

# OA GUIDELINES



## Guidelines for OA Events

- Purpose of OA events
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- Choosing speakers

### Why hold an OA event?

The main reason for having OA gatherings outside of group meetings is to provide a forum of recovery for all members throughout a given area. Many members think of OA events as “supercharged meetings.” Such get-togethers beyond the group level give us an opportunity to share on a broader scale and remind us that we are part of a larger whole, that we are not alone.

Another reason for holding retreats, marathons and conventions is that they offer the laughter, warmth, understanding, and support of old OA friends and “friends we’ve yet to meet” from communities near and far.

Still another important benefit derived from OA events is the much-needed revenue they can raise for OA as a whole. These proceeds help intergroups to further their Twelfth-Step work, develop and produce new literature at the World Service level, provide funds to send delegates to the World Service Business Conference and representatives to the region assemblies, and help continue services at the World Service level.

### What types of events are there?

The utmost care should be given when using the OA name in conjunction with an event. Except for social functions (for example, a dance), OA events should deal with recovery from compulsive overeating through the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous. The following events are those most commonly held by OA groups and service bodies. If an event you are considering is not listed, you may wish to contact your Regional Trustee to ensure

that the event is within the spirit of OA’s Twelve Traditions.

**Convention:** An OA convention can be almost any type of gathering beyond the group level.

Most conventions are weekend events that are province, region or statewide. A convention usually begins on Friday evening, with meetings, workshops, speaker sessions and other activities continuing until Sunday. The convention may also include a banquet, a Saturday night dance and entertainment, and perhaps a spiritual meeting on Saturday or Sunday mornings. The World Service Convention is international in scope and rotates among the regions.

**Retreat:** Retreats are weekend getaways, usually held in a quiet, secluded location, such as a camp or retreat center. The atmosphere is casual. In most cases, meals are provided for the entire weekend. A retreat should be based on recovery through the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous and not be connected with any religious, political, therapy or any other Twelve-Step group. Retreats given by religious groups or other organizations are considered outside enterprises and should not use the OA name.

Retreats sponsored by an OA service body, such as a group or intergroup, may either have an OA speaker or “retreat leader” from outside the area, or they may have one or more local OA members who conduct the sessions. Often there is a variety of activities: speaker sessions on scheduled topics, small group discussions, one-on-one sharing, and time for writing and reflection. To make the retreat more relaxing for the participants, some free time is usually scheduled for participants to do as they wish.

**Weekend marathon:** A weekend marathon generally runs from 24 to 48 hours, with scheduled meetings and workshops running around the clock. In the early hours of the morning, the marathon room may be open for sharing from the floor, with no scheduled

speakers. Usually two or three sessions are held simultaneously, and the sessions last from one to two hours each. It is important to allow adequate sharing time during the marathon.

**One-day marathon:** One-day marathons are back-to-back speaker meetings generally held from 9:00 to 5:00, though some may be longer or shorter. As in weekend marathons, various topics are scheduled, allowing attendees to choose according to their needs.

**Banquet:** Luncheon or dinner banquets, usually with an OA speaker, are an increasingly popular type of OA event. Often a hotel or restaurant will offer free meeting space for an evening or part of an afternoon in exchange for a guaranteed minimum number of meals purchased by the attending members. On the other hand, planning a potluck dinner in a meeting area will keep costs down, but it will involve more work.

**Special open meeting:** Open meetings are held for the public, the professional community, and family and friends of OA members who wish to learn about OA. Some groups have a panel of recovering members share. Some groups hold open meetings regularly—once a month, for example—while other areas hold them only occasionally.

**Service, Traditions and Concepts workshops:** Service, Traditions and Concepts workshops are usually conducted by individuals with a thorough understanding of the Twelve Traditions and the OA service structure. These workshops provide a forum for sharing group strengths and passing on knowledge gained from actual experience. Your Region Trustee and/or regional board members can offer valuable assistance in planning these workshops.

**Note: Many OA groups and service bodies hold one of the above events in conjunction with IDEA Day and Unity Day.**

### Guarding our Traditions

It is the responsibility of all of us to act as guardians of the Traditions. Most failures to uphold Traditions occur through misunderstanding or misin-

formation. We must always be aware that we may inadvertently make some precedent-setting decision that could adversely affect our own and other groups, and thus OA as a whole. Use the following in order to properly observe the Traditions:

1. The event must be sponsored by a registered OA service body. The name “Overeaters Anonymous” should be used on all flyers, registration forms, etc. As sponsors of an OA event, members are bound to uphold the Traditions. An event that is not sponsored by an OA service body is an outside enterprise and, as such, may not use the OA name or mailing list.
2. Clearly state the OA service body which is sponsoring the event on all flyers, newsletter articles, registration forms, and other announcements. Be careful not to endorse any outside enterprises on such printed materials or at the event itself. Outside enterprises include book titles, publishers, treatment facilities, professionals in the field of eating disorders, hospitals and other non-OA entities.
3. Paying a “speaker’s fee” beyond reimbursement for travel, food and lodging is a violation of our Traditions.
4. Avoid putting speakers on a pedestal, keeping in mind “principles before personalities.” The 1990 World Service Business Conference passed a motion (amended in 2011) suggesting that OA bodies “refrain from publishing the names or non-OA titles of speakers/leaders at OA functions in any informational materials (flyers, newsletters, etc.). OA service titles (but not names) may be used when a speaker/leader is performing the service responsibility of his or her OA office.”
5. Ask “two-hatters” (OA members who work professionally in the field of eating disorders or are members of other Twelve-Step programs) to speak from their personal experience as recovering compulsive eaters in Overeaters Anonymous. This makes a more effective presentation and avoids implied endorsement of an outside enterprise.
6. The OA-approved literature list of books and pamphlets that may be offered for sale at the

event can be obtained from the World Service Office. Locally produced literature should be used with the greatest discretion. Even then, we suggest you submit it to the World Service Office for its information. This type of local literature should be considered temporary and discontinued when OA literature that is approved for general use is available to cover the topic.

## Committees

There are many things that need to be done when planning an OA event. It takes more than one person to handle the necessary details. The number of committees and people to be involved depends on the size and complexity of the event. Consider the following:

- Program:** Plans the program and obtains speakers or leaders.
- Registration:** Handles pre-registration 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.
- Decorations:** Responsible for signs and decorations.
- Public Information:** Sends information about the event to local newspapers, radio and television stations, and nearby groups, unaffiliated groups and service bodies.
- Literature:** Handles OA literature to be sold at the event.
- Lifeline:*** Hosts a *Lifeline* display table and encourages subscriptions.

**Hospitality:** Provides greeters, arranges for refreshments.

**Entertainment:** Arranges for songs, skits, dance music or other entertainment.

The type of event will dictate the number and kind of committees needed. It's important to remember that involving more people not only means reduced workloads, but also provides a greater number of members with an opportunity to do OA service.

## Finances

There are no dues or fees in meetings; however, it is not against Traditions to charge such fees for OA events.

These events should be self-supporting to enable service bodies to carry out their primary purpose, as many are held, in part, as fund-raisers. One should estimate both the total expenses and attendance in order to calculate the registration fee.

Items to consider as expenses are: meeting room rental, cost of publicity (printing, postage, posters, etc.), programs, name tags, decorations, other hand-outs and expenses of the invited speakers, if any. Speakers' expenses include transportation, housing (unless the speakers are staying in members' homes) and meals. Estimated expenses divided by estimated attendance equal the per-person fee required to cover expenses.

Many events charge more to register at the door in order to encourage a large pre-registration. This makes event planning easier and even allows for cancellation of the event if it is foreseen that costs will not be covered. Another reason for a set fee is to avoid passing the basket every hour. Like meetings, all OA events should be self-supporting.

While it is customary at OA events to turn no one away for lack of a registration fee, it is not necessary to provide meals and lodging. You may wish to suggest to those who feel they cannot pay to honestly decide how much they can afford, and accept it as their fee. Some areas set up "scholarship" funds to help those in need.

Good money-management practices for OA events include the following:

- Set up a separate checking account for OA events.
- Require two signatures on all checks.
- Pay all expenditures and refunds, if any, by check.
- Require receipts for all expenditures.
- Issue a financial report itemizing income, expenses, and net profit or loss soon after the event. Income should detail the number of persons registered and the amount received. Receipts and expenditure for other items should be separated by category, such as literature, refreshments, fundraising items and so on.
- 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 in order to protect both the treasurer and the sponsoring body.

After event and other expenses have been paid, excess revenue is often used to send delegates to the World Service Business Conference and to region assemblies, as well as to start literature banks, help form new groups and to support other Twelfth-Step work.

### **Sale of merchandise**

The following statement was adopted by the delegates at the 1984 World Service Business Conference: "It is the will of the 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, follow these guidelines:

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, intergroup, region, World Service and other

service bodies may determine whether or not to sell merchandise. Overeaters Anonymous must be ever mindful of our Traditions which warn against endorsement of outside enterprises.

### **Program and speakers**

Most 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. Individual workshop sessions usually last an hour to an hour and a half, with breaks.

Some event planners invite an OA member to be their guest speaker, while others rely solely on attendees. Experience has shown that it is advisable to check out potential speakers to determine if they will present the shared recovery, and "experience, strength and hope" your OA audience expects, and if they will conduct themselves fully within the Twelve Traditions of OA. Unfortunately, some speakers promote affiliation with outside enterprises, such as eating disorder centers and counseling services, sell their own literature and tapes, or require signed contracts, use of certain outside services, or other improprieties. All of these should be avoided because they do not uphold Traditions. One way to check on the speaker is to seek a recommendation from another OA service body for which the individual has spoken. Sometimes recordings of the proposed speaker from previous events are available for review beforehand.

After confirming speaker availability, set the date for your event. It is customary to cover all of a speaker's expenses, but not to pay speakers for their service.

The group sponsoring the event determines the eligibility requirements for speakers. Most events have abstinence requirements. What your group expects from speakers should be discussed at the time you invite them. Some groups obtain the services of an audio professional to tape the speaker or workshop for resale after the event.

### **Suggested dos and don'ts**

- Keep it simple.
- Consider handicapped access and the comfort of attendees.
- Contact other service bodies, the Region

Trustee or WSO if you have questions or need assistance.

- Schedule enough breaks and sharing time.
- Plan ahead. Accommodate all attendees by making detailed plans for the program well in advance.
- Remember to “let go and let God” and enjoy your event.
- Don’t plan the event on the same date as other nearby events, World Service events or on a religious holiday.
- Don’t try to compete with last year’s event or some other area’s event.
- Only OA members may be used as speakers.

OA Board-Approved

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Overeaters Anonymous®, Inc.  
6075 Zenith Court NE  
Rio Rancho, New Mexico 87144-6424 USA  
Mail Address: PO Box 44020, Rio Rancho, NM 87174-4020 USA  
Tel: 1-505-891-2664 FAX: 1-505-891-4320  
E-mail: [info@oa.org](mailto:info@oa.org) • Web site: [www.oa.org](http://www.oa.org)  
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