

Oxford House Manual Excerpts

There is a frequent saying among Oxford House™ Members that "Oxford House™ has no rules except 'Don't drink.'" However, 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 charter⁴ 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™
5. The anticipated charge per person per week, which would be needed to make the House self-supporting.

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. 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 a case, the charter will be issued upon the condition that the charter members obtain a suitable house within a specific period of time.

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 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. 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.

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 single-family residential property within its jurisdiction.

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 to what extent 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), held 13 members. The monthly rent was \$700; utilities ran about \$300 a month; staples about \$250 a month. The charge per member had been set at \$30 a week. Since the House quickly became full and stayed full income exceeded expenses. 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 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 and NA 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. 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. 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/she 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. 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. Relationships are bound to develop and will unnecessarily complicate the comfortable operation of an Oxford House™.

When a new Oxford House™ is established, the charter members of the House should make themselves known to quarter way houses, halfway houses, detoxification units, 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. 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 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.

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. 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™ 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 very 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. 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™ 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 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 rental income.

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.

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. Promptly deposit member's rent in the checking account and pay all bills by check. That is the easiest and safest way to assure good record keeping. Many houses use electronic payments directly from checking accounts for standard monthly payments such as contributions to Oxford House, Inc. to help expand the network of Oxford Houses.

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

- money on hand 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.

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 and discussed with the full membership of the House so that the membership can determine whether the member rent is too high or too low and whether an individual has fallen too far behind in the payment of his rent.

Chapters

The primary purpose of each Chapter is to assure that each Oxford House operates in a way that is consistent with the Oxford House Traditions and system of operations as described in the Oxford House Manual©. The guidelines for making a Chapter work are set forth in this manual. Chapters have become the front-line building blocks of quality control and mutual assistance for the continued success of all Oxford Houses. Experience has shown that both the individual houses and Oxford House, Inc. as a whole are more likely to succeed and last if every house belongs to a Chapter.

When there were just a few Oxford Houses there was no need for Chapters because each Oxford House President was a member of the Board of Directors of Oxford House, Inc. and met once a month in order to share the experience, strength and hope of each house. By 1988, the number of individual Oxford Houses had become so great that it became difficult to have a meeting at which everyone would get a chance to speak. Some longed for the "old days" when there were fewer houses and the combined group of houses was smaller. Others recognized that the success of Oxford House made it clear that there would be more and more houses and

there was no turning back the clock.

Oxford House, Inc., a non-profit corporation, belongs to the residents of Oxford Houses nationwide. Residents democratically make their voices heard through the individual houses, the Chapters, the World Council and the Oxford House, Inc. Board of Directors. The legacy of Oxford House is forever secure as long as the concept, Traditions and system of operations is assured by control of its members through participation in an effective democratic system of organization.

Chapters are important links in the effective democratic system of operation guiding Oxford House as a whole. They are one way to solve the problem of keeping combined groups of houses small enough to permit each house to share its experiences, strengths and hopes with other houses. This manual describes how chapters work and are organized to strengthen the world network of Oxford Houses.

Principles

Three principles underlie the formation and operation of Oxford House Chapters and explain why individual Oxford Houses group together to start Chapters:

1. Oxford Houses share their experience, strength, and hope with each other.
2. The common welfare of Oxford House requires that all Oxford Houses follow the conditions of their charter.
3. Oxford House Chapters foster expansion of the number of Oxford Houses in order to provide safe, sober, supportive living environments for a greater number of individuals recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction.

Starting a Chapter

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

The reason for forming Chapters in the first instance is to benefit from the principles embodied in the Chapter concept. The reason for keeping Chapters small is to give each Oxford House the full benefit of being part of a Chapter. Experience has demonstrated that when the number of Oxford Houses in a Chapter becomes too large the Chapter lacks cohesiveness and should be divided into two chapters. If a Chapter wants to have more than 13 or 14 houses, a chapter officer should call Oxford House World Services Office to discuss the reasons for not

subdividing into two chapters. Sometimes, when a Chapter has a number of fairly new houses, it is reluctant to subdivide into two chapters until the group of houses gains some experience.

Membership by an individual Oxford House in a Chapter is important because each Oxford House understands the importance of sharing experience, strength and hope among houses. Because a Chapter may take corrective action if an individual house is not adhering to the conditions of its charter, every house should take an active role in Chapter business. The World Services Office can be consulted to make certain that all options are considered when corrective action is necessary to get an individual house back on track.

World Council

The primary purpose of the Oxford House World Council is to assure that all Oxford Houses™ and Oxford House as a whole, operate in a way that is consistent with the Oxford House traditions and system of operations as described in the Oxford House Manual©. To achieve that purpose the World Council utilizes all levels of Oxford House organization – houses, chapters, state associations and the Oxford House World Services office. It identifies problems, develops solutions and makes suggestions to all levels of the organization. The World Council Chairperson is also an ex officio member of the Board of Oxford House, Inc. – the umbrella 501(c)(3) organization for all of Oxford House.

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 round out the 12-member World Council. Elections for one-third of the World Council 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 World Council, started in 1997, meets regularly to assure that the self-help legacy of Oxford House™ is forever secure by keeping the concept, traditions and system of operations up-to-date and under the control of residents and Oxford House alumni.

Oxford House, Inc.

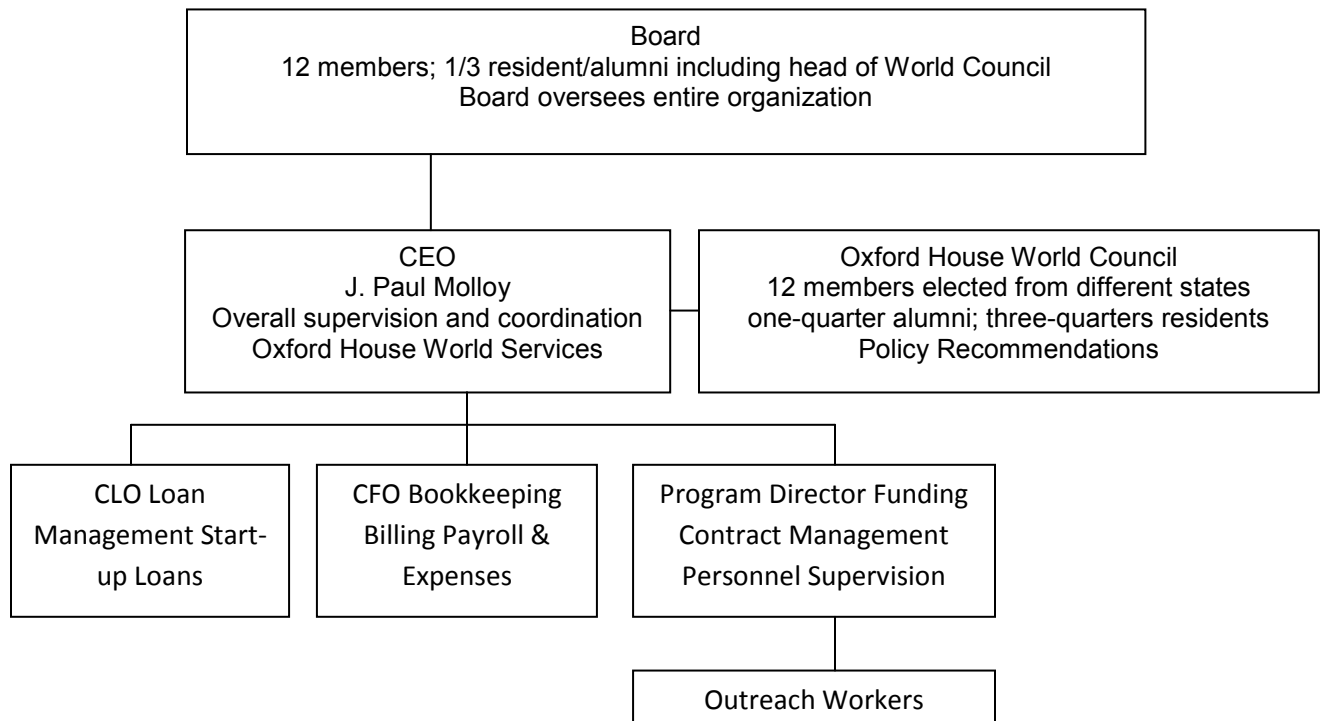
Oxford House, Inc., serves as an umbrella, non-profit corporation for all the Oxford Houses, which have or will be given a charter. It is incorporated in the State of Delaware and is recognized as qualifying under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The sole purpose of the umbrella organization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

Oxford House, Inc. Basic Organization



Principles

Six principles underlie the role of the Oxford House World Council

- Oxford Houses must be self-run and self supported.
- Peer coordination and direction of Oxford House at all levels is best assured with oversight by an elected, geographically balanced World Council.

- Residents and alumni sharing experiences can provide the best policy and practices to preserve the integrity and foster the expansion of the network of individual Oxford Houses.
- The legal rights of individual houses should be protected at all times.
- Practices and procedures to guaranteeing vigilance to assure adherence to Oxford House Traditions must be available at all levels of the organization
- Financial support to expand the network of Oxford Houses must be directed to expansion without compromising the Oxford House concept and the disciplined, democratic, and self-support foundation of Oxford House.