

How an A.A. Group Functions

Tradition Four: *Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.*

How to Start a New A.A. Group

Reasons for starting a new group vary, but the ways to go about it are basically the same.

Important to establishing an A.A. group is the need for one as expressed by at least two or three alcoholics; the cooperation of other A.A. members; a meeting place; a coffee pot; A.A. literature and meeting lists; and other supplies.

Once the group is off to a good start, it would be helpful to announce its presence to neighboring groups; your local intergroup (central) office, if there is one; your district and area committees; and the General Service Office. These sources can provide much support.

Contact G.S.O. for copies of the New Group Form, which should be completed and returned for the new group to be listed. Each new group receives a complimentary handbook and a small supply of literature at no charge when it is listed with G.S.O. (one of the many services made possible by the regular support of other A.A. groups and individual members). The New Group Form can be down-loaded from our website (aa.org), or requested by mail at G.S.O., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Naming an A.A. Group

No matter how noble the activity or institution, experience has taught A.A. groups to carefully avoid any affiliation with or endorsement of any enterprise outside A.A.

Tradition Six: *An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

Even the appearance of being linked to any organization, club, or political or religious institution needs to be avoided.

Therefore, an A.A. group that meets in a correctional or treatment facility or a church should take care not to use the institution's name, but to call itself something quite different. This makes it clear that the A.A. group is not affiliated with the hospital, church, prison, treatment facility, or whatever, but simply rents space there for meetings.

Our A.A. group conscience, as voiced by the General Service Conference, has recommended that "family" meetings, "double trouble" and "alcohol and pill" meetings not be listed in our A.A. directories. The use of the word "family" might also invite confusion with Al-Anon Family Groups, a fellowship entirely separate from A.A.

The primary purpose of any A.A. group is to carry the A.A. message to *alcoholics*. Experience with alcohol is one thing all A.A. members have in common. It is misleading to hint or give the impression that A.A. solves other problems or knows what to do about drug addiction.

There has also been a recommendation by the A.A. General Service Conference suggesting that no A.A. group be named after any actual person, living or dead, A.A. or non-A.A. That is one way we can "place principles before personalities."

What Do A.A. Group Members Do?

"I am responsible ... when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that I am responsible." In short, when newcomers walk into our meeting rooms, we want A.A. to be there for them as it was for us — something we can do continuously only if we function as a group.

But, for a group to keep going, all kinds of service must be done. It is through the combined efforts and ongoing commitment of group members that:

- A meeting place is provided and maintained.
- Programs are arranged for the meetings.
- Seventh Tradition contributions are collected, and properly allocated and spent.
- A.A. Conference-approved literature is on hand.
- A.A. Grapevine and La Viña literature and lists of local group meetings are available.
- Refreshments are available.
- Assistance in finding A.A. meetings is given to alcoholics in the area.
- Calls for help are answered.
- Group problems are aired and resolved.
- Continuing contact is sustained with the rest of A.A. — locally, through the intergroup (central office), district and area's general service structure; and nationally and internationally, through the General Service Office in New York.

What Trusted Servants (Officers) Do We Need?

It takes member participation to ensure that group service work is done. Most of us agree that A.A. ought never be "organized." However, without endangering our commitment to preserve our spiritual and democratic Fellowship, we

can “create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve” (Tradition Nine). In A.A. groups, these trusted servants are sometimes called “officers” and usually are chosen by the group for limited terms of service. As Tradition Two reminds us, “Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”

Each group determines the minimum length of sobriety for A.A. members to be eligible for any position (or office). The general guideline might be stable sobriety of six months to a year, or longer.

These service positions may have titles. But titles in A.A. do not bring authority or honor; they describe services and responsibilities. And it has generally been found that giving members service positions solely to help them stay sober does not work; instead, the group’s welfare is of primary concern in choosing officers. At election time, a review of Traditions One and Two can be helpful.

Individual groups have many ways of making sure that the necessary services are performed with a minimum of organization. The chart on page 19 shows possibilities for service at the group level.

Some groups have positions that do not appear on this chart, such as greeter, archivist, accessibility representative, and liaison to a meeting facility. Following are the offices established by numerous groups in order to serve the group “at home” and in the community at large.

Chairperson: Group chairpersons serve for a specified period of time (usually six months to a year). Experience suggests that they should have been sober awhile, at least a year; and, ideally, they have held other group offices first.

The chairperson coordinates activities with other group officers – and with those members who assume the responsibility for literature, hospitality, coffee-making, programming individual meetings within the group, and other vital functions.

The more informed that chairpersons – and other group officers – are about A.A. as a whole, the better they function. By keeping Tradition One firmly in mind and encouraging members to become familiar with all the Traditions, they will help to ensure a healthy A.A. group.

Secretary: Like chairpersons, secretaries need to be good all-around group servants. For groups that have no chairpersons, they may perform the tasks associated with that position. While each group has its own procedures, the secretary is generally expected to:

- Announce and/or mail information about important A.A. activities and events.
- Maintain minutes of business meetings.
- Maintain and update a strictly confidential file of names, addresses and telephone numbers of group members (subject to each member’s approval); and know which members are available to visit still-suffering alcoholics (Twelfth Step calls).
- Keep a record of members’ sobriety dates, if the group so wishes.
- Maintain a bulletin board for posting A.A. announcements, bulletins and newsletters.
- Make certain that the General Service Office and other service entities are informed, in writing, of any changes of address, meeting place or group officers.
- Accept and assign calls for Twelfth Step help (unless there is a Twelfth Step chairperson for this task).
- Share with group members the mail from other groups and the intergroup (central office), unless this is done by the intergroup representative.

Treasurer: A.A. groups are fully self-supporting through their members’ voluntary contributions. Passing the basket at meetings usually covers the group’s monetary needs, with enough left over so the group can do its fair share of supporting the local intergroup (central office), the general service district and area offices, and the General Service Office.

Group funds ordinarily are earmarked for such expenses as:

- Rent.
- A.A. literature.
- Local meeting lists, usually purchased from your nearest intergroup (central office), general service district or area committee.
- Coffee and refreshments.
- Support of all A.A. service entities, usually on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Treasurers generally maintain clear records (a ledger is helpful) and keep their groups informed about how much money is taken in and how it is spent. They may make periodic reports to the group and post financial statements quarterly. Problems can be avoided by keeping group funds in a separate group bank account that requires two signatures on each check. The flyer “The A.A. Group Treasurer” offers many other helpful suggestions.

A.A. experience clearly shows that it is not a good idea for a group to accumulate large funds in excess of what is needed for rent and other expenses. It is wise, though, to keep a prudent reserve in case an unforeseen need arises (an amount to be determined by the group conscience). Group troubles also may arise when extra-large donations – in money, goods or services – are accepted from one member.

The Conference-approved pamphlet “Self-Support Where Money and Spirituality Mix” makes suggestions as to how groups may support A.A. services. Additionally, G.S.O., area and sometimes district committees and your local intergroup accept contributions from individual A.A. members. A.A. members are free to contribute whatever they wish, within the limits set by A.A. service entities. The maximum individual contribution to the General

Service Office is \$3,000 annually. Bequests or in- memoriam contributions of not more than \$5,000 are acceptable on a one-time basis, but only from A.A. members. Check with other A.A. service entities for the maximum yearly contributions they accept. Some members celebrate their A.A. anniversaries by sending a gratitude gift to the General Service Office for its world services. With this "Birthday Plan," some members send one dollar for each year of sobriety, while others use the figure \$3.65, a penny a day, for each year. Other members give more, but not in excess of \$3,000 per year. For additional information, talk to your general service representative or contact G.S.O.

General service representative (G.S.R.): Working via the district and area committees, the G.S.R. is the group's link with the General Service Conference, through which U.S. and Canadian groups share their experience and voice A.A.'s collective conscience. Sometimes called "the guardians of the Traditions," G.S.R.s become familiar with A.A.'s Third Legacy our spiritual responsibility to give service freely. Usually elected to serve two-year terms, they:

- Represent the group at district meetings and area assemblies.
- Keep group members informed about general service activities in their local areas.
- Receive and share with their groups all mail from the General Service Office, including the newsletter *Box 4-5-9*, which is G.S.O.'s primary tool for communicating with the Fellowship.

G.S.R.s also may assist their groups in solving a variety of problems, especially those related to the Traditions. In serving their groups, they can draw on all the services offered by G.S.O. (see page 33). An alternate G.S.R. is elected at the same time in the event that the G.S.R. may be unable to attend all district and area meetings. Alternate G.S.R.s should be encouraged to share the responsibilities of the G.S.R. at the group, district and area levels. (See *The A.A. Service Manual*, Chapter 2, "The Group and its G.S.R.," for further information.)

Financial Support: Current experience indicates that many groups provide financial support for their general service representatives to attend service functions.

Intergroup (central office) representative: In the many locations where an intergroup (or central office association) has been formed, each group usually elects an intergroup representative, who participates in business meetings with other such representatives several times a year to share their groups' experience in carrying the A.A. message. The intergroup representative tries to keep the group well-informed about what the local intergroup is doing.

A.A. Grapevine/La Viña representative (GVR/RLV): The job of the GVR and RLV is to familiarize members with the Fellowship's international journal, A.A. Grapevine, and its bimonthly Spanish-language magazine La Viña, and the enhancements to sobriety the magazines offer. The magazines contain articles written by A.A. members based upon their personal experiences; discussion topics; regular features; and a calendar of special A.A. events.

GVRs and RLVs participate in the activities of their area's Grapevine committee, announce the arrival of new magazines at the group each month, encourage members to submit articles and illustrations, and explain how members can order their own subscriptions. In some groups, the GVR and RLV positions are combined.

A new GVR or RLV should send his/her name, address, group name and group service number to: Grapevine, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, or email gvrc@aagrapevine.org, attn: GVR/RLV Coordinator. Representatives will then receive quarterly mailings containing order forms for the magazine and for books, audio and other Grapevine items. GVRs and RLVs can also provide contact information online at the Grapevine website: aagrapevine.org. Magazine subscription checks should be made out to the Grapevine, Inc.

Literature representative: The group's literature representative makes certain that A.A. Conference- approved books and pamphlets, ordered from the General Service Office or purchased from the local intergroup (central office), are on hand for meetings and properly displayed.

Group literature representatives can obtain information on their responsibilities by writing to the literature coordinator at G.S.O. Regular communications are sent to literature representatives from G.S.O. The A.A. Guideline for Literature Committees is also a valuable resource.

For A.A. literature and subscriptions to the A.A. newsletter *Box 4-5-9*, checks should be made out to A.A. World Services, Inc. Many A.A. groups purchase bulk subscriptions to *Box 4-5-9* (in units of 10) for distribution to their members, thus providing them regular communication with A.A. in the U.S., Canada and countries throughout the world.

Why Have a Steering Committee?

Some groups have steering committees. At steering committee meetings, questions related to group practices, selecting a slate of candidates for office, and other group issues often are tackled first by the steering committee (or group service committee), which goes to the group for its members' group- conscience decision. In many cases, the officers and/or past officers make up the committee, which usually meets at regularly scheduled times.

For a small group, a steering committee composed of three to five members has been found to work well. For larger groups, 12 or more members provide a better cross-section of group experience and can share the workload more easily. In some groups, a rotating committee (with members rotated on and off periodically) serves the same purpose as a steering committee.

How Can Newcomers Be Reached and Helped?

Naturally, alcoholics cannot be helped by A.A. unless they know A.A. exists, and know where to find it. So it is a good idea for groups in smaller towns to communicate their meeting place and times to public agencies. Along with such a notice, it is helpful to distribute the flyer "A.A. at a Glance" or the pamphlet "Alcoholics Anonymous in Your Community."

In large urban areas, the central office, inter- group or district meeting list of all groups can be used for this purpose.

Should an A.A. group let the public know how to obtain information on open A.A. meetings? Some groups do, but for only one reason — to let the community know of the availability of help for alcoholics through our program. Such small notices are usually placed in community service sections of the local newspaper to let people know how to get in touch with nearby A.A. meetings, if they so desire.

A typical notice might look like this:

Faced with a Drinking Problem?

Perhaps Alcoholics Anonymous Can Help Write to P.O. Box 111

City, State, Zip Code

or call (123) 123-4567

Weekly Meetings Open to the Public Civic Building, Tuesday at 8:00 p.m.

Some groups keep lists of members available to do Twelfth Step work. Groups may have hospitality committees and/or greeters to make sure no new member, visitor or inquiring prospect goes unwelcomed.

Sponsors usually take the responsibility for helping newcomers find their way in A.A. Much help can be found in the A.A. pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship."

SERVICE STRUCTURE INSIDE THE A.A. GROUP

