

Strategic Plan for The Oceanography Society 2025–2030

INTRODUCTION

In May 2024, members of The Oceanography Society (TOS) Council and staff met to develop a new strategic plan for the Society. As a starting point, they revisited the organization’s mission and produced a shorter, more focused statement.

The Oceanography Society’s mission is:

To build the capacity of its diverse global membership; catalyze interdisciplinary ocean research, technology, policy, and education; and promote equitable access to opportunities for all.

In support of the mission, the TOS Council defined goals in three areas to advance during the period encompassed by the plan:

- Develop Policy for Science and Science for Policy
- Serve a Broader Ocean Science Community
- Support Undergraduate and Graduate Students

I. DEVELOP POLICY FOR SCIENCE AND SCIENCE FOR POLICY

Science is influenced by institutional and national policies that guide and impact how scientists work, progress through their career, receive professional recognition, compete for funding, and disseminate their results, which we refer to as Policy for Science. Scientific data, analysis, interpretation, and translations are critically important to inform sound public policy decisions, which we also refer to as Science for Policy. In the first two goals, TOS seeks to support clarity in policies and procedures surrounding promotion and tenure and to take the first steps at building a more robust approach to support our members who want to use science for policy.

Goal 1 – Catalyze pathways to equity in promotion and tenure

Developing solutions to grand challenges like climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental sustainability requires collaboration across disciplines and communities. This collaboration is often hindered by outdated hiring, promotion, and tenure policies in academia.

Professional societies like TOS help define and set standards within the fields represented by their members. For example, the TOS Council and its Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) committee improved the award nomination and selection process to ensure more equitable recognition among all career types and people. However, more needs to be done to continue to promote equity in promotion and tenure practices within the field of ocean science. One way to continue to catalyze pathways to equity in promotion in tenure is through educating TOS members on the various metrics used in promotion considerations in different careers, knowledge that can also help when choosing a career path or transitioning from one career to another.

Implementation:

Action 1.1 – TOS will conduct a literature review, administer a survey, and host virtual listening sessions to gather information on the following topics:

- Promotion and tenure policies at institutions of higher education
- Promotion policies in industry
- Promotion policies at NGOs and agencies
- Assessment of how each of the above vary by institution type and country

Timing – 2025

Estimated financial cost – \$3,000 to hire an intern to work with the TOS Executive Director or a member(s) of Council. \$6000 to cover the costs of publishing two articles in *Oceanography*

Metric for success – Report or series of articles published in *Oceanography* that can serve as a guide to members of university, industry, NGO, and agency committees involved in hiring, tenure, and promotion and individuals considering career options or preparing for promotion or tenure decisions

Action 1.2 – TOS will solicit white papers from the TOS membership and ocean science community at large on challenges and opportunities within the current promotion and tenure system

Timing – 2025/2026

Estimated financial cost – \$4000 to cover the costs of publishing five white papers in *Oceanography*

Metric for success – Compilation of white papers for publication in *Oceanography*, host a Town Hall at the Ocean Sciences Meeting in 2026

Action 1.3 – Based on the information collected in Action 1.1 and 1.2, TOS will form working groups to craft best practice document(s) for promotion and tenure in academia, industry, NGOs, and agencies

Timing – 2027/2028

Estimated financial cost – None

Metric for success – Best practice documents available for community discussion in webinars and presentation at the Ocean Sciences Meeting in 2028

Goal 2 – Develop a TOS Policy Program

Good public policy is informed by sound science. Scientists can engage with policy issues through a broad range of activities, from conducting policy-relevant research, to providing expert opinions on policy issues, to pursuing a career in developing and advocating for specific policies. To meet the needs of TOS members interested in policy, the Society will develop a program aimed at providing skills that can be used in any country.

Implementation:

Action 2.1 – TOS will develop and administer a survey to the ocean science community to better understand their policy-relevant opportunities and needs. Based on the survey results, TOS will develop a proposal for a TOS Policy Program, which clearly identifies goals, strategies for implementing those goals, and corresponding capacity and resource needs.

Timing – 2025

Estimated financial cost – TBD

Metrics of success – Development of a new program

II. SERVE A BROADER OCEAN SCIENCE COMMUNITY

TOS currently conducts a wide range of activities that serve the broader ocean science community, such as:

- Publishing *Oceanography*, which includes a wide array of peer-reviewed scientific articles and other educational content
- Hosting and co-hosting conferences such as the biennial Ocean Optics conference and Ocean Sciences Meeting
- Hosting an exhibit booth at conferences to engage with existing and potential members
- Hosting webinars, panels, networking events, and town halls (online or at in-person) focused largely on career development
- Recognizing members who excel by giving awards and honors to deserving community members and groups
- Maintaining a strong web presence that includes pages targeted at undergraduates, graduate students, and early career scientists
- Promoting ethical guidelines and codes of conduct among its members
- Nurturing transparency and open access to scientific research
- Combating misinformation and disinformation

Goal 3 – Facilitate bidirectional support and networking to connect members with industry, NGOs, and agencies

Traditionally, TOS activities have largely focused on members working in academia, but increasingly TOS members are pursuing careers outside the academy. Compared to AGU and ASLO, TOS membership consists of a higher proportion of people who work at non-academic organizations. TOS seeks to serve this important and growing community through targeted professional development opportunities and by helping build connections between job seekers and industry, NGOs, and federal and national agencies seeking to hire professionals with multidisciplinary oceanographic research and/or technology expertise.

Implementation:

Action 3.1 – TOS will provide resources that help its members prepare for and find jobs in industry, NGOs, and agencies and help employers connect with qualified candidates

- Host in person town halls at meetings and virtual career development activities, which could include:
 - A panel of employers who describe jobs and internships available, skills needed, and how to apply
 - Training and advice for job seekers
 - CV and resume development targeted for different positions in a range of sectors
 - Application preparation and interview skills for different types of positions

- Add a page to the TOS website with links to available resources for navigating career transitions between academic and non-academic careers and leadership or management roles

Timing – In-person town halls may alternate between Ocean Science Meetings (winter 2026, winter 2028) and Marine Technology Society meetings (fall 2027, fall 2029). Virtual events will be scheduled periodically.

Estimated financial cost – In-person town hall costs are expected to be minimal but may include room rentals and meeting registration for coordinators

Metric for success – Increases in town hall and career week attendance and post-event survey responses from registered participants

Action 3.2 – TOS will support and host or co-host networking receptions aimed at bringing together industry, NGOs, and agencies with members seeking career opportunities in these areas. These receptions may occur in conjunction with town halls at meetings or at locations around the world where maritime career opportunities are clustered (such as the reception co-hosted with Sea-Bird Scientific in Seattle, WA, in June 2023).

Timing – In-person post-town hall receptions may alternate between Ocean Science Meetings (winter 2026, winter 2028) and Marine Technology Society meetings (fall 2027, fall 2029).

Estimated financial cost – \$15,000 Annually (100 people), funded through corporate sponsorships

Metric for success – Increase in event attendance over time, post-event survey responses from registered participants

Action 3.3 – The TOS Council will establish a TOS committee consisting of members from industry, NGOs, and agency sectors. This committee will provide guidance and recommendations to the TOS Council on issues related to Goal 3. Committee responsibilities will be to:

- Assist TOS in coordinating town halls, virtual professional development, and networking events to ensure (a) diverse attendance and participation and (b) the information provided is relevant to the industry, NGOs, and agency sectors
- Work with the TOS Council to evaluate how best to include the voice of industry, NGOs, and agency sectors in Council decisions, such as adding additional councilor positions to represent their communities

Timing – Committee members will be asked to serve three-year terms

Estimated financial cost – None

Metric for success – Establishment of a committee that delivers actionable recommendations to the TOS Council that serves this segment of membership

III. SUPPORT UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENTS

TOS currently provides a broad suite of support for student members such as:

- Providing travel grants to the Ocean Sciences Meetings and Ocean Optics Conferences
- Hosting the TOS Breakfast at the Ocean Sciences meeting
- Providing volunteer opportunities throughout the conferences
- Convening workshops on topics relevant to students during conferences
- Maintaining the Graduate Student/Early Career Resources page (<https://tos.org/opportunities>) and Undergraduate Resources page (<https://tos.org/undergrad>)
- Including announcements of relevant opportunities for students in TOS NEWS
- Hosting virtual webinars such as *Forging Your Career in Academia and Industry*
- Providing leadership development opportunities through inclusion of the elected Student Councilor as a voting member of the Council and the appointment of a TOS Student representative as a core committee member for the Ocean Sciences Meeting Planning Committee

Goal 4 – Increase student members’ sense of belonging in TOS

Implementation:

Action 4.1 – Increase student member engagement, such as recognition at the TOS Breakfast, serving as a panelist or facilitator for TOS online programming, or serving as a peer-mentor at future meetings

Timing – Annually at TOS meetings (OSM, Ocean Optics, etc.)

Estimated financial cost – Increase from \$10,000 to \$15,000

Metric for success – Increased student support for meeting attendance and increased number of student members

Action 4.2 – TOS will provide professional development and career readiness programming, including for undergraduates exploring the possibility of pursuing ocean research in graduate school

Timing – Annually

Estimated financial cost – None

Metric for success – Increases in numbers of participants and post-event survey responses from registered participants

Action 4.3 – TOS will guide members through the transition from student membership to professional membership by describing the benefits of TOS membership as one moves forward in their career

Timing – Annually

Estimated financial cost – None

Metric for success – Increased retention of student members as early career members through time

OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The long-term objective of The Oceanography Society is to attract and serve a vibrant membership community that spans disciplines and career trajectories. We hope our members view TOS as a source of nurturing, support, guidance, and community. This 2025–2030 strategic plan provides an actionable roadmap to guide the TOS Council to better serve and grow its membership and ensure advances in the field of ocean science benefit the broader society.