

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**



Commemorative Edition

13th Oxford House World Convention

Grand Hyatt Hotel
Washington, DC

September 1st to 4th 2011

Oxford House, Inc., the umbrella organization of the national, self-help, network of individual Oxford Houses, is a non-profit corporation, which provides charters, at a nominal charge, to recovering alcoholics and drug addicts who want to establish new Oxford Houses.

Introduction

This is the fourth revision of the Oxford House™ Manual©, which has served thousands of Oxford House members since 1975.

Whenever the masculine pronoun is used in this manual, it means the female pronoun as well. There are Oxford Houses for men and there are Oxford Houses for women. There are no Oxford Houses for both men and women in the same house.

On November 18, 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed P.L. 100-690, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, which establishes 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 in crafting a simple, but workable, start-up loan program in each state.

Expansion of Oxford Houses began in June 1989. Within five years the number of Oxford Houses had grown from 18 primarily located in and around the Nation's Capitol to more than 500 located in 39 states.¹ Each individual Oxford House™ receives a charter from Oxford House, Inc., the umbrella organization of the national network of individual Oxford Houses. Oxford House™ has become a national self-help movement that provides a missing link in the recovery process from alcoholism and drug addiction.

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This revision or up-date is dedicated to Jim S., the first member voted into Oxford House™ – as was the second edition. On August 19, 1987, Jim died – at far too young an age but with over 12 years of remarkable sobriety. He touched hundreds of recovering alcoholics with his dedicated program of joyful sobriety and taught one and all that sobriety could be happiness, a good time, a full life and totally rewarding. 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 to have a good time in an Oxford House™. It is a very special fraternity.

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¹ The number of Oxford Houses reached 1,438 early in the third quarter of 2010 just prior to the 12th Oxford House World Convention held September 2nd – 5th at the Fairmont Chicago Millennium Park Hotel in Chicago, Illinois. The total number of Oxford Houses includes houses in Australia, Ghana and Canada.

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, who had been living in a county government halfway house, which was being closed. Each of them had been clean and sober for but a short period of 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 straight.

When the news reached them that the halfway house was going to be closed their first reaction was one of 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 the fears and insecurity they felt 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 a lot of money to run. The county budget was tight and Alpha I, as the halfway house was named, would definitely be closed. He then asked if the men had given any thought to taking over the house themselves.

Over the next several days, hope began to replace the despair shared by the men but a number of obstacles stood between the ideas of taking over the house themselves and the reality of being able to do it. Where would they get the money? All of them had drunk themselves out of good jobs and few of them 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? Who could they find to run the house, even if they could come up with the money? Day and night they discussed the possibilities among themselves and went to a lot of AA meetings in order to get the advice of AA members. Time and again AA members gave them encouragement. "Just don't drink and pay the rent," 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 maybe it could be done. The first task involved studying the costs of the halfway house to determine how much money was needed. The largest single cost was the paid manager, cook and counselor attached to the house. Someone suggested maybe they could live without a paid manager or cook or counselor. But who would be the supervisor or manager if they did not have a paid manager who lived in the house? Of the men in the halfway house to be closed, only one had gained six months of sobriety.

The men decided that the cost of a manager, cook and counselor was too great. If there were going to be any chance of maintaining a house on his or her own, 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 and they had not had a paid manager. Of course there had been no requirement of not drinking 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 there was considerable doubt about whether or not they could act responsibly as a group.

As discussions centered on whether or not they could run a house themselves, talk would inevitably drift into complaints about the halfway house way of life. There were a lot of rules. Lights out at eleven o'clock at night. Everybody up at six in the morning. Breakfast at exactly seven o'clock. Table setting, dishwashing, vacuuming, trash removal, bed making – all specific assignments to be done at a specific 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 which gave the founders of Oxford House™ the confidence they needed to give it a 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 for in the county halfway house.

On the positive side of the ledger of halfway house experience was the re-enforcement of sobriety that was gained by knowing that immediate eviction followed 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 members of the house. The problem for a self-run group house was how to develop procedures to make sure that any resident who drank or took drugs would be thrown out. It was finally decided that the only way it could be done was 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 in fact taken a drink or drugs, he was automatically out.²

Before the first relapse occurred there was considerable debate among the members about how one could tell if an individual has in fact returned to drinking or taking drugs. Some members thought that the house should purchase a breathalyzer to test everybody to guard 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 concern. The fact of the matter is that no member of a house is able to fool other members for very long. We are all professional alcoholics and/or drug addicts who would have done anything to drink and take drugs. We really do know all the tricks of the trade and a relapse cannot be covered up by any one of us for very long.

Unfortunately, relapses can be a part of the disease of alcoholism and addiction. Some members of an Oxford House™ will return to their addiction. When they do, it is important for the other members of the house 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 member of a house. Every Oxford House™ resident knows before he moves in that the use of

² 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 it 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 in fact a relapse has taken place. The third condition of a house's charter absolutely requires immediate expulsion and no house wants to lose its charter.

alcohol or drugs results in getting kicked out. Oxford House™ members have the responsibility to use "tough love" and promptly expel the slipper – for his welfare, their own welfare and the welfare of the entire house³

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 successful completion of 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 AA and/or NA as a minimum requirement for reacceptance into an Oxford House™⁴.

The founders of Oxford House™ developed a democratic way of operation. They had to – they could not afford to pay a house manager or supervisor to take responsibility for them. The early history of Oxford House™ showed that the Oxford House residents 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 started a third and the three houses then 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 the Washington area 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 alcoholism and drug addiction the technical assistance necessary for them to start Oxford Houses in their communities. There is a strong belief that Oxford House™ will 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 2011 the growth of Oxford Houses has been phenomenal – more than 1,500 individual Oxford Houses have been started in 46 states, Australia, Ghana and Canada.

Foundations, businesses, churches, individual and government agencies have helped fund technical assistance to help get the first few Oxford Houses established in an area. However, expansion of the movement continues to rely primarily upon the volunteer efforts of individuals living in existing Oxford Houses working with newly formed groups. Throughout the country

³ It is seldom easy to take action against the relapsing member but every Oxford House™ does. The first case is always the most difficult because all members in a house become friends and no one likes to have to throw a friend out. Nevertheless, principles must come before personalities and the member who has relapsed must leave the house right away. Otherwise the sobriety of every member of the house is threatened. More importantly, the good reputation of Oxford House™ is threatened. The first Oxford House™ used to be the subject of bets by outsiders about how soon it would fail. There was a genuine belief by many that a group house of recovering alcoholics and addicts could not work without a manager or counselor to enforce the edict against drinking or taking drugs. Those doubters all lost their bets because the members of Oxford House™ proved that they could act responsibly. The first responsibility of any Oxford House™ is to enforce sobriety.

⁴ Once a geographic area has opened several Oxford Houses, 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 which can give the most support.

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 in a democratic fashion 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* contain the blue print for any Oxford House™ to work well by following a tried and true path for success.

The *System of Operations* and *Oxford House Traditions*, which follow, are taken directly from the original Oxford House Manual© with very minor changes, duly noted through footnotes.

The key Oxford House™ organization is listed below. Direct any correspondence, telephone calls or e-mail to it. Its purpose is to be of help.

Oxford House World Services Office
1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 300
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Telephone: 1-(301) 587-2916
Facsimile: 1-(301) 589-0302
Internet: www.oxfordhouse.org
E-Mail: Info@oxfordhouse.org

(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:

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 simple form to record the minutes of the weekly meeting of the Oxford House™ family members so that the House has an on-going record of the democratic decisions made by the group.

Weekly Financial Reports

A simple form to report who have paid their share of expenses, a list of expenses paid during the previous week, the amount of funds available to the house and a list of regular or unexpected expenses coming due with the next few weeks.

Oxford System Checklist

A simple checklist used by some Oxford Houses to remind members of the Oxford House™ family about the basic steps that have to 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.'" 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 impossible for any organization to function without having 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 in the case of accepting a new recovering alcoholic or drug addict 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 alcoholic or drug addict who is interested (1) how to start an Oxford House™; (2) how to make an Oxford House™ run smoothly; (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 who wants to form an Oxford House™ must obtain a charter from Oxford House, Inc. The charter confers on the particular Oxford House™ the benefits of being part of a non-profit corporation, which can offer the experience and guidance necessary for making an Oxford House™ work.

Any group of recovering alcoholics and/or drug addicts can apply for an Oxford House™ charter. Oxford House, Inc., has no hard and fast rules as to the length of sobriety required of applicants who want to charter a new house. As a general rule, however, several members of any charter group 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 charter⁵ 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 proposed charter group has for renting or leasing a house.
4. The number of beds contemplated for use in the proposed new Oxford House™.⁶
5. The anticipated charge per person per week, which would be needed to make the House self-supporting.

⁵ 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 web site www.oxfordhouse.org by clicking "applications" under "Houses".

⁶ 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 is no "co-ed" Oxford Houses. Leases with landlords should make clear that no smoking within the house is permitted and no use of decorative candles, incense or other items that represent fire hazards should be prohibited. Group safety is important.

Once Oxford House World Services 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 in order to obtain a charter. A charter will be issued if, in the judgment of Oxford House World Services, the proposed new Oxford House™ would have a reasonable chance of success.⁷ 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 World Services will issue a charter prior to 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.⁸

Obtaining a House

The Oxford House™ philosophy is one that 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 which it is unable to accept because of lack of space.

The size, location and cost of a suitable house to begin an Oxford House™ depends more on what is available than any specific criteria. The charter members who are looking for a suitable house should make certain that any prospective house can be occupied without violating local zoning or health and safety laws. This does not mean that an Oxford House™ should not be considered simply as residential property. In practice Oxford House™ is no different from an ordinary family— except no one in an Oxford House™ drinks or takes mood-changing drugs and avoids fire hazards by prohibiting smoking in the house and use of candles.

As a matter of fact, most jurisdictions in the country do not have specific ordinances, which 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, or hotels or motels, are inappropriate for the Oxford House™ situation. Under the Federal Fair Housing Act local governments are required to make a reasonable accommodation for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts to live in the supportive Oxford House™ living environment.⁹

If the charter members have any doubt as to how their particular jurisdiction will view an Oxford House™, they should face the matter directly and clear their occupancy with the local zoning authorities. Oxford House, Inc., is willing to provide any assistance it can for the

⁷ The Board of Directors has delegated the decision-making authority to approve charter applications to Oxford House World Services.

⁸ 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 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 make sure supply and demand stay in balance.

⁹ The United States Supreme Court on May 15, 1995 issued a decision in *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, and local jurisdictions must make a reasonable accommodation to afford them living arrangements supportive of recovery. A number of subsequent federal cases have affirmed that Oxford Houses are not commercial institutions and should be treated as single families for purposes of zoning.

purpose of persuading local authorities to treat Oxford House™ the same as it would treat any other single-family residential property within its jurisdiction.¹⁰

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

The amount of rent that a new group can afford depends on the number of beds that the house can hold. There is nothing wrong with putting more than one bed in larger rooms. New members moving into a house can be made to 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 to a room. First, newcomers maintain recovery better with a roommate. Loneliness continues to be a threat to 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 has to pay for the House to be self-supporting. Third, roommates discourage having non-house members spending the night at an Oxford House™.

The size of the house has a direct relationship to the amount of rent a new group can afford to pay. In most areas the monthly rent will be the largest single cost for the members of a House to meet. For example, the very first Oxford House™ (Oxford House-Silver Spring)¹¹, held 13 members. The monthly rent was \$700; utilities ran about \$300 a month; staples about \$250 a month.¹² The charge per member had been set at \$30 a week. Since the House quickly became full and stayed full income exceeded expenses.¹³ As a matter of fact, after six months of operation the House had nearly \$2,000 in the bank. It used \$1,200 of that money to start a new Oxford House™ so that some of the 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.

As a general rule, it is easy to acquire furniture for a new House at little or no expense. Sometimes, however, it may be difficult to get beds and chests of drawers. Since beds produce the money, which makes an Oxford House™ self-sufficient, members in a new house might want to buy twin-size mattress and box springs sets. New twin-size mattresses and box springs

¹⁰ 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 useful service provided by an Oxford House™ that it is considered to have a "family" classification.

¹¹ Oxford House-Silver Spring was opened 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.

¹² The first Oxford House™ and most subsequent Houses have bought milk, potatoes, spices, flour, coffee, 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.

¹³ 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.

cost between \$90 to \$120 per unit. Thrift stores, Good Will or Salvation Army often have chests of drawers at a reasonable price. The first and most effective way to get furniture, however, is to ask for it from AA members. Often they are up-grading their own furnishing and are pleased to give their old furniture to an Oxford House™.

Other start up costs often includes a month's rent in advance and a security deposit equal to one month's rent. New Houses often get a loan from AA members or other Oxford Houses in order 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.¹⁴ 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 on a regular basis.

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 so as to fill all available beds. The higher the occupancy rate, the lower the rent, which must be paid by each Oxford House™ member.

One of the requirements under 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 that all of the members living in an Oxford House™ feel comfortable with any newcomer. As a 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 available¹⁵. A waiting list is maintained, but it is of little value after a period of time because when a person needs a room, he must get one immediately. On the other hand, the waiting list can become a useful resource for getting new members to help form another House.¹⁶ 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 a 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.¹⁷ Relationships are bound to develop and will unnecessarily complicate the comfortable operation of an Oxford House™.

¹⁴ This is also true of loans received from a state revolving loan fund. Repayments on time is 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.

¹⁵ Not everyone is suited for living in an Oxford House but the existing members should never exclude anyone simply because of race, creed 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 error on the side of providing any 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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

When a new Oxford House™ is established, the charter members of the House should make themselves known to quarterway houses, halfway houses, detoxification units, drug courts, rehabilitation facilities, AA groups and NA 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 that both the new and not-so-new recovering alcoholics are welcome to come and live at the House as long as 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 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, and be interviewed and 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.¹⁸ 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 the way that Oxford House™ is able to comfortably exist with the principle of letting members live in an Oxford House™ for as long as they want provided they do not drink or use drugs and pay their rent.

Rules

Alcoholics and drug addicts by nature seem to dislike rules. There is only one rule applicable 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 a practicing alcoholic among those who are trying to stay sober invites other relapses. As a matter of self-preservation it is necessary for the membership of an Oxford House™ to 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 the use of alcohol or drugs grows out of common sense. That rule is the only rule considered mandatory once a group of recovering alcoholics has received an Oxford House™ charter. Other rules will tend to evolve from the membership of the House itself. Those rules should come into being only if they are absolutely necessary. The fewer the rules, the more likely it will be that a house will be successful. Different Houses will tend to

accepting four additional women. Instead the women accepted four additional men as replacements and the House began to have problems. A number of relationships evolved between the men and women and soon a number of the members had 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™ creates an unnecessary additional stress to group living. All women Oxford Houses work well; all men Oxford Houses work well; Houses with both men and women do not work and will not be granted a charter by Oxford House, Inc.

¹⁸ In the first Oxford House™ – Oxford House - Silver Spring– members felt confident enough after six months to start another House. 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.

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 probably require unanimous consent before either the cat or the dog could be evicted.

In many alcoholic rehabilitation units, there are rules covering a multitude of activities. Those rules include curfew hours; clean-up details; mandatory attendance at AA or NA 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 assure 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 other individuals.¹⁹

Since the success of an Oxford House™ depends on having enough income to meet expenses, it is important that members pay their equal share of household expenses in a timely manner. 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 idea time to discuss any resident that is not up-to-date in paying the equal share of household expenses. It helps neither the individual resident nor the house group to let anyone get 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 no officer shall serve longer than six months in the same office for one continuous period of time.²⁰ 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 both a treasurer and comptroller emphasizes the importance each Oxford House™ places on money management. The two officers are able to divide rent collection and help each other with the payment of 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 particular office, i.e. after an intervening six-month period an individual can be re-elected to an office in which he or she has already served. The duties of the various officers are to keep Oxford House™

¹⁹ For example, if a resident'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. In this situation the "group conscience" should be the determining factor. 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.

²⁰ See Tradition Two.

running smoothly, conduct regular meetings of the House membership, assure that the Oxford House Traditions are followed, and keep the finances of the House in good order.

Meetings

It is important to have a House meeting at least once a week. After some experimenting, an Oxford House™ will find the particular hour or half-hour, which is the 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 meetings are the most difficult of any held in an Oxford House™. Some Houses have decided to use three of the elected officers as a screening committee for determining 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 or not 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, 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 and the minutes of the meeting should be made a permanent record of the House. The Secretary should also verify that he or she has logged onto the website: www.oxfordhouse.org to update vacancy information for the house.²¹ 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 cash on hand, (c) member's rent paid in advance, and (d) member's rent due. To the extent possible the Treasurer should project what the House finances are likely to be over the next month. Take into account 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 or not space is available. If the applicant is rejected he or she should be told right after the meeting. If the applicant is accepted, and space is available, he or she should be informed as to when to move in and given a copy of the manual so as to understand how Oxford House™

²¹ Keeping vacancies accurate on the website is essential if a house is to have any credibility 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 website at least once a week.

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

Meetings also include the wide range of decisions facing an Oxford House™ from purchases of wastebaskets to plans for opening a new House. The House meeting is the place to resolve any conflicts, which arise from living together as a group. It is also a good place to pass on information about new AA or NA meetings or up-coming AA/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 operate from its rent receipts. 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 of its operating expenses out of its equal share of household expenses.

Some expenses associated with an Oxford House™ are not controllable after a commitment has been made to begin a House. For example, the monthly rental payment will be a fixed amount. In addition, utilities (electric, gas or oil, telephone and often water) will for the most part be fixed expenses. One area where expenses are controllable involves the purchase of food and supplies. All expenses, 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 the telephone expenses. Each member should pay for his or her own long distance calls. Usually the Comptroller is responsible to see that the members pay their share of the telephone bill promptly so that the House is not faced with an unwanted and unwarranted expense.²²

The President, the Treasurer, and Comptroller all have a responsibility for making certain that accurate records are maintained showing 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 very first thing a new Oxford House™ does is to establish a checking account. At least three officers of the House should be authorized to sign checks with two signatures required on each check in order for it to be valid. Promptly deposit member's rent in the checking account and pay all bills by check.²³ That is the easiest and safest way to assure good record keeping. Do not use electronic payment except for start-up loan repayment and contributions to Oxford House World Services.

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".

²² As a general rule an Oxford House™ gets a telephone for the house that has long-distance and other toll lines blocked. If residents want to make long-distance calls they can get a debit card (Sprint, MCI etc.) that prepays for long distance calls. Do not have long-distance or toll service on a telephone used by the group. After a house is established for some time, residents may want to get their own individual telephone – which is agreeable to most houses.

²³ Sometimes petty cash is useful for buying the staples the House will use. Usually petty cash is less than \$100 and can be run through the checking account by making out a check for "cash". Receipts should then be kept for purchases made out of petty cash and on a weekly basis 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 when the bank charges for checks written.

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

- money on hand on the week before;
- 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;
- member's rent paid in advance (total dollars);
- member's rent behind (total dollars) and
- list status of individual members (paid in advance, up-to-date and behind) by member.²⁴

The Treasurer and Comptroller are the two officers primarily responsible for assuring sound financial management for an Oxford House™. Together with the President, they should continually check and crosscheck the books so as to assure the accuracy of 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 correct and to decide if a member is too delinquent in paying to continue in the house.

Oxford House, Inc.

Oxford House, Inc., serves as an umbrella, non-profit corporation for all the Oxford Houses, which 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, which is consistent with the principle that each resident has an equal voice in the running of an individual Oxford House™.

Oxford House, Inc. is 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. It is made up of World Council and a Board of Directors.

The World Council

Nine Oxford House™ residents are elected by vote of all of the Oxford Houses to serve staggered three-year terms as members of the Oxford House World Council. Three alumni members of Oxford House™ are also elected to the 12-member World Council. Elections for one-third of the members are held each year at the annual Oxford House Convention. Meetings of the Oxford House World Council are held six times a year. Various committees of the World Council are established to address policy areas important to the worldwide network of Oxford Houses. The Chairperson of the World Council serves as a member of the Oxford House Board of Directors to assure that the corporation's services are consistent with the policies of the individual houses reflected by actions of the World Council.

The Board of Directors

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

²⁴ 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 in order to know how much needs to be charged for a House to be financially sound.

Oxford House Traditions

- 1. Oxford House™ has as its primary goal the provision of housing and rehabilitative support for the alcoholic who wants to stop drinking or using and stay stopped.**
- 2. All Oxford Houses are run on a democratic basis. Our officers are but trusted servants serving continuous periods of no longer than six months in any one office.**
- 3. No Member of an Oxford House™ is ever asked to leave without cause – a dismissal vote by the membership because of drinking, drug using, or disruptive behavior.**
- 4. Oxford House™ is not affiliated with Alcoholics Anonymous, organizationally or financially, but Oxford House members realize that only active participation in Alcoholics Anonymous offers 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 although financially secure houses may, with approval or encouragement of Oxford House, Inc., provide new or financially needy houses a loan for a term not to exceed one year.**
- 7. 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.**
- 8. Propagation of the Oxford House, Inc. concept should always be conceived as public education rather than promotion. Principles should always be placed before personalities.**
- 9. Members who leave an Oxford House™ in good standing are encouraged to become associate members and offer friendship, support, and example, to newer members.**



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 head, but also to create a home where the disease of alcoholism and drug addiction 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 in order 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 successfully change our lives had a direct relationship to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. Many of us soon learned, however, that living alone or living 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 in part the realization that we were shirking responsibility for our own lives and in part a 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 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 serving continuous periods of no longer than six months in any one office.

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

A major 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 the running of 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 majority rule applies except that 80% of the members must agree in accepting 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 are able to abide by the strict letter of any rule, regulation, or law. Alcoholics and drug addicts seem to have a tendency to test and retest the validity of any real, 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 important for us to learn how to live, without *the use of alcohol or drugs*, within a society— which relies on a wide variety of rules.

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 to 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, in order 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 but trusted servants. To discourage an excessive dependence on leaders, it is a principle of Oxford House™ that no member should serve in the same office for a continuous period of longer than 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 for alcoholism and drug addiction, some members had to leave an institution in order to make room for an alcoholic or drug addict just beginning the recovery process. Other members were asked to leave halfway houses in order to make room for a recovering alcoholic or recovering drug addict who was ready to move into a halfway house. Only the very fortunate are able to 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, which places considerable glamour on the use of alcohol and drugs, causes a return to alcoholic drinking or addictive drug use.

There is no reason to believe that society as a whole has the responsibility to provide long-term housing within a protected environment for the alcoholic and drug addict. However, there is every reason to believe that recovering alcoholics and drug addicts can do for themselves that which society, as a whole has no responsibility to do for them. Oxford House™ is built on the premise of expanding in order to meet the needs of recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. This principle contrasts sharply with the principle of providing the alcoholic or drug addict with assistance for a limited time period in order to make room for a more recently recovering alcoholic or drug addict.

One of the greatest threats to the sobriety of a recovering alcoholic or drug addict is loneliness. At a time when we acquired a serious desire to stop drinking or using drugs, many of us had lost our families and friends because of our alcoholism and/or drug addiction. Too often, newly recovering alcoholics and drug addicts are faced with the necessity of living alone and of relying solely on contacts with Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous to stay sober. Some are able to keep from drinking in spite of the loneliness with which they were faced. Others are not so fortunate. The alcoholic or drug addict alone begins to compare 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 drugs by one of its members because that threatens the sobriety of all of 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 strongly 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 a thin one. A member's tenure is absolutely secure in an Oxford House™ as long as he does not drink or use drugs and keeps his share of household expenses up to date and is not disruptive.

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/or Narcotics Anonymous offers assurance of continued sobriety.

Every Oxford House member attributes his sobriety to Alcoholics Anonymous and/or Narcotics Anonymous. Each Oxford House member, as an individual, considers himself a member of AA and/or NA. Without that, sobriety would be short-lived.

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

An A.A. group ought never 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.

In deference to that tradition, Oxford House™ has never sought nor obtained sponsorship from any AA or NA group. 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/or Narcotics Anonymous.

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

An underlying principle of Oxford House™ is that each individual member has the ability to be responsible for himself. Living within an Oxford House™ provides both the opportunity and motivation for all residents to regularly attend AA and/or NA meetings. The example of Oxford House members going to AA or NA meetings on their own is contagious. It has been the experience of Oxford House™ that participation in AA and NA is extremely high in an environment where one individual can see another individual, with the same disease, reaping great benefits from AA and/or NA participation.²⁵

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

²⁵ If a resident'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. In this situation the "group conscience" should be the determining factor. 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., as a whole.

Each Oxford House™ is self-supporting and self-run. The members of an Oxford House™ assume full responsibility for the operation of the House. The House is theirs and in no way is it part of any other organization. The members themselves in a democratic fashion determine the equal share of household expenses that is charged the members. The rules, which govern the house, are for the most part also made by those who live in a particular Oxford House™²⁶ 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 who are closest to a situation are best able to manage it. If an Oxford House™ follows the democratic principles and traditions of Oxford House, Inc., it should have no difficulty in 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 certain minimum requirements of Oxford House, Inc. First of all, no Oxford House™ may permit individuals to remain as members if those individuals are drinking or using drugs. Second, an Oxford House™ must follow the democratic principles in running the house. Third, an Oxford House™ must, in essence be a good member of the community by obeying the laws and paying its bills.

Failure to adhere to any of these three requirements would bring the entire Oxford House concept into question. Therefore, it is important that each Oxford House™ meet these minimum responsibilities in order for its charter to be continued.²⁷ 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 in convention to elect the national Oxford House World Council. In fact, nine members of the Oxford House World Council not only are elected by all the individual Oxford Houses but also must be a resident of an Oxford House when they are elected. Three of the World Council members are alumni and are elected by the houses and the alumni in attendance at the annual world convention. The organization was deliberately set up to assure that each Oxford House™ is autonomous and that overall policy of the Oxford House movement reflects the will of the majority of individual Oxford Houses.

²⁶Rules 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.

²⁷At 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, with approval or encouragement of Oxford House, Inc., provide new or financially needy houses a loan for a term not to exceed one year.

Oxford House™ was built on the unique concept that its members should try to expand the number of beds available – rather than turn existing members out of the house after a set period of time. In carrying out that concept, Oxford House-Silver Spring, shortly after it was six months old, put up over \$1,200 in order 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ Second, when a House first 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 weekly equal 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 which they received. Once more applications are received than there are 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. It also acts as the coordinating body to help individual houses to organize mutually supportive chapters. Through chapters individual houses are able to share their experience, strength and hope with each other to assure compliance with the Oxford House concept and its respected standardized system of operations.

²⁸ Numerous Oxford Houses have been opened since 1975. Some operate for several years and then, because of 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 as well as the start-up of new Oxford Houses. In both cases, financial assistance is in the form of a loan having a pay back schedule, not to exceed one year, defined up front. (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.)

²⁹ 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 in order to pick them up. There may also be a need to buy more "staples" such as flour, sugar, coffee, cleaning supplies, etc. when a new House starts up.

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, which cannot be dealt with by the group. 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 as a whole, the member may be required to seek such professional help or more self-help meetings in order 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 AA and/or NA program in order to obtain and keep a comfortable sobriety. However, an Oxford House™ relies primarily upon example for assuring a high percentage of AA and/or NA attendance from its members. As a general rule formal AA or NA meetings are not held in an Oxford House™. However, every member who has maintained comfortable sobriety in an Oxford House™ makes it a practice to attend a lot of AA and/or NA meetings on a regular basis.³⁰ If a house member does not regularly attend AA or NA meetings, the house may – as a group conscience – decide that an individual residence 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 groups of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous having meetings near an Oxford House™. This not only helps those individuals to become more involved in AA or NA, and thereby reap greater individual benefits, but also helps to build strong bonds between local AA and NA groups and Oxford House™.

³⁰ The Spring 1988 Survey of Oxford House members showed that the average member attends six AA or NA meetings a week. 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.

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 corporation and will continue to operate as one both according to the letter and spirit of the law.

It is not easy to spread the word of a new concept or an old concept with a new twist. Propagation, or spreading the word, of the Oxford House concept is given the highest priority by the members of Oxford House™.

Before spreading the word, an individual Oxford House™ should make certain that it is sufficiently established to undertake 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, there will be some individuals who 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 a sound one, based on sound principles, and 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 Oxford House™ 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; they may start new families; they may simply move into another living situation.

Once a member has left an Oxford House™, he 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 an associate house member. The associate member should be encouraged to attend 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 find it difficult to adequately express their gratitude. The alumni member of Oxford House™ is in the enviable position of being able to be of service in an environment in which he has total understanding. The alumni member can offer friendship, support, and an example to the active members of an Oxford House™.

Moreover, the alumni member can often provide assistance in forming new Oxford Houses or in recruiting new members who want to live in an Oxford House™. Above all the associate member serves as 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 contacts between associate members and active members should be encouraged.³¹

To the extent possible each Oxford House™ should keep Oxford House, Inc. up-to-date with the current address of Alumni Members, who have left the House in good standing, so that they can receive the "Oxford Grape" and other Oxford House newsletters.³²

³¹ Many former residents of Oxford Houses, who left their particular house 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 experience, strengths and hope in order 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.

³² Names and addresses of Alumni Members and inquires 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.

OXFORD SYSTEM CHECKLIST

MONEY

- **Set up checking account for each Oxford House™**
 - Obtain a federal tax identification number
 - Get name of 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 account
 - Post monthly statement so all members of House can see
- **Set weekly equal share of household expenses at amount to cover costs**
 - Figure monthly expenses (rent, utilities, staples)
 - Divide by number of beds likely to be occupied
 - Add a small amount to enable House to have a reserve
- **Collect 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 equal share of household expenses
 - If a member is two or three weeks behind confront the member at the weekly meeting
 - Discuss hardship cases at a meeting before accepting a new member—sometimes, if a House can afford it, it may be necessary to take into account the fact that an individual just out of rehabilitation will have to get a job in order to get rent money
- **Utilities**
 - Remember electric bill is higher in summer
 - Remember fuel bill is higher in winter
 - Telephone long distance calls must be paid by user
 - Protect against telephone long distance abuse

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

- **Sobriety**
 - Sobriety is the primary purpose of an Oxford House™
 - Make no compromise
 - Frequently go to AA /NA meetings but rely on "attraction"; formal 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 use expulsion results
 - If drunk or high, member should leave immediately
 - If passive, leave the next morning
 - Make no exceptions
 - Establish a readmission guideline of thirty days sobriety
 - Accept the fact that the House welfare is more important than any individual
 - Accept the fact that "tough love" stops relapses

OFFICERS

- **House President**
 - Elected for six month term
 - Must be resident of House
 - Calls and leads weekly and special meetings
 - Cannot succeed himself but can be elected to the same office after six months have elapsed
- **House Treasurer**
 - Elected for six-month term
 - Must be resident of House
 - Responsible for maintaining House financial records
 - Keeps membership informed about financial condition
 - Cannot succeed himself but can be elected to the same office after six months have elapsed
- **House Secretary**
 - Elected for six month term
 - Must be resident of House
 - Responsible for recording minutes of House meetings
 - Keeps pending applications for new memberships
 - Sends thank you notes to contributors
 - Each week must update the main Oxford House website www.oxfordhouse.org for vacancies before the regular weekly meeting
 - Cannot succeed himself but can be elected to the same office after six months have elapsed

- **House Comptroller**
 - Elected for six month term
 - Must be resident of House
 - Collects rent
 - Deals with day to day expenses
 - Responsible to Treasurer
 - Balances books with Treasurer prior to each meeting
 - Cannot succeed himself but can be elected to same office after six months have elapsed

- **House Coordinator**
 - Elected for six month term
 - Must be a resident of House
 - Assigns and reviews house chores
 - Cannot succeed himself but can be elected to same office after six months have elapsed.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- **Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous**
 - Individual members should attend many AA/NA meetings
 - Oxford House™ is not affiliated with AA or NA but members of the House know that only active participation in AA or NA offers assurance of continued sobriety
 - Let AA/NA members know about Oxford House™ and how it is doing

- **Neighbors**
 - Be a good neighbor
 - Keep the outside of the House looking good
 - Be considerate of where members park cars
 - Get to know neighbors and be friendly
 - Write thank you notes to those who give furniture and other things to the House

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*This Oxford System Checklist is simply a guideline used by some of the existing Houses. Your House may have better ideas and shorter or longer checklist. Use whatever helps to keep your Oxford House™ running smoothly so that all members have comfortable and long-term sobriety. Remember, however, to keep data about your house up-to-date on the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org). A good reputation depends upon accurate information.*

## Staying Connected



Every Oxford House stays connected in order to share strength, experience and hope with other Oxford Houses, Oxford House World Services, the treatment community, drug courts and all in the recovery community. At the heart of staying connected is the Oxford House website: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org).

The elected Secretary of each Oxford House “checks-in” to the website at least once a week and reports that fact at the weekly house meeting. When “checking-in” the Secretary keeps the vacancy information for his or her house up-to-date because it is important to be credible. Credibility means that the information on the website should be correct. Remember that finding a safe place to live was a tough job 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 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.

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 TV. Keeping connected and up-to-date will mean that vacancies are promptly filled. Everyone in an Oxford House knows that an empty bed costs everyone in the house because paying house bills depends on every bed being filled. More significantly, everyone in any Oxford House wants to provide the newly-recovering person the opportunity to gain the “Time for Recovery” that can assure sobriety comfortable enough to avoid relapse. Until your house gets online, see about getting access from a friend or at the public library.

Oxford Houses, by coupling self-help with an effective and disciplined system of operation, are able to reach out to all who want an opportunity to gain enough time and peer support to get comfortable enough in sobriety to avoid relapse. Good connection with each other and the public at large is an important tool that every house uses to stay on track and to make recovery without relapse the norm.



## Protecting House and Chapter Finances

The key to making any Oxford House work well is to have a weekly house meeting. Avoid thinking that, “Things are going so well we only need to meet once every two weeks or once a month.” Experience has shown that whenever a house fails to have a regular weekly house meeting, trouble is just around the corner. The standard forms in the Oxford House Manual<sup>®</sup>, the Oxford House Chapter Manual<sup>®</sup>, and on 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. Whenever in doubt about how to use a form or any other issue facing a house, get connected and get an answer.

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 residents in the house will have it. Also, make certain that Oxford House World Services has a copy of the number in their database. When the House Secretary checks into the website to post vacancies, show voluntary departures or expulsions, he or she 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 House write checks 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. Between house meetings, the house checkbook should be locked up in a safe place. A simple lock box can be purchased at office supply stores like Staples, Office Max or Office Depot. The President, Treasurer and one other officer should have a key or know the combination code for opening the lock box. This ritual underscores how important it is to keep house money safe. Remember not to use electronic payments for paying bills except for start-up loan repayment or contributions to Oxford House, Inc. That makes certain that all expenditures on behalf of the house are easily documented and approved by all the house members. Also do not vote the same person as treasurer of house, chapter or state association.

The best safeguard for protecting finances in a house or chapter or state association is to make the financial data available to all members of the house or 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 house or chapter funds to make sure careless mistakes in addition or subtraction do not misrepresent how much money is on hand, paid out or due.

Finally, don't let residents 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. When we were using, “tomorrow” never came; now that we are clean and sober, doing things we need to do today protects our sobriety. When it comes to house finances, diligence protects the house, the chapter and Oxford House as a whole.



## OXFORD HOUSE TRADITIONS

1. Oxford House has as its primary goal the provision of housing for the 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 AA and/or NA offers 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 an Oxford House in good standing should become associate members.



# *Oxford House*<sup>TM</sup>

1975-2011

*36 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.

Write or Call

**Oxford House World Services**

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Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

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Facsimile 301-589-0302

E-Mail [Info@oxfordhouse.org](mailto:Info@oxfordhouse.org)

Web Site: [www.oxfordhouse.org](http://www.oxfordhouse.org)