

Frequently Asked Questions about OA Bylaws

Q: Why do we have bylaws?

A: Bylaws or a summary/statement of purpose are part of the requirements to register with the World Service Office (WSO). Bylaws disclose a service body's rules and principles that define its structure. They prevent conflict between groups and the group conscience of OA as a whole as determined by the World Service Business Conference (WSBC).

Bylaws describe such topics as member categories, identification of the officers and their main duties, financial policies, etc. They also may show new service-position holders what their key responsibilities are. (More detailed job descriptions are described in a policies and procedures manual.)

As your service body grows, your bylaws will need to be changed to provide consistency over time.

Sources: Document Library on oa.org under the category "Bylaws":

- Bylaws Basics Overview
- Introduction to the Sample Intergroup/Service Board Bylaws *template*
- Sample Intergroup Bylaws *template*
- Sample Service Board Bylaws *template*
- Sample Summary of Purpose *template*
- Suggestions for Starting an Intergroup/Service Board

Q: Can we do something different from bylaws?

A: Yes. If a service body does not have bylaws, it must have a summary/statement of purpose and operating procedures. Both choices must conform with OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, that they must say their purpose is to aid with the problem of compulsive overeating using the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and that they are guided by the Twelve Concepts of OA Service.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 2a) 2

Q: Why are bylaws written in such formal language? Do they have to be that formal?

A: A formal tone suggests the organization is serious about its agreed-upon practices and may lend itself to more precise definitions. However, as long as bylaws meet the formal requirements and are approved by the trustee reviewing them, there is no requirement for formality.

Source: OA member who has service experience

Q: Why do we use *Robert's Rules of Order*? Isn't just talking things out a better way?

A: *Robert's Rules of Order*, with some additional specifications, are the basis of the Conference Standing Rules for WSBC. They are suggested, but *not required* for service bodies. *Robert's Rules of Order* provide one way to structure how meetings are conducted, and many members do not believe it is better to talk things out. Here is why:

- By using one set of “rules,” members have the same understanding of the meeting process.
- Terms and language are used consistently; this allows everyone to be heard and make decisions without confusion.
- This process helps make sure that everyone has a chance to speak on a topic.
- This process also limits the number of times a person can speak on a topic.
- Concept Twelve reads: “All important decisions shall be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.” Using *Robert's Rules of Order* is one way to facilitate this.

Source: experienced OA members

Q: What do we do if a bylaw no longer works for us?

A: A service body's bylaws, approved by the trustee reviewing them, always include provisions for amending them. If a bylaw no longer works, it needs to be amended according to the service body's agreed-upon policies and procedures. It is possible that such a change might be better included in a more easily amended policies and procedures manual. (*See next question, below, for more information on policies and procedures manuals.*)

Once the amendment process has been accomplished, the service body's updated bylaws are to be forwarded to the WSO, which then arranges for region trustee review and approval.

Source: Document Library on oa.org under the category “Bylaws”: Bylaws and Policies and Procedures for Service Bodies

Q: Which guiding documents are the easiest or hardest to challenge?

A: Bylaws are more difficult to amend than a policies and procedures manual, as bylaws usually require a larger majority for approval.

Policies and procedures manuals explain the “how” to implement the “what” that was identified in the bylaws. Any policies and procedures that are likely to change for practical reasons probably belong in the policies and procedures manual. Policy and procedure changes do not need to be reviewed by trustees as bylaws do.

Source: Document Library on oa.org, under the category "Bylaws": Bylaws and Policies and Procedures for Service Bodies

Q: What is the responsibility of service bodies when OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B are amended through the voting process by delegates at WSBC?

A: The service body's responsibility is to examine their own bylaws to make sure there is nothing in them that conflicts with the newly revised OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B. Often, the changes involve *adding* some criteria to the service body's bylaws. If there is no conflict, adding is all the service body needs to do. If, however, the service body identifies a conflict, they must:

- Amend their bylaws.
- Send the updated version to the WSO to arrange for review by their region trustee.

Sources: Document Library on oa.org, under the category "Bylaws": Bylaws and Policies and Procedures for Service Bodies, and OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 2b and 2c

Q: How often do we have to change our bylaws?

A: It is recommended that the bylaws be reviewed annually to ensure any necessary changes made at the WSBC are included. In addition, the review will make sure that changing local needs are reflected in the document.

If bylaws need to be amended more frequently than once a year, this may be an indication that certain provisions are better moved into a more easily amended policies and procedures manual. Policies and procedures explain how bylaws are to be implemented or practiced. For example, bylaws would state that the service body meets at regular intervals, while the policies and procedures manual might specify a date (e.g., third Saturday of each month), time, and location that can be changed as needed. Unlike bylaws, a policies and procedures manual does not need to be submitted to the WSO and the region trustee.

Updated bylaws do need to be submitted to WSO for review by the region trustee.

Source: Document Library on oa.org under the category "Bylaws": Bylaws and Policies and Procedures for Service Bodies

Q: What are the five conditions for the recognition of a group as an Overeaters Anonymous group?

A: The following are the five conditions:

- Practice the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, guided by the Twelve Concepts of OA Service.
- Welcome everyone with a desire to stop eating compulsively.
- Do not require members to do anything else to remain a member or share at a meeting.
- Have no affiliation except Overeaters Anonymous.

- Register with the World Service Office.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article V, Section 1a through 1e

Q: Under what conditions can a single group function as a service body?

A: If it is the only group in its country, state, or province.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 1a through 1d

Q: What are the minimum requirements for the bylaws or a summary/statement of purpose of each intergroup/service board and region?

A: At a minimum, bylaws or a summary/statement of purpose must include:

- That the service body's primary purpose is to aid those with the problems of compulsive eating through the practice of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous, guided by the Twelve Concepts of OA Service, and
- That the service body should serve and represent the OA groups from which it is formed.

(Note: Samples of intergroup and service board bylaws and a sample of a summary of purpose are available on oa.org in the Document Library under the category "Bylaws.")

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 2

Q: When must a service body submit a copy of their bylaws to the WSO for review by the region trustee?

A: A service body must submit a copy of their bylaws for review:

- At the initial registration of the service body,
- Whenever bylaws and/or the summary/statement of purpose are updated or revised, and
- When the OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B is modified in ways that are no longer in agreement with the service body's bylaws.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 2

Q: What is the process if a state or province wants to switch to another region that is geographically more convenient?

A: Notice of the desired change must go to the intergroup's/service board's current region, the region the intergroup/service board would like to join, and the Board of Trustees. The board submits a motion to the WSBC to amend OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 1 of the bylaws.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 1, last paragraph

Q: Are there minimum requirements in the OA Bylaws for delegates to WSBC beyond the requirements of their own service bodies?

A: Yes, delegates are to have at least one year of current abstinence and at least two years of service beyond the group level. Additional suggested attributes are listed in the Overeaters Anonymous, Inc. Business Conference Policy Manual, Continuing Effect Motion 1988a.

(Note: The Business Conference Policy Manual and OA Bylaws are found in the Document Library on oa.org.)

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VIII, Section 3c) 1 and OA, Inc. Business Conference Policy Manual, Continuing Effect Motion 1988a

Q: Under what circumstances may a WSBC committee be disbanded?

A: Conference committees established by the Board of Trustees may be disbanded by the board if the committee is not working or meeting outside of WSBC for more than one year. This is done by a motion to disband the committee being placed on the agenda for the next WSBC for consideration.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article IX, Section 5

Q: What are the requirements for modifying the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions?

A: Amendments to Article I (Twelve Steps) and Article II (Twelve Traditions) of OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B may only be adopted if:

- The amendments receives a two-thirds vote of the WSBC delegates as required for other amendments,
- They are also ratified by three-fourths of the registered Overeaters Anonymous groups who respond within six months of notification, and
- At least 55 percent of the registered groups have responded.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article XII, Section 1d and 1e

Q: How do 2021 bylaw amendments affect the possibility of a national or language service board in Canada or the United States?

A: Prior to 2021, national service boards (and by implication language service boards) were permitted **only** outside Canada and the US (2020 version of OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VIII, Section 2). The 2021 bylaws, as amended, do not include this restriction.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VI, Section 1b and 1c

Q: What if we want to change our service body's name?

A: A service body's name is part of their bylaws or summary/statement of purpose. Therefore, to change the name:

- The bylaws or summary/statement of purpose document needs to be amended by a group conscience that is conducted according to agreed-upon procedures.

- Once this is done, the amended document is sent to the WSO for review by the region trustee.

Source: longtime OA member with extensive service experience

Q: Can we elect someone to be a WSBC delegate who does not meet the requirements that are in the OA Bylaws?

A: Permission for any exception in qualifications for valid reasons, if deemed credible by the trustees, may be received by application to the WSO.

Source: OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article VIII, Section 3c) 1

Q: What are the region trustees checking when they review bylaws for service bodies?

A: Region trustees may use the following questions to determine whether service body bylaws are in agreement with OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B:

- Are the registration requirements for the service body met?
- Are the Twelve Steps included or referred to?
- Are the Twelve Traditions included or referred to?
- Are the Twelve Concepts of OA Service included or referred to?
- Is the definition of a group the same as defined in OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, Article V, Section 1?
- Does the article on amendments to the bylaws acknowledge that service bodies may not make amendments to the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts except as per OA Bylaws?
- Are qualifications for delegates to WSBC included, and do they meet the minimum requirements stated in OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B?

Source: Document Library on oa.org under the category "Bylaws": Introduction to the Sample Intergroup/Service Board Bylaws template

Q: What are the errors that trustees need to correct most often when they review their service bodies' bylaws?

A: Common errors include:

- Typos and other errors in the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts.
- Group definition is not up to date. (If the service body's bylaws simply point to the correct section of OA Inc. Bylaws, Subpart B, the service body will not have to update their bylaws if the definition of an OA group in the OA Bylaws changes.)
- Not limiting the service body's ability to change the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts.
- Placing specific dates and times in their bylaws rather than referring to a policy or standing rules.
- Defining things such as recovery or abstinence that go well beyond the OA definitions (e.g., "recovered through the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.")
- Mention of a specific food plan.
- Lack of term limitations.

- Not using the region's or OA Bylaws' service and abstinence requirements for representatives or delegates.
- Placing job descriptions and specific duties in the bylaws.

Source: personal correspondence from a region trustee