

Overeaters Anonymous

2017 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET

6/23/17

2017 WSBC ASK-IT BASKET Q&A

Q. Who created OA's permission forms for translations—the License 1 and License 2 Agreements? How can we simplify the translation process to better carry the message?

The International Publications and Translations Committee (made up of Board of Trustee members) has oversight of OA's translation and licensing Agreements; the committee receives input from the World Service Office staff and OA's legal advisors, experts in the areas of rights and licensing. In 2015, OA's translation licensing system was reviewed and simplified from a three-step process to a two-step process.

Each stage of the translation process requires a licensing Agreement. [License 1](#) gives permission to translate a particular piece of literature and to circulate that translation to validate its accuracy. [License 2](#) gives permission to publish and distribute the approved translation. These licenses are formal legal agreements between a service body and OA, Inc. They state exactly what OA and the service body are each agreeing to do. Only these licenses grant a service body permission to translate and distribute OA's copyrighted material—if someone without permission is translating and distributing literature, they are breaking the law and possibly affecting OA's ability to be self-supporting.

OA literature, its print and digital media, and the Overeaters Anonymous logo are protected under US copyright law, and that copyright is owned solely by Overeaters Anonymous, Inc. No one, including OA members or service bodies, can legally reprint text, reproduce digital media, or publish excerpts from OA literature without written permission from the WSO. For further information, and a list of exceptions ("items not needing written permission"), refer to oa.org/guidelines "[Copyright Requests](#)."

OA, Inc., OA members, and World Service Office staff spend a considerable amount of time and money developing our literature. Revenues from literature sales make up a large portion of OA's income. If service bodies translate and distribute OA literature without a License Agreement, it could become difficult for our Fellowship to prevent people outside OA from misusing our literature or making profits for themselves. For further information and downloadable Agreement forms, see oa.org/guidelines "[Literature Translations](#)."

The launch of OA's new website in 2015 included adding a Select Language button to the homepage of oa.org. The Select Language option makes possible the immediate translation of oa.org Web pages into many languages. License 1 and License 2 Agreements can be translated by members to assist with their application process—but the forms must be submitted in English.

Q. Why are OA's translation Agreements—Licenses 1 and 2—not offered as e-documents that could be automatically translated themselves?

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License 1 and License 2 Agreement forms must be submitted to the World Service Office in English as this is the language our WSO staff uses. There is no point in submitting either form in a different language; these translation, publication, and distribution Agreements are “governed and construed under the laws of the State of New Mexico and the United States of America,” and must appear in that country’s language: English.

Many service bodies involved with translation work have translated these forms into other languages, just to serve as templates to help members fill in the English forms correctly. The need to translate these forms is important, but as there are so many languages in the world, the WSO cannot provide translations for them all. This is where web-based translation applications can help. Google Translate and others keep improving their translation capabilities over time.

An announcement at the end of the 2017 WSBC business session made clear the OA policy that all English-language downloadable documents on the oa.org website may be translated freely, provided that the translating body sends an official copy of the translated document to the WSO to be archived. See the oa.org/guidelines page to find out more about [Literature Translations](#) and [Copyright Requests](#).

Q. How can we encourage each other to not gossip while at Conference (or any other time)?

It’s a seemingly innocent question—yet this is so crucial to the existence and integrity of Overeaters Anonymous. Anonymity, both a Tradition and a Tool, is essential at any OA meeting. Every member, newcomer or returning, needs to feel protected and safe from gossip in OA. Knowing that what is being shared in confidence will be respected and remain private results in members sharing more deeply, leading to recovery. Without that safeguard, members are reluctant to share freely.

How to prevent gossip? First, it might be listed in the [Suggested Meeting Format](#). Some meetings say, “Who you see here, what you hear here, let it stay here.” Some meetings state the importance of anonymity, reminding those present of its importance. Newcomers might have no understanding of anonymity and freedom from gossip. These concepts can be explained while newcomers are being greeted and given [Newcomer Packets](#).

If someone is known to be gossiping, a longtimer might privately speak with or call that person and explain the importance of anonymity. Sponsors can and should be excellent resources for explaining and upholding anonymity, discussing different instances of anonymity with each and every sponsee.

Gossiping destroys trust and discourages people from sharing. Anonymity builds trust, shows caring, and demonstrates respect for individuals and for issues being shared. As our Twelfth Tradition states, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all these Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

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Q. *We would very much like to have OA coins available to celebrate every year of abstinence, not just every five. Is it possible? If not, why not? It is important to acknowledge and celebrate every year.*

This issue has been discussed with the Board of Trustees and the World Service Office Publications Manager. After researching the cost per unit and the sale price (including postage and handling), it was decided that OA, Inc. would not earn enough return on money spent—the cost was too high. The WSO does not receive enough inquiries for these items to justify buying and maintaining a stock; therefore, the Board of Trustees decided it would not be a good use of OA funds.

However, there is already a viable option in the OA bookstore: the [Recovery Medallion](#)! This celebration coin can be personalized for anybody; it's a beautiful "nickel silver medallion with antiqued finish." It has "Overeaters Anonymous" engraved on one side and the Serenity Prayer on the other, and, best of all, has space to engrave years of abstinence or any other OA birthday. Look for #480 at bookstore.oa.org.

Q. *In our meeting, we read a piece called "How Miracles Can Happen;" where does this reading come from? Is it OA-approved literature?*

"How Miracles Can Happen" is a letter written by program founder Rozanne and the members of her group. They created this form letter to respond to the seven thousand letters they received when OA was mentioned in Dear Abby (a grateful recovering member's letter appeared in Dear Abby's column on February 25, 1965, along with OA's post office box address). You can find the story and read "How Miracles Can Happen" in [Beyond Our Wildest Dreams](#) (pp. 179–183).

[Beyond Our Wildest Dreams](#) (#998) is OA's history book; it is considered OA Conference-Approved literature. Find it at bookstore.oa.org.

Q. *Why was New Mexico USA chosen to be the site of OA's World Service Office?*

In her book [Beyond Our Wildest Dreams](#), our cofounder Rozanne talks about this process. The main office of OA was located near Los Angeles, California USA for thirty-five years. At that time, the Fellowship continued to grow but, due to local and national shifts in economy, its income had decreased, so OA, Inc. performed a business relocation study. The decision was made to move to Rio Rancho, New Mexico, just outside Albuquerque (USA). The new [World Service Office](#) building and warehouse opened its doors on November 11, 1994. If you are interested in the history of OA, I suggest reading [Beyond our Wildest Dreams](#) (#998 at bookstore.oa.org).

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Q. I would like to ask the Board of Trustees to restore “Bariatric Surgery” as an option for Special Focus meetings.

A little background is necessary to understand the context of this request. When an OA meeting is newly registered, or when an existing meeting changes, the contact person for that meeting enters appropriate information on the oa.org [Find a Meeting](#) page. Information required includes meeting time, location, and language, and an option is available to identify the meeting as a Special Focus meeting. Until late 2016, “Bariatric Surgery” was one of the options available, along with “100-Pounders,” “Anorexia/Bulimia,” “Black,” “Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans,” “Health Issues,” “Lesbian,” “Men,” “Women,” “Women’s Anorexia/Bulimia,” and “Young Persons.”

On November 19, 2016, the Board of Trustees passed a business motion to remove “Bariatric Surgery” from among the options. This was the reason given: “While it is understood that many OA members have had bariatric surgery, whether or not a member has had the procedure [is] an outside issue to recovery in Overeaters Anonymous.” At the time, there were only two “Bariatric Surgery” Special Focus meetings registered with the World Service Office. It was pointed out that these meetings could be registered under “Health Issues,” just like meetings dealing with diabetes or heart disease. In addition, there is a “Meeting Notes” space for each registered meeting where the contact person can enter appropriate, detailed information about that meeting. Nothing precludes any contact person from putting in notes about Bariatric Surgery. The fewer Special Focus and Special Topic categories OA has, reasoned the Board of Trustees, the more we can focus on our common issues rather than our differences.

OA’s [Business Conference Policy Manual](#), representing the group conscience of OA, passed the following policy motion: (1994b, amended 2008):

The Fellowship of Overeaters Anonymous recognizes the existence of special focus meetings (i.e., gay and lesbian meetings, women’s meetings, men’s meetings, 100-pounders, maintainers, old timers, and people of various cultural backgrounds, etc.) which have been formed of persons who can more readily identify with fellow OAers with similar attributes. According to the Traditions, bylaws, and policies of OA, the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop eating compulsively. We ask each person attending a meeting to respect and consider the group conscience. All registered meetings shall welcome and give a voice to any person who has the desire to stop eating compulsively.

This policy motion affirms the fact that some members find it easier to identify with persons who have similar attributes; it requests that anyone attending such a meeting respect and consider the desire of those who formed the meeting to encourage that identification; and also requests that all meetings give voice to anyone who wishes to attend and share, regardless of whether that person has the same attributes. There is a balancing of interests in this motion—the need to allow people to

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identify among themselves alongside the need to allow individual members to feel welcome at any meeting.

The Board of Trustees' decision to remove "Bariatric Surgery" from among the options affects only the way such meetings are listed by the World Service Office on the oa.org [Find a Meeting](#) page and in correspondence. It does not, nor can it, prohibit any meeting from designating its own Special Focus, or any intergroup or region from listing that Special Focus, even if that focus is not listed on oa.org. Nor does it prevent adding a particular group's special interest in "Meeting Notes."

Given that this is a request to the Board of Trustees, it will be considered by the BOT at one of their upcoming informal meetings; it will be noted whether the consensus that supported removing the "Bariatric Surgery" option continues to exist.

Q. Is there some sort of workshop or list of activities that encourages the use of OA literature?

The [Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide](#) walks OA members through the use of [The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous](#), as well as using [Alcoholics Anonymous, fourth edition](#) (the Big Book). It also uses the AA [Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions](#) book, our own [Overeaters Anonymous, Third Edition](#) (the Brown Book), and OA's daily readers [Voices of Recovery](#) and [For Today](#).

Although the [Twelve Step Workshop and Study Guide](#) is designed to facilitate a fifteen-week workshop series, members are using this guide in many creative ways: while working with sponsors and sponsees, for instance, or while creating overview workshops on how to work the Steps; or during workshops on individual Steps—and many other ways.

I would also suggest giving a literature presentation at any intergroup/service board meeting or any special workshop. Discussing our literature would be an effective way to introduce members to a wide variety of available resources. On the [Groups/Service Bodies "Guidelines" page](#), you'll find suggestions for developing [newsletters](#), [translating literature](#), or creating [locally-produced literature](#). You'll also find the [OA-Approved Literature List](#), which lists all board- and Conference-approved books, pamphlets, PI materials, and periodicals available through the OA bookstore (visit [bookstore.oa.org](#)).

Q. How can the Board of Trustees safeguard against one "pushy" trustee dominating the board, and ensure that more humble committee members' voices are also heard? My fear is that pushy behavior will silence the voices of BOT members who might represent worldwide groups more accurately. Our Fellowship has a service structure of an upside-down triangle; all voices need to be heard.

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Tradition Two of Overeaters Anonymous states: “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.” When we practice Tradition Two, we remember that our service boards are led by our collective Higher Power. No one person has more influence than another.

Any member of the Board of Trustees might have a strong opinion, but all the other trustees are practicing their own recoveries and have their own opinions of how the World Service Office and OA assets need to be managed. All work is done in Executive Committee meetings by discussion and vote and should reflect substantial unanimity. We work toward consensus, something we can all live with. Each member is allowed time to share ideas while others listen respectfully and consider outcomes from the place of “What’s best for OA as a whole?”. There have been many years when BOT members held varying opinions on what would work better, or differently.

OA has survived for the past fifty-seven years using this method of governance. We are still grateful for those who came before, no matter what their personal beliefs about how things need to be. Hearing those minority voices keeps us stronger. Together we can.

Q. Is a group or intergroup able to change the Suggested Meeting Format by deleting the suggested Seventh Tradition contribution? In our Public Information materials or meeting formats, is it okay to say that OA is “free”?

Tradition Four states, “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or OA as a whole.” The [Suggested Meeting Format](#) is “suggested.” Many groups change or adapt it to suit the specific needs of their group. Some groups do not use it at all. From this standpoint, you can leave any part of it out that you choose.

Tradition Seven states, “Every OA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” (Underlines added.) Two important words in Tradition Seven are “every” and “fully.” Some OA groups, especially virtual groups, do not believe they need to mention Tradition Seven because their group has no direct expenses. The “self” in “self-supporting” can be extended to refer to OA as a whole, not simply the individual group. “Self” includes OA: our intergroups, service boards, regions, and World Service. Even if individual groups themselves have no expenses, our Seventh Tradition reminds us it is important to support our Fellowship as a whole. Our World Service Office needs our support to help carry the message to other compulsive overeaters. The World Service Office maintains the OA website and provides worldwide meeting lists so people can find our meetings. The World Service Office prints and distributes our OA literature. Without the World Service Office, OA would be just a bunch of fragmented groups and would quickly fall apart.

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Tradition Seven says that every group ought to be fully self-supporting; it does not leave any groups out. There are no exceptions. “Fully” indicates that we keep the needs of the entire Fellowship in mind, not simply the needs of the individual group. We do not accept outside donations, but Overeaters Anonymous never demands that members contribute. The [OA Preamble](#) says, “There are no dues or fees for members; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.” [The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Overeaters Anonymous](#) says, “Individuals are fully self-supporting only when they do what they can, when they can, giving back some of the help they have been given in OA” (p. 166).

Is it okay to say that OA is “free” in our PI materials or meeting formats? We are a program of honesty. Saying that OA is “free” would not be an honest statement. “Self-supporting” does not equal “free.” To say that OA is “free” would give members, newcomers, and people investigating OA an incorrect impression. It is more accurate to continue using the term “self-supporting” in PI materials and meeting formats. Members are still free to choose for themselves whether or not to donate. However, it is an important reminder to all members that an important part of our recovery is to take responsibility both inside and outside Overeaters Anonymous meetings.

Step Twelve indicates we “practice these principles in all our affairs.” The [program principle](#) behind Tradition Seven is Responsibility. Every member of OA, every OA group, every OA service body, has the responsibility to do what we can, when we can— in monetary contributions and in service—to support OA as a whole.

Q. How can we encourage members to do service? Many take the view that they can't do service before they recover!

When we first come into Overeaters Anonymous, we want recovery to be about us; then our sponsor mentions service. Service gives back to the program and helps us too. In order to keep what we have, we have to give back what was so freely given.

All members, newcomers and longtimers, are encouraged to do service to help their recovery. Newcomers can set up chairs, carry the literature for a meeting or the key to a meeting. Some meetings have coffee, which newcomers can set up. They can also make outreach calls to other members, participate in readings at meetings, make announcements, and visit their intergroup.

I was encouraged to go to intergroup by my sponsor. I didn't need to be abstinent to go and see what an intergroup was all about. I went as a meeting rep. There were all kinds of things I could do without any abstinence requirements at all, like helping plan recovery events. I was good with computers, so I made flyers. I was able to place flyers and pamphlets in our local libraries and hospitals. My service helped carry the message to the still-suffering compulsive overeater. When I did reach

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required abstinence times, I was voted in as Secretary of our intergroup. I also became the region rep for our Region Eight assembly.

My love of service and OA took off from there. I served in many positions on the intergroup board and in my region. Here I am today—an OA trustee.

I love the journey of recovery. I meet so many people I never would have met otherwise. Doing service means we can trudge together that “Road of Happy Destiny” the Big Book mentions ([Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th ed.](#), p. 164), and carry the message to other compulsive eaters; it is our primary purpose.

[Another trustee answers:]

Your second sentence, “Many take the view that they can’t do service before they recover” captures one of the many paradoxes in our program. Those who wait to be recovering or abstaining before they give service miss the fact that many who do service are gifted with recovery/abstinence along the way.

We can remind members that Service is one of our [Tools](#) of recovery; it can also be included in another Tool: Action Plan. A sponsor can request that all his or her sponsees do some level of service. When encouraging members to do service, include many ideas: members can help set up chairs and put them away at the end of meetings (they will undoubtedly share with others while doing this service). A newer person can become a “speaker getter” for the group, or be the group’s literature person. Two or more newer members can work as a team to do a service—this practice generates support and helps with commitment, and service becomes fun! All this while, any person who has a dilemma about putting service, recovery, or abstinence first gets to put aside intellectual argument and instead live in the solution.

Always remember that any person giving service can ask their Higher Power to be with them; that way they are working Step Eleven whether they realize it or not. And please remember too that we humans want to be asked to help.

Q. Is there a list of willing speakers on oa.org that notes their past experience (for example, bingeing or anorexia)? Where would one find this list?

There is no such list. According the World Service Office, there once was a [Twelfth Step Within](#) Speakers list, but the Twelfth Step Within Committee decided at WSBC 2016 that they would no longer support the document. They had difficulty keeping the spreadsheet up-to-date, even on an annual basis. They felt that the handling of speaker information is better left to regions or local intergroups and service boards.

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Q. Our morning meeting has a longtime member who is emotionally attached to saying the Lord's Prayer and changing the wording of AA literature. He adamantly defends his right to do so, citing Tradition Four and the group's autonomy. A few group members follow his lead when we take an informal group conscience. These are people who don't do service above the group level and don't want to, but who do conduct a newcomer's meeting. My question is this: When even one member is discouraged by repeated violations of Traditions, is taking a group conscience even possible?

I understand your frustration. You might want to raise these issues with your group in a more formal way. (I suggest that when you do raise these issues, you also explain that you are considering OA as a whole; explain that groups that do not follow OA Traditions and ignore group conscience suggestions often end up being weak, and eventually disband.) It might be useful to ask these questions:

- Does my group read the OA Traditions regularly as part of its format?
- Does my group carry out a regular [Group Conscience business meeting](#)?
- If we don't do these things—can I as a member ask that they be done?
- Can I also ask for a [Group Inventory](#) to be put on the agenda of that Group Conscience meeting?

If you need to provide an explanation of why a Group Conscience Meeting is necessary, you might say, "I would like us all to consider whether our group actions are carrying the OA message of recovery in the best way possible. It never does any harm for us all to do this once in a while to keep our minds open as to how we might possibly improve."

In the Group Conscience Meeting, you might suggest reviewing the [Strong Meeting Checklist](#). (This can be found, along with other resources, at [oa.org Groups/Service Bodies; Groups; Group Support](#).) It's often hard to raise issues that make us unhappy. Our legitimate grievances can be met with silence or provoke opposition. But it's worthwhile to persevere and share the reasons we are not happy. In my experience, this is when I have to pray that my HP give me the right words, so I can speak up with love and kindness to uphold our Traditions and keep OA strong. I might ask that the Traditions be added to our meeting's topics. I might suggest that all sponsors "do" the Traditions with sponsees and also look with them at the [Twelve Concepts of OA Service](#).

During any difficult discussion of group conscience, at any level, it's useful to mention the fact that OA decides things in a fair manner and we are guided by these Twelve Concepts. In particular, Concept Four guarantees the right of participation for all. "The right of participation ensures equality of opportunity for all in the decision-making process." And Concept Twelve (d) states, "All important decisions shall be reached by discussion, vote and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity." You can have a list of these Concepts in front of you so that members can see them, and a list of the Traditions as

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well. Then you can ask the group to consider each Tradition when a member feels that some action of the group is not in alignment.

Regarding that one member's insistence on saying the Lord's Prayer: I believe this is not in alignment with many of the Traditions. OA is for all compulsive eaters, not just those to whom this prayer would appeal. In a Group Conscience Meeting, you could explain that Service Concept Two applies to this situation: "The OA groups have delegated to World Service Business Conference the active maintenance of our world services; thus, World Service Business Conference is the voice, authority, and effective conscience of OA as a whole." A policy adopted by WSBC (1993a) discusses prayer at meetings:

We, the 1993 Business Conference of Overeaters Anonymous, suggest that OA meetings and events be closed with one of the following: the Serenity Prayer, the Seventh-Step Prayer, the Third-Step Prayer, or the OA Promise *I Put My Hand in Yours*.

Two things to note about policy 1993a: the key word "suggested" and the fact that the Lord's Prayer is not included. I suggest including this direct quote from the [Business Conference Policy Manual](#) in the group conscience discussion of this issue.

Regarding that same member's changing the wording of AA literature: I believe this too is not in alignment with many OA Traditions, and may in fact be illegal. In your Group Conscience Meeting, you could explain that Alcoholics Anonymous literature is protected by copyright law: AA material is © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. If we change it, any of it, we are contravening copyright. AA has given OA express permission to adapt the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, but nothing more. You might cite this excerpt of a letter from the AA General Service Office, dated January 22, 2010, addressing this issue:

Although the First and Second Editions of Alcoholics Anonymous are in the public domain of the United States, it has always been Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. ("AAWS") Board's position to request the cooperation of other Fellowships based on A.A.'s Steps, Traditions, etc. in protecting the integrity of the A.A. message as conveyed in Alcoholics Anonymous. AAWS has historically permitted the adaptation of the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions by other Fellowships. However, when it comes to other A.A. materials, the Board does not feel that it is appropriate for other Fellowships to substitute any other words where the words such as "alcoholics", "alcoholism" appear in the original text.

In any meeting, OA's Traditions are important. We are a program of honesty. When someone is leading a meeting for newcomers, it's of utmost importance that they follow OA Traditions and the policies that have been agreed upon by the Fellowship as a whole.

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Q. Regarding OA's new Translation Fund, is there a limit to the amount one can contribute to this fund per year? What is it?

"Give as if your life depends on it!" A member may contribute up to US\$5,000 per year to the general fund and up to US\$5,000 per year to any special or restricted fund. (Restricted funds include the Delegate Support Fund, the Professional Exhibit Fund, and now the Translation fund.) OA will also accept a bequest in any amount from the will of a deceased member.

Visit oa.org/contribute and choose the appropriate designation to make a donation to the Translation Fund or any other OA fund. Find more information in the [Seventh Tradition of OA](#) pamphlet, available for download at oa.org/documents "Group Treasurer Materials."

Q. During a spiritual meeting, how do you handle members writing on paper? Is it against the Twelfth Tradition?

Taking notes during meetings is not against our Traditions. If this spiritual meeting includes spiritual guidance and meditation, other members might be disturbed by papers being shuffled during quiet times. Our First Tradition states, "Our common welfare should come first;" that does not mean *my* common welfare (or any individual's). It might be a good idea to bring this issue up in a group-conscience context at a business meeting. As always in our program, everyone has a voice—and the majority decides.

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