

# THE A.A. GROUP

...WHERE IT ALL BEGINS

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

How a group functions. How to get started.



service

*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*® is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

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How a group functions

How to get started

## **The A.A. Group**

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## **How To Use This Pamphlet**

This pamphlet is designed as a handy information tool and suggested guide for an A.A. group. It serves as a complement to *The A.A. Service Manual*, the A.A. Group Handbook and other literature (see inside back cover), which cover specific group matters at greater depth.

Designed for easy reference, the pamphlet covers four main areas: what an A.A. group is; how a group functions; group relations with others in the community; and how the group fits into the structure of A.A. as a whole.

The table of contents details the group-related subjects covered in the body of the pamphlet. If you have further questions, please contact the General Service Office (G.S.O.) of A.A., which stands ready to help in every way it can.

## A.A.'s Single Purpose

Tradition Five: *Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*

"There are those who predict that A.A. may well become a new spearhead for a spiritual awakening throughout the world. When our friends say these things, they are both generous and sincere. But we of A.A. must reflect that such a tribute and such a prophecy could well prove to be a heady drink for most of us—that is, if we really came to believe this to be the real purpose of A.A., and if we commenced to behave accordingly.

"Our Society, therefore, will prudently cleave to its single purpose: the carrying of the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Let us resist the proud assumption that since God has enabled us to do well in one area we are destined to be a channel of saving grace for everybody."

A.A. co-founder Bill W., 1955

## **The Importance of Anonymity**

Tradition Twelve: *Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

What is the purpose of anonymity in A.A.? Why is it often referred to as the greatest single protection the Fellowship has to assure its continued existence and growth?

At the level of press, television, radio, film, and the Internet, anonymity stresses the equality in A.A. of all its members. It puts the brake on our easily inflatable egos, our misplaced conviction that violating our anonymity will help someone, and our desire for personal recognition or control. Most importantly, the Anonymity Tradition reminds us that it is the A.A. message, not the messenger, that counts.

At the personal level, anonymity assures privacy for all members, a safeguard often of special significance to newcomers who may hesitate to seek help in A.A. if they have any reason to believe their alcoholism may be exposed publicly.

In theory, the anonymity principle seems clear, but putting it into effect is not always easy. Following are some general guidelines culled from A.A. group experience that may be helpful.

### ***Maintaining Anonymity at the Public Level***

When appearing on radio, television, film or on the Internet as A.A. members, we refrain from showing our faces or revealing our last names. In printed articles, on websites or email, we are identified by our first names and last initials only.

We use our first names and last initials only when speaking as A.A. members at non-A.A. meetings. (See the A.A. pamphlet "Speaking at Non-A.A. Meetings.")

We do not put "A.A." on envelopes sent through the mails, not even on correspondence directed to A.A. entities. On material to be posted on A.A. bulletin boards and printed on A.A. programs that the general public might see, we omit all members' last names and identifying titles, such as "Reverend," "Professor," or "Sergeant."

### ***Understanding Anonymity at the A.A. Group Level***

We may use last names within our group. At the



same time, we respect the right of other members to maintain their own anonymity however they wish, and as closely as they wish. Some groups keep a list of names and telephone numbers volunteered by their members, and may provide phone lists—but for the eyes of the group members only.

We repeat no one's personal sharing made in A.A. meetings. The word "anonymous" in our name is a promise of privacy. Besides, the only story of recovery we can truly share is our own.

In our personal relationships with nonalcoholics—and with those we think might have a problem with alcohol—we may feel free to say that we are recovering alcoholics (without divulging the names of other A.A. members), although discretion is recommended. Here our openness may help to carry the message.

We refrain from videotaping that special A.A. talk or meeting which might receive exposure at the public level. And, as the 1980 General Service Conference recommended, it is wiser that talks by A.A. members be given in person, in view of the temptation when videotaping to place personalities before principles and thus encourage the development of a "star" system in Alcoholics Anonymous.

For more information about this important Tradition, see the A.A. pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity."

## **Introduction**

As it says in Concept I:

*The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.*

### ***The A.A. Group—the Final Voice of the Fellowship***

Alcoholics Anonymous has been called an upside-down organization because "the ultimate responsibility and final authority for world services resides with the groups—rather than with the trustees, the General Service Board or the General Service Office in New York." ("Twelve Concepts For World Service Illustrated").

The entire structure of A.A. depends upon the participation and conscience of the individual groups, and how each of these groups conducts its affairs has a ripple effect on A.A. everywhere. Thus, we are ever individually conscious of our responsibility for our own sobriety and, as a group, for carrying the A.A. message to the suffering alcoholic who reaches out to us for help.

A.A. has no central authority, minimal organization, and a handful of Traditions instead of laws. As co-founder Bill W. noted in 1960, "We obey [the Twelve Traditions] willingly because we ought to and because we want to. Perhaps the secret of their power lies in the fact that these life-giving communications spring out of living experience and are rooted in love."

A.A. is shaped by the collective voice of its local groups and their representatives to the General Service Conference, which works toward unanimity on matters vital to the Fellowship. Each group functions independently, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.

A.A.'s essential group work is done by alcoholics who are themselves recovering in the Fellowship, and each of us is entitled to do our A.A. service in the way we think best within the spirit of the Traditions. This means that we function as a democracy, with all plans for group action approved by the majority voice. No single individual is appointed to act for the group or for Alcoholics Anonymous as a whole.

Each group is as unique as a thumbprint, and approaches to carrying the message of sobriety vary not just from group to group but from region

to region. Acting autonomously, each group charts its own course. The better informed the members, the stronger and more cohesive the group—and the greater the assurance that when a newcomer reaches out for help, the hand of A.A. always will be there.

Most of us cannot recover unless there is a group. As Bill said, "Realization dawns on each member that he is but a small part of a great whole. . . . He learns that the clamor of desires and ambitions within him must be silenced whenever these could damage the group. It becomes plain that the group must survive or the individual will not."

## **The Group... Where A.A.'s Service Structure Begins**

### ***What is an A.A. Group?***

As the long form of Tradition Three clearly states, "Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."

Further clarification of an A.A. group may be found in the *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, Concept Twelve, Warranty Six:

- no penalties to be inflicted for nonconformity to A.A. principles;
- no fees or dues to be levied—voluntary contributions only;
- no member to be expelled from A.A.—membership always to be the choice of the individual;
- each A.A. group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes—it being merely requested to abstain from acts that might injure A.A. as a whole; and finally
- that any group of alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group provided that, as a group, they have no other purpose or affiliation.

Some A.A.s come together as specialized A.A. groups—for men, women, young people, doctors, gays and others. If the members are all alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help, regardless of profession, gender or other distinction, and meet all the other aspects defining an A.A. group, they may call themselves an A.A. group.

### ***Is There a Difference Between a Meeting and a Group?***

Most A.A. members meet in A.A. groups as defined by the long form of our Third Tradition (see page 42). However, some A.A. members hold A.A. meetings that differ from the common understanding of a group. These members simply gather at a set time and place

for a meeting, perhaps for convenience or other special situations. The main difference between meetings and groups is that A.A. groups generally continue to exist outside the prescribed meeting hours, ready to provide Twelfth Step help when needed.

A.A. groups are encouraged to register with G.S.O., as well as with their local offices: area, district, intergroup or central office. A.A. meetings can be listed in local meeting lists.

### ***How Do You Become an A.A. Group Member?***

"The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking." (Tradition Three) Thus, group membership requires no formal application. Just as we are members of A.A. if we say we are, so are we members of a group if we say we are.

### ***The Difference Between Open and Closed***

#### ***A.A. Meetings***

The purpose of all A.A. group meetings, as the Preamble states, is for A.A. members to "share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism." Toward this end, A.A. groups have both open and closed meetings.

*Closed meetings* are for A.A. members only, or for those who have a drinking problem and "have a desire to stop drinking."

*Open meetings* are available to anyone interested in Alcoholics Anonymous' program of recovery from alcoholism. Nonalcoholics may attend open meetings as observers.

At both types of meetings, the A.A. chairperson may request that participants confine their discussion to matters pertaining to recovery from alcoholism.

Whether open or closed, A.A. group meetings are conducted by A.A. members who determine the format of their meetings.

### ***What Kinds of Meetings Do A.A. Groups Hold?***

"Each group should be autonomous," our Fourth Tradition says, "except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole." So, predictably, each meeting held by our thousands of groups has its own imprint.

The most common kinds of A.A. meetings are:

1. *Discussion.* Whether closed or open, an A.A. member serving as "leader" or "chair" opens the meeting, using that group's format and selects a topic for discussion.

Background for many topic meetings derives from A.A. literature, such as *Alcoholics Anonymous* (Big Book), *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *As Bill Sees*

*It, Daily Reflections*, and from the A.A. Grapevine. A few specific topic suggestions may include:

- attitude
- defects of character
- fear
- freedom through sobriety
- gratitude
- higher power
- honesty
- humility
- making amends
- resentments
- sponsorship
- surrender
- the tools of recovery
- tolerance
- willingness

2. *Speaker*. One or more members selected beforehand "share," as described in the Big Book, telling what they were like, what happened and what they are like now.

Depending upon the group conscience for general guidelines, some groups prefer that members who speak have a minimum period of continuous sobriety. Speaker meetings often are "open" meetings.

3. *Beginners*. Usually led by a group member who has been sober awhile, these are often question-and-answer sessions to help newcomers. Beginners' meetings may also follow a discussion format, or focus on Steps One, Two, and Three.

(A Guide for Leading Beginners Meetings is available from G.S.O.)

4. *Step, Tradition or Big Book*. Because the Twelve Steps are the foundation of personal recovery in A.A., many groups devote one or more meetings a week to the study of each Step in rotation; some discuss two or three Steps at a time. These same formats may be applied to group meetings on the Big Book or the Twelve Traditions. Many groups make it a practice to read aloud pertinent material from the Big Book or *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* at the beginning of the meeting.

In addition to the meetings described above, groups also hold the following kinds of meetings:

*Business*. Some groups schedule special sessions throughout the year, apart from regular meetings, for reports from group officers to discuss group affairs and obtain group guidance. Group officers usually are elected at such meetings. (See section on Business Meetings, p. 28.)

*Group Inventory*. These are meetings at which members work toward understanding how well the group is fulfilling its primary purpose. (See section on Group Inventory, p. 27.)

*Service.* These are general information meetings about service; they may also function as a forum for delegate reports or other communications.

*A.A. Grapevine/La Viña.* These are meetings where A.A. topics from the A.A. Grapevine or La Viña may be discussed.

### ***Suggested A.A. Meeting Procedures***

No one type or format is the best for an A.A. meeting, but some work better than others.

The chairperson usually opens the meeting with the A.A. Preamble and a few remarks. Some call for a moment of silence and/or recite the Serenity Prayer. Others have a reading from the Big Book—frequently a portion of Chapter 5 ("How It Works") or Chapter 3 ("More About Alcoholism"). At many group meetings, a chapter, or a part of a chapter, from *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* is read aloud. Having different members or visiting A.A.s do the reading helps newcomers especially to feel they are sharing in group life.

The chairperson may stress the importance of preserving the anonymity of A.A. members outside the meeting room and further caution attendees to "leave any confidences you hear in these rooms behind when you go." (Wallet cards and a display placard on the subject, as well as the pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity" are available from G.S.O.)

Many meetings close with members joining in a moment of silence followed by a prayer, or perhaps by reciting the Responsibility Declaration or other A.A. text.

### ***The A.A. Home Group***

Traditionally, most A.A. members through the years have found it important to belong to one group which they call their "Home Group." This is the group where they accept service responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. And although all A.A. members are usually welcome at all groups and feel at home at any of these meetings, the concept of the "Home Group" has still remained the strongest bond between the A.A. member and the Fellowship.

With membership comes the right to vote upon issues that might affect the group and might also affect A.A. as a whole—a process that forms the very cornerstone of A.A.'s service structure. As with all group-conscience matters, each A.A. member has one vote; and this, ideally, is voiced through the home group.

Over the years, the very essence of A.A. strength has remained with our home group, which, for many members, becomes our extended family. Once isolated by our drinking, we find in the home group a solid,

continuing support system, friends and, very often, a sponsor. We also learn firsthand, through the group's workings, how to place "principles before personalities" in the interest of carrying the A.A. message.

Talking about her own group, a member says: "Part of my commitment is to show up at my home-group meetings, greet newcomers at the door, and be available to them—not only for them but for me. My fellow group members are the people who know me, listen to me, and steer me straight when I am off in left field. They give me their experience, strength and A.A. love, enabling me to 'pass it on' to the alcoholic who still suffers."

### ***Self-support: The Seventh Tradition***

There are no dues or fees for membership in A.A., but we do have expenses such as rent, refreshments, A.A. Conference-approved literature, meeting lists and contributions to services provided by the local intergroup (central office), district and area, and the General Service Office of A.A. In keeping with the Seventh Tradition a group may "pass the basket" for contributions, and members are encouraged to participate.

### ***Coffee, Tea and Fellowship***

Many A.A. members report that their circle of A.A. friends has widened greatly as the result of coffee and conversation before and after meetings.

Most groups depend upon their members to prepare for each meeting, serve the refreshments, and clean up afterward. You often hear A.A. members say that they first felt "like members" when they began making coffee, helping with the chairs, or cleaning the coffeepot. Some newcomers find that such activity relieves their shyness and makes it easier to meet and talk to other members.



## **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 coffeepot; 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 registered. Each new group receives a complimentary handbook and a small supply of literature at no charge when it registers 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 downloaded from our website ([www.aa.org](http://www.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, 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/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

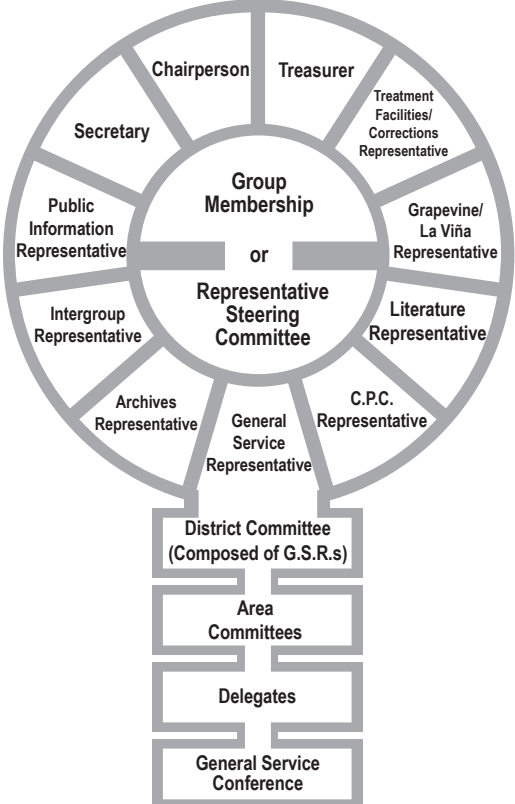
never be "organized." However, without endangering our commitment to preserve our spiritual and democratic Fellowship, we can "create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve." (Tradition Nine) In A.A. groups, these trusted servants are sometimes called "officers" and usually 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 below shows possibilities for service at the group level.

**SERVICE STRUCTURE INSIDE THE A.A. GROUP**



Some groups have positions that do not appear on this chart, such as greeter, archivist, special needs 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 \$3,000 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 p. 30).

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, The A.A. Grapevine, and its bi-monthly 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, Rm. 1040, New York, NY 10115, or e-mail [gvrca@agrapevine.org](mailto:gvrca@agrapevine.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 register online at the Grapevine website: [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org). Make out magazine subscription checks 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 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, intergroup, 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."



## **The A.A. Group's Relations With Others In The Community**

Tradition Eleven: *Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.*

### ***How Service Committee Representatives Serve A.A.***

A.A. service committees, composed mainly of representatives, or liaisons, from area groups, shoulder major responsibility for carrying the A.A. message into the community and around the world (see *The A.A. Service Manual*). Each of these committees may serve as a resource for the community through our Sixth Tradition of cooperation but not affiliation.

To assist service committees in their local efforts, their counterparts at A.A. World Services—the trustees' and General Service Conference committees—offer suggested guidelines to local committees when asked, with the help of the General Service Office.

### ***Corrections Committee Liaison***

Group Corrections representatives take part in local intergroup (central office), district or area Corrections committee meetings. They keep their home groups informed about local Twelfth-Step activities in nearby institutions and encourage group members to participate.

Corrections representatives, known in some areas as Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) representatives, take A.A. meetings into prisons and jails, where allowed by the correctional facility, to help alcoholic inmates recover and prepare for sober, fulfilling lives after release. As part of the temporary contact program known in some areas as Bridging the Gap, they may also serve as correspondents and as A.A. contacts when the inmates are released. The pamphlet "A.A. in Correctional Facilities" and the *Corrections Workbook* can be of help to A.A.s in corrections service work.

### ***Treatment Facilities Committee Liaison***

Some groups have treatment facilities (T.F.) representatives who serve as the group liaison with the local intergroup (central office), district or area treatment facilities committee. They share this vital service work with home group members and encourage them to join in this responsibility.

Members of the T.F. committee, known in some areas as Hospitals and Institutions (H&I) representatives, work to help hospital and treatment center staffs better understand A.A., and to take the A.A. tools of recovery to alcoholics in treatment. As part of the Bridging the Gap program (Temporary Contact) T.F. committee members also may act as contacts when alcoholic patients are discharged.

The pamphlet "A.A. in Treatment Facilities" and the *Treatment Facilities Workbook* can be of help to A.A.s in T.F. service work.

### ***Public Information Committee Liaison***

Group Public Information representatives (P.I.) usually work with the local intergroup (central office), district or area P.I. committee to carry the A.A. message locally. They periodically inform their home groups of local activity and may arrange for group volunteers to participate in P.I. programs requested by schools, businesses, law-enforcement agencies and other organizations interested in the A.A. approach to recovery from alcoholism.

Most groups realize that alcoholics can't come to A.A. for help unless they know where we are. Using many suggested methods ranging from personal contact to public service announcements on radio and TV, groups and their members reach out, working within the framework of Tradition Eleven. Sometimes a small sign saying "A.A. meeting tonight" outside the meeting-place door points the way. And from A.A.'s earliest days, radio announcements and small newspaper announcements of A.A. meetings have been used to attract alcoholics in need of help.

*The Public Information Workbook* offers suggested guidelines in furthering this vital group-service activity.

### ***Cooperation With The Professional Community Committee Liaison***

Group Cooperation with the Professional Community (C.P.C.) representatives, usually working with their local intergroup (central office), district or area C.P.C. committees, focus on cooperation but not affiliation with professionals in the community—educators, physicians, the clergy, court officials and others who often are in contact with active alcoholics. They keep their home groups informed of area C.P.C. activities

and, when appropriate, arrange for group volunteers to join together in carrying the A.A. message at professional meetings, seminars, and more. (In some groups, the functions of the C.P.C. and Public Information representatives are combined.)

The C.P.C. Workbook and the pamphlets "If You Are a Professional, Alcoholics Anonymous Wants to Work with You," "Members of the Clergy Ask About A.A.," and other pertinent literature can be of assistance to C.P.C. representatives in reaching out to professionals.

### ***Special Needs Committee Liaison***

The special needs representative may coordinate any needed assistance to those with special needs within their home group. Many special needs representatives find it beneficial to communicate with their intergroup (central office) when trying to reach those with special needs. Some areas or districts have special needs committees.

While there are no special A.A. members, many members have special needs. A.A.s who are blind or visually impaired may need help with transportation to a meeting. A deaf or hearing-impaired member may need a sign language interpreter, or special listening device, in order to hear what is being shared. A.A.s with special needs may also include those who are homebound, those who require a meeting with wheelchair access, or those who are unable to read. Conference-approved literature and other service material is available in various formats to accommodate those with special needs, such as Braille, large print, American Sign Language, or the spoken word on audiotape or compact disk. The service piece, "Serving Alcoholics with Special Needs" and the A.A. guidelines "Carry the A.A. Message to the Deaf Alcoholic" can provide direction and guidance for those interested in working with A.A.s with special needs.

## **Principles Before Personalities**

Tradition Two: *For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.*

### ***The Principle of Rotation***

Traditionally, rotation ensures that group tasks, like nearly everything else in A.A., are passed around for all to share. Many groups have alternates to each trusted servant who can step into the service positions if needed.

To step out of an A.A. office you love can be hard. If you have been doing a good job, if you honestly don't see anyone else around willing, qualified, or with the time to do it, and if your friends agree, it's especially tough. But it can be a real step forward in growth—a step into the humility that is, for some people, the spiritual essence of anonymity.

Among other things, anonymity in the Fellowship means that we forgo personal prestige for any A.A. work we do to help alcoholics. And, in the spirit of Tradition Twelve, it ever reminds us "to place principles before personalities."

Many outgoing service position holders find it rewarding to take time to share their experience with the incoming person. Rotation helps to bring us spiritual rewards far more enduring than any fame. With no A.A. "status" at stake, we needn't compete for titles or praise—we have complete freedom to serve as we are needed.

### ***What is an Informed A.A. Group Conscience?***

The group conscience is the collective conscience of the group membership and thus represents substantial unanimity on an issue before definitive action is taken. This is achieved by the group members through the sharing of full information, individual points of view, and the practice of A.A. principles. To be fully informed requires a willingness to listen to minority opinions with an open mind.

On sensitive issues, the group works slowly—discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles before personalities, the membership is wary of dominant opinions. Its voice is heard when a well-informed

group arrives at a decision. The result rests on more than a "yes" or "no" count—precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience. The term "informed group conscience" implies that pertinent information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes.

### ***A.A. Group Inventory***

Many groups periodically hold a "group inventory meeting" to evaluate how well they are fulfilling their primary purpose: to help alcoholics recover through A.A.'s suggested Twelve Steps of recovery. Some groups take inventory by examining our Twelve Traditions, one at a time, to determine how well they are living up to these principles.

The following questions, compiled from A.A. shared experience, may be useful in arriving at an informed group conscience. Groups will probably wish to add questions of their own:

1. What is the basic purpose of our group?
2. What more can our group do to carry the message?
3. Is our group attracting alcoholics from different backgrounds? Are we seeing a good cross-section of our community, including those with special needs?
4. Do new members stick with us, or does the turnover seem excessive? If so, why? What can we as a group do to retain members?
5. Do we emphasize the importance of sponsorship? How effectively? How can we do it better?
6. Are we careful to preserve the anonymity of our group members and other A.A.s outside the meeting rooms? Do we also leave what they share at meetings behind?
7. Does our group emphasize to all members the value of keeping up with the kitchen, set-up, clean-up and other housekeeping chores that are essential for our Twelfth Step efforts?
8. Are all members given the opportunity to speak at meetings and to participate in other group activities?
9. Mindful that holding office is a great responsibility not to be viewed as the outcome of a popularity contest, are we choosing our officers with care?
10. Are we doing all we can to provide an attractive and accessible meeting place?
11. Does our group do its fair share toward participating in the purpose of A.A.—as it relates to our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity, and Service?
12. What has our group done lately to bring the A.A. message to the attention of professionals in the community—the physicians, clergy, court officials,

educators, and others who are often the first to see alcoholics in need of help?

13. How is our group fulfilling its responsibility to the Seventh Tradition?

### ***A.A. Business Meetings***

In most groups, the chairperson or another officer calls the business meeting, which ordinarily is held on a monthly or quarterly basis.

While some groups may occasionally permit nonmembers to attend, the group may request that only home group members participate or vote. The order of business may include: electing new officers; scheduling meetings; receiving and discussing the treasurer's periodic financial reports; hearing progress reports from the general service representative and other group servants; and apportioning excess funds among the local intergroup, G.S.O. and the area and district treasuries.

Before a vote is taken, it is essential that the members be given all facts relevant to the subject at hand. In many cases, a few members may be asked to look into the pros and cons of the issue and present them at the meeting. Arriving at an informed group conscience in big matters or small is a process that may take some time. But it is important that the minority, or dissenting, views be heard along with those of the majority. In some instances, they may even turn the tide.

Business meetings generally are scheduled before or after the group's regular meeting. They tend to be informal, but custom varies from group to group. Some groups have tried observing Robert's Rules of Order, a parliamentary procedure for running smooth meetings, only to find that many members are inexperienced in the procedures and feel too intimidated to speak up. Besides, there is the spiritual nature of our Fellowship, embodied in our Traditions and Concepts, which give ample guidance.

### ***About Those A.A. Group Problems...***

Group problems are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among the group members. They give us a chance, in the words of Step Twelve, to "practice these principles in all our affairs."

Group problems may include such common A.A. questions as: What should the group do about members who return to drinking? How can we boost lagging attendance at meetings? How can we get more people to help with group chores? What can we do about one member's anonymity break, or another's attempts to attract the romantic interest of

newcomers? How can we get out from under those old-timers who insist they know what's best for the group? And how can we get more of the old-timers to share their experience in resolving group dilemmas?

Almost every group problem can be solved through the process of an informed group conscience, A.A. principles, and our Twelve Traditions. Some groups find that their G.S.R. or D.C.M. can be helpful. For all involved, a good sense of humor, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and to wait—plus a sense of fairness and trust in a "Power greater than ourselves"—have been found far more effective than legalistic arguments or personal accusations.

## How the A.A. Group Relates To A.A. as a Whole

Tradition One: *Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.*

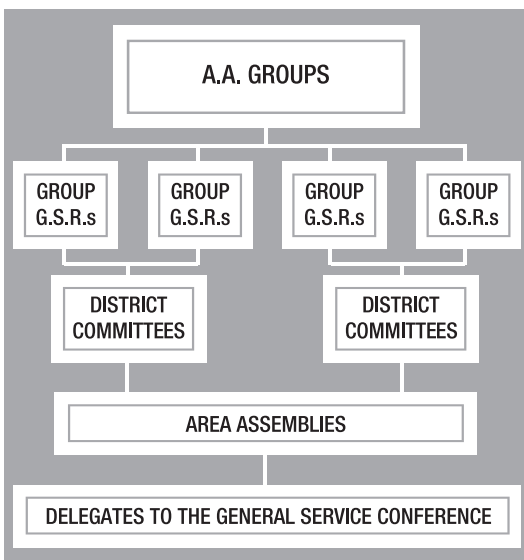
### ***What is the General Service Office?***

The General Service Office is a repository for A.A.'s shared experience. It fulfills our primary purpose by: (1) providing service, information and experience to groups worldwide; (2) publishing literature; (3) supporting the activities of the General Service Board of A.A.; and (4) carrying forward recommendations of the General Service Conference.

G.S.O.'s history dates back to 1938, when the about-to-be-published book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, provided a name for the small society known only as the Alcoholic Foundation. The Foundation's rapidly expanding office soon served as the focal point for questions about A.A. from around the world, and in time became the General Service Office as we know it today.

The former Alcoholic Foundation is now called the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. Its trustees, alcoholic and nonalcoholic alike, and directors are entrusted with the supervision of the two service agencies—Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc.—and are the custodians of funds contributed by the groups.

### **HOW THE A.A. GROUP FITS INTO THE STRUCTURE OF THE FELLOWSHIP (United States & Canada)**





## ***What Gets Done At Your General Service Office?***

Working closely with committees of A.A.'s General Service Board, your General Service Office has broad responsibilities to its member groups. They include the following:

1. Collect, organize and pass along to A.A. groups and members throughout the U.S. and Canada the shared experiences on group challenges and solutions, when asked.
2. Work with alcoholics overseas, as well as Loners (A.A.s living in areas with no meetings); Homers (housebound or disabled members); Internationalists (seagoing A.A.s); A.A.s in the armed forces; and A.A.s in treatment and correctional facilities.
3. Answer numerous letters requesting information about A.A. and the help it provides for alcoholics.
4. Publish the A.A. newsletter, *Box 4-5-9*, and other bulletins.
5. Distribute A.A. books and pamphlets approved by the General Service Conference and published by A.A. World Services (see list on inside back cover).
6. Provide complimentary literature and a Group Handbook to each new group that registers with G.S.O.
7. Coordinate and support the work of our General Service Conference committees.
8. Publish group Directories to help A.A. groups and individuals with Twelfth Step work.
9. Disseminate public information at the national and international levels for A.A. as a whole—cooperating with the print and electronic media as well as with organizations concerned with the treatment of alcoholism.
10. Produce and distribute audiovisual materials.
11. Maintain A.A. Archives.
12. Maintain the General Service Office website.

## ***Who is in Charge at G.S.O.?***

No one person or group of persons is "in charge," although the general manager carries out primary responsibility for day-to-day operations and is assisted by other administrative officers and the General Service Office staff. Staff members at each service desk are themselves recovering alcoholics. Other employees may or may not be recovering alcoholics.

## ***Who is in Charge at the A.A. Grapevine?***

At the Grapevine, the executive editor oversees the publication of the magazine, circulation, customer service, and the day-to-day operation of the office.

### ***How Decisions Affecting A.A. Are Made***

The trustees of the General Service Board (14 alcoholics and 7 nonalcoholics) are responsible to A.A. groups through the General Service Conference. Annually, groups from the U.S. and Canada elect delegates (serving two-year terms) from their areas to the yearly meeting of the Conference in New York—to hear the reports of the board's committees, G.S.O. and Grapevine staffs, and to recommend future directions, mainly in the form of Advisory Actions. It is the responsibility of the Conference to work toward a consensus, or informed group conscience, on matters vital to A.A. as a whole. The Conference delegates report back to the groups in their areas.

Each area committee is responsible to—and is chosen by—an assembly of the groups' general service representatives (G.S.R.s—see p. 20).

Essential links between G.S.R.s and area delegates to the General Service Conference are the district committee members (D.C.M.s) and their alternates, who are generally elected at the same time. As trusted servants of the district committees, composed of all the G.S.R.s in that district, the D.C.M.s are exposed to the entire group conscience of their districts. As members of the area committees, they are able to share this group conscience with the area delegate and committees.

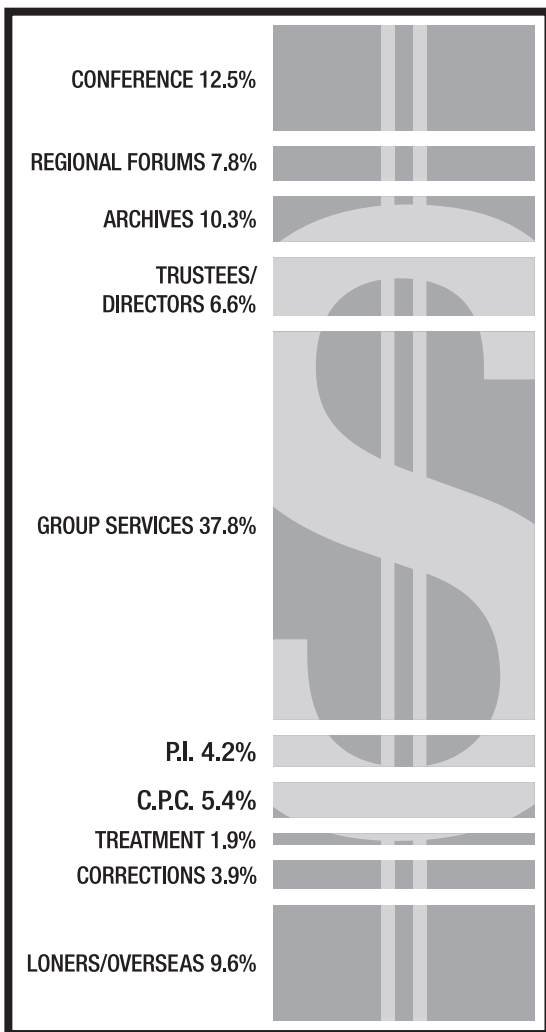
Were it not for the link provided by D.C.M.s in communicating with new groups as A.A. expands, the General Service Conference might soon become unwieldy. As the number of A.A. groups climbs, more districts may be added. For more information, see *The A.A. Service Manual*.

### ***How Are A.A. World Services Supported?***

Like the expenses of other A.A. activities, those of the General Service Office are met generally by group and individual contributions. Since these contributions do not completely cover the cost of A.A.'s world services, publishing income is used to help offset the deficit.

For ways your group can give support, read the suggestions on p. 33.

## YOUR A.A. DOLLAR: THE SERVICES IT PAYS FOR



### ***How Can A.A. Groups Help G.S.O.?***

The final responsibility for, and the benefits of, what gets done by G.S.O. depends very much on each and every group.

If groups want A.A. to be available to the newcomer today and in the future, their participation in the work of G.S.O. is needed. Here are a few of the things groups can do to help:

1. Stay informed about what goes on at G.S.O., because your group may be affected. And ask questions. The more you know about A.A., the more useful you can be in carrying the message.
2. Choose a qualified general service representative. The G.S.R. acts as the important liaison between the group and A.A. as a whole —carrying the group's voice to the general service structure, and

reporting news of the greater Fellowship back to the home group.

3. It is important to inform G.S.O. of any group changes—such as information concerning a new G.S.R. or a change in address or group name. This is the only way to keep information coming to your group without interruption.

Once your group service number has been assigned by G.S.O., it should be used on all communications from your group to G.S.O., to ensure faster processing and greater accuracy.

G.S.O. furnishes a form specifically for the purpose of recording changes in existing group information ("For Use in Changing Group Information"—not to be confused with the "New Group Form" for startup groups— see p. 15). You can request the form by mail at: Group Services, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; or download the form from our website at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

### ***What is Available from Your G.S.O.?***

The General Service Office makes available a storehouse of service material to assist groups with nearly every phase of A.A. life.

Unlike A.A. Conference-approved books, pamphlets and audiovisual materials, which are produced as the result of General Service Conference Advisory Actions, service material is created in response to members' expressed needs for clear, concise, experiential information on subjects ranging from the A.A. Birthday Plan and Shared Experience on Self-Support to a map of A.A. regions in the U.S. and Canada.

Other service pieces provide information on such frequently asked questions as: What is the origin of the Serenity Prayer? What is an A.A. group? How is the Fellowship structured? How is a sharing session conducted? Why is sponsorship important? Included in each piece are some suggested topics for discussion meetings.

G.S.O. also offers suggested A.A. Guidelines sharing experience on many topics of concern to members, groups and committees. Some topics these Guidelines cover include:

- Carrying the A.A. Message to the Deaf Alcoholic
- Serving Alcoholics With Special Needs
- Central or Intergroup Offices
- A.A. Answering Services
- Clubs
- Relationship Between A.A. and Al-Anon
- Cooperating with Court, D.W.I., and Similar Programs
- Literature Committees

- Corrections Committees
- Treatment Facility Committees
- Public Information Committees
- Cooperation With the Professional Community Committees

Some of the more frequently requested service pieces have been printed in large type to accommodate the visually impaired. Others, including a number of the Guidelines, are available in French and Spanish.

For a listing of all service pieces available, write: the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; or find the listing on the website at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org).

### ***What is an Intergroup (Central Office)? How Does It Function?***

Your intergroup, or central office, is often where the still-suffering alcoholic first calls or shows up for A.A. help.

Although local intergroups operate independently of A.A.'s worldwide service structure, they are a vital part of the Fellowship. In most areas, any group that so wishes can belong to the local intergroup, which is supported by contributions from its member groups. These contributions are purely voluntary.

In areas where it may not be practical to open a service office as such, groups sometimes set up joint committees for their Twelfth-Step efforts and activities, and use a carefully briefed central telephone answering service to take calls. Due to workload, a local service system of this type seems to work better if it is handled separately from the work of the area general service committee.

Most intergroups function with only one or two paid workers (some have none) and so rely heavily on A.A. volunteers for help. Many A.A.s have found that serving at intergroup—answering calls from alcoholics and doing what else needs to be done—greatly enriches their sobriety and broadens their circle of friends.

### ***What Does an Intergroup (Central Office) Do?***

An Intergroup or Central office is a vital A.A. service office that represents a partnership among groups in a community – just as A.A. groups themselves are a partnership of individuals. These offices are established to carry out common functions that are best handled by a centralized office, and it is usually maintained, supervised, and supported by these groups for their common interest. The office exists to aid the groups in carrying the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Methods and goals vary from one area to another, but generally the intergroup

or central office responsibility is to:

1. Respond to phone or walk-in requests for help from alcoholics and, when appropriate, arrange for A.A. volunteers (listed with the office) to meet with and accompany them to an A.A. meeting.
2. Maintain A.A. listings in local phone directories, handle phone and mail inquiries, and route them to local groups, thus distributing Twelfth-Step work on a geographical basis so that newcomers are assured of help.
3. Distribute up-to-date meeting lists.
4. Stock and sell A.A. literature.
5. Serve as a communications center for participating groups—often issuing regular newsletters or bulletins to keep groups informed about one another.
6. Arrange systems for groups to exchange speakers.
7. Coordinate the efforts of intergroup committees.
8. Sometimes provide information on treatment facilities, hospitals and halfway houses.
9. Through P.I. and C.P.C. committees, handle requests for information about A.A. from local news media,  
arrange local radio or TV programs about A.A., and furnish speakers for schools and non-A.A. organizations.
10. Cooperate with local, district and area committees. (Some intergroups elect members to serve as area liaisons and welcome their participation in intergroup meetings.)
11. Maintain communication and cooperation— but not affiliation—with the community and helping-professionals in the field of alcoholism.

## **What A.A. Does *Not* Do**

*Tradition Ten: Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*

1. Recruit members or furnish initial motivation for alcoholics to recover.
2. Keep membership records or case histories.
3. Follow up or try to control its members.
4. Make medical or psychological diagnoses or prognoses.
5. Provide hospitalization, drugs, or medical or psychiatric treatment.
6. Provide housing, food, clothing, jobs, money or other such services.
7. Provide domestic or vocational counseling.
8. Engage in or sponsor research.
9. Affiliate with social agencies (though many members and service offices do cooperate with them).
10. Offer religious services.
11. Engage in any controversy about alcohol or other matters.
12. Accept money for its services or contributions from non-A.A. sources.
13. Provide letters of reference to parole boards, attorneys, court officials, schools, businesses, social agencies, or any other organization or institution.

## **A.A. and Alcoholism**

*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.*

### ***Cooperation but not Affiliation***

Alcoholics Anonymous is a worldwide fellowship of alcoholics who help each other to stay sober and who offer to share their recovery experience freely with others who may have a drinking problem. A.A. members are distinctive in their acceptance of a suggested program of Twelve Steps designed for personal recovery from alcoholism.

The Fellowship functions through more than 61,000 local groups in the U.S. and Canada and there is A.A. activity in more than 180 countries. It is estimated that there are now more than 2,000,000 members.

A.A. is concerned solely with the personal recovery and continuing sobriety of individual alcoholics who turn to the Fellowship for help. A.A. does not engage in the field of alcoholism research, medical

or psychiatric treatment, education, or propaganda in any form, although members may participate in such activities as individuals.

A.A. has adopted a policy of cooperation but not affiliation with other organizations concerned with the treatment of alcoholism.

Traditionally, Alcoholics Anonymous does not accept nor seek financial support from outside sources, and members preserve personal anonymity at the level of press, television, radio, the Internet and films.

### ***A.A. and Other Organizations***

A.A. is not affiliated with any other organization or institution. Our Traditions encourage cooperation but not affiliation.

## **More Questions and Answers About A.A.**

### ***What are the Three Legacies of A.A.?***

Recovery, Unity, and Service. These are derived from the accumulated experience of A.A.'s earliest members that has been passed on and shared with us: the suggestions for Recovery are the Twelve Steps; the suggestions for achieving Unity are the Twelve Traditions; and A.A. Service is described in *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, and *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

### ***Who Runs Clubhouses for A.A.s?***

Owning and managing real estate are not a part of the functions of an A.A. group or of combined groups. So, technically, there is no such thing as an "A.A. club."

However, some members—acting as private individuals, not as A.A. members—have formed nonprofit corporations—entirely separate and apart from their A.A. groups—to maintain clubs for A.A. members and groups, who usually pay rent to the club.

To avoid problems of money, property, and prestige, most groups have learned to stick to their primary purpose and leave club-running to separate corporations outside A.A. itself. For that reason, the General Service Office does not accept contributions from clubs. Of course, G.S.O. does accept contributions directly from groups that rent meeting space in clubs. (For more information, see "A.A. Guidelines on Clubs.")

### ***Who Runs Halfway Houses and Other Treatment Facilities?***

A.A. does not provide medical and social services. As a Fellowship, we are not qualified to render such aid.

However, many A.A. members serve as valuable employees in hospitals and treatment facilities. There



is no such thing as an "A.A. hospital" or an "A.A. halfway house"—although A.A. meetings and fellowship, sponsored by A.A. members, are available at many of these facilities.

In accordance with Tradition Six, A.A. members and groups make certain that neither the name of the institution nor its promotional literature or letterheads bear the A.A. name. Neither should any other name (such as "Twelfth-Step House") be used that erroneously implies endorsement by A.A.

### ***What Types of A.A. Meetings***

#### ***Are Held in Treatment Facilities?***

Regular A.A. Group Meetings: Some A.A. groups rent space in treatment facilities. These meetings have the advantage of making the meeting more accessible to clients in the facility.

Treatment Facility A.A. meetings: Attendance is primarily limited to clients in the facility and A.A.s on a treatment facilities committee who chair the meeting and arrange for outside A.A. speakers.

## THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. 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.
7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

### THE LONG FORM

*Our A.A. experience has taught us that:*

1. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. A.A. must continue to live or most of us will surely die. Hence our common welfare comes first. But individual welfare follows close afterward.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience.
3. Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.
4. With respect to its own affairs, each A.A. group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighboring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect A.A. as a whole without conferring with the trustees of the General Service Board. On such issues our common welfare is paramount.
5. Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity *having but one primary purpose*—that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.
6. Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A.—and medically supervised. While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such

cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An A.A. group can bind itself to no one.

7. The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members. We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligations whatever, is unwise. Then, too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.
8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional. We define professionalism as the occupation of counseling alcoholics for fees or hire. But we may employ alcoholics where they are going to perform those services for which we might otherwise have to engage nonalcoholics. Such special services may be well recompensed. But our usual A.A. Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.
9. Each A.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best. The small group may elect its secretary, the large group its rotating committee, and the groups of a large metropolitan area their central or intergroup committee, which often employs a full-time secretary. The trustees of the General Service Board are, in effect, our A.A. General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our A.A. Tradition and the receivers of voluntary A.A. contributions by which we maintain our A.A. General Service Office at New York. They are authorized by the groups to handle our overall public relations and they guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the A.A. Grapevine. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in A.A. are but trusted and experienced servants of the whole. They derive no real authority from their titles; they do not govern. Universal respect is the key to their usefulness.
10. No A.A. group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate A.A., express any opinion on outside controversial issues—particularly those of politics, alcohol reform, or sectarian religion. The Alcoholics Anonymous groups

oppose no one. Concerning such matters they can express no views whatever.

11. Our relations with the general public should be characterized by personal anonymity. We think A.A. ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed. Our public relations should be guided by the principle of attraction rather than promotion. There is never need to praise ourselves. We feel it better to let our friends recommend us.
12. And finally, we of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility. This to the end that our great blessings may never spoil us; that we shall forever live in thankful contemplation of Him who presides over us all.

## THE TWELVE CONCEPTS FOR WORLD SERVICE

1. The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.
2. When, in 1955, the A.A. groups confirmed the permanent charter for their General Service Conference, they thereby delegated to the Conference complete authority for the active maintenance of our world services and thereby made the Conference—excepting for any change in the Twelve Traditions or in Article 12 of the Conference Charter—the actual voice and the effective conscience for our whole Society.
3. As a traditional means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relation between the groups, the Conference, the A.A. General Service Board and its several service corporations, staffs, committees, and executives, and of thus insuring their effective leadership, it is here suggested that we endow each of these elements of world service with a traditional "Right of Decision."
4. Throughout our Conference structure, we ought to maintain at all responsible levels a traditional "Right of Participation," taking care that each classification or group of our world servants shall be allowed a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge.
5. Throughout our world service structure, a traditional "Right of Appeal" ought to prevail, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of personal grievances will be carefully considered.
6. On behalf of A.A. as a whole, our General Service Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters should be exercised primarily by the trustee members of the Conference when they act among themselves as the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.
7. The Conference recognizes that the Charter and the Bylaws of the General Service Board are legal instruments: that the trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is further understood that the Conference Charter itself is not a legal document: that it relies instead upon the force of tradition and the power of the

- A.A. pursue for its final effectiveness.
8. The trustees of the General Service Board act in two primary capacities: (a) With respect to the larger matters of overall policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs. (b) But with respect to our separately incorporated and constantly active services, the relation of the trustees is mainly that of full stock ownership and of custodial oversight which they exercise through their ability to elect all directors of these entities.
  9. Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are at all levels indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership once exercised by the founders of A.A. must necessarily be assumed by the trustees of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.
  10. Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority—the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description, or by appropriate charters and bylaws.
  11. While the trustees hold final responsibility for A.A.'s world service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate service directors, executives, staffs, and consultants. Therefore, the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs, and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.
  12. General Warranties of the Conference: In all its proceedings, the General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the A.A. Tradition, taking great care that the Conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, wherever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that, though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous,



it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

Note: *The A.A. General Service Conference has recommended that the "long form" of the Concepts be studied in detail. Twelve Concepts for World Service, in which A.A. co-founder Bill W. closely examines all these principles of A.A. service, may be ordered from G.S.O.*



**A.A. PUBLICATIONS** Complete order forms available from General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

**BOOKS**

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ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged pocket editions*)  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE  
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CAME TO BELIEVE  
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44 QUESTIONS  
A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED  
MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.  
THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.  
ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR  
THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY  
IS A.A. FOR YOU?  
IS A.A. FOR ME?  
THIS IS A.A.  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?  
DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?  
A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC  
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP  
A.A. FOR THE WOMAN  
A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN  
A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC  
A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE  
THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE  
YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.  
A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES  
THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS  
IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?  
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G.S.R.  
MEMO TO AN INMATE  
THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED  
THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED  
LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS  
HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE  
A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES  
A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS  
A.A. IN TREATMENT FACILITIES  
BRIDGING THE GAP  
IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL  
A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY  
A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL  
UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY  
THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS  
A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.  
A NEWCOMER ASKS  
WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE  
(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)  
TOO YOUNG? (*A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers*)  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
(*An illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

**VIDEOS**

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A.A.—AN INSIDE VIEW  
A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE  
HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS  
IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL  
CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS  
YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,  
THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

**PERIODICALS**

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THE A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)  
LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

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.