

# Orientation and Mobility Specialist Association

## 2024 Strategic Plan Review

The Orientation and Mobility Specialist Association (OMSA) has successfully completed a thorough review of the 2024 strategic plan. This review outlines the significant progress made throughout the year, highlighting key achievements and milestones. The results demonstrate the association's impact and value within the profession of O&M, showcasing how our efforts contribute to empowering individuals and enhancing their independence.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of each committee within the organization, detailing their specific goals and the progress made through October 2024. It highlights the efforts and achievements of all the committees, pointing out their objectives and how they have been met, advanced, or have not been met. By reviewing these results, we aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of our collective work and the impact each committee has had on fulfilling the overall mission of the association.

Committee Strategic Goals and Results:

### **VII. COMMITTEE GOALS, PLANNED ACCOMPLISHMENTS, AND STRATEGIES**

#### A. Executive Committee

##### 1. Facilitate quarterly Town Hall Meetings

#### ***Schedule of Town Hall Meetings***

*February 28: Hosted by Eileen Siffermann. The discussion focused on concerns regarding the ACVREP O&M certification program including the certification examination.*

*May 29: Hosted by Eileen Siffermann. Kathleen Zeider, ACVREP President/CEO, lead a discussion on the O&M Certification Program administered by ACVREP. Judy Strauss-Schwartz asked if ACVREP would consider an emeritus certificate for retired COMS. Kathy suggested that Judy and Eileen Siffermann submit such a proposal for the ACVREP Board to consider at their September 2024 meeting. Following the meeting Judy contacted Eileen to work on the proposal which they submitted to Kathy titled: A Proposal for Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist – Emeritus/Emerita (COMS-E) Credential.*

*August 28: Participants discussed the need for centralized information on continuing education credits opportunities. They addressed concerns about the lack of resources for clinical research projects and the need for mentorship and internship opportunities*

*November 20: Report to the members by the OMSA Board of Directors and Committees*

### *Policy and Procedure for Town Hall Meetings*

***Purpose:*** *The OMSA Board is interested in staying current on issues happening in the fields of O&M and guide dog services, and in exploring how to best advocate for our members and those providing O&M and guide dog services. As well as keeping the membership up to date by reporting on the work of the Board and its Committees.*

***Procedure:*** *A member of the OMSA Board will host Town Hall Meetings held in February, May, August, and November usually on the fourth Wednesday of those months. The Board will set the date for the meeting and identify a Board member to host. Dates for the Town Hall Meetings are posted on the website (usomsa.org). E-mail announcements sent out to the membership 10 days prior, with a reminder sent out the day before the meeting.*

2. Maintain the Association's trademarks.

*The trademark OMSA® is for a term of 10 years expiring May 9, 2033. File a declaration of continued use of the mark between May 9, 2028, and May 9, 2029. The trademark for Orientation and Mobility Specialist Association is for a term of 10 years expiring January 2, 2034. File a declaration of continued use of the mark between January 2, 2029 and January 2, 2030.*

*Both trademarks have been filed. Plaques have been received and are being maintained by Eileen Siffermann. Documentation of trademark activities has been placed in OMSA Dropbox.*

3. Maintain the Association's filings with the AZ Corporation Commission. Pay in November of each year the yearly fee and update offices as needed.

*This will be done in November by Eileen Siffermann and Liz Robertson, Treasurer. Transferring the responsibility for maintaining the filing to the Treasurer. Recommend that this should be a function of the Finance Committee and not the Executive Committee.*

#### **B. Membership Committee**

1. Short Term: Continue to populate missing data in membership list as available.

*Ongoing. Currently missing demographic data for 8 individuals.*

*Establish policies and procedures for new scholarships.*

*Completed. OMSA had a successful first Pay it Forward Program and have written policies that were approved by the Board in August.*

Develop a means of soliciting ongoing feedback from members.

*Ongoing. Currently working on an OMSA survey, to be sent to both current and potential OMSA members.*

2. Long Term: Increase OMSA membership.

*Ongoing. Ebbs and flows. 202 members at the December 2023 meeting, currently 211.*

Maintain annual scholarship program.

*Ongoing, the committee has already started to discuss this year's program.*

Continue to search for meaningful ways to engage with members, and brainstorm ideas to provide value to members.

*Ongoing. The current project to address this goal is our new survey, which is in progress. Also supports the CE committee to verify membership for CEU's.*

Update information sent to new and renewing members.

*To be completed. The committee has discussed updates to website applications.*

Increase GDMI/NOMC/student involvement in OMSA.

*Ongoing. Successful collaboration with Activities Committee in hosting 2 GDMI Gatherings, 3rd is in the works.*

Collaborate with yet-to-be-established Communications Committee.

*To be completed.*

### C. Continuing Education Committee

1. Develop and follow procedures for offering continuing education for O&M and guide dog professionals.

*The Continuing Education Committee has created and follows procedures for its events.*

2. Offer at least three 90-minute presentations, registered with ACVREP. The OMSA would offer CEs to members at no charge.

*The Continuing Education Committee has offered the following presentations over 2024:*

- *O&M in the Deafblind World by Monica Godfrey-Lehrer in February, however, was cancelled by the presenter due to a personal emergency.*
- *Supported the Barlow Initiative in providing CEs in April at Penn-Del AER.*
- *Structured Discovery Cane Travel Approach to O&M Concepts in June.*
- *O&M Referral Policies and Procedures in September.*

3. Based on membership surveys, offer presentations on issues affecting the fields of O&M and guide dog mobility including multiple disabilities and current research.

*All topics presented have aligned with member needs documented in the survey.*

#### D. Finance Committee

1. Develop a transition plan from outgoing to incoming treasurers. Create procedural steps for handing over hard drives and log in information.

*The committee has successfully been working on the first item (documenting it is still in progress, though the transition to a new Treasurer has already occurred).*

2. Manage and monitor all financial transactions for accuracy to protect the assets of the organization.

*This item has been consistently met every month. In addition, the finance committee helped facilitate the Barlow Day workshop.*

#### E. Activities Committee

1. To create and facilitate activities, such as Mobility Monday, for our OMSA members that allow for career discussions and presentations critical to the fields of O&M and guide dog mobility.

*Most months Mobility Monday covers an important topic in O&M and guide dog services. They have ranged in attendance from around 10 to 25.*

2. To assist universities nationwide in promoting a career in O&M through OMSA-regulated pamphlets, posters, and other educational materials at Job/Career Fairs.

*After discussion with some other professionals, the committee is shifting from using a kit for university outreach and instead making a kit regarding blind rehabilitation and presenting to different eye care professionals.*

*The committee has been hosting a quarterly GDMI gathering that has been successful averaging around 30 participants from all over the world including Canada, Australia, and Argentina.*

## F. Communication Committee

1. Establish a communication committee.

*In progress. Searching for a committee chair.*

## G. The Barlow Initiative Committee

1. Develop and host regular workshops with representation of both traffic engineers and O&M specialists and guide dog instructors.

### ***Barlow Initiative AER Penn-Del Conference - Harrisburg, PA - April***

*Traffic Engineering and Orientation and Mobility: Cultivating Collaboration Workshop: Transportation Professionals and O&M Specialists visited intersections in small groups to discuss strategies used by pedestrians with visual disabilities. Participants had an opportunity to cross streets while blindfolded or using a low-vision simulator. During a follow-up discussion, participants identified modifications that could make wayfinding easier and/or crossing safer at a few of the targeted intersections. Transportation professionals shared experiences and possible hurdles of meeting access needs of pedestrians with visual disabilities, including time frame and funding options.*

- *33 Vision Professionals registered with 25 actual attendees and 8 Transportation Professionals with 7 actual attendees.*
- ***Comments from Transportation Professionals:***
  - *I have a much deeper appreciation for mobility challenges posed by streets and intersections - even things as simple as large, concrete traffic islands.*
  - *I gained an appreciation for how blind/low vision folks find their way around sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.*
  - *Terrific workshop. More transportation professionals - especially those with DOTs - need to be exposed to these kinds of workshops.*
  - *We definitely need to do a better job to accommodate this population. Some of the things we do to improve pedestrian safety works well for sighted people but not always for blind and low vision people.*
  - *My expectation was this was more oriented towards engineers and was pleasantly surprised to have come away with a new perspective of what we can do better. We think Lancaster is a model for what a small city can do to improve safety on our streets, regardless mode, age and ability. It's a challenge to balance how we spend limited resources for the greater good. There is definitely room for doing it better.*

- *Predictability is key. Communicating design information spatially and audibly needs to be top priority for engineers.*
- *This was the most valuable training I've ever received. Please do more of these.*
- **Comments from Vision Professionals:**
  - *I'm going to make sure my coworkers (GDMLs) know they can encourage their clients to contact traffic engineers to request any upgrades or modifications to the APS systems.*
  - *I loved working alongside a traffic engineer!*
  - *The enthusiasm and passion shown by the presenters of the Barlow Initiative Workshop is quite clear. I'm sure that your former colleague Janet is quite proud of you all for continuing to educate and collaborate with Traffic Engineers. Thank you for all you do in this effort. And thank you for the opportunity to share the experience!*
  - *I have been inspired to look into who my local traffic engineers are and begin formulating a relationship with them and encouraging my consumers to reach out with their concerns/ feedback.*
  - *I thought it was a great start. The hands-on experience at the intersections was great and very helpful. I think it's a great foundation to build on.*
  - *The importance of getting to know local traffic engineers and how to reach out to them*
  - *I think it would be interesting to have a future student of mine contact a traffic engineer themselves and advocate for what they think would be helpful for them as a visually impaired individual for crossing at an intersection. I knew you could contact traffic engineers, but I didn't realize there were set ones for each city/area and that you could meet with them in person. I feel like this would not only help my future students become better advocates for themselves, but that it would also let traffic engineers see how their designs or ideas aren't necessarily accessible for all.*

### **Barlow Initiative APBP Conference - Detroit, MI - August**

#### **Wayfinding with Tactile Walking Surface Indicators (TWSI)**

*Increasingly complex geometries in public rights-of-way present new safety and wayfinding challenges to pedestrians who are blind or who have low vision. Experience the effects of simulated low vision on wayfinding in a field exercise near the conference venue. As you learn about how people with low vision are taught to navigate, you'll begin to understand how existing cues in the built environment may be missing,*

*confusing or misleading. Then learn about three types of tactile walking surface indicators (TWSIs) that recent research has identified and validated for providing accessible information for wayfinding and safety to address these challenges. Find out what truncated dome detectable warning surfaces (DWS), raised bar tactile direction indicators (TDI), and trapezoidal tactile warning delineators (TWD) are, and how, and where to use them in a variety of transportation settings. Finally, join in a small-group exercise to practice what you've learned as your group redesigns a case site using TWSIs to improve accessibility and address the wayfinding challenge(s) you can identify.*

- *Attendance at the workshop: 18 Transportation Professionals signed up. More were actually attended the workshop.*
- *Comments: from a Transportation Project Manager from Boston, MA who attended the workshop:*

*"As someone who is designing intersections, floating bus stops, and things of the like, the information you both provided was incredibly important to hear and will certainly influence any future designs I work on."*

2. Promote cross-collaboration at universities between O&M and civil engineering programs.

### **University of Kentucky Fall 2023 O&M Class**

#### *Traffic Engineering Collaboration*

*The University of Kentucky O&M Program and the Lexington Fayette County Transportation Division collaborated on a joint learning workshop. The group brought together 3 UK faculty members, 11 O&M graduate students, 3 Lexington traffic engineers, and 2 high school students with visual impairments. The focus of the workshop was to analyze challenging intersections and allow for experiences under blindfold and low vision simulations.*

*Lexington traffic engineers presented on the basis of understanding traffic control and terminology. UK students had been introduced to these concepts previously, but this was a useful review, and it allowed them to ask better questions of the engineers. One of our instructors who had assisted with our blindfold courses, is also a COMS in the school system, and she brought a few high school students with visual impairments to participate in the workshop. They were also able to interact with and ask questions of the engineers.*

*The group analyzed a roundabout and a diverging diamond intersection. The group were able to explore the intersections in small groups and talk about the specific features as the group went. The group brought the low vision simulators to help explain and demonstrate the challenges faced by individuals with visual impairments. Also, there was a unique feature on the edge of the roundabout with an additional out of place ramp (6 feet from the actual crossing with a ramp) and set of truncated domes, which the engineer's thought was designed for bikes entering/exiting the sidewalk. It was interesting to discuss this feature and how this could easily be mistaken for a crosswalk by a cane user. The group walked through and discussed each crossing at both*

*intersections. Everyone involved in this workshop reported that they felt it was a useful and helpful experience. This would be a good experience to do again with O&M graduate students.*

3. Create and maintain a database to identify resources and create collaborative educational opportunities between O&M professionals and guide dog instructors with an interest in environmental accessibility.

*In progress.*