

Secular Overeaters Charter

7/1/2023

Introduction and Background

Secular Overeaters (SO) is not part of Overeaters Anonymous (OA), and unlike OA, SO is not a fellowship. We are a community committed to providing secular life-saving resources and alternatives to OA's theist and patriarchal solutions to compulsive food behaviors. Some of our meetings and workshops may follow some common OA conventions, while others, which are unregistered OA meetings, use outside literature and alternative Steps.

The first Secular Overeaters project was the secularovereaters.org website, which was launched in the fall of 2020 with volunteers contributing content development, web skills, and financial backing. Since then additional SO initiatives resulted in SO recovery workshops and special events, secular literature, a Facebook page, a podcast, free Zoom rooms for group meetings, and free print copies of OA newcomer and sponsor brochures. Our annual expenditures for 2022 are around \$1600, and our funding comes from community donations.

For a full history of SO, please see Appendix A at the end of this Charter.

Purpose

Secular Overeaters' purpose is to maintain and create secular resources for those in recovery from compulsive eating behaviors, provide support for the expansion of SO online meetings, and grow the SO Community.

Mission Statement

Secular Overeaters is an informal community and resource hub created to support the physical, emotional, and integrative recovery of Overeaters Anonymous members and others who don't identify with the traditional Twelve-Step presentation of god. We recognize that theist and patriarchal language can not only alienate but also cause additional harm to many who come to the rooms seeking relief from compulsive food behaviors. Our mission is to provide secular resources, including literature, podcasts, workshops, meeting listings, and fellowship. Most importantly, we strive to be a safe, inclusive space for secular overeaters as we support each other on the lifelong journey of recovery.

Organizational Information

The SO Board (the Board) is a self-perpetuating board staffed by volunteers. The Board manages its membership according to its own regulations and sets terms (e.g., dictating minimum board

member service commitments and vetting/electing board members) itself without input from external members of the SO Community. The Board will reach decisions by consensus and will resolve matters with a simple majority rule vote when consensus cannot be reached. Board members may move to delay a vote until the next board or ad hoc/special topic meeting.

The SO Board meetings are held on the first Sunday of every month, and special topic meetings are scheduled when needed. Quorum is reached if a simple majority of board members are in attendance.¹ The Board meetings are used to conduct SO activities, for example, prioritize and update members on key SO initiatives, create and coordinate new SO recovery and community building initiatives, make budget decisions, etc. The Board produces (internal) written records (i.e., meeting notes) for regularly scheduled and special topic meetings, and members rotate note taking duties. Financial reports are generated each quarter and annual reports are issued at the end of every calendar year. Both financial and annual reports are made available on the SO website.

Scope of Board Tasks

- Collecting and spending money
- Oversight for all SO-branded resources including the website, Facebook, podcast, newsletter, publications, google group
- Oversight for all SO activities (workshops)
- Initiating community events/gatherings
- Initiating surveys to improve SO services
- Informal liaison to the Secular Service Board of OA
- Review the SO Charter annually in October and approve revised by the end of the calendar year
- Other tasks as identified

Finances

Spending Limits

Spending over \$100.01 requires a Board vote prior to the expenditure, unless the expenditure was pre-planned (e.g., \$149.00 for SoundCloud account per year, Zoom subscriptions, annual newcomer packet expenses, etc.). New initiatives need to be sanctioned by the Board before an expenditure can be made.

¹ A quorum is the minimum number of people needed to hold meetings or make decisions during regular or special-topic SO Board meetings.

Disposition of Funds

In the event Secular Overeaters should implode (i.e., cease to exist/dissolve), all remaining funds will be distributed to secular 12 Step organizations or other nonprofit secular support organizations at the discretion of the active Board Members.

Board Members

The Board may expand when needed or desired and shall strive to maintain an odd number of members for voting purposes. The Board's current members are:

Jenne M., since June 2020
Jana K., since August 2022
Ashley L., since August 2022
Karolina N., since August 2022
Linda L., since July 2023

Matt J., Emeritus, Active June 2020-January 2023 (Emeritus February 2023 - Present)

Board Member Requirements

New members of the Board are selected by the existing members of the board, who identify and enlist individuals according to criteria established by the board itself. There are no SO abstinence requirements to serve as a board member. New board members shall:

- Identify as part of the SO Community.
- Agree to the SO mission statement.
- Have no conflicts of interest (e.g., holding an elected position on the OA Secular Service Board).
- Have prior service to the SO Community, preferably for at least a year (e.g., set up a new meeting, hold an SO position or work on an SO project).
- Have the ability to meet regularly with the team AND participate in SO administrative Board tasks (e.g., taking a regular turn facilitating or taking notes).
- Participate in an informational interview with the board.
- Be an overall good fit with the team.
- Agree to serve for a two (2) year commitment, with an option to renew.

Separation from the Board

When a Board member separates from the Board, the remaining members will:

- Change passwords for meetings
- Change Zoom link for meeting
- Remove access to shared documents
- Take a new Board photo for the website w/out that member

At the Board's discretion the Board can bestow emeritus status to former Board members which may include continued access to some or all of the above content.

Board members may separate voluntarily or involuntarily.

Voluntary Separation - Board members departing the board voluntarily should provide the Board three (3) months notice—in writing—before leaving, if at all possible.

Involuntary Separation - Before the Board decides to ask a member to step down, the remaining Board members will gather to discuss the potential separation and vote to either 1) intervene as a group to correct behavior and/or reassign duties or 2) to give notice of the involuntary separation. Board members who are asked to step down will be removed immediately upon the Board's written communication to that member.

Service Positions and Duties

Positions are filled by a mixture of Board members and SO community volunteers. There may be times when we ask a volunteer to attend a board meeting or to spearhead a special project.

- Facebook Administrator(s) for Secular Overeaters and Friends group, duties include admitting new members and monitoring the posts for inappropriate content.
- *Google Group Administrator(s) for Secular Overeaters Community, <https://groups.google.com/g/secular-overeaters-community>, duties include admitting new members and monitoring the posts for inappropriate content.
- Literature Development Committee, duties include creating new SO literature.
- Literature Distributor, duties include distributing SO and OA newcomer and sponsor print materials and updating the email list with new members (the “contacts”).
- Newsletter Editor for Secular Overeaters email newsletter, duties include soliciting new material, editing posts, managing the email list (the “contacts”), and sending out the email newsletter at the beginning of the month.
- OA Lifeline Project reviews all stories and tracks non-theist ones for use by OA secular meetings who require conference-approved literature.

- Podcast Editor(s) for The Secular Overeaters Podcast, duties include editing sound files and posting them on SoundCloud.
- Sponsor Committee, duties include developing and offering workshops for the SO community related to the topic of building recovery support.
- Treasurers duties include tracking donations, paying expenses, and posting a quarterly financial report on the website. To maintain accountability, this will always be a shared position.
- Website Administrators for <https://secularovereaters.com>, duties include WordPress and Elementor updates, assigning access to web editors. To maintain accessibility, this will always be a shared position.
- Web Editor(s) for <https://secularovereaters.com>, duties include suggesting, writing, editing and posting new content, reviewing site for outdated material and broken links.

*Not under direct SO control.

Additional roles and responsibilities will be established by the Board as the need arises.

Attachment A

History of Secular Overeaters

In fall of 2019 Jim D. started a new Atheist Agnostic group in the DC metro area, and he reached out to the Freethinker meetings in Emeryville, CA, where Jenne M. was the meeting contact. At that same time, those two Freethinker meetings were facing a messy “delisting” from OA because they used alternative Steps and outside literature. This politicized several of the members, including Matt J. and Jenne M., who discussed building a website to promote secular resources.

When the pandemic began in earnest, all OA face-to-face Atheist/Agnostic meetings went on Zoom (March 2020), and it was possible to meet people from outside our own geographical areas and for people who had no local Atheist/Agnostic meeting to attend a secular OA meeting.

May 2020: Laura B. approached the OA Virtual Region (VR) to include a Special Topic session for Atheists/Agnostics. With the help of Jim D., they put together a list of panelists that included Jenne M., Alan S. (Atheist/Agnostic meeting in Bethesda, MD), Lisa D. (Meditation Atheist/Agnostic meeting in Newton Corner, MA), and Mindy L. (Unconventional Spirituality phone meeting). A.O., Alan S., Jenne M., Jim D., and others met at a planning meeting for VR Workshop. At the time, there were only 7 secular meetings (2 phone and 5 F2F/Zoom).

June 13, 2020: In anticipation of the VR secular session the first google group, OA Secular Forum, is started by AO and Jim D (this forum is currently inactive and has been replaced by the Secular Overeaters Community group).

June 20, 2020: VR workshop “A Higher Power of My Understanding” is offered and about 20 people attended.

June 30, 2020: First meeting of the website committee with Alan, AO, and Jim (from the East Coast Friday noon meeting) and Jenne, Mark and Matt (from the West Coast Monday/Wednesday evening Freethinkers meetings). Over the next few months there are discussions about having two websites (one that’s official OA and the other that isn’t). Another OA member, Vicki, working independently, started secularoa.org (now defunct, went down in July 2022), which was an official OA site, so SO went back to focusing on creating an unofficial site. Over 20 members, in addition to the original six, helped pull the content and functionality together. Mark set up fundraising accounts, and we started taking in donations to pay for our costs.

September 14, 2020: Website launched.

In the fall of 2020, SO purchased a Zoom account where secular meetings could have a free room to meet, and more new meetings started joining, including one in Germany. Of the original six website members, four became the first four SO board members (Alan, Jenne, Jim, and Matt).

In 2021, we planned four Community Gatherings and pulled together a cadre of volunteers to help create [initiatives](#) and resources for secular overeaters (e.g., Facebook page, podcast, literature and handouts, and workshops). Community Gatherings included speakers (e.g., John S. from the Beyond Belief podcast and Jeffrey Munn, *The Practical 12 Steps*), recovery exercises by Alan S., and community information (e.g., discussions about our surveys and initiatives) and pursued several initiatives (e.g., Sponsor Workshops, literature, and special focus name for OA). See the [2021 annual report](#) for more information.

At the beginning of 2022, the original board dissolved. A new board (Ashley, Jana, Jenne, Karolina and Matt), was created in July 2022 to focus on secular resources, including those forbidden by OA, that help the secular community recover from compulsive food behaviors. And, in order to avoid conflicts of interest, all ties with Overeaters Anonymous were cut.