

AERO-AOCE Membership Visioning Survey May 2018 Summary



In May 2018, AERO-AOCE members were provided with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences with the organization and to offer suggestions for the future direction and growth. While the individual responses show a range of perspectives, there was strong agreement on some fundamental issues. The following represents a brief overview of those areas of consensus.

Responses were received from a total of 35 people.

1. Please indicate your organization/affiliation

The majority of respondents, 28 (80%) indicated that they were associated with a school board, 6 (17%) represented a government ministry or agency and 1 (3%) was an independent researcher.

2. How many years have you been a member of AERO-AOCE?

11 (31%) of those that responded stated that they had been a member of AERO-AOCE for 10 or more years. 7 (20%) were members for 2-5 years, 6-10 years, or indicated that they are not currently a member. 3 (9%) respondents have been a member for one year or less.

3. How has AERO-AOCE helped to support you in your role?

The majority of respondents reported that they appreciate the networking, learning and professional development opportunities they receive by attending AERO-AOCE conferences and Special Interest Groups (SIGs). The opportunity to connect with researchers in other boards to share/discuss current issues, Ministry priorities, etc. supports AERO-AOCE members within their roles.

4. AERO-AOCE currently offers a Fall Conference, a Spring Special Interest Group, and opportunities for our members to connect and collaborate. Please provide comments and suggestions about our current offerings and what we could offer in the future.

Many of the respondents shared that they like the current offerings/structure of a Fall Conference and a Spring SIG (conference topics are current and appreciate the networking opportunities). A few respondents felt that the current conferences are too curriculum focused and liked the structure of having a Fall and Spring conference. In the past, the Fall conference was research-themed and the Spring conference provided professional learning.

Suggestions about the current offerings included:

- a) Increase networking, relationship building and communication among members between offerings (such as through a newsletter or other opportunities for members to share their work and ideas).
- b) Offer more opportunities for skill development/enhancements (such as virtual SIGS, have conference-themes that are more research focused as opposed to general board/ministry programs and initiatives, continue to offer professional development on Ministry priorities and initiatives).
- c) Create partnerships with other organisations and faculties of education to co-host/co-sponsor events.

5. What is your vision of what AERO-AOCE should look like and do in the next five years?

Some survey respondents suggested that AERO-AOCE continue 'as is'. The organization is designed to encourage networking and provide professional learning opportunities for educational researchers across Ontario. AERO-AOCE provides the opportunity to collaborate, connect and network, to identify best practices in education and support and foster research in education.

Others encouraged AERO-AOCE to make more connections (not just during the Fall conference and Spring SIG) and improve the communication between members. They would like AERO-AOCE to provide more relevant topics for conferences and SIGs that can be used by school board researchers (such as analysis tools, technical SIGs, methodologies, etc.) and offer on-line learning opportunities. Respondents see AERO-AOCE as a provincial organization with the voice to advocate for researchers in school boards across the province.

Some viewed AERO-AOCE as the bridge between school board researchers and other education organizations (such as the Ministry of Education, academia/university) and the one to connect and promote cross-board research.

It was also suggested that AERO-AOCE work towards providing a certification program for education researchers – creating courses/workshops that build competences and knowledge/skills in educational research. It was suggested that AERO-AOCE look at what the Canadian Evaluation Society does with its Credentialed Evaluator Designation or its Essential Skills Series workshops as a model and provide training/courses in applied research and evaluation.

With increasing capacity within Ontario in the last decade (e.g., KNAER, Ministry of Education research branches, OERS, Learning Partnership etc.) a key role for AERO-AOCE might be in continuing to forge/strengthen/make visible connections, disseminate information about opportunities, conferences, updates, new resources, etc. (perhaps an AERO-AOCE Newsletter that shares what is happening that is relevant to educational researchers in Ontario). These activities might serve to support our role in the area of knowledge sharing, knowledge mobilization in school boards.

6. What obstacles or blocks might stand in the way of achieving this vision?

One of the main obstacles that may pose interference with the vision for AERO-AOCE is a lack of resources. The resources include time and funding. Since AERO-AOCE is run by volunteers, it may be difficult for members of the Executive and sub-committee members to balance volunteer activities with their daily research roles. Time is also a factor in getting the membership to participate in AERO-AOCE's various offerings. Some researchers are not supported by their school boards to participate in AERO-AOCE activities during their working hours.

Others felt that AERO-AOCE has lost its focus, purpose and commitment. It is being left behind as the province moves forward. The organisation cannot be championed by a single individual but requires the commitment of many. There are also many competing research based groups, organizations and platforms (such as MiSA, KNAER, OERS) which have filled the roles that AERO-AOCE previously played a part in.

Another obstacle that was expressed was the decline in the number of school boards employing researchers and oftentimes, the current researchers employed are not as qualified as educational researchers in the past. There is also a lack of board research staff outside of the GTA and Ottawa.

7. What can AERO-AOCE do to overcome these obstacles and move toward this vision?

Survey respondents provided some suggestions to overcome the stated obstacles. First, ideally the Executive should have a mix of new and more seasoned educational researchers. The Executive should take ownership and be committed to moving AERO-AOCE's vision forward. AERO-AOCE needs to be a priority in the work they do. The Executive could adopt an implementation lens by picking no more than three priorities to focus on and 'go deep'.

AERO-AOCE could connect with other education groups (such as with Ministry of Education, KNAER; MiSA). AERO-AOCE could consider being a co-sponsor and support the planning of OERS.

AERO-AOCE needs active collaboration and participation of members and find ways to increase interest, buy in and support among members. AERO-AOCE could highlight member work in research. Broader connections and collaborations could be made through the use of technology. Online tools such as SLACK could be used, SIGS could be on-line and/or offered in other parts of the province (remote areas) to encourage participation and increase engagement. For certification and/or course offerings in applied research, AERO-AOCE could do a survey to determine needs/interests of AERO-AOCE members

Many boards need to build up expertise of staff. AERO-AOCE could be the broker that gathers information on the types of projects being completed and share with members. They could model good research (what it looks like) and advocate for evidence informed decision making. Helping boards do more with less can be encouraged.

To help with the obstacle of finances, AERO-AOCE could search out other sources of funding or increase the conference fee.

We need to determine what makes AERO-AOCE unique!

8. Please share any other comments you may have.

A few respondents shared some additional comments. The comments included thanking AERO-AOCE for the work that they do and expressing happiness that the visioning process is taking place. Some offered suggestions for AERO-AOCE in moving forward such as:

- a) With the extensive skills and experience of members, is there a reason why AERO-AOCE cannot propose for and become a vendor of record for government and school boards' research and evaluation contracts.
- b) Increase communication and sharing of information.
 - o Create "NEWS FLASHES" about anything to do with education and "hot topics".
 - o Have a repository of good research on these topics.
 - o Be a place where boards share any public reports that they release so we can see what cool things are going on out there.
- c) Increase connections/partnerships, such as with CODE and People for Education.
- d) More research-based focused discussions.