

Greater NY OA Metro IG Inventory 10/29/16

This summary was prepared by myself - Don C. - a “third party” who was asked to facilitate the inventory for Greater NY OA Metro. We used the Intergroup Inventory format suggested on oa.org, supplemented by information on the functions of intergroups from pages 33 and 34 of the *OA Handbook for Members, Groups and Service Bodies*. It lasted from 6:35 pm to 9:25 pm with a 10-minute break in the middle. Forty people were present before the break where we covered the first 38 questions. Nineteen people left at the break leaving twenty-one in the second half. Two “leavers” remarked to me they thought it was going to be a normal IG-length meeting. For whatever reason, losing half the attendees is significant. Expectations and train schedules and travel time and week-night notwithstanding, it could also indicate disinterest. We covered the remaining 21 questions after the break, which means 2/3 of questions were discussed before the break.

In summarizing what I heard from the audience, I sometimes use the pronoun “I”, sometimes “they”, sometimes “we”, depending on the question and how the discussion unfolded. Bear with me on the tense inconsistency and focus on content.

I sometimes share ideas or information in the summary from my own experience as chair of several intergroups. This is simply information, not recommendations. Action plans are up to the intergroup. As I noted in my opening comments with the attendees, this is much like a Step 4 and 5. We’re identifying what works and what doesn’t work. Steps 6 and 7 are about changes. NY Metro will decide what to change and what not to change. As with other intergroups I’ve worked with, there were many positives in the inventory. There were, however, many other areas that they themselves said needed to be changed or improved or started.

For this summary I have changed the question numbers from the OA Intergroup Inventory format downloaded from oa.org to sequential numbers from 1 to 59. This should make it easier to reference questions in the discussions to come.

A. Preliminary Questions

1. Are we satisfied with the function of our IG? If not, why not?

A mixed response but a clear majority were NOT satisfied. Comments included lack of resources, i.e., people don’t volunteer, not enough new people being brought in, gaps between longtimers and newcomers, too long and boring for new reps, not doing as much as IG could and should to assist members and groups.

2. Have we ever taken an IG inventory? If not, why not? If so, what were the results?

Many, many years ago. Don't know results.

B. Part 1 - The Function of the IG

3. What is the purpose of our IG?

Responses included: to support groups; do things that individual groups can't; connect the groups; public outreach and professional outreach to healthcare professionals; facilitate communications; meeting lists; carry the message; support groups.

I reviewed with them the mission of IG's, quoting from the *OA Handbook for Members, Groups, and Service Bodies*. The underlining is mine.

“Intergroups/service boards may manage administrative functions, such as meeting lists, hotlines, and websites, but their primary purpose remains the same as every other group or service body in OA – to carry its message to the compulsive overeater who still suffers (Tradition Five). This includes those still suffering both inside and outside of OA. Intergroups are in a unique position to help those still suffering within OA. A few representatives working together on an intergroup/service board committee can organize recovery events, such as Unity, IDEA Day, retreats, and conventions, which may benefit large numbers of members.”

”Intergroups/service boards often handle such responsibilities as:

1. Acting as guardians of the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts of OA Service as specified in the Bylaws of Overeaters Anonymous, Inc.
2. Creating and maintaining intergroup/service board websites. A majority of people coming to OA now find their way to a meeting through oa.org or a local intergroups website.
3. Maintaining OA listings in local telephone directories and handling telephone and mail inquiries.
4. Training to supplement sponsorship: Sponsoring and arranging workshops, marathons, and other special events aimed at educating, informing, and helping members strengthen their personal recovery, since everything in OA begins with personal recovery. [I call this training to supplement sponsorship.]
5. Publishing regular newsletters or bulletins to keep groups informed about each other and about upcoming OA events, distributing up-to-date directories of all nearby meetings, and providing other necessary information.
6. Handling public information requests from local news media, arranging radio or TV public-service announcements or programs about OA, and furnishing OA

speakers for outside organizations.

7. Maintaining contact with health care professionals in fields related to OA.
8. Speaker Bank: Arranging a system for groups to obtain abstaining OA speakers.
9. Helping to find sponsors for new members.
10. Maintaining a stock of OA literature and OA-approved AA literature for sale.
Some groups and individuals also purchase literature for themselves directly from bookstore.oa.org.
11. Sending representatives to regional assemblies and delegates to the world Service Business Conference, OA's annual business meetings.
12. Maintaining an office, if there is a need and local groups can support it financially."

4. Do we have a statement of purpose or bylaws?

Yes. I read their one sentence from page 4: "*The primary purpose of this organization is to aid those with the problem of compulsive eating through the Twelve Steps of Overeaters Anonymous, and to serve and represent the OA groups from which the Intergroup is formed.*"

I noticed their bylaws need to be updated in the definition of a group section because of decisions at the last WSBC.

5. Do we use *Robert's Rules of Order* and our bylaws during our business meetings?

Mostly yes, but often loosely. Meeting decorum didn't come up as a big problem. Robert's Rules are about making certain everyone gets a fair hearing and that meetings run smoothly. People wait to be recognized to share.

6. Do the Twelve Traditions take precedence over "Robert Rules" in our IG's bylaws?

Yes, definitely.

7. Do IG bylaws and policies protect and /or extend the tenure of certain "trusted servants"? i.e., is there rotation of service or is it the same people all the time?

Bylaws mandate rotation of service for officer jobs.

8. Does our IG dictate or suggest? i.e, do we tell groups what to do?

Majority said "suggest." But there were a couple comments that from a group's perspective it sounded more like a dictate than suggestion. The most important point in the discussion of this question, however, was that there is very limited contact with the groups. This point came up in different ways throughout the inventory, i.e. lack of

relationship with meetings.

9. Are we incorporated? Do we have a nonprofit tax status?

Yes and Yes.

10. Do we set realistic short- and long-term goals?

A spontaneous and very emphatic “no” came from the audience. A few other comments suggested that members may not understand the value of goals, so I made a few points on the subject:

Goals inspire action. Having no goals leads to drift and lethargy, a reactive organization rather than a proactive one. Goals are ways to keep our attention focused on where we want to go. Goals “pull” through vision rather than ‘push.” Goals propel us forward in one direction, keeping us all on the same page. I gave examples of my own past IG’s goals that kept us all on the same page pursuing only activities that could help us achieve these goals.

- Help members strengthen their personal recovery.
- Increase the number of sponsors.
- Increase the number of newcomers.
- Increase the retention of newcomers.
- Increase outreach activities, especially to healthcare professionals.

A critical point on goals is that they need to be set based on group conscience. Leaders may lead and suggest, but if everyone is not involved, there is no ownership.

11. Does our IG have a need for regular steering committee meetings or board meetings?

They don’t have many. There seemed to be a consensus they SHOULD have more steering committee or Board meetings, but NOT immediately preceding a regular IG meeting where they are visible to the rest of the IG, i.e., gives the impression of we/them.

12. Are there frequent steering committee meetings for discussions and decisions beyond the purview of the entire group conscience?

I rephrased this question to “*Are the officers doing stuff that should involve everyone and doesn’t?*” The answer was no.

13. Does a select group make most of our IG's "important" decisions?

IG's attendance averages 25. Someone suggested that it's 6 of the 25 that are the key players and drive most of the motions and decisions. Many heads in the audience nodded in the affirmative. There was not a lot of discussion about it, but my sense is that this is a concern, whether driven by personalities or simply lack of people.

14. Is ours an exclusive club or an inclusive IG?

The comments on the previous questions are relevant, but overall I did NOT hear over the course of the nearly three-hour discussion that a small clique was running things and others resented it.

15. Are all our IG's activities open to the scrutiny of each member of the Fellowship?

Absolutely, if they're interested.

16. How can we keep the WSO group registrations up-to-date?

They have a process, but obviously it is challenging and apparently not very up-to-date at the current time. I asked which officer job description included this task? I heard uncertainty. Needs to be clarified. Note: This is a difficult admin task for most intergroups, including my own.

17. Are committee meetings open to all members?

Yes was the quick answer. But not everyone knows due to lack of communication.

Are there active committees? Nine standing committees per their bylaws. Two have no chairs at the current time. That is a problem.

We briefly discussed ad hoc committees and their high value.

I forgot to bring up the topic of chair versus co-chairs. I believe I saw either in the bylaws or policy manual that co-chairs are not allowed. I personally have found high-value in using co-chairs. It makes it MUCH easier to recruit people for the jobs because they are much less apprehensive when they know they have someone to work with. People often step up when its "WE", not "I".

Do committees hold meetings separate from an IG meeting? Yes. Open? Yes.

18. Are committees' recommendations presented to the entire IG for consideration

and deliberation?

Behind this question is whether committees over-step their authority by doing things independently without consultation with IG, or under-step it by bringing everything to the full intergroup, thus needlessly clogging up IG meetings with minute details that could have been handled by the committee. The audience didn't express much concern either way, but I'm not certain based on discussion elsewhere that the committee operation question is not in fact an issue.

I commented on the importance of keeping IG meetings agenda-driven, structured and timely without getting bogged down in details that could be decided by committee. I also noted that my own objective has always been to get most of the detailed business done by the committee prior to the IG so only final decisions on direction or overall plan are brought to IG for validation.

19. Do we choose our service people with care and consideration, placing principles before personalities?

The same response came out that I've heard from so many struggling IG's over the past 3 years: We take what we can get. Few people volunteer, not all have the bylaws qualifications (including abstinence and time).

I asked if requirements, particularly abstinence, were ever waived. A couple people said no, but having read the monthly IG minutes for 2016, I recalled 2 or 3 instances where the abstinence requirement was noted as being waived.

20. Is anonymity honored within our IG?

A strong "yes." I asked about IG gossip. Not a problem.

21. Is an opportunity given to each and every member to participate in the IG's activities?

An emphatic yes. Of course, other questions suggest that lots of non-intergroup members don't know about the activities or opportunities, i.e., lack of communication with the membership.

22. Do we have a budget which includes a prudent reserve and contributions to region and the WSO?

There is a budget and prudent reserve, but they have not made any recent contributions to Region or World Service. Approximately 60% of their 105 meetings never send a contribution.

23. Have we done all we can to provide an attractive and convenient meeting place?

Looked pretty close to a 50/50 split. This is apparently an ongoing issue, driven by both cost and location, i.e., commuting time from the various sectors of Manhattan. I mentioned in passing that some intergroups out in the "country" are using teleconferencing with a speaker phone on the table for reps who are far away. They are sent the agenda beforehand, take part in discussions, vote as if they were there. Not sure this is relevant to Manhattan but it is being done elsewhere. Not ideal, but it works to get more meetings represented.

24. Are we committed to participating in the region and world service structure?

Definitely. Always send rep and delegates.

25. Do we make every effort to fund our representatives to regional assemblies and the World Service Business Conference?

Definitely.

26. How often do our "trusted servants" say, "Trust me, I know what's best"?

Never.

27. Is there a frequent need for quick decisions?

Not really. Not an issue.

28. Is there a place on our IG agenda for open sharing and expressing group concerns?

No, but a strong majority said there should be.

29. Who decides how our IG spends money?

Group as a whole. There is a budget and financial controls. Group Conscience?
Not an issue.

30. Do we see complete monthly financial reports, or just the general fund's beginning and ending balance?

Complete reports monthly. Not a concern.

31. Does our IG have special savings accounts?

No, just checking account.

32. Are funds readily available, or are they invested?

Readily available.

33. ~~Is the prudent reserve really prudent, or is it a hedge against a worldwide recession?~~

I skipped the question, on purpose.

34. Are the requests for IG contributions consistent with expenditures shown on the financial reports?

Consistent. They are not trying to accumulate without spending on activities.

35. How long has the treasurer been in control of the books?

This year.

36. Are there multiple signatories on all accounts?

Yes. Two Board members to sign plus one additional Board as backup.

37. Does someone other than the treasurer reconcile bank accounts.

Finance committee reviews quarterly, headed by Treasurer.

38. Have the books been audited lately?

I didn't hear they were "formally" audited, but there is the quarterly review. See above. Not a concern.

C. Part 2: The Twelfth Step Within

I
about itself.)

(Note: Tense shifts to "we" in this section as
quote what the group was saying

39. Do all the groups in our geographic area know about our IG and the services we provide?

Not really. Minimal or no contact with most meetings. We don't do that much for them. Most groups and members don't know much about us. 50-60% don't contribute. Only small percentage of groups send Reps. Average attendance 25, including officers not representing meetings.

I shared that many IG's develop a small pamphlet or sheet on "What Is Intergroup?" that's distributed periodically. What is IG? What we do, where your money goes, committees, who to call, why your meeting needs to have an IR, etc. etc.

Do you think groups look at IG as providing a service for them? Not really.

40. Do all the groups in the area belong to an IG?

Yes. No unaffiliated in Manhattan. 105 meetings. Average attendance at IG 25.

41. Do we keep in touch with groups that don't send representatives or contributions to IG?

Not really. Why don't we? Don't know. Should we? Yes.

42. Do we let all groups know how they can support the IG through service and financial contributions?

Not really. Should we? Yes, especially the service part. Whose job is it to educate them? Ours.

43. Do we encourage the Seventh Tradition's 60/30/10 contribution formula, making sure our area groups know about it?

Not really, but it's well noted on the website.

Should we do more in some way? Yes. One person noted her meeting had never sent anything to Region or World Service. There was another comment about meeting formats needing to include a \$4.00 recommendation.

I mentioned the Seventh Tradition pamphlet – free and downloadable.

44. Do we inform all members and groups of the structure of OA?

Not really. This and many of the other questions shows a lack of contact or relationship with meetings.

45. Do we sponsor OA workshops and marathons for OAs in our area?

Some events, but the number is way down from past years. Attendance at recent events has also declined. Should we be doing more to help members and OA as a whole? Absolutely. I again reviewed item 4 in the Handbook list of IG functions – training, educating, informing people to help strengthen their personal recovery and as a result OA.

46. Do we keep our meeting list current?

We try, but not so easy with 105 meetings and all the nuances, but we do our best.

47. Do we publish a newsletter for the groups in our area?

Quarterly printed newsletter is starting up again after two-year hiatus. There is an online monthly. I noted importance of newsletter to overall communication strategy.

Will it be helpful to members? Hopefully.

48. Do we maintain a stock of OA-literature for sale? Do we encourage subscriptions and written contributions to *Lifeline*?

We don't sell literature. We have encouraged *Lifeline* subscriptions to some extent but should do more.

49. Do we help new members find sponsors?

NO. Although at the retreat we try to match up people.

I forgot to ask the question, "Is there a shortage of sponsors and, if so, what are you doing about it?" I assume there is a shortage, like most everywhere else in OA.

I did ask about sponsor training? No, they are not, but would like to.

50. Do we arrange a system for groups to obtain abstinent OA speakers?

Speaker Bank? Not yet, but working on it.

51. How do we help floundering groups?

We don't help. Should we, could we? Yes.

How? I didn't ask this question.

52. ~~Do we assist unaffiliated groups in nearby areas to form their own IG?~~

53. Do we address the special needs of our members, e.g., young people or the physically challenged, and try to find ways to meet their needs without isolating them?

Not really. Someone noted they put handicapped access on the meeting list. However, in reviewing the list I printed out from their website, I find no indication anywhere of handicapped access. There may also be an attempt to start a Spanish-speaking meeting.

D. Part 3: Carrying The Message

54. Do we have a permanent address and a phone number that is answered twenty-four hours a day?

Google Voice. People leave messages and are called. There is someone to coordinate the volunteers who return calls. The phone number on website. 347-433-5876. I called it. Script: *Hello and welcome. You have reached Overeaters Anonymous for New York City. Please leave your first name and a contact number after the tone and someone will be in contact with you within 24 hours. We welcome all of your questions and comments.*

Do you keep track of the phone volume? No, not really. We don't trend. We do track website hits.

55. Is our IG phone number listed in area phone books?

No phone books.

56. Are we reaching compulsive overeaters in our community through

- meeting listings in local newspapers
- radio and TV public service announcements (PSAs) notices
- newspaper and magazine articles
- news releases about special OA events
- bulletin board notices
- OA literature in libraries
- special newcomer meetings
- speakers list for various community gatherings

57. What have we done to bring the OA message to the attention of the professional community, such as:

- **medical professionals**
- **physicians**
- **nurses**
- **dietitians**
- **nutritionists**
- **medical technicians**
- **psychiatrists**
- **psychologists**
- **counselors**
- **teachers**
- **social workers**
- **clergy**
- **military**
- **employee assistance counselors**
- **Other** _____

The answer to all the items mentioned in questions 3 and 4 was the same: NOT REALLY. We used to do much more. There is a new effort to put plastic card holders in doctors' offices. I didn't hear what progress there has been on that.

The unequivocal answer to "Should they do more of these things" was, "We definitely need to do more."

58. What are we doing to carry the message into institutions, such as:

- **schools**
- **prisons and detention centers**
- **hospitals**
- **training facilities**
- **nursing homes and retirement communities**
- **Other** _____

The answer was the same as questions 3 and 4: Not really. There was less enthusiasm on these items for the "We definitely need to do more" responses on questions 3 and 4.

E. Final Question

59. Are there other alternatives to the present IG structure that might be more useful in meeting the area's needs? If so, what?

There was only one comment brought up on structure and that had to do with officer tenure and election timing. Currently all NY Metro officers are elected at the same

time every year and their term is one year. The suggestion was made that to ensure better continuity officer elections should be divided with half being elected one year and the other half the next year AND that terms should be two years, not one year. My own experience is that a large number of intergroups elect officers in this manner and that many also have two year terms – all for the sake of continuity. I personally support this idea for the sake of continuity and particularly where an intergroup may be undertaking a rebuilding of itself and its mission.

I mentioned in question 15 above the idea of committee co-chairs.