

AER Orientation and Mobility Division (Division Nine)

Biennial Business Meeting

July 27, 2024

Charlotte, North Carolina

**Call To Order**

Raychel Callary called the meeting to order at 11:20 AM. Chris Tabb agreed to act as parliamentarian, and Amy Schreiner agreed to act as timekeeper.

**Welcome**

Current and former Board members in attendance were acknowledged:

* Margaret “Maggie” Winn, incoming Chair
* Autumn Booths, incoming District 1 representative
* Joe Greene, incoming District 6 representative
* Chris Tabb, 2018-2020 Division Chair

**Announcements**

* Attendees were reminded to announce themselves when speaking.
* It was noted that Raychel Callary and Maggie Winn provided an update on 2022-2027 Strategic Plan progress at a session prior to this meeting.
* The recently-passed AER Position Paper on Adult Service Provision was announced. This was a collaborative project by members of the Council of Division Chairs, and is intended to provide guidance with hiring and work assignments.

**Consent Agenda**

* + No changes or corrections were made to the consent agenda which contained the approval of the meeting agenda, approval of the 2022 business meeting minutes, and committee reports included below. Barry Stafford moved to approve the Consent Agenda, seconded byEileen Sifferman. The motion passed.

**Presentation of Newcomer-Hill award**

Raychel Callary presented the Newcomer-Hill award to Maggie Winn. The recipient of the Newcomer Hill Service Award is selected by the outgoing Division Chair in recognition of major contributions to the Division during the previous two years. This award was initiated in 1992 by Bruce Blasch, who was then Division Chair. It is named after two past Division Chairs, James Newcomer (1985-88) and Everett “Butch” Hill (1988-90), who served the Division with commitment and dedication and were exemplary models of professionalism for all orientation and mobility specialists. Raychel remarked that she did not know Maggie well before beginning the term, and has found her to be extremely capable and valuable to the division. She said that she is happy to help support Maggie as she becomes the Chair; she is proud of Maggie and all that is to come.

**Installation Of New Officers**

Raychel listed and thanked the 2022-2024 O&M division board members and committee members. 2024-2026 board members were officially installed:

Chair -- Margaret “Maggie” Winn

Chair-elect -- Alexa Poynor

Past-chair -- Raychel Callary

Secretary -- Linda McFall

District 1 -- Autumn Booths

District 2 -- Debbie Fussell

District 3 -- Jennifer Duncan

District 4 -- Eric Shaw

District 5 -- Jennifer Thurman

District 6 -- Joe Greene

**OLD BUSINESS**

* + Additions to Policies and Procedures Manual (PPM) approved 4/1/24:

Several language changes were made to reflect current AER practices related to funding -- “budget” is replaced by “funding request”. The following was removed, as it no longer applies: “The $10 Orientation and Mobility Division membership fee for an AER member selecting the Orientation and Mobility Division beyond there three selections included with annual AER membership dues, shall be collected at the same time that AER dues are paid.”

References to eliminated AER staff positions were removed and replaced with “AER staff” or “the AER central office”.

Substantive changes addressed the combining of the secretary and treasurer positions. The new description is as follows:

### D. SECRETARY/TREASURER

1. Shall serve as a member of the Division Executive Committee.
2. Shall call the meeting to order if chair and chair-elect are not present.
3. Shall prepare the minutes of Executive Committee meetings and Division business meetings.
4. Shall ensure minutes of Division business meetings and Executive Committee meetings are properly reviewed, corrected as necessary, officially approved, and provided to the AER office to be posted on the AER O&M division webpage.
5. Shall monitor the Division website, in collaboration with the Communications/Media Committee, and facilitate updates with the AER office.
6. Shall ensure that all appropriate material including historical and updated policies and procedures manuals be transferred to a cloud based Resource and Archives folder/location that is accessible by Division members.
7. Shall review the Division membership list quarterly and notify any Division committee member whose membership has lapsed, as well as the division chair.
8. Shall review reimbursement forms and receipts for accuracy and compliance with current reimbursement policies, and submit these to the AER office as directed

The following was added to the Nominating and Elections Committee description:

Note: A full slate of nominees was not received for the Nominating and Elections Committee in 2024. This committee will be elected prior to the 2026 election cycle, and a determination made at that time about how to proceed for future elections.

**NEW BUSINESS** (note: Maggie Winn led the meeting from this point)

* 1. AER leadership
     1. Maggie presented Raychel with a plaque as an outgoing chair gift, and mentioned that Raychel has been a huge support to Maggie as Maggie has been preparing for her role as division chair.
     2. Maggie reported that the O&M Division board sent a letter to current and incoming AER Board members asking them to investigate staff turnover and to attempt to rehire Lee Sonnenberg as our Executive Director.
  2. In-progress division position paper updates
     1. Drs. Justin Kaiser and William Wiener reported on the draft paper *Model Program for Use of Paraeducators in Orientation and Mobility Instruction*. Nick Casias and Eileen Siffermann are also part of the writing team. A vote passed at the 2022 business meeting to create a paper addressing O&M assistants. A paper existed previously and was withdrawn, but there are some places that still use OMAs and there is interest in defining the role in order to provide more frequent services. The writing team conducted a Delphi study for university O&M programs and O&M practitioners. Results demonstrated support for a paraeducator reinforcing skills taught by the orientation and mobility specialist, with support for teaching a limited range of indoor skills and sensory training.

Discussion took place about this paper. Dawn Anderson reported having been successful with hiring people while they are in training; hiring a para who is under an O&M specialist.

Use of this model with adults was questioned. Presenters answered that the survey data suggested more indication of working well in the school system; that it was harder to draw conclusions about adult service provision. This model may be more difficult to apply to adult rehab and environments, but may work well for reinforcement of skills.

An apprentice system in Canada was mentioned which had poor results.

Concern was mentioned that the terminology of “O&M Assistant” could suggest that this is a position that looks to introduce new skills. Dr. Wiener stated that the writing team stayed away from that term and emphasizes that the work should be done by a paraprofessional likely already working in the school which would be restricted to listed skills.

Kevin Hollinger asked that the title be kept consistent. He mentioned the issue with liability when a practitioner has the backing of the school system as opposed to being a private contractor, and expressed concern about ensuring training competency for the paraprofessional. Dr. Wiener stated that skills needed by an individual learner should be the focus, and there should not be an expectation for a paraprofessional to be trained in all competencies.

Nora Griffin-Shirley shared her experience with an adult rehab center with a paraprofessional leading to people being in better shape for O&M lessons. She mentioned that this person never overstepped her role.

A draft will be provided to division members soon for a 30-day comment period, after which a final draft will be voted on by the division. If approved, it will go to the AER board for a vote and be presented as an AER position paper.

* + 1. Maggie stated that a new writing team was being formed for *The O&M Specialists Role with Support Canes* after progress stalled. A physical therapist is being solicited to be on the writing team along with O&M specialists and an Occupational Therapist. Two additional members are being sought. We are hoping the paper will be ready before the 2026 conference.

Concern was expressed about whether people who vote on position papers are O&M specialists. There is currently not a way for this to be identified on the voting form. Division leaders will check into whether this is possible.

**FROM THE FLOOR**

Newsletter editor Meg Robertson asked for feedback on whether the quarterly newsletter is effective. Several people expressed that they would like this to continue. Maggie asked that people please send news to mobilitymeg@aol.com. The deadline for the next newsletter is September 1.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 PM EDT.

## O&M Division 2022-2024

Officers

Raychel Callary (Chair)

Maggie Winn (Chair-Elect)

JoAnne Chalom (Past Chair)

Valery Kircher (Secretary)

Megann Brousard (Treasurer)

District Directors

Angela Leavens (District 1)

Shay Utley (District 2)

Jennifer Duncan (District 3)

Eric Shaw (District 4)

Kevin McCormack (District 5)

Tessa McCarthy (District 6)

Committee Chairs

Archives Committee - Rod Kossick

Awards Committee - Nicholas Leon

Communications/Media-Newsletter - Meg Robertson

Environmental Access Committee Chair - Meg Robertson

Finance Committee-Treasurer - Megann Brousard

Nominating and Elections Committee - Mary Shore

Professional Issues Committee- Maggie Winn

Program Committee - Maggie Winn

Strategic Plan Committee - Raychel Callary

## O&M Division 2024-2026

## Officers and District Directions

Chair -- Margaret “Maggie” Winn

Chair-elect -- Alexa Poynor

Past-chair -- Raychel Callary

Secretary -- Linda McFall

District 1 -- Autumn Booths

District 2 -- Debbie Fussell

District 3 -- Jennifer Duncan

District 4 -- Eric Shaw

District 5 -- Jennifer Thurman

District 6 -- Joe Greene

2024-2026 committee chairs will be determined after the new term begins.

**Committee Reports**

**Strategic Plan Committee: Raychel Callary, Chair**

A summary of progress toward reaching the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan during 2022-2024 is below.

**Increasing Awareness of the Profession:**

A document was created to collect suggestions for support system and community involvement including White Cane Day/Blind Americans Equality Day events and projects. Ideas were solicited from the membership and included in the newsletter. This will be circulated in the spring and in August and September every year.

**Communication with Membership:**

Virtual division meetings were held in April 2023, October 2023 and February 2024 to informally discuss member needs, division activities, leadership roles, and elections as well as to promote involvement.

Quarterly Newsletters were emailed. Eblasts to O&M Division members were provided for meetings and webinars. Social media engagement was present but needs a more concerted effort in the next term.

Division Representation:

* + Southwest Orientation and Mobility Association (SWOMA) 2022, 2023
  + Michigan AER Conference (MAER) 2023, 2024
  + Pacific Northwest AER (PNWAER) 2024: Chair presented with AER Executive Director Lee Sonnenberg -- “AER and Its Divisions: United to Advance our Professions”

**Professional Development:**

Environmental Access Committee eLearning webinar -- [Understanding Modern Signals-Feb 20, 2024](https://www.pathlms.com/aer/courses/62929)

**2024 International Conference Participation:**

* + Environmental Access Committee PROWAG presentation
  + Strategic plan update breakout session
  + Collaborating on Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee panel discussing recruitment
  + Position Paper update: O&M Assistants
  + Division Awards Ceremony
  + Chair-elect Maggie Winn was Symposium Day Chair and a member of the conference committee
  + O&M Board members participated in proposal reviews

**Collaboration, Advocacy for high quality programs and standards of O&M personnel preparation:**

* + Division Board members participated in Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee (PPRC) meetings and supported the creation of a recruitment video and updated flier.
  + The strategic plan committee met several times with Personnel Preparation Division (Division 17) members to collaborate on a document to connect professionals with a mentor in their area for internship supervision or relocation, which should be available soon on the AER website.
  + Chair and Chair-elect presented a webinar for the Administration and Leadership Division (Division 1) on how to fill open positions.
  + Participation in Orientation and Mobility Association (OMSA) Town Halls when possible.
  + Chair led writing team for the first AER Position Paper created by the Council of Division Chairs -- “Requirements for the Provision of Adult Vision Rehabilitation”.

**Educating other professions, Advocacy**

* Several Environmental Access Committee (EAC) members participate in the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. with attendance expenses covered by AER. Several members of the (EAC) are members of TRB Standing Committees, present at annual meetings, and/or are panel members. Participants advocate for accessible infrastructure through committees, presentations, and interaction with traffic planners participants also share information about trends in infrastructure through presentations and the Division newsletter.

**Finance Committee: Megann Brousard** served as treasurer until January 2024, when the position was merged with the secretary position to better align with division needs and AER practices since the advent of requests for funding instead of anticipated budgets.

Approval for our 2023 Division Request for Funds was received August 2, 2022 after approval by the AER Board of Directors, including projected requests for 2024. This includes:

* + $4000 for the Donald Blasch scholarships.
  + $450 for professional development awards and an outgoing chair gift.
  + $9000 for the 2024 TRB conference to follow the AER travel policy. The division may raise funds to supplement AER’s support for conference participation.
  + $1200 for tables at O&M association conferences.
  + $600 for webinar registration. Information to be shared with the division and if appropriate, the entire membership via an article in the Voice.

2023: $13,985.27 was reimbursed for participation in the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting by nine Environmental Access Committee members. The following organizations provided financial support:

* + - * + $1800 from Stronggo Industries
        + $1000 from Vanguard
        + $2000 from Polara
        + $2000 from PedSafety
        + $1500 from Novax Industries

2024: $7466.41 was provided to five Environmental Access Committee members as reimbursement for expenses associated with the Transportation Research Board annual meeting in Washington, DC.

$6250 was received in support of this participation:

* Access Products - $750
* Polara -- $2000
* Stronggo Industries - $1,500
* Dick Campbell Company -- $2000

**Environmental Access Committee: Meg Robertson, Chair**

This committee met quarterly to discuss trends in infrastructure and advocacy/research needs. Nine Environmental Access Committee (EAC) members participated in the Transportation Research Board (TRB) Annual Meeting in January 2023, and five participated in 2024.Several members of the EAC are members of TRB Standing Committees and/or presented at TRB in 2023 and 2024.

TheeLearning webinar “[Understanding Modern Signals” was provided February 20, 2024](https://www.pathlms.com/aer/courses/62929).

**Nominating and Elections Committee: Mary Shore, Chair**

The Nominating and Elections Committee met and collaborated on shared documents from January through March. Nominees were solicited for elected positions through the efforts of many committee members, district directors, and division members. We did not receive enough nominees to elect the next Nominating and Elections committee. It was determined that this committee will be formed closer to when the 2026 election will take place, which aligns with other divisions and AER. In 2026 (or before if indicated) the division board can determine whether to continue that practice or return to electing this committee during the biennial elections.

The ballot for division elections went out 3/22 and closed 4/12. The new board will take on their roles after the business meeting at the AERI conference in July. The election produced the following results:

Chair-elect -- Alexa Poynor

Secretary -- Linda McFall

District 1 -- Autumn Booths

District 2 -- Debbie Fussell

District 3 -- Jennifer Duncan

District 4 -- Eric Shaw

District 5 -- Jennifer Thurman

District 6 -- Joe Greene

**Archives Committee; Rod Kossick, Chair**

The American Printing House informed the committee that they are consolidating their libraries into a single space at APH in order to have all material together for easier access and usage. APH agreed to stamp our materials with “This information is provided by AER Division 9 Orientation and Mobility”. After discussion, the committee was in agreement with this change and relayed the approval to APH staff after communicating the information to the Division Chair. A list of transferred Warren Bledsoe collection books was provided to the Division Chair to be documented in the division website.

## Donald Blasch Scholarship Committee: Eric Shaw, Chair

AER’s O&M Division presents an annual scholarship competition for students enrolled in AER accredited O&M programs. The scholarship recognizes the vital contributions of the late Donald Blasch to the profession of O&M during his long tenure at Western Michigan University.

Individuals selected for the scholarship receive an unrestricted award of $1,000.00. Two scholarships are awarded each year (depending on availability of funds).

2023 there were nine fully completed applications, from which two winners were selected.

Jen Scheel, Portland State University

Suzanne Feigenson, Portland State University

2024 there were six fully completed applications from which two winners were selected.

Emily Vetter, Texas Tech University

Katie Fischer, University of Northern Colorado

Special thank you to Margaret Winn who previously managed as Blasch Scholarship Chair and especially to the team of judges who dedicated their time and applied their knowledge of our field in making their selections.

Sincerely,

Eric L. Shaw

Chair, Blasch Scholarship Committee

## Newsletter: Meg Robertson, Editor

Since the last Orientation and Mobility Business Meeting, 7 editions of the newsletter have been emailed to the Division membership. Thanks to all who have contributed to the Newsletter content.

**Awards Committee: Nick Leon, Chair**

This year, the O&M Awards Committee bestowed the following awards:

● The Orientation and Mobility Citation of Excellence for Direct Service to Benjamin Bossley

● The Janet Barlow Environmental Access Service Award to Billie Louise (Beezy) Bentzen

● The Lawrence E. Blaha Memorial Award to Rona Pogrund

The committee is pleased to report that this year's awards process was highly successful, thanks to the active engagement of all involved. We were able to recognize and honor three outstanding recipients, facilitated by a dedicated 11-person committee representing the O&M division.

Each year, the committee works diligently to refine and enhance the award process, ensuring it remains smooth and equitable. We are grateful to all the committee members for their commitment and hard work throughout the challenging selection process. We also want to express our sincere appreciation to the nominators and all nominees for their continued dedication to the field of Orientation and Mobility.

**Professional Issues Committee: Margaret Winn, Chair**

* All division position papers were revised or created during the last term.
* New position paper: *Model Program for Use of Paraeducators in Orientation and Mobility Instruction* (In progress)

Session will be held Saturday morning 10AM-11AM  
Location: Symphony 1, Sheraton & Le Meridien Charlotte Hotel Complex

* New position paper: Support Canes (In progress, with new writing team in place)
* Raychel attended the Professional Personnel Recruitment Committee (PPRC) meeting 4/18, 5/16. Will present on panel at AERI about division recruiting efforts.
* Raychel and Maggie presented to Administration and Leadership Division (Div 1) collaboration
  + Webinar regarding Open Positions and recruitment
* The executive board of Personnel Preparation Division (Div 17) and executive board of O&M division participated in a collaboration to dialogue about recruitment and retention. Results supported our feedback to the PPRC and helped support the edits of O&M recruitment materials and the beginnings of a mentor connect document.