



# Investigating Membership in the Mississippi Occupational Therapy Association (MSOTA): Perceptions of Pediatric Practitioners

Fallon, F., OTS, Friend, C., OTS, Groce, L. , OTS, Hardin, Z., OTS, Johnson, M., OTS | Ladner, M., DHA, MS, OTR/L  
University of Mississippi Medical Center



## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine the perceptions of pediatric occupational therapy practitioners in Mississippi who have been practicing for five years or more on membership in MSOTA.

**Method:** This descriptive research study consisted of a qualitative design, using semi-structured phone interviews that followed the appreciative inquiry guidelines with pediatric occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs). The interviews collected narrative data on the participants' perceptions of membership in MSOTA.

**Results:** Eleven occupational therapy pediatric practitioners were interviewed, and nine out of the eleven met the inclusion criteria. The phone interviews revealed information about the benefits of membership, deterrents to membership, preferred recruitment methods, and engagement of pediatric practitioners within MSOTA. Six general themes emerged across the four primary aims including awareness of legislation, education opportunities, cost and time, access and communication, resources, and support.

**Conclusion:** This qualitative study provides a better understanding of the pediatric practitioner perceptions of membership in MSOTA. As a result of this study's findings, the researchers propose that MSOTA investigate auto-enrollment options for membership, broaden the opportunities for conferences, and reevaluate the website and social media presence of the organization, among other things. Researchers recommend that further research be done to expand the perspective of state level organizations for pediatric occupational therapy practitioners.

## INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on investigating perceptions of pediatric practitioners on membership in a professional organization such as the Mississippi Occupational Therapy Association (MSOTA) and what professional organizations can offer to their members. Professional organizations are made up of like-minded individuals with similar interests that work together to accomplish set objectives. (Chity, 2005; Huston, 2010, as cited in Esmaeili et al., 2013). Regarding the field of occupational therapy specifically, there are professional organizations at the national, state, and local-community level. The state-level occupational therapy association for Mississippi is MSOTA. Currently, there are 260 OT/OTAs and 184 students with active memberships in MSOTA (Mississippi Department of Health, n.d.-a). In comparison, there are 1964 licensed OT practitioners in the state of Mississippi (Mississippi Department of Health, n.d.-a). This comparison of active members in MSOTA to licensed OT practitioners in Mississippi results in a low membership percentage of 13.23%. Because of this, the desire of the membership committee of MSOTA is "to assist the districts in determining ways to increase membership of OT programs and participation throughout the districts" (MSOTA, 2016).

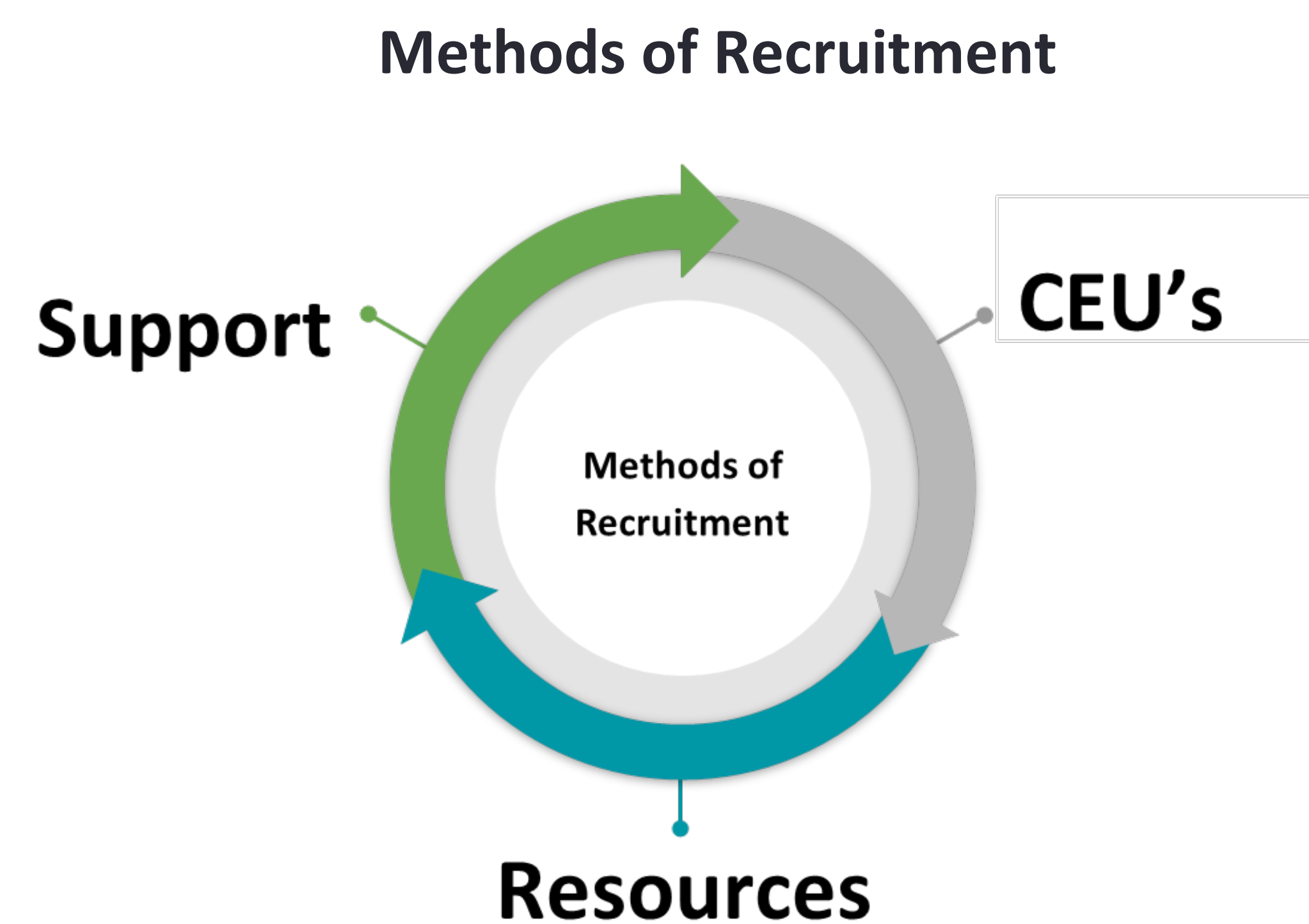
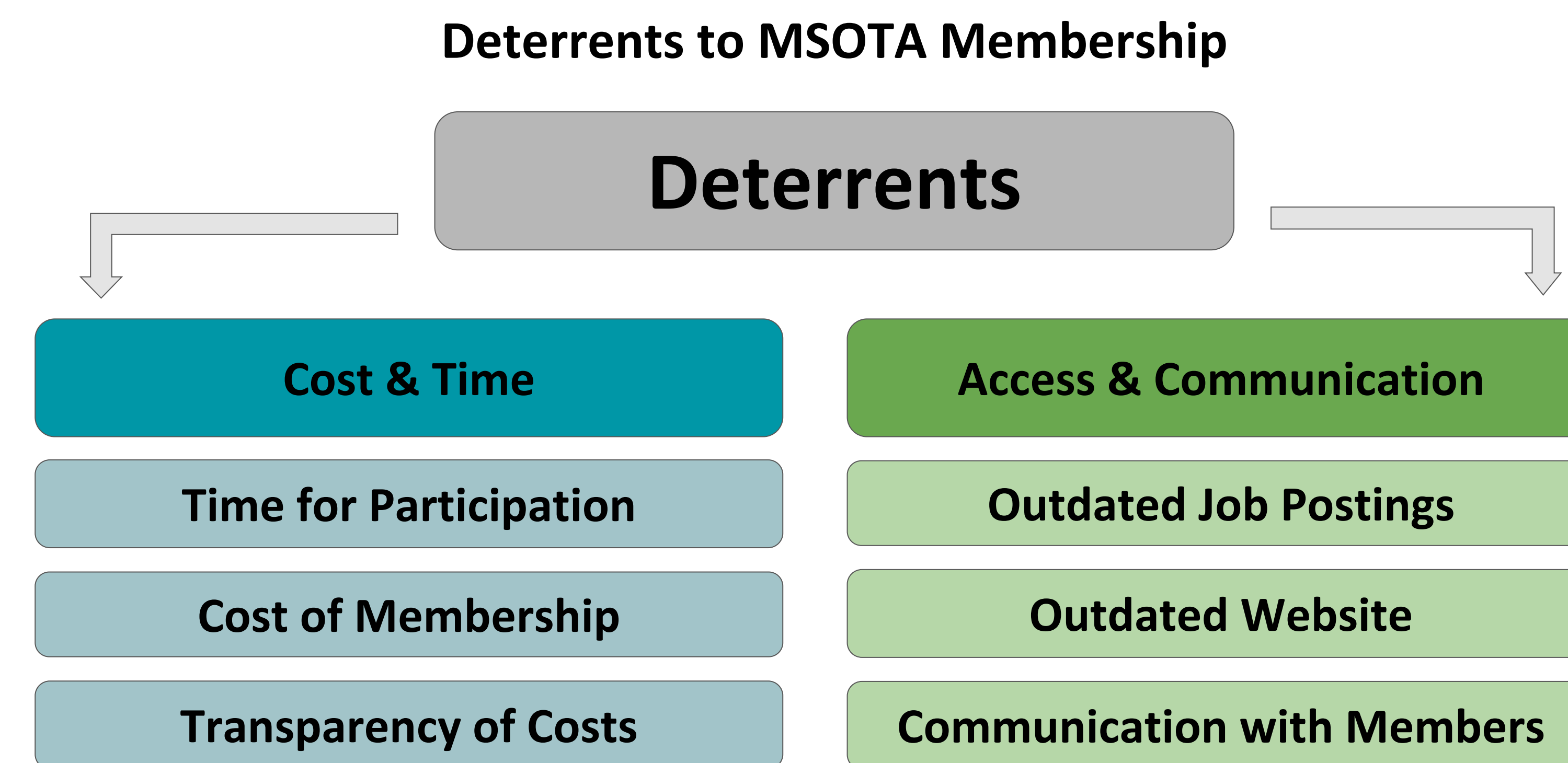
## PURPOSE AND PRIMARY AIMS

**Purpose:** Determine the perceptions of pediatric occupational therapy practitioners in Mississippi on membership in MSOTA who have been practicing for five years or more.

**Primary Aims:**

- I. Identify awareness of benefits offered by MSOTA for pediatric occupational therapy practitioners.
- II. Identify deterrents of membership in MSOTA for pediatric occupational therapy practitioners.
- III. Suggest preferred methods to facilitate engagement of pediatric practitioners in MSOTA.
- IV. Suggest preferred methods of recruitment for membership in MSOTA to target pediatric practitioners of five or more years.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION



## METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** This descriptive research study consisted of a qualitative design that used semi-structured phone interviews which followed the appreciative inquiry guidelines with pediatric occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs). The interviews collected narrative data on the participants' perceptions of membership in MSOTA.

**Study Participants:** The participants of this study consisted of both occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants within the state of Mississippi who are not members of MSOTA. Participants must be pediatric occupational therapy practitioners who have been practicing for at least five or more years.

**Data Collection Instrument:** Semi-structured questionnaire interview comprised of several open-ended probing questions to collect qualitative data. The interview used appreciative inquiry (AI) designed questions to elicit responses that address primary aims.

**Data Analysis:** All telephone interviews were recorded using an iPhone 11/12 application and a second digital recorder. Each interview was transcribed via two co-investigators and stored on a Word Document. The research team met to code interviews and identify overarching themes using Tesch's Eight Steps in the coding process. The team used Tesch's methods to identify and label themes that emerged.

## IMPLICATIONS

- MSOTA will investigate offering an automatic renewal membership option for annual payments.
- MSOTA will consider hosting annual conferences in various locations across Mississippi to offer equal opportunity for attendance.
- MSOTA will examine providing a virtual option for MSOTA meetings to engage more participation of members in the organization.
- MSOTA will work to increase social media presence and networking opportunities for members.
- MSOTA will explore methods to post job listings that are up to date for new and current practitioners as a network of support and resources for members.
- MSOTA will promote awareness of the discounted and free learning opportunities offered to its members.
- MSOTA will explore developing a forum as a way to connect practitioners across the state based on their practice area to allow members to share information, materials, and other resources.

## LIMITATIONS

- Small sample size
- Limited to only pediatric practitioners who have been practicing five or more years
- Limited to only OT practitioners who are not members of MSOTA
- Misunderstanding of survey instruments
- Time constraints for interviews
- Participants not being available at the scheduled time of interview
- Participants misunderstanding research questions

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative study provides a better understanding of the pediatric practitioner perceptions of membership in MSOTA. With the understanding of the factors that have been established regarding membership, MSOTA can consider arrangements needed to provide better engagement and involvement of their members. Because state level professional organizations are not prioritized by current practitioners, there is very limited research available on memberships of occupational therapy organizations. Although the results of our study provides useful insight to the components that can encourage membership, engagement, and involvement, we recommend that further research be done to expand the knowledge and understanding of the perspective of state level organizations for pediatric occupational therapy practitioners.