

2026 Illinois Occupational Therapy Association Awards

The Awards Committee welcomes your nominations for our 15 award categories! If you have questions, contact office@ilota.org, and we will reach out to you.

2026-27 Awards Committee:

Coordinator: Gail Fisher, OTR/L
Members: Mae Brandon, OTR/L,
 Jennifer Reedy, OTD, OTR/L,
 Jeanne Rehr, COTA/L, and
 Erin Simpson, DrOT, MOT, OTR/L

Key to abbreviations:

ILOTA: Illinois Occupational Therapy Association
 AOTA: American Occupational Therapy Association
 ACOTE: Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education
 OT: Occupational Therapist
 OTA: Occupational Therapy Assistant

Nominees who are OTs, OTAs, or OT/OTA students are required to be ILOTA members at the time of their nomination and receipt of their award.

There are two awards that can be presented to non-members who are not OTA/OT students or practitioners, indicated by an asterisk (*).

Purpose/Description of the Award	Eligibility for the Award	Criteria for the Award
<p>Occupational Therapist of the Year</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapist who has made significant contributions which advance occupational therapy in Illinois and positively impact the ILOTA.</p>	<p>The nominee shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be a licensed occupational therapist and an ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. 2. Have a minimum of 5 years of demonstrated contributions. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The nominee shall have demonstrated excellence in one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical or community-based occupational therapy practice, administration, leadership, and/or research • Participation in clinical or academic education • Publications, presentations, or media activities 2. The nominee shall have advanced occupational therapy in Illinois and contributed to ILOTA goals or initiatives. 3. Further consideration for years of service and impact of sustained activity on ILOTA and the profession.
<p>Occupational Therapy Assistant of the Year</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy assistant who has made significant contributions which advance occupational therapy in Illinois and positively impact the ILOTA.</p>	<p>The nominee shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be a licensed occupational therapy assistant and an ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. 2. Have a minimum of 5 years of demonstrated contributions. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The nominee shall have demonstrated excellence in one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical or community-based occupational therapy practice, administration, leadership, and/or research • Participation in clinical or academic education • Publications, presentations, or media activities 2. The nominee shall have advanced occupational therapy in Illinois and contributed to ILOTA goals or initiatives. 3. Further consideration for years of service and impact of sustained activity on ILOTA and the profession.

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<p>Occupational Therapy Assistant/ Occupational Therapist (OTA/OT) Partnership Award</p> <p>1. Recognizes an occupational therapy assistant and occupational therapist team that demonstrates an exemplary collaborative intraprofessional partnership which advances the occupational therapy profession in Illinois.</p> <p>2. Promotes the collaborative team model of OTA and OT practitioners.</p>	<p>The OTA/OT partners shall:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be a licensed occupational therapy assistant and an occupational therapist. 2. Be ILOTA members at the time of the nomination and receipt of the award. 3. Document evidence of working collaboratively in their resumés or CVs. <p>Only OTA and OT teams are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The OTA/OT partnership shall have demonstrated contributions which may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of a practice model or method of evaluation and/or treatment with significant application. ● Development of programs or approaches utilizing the OTA/OT partnership to enhance the education, leadership, and/or practice of occupational therapy practitioners in Illinois. ● Participation in research activities that benefit the profession and reflect the OTA/OT partnership. ● Collaboration which demonstrates and shares expertise and knowledge through publications or presentations at the local, state, national, or international level.
<p>Outstanding Occupational Therapy Student Award</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy student or recent graduate who has demonstrated leadership and excellence in service, academics, fieldwork, and/or capstone, and exceptional ability to promote occupational therapy through their activities as a student.</p>	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A student currently enrolled in OT coursework or fieldwork at an ACOTE approved or accredited program in Illinois. OR A student who graduated from an ACOTE accredited OT program in Illinois between September 1 of the previous year and August 31 of the current year, e.g. from 9.1.25 to 8.31.26. 2. An ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of award. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee shall have made a significant contribution in one or more of the following areas while a student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leadership of and participation in student occupational therapy organizations and/or ILOTA. ● Clinical or community-based practice, research, community outreach or service. ● Written and oral communication activities. ● Other relevant activities to promote and advance occupational therapy.
<p>Outstanding Occupational Therapy Assistant Student Award</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy assistant student or recent graduate who has demonstrated leadership and excellence in service, academics, fieldwork, and/or capstone, and exceptional ability to promote occupational therapy through their activities as a student.</p>	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A student currently enrolled in OTA coursework or fieldwork at an ACOTE approved or accredited program in Illinois. OR A student who graduated from an ACOTE accredited OTA program in Illinois between September 1 of the previous year and August 31 of the current year, e.g. from 9.1.25 to 8.31.26. 2. An ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of award <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee shall have made a significant contribution in one or more of the following areas while a student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Leadership of and participation in student occupational therapy organizations and/or ILOTA. ● Clinical or community-based practice, research, community outreach or service. ● Written and oral communication activities. ● Other relevant activities to promote and advance occupational therapy.

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<p>Fieldwork Educator Award</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognizes an occupational therapy practitioner’s exemplary contributions in their role as a fieldwork educator. 2. Nominations may be submitted by a co-worker, supervisor, fieldwork student, academic fieldwork coordinator or fieldwork site representative. 	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A licensed occupational therapy practitioner (OT or OTA). 2. An ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The nominee shall have demonstrated excellence in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldwork supervision, support, and mentorship. • Collaboration with academic programs and fieldwork students to promote high-quality educational experiences. • Cultivation of critical thinking and evidence-based practice of their fieldwork students. 2. Further consideration for years of service as a fieldwork educator, number of students who the nominee has supervised, and supervision of both Level I and Level II students.
<p>Early Career Impact Award</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy practitioner in the first five years of their career who has demonstrated significant contributions to the profession of occupational therapy</p>	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A licensed occupational therapy practitioner (OT or OTA) for 5 years or less. 2. An ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee shall have demonstrated significant contributions which may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributions to the profession’s body of knowledge • Development of a new or innovative practice program • Advocacy for the profession or recipients of OT services • Leadership • Volunteerism • Involvement in ILOTA
<p>Mentor Award</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy practitioner (clinician, supervisor, educator, or researcher) who has demonstrated outstanding mentorship of one or more students, colleagues, or employees in a sustained partnership in practice, academic, or research contexts, wherein mutual respect, guidance, and knowledge are shared.</p>	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A licensed occupational therapy practitioner (OT or OTA). 2. An ILOTA member at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee shall have demonstrated outstanding mentorship in one or more of the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisement and guidance of the mentee(s). • Advocacy (i.e., advocating on behalf of the mentee, or coaching self-advocacy of the mentee(s)). • Instruction of the mentee(s) in specific skills/strategies and/or provision of resources/opportunities for independent learning. • Communication and facilitation of the mentee’s progress toward achieving professional development goals. • Performance as an inspiring role model for the mentee(s).

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<p>Innovative Practice Award</p> <p>Recognizes an occupational therapy practitioner or a group of practitioners whose efforts expand and/or improve the provision of occupational therapy services in Illinois.</p>	<p>The nominee(s) shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs). ILOTA members at the time of the nomination and receipt of the award. <p>An individual or a group of individuals is eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee(s) shall have demonstrated innovation in OT practice through the implementation of at least two of these actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Envision, plan and design a new OT program, role, partnership, or set of activities that expand or improve OT practice in an innovative manner. Implement an innovation in practice that expands or improves the provision of occupational therapy services. Evaluate the outcomes and impact of an innovation in practice. Disseminate their work at the state, national, or international level.
<p>Political Action Award</p> <p>Recognizes an individual or group of occupational therapy practitioners or students who have promoted occupational therapy practice, payment for occupational therapy, and/or disability rights through legislative or policy advocacy.</p>	<p>The nominees shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs) or current OTA or OT students. ILOTA members at the time of the nomination and receipt of the award. <p>An individual or a group of individuals is eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee(s) shall have demonstrated contributions at the national, Illinois or local level which may include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership role in planning and implementing legislative or policy advocacy. Initiation of meetings and actions with elected or appointed officials as part of an advocacy campaign. Development of a political action initiative and the recruitment of others to join in the initiative to influence state legislation, regulations, or policies. Education of legislators or other key government officials about the purpose and value of occupational therapy. Participation in the Illinois Occupational Therapy Political Action Committee (IOTPAC).
<p>* Public Awareness Award</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes an individual or group of occupational therapy practitioners, students, or non-members who are not occupational therapy students or practitioners, who have made outstanding contributions toward increasing the public's awareness or understanding of the value of occupational therapy. Expands awareness of the profession to potential future occupational therapy practitioners. 	<p>The nominees shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs) or current OTA or OT students who are ILOTA members at the time of nomination and receipt of the award, <p>OR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> An individual or group that is not made up of occupational therapy practitioners or OT/OTA students. <p>An individual or a group of individuals is eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee(s) shall have provided an outstanding contribution to the public's awareness and understanding of the value of occupational therapy through one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radio, television, social media, blogs Newspapers, journals, magazines Presentations to community groups Participation in student recruitment activities through organization and leadership.

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<p>*Award of Appreciation</p> <p>Recognizes an individual, group or organization that demonstrates support and advocacy for the advancement of occupational therapy in Illinois.</p>	<p>The nominees shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An individual or group that is not comprised of occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs) or OT/OTA students. <p>OR</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. An organization that is not an occupational therapy organization. <p>An individual, a group of individuals, or an organization are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee(s) shall have promoted the advancement of occupational therapy in one or more of the following ways, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Volunteerism of time, funds, or supplies for activities supporting the profession. ● Demonstration of advocacy for the profession. ● Establishment of relationships with legislative personnel, regulatory agencies, or organizations to advocate for the provision of services by an occupational therapy practitioner. ● Participation in organizations and/or activities related to occupational therapy and the persons served by the profession.
<p>Board Award of Merit</p> <p>Recognizes individuals on the ILOTA Board who have made outstanding contributions toward facilitating board business and advancing the practice of occupational therapy in Illinois.</p>	<p>The nominees shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs) and ILOTA members at the time of the nomination and receipt of the award. 2. Current executive or full Board members, or former members who have transitioned off the Board in the previous year. <p>An individual or a group of individuals is eligible for this award.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The nominee(s) shall have provided outstanding service in their role on the Board, benefitting both the profession and ILOTA in one or more of the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Outstanding achievement in administration, management, or leadership while on the Board. ● Specific contributions to identify the professional needs of the membership and establish objectives and procedures to meet those needs through their role on the Board. 2. Further consideration for time served on the Board and their impact while carrying out their role.
<p>Award of Merit (also referred to as the Historian’s Award)</p> <p>Honors members of the ILOTA who have shaped the course of occupational therapy in the state by making a comprehensive and sustained contribution to the growth and development of occupational therapy in Illinois.</p>	<p>The nominees shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Licensed occupational therapy practitioners (OTs or OTAs). 2. ILOTA members at the time of nomination and receipt of the award. <p>An individual or a group of individuals is eligible for this award.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The nominee(s) shall have made outstanding contributions to the profession of occupational therapy in two or more of the following areas of occupational therapy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Practice ● Education ● Research ● Administration ● Leadership 2. Nominees’ contributions shall have benefited the growth and development of the profession in Illinois over an extended period of time.

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<p>Lifetime Achievement Award</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognizes long-term members of ILOTA who have performed distinguished service in the field of occupational therapy and with the ILOTA board. 2. The Lifetime Achievement Award is granted by the ILOTA Executive Board, and the recipient is granted an honorary lifetime membership in ILOTA. 	<p>The nominee shall be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A licensed occupational therapy practitioner (OTs or OTAs) and ILOTA member at the time of the nomination and receipt of the award. 2. Actively employed as an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant for at least 30 years. 3. An ILOTA member for at least 25 years. 4. A previous member of the ILOTA Executive and/or ILOTA Full Board for at least 10 years; or an ILOTA member that has made significant contributions to ILOTA in other ways such as frequent conference presentations, articles published in the ILOTA <i>Communique</i>, or as a member of the IOTPAC Executive Committee. <p>Only individuals are eligible for this award.</p>	<p>The nominee shall have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrated exceptional service to the field of occupational therapy through leadership, management, advocacy, community engagement, research, scholarship, education, and/or clinical or community-based practice. 2. Made substantial contributions to ILOTA over an extended period of time.