The word why is used here as a noun, in the way that was popularized by Simon Sinek in his book Start with why1.

“Very few organizations know WHY they do what they do. WHY is not about making money. That’s a result. It’s a purpose, cause or belief. It’s the very reason your organization exists.”

The promise of discovering the WHY is that doing so injects passion into the work of the organization and has the ability to inspire those who interact with the organization. I don’t know of any professional governing body that wouldn’t like to inject passion into the work of the organization and inspire those who interact with the organization.

Now according to Sinek, organizations have WHYS, teams have WHYS, and individuals have WHYS, but what about professions and their governing bodies? Actually, professions always had a WHY. In fact, one of the distinguishing aspects of professions is this sense of WHY, and it is rooted in the social contract. The social contract between professions and society has been described as follows:

“In exchange for a grant of authority to control key aspects of their market and working conditions through licensing and credentialing, professionals are expected to maintain high standards of competence and moral responsibility.”

All professions have a variant on the same WHY—to serve the public good by exercising their profession in a competent, diligent, and ethical manner.

“I don’t know of any professional governing body that wouldn’t like to inject passion into the work of the organization and inspire those who interact with the organization.”

Professional regulation statutes are really embodiments of the social contract between a profession and society. Professional regulation statutes are contracts between the profession’s governing body, on behalf of the profession, and the Legislature, on behalf of society.

So where do professional governing bodies fit in? What is the WHY of professional governing bodies? As it turns out, the WHY of professional governing bodies is related to the WHY of the professions they govern.

The WHY of professional governing bodies is to ensure that their professions and members live up to their end of the social contract which the profession and its members have made with society.

Sinek points out that the WHY is not a result, it is a purpose, cause or belief. It seems that we often communicate what we are all about by referring to results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose, cause or belief</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Serving the public good by assisting the profession and its members to living up to the social contract the profession and its members have made with society</td>
<td>To reduce, suppress, mitigate or eliminate harms, or potential harms, to the public stemming from the practice of the profession.</td>
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Individuals relate to organizations because of the WHY, not the HOW or WHAT. A statement of what a professional governing body framed in terms of WHY should be more compelling than a statement framed in terms of HOW or WHAT. Let’s see how this works. Using for the most part the language in the Objects section of the Registered Human Resource Professionals Act, 2013, we get:

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The biggest difference is in the WHY paragraph. Instead of saying ‘to promote and protect the public interest,’ the paragraph above says ‘assist the profession and its members in living up to the social contract…’ The idea here is that the latter wording positions professional regulation as something that the profession and its members choose to do to demonstrate commitment to living up to the social contract rather than something imposed on the profession and its members.

In any case, you can be the judge as to whether describing what professional governing bodies do in terms of WHY leads to a more compelling description of what professional governing bodies are all about. The importance of this is that understanding the WHY of professions and their governing bodies and expressing what professional governing bodies are all about in terms of the underlying purpose, cause or belief may significantly increase stakeholder engagement in the organization and its mission. And that would not be a bad thing.