

## **2018 Oak Spirit Sanctuary Community Survey**

### **Introduction:**

This is the second community survey in two years. The methodology and many of the questions remain the same as in 2017, the first year of this round of community surveys. The survey results were collected via a self-selected online survey distributed through the Oak Sprits Sanctuary Community Facebook page. Results were collected 9/8/18 – 9/19/18.

It must be noted that these results are not scientific. The number of results received (32 total) is too small to yield statistically meaningful results and the respondents were self-selected. However, the survey results are none the less useful in terms 1) verifying that the priorities and perspectives of the Board of Directors align with those of a core group of engaged members of the community 2) raising important questions to seriously consider where survey results may differ from the perspectives and/or assumptions of the Board 3) there may be some individual responses that, although isolated, are simply great ideas or important perspectives to consider.

One further value this year's survey has that last year's did not is the potential to track changes in attitudes or priorities and progress, or lack thereof, in the leadership team's success in meeting community expectations and desires over time. In other words, the results of the survey are potentially important and ought to be taken seriously as a snapshot of community attitudes, but are not as authoritative as a larger, scientifically methodological, professional community survey.

### **Methodology:**

First, I will note that all results are reported in full in the appendix of this report and I would suggest that Board members at least scan through the raw data for themselves. This is especially the case for the open-ended questions. In the appendix you will find a spreadsheet of results for each of the questions. In the case of questions that were repeats of questions asked in 2017 (excluding the open-ended questions), the 2017 results are also included. I was pleased to see that the number of responses was nearly identical to the number of responses collected in 2017. While a larger sample size would have been ideal, the 2018 pool was 32 responses compared to 33 in 2017, meaning the results are based on a data set that is at least as good as it was last year.

## Executive summary

The level of participation in the annual survey was about the same as last year's. There was no radical change in the responses compared to 2017. However, there were some shifts here and there which may indicate changing opinion, but may also be simple statistical variance.

- The **spiritual work** of Oak Spirit Sanctuary continues to be the highest priority among respondents. **Leadership development** remains a very high priority and **developing infrastructure** again had a **surprisingly low priority response**.
- While infrastructure dropped fairly significantly in terms of priority, there is **still a great desire to see the water / plumbing / shower situation improved**.
- There may be some small indication of a shifting in opinion regarding the "wildness" of the land and/or OSS' **preservation of the land as a place to commune with nature** simply in terms of prioritization.
- **The majority of respondents have both a favorable opinion of the performance of the Board of Directors (61%) and of the overall direction of OSS (57%).**
- Of those who have a negative opinion of the performance of the Board (13%), while the overall number has remained relatively constant (vs. 12% in 2017), **the intensity of their negative feeling seems to have increased** (10% 'strongly disapprove' vs 0% in 2017).
- **About 20% - 25% of respondents seem to be neutral regarding performance of the Board and/or direction of organization.** This is a group of people I would recommend would be important to focus on meeting the needs of.
- The difference between the percentage of respondents who do not believe OSS is heading in the right direction (24%) and the number of people who have a negative opinion of the Board's performance (13%) suggests that at least **some people who do not believe OSS is heading in the right direction do not blame that on the performance of the Board.**
- **Oak Spirit Sanctuary still has problems among respondents in terms of the organization being prone to personal drama and some feeling that the leadership lacks transparency and contributes to negative perceptions of their experience.**
- OSS' fundraising activities, which ramped up a bit in 2017, do not seem to be alienating our community members.
- **The Land and People (individually and as a community) continue to be the greatest assets Oak Spirit Sanctuary has to offer and are why people support us.**
- **Diversity and a safe space for people to be themselves are highly valued by the community.**
- The frequent repetition of the word "More" in open-ended responses suggests that the direction the community wants the organization to take is **improvement rather than a change *per se*.**

## Survey Analysis

### Question 1: "How long have you been involved in Oak Spirit Sanctuary (and/or Ozark Avalon)"

I was very pleased to see a wide range of answers to this question again this year. Of the thirty-two respondents only 2 have been involved for less than one year (6%). Ten (31%) have been involved for 1-5 years. 7 (22%) have been involved for 5-10 years and 13 (41%) have been involved for over ten years. There is a nice, relatively even spread. However, there is a significant shift in responses over 2017 from people who have been involved less than one year (a 21% decrease) and those involved for more than 10 years (a 16% increase). However, given the small sample size this may be the result of simple statistical variation. **Combined with similar the results in Question #2, I have a high level of confidence that our results represent a wide range of community perspectives.**

### Question 2: "How often do you attend events at Oak Spirit Sanctuary or sponsored by OSS?"

2017's responses were skewed toward representing community members that were "very active" (41% attending more than once a month). 2018's results are skewed toward respondents who attend OSS events 1-2 times per year (also 41%). Again, small sample size suggests this may be simple statistical variation. Overall, combined with results from Question 1, the data show a pretty good variation across "very active" to those who attend fewer events and are less involved in the community. That said, some of the respondents who do not attend as many events may be just as dedicated to supporting our organization but may be limited in their ability to participate due to geographic or economic considerations. They may also eventually become more involved in OSS in the future. Ideally we will be able to forge a path that appeals to both the dedicated, active, core members and more casual, sporadic attendees.

Of the thirty-two responses one had never attended an OSS event. 13 (41%) attend events 1-2 times a year. Three (9%) attend events 3-5 times a year. Six (19%) attend 6-10 times a year and nine (28%) attend once a month or more. I would argue that these results are well split between "active and "casual" community members. **53% of respondents report attending fewer than 5 events a year and 47% report attending 6 or more.**

**Question 3: "Rank this list n terms of importance to you, with 1 being the MOST IMPORTANT and 5 being the LEAST important, the things OSS should focus their energies on."**

Below is a chart of the responses with 2017 responses in parentheses :

	2018 (2017)	1 (MOST)	2	3	4	5 (LEAST)
General education (how-to workshops, lectures, guided hikes, crafts, etc.)		2 (1)	6 (7)	4 (7)	10(6)	6 (8)
Spiritual practice (rituals, clergy training, sweat lodges, etc.)		10 (10)	5 (8)	8 (6)	5 (3)	2 (2)
Preserving the land in a wild or natural state		8 (2)	3 (4)	11 (5)	5 (8)	4 (10)
Developing internal community leadership and organizational stability		5 (13)	11 (8)	4 (3)	6 (5)	3 (0)
Developing infrastructure on the land		6 (5)	3 (3)	4 (8)	5 (7)	13 (8)

**“Spiritual practice” and “leadership development” remain the highest priorities among respondents with “spiritual practice” becoming the most common TOP priority.** I found the fact that “leadership development” dropped from the #1 “MOST IMPORTANT” response to 4<sup>th</sup> very striking. I read this as a potential indication that while respondents still believe it is among the most important things for the Board to be doing, it is perhaps less emergent than it was a year ago. It MIGHT be evidence that the Board’s actions over the last year have moved this issue off the front burner AS MUCH. It is, however, still a very high priority among respondents and there is not nearly enough evidence to make a statement with any certainty.

**“Developing infrastructure” became the most common LEAST and 4+5 combined response.** Last year “preserving the land in a wild state” held a similar place. In fact, **“preserving the land in a wild state” took a significant jump in priority among respondents with 25% of respondents listing it as their MOST important priority.** This is a 16% increase over last year. There was a 25% increase in the number of respondents that ranked it 1 or 2 in their priorities.

It is not that developing infrastructure is not a priority among respondents, necessarily. Even the lowest ranking priority may still be important to our community members. It is just the lowest priority among the choices provided. Taken in combination with the changes in “preserving the land”, **based on this feedback being cognizant of striking a balance between development and preservation may be wise moving forward.**

## Question 4: "How do you feel about each of these activities?"

	2018 (2017) Very highly, "Love!" More!"	"Like", "Enjoy"	Neutral, "Okay"	"Do Not Enjoy"	Actively dislike, "Yuck!"
Festival weekends (overall)	14 (20)	13 (10)	4 (3)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Hanging out at the retreat center	4 (9)	15 (13)	10 (11)	2 (0)	0 (0)
Potluck meals	10 (17)	9 (10)	10 (5)	1 (1)	1 (0)
Monthly lunars (overall)	6 (15)	13 (12)	9 (5)	1 (0)	0 (0)
Party circle (drumming/chanting/socializing)	13 (19)	10 (5.5)	6 (3.5)	0 (4)	1 (1)
Workshops and classes	8 (16)	10 (8)	11 (7)	0 (2)	0 (0)
Group rituals	13(18)	11 (11)	6 (3)	0 (1)	0 (0)
Walking the land	16 (17)	10 (9)	2 (5)	2 (1)	0 (0)
Work weekends	7 (10)	11(11)	10 (10)	1 (0)	0 (1)

I would like to point out that this question does not address which activities our community members like the best, individually. Each person could answer "Love!" on every option. I would say that this question tries to capture the strength of feeling regarding each activity among our community members. The results show that all of these activities are either "liked" or "loved" by most respondents. There was no clear-cut "lowest" positive response among any of the activities. "Festival weekends" remains the highest recipient of positive responses. Both "group rituals" and the "party fire" saw significant reduction in positive responses compared to 2017, but still remain very popular. **In general this year's responses tended to be more neutral (but still leaning toward positive).** This fact may not be reflective of anything other than the average standards of this year's respondents.

The fact that **"walking the land" became the most common "love" response in 2018** (up from 4<sup>th</sup> in 2017) corresponds to the prioritization of "preserving the land in a wild state" in Q3. The two may be related, though in what ways remains unclear to me. It may be that there is a larger proportion of community members getting deeper into the undeveloped areas or it may be a reflection of the work OSS has done to make walking the land easier. Both things may be true or it may be a statistical blip.

"Hanging out at the retreat center" remains the least "loved" activity, though it has come up nicely from merely "neutral" to more "liked".

In 2017 the "party circle" was identified as an area with a significant number of respondents the selected "do not enjoy". **2018 saw a decline in the number of respondents who said they "love" the party fire.** However, the responses seem to show merely a moderation in enthusiasm for the party fire, with the number of respondents saying they "like, enjoy" the party fire significantly increasing. **The good news is**

**that the number of “do not enjoy” responses was completely eliminated.** Based on these results it could be that whatever was making the fire unenjoyable for some has been eliminated, but that whatever changes took place may have dampened a bit of the enthusiasm for the activity.

This is a complex question with a lot of data in play and room for further interpretation and speculation regarding the meaning of the results.

**Question 5: “During the last year, do you approve or disapprove of the overall performance of the OSS Board off Directors?”**

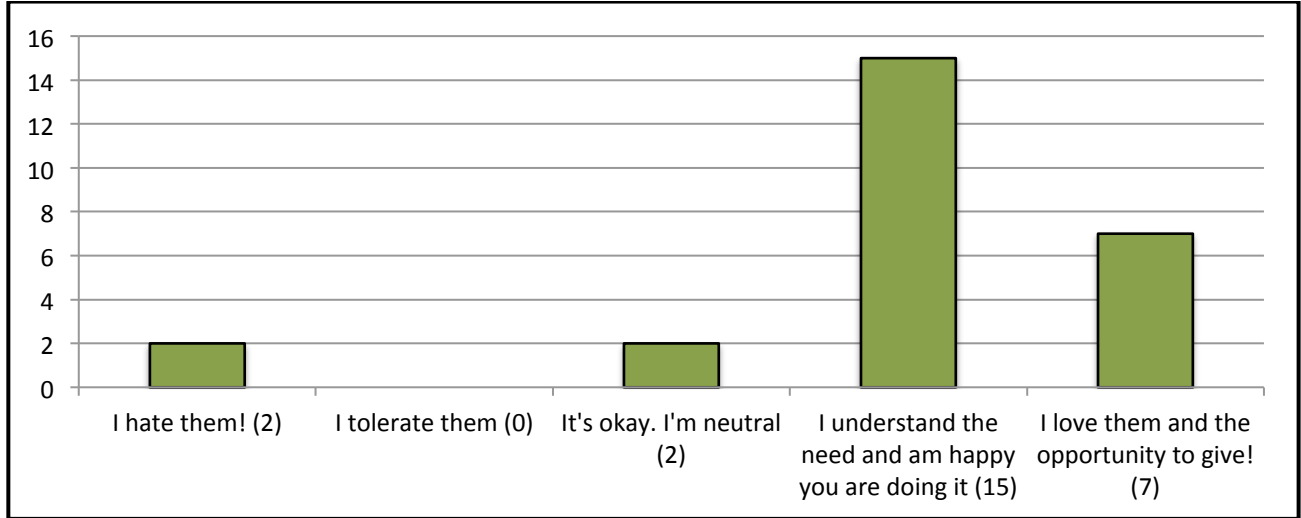
	Strongly approve	Approve	Neutral	Somewhat disapprove	Strongly disapprove
2018 (2017)	6 (7)	13 (14)	8 (8)	1 (4)	3 (0)
2018 (2017)	19 % (21%)	42% (42%)	26% (24%)	3% (12%)	10% (0%)

The one difference between this and a very similar “overall approval” question asked in 2017, is that in 2017 the survey asked about Board performance over the last two years. This year’s survey asked about performance over the last year, with the hope of being able to track any changes in community satisfaction of the work of the Board since the last survey. **The 2018 results show very little change. 61% of respondents either “approve” or “strongly approve” of the performance of the Board.** In all areas “neutral” and better there was no percentage shift greater than 3%. The only areas that showed significant change was an about 10% shift of some respondents from “somewhat disapprove” to “strongly disapprove”. Given that this 10% shift represents only 3 people, it could be a normal statistical variation or a single issue involving a small group of connected individuals. Again, we should note that the small sample size does not make even a 10% change technically statistically significant. It does, however reflect a snap shot of some sort of intensification of negative feeling toward the board, the cause(s) of which are not at all addressed by the question. The reasons may be explored further in the results from Question 9 (“What are 1-3 things you would CHANGE about Oak Spirit Sanctuary?”).

**Question 6: Whether you donated to OSS in 2017 or not, how do you feel about fundraising efforts we have undertaken?**

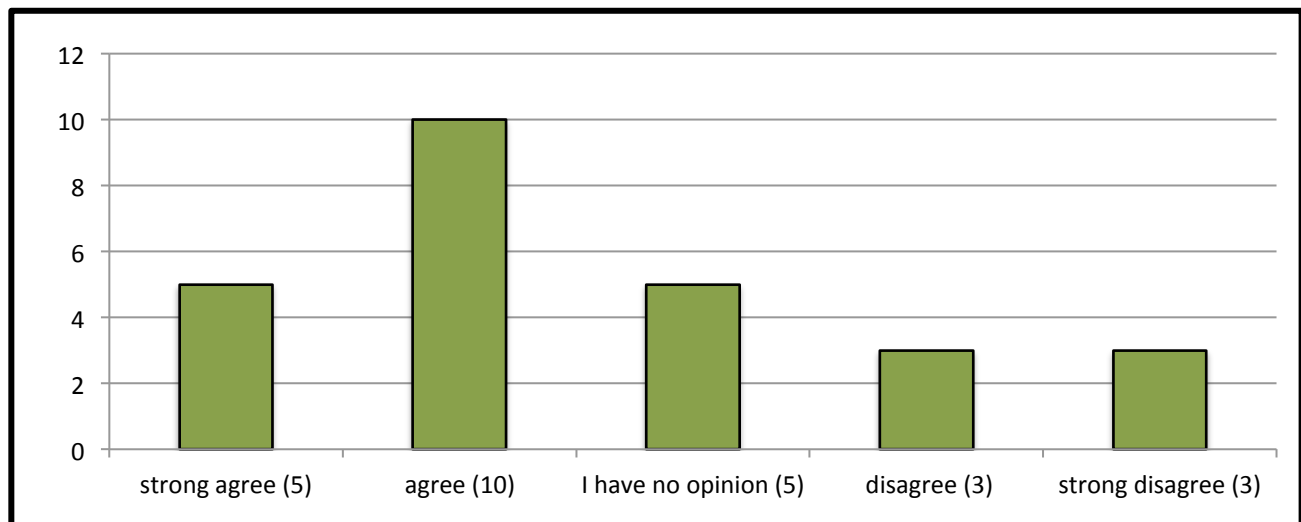
**The largest take-away from this question is that 85% of respondents at least understand the need for active fundraising and are pleased that we are doing it.** Only two people (8%) hate OSS’s fundraising efforts, a number that corresponds closely with the number of people who strongly disapprove of the performance of the Board. It seems likely to me that these are the same respondents. It could be that their disapproval of the Board’s performance in general is driving this number. It could also be that these fundraising activities are part and parcel of their disapproval of the Board. The relationship between these

two results can only be speculative. **In general, however, it can be said that there is broad general support for continuing our current level of fundraising work.**



## Q7 Do you agree, "OSS is headed in right direction?"

Of the 26 respondents to this question, **57% of respondents have a positive opinion ("agree" or "strongly agree") of the direction OSS is heading.** Another 19% have no opinion. **24% of respondents do not believe OSS is heading in the right direction.** The 12% of those who disagree with the current direction of OSS corresponds closely to the number of people who strongly disapprove of the performance of the Board which may suggest that this is the same cohort of respondents and may tie these two question result together. That these are the same people seems likely to me. What is striking, however, is that there is then a fairly large discrepancy between those who only "somewhat disapprove" of the performance of the Board (1 person representing 3% of respondents) and those who "disagree" that OSS is heading in the right direction (3 people representing 12% of respondents). Assuming that there is significant overlap between respondents who disapprove of the actions of the Board and those who believe OSS is heading in the wrong direction, there appears to be at least a couple of people who do not believe that OSS is heading in the right direction, but who do not attribute that to the performance of the Board. Regardless, however, **a result of 24% of respondents believing that OSS is heading in the wrong direction is a disconcerting result that may warrant additional investigation such as a more detailed look at individual survey responses.** Some evidence as to why this may be the case might also be found in the results of **Question 9** ("What are 1-3 things you would CHANGE about Oak Spirit Sanctuary?"). Likewise, further engagement with the broader community may be warranted.





## Question 8: "What are 1–3 things you LOVE about Oak Spirit Sanctuary?"

Below is a word cloud of all of the significant words found in the above open question. Word clouds are a useful tool to visualize common ideas and their relative frequency in respondents' language.



Comparing last year's results to this year's, it is clear that most of the things respondents love about Oak Spirit Sanctuary remain unchanged in both type and priority: **"The Land", "the people", "the community" and related words remain the most repeated across the board.** I again would like to differentiate between "people", which I read as referring to individuals, and "Community" (and related words such as "tribe" and "family"), which I take to be the social network at OSS. This assumption is supported by a number of people who differentiated between the two themselves in their responses.

58% of respondents mentioned "the land" or "nature". This was by far the most common response. 38% of respondents mentioned "people" in their response and 27% used the words "community" or "tribe". **Continuing a dual mission prioritizing BOTH the land and the community will have broad support across virtually all respondents.**



While there has been some issues that have carried over from the 2017 community survey to this year's, one noticeable difference is a reduction in the number of comments regarding infrastructure. This is not to say that there wasn't any. **55% of respondents made some mention of some improvement to the infrastructure they would like to see.** The vast majority of those involved our water system (toilets, showers, hot water). While still a major issue, this result is down 11% from last year. **Issues of governance, transparency, organization and the like also continue to be a major theme from last year.** 22% of respondents mentioned something about **organizational issues.** An equal number of respondents are **looking for more diversity and more inclusion,** particularly in ritual. Several comments reflect an opinion that OSS leadership still has significant work to do to live up to the standards and hopes of the community in terms of involvement.

**The full text of each response is available for review in the report appendix**

