



The Role of the Branch President

The Branch President plays a number of key roles in the day to day careers of the Members of OSSTF. The Branch President should be aware of these responsibilities and of how best to fulfill them.

OSSTF Toronto TBU Constitution defines the duties of the Branch President as follows:

- Furnish the Bargaining Unit with a complete list of all Members of the branch, including mailing address, telephone number and personal email address of each Member, at the beginning of each school year.
- Update the above-noted list in February.
- Conduct Branch elections as stipulated in our Bylaws/Collective Agreement.
- Attend TTBU Council Meetings (*see page 5.*)
- Provide assistance to Branch Members as required.
- Hold monthly OSSTF Branch Meetings.
- Conduct a Staffing Committee Election in October.
- Co-Chair the School Staffing Committee through the staffing process (*see page 4.*)
- Fulfill duties as prescribed by the Collective Agreement.
- Deal with Members in a manner which is non-arbitrary, non-discriminatory and in good faith (*see page 3.*)
- Communicate and convey information to your Branch membership from the Executive or Provincial OSSTF (*see page 5 & 6.*)
- Providing clarification to Members (*see page 7.*)
- Assistance re Allegations of Assault (*see page 7.*)
- Contract Knowledge and Contract Maintenance (*see page 8.*)
- Representing a Member in Crisis (*see page 9.*)
- Maintaining confidentiality (*see page 10.*)
- Providing assistance with issues arising from Teacher Performance Appraisals (*see page 10.*)

The Branch President is the key to communication between:

- the Executive and the Membership
- the members of the Branch Executive
- between Members in your school and your school Administration

Tips for a new Branch President:

- Delegate! Recruit other members of your Branch executive to help stuff mailboxes.
- Set up an email group to forward communications, especially time sensitive messages, quickly.
- Use your Branch rebate funds to provide snacks at an OSSTF meeting.
- Introduce yourself to new members. Take them out for pizza and wings and introduce them to the Union! Keep the bill, with names written on the back, and submit them for a refund to the Treasurer. Invite your Executive Officer to join you as well.
- Set up a phone tree for emergencies. Your school may already have one in place or ask other members to help you set it up.
- Have a meeting with your Administration to discuss ongoing issues in your school.
- Have a dedicated space, in a central location, where flyers and notices will be posted
- Contact your Executive Officer – we are here to help support you in your new role!

Duty of Fair Representation:

As Union Representatives, Branch Presidents have the “duty of fair representation” of their Members in accordance with the Labour Relations Act. This means that dealings with Members must not be arbitrary, discriminatory or in bad faith.

1. Non-Arbitrary: Make reasonable inquiries, respond in a reasonable manner, consider the relevant facts and do not act in a non-caring or capricious manner.
2. Non-Discriminatory: Treat the Member as you would treat any other Member in similar circumstances.
3. Good Faith: Act for the proper reasons and in the best interest of the Member. There are times we must sacrifice individual rights for the rights of the collective.

Co-Chair, School Staffing Committee

As Branch President, in accordance with our Collective Agreement, you are the Co-Chair, along with your Principal or their designate, of your School Staffing Committee. This involves year-round responsibilities, beginning with fulfilling the contractual obligation to hold elections for the two teacher positions on the School Staffing Committee by the end of October each school year (the other ex-officio role in accordance with the Collective Agreement goes to your school's Staff Workload Representative) **and providing the names of the members of the Committee to your administration no later than November 15.**

The School Staffing Committee functions year-round with the most vital staffing process duties beginning with the completion of the seniority verification forms in February, and continuing to the end of the school year. **You have a duty to represent the interests of your members and to ensure that in doing so, the terms of the Collective Agreement and the Staffing Binder are followed in your school.**

If a Member needs assistance during the staffing process, make sure that his/her concerns are conveyed to a Staffing Officer or your Executive Officer at the OSSTF Toronto Office, or to the school administration. The responsibilities of the committee are outlined in the Staffing Binder, and Collective Agreement.

Representing the Branch at the Toronto Teachers Bargaining Unit (TTBU) Council Meetings

Depending upon the number of Members at your work site, this role may be shared with other Members of your Branch Executive and/or staff, but is a crucial role for the Branch President in particular. At TTBU Council meetings, interim policy and TTBU actions are debated and decided upon. The Branch President/Council Representatives should be prepared to represent the membership of their Branch during these debates and votes. If notice of motion has been given, the Branch President should try to make sure that the motion is discussed at a staff meeting prior to Council.

Conveying Information to Your Branch Membership

The Branch President along with the other Council Representatives from a branch must fully communicate the decisions of the Council Meeting to their Members. Verbal reports should be made at staff meetings. These should be timed reports. If there is a major item, arrange for sufficient time for debate and discussion. Avoid giving rushed reports at the end of meetings. Remember, what you are saying is just as important to the staff as all of the other items on the agenda, sometimes even more important! Be positive and as detailed as is necessary. If possible, try to arrange for other members of the Branch Executive/Council Representatives to give parts of the report as well. This will create a team feeling and also allow the staff to become aware of these people and their roles.

The Branch President is the key to communication between:

- the Executive and the Membership
- within the Branch Executive
- between Members in your school and your school Administration
- and distributes information from Provincial Office

Communicating with Members in Your Branch

Communicating effectively with your Membership and motivating them to take an active interest in OSSTF go hand in hand. There are a variety of methods that you may use to communicate with your branch members. The method you select will depend upon time available, the issue, the nature of your branch and your personal preferences and strengths. Some Branch Presidents have an intranet site on which they provide information, others use a bulletin board or back of the door to the main office to post information, still others have an in-school OSSTF newsletter. All of this supplements the monthly report to membership which takes place at your branch meeting.

Written Summaries

Written summaries are useful for reminding your Members of key items and deadlines. The written reports from Council can be used to quickly create a written summary, or may be copied and distributed.

Staff Meetings

A report and discussion at your staff meeting is usually the most effective way of communicating with and involving your branch Membership. This allows both for questions to clarify the issues, and debate and input from the Members. It also ensures that all Members will get pertinent information. **NOTE: TTBU Executive Members may be invited to a Branch Meeting at any time.**

Timing

Ensure that you have enough time to do an adequate job. You should discuss the timing of the OSSTF report with your administration and/or the chairperson of your staff meetings. Try to reach an agreement that when you have a special issue, it will be dealt with as a timed item and early in the agenda.

Remember that the issues that you are dealing with are just as important as the other items on the agenda, sometimes even more so. Take sufficient time to deal with them.

Being Prepared

Make sure that you have an outline of what you are going to say. Most of your report will come from what goes on at Council. **Your responsibility is to report the decisions made by council and/or the decisions made by the Executive as reported to council.** The written reports provided in your Council Package will be crucial to what you are going to say at your own meeting.

Prioritizing Information

Make sure that the key items such as approved motions, upcoming events and projects are reported on.

Items that are of interest to only one or two people can be reported individually, outside of the meeting.

Providing Clarification

Often the issues are complex and the plans are complicated. Make sure that you are conveying the correct information. Take notes at Council on the key items. If you are not sure about something, either clarify it at the Council Meeting or phone our Office to get the correct answer.

You will often be asked questions. If you are unsure of the answer, write down the question and then phone the District Office to get the correct answer and report back to the individual or to a future meeting.

Involving Your Branch Executive

If other members of your branch Executive are involved in projects through their committees, have them give this part of the report. This allows your staff to see that there is a team working on their behalf in the school. It also prepares others to take over when you are ready to step down as Branch President.

Allegations of Assault

The Student Protection Act came into force in September 2002. It affects all members of the College of Teachers, as well as employers of certified teachers in Ontario, including tutoring services, private schools and school boards.

In accordance with this Act, the employer must remove from the classroom a teacher charged with or convicted of a sexual offence with minors, or an offence the employer believes may put students at risk. In nearly all situations involving an alleged assault by a teacher of a student, the teacher will be suspended with pay pending an investigation by Board managers. **The Member or Branch President should contact the Executive Officer for their school immediately for instructions. OSSTF's Provincial Office will be contacted by the OSSTF Toronto Office and will arrange legal representation if necessary. Members should be advised to refrain from making any statement, verbal or written to management, or attend any meetings regarding allegations of this nature without first seeking advice from the union.**

Contract Knowledge and Contract Maintenance (Grievance Procedure) You should be familiar with the collective agreement. The Branch President is often the first person a Member will ask for information about the collective agreement or for an interpretation of a clause. If you are in doubt, take time to find the answer. Contact our Office whenever you have a need of an explanation or more information. Resource people will normally be your Executive Officer or Vice-President. Don't be afraid to ask questions! Take time to get the correct answer.

Grievance Procedures

A grievance is the Union's way of protecting the collective agreement and is based upon a breach of a clause or clauses of the Collective Agreement. For detailed information about the Grievance Process, please see the Grievance Process document contained in the Branch President's Manual.

The Branch President is usually the first OSSTF Person to be aware of a potential grievance. When there is a potential grievance make sure that you do the following:

- > inform your Executive Officer immediately
- > advise the Member about the process or put them directly in touch with the Executive Officer for your school
- > help gather facts
- > keep your Executive Officer informed of all developments

Your Executive Officer must be involved whenever you feel that the contract may have been violated.

Representing a Member in Crisis

Keep Calm

The circumstances under which Members need and ask for Union representation can be emotionally charged. Everyone else, be it the superintendent, principal, vice-principal, teacher(s), parent(s) or Student(s) is likely to be angry, or frightened, or both.

Meet Privately with the Member

Before any meeting with a supervisory officer, principal or vice-principal, ensure that you speak privately with the Member.

Get Advice

Before attending any meeting or taking any action, call your Executive Officer for assistance from a telephone where you and your Member have privacy. If the matter is urgent, say so. If your Executive Officer is not available, ask to speak to the appropriate Vice President. It is not incumbent upon you to attend a meeting with your Member. You and/or your Member may request that a representative from the District Office attend instead.

Keep the Member Calm

Explain to the Member the necessity of keeping a cool head. If the conduct or competence of your Member is questioned, the Member might want to “fight back on the spot.” This is **not** a good idea. Your Member should be briefed in advance to listen to the “charge” and, if possible, get it in writing, and then withdraw with you to seek further advice.

Act as a Witness

If allegations are made about the conduct or competence of a Member you represent, attend the meeting at which these allegations are formally brought forward. Evidence as to what is said, by whom and to whom, may be required later. Make notes to assist you to remember. This meeting should be formal and as short as is consistent with getting all the information about the charge or complaint.

This meeting is **not** the time or place to discuss the entire matter or to attempt to “solve the problem”.

Withdraw and Seek Further Advice

Once the complaint and the circumstances around it have been made clear to the Member, you should both withdraw, without responding, to get specific advice from your Executive Officer on what to do next.

Confidentiality

For the protection of all of our Members, confidential matters are treated as confidential at all levels of the Union and by all Union Officers.

Teacher Performance Appraisal

Teacher Performance Appraisal is a significant process, and one that needs to be taken very seriously. Your school administration must provide Members who are to be evaluated with a copy of the policy which includes detailed information about the process, its time-lines and the Member's responsibilities. Information about the TPA process is also available on our website at www.osstfdist12.com. Members who have questions about the process will likely come first to you, so you should familiarize yourself with the TPA Implementation Manual. Questions about application by administrators of the process may be directed to your Executive Officer.

While the jointly developed policy provides for a selection process of who is to be evaluated each year, there is wide ranging power granted to administrators within the legislation to evaluate any teacher in their school. If an administrator has concerns about a teacher's classroom performance or about how the Member is handling other duties of a teacher, they may implement the TPA process. Prior to doing this, the administration may arrange a meeting with the Member, advising him/her to bring a Union representative, or the Member may ask you to attend at such a meeting. Sometimes, at this informal stage, the concern can be resolved. If it cannot be quickly resolved, the Member is usually given a written statement outlining the details of the concern and directions for addressing the concern. The principal may arrange to provide assistance for the teacher and should provide reasonable time for the teacher to improve in the area of concern.

Apart from placing the teacher under the TPA process, there may be "progressive discipline" if the concern is not resolved, or a combination of both placing the teacher under the TPA process and progressive discipline. The next step could be a written statement of the problem and the possible consequences if the problem is not corrected. It could then progress to a disciplinary letter in the Member's personnel file. If the problem continued or the misconduct was serious enough, the Member could be suspended with or without pay pending investigation. OSSTF grieves the discipline if it is seen to be unreasonable.

Branch Presidents should put Members who find themselves faced with these circumstances in touch with their Executive Officer.