

# Oxford House <sup>TM</sup>

## Chapter Manual<sup>©</sup>

*“Sharing the Experience, Strength, and Hope of Oxford Houses for the Common Good”*



**Commemorative Edition**  
**2014 World Convention**  
Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront  
Portland, Oregon

**“Oxford House: Building Community”**

Oxford Houses are a network of self-run, self-supported recovery houses for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Each Oxford House is autonomous and holds a weekly democratic house meeting to assure the smooth operation and financial viability of the house. On a monthly basis, the houses in a geographic area get together to share their common experiences in order to assure that all Oxford Houses operate in a way that preserves the good name of Oxford House and to encourage more experienced houses to help newer ones.

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Oxford House Residents and Alumni,

This is the first new version of the Oxford House Chapter Manual since it was first published in 1991. Eric Heber and the other World Council Members spent hours interviewing house members and alumni around the country about how the Oxford House Chapter Manual could be improved. Two things became clear: [1] nearly everyone felt that chapters should work better, and [2] the Chapter Manual itself could be written in a way that made it easier to use.

This edition is an effort to improve the Chapter Manual. Let the World Council and the central office of Oxford House, Inc. (OHI) know if you find parts that still need improvement. The three principles underlying Chapter work stay the same:

- 1) Oxford Houses should share their experience, strength and hope with each other.
- 2) The common welfare of Oxford House™ requires quality control to make sure that all Oxford Houses follow the conditions of their charter.
- 3) Expansion of the number of Oxford House to meet demand should be a primary goal of Oxford House™.

Chapters provide important way to make the principles meaningful. Having strong, viable chapters can help every Oxford House provide a safe haven for recovering individuals to become comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse. That is the most important goal of every Oxford House™.

Paul Molloy  
CEO and Co-founder

## **Purpose and History of Chapters**

The primary purpose of each Chapter is to assure that each Oxford House™ operates in a way that is consistent with the Oxford House™ traditions and system of operations as described in the Oxford House Manual©. Experience has shown that both the individual houses and Oxford House, Inc. (OHI) as a whole are more likely to succeed and last if every house belongs to a Chapter; however, membership in a chapter is voluntary and no individual Oxford House is required to belong to a chapter.

Tradition Five of the Oxford House Traditions makes clear that each individual Oxford House™ is autonomous – that means that each Oxford House™ is independent and the membership of each house can decide whether or not it wants to belong to a Chapter. Most Oxford Houses decide to participate because they realize the benefits of belonging to a chapter. They know that someday their house may need the help of other houses in the area. Making friends is a lot better than not making friends – particularly when Oxford Houses are really like one big family because they all have the same goal of staying clean and sober.

Chapters are important links in making the democratic system of organization underlying Oxford House™ work. When Oxford House™ consisted of only a few houses, Chapters were not needed because all the houses were in proximity to each other and were always helping each other to stay on track. As the network of Oxford Houses grew, it became clear that, in order for houses to share their experiences, strengths and hopes with each other, it would be necessary to create some intermediary organizational structures between Oxford House, Inc. – the umbrella organization – and the individual Oxford Houses.

The first Oxford House Chapters were established in 1989 following enactment of the federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, PL 100-690. That law encouraged every state to support the establishment of self-run, self-supported recovery group recovery homes based on the Oxford House Model. That law served as a catalyst for the great expansion of the number of Oxford Houses from a small group of only 13 houses in the Washington, DC area to a national network of more than 1,750 houses.

The Chapter is the place where all the members of the growing members of the Oxford House family of individual houses help each other to stay on track and to remain effective. The Chapter also is the place where individuals expand their network of sober friends as Chapters put together all kinds of social events, from car washes, to bowling leagues, picnics and visits to primary treatment facilities.

## Overview of the Work of Chapters

In a nutshell, the work of Oxford House Chapters is to give practical meaning to the three Chapter Principles – sharing, quality control and expansion

### **1. Oxford Houses share their experience, strength and hope with each other.**

The principle of Oxford Houses sharing their experience, strength and hope with each other is an extension of a basic principle underlying the twelve step self-help programs of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts – AA and NA. While an individual's "program" benefits by helping others through the sharing of individual recovery experiences, so too, Oxford Houses benefit from the individual houses in an area sharing their successful (and unsuccessful) House experiences. Since every Oxford House™ has as its primary purpose the achievement of comfortable sobriety and follows a standardized system of operations, a common ground exists for Oxford Houses to learn from each other.

Each Oxford House operates democratically and is financially self-supported following the Oxford House Manual and the traditions designed to perpetuate the house as an alcohol and drug-free environment. The similarities among houses range from day-to-day operations such as maintaining financial integrity through weekly reports concerning the house checking account to expulsion of residents who relapse. Living problems range from personality conflicts to keeping a house clean. Often, the way that one house solves such problems helps another house having similar problems to solve them. The sharing of experiences among houses helps all Oxford Houses to become safe havens for comfortable recovery from addiction -- which is the sole reason for Oxford House™.

What are some of the practical ways that Chapters can work to share experience, strength and hope? Much of the work that can be undertaken could be described as “Building Community” – creating strong bonds within the local community of Oxford Houses. Successful chapters can do this in numerous ways:

- Hold regular Chapter meetings and encourage broad attendance so that Oxford House residents get to know one another.
- Sponsor social events – barbecues, dances, open houses, picnics. Recovery should be fun; otherwise, it's hard to maintain.
- Encourage job networking and circulate notice of openings.
- Keep in touch with alumni – it will help them and you strengthen sobriety.
- Raise money to send representatives to the Oxford House World Convention.
- Work with new Oxford Houses to give them the benefit of the experience of older Oxford Houses and help them start off on the right foot.
- Identify Oxford Houses that may be in trouble and help them get back on track.
- Lead by attraction, not coercion; cooperation rather than ‘bossism.’
- Make chapter work exciting, rewarding and energizing for all.

Successful Chapters also recognize their obligation to share their experience, hope and strength with newly-recovering individuals who might benefit from Oxford House living. Among activities that chapters undertake are:

- Dropping off literature about Oxford House and make presentations at treatment centers and other referral agencies
- Developing good relations with re-entry organizations and drug courts.

All of these activities and many others not listed here go toward making the sharing of experience, strength and hope a reality – for the benefit of all Oxford House residents and alumni and the recovery community at large.

## **2. Quality control assures the common welfare for all Oxford Houses.**

Oxford House™ works because it has a proven system of operations and traditions. It also relies upon having a good reputation for providing an alcohol and drug-free living environment in which recovering individuals are able to learn how to develop responsible lifestyles without using either alcohol or drugs. That means that each individual Oxford House™ must adhere to the conditions of its Charter – namely –

1. The house must be self-run on a democratic basis;
2. The house must be financially self-supported; and
3. Any resident who drinks alcohol or uses drugs must be immediately expelled.

Most Oxford Houses follow all the Charter conditions and run the House in accordance with the letter and spirit of the conditions. A few stray, however, and it is incumbent upon Chapters to identify Houses in trouble or in violation of their charter. A significant role of the Chapter is to impress upon a new house – or a house in trouble – the importance of meeting the conditions of an Oxford House Charter.

One "bad apple" can adversely affect the welfare of Oxford House as a whole. By skillfully carrying the message, the Chapter can prevent problems from arising and for those problems that do come up the Chapter can quickly provide suggestions for solving them. However, the Chapter should avoid becoming a super-power or high court for disputes that may arise among residents of a new or troubled house. Oxford House Tradition Five clearly states: "Each Oxford House™ should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses of Oxford House, Inc., as a whole." What that means in a nutshell is that if a house is operating in accordance with its charter, the Chapter is limited to making suggestions.

On the other hand, if a house is in violation of any of the three conditions of its charter, the Chapter can take corrective action. For example, if one house is not regularly electing new officers or is not expelling residents who relapse, it reflects badly on all Oxford Houses. In order to protect the good reputation of Oxford House™, a Chapter has to intervene promptly to ascertain if the member house has gone astray. Whenever a House is believed to be in violation of its Charter and corrective action is necessary, it is a good idea to call the OHI Office to let them know about it and to get advice. Only Oxford House, Inc. [OHI] can

revoke a charter and it is good to have it involved from the beginning so that charter revocation is a real threat and can motivate a group to get back on track.

More frequently, a House isn't in violation of Charter conditions but may be facing other problems that are affecting its effectiveness. There may be personality clashes among members; finances might be in some disarray; unfilled vacancies may exist and cause financial strain. In these and similar situations, the Chapter should consider helping the House get back on track. Generally, Houses will welcome assistance so long as Chapters approach the task in a collegial, cooperative fashion and not as a big boss. Some actions that can be taken are:

- Attending House meetings; offer guidance but don't take over.
- Reviewing guidelines with them.
- Helping with monthly audits and reports.
- Being available for questions.
- Sharing knowledge (and experience and hope).
- Don't 'tell' the members; 'show' them.
- Be an advocate, not a dictator – it's their House.

Subsequent sections of this Manual discuss the process for helping a house in trouble in more detail. Overall, it is the responsibility of all Oxford House residents to protect the good name of Oxford House and show the world that it's really true that: "The inmates can run the asylum."

### **3. Expansion of the number of Oxford Houses is necessary in order to provide safe, sober, supportive living environments for a greater number of individuals recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction.**

The principle recognizes that Oxford House relies on the concept of expansion rather than limiting the time that a member can live in an Oxford House™. Tradition Three of Oxford House™ underlies this Chapter principle in that it provides that: "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."

The number of applicants for every Oxford House™ generally exceeds the space available and the principle of expanding to meet the need of other recovering individuals has been at the heart of the Oxford House experience right from its earliest days.

Once an Oxford House™ has been established it quickly becomes full. New applicants, no matter how deserving, cannot be accepted for membership in a house when there are no vacancies. After a few months, some of the members in the house will look around to rent another house because each recovering member of an Oxford House™ wants other recovering individuals to be able to share the benefits of living in a supportive, alcohol and drug free Oxford House™. This is also the role of chapters, either alone or working in

concert with Oxford House Outreach Workers. Chapter can help both in finding and opening new Oxford Houses and in helping the new House get off to a good start.

Chapter actions to take to open a new Oxford House include:

- Finding a suitable rental house.
- Touring the house and determining its acceptability.
- Negotiating a lease for the group.
- Helping the group apply for a start-up loan (when available).
- Making and distributing flyers to attract new members.
- Furnishing the house; getting donated furniture.

Chapter actions to take to get a new House off to a good start include:

- Attending the House meeting for a couple of months as an advisor.
- Teaching the group how to run a weekly House business meeting.
- Helping the group set up and organize their House files.
- Being available to be a resource person and answer questions.
- Telling about the experiences of your house as it was getting started.
- Advising newcomers of local 12-step meetings other Oxford House residents attend.

In many jurisdictions, Oxford House Outreach Workers are available to help open new Oxford Houses but they are not available everywhere. Where there is no Outreach Worker presence, it is especially incumbent upon Chapters to assess the demand for new Oxford Houses – both in terms of applicants turned away for lack of space and in terms of overall need in the community for effective recovery housing – and open new Oxford Houses when demand is found to exist. The chapter should also take a leading role even where an outreach worker from OHI is present. The long-term welfare of a network of Oxford House depends upon self-help, not support from a paid outreach worker.

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Chapter work is hard but, done right, it's very rewarding. Good Chapter work has far-reaching benefits. Good Chapter work protects the good name of Oxford House, fosters the expansion of the network of Oxford Houses, and builds a healthy, vibrant community of Oxford House residents. In many cases, good chapter work demonstrates to the community at large that, by working together to solve community problems, men and women of good faith can do wonders in a society that encourages freedom of association and individual action.

# **The Structure of Chapters**

## **Creation of Chapters**

An Oxford House Chapter may be started in two ways. First, two or more Oxford houses may form a Chapter by deciding to become a Chapter and notifying OHI of their action. The World Services Office will acknowledge the notification by sending each house in the new Chapter a kit including a copy of the Oxford House Chapter Manual and a “Certificate of Recognition.” Second, a Chapter may subdivide into two Chapters whenever the number of individual Oxford Houses in the existing Chapter reaches twelve (12). When a Chapter subdivides, the existing Chapter should notify the OHI Office and the Oxford Houses forming the newly-created Chapter will be sent a new Chapter kit and “Certificate of Recognition.”

## **Size and Membership**

Chapters operate democratically just as Oxford Houses do. Chapters usually are made up of from two to twelve Oxford Houses in an area. Generally, when a Chapter gets larger than that, they split into two chapters. Experience has shown that when the number of Oxford Houses in a Chapter becomes too large, the chapter will lack cohesiveness and it should be divided. If a Chapter wants to have more than 13 or 14 Houses, a Chapter officer should call OHI to discuss the reasons for not subdividing into two chapters. Sometimes, when a Chapter has a number of fairly new houses, it is reluctant to subdivide into two chapters until the houses gain some experience.

While Oxford Houses are not required to join a Chapter, most Oxford Houses do join and participate in Chapter activities. Chapter meetings are open to all members of Oxford Houses in the Chapter and Chapter activities should attract participation. Showing that, together, men and women in recovery can enjoy life without booze and drugs is a powerful force. That powerful force has to expand out from the Chapter meeting into the real world. Setting up specific committees focused on particular activities can foster this engagement. For example, a Housing Services Committee can help new Houses and those in trouble, an Event Committee can be planning picnics, dances, sports leagues – bowling, softball, croquet or badminton – educational retreats and workshops. A Presentation Committee can create a schedule to acquaint every treatment provider, drug court and prison re-entry program about Oxford House living and availability. A Fundraising Committee can organize projects to raise money to pay for residents or alumni to attend the national convention or to create a local revolving loan fund to start new houses. Chapter Committees and their activities create opportunities for residents and alumni to work together to help make local networks of Oxford Houses strong members of the both the Oxford House community and their local community.

Membership by an individual Oxford House in a Chapter is for sharing experience, strength and hope among Houses. Because a Chapter may take corrective action whenever an individual Oxford House is not adhering to the conditions of its charter, every house should take an active role in Chapter business. OHI can be consulted to make certain that all options are considered when corrective action is necessary to get an individual house back on track.



Oxford houses that participate in a Chapter help themselves and Oxford House, as a whole. Chapter membership reflects both gratitude and common sense.

## **Officers**

In order to conduct meetings and get things done, Chapters elect the following officers: Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. In addition, the Chapter will elect Committee Chairs. All officers serve for terms of one year in the same office and only as long as they stay clean and sober. When an officer's term of office is up or an officer leaves the office, the Chapter should fill the office at the next regular Chapter meeting.

The officers should be elected once a year and be guided by Tradition Two in the Oxford House Manual<sup>©</sup> that points out that: "All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers are but trusted servants..." The duties of the officers are similar to the duties of officers in an Oxford House<sup>™</sup> but the term of office is one year while clean and sober. The duties of the officers and the suggested conduct of meetings are outlined in the Appendix.

When a Chapter is small, it is not unusual that more than one officer may come from the same Oxford House. In larger Chapters, the group usually spreads the offices around so that various houses are represented among the Chapter officers and every house feels that it is an important part of the Chapter.

## **Committees**

Chapters create committees to undertake the Chapter work and select a Chairperson for each committee. The particular committee structure chosen usually depends on the size of the particular Chapter and the number of members it has. Whatever the structure, the officers of each committee report on committee work at each regular Chapter meeting. This manual speaks of Chapter activities rather than Committee activities; however, most activities will be delegated to specific Committees – many of which will have at least some overlapping membership.

A Housing Services Committee is one of the most important committees because its activities can be crucial in assuring quality operation among all Oxford Houses in the area. That Committee undertakes responsibility for working with new and with troubled houses. It is particularly important to ensure that membership on committees dealing with new and troubled houses have members from several Houses in the Chapter. This practice will help ensure that Chapters offer guidance and encouragement rather than creating a top down or "big boss" relationship.

Most chapters will probably want to create an Event Committee, a Presentation Committee, and a Fundraising Committee in addition to a Housing Services Committee. Creating only a Housing Services Committee sometimes leads a Chapter to focus too much on what's not working. Chapter work goes beyond just working with new and troubled housing. Equally as much attention needs to go to the other activities and the creation of separate committees can help achieve that balance.

## **Helping To Start a New Oxford House**

The first steps toward starting a new Oxford House are: (1) assessing the need for more recovery beds in the area; (2) finding a suitable house to rent; and (3) putting together the initial group is that isn't already formed.

Chapters will know when the demand for Oxford House beds is greater than the supply – the member houses of a Chapter will have firsthand count of the number of applicants they are getting and too many applicants for too few spaces is a signal that another house is needed. Everyone should keep their eyes open for suitable houses and find members interested in helping to start a new house. The group conscience of the Chapter can provide a powerful force for helping to keep expansion in pace with demand. In his or her heart every resident of an Oxford House™ realizes that there will never be “too many” Oxford Houses as long as there are still alcoholics and drug addicts enslaved to addiction.

A suitable house will have enough bedrooms, enough bathrooms and adequate common space for the group to have room to have common space for members to socialize with each other. The availability of adequate parking is usually also a consideration.

Generally, an Oxford House™ applies for a Charter once a suitable house has been lined up. The group should apply to OHI for a Temporary or Probationary Charter and the Chapter can help the group complete that task as well as the subsequent request for a Permanent charter. These documents can only be issued by OHI but OHI will take Chapter recommendations very seriously and usually agree with them.

Once a House has been opened, the Chapter can be very helpful in getting the House off to a good start. How can it do this? First of all, great consideration should be given to the fact that even though the Oxford House System of Operations appears easy to understand for those who have been following it, the new group needs a thorough education about how it works. That education may require hands-on assistance for the first several months.

Sometimes a member of an existing house is willing to move into a new house. Generally the "old-timer" stays in the background and suggests that the new House elect officers from other "newcomers." This avoids undue reliance on the "old-timer" and permits the "newcomers" to learn responsibility firsthand. At the same time the "old-timer" is there to offer helpful advice on getting the new house started down the right track. If an "old-timer" is not available to live in the new house, the Chapter should consider having an experienced volunteer attend the new house's weekly meetings for several months. The volunteer should offer helpful advice but leave the decision-making to the residents of the new house. Sharing experiences is the best tool for guiding a new house to the track that will result in success.

New Oxford Houses generally need help in three areas: (1) operation of weekly house meetings; (2) getting utilities hooked up and working; and (3) managing finances and paying bills. A new house may initially need help in recruiting residents so that the house can be filled quickly to help pay the costs of the house. The Chapter can help spread the word and

teach house residents how to make contact with rehabilitation facilities and within the recovery community in order to get applicants for membership in the house. The new house may also need assistance in establishing a checking account for the house and setting up records to keep track of house finances.<sup>5</sup> For example, two signatures are always needed to write checks on the house account and all expenditures by the house must be run through the house checking account in order to make certain that all members of the house know exactly how house money is being spent.

The OHI central office will probably have sent a start-up kit to the new house that includes an application for the Federal Tax Identification Number (necessary for setting up the house checking account) and specific instructions about how the checking account for the house should be established. If the Chapter has experience or if an outreach worker is in the field, the potential house will probably get its federal tax ID number before it even applies for the charter. If not, the House or the Chapter should give the OHI office a telephone call to get the material necessary for the new house to start operations on the right foot.

New Houses will tend to have a shakedown period before operating smoothly; that is the primary reason that Chapter volunteers sit in on meetings as advisors for the first few months. All houses democratically operate following the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup> but it takes guidance for a new group to understand how democratic procedures assure a smoothly operated house.

The first step in a new house involves the election of house officers – each of whom must learn the responsibilities of their office. A common pitfall in the early days of a new house is that some individuals will tend to be bossy. Democracy works best when leaders make suggestions and set good examples rather than give orders. The Chapter members have experience that often provides valuable lessons about how leaders in a democratically run house can provide effective leadership. Sharing the experiences and growing pains of other houses provides guideposts for new leaders in a new house.

A significant role of the Chapter is to impress upon the new house (or on a house in trouble) the importance of meeting the conditions of an Oxford House Charter. Oxford House<sup>™</sup> relies on having a good reputation in the community and one "bad apple" can adversely affect the welfare of Oxford House as a whole. By skillfully carrying the message, the Chapter can prevent problems from arising and, for those problems that do arise, quickly provide suggestions for solving them. However, the Chapter should avoid becoming a super-power or high court for disputes that may arise among residents of a new or troubled house.

Oxford House Tradition Five emphasizes: "Each Oxford House<sup>™</sup> should be autonomous except in matters affecting other houses of Oxford House, Inc., as a whole." What that means in a nutshell is that if a house is operating in accordance with its charter, the Chapter is limited to making suggestions. On the other hand, if a house is in violation of any of the three conditions of its charter, the Chapter can take corrective action. Whenever corrective action is necessary it is a good idea to call the OHI Office to let them know or to get advice.

## Helping the Oxford House in Trouble

Sometimes an individual Oxford House™ "gets off track." For example, vacancies may last so long that the finances of a house become insufficient to pay all the bills, or personality problems may develop which disrupt the smooth operation of the house. The elected officers of the house in trouble should ask the Chapter for help at the first sign of difficulty. Even if they do not, the Chapter (or any member of the Chapter) should volunteer to help at the first sign of trouble in a house. Early signs of trouble often include: unfilled vacancies, late payment of rent, late payment of the loan repayment, or rumors in the recovery community that a resident of a house is drinking or using drugs. Whenever, any of these problems occur the Chapter should promptly find out what the real situation is.

The Chapter follows a three step process for helping a house in trouble: (1) the problem is assessed and solutions are evaluated for suggesting to the house in trouble, (2) members of the Chapter meet with the leaders of the house in trouble to discuss the nature and extent of the problem, and (3) an appointment is set up for members of the Chapter to attend a house meeting to discuss ways to get the problem solved. The house in trouble should schedule a house meeting and work with the Chapter to develop and implement a plan of action to solve the difficulty facing the house.

**Keep in mind:** Unless a House is in violation of its Charter conditions, it does not have to accept Chapter help. Nonetheless, most Oxford Houses will welcome assistance from the Chapter. Just be careful to offer it as assistance to the House, not a House takeover.

Only in unusual circumstances should the Chapter make a loan to the house in trouble. If a loan is made it should be approved by a majority of the houses in the Chapter and a promissory note should be executed between the house and the Chapter. The note should be signed by at least two officers of the house and include a schedule for repayment of the loan to the Chapter. *See the forms printed in the appendix for a copy of a promissory note.*

Seldom has intervention by a Chapter failed to result in correction of the problem facing a house. Just as members of a well-functioning family can help each other solve problems affecting the family, the houses in a Chapter working through the Chapter can help a member house in trouble resolve its problems.

Only in the most unusual circumstance should a Chapter consider advocating the closing an Oxford House. Sometimes when a house is in trouble because there are too many vacancies in a particular house or the Chapter as a whole and it is tempting to think about reducing the supply of recovery beds. Such temptation should be examined carefully before a Chapter acts on it. The first test of whether or not it is right to close a house is to honestly ask each other if everyone is doing all they can to recruit residents. Are treatment providers in the area being visited on a regular basis to carry information about Oxford Houses to those newly in recovery? Are newcomers at 12-Step meeting being educated about the values of living in the supportive recovery environment of an Oxford House? Are all the houses in the Chapter actively looking for new residents to fill the beds in the house that has vacancies?

Are older residents in existing houses willing to move into a house that is having a hard time filling vacancies? The reason these hard questions are needed is that in most places there are not enough beds to serve all those who could benefit from living in an Oxford House™. Therefore, it is important not to give up on a dwelling that is already an Oxford House™.

Keeping chartered Oxford Houses open and opening new ones as soon as demand shows the need should be the guidepost for all Oxford House members.

## **Recommending Charter Revocation**

The Oxford House Charter is the official document that makes a self-run, self-supported recovery house part of the Oxford House network of houses. The Charter is provided free of charge but it carries with it the responsibility for the new house to work to obtain a permanent charter and to comply with three basic charter conditions:

1. The house must be self-run on a democratic basis;
2. The house must be financially self-supported; and
3. Any resident who drinks alcohol or uses drugs must be immediately expelled.

The Chapter has an affirmative obligation to make certain that each member house adheres to the conditions of its Charter, but only Oxford House, Inc. can revoke a Charter. Generally, other houses in a Chapter will spot a violation of Charter conditions quickly. The most serious Charter violation is the failure of a house to immediately expel any resident who has relapse into using alcohol or drugs. Likewise, a clear-cut problem is apparent whenever a house gets behind in paying its bills. In both of those cases the Chapter should immediately intervene and help a house in violation of its Charter to correct its problems.

Sometimes personality differences within a house will cause one or more residents to complain that a house is not being run on a democratic basis. A Chapter is wise to ask several questions in order to determine the facts of a particular case when such an issue arises. For example, is the house in question having its regular weekly business meeting? Have the officers of the house been duly elected or is another election in order because the officers have served more than the six-month limit suggested in Tradition Two of the Oxford House Manual®? A first step to providing corrective action for a house in trouble is to get the facts straight up front. Armed with the facts, the experience of the Chapter can usually bring effective help to a house to correct any problem it may have with democratic procedures, financial self-support or maintenance of an alcohol and drug-free living environment.

If corrective action is not possible, a Chapter may want to recommend to Oxford House, Inc. that the Charter of a house be revoked. Only when corrective action is not possible should a Chapter decide to recommend that the charter of a local Oxford House™ be revoked. When such an action of last resort is taken, Oxford House, Inc., usually through its World Council, will independently investigate the facts surrounding the house in question and promptly act upon the Chapter's recommendation.

There is a presumption that a Chapter has a proper basis for requesting a Charter revocation and generally the recommendation of the Chapter will be followed, but only if corrective action is not possible. The knowledge that there are many alcoholics and drug addicts still using should always force us to do everything possible to keep as many Oxford House recovery beds in existence as possible. Getting a house “back on track” is always better than closing a house and thereby reducing the number of possible beds that exist in the local, national and world network of Oxford Houses.

Every Oxford House realizes the importance of Oxford House Tradition Five, recognizing the autonomy of each Oxford House except in matters affecting other houses of Oxford House, Inc. as a whole.

It is the autonomy provided by Tradition Five that makes the network of Oxford Houses truly self-run. Oxford House™ is a “bottom-Up” democracy with elected House officers, Chapter officers and World Council members. The organization belongs to the men and women in Oxford Houses. Once a House receives a charter, it has rights equal to the rights of every other Oxford House™. It is the protection of this autonomy that allows every resident of every Oxford House™ to gain comfortable sobriety through the acceptance of new values, behavior and assumption of individual responsibility.

Keep in mind that Oxford House™ residents can pursue comfortable sobriety with a true sense of long-term security. No individual is ever asked to leave an Oxford House™ without a specific cause. No Oxford House Charter is ever revoked without a specific cause.

## **Assuring Chapter Self Support**

Chapters generally do not have very many expenses – but they do have some. Moreover, many Chapters keep a reserve fund with which to make emergency loans to houses that need them; however, while there are times when a loan is justified, Chapters should avoid becoming enablers of sloppy or irresponsible operations by a troubled House and should work with the House to figure out a way the House can correct the situation. If a member house needs a temporary loan, make sure to have its officers sign a promissory note with the chapter specifying repayment terms. Remember loans rather than grants are the best way to avoid creating dependency and to make sure money is available the next time it is needed.

To raise money for miscellaneous Chapter expenses, each house pays dues based on the number of recovery beds in each house. The Chapter also usually contributes a portion of its dues to Oxford House, Inc. [OHI] to defray the costs of expansion and support other services it provides.. This is generally an amount in addition to the amount from individual houses. Individual houses often contribute directly to so that they become eligible for the Director’s Hundred Years Award. The Board of Directors honors houses at the annual Oxford House Convention, who have contributed \$50 a month during the prior year. The \$50 suggested contribution per house is the amount agreed upon by the delegates at the First World Convention on October 9, 1999. Over 20% of Oxford Houses nationally contribute \$600 or more each year so that the number of Oxford Houses can continue to grow and can continue to provide services to all existing Oxford Houses. The Director’s Award is called

“the Hundred Years award” because it is felt that if becomes totally self-supporting it will last forever. Time will tell.

From time to time, some Chapters may make special assessments for the purpose of keeping state loan repayments current for houses within their state that have failed. Such contributions are voluntary but reflect the gratitude members of Oxford Houses and their desire to protect the good name of the Oxford House program. Repayment to the state revolving fund is in the interest of all Oxford Houses and helps assure that start-up funds are available to expand the local Network of Oxford Houses to give other recovering alcoholics and drug addicts an opportunity to develop comfortable sobriety.

Some Chapters also undertake fundraising campaigns to support their activities. This is usually done to send representatives to the World Convention, to support Chapter and State workshops and conventions, and to help Houses that have no resources left after an unexpected event; e.g., theft or hurricane.

### **Working with Other Chapters and with State Associations**

In some areas, the network of Oxford Houses has grown so large that there is a need to organize houses into more than one Chapter. It can be difficult to maintain communication and cooperation between these Chapters without some type of regular meeting. Many of the goals for the individual Chapters can be more effectively accomplished by working together. Furthermore, making presentations to local referral sources, planning fundraisers, and putting on social events can all be improved upon by having the Chapters working together. In most cases, joint activities will increase participation and networking and will benefit everyone.

There are a number of ways that multiple chapters can work together from keeping each other informed through social network pages of the internet to periodic “in person” meetings. It is important to keep in touch with each other to avoid multiple or overlapping meetings with treatment providers, drug courts or community leaders. Some areas with multiple Chapters have organized an Oxford House Chapter Coordinating Committee to avoid unnecessary overlap.

### **Chapters and Oxford House, Inc. (OHI)**

Oxford House, Inc. [OHI] is the umbrella organization for all Oxford Houses and all Chapters. OHI retains exclusive jurisdiction over the granting and revocation of individual Oxford House Charters but Chapters play a critical role in maintaining quality control and advising OHI whenever they believe that an individual Oxford House™ is in violation of its Charter. When so advised, OHI will conduct an investigation and may revoke the Charter but it will often make a last ditch effort to get the house whose charter has been suggested for revocation to make changes necessary for coming into compliance with the conditions of the Charter. However, the presumption is that the Chapter had undertaken such efforts to no avail and therefore revocation is justified. OHI can also revoke Charters acting alone, whenever it finds a violation of the conditions of a charter.

Oxford House, Inc. sends each new Chapter a “Certificate of Recognition” and an operations kit that includes a copy of the Oxford House Chapter Manual and various forms for keeping Chapter records. Once recognized, each Chapter is able to get advice and counsel from headquarters to assure smooth operations of all Oxford Houses that are members of the Chapter. On a regular basis, Chapters reports to OHI concerning the demographics of member Oxford Houses, vacancies and the financial condition of individual houses within the chapter.

While OHI is the sole organization that can authorize changes to the Oxford House manuals, it welcomes suggestions for revisions. While the manuals are time-tested and should only be changed when updating is truly necessary, there are times when this is warranted. The World Council has been particularly helpful in suggesting revisions found in this 2014 revision of the Chapter Manual.

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## Questions and Answers

### **Q. What is an Oxford House Chapter?**

A. An Oxford House Chapter is an official group of individual Oxford Houses that meets monthly and provides a vehicle for individual houses to share their strength, experience and hope.

### **Q. How many individual Oxford Houses does it take to form a Chapter?**

A. Three, usually located within a few miles of each other, although there have been Chapters made up of houses geographically separated by 100 miles or more. Modern communication makes distance communication easier and Oxford Houses make use of internet communication and social networks.

### **Q. Does a Chapter have officers?**

A. Yes. There is a Chapter Chairperson, a Vice Chairperson, a Treasurer, a Secretary and Committee chairs.

### **Q. How long can officers of a Chapter serve?**

A. One year. Unlike officers of an individual house who are limited to terms of six months, Chapter officers are limited to one-year terms of office. The difference in limitation is for practical reasons – the Chapter meets only once a month – and the officer must be living in a house at time of election and stay clean and sober during period of service.

### **Q. Does a Chapter have any permanent committees?**

A. Yes. Every Chapter usually has four committees: Housing Service Committee, Events Committee, Presentation Committee and Fundraising Committee. Multiple committees are important in order for each Chapter to avoid exclusively dealing with ‘problems’ or “bad news.” Living in Oxford House should be fun.

- The **Housing Service Committee** serves the important purpose of helping new houses get started and existing houses that are having problems. The committee is generally made up of individuals who understand how Oxford House works and have the desire to help other houses gain what their house has achieved. Serving on this committee gives a house member the opportunity to share his or her experience, strength and hope. It is also rewarding to help another house to get or stay on track. The members of the Housing Service Committee should include individuals from several houses in the Chapter. It is also helpful if they hold or have held offices within their own house.
- An **Events Committee** that promotes events to share the fun of being clean and sober and creating strong Oxford House communities. Many events from dances to picnics to sporting events bring Oxford House family members into contact with the larger community creating new friends, new contacts and new opportunities.
- A **Presentation Committee** should be part of every chapter to carry the message of Oxford House to treatment providers, drug courts and the still suffering addict. Sharing the good news about Oxford House living keeps Oxford House strong. It helps fill vacancies and it helps gain respect within the community at large.
- A **Fund-Raising Committee** serves three purposes: [1] money is raised to help start new Oxford Houses through a local revolving loan fund, [2] money is raised to help serve the community from fighting hunger to fighting addiction and [3] money is raised to pay expenses of local individuals to attend national and state conventions established to enhance the Oxford House movement.

Of course, the Chapter may from time to time establish other committees. Chapters are democratically self-run – just like an individual Oxford House – and by majority vote can create special committees and local rules for presentations, events and fund-raising.

**Q. Where are Chapter meetings usually held?**

A. Chapter meetings are usually held at one of the individual houses in the Chapter. Usually the Chapter meeting is held at a different Oxford House each month so that all Oxford House residents in the chapter can learn from each other about the things to do – or not do – in operating an Oxford House.

**Q. How are Chapter meeting conducted?**

A. Chapter meetings are conducted just like house meetings. After the reading of the three Principles and one Principle in its entirety, the Chairperson asks the Secretary to read the minutes of the last meeting and asks the Treasurer to give the financial report. Next, the Chairperson goes around the room to call the roll of the houses and asks each house representative three questions” (1) what is the financial condition of your house, (2) does the house have any vacancies and (3) who left the house this month and under what conditions? Third, new business is taken up and can range from the opening of a new house to organizing a Saturday night dance. Each new business item is discussed and either voted up or down or tabled for decision at a later date. Each house has one vote in a Chapter Meeting. All forms for Chapter Meetings can be downloaded from the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org) and using them makes it easier to keep an orderly Chapter.

**Q. How often do Chapters meet?**

A. A Chapter meets once a month unless some emergency situation requires getting together immediately.

**Q. When should a Chapter apply for recognition by Oxford House, Inc.?**

A. A Chapter should apply for recognition as soon as it begins to think about forming because recognition is provided quickly and the start-up kit can insure that the Chapter gets off on the right foot.

**Q. When should a Chapter divide into two chapters?**

A. Whenever a Chapter becomes too large to effectively operate it should divide into two chapters – usually 13 or 14 houses in a Chapter is about as big as a Chapter can handle without becoming too big to be effective.

**Q. How does a Chapter divide?**

A. The best way is to list all the houses according to the date the houses started with the oldest house at the top of the list. Go down the list marking “A” by the first house on the list; “B” next to the second house on the list; “A” by the third house; “B” by the fourth house and so on. All the “A” houses would become one Chapter; all the “B” houses would be the other Chapter. That way makes certain that each of the new Chapters will have both older and newer houses as members. It also avoids splitting Chapters on the basis of friendships or some other reason that could weaken the Oxford House system of operations. The money in the original chapter is divided equally with each new chapter taking half. Both Chapters should apply for Chapter Recognition and notify the Oxford House World Services Office of the division.

**Q. Are there standard forms to be used by an Oxford House Chapter?**

A. Yes. The forms can be downloaded from the Oxford House website at [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org).

## Chapter Officer Duties and Procedure for a Chapter Meeting

Chapter officers are elected for a term of one year. There is a limit of one continuous year in any single chapter office. To be eligible, the officer must be living in a house at the time of election. If an elected individual leaves a house involuntarily, he or she is automatically out of office and a special election is held to fill out the term of office. If a Chapter officer leaves a house voluntarily, he or she should serve out his or her term of office and continue to be involved with the Chapter.

### Duties of Chapter Officers:

**Duties of Chapter Chairperson:** The Chapter Chairperson is chief executive officer for the Chapter. He or she makes certain that the Chapter meets once a month – usually rotating the site of the meetings among the several houses in the Chapter. He or she is elected for a one-year term and must be an officer of a house that is in the Chapter at the time of election.

**Duties of Vice Chairperson:** The Vice Chairperson helps the Chairperson and conducts meetings when the Chairperson is unavailable.

**Duties of Treasurer:** The Treasurer should collect dues from the houses and deposit them as soon as possible in the Chapter Checking Account. The Treasurer and President should be required signatures on the Chapter Checking Account. All checks to pay bills or send contributions to OHI should be written at the Chapter Business Meeting. The Treasurer should make sure to send the checks out the day after the meeting. Contribution to OHI help get other Oxford Houses started around the world.

**Duties of Secretary:** The Secretary should take notes at the meeting using the standard forms. He or she should send the monthly Chapter report to the World Services Office. He or she should also remind each house of the time and place for the monthly chapter meeting.

**Duties of Committee Chairpersons:** Committee Chairpersons should identify and organize the Committee tasks to be accomplished. Committees usually meet separately from the Chapter Meeting but report on the activities of the Committee at each Chapter meeting. The Housing Service Committee usually meets more often than the Chapter because it meets whenever there is a problem to be solved.

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### Three Chapter Principles:

- **Sharing**
- **Quality Control**
- **Expansion**

### Order of Business for Chapter Meetings:

1. Chairperson calls the meeting to order.
2. “Three Principles “ from the Oxford House Chapter Manual are read to open meeting.
3. Chapter Secretary calls the roll of houses in the Chapter. During the roll call the Chapter Secretary asks the house to (a) report the number of vacancies, (b) state the financial condition of the house and (c) report resident turnover.
4. Asks Secretary to read the “Minutes of the Last Meeting.” After the minutes are read the President asks: “Are there any changes or corrections?”
5. If there are changes suggested in the minutes of the last meeting, the Chairperson asks for a motion to accept the change. Once a motion is made it must be seconded. (Each house has one vote in a Chapter meeting.)
6. If there are no changes in the minutes of the last meeting – or once changes are rejected or approved – the Chairperson asks for a vote to approve the minutes of the last meeting.
7. The Chairperson asks for the Treasurer to give the financial report for the Chapter. After the report, the President asks the group if there is any discussion or questions.
8. The Chairperson then brings up “old business” – one item at a time. Old business is business that had been discussed at a previous meeting. Each matter should be open to discussion and decision by the group. During old business the Chairperson should ask for reports from all Committees.
9. Following old business, new business may be considered. Each item of new business is discussed and where appropriate motions made and votes taken.
10. When business has been concluded the Chairperson calls for motion to adjourn and states when and where the next meeting will be held.

# Oxford House™

1975-2014

*39 Years of Organized Self-Help To Enable Alcoholics and Drug Addicts to Recover Without Relapse*

- Providing Sole Authority for 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 to Help 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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