

THE AUSTRALIAN AA GROUP HANDBOOK



This is AA Conference Approved Literature



The Australian

AA Group Handbook

The AA group...where it all begins

How a group functions

How to get started

Alcoholics Anonymous® is a fellowship of people 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 AA membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.

AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organisation 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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About this booklet

This handbook is a suggested guide for setting up and running an AA group. More detailed information is available in *The AA Service Manual*, the *Guidelines* and other AA literature, which cover group matters at greater depth.

In all matters, AA members can be guided by the Three Legacies of AA: recovery, unity and service.

- the suggestions for Recovery are the Twelve Steps;
- the suggestions for achieving Unity are the Twelve Traditions;
- Service is described in *The AA Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, and *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

If you have further questions, please contact the General Service Office of AA in Australia, which stands ready to help in every way it can.

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AA'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 AA 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 AA 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 AA, 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."

AA 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 AA? Anonymity at the level of the mass media (press, television, radio, film, and the Internet) stresses the equality in AA 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 AA 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 AA if they have any reason to believe their alcoholism may be exposed publicly.

For more information about this important Tradition, see the AA pamphlet *Understanding Anonymity*.

Contents

Introduction	8
The AA group—the final voice of the fellowship	8
The group: where AA's service structure begins ...	10
What is an AA group?	10
Is there a difference between a meeting and a group?	11
How do you become an AA group member?	11
The difference between open and closed AA meetings	11
What kinds of meetings do AA groups hold?	12
Suggested AA meeting procedures	13
The AA home group.....	15
Self-support: the Seventh Tradition	16
How an AA group functions	17
How to start a new AA group	17
Public liability insurance.....	17
Starting a group in a small town.....	18
Naming an AA group.....	19
Promoting AA events	20
What do AA group members do?	20
What trusted servants (officer bearers) do we need?.....	21
Service within the AA group.....	23
The secretary.....	23
The treasurer	25
The general service representative (GSR)	27
The literature co-ordinator.....	28
The Central service office (CSO or Intergroup) representative.....	28
The AA group's relations with others in the community	29
T&CF representative	30
PI&CPC representative.....	30
Special needs committee liaison	32

Principles before personalities	33
The principle of rotation	33
What is an informed AA group conscience?	33
What happens at a group conscience meeting?	34
AA group inventory	36
About those AA group problems... ..	37
Service Sponsorship.....	37
How an AA group relates to AA as a whole	40
How can AA groups play their part in the national structure?	40
How decisions affecting AA are made.....	41
What is the General Service Office?.....	41
Who is in charge General Service Office?	42
What is a central service office (CSO or intergroup)?.....	44
What AA doesn't do	46
The Twelve Traditions – the long form	47
The Twelve Concepts for World Service	51

Introduction

The AA group—the final voice of the fellowship

Alcoholics Anonymous has been called an "upside down" organisation because the ultimate responsibility and final authority for world services resides with the groups—rather than with our General Service Board or our General Service Office or the General Service Office in New York.

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

AA has no central authority; there is minimal organisation, 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."

AA 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 AA as a whole.

AA's essential group work is done by alcoholics who are themselves recovering in the fellowship, and each of

Concept I

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

us is entitled to do our AA 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 the ways of 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 AA will be there.

Most of us cannot recover unless there is a group. As Bill W. said, "Realization dawns on each member that he is but a small part of a great whole... He learns that the clamour 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 AA's service structure begins

What is an AA 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 AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."

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

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

Some AAs come together as specialised AA groups—for men, women, young people, doctors, members of the LGBTQIA+ community 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 AA group, they may call themselves an AA group.

Is there a difference between a meeting and a group?

Most AA members meet in AA groups as defined by the long form of our Third Tradition (see page 47). However, some AA members hold AA 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 AA groups generally continue to exist outside the prescribed meeting hours, ready to provide Twelfth Step help when needed.

Most groups have just the one meeting each week but many have more than one meeting a week. Some have meetings every day of the week.

AA groups are encouraged to register with General Service Office as well as with their local offices: area, district, or central service office.

How do you become an AA group member?

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

The difference between open and closed AA meetings

The purpose of all AA group meetings, as the Preamble states, is for AA 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, AA groups have both open and closed meetings. Closed meetings are for AA 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 AA's program of recovery from alcoholism. Non-alcoholics may attend open meetings as observers.

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

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

What kinds of meetings do AA groups hold?

"Each group should be autonomous," our Fourth Tradition says, "except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole." Consequently, each meeting held by our thousands of groups has its own character. No one type or format is the best for an AA meeting. Members can try out different formats and join or attend whatever type suits their needs.

The most common kinds of AA meetings are:

- *"ID" meetings.* In this type of meeting members identify as alcoholics and talk (share) for ten minutes or so about their experiences along the lines of "what we used to be like, what happened and what we are like now." It's common in Australian meetings for the secretary to appoint someone to act as chairperson for that meeting. The chairperson will call on individual members to speak or may invite anyone who wants to, to speak.
- *Step, Tradition or Big Book meetings.* Because the Twelve Steps are the foundation of personal recovery in AA, 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 *Alcoholics Anonymous*

("the Big Book") or *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* at the beginning of the meeting.

- *Discussion meetings.* These are for discussing particular topics and are often held sitting around a table. Topics are usually taken from AA literature, such as the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *As Bill Sees It*, and *Daily Reflections*. 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 and willingness.
- *Speaker meetings.* One or more members selected beforehand share their stories. Usually they will speak for 20-40 minutes. The rest of the meeting will be filled out with other members speaking for just a few minutes each.
- *Beginners meetings.* Usually led by a group member who has been sober a good while, 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 National Office)
- *Group conscience meetings.* These are meetings just for members of the group to discuss issues arising in the group: elect new office bearers, discuss money matters, go over problems between members, discuss changes in the meeting's format, etc. (See page 33 for more detail on this important subject.)

Suggested AA meeting procedures

The group secretary usually selects someone to chair each meeting. This could be a member of that group or someone from a different group. The secretary calls the meeting to order and then hands over to the chairperson. The chairperson often begins by reading

the AA Preamble. He or she might then make a few remarks, call for a moment of silence or get straight down to asking members to speak. During the meeting the chairperson usually reads a passage from the Big Book, usually a portion of Chapter 5, "How It Works".

The chairperson may stress the importance of preserving the anonymity of AA 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 General Service Office.) If AA members wish to use their full names when they introduce themselves that is their privilege. It is not an anonymity break to do so at a meeting. But members should never reveal the full name of any other member even at a meeting.

A group's customs can help it develop solidarity and can provide reassuring feeling of continuity. But just a little bit of ceremony seems to go a long, long way in AA. Variety and change can always bring a fresh look to the same principles.

Informed guest speakers, such as doctors, psychiatrists, members of the clergy, alcoholism counsellors, public officials, Al-Anon Family Groups and Alateen members, can be invited to speak as they often give helpful new insights and knowledge. Some groups like films and videos. Recordings of AA talks are sometimes played, especially in remote areas there may not be a big variety of speakers.

Many meetings close with members joining in a moment of silence, reciting the Serenity Prayer or some other prayer, or perhaps by reciting the Responsibility Declaration or other AA text.

The AA home group

Traditionally, most AA members through the years have found it valuable to belong to one group which they call their "home group." This is the group where they attend regularly, accept service responsibilities and sustain friendships. And although all AA members are 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 AA member and the fellowship.

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

Tradition Seven

Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Over the years, the very essence of AA 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 AA message.

Talking about her home 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 track. They give me their experience, strength and AA 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 AA, but we do have expenses such as rent, refreshments, AA Conference-approved literature, meeting lists and contributions to services provided by the local central service office, district and area, and the General Service Office of AA. In keeping with the Seventh Tradition a group may "pass the basket" for contributions, and members are encouraged to participate.

Many AA members report that their circle of AA friends has widened greatly in conversation over a tea or coffee 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 AA members say that they first felt "like members" when they began making coffee, helping with the chairs, or doing the washing up. Some newcomers find that such activity relieves their shyness and makes it easier to meet and talk to other members. Many members have said that they got sober at the end of a teatowel.

Safety in AA, What Can Groups and Members Do?

Groups and members can discuss the topic of safety within meetings to raise awareness in the Fellowship and seek through sponsorship, workshops and meetings, to create as safe an environment as possible for the newcomers, other members, observers, visiting members or potential members.

This can be the subject of discussion within a Group Conscience and sharing among groups at the District or Area Assembly level where GSR's can present their groups concerns.

Please refer to Guideline #38 in the The Australian AA Service Manual "The Guidelines" Section 14 for further suggestions.

How an AA group functions

How to start a new AA group

Reasons for starting a new group vary, but the ways to go about it are basically the same. For a new AA group to start up there should be a clear need expressed by at least two or three alcoholics. They will need to get the cooperation of other AA members, a meeting place; tea and coffee-making facilities AA literature and meeting lists; and other supplies.

Tradition Four

Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

Once the group is off to a good start, it would be helpful to announce its presence to neighbouring groups; your local central service office, if there is one; your district and area committees; and the General Service Office so it can be listed on the National AA Website. Groups don't have to

notify any other AA body but they find it's useful to attract more members.

Public liability insurance

Most groups find that the venue they use for their meetings will ask them to show that the group has public liability insurance. The General Service Office has taken out a policy which covers all AA groups in Australia. It covers the group's office holders against being sued if they were responsible for a personal injury that happened at a meeting. Groups should register with General Service Office so that, if a claim had to be made, it would be formally established that the group comes under the policy. Also, by registering, a group can be given a certificate of currency to show the landlord of the meeting premises that the group is covered under the policy.

To get a copy of the group registration form phone
General Service Office: gso@aa.org.au

Starting a group in a small town

Members in small towns may find it hard to get a meeting up and running so it can help to have a willingness to make oneself known to the community as an AA member. Many people will already be aware of your problem and will probably be only too glad to know of the possibility of recovery, if they are given adequate information about the AA program.

There should be no difficulty in letting key members of the community, such as doctors, social workers and law-enforcement officials, know of the availability of AA and our willingness to help any alcoholic who is willing to accept help. Of course, you can't disclose your identity to local newspapers, radios or TV stations. However in some cases useful media coverage can be gained by using a local identity who is willing to help. This could be the local mayor, a clergyman, etc.

You can run a small ad in a local newspaper giving details of meetings, get a listing in the local phone book, put notices up in shopping centre bulletin boards, etc.

Some groups in small towns get very few people at their meetings. Members may get a bit bored hearing the same stories over and over so here are some suggestions to keep the interest-level up:

- Have open meetings where the spouses of members may attend.
- Step meetings could be planned, rotating the study of each Step at the closed meeting until all twelve have been covered.
- If geographically feasible, exchange meetings could be planned with groups in nearby towns.

- If the group is too far away from other groups to allow for visiting groups and speakers, try for a meeting or two devoted to listening to good recordings of AA talks or AA films.
- Some closed meetings could be devoted to a study of portion of the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* or *As Bill See It*, asking each member of the group to take a turn as chairperson for the evening.
- As soon as a group has achieved a reasonable length of sobriety and solidity, a public meeting for the community might be planned, to which local dignitaries such as the mayor, police, doctors and members of the clergy would be invited to participate, along with one or two group members who would talk about their recovery in AA and AA's availability locally and worldwide.

Naming an AA group

Tradition Six

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

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

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

Therefore, an AA 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 AA group is not affiliated with

the hospital, church, prison, treatment facility, or whatever, but simply rents space there for meetings.

Our AA 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 AA directories. The use of the word "family" might also invite confusion with Al-Anon Family Groups, a fellowship entirely separate from AA

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

There has also been a recommendation by the AA General Service Conference that no AA group be named after any actual person, living or dead – whether or not they are or were AA members. That is one way we can "place principles before personalities."

Promoting AA events

While it is acceptable to promote activities originating from within AA, such as forums, workshops and rallies, it is contrary to the principles of Tradition 6 to promote activities originating from any ***outside enterprise***.

Members are free to choose whether or not to attend such non-AA events, but endorsing them within AA creates the false impression that they are AA events. Membership of AA does not entitle individual members or groups of members to promote their outside business enterprises within AA, even if the subject matter of their workshops, etc., may appear to be AA related.

What do AA group members do?

In short, when newcomers walk into our meeting rooms, we want AA to be there for them as it was for us—something we can do continuously only if we function as a group.

"I am responsible... when anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA always to be there. And for that I am responsible."

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 allocated according to the group conscience.
- AA Conference-approved literature is on hand.
- Lists of local group meetings are available.
- Refreshments are available.
- Information is given on where and when the meeting is held so newcomers and other members can find it.
- Calls for help are answered.
- Group problems are aired and resolved.
- Continuing contact is sustained with the rest of AA—through the general service structure (General Service Office, area, district, etc) or local central service office, as well as internationally, through the General Service Office in New York.

What trusted servants (officer bearers) do we need?

It takes member participation to ensure that group service work is done. Most of us agree that AA ought never be "organised." 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 AA groups, these trusted servants, or office bearers, are usually 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 AA members to be eligible for any position. The general guideline might be stable sobriety of six months to a year, or longer.

The group also determines how long a person should hold a position. Typically, a secretary rotates off after six

months or a year. The treasurer may be asked to hold the position for a longer period. Rotation is vitally important to ensure the benefits of holding a position are shared around and that no one gets entrenched in a position and causes resentment or exerts undue influence. Of course, some small groups may not have enough members to enjoy the benefits of regular rotation.

These service positions may have titles. But titles in AA do not bring authority or honour; 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. Rather, the group's welfare is of primary concern in choosing office bearers. At election time, a review of Traditions One and Two can be helpful.

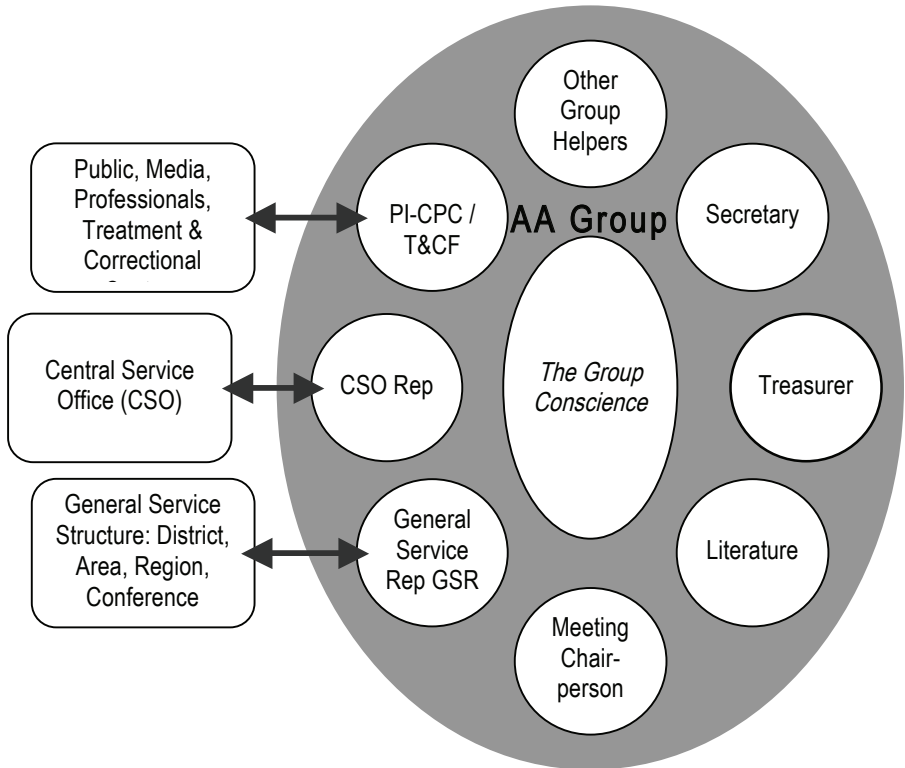
Individual groups have many ways of making sure that the necessary services are performed with a minimum of organisation. The diagram on page 23 shows possibilities for service at the group level.

Many very small groups don't have enough members – or a great need – for more than just a secretary but larger groups have found that filling several positions and following a sound structure leads to greater effectiveness in carrying the message.

Online AA Groups

There is little difference between regular and online AA groups. Online groups are guided by the same 12 Traditions (p. 47 of the AA Australian Group Handbook), conduct the same kinds of meetings (p. 12), are served by the same office bearers (p. 21), collect 7th Tradition contributions (p. 16), and have the same relationship with the General Service Structure (p. 40). Any differences that exist are due to the additional functionality that internet technologies afford.

Service within the AA group



Some groups have positions that do not appear in the diagram, such as greeter, archivist, special needs representative and liaison to a meeting facility. Following are the positions established by numerous groups in order to serve the group "at home" and in the community at large.

The secretary

Group secretaries serve for a specified period of time (usually six months or a year). Experience suggests that they should have been sober at least a year; and ideally, they have held other positions in the group first.

The secretary 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 secretary takes responsibility to ensure the meeting venue is opened on time, the chairs are set up, refreshments are ready and so on.

The more informed that secretaries—and other office bearers—are about AA, 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 AA group.

Secretaries need to be good all-round group servants. While each group has its own procedures, the secretary is generally expected to:

- Choose a member to chair each meeting. Sometimes the chairperson is a member of the group but often a member visiting from another group is chosen.
- Contact members about important AA activities and events.
- 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.
- Make certain that the General Service Office and other service bodies are informed, in writing, of any changes of address, meeting place or office bearers.
- 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 national and central service offices.

These chores are performed by various officers in some groups. But as we have mentioned before: it does

not seem to matter exactly which officers do which chores, as long as all the necessary jobs get done and it is understood who is to do what.

In small groups the secretary may take on the job of treasurer and literature co-ordinator but experience shows it is better to spread these positions around the other group members so that all group members get an opportunity to be of service and feel part of the group.

The treasurer

AA 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 area, district, General Service Office and central service office.

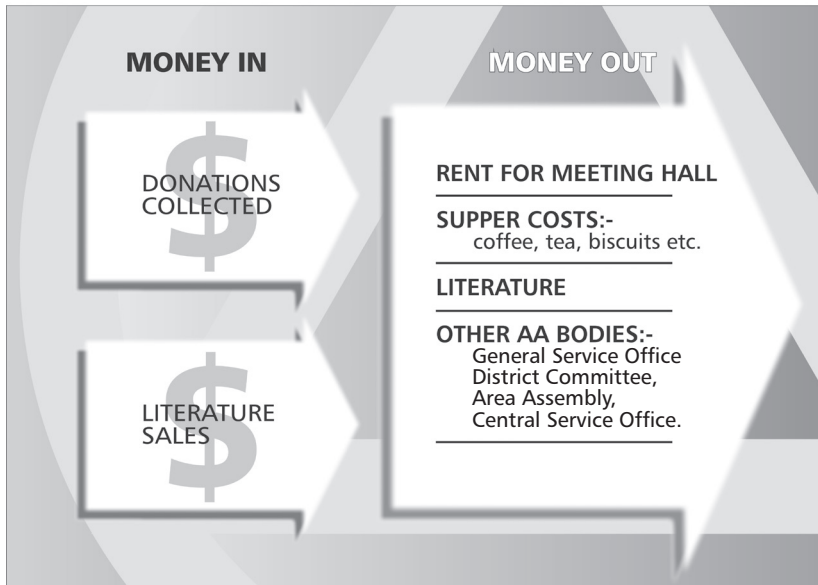
Group funds ordinarily are earmarked for such expenses as:

- Rent
- Refreshments such as tea coffee, biscuits, milk, etc.
- AA literature. Groups sell books, CDs and other literature but often give away the pamphlets.
- Support of all AA service bodies, usually on a monthly or quarterly basis.

Treasurers generally maintain clear records (a ledger or spreadsheet is helpful). It is important to record how much money was collected at each meeting, how much was spent on refreshments and how much literature was sold. Treasurers are encouraged to inform members as to how their contributions are distributed, make periodic reports to the group, and give financial statements each quarter showing rent payments, literature purchases and distributions to other AA bodies.

Problems can be avoided by keeping group funds in a separate group bank account that requires two signatures on each cheque. The pamphlet *The AA Group Treasurer* offers many other helpful suggestions.

AA 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 pamphlets *Group Donations Plan* and *Self Support - Where Spirituality and Money Mix* make suggestions as to how groups can support AA services.

When the collection tins or baskets are handed out, it's a good idea to explain what the collection is for. If you list the specific ways the donations will be used to help the still-suffering alcoholic, you may find members are much more generous.

There is another issue involving money although it doesn't involve the group treasurer, donations other

than at the group level. General Service Office, area and sometimes district committees and central service offices accept contributions directly from individual AA members. AA members are free to contribute whatever they wish, within the limits set by AA service entities. The maximum a member can contribute to all AA bodies in any given year is decided at the General Service Conference and is raised in some years to allow for inflation. There is also a maximum bequest (amount that a member can leave in their will to be given after they die.) AA bodies can accept bequests only from AA members. The amount a member can bequeath is also decided by the General Service Conference.

Note: In 2016, the maximum total donation from any member in any given year was limited to \$15,000. The maximum bequest was limited to \$25,000.

Some members celebrate their AA 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 (one cent a day) for each year of sobriety). For additional information, talk to your general service representative or contact General Service Office.

The general service representative (GSR)

Working via the district and area committees, the GSR is the group's link with the General Service Conference, through which all Australian groups can share their experience and voice AA's collective conscience. Sometimes called "the guardians of the Traditions,"

GSRs become familiar with AA's Third Legacy—our spiritual responsibility to give service freely. Elected to serve two-year terms, they:

- Represent the group at area Assemblies and, if there is a local district, on the district committee as well.
- 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 *AA Around Australia*, which is General Service Office's primary tool for communicating with the fellowship.

GSRs 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 General Service Office.

An alternate GSR is elected at the same time in the event that the GSR is unable to attend an area or district meeting. Alternate GSRs should be encouraged to share the responsibilities of the GSR at the group, district and area levels. (See *The AA Service Manual*, Chapter 2, The Group and its GSR, for further information.)

The literature co-ordinator

The group's literature co-ordinator makes certain that a stock of AA Conference-approved books and pamphlets is on hand for meetings and that it is properly displayed at meetings.

The central service office (CSO or Intergroup) representative

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

In state capitals, CSOs usually publish a statewide magazine listing meetings, events and other information for members. For more information see What is a CSO? on page 43.

The AA group's relations with others in the community

AA service committees, composed mainly of representatives from area assemblies, shoulder the major responsibility for carrying the AA message into the community and around the world (see *The AA 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 AA 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.

To do this most effectively groups need to cover four main areas:

- Public information (PI) – information about AA distributed to the general public.
- Cooperation with the professional community (CPC) AA cooperates with but doesn't affiliate with professionals such as doctors, ministers of religion, police, psychologists, etc.
- Treatment facilities (TF) –carrying the message to patients in hospitals, detox centres, etc.
- Correctional facilities (CF) – carrying the message to alcoholics in prisons and other correctional facilities.

Your group can address these different areas however it wishes but most groups find the most effective way is to have a group representative on area committees. Usually, groups appoint one PI&CPC representative and one T&CF representative who attend the relevant committees at area level.

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.

T&CF representative

T&CF representatives take AA meetings into hospitals, prisons and similar institutions. Hospitals and detox centres are often keen to have AA involvement in their programs. It helps introduce their patients to the support available from AA once they leave the treatment facility. Correctional facilities require special arrangements because they have important security requirements. Many inmates are especially eager to gain some involvement with AA, when the institutions allow it. AA can help alcoholic inmates recover and prepare for sober, fulfilling lives after release. AA meetings and visits in correctional facilities are organised through area and district corrections committee and/or local central service office. They keep their home groups informed about local Twelfth Step activities in nearby institutions and encourage group members to participate.

The pamphlet *AA in Correctional Facilities* and the *Corrections Workbook* can be of help to AAs in corrections service work.

Members work to help staff in hospital and treatment centres better understand AA and to take the AA tools of recovery to alcoholics in treatment. The pamphlet *AA in Treatment Facilities* and the *Treatment Facilities Workbook* can be of help to AAs in this part of service work.

PI&CPC representative

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

Most groups realise that alcoholics can't come to AA 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 "AA meeting tonight" outside the meeting-place door points the way. From AA's earliest days, radio announcements and small newspaper announcements of AA meetings have been used to attract alcoholics in need of help. A typical notice in a local newspaper or on a community noticeboard might look like this:

Faced with a drinking problem? Perhaps Alcoholics Anonymous can help Weekly meetings open to the public (address of meeting), Tuesday at 8:00 p.m. More details at www.aa.org.au .

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 *AA at a Glance* or the pamphlet *Alcoholics Anonymous in Your Community*. Some groups keep lists of members available to do Twelfth Step work. Groups may have hospitality committees and/or greeters to make sure every new member, visitor or inquiring prospect is welcomed.

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

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

PI&CPC representatives, usually working with their local area assembly PI&CPC committee, 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 CPC activities and, when appropriate, arrange for group volunteers to join together in carrying the AA message at professional meetings, seminars, and more. The CPC Workbook and the pamphlets *If You Are a Professional, Alcoholics Anonymous Wants to Work with You*, *Members of the Clergy Ask About AA* and other pertinent literature can help when you reach out to professionals.

Special needs committee liaison

Groups may also find value in having a person to look after providing for members with special needs: wheelchair access, vision and hearing impairment, etc. This may already be a requirement in a group and may also be an opportunity to extend help to people with special needs who don't know what AA can do for them.

While there are no special AA members, many members have special needs. AAs 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. AAs 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 or the spoken word on audiotape or compact disk. For hearing-impaired people there is a DVD of some AA discussion in Auslan sign language. The pamphlet *Carrying the AA Message to the Hearing Impaired Alcoholic* can provide direction and guidance for those interested in working with AAs with special needs.

Principles before personalities

The principle of rotation

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

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.

To step out of an AA position 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 AA 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 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 AA 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, listening to individual points of view, and the practice of AA 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.

What happens at a group conscience meeting?

Most groups hold group conscience meetings separately from their normal meetings. These include meetings for group business matters, elections, hearing short reports, discussing issues, taking inventory, etc. Only members of the group vote at a group conscience meeting but other members may be invited to attend as observers or to give special information.

Custom varies a lot because each group is autonomous. Group conscience meetings may be held either just before or just after a regular AA meeting, or at a separate time and day. They can vary in length and may be short or quite long depending on what needs to be discussed. Some groups hold regular monthly or quarterly meetings and others hold one only when needed.

It's up to each group to decide how formal their group conscience meetings will be. Some are very formal and have a person recording the minutes, they read the minutes of previous meetings, have formal motions with seconders, etc. Some groups are very informal. Groups

usually find they benefit from having regular group conscience meetings that are properly structured.

Despite the differences, all group conscience meetings have one thing in common: the need to arrive at informed, spiritually based decisions that take account of all sides of any issue. Branch stacking, "working the numbers" and overbearing conduct or shouting have no place at a group conscience meeting. Instead, members need to:

- Gather all the information needed.
- Place principles before personalities.
- Listen carefully, respectfully and with an open mind.
- Don't take it personally if someone thinks differently to you.
- Invite each person to speak in turn, before speaking a second time.
- Encourage new members and silent or shy people to speak.
- Be prepared to compromise.
- Speak quietly and calmly.
- Respond to angry outbursts quietly, calmly and respectfully.
- Discourage formal motions and voting until a clear collective view emerges.
- Be prepared to postpone a decision if more information is needed or substantial agreement is not reached.
- Give any minority voice a good hearing and the last word after a vote if there is something new to say.

This may seem straightforward and easy. Usually it isn't. When you care deeply about something it can be hard to remain calm when you think it is being threatened. We can feel stressed if people oppose what we want. We have to keep our primary purpose in mind and remember how important AA unity is.

For a deeper understanding of the group conscience process read *The Language of the Heart, Bill W's Grapevine writings*.

AA 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 AA'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 AA 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 emphasise 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 AAs outside the meeting rooms? Do we also leave what they share at meetings behind?
7. Does our group emphasise 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 AA—as it relates to our Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service?

12. What has our group done lately to bring the AA 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?

14. Is this inventory being taken in a sincere spirit of improvement rather than fault-finding?

15. Are group service positions being rotated regularly?

About those AA group problems...

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

Group problems may include such common AA 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 a member's anonymity break?
- What do we do about a member who is preying on newcomers for sexual or financial gain?

- How can we politely restrain 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?
- What should the group do about non-alcoholics wanting to share at the meeting?
- Should we buy literature for a hospital group that can't afford it?
- Should we celebrate members' birthdays or does this conflict with one-day-at-a-time?

Almost every group problem can be solved through the process of an informed group conscience, AA principles and our Twelve Traditions. Some groups find that their GSR can be helpful in this process. For all involved, a good sense of humour, 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.

Group problems should be resolved by group conscience and the General Service Conference, the General Service Board and the General Service Office have no responsibility.

Service Sponsorship

A.A.'s "Third Legacy", Service, is anything that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer. The A.A. Service Manual, The Guidelines and the Twelve Concepts for World Service are our main guides for all service. They have been put together using the knowledge gained from A.A. experience going back to A.A.'s founders. Sponsorship in A.A. is basically the same, whether guiding another through A.A.'s Twelve Steps of recovery or in their service to their group. It can be defined as one alcoholic who has made progress in recovery and/or performance in service, sharing this experience with another alcoholic who is just commencing the journey in A.A.

Both types of service spring from the spiritual aspects of A.A.'s three legacies, Recovery, Unity and Service. The basis of all sponsorship is the power of example.

The Service Sponsor begins by encouraging the member to become active in their home group. As the member serves in different roles and levels of A.A. service, the Service Sponsor is not only a guide in service commitments and responsibilities, but also a useful resource for the member when encountering the unique vagaries that exist in A.A. service.

A Service Sponsor is usually someone who is knowledgeable in A.A. history, the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions and has a reasonable background in A.A. service with a sound understanding of Alcoholics Anonymous service structure.

The Service Sponsor should be mindful that not all members will have the desire or experience to move beyond certain levels and, and therefore might be required to suggest tasks appropriate to individuals' abilities and interests. Of course, our experience is, we can learn on the job in A.A.

How an AA group relates to AA as a whole

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

How can AA groups play their part in the national structure?

The final responsibility for, and the benefits of, what gets done in Australia by AA depends very much on each and every group. If groups want AA to develop and be available to the newcomer today and in the future, their participation in the work of the national structure is needed. Here are a few of the things groups can do to help:

Tradition One
Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

1. Stay informed about what goes on at Conference, at the Board and at General Service Office. Ask questions. The more you know about AA, the more useful you can be in carrying the message.

2. Choose a qualified general service representative. The GSR acts as the important liaison between the group and AA 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 General Service Office of any group changes, such as a change in address or group name. This is the only way to keep information coming to your group without interruption.

Groups are responsible to ensure that their meeting listing at the national AA website is up to date and should notify of any changes online at www.aa.org.au

How decisions affecting AA are made

The trustees of the Australian General Service Board (eight alcoholics and four non-alcoholics) are responsible to AA groups through the General Service Conference. Groups send GSRs to area assemblies and the assemblies send delegates (serving three-year terms) from their areas to the yearly meeting of the General Service Conference to hear the reports of the Board's committees and General Service Office 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 AA 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.

In many cases district committees, composed of all the GSRs in a given district, serve as a filter to the Area Assembly. Not all areas in Australia have district committees but as the number of AA groups increases, more districts will need to be formed or else the area assemblies will become unwieldy.

What is the General Service Office?

The Australian General Service Office is the Australian version of the General Service Office (GSO) in New York. It helps to fulfil our primary purpose by a range of activities including:

1. Coordinate and support the work of our General Service Conference committees.
2. Distribute AA books and pamphlets approved by the General Service Conference and published by AA World Services.
3. Publish and print literature and other materials specifically for Australian purposes.

4. Answer enquiries and requests for information about AA and the help it provides for alcoholics.
5. Publish the AA newsletter, *AA Around Australia* and other bulletins.
6. Disseminate public information at the national and international levels for AA as a whole, cooperating with the print and electronic media as well as with organisations concerned with the treatment of alcoholism.
7. Maintain an informative national website with a national list of AA meetings.
8. Provide complimentary literature and this Group Handbook to each new group that registers with National Office.
9. Work with alcoholics overseas, as well as Loners (AAs living in areas with no meetings); Homers (housebound or disabled members); Internationalists (seagoing AAs); AAs in the armed forces; and AAs in treatment and correctional facilities.
10. Maintain the Australian AA archives.

Who is in charge at the General Service Office?

No one person or group of persons is "in charge," of General Service Office 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 are themselves recovering alcoholics. In 2016 there were three full-time employees in the General Service Office.

Groups (and Districts) should be careful not to neglect their Group/District/Area/CSO and GSO financial donations in order to support Conventions.

GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

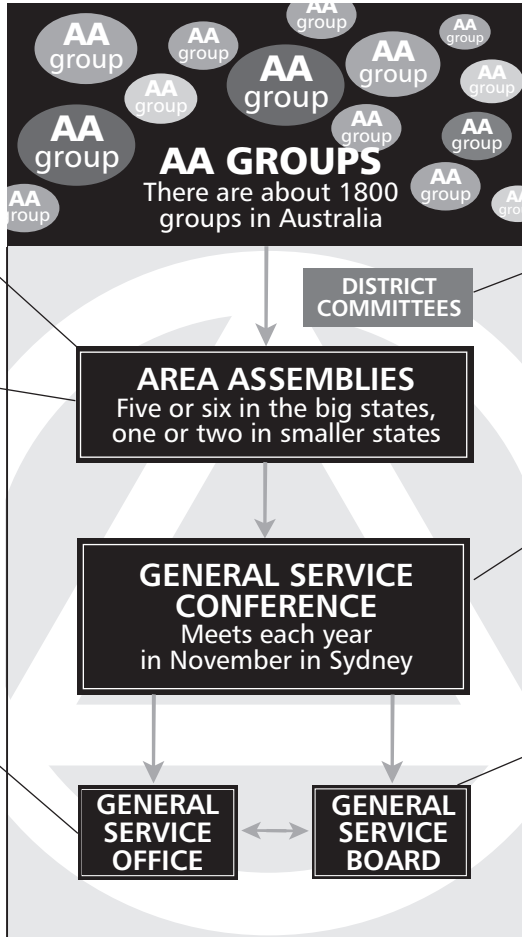
Every member and every AA group is entitled to put forward items directly to the General Service Conference. Typical agenda items would be ideas like;

- * "We should set up a service website."
- * "Let's update the pamphlet "Young people and AA."
- * "We should have another public information forum".

Area assemblies do much of the work in carrying the message. They are involved in public information campaigns and they deal with hospitals and prisons to help the suffering alcoholic.

Each area assembly elects a delegate to the General Service Conference. The Conference is the group conscience of AA in Australia. It is held in November each year in Sydney.

The General Service Office has the only paid staff in the General Service structure. As of 2008 there are three employees in the office.



Group representatives meet at area assemblies but as the number of groups increases, or if it's a widespread area, they often find it easier to get together as an intermediate body called a district committee which represents them at area assembly.

When Conference approves recommendations they become "advisory actions" (not orders!) to be carried out by the Board and the National Office.

The General Service Board is made of 12 trustees, eight alcoholic trustees and 4 non-alcoholic. The Board is the legal entity of AA in Australia. It meets three times a year and carries out the recommendations of the Conference.

The National Convention

This is a highly important event but is completely different to the Conference. It's not really part of the General Service structure. It is an inspiring get-together for members like a gigantic AA meeting. It's held each year often over Easter and is rotated around various cities throughout Australia.

What is a central service office (CSO or intergroup)?

Your local central service office (sometimes called an intergroup office), is often where the still-suffering alcoholic first calls or shows up for AA help.

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

CSOs have other functions including:

- Respond to phone or walk-in requests for help from alcoholics and, when appropriate, arrange for AA volunteers (listed with the office) to meet with and accompany them to an AA meeting.
- Maintain AA 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.
- Distribute up-to-date meeting lists.
- Stock and sell AA literature.
- Serve as a communications centre for participating groups—often issuing regular newsletters or bulletins to keep groups informed about one another.
- Through PI and CPC committees, handle requests for information about AA from local news media, arrange local radio or TV programs about AA and furnish speakers for schools and non-AA organisations.
- Maintain communication and cooperation— but not affiliation—with the community and helping-professionals in the field of alcoholism.
- Sponsor or arrange social and fund-raising AA events such as sausage sizzles, dances, etc.

Although local CSOs operate independently of AA'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 CSO, which is supported by contributions from its member groups. How much financial support a group gives to a CSO (or to any other AA service body) is entirely a matter for each group to decide.

Groups are often confused regarding which Central Service Office in their region they should support financially. This confusion appears to happen when some offices refer to themselves as 'State' offices. Many years ago, it was common for there to be only one Central Service Office within a region. However, this is not the case today and there are no 'State' offices. It is recommended that groups support their local Central Service Office. In 2001 the Australian General Service Conference attempted to minimise the confusion by including the following statements in Advisory Action #046/2001:

1. All Central Service Offices within a region are of equal status and importance, their primary purpose being the 12th Step.
2. Groups are strongly encouraged to support their local Central Service Office, both financially and by members volunteering their services.

In areas where it may not be practical to open a CSO 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 assembly.

What AA doesn't do

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.

Tradition Ten

Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

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 counselling.

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-AA sources.

13. Provide letters of reference to parole boards, attorneys, court officials, schools, businesses, social agencies, or any other organisation or institution.

The Twelve Traditions – the long form

Our AA experience has taught us that:

1. Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole. AA 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 AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.
4. With respect to its own affairs, each AA group should be responsible to no other authority than its own conscience. But when its plans concern the welfare of neighbouring groups also, those groups ought to be consulted. And no group, regional committee, or individual should ever take any action that might greatly affect AA 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 AA should be separately incorporated and managed,

thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An AA group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to AA, 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, AA managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside AA—and medically supervised. While an AA group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never to go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An AA group can bind itself to no one.

7. The AA 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 AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated AA 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 counselling 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 AA Twelfth Step work is never to be paid for.

9. Each AA group needs the least possible organisation. 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 AA General Service Committee. They are the custodians of our AA Tradition and the receivers of voluntary AA contributions by which we maintain our AA

AA's General Service Office in New York is authorised by the groups to handle our overall public relations and guarantee the integrity of our principal newspaper, the *AA Grapevine*. All such representatives are to be guided in the spirit of service, for true leaders in AA 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 AA group or member should ever, in such a way as to implicate AA, 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 characterised by personal anonymity. We think AA ought to avoid sensational advertising. Our names and pictures as AA 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 AA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole fellowship.

2. When, in 1955, the AA 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 AA 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 AA 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 recognises 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 recognises 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 AA purse 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 AA 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 AA'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 AA 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 AA General Service Conference has recommended that the "long form" of the Concepts be studied in detail. "Twelve Concepts for World Service", in which AA co-founder Bill W closely examines all these principles of AA service, may be ordered from the General Service Office or from your local central service office.

Index

A		H	
advertisement	18	home group	15
anonymity	33	Homers	41
B		I	
<i>Beginners meetings</i>	13	<i>ID meetings</i>	12
bequest	27	insurance	17
Big Book	12, 14	intergroup	43
Bill W	8, 9	Internationalists	41
C		L	
central service office	28	literature	28, 43
Closed meetings	11	Loners	41
collection	26	M	
CSO	43	maximum donation	27
CSO representative	28	meeting procedures	13
D		N	
<i>Discussion meetings</i>	13	Naming an AA group	19
<i>Donations</i>	26	newspaper notice	31
G		O	
General Service Board	8, 40	Open meetings	12
General Service Conference	8, 40	P	
General Service Office in New York	8	PI&CPC	30
general service representative	27	Preamble	11, 14
group conscience	13, 33, 34		
group inventory	36		
GSR	27, 38, 39, 40		
guest speakers	14		

R

registering	17
registration form	18
rotation	33

S

secretary	23
Serenity Prayer	14
Seventh Tradition	16
small town	18
<i>Speaker meetings</i>	13
special needs	32
starting a group	17
<i>Step meetings</i>	12

T

T&CF	30
Tradition Eleven	31
Tradition Nine	21
Tradition One	39
Tradition Two	21
treasurer	25
trusted servants	21
Twelve Concepts	50
Twelve Traditions - long form	46

U

upside down	8
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NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

NOTES

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This handbook is a suggested guide for setting up and running an AA group. More detailed information is available in *The AA Service Manual*, the *Guidelines* and other AA literature, which cover group matters at greater depth.

In all matters, AA members can be guided by the Three Legacies of AA: recovery, unity and service:

- the suggestions for Recovery are the Twelve Steps;
- the suggestions for achieving Unity are the Twelve Traditions;
- Service is described in *The AA Service Manual/ Twelve Concepts for World Service*, and *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*.

If you have further questions, please contact the General Service Office of AA in Australia, which stands ready to help in every way it can.

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