

# OA GUIDELINES



## Guidelines for Small Meetings: Help and Hope

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 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.

While most OA groups start small, meetings in small towns often face challenges different from those in larger cities. These guidelines share some of the experience, strength, and hope that other meetings have found useful in carrying the OA message in smaller communities. They are intended to be a companion to the *OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies* (#120), also known as the *OA Handbook*, available at [bookstore.oa.org](http://bookstore.oa.org). Additional resources are listed below.

### Does Size Matter?

The size of a meeting does not determine its quality. Small meetings can be, and often are, successful. They may be more intimate and provide more time for members to share. Members may make personal connections more quickly, and it may be easier to see and hear fellow members in a small meeting.

Flourishing groups go out of the way to make everyone—newcomers, longtimers, and members in relapse—feel welcome. The group makes OA-approved literature available at the meeting, takes time to reach out and encourage new members, and establishes service opportunities. Offering service roles for members in all stages of abstinence and rotating service positions strengthen a meeting. Giving service is an honor and a privilege.

Tradition Five makes clear that the primary purpose of every OA group is to carry the message of recovery through the Twelve Steps to those who still suffer. Meetings that grow and thrive stay focused on

abstinence and recovery from compulsive eating and offer help to those who are struggling to get abstinent. Abstinent members are willing to serve as sponsors and have sponsors. Healthy meetings do strong Twelfth Step work, and members make a sincere effort to contact those who haven't been at meetings for a while. Hope is the greatest gift we give to all members. The message is clear around the world: Together we can. You are not alone.

Those who consider their meetings to be strong frequently credit the presence of committed members who identify the meeting as their “home group”; these members may have long-term abstinence and are at or working towards a healthy body weight and are working the Twelve Steps of OA. Their meetings follow a specific format, with an emphasis on working the Twelve Steps while honoring the Twelve Traditions of OA. Decisions are made by group conscience and not by an individual or individuals dictating policies and procedures.

### Small Meeting Challenges and Solutions

One of the challenges of small meetings or meetings in a small town is that there may be few or no people with long-term experience in the OA program. There may not be many abstinent members who can share their experience, strength, and hope. Abstinent sponsors may also be hard to find, especially if sponsors avoid sponsoring personal friends. Such meetings can still prosper, and newcomers can still find inspiration if individual members focus their shares on how working the Twelve Steps can lead to recovery.

Fortunately, technology provides many ways for small meetings to reach out and plug into the abundance of abstinent experiences in OA. For example, abstinent speakers might be brought into a meeting via speakerphone or videoconferencing services.

Members might also supplement their regular face-to-face meetings with virtual (phone, online, or non-real-time) meetings. Lists of phone, online, and

non-real-time meetings can be found on the Find a Meeting page on the OA website. Virtual meetings can provide an excellent means to find abstinent speakers for face-to-face meetings as well as experienced, abstinent sponsors. Going to “ninety meetings in ninety days,” which is one suggestion for accelerating recovery, is now something anyone can do via virtual meetings.

OA events, such as workshops, retreats, marathons, and conventions, are held frequently around the world. These are an excellent way to strengthen recovery and meet abstinent members who may make good speakers or sponsors. Gathering a group of OA members to travel together to these events can turn the journey itself into a valuable recovery experience, as members share their experience, strength, and hope along the way.

Email and social media are other methods for OA members in recovery to stay connected. Non-real-time meetings (meetings that do not meet in real time or meetings that do not occur immediately, taking place over a period of hours or days) can provide support for those in isolated areas. For a list of non-real-time meetings, see Find a Meeting on [oa.org](http://oa.org). Intergroups/service boards, regions, and the World Service Office also use email to share OA information, and members can sign up to receive news. Members might volunteer to serve as designated downloaders, responsible for passing on information from the WSO and OA service body websites, especially to those who might not have access to computers.

OA's magazine, *Lifeline*, is “A Meeting on the Go” and back issues can be ordered from the OA bookstore at [bookstore.oa.org](http://bookstore.oa.org). Using *Lifeline* is another way to bring the experience, strength, and hope of the worldwide Fellowship to a meeting. Many groups use past issues of *Lifeline* as a source for discussion topics at meetings.

Another way to keep a meeting connected to OA's worldwide network of recovering compulsive overeaters is to elect a representative to serve at the local intergroup/service board level, even if attendance is only possible virtually. A representative attending intergroup/service board meetings may be selected to serve as a region representative or World Service Business Conference delegate. (If the meeting is not affiliated with an intergroup/service board, it may still be able to participate in region meetings and events.) In this way, group members contribute to the

group conscience of OA as a whole and find out what is happening at the region and world service levels. Giving service as a representative provides excellent opportunities to strengthen recovery and meet abstinent members who may be available as speakers and/or sponsors.

### **Actions Abstinent OA Members Take**

There are thousands of recovering OA members around the world who have access to only one or two small face-to-face meetings. In fact, many members have long-term recovery precisely because they have been willing to go to any length to get it. They:

- Work OA's Twelve Steps of recovery, one day at a time.
- Assume the higher level of responsibility that comes with participation in smaller meetings.
- Reach out to nonlocal OA members by phone, email, text, and social media, for example. There are meetings and members with strong recovery around the world.
- Travel to visit other meetings and go to OA events, such as workshops, retreats, marathons, or conventions.
- Sponsor to the level of their experience.
- Search for sponsors outside their local area, if none are available nearby.
- Study and practice the Traditions to strengthen their meetings.
- Be the only person attending a meeting for weeks or months, to ensure that newcomers have a chance at recovery.
- Listen to OA recordings or podcasts and attend virtual (phone, online, and non-real-time) meetings.
- Set up a public information booth at community events.
- Be the meeting treasurer, secretary, leader, or service body representative.
- Start new meetings or an intergroup/service board.
- Do service beyond the group level.
- Visit an intergroup/service board meeting or a region assembly.

The challenges of a small town or a small meeting can be a positive incentive to strive for recovery. As has been said many times, OA is a simple program but not an easy one. These guidelines identify some

of the challenges that small meetings or meetings in small towns might face. We hope this provides ideas and possible solutions. Know that you and your small meeting are not alone. Welcome to OA. Welcome home.

#### **Resources on oa.org:**

To find the following resources on the OA website, go to [oa.org/sitemap](http://oa.org/sitemap). You will find links to all of the pages named below on the Sitemap list.

#### **Abstinence** (Document Library page):

- *Abstinence Literature Guide*
- *Strong Abstinence Checklist*
- And more, including a PDF of the *Abstinence Presentation*

#### **Meeting Formats** (Document Library page, under the “Meeting Formats” category):

- *Guidelines for a Group Conscience Meeting*
- *Suggested Meeting Format*
- *Suggested Step Study Meeting Format*
- Many other meeting formats

#### **Guidelines** (Document Library page, under “Guidelines”):

- *Guidelines for Addressing Disruptive Behavior*
- *Guidelines for Membership Retention*
- *Guidelines for Website Development*
- *OA-Approved Literature List*

#### **Public Information** (Guidelines: Events & Outreach page, under the drop-down menu):

- Types of public information events
- Publicity suggestions
- PI posters found in Document Library under category “PI Posters”
- OA Press Kit found on the Media & Press Kit page
- OA podcasts and videos at [oa.org/podcasts](http://oa.org/podcasts)

#### **Groups** (Group Resources page):

- *Group Inventory*
- *Temporary Sponsors: Newcomers’ First Twelve Days*
- *Strong Meeting Checklist*
- *Unity with Diversity Checklist*
- *Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide, Second Edition* (#960-2), available in the OA bookstore

#### **Virtual Services** (Document Library page under “Virtual”):

- *Guidelines for Anonymity in the Digital World*
- *Suggested Telephone Meeting Format*
- Virtual meetings may be found by clicking Find a Meeting
- Virtual Intergroup Registration/Change Form available from [oa.org/sitemap](http://oa.org/sitemap)

#### **Group registration and meeting information changes** (Find a Meeting section):

- Click on Find a Meeting to “Add, edit, or cancel an existing meeting”
- Click directly on Add a Meeting, Edit a Meeting, Cancel a Meeting, or Manage a Service Body from the Sitemap.

#### **Find additional resources on oa.org in the Document Library** ([oa.org/document-library](http://oa.org/document-library)):

- “Secretary Materials”
- “Treasurer Resources”
- “Service Body Resources” (also on the Service Bodies page at [oa.org/sitemap](http://oa.org/sitemap))

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