

# SECRETARY HANDBOOK

## LOS ANGELES WEST SIDE COMBINED DISTRICTS

SECRETARY HANDBOOK .....	1
1. TO THE NEW SECRETARY .....	1
2. BRIEF HISTORY OF A.A. ....	2
3. WESTSIDE COMBINED DISTRICTS GENERAL SERVICE .....	2
MAP OF WESTSIDE COMBINED DISTRICTS .....	3
4. REQUIREMENTS AND DUTIES OF A GROUP SECRETARY.....	3
Registering the Group with LACO .....	5
Registering the Group with GSO.....	5
A.A. Pamphlets about the A.A. Group.....	6
5. GROUP TREASURER .....	6
Overall Duties .....	6
Contribution guidelines. ....	6
LACO has different contribution guidelines.....	7
6. GROUP ORGANIZATION .....	8
7. STEERING COMMITTEE .....	8
8. TYPES OF MEETINGS .....	9
9. SUGGESTED MEETING AGENDA .....	11
10. ANONYMITY.....	12
11. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS .....	13
12. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION MEETING TOPICS.....	16

Thanks to San Mateo County Fellowship Central Office, And Ventura County Intergroup for coming before us. Their materials were used in compiling this Secretary Handbook and Training Workshop

### 1. TO THE NEW SECRETARY

Congratulations on being elected secretary of your group. It can be a wonderful and rewarding experience for you.

This handbook is designed to answer any questions you may have about your specific responsibilities as secretary of the group and about A.A. in general. Action is the magic word to insure sobriety. Never hesitate to ask for help with your job, and don't forget Tradition 2, which states: "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."

## **2. BRIEF HISTORY OF A.A.**

Our first members in A.A. were Bill W. and Dr. Bob S., whose meeting in Akron, Ohio in 1935 led to the formation of the fellowship as we know it today. Bill W. had been a successful New York stockbroker who had been given up as a "hopeless" drunkard. While hospitalized in the fall of 1934, he underwent an experience which seemed to release him from the compulsion to drink. Bill talked to other alcoholics, trying to help them, but none stopped drinking.

In Akron, on a business trip the following spring, Bill again felt the need to talk with another alcoholic. He was introduced to Dr. Bob, a well-known surgeon whose practice had been seriously affected by his drinking and who had sought many ways to solve his problem. The two men noted that their own desire to drink disappeared when they tried to share their recovery experience with other alcoholics. The chain reaction resulting from this discovery has been responsible for the consistent growth of the A.A. movement.

Dr. Bob died in 1950 and Bill W. in 1971. You can find their stories in the Big Book -- "Alcoholics Anonymous". Their legacy is our lifesaving fellowship.

## **3. WESTSIDE COMBINED DISTRICTS GENERAL SERVICE**

As of 2010 Alcoholics Anonymous lists over 4,286 Groups and Meetings in Los Angeles County with 918 of them Spanish Speaking. In addition to being the conduit for our individual members to GSO in New York, we organize free events throughout the year to raise awareness among our groups, of the service opportunities that exist for all AA's to be able to help another alcoholic, whether or not they hold a GSR commitment.

It is essential that Westside Combined Districts receive adequate financial and moral support of all A.A. groups and members in the district so that it may continue to support the A.A. program for the alcoholic who lives, works, or visits here.

## MAP OF WESTSIDE COMBINED DISTRICTS



### 4. REQUIREMENTS AND DUTIES OF A GROUP SECRETARY

A group Secretary should have at least six months of continuous sobriety; be free to attend all meetings during the recommended term of office and be early at the meeting place to ensure it is

properly "set up" -- coffee made, meeting formats available for the leader, available to members for any announcements to the group, etc Other duties of importance are:

1. Start and close all meetings on schedule.
2. Obtain speaker/leader in advance (Speaker and Speaker Discussion meetings). Speakers should be advised in advance of the type of meeting and A.A.'s primary purpose.
3. Before the meeting starts, select members to read "How it Works", "Traditions" and other Group approved readings.
4. Have books and literature available and on display.
5. Make A.A. related announcements -- Request reports from Treasurer, Delegate, GSR, and H&I representatives on a regular basis.
6. Facilitate Group business matters (oversee elections, group consciences, etc.)
7. See that collection baskets are passed around the room and are returned to the secretary.
8. Make sure that facilities are clean and dishes put away after meeting. Turn off lights.
9. Maintain good relations with the landlord, and insure that the rent is paid on time.
10. The Group Secretary is responsible for maintaining orderly conduct of the meeting. Should a disturbance arise during the meeting, the secretary should stand and perhaps say something like this: "Pardon me, but I think we should continue with the general discussion. Perhaps we can discuss this after the meeting."
11. A good secretary should never interrupt the discussion to interject his or her own thoughts. He/she seldom participates in the discussion unless the group is small and time is plentiful.
12. For the peace of mind and protection of the secretary from any criticism, it is suggested that each group have a Treasurer.

**ROTATING OUT AND PASSING IT ON** Part of the responsibility of the rotating secretary is to PASS IT ON. Rotation is one of the important principles in the structure and operation of a local group (and, indeed, throughout the fellowship). It means simply that A.A.s

shy away from the idea of an individual, no matter how competent, serving too long as a group officer or member of a service committee.

The suggested term of office for Group Secretary is six months; for co-secretaries, one year. In A.A., it's the program, not the personalities that count.

### **Registering the Group with LACO**

An important job of the Secretary is to make sure your group is registered accurately with the Los Angeles Central Office and with the A.A. General Service Office in New York. The LA Central Office web site contains an online meeting directory and a New Meeting form which can be downloaded so that you can list your meeting's most current info: . [www.lacoaa.org](http://www.lacoaa.org) . LACO will assign you a group number. Use this number on all contributions to Central Office. **NOTE** – this LACO group number is different from the group number assigned by GSO in New York.

### **Registering the Group with GSO**

Contact GSO in New York to find out if your group is registered and get your GSO group number. Update your group information at GSO. You can also get group registration forms from your District Committee Member and the Registrar for our Area 5. Put your GSO group number on all contributions to GSO, the District and Area 5 as noted below. **NOTE** – Make sure you put your full name, address and contact information on all correspondence to GSO as they apparently have a policy of ignoring communication that does not include this. Calling GSO on the phone may be a good idea for starters.

A.A. World Services, Inc.,  
P.O. Box 459,  
New York, NY 10163  
(212) 870-3400

<http://www.aa.org/lang/en/subpage.cfm?page=26>

If your successor happens to be a secretary for the first time, you will want to be available to them for the first few meetings of

their term; or if you're eager to try other meetings during that time, leave your phone number with the new secretary.

### **A.A. Pamphlets about the A.A. Group**

The A.A. Group

Self Support – Where money and spirituality mix

The A.A. Group Treasurer

## **5. GROUP TREASURER**

Suggested continuous sobriety of a Treasurer should be 2 years and willingness to serve a 2 year term. If your group does not have a treasurer, then this is an important part of your job as secretary.

### **Overall Duties**

1. It is highly desirable to **keep a simple but formal record of funds** received, costs, and disbursements of monies. This serves as a record to assist your memory and as a point of pride to the group with respect to their contributions.
2. **A regular financial report should be made to the group.** After each meeting, take a few minutes to make a summary report of contributions received and expenses.
3. **At the end of each month, make a monthly report and distribute your contributions** to the Central Office and GSO in New York, Area 5 and your district. A.A. experience has taught us that it is not a good idea for a group to hoard money. The funds should be distributed on a monthly basis.

### **Contribution guidelines.**

A. Groups are autonomous and are free to contribute or distribute funds as they see fit by group conscience

B. Generally, after paying group expenses such as rent, coffee, snacks, etc groups maintain a prudent reserve of one to three months expenses.

C. After meeting these obligations it is suggested groups make contributions to the LACO, GSO in New York, the local Area 5, the local district – Westside Combined Districts.

**NOTE – LACO and GSO have DIFFERENT guidelines for contributions AND LACO makes NO provision in their guidelines for contributions to the Westside combined Districts.**

Below are suggested 7<sup>th</sup> Tradition contribution distributions found in the A.A. approved pamphlet, "Self-Supporting Through Your Own Contributions":

1. Each A.A. group is self-supporting. This means you must pay rent, buy coffee and the refreshments (if any) and attend to all other expenses of the group (like coffee pots, A.A. wall-hanging signs, A.A. books, etc.) and maintain a prudent reserve of one or two months expenses.
2. **50%** of the remainder of your balance after Group Expenses should be mailed to the Central Office: **LACO, PO Box 70159, Los Angeles, CA 90070** [www.lacoaa.org](http://www.lacoaa.org)
3. **30%** of the remainder of your balance should be mailed to the General Service Office. The services provided by General Service Office (GSO) in New York and your district are important. **General Service Office, P.O Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163** [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)
4. **10%** to Area 5. Your contribution supports Area Assemblies, Delegate's expenses, Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community and Institutions work, among al ot of other activities. See your group GSR for more information. **SCAA – Area 05, P. O. 481193 Los Angeles, CA 0048** [www.aascaa.org](http://www.aascaa.org)
5. **10%** to your District: Your contribution supports District communication with groups, funding service events and serving as a link between Area delegates and GSR's. **Westside Combined Districts, P.O. Box 642242, Los Angeles, CA 90054**

Again a reminder – put your GSO group number on all contributions, put your LACO group number on LACO contributions.

LACO has different contribution guidelines. They suggest 60:30:10 to LACO, GSO and the Area, **omitting the district all together.**

## 6. GROUP ORGANIZATION

Each A.A. Group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, therefore the type of Group Organization is usually determined by the group conscience.

The following suggested Group Organization is based on the experience of many successful groups and should be used as a guide to establish an organization best suited for your group. The size of your group and type of meeting your members may help to determine the organization required.

- **Steering Committee Secretary** (Some groups also have a co-secretary)
- **Treasurer**
- **GSR General Service Representative to the District Committee** (and alternate)
- **CSR Central Service Representative to Central Office** (and alternate)
- **Grapevine Representative**
- **Greeters** to welcome newcomers and members to meetings
- **Coffee maker and coffee servers**
- **Literature** person to obtain books and literature for the group
- **Hospitals & Institutions Committee Representative**
- **People to set up**
- **Clean up people** to and take down chairs, tables, etc. Dish washers and dryers when necessary.
- **Program Chairperson or Speakers Committee** to get speakers. Consideration should be given as to who will provide these services when a person delegated for any such service is unable to assume responsibilities.

## 7. STEERING COMMITTEE

The steering committee serves the group by providing convenient, experienced cross section of group membership to whom problems of the group can be referred and for handling "policy questions" that may arise within the group. It does not represent management of a group; no individual or committee can do that.

The steering committee may be comprised of the GSR, past and present secretaries, treasurer and other concerned members of the

group. Individual groups may set certain suggested minimum of sobriety for members of steering committees, normally one year's sobriety. Based on the experience of a number of groups, here is a guide on how large your steering committee should be:

### **Members in Group Steering Committee**

- 10 to 20            3 to 5
- 20 to 40            5 or 6
- 0 to 75             6 to 8
- 75 to 100          8 or 9
- 125 to 200        9 to 13

## **8. TYPES OF MEETINGS**

Each Group should determine by "Group Conscience" the type and format for its meetings. Here are some common formats used:

- **Speaker Meetings:** The secretary opens the meeting with the recommended meeting format and then introduces the speaker who shares their experience, strength and hope. It is recommended that speakers have at least six months of continuous sobriety and have an inspiring story of recovery. If the speaker has had addictions other than alcohol, he/she should be requested to emphasize the alcoholism and hold discussion of other addictions to a minimum. Speakers should be advised in advance of the meeting time and the maximum time they should speak. If a speaker exceeds this time schedule, the secretary should pass a polite note to the speaker advising him or her that the time is up.
- **Speaker-Discussion Meetings:** The same general format as speaker meetings, except that the speaker may talk for about half of the time left after the "opening". He/she then selects a topic for discussion, which is related to alcoholism or the A.A. Program.
- **Book Study Meetings:** Meetings to review and discuss A.A. books, such as the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions". These meetings are usually opened in the same manner as "Speaker" and "Speaker-discussion" Meetings, but instead of a speaker the Secretary arranges to have an A.A. member who understands the topic under discussion at that meeting, lead the discussion

as chairperson. -12- It is suggested that as many members as possible participate in the reading and discussion of the topic being considered. For this reason, it is suggested the chairperson briefly qualify as an alcoholic and then share his/her overall thoughts on the subject under consideration. Usually a copy (or copies) of the book being discussed is passed around the room and each member present is given an opportunity to read one or two paragraphs (the number of paragraphs to be read should be announced at the beginning of the meeting) until the chapter is completed. After the chapter has been read, the chairperson will usually ask for volunteers or will call on members to explain their understanding of, or experiences with the subject being considered.

- **Discussion Only Meetings:** Same opening format used by other meetings. Then the secretary or chairperson asks the group if they have a subject related to alcoholism or A.A. they would like to discuss. If such a topic is suggested, it will be used; otherwise the secretary or chairperson will announce a subject to be discussed. The members will then discuss the topic or other subjects related to alcoholism for the balance of the meeting.
- **Table Meetings:** A type of discussion meeting in which multiple large tables are arranged throughout the meeting place, each with a topic. Members choose which table to sit at. Sometimes each of twelve tables is devoted to one of the steps. This is one of the original types of discussion meetings held in Cleveland at the beginning of A.A.
- **Special Interest Meetings:** A.A. members who have special interests sometimes start special interest groups, such as doctors, lawyers, women only, airline pilots, men's stag, teenage, pre-teenage, gay, etc. Such special interest groups are neither encouraged nor discouraged, however before starting such groups, the members involved should determine if such groups are in the best interest of unity in our A.A. Program as a whole and be governed by the group conscience.
- **Open, Closed and Public Meetings:** A closed meeting is for A.A. members, or for those who "have a desire to stop drinking."

An open meeting is for alcoholics, their families and interested friends. A public meeting is designated to acquaint key people in the community (doctors, clergy, etc.) with the local availability of the A.A. recovery program. An announcement of this type of meeting generally appears in the local newspapers. The meeting is open to the general public and professional people interested in A.A. and alcoholism are especially invited to attend.

## 9. SUGGESTED MEETING AGENDA

The order of meetings varies somewhat from area to area, but you can feel safe by following this outline:

1. "Good morning/afternoon/evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is the regular open/closed meeting of the \_\_\_\_\_ group of Alcoholics Anonymous. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am an alcoholic and your current Secretary/Co-Secretary."
2. "Shall we open the meeting with a moment of silence to do with as you wish, followed by the Serenity Prayer."  
"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."
3. "I shall now read the definition of Alcoholics Anonymous, taken from our monthly publication, the A.A. Grapevine:

"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."

4. "\_\_\_\_\_ will now read the beginning of Chapter 5 of the Big Book." (This may be substituted by the beginning of Chapter 3 or

other portion from the Big Book. It is suggested only A.A. approved literature be read.)

5. " \_\_\_\_\_ will read the Twelve Traditions of A.A. which are to the group what the Twelve Steps are to the individual."

6. Ask any new members to introduce themselves by their first names. Explain that this is not to embarrass them; but rather so we may get to know them. (A new member is defined as someone new to the Fellowship or in early sobriety.) You may wish to ask if there are any visitors, any A.A. members attending this meeting for the first time, and if anyone is celebrating an A.A. birthday. Ask for announcements from the group pertaining to A.A. Be sure to make your own A.A. announcements about the availability of free literature, books for sale and any other general A.A. announcements.

7. Make sure your delegate to Central Office, GSR, H&I and Grapevine representatives have a opportunity to give a report of their activities, when they have important information to report.

8. Introduce the Speaker/Leader

9. The Speaker/Leader conducts the meeting in accordance with the format agreed upon with the secretary.

10. Thank the Speaker/Leader after his/her presentation.

11. Pass the basket. (The time for passing the basket is optional -- some groups do so before the speaker, some after the speaker or discussion.) Usually the secretary precedes this by saying: "We have no dues or fees in A.A., but we do pay our own way. In accordance with the Seventh Tradition, your contribution will be appreciated. The money in the basket pays the rent, buys coffee, and helps support General Service and our Central Office." It is also suggested that the H&I Pink Can should be passed separately from baskets to avoid confusion of support.

12. Close with Serenity Prayer or another prayer of choice if customary for those who wish to do so.

## **10. ANONYMITY**

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities".

Who we are, what we do for a living and where we live is not the important thing. Our primary purpose is "to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety".

**At the public level** Personal anonymity is our assurance to the world that none of us will use the A.A. name for personal profit, prestige or power -- and our assurance to the newcomer that his identify will not be revealed. At open or public meetings, the secretary is requested to remind visitors of the importance of anonymity. Clubs, halfway houses and other institutions and organizations cannot represent themselves as Alcoholics Anonymous since by tradition this is not permitted

**At the private level** We are asked to respect the anonymity of the other fellow. We should never reveal to others the names of people we meet in A.A. The individuals themselves are the only people who can determine whether or not they want to tell of their association with A.A. A.A. experience has taught that no A.A. need be anonymous to family, friends or neighbors; disclosure there is usually right and good. But this, of course, is up to the individual involved.

## **11. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **WHO "RUNS" A.A.??**

A.A. has no "leaders" in the usual meaning of the term. No individual is authorized to speak for A.A. on a local, regional, national or international basis. A.A. gets things done largely through service committees, and positions of responsibility or authority are filled on a rotating basis. There are a few paid workers in the fellowship. These are found in the General Service Office in New York and in Area service offices (Central Office) where the burdens of full-time responsibility are too great for volunteer workers. You are helping "get things done" by taking your turn as secretary of this group.

**WHAT IS A HOME GROUP?** A Home Group is a meeting one regularly attend, accepts responsibility within, and sustains friendships. The Home Group introduces service and the service structure to its members. In the Home Group, people really get to know each other. They feel safe; they feel comfortable; they feel a sense of belonging. -20- They share in each other's problems and willingly help each other by telling about their own experiences and

solutions to similar problems. For the member of the group, it is a source of strength and stability. The Home Group can be counted on to be there for each individual. Members of a Home Group have a right to vote on important issues that affect the group as well as AA as a whole – a process that forms the very cornerstone of AA's service structure. (From the pamphlet THE AA GROUP) The Home Group can participate in activities that can help carry the message. A few examples of this are : Helping Central Office with phone calls, participating a marathon meetings as a group at an AA convention, actively supporting H& I and Grapevine, or participating in service commitments like Greeting, Dessert, Parking, at Westside Combined District events.

**WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN OPEN AND CLOSED MEETINGS?** A closed meeting is Alcoholics only. At an open meeting anyone interested may attend.

**WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO AND HOW OFTEN SHOULD A FINANCIAL REPORT BE GIVEN?** A treasurer's report should be given at least once a month. Guidelines for contributions to support AA Service can be found in the Pamphlet "Self Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix". The seventh tradition money is used to pay the group's rent, purchase, literature, refreshments an supplies. After subtracting the meeting's prudent reserve the balance of the money can be sent to support AA reaching its members worldwide. To do the job of keeping track of all the groups and loner members, and furnishing them with literature and information we have:

**The General Service Board. (a board of trustees)** Safeguards traditions and service fund. Oversees the operating service units, the General Service Office, "A.A. World Services, Inc.", and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

**The General Service Office (GSO)** Handles inquiries from groups and the general public. Prepares literature, issues periodic bulletins, corresponds with "Loners", Institutional Groups, and Overseas Groups (people in remote places where there are no meetings.).

**A.A. World Services, Inc.** Handles all details involved in the publication and distribution of A.A.'s basic texts

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions

- A.A. Comes of Age
- all pamphlet literature.

**A.A. Grapevine, Inc.** Publishes and distributes our monthly magazine

**General Services Conference** Is the link between A.A. groups and services committees. It makes policy decisions on matters that affect A.A. as a whole.

## **HOW DO PROBLEMS GET SOLVED?**

### **WHAT IS A GROUP CONSCIENCE?**

Each group should have a business meeting or steering committee meeting to discuss and decide on a policy when issues need to be addressed. From this discussion a “group conscience” can be achieved. When issues cause rifts in the group, a “cooling off” period should be declared. Trust in a power greater than ourselves has been found more useful than rancor or personality conflicts. The “Twelve Concepts for World Service” is a very useful tool in settling most issues. A copy of this booklet can also be obtained from your GSR.

We hear the phrase “Group Conscience” often in AA. This concept is fundamental and vital to our operation and functioning of AA at all levels. It flows out of our 2nd tradition, “but one ultimate authority.” In order to have a Group Conscience it is necessary to have three essential elements:

- **THE SUBJECT MUST BE APPROPRIATE** . The matter should be of sufficient importance (e.g. the format of the meeting or the good and welfare of its business)
- **TIMING IS APPROPRIATE**. Prior notice is given and the topic under consideration announced. Also in the event a topic is being considered, it is presented at one meeting with a brief discussion with the final decision made at the next meeting. (e.g. “There will be a business meeting two weeks from tonight to elect new officers” or “It is suggested that we eliminate the meeting break because...”)
- **SUBSTANTIAL UNANIMITY TARGETED**. It is a practice in AA that not only do we attempt to get everyone to agree to the proposed action or idea but also we more than encourage minority opinion, we vigorously pursue it.

## **12. SUGGESTED DISCUSSION MEETING TOPICS**

**Acceptance is the answer to all my problems**

**Action is the key**

**Altered Attitudes**

**Anxiety**

**Attitude of Gratitude**

**Making Amends**

**Anger**

**Anonymity**

**Dependence upon a higher power**

**Easy Does It**

**Expect a miracle**

**Ego – Edging God Out**

**False Pride**

**Fear – Absence of Faith**

**Firth things first**

**Freedom through Sobriety**

**God as I understand God**

**God and me – instead of me and God**

**Growth in Sobriety**

**Happiness is an inside job**

**HOW it works**

**Humility**

**Help is only a prayer away**

**I am an Example**  
**Is Your Own House in Order**  
**If it is to be – it is up to me**  
**Just for today**  
**Keep it simple**  
**Let go – Let God**  
**Living Sober**  
**Live and Let Live**  
**Love and Service**  
**Meditation**  
**Open-Mindedness**  
**Powerlessness**  
**Principles before Personalities**  
**This Too shall pass**  
**Turn it Over**  
**Trust in God**