

OA GUIDELINES



Guidelines for OA Events

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These guidelines have been developed through the experience of OA members and the Board of Trustees, who have contributed to their creation. They reflect OA Traditions and Concepts of Service as reflected in our OA Conference-approved literature. These guidelines are strong suggestions based on the experience of those who have gone before. The guidelines do not replace the group conscience of local OA members, but we encourage OA groups and service bodies to consider carefully before acting contrary to these suggestions.

Purpose of OA Events

The reason for OA gatherings held outside of group meetings is to provide more recovery opportunities for members. Such get-togethers remind us that we are part of a larger whole, that we are not alone. The focus of such OA events is recovery from compulsive overeating through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of OA. Many groups and service bodies hold events in conjunction with International Day Experiencing Abstinence (IDEA), Unity Day, Sponsorship Day, or OA's birthday. Some host only one annual event, while others hold monthly or quarterly events.

Retreats, marathons, and conventions offer the laughter, warmth, understanding, and support of the OA Fellowship. They introduce members to a wider circle of individuals and to the experience, strength, and hope of others who share our disease.

These events can also benefit OA by raising much-needed revenue for OA as a whole. The income helps groups and service bodies to carry the message of recovery to the still-suffering compulsive eater.

Types of Events

All OA events address recovery from compulsive overeating through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous. An OA event should not be connected with any outside issues, including religions, politics, therapies, non-OA literature, or other Twelve Step fellowships. The following events are the types most commonly held by OA groups and service bodies, such as intergroups and service boards.

Conventions: Most conventions are weekend events that are hosted by a service body rather than a group. They are held in hotels or conference centers that can accommodate the event's space requirements. The activities are focused on OA recovery and fellowship, meetings, workshops, speaker sessions, and entertainment, such as dances or breaks for relaxation and fun.

Retreats: Retreats are usually held in a quiet location, such as a camp or retreat center. Retreat activities may include speaker sessions, small group discussions, one-on-one sharing, time for writing and reflection, as well as free time for members to experience fellowship.

Marathons: Marathons are usually one-day events. They consist of back-to-back speaker meetings or workshops with various, scheduled topics, allowing attendees to choose according to their needs. OA's virtual community provides marathon phone meetings on many holidays.

Fellowship Meals/Banquets: Lunch or dinner meals with an OA speaker provide another way to combine recovery and fellowship. This type of gathering can be held at a local hotel or restaurant where the meals are purchased, or it can be as simple as a gathering where OA members provide the food.

Public Information Meetings: Special public information events are held to raise awareness of Overeaters Anonymous for the public, the professional community, and OA members' families and friends.

Service, Traditions, and Concepts Workshops:

These workshops are usually conducted by members with a thorough understanding of the Twelve Traditions and the Concepts of OA Service. A region trustee and/or regional board members can offer these workshops to intergroups and service boards as part of their service to OA.

Guarding Our Traditions

Use the following guides to observe the Traditions when planning an OA event. Remember to honor “principles before personalities” (Tradition Twelve).

- An OA event must be sponsored by a registered OA group or service body. An event that is not sponsored by an OA group or service body is considered an outside enterprise and, as such, may not use the OA name or mailing list (Tradition Six).
- The name “Overeaters Anonymous” and the name of the sponsoring group or service body should appear on all flyers, newsletter articles, registration forms, and other announcements and forms for the event (Tradition Five).
- Only OA members may be invited to act as event and workshop leaders or speakers (Tradition Six).
- Printed materials should not contain endorsements of outside enterprises, such as books, publishers, treatment facilities, professionals in the field of eating disorders, hospitals, and other non-OA entities. This includes any materials or information regarding non-OA enterprises or activities with which the leader or speaker is personally involved. Refrain from printing the names or non-OA titles of speakers and leaders at OA events in all information materials. OA service titles (but not names) may be used when a speaker or leader is performing the service responsibility of their OA office (Traditions Six and Eight and OA Business Conference Policy 1990).
- Ask OA members who work professionally in the field of eating disorders or are members of other Twelve Step programs to speak only about their personal experience as recovering compulsive eaters in Overeaters Anonymous (Tradition Five).

- Reimbursement to a speaker beyond travel, food, and lodging is not appropriate (Tradition Eight).
- Only OA-approved literature should be offered for sale at an OA event. For a list of books and pamphlets, see the *OA-Approved Literature List* at oa.org/document-library under “Guidelines” or contact the World Service Office. Locally produced literature should be used with the greatest discretion (Tradition Six).

Committees

An event sponsored by a group or service body is an opportunity to involve many members in Twelfth Step work. The larger the event, the more members needed to share the workload. The following are examples of service needs and opportunities:

Program volunteer:	Plans the program and obtains speakers or leaders.
Registration volunteer:	Handles preregistration and on-site registration.
Treasurer:	Deposits receipts, pays bills incurred by the event, and furnishes detailed accounting of income and expenses when the event is over. Funds may be collected via check or electronic funds transfer (if available to group/service body).
Decorations volunteer:	Responsible for signs and decorations.
Public Information volunteer:	Sends information about the event to local newspapers, radio and television stations, and nearby groups, unaffiliated groups, and service bodies.
Literature volunteer:	Handles OA literature to be sold at the event.
Hospitality volunteer:	Provides greeters and arranges for refreshments.
Entertainment volunteer:	Arranges for songs, skits, dance music, or other entertainment.

Finances

There are no dues or fees at meetings; however, it is not against the Traditions to charge fees for OA events. Events should be self-supporting to enable groups and service bodies to carry out their primary purpose, as many are held, in part, as fundraisers. Estimating both the total expenses and expected attendance should be part of event planning in order to calculate the suggested registration fee.

Items to consider when estimating expenses are: meeting room rental fees, publicity costs (printing, postage, posters, etc.), programs, name tags, decorations, and other handouts. Speakers' expenses may include transportation, lodging, and meals. For a single-day event, consider asking a local member to host the speaker if they must stay overnight, which will lower this cost. Estimated expenses divided by estimated attendance will indicate the approximate amount needed per person to cover costs. A registration fee is then added to that amount if the purpose of the event includes fundraising.

Many events encourage preregistration by charging less for those who register early than those who register at the event. This makes event planning easier and allows for the event's cancellation if there is an indication that costs will not be covered. Like meetings, all OA events should be self-supporting. Collecting a Seventh Tradition at the event is another way to increase contributions.

It is customary to turn no one away from an OA event for lack of funds; however, it is not necessary to provide meals and lodging. Event organizers may wish to suggest to those who feel they cannot afford the registration fee to honestly decide how much they can contribute and accept it with no further questions. It is also possible to ask these members to give service at the event in order to practice their Seventh Tradition. Some service bodies set up "scholarship" funds to help those in need.

Good financial practices for OA events may include the following (depending on the size and complexity of the event):

- Set up a separate bank account for OA events.
- Require two signatures for authorization on all expenditures.
- Pay all expenditures and refunds, if any, by check.

- Require receipts for all expenditures.
- Keep a log of all registrations received, recording check or cash information.
- Appoint three knowledgeable OA members to an audit committee to verify the financial report to protect both the treasurer and the sponsoring body.
- Issue a financial report itemizing income, expenses, and net profit or loss soon after the event. The income section should detail the number of people who registered and the amount received. Receipts and expenditures for items should be separated by category, such as literature, refreshments, fundraising, etc.

Sale of Merchandise

The following statement was adopted by the delegates at the 1984 World Service Business Conference (amended 2014): "It is the will of the Business Conference that sale of merchandise, per se, is not prohibited by the Traditions. With regard to sale of merchandise, 'Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.' If you choose to sell merchandise, the following guidelines are suggested:

1. All sales be made by and for OA service bodies.
2. Each sale item be approved by group conscience.
3. Sales at OA events and functions should be conducted in such a manner so as not to divert or distract from our primary purpose to carry the message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers."

In accordance with our Traditions, each group and service body may determine whether to sell merchandise. Overeaters Anonymous must be ever mindful of our Traditions, which warn against endorsement of outside enterprises.

Program and Choosing Speakers

Recovery events are centered on a theme that is related to the OA Twelve Step program. Topic ideas may be taken from OA-approved literature. Only OA members may be invited to act as event and workshop

leaders and speakers.

Some event planners invite a guest speaker, while others rely solely on members attending the event. The sponsoring group or service body determines the eligibility requirements for leaders and speakers. Most events have abstinence requirements for lead speakers but encourage all attending to share if that is a part of the event agenda. Groups and service bodies are encouraged to dialogue with potential and selected speakers to ensure both that there is a mutual understanding of expectations and requirements of the materials they will present when sharing their recovery with the OA audience and that they will conduct themselves fully within the Twelve Traditions of OA.

We suggest that the following OA Speaker Statement be read at all OA events:

“OA speakers do not represent OA as a whole, but speak from their own experience, strength, and hope. OA recognizes there are individual approaches and different concepts of working the Twelve Step program of recovery. We all are reminded that our common disease and our common purpose unite us; differences in approaches to recovery need not divide us. OA is strengthened when we honor and respect all by practicing unity with diversity.”

Unfortunately, some speakers promote outside enterprises, such as eating disorder centers and counseling services; sell their own literature and tapes; or require signed contracts, use of outside services, or other actions that raise concerns. One way to verify a speaker’s respect for the OA Traditions

is to seek a recommendation from another OA group or service body for which the individual has spoken. Another method is to ask the potential speaker for a copy of a recording from a previous event where the speaker has shared.

Additional Suggestions

- Contact other groups, service bodies, the region trustee, or the World Service Office with questions or for assistance. They may have more detailed information on how to plan for events.
- Keep it simple.
- Consider handicapped access and the comfort of attendees.
- Schedule plenty of breaks and time for sharing.
- Plan ahead. Include a variety of topics to accommodate all attendees.
- Avoid scheduling on holidays, either national or religious, unless that is the purpose of the event (e.g. some groups and service bodies choose to hold events on holidays where large meals tend to be part of the celebratory aspect of the day). Check with nearby intergroups and service boards (as well as region and the WSO) that may be planning an event on or around the same date. This may hurt attendance at both events.
- Focus on this event, not last year’s or what some other area has done.
- Remember to “let go and let God” and enjoy the event.

OA Board-Approved

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