

OA GUIDELINES



Guidelines for Public Information Events

Purpose

Public information events are excellent ways of informing the public about the Overeaters Anonymous (OA) 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 speakers and a question-and-answer period. OA literature is provided as handouts if possible. The focus is on people new to or interested in Overeaters Anonymous, whether potential members or not.

Young persons events: Schools (colleges and universities) are the usual settings for these events, whether as an intimate classroom talk or in an assembly. They commonly feature two or more speakers and follow a format similar to that of newcomers nights, above. Another way to reach young people and teenagers is to participate in a school health fair. Many intergroups/service boards 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* on oa.org.

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. Staff members and/or counselors are often quite receptive to learning how OA can help their clients.

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

When to hold public information events

Anytime is a good time!

Strategic times:

- Before holidays
- After New Year's
- Early spring

We also recommend holding events on OA-related days:

- OA's birthday (third weekend of January)
- Unity Day (last Saturday of February in even years and last Sunday of February in odd years)
- Sponsorship Day (third weekend of August)
- IDEA day (third weekend of November)
- Twelfth Step Within Day (December 12)

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 its 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. You will need to consider:
 - How many will attend?
 - Will you have one or more speakers? A panel? (Microphones, a podium, table)
 - Will there be a question-and-answer 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. Questions to ask:
 - Are there any fees?
 - What about parking?
 - What is the maximum legal occupancy of the room?
 - Will someone from the facility be there the day or night of the event? If so, is there an additional fee, such as for janitorial staff to close the facility?

Materials (about two to three months prior)

- Order the literature and other materials (videos, etc.) you may need: We suggest that only OA Conference- and Board-approved literature be used. Be sure to bring along local meeting directories that clearly list phone numbers of meeting contacts, the oa.org website, and your intergroup's website, 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 website address.
- Suggested literature for newcomers nights:
 - About OA*
 - A Program of Recovery*
 - Fifteen Questions*
 - Many Symptoms, One Solution*
 - Where Do I Start?*
 - To the Teen*
 - OA Members Come in All Sizes*
 - To the Family of the Compulsive Overeater*
- Suggested literature for young persons and teens events:
 - To the Teen*
 - Many Symptoms, One Solution*
 - OA Members Come in All Sizes*

To the Family of the Compulsive Eater (for parents and teachers)

To Parents and Concerned Adults

Young Person's Packet

Focus on Anorexia and Bulimia Packet

Lists of young persons meetings and contact phone numbers if possible

- In addition, you might include:

Back issues of *Lifeline* (available from the WSO)

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, Second Edition

Lifeline Sampler

Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition (the Brown Book)

OA catalogs

Other specialized pamphlets, depending on your audience

- Suggested literature for professionals:

When Should I Refer Someone to Overeaters Anonymous?

Courier newsletter

Back issues of *Lifeline*

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. It is highly recommended that speakers have at least one year of current abstinence and are maintaining a healthy body weight. 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 fifteen minutes. Speakers should be the same age or just slightly older than those in the audience; one might be bulimic. They should focus on their teenage or younger years, and share personal problems and health risks of compulsive overeating. Please note that anyone having contact with children in a school setting might need to be reviewed with the administration of any school where an OA PI event might be planned.

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

To find 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 the 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, Twelve Step bookstores, doctor and professional offices (obtain permission first), and 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.) Consider free advertising on online local classified ad sites. These sites often have community events/meeting announcements sections. Even if they don't, you can still create an ad inviting people to a public information meeting or to just make contact for more information about OA.

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 of service include:

- Registration table
- Literature
- Cleanup
- Door greeting
- Making and distributing ID badges
- Writing flyers
- Distributing flyers
- Decorating, if necessary
- 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:

- Call all volunteers again to verify their participation.
- Make sure the facility is ready for you.
- Give a flyer to the person answering the phone at the facility.

On the day

Arrive at least an hour before the event starts. You will need to:

- Set up the meeting room
- Coordinate volunteers
- Check the literature
- Check the registration table
- Check the refreshment tables

Follow-up

- *Have a post-event meeting:* Evaluate what happened and make recommendations for the future.

- 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 Service Manual* and the *Professional Outreach Manual*.

OA Board-Approved

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