

# PATHWAYS

**Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation**  
**Fédération des enseignantes-enseignants**  
**des écoles secondaires de l'Ontario**  
60 Mobile Drive, Toronto, Ontario M4A 2P3

**TEL 416.751.8300**  
**TEL 1.800.267.7867**  
**FAX 416.751.3394**  
[www.osstf.on.ca](http://www.osstf.on.ca)



# PREAMBLE

This document is a product of the OSSTF/FEESO Provincial Standing Committee for the Status of Women. It came out of our workshop, “Feminism and Unionism,” presented at our Regionals and at Summer Leadership in 2016. Women and women-identified members (henceforth referred to in this document as “women”) tell us, time and again, that they want resources that speak to their experiences in our Federation, and so this resource was created with a tripartite goal: identifying the potential pathways to leadership for women in their union, suggesting the skills, attributes, and responsibilities these pathways might require, and illuminating the resources that OSSTF/FEESO provides for members that can facilitate their pursuit of leadership. While we recognize that every woman’s experience will be different, depending on the nature of their job class, worksite, Bargaining Unit and District, we hope this document will empower more women to become informed about the ways they can get involved and make a difference in OSSTF/FEESO.

# PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP

## WORKSITE REPRESENTATIVE

- Either elected (eg. Branch President, Union Steward, Health and Safety Rep) or volunteer (eg. representative to local committee).
- Attend workplace/branch meetings as well as District/Bargaining Unit meetings.
- Some expenses such as mileage and childcare may be able to be claimed.

## LOCAL COMMITTEE MEMBER

- Some local committees may include: Human Rights Committee, Status of Women Committee, GSA, Political Action Committee, etc.
- Meetings may vary in frequency but usually occur at least a few times a year. Involvement in special events may require more time commitment.
- Some expenses such as mileage and childcare may be able to be claimed.
- Opportunities to attend Provincial Committee conferences and regional workshops may exist.

## PROVINCIAL STANDING COMMITTEES/COUNCILS

- Application process, requires support of a Provincial Councillor.
- Applications can be done online, usually due March 1.
- Selected by the Nominations Committee and approved by Provincial Council.
- Three-year term, or one-year co-option (co-option = selection by the committee) available.
- Meetings occur 4–6 times a year, usually in Toronto. Expenses for travel can be claimed.
- Many committees also hold regional workshops and conferences, attendance and participation is usually expected.

- Time release provided if required (depending on arrangements of Bargaining Unit).
- Committees/Councils open to applications:
  - Certification Council
  - Collective Bargaining Committee
  - Comité des services en langue française
  - Communications/Political Action Committee
  - Educational Services Committee
  - Finance Committee
  - Health and Safety/Workplace Safety Insurance Act Committee
  - Human Rights Committee
  - Parliamentary and Constitution Council
  - Status of Women Committee

## **ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY (AMPA) DELEGATE**

- Usually elected or selected by Bargaining Units, in November-December (varies by District and Bargaining Units).
- Attend pre-AMPA meetings (nature vary by Bargaining Unit/District) as well as four days of AMPA (Friday-Monday at the start of the conventional March Break).
- All travel and accommodation expenses covered. Allowances or laid-on meals provided. Childcare available. Time release provided if required (depending on arrangements of Bargaining Unit).

## **PROVINCIAL COUNCILLOR**

- The Bargaining Unit President is automatically a Provincial Councillor. Additional Provincial Councillors are allotted based on the FTE of each unit. These are elected following the procedures in the Bargaining Unit constitution.
- Attend monthly meetings, usually Thursday/Friday in Toronto.
- All travel and accommodation expenses covered. Allowances or laid-on meals provided. Childcare can also be expensed. Time release provided if required (depending on arrangements of Bargaining Unit).

## **BARGAINING UNIT EXECUTIVE**

- Elected following the procedures in the Bargaining Unit constitution.
- Time release may be provided (amount of release dependent on size of Bargaining Unit and its setup).
- Duties may include: attending meetings, answering member questions, filing grievances, representing members in meetings, liaising with other affiliates, involvement in collective bargaining, etc.
- May serve summer hours beyond the conventional school year.
- Usually serve as AMPA Delegates and possibly as Provincial Councillors.

## **PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE**

- Elected following the procedures in the constitution, bi-annually at AMPA.
- Time release provided, along with housing, vehicle and other allowances.
- Duties are vast and varied, but may include: attending meetings, liaising with other affiliates, serving as representatives on outside boards, councils and committees, involvement in collective bargaining, setting direction and priorities for the Federation, etc.
- Often work outside the work day and serve summer hours beyond the conventional school year.

# HOW TO KNOW WHICH PATH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

There is obviously a breadth of skills and attributes required to be a good leader in our Federation. Below, we suggest several pathways potential leaders can take, given a few hypothetical skill sets or interests.

I'm interested in a special area of work such as women's issues or human rights. I am dedicated to a cause and will devote extra time to do work on it. I have community connections or I like planning events for this cause.

Local Committee member

↓  
Attending Provincial Committee conferences/  
regional workshops

↓  
Provincial Committee member

I'm interested in representing my fellow members by speaking up for their interests. I don't mind attending meetings. I like knowing how decisions get made and to offer my voice on those decisions. I am interested in things like rules of order and bylaws and constitutions.

Workplace Representative  
↓  
AMPA Representative  
↓  
Provincial Councillor

I'm interested in full-time service to the union. I have some background in the Federation and want to go to the next step. I have a variety of skills such as listening, public speaking, and working with others. I am interested in the connections between our union and the labour movement in general.

Branch Executive  
↓  
Bargaining Unit/  
District Executive  
↓  
Provincial Executive

# STEPS TO TAKE TO START YOUR PATH

- Attend a meeting! Most local committees welcome new members.
- Become familiar with Robert's Rules, or the rules of order used in your Bargaining Unit/District.
- Become familiar with your local constitution if your interest is local. Learn how to move motions, become familiar with the procedures for elections in your Bargaining Unit/District, etc.
- Talk to local leaders and people in OSSTF/FEESO who share your interests. If there are none in your school or Bargaining Unit or District, email the Chair of the Provincial Committee and ask with whom you can get in touch.
- Attend conferences and regional workshops organized by Provincial Committees.
- Figure out how to access funding for expenses such as driving and childcare costs.
- Look at the funding available to Districts and see if any can be of use to you.

# SUPPORTS FROM OSSTF/FEESO ON YOUR PATH

There are a number of ways the Federation supports people pursuing leadership. The following are some of the accounts that members can access that might be of assistance, either to individuals or to committees or groups wishing to welcome more members via events, etc. Please note that each Bargaining Unit has procedure to follow when applying for these funds, which can be determined by speaking with your Bargaining Unit/District Treasurer. Further information about these accounts can be found in the OSSTF/FEESO Financial Handbook.

## **ACCOUNT #2010**

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND UNION TRAINING**

This account provides funds to assist Districts and Bargaining Units to offer

1. Professional development/training programs
2. Training programs for Workplace Representatives
3. Workshops for new members.

## **ACCOUNT #2045**

### **INVOLVING THE NOT YET ENGAGED**

This account will provide funding for local membership activities other than training sessions (ie: social events, Friday night get together, etc.).

## **ACCOUNT #2047**

### **COMMUNITY OUTREACH**

This account will provide funding for local participation in activities or events that raise the profile of OSSTF/FEESO as a community leader.

## **ACCOUNT #2050**

### **POLITICAL ACTION SPECIAL DISTRICT PROGRAMS**

This account provides additional assistance to Districts for special political action programs and activities.

## **ACCOUNT #2054**

### **LABOUR COLLEGE FUNDING**

This account (established at AMPA 2011) will provide

financial support for up to three members who are approved by their Bargaining Unit or District Executive and by the Provincial Executive to attend the Canadian Labour Congress Labour College of Canada.

### **ACCOUNT #2071**

#### **LOCAL CLIMATE CHANGE INITIATIVES**

This account was established at AMPA 2016 to support District and/or Bargaining Unit participation in local climate change groups and/or to organize climate change educational/political action events.

### **ACCOUNT #2085**

#### **ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIAL DISTRICT PROGRAMS**

This account (established at AMPA 2007) provides assistance to local districts and bargaining units for special Human Rights Projects, programs or activities, designed to strengthen human rights work at the local level.

### **ACCOUNT #2090**

#### **MEMBER ACCESSIBILITY FUNDING**

This account was established at AMPA 2005 (see bylaws 16.1.1.3.11 and 16.1.1.3.12). Funding from this account supports:

1. Note taking and/or sign language interpreter services for deaf and hard-of-hearing members who participate in OSSTF/FEESO activities at the Bargaining Unit or District level
2. Braille transcription for blind members who participate in OSSTF/FEESO activities at the Bargaining Unit or District level
3. Devices to assist bargaining unit leaders to communicate with blind, deaf and/or hard-of-hearing members

### **ACCOUNT #4140**

#### **PROVINCIAL POLITICAL CONVENTIONS**

Account 4140 provides funding to assist members who are active in provincial political parties to meet elected members, party officials and delegates, and to explain OSSTF/FEESO issues and concerns.

# CASE STUDIES FROM WOMEN LEADERS ABOUT THEIR OWN PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP

- 1. What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?**
- 2. What was the first formal involvement you had (eg. committee or position)?**
- 3. What were the steps you took to becoming more involved, and reaching the position(s) you have now?**
- 4. How did others help or support you along the way?**
- 5. What advice you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in the Federation?**

Committee/Work group path: Jenny Chen  
Local leadership to PE: Karen Littlewood  
Leadership to Staff: Tracey Marshall

## **PATHWAYS CASE STUDY: JENNY CHEN, DISTRICT 12 —TORONTO TEACHERS BARGAINING UNIT**

### **What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?**

Truthfully, I never really meant to. As a beginning teacher—maybe in my year fifth or sixth year of teaching—I decided I wanted to know more about the staffing process (i.e. declaration of surplus). Early in my teaching career, OSSTF/FEESO was only ever on the periphery of my work life. And while I liked the idea of being in a union, I do not remember noticing that OSSTF/FEESO was part of my survival as a new teacher. Much like many other newer teachers, I remember that the school and board wide staffing process was a frustrating process to go through as a newer member as I felt like I didn't know anything about a process I had no control over. Rather than complain about this, I decided I could run for a position on the in-school Staffing Committee. In making up for a lack of experience, I ran for an elected position on the Staffing Committee on what I knew I had—the ability to actively seek out the appropriate background information, consider divergent ideas, and respect multiple perspectives.

**What was the first formal involvement you had (eg. committee or position)?**

Locally—as per the answer to the previous question, I was elected to be a representative on the in-school Staffing Committee.

Provincially—Based on my interest and work as a teacher in the areas of equity and human rights, I had applied and was “co-opted” to the provincial Human Rights Committee (HRC) on a one year term. For our provincial standing committees, members can apply for a one year co-option appointment (i.e. think of it as a “try on”) or term appointments (which can range from three to five year terms, depending on the committee). I found the Human Rights Committee to be a really great committee to start with as it fit my interest and work in equity and human rights. It is also one of our smaller committees which meant that I quickly learned about the work of the committee and got to know the members from different parts of the province—representing a variety of job classes—very well and right away.

**What were the steps you took to becoming more involved, and reaching the position(s) you have now?**

I did not take any formal steps in the way I continued to stay involved within Federation. I am inclined to describe it as a haphazard approach since my involvement has always been guided by how much I was enjoying what I was involved with and more importantly, if I felt I was useful in the role I had taken on.

Locally—after serving on the in-school Staffing Committee for five years, I ran for the position of Branch President on the branch executive. The concept of being the union representative for frontline members was appealing because I saw the direct impact our union has when we have reps that are committed to the role. One of the most remarkable aspects of being a Branch President is realizing how much of a leap of faith the members are taking when they approach you for assistance when it comes to many complex issues that they are dealing with—whether they are professional and/or personal in nature. The responsibility attached to “duty of fair representation” profoundly changed my perspective in what it means to be in a union.

Provincially—After serving on the provincial Human Rights Committee for three one year co-options, I had the opportunity to run for either Vice Chair or Chair of HRC but made the conscious decision to not take that on. In retrospect, as much as I would

have grown as a Federation member in a leadership role then, I felt I had to learn more about the culture of the organization; more than that, I felt I had to assess and understand how I fit into my union as a woman who is also a racialized person. These complex questions about equitable practices within OSSTF/FEESO began to form for me in 2010 as I was in the midst of my involvement with the Educational Services department helping to write the OSSTF/FEESO workshop on equity and inclusion (EQUIP: Equity in Practice). From having enjoyed working on the writing team for EQUIP, I had continued my volunteer work with the Educational Services department being trained to present other workshops. Then in the fall of 2011, I had applied to and was appointed to the provincial Equity Advisory Work Group. My involvement with this Work Group is probably a perfect example of being at the right place at the right time. Equity work within Federation has had a long journey to where it is today. The Equity Advisory Work Group is unique as it is our organization holding ourselves accountable to those who have been historically marginalized in society and in our organization. The creation of the Work Group happened as a result of a close vote at AMPA 2011. After six years serving on this Work Group, we had opportunities to advise the Provincial Executive on a more fulsome equity strategy that moves away from a piecemeal plan to a thoughtful and measured approach of moving the OSSTF/FEESO Equity Statement from theory to practice.

### **How did others help or support you along the way?**

Mentoring. The health of our union is dependent upon leaders to volunteer their time to mentor newer members. In each stage of involvement within OSSTF/FEESO, I had a number of people who reached out to help me navigate the work we were doing together. Whenever I had questions, I knew there were key people in my district/bargaining unit or around the province who I can connect with. And, as much as I consciously deferred opportunities to get more involved with Federation activities due to life events that I was dealing with, I had support from the many folks who were quickly becoming my “OSSTF/FEESO family”. Now, in my various roles, I am mindful of lending that same lens and support to members who are new (or newer to pursuing leadership in the Federation). I am always looking to let members know how they can apply to be an OSSTF/FEESO PD workshop presenter, how they can apply to provincial standing committee, how they can join a local committee, or the benefits of becoming a branch representative. When experienced

members took the time to mentor me, it gave me the confidence to volunteer my time with my union. It made me feel accepted and welcomed.

### **What advice you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in the Federation?**

The union needs you. From an OSSTF/FEESO membership survey that was done in 2015, members from Equity Seeking Groups (the majority are women members) make up 70% of those who were surveyed. Here are a few “tips” that I have learned so far in my journey:

Ask questions—As with any organization, there is a lot to learn about the working norms. Over the years, I have realized how much work and time it takes to develop a comprehensive understanding of the OSSTF/FEESO culture, structure, policies and procedures. The process of participation is still largely dependent upon members mentoring members in an accidental way. I am excited that the future of mentorship for leadership within OSSTF will be formalized through an Equity Mentorship Pilot Program that was passed by AMPA 2017. Aside from the formal mentorship program, I am also hopeful that members new to provincial standing committees will have more of a formal introduction to the working norms when they are first appointed to the committee. In my experience, I have noticed the strides OSSTF/FEESO is making in challenging ourselves to move away from a deficit model of thinking when it comes to member engagement. We are taking steps to formalized working norms so that it isn't up to individual members to know the “right” questions to ask. I hope women members who want to pursue leadership roles hold our organization accountable to make leadership opportunities accessible to all members. This is what women activists within OSSTF/FEESO have done in the past and continue to do. It is what we must do to plan for the future.

Find allies—In however way you wish to volunteer your time with OSSTF/FEESO, there are many members who are more than willing to work with you. Member engagement is going to look differently throughout your time as an OSSTF/FEESO member. The level of participation can change depending on your interest in relations to the organization's priorities, your own life events, and/or lots of varying factors that can determine your perception of how welcome you feel in the Federation. Ultimately, it is helpful to seek allies who have the same interest as you so that you can work together in achieving your common goals.

Expect pushback—Do not be afraid of pushback or deterrence in your pursue of leadership roles within the Federation. One of the unique features of OSSTF/FEESO is that we are a union that represents the full education team. As a result of the wide range of job classes that make up who we are as a provincial organization, it should be expected that you will see a difference in perspective, interests, and priorities.

“Lean in”—Members of equity seeking groups do make up the majority of those were surveyed in the Member Engagement survey that Federation undertook in. Yet, what we also know is that these same members aren’t represented in leadership roles within Federation. Simply said, the face of our Federation does not match the membership. Members of equity seeking groups—and in particular those with intersectional identities—are needed in leadership roles within Federation. Our own OSSTF/FEESO Equity Statement tasks the organization to address systemic barriers so that all members can see themselves reflected in our policies, practices, and priorities. It is up to us to “lean in” and make sure we are actively creating a culture and environment for future leaders to move our organization forward. As we approach OSSTF/FEESO’s centennial, women members who want to pursue leadership positions cannot be restricted by the same barriers of the past.

## **PATHWAYS CASE STUDY: KAREN LITTLEWOOD**

### **What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?**

I had been quite involved on the executive when I was an ETFO member and had attended 7 or so AGMs so when I switched to OSSTF/FEESO, I knew I would still want to be involved. I had also worked with the local labour council and had been on the Political Action Committee (which was a joint OSSTF/FEESO/ETFO venture at that time) so already knew some of those in leadership positions at OSSTF/FEESO in our District. I got my contract for second semester and desperately wanted to go to AMPA that first year but of course had missed the nomination process as it happens locally in November. I have made it a point to attend every year since though.

**What was the first formal involvement you had (eg. committee or position)?**

My first role was as the recording secretary for the local ETFO executive. My first formal involvement in OSSTF/FEESO was on the Political Action Committee but the most pivotal involvement was my appointment to Provincial CPAC. I had only been an OSSTF/FEESO member for a couple of years when I was encouraged to apply by our then President. Beth (also female) made a point of encouraging people to be involved and to find roles or committees that would suit them. I really had no idea at all what these provincial committees were all about but I am 100% sure that if I hadn't been encouraged to apply for CPAC (and been successful) that I would not be sitting where I am today (District 17 TBU President).

**What were the steps you took to becoming more involved, and reaching the position(s) you have now?**

I listened to others who encouraged me and asked me to become involved. Both in ETFO and OSSTF/FEESO, people asked me (as they ask other activists) to be a part of various committees or events. The more involved I became, they more aware I was and the better able I was to perform those tasks. My initial reaction any time anyone suggested me becoming more involved or moving up or taking on a new role was to say I wasn't ready for that. People kept asking though and that increased my confidence in myself. I also felt though that I had been given such wonderful opportunities that it was incumbent on me to give back and to also pay it forward.

**How did others help or support you along the way?**

It's all about the conversations and the relationships. You build a bond with people, you trust them, they have confidence in you, they trust you, you have similar goals, you are working for a common good and you collaborate. It's a sense of accomplishment, a job well done and making a difference that fuels us, in my opinion. None of this happens in isolation. I think about where I am headed but I am always looking around for those who can also step up and continue to give and who will be there tomorrow. Nobody moves into a leadership role overnight. It's a very gradual process but there are so many opportunities and they are so satisfying that it's hard to resist. It's quite addictive actually and we like to draw others who are like minded in.

### **What advice you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in the Federation?**

I started slow and did what I could. There were roles I would have like to have had earlier on in my union involvement but my family took priority. I was still involved but couldn't do it all. As my kids grew, it became easier to do more but that's only possible with a very strong support system. My husband is the one who is home in the evenings while I am at meetings. I try to concentrate my efforts into the 'off' periods though and spend real quality time together. Family still comes first and while we can say we will pay for dependent care, that doesn't always make things any easier. We have to appreciate it when people contribute at the level they are able. We need to recognize that we all need different levels of support. We can break things down into tasks that people can do from wherever or with the resources and time they have. We have to recognize that some individuals may have the skills that would benefit our organization but that they may not have the 20 page resume because they have been doing other things. We need to help each other out where we can, find creative solutions, be grateful for any level of contribution and remember to support each other and express gratitude. Being thanked and appreciated is the fuel that keeps us going. Never stop asking people to be involved but please don't make them feel guilty when they have to decline. Finally I'd say expect the unexpected and Never Say Never. We meet people who fuel our passions or introduce us to new things or who open doors for us. As women, we may not be able to do it all right away, due to numerous barriers but being open and flexible and taking risks can lead us down many different paths. Bring someone along with you too!

### **PATHWAYS CASE STUDY: TRACEY MARSHALL**

#### **What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?**

The Bargaining Unit that I worked in was unraveling just prior to amalgamation and there was an opportunity to run for election as the grievance officer. I knew that the bargaining unit needed help and I had some spare time to give. I had no idea of the time commitment, and the bargaining unit, being relatively new to OSSTF/FEESO, didn't send me for any training. We also had a new president at that time and we worked together to build a

more cohesive unit and learned our respective jobs together. Our bargaining unit was very small and I felt that we needed to be strong and receive more respect from our school board. I had no idea where that first 'jump' would lead!

**What was the first formal involvement you had (eg. committee or position)?**

The first involvement I had was in an executive position as grievance officer. I really didn't know what I was doing at first, but I learned on the job. Thinking back to that time, I made so many mistakes—but that was okay. I was so tough and aggressive. I learned over the years that in order to get some movement in our favour on tough issues, I didn't need to be so harsh. I learned that with research and conviction, I could make positive change on issues that were important to my members.

**What were the steps you took to becoming more involved, and reaching the position(s) you have now?**

I became the vice president/grievance officer almost immediately due to the lack of women wanting to become engaged. The bargaining unit was very small, about 120 people. I was motivated by wanting to help our mostly female profession grow and be greater respected by our school board. I attended a few non-union grievance and mediation courses. We then became amalgamated with another district and we grew to over 200 members. The president that I started with left the position to pursue an organizing position and I supported the new president. I took a hiatus (at that time I had to give up my union position) to have children. When the new president decided that the job was not her cup of tea, a few members approached me and asked if I would run for president. I was on maternity leave at the time and the job had no time release. There were approximately 260 members. I negotiated with them to move motions to provide time release and a home office. Then I became president. Each year, as my bargaining unit grew, the role grew too and I became more deeply immersed in my union.

**How did others help or support you along the way?**

I think almost right away after I became president, our field secretary who supported me, became a mentor to me. She encouraged me to attend ESS Sector and run for vice chair. She encouraged me to become a district provincial councillor and attend Canadian Labour Congress convention as a delegate. It was through sector

that I met many other support staff presidents who were strong and supportive women. At the time, they were all women and we truly supported each other and held each other up. We trained together and attended as many events as we could. I had a very young family and at first, my family status was a definite barrier for participation for me. I worked hard with many other women to change the union from within and offer things like childcare, single rooms so I could bring my children to events and to ensure that my meetings were planned around my family and not the other way around.

**What advice you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in the Federation?**

Find a supportive female ally. I think that I may not have chosen to pursue other leadership opportunities if I didn't have the support of someone who had already taken the pathway. I also think that women need to know that, in our union, they aren't alone. There are many supportive, encouraging and strong women who they can lean on. It's very important to be brave and try to move outside your comfort zone. One thing I know for sure is that our union is always willing to explore new avenues for member engagement. They are always open to proposals and even if your proposal doesn't get accepted the first time, don't give up. Involvement can be whatever you want it to be and you can still have a family and a life and support your union.

