

# *Oxford House Manual* ©

**An Idea Based on a Sound System  
For Recovering Alcoholics and Drug Addicts  
to Help Themselves**

**HOUSING,  
FELLOWSHIP,  
SELF-RELIANCE,  
SELF-RESPECT,  
FOR RECOVERING INDIVIDUALS**

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*Commemorative Edition*

**25<sup>th</sup> Oxford House World Convention**

**Oxford House:  
"Strength in Numbers"**

**Rosen Shingle Creek Hotel  
Orlando, Florida**

**October 3-6, 2024**

Oxford House Inc., the umbrella organization of the worldwide network of individual Oxford Houses, is a non-profit umbrella corporation that provides charters to eligible groups of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who want to establish a new Oxford House.

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## Introduction

This is the tenth edition of the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup>, which has served thousands of Oxford House members since 1975. The theme of the 2024 Annual World Convention in Orlando, FL, is “Oxford House: "Strength in Numbers,"– which focuses on the characteristics and practices identified in this manual and are still applicable.

On November 18, 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed P.L.100-690, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which established a nationwide program to encourage the mass replication of recovery houses based upon the Oxford House concept. At the request of Congress, Oxford House worked with them to craft a simple but workable start-up loan program in each state. Originally, the start-up loan program was mandatory, but now it is permissive.<sup>1</sup> Some states have start-up revolving loan funds, and some do not.

The expansion of Oxford Houses began in June 1989. By 1994, only five years later, the number of Oxford Houses had grown from 18, primarily in and around Washington, D.C., to more than 500 located in 39 states.<sup>2</sup> Year after year, the number of Oxford Houses has continued to increase. Over 580,000 individuals recovering from alcoholism, drug addiction, and co-occurring mental illness have found that Oxford House living has contributed to their long-term recovery. The time, peer support, and disciplined participatory democracy that underlies Oxford House gave each of them the time to re-invent personal behavior from a life of chaos into comfortable long-term recovery without relapse.

The foundation or blueprint for that transformation continues to be the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup>. As with the previous editions of the original 1975 manual, this edition is also dedicated to Jim S. – the first member who was voted into Oxford House in 1975. On August 19, 1987, Jim died – at far too young but with over 12 years of remarkable sobriety. He touched hundreds of recovering alcoholics with his dedicated program of joyful sobriety. For two and a half years, he lived in Oxford House, keeping everyone's spirits up and proving that Oxford House worked, and then rejoined his wife and two children. As a "graduate of Oxford House," Jim kept coming back to bring "newcomers" in and help "old-timers" out. Jim taught us all that you don't need to drink or use drugs to have a good time living in an Oxford House.

This latest edition of the manual adds a reminder that emphasizes that if an applicant or Oxford House resident relies on a service animal or emotional support pet due to a disability, reasonable adjustments should be made. These adjustments allow the

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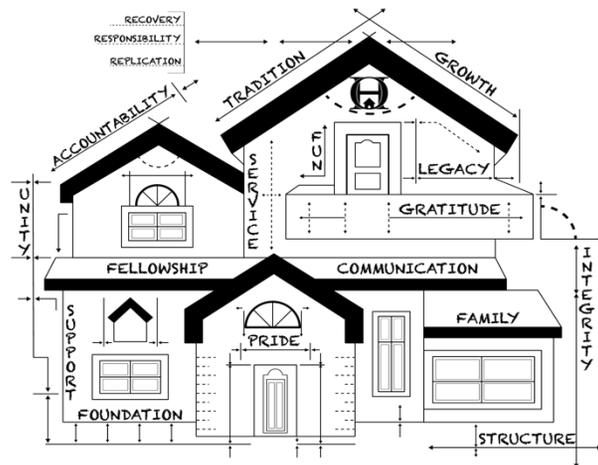
<sup>1</sup> See the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) under “About Us/History” for the text of the current law.

<sup>2</sup> The number of Oxford Houses reached 3,900 in August 2024, just prior to the 25<sup>th</sup> Oxford House World Convention in Orlando, FL. The total number includes houses in 48 states, Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, and Ghana.

individual to keep their animal in the residence, irrespective of pet policies. The person with the disability is accountable for the animal's well-being, behavior, and control. Oxford House members should discuss and decide on suitable accommodations for the animal, considering all household members' needs and rights.

In summary, Oxford Houses, like any housing entity, must comply with the regulations of the Fair Housing Act when it comes to either service animals or emotional support pets; individuals with disabilities who require the assistance of service animals should be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to housing and recovery support.<sup>3</sup>

The Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup> is a blueprint for running a successful Oxford House. Learn what it says and follow its time-tested practices and procedures.



<sup>3</sup> Regarding either service animals or emotional support pets, Oxford House, like other housing entities, is subject to the regulations outlined in the Fair Housing Act (FHA) in the United States. Under the FHA, individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination in housing, and this includes the right to have service animals in housing units, even if the housing entity has a "no pets" policy. Service animals are not considered pets; they are trained to perform specific tasks that aid individuals with disabilities. These tasks could include alerting to seizures, providing mobility assistance, or helping individuals manage psychiatric symptoms. If a resident or prospective resident believes that he/she requires a reasonable accommodation, that individual should contact Oxford House, Inc. for assistance.

## The Oxford House Story

In October 1975, the first Oxford House was opened in Silver Spring, Maryland, by a group of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts living in a county government-run halfway house. Each of them had been clean and sober for a short time when they learned that the halfway House was to be closed. Each of them was fearful that he would return to alcoholic drinking or drug use without the support of living in a group committed to staying sober and clean.

When the news reached them that the halfway House would be closing, their first reaction was anger, resentment, and panic. They had known that the halfway House had a "six-month rule," which required an individual to move out after six months to make room for a newcomer. As a matter of fact, during their tenure in the halfway House, they had watched 12 men move out at the end of six months. Eleven of the 12 had returned to drinking or using drugs within a month. That fact only added to their fears and insecurity upon learning that the House they lived in would be closed, and they all would have to move within thirty days.

A private individual, a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, held the lease on the House the county was closing. Several of the men faced with eviction approached him to see if there was some way the county could be convinced to change its decision. He felt such a change of heart was impossible. It was a matter of economics. County halfway houses cost too much money to run. The county budget was tight, and Alpha I, as the halfway House was named, would be closed. He then asked if the men had considered taking over the House.

Over the next several days, hope replaced the despair the men shared. Still, several obstacles stood between the idea of taking over the House by themselves and the reality of being able to do it. Where would they get the money? They all had drunk themselves out of good jobs, and few had done more than day work since getting sober. How could they pay for the rent, the utilities, the food, and a counselor to manage a halfway house? Whom could they find to run the House, even if they could come up with the money? Day and night, they discussed their possibilities and went to many A.A. meetings to get advice from A.A. members. Time and again, A.A. members encouraged them. "Just don't drink," they heard over and over again. "Keep it simple" and "Remember—a day at a time" were offered as advice almost as frequently.

Slowly, an idea began to form that it could be done. The first task involved studying the costs of the halfway House to determine how much money was needed. The highest single cost was the paid manager, cook, and counselor attached to the House. Someone suggested they could live without a paid manager, cook, or counselor. But who would be the supervisor or manager if they did not have a paid manager who lived in the House? In addition, of all the men to live in the new House, only one had gained six months of sobriety.

The men decided that the cost of a manager, cook, and counselor was too great. If the house were to be maintained, a way would have to be found to learn how to stay sober and manage a house without a paid staff.

One man recalled that he had lived in a college fraternity with sixteen men that did not have a paid manager. Of course, there had been no requirement not to drink in that House. As the men talked about the fraternity house concept, fear of being able to enforce sobriety without the presence of a paid authority figure became the heart of the matter. They had been without real responsibility for so long that there was considerable doubt about whether they could act responsibly.

As discussions centered on whether they could run a house themselves, talk would inevitably drift into complaints about the halfway house way of life. There were many rules. Lights out at eleven o'clock at night. Everybody is up at six in the morning. Breakfast at precisely seven o'clock. Table setting, dishwashing, vacuuming, trash removal, bed making – all specific assignments to be done at an exact time and in a particular way. Any suggested changes to the rigid routine were dismissed with a lecture and a warning to shape up or ship out. As much as the residents of the halfway House resented the arbitrary rules, the fear of having no place to live was even greater.

After days and days of discussions, an organizational plan began to evolve, giving the group the confidence to try. Their experiences in the halfway House—both positive and negative—helped them develop an organization to carry the responsibilities for which the manager, cook, and counselor had been responsible in the county halfway House. And so, the Oxford House concept began to take form.

On the positive side of the ledger of the halfway house experience was the reinforcement of sobriety gained by knowing that immediate eviction followed by taking the first drink. From the start, the founders recognized that there had to be an absolute rule against any alcohol or drug use by house members. The problem for a self-run group house was the development of procedures to ensure that any member who drank or took drugs would be thrown out. It was finally decided that the only way it could be done would be to call a meeting of the house members and discuss the situation. If a member had taken drugs or a drink, there would have to be a vote to expel him from the House. If a majority of the members agreed that the member had taken a drink or drug, he would automatically be out.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The first Oxford House tried a system that distinguished drinking or taking drugs in the house from drinking or taking drugs outside the house. In the former case, expulsion from the house was automatic; in the latter case, expulsion was likely, but if the membership felt it was warranted, a member who had relapsed away from the house could be given probation. This was done in four cases and did not work in any of them. In each case, the member with the relapse had relapsed again within a period of a few days or weeks. Experience showed that probation did not work. Therefore, any slip or relapse now results in automatic expulsion. The vote taken by the house membership is solely to judge if a relapse has occurred. The third condition of a house's charter absolutely requires immediate expulsion, and no house wants to lose its charter.

Before the first relapse occurred, there was considerable debate among the members about how one could tell if an individual had returned to drinking or taking drugs. Some members thought the House should purchase a breathalyzer to test everybody against the "secret drinker" among us. Others suggested the election of an official "sniffer" (as a less expensive safeguard). New houses today will probably go through the same kinds of concerns. The fact is that no house member can fool other members for very long. We are all professional alcoholics and drug addicts who would have done anything to drink and take drugs. We know all the tricks of the trade and cannot cover up relapse for very long.

Unfortunately, relapses can occur. Some members of Oxford House will return to their addiction. When they do, the other members of the House need to act promptly. The worse mistake any house can make is to let a slip or relapse by one member slide. That slip endangers the sobriety of every other house member and can quickly ruin the House for everyone. Every Oxford House member knows before moving in that the use of alcohol or drugs will result in getting kicked out. Oxford House members are responsible for using "tough love" and promptly expelling the slipper – for his welfare, their welfare, and the welfare of the entire House.<sup>5</sup>

Once a member has been expelled from a house because he has returned to drinking or taking drugs, he cannot be readmitted unless there is a clear demonstration that he has returned to solid sobriety. Each House develops certain rules of thumb for determining a return to solid sobriety. Some accept completing a 28-day rehabilitation program as a return to solid sobriety. Most generally require strong evidence of no drinking or taking of drugs and regular attendance at A.A., N.A., or other mutual aid meetings. as a minimum requirement for re-acceptance into an Oxford House<sup>6</sup>.

The founders of Oxford House developed a democratic way of operating. They had to—they could not afford to pay a house manager or supervisor to take responsibility

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<sup>5</sup> Acting against a member who has resumed using alcohol and drugs is rarely an easy task, but it's a step taken by every Oxford House. Dealing with the first instance of such a relapse is particularly challenging due to the close bonds formed among house members, making it uncomfortable to expel a friend. Nevertheless, prioritizing principles over personal relationships is crucial, and any member who has returned to using alcohol and/or drugs must be immediately asked to leave the house. Failure to do so jeopardizes all house members' sobriety and Oxford House's reputation. The first Oxford House encountered skepticism from outsiders who placed bets on its rapid downfall. Many believed that a shared residence for individuals in recovery from addiction couldn't succeed without a manager or counselor enforcing abstinence from alcohol and drugs. However, these doubters were proven wrong as Oxford House members demonstrated their capability to act responsibly. The primary duty of any Oxford House is to uphold a secure and drug-free living environment.

<sup>6</sup> Once several Oxford Houses have opened a geographic area, each house keeps in touch with the other houses so that a relapsing member does not simply move from one house to another. On the other hand, once a relapsing member regains sobriety, it may be advisable for him to "start over" in another house in the area if it has room. The group conscience of those for whom Oxford House is working generally has no trouble in guiding the recovered relapsing member into the house that can give the most support.

for them. The early history of Oxford House showed that the members could run a house on their own. Today, Oxford House is still self-run, and it still works.

Within six months of its beginning, the first Oxford House had helped finance and start the second Oxford House. Soon, those two houses began a third, and the three houses started a fourth. Over its first thirteen years, Oxford House grew from one House to more than twenty houses, and the expansion of a good idea had just begun.

In October 1987, an Oxford House for men was started in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania—far away from the cluster of houses in the Washington, D.C. area. It worked, and the eleven men in that Oxford House followed the pattern begun thirteen years earlier by finding another house to rent to start a second house in the Bethlehem area.

Early in 1988, all the members of the individual Oxford Houses decided to establish a full-time central services office to provide other individuals recovering from a substance use disorder the technical assistance necessary to start Oxford Houses in their communities. There was a strong belief that Oxford House could work anywhere. As Oxford Houses open around the country, the first Oxford House in a particular area will follow the tradition set by the original Oxford House of helping other houses get started. Between 1989 and 2021, the growth of Oxford Houses has been phenomenal – more than 3,600 individual Oxford Houses have been started in 47 states, Australia, Canada, England, and Ghana.

Foundations, businesses, churches, and individual and government agencies have helped fund technical assistance to help get the first few Oxford Houses established in an area. However, the movement's expansion continues to rely primarily upon the volunteer efforts of individuals living in existing Oxford Houses and working with newly formed groups. Throughout the country, clusters of Oxford Houses have organized themselves into mutually supportive chapters, working together to expand the number of houses so that every recovering alcoholic and drug addict can gain the support of living in an Oxford House.

Each Oxford House has its own history, but all Oxford Houses share a common history of operating democratically on a self-supporting basis. That common history is the key to why Oxford House works. The *System of Operations* and the *Oxford House Traditions*, which follow, are taken directly from the original Oxford House Manual© with minor changes duly noted through footnotes and contain the blueprint for any Oxford House to work well by following a tried-and-true path to success.

The Oxford House, Inc. organization is listed below. Direct any correspondence, telephone calls, or emails to it. Its purpose is to be of help.

**Oxford House, Inc.**  
1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 300  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
Telephone: (301) 587-2916  
[www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) / [www.oxfordvacancies.com](http://www.oxfordvacancies.com)

*Oxford House, Inc. is incorporated in Delaware and is a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.*

The following standard forms and others — time-tested to be helpful in running an Oxford House — are printed at the end of this manual and can be downloaded from the website [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org), as can new versions of the forms.

### **Membership Application**

The standard form used by Oxford Houses to help evaluate the eligibility of applicants applying for membership in an Oxford House.

### **Weekly Meeting Report**

A form to record the minutes of the weekly meeting of the Oxford House family members so that the House has an ongoing record of the democratic decisions made by the group.

### **Weekly Financial Report**

A form to report who has paid their share of expenses, a list of the costs paid during the previous week, the amount of funds available to the House, and a list of regular or unexpected expenses coming due within the next few weeks.

### **Oxford System Checklist**

A checklist is used by some Oxford Houses to remind members of the Oxford House family about the basic steps that must be taken to make the House run on a financially sound basis.

## Oxford House System of Operations

There is a frequent saying among Oxford House members that "Oxford House has no rules except "Don't drink or use drugs." For the most part, that saying is true. However, it does overstate the facts.

While rules at Oxford House are kept at a minimum, there are nevertheless rules. Unfortunately, it is only possible for an organization to function with some system or procedures. The basic rule for all Oxford Houses is that they *must operate on a democratic basis*. Each member of the House has one vote. A majority rules except accepting a newly recovering person with a substance use disorder for membership when 80% of the current membership must vote its approval.

The following discussion spells out the Oxford House System of Operations. It draws upon the experience of the existing Oxford Houses and tells any recovering person with a substance use disorder who is interested (1) how to start an Oxford House, (2) how to make an Oxford House run smoothly, and (3) how to manage money in an Oxford House.

Oxford House, Inc. is the umbrella organization for all Oxford Houses. Any group of recovering alcoholics that wants to form an Oxford House must obtain a charter from Oxford House, Inc. The charter confers on to the Oxford House the benefits of being part of a non-profit corporation that offers the experience and guidance necessary for making the Oxford House Model work.

Any group of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts can apply for an Oxford House charter. Oxford House, Inc. has no hard and fast rules regarding the length of sobriety required of applicants who want to charter a new house. As a rule, however, several charter group members should have several months of solid sobriety.

### Obtaining a Charter

Two or more recovering alcoholics can apply for a charter from Oxford House, Inc., by completing an application for a charter<sup>7</sup> or simply writing a letter containing the pertinent information to Oxford House World Services. Pertinent information would include answers to the following questions:

1. Names of proposed charter members.
2. Length of sobriety for each proposed charter member.
3. The plans that the charter group has for renting or leasing a house.
4. The number of beds contemplated for use in the proposed new Oxford House.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> One can get a form to apply for a charter by writing to Oxford House, Inc., 1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 300, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, or by downloading a charter application form from the website [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) by clicking "applications" under "Houses."

<sup>8</sup> To receive a charter the proposed house must be for a minimum of six residents. The largest Oxford House group to date has been eighteen. The best size group seems to be made up of eight to twelve members. Charters are only granted for single-sex houses. There are no "co-ed" Oxford Houses. Leases with landlords should make clear that no smoking within the house is permitted and that the use

5. The anticipated charge per person per week would be needed to make the House self-supporting.

Once Oxford House, Inc.'s central office has reviewed the application or letter from the prospective charter members, they will either issue a charter or suggest additional steps for the prospective members to take to obtain a charter. A charter will be issued if, in the judgment of Oxford House, Inc. central office, the proposed new Oxford House would have a reasonable chance of success.<sup>9</sup> All charters are issued conditionally. This means that the new group, once started, must demonstrate that it has learned the Oxford House system of operation sufficiently to be awarded a permanent charter.

In rare cases, Oxford House, Inc.'s central office will issue a charter before the actual acquisition of housing by the applicants. In such cases, the charter will be issued upon the condition that the charter members obtain a suitable house within a specific period of time.<sup>10</sup>

### Obtaining a House

The Oxford House philosophy relies on expanding capacity rather than limiting the length of time that a member can live in a House. To achieve sufficient capacity for providing enough rooms for all recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who want to live in an Oxford House, it has been the custom for an established Oxford House to look for an additional house once it has become full and has applications that it is unable to accept because of lack of space.

A suitable house's size, location, and cost depend more on what is available than any specific criteria. The charter members looking for a suitable house should ensure that any prospective house can be occupied without violating local zoning or health and safety laws. In practice, any Oxford House is no different from an ordinary family—except no one in an Oxford House drinks or takes mood-changing drugs.

Most jurisdictions in the country do not have specific ordinances that relate directly to an Oxford House-type situation. Most group housing ordinances, if they exist at all, are geared to highly institutionalized situations. Most commercial zoning ordinances, i.e., rooming houses, apartments, hotels, or motels, are inappropriate for the Oxford House situation. Under the Federal Fair Housing Act, local governments must reasonably accommodate recovering alcoholics and drug addicts from living in the supportive

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of decorative candles, incense or other items that represent fire hazards should be prohibited. Group safety is important.

<sup>9</sup> The Board of Directors has delegated the decision-making authority to approve charter applications to Oxford House, Inc.'s central office.

<sup>10</sup> This situation is more likely to occur when Oxford House is new to a geographic area. In those geographic areas where there is already an Oxford House, those wanting to start a new House are more likely to find the available house first and then apply for a Charter. Following the tradition of early Oxford Houses, each house tries to match the supply of Oxford House recovery beds with the number of applicants wanting to live in an Oxford House. Houses in an area always work through the chapter to ensure supply and demand balance.

Oxford House living environment.<sup>11</sup>

Suppose the charter members have yet to determine how their jurisdiction will view an Oxford House. In that case, they should face the matter directly and clear their occupancy with the local zoning authorities. Oxford House, Inc. is willing to provide any assistance to persuade local authorities to treat Oxford House the same as it would treat any other single-family residential property within its jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup>

Common sense should be used in selecting any house to be used as an Oxford House. It should have adequate plumbing, adequate kitchen facilities, adequate laundry facilities, enough bedrooms, and a pleasant common living space. In addition, the area should be carefully examined to determine if parking automobiles might cause a problem.

The rent a new group can afford depends on the number of beds the House can hold. More than one bed should be put in larger rooms. New members moving into a house can feel at home more easily if they share a room. Most Houses use a system of seniority for bed selection. "Old-timers" generally move into single rooms as new members move into the House. The single rooms are usually the smaller rooms in a house.

There are three reasons Oxford House encourages more than one room. First, newcomers maintain recovery better with a roommate. Loneliness continues to threaten sobriety, and loneliness can be a problem for the newcomer adjusting to a new place to live. Second, the number of people living in a House directly affects the economics of an Oxford House. The more people who live in a House, the less each member must pay for the House to be self-supporting. Third, roommates discourage having non-house members spend the night at an Oxford House.

The House's size is directly related to the rent a new group can afford. In most areas, the monthly rent will be the most significant single cost for the members of a House to meet. For example, the first Oxford House (Oxford House-Silver Spring)<sup>13</sup> held 13 members. The monthly rent was \$700; utilities ran about \$300; staples about \$250 monthly.<sup>14</sup> The charge per member had been set at \$30 a week. Since the House quickly

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<sup>11</sup> The United States Supreme Court on May 15, 1995, issued a decision in the *City of Edmonds, WA v. Oxford House, Inc.* (514 U.S. 725), which confirms that recovering alcoholics and drug addicts living in an Oxford House are "handicapped" and therefore a protected class within the meaning of the Federal Fair Housing Act, as amended. Local jurisdictions must make reasonable accommodations to afford them living arrangements that are supportive of recovery. Several subsequent federal cases have affirmed that Oxford Houses are not commercial institutions and should be treated as single families for purposes of zoning.

<sup>12</sup> In Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for example, Oxford House received a ruling from the Chief of the Bureau of Inspections that it is within the definition of "Family" as defined in the City Zoning Code. As a practical matter, most jurisdictions so appreciate the valuable service provided by Oxford House that it is considered to have a "family" classification.

<sup>13</sup> Oxford House-Silver Spring was opened on October 25, 1975, and continued to be an Oxford House until the end of 1984. It was located at 1219 Fiddler Lane, Silver Spring, Maryland. The building was razed to make way for another building in 1986.

<sup>14</sup> The first Oxford House and most subsequent Houses have bought milk, potatoes, spices, flour, coffee,

became full and stayed full, income exceeded expenses.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, after six months of operation, the House had nearly \$2,000 in the bank. It used \$1,200 to start a new Oxford House so that some recovering alcoholics who had applied to live in an Oxford House could live in one. Even today, most Oxford Houses have a backlog of applications. The tradition of some house members of an existing house helping to start a new Oxford House in an area continues.

Generally, it is easy to acquire furniture for a new House at little or no expense. Letting friends, family, and church groups know you are looking for furnishings can be very effective. Every community tends to be willing to help. However, getting beds and chests of drawers donated may be difficult sometimes. Since beds are essential, members in a new house might want to buy twin-size mattresses and box springs sets. New twin-size mattresses and box springs cost between \$90 to \$120 per unit. Thrift stores, Goodwill, or Salvation Army stores often have chests of drawers at a reasonable price. However, the first and most effective way to get furniture is to ask the local recovery community members for it. Often, they upgrade their own furnishing and are pleased to give their old furniture to an Oxford House.

Other start-up costs include a month's rent in advance and a security deposit equal to one month's rent. New Houses often get loans from A.A. members or other Oxford Houses to meet this expense. Whenever a loan is obtained, the members of the new House should agree to pay it back according to a definite schedule – at least \$100 a month until it is repaid.<sup>16</sup> The good name of Oxford House is at stake whenever any House has a loan outstanding. Therefore, it is important to make payments on the loan regularly.

## Membership

The charter members of a new Oxford House constitute a basic core of membership for the House. Once the House has started, the charter members will want to bring in enough new members to fill all available beds. The higher the occupancy rate, the lower the rent that each Oxford House member must pay.

One of the requirements of an Oxford House charter is that new members must be approved by 80% of the existing members in a particular House. An approval by 80% of the existing members is required because it is extremely important for all the members living in an Oxford House to feel comfortable with any newcomer. As a

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bread, eggs, and bacon on a group basis. Individual members get their own meals – either individually or as groups – but use the "staples" as needed. Note also that the figures used above are 1975 dollars or about one-half comparable 1987 dollars or one-third 2000 dollars.

<sup>15</sup> By late spring, a surplus of nearly \$2,000 was in the House treasury. The members met to decide whether to lower their weekly payment or to use the surplus to open a new House. They chose to open a new House in Washington, DC, in May 1976.

<sup>16</sup> This is also true of loans received from a state revolving loan fund. Repayments on time are a must because it allows other groups to start houses and helps expand the opportunities for recovering individuals to stay clean and sober without relapse. State loans are usually \$4,000 and are repaid at \$170 a month for 24 months.

practical matter, existing Oxford Houses have denied membership to very few individuals. Most members of Oxford House keep their memory green, and few applicants are excluded from membership. Those who are excluded are generally excluded because there are no beds available<sup>17</sup>. A waiting list is maintained, but it is of little value after some time because when a person needs a room, he or she needs it immediately. On the other hand, the waiting list can be a useful resource for getting new members to help form another House.<sup>18</sup> The waiting list also is a ready resource for filling vacancies as members move out to live elsewhere in the community or are evicted because of relapse to drinking or taking drugs.

Oxford House works well for men and for women. However, it has been the experience of Oxford House that it does not work well with men and women in the same House<sup>19</sup> Relationships are bound to develop and will unnecessarily complicate the comfortable operation of an Oxford House.

When a new Oxford House is established, the charter members of the House should make themselves known to quarter-way houses, halfway houses, detoxification units, drug courts, rehabilitation facilities, A.A. groups, and N.A. groups within the area. Included among those items which should be stressed are that the House is democratically run; it is self-supporting; drinking or the taking of drugs is not permitted; and both the new and not-so-new recovering alcoholics are welcome to come and live at the House if they do not drink or take drugs and pay their equal share of household expenses. Oxford House is not in competition with any of these groups. It is a resource

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<sup>17</sup>Not everyone is suited for living in an Oxford House, but the existing members should never exclude anyone simply because of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, or national origin or a disability co-occurring with addiction to alcohol or other addictive drugs unless such disability would make it difficult for an individual to function in an Oxford House. For example, being HIV positive does not - in and of itself - preclude successful Oxford House membership because, absent unprotected sex or needle sharing, HIV or AIDS is not contagious and hundreds of recovering individuals afflicted by HIV or AIDS are and have been successful Oxford House residents. Also, hundreds of recovering individuals with co-occurring mental illnesses or physical disabilities have been - and are - successful Oxford House residents. In considering whether an applicant will make a suitable Oxford House resident, the group conscience should always err on the side of providing a recovering individual a chance to benefit from Oxford House living. In other words, if the group believes the individual has exhibited a sincere desire to develop sobriety comfortable enough to avoid relapse, pay an equal share of household expenses and help others in recovery, the applicant should be accepted if space is available.

<sup>18</sup> Once an Oxford House has been established for a few months, there will soon be more applicants than there are beds available. The situation soon causes the members living in the House to start looking for an additional house to rent.

<sup>19</sup> In 1978, Oxford House opened a House intended for women but started with a core group of four men from an existing Oxford House. After eight women moved into the House, the four men moved out with the expectation that their spaces would be filled by the women accepting four additional women. Instead, the women accepted four additional men as replacements, and the House began to have problems. Several relationships evolved between the men and women, and soon, a number of the members returned to drinking. Oxford House, Inc. closed the House and reopened it as a House for men. It was clear then and continues to be clear today that men and women living in the same house operating under the self-support system of Oxford House create unnecessary additional stress to group living. Women's Oxford Houses work.

for them to use in the common goal of helping the alcoholic avoid relapses. Many of these groups will become supporters of Oxford House and will refer new members to the House. Remember to explain that a new member must file an application, be interviewed, and be approved by 80% of the members living in Oxford House.

Once an Oxford House has been established for a few months, applications for membership will exceed the space available. At that point in time, consideration should be given to opening a new Oxford House, using some of the current members as a core group for the new House.<sup>20</sup> Generally, a few members in a House will begin thinking about opening another House in response to a House's inability to accept all the deserving applicants. They will discuss the matter at a House meeting, and everyone will begin to look for a suitable additional house to rent. When such a house is found, several existing members will volunteer to become the core group for a new House. The existing House begins to figure out ways to come up with the necessary money for starting the new House and checks with applicants to see if they would be willing to live in the new House. This is how Oxford House can comfortably exist with the principle of letting members live in an Oxford House for as long as they want to be provided for; they do not drink or use drugs and pay their rent.

### Rules

Alcoholics and drug addicts, by nature, seem to dislike rules. Only one rule applies to all Oxford Houses, i.e., membership is conditioned on not drinking. It is impossible for a house of recovering alcoholics to stay sober if even one person is permitted to drink or take drugs—the presence of someone actively using drugs or alcohol among those who are trying to stay sober invites other relapses. As a matter of self-preservation, the membership of an Oxford House must confront the relapsing member immediately. A meeting of the House should be held, and if a majority of the members believe that a member is drinking or taking drugs, that member should be asked to leave.

The rule relating to alcohol or drugs use grows out of common sense. That is the only mandatory rule once a group of recovering alcoholics has received an Oxford House charter. Other rules will evolve from the membership of the House itself. Those rules should come into being only if they are necessary. The fewer the rules, the more likely it will be that a house will be successful. Different Houses will often tend to have different rules. For example, one Oxford House has a rule that requires unanimous consent before any pet can be brought onto the premises. Another Oxford House has two cats and a dog and would require unanimous consent before either the cat or the dog could be evicted.

In many alcohol rehabilitation units, there are rules covering many activities. Those rules include curfew hours, clean-up details; mandatory attendance at A.A. or N.A. meetings; and other rules almost inherent in institutional living. Oxford House is not an institution. It is more analogous to a family. However, certain rules may be required to

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<sup>20</sup> In the first Oxford House - Oxford House - Silver Spring - members felt confident enough to start another House after six months. They started the first house in Washington, DC, by having four of the thirteen members in the original house move to form a core membership for the new House.

ensure an equitable distribution of the work in keeping the House clean, and at times there may be the need for rules to keep some individuals from disrupting others.<sup>21</sup>

Since the success of an Oxford House depends on having enough income to meet expenses, members must pay their equal share of household expenses promptly. Rules may be required that force the eviction of members who do not keep their equal share of household expenses up to date. All members should be encouraged to pay their share of household expenses at least one week in advance. The weekly house meeting becomes the ideal time to discuss this issue, mainly if a member is not up to date in paying an equal share of household expenses. It helps the individual member and the house group to keep everyone from getting behind.

### Officers

For an Oxford House to run successfully on a democratic basis, it must have certain elected officers. It is part of the Oxford House tradition to make sure that officers do not become so entrenched that other members of the House do not have an equal voice in its management. Therefore, it is an Oxford House tradition that an officer shall serve up to six months in the same office for one continuous period.<sup>22</sup> All officers are but trusted servants of the entire membership. The number of officers may vary from House to House, but all Houses generally have the following elected officers:

- President
- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Comptroller
- Coordinator

The election of a treasurer and a Comptroller emphasizes the importance each Oxford House places on money management. The two officers can divide rent collection and help each other pay bills. Houses elect a "Coordinator" to help schedule daily and weekly work details to keep the House clean – inside and outside.

The election of officers is necessary because they provide the leadership for the House to work well. The officers can serve continuously for only six months in any office, i.e., after an intervening six-month period, an individual can be re-elected to an office they have already served. The duties of the various officers are designed to keep Oxford House running smoothly by conducting regular weekly meetings of the House

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<sup>21</sup> For example, if a member's non-attendance at AA or NA meetings is causing problems – for the individual or the house – the residents may vote at a meeting to require meeting attendance as a condition of living in the house. The "group conscience" should be the determining factor in this situation. It is guided by the fact that the welfare of the house must always come first. Long-term recovery is the primary reason for the house to exist.

<sup>22</sup> See Tradition Two

membership, ensuring that the Oxford House Traditions are followed, and maintaining the finances of the House in good order.

### Meetings

It is essential to have a House meeting at least once a week.<sup>23</sup> After some experimenting, Oxford House will find the hour or half-hour most convenient for most of its members. A meeting should be used to:

- ▶ report on the current financial status of the House.
- ▶ consider new applications for membership.
- ▶ resolve any problem affecting members in the House.
- ▶ resolve general complaints about maintenance of the house; and
- ▶ consider proposals or projects to be undertaken by the House.

A special meeting should be called, just as soon as possible, whenever there is any suspicion that a member is drinking or taking drugs. Such a meeting is the most difficult of any held in an Oxford House. Some Houses have decided to use three elected officers as a screening committee to determine if an individual has violated the rule against drinking or taking drugs. In such cases, the screening committee makes its report to the full membership of the House for their consideration. The individual suspected of violating the rule against drinking or taking drugs should be directly confronted with the facts leading to the suspicion. The membership of the House then must vote on whether the facts support the conclusion that a member has violated the rule.

The decision by the House membership should be viewed simply as a factual determination. If a majority of the House membership attending the special meeting believes that the individual did, in fact, drink or take drugs, the expulsion of that member is automatic.

The Secretary should take notes about what takes place at each House meeting. The notes of the previous meeting should be read at the beginning of the next meeting so that all the members can agree with the record of what the House had previously determined. If the Secretary has made a mistake in recording what had happened, it should be corrected. The approved minutes of a meeting should be made a permanent record of the House. The Secretary should also verify that vacancy updates have been made.<sup>24</sup> The next item of business should be the report on House finances by the Treasurer. That report should include (a) the amount of the bills outstanding, (b) the

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<sup>23</sup> It is suggested that all Oxford Houses and related entities, including chapters and state associations, should engage in properly duly organized meetings, allowing for real-time interactive discussions and accurate minutes. This approach aims to preserve the integrity of the Parliamentary Procedure and the Democratic Process.

<sup>24</sup> Keeping vacancies accurate on the website is essential if a house is to have any creditability with treatment providers, drug court judges or the recovery community. The newcomer relies upon accurate vacancy data, and every house should make sure that the Secretary updates the vacancy website by text at least once a week and that a current cell phone in the house is available for weekly vacancy verification.

cash on hand, (c) members' rent paid in advance, and (d) members' rent due. To the extent possible, the Treasurer should project what the House finances will likely be over the next month and consider the expectation of any large utility bills or unusual expenses.

The House meeting should then take up new applications and listen to each member who has met or talked to the applicant. A vote should be taken on each applicant whether space is available. If the applicant is rejected, they should be told right after the meeting and encouraged to apply to another Oxford House. If the applicant is accepted and space is available, they should be informed as to when to move in, who the current officers are, the money due to move in, and given a copy of the manual – to understand how Oxford House works.

If the applicant is accepted but no space is immediately available, they should be put on a waiting list and told their prospects of getting in. Each new member should be told that the completed application constitutes an agreement to follow the rules of the House.

Meetings also include discussions of the wide range of decisions facing an Oxford House, from purchasing wastebaskets to planning to open a new house. The House meeting is the place to resolve any conflicts that arise from living together as a group. It is also an excellent place to pass on information about new A.A. or N.A. meetings or upcoming A.A./NA-related events. Staying sober and enjoying life is at the heart of Oxford House living.

### **Money**

Oxford House is built on the principle of self-help. When it comes to money matters, this simply means that any House must be self-supporting and operate without debt – other than the start-up loan that should be repaid on a regular basis. There may be exceptions when a House is first getting started. After a few weeks or months, a new Oxford House should be able to pay all its operating expenses out of its equal share of household expenses.

Some expenses associated with an Oxford House are fixed. For example, the monthly rental payment will be a fixed amount. In addition, utilities (electric, gas or oil, telephone, and often water) will be relatively fixed expenses. One area where expenses are controllable involves the purchase of food and supplies. All costs, whether fixed or controllable, must be carefully watched so that any member at any time can know the exact financial condition of the House. Particular attention must be paid to cable T.V. expenses. If one or two members get a pay-for-view, they should reimburse the House. Usually, the Comptroller is responsible for seeing that the members pay their share of the cable bill promptly so that the House is not faced with an unwanted and unwarranted expense.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> As a rule, an Oxford House gets cable TV with limited access to pay for the view. However, if that is not possible, the house should carefully monitor any “extra” expense over the basic system.

The President, the Treasurer, and the Comptroller are all responsible for ensuring that accurate records are maintained showing the expenses and income of the House. Every Oxford House should have its own checking account and make certain to run all income and outgo through the checking account as the main control point for keeping track of money flow. The first thing a new Oxford House does is establish a checking account. At least three officers of the House should be authorized to sign checks, with two signatures required on each check for it to be valid. Promptly deposit members' rent in the checking account and pay all bills by check.<sup>26</sup> That is the easiest and safest way to ensure good record-keeping. Do not use electronic payment except for start-up loan repayment and Oxford House World Services contributions.

Each Oxford House should maintain (1) a membership ledger, (2) a cash receipts journal, and (3) a cash expenses journal. The Treasurer is responsible for keeping these records and for posting the "Weekly Financial Status Report."

The "Weekly Financial Status Report" lets everyone in the House know exactly the current financial condition of the House. It shows:

- ▶ money on hand the prior week.
- ▶ money on hand that week.
- ▶ bills paid during the last week.
- ▶ bills due during the current week.
- ▶ bills due by the end of the current month.
- ▶ members' rent paid in advance (total dollars).
- ▶ members' rent behind (total dollars) and
- ▶ status of individual members' payment history (paid in advance, up-to-date, and behind) listed by the member.<sup>27</sup>

The Treasurer and Comptroller are the officers primarily responsible for ensuring sound financial management for Oxford House. Together with the President, they should continually check and crosscheck the books to ensure the true financial status of the House. At each weekly meeting, a report should be made to the full membership of the House for the membership to determine whether the equal share of household expenses is accurate and to decide if a member is too delinquent in paying to continue in the House.

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<sup>26</sup> Sometimes, petty cash is helpful in buying the staples the House will use. Usually, petty cash is less than \$100 and can be run through the checking account by making a check for "cash." Receipts should then be kept for purchases made from petty cash, and every week the Treasurer should balance the cash against the receipts in the petty cash fund. The Treasurer is usually the person who has control over the petty cash and pays individual members who make the purchases of staples for the House. A separate little book for petty cash is useful to maintain showing income and outgo. A small amount of petty cash is a good idea because checks for only a few dollars can become expensive if the bank charges for checks written.

<sup>27</sup> There are no "secrets" in an Oxford House. Members need to know whether the House is living on "borrowed money" (from rents paid in advance) or whether members are falling behind in rent to know how much needs to be charged for a House to be financially sound.

Oxford House members should remember that paying bills punctually is crucial to maintaining the house's charter. Simply put, if there's not enough money to cover rent or other expenses on schedule, the current occupants must each contribute equally from their funds. Preserving Oxford House's reputation is paramount and shouldn't be jeopardized by those who don't fulfill their financial responsibilities.

### **Oxford House, Inc.**

Oxford House, Inc. serves as an umbrella, non-profit corporation for all the Oxford Houses that have or will be given a charter. It is incorporated in the State of Delaware and is recognized as qualifying under Section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The sole purpose of the umbrella organization is to serve the Oxford House movement. Each Oxford House has an equal voice in running Oxford House, Inc., consistent with the principle that each member has an equal voice in running an individual Oxford House.

Oxford House, Inc. is the only entity authorized to provide charters for individual Oxford Houses and operates a central services office to help existing houses stay on track and to help start new houses.

### **The World Council**

The Oxford House World Council, an advisory board responsible for making policy recommendations, comprises 12 members. Among these members, nine are residents of Oxford Houses who are elected through a vote involving all Oxford Houses. These member members serve staggered three-year terms. Additionally, three alumni members of Oxford House are elected to join the World Council. Every year, elections are held during the Oxford House Convention to fill one-third of the positions on the World Council. The World Council holds six meetings per year. Several committees have been established within the World Council to address various important aspects of the global network of Oxford Houses.

The World Council's chairperson also serves on the Oxford House Board of Directors. This arrangement ensures that the organization's services align with the needs of individual houses, as evidenced by the actions taken by the World Council.

### **The Board of Directors**

The Oxford House Board of Directors oversees and governs Oxford House, Inc., the umbrella 501(c)(3) non-profit organization of the national network of individual Oxford Houses. One-quarter of the Board members are alumni or members of Oxford Houses. The Board guides the external finances used for expansion and network maintenance.

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## ***Oxford House Nine Traditions ...***

### **TRADITION ONE**

Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing and rehabilitative support for the alcoholic and drug addict who wants to stop drinking or using drugs and stay stopped.

By the time many of us had stopped drinking, we had lost jobs, we had lost families, and some of us either had no place to live or no place to live, which was not an invitation to start drinking again. Oxford House was founded not only to put a roof over our heads but also to create a home where the disease of a substance use disorder was understood and the need for the alcoholic and drug addict to stay away from the first drink or drug fix was emphasized.

Oxford House is group housing. The bond that holds the group together is the desire to stop drinking or using drugs and to stay stopped. Modest rooms and living facilities can become luxurious suites when viewed from an environment of alcoholics and drug addicts working together for comfortable sobriety.

When we stopped drinking or using drugs, we began to realize that to stay stopped, our lives would need to change. Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous provided a framework for us to change physically, mentally, and spiritually. The degree to which we were able to change our lives successfully had a direct relationship with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Many of us soon learned that living alone or among our old drinking companions made it more difficult to practice the principles necessary for continued sobriety.

Some of us had lived for a time in alcoholic and drug rehabilitation facilities. Those facilities provided us with shelter, food, and therapy for understanding alcoholism and addiction. Initially, the structure and supervision of such facilities were acceptable because, physically and mentally, we were exhausted. Later, some of us were to move into halfway houses, which provided shelter, food, and supervision. As our recovery progressed, the supervision and dependency on a halfway house created dissatisfaction. The dissatisfaction was partly the realization that we were shirking responsibility for our own lives and, in part, resentment of authority. The third factor affecting us both in the rehabilitation facilities and the halfway houses was the realization that the duration of our stay must be limited because space must be made for others in need of help.

Oxford House grew out of the need for many of us to begin a new life without fear of backsliding because of loneliness leading to a renewed dependency on former drinking companions or drug dealers. Throughout its tradition, Oxford House has combined the concepts of self-support and responsibility with a fellowship having the common purpose of continued and comfortable sobriety. Oxford House must always have as its primary goal the provision of housing and rehabilitative support for the alcoholic who wants to stop drinking and stay stopped and the drug addict who wants to stop using drugs and stay stopped.

## TRADITION TWO

All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers are, but trusted servants are serving continuous periods of no longer than six months in any one office.

Most of us ceased functioning as responsible individuals during the last days of drinking or using drugs. We were not only dependent upon alcohol and illegal drugs but were also dependent on many others to continue our alcoholic and drug-addicted ways. When we stopped drinking or using drugs, we began to realize just how dependent we had become. For those who had been in institutions or halfway houses, resentments against authority were common.

A significant part of the Oxford House philosophy is that dependency is best overcome through an acceptance of responsibility. In Oxford House, each member equally shares the responsibility for running the House and upholding the Oxford House tradition. All aspects of Oxford House operations, from the acquisition of the House to the acceptance or dismissal of members, are carried out under democratic procedures. Each member has one vote, and the majority rule applies except that 80% of the members must agree to accept new persons for membership.

During our drinking and drug use years, and even before, many of us found it difficult to accept authority. Many individuals in society can abide by the strict letter of any rule, regulation, or law. Alcoholics and drug addicts tend to test and retest the validity of any actual, potential, or imagined restriction on their behavior. As alcoholics and drug addicts, we became experts at outwitting "the system." As recovering alcoholics and recovering drug addicts, it has become essential for us to learn how to live without the use of alcohol or illegal drugs within society.

By running Oxford House on a democratic basis, members of Oxford House become able to accept the authority of the group because the group is a peer group. Each member has an equal voice in the group, and each has an opportunity to relearn responsibility and accept decisions once they are made.

The opportunity for a house to democratically function requires periodic meetings within the House – at least once a week. Such meetings should be used to resolve any operational or personality problems facing the House.

Any group, to function effectively, needs leaders. Misguided leaders can create dependency and usurp self-responsibility. Oxford House should rely on democratically chosen leaders, but the leaders must always be trusted servants. To discourage excessive dependence on leaders, Oxford House's principle is that every member should serve in the same office for a continuous period of six months.

## TRADITION THREE

No member of an Oxford House™ is ever asked to leave without cause – a dismissal vote by the membership because of drinking, drug use, or disruptive behavior.

During early recovery from a substance use disorder, some members had to leave an institution to make room for a person with a substance use disorder just beginning the recovery process. Other members were asked to leave halfway houses to make room for a recovering alcoholic or recovering drug addict ready to move into a halfway house. Only the very fortunate can make such a transition upon demand. Each individual recovers from alcoholism or drug addiction at a different pace. All too often, an abrupt transition from a protected environment to an environment that places considerable glamour on the use of alcohol and drugs causes a return to alcoholic drinking or addictive drug use.

There's no justification to assume that it's the collective responsibility of society to offer extended shelter in a safeguarded setting for those struggling with alcohol and substance addiction. Nonetheless, there's ample reason to believe that individuals in recovery can care for their own needs, a task society isn't obligated to undertake. Oxford House operates on the principle of replication to address demands, which sharply differs from the notion of temporarily aiding someone with a substance use disorder to create space for a more recently recovering addict or alcoholic just finding sobriety.

Loneliness is one of the greatest threats to the sobriety of a recovering person with a substance use disorder. At a time when we acquired a serious desire to stop drinking or using drugs, many of us lost our families and friends because of our alcoholism and drug addiction. Too often, newly recovering alcoholics and drug addicts are faced with the necessity of living alone and relying solely on contacts with twelve-step or other mutual aid groups to stay sober. Some can keep from drinking despite the loneliness. Others are not so fortunate.<sup>28</sup> The person with a substance use disorder alone compares himself to those members of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, who still have family and friends. Loneliness and self-pity soon lead such individuals back to alcoholic drinking or drug use. With Oxford House, there is no need for a recovering individual to live in an environment dominated by loneliness.

The only members who will ever be asked to leave an Oxford House are those who return to drinking, use drugs, or have disruptive behavior, including the nonpayment of an equal share of household expenses. No Oxford House can tolerate the use of alcohol or illegal drugs by one of its members because that threatens the sobriety of all the members. Neither can an Oxford House function if some do not pay their fair share of the costs.

It is obvious why Oxford House must vigorously protect the sobriety of its other members by asking the drinking member or member using drugs to leave. The line between an Oxford House of recovering alcoholics or drug addicts and an Oxford House of active alcoholics or drug addicts is thin. A member's tenure is secure in an Oxford House if he does not drink or use drugs, keeps his share of household expenses up to date, and is not disruptive.

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<sup>28</sup> Due to the increasing overdoses from the opioid epidemic, it's highly advised that all Oxford Houses get Narcan opioid overdose reversal kits. Members should learn how to use them correctly and keep them safe. This topic should be covered in their weekly meetings to address the location of the kits and any other questions.

## TRADITION FOUR

Oxford House is not affiliated with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, organizationally or financially, but Oxford House members realize that only active participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous offers the assurance of continued sobriety<sup>29</sup>.

Oxford House members often attribute their sobriety to Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, or other mutual aid meetings. Each Oxford House member, as an individual, considers himself a member of A.A. and N.A. Without that, sobriety would be short-lived.

As individual members of Alcoholics Anonymous, Oxford House members are keenly aware of the Sixth Tradition of A.A., which is:

*An A.A. group ought never to endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

Oxford House has never sought nor obtained sponsorship from any A.A. or N.A. group in deference to that tradition. Oxford House members value the Sixth Tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous (and Narcotics Anonymous) too greatly for themselves to try to get either movement deeply involved in the organizing, financing, or sponsorship of any Oxford House. However, Oxford House members firmly believe that the Oxford House concept can expand as an independent entity while fully utilizing the benefits of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Oxford House creates an environment whereby each member can more fully realize the benefits of active A.A. or N.A. membership. A house full of sober, recovering alcoholics and drug addicts invites informal A.A. or N.A. "meetings after the meeting," each day, they find many informal A.A. or N.A. meetings before individual members go off to their regular A.A. or N.A. meeting.

An underlying principle of Oxford House is that each member can be responsible for themselves. Living within an Oxford House provides all Members the opportunity and motivation to attend recovery meetings regularly. The example of Oxford House members attending A.A. or N.A. meetings on their own is contagious. Oxford House's experience has shown that participation in A.A. and N.A. is exceptionally high in an environment where one individual can see another individual with the same disease, reaping great benefits from A.A. and N.A. participation.<sup>30</sup>

As an organization, Oxford House is not part of A.A. or N.A. However, the members of Oxford House have found that only by being active in A.A. and N.A. have they found comfortable, long-term sobriety – for themselves and the Oxford House in which they live.

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<sup>29</sup> Since its inception in 1935, numerous mutual aid meetings have sprouted within the A.A. community. Each Oxford House is urged to adopt the diverse range of available pathways and ensure that its members take responsibility for actively engaging in their chosen path to recovery.

<sup>30</sup> If a member's non-attendance at AA or NA meetings is causing problems – for the individual or the house – the residents may vote at a meeting to make meeting attendance for a particular member a condition of living in the house. The "group conscience" should be the determining factor in this situation. It is guided by the fact that the welfare of the house must always come first.

## TRADITION FIVE

Each Oxford House should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses or Oxford House, Inc.

Each Oxford House is self-supporting and self-run. The members of Oxford House assume full responsibility for the operation of the House. The members themselves, in a democratic fashion, determine the equal share of household expenses that are charged to the members. The rules that govern the House are, for the most part, made by those who live in a particular Oxford House.<sup>31</sup> Such autonomy is essential for the Oxford House system to work.

The reason that each Oxford House is independent arises from the very practical consideration that those closest to a situation can best manage it. If Oxford House follows the democratic principles and traditions of Oxford House, Inc., it should have no difficulty running smoothly. Those democratic principles will also enable the members of a particular Oxford House to take pride in their newfound responsibility.

The charter of each Oxford House requires that an Oxford House meet specific minimum requirements of Oxford House, Inc. First, an Oxford House must be democratically self-run following the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup>. Second, an Oxford House must, in essence, be a good member of the community by obeying the laws and paying its bills. Third, an Oxford House group must immediately expel any member who returns to drinking alcohol or using drugs.

Failure to adhere to any of these three requirements would bring the entire Oxford House concept into question. Therefore, it is essential that each Oxford House meet these minimum responsibilities for its charter to continue.<sup>32</sup> Oxford Houses are both autonomous and self-supporting. All Oxford Houses have been careful to avoid undue dependence on government or other outside funds.

Each local Oxford House votes annually at the convention to elect the national Oxford House World Council. All the individual Oxford Houses elect nine members of the Oxford House World Council and must be a member of an Oxford House when they are elected. Three of the World Council members are alums and are elected by the houses and the alums in attendance at the annual world convention. The organization was deliberately set up to assure that each Oxford House is autonomous, and that the overall policy of the Oxford House movement reflects the will of the majority of individual Oxford Houses.

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<sup>31</sup> Rules against anyone living in an Oxford House who uses alcohol or drugs are universal with all houses. For obvious reasons, an individual house cannot establish different rules in this regard because such rules would run entirely counter to the primary purpose and functions of the Oxford House System. On the other hand, while the "application for residency" is used by every house, other forms are "suggested" for use – they generally make sense to use by every house but are not mandatory.

<sup>32</sup> At this point in the text the original Oxford House Traditions, which were written when the first Oxford House began in the Fall of 1975, stated: "At this time, it also appears that Oxford Houses can be totally self-supporting. By that, we mean that a minimum amount of government support or private support may be accepted for start-up purposes." Some states have recovery house revolving loan funds to help a new house get started. This grew out of §2036 of PL 100-690, the federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, and has served as an important catalyst for the expansion of Oxford Houses.

## TRADITION SIX

Each Oxford House should be financially self-supporting, although financially secure houses may provide new or financially needy houses with a loan for a term not to exceed one year with the approval or encouragement of Oxford House, Inc.

Oxford House was built on the unique concept that its members should try to expand the number of available beds rather than turn existing members out of the House after a set period. In carrying out that concept, Oxford House-Silver Spring, shortly after it started, put up over \$1,200 to start Oxford House-Washington. Later, Oxford House-Washington did the same for the start-up of another House. From the beginning, existing Oxford Houses helped new ones get started. Once a new House gets on its feet, it pays back the older Houses, which had loaned it money, and stands ready to help another new House.<sup>33</sup>

When an Oxford House first starts, it is generally necessary for the members to pay a slightly higher rent than what they pay once the House is established. There are two reasons for this pattern. First, there are start-up costs associated with the beginning of any new house, such as security deposits, supplies, and furnishings.<sup>34</sup> Second, when a House starts, it takes some time to fill all the beds. As all the available beds in a House become full, the members can decide whether to lower the equal share of household expenses or begin to develop a small surplus. As a practical matter, most houses choose to have a surplus of one month's expenses. Once having obtained that surplus, it then decides whether to lower the equal weekly share of household expenses or to accumulate money for the beginning of a new house – or to do both.

Starting new Houses through the mutual assistance of existing Oxford Houses is a tradition because each House was started with the help of existing Houses and tends to pass on to others that they received. Once more applications are received than beds available, the members of any Oxford House will begin to look around for another suitable house. When they find such a house, they will bring it up with the other existing Houses, and if there is a consensus, they will attempt to find the start-up money and members to fill the new House. Often, several members of an existing House will move into the new House to provide a core group of new members who already know how an Oxford House works.

Oxford House, Inc. acts as the coordinating body for providing charters for the opening of new Oxford Houses and for helping individual houses organize mutually supportive chapters. Through chapters, individual houses can share their experience, strength, and hope with each other to ensure compliance with the Oxford House concept and its respected standardized system of operations.

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<sup>33</sup> Numerous Oxford Houses have been opened since 1975. Some operate for several years, and then, because of the expiration of a lease, dissatisfaction with the facilities, or simply the finding of a better location, the members of a particular House will move into a new location. Other Houses often help that type of move and start new Oxford Houses. In both cases, financial assistance is in the form of a loan having a payback schedule not to exceed one year, defined upfront. (Since 1989, many new Oxford Houses have taken advantage of state revolving loan programs. Repayment from those start-up loans assures the continuation of the revolving fund to enable other new houses to get started – just as repayment of loans to chapters permits the same resources to be used again and again.)

<sup>34</sup> For example, the landlord and phone company may require a security deposit, and while furnishings are generally donated, members will often have to rent a truck to pick them up. When a new House starts up, there may also be a need to buy more "staples" such as flour, sugar, coffee, cleaning supplies, etc..

## TRADITION SEVEN

Oxford House should remain forever non-professional, although individual members may be encouraged to utilize outside professionals whenever such utilization is likely to enhance recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction.

It is inconsistent with the Oxford House system of democratic rule to have a professional manager of Oxford House. Likewise, it is inconsistent with the Oxford House concept to have a requirement placed on members to utilize the services of psychiatrists, doctors, or even the program of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, except in very special circumstances.

Within an Oxford House group, it is not unusual to find some members who have problems that the group cannot deal with. In those situations, it is not uncommon for the Oxford House members, at a meeting, to strongly suggest that a fellow member seek professional help. In those situations where a member's behavior is disruptive to the group, the member may be required to seek professional help or attend more self-help meetings to avoid being dismissed from Oxford House.

One can only be dismissed from an Oxford House because of drinking, using drugs, non-payment of rent, or disruptive behavior. Members should be careful not to abuse the dismissal process. Every opportunity should be given to a member who needs professional help to see that he obtains it.

Nearly all members of Oxford House utilize the A.A., N. A., or other mutual aid meetings to obtain and maintain comfortable sobriety.<sup>35</sup> However, Oxford House relies primarily upon an example to ensure a high percentage of meeting attendance from its members. Formal meetings such as 12-step meetings are not held in an Oxford House. However, every member who has maintained comfortable sobriety in Oxford House makes it a practice to attend many recovery meetings regularly.<sup>36</sup> If a house member does not regularly attend A.A. or N.A. meetings, the House may – as a group conscience – decide that an individual member should attend a set number of meetings each week for both the individual's well-being and the well-being of others who live in the House.

Individuals living in each of the Oxford Houses have also been responsible for starting many new Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous groups with meetings near an Oxford House. This not only helps those individuals become more involved in A.A. or N.A. and thereby reap greater individual benefits, but it also helps to build strong bonds between local A.A. and N.A. groups and Oxford House.

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<sup>35</sup> Since its inception in 1935, numerous mutual aid meetings have sprouted within the A.A. community. Each Oxford House is urged to adopt the diverse range of available pathways and ensure that its members take responsibility for actively engaging in their chosen path to recovery.

<sup>36</sup> The 1988 Spring Survey of Oxford House members showed that the average member attends six weekly mutual aid meetings, such as AA or NA meetings. Subsequent annual surveys of Oxford House residents all around the country have confirmed that Oxford House residents attend an average of between five and six AA or NA meetings a week. There are two primary reasons 12-step meetings are not held in an individual Oxford House: [a] it is good for individuals in recovery to get into the habit of attending 12-step meetings in the community, and [b] it is unfair to house members and neighbors to collect many cars in the neighborhood for a regular 12-step meeting at the house.

## TRADITION EIGHT

Propagation of the Oxford House, Inc. concept should always be conceived as public education rather than promotion. Principles should always be placed before personalities.

Those who have benefited from living in an Oxford House have acquired enthusiasm for the Oxford House concept. In their enthusiasm, they have been anxious to share Oxford House with any recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who want to establish an Oxford House in their community.

Every Oxford House member stands ready to explain the workings of his House and the benefits derived there to anyone anywhere. No personal gain is derived from any Oxford House promotion. It should also be pointed out that Oxford House, Inc. in no way gains from the creation of new Oxford Houses. It has been formed as a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation and will continue to operate as one according to the letter and spirit of the law.

It is not easy to spread the word about a new or old concept with a new twist. The members of Oxford House give the highest priority to propagating or spreading the word about the Oxford House concept.

Before spreading the word, an individual Oxford House should make certain that it is sufficiently established to undertake a public discussion of its goals and mission. The best sales pitch for spreading the word about Oxford House is simply the establishment of a sound Oxford House and a straightforward discussion of what it is, how it works, and why it is needed.

As with any group or organization, some individuals will be so impressed with the Oxford House concept that they will become "super salesmen." Each super salesman should be keenly aware that the Oxford House concept is one based on principles rather than personalities. The situation should be avoided whereby certain individuals will begin to equate their persuasive qualities with the Oxford House concept. The concept and the standardized, democratic, self-supported Oxford House system of operations itself are far more persuasive than any individual. Be honest and straightforward when sharing the Oxford House concept with others.

The Oxford House concept is sound and based on sound principles. It has demonstrated its worth with an established track record. We should spread the word about Oxford House but be wary of individuals who place their own personalities before the principles that made it work. Oxford Houses are dedicated to recovery and group support, not individual gain.

## TRADITION NINE

Members who leave an Oxford House in good standing are encouraged to become associate members and offer friendship, support, and example to newer members.

While no one is ever asked to leave an Oxford House without cause, some individuals will simply outgrow living in an Oxford House. They will return to their families and start new families; they may simply move into another living situation.

Once members have left Oxford House, they should be encouraged to become active in the Oxford House Alumni Association. Many alumni members continue to be associated with their former Oxford House as associate house members. The associate member should be encouraged to attend House meetings, but a local house may decide that his voting privileges are somewhat less than those who live in the House. Such a restriction of voting privileges makes sense and should not discourage members who leave in good standing from becoming associate members of their former House or chapter.

Gratitude is a feeling that most alcoholics acquire sometime during their recovery process. Often, recovering alcoholics and drug addicts struggle to express their gratitude adequately. The alumni member of Oxford House is in the enviable position of being of service in an environment where he has total understanding. The alumni member can offer friendship, support, and an example to the active members of Oxford House.

Moreover, the alumni member can often assist in forming new Oxford Houses or recruiting new members who want to live in an Oxford House. Above all, the associate member is an example of one who lived in an Oxford House and "made it."

All Oxford Houses should encourage members who leave in good standing to maintain a continuous link with their Oxford House experience. The welcome mat should be out to any associate member and contact between associate members and active members should be encouraged.<sup>37</sup>

To the extent possible, each Oxford House should keep Oxford House, Inc. updated with the current address of Alumni Members who have left the House in good standing so they can receive the "Oxford Grape" and other Oxford House newsletters.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Many former Oxford Houses residents who left their houses clean and sober become members of the national Oxford House Alumni Association. The Alumni Association is a fellowship of former Oxford House residents who share their experiences, strengths and hope to expand the Oxford House movement and keep it operating and expanding in a way to assure other recovering individuals the same opportunity they have enjoyed.

<sup>38</sup> Names and addresses of Alumni Members and inquiries concerning the Oxford House Manual© should be sent to Oxford House, Inc. 1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 300, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. A cooperative effort by both alumni and active house members can help keep successful members of Oxford House in touch with the Oxford House family. Most Oxford Houses honor their members who leave in good standing by awarding them a certificate of accomplishment and the first year's membership in the Oxford House Alumni Association. On the website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org), one can go to "Contact Us" and register the name and current address of alumni members.

## OXFORD HOUSE SYSTEM CHECKLIST

### MONEY

#### Set Up a Checking Account for Each Oxford House

- ▶ Obtain A Federal Tax Identification Number
- ▶ Get The Name of The House and Address on Each Check
- ▶ Require At Least Two Signatures to Write a Check
- ▶ Record All Deposits, Checks Drawn, And Service Charges
- ▶ Run All Income and Expenses Through the Account
- ▶ Post Monthly Statements So All Members of The House Can See

#### Set Equal Weekly Share of Household Expenses to Cover Costs

- ▶ Figure Monthly Expenses (Rent, Utilities, Staples)
- ▶ Divide By the Number of Beds Likely to Be Occupied
- ▶ Add A Small Amount to Enable the House to Have a Reserve
- ▶ Remember That Other Members Must Make Up Any Shortfall If Any of The House Recovery Beds Are Not Occupied

#### Collect an Equal Share of Household Expenses in Advance

- ▶ Usually, A House Sets a Rule of One or Two Weeks in Advance
- ▶ Do Not Let Members Get Behind in An Equal Share of Household Expenses
- ▶ If A Member Is Two Weeks Back, Confront the Member at The Weekly Meeting
- ▶ Discuss Hardship Cases at A Meeting Before Accepting a New Member – Sometimes, It May Be Necessary to Consider the Fact That an Individual Just Out of Rehabilitation Will Have to Get a Job to Pay Their Equal Share of Expenses

#### Utilities

- ▶ Remember The Electric Bill Is Higher in Summer
- ▶ Remember, The Fuel Bill Is Higher in Winter
- ▶ Cable T.V. Programs Must Be Paid for By the User Unless There Is a House Vote.

## ALCOHOL OR DRUG USE

### Sobriety

- ▶ Sobriety Is the Primary Purpose of An Oxford House
- ▶ Make No Compromise
- ▶ Frequently Go to AA /NA Meetings but Rely On "Attraction" Rather Than Mandates – AA/NA Meetings Should Be Outside the House.

### Alcohol Or Drug Use

- ▶ As soon as Use Is Suspected, Call A Special Meeting
- ▶ When A Majority Vote Confirms the Use of Expulsion Results
- ▶ If Drunk or High, Members Should Leave Immediately
- ▶ If Passive, Leave the Following Day
- ▶ Make No Exceptions
- ▶ Establish A *Readmission* Guideline of Thirty Days of Abstinence
- ▶ Accept The Fact That the House's Welfare Is More Important Than Any Individual

## OFFICERS

### ▶ House President

- ⇒ Elected For a Six-Month Term
- ⇒ Must Be a Member of The House
- ⇒ Calls And Leads Weekly and Special Meetings
- ⇒ They Cannot Succeed Themselves but Can Be Elected to The Same Office After Six Months Have Elapsed

### ▶ House Treasurer

- ⇒ Elected For a Six-Month Term
- ⇒ Must Be a Member of The House
- ⇒ Responsible For Maintaining House Financial Records
- ⇒ Keeps Membership Informed About the Financial Condition
- ⇒ They Cannot Succeed Themselves but Can Be Elected to The Same Office After Six Months Have Elapsed

## Protecting House and Chapter Finances

### ► **House Secretary**

- ⇒ Selected For a Six-Month Term
- ⇒ Must Be a Member of The House
- ⇒ Responsible for Recording Minutes of House Meetings
- ⇒ Before Each Weekly Meeting, Ensure That Vacancy Updates Have Been Made and The Vacancy Contact Cell Phone Is Accurate
- ⇒ Sends Thank You Notes to Contributors
- ⇒ They Cannot Succeed Themselves but Can Be Elected to The Same Office After Six Months Have Elapsed

### ► **House Comptroller**

- ⇒ Elected For a Six-Month Term
- ⇒ Must Be a Member of The House
- ⇒ Responsible For Collection of EES "Equal Share of Expenses" And Reports to The House
- ⇒ Balances Books with the Treasurer Before Each Meeting
- ⇒ Responsible For Annual Survey Completion and Transfer to The Website
- ⇒ They Cannot Succeed Themselves but Can Be Elected to The Same Office After Six Months Have Elapsed

### ► **House Chore Coordinator**

- ⇒ Elected For a Six-Month Term
- ⇒ Must Be a Member of The House
- ⇒ Assigns and Reviews House Chores
- ⇒ They Cannot Succeed Themselves but Can Be Elected to The Same Office After Six Months Have Elapsed.

The goal of every Oxford House is to be an example to everyone in the recovery of the way to become comfortable enough in sobriety to ensure long-term recovery without relapse. In brief, every Oxford House is a "*Good Neighbor and a Good Citizen.*"

Having a weekly house meeting is the key to making any Oxford House work well. Avoid thinking, "Things are going so well; we only need to meet once every two weeks or once a month." Experience has shown that trouble is just around the corner whenever a house fails to have a regular weekly house meeting. The standard forms in the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup>, the Oxford House Chapter Manual<sup>®</sup>, and the website are blueprints or maps for staying on track during a house or chapter meeting. Use them, and if you have any questions, use the hotline or web contact form to get an answer or explanation from Oxford House World Services.

When an Oxford House is established, it gets its own unique Federal Employer Identification Number [FEIN] from the Internal Revenue Service because that number is needed to establish a house checking account. Write the FEIN number in the House Record Book so that future members of the House will have it. Also, make sure that Oxford House World Services has a copy of the number in their database. When the House Secretary checks into the website, they should verify house data on the World Services database. If the FEIN number is blank, please provide one. Your bank can tell you the FEIN number if your House has misplaced it.

All Oxford Houses require two signatures for checks drawn on their checking accounts. Most Oxford Houses write reviews for paying bills during their regular house meeting. That way, everyone knows that the house money – which belongs to all the house members – is being properly spent. The house checkbook should be locked up in a safe place between house meetings. A simple lock box can be purchased at office supply stores like Staples, Office Max, or Office Depot. The president, treasurer, and another officer should have a key or know the combination code for opening the lockbox. These ritual underscores how important it is to keep house money safe. Remember not to use electronic payments to pay bills except for start-up loan repayment or Oxford House, Inc. contributions. That ensures that all expenditures on behalf of the House are easily documented and approved by all the House members. Also, do not vote for the same person as the Treasurer of the House, chapter, and state association.<sup>39</sup>

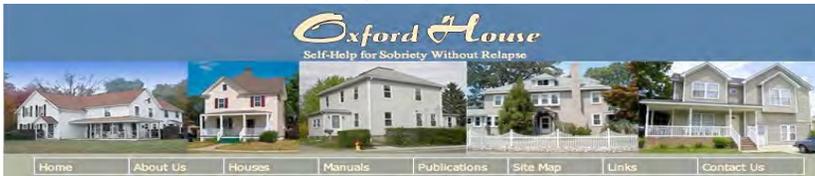
The best safeguard for protecting finances in a house, chapter, or state association is to make the financial data available to all members of the House, chapter, or state association. Transparency is the best safeguard against stealing by dishonest members. The audit forms and procedures ensure transparency. The Treasurer of the House should report current house finances at each weekly house meeting. The Comptroller should work with the Treasurer to conduct a monthly audit of the house or chapter funds to ensure careless mistakes in addition or subtraction do not misrepresent how much money is on hand, paid out, or due.

Finally, don't let House members get behind in paying their equal share of expenses. Everyone in recovery must be responsible. Our past addictive behavior often led us to put off doing things until tomorrow. Remember, there is never an excuse for not paying house bills on time - including rent to the landlord. Vacancies can be no excuse. If the house checking account is short of funds when the bills are due, house members must kick in an additional amount on an equal basis to pay the rent and other bills on time.

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<sup>39</sup> See World Council Resolution # 42. Voting for different individuals to oversee membership money at different levels of the organization is a sound "check and balance" to avoid embezzlement.

## Staying Connected



Every Oxford House stays connected to share strength, experience, and hope with other Oxford Houses, Oxford House, Inc. central office, the treatment community, drug courts, researchers, and all in the recovery community. Having the House Secretary check the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) before each weekly house meeting to report any new material to the house membership is at the heart of staying connected. The House Secretary should also make sure that the cell phone number of at least one current member is listed on the vacancy input website [www.oxfordvacancies.com](http://www.oxfordvacancies.com) so that a person in the House can respond to the text messages automatically sent each week to record current vacancies.

Remember that finding a safe place to live was tough for each of us. We were often frustrated. One frustration was learning that a house reportedly had a vacancy but then finding out there was no vacancy. The least each of us can do for the newcomer to recovery seeking a safe place to live is to make sure that our vacancy data is correct – if for no other reason than to protect the good name of our House among counselors and members of the recovery community who are trying to help the newcomer to find a safe place to live. No counselor or twelfth stepper will refer anybody to Oxford House if they are consistently misled by the vacancy information on the Oxford House website or if the telephone contact number is wrong or never answered. Since every House has been assigned an email address, answering emails promptly can be an excellent way to set up interviews and fill vacancies.

Each House's elected Comptroller is responsible for ensuring that the House has an assigned email account. Beginning in September 2012, every new House will get an assigned email address when it gets its charter. Check the website for how houses existing before that date can get an assigned email address. If an Oxford House does not have a computer or an Internet connection, get one. Computers have come down in price, and a fast Internet connection costs much less than cable T.V. Donated hand-me-down computers are also okay. Ask the community for donations of computers.

Keeping connected and up to date will mean that vacancies are promptly filled. Remember that if a house does not have enough money in its checking account to pay the landlord or the utility company on time, every member must dig into their pocket to come up with the shortfall. It is essential that vacancies be filled quickly and that adjustments to the equal share of household expenses be promptly made to avoid losing the house charter. Keeping an Oxford House on track by expelling house members who relapse and paying bills on time is important to everyone. It is also a requirement to meet the conditions of the House Charter.

## OXFORD HOUSE TRADITIONS

1. *Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing for alcoholic and drug addict who wants to stay clean and sober.*
2. *All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers serve continuous periods of no longer than six months.*
3. *No Member of an Oxford House is ever asked to leave without cause -- drinking, drug use, or disruptive behavior.*
4. *Oxford House members realize that active participation in A.A. and N.A. offers the assurance of continued sobriety.*
5. *Each Oxford House should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses or Oxford House, Inc. - as a whole.*
6. *Each Oxford House should be financially self-supporting.*
7. *Oxford House should remain forever non-professional.*
8. *Propagation of the Oxford House, Inc. concept should always be conceived as public education.*
9. *Members who leave Oxford House in good standing should become associate members.*

# Oxford House™

1975-2024

*Empowering Long-Term Recovery for Individuals  
Struggling with Substance Use Disorders:  
A 49-Year Journey of Organized Self-Help*

- ▶ Providing Sole Authority for the Issuing of Oxford House Charters
- ▶ Providing Technical Assistance to Establish New Oxford Houses
- ▶ Providing Technical Assistance to Keep Existing Oxford Houses on Track
- ▶ Providing Organization of Chapters and State Associations to Help Oxford Houses Help Themselves
- ▶ Providing the Time, Living Environment, and Support to Enable Alcoholics and Drug Addicts to Achieve Recovery Without Relapse
- ▶ Providing the Legal, Philosophical, and Scientific Framework for a Cost-effective, Worldwide Network of Supportive Recovery Housing.

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