

**BY-LAWS OF THE WASHINGTON AREA OROMO COMMUNITY**  
**ORGANIZATION (OCO)**  
**AMENDED VERSION**

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## **Preamble**

The Oromo people well over 40% of Ethiopia's total population and are the second largest single nationality group in Africa. They have their own unique language (*Afaan Oromo*), culture, and democratic governance (the *Gada system*). The Oromo have been fleeing and continue to flee their homeland, Oromia, due to political persecution, economic injustices and human rights abuses perpetrated against them merely because of their ethnicity.

It is estimated that more than ten thousand Oromo immigrants and refugees live in the Washington metropolitan area--the second largest concentration of Oromo in the United States (only after the State of Minnesota). Most of those who are here have lived through experiences of imprisonment, torture, or internment in their homeland and refugee camps in neighboring states. A significant number of them are separated from their loved ones and have lost their properties. They do not have established families in the USA. Like other refugee and immigrant groups, they face many barriers to becoming self-sufficient, including language and cultural barriers. The Oromo Community Organization (OCO) of the Washington Metropolitan Area was established in 1988 to assist them to overcome these challenges.

This bylaw is meant to guide and govern the community's activities and to enable its members to effectively, lawfully, and efficiently achieve their collective goals and aspirations.

## **Article I: Offices of the Organization**

1. The principal office of the Oromo Community Organization (OCO), hereinafter referred to as the Organization, is located at 6212 3<sup>rd</sup> ST NW, Washington, DC 20011-1312

2. The Board of Directors (BOD) may change the principal office location as appropriate.
3. The BOD may authorize the opening of branch offices in neighboring states.
4. The BOD may authorize the EC to enter into a collaborative arrangement with other Oromo community organizations with common goals and objectives, and legally incorporated in other U.S. states or other countries in accordance with the laws and regulations of such states or countries.

## **Article II: Mission and Objectives**

1. The Organization is established exclusively for one or more of the purposes as specified in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code or corresponding sections of any future Federal Tax Code.
2. The mission of OCO is to foster a unity of purpose and networking among the Oromo in order to support one another, and to promote the preservation, continuity and development of the Oromo language, culture and traditions. Founded on the enduring concept of Oromuma, the OCO serves the interests of all Oromo without any bias.
3. The specific objectives and purposes of the Organization shall be to:
  - a) Provide basic social services such as cultural orientation, Oromo and English language classes, computer training, job networking services, immigration support, health awareness and education, and other social assistance services as may be necessary;
  - b) Own and manage a community center for the benefit of its members;
  - c) Promote self-help and social assistance (*Afoshaa*) among the Oromo residing in the Washington DC Metropolitan area in order to strengthen individual and family life;
  - d) Provide opportunities for keeping abreast of events in Oromia, through a regular media service program that provides current news and analysis on human rights, injustice and mistreatment, political situation and economic development issues;

- e) Educate on Oromo culture, historical heritage, ,Oromo language (Afaan Oromo), and Civic education to Oromos and non-Oromos;
- f) Periodically organize social and cultural activities, as well as international workshops, symposiums, and conferences focusing on Oromo issues and topics;
- g) Provide opportunities for formal and informal networking among members; and,
- h) Foster and maintain good relations with other communities and humanitarian organizations with common goals and aspirations.

### **Article III: Membership Rights and Responsibilities**

1. An Oromo, who is eighteen (18) years or older, lives in the Washington Metropolitan Area, and is fully committed to the Organization’s mission and objectives is eligible to become a member of OCO.
2. A non-Oromo who fully subscribes to the Organization’s mission and objectives, may be accepted as an honorary member subject to approval by the BOD.

#### **3.1. Membership Registration**

1. An Oromo who wishes to become a member shall submit a duly completed application form.
2. An applicant shall pay a \$20.00 non-refundable application processing fee.
3. The EC shall decide on an application of a member by a simple majority vote.
4. An applicant whose application is approved by the EC shall submit three passport size photographs and receive a membership card.

#### **3.2. Membership Dues**

1. A member shall pay \$15.00 per month in membership dues starting from the first month of membership.

2. A member shall pay her/his membership dues monthly, quarterly semi-annually or annually to minimize collection costs and efforts.
3. Under special circumstances, the EC may grant exceptions to 3.2.2 above.

### **3.3 Membership Rights**

1. A member shall have the right to elect or be elected to the office of OCO or its various committees, only if she/he has fully paid his/her membership, during the preceding calendar year.
2. A member is entitled to receiving all information about the activities of the Organization through regular mails, emails, and OCO radio announcements. Appropriate information may also be posted on the Organization's web page.
3. A member shall have the right to access any of the social services provided by the Organization on terms determined by the Board
4. A member shall have the right to use the Organization's facilities on terms determined by the EC.
5. A member shall have the right to withdraw from membership by written notice to the Executive Committee (EC).
6. An honorary member shall be entitled to the same rights as an ordinary member, except the right to vote and be elected to the Organization's office.

### **3.4. Membership Obligations**

1. A member shall at all times abide by the bylaws of the Organization.
2. A member shall at all times be current on her/his payment of membership dues.
3. A member shall be able to exercise her/his membership rights only so long as she/he remains current on payment of membership dues and OCO mission

### **3.5 Membership Suspension, Termination**

- 3.5.1 A member shall be terminated from membership when she/he is deceased, moves from the Washington Metropolitan Area, and/or withdraws from the Organization voluntarily regardless of the reasons for doing so.

- 3.5.2 A member shall be suspended from membership when she/he fails to be current on her/his payment of membership dues.
- 3.5.3 Advocates and/or promotes ideas, values, against Oromo community mission
- 3.5.4 No reimbursement will be paid when/if membership is terminated for any reason/reasons.
- 3.5.5 A member may be suspended, expelled or otherwise disciplined by the BOD for violation of this bylaw.
- 3.5.6 The BOD may suspend a member from membership if she/he: (a) Abuses another member(s) or officers of the Organization; (b) Hampers meetings and works of the Organization and its various committees; (c) is involved in any act of theft or dishonesty and/ or is found falsifying information or deceiving the Organization to receive benefits.

### **3.6 Membership Reinstatement**

- 1. A member whose membership rights are suspended or terminated due to reasons other than article 3.5.3 through 3.5.6 and disciplinary action by the BOD may reapply should she/ he choose to do so.
- 2. If a member whose membership is suspended because of disciplinary actions apologizes for the mistakes made other than article 3.5.3 through 3.5.6, pays penalty (if any), and the BOD is convinced that the suspended member could meet all the standards set by the Organization, the suspension shall be lifted and the membership rights and privileges restored.

### **Article IV: Management and Organizational Structure**

- 1. The governance structure of OCO shall consist of:
  - a) General Assembly (GA)
  - b) Board of Directors (BOD)
  - c) Executive Committee (EC)

### **Article V: General Assembly Roles and Responsibilities**

1. The General Assembly (GA) is the highest decision making body of the OCO.
2. The General Assembly (GA) can amend the bylaw at any time as it sees fit.
3. The General Assembly (GA) can dissolve the entire BOD and EC members at any time with or without reason/reasons.
4. The General Assembly (GA) can elect varieties of committees as necessary
5. A GA meeting shall be convened up to three times a year. The BOD may call for additional GA meetings as may be required.
6. The GA shall be responsible for the following:
  - a) Receive, discuss and decide on annual report of the organization;
  - b) Elect members of the BOD
  - c) Review and approve policy and procedural guidelines developed and proposed by the BOD
  - d) Appoint the auditor of OCO
  - e) Receive auditor's report and deliberate on it
  - f) Act on managerial issues the BOD may present to it
  - g) If no quorum at the first GA call postponed to another specified date, and if also no quorum on the second call and passed to the next meeting, then at the third call the meeting will be held and resolutions will be passed by any present members and will be applicable to all. For meeting the Robert's Rules of Order and Parliamentary procedure will be used which is known and accepted procedure in USA.

### **Article VI: Election**

1. The General Assembly shall be convened to elect an Election Committee at least four weeks in advance of the annual election.
2. The General Assembly shall ensure that the candidates of Election Committee meet all criteria in article 3.5.1 through 3.5.6 themselves

3. The election Committee shall ensure that the candidates meet All criteria mentioned in article 3.5.1 through 3.5.6
4. The Election Committee shall identify suitable candidates who are willing to serve as members of the BOD
5. The Election Committee shall ensure that the candidates presented for election are individuals who demonstrate unquestionable commitment to the mission, goals, and objectives of OCO; command the respect of community members; have outstanding managerial and leadership skills; and are willing to serve the community.
6. The elections of the BOD shall be staggered or alternated every year to provide maximum leadership continuity for the Organization.
7. The Chair of the Election Committee shall chair the GA meeting pertaining to election on the Election Day.
8. The Election Committee's role shall end at the end of the annual election.

## **Article VII: Board of Directors Roles and Responsibilities**

### **7.1. Board Election and Membership**

1. The GA shall elect Board members among its voting members.
2. The BOD shall consist of nine voting members.
3. The BOD shall choose from among its nine members, a President, a Vice-President, a Secretary, and appoints executive committee, which includes the Executive Director Executive secretary, Executive treasurer, and one executive member
4. The BOD shall be elected for a maximum period of two years, renewable only once for another two years.

### **7.2. Board Duties and Responsibilities**

1. A simple majority makes the Board quorum. If there is no simple majority at any of the Board meeting(s), another meeting shall be called within 30 (thirty) days and a decision(s) shall be taken by the members present.
2. The Board decision(s) shall be passed by a simple majority vote.



3. The BOD shall hold at least four business meetings (in March, June, September, and December) and more as required each year. The BOD chair, in consultation with the other Board members, may call for additional meetings as required.
4. The BOD shall be responsible for the following:
  - a) Provide overall organizational vision and managerial and technical policy guidelines, including terms of access to the Organization's facilities and services
  - b) Review and approve EC's progress and financial reports, work plans, and budgets
  - c) Approve the hiring and firing of full or part-time staff;
  - d) Approve all payments and the board chair will sign the check
  - e) Act on behalf of the Organization in the event that the EC is unable to function as mandated;
  - f) Represent the Organization at major national or international events;
  - g) Coordinate and facilitate the election by the GA of the members of the Board
  - h) Assist in fund raising and other activities of the Organization;
  - i) Resolve any conflict that may arise within the Organization;
  - j) Take disciplinary action against members who act contrary to the Organization's mission and interest;
  - k) Promote relationships and collaboration with other relevant organizations in support of the Organization's goals and objectives;
5. The Board President shall
  - a) Chair the annual GA and Board meetings.
  - b) Present report on OCO activities to the GA
  - c) Call OCO members for meeting as required
6. The Board Vice President shall perform all duties of the President in the absence of the President.
7. The Board Secretary shall keep all minutes of Board meetings, prepare agendas, and ensure that all Board and GA meetings are announced properly.

8. The Board President and the Secretary shall co-sign the minutes of all Board and GA meetings.

### **7.3. Board and EC Members Obligation**

- 7.3.1 A Board and EC member shall at all times abide by the bylaws of the Organization.
- 7.3.2 A Board and EC member shall at all times be current on her/his payment of membership dues to be a model for other members.
- 7.3.3 A Board and EC member shall be able to exercise her/his Board or EC Membership rights only so long as she/he remains current on payment of membership dues and respect OCO bylaw

### **7.4 Board and EC Membership Suspension, Termination**

- 7.4.1 A Board or EC member shall be suspended from membership when she/he fails to be current on her/his payment of membership dues.
- 7.4.2 A Board or EC member may be suspended, expelled or otherwise disciplined by the BOD for violation of this bylaw.
- 7.4.3 A Board or EC member will be permanently terminated without possibility of reinstatement if violates article 3.5.3 through 3.5.6
- 7.4.4 A Board or EC member may be removed and replaced by another member by BOD decision if she/he fails to show up on her/his duty consecutively for more than three times without reason.
- 7.4.5 A Board or EC member may be suspend or expelled by the BOD if she/he: (a) Abuses another member(s) or officers of the Organization; (b) Hampers meetings and works of the Organization and its various committees; (c) is involved in any act of theft or dishonesty and/ or is found falsifying information or deceiving the Organization to receive benefits or violates article 3.5.3 through 3.5.6.

## **7.5 Membership Reinstatement**

- 7.5.1 If a Board or EC member whose membership is suspended because of disciplinary actions apologizes for the mistakes made, pays penalty (if any), and the BOD and EC is convinced that the suspended member could meet all the standards set by the Organization, the suspension shall be lifted and the membership rights and privileges restored.

## **Article VIII: Executive Committee Roles and Responsibilities**

### **8.1. Executive Committee Election, Membership**

1. The Board shall appoint the Executive Committee (EC) members from among its nine voting members.
2. The EC shall consist of four voting members.
3. The Board shall appoint from among its nine members, an Executive Director, an Executive Secretary, and an Executive Treasurer, and Executive Member
4. The EC shall be appointed for a maximum period of two years, renewable only once for another two years.

### **8.2. Duties and Responsibilities**

1. The Executive Director (ED) shall be responsible for the following:
  - a) Manage the day-to-day operational activities of the Organization, including implementation of BOD approved programs, projects, and activities of the Organization
  - b) Chair the EC meetings, prepare annual work plan, maintain membership and donors databases, and prepare annual organizational and implementation reports, and submit to the Board
  - c) Lead fund-raising and resources development efforts in support of the implementation of the Organization's programs and activities;
  - d) Prepare and report the activities of the Organization to the BOD as needed
  - e) Identify and appoint functional committees, and their replacements as required;

- f) Supervise other members of the Executive Committee, and the activities of functional committees and volunteer staff;
  - g) Represent the Organization in its day to day operation.
  - h) will sign the check ,which approved by the board
2. The Executive Secretary (ES) shall be responsible for the following:
- a) Oversee the management and up keeping of the Organization’s office;
  - b) Prepare the agenda for EC meetings, maintain minutes of all meetings, and handle all correspondences and follow-up actions;
  - c) Ensure the safe keeping of all records of activities, events, programs, correspondence, and meetings of the Organization;
  - d) In the absence of the ED or whenever delegated, chair the EC meetings and carry out the activities of the ED.
3. The Treasurer is responsible for the following:
- a) Serve as the Organization’s accountant, and maintain full and comprehensive financial records of the Organization following standard accounting principles, as required by the IRS and other federal and state laws;
  - b) Manage the Organization’s financial affairs, including its revenues, expenditures, and bank accounts;
  - c) Maintain records of the Organization’s assets and properties, and ensure their safe keeping and efficient use at all times;
  - d) Maintain complete and up to date membership records, and ensure the timely collection and efficient use of membership dues;
  - e) Prepare annual budgets and financial reports for internal and external stakeholders;
  - f) Prepare quarterly financial statements as required by the BOD and/ or donors;
  - g) Prepare and file the Organization’s tax returns every year.

- h) will sign the check ,which approved by the board
- 4. The EC decision(s) shall be passed by a simple majority vote.
- 5. The Executive Secretary shall perform all the duties of the Executive Director in the absence of the Executive Director.
- 6. The Executive Director and the Executive Secretary shall co-sign the minutes of all EC meetings.

### **Article IX: Functional Committees' Roles and Responsibilities**

- 1. The EC may, in consultation with the BOD, appoint Functional Committees that would help implement the Organization's programs, projects, and activities.
- 2. The Functional Committees shall report to the Executive Director.
- 3. The number and focus of functional committees shall depend on the needs and resources of OCO but a typical cases may include:
  - a) Basic social services (e.g. immigration and job-related support);
  - b) Self-help and social support (or *Afooshaa*);
  - c) House Committee;
  - d) Elders( Manguddoo) Committee
  - e) Cultural, language, and education;
  - f) Fund raising, grants and resources development;
  - g) Social affairs and public relations;
  - h) Research and publications.
  - i) Oromo human rights and advocacy.

### **Article X: Sources of Revenue**

- 1. The primary sources of the Organization's revenue are:

- a) Registration fees and membership dues;
- b) Fundraising activities such as cultural shows, solicitations, parties, etc;
- c) Property rental;
- d) Grants and donations; and,
- e) Other revenue generation activities consistent with the Organization's tax-exempt status as approved by the Board

### **Article XI: Financial Management and Audit**

1. The Organization shall open and operate checking and trust fund accounts with one or more banks as appropriate.
2. The Board Chair, the Executive Director and the Treasurer shall be responsible for opening the Organization's bank account (s).
3. All payments shall be paid in checks.
4. All payments will be approved by BOD decision
5. The BOD Chairman or the Executive director will sign the check with Executive Treasurer
6. The GA shall appoint a certified and independent auditor who will:
  - a) Audit all financial statements and resource management procedures of the Organization, and present annual audit reports;
  - b) Advise the Organization on how to continuously update and improve its accounting, financial, and asset management, and reporting practices.
  - c) Make sure that the financial handling standard is in accordance of nonprofit organization handling procedure.

### **Article XII: Organization Calendar**

1. The fiscal year of the Organization shall be from January 1 to December 31.

**Article XIII: Amendment and Closure**

1. This bylaw shall be written in in Afaan Oromoo and distributed to its members
2. This bylaw shall be amended or replaced by a two-thirds majority vote.
3. The Organization shall be declared closed if requested and supported by three-fourths of the Board and a simple majority of voting members present at a General Assembly attended by at least two-thirds of active members.
4. In the event of the Organization's closure, all available funds and properties of the Organization shall be donated to legally registered non-profit Oromo humanitarian or charitable organizations after all OCO dues paid.
5. In case the Board becomes non-functional the Board Chairman should call the General Assembly for evaluation and decision to replace the bad elements. If the Board Chairman doesn't act or not fulfill its responsibilities the EC cover board's activities or the combined meeting of the Board and Executive Committee members can decide to call the General Assembly.

**Article XIV: Approval of this Bylaw**

1. The GA has convened on September 7, 2013 and approved this amended version of the bylaw.

**Done in Washington, DC**

**On September 7, 2013.**