

Guidelines for Public Information Events

Purpose

Public information events are excellent ways of informing the public about our program of recovery.

Types of public information events

Newcomers nights: These are usually open OA meetings whose formats may vary to meet the needs of a particular audience. They commonly feature a question-and-answer period. OA literature is provided as handouts if possible. The focus is on people new to or interested in our program, whether potential members or not.

Young people's events: Schools are the usual settings for these, whether an intimate classroom talk or an assembly. They commonly feature two or more speakers and follow a format similar to that of a newcomers night, above. Another way to reach young people and teenagers is to participate in a school health fair. Many intergroups have display booths that can be used for this purpose. For information about participating in a health fair, see the Guidelines for Health Fair Participation.

Presentations to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) staff: EAPs are counseling centers that some large companies employ to help workers deal with personal problems in a confidential setting. They are often quite receptive to hearing how OA can help their clients.

Other types of PI events: There are many other settings for public information outreach. For more information about these, refer to the *Public Information Manual* and the *Professional Outreach Manual*.

When to hold public information events

Anytime is a good time—but strategic times of year are before the holidays, after New Year's or in early spring. Why not hold one in conjunction with OA's birthday (third Saturday in January), Unity Day (last Saturday in February) or IDEA day (third Saturday in November)?

Preparation and planning (about three to four months prior)

- Form a committee and choose a chairperson.
- Encourage participation within your intergroup by enumerating specific tasks and the time commitment needed to accomplish them.
- Determine your budget. Keep in mind that the purpose of PI events is to get

information out to the community, not to make money. Things such as suggested donations or raffles should be saved for retreats and conventions. If your intergroup does not have the funds to put on an event on their own, contact your region. Some regions will provide funding for PI events.

- Select a site. If your event will be in a school or institution, make sure the arrangements are made with the proper authorities. The site should be easily accessible, with well-lit parking. Besides schools and hospitals, libraries and churches are usually good locations.
- Decide on format. The format will determine your needs. How many will attend? (Chairs.) Will you have one speaker? A panel? (Microphones, a podium, tables.) Will there be a “Q and A” session? (Paper, pencils.) What special interests does the audience have? (Specific literature, topics.)
- Inspect the site and ask questions. Tell the facility’s manager what you’ll need, and find out what’s available. Ask: Are there any fees? What about parking? What’s the maximum legal occupancy of the room? Will someone from the facility be there the day/night of the event?

Materials (about two to three months prior)

- Order the literature and the films: We suggest that only OA Conference- or board-approved literature be used.
- Suggested literature for newcomers nights:

About OA

A Program of Recovery

Fifteen Questions

Many Symptoms, One Solution

To the Newcomer

To the Teen (flyer)

OA Members Come in All Sizes

Be sure to bring along local meeting directories that clearly list phone numbers of meeting contacts, the www.oa.org Web site, and your intergroup’s Web site if you have one. Remember: the Internet is one of our most important public information resources. Newcomers who do not approach you at the event may wish to find out more about OA after the event. You may wish to bring along wallet cards with your local intergroup’s number and Web site.

In addition, you might include back issues of *Lifeline* (available from the WSO); OA books such as *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous*, *Lifeline Sampler*, *Overeaters Anonymous* (the Brown Book); and OA catalogs. Depending on your audience, you might wish to order other specialized pamphlets.

- Suggested literature for young people and teens:

To the Teen

Many Symptoms, One Solution

OA Members Come in All Sizes

Also suggested: copies of *To the Family of the Compulsive Eater* (for parents and teachers). If possible, include lists of young people's meetings and contact phone numbers.

- Suggested literature for professionals:
Introducing OA to Health Care Professionals
Treatment and Beyond
The Courier

You might also bring along back issues of *Lifeline* and suggest a subscription for their waiting rooms.

Speakers (about two to three months prior)

Speakers should be chosen carefully; they'll be representing the OA program and should demonstrate recovery on all three levels: emotional, spiritual and physical. You may wish to have abstinence requirements. Look for members who have suffered from different symptoms of the disease.

Speaking to young people and teens: Two speakers are preferred, since two stories provide more diversity. Two people can also answer questions more effectively. Each should share for 15 minutes. Speakers should be the same age or just slightly older than those in the audience; one might be a bulimic. They should focus on their teenage or younger years, and share personal problems and health risks of compulsive overeating.

Speaking to EAP professionals: In the spirit of cooperation, not affiliation, tell them how helpful OA can be for their clients who struggle with eating disorders. Stress that we are not in competition with them, but an outside source of help.

For more detailed information on doing presentations to schools, professionals or other special groups, see the *Public Information Manual* and the *Professional Outreach Manual*.

Publicity (about two months prior)

Prepare 8 1/2-by-11-inch flyers: Make these in time to be distributed four to six weeks prior to the event. They should contain the event title; the sponsoring intergroup's name; event location, date and time; and contact phone number (no names). Flyers should make it clear that it's an event for the general public and not just for OA members. Suggested distribution sites: public health clinics, student health centers, exercise clubs, Y's, Twelve-Step bookstores, doctors' and professional offices (obtain permission first), OA meetings. Provide plenty of extra flyers for OA meetings, and urge members to take a few and post them on bulletin boards at their grocery store, laundromat, church, school, etc.

Get the word out to the community: Contact radio and TV stations and ask them to run public service announcements. Tell them OA is a nonprofit organization. Make

sure the PSAs include a local contact phone number. Also: local, regional, senior, school and free newspapers often have calendars of community events; send them announcements. (For sample PSA scripts and press releases, see the *Public Information Service Manual*; to purchase the PSAs, contact the World Service Office.)

Inform the Fellowship: Announce the event at all OA meetings, telling members of the planned content. Ask them to attend and bring a non-OA guest. List tasks for which volunteers are needed, and provide a contact name and number to call if interested in helping.

Final preparations (about one month prior)

Get firm commitments from volunteers and assign duties. Areas include registration table; literature; cleanup; door greeting; making and distributing ID badges; writing and distributing flyers; decorating, if necessary; and making signs to direct participants to the right room. Call all volunteers and remind them of their commitments.

Checklist for one week prior to event:

1. Call all volunteers again to verify their participation.
2. Wind up the publicity effort.
3. Make sure the facility is ready for you.
4. Give a flyer to the person answering the phone at the facility. *Arrive at least an hour before the event starts.* Allow time to set up, coordinate volunteers and check the literature, registration and refreshment tables.

Follow-up

Have a post-event meeting: Evaluate what happened and make recommendations for the future. Also, send thank-you notes to those outside OA who helped, such as radio, TV and facility personnel. Retrieve recorded PSAs, if any, from TV and radio stations. For more information on putting together Public Information/Newcomers Nights, consult the *Public Information Manual* and the *Professional Outreach Manual*.

OA Board-Approved

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