

Proposal to Create OTAO Task Force

Background

AOTA (May 31, 2020) issued a *Statement on Justice and Systemic Racism*, acknowledging and condemning “the multifaceted aspects of systemic racism and oppression”. OTAO (June 6, 2020) issued a statement confirming its stance as one “consistent with that of AOTA” and in “solidarity with all people who are impacted by racial disparity, oppression and bigotry.” An informal coalition of Oregon OT/OTA practitioners/students sent OTAO a letter, stating that silence is no longer acceptable regarding the recent injustices and centuries of trauma experienced by the Black community and expressing their solidarity with Black classmates, colleagues, and community. They asked that OTAO leadership stand by the association’s mission to advocate for and educate OTAO members, and to address the ongoing injustices towards people of color and promote equity and inclusion as a human right.

During an OTAO Board meeting (June 16, 2020), the Board agreed to create a task force to develop a plan for the association to address racial injustice. The OTAO Bylaws (Article 5, Section 6.4, and Article 7.4) specify that:

- a) the Board can create task forces to accomplish a definitive objective;
- b) a task force must have guidelines, approved by the Board, that specify functions and responsibilities;
- c) the task force Chairperson reports to the President as a non-voting Board member.

The following is submitted to the Board for discussion, amendment, and approval, to:

Create a diversity, equity, & inclusion task force whose immediate focus is racial injustice.

Purpose of task force

According to [AOTA \(2020\)](#), *We must address the fundamental issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion beyond conceptual factors*. While important for AOTA and OTAO to condemn racial injustice, action is needed by OTAO to commit to and enact racial justice. In the words of [Justice Based Occupational Therapy \(June, 2020\)](#): *We are not fully animating our professional ethics if we do not address how racism affects our practice sites, interactions, selections of interventions, and therapy outcomes*. This is the time to be better humans, better OT practitioners, to support the Black community and people of color, and directly address the consequences of centuries of systemic and structural racism.

While critical for OTAO to take immediate action, this proposal is not the solution. Rather, this proposal provides a structured and intentional framework for an equity, diversity & inclusion task force to follow as it develops and submits to the Board a final plan of action for OTAO to address racial injustice.

The task force should be confirmed within two weeks of approval of this proposal, and:

- be coordinated by a chairperson or co-chairpersons appointed by the Board.
- consist of 6-12 members from diverse backgrounds.
- identify meeting times and a timeframe to complete its work.
- as needed, within 10 days, request meetings with OTAO Board or Executive Committee.
- report progress monthly to the Executive Committee.
- submit progress reports during regularly scheduled Board meetings.
- ensure transparency of work and progress.
- submit a final action plan to the President within 3 months.

We acknowledge that OTAO is a volunteer organization – and only 10% of Oregon OT practitioners are members. OTAO has limited resources – personnel and financial. This proposal asks that Board members do extra work and that OTAO members step forward to volunteer their time and/or commit to being an agent of change for racial justice. We hope a bold and authentic commitment by the association will inspire OT practitioners to join OTAO.

Additional information is needed – this following proposal is not set in stone. As the task force continues to engage with its members and the broader OT community, and identifies resources/partnerships to address racial injustice, modifications should occur, facilitated by the task force chairperson(s) under the guidance of the Board. Moreover, this task force should be the first step for the Board and the association to broaden its work to comprehensively promote equity, diversity & inclusion for the Black community, people of color, indigenous peoples, and people from marginalized groups. While racial injustice is the initial focus of this task force, occupational justice for all persons should become a primary focus for OTAO.

The following asks OTAO to examine its own organizational practices to ensure that social justice becomes an integral and sustainable component of how the association operates. This proposal asks that OTAO's mission and values be enacted to focus specifically on enacting social justice. One anticipated outcome of this task force is the establishment of a permanent equity, diversity & inclusion 'committee' (or comparable position) within the association.

The proposal

Any proposal must be in congruence and guided by the association's *Mission, Values and Purpose* (OTAO Bylaws, Article 3).

The mission of OTAO is to support our members and strengthen the occupational therapy profession through **advocacy, education, and networking**.

The association's values:

- OTAO values its members.
- We value creating a strong community for practitioners to come together and grow.
- We value providing education to support competent practitioners.
- We value our members' ability to effect change in the occupational therapy community.

With these in mind, the aspirational, long-term outcome guiding this task force is:

OTAO builds a community of practice – “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger-Traynor, 2015) – that engages in action steps to address systemic racism, promote social/occupational justice, and uphold human rights.

This proposed task force is an initial step to help OTAO answer the question:

How could OTAO address systemic racism and racial injustice while fulfilling its mission to strengthen the OT profession and support its members?

The following outlines an intentional focus for the task force to comprehensively identify how OTAO might promote racial justice across four areas of its 'operations':

- a) education
- b) networking
- c) advocacy
- d) association structure/process

Education

(OTAO Bylaws, Article 3 Purpose)

B. Promoting excellence in the practice of occupational therapy;

D. Facilitating professional development resulting in competent, ethical, and quality occupational therapy practice, education, and research.

Proposed long-term, aspirational goal to fulfill above purpose:

Provide guidance, opportunities, resources, and experiences to OTAO members and OT practitioners that educate and empower practitioners to provide equitable and just services that address systemic and structural racism at all levels of OT practice.

As a first step toward this goal, with Board oversight, the task force will:

- Propose a formal commitment to ensure CE opportunities and speakers reflect diverse topics/backgrounds.
- Develop guidelines to provide educational opportunities for personal/professional development with the following in mind:

Promote an understanding of:

- racial injustice, e.g., systemic/structural racism, implicit bias, white privilege/supremacy
- anti-racism and the work involved
- lived experience of Black people and people of color
- historical roots of racism, particularly in Oregon

Provide opportunity for self-reflection to:

- understand personal position within a society in which racial injustice exists
- examine personal stance/perspective to address racial justice

Develop practice skills to:

- work intentionally with Black people and people of color who experience the daily effects of systematic racism, particularly on their mental, physical & spiritual health
- respond to incidents of bias/racism that occur during client/practitioner interactions

Develop professional skills to:

- collaborate with health/human service colleagues to enact anti-racism work
- effectively address macro- to micro-aggressions within place of employment
- manage conversations/communication with staff regarding race and racial injustice

Develop advocacy skills to:

- effectively promote need for racial justice locally and nationally
- enable communities of color to have their voices heard
- effectively be an ally for equality, racial justice, and human rights

Networking

(OTAO Bylaws, Article 3 Purpose)

C. Fostering collaboration between the Association, consumer, other agencies, organizations, and related associations to increase occupational therapy's influence in health promotion within health care and human service systems;

E. Providing members with opportunities for professional networking;

Proposed long-term, aspirational goal to fulfill purpose:

Build relationships with groups/organizations within and outside the OT profession that work to promote racial equality/equity and seek to achieve social/occupational justice.

As a first step toward this goal, with Board oversight, the task force will:

- Identify diverse groups/organizations that focus on social/occupational justice for liaison/partnership with OTAO.
- Identify mechanism within OTAO to promote membership in advocacy groups, e.g., *AOTA Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion (MDI) Network*
- Identify partnerships with other groups/organizations doing similar work as providers of health and human service, e.g. speech/language pathology, psychology, social work

advocacy

(OTAO Bylaws, Article 3 Purpose)

A. Supporting its membership by providing direction and vision for the profession;

Proposed long-term, aspirational goal to fulfill purpose:

Model how an OT professional organization can advocate for and take action that promotes diversity, equity & inclusion for OT practitioners, clients, and the community.

As a first step toward this goal, with Board oversight, the task force will:

- Propose creation of networking opportunities to support OT practitioners/colleagues of color who experience effects of systemic and structural racism.
- Identify how OTAO can act to redress the deep roots of systemic racism that lead to health disparities among the Black community and people of color.
- Explore partnership with Oregon OT Licensing Board to address CE requirements that focuses on equity, diversity & inclusion and anti-racist work.

organization

F. Operating an efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible organization that is responsive to its members' needs.

Proposed long-term, aspirational goal to fulfill purpose:

Ensure that equity, diversity & inclusion is embedded throughout the association's mission, vision, values, structure, process, communications, and actions.

As a first step toward this goal, with Board oversight, the task force will:

- Develop an action plan for OTA0 that reflects an authentic commitment to equity, diversity & inclusion and specifically addresses racial justice.
- Propose plan to audit effectiveness of action plan to promote racial justice.
- Recommend re-structuring of OTA0 policies/procedures to specifically ensure equity, diversity & inclusion are considered explicitly during decisions, actions, and governance.
- Recommend a plan to ensure that each Board member understands and commits to their responsibility as a steward of OTA0 to promote and enact racial justice.

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OTA0 Members

Note: This proposal was developed in consultation with Liz Miller, OTR/L, OTA0 President.