



TESOL Board Connect: New Year Reflections

by [Graciela Martin](#)

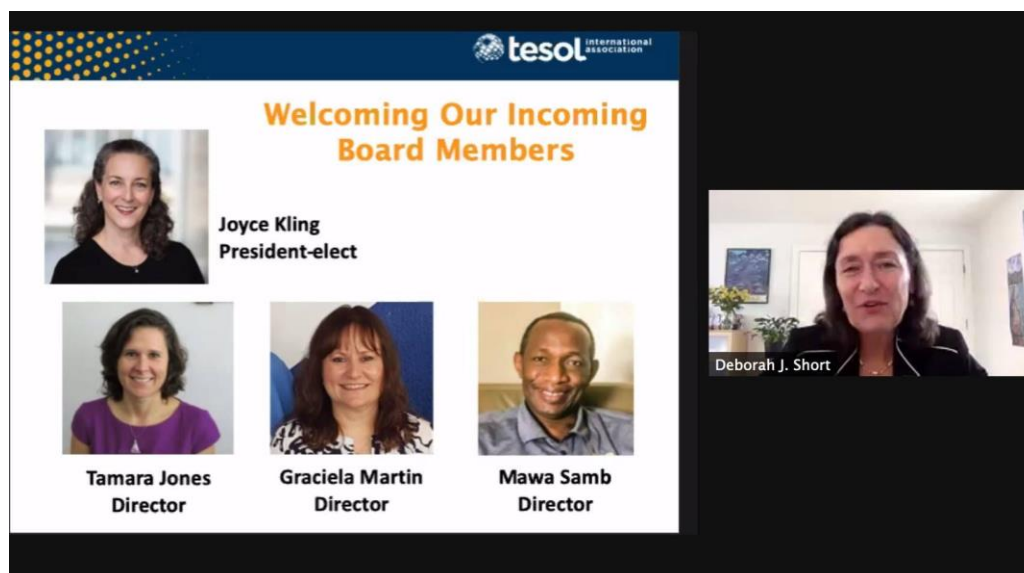
To many people, the first day or week of the year is definitely a good time to think forward to the rest of the year, to reflect on the past year, and to come up with New Year's resolutions. That is why I thought this article provided me with a timely opportunity to share my reflections about my almost 2 years on the Board of Directors of TESOL International Association. I can't believe it has been that long already.

It seems like yesterday when I received a voicemail from former TESOL interim executive director breaking the news: *Hello Graciela, this is Rosa Aronson from TESOL International Association. I wanted to congratulate you. You have been elected to the TESOL Board of Directors.* I remember playing that voicemail several times. I simply couldn't believe my ears! That was certainly one of the happiest days in my path as a volunteer.

In less than a month, I started the orientation process under the mentorship of Gabriela Kleckova, president-elect at that time. I shared the onboarding with the other newly elected board members and president-elect for the period 2021–2024, from then on my “class buddies,” as Joyce Kling calls us. We learnt about our responsibilities, TESOL's governance, leadership, organizational structure, and financials.

In March, we were invited to participate in the upcoming board meeting, which was to be held right before the annual convention. What a thrill! I was so excited! During that meeting, we could get a taste of what was to come in the 3 years ahead: board operations, agenda, consent agenda, minutes, resolution action items, motions, and much more. Thanking board members who were rotating off and welcoming incoming board members. A mixture of sadness and fulfillment, happiness and expectation. Everything was so professional, and the pace was so fast.

Our ride had started. We were then officially installed at the [TESOL Virtual Convention 2021](#) annual business meeting, during the second year of the pandemic. It was 4 pm in Buenos Aires and I was home alone, facing the computer, and I was so moved. Tears of joy filled my eyes as I saw my picture on a slide and heard President Deborah Short say my name. I couldn't avoid thinking what this could have been like if held in person.



Virtual installation of newly elected board members, 27 March 2021

From that moment on, my time on the board has been a wonderful journey of emotions and learning. As I look ahead to this new year, my third and last on the board, I realize how much I have learnt, and how much I have grown personally and professionally thanks to the mentorship and support of other board members and staff.

I feel I have developed a better understanding of what it takes to run a large nonprofit, international association whose foundation rests on volunteer work. I learnt to think and act in the best interests of the association to further its mission while complying with our responsibilities. Thinking together. Embracing diverse points of view. Challenging our comfort zone. Standing for the benefit of all the members.

I had the opportunity to problem solve and think strategically. I joined different working groups where I could actively collaborate and contribute my work and perspectives.



First in-person board meeting I attended, October 2021.
The board had not met in person for 2 years.

I also faced many challenges. The global economy and the effects of the pandemic impacted us all: individuals and organizations alike. We faced illness and felt vulnerable. We experienced vaccine inequities and felt helpless. We cried and laughed.

Thinking together, learning to be more empathetic and supportive of one another, has made us stronger than before.

I am sure there will be lots of learning and unlearning ahead as we experience the postpandemic world. We went virtual, we went hybrid. We are returning to in-person and keeping virtual. TESOL board of directors stands in an ever-changing global environment where flexibility and adaptability are key to ensure the sustainability of the association.

TESOL is a global organization that needs representation from the diverse voices of its members and learners. Volunteer leaders play a vital role in supporting the work of the association and in helping to move it forward.



Would you like to see your country or region represented? Do you belong to an underrepresented group that you would like to be heard? Have you ever considered [volunteering on the TESOL board](#)? There is so much you can give, and so much more that you can learn.

Take action. Let diverse voices be heard. Include TESOL in your 2023 New Year's resolutions! Make it happen.

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