

THE ORDER OF BARDS, OVATES & DRUIDS



GUIDELINES FOR OBOD SEED GROUPS AND GROVES

Introduction by Eimear Burke, Chosen Chief, Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids

The Order's distance-learning programme was designed to provide all you need to follow the path of Druidry, but meeting with others to celebrate the festivals, to share spiritual journey and be in the company of like minds and hearts is a natural thing to want to do. Being in a group can offer great support, introduce you to new friends, expand your horizons and be invigorating, informative and inspiring. It is a wonderful addition to your personal practice and your studies with the Order. I have found that wherever OBOD members meet there is magic and a common bond which lasts long after we return home. There are over 250 Seed Groups and Groves of the Order around the world, and some are online. The following information will help you understand what is involved if you decide to join a group, or are already in one, or if you'd like to start a group yourself.

***May you experience the Joy of the Journey! Go n-éirí an bóthar libh!
May the Spirit of the Order and the Spirit of your group guide and bless you!***

What is the difference between an OBOD Seed Group and Grove?

We use the terms 'Seed Groups' and 'Groves' to indicate our connection with nature and the Druid tradition.

Seed Groups

A Seed Group can be formed by any OBOD member at any point in their studies. Membership of OBOD is defined as having entered the Bardic Grade, in other words, having gone beyond the two introductory Bardic gwers to actually start the course with Gwers 1. Seed Groups are informal and relaxed, giving members the opportunity to meet and meditate together in real time, to celebrate, to discuss Druidry and topics of mutual interest, and to socialise.

Many Seed Groups meet to celebrate the seasonal festivals. Meetings might sometimes be in person and sometimes online. A group may meet in a member's house or garden, but more often than not they will try to meet out of doors in a garden, forest clearing or local park. Some may welcome non-members to some

of their gatherings. There might be story-telling and music-making – an eisteddfod – and with everyone bringing food and drink to share.

Members might stay in touch between meetings by social media, email, etc. Some groups run websites, newsletters, Facebook pages and discussion forums. These are an ideal way of letting people know about events, providing access to group policies and for socialising. Some Seed Groups arrange activities such as retreats, workshops and camps. Some offer additional services and ceremonies to its local community, such as rites of passage, moots and community projects. Each group develops its own style. Each group is different.

Groves

A Grove is a term which denotes not only a woodland temple but also a group of Druids and the meetings they hold. Like in sacred forests, Groves create a powerful and peaceful atmosphere. A Grove is a group is led by at least two members who have been initiated into the OBOD Druid Grade. A main distinction between a Seed Group and a Grove is that a Grove may give group initiations into the three OBOD grades of Bard, Ovate and Druid, and might hold meetings for each grade.

Groves have a sense of commitment to the Order, and generally do more than Seed Groups. However, in practice, some Seed Groups are large, have been in operation for many years, are very active and have long-established traditions. Some Groves are relatively small and quiet. Just because a group has two Druid grade members doesn't mean it must be a Grove – it too may be a Seed Group. Each Grove is different.

Online-only groups

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many groups and groves turned to online meetings and experimented with online-only gathering, meaning that members in any part of the world can join. To be registered with OBOD as an online-only group, the group must offer meetings in real time via Zoom, skype, or Messenger, etc, and not just be, say, a Facebook group. It must have a purpose. This is to differentiate them from online spaces where people come to chat. It may help to ask “Who does our group serve?”.

Online-only groups can be much like other groups, but with some important differences. The OBOD gwersi must not be discussed in open forums. Unlike in real meetings, the content of discussion remains online long after the participants have departed, therefore care is needed. It is also more difficult to verify OBOD membership online than in a physical group. Because of these limitations of the medium, online groups cannot offer initiations and so must be Seed Groups only.

At the moment, Facebook is the main platform for online groups. Members are experimenting with different platforms. What technology you use to make your group possible is up you.

To find a Seed Group or Grove

Members receive a full listing of all groups when they join. You will find details of Seed Groups and Groves throughout the world who are happy to be listed publicly on the OBOD website in the [Groups and Groves section](#).

“Let us take three breaths ... together”

Who can join an OBOD Seed Group or Grove?

Any member of the Order should be welcome at an OBOD group as a guest: either just ‘passing through’ or as a potentially permanent member. However, Seed Groups and Groves also have a duty to the group, and, at certain times, may not wish to welcome visitors. Please be sensitive to the variety of issues which may lead a group to say ‘no’ to a request for a visit. These issues may include limitations of space, the need for privacy regarding meetings in members’ houses, the undertaking of a private ceremony or initiation on the date requested, and so on. Nevertheless, OBOD’s general stance is open and inclusive, and a permanently ‘closed’ group would not be in tune with that ethos.

Some groups allow non-members into their meetings, and partners of members who are interested but do not wish to join the Order may also be welcomed. Membership of a group is not the same as membership of OBOD, which can be arranged only through enrolling with the OBOD office or via the OBOD website. Your attendance at the group does not in itself make you a member of OBOD. Bardic, Ovate and Druid Grove meetings are open only to members who have entered the relevant Grade, although an exception is sometimes made to invite visiting speakers or guests.

If you are interested in joining a group and there isn’t an existing group in your areas, please consider starting one! To find other members nearby, you could post something in Touchstone (touchstone@druidry.org) and you could also reach out in the OBOD Bardic Forums (<https://messageboard.druidry.org>) or in the official OBOD Members-only Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OBODGroup>).

How are groups managed and funded?

Groups are self-managed and need to be self-supporting financially. The group is the people, not regalia, and so costs incurred in running a group should not be onerous, and should be shared amongst its members. There is usually a small subscription or request for donations to cover the cost of tea, coffee, candles, communications, etc. But this is a matter for the group to decide, and there are different ways that a group can support itself: some rotate their venues amongst members’ homes, and each member brings food, candles and so on to share, so that there is no need for a central fund. Collect any contributions at the beginning rather than the end of a meeting, when those who have left early will be missed, and it is easy for such a task to be forgotten during post-ritual celebrations! Costs incurred of running websites, newsletters and other activities should be shared amongst members. Discuss finances openly to avoid misunderstandings.

“We swear by peace and love to stand, heart to heart and hand in hand.”

Meetings

How often?

Most groups meet for the eight seasonal festivals. Additionally, there may be regular meetings between the festivals. Some larger groups often hold separate meetings for Bard, Ovate and Druid grade members.

Most groups find that it is best to pick a day convenient to everyone and stick to it - for example, the Saturday before the festival. Decide on a start and finishing time so that everyone knows what to expect. Keep the arrangement constant and simple so that no-one gets left out. Of course, it can be changed. Meeting at the full moon is one option but difficult to arrange as the moon goes through her phases on different days each month.

What happens at meetings?

The Order encourages freedom, creativity and individual responsibility, and for this reason we do not advocate any specific or set format for a meeting. It really is up to the members of a group to decide how they wish to spend their time together.

In working out how you would like to spend the time, remember that you need focus and boundaries as well as freedom and creativity.

A tried and tested format is to have a time for a combination of these elements:

- Arriving, welcoming, stating the purpose of the meeting
- Attunement
- Exchanging news and ideas
- Discussion and debate on a chosen subject
- Meditation
- Ceremony
- Eisteddfod
- Feasting

There is more about all of these below.

Arriving

Those who have taken responsibility for the meeting should ensure that everyone is made welcome, particularly any newcomers. Prior to newcomers attending their first meeting it's a good idea for an established member of the group to talk to them in person or via phone or video to let them know what to expect and what is expected of them. If you are the newcomer, a chat with the host before the meeting will ensure you know what to expect and have brought anything you might need or want to contribute. The meeting should begin with a few words of welcome and a brief outline as to its purpose. This would also be an appropriate time to introduce any new members.

Attunement

This could include any of these elements: standing together hand in hand, lighting a candle, three breaths, a simple reminder of the journey that brought all together, a reminder to be here now, an invitation to listen to the wind outside... any short and simple witnessing of time, place and people.

Exchanging news and ideas

Some groups use a 'talking stick'. A beautiful, sometimes decorated, stick is passed around the circle from person to person. Only the person holding the talking stick can speak, and while they do, everyone else listens. Everyone has a turn to speak, but knows they mustn't 'hog' the stick. As the talking stick moves

around the circle each contribution becomes woven into a whole. If you do not want to speak, that is fine, just take the talking stick, hold it silently for a moment, then pass it to your neighbour. The purpose of having this talking circle is not for therapy, but to make sure everyone gets a chance to be heard. Sometimes this kind of sharing circle is only used when there is a specific matter to be discussed, or a decision to be made.

It is often surprising how a shy person will have the confidence and feel moved to speak once they have the talking stick in their hand. It is important to explain the simple talking stick rules before commencement, otherwise it won't work. To avoid problems, many groups reiterate the simple rules before each talking stick circle:

- Only the person holding the talking stick can speak, and while they do, everyone else listens.
- The speaker should focus on the subject matter, speak from their point of view and not direct their comments towards other contributors.
- The facilitator may interject if they feel that these rules are not being followed, if someone is speaking inappropriately, or is blatantly taking too much time.

After the talking stick has gone round it might then be appropriate to have an open discussion.

Discussion

Subjects could be about any of the topics covered in the broad sweep of Druidry and spirituality, such as Earth Mysteries, sacred sites, stone, tree or animal lore, storytelling, alternative medicine – the list is endless. There can be practical evenings or even weekends. And it's good to find out about the specialties and interests of each group member and for them to have the opportunity to share their experience and expertise with the group. There are lots of approaches to this and it is best not to get too set in any one. So there might be a short series of discussion meetings on a particular subject area, or members with special interests or knowledge could be invited to host one. In the early days having time to discuss the development of the group may well pay dividends later.

Should we study the Gwersi in meetings? Since the members of a group will not be following the course at exactly the same pace, and because of the uniqueness of the journey through the gwersi for each individual, it is not recommended, and not at all practical, to try to study the gwersi together in a group. As you work through the gwersi you will realize how very subjective the experiences can be, and also that the course is carefully structured so that the experience of each gwers leads to the next or subtly suggests what is to happen in a few gwersi's time. It would be a shame to spoil another's journey by working with a gwers that they have not yet reached, and it could also change their experience of the meditation or practicum because they have pre-conceived ideas of what will happen. The magic of the exercises and meditations in the gwersi is that they act spontaneously upon the subconscious and trigger responses from the person's own inner world or psyche, as a continuing and ever-developing journey. There are so many wonderful subjects to choose for discussion that there is no need to treat meetings as 'Gwers Reading and Study Groups'.

However, it is best not to stray too far from the topics and themes covered in the gwersi because one important role of seed groups and groves is to encourage and support members on their paths through the OBOD grades, leaving room for their own work. This support can happen most simply by the occasional reference to the gwersi that relate to the discussion. Members should be reminded strongly that being involved in groups does not replace the course lessons. It's very easy to get caught up in group think, group talk, and group 'do', and forget about personal practice. Personal practice is primary and paramount.

Meditation

Most meetings will include a meditation. This can be a treasured time. But if you don't want to participate, you may prefer to just enjoy sitting quietly. Remember there is no right or wrong way to experience a meditation. You might visualize vividly or 'see' nothing but can sense the surroundings, scents and sounds very keenly. No-one should try to analyse your experience, and often the images or words may take some time to reveal their meaning to you. You won't necessarily 'get' anything in a meditation, you may simply feel relaxed by it. Working together in guided meditation and pathworking can be a very rewarding experience and can help to bring the group closer together. It may also enable the voice of the group, or group awareness, to become clearer over time.

Since members of a group are often at different stages on their journey, with some very familiar with meditation and others completely new to it, whoever is leading the meditation should be aware of this, and should use tried and tested meditation journeys. Try not to use the meditations in the gwersi, apart from the basic Light Body and Sacred Grove meditations, unless it is one the whole group has done already as part of the course, so as not to spoil it for others. Feedback from the group will help the person leading the meditation to make improvements, so do not feel shy about commenting on the meditation if you felt it too long, too short, or have some other constructive comments to make about it.

The group may find it best if the same opening and closing to meditations and pathworkings is followed. This repetition and familiarity enable people to more easily reconnect with the altered state of consciousness associated with this form of practice. If you lead an inner journey it is important to lead people back along the same route that they took on the outward journey, to enable people to be fully grounded more easily. Often a break for tea, coffee or similar will also help in this grounding, and a sharing using the talking stick might then follow. Beware, though, of lengthy 'picking over' of meditation experiences which to some may feel intensely private. In a large group this can be time-consuming and energy-draining. It may be better to suggest sharing in groups of two or three for ten minutes, or simply for everyone to sit quietly to process what they've experienced whilst the kettle is boiling.

"This is sacred time, this is sacred space."

Ceremony/Ritual

The OBOD scripts Meeting together regularly for ceremony/ritual is a way of establishing the spiritual foundations of a group. It is a time when differences of opinion are laid aside and individuals can begin to experience the unique energy or group soul of their Seed Group or Grove. For this reason, there is no

insistence that groups should slavishly follow scripted ceremonies, but conversely, those creating the ritual, in considering the expectations of the group, do not have the option of being experimental in the way they might be when working on their own. Any changes should be made thoughtfully, for reasons that can be discussed, understood and agreed by the group. As is said in the opening section of OBOD rituals, 'We gather as equals ...' This is profound and powerful and has to be true if the circle is going to flow with energy. Every person in the group contributes with their inner and outer awareness, regardless of whether or not they have an active role to play, and this should be made clear to them.

When OBOD members come to a group they will expect the rituals to reflect what they have learned in the coursework. This is especially true when celebrating the seasonal festivals. The Order ceremonies are fundamental to the work of OBOD: many members consider them part of an OBOD heritage, as magical templates to be cherished, and this must be respected. Groups that decide to share the seasonal celebrations between scripted and more free-flowing seasonal expressions should regularly refer back to the scripts and the *Book of Ritual* to keep the group 'on track'.

If a group wants to make a change, it is often best to focus on changing the central section of a rite, while continuing to use the 'standard' OBOD opening and closing – itself a powerful holding structure for what might happen within the ceremony. By always using the OBOD forms of opening and closing we not only reinforce the energy of our group but we also connect with the Spirit of the Order itself. Knowing that this is happening in groves and groups throughout the world engenders a strong sense of spiritual community.

In considering possible changes, some questions to consider would be:

- What does the proposed change add to the ceremony and group experience, and in what way?
- Is this harmonious with and in the spirit of the Order?
- How will this appear to and support the newest Bard of OBOD on their journey?
- Would a visitor find our group identifiably OBOD?

Where should we perform ceremonies? Our Druid path connects us to nature and the elements, so ceremonies are often best held outside, although you may choose to work indoors if warmth, dryness, privacy or access for the physically challenged is needed. If you live near a wood or forest then there might be a grove of trees that is suitable. On private land, ensure you have the owner's permission for the whole group, to prevent misunderstandings (or breaking the law). Even if you are on public land, access to that area might not be automatic, it is best to be discreet, to not prevent others from their enjoyment of the area and to obey bye-laws and regulations. Some people are fortunate enough to have a secluded garden and understanding neighbours. Some groups have been fortunate enough to be able to plant a grove of trees that they then use for their rituals.

Working outside may mean a trek before your ceremony can begin, so come prepared. But the journey together, which may begin with a car ride and then a silent walk across the land, is as much a part of the ceremony as the circle itself. When you leave the grove or circle clear up any litter that others might have left before you.

In an ideal world we would all have a perfect grove in a beautiful setting. In reality this isn't always possible or practical. The important thing is to begin meeting regularly whether this is in someone's back yard or indoors. The group is the people first, and the location second, and it is often found that the right location somehow presents itself once a commitment is made.

Should ceremonies be public? The four solar festivals can be public ceremonies, although it is usually only the more seasoned groups who feel equal to performing in full daylight before casual observers. The four fire festivals tend to be more intimate events (particularly Samhuinn) with perhaps some invited guests.

Festivals Celebrating the festivals together is a great way to begin to meet. As time goes on, missing one can feel like a wheel without a spoke. Journeying together around the wheel of the year is a wonderful experience, building up your group rapport from one festival to the next, and then finding that suddenly you have done a whole year's worth and are stepping out onto the second spiral of another round together. Most groups find that they develop their festivals together, refining and re-working them from year to year, so that they never become static, but grow as the group grows in experience and wisdom.

Initiations OBOD Groves may provide initiations. Bards, Ovates and Druids wishing to be initiated in a Grove ceremony must have received the OBOD gwers containing the relevant initiation ceremony. It is not enough to have been accepted by the Order for the next grade or to have just the introductory gwers of the next grade. Some Groves insist that the member perform their personal initiation before a group one, while some hold the opposite view, believing that an initiation can occur only once, and offering instead a Welcoming ceremony if a member has already performed a self-initiation. OBOD Groves use ceremonies that differ from the self-initiations sent in the distance-learning course. The Groups Co-ordinator can send copies of these to Groves who ask for them. During an initiation ceremony, the only people present should be those members who have themselves been initiated into the relevant grade.

Seed Groups are not expected to offer initiations. However, some long-standing Seed Groups, which have just one Druid grade member, do want to offer initiations, and if this is relevant to your Seed Group, please contact groups@druidry.org

Eisteddfod

The eisteddfod offers an opportunity to shed the more formal aspects of the ceremony for a while, to exchange stories, songs, music and poetry. Everyone is free to contribute or not. In order to encourage contributions, and make a respectful space for those who may be nervous about singing/speaking in public, it is helpful to have a firm rule about respectful listening during performances, with no talking, entering or leaving the space or otherwise causing distractions.

Feasting

A 'pot-luck' (bring and share) picnic following the ceremony is a lovely way to bring people together and to ensure that everyone is grounded before setting off home. Some Druids drink wine, beer and mead but being alcohol-free is part of a spiritual path for many people so alternatives to alcohol should be available.

Online meetings

A group that meets in person eight months of the year might choose to have their meetings online for four months of the year. Just as some groups will have all their meetings outdoors except maybe the winter solstice. It is up to the group to decide. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many seed groups and groves turned to online meetings. Online meetings make it easier to invite guests from afar.

With all that being said, we also need to stress that we are a nature-based, physical, world-embracing spiritual community. Whilst watching talks online about aspects of Druidry, or using social media to connect with other Order members, is certainly nourishing and informative, we should take care to also nourish and inform our Druidry with regular contact with the natural world. When hosting ceremonies online we should also anchor ourselves in our physical bodies, and find ways to incorporate our connection with the natural world around us. This could include bringing something physical and tangible to the ceremony that you collected in nature, and connecting with the directions from where you stand. An article by Liluri in the Lughnasagh 2021 edition of *Serpentstar*, a newsletter by southern hemisphere OBOD members, offers some tips. <http://serpentstar.druidryaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/SerpentStar-Lughnasadh-2021.pdf>

What else do groups do?

As well as meeting for the seasonal festivals, many groups also facilitate additional events which may include camps, workshops, local moots and other activities. Additional activities will depend upon local needs and opportunities, and offer the possibility to serve as druids whilst developing the group's identity. Groups should consider outreach in the community at large. Interacting with other faith groups, environmental advocacy groups, and the general public in constructive ways not only cements goodwill but brings the expertise and dedication of the group to a broader world. Activities such as tree planting, interacting with naturalist or garden groups, or developing and presenting meaningful content programs can be beneficial. A powerful and simple way for Druids to be of service is for the group to agree to take care of a specific spot in their locality, perhaps where they meet for ceremonies. Members can agree to visit the site to remove litter, etc., in between or before meetings.

Staying in touch

Groups may need to decide how to stay in touch and that that means should be as accessible to all as possible. That might be an SMS broadcast, a WhatsApp group, Facebook Group, email etc. Each method has its opportunities and drawbacks. It's a choice.

"We gather as equals, in our physical form here upon the earth."

Leadership

Druidry and OBOD tend to attract warm-hearted, kind and generous people who are keen to make a positive difference to the world. They may decide to start a Seed Group or Grove. Often, they host the group in their homes, and, provided they have the support of the other members of the group, they deserve respect and consideration. But they should not be seen as 'superior' or 'above' any other member

of the group. We see leadership as service, not power, as giving encouragement and support, but not commanding. The group does not belong to any one person and does not exist to have that person's ideas imposed upon it. Its light and energy are available to all members. This group spirit is independent. It will change and evolve in accordance with the people who join the group and not in accordance with the will or desires of any one person. Members of a group may choose to operate a system of 'rotating leadership' whereby at each meeting different members take on the roles of organization, leading a meditation, and so on. Other groups may prefer to vote in or appoint people to serve in roles for a certain term, say, a year and a day.

Whatever way a group chooses to operate, it is important that members don't feel 'bogged down' in rules and formalities. A group needs to avoid on the one hand being so informal that it is disorganized and the structure unclear to members, and on the other hand being so structured that members feel it is too rigid. This question can be a good topic to discuss in the group.

"By all that is fair and free, we welcome you"

The responsibilities of running an OBOD Group include:

1. Being the contact point for the OBOD Groups Co-ordinator, for members and potential members of the group.
2. Hosting the group, providing a place to meet that ensures the physical comfort and security of the group. Considering accessibility and making reasonable provision for members to attend.
3. Nurturing and protecting the group, creating an appropriate space within which members may explore and experience their Druid worlds within and without, and where members may sometimes want to share their deepest thoughts and feelings. Given the peculiar problems in online discussions, it may be helpful to have guidance from an experienced Moderator on how to maintain a healthy space.
4. Respecting confidentiality applies to many areas, including photographs. As a general rule, photographs and recordings should be taken only with permission of those in the photograph, and only during the social time of the meeting, not in meditation or ceremony. The same applies to online posting and any sharing of photographs and recordings on Facebook or elsewhere. Some members do not want to appear in social media or recordings, even in closed groups and this should be respected. Only those who give permission are photographed. For video recordings, Seed Groups and Groves should not record their own online rituals on Facebook, Zoom or other online sites or put up rituals they may have wanted to record on a video camera. We have become aware that even with a closed Facebook page it is all too easy for photographs or videos to be misused for the purpose of blaming and shaming. The formal online rituals requested by Eimear are a different case where everybody who holds a role needs to have given permission to be recorded and we all understand that these are public.
5. Tuning in and sensing the needs of the group, listening to the voice of the group spirit to provide a certain amount of direction and purpose, helping to maintain the continuity and stability of the group, the dynamic drive and evolution comes from the interaction of the whole group and each person's unique presence within it.

6. Upholding the integrity of the Druid spirit and of OBOD. Members may have come to OBOD through explorations of other spiritualities. To be inclusive and serve all members, groups should make sure to centre the OBOD teachings which all have in common. However, we celebrate the paths each member has taken, the treasures and insights they have gained along the way and members should also feel free to share and exchange those.
7. Setting the ground rules, including having a well thought-out and well communicated position on what is and is not permissible. This is especially important in online spaces. Individual groups have the right to set their own rules, provided these don't conflict with OBOD values. Nowhere should groups permit the expression of racism or of any hatred or injustice. OBOD Groups should abide by the laws of their land.
8. Arranging ceremonies.
9. Identifying those members whose needs might best be met outside the group, and suggesting how they might seek appropriate help. While group members may be able to offer some help to each other, it is important that they avoid acting as their therapist (even if they are one), and instead recommend proper expert help.
10. Exercising discernment and authority to say 'No' to members who they consider are being disruptive. If a seemingly insoluble problem should arise it might help to consult with other experienced members or the OBOD Groups Co-ordinator.
11. Arranging insurance. At some point a group may find it advisable to establish some litigation protection through registering as a non-profit entity (in the US) and/or acquiring public liability insurance. This may become relevant if the group decides to sponsor camps, retreats, or public rituals. This is a decision not to be taken lightly but only after due consideration.

Titles

Titles are by no means necessary, and could even be considered inadvisable if this leads to members feeling that those in the group holding titles are more important than those without. However, if everyone understands that titles are symbolic and designate service roles and not superiority, then they can be used. Titles may remain with certain people in the group, or can be rotated, or allocated through divination or choice.

Some groups put a lot of thought and emphasis into the titles given to members, and may link these into ritual roles as well. Other groups are less formal, some avoid formal titles altogether. There is no right or wrong in this, but careful consideration as to the best way forward would be time well spent as the foundations of the group are laid. The sorts of titles used are: Grove Chief, Grove Mother and Father, Pendragon and Scribe. Some people like the use of the terms 'Mother and Father' but others find these infantilising, and too evocative of parental control or Church associations. Grandiose titles often give the impression of pomposity and seem very old fashioned! A group should not use the titles of High Priest or High Priestess (or Priest and Priestess). While Druidry and Wicca share much in common, these titles are strongly associated with Wicca and they do not reflect the OBOD ethos of equal responsibility, within each individual's capabilities, for the practical and ritual work of the group. Names of Gods and Goddesses should also not be used in titles except within ritual.

How do I establish an OBOD Seed Group or Grove?

If you are a member of the Order, whether Bard, Ovate or Druid, you can start a Seed Group. If you are a Druid Grade member of the Order, and have found another Druid Grade member who will work with you, you can apply to open a Grove. Just email the Seed Group and Groves Co-ordinator at groups@druidry.org and tell us of your intention!

We will give you an application form and ask you some questions, such as 'Who does your group serve?' and 'Do you meet in person?'. Remember the, focus is on people not technology and that an OBOD Seed Group or grove cannot be identity-exclusive. Groups are invited to add a paragraph about themselves for the OBOD website.

There is a Facebook group for registered contacts and other resources to share with you. We want to ensure that you as members of the Order are supported to form new groups, meet new members and to thrive in your Seed Groups and Groves. If there is anything we can do to help you in this, please let us know.

Naming your group

You can adopt whatever name you choose, so long as it isn't already in use and doesn't include 'Grove' in the name of a Seed Group or 'OBOD' in the name of any group, to avoid the impression that is a group run by OBOD. Have a look at the names of groups listed on the website to get an idea of the sorts of titles used. Some groups choose names connected with their location, or align themselves to a particular deity, tree or animal. Whatever you choose, it is a reflection of your unique group spirit and may well evolve after you have been working together for some time.

Groups which are online-only have 'online' in the title. Select a name which does not imply that it is an official OBOD group on any given platform e.g. Orchard Online Seed Group is a good name, whereas OBOD Discord Server Group and OBOD Orchard Grove Seed Group aren't.

Within OBOD there are many social media groups with a particular interest or focus. However, registered OBOD Online-only Seed Groups must be as inclusive as possible and must not be restricted to particular interests.

You can decide whether you would like your group listed publicly on the Order's website, or whether you would prefer contact details be made available only in the printed list sent out periodically to members. Online-only groups are listed separately on the website.

IMPORTANT – What an OBOD Group is Not and Pitfalls to Avoid

Some groups may be affiliated with other Druid groups, such as ADF, AODA, BDO or The Druid Network, and their ways of working may differ from OBOD. If you are thinking of joining a group, find out about its

affiliations, and make sure you feel comfortable with the way it works. OBOD groups have clarity about what they do, and why they do it.

Members are also expected to take responsibility for their own path. Sometimes people join a group in search of emotional healing, and while a group can often help members through periods of stress and sadness, there is a limit to the support a group can give to someone who has a more ongoing problem of psychological distress. You may experience meetings as healing, but Seed Groups or Groves are not therapy groups.

Groups are also not 'teaching groups' although you may learn much from them.

A meeting should not be used as a means for an individual member to engage in their own agenda, such as gathering 'followers' for their own teachings, finding participants for their own workshops, or clients for their own healing services. Members attend because they want to enjoy each other's company, celebrate the festivals, and explore Druidry and the spiritual path with others of like mind. If a member of the group happens to be a healer, or runs workshops, they can of course mention this to fellow members, but they should not be using the group as a means of recruitment.

No one should use the group to fulfill their needs for approval or domination: to be seen as 'all-knowing' or 'wise', or to engage in 'power-trips' whereby they act or feel superior to other members because of their leadership position.

They should not suggest that they have a special relationship that another member does not have, with the Order or the OBOD Office.

They should not ask you for money, apart from a small subscription to group funds to cover tea, coffee, candles etc.

They should not ask for any favours or payment for anything related to the Order, or for a candidate's progress through the grades.

They should not offer to act as a replacement for the course Mentor that the member has been allocated.

They should not imply that they are in receipt of any privileges or teachings that are not available to other members.

OBOD groups are autonomous – which means they are self-organizing and self-determining. The Order has no knowledge of what occurs within any group, and has no control over what groups do.

If you find you are not enjoying meetings, or that it is really not meeting your needs, don't feel obliged to attend. You might even consider starting your own group that better reflects your tastes and preferences.

If any member of a group is concerned about the conduct of a group, they should contact the OBOD Groups Co-ordinator.

Resolving difficulties within the group

Difficulty or conflict sometimes serves a deeper purpose, such as effecting transformation and bringing about learning. As Druids we recognize the naturalness of conflict and the potential it offers for growth, learning and transmutation. We understand the importance of taking time to reflect on what is at the heart of an issue. Resolving difficult problems can sometimes become the opportunity for deeper understanding and insight which may ultimately strengthen the group. A useful question to ask, when difficulties arise, is: 'Is there a gift here, trying to manifest itself?' or: 'What is it that is seeking transformation?'

As Druids we appreciate the way in which everything in nature follows the cycle of birth, growth, decay, death and rebirth. Groups follow this cycle too, and a difficulty may be a symptom that the group is 'stuck' and that something needs to change to help it move into a new phase. Differences of opinion are inevitable in any group, and sometimes personality clashes occur. Druidry offers a down-to-earth realistic view of life that doesn't try to ignore the more difficult aspects of relating in a group. Sometimes differences can be resolved with sharing circles using the talking stick, at other times no amount of discussion seems capable of resolving an issue. Sometimes groups dissolve and new ones form, or a group of members 'breaks away' to form another group. This is natural, and although this experience can sometimes be difficult, it is best to view it with trust and detachment, allowing things to settle into their new form, even if that means a loss of members to one group.

A group should not feel that they have to tolerate a disruptive person, though they need to deal with them fairly. If conflict arises within a group it might be appropriate to seek the confidential counsel of a trusted member from outside the group. If a resolution should prove impossible then referral to the OBOD Groups Co-ordinator might be necessary.

"May our memories hold what the eye and ear have gained."

When a Group comes to an end

It's OK for groups to come to an end. Everything has its season that is right and good. The lives of those involved may change that they don't have the time to commit, and sometimes it is better to allow a group to end. And, of course, the converse is also true, that sometimes it is good to keep going. When the group comes to an end, please remove any website and social media presence, and also let the OBOD Group Co-ordinators know so that they can remove the listing from the OBOD directory and website.

While there is enthusiasm for online groups, experience shows that interest can wane quickly, whereas material left online can persist long after the founders/admins have moved on. Online spaces, if untended, can quickly degenerate and, unlike physical groups, they are highly visible and could bring the group and

Order into disrepute if certain things were left posted. For this reason, registered online groups should make provision at the outset to ensure that their online presence doesn't outlive the group.

If you have a question, problem or complaint

Whatever happens in or to the group and however you decide to structure your meetings, know these things. You are not on your own. You can always get in touch with the Co-ordinator of OBOD Groups at groups@druidry.org And you can always contact the office: office@druidry.org

There are many other Seed Groups and Groves and if you come up against a problem you could also try getting in touch with another Seed Group or Grove contact to sound them out. If you have a complaint about a group, or you try to contact a group and receive no reply to your communications, let us know at groups@druidry.org

For more information

- Grove and Seed Group listing at www.druidry.org/community/groves-groups
- The *OBOD Book of Ritual* sent out in the Bardic Grade
- The Seed Groups and Groves area in the Members-Only Forums section on the [Bardic Forums](#)
- The Order offers [courses in celebrancy](#).

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Quotations are from OBOD ceremonies.

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