American Occupational Therapy Association

AOTA, ACOTE, & NBCOT: Alignment and Opportunities for Collaboration

OT-ALC Session #1
October 22, 2026

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Background & Objectives

- Feedback from the 2026 Spring ALC meeting included requests for clarity on standards reform, entry-level practice, competency frameworks, NBCOT exam development, and greater alignment among national organizations.
- This was the highest priority topic identified on a recent survey of OT PDs (N=133)

Describe past & current efforts by national organizations to promote alignment & collaboration

Discuss opportunities for future/expanded collaboration amongst national organizations

Identify possible opportunities for OT programs & program directors to contribute to collaborative efforts

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3 organizations. Different missions.



AOTA

To advance occupational therapy practice, education, and research through standard setting and advocacy on behalf of its members, the profession, and the public.



ACOTE

Support quality, inclusion, and innovation to advance entry-level occupational therapy education.



NBCOT

NBCOT protects the public through the validation of essential competencies for effective and safe occupational therapy practice.

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Today's Panelists



Neil Harvison, PhD, OTR, FNAP, FAOTA

AOTA Interim Chief Executive Officer



Lynn Kilburg, DHSc, MBA, OTR/L

ACOTE Chairperson



Barbara Williams, DrOT, MS, OTR

NBCOT Vice President, External & Regulatory Affairs

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AOTA

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Reimagining and Reenvisioning OTA/OT Education Ad Hoc Committee

RA Competency Project Taskforce

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AOTA Board: Reimagining and Reenvisioning OTA/OT Education Ad Hoc Committee

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The **Reimagining and Reenvisioning OTA/OT Education Ad Hoc Committee** has been convened for a one-year term to develop recommendations addressing the challenges facing entry-level occupational therapy assistant (OTA) and occupational therapy (OT) programs.

The goal is to ensure high-quality education, support a sustainable pipeline of competent practitioners, and respond to the evolving needs of the profession and society.

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Roster:	Community:
Arameh Anvarizadeh, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA	Chairperson, AOTA BOD
Angela Macauley, PMP	NBCOT
Bryant Edwards, OTD, MA, MPH, OTR/L, BCP FAOTA	AOTA BOD/ Employer/ Pediatric Practice
Chris Daughtry, OTR/L, ATP,	Corporate/ Employer/ Physical Disabilities
Dawn M. Nilson, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA	AOTA CBE Committee
Felicia Banks, PhD, Med, OTR/L, FAOTA	CHIRP-HBCU
Kendra Heatwole Shank, PhD, OTR/L	SSO
Ketki Raina, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA	AOTA- ACOTE
Ricardo Ramirez, OTD, OTR/L, QMHP	ALC/ Mental Health Practice
Robin Pegg, EdD, COTA/L, ATP, ROH	OTA Educator
Ryan Lavalley, PhD, OTR/L	COTAD
Shaina Kale, MHA, COTA/L, AHI	OTA Practice
Tracy Jirikowic, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA	AOTF
Berit Boyle	Student
Neil Harvison, PhD, OTR/L, FNAP, FAOTA	AOTA Staff

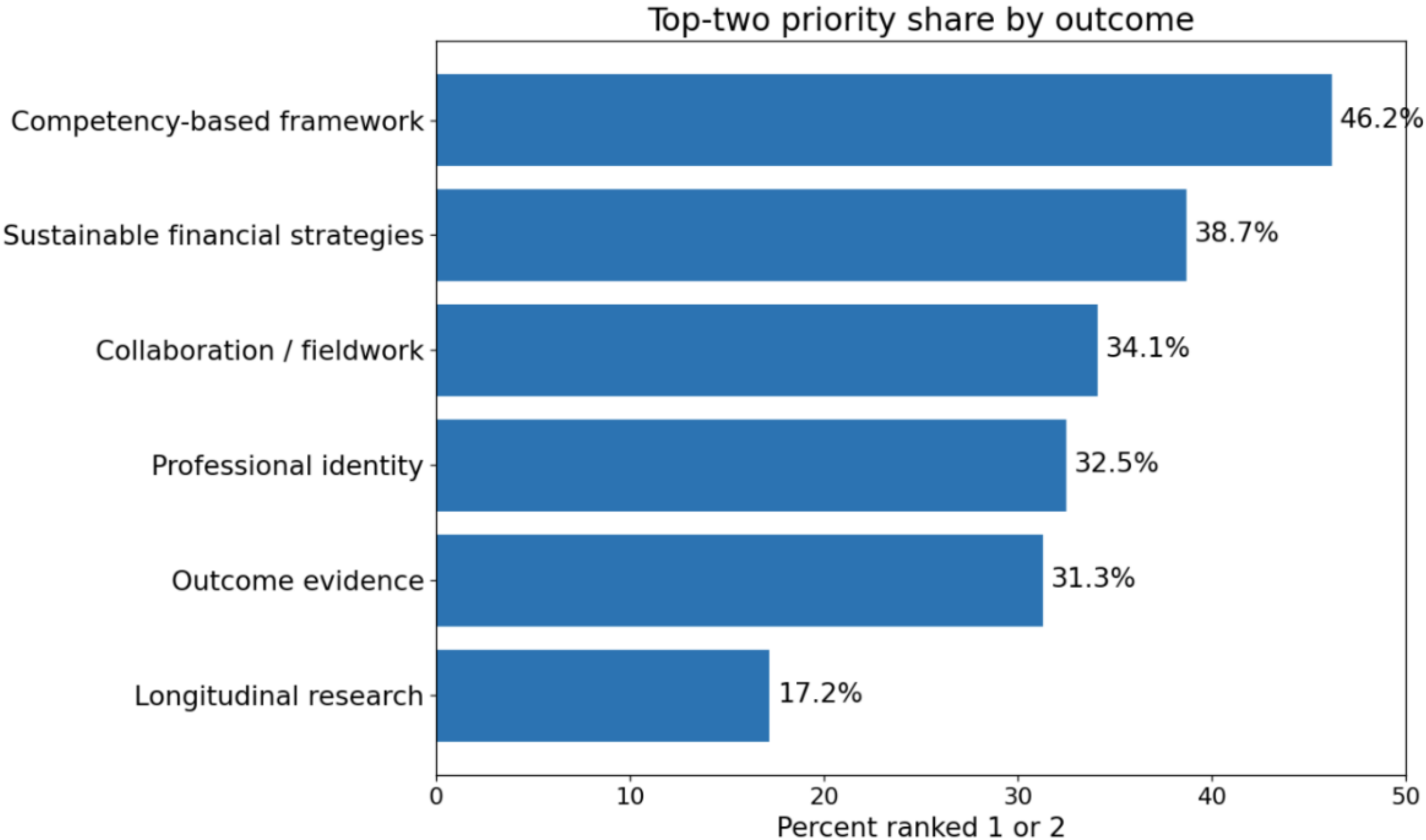
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Susan MacDermot, OTD, OTR/L
Jenn Soros, PhD, OTR/L
Kathryn Ellis, OTD, OTR/L, CSOT, FAOTA, AASECT-SC, CSB
Karla Reese, DHSc, OTR/L
Carlin Reaume, OTD, MAEd, OTR/L
Kara Welke, OTD, OTR/L, CLT
Stacey Vieyra-Braendle, OTD, OTR/L, MT-BC
Michael Heaton, MA, OTR/L
Sue Ludwig, OTR/L, CNT
Douglene Jackson, PhD, OTR/L, LMT, ATP, CYT, FAOTA
Danielle Sparks, DHS, MOT, OTR, CHT
Thomas Fisher, PhD, OTR/L, CCM, FAOTA
Tim Wolf, OTD, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA
Jaime Munoz, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA
Laura J. Carpenter, PhD, OTR/L
Christine Gunnigle, MS, OTR/L, OTA/L
Steve Taff, PhD, OTR/L, FNAP, FAOTA
Louisa Boyd, OTR, CLT
James (Jim) Lenker, PhD, OT/L, FAOTA, RESNA Fellow
Ann Marie Dundas, OTR/l, PYT, WHC
Sarah Larson, MOTR/L
Sandy Hanebrink OTR/L, CLP, FAOTA
Natalie Chang Wright MBA-HCM, COTA/L, ROH
Dahlia Castillo OTR, OTD
Doug Vestral

Subject Matter Experts

Higher education
Disability advocates
Underrepresented communities
RESNA
Lymphedema network
SoTL
Hand therapy
Neonatal therapy
Mental health advocates
For profit education
Innovation & entrepreneurs
OT & sexuality
Maternal health
Pelvic health

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Top-two priority share by outcome
Competency-based framework
Sustainable financial strategies
Collaboration / fieldwork
Professional identity
Outcome evidence
Longitudinal research
46.2%
38.7%
34.1%
32.5%
31.3%
17.2%
0
10
20
30
40
50
Percent ranked 1 or 2

Survey.

Completed.

Brainstorming with small groups.

Clarify findings from survey and start formulating actionable steps.

Build out Recommendations.

Build out practical, achievable actions to address challenges facing education

Report back.

Board of Directors meeting in February. ALC meeting in April.



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RA Competency Project Taskforce

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2021 RA appointed a task group to examine the growing number of entry level competencies (standards).

2023 Task group recommended…explore a competency-based educational approach.

2023 RACC appointed a task group to explore competency-based education.

2024 task group recommended the development of a competency framework for OT and OTAs.

Roster	Community
Bryan Gee Ph.D., OTD, OTR/L, BCP, CLA, OTR/L, FAOTA	RA - COE
Lauren Gray, B.S., COTA/L, ROH	NBCOT
Laura Green, MOT, OTR/L	AOTA - ACOTE
Efekona Nuwere EdD, OTR/L	RA- COE
Meghan Suman OTD, OTR/L, BCP, SCSS	RA_ CCPD
Abi Swidergal, MS, COTA/L, CKTP, ROH	RA_ LC
Cheryl Boop MS, OTR/L, BCP	RA - COP
Valerie Demler COTA/L	AOTA - MHSIS
Razan Hamed PhD, OTR/L	AOTA - BOD
Dawn Nilsen, EdD, OTR/L, FAOTA	SME
Douglene Jackson, PhD, OTR/L, LMT, ATP, BCTS	SME

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Competency Project Taskforce Tasks and Timeline

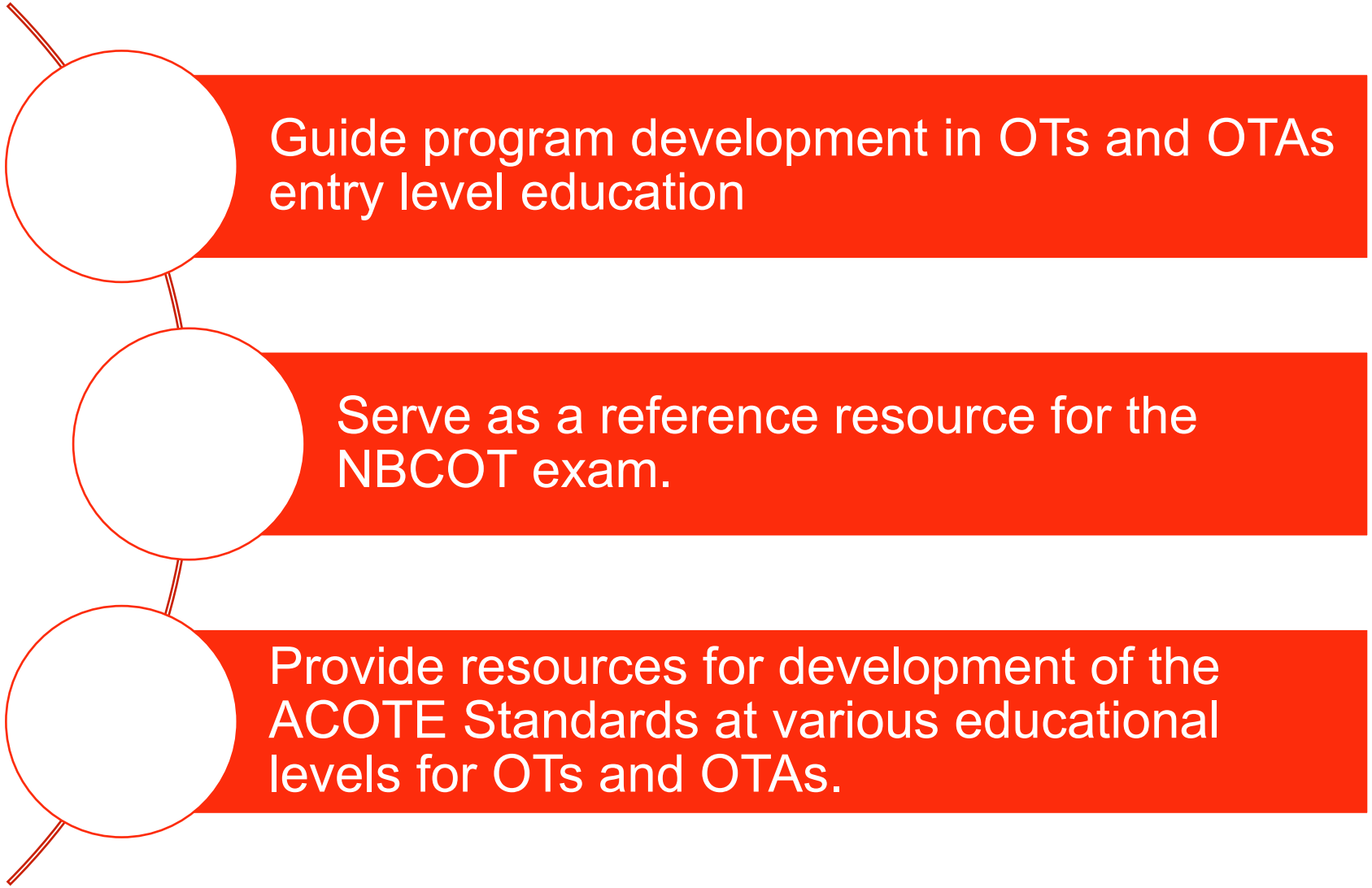
Step	Outcome	Process	Timeline
Step 1: Establish the Plan	Identify the purpose, intended use, scope of the competency framework, and identify key communities and their roles.	Online meetings: Taskforce members	4 months
Steps 2 & 3: Identify and explore the contexts domains of practice	Establish the domains of competence.	Literature review; focus groups; drafting panel; reactor panels, etc.	6-9 months

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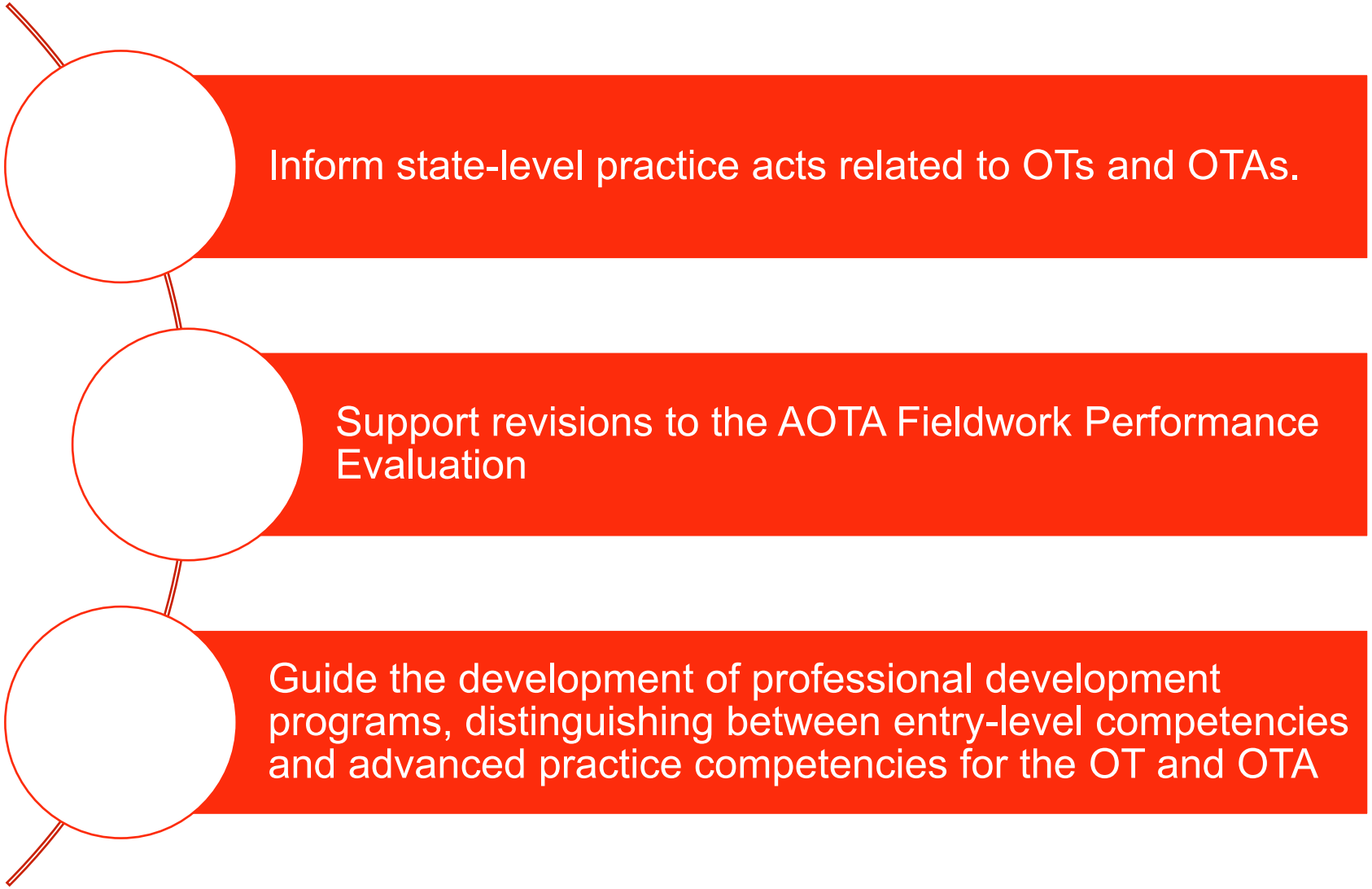
Competency Project Taskforce Tasks and Timeline

Step	Outcome	Process	Timeline
Step 4: Translate & test	Identify and specify competencies required for professional practice.	Delphi survey(s)	9 months
Step 5: Feedback	Collect and compile community feedback	Town halls & surveys	3 months
Step 6: Report	Adoption and dissemination of the final competencies.	Webinars; Publications; etc	3 Months

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ACOTE

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Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education

ACOTE Collaborations

Fall Academic Leadership Council: Oct. 2026

Dr. Lynn Kilburg, ACOTE Chairperson

ACOTE

VISION: *Lead, innovate, and advance occupational therapy education in a global environment*

MISSION: *Support quality, inclusion, and innovation to advance entry-level occupational therapy education*

VALUES: *Quality; Innovation; Collaboration; Inclusion; Integrity*

ACOTE©
Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education

Purpose of Accreditation

- Accredit entry level occupational therapy educational programs and occupational therapy assistant educational programs
- Assure the quality and assist in the improvement of the program

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Purpose of Accreditation

- Accreditation serves the profession by:
  - contributing to the unity of the professions by bringing together practitioners, educators and students in an activity directed at improving professional preparation and professional practice
  - providing a means for practitioners to **participate in setting the requirements for preparation to enter the profession**

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Scope of ACOTE

- ACOTE establishes, approves, and administers educational Standards to evaluate entry level occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant educational programs.
- ACOTE has autonomy in:
  - establishing standards for entry level educational programs
  - developing and implementing policies, rules, and procedures for conducting accreditation reviews
  - making accreditation decisions

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Scope of ACOTE

- ACOTE Standards seek to ensure a comprehensive academic journey for the student, allowing for innovation, faculty autonomy, and institutional/regional areas of emphasis.
- Accreditation standards focus on educating the WHOLE professional for entry into a life-long career to include entry competencies in the OT process, research, leadership, diversity, administration, theory, and professional advocacy.
- Thematic alignment with NBCOT is important to support passing the exam for entry to practice BUT the accreditation standards are not intended to be a “test-prep” guide.

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Standard Review Process

- Five-Year Review Cycle (starting the process now)
  - ACOTE forms the Educational Standard Review Committee (ESRC) ~2 years
  - Committee includes:
    - voting members: educators, practitioners, student, public member, consumer
    - non-voting members: representative from NBCOT and AOTA
    - Representation from both practitioner level, across the country, different types of institutions
- Ongoing Review
  - ACOTE Council Standards Committee – to consider topics, questions, need for interpretive guides/clarification

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Standards Review Process

- The ESRC reviews:
  - survey results; feedback from communities of interest
  - AOTA official documents
  - NBCOT practice analysis and crosswalk
  - USDE and CHEA requirements
  - WFOT Standards
- ESRC Chair presents potential Standard changes at an open hearing at INSPIRE (2028)

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Collaborations

- Primarily through the ACOTE Standards review process
  - communities of interest
  - AOTA
  - NBCOT

Collaborations with communities of interest

- AT ANY TIME
  - Complete simple on-line form via the ACOTE Website www.acoteonline.org
  - Email the Accreditation Department at: accred@aota.org
- PLUS DURING FORMAL REVIEW PERIODS:
  - Attend ESRC open hearing at INSPIRE (2028)
  - Review and submit comment on draft standards.
- All comments are reviewed by ACOTE and/or ESRC



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Collaborations with AOTA

- Non-voting AOTA representative serves on the ESRC as nominated by the AOTA president
- ESRC refers to AOTA official documents and position papers, to inform Standard review
- Participate in committees as requested by AOTA: Currently
  - AOTA President's Ad hoc committee regarding Reimagining OTA and OT Education
  - Competency Based Education

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Collaborations with NBCOT

- Non-voting NBCOT representative serves on the ESRC
- Data sharing to inform ESRC and Standards review:
  - Identify gaps in ACOTE Standards and NBCOT exam
  - Crosswalk Standards to Exam
  - NBCOT practice analysis

NBCOT®
National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy

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Any Questions – Any Time



Contact the Accreditation Department at:

accred@aota.org

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NBCOT

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OTR and COTA Practice Analysis Studies

- Professional testing standards and regulations require that certification exam content is based on a study of the profession called a practice analysis.
- Conducted every five years to identify the essential tasks performed by entry-level OT professionals and the knowledge required for proficient performance of those tasks.
- Results are used to develop exam content outlines that guide content development for the OTR and COTA exams.
- Basing the exam content on a practice analysis ensures that the knowledge tested on the exam is linked directly to practice, thereby ensuring the validity of the exam.

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Next Practice Analysis Timeline

Practice analysis study conducted – Q1 2027 to Q2 2028

Public announcement of new content outline – Q2 2028 (target is June 2028)

First exams under new content outline administered – Q2 2029 (target is June 2029)

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NBCOT Resources

https://www.nbcot.org/exam-info

Exam Outline

Review the knowledge covered on the exam and the percentage of questions in each domain.

Foundations of the NBCOT Exam

Learn about the scoring, item types, development, and formatting of the exam.

Practice Analyses

We use evidence-based studies to create the exam outline.

Certification & Education Standards: A Crosswalk

A review between the 2023 ACOTE Standards, Section B, and the NBCOT Exam Content Outlines.

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Q&A

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