



Ontario Society of
Occupational Therapists



Are you ready, willing, and
able to lead?



Your Voice Matters!
GO FOR IT!



7 Questions to Ask Before
Joining a Board of Directors

We want you to consider a nomination to the Board of Directors of the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists! In fact, we'd like you to *accept* a nomination to the Board! But... we want you to make an informed decision and feel that you have answers to important questions that help you assess the fit of the role, focus of work and time demands.

The following 7 questions are important to consider when contemplating a role on any Board of Directors.

1. What is the organization's mission?

The mission statement should explain who the organization serves and what good the organization intends to do for them. If you do not understand or are not fully committed to the organization's mission, you should not consider joining the board.

OSOT is a professional association and exists to serve its members. OSOT members have the opportunity to see the Society's mission statement on virtually every communication. We're proud to shout that OSOT's mission is to **lead the profession of occupational therapy in Ontario by providing vision, voice, visibility and value for Ontario occupational therapists.** The Society is a membership community of over 4500 OTs and student OTs who share a commitment to a strong future for the profession of occupational therapy in Ontario and, through OSOT, support advocacy (voice) and promotion (visibility) of the profession to achieve the membership's vision for the profession. Through member services, professional development opportunities and the strength of an engaged professional community, members are ensured that their vision for the Society is achieved. View [OSOT's mission and vision statements and corporate Letters Patent.](#)

2. What is the role of the board?

What an organization needs from the board changes both with the type of organization and over time. The recruitment of board members should be based upon the current and anticipated tasks in which the board will be engaged.

OSOT's Board of Directors provides strategic leadership and direction and oversees the organization to see that staff and volunteer teams are working to achieve the goals of the [strategic plan](#) and vision and function within policies and standards of the organization. The Board sets strategic direction in consultation with the members and defines a strategic plan. The Board's work addresses governance issues such as risk management, financial security, policy, and positions of the organization. Board Directors look at the big picture, addressing and approving recommendations, positions, strategies, etc. prepared by staff and volunteers, identifying issues, risks and opportunities, and directing appropriate actions to be taken to ensure

the integrity of the Society in operations of its mission, vision, and values. The Executive Director is responsible for the day to day management and operations of the organization and reports directly to the Board.

The role of the OSOT Board of Directors is defined in Article 4.13 of the Society's [Bylaws](#). The bylaws prescribe that all Board Directors be Active Members and therefore occupational therapists. A keen interest in one or more of the priorities of the strategic plan is important to assure that the experience is a good fit for both the Board and the director. Members need to feel that their Board has effective ways to access issues and priorities from its diverse membership. Sometimes this is facilitated by diversity within the Board – e.g. geographic representation, practice foci, years of experience, etc., however, the broad diversity of the profession makes a truly representative board difficult with only 8 members so the OSOT Board has other means through which to gather member input and direction (teams, surveys, etc.)

3. What are the Board and Committee meeting schedules?

The organization should provide you with a list of board meeting dates for the coming year. Before joining a board, you need to be reasonably certain you can attend at least 80% of all meetings. You should know how many directors are required to achieve a quorum and how often meetings are cancelled as a result of director absence.

OSOT's Board of Directors generally meets 6 times per year for a full day meeting (typically on a Saturday). Expenses are paid for all Directors to attend meetings held in the Society's offices in Toronto, however, the bylaws allow for meetings to take place over teleconference or videoconference and this occurs occasionally. OSOT will be re-locating its office to 110 Shepard Ave East (Yonge St./Sheppard Ave) in May 2020. A quorum (the minimum number of voting participants required to constitute a meeting) of 5 members is required for any meeting. If this number cannot be achieved meeting dates are re-scheduled. The 2020 - 2021 Board Meeting schedule will be developed with input from incoming Directors. View the current year [Board meeting schedule](#) as an example.

In addition to regular Board meetings, each Board Director generally sits on two Board Standing Committees. These committees are the mechanisms through which the governance work of the Board is accomplished and ensures that Board meetings can be focused on dealing with strategic issues, decision-making, and proposal reviews. Roles and functions of Standing Committees (Executive, Finance, Human Resources, Nominations and Elections, Process Monitoring) are defined in [Articles 6 and 7 of the Bylaws](#). Standing Committees typically meet 4 - 6 times per year. Meetings are held by teleconference and are generally 1.5 hours in duration.

While attendance at meetings is a visible requirement of Board participation, preparation requirements for these meetings is less visible to an individual considering a Board position. Directors are required to read materials in advance of Board meetings in order to ensure that informed discussion and decision-making can take place. There is typically at least one evening's reading in advance of each Board meeting. In fact, as a Director one is always a representative of the Society and may be contacted, questioned or consulted as such at any time. OSOT Board Directors are encouraged to listen to and observe the professional world in which they work for insights of member perspective, issues impacting OT practice, emerging opportunities, etc. that can be shared to inform the Board. This activity requires little additional time, just thoughtful attention to the trustee and leadership role one assumes as a Director of the Society.

4. What is the organization's financial condition?

The organization should provide you with its most recent financial statements and current budget. It should also tell you if it has experienced or is anticipating any financial problems. You may want to think twice before

joining a board with a history of deficits -- or you may consider it a personal challenge to help them become financially stable. In either case, you need to know before you make a commitment to serve.

OSOT has been in a strong and stable financial position for many years. Continued membership growth and diversification of non-dues revenues has enabled budget growth to serve and represent members ever better. A review of [the Society's Audited Financial Statement at September 30, 2019](#) reflects the financial status of the organization at year end. As a result of fiscal resources in excess of policy directed reserves, the Board has approved a deficit budget for 2019 -20 which appropriately utilizes the members' equity to serve them. The strength of the Society's finances has allowed for increased investment in advocacy and professional promotion in recent years. The Board has established sound financial policy and procedure that promotes effective fiscal management and appropriate oversight. Management is responsible for the day to day operations and financial management of the organization. The Treasurer is well supported by staff in their work to Chair the Finance Committee and oversee financial security of the organization.

5. What are the organization's major fundraising and program goals for the next three years?

The organization should be able to provide a recent strategic plan and explain its planning process. If it has not done any recent planning or evaluation, you need to know how the organization knows its programs and services are serving some useful purpose.

OSOT is not a fundraising organization or registered charity so prospective directors will not be involved in fundraising activities. OSOT's program and activity goals are directed by the Society's mission and directed by the Board's Strategic Plan. Members of the Board support OSOT's ability to deliver its mission: to lead by providing vision, voice, visibility and value for Ontario occupational therapists.

In 2017, the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists engaged in a robust strategic planning effort engaging members and other stakeholders in an exploration of what is most needed to support the practice of occupational therapy in Ontario now and into the future. Four interconnected priorities were identified to support achievement of a goal to ensure that every Ontarian has access to comprehensive, high quality occupational therapy that supports and enables their life goals.



OSOT Strategic Plan 2018 - 2022

The Strategic Plan gives an indication of the priority foci of the organization and Board over the next five years. Each year OSOT staff propose an Operations Plan that identifies key initiatives to be undertaken to drive the Society closer to the achievement of strategic objectives. The Operations Plan is approved by the Board in early fall each year and reviewed in quarterly reports to assess progress and objective achievement.

View more details about OSOT's Strategic Plan [here](#).

6. What orientation and Board development activities are planned?

The organization should have a process for introducing new directors to the organization's history, bylaws, current issues, financial situation, plans and governance process. If their only orientation is to hand you a big binder and expect you to absorb it on your own, there is a strong likelihood this will not be a high-performing board of directors.

OSOT commits to a formal and ongoing Board orientation, which typically includes a 1 – 2 hour orientation session/discussion with the President and Executive Director, an online orientation program and Board online community and resource room and formal governance issue reviews at regular intervals for all Board Directors (financial management, advocacy agenda, risk management, etc.). As OSOT's Board of Directors is an 8 member team (9 in alternate years), there is easy opportunity for collegial relationship and support.

7. Exactly why are you being asked to serve on this Board?

The organization should be able to explain what skills and experience it hopes you will bring to the board as well as the time and financial commitment it expects from you. If they can't give you a reason other than someone recommended you, you had better expect most of the other directors will be asking themselves why they ever agreed to join the board.

OSOT typically seeks members who have an interest and commitment in the work of the Society and its leadership and are interested and able to view the big picture landscape of the profession in Ontario. Effective communicators and strong team players bring valuable and important skills. A keen interest in at least one of the strategic priorities of the Society is important to assure fit for both the Board and the director – you may have been nominated because of your expertise in a particular area. The Society encourages members to consider the diversity of the Board in relation to components of membership diversity – geographic location, practice focus, years of experience, gender, etc. and this may be a factor in your nomination. The diversity that directors bring to the Board enriches discussions and decision-making. Many boards recruit Directors that bring specific skills such as marketing, finance, legal to the board table. OSOT is reliant on its ability to secure external resource support (either volunteer or contracted) for such specific insights – it's not expected that occupational therapists will necessarily bring these insights.

For more information about OSOT and the Board of Directors....

- Visit www.osot.on.ca, the Society's website. Explore the site to learn about the Society, its structure, services and member resources.
- Contact [Sylvia Davidson](#), Chair OSOT Nominations and Elections Committee or [Christie Brenchley](#), Executive Director to address questions relating to board positions, OSOT, the nominations/elections process.
- Feel comfortable to contact a current board director to discuss their role, experience and advice to a potential nominee. See the [2019 – 2020 Board of Directors](#) listing. (Use the identified email address and your message will be forwarded to the appropriate Board Director.)
- Talk to colleagues...assess the reputation of OSOT.

*This resource is developed using questions identified in "Seven Questions to Ask Before You Join a Board of Directors" by Nathan Garber, [Nathan Garber & Associates](#) and reprinted from *Nonprofit Boards & Governance Review* Feb 28, 2002.*