

STATUS OF WOMEN



PATHWAYS

to Leadership for Women
in OSSTF/FEESO:
A Resource Document

PREAMBLE

Members who identify as women, some or all of the time, (henceforth referred to in this document as “women”) tell us, time and again, they want resources that speak to their experiences in our Federation. 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 illuminate 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, work site, 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.

Revised Spring 2025

Pathways to Leadership— Which path will you choose?

WORKSITE REPRESENTATIVE

- Either elected (e.g. Branch President, Branch Representative, Health and Safety Rep) or volunteer (e.g. representative to a 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, Gay Straight Alliance, 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 open in January and can be done online, usually due by March 1st.
- Selected by the Nominations Committee (Provincial) 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 are expected.
- Time release provided if required (depending on arrangements of the Bargaining Unit). Committees/Councils open to applications:
- Addressing Anti-Black Racism/Racism Committee
- 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
- 2SLGBIQI+ Committee

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY (AMPA) REPRESENTATIVE

- Usually elected or selected by Bargaining Units, in November-December (varies by district and bargaining units).
- Attend pre-AMPA meetings (nature varies 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 for meals or laid-on meals provided. Childcare available, or able to be expensed. Time release provided if required (depending on arrangements of the Bargaining Unit).

PROVINCIAL COUNCILLOR

- The Bargaining Unit President is automatically a Provincial Councillor. Additional Provincial Councillors are allotted based on the full-time equivalent of each unit. These are allotted 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 the 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 representatives and possibly as Provincial Councillors.

PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE

- Elected following the procedures in the OSSTF/FEESO Provincial 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 workday and serve summer hours beyond the conventional school year.

How to know which path is right for you?

There is 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 am 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 am interested in representing my fellow Members by speaking up for their interests. I do not 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, bylaws, and constitutions.

Workplace Representative



AMPA Representative



Provincial Councillor

I am 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 the OSSTF/FEESO standing rules

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. There is a provincial Staff Liaison to every committee who would help with any questions you may have. You can also speak to the Provincial Executive assigned to your Bargaining Unit. They will also be a wealth of information and support.

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/District has a procedure to follow when applying for these funds, which can be determined by speaking with your BU/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 #2015

UNION/HEALTH AND SAFETY TRAINING PROGRAMS

This account provides funds to assist individual members to attend union training programs run by organizations such as the Canadian Labour Congress and the Ontario Federation of Labour.

ACCOUNT #2047

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND ORGANIZING

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

ACCOUNT #2045*INVOLVING THE NOT YET ENGAGED*

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

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 #2065*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 #2890*ANTI RACISM AND EQUITY TRAINING FOR MEMBERS*

This account covers costs of Members who wish to increase their anti-Racism and/or Equity expertise through courses or workshops in addition to those offered by OSSTF/FEESO.

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

Case studies from women leaders about their own pathways to leadership

1. What was your first formal involvement in OSSTF/FEESO? (committee or position)
2. What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?
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. How did you navigate identity-based barriers you encountered?

Committee/Work group path: Jenny Chen

Local leadership to PC: Karen Littlewood

Leadership to Staff: Tracey Marshall

Pathways Case Study:

Karen Littlewood

1. WHAT WAS THE FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT YOU HAD (E.G. 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 the Provincial Communications and Political Action Committee (CPAC). I had only been an OSSTF/FEESO member for a couple of years when I was encouraged to apply by our then President. Our President, (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 Teachers' Bargaining Unit President).

2. 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 (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario) member and had attended 7 or so Annual General Meetings, 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 the 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.

3. 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, the 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 was not 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.

4. HOW DID OTHERS HELP OR SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY?

It is 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 was 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 is quite addictive actually and we like to draw in others who are like minded.

5. WHAT ADVICE DO 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 could not do it all. As my kids grew, it became easier to do more but that's only possible with a 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, it doesn't always make things any easier. We must appreciate it when people contribute

at the level they are able. We need to recognize that we all need various 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 must 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 do not make them feel guilty when they have to decline.

Finally, I would 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!

Karen Littlewood Update: Karen became the provincial President of OSSTF/FEESO from 2021-2025.

Pathways Case Study:

Tracey Marshall

1. WHAT WAS THE FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT YOU HAD (E.G. COMMITTEE OR POSITION)?

The first involvement I had was in an Executive position as Grievance Officer. I did not know what I was doing at first, but I learned on the job, and with help from the secretariat staff at Provincial Office of OSSTF/FEESO. Thinking back to that time, I made so many mistakes—but that was okay. I was tough and aggressive. I learned over the years that to get some movement in our favour on tough issues, I didn't need to be harsh and needed to be more collaborative. I learned that with research and conviction, I could make positive change on issues that were important to my members.

2. WHAT FIRST MADE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IN OSSTF/FEESO?

The Bargaining Unit that I worked in was unravelling 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, even though I had young children. I had no idea of the time commitment, and the Bargaining Unit, being 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 at that time, and we needed to be strong and receive more respect from our school board. I had no idea where that first 'jump' would lead!

3. WHAT WERE THE STEPS YOU TOOK TO BECOMING MORE INVOLVED AND REACHING THE POSITION(S) YOU HAVE NOW?

I became the Vice President almost immediately due to the lack of women wanting to become engaged. The Bargaining Unit

was small, about 120 people. I was motivated by wanting to help our mostly female profession grow and be more respected by our school board. I attended a few non-union grievance and mediation courses. We then became amalgamated with another school board 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 leave to have children and at the time, had to give up my union position because there were no allowances for Executive members to take leave. 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 birth-related leave at the time and the job had no time release. I negotiated with the members 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. I was President for 17 years.

4. HOW DID OTHERS HELP OR SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY?

I think right after I became President, our field secretary who supported me, became a mentor to me. She encouraged me to attend ESS Sector, now Sector Caucus, and run for Vice Chairperson. She encouraged me to become a District Provincial Councillor and attend Canadian Labour Congress convention as a delegate. It was through Sector Caucus that I met many other education worker Presidents who were strong and supportive women. We truly supported each other and held each other up. We trained together and attended as many events as we could. I had an incredibly 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 to offer things like childcare, single rooms so members could bring my children to events, and I ensured that my meetings were planned around my family and not the other way around.

5. WHAT ADVICE DO 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 did not have the

support of someone who had already taken the pathway. Women need to know that, in our union, they are not alone. There are many supportive, encouraging, and strong women who they can lean on. It is especially important to be brave and try to move outside your comfort zone. If you don't know how to do something, there is always training to attend and support to help you learn and grow. 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 does not get accepted the first time, do not give up. Involvement can be whatever you want it to be, and you can still have a family and a life, grow in your leadership, and support your union.

Tracey Marshall Update: Tracey was hired on as staff at Provincial Office in 2016.

Pathways Case Study:

Jenny Chen

1. WHAT FIRST MADE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IN OSSTF/FEESO?

Truthfully, I never really meant to. As a beginning teacher—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 board-wide staffing process was a frustrating process to go through as a newer member as I felt like I did not 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.

2. WHAT WAS THE FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT YOU HAD (E.G. 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 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 various parts of the province—representing a variety of job classes—very well and right away.

3. 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 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 representatives 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 because 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.

4. 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 with whom I can connect. 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 the 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.

5. 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/FEESO 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 collaborate 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 pursuit 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. Yet, what we also know is that these same members are not represented in leadership roles within Federation. Simply said, the face of our Federation does not match the membership. Members of equity seeking groups—and particularly 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.

Jenny Chen Update: Jenny became provincial Director of the Education Services Department at Provincial Office in Toronto in 2021.

Case studies from women leaders about their own pathways to leadership

1. What was your first formal involvement in OSSTF/FEESO? (committee or position)
2. What first made you want to get involved in leadership in OSSTF/FEESO?
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. How did you navigate identity-based barriers you encountered?
6. Describe any changes you have seen in the federation during your time in leadership.
7. What advice do you have for women members who want to pursue leadership in the Federation?

A. Marcelle Desmornes: President, University of Ottawa—District 35

B. Solange Scott: President of Professional Student Support Personnel—District 12

C. Malini Leahy—Vice-President, Provincial Executive

Pathways Case Study:

Marcelle Desmornes

1. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT IN OSSTF/FEESO?

My first formal involvement was that I became Grievance Officer and Chief Negotiator in my local (University of Ottawa, PSUO-SSUO/District 35) and member of the Comité des services en langue française.

2. WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IN OSSTF/FEESO?

As a woman from a visible minority background, my desire to get involved in a leadership position within a union stems first and foremost, from my desire to make voices heard that all too often remain on the margins. I have faced challenges related to my identity, whether systemic barriers or unconscious prejudices, and this drove me to want to take action to create a more fair, more inclusive work environment. The union represents a collective force capable of defending the rights of all workers, and I believe it's essential that this force reflects the diversity of its members. By taking on a leadership role, I hoped, not only to represent people who, like me, come from diverse backgrounds, but also to inspire others to get involved and believe they have a place at the decision-making table. For me, it is a concrete way of contributing to positive change and ensuring that no one is left behind.

3. WHAT WERE THE STEPS YOU TOOK TO BECOMING MORE INVOLVED AND REACHING THE POSITION(S) YOU HAVE NOW?

My journey to becoming Bargaining Unit President unfolded through a series of significant steps. It began with active participation as a member—attending meetings regularly and engaging deeply with the issues impacting my colleagues. This involvement naturally led me to take on greater responsibilities,

joining the executive committee that provided insight into the union's inner workings and strengthened my understanding of its operations.

Navigating this space as a woman meant I often had to work twice as hard to ensure my voice was heard and my skills recognized. I pursued leadership and negotiation training through OSSTF/FEESO, Canadian Labour Congress Academy, and my local labour council, which equipped me with the tools to effectively advocate for our members. Alongside this, I focused on fostering inclusive spaces where every member felt empowered to share their perspectives openly.

With time, my dedication and perseverance were acknowledged, and I was encouraged to run for union office. The path was not without its challenges, but the encouragement of my peers and my commitment to driving positive change helped me reach this role. Now, I am dedicated to being a source of inspiration and support for other women who want to step forward, get involved, and amplify their voices within the union.

4. HOW DID OTHERS HELP OR SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY?

During my path to becoming President of the Bargaining Unit, I was grateful to have the unwavering support of many individuals. My colleagues were instrumental in motivating me and openly sharing their insights, which deepened my understanding of the union's challenges and expectations. I also benefited from guidance of the former President, and local leaders, whose valuable advice and expertise helped shape my approach. This combination of moral and professional support fueled my determination and boosted my confidence. Above all, the dedication and unity of the unit's members were fundamental—it is through our collective efforts that we uphold the union's principles and advocate for everyone's rights.

5. HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE IDENTITY-BASED BARRIERS YOU ENCOUNTERED?

Navigating the challenges tied to my identity as the first racialized female President of the Bargaining Unit has been demanding, yet profoundly transformative. Facing stereotypes and biases pushed me to grow both personally and

professionally. Rather than allowing these barriers to hold me back, I used them as stepping stones to create pathways for others. The journey was made possible through the invaluable support of mentors, allies, and communities who understood these shared struggles. I leaned on resilience and the strength of my voice, always guided by my core values. Every challenge deepened my belief that diversity in leadership isn't just important—it's a vital asset that enriches the entire organization.

6. DESCRIBE ANY CHALLENGES YOU HAVE SEEN IN THE FEDERATION DURING YOUR TIME IN LEADERSHIP?

I have seen significant developments within the Federation, particularly in terms of diversity and inclusion. One of the most striking changes has been the increase in the number of women in leadership positions.

The active participation of women in decision-making bodies has strengthened the Federation's ability to innovate and respond more effectively to today's challenges. This progress testifies to our commitment to a more inclusive and equitable environment.

7. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN MEMBERS WHO WANT TO PURSUE LEADERSHIP IN THE FEDERATION?

First, I would encourage women members to trust in their abilities and recognize their rightful place in leadership roles. It is crucial to value your contributions and confidently embrace the opportunities that come your way.

Building strong connections with the Federation is equally important. Engaging with other leaders can provide invaluable support, inspiration, and guidance. I also recommend taking advantage of training sessions, mentorship programs, and leadership development opportunities to strengthen your skills and boost self-confidence. Most importantly, stay true to your values. Do not hesitate to voice your perspectives and make bold decisions. Authenticity and positive influence lie at the heart of effective leadership. Remember, every voice matters and has the power to spark meaningful change.

Pathways Case Study:

Solange Scott

1. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT IN OSSTF/FEESO?

I was a part of the Constitution Committee and branched off to getting involved more in the local as well as at the District level. I was the co-chairperson of the District Status of Women Committee for two years.

2. WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IN OSSTF/FEESO?

I come from a union family, and I have always been involved with the union in my previous jobs.

3. WHAT WERE THE STEPS YOU TOOK TO BECOMING MORE INVOLVED AND REACHING THE POSITION(S) YOU HAVE NOW?

I first joined my local by getting involved with the constitution committee. It was important for me to understand and learn about the organization and how it functioned. I then became the Health and Safety Inspector, so that I could learn more and the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and how I could best support the members that I worked with. I ran and was the successful candidate for the position of President for my Bargaining Unit, where I ensured that my member's rights were protected. I was and am still committed to learning along the way.

4. HOW DID OTHERS HELP OR SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY?

I have been lucky to have people who mentored me. Those mentors taught me everything I know and always reminded me to take time for myself. The Federation will always be around. Time with family should be prioritized.

5. HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE IDENTITY-BASED BARRIERS YOU ENCOUNTERED?

I am still navigating those barriers. I intersect on many levels, so I continue to jump through hoops, but I don't give up. We must keep moving forward because moving backwards is not an option.

6. DESCRIBE ANY CHALLENGES YOU HAVE SEEN IN THE FEDERATION DURING YOUR TIME IN LEADERSHIP?

The Federation has begun focusing on equity much more than in the past. They are making equity a priority, and that makes me proud of my union.

7. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN MEMBERS WHO WANT TO PURSUE LEADERSHIP IN THE FEDERATION?

It is not an easy road. I will not pretend that the journey is easy, but it is worth it. Find your people. Reach out and connect with others who can be there to support you 100%. Lean on each other for support, and remember, you cannot do it all alone. Take it one step at a time. One foot in front of the other.

Pathways Case Study:

Malini Leahy

1. WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST FORMAL INVOLVEMENT IN OSSTF/FEESO?

My first formal involvement in OSSTF/FEESO was attending a local Status of Women event. That hooked me and not long after, I became the Branch Representative at our school.

2. WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN LEADERSHIP IN OSSTF/FEESO?

To be honest, it was a tap on the shoulder, and I really enjoyed the work. I also had a Principal that wanted to solve problems together before they turned into a grievance. She would also include me if she wanted to initiate something new and involved me in conversations regarding new programs or operations. Being a Branch Representative was a good experience under her leadership, and I continued to get more involved.

3. WHAT WERE THE STEPS YOU TOOK TO BECOMING MORE INVOLVED AND REACHING THE POSITION(S) YOU HAVE NOW?

I took on various leadership roles within the local executive, including Benefits Officer, Treasurer, and Vice-President before becoming the local Teacher's Bargaining Unit President. In 2017, I successfully ran for the position of Governor for the Ontario Teachers' Federation and then ran for Executive Officer of OSSTF/FEESO in 2019. I always joke that I applied to provincial committees but wasn't able to get on, so I just found a different pathway to get there.

4. HOW DID OTHERS HELP OR SUPPORT YOU ALONG THE WAY?

The local Teacher's Bargaining Unit President, Sharon Indrevold, was incredibly supportive while I was on the local encouraged me to attend AMPA, as well as other conferences.

Along the way, it always seemed that other women were encouraging me. That was the case in 2019, when Martha Hradowy encouraged me to run for the Provincial Executive. Karen Littlewood continued to support and encourage me in growth as a Provincial Executive member.

5. HOW DID YOU NAVIGATE IDENTITY-BASED BARRIERS YOU ENCOUNTERED?

This is a loaded question for sure! Getting hired at my school board was challenging. I wasn't a coach or a former student, so I didn't have the connections that are helpful, and I really had to prove that I was good at my job. It made me recall the advice my mom had given me when I was young. She said, "Remember, you will always have to work twice as hard as others to prove you are capable."

I would say that locally, I had a great deal of support from others on both the Teacher's Bargaining Unit and the District Executive. Provincially, the first barrier I encountered was when I told people that I was running for a position that would require me to be in Toronto for most of the time. The first question many asked (mostly women), was, "Who is going to take care of the kids?" I know they meant well, but I am sure there was an edge in my voice when I responded that the kids were independent, and that Brian is very supportive and capable of looking after them.

The timing of the Question-and-Answer period at AMPA was also a bit of a barrier. I have always wondered how different those sessions would be if they were held in the morning or before dinner. As a mom, I was often up early, so staying up late at suites was often hard on me. I am most productive in the morning. Once I was on the Provincial Executive, there were many more barriers to navigate. I navigated these by having several one-on-one conversations. Often these conversations were about something that was said or done in a meeting that I felt was not acceptable. I always felt that it important to address the situation in a timely but respectful way. Sometimes these conversations were about pushing for some changes within the

organization, and this was always a team approach. For me, when I want to make change, it is important to speak to others individually and listen before charging ahead. If you have a few voices that have committed to supporting you, it is easier to move things along.

I have always relied on colleagues, friends, and of course, family to help me navigate the hurdles as I chose my path. They give me perspective, advice, and support. The journey is not always easy, but having an incredible support system has helped.

6. DESCRIBE ANY CHALLENGES YOU HAVE SEEN IN THE FEDERATION DURING YOUR TIME IN LEADERSHIP?

When I was first elected to the Provincial Executive, there were three men and three women, and I was the only racialized person. In my first year on Provincial Executive, I was assigned all the equity related committees and work groups. So, prior to the following year's assignments, I went to the president and advocated for myself. Today, the Provincial Executive looks very different, and it is so wonderful to have people with different experiences and perspectives providing leadership in the organization. Additionally, when I started, we did not have an Equity Action Plan, or an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Coordinator. I felt that it was important to make some concrete changes within the organization. While we have made many strides, we still have much work to do as a Federation.

7. WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN MEMBERS WHO WANT TO PURSUE LEADERSHIP IN THE FEDERATION?

Be involved in your local at both the Bargaining Unit and the District level. Find a mentor and rely on them for support and advice. Keep trying. You might not always be successful on your first attempt, but do not give up. Remember that it is normal to be uncertain and we all have our doubts and fears. Lead with your passion and let it always shine brighter than your doubts.

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