
- The document review will require the Practice Consultant to review specific documents, which you will need to prepare in advance of the on-site consultation. It will consist of an estimated 1 ½ hours of review time per project for a total of 4 ½ hours. This part of the review does not require you to be present.
- The structured interview requires that the Practice Consultant interview the principal(s) of the practice, possibly with the project architect/manager responsible for the projects that the consultant has reviewed earlier in the day. The interview will take 2 to 2 1/2 hours and is generally conducted during the afternoon of the on-site consultation visit.

The process would be scheduled on a 60-day timeline, from initial contact by the Practice Consultant to receipt by you of the final report. Timeline for implementing any recommendations or requirements arising out of the report would vary.

36. What happens if a practice does not have the proper documentation ready for review?

- Project documentation should be labelled and placed in the room where the Practice Consultant is going to work.
- The Practice Consultant has a limited amount of time for document review and should not be expected to look in boxes of project files for the specifically requested documents that are to be tagged in advance of the on-site consultation. If the requested documentation is not prepared at the time of the consultation, the Practice Consultant will advise the practice that the documents have not been prepared and the on-site consultation will have to be rescheduled.

37. I am out of the country for the next three months; can my senior staff prepare the documentation and meet with the PCS consultant while I am away?

- It is expected that the principal(s) of the practice participate in the PCS process.
- Documents and key personnel involved in the selected projects need to be available at the time of the on-site consultation.
- Any architect employed at the practice may be asked to meet with the Practice Consultant so any questions which arise can be addressed by someone who is more directly knowledgeable of the projects.
- Rescheduling of on-site consultation visits increases the expense of operating the PCS program for AIBC members and wastes everyone's valuable time and energy.

38. What if the PCS visit occurs when we have a deadline in the office?

- The PCS on-site consultation should be scheduled far enough in advance as to not interfere with the normal operations of your practice.
- The Practice Consultant will require, during the structured interview, reasonable access to the principal(s) of the practice.
- After the date of the on-site consultation has been confirmed, it is the responsibility of the practice holder to ensure that the on-site consultation will not become a burden to the operations of their practice.

39. Can we reschedule the PCS visit for next month?

- Yes, the PCS program is designed to work with the practices.
- In order to keep the program cost-effective, on-site consultations may be grouped in packages of two or three practices in a specific geographical area.

40. How much is the PCS visit going to cost me?

- The PCS is part of the AIBC Practice Program; it is provided as a service to our members. You will not receive an invoice.

41. Will my colleagues see my results?

No, except in very unusual circumstances.

The Practice Consultant and the AIBC, as involved in the administration of the program, are bound by requirements of confidentiality. In addition, if you believe that the Practice Consultant chosen for your file is unsuitable due to a perception of conflict, bias or other reasonable concern, the AIBC will arrange for an alternate.

You won't have to worry that your unique practices or proprietary processes will be shared with others, and a confidentiality agreement will be signed to help reassure and protect participating firms and members. This agreement will require all parties to preserve and respect confidentiality and intellectual property rights.

Only the Practice Consultant will view any forms provided or any notes he/ she makes at the on-site consultation. Only the final Observations & Recommendations Report will be viewed by the Professional Practice department for clarity and accuracy. No documents will be taken out of your office, and all notes and information gathered from the on-site consultation will be kept in accordance with standard AIBC protocol.

Anonymous statistical information regarding PCS findings are maintained by the AIBC for the development of future Professional Development programs and support services for our members. The Observations and Recommendations Report will be sent only to the Certificate of Practice holder.

The only time that certain (non-proprietary) information about a practice consultation could become widely known would be if a rare, unresolved requirement proceeded through the professional conduct process to a finding of unprofessional conduct at a Disciplinary Inquiry (or admission by way of the consensual resolution process). However, we remind members that the PCS is an across-the-board collaborative review of the profession and is not intended as a 'fishing expedition' or an "audit" to encounter problems. Referrals of unresolved concerns to the

conduct department are expected to be highly unusual.

42. Can I meet with my clients while the PCS consultant is visiting my office?

- Accommodations are required to be made for the Practice Consultant to review the project files and drawings in a room that can be closed off from the rest of the office.
- During the structured interview, it is expected that the participants be made available at the designated time and that outside interruptions be actively discouraged during the interview.

43. I am concerned that some of my clients will become upset if they think that my practice is being audited. What do I tell them about the reason for the PCS visit?

- The PCS process is **not** an audit.
- The PCS process is a collaborative process that involves you working with an AIBC Practice Consultant to help you evaluate your practice and identify areas of strength and areas for improvement. Furthermore, the Practice Consultant will assist you in identifying resources to help you implement change or improvements to your practice.
- Clients can be advised that PCS is a component of the Practice-support program of the architectural profession in BC in order that the public interest may be served and protected.

44. I am working on some very sensitive projects and the clients do not want the public to know about them just yet. What do I say to them about the PCS on-site consultation and the confidentiality of their projects?

- The Practice Consultant is bound by requirement to confidentiality.
- Clients can be assured that all matters surrounding the projects, unique practices or proprietary process of your practice will be held in the strictest of confidence and will not be shared with other members.
- Reviewed projects typically are completed, not in progress

45. When can I expect my “Observations & Recommendations Report”?

- The Observations and Recommendations Report is expected to be mailed to the practice within four weeks of the on-site consultation; in the initial stages of the PCS programme, this time may be increased up to eight weeks.

46. What if I disagree with the “Observations & Recommendations report” and I request that the consultant revisit my practice?

- A limited opportunity for constructive dialogue is available.

47. Who will be involved in delivering the PCS?

The PCS will be administered by the AIBC.

A Practice Consultant, who is experienced in practice and specifically trained in the PCS, will guide you through the process.

The Practice Consultant will coordinate with staff responsible for delivery of other AIBC services, and will work especially closely with the Professional Practice Department and the PCS committee to ensure that the PCS continues to be relevant and valued. Accordingly, Practice Consultants' final reports on practices are NOT revealed to the PCS committee. The committee acts solely to organize and administer the PCS process, not to review the content of any reports. In 2006-07, during the development of the PCS, the Peer Review Task Force determined that members do not want 'potential competitors' reviewing their operations and using proprietary information. This has been borne out by the experience of a number of other professions that administer similar programs, especially those where most members are 'general practitioners' as is the case in architecture.

All reasonable effort will be made to avoid conflicted situations.

48. Who is the Practice Consultant and what are his/her qualifications to review my practice?

- The Practice Consultant is, or was recently, a licensed Architect in the Province of British Columbia.
- The experience and qualifications of the Practice Consultant are fundamentally the same that you and other practising architects in the province have.
- Each Practice Consultant has received training specifically geared to the objectives, approach and implementation of the AIBC-designed PCS program.

49. Can I have my choice of the Practice Consultant that I want to review my practice?

- Practice Consultants are assigned practices according to specific criteria and operational objectives.
- If there is an issue with respect to the assigned Practice Consultant reviewing your practice you will need to put that concern in writing and address the matter to the PCS staff (Coordinator of Professional Practice).

50. What kind of feedback will I receive from the Practice Consultant?

You would receive advice of the type that management consultants and risk managers would provide, only the advice from the PCS is specific to architecture.

There are essentially two kinds of advice you may receive through the PCS Practice Consultant.

(a) One type of advice is how to implement recognized 'good practices' that could help you build and maintain a practice that is:

- More successful
- More efficient
- Less exposed to claims
- Recognized in an increasingly competitive marketplace for consistently providing a high standard of professional service
- Highly valued

You could choose to ignore this advice. Of course, there is an obvious risk and opportunity loss to you and your business, as well as to the reputation and future of your practice.

(b) The second type of advice includes more substantive issues.

If the Practice Consultant were to identify, either through your self-assessment or through the On-Site Consultation, that your practice is not meeting the standards of the profession, you will be informed in confidence by the Practice Consultant, and given advice on how to make the necessary changes and requirements to provide further information and/or confirmation that shortcomings have been brought up to standard.

51. What are the benefits of the program?

The PCS will benefit:

- **your practice**
- **the profession**
- **the public; and**
- **the building industry**

The PCS will help you evaluate your current operation and provide advice, recommendations and a list of resources to improve your efficiency, effectiveness AND profitability and to help you meet and exceed the standards we set as a profession.

Whether you are an established practice or just starting out, you can benefit from the self-assessment and your on-site meeting with the AIBC Practice Consultant.

The Practice Consultation Service self-assessment process will enable you to identify areas for improvement in your practices and assist you by directing you to recommended resources (i.e., AIBC guidelines, checklists, bulletins, resources and standards).

By making an on-site visit, the Practice Consultant can provide assistance and support specifically designed to your practice.

Experience in other professions shows that the PCS will identify aspects of practice where the profession in general has a collective opportunity for improvement.

Once common issues are identified, they will be addressed across the province through the AIBC's Professional Development program, Practice Notes, other programs and services.

Ultimately, we expect that the results will include:

- Increased confidence in the profession
- Increased value in hiring an architect
- A reduction in the number and severity of liability and professional conduct claims, thereby enhancing the "insurability" of members, having a positive effect on premiums.
- Increased standards of skills and knowledge
- Ability to identify common issues around which to focus AIBC programming

Through the benefits of the PCS, the building industry and the public will have increased confidence in architects and enjoy higher standards of professional service.

52. Will I get a certificate stating that we have been reviewed by the PCS that I can put on my wall?

- At this time there is no PCS review certificate being issued.

- All practices which are reviewed will receive a PCS “Observations and Recommendations Report”.

53. Can I state in my promotional material that we have been reviewed by the PCS with respect to the professional standards set for the architectural profession in British Columbia?

Yes.

54. What statistics are being compiled about my own practice and other practices?

- The PCS is designed to identify areas of the architectural practice which could use improvement and to assist practices in achieving those improvements.
- The PCS program covers seven primary areas of the practice and twenty-seven sub-categories of the profession.
- As practices are reviewed, areas of improvement in the architectural profession may be identified for strengthening.
- The AIBC intends to develop programs and support services to address identified deficiencies in the architectural profession.
- Statistics collected will be anonymous and will only be used for pattern-based studies of the profession.

55. Is my practice being rated against other similar practices?

- No, it is not the intention of the AIBC or the PCS program to rate practices.
- The normative data will indicate what practices are doing or not doing.
- This information will be useful for the AIBC in developing programs and resources to assist our members and the profession in general.

56. Could you tell me more about the history behind the PCS?

The industry and government expect a self-regulating profession like ours to have in place measures designed to ensure that practices meet the standards set by the profession.

Starting over a decade ago, AIBC Council has taken a series of definitive steps to ensure that we are fulfilling our mandate as a self-regulating profession, and providing services that will support members and practices in a changing landscape.

Council began a review of ‘peer review’ options in the late 1990s. As interest in such a process grew, Council built upon the research prepared by volunteer

members, creating a Peer Review Task Force (PRTF) in 2005. The PRTF had a mandate to make recommendations to Council as to how to implement a peer review process for MAIBCs.

In 2006, after reviewing options from other organizations and conducting research and interviews, the PRTF concluded that the Ontario Association of Architects' (OAA's) "Practice Consultation Service" most closely aligned with our members' interests. By agreement with the OAA, the AIBC's PCS is modeled on the OAA process, with suitable modifications to reflect architectural practice in British Columbia.

A PRTF workshop was held at the AIBC/RAIC 2006 Conference to introduce the proposed service and provide an opportunity for members to exchange ideas.

In October 2006, AIBC Council converted its task force to the PCS Committee, under the auspices of the "Practice Board" (not "Conduct"). The PCS Committee's primary mandate is to establish a consultation service available to all holders of Certificates of Practice.

57. What is the legal authority for the PCS?

No "authority" under *Architects Act* or bylaw is needed for a voluntary program. We would need to develop "authority" for a mandatory program.

The AIBC is given the authority to make bylaws, under the *Architects Act* with the approval of the Provincial Government, that are "considered necessary for the regulation of the institute, its members, architectural firms, licensees and associates."

Every AIBC bylaw also has to be approved by the AIBC membership in a formal vote.

58. How can I learn more? How do I sign up?

For more information visit the AIBC website (www.aibc.ca/member_resources/practice). You will find this Practice Consultation Service: Guide & Frequently Asked Questions; as well as the Practice Self-Assessment Rating Form (PSARF)

Still have questions or interested in participating? Please contact Erica Holt, Coordinator of Professional Practice at (604) 683-8588 ext. 314 or eholt@aibc.ca.