



# TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

## TESOL Board Connect: My TESOL Journey of a Thousand Steps

by [Kate Mastruserio Reynolds](#)

I recall so vividly the series of long escalators that took us to the registration desks at the Seattle TESOL International Association convention in 1998. A group of graduate school colleagues and I wrote mini-grants and sold engraved pens to raise funds to attend the convention. It was not my first TESOL convention, but it was the first one where I volunteered. The professors in my doctoral program encouraged my peers and me to volunteer; I chose the [Career Center](#), where recruiters came from all over the world to interview instructors for their positions. It was exciting to see so many job openings, recruiters, and candidates, knowing that all these opportunities were available to us through TESOL International Association.

My tasks were simple: I only needed to receive paper resumés or CVs from candidates and file them with the recruiter or post/remove job opportunities from the bulletin boards. (This was before all the technology that streamlines these processes today.) This volunteer work was the first small step that I took in my career that ultimately opened doors for me professionally. Though systems within TESOL International Association have morphed and changed over time, the role of volunteerism in creating worthwhile and rewarding careers has not.

After my initial TESOL convention, I was hooked and endeavored to find ways to be able to attend every year. The desire to attend challenged me to research and propose sessions for every convention. Simultaneously, I volunteered.

In the late 1990s, while volunteering at the international level, I engaged at my regional affiliate, OhioTESOL, attending the conferences and serving as the newsletter text review column editor. The newsletter editor I worked with was [Suzanne Panferov Reese](#). My role was to obtain textbooks from publishers and identify reviewers to write their analysis for the newsletter. In the process, I met many colleagues and read numerous new textbooks. It was stimulating to be surrounded by others who shared the same interests in additional language learning and acquisition as me. In my volunteerism, I discovered information and made new connections between what I was learning in my graduate program and developments in the field. I was also making professional connections—people who would become my network.

I studied in a small graduate program, so I wanted to meet more colleagues. I applied for TESOL's Professional Development Standing Committee (now called the [Professional Development Professional Committee](#)) and learned about the educational programs TESOL

offered, including academies, symposia, and the [Leadership Development Certificate Program](#) (LDCP). I recall being able to collaborate with [Judy O'Loughlin](#) on tasks that helped guide the organization's offerings; later Judy and I would present and write together several times. My first year on the committee, I was placed on the LDCP team and was able to participate in the program myself. At that time, the program was not public facing; it was by invitation only. I took program courses in leadership with Ann Romney, Neil Anderson, and other luminaries, who taught me concepts that still resonate with me today. The next year, I was placed again on the same team, but, this time, I was elected chairperson. One of the first substantive changes I initiated was to recommend to leadership to make the LDCP open to all members of the organization. I was so happy that I was able to share this program with other TESOL members. TESOL needs leaders, and this is a fantastic place to start!

My international and regional volunteer efforts always worked in tandem. Whether I lived in Connecticut, Wisconsin, Ukraine, Qatar, or Washington State, I valued engagement regionally. [Regional affiliates](#) are always looking for colleagues to participate in reviewing conference proposals, conducting a webinar, coordinating student speaking or writing contests, writing for the newsletter, recruiting members, or organizing a conference. One foundational volunteer opportunity for me was co-organizing the Wisconsin TESOL Conference in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, USA in 2003. Back then, there was a conference planning handbook that was floating around the organization. (Just to give you context, the original had been printed from a computer and then shared many times and finally scanned. That is the copy we ended up with that helped us organize the conference.) The first step for us was finding a reliable team of people who would develop a call for proposals, then we would need to vet those submitted, identify and engage plenary speakers, generate excitement about the upcoming conference through announcements and graphic posters, obtain the proper rooms and other facilities, plan the refreshments, organize hotels and parking, and so on. Each of these specific responsibilities has someone who excels in that sort of task; volunteers are essential to making the regional conferences happen. I had the stimulating job of pulling it altogether. Our plenary speaker was Neil Anderson, who spoke about his model of reading. I was so pleased when he complimented us on the organization of our conference.

Jumping ahead, in 2011, I presented a plenary talk at PeruTESOL. Another plenary speaker was Suzanne Panferov Reese! I had not encountered her since my OhioTESOL days. Suzanne, who was incoming TESOL president, asked me if I was willing to serve as the TESOL International Association's convention planning chair (CPC) for 2013 in Dallas, Texas, USA. This offer was exhilarating; I could not pass up the chance to participate, so I applied. I had to learn about how the international convention was organized and what the expectations were, but all the leaders were constructive and supportive while I learned the ropes.

During the lead up to the 2013 convention, the board of directors decided that the organization would benefit from analyzing the review process of convention proposals. Because I was the incoming CPC, I was asked to serve on the Proposal Adjudication Task Force with Dudley Reynolds and Mark Algren. I was definitely the unknown person on the team! I hoped that I would be able to contribute to the goal of the group. We ended up making small tweaks to the proposal review rubric. The biggest impact, though, was the work we did to create an application for proposal reviewers and to norm proposal reviewers on the use of the rubric. I found it

hilarious that I created the training PowerPoint and recorded the first ever proposal review training session, and I had to record it in one continuous take without mistakes! (I made one but caught myself). Through this, my voice was heard by upward of 100 reviewers over those first years. No one knew who I was—I was not an influential leader—but I felt good about contributing what I could to the organization.

In planning the convention, I was able to collaborate with my associate CPCs and the fabulous team of Texas TESOL V to choose the plenary speakers, featured speakers, and the individuals for Tea With a TESOLer. I was proud we invited [John Hunter](#) to speak about his critical thinking game on World Peace. [Thomas Nakayama](#) spoke on critical intercultural communication, and [Aram de Koven](#) on unconscious bias and the myth of racial colorblindness. [Bonny Norton](#) presented on identity and language learning. Suzanne Panferov Reese spoke on developing great teachers. Why was I so proud of this? I was able to influence our collective learning because these were the first plenaries that incorporated explicitly or implicitly the ideas of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, and identity.

After that brief moment in the spotlight, I was asked to undertake a volunteer role as the first vocabulary strand coordinator when we transitioned to strands for the convention in 2018. This role allowed me to collaborate with [Jennifer Majorana](#) and [Lawrence Zwier](#) to offer vocabulary and grammar reviewer preparation and make the final selections of sessions once the proposals had been reviewed and rated. I built upon my work as an editor on the [TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching](#), vocabulary volume; while I contributed, I learned even more from participating, reading, and collaborating, and met a future coauthor, [Kenan Dikilitas](#).

I volunteered regionally on the Board of Washington State ESOL (WAESOL), and for the TESOL International Association Teacher Educator Interest Section (TEIS) and served as the chairperson (2019). Working with other teacher educators, like [Laura Baecher](#), [Andrea Hellman](#), [Faridah Pawan](#), [Michelle Benegas](#), [Angela Bell](#), [Khanh-Duc Kuttig](#), and [James Whiting](#), and learning at their sides was enriching beyond words.

Unexpectedly, in 2021, a colleague asked me to run for the TESOL board of directors. I had had hopes in the past but was not sure if I would make it onto the ballot, let alone be elected. I took the risk and spent time writing the best application I could. I asked colleagues from various activities throughout my career to support my nomination, and they were gracious to do so. When I was elected, I was stunned and thrilled. I am honored to serve the organization in this capacity; like my other service, I just want to contribute meaningfully to the organization's goals.

In 2026, I will have been a member of TESOL for 30 years and a professor for 26 years. TESOL enabled me to have a career because I attended, volunteered, and learned, starting with my first conventions. How has this path mirrored yours or what might you take from my journey and apply to yours? I would like to know, so look for me in Portland at the convention or at the online convention!

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