



# ***Oxford House Manual<sup>©</sup>***

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***An Idea Based On a Sound  
System  
For Recovering Alcoholics and Addicts  
To Help Themselves***  
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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.

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## Introduction

This is the second revision of the Oxford House Manual<sup>©</sup>, which has served thousands of Oxford House members since 1975.

The term alcoholic is used throughout this manual, as it was in the original. It should be read with the recognition that many individuals have dual addictions to alcohol and drugs. There have been many recovering alcoholics in Oxford House who were also recovering from addiction to other drugs.

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 37 states. 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 of the manual is dedicated to Jim S., the first member voted into Oxford House. 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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# The Oxford House Story

In October, 1975, the first Oxford House was opened in Silver Spring, Maryland, by a group of recovering alcoholics, who had been living in a county government half-way house which was being closed. Each of them had been sober for but a short period of time when they learned that the half-way house was to be closed. Each of them was fearful that he would return to alcoholic drinking without the support of living in a group committed to staying sober and straight.

When the news reached them that the half-way house was going to be closed their first reaction was one of anger, resentment and panic. They had known that the half-way 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 half-way house they had watched 13 men move out at the end of six months. Twelve of the 13 had returned to drinking 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 half-way houses cost a lot of money to run. The county budget was tight and Alpha I, as the half-way 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 idea 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 half-way 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 half-way house to determine how much money was needed. The largest single cost was the paid manager or counselor attached to the house. Someone suggested maybe they could live without a paid manager-counselor. But who would be the supervisor or manager if they did not have a paid counselor 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-counselor was too great. If there was going to be any chance of maintaining a house on their own, a way would have to be found to learn how to stay sober and manage a house without a paid manager-counselor.

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 around whether or not they could run a house themselves, talk would inevitably drift into complaints about the half-way 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, dish washing, 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 half-way 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 half-way house--both positive and negative--helped them develop an organization to carry the responsibilities for which the manager-counselor had been solely responsible in the county halfway house.

On the positive side of the ledger of half-way 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 who have done anything to drink and sometimes take drugs. We really do know all the tricks of the trade and a relapse cannot be covered up for long.

Unfortunately relapses are 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 by one member slide. That slip endangers the sobriety of every other member of a house. 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 house<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The first Oxford House tried a system which 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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

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 at least a month of no drinking or taking of drugs and regular attendance at AA as a minimum requirement for reacceptance into an Oxford House<sup>3</sup>.

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 in 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 1994 the growth of Oxford Houses has been phenomenal -- more than 700 individual Oxford Houses have been started in 32 states.

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 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.

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addicts could not work without a manager-counselor to enforce the addict 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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 relapser into the house which can give the most support.

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

The key Oxford House organizations are listed below. Direct any correspondence or telephone calls to them. Their purpose is to be of help.

**Oxford House, Inc.**  
***Central Services***

9312 Colesville Road  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20901

**Telephone:** (301) 587-2916 or (800) 689-6411

**Facsimile:** (301) 589-0302

**e-mail:** oxfordhouse@erols.com

**Oxford House, Inc.**  
***Financial Services***

11317 Beach Mill Road, PO Box 179  
Great Falls, Virginia 22066

**Telephone:** (703) 450-6501 or (800) 486-6488

**Facsimile:** (800) 899-6577 or (800) 899-6577

**TTY:** (703) 450-6503 or (800) 899-6577

**e-mail:** oxfordh@icagroup.org

**Web Page:** <http://www.icagroup.org>

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

The following suggested forms to help an individual Oxford House group function as an orderly and financially responsible family can be obtained from the Financial Services Office:

### **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 within the next few weeks.

### **Weekly Meeting Reports**

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.

### **Coordinator's Report**

A simple form to help the coordinator keep track of the duties of each members of the Oxford House family members so that the House will be well maintained.

### **Membership Applications**

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

### **Charter Applications**

The necessary forms to apply for a 'conditional charter' to establish a new Oxford House and the forms to apply for a 'permanent' charter following successfully meeting the requirements of a conditional charter.

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### **An Oxford System Checklist**

This 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 has been reprinted at the end of this manual.

# 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 for membership in which case 80% of the current membership must vote its approval.

The discussion which follows spells out the Oxford House System of Operations. It draws upon the experience of the existing Oxford Houses and tells any recovering alcoholic 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 which wants to form an Oxford House must obtain a charter from Oxford House, Inc. The charter confers on the 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 two or more recovering alcoholics can apply for an Oxford House charter. Oxford House, Inc., has no hard and fast rules as to the length of sobriety required of recovering alcoholics who want to charter a new house. Charter applications are accepted by the Board of Directors on a case-by-case basis. 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 charter<sup>4</sup> or simply writing a letter containing the pertinent information to Oxford House, Inc., 11317 Beach Mill Road PO Box 179, Great Falls, Virginia 22066. 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.<sup>5</sup>
5. The anticipated charge per person per week, which would be needed to make the House self-supporting.

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<sup>4</sup> One can usually get a form to apply for a charter from an existing Oxford House or by writing to Oxford House, Inc., 11317 Beach Mill Road PO Box 179, Great Falls, Virginia 22066.

<sup>5</sup> To receive a charter the proposed house must be for a minimum of six residents. The largest Oxford House group to date has been eighteen. The best sized groups seem to be from between eight to twelve.

Once Members of the Board of Directors of Oxford House, Inc., have 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 the Board of Directors, the proposed new Oxford House would have a reasonable chance of success.

In some cases, the Board of Directors will issue a charter prior to the actual acquisition of housing by the charter applicants. In such a case, the charter will be issued upon the condition that the charter members obtain a suitable house within a specific period of time.<sup>6</sup>

## 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 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 alcohol or takes mood changing drugs.

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.

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 purpose of persuading local authorities to treat Oxford House the same as it would treat any other residential property within its jurisdiction.<sup>7</sup>

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 bed rooms, and a pleasant common living space.

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<sup>6</sup> This situation is more likely to occur when Oxford House is new to a geographic area. In those geographic areas where there is already an Oxford House, those wanting to start a new House are more likely to find the available house first and then apply for a Charter. Often a new House in that situation is formed by some members of the existing House deciding that they want to become the core member of a new House so that the availability of Oxford House living is expanded. This usually happens when the number of applicants for living in the existing House is far greater than the number of beds available.

<sup>7</sup> In Bethlehem, Pennsylvania for example, Oxford House received a ruling from the Chief of the Bureau of Inspections that it is within the definition of "Family" as defined in the City Zoning Code. As a practical matter most jurisdictions so appreciate the useful service provided by an Oxford House that it is considered to have a "family" classification. Any zoning complaints by local jurisdictions against an Oxford House should be immediately referred to the central services office of Oxford House, Inc. [ Telephone (301) 587-2916] because discrimination under the 1988 Amendments to the Federal Fair Housing Act is prohibited.

In addition, the area should be surveyed to determine to what extent parking of automobiles may cause a problem.

The amount of rent that a new group can afford depends on the number of beds which 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 two reasons Oxford House encourages more than one to a room. First, newcomers do 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 economics of an Oxford House is directly affected by the number of people living in a House. The more people who live in a House the less each member has to pay for the House to be self supporting.

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)<sup>8</sup>, held 13 members. The monthly rent was \$700; utilities ran about \$300 a month; staples about \$250 a month.<sup>9</sup> The charge per member had been set at \$30 a week. Since the House quickly became full and stayed full income exceeded expenses.<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, after six months of operation the House had nearly \$2,000 in the bank. It used 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, with twelve Oxford Houses in the Washington, D.C., area, each House has a backlog of applications.

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 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 include 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--usually \$100 a month until it is repaid. 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.

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> By late Spring a surplus of nearly \$2,000 was in the House treasury. The members met to decide whether to lower their weekly payment or to use the surplus to open a new House. They chose to open a new House and Oxford House Washington was opened in May 1976.

## 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 available. 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.<sup>11</sup> The waiting list also is a ready resource for filling vacancies as members move out to live elsewhere in the community or are evicted because of 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.<sup>12</sup> Relationships are bound to develop and will unnecessarily complicate the comfortable operation of an Oxford House.

When a new Oxford House is established, the charter members of the House should make themselves known to quarter-way houses, half-way houses, detoxification units, 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 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 rent. 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 prospective new member must file an application and be approved by a majority of those living in the Oxford House and that there may be a waiting list for available beds.

Once an Oxford House has been established for a few months, applications for membership will exceed the space available. At that point, consideration should be given to opening a new Oxford House using some of the current members as a core group for

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<sup>11</sup> Once an Oxford House has been established for a few months, there will soon be more applicants than there are beds available. The situation soon causes the members living in the House to start looking for an additional house to rent.

<sup>12</sup> In 1978 Oxford House opened a House intended for women but started with a core group of four men from an existing Oxford House. After eight women moved into the House, the four men moved out with the expectation that their spaces would be filled by the women accepting four additional women. Instead, the women accepted four additional men as replacements and the House began to have problems. 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 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 as a general rule will not be granted a charter by Oxford House, Inc.

the new House.<sup>13</sup> Generally a few members in a House will begin thinking about opening another House in response to a House's inability to accept all the deserving applicants. They will discuss the matter at a House meeting and everyone will begin to look for a suitable additional house to rent. When such a house is found, several existing members will volunteer to become the core group for a new House. The existing House begins to figure out ways to come up with the necessary money for starting the new House and checks with applicants to see if they would be willing to live in the new House. This is 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.

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<sup>13</sup> In the first Oxford House -- Oxford House Silver Spring -- members felt confident enough after six months to start another House. They started Oxford House Washington, now Oxford House Huntington, by having four of the thirteen members move to form a core membership for the new House. Because the first Oxford House had a long list of pending applications it immediately filled the four vacancies it had and six other applicants were able to be accepted by the new House.

## Rules

Alcoholics by nature seem to dislike rules. There is only one rule applicable to all Oxford Houses; i.e. membership is conditioned on not drinking or using drugs. 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 have 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 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 meetings; and other rules almost inherent in institutional living. Oxford House is not an institution. 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.<sup>14</sup>

Since the success of an Oxford House depends on having enough income to meet expenses; it is important that members pay rent in a timely manner. Rules may be required which force the eviction of members who do not keep their rent up to date. All members should be encouraged to pay their rent at least one week in advance.

## 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.<sup>15</sup> All officers are but trusted servants of the entire membership. The number of officers may vary from House to House but all Houses generally have the following elected officers:

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<sup>14</sup> For example, if a resident's non-attendance at AA or NA meetings is causing problems – for the individuals 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 the welfare of the house must always come first. Long-term recovery is the primary reason for the house to exist.

<sup>15</sup> See Tradition Two.

- \_ 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. Some Houses elect a "Coordinator" to help schedule work details to keep the house clean.

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 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 within twenty-four hours 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 happened, it should be corrected. The minutes of the meeting should be made a permanent record of the House. The next item of business, except at a special meeting considering the dismissal

of a member, 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) members' rent paid in advance, and (d) members' 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 applicants. A vote should be taken on each application 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 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 application he or she completed 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 each 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 rental income.

Some expenses associated with an Oxford House are not controllable until 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 for seeing that the members pay their shares of the telephone bill promptly so that the House is not faced with an unwanted and unwarranted expense.<sup>16</sup>

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. Any local bank will be more than willing to assist an Oxford House in establishing its checking account.

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<sup>16</sup> 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.) which 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 telephones – which is agreeable to most houses.

Promptly deposit members' rent in the checking account and pay all bills by check.<sup>17</sup> That is the easiest and safest way to assure good record keeping.

Each Oxford House should maintain (1) a membership ledger; (2) a cash receipts journal and (3) a cash expenses journal. The Treasurer is responsible for keeping these records and for posting the "Weekly Financial Status Report". The "Weekly Financial Status Report" lets everyone in the House know the current financial condition of the House. It shows:

- \_ Money on hand 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;
- \_ Members' rent paid in advance (total dollars);
- \_ Members' rent behind (total dollars) and
- \_ Status list of individual members (paid in advance, up-to-date and behind) by member.<sup>18</sup>

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 financial status of the House. At each weekly meeting, a report should be made and discussed with the full membership of the House so that the membership can determine whether the individual rent allocation is too high or too low and whether an individual has fallen too far behind in the payment of his rent.

## **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. -- just like 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 and to help start new houses. Nine Oxford House residents are elected by vote of all of the Oxford Houses to serve staggered three-year terms as members of the Board of Directors.

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<sup>17</sup> 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 book for petty cash is useful to maintain. 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.

<sup>18</sup> There are no "secrets" in an Oxford House. Members need to know whether the House is living on "borrowed money" (from rent 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.

## The Board of Directors

The Oxford House Board of Directors is the elected policy group that oversees the well being of Oxford House, Inc. -- the umbrella organization of the national network of individual Oxford Houses. It is a nine-member board. Each of the elected board members must have served as the President of an individual Oxford House prior to being elected to the board.

Conditions to be a candidate to the board are three: a candidate for the board must be nominated by an Oxford House or Chapter, a candidate must be living in an Oxford House at the time of election, and a candidate must have served as President of an Oxford House.

Conditions for serving on the board are three: a board member must have been elected, a board member must stay clean and sober, and a board member must avoid three or more unexcused absences from a meeting of the board. In the event a board member relapses or misses three board meetings without prior approval of the board, the first alternate board member is appointed to serve out the term of the board member leaving.

Alternate Board members are candidates for the board who receive the next greatest number of votes as the candidate elected to the board with the fewest number of votes. There are always two alternates either carried over from a previous election or selected from the vote totals of the most recent election. The alternates selected attend board meetings and can participate in discussion but do not have a vote.

Continuity of Oxford House, Inc. policy is assured through the combination of board members and alternates. The election of the board from member houses is fairly unique among non-profit organizations. Oxford House, Inc. is self-run from the bottom-up and does not have an "outside" board of directors.

The by-laws of the corporation provide a framework for the board of directors to operate. The board can change or add to the by-laws except in two areas which require an unanimous vote by the individual Oxford Houses; namely, the conditions for a charter and the nine Oxford House Traditions.

Meetings of the board are generally held four times a year in Washington, D.C. Members attend the meetings in person if they can. Board members who live more than 100 miles away from Washington participate in the meeting via speaker telephone. Whenever the board has pressing business, additional meetings of the board are arranged.

## Oxford House Traditions

**1. 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 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 or 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.**

**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 and stay stopped.**

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

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

When we stopped drinking, 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. 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 half-way houses which provided shelter, food, and supervision. As our recovery progressed, the supervision and dependency of a half-way 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 half-way 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 or renewed dependency on former drinking companions. 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 half-way 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, is 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 half-way houses in order to make room for a recovering alcoholic or recovering drug addict who was ready to move into a half-way 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 alcohol or 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 that for themselves. 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, using drugs, or have disruptive behavior, including the nonpayment of rent. 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 rent 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.<sup>19</sup>

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.

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<sup>19</sup> 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 of 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 rent that is charged the members. Those who live in a particular Oxford House for the most part also make the rules, which govern the house.<sup>20</sup> Such autonomy is essential for the Oxford House system to work.

The reason that each Oxford House is independent arises from the very practical consideration that those 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 new found 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.<sup>21</sup> Oxford Houses are both autonomous and self-supporting. All Oxford Houses have been careful to avoid undo dependence on government or other outside funds.

Each local Oxford House votes annually to elect the national Oxford House Board of Directors. In fact, all nine members of the Oxford House, Inc. Board not only are elected by all the individual Oxford Houses but also must be a resident of an Oxford House when they are elected. The organization was deliberately set up to assure that each Oxford House be autonomous and that overall policy of the Oxford House movement reflects the will of the majority of individual Oxford Houses.

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<sup>20</sup>Rules against anyone living in an Oxford House who uses alcohol or drugs are universal with all houses. For obvious reasons, an individual house cannot establish different rules in this regard because such rules would run entirely counter to the primary purpose and functions of the Oxford House System.

<sup>21</sup>At this point in the text the original Oxford House Traditions, which were written when the first Oxford House began in the Fall of 1975, stated: "At this time, it also appears that Oxford Houses can be totally self-supporting. By that, we mean that a minimum amount of government support or private support may be accepted for start-up purposes." As this is written, twelve years later, it should be noted that many Oxford Houses have existed totally without government support and the start-up loans have, for the most part, come from existing 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 got on its feet, it pays back the older Houses, which had loaned it money, and stands ready to help another new House.<sup>22</sup>

When an Oxford House first starts, it is generally necessary for the members to pay a slightly higher rent than what they pay once the House is established. There are two reasons for this pattern. First, there are start-up costs associated with the beginning of any new house such as security deposits, supplies and furnishings.<sup>23</sup> 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 rent 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 rent 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.

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<sup>22</sup> 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 establishment of a brand new House. 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).

<sup>23</sup> For example, the landlord and phone company may require a security deposit and, while furnishings are generally donated, members will often have to rent a truck in order to pick them up. There may also be a need to buy more "staples" such as flour, sugar, coffee, etc. when a 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.**

It is inconsistent with the Oxford House system of democratic rule to have a professional manager of an 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 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.

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<sup>24</sup> The Spring 1988 Survey of Oxford House members showed that the average member attends six AA or NA meetings a week. Five additional 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 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 straight-forward 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 an associate member. An associate member may or may not pay dues according to whatever rules a local Oxford House establishes. 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.

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 associate 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 associate member can offer friendship, support, and an example to the active members of an Oxford House.

Moreover, the associate 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.<sup>25</sup>

To the extent possible, each Oxford House should keep Oxford House, Inc. up-to-date with the current address of Associate Members, who have left the House in good standing, so that they can receive the "Oxford Grape" and other Oxford House newsletters.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Many former residents of Oxford Houses who left their particular house clean and sober become members of the national Oxford House Tradition Nine Club. The Tradition Nine Club 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.

<sup>26</sup> Names and addresses of Associate Members and inquiries concerning the Oxford House Manual<sup>©</sup> should be sent to Oxford House, Inc. 9312 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, Maryland 20901. 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 Tradition Nine Club -- the national alumni group of successful Oxford House members.

# OXFORD SYSTEM CHECKLIST

## MONEY

- **Set up checking account for each Oxford House**
  - ☐ Obtain a Federal Tax Identification Number – FEIN – directly from Oxford House, Inc.
  - ☐ Get name and address of House and lines for two signatures 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 rent at amount to cover costs**
  - ☐ Figure monthly expenses (rent, utilities, staples, loan payments)
  - ☐ Divide by number of beds likely to be occupied
  - ☐ Add a small amount to enable House to have a reserve
  
- **Collect rent in advance**
  - ☐ Usually a House sets a rule of one or two weeks in advance
  - ☐ Do not let members get behind in rent
  - ☐ 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
- ☐ 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/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 checklists. Use whatever helps to keep your Oxford House running smoothly so that all members have comfortable and long-term sobriety.*



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