

THE AUSTRALIAN AA SERVICE MANUAL

SECTION FIVE

THE AREA



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PART 1: THE AREA COMMITTEE

SCOPE OF THE AREA COMMITTEE

The Area Committee, perhaps more than any other group of people in AA, is responsible for the health of the Conference structure and, by the same token, for growth and harmony in our beloved Fellowship.

The Area for which the Area Committee is responsible may be part of a *Region* (see Map in Section 9: "The General Service Board"), or all of it. Thus, the Area Committee is in a fortunate middle position. Through its elected *Area Delegate*, it learns first hand what is happening in AA Australian and *World Services*. Through the *District Committee Members*, it is close to *District* and local scenes. If GSRs are lax, if there is a lack of harmony in the District, the District Committee Member soon knows it and can then turn to the whole Area Committee for help in restoring peace or generating more activity among the Groups in the District. This middle position is indeed a vital one.

An active Area Committee is aware of all kinds of service problems and is alert to situations which happen with some frequency throughout the Fellowship, such as:

Group meetings that attract

Are they generally interesting? Are they programmed to attract new members and to hold the interest of oldtimers as well?

Active institutional work

Is the AA message getting into hospitals, prisons, and rehab centres?

Useful public information

Are news media informed about AA in the District? Do they know the AA sources for news and feature material? Is there an active public information committee, or is one needed?

New Groups and Loners

Are they being visited and helped?

This is but a sampling of the problems with which an Area Committee may find itself involved. (See Part 2 of this chapter for full dress treatment of Area activities). A partial list has been given here to point up the kind of activity and the kind of active AAs the Area Committee needs to accomplish its purpose. In other words, there is much more to an Area Committee's work than the election of officers and an Area Delegate to the Australian General Service Conference in Sydney.

WHO IS ON THE AREA COMMITTEE?

Basically, the Area Committee is composed of all *District Committee Members* (DCMs), **one from each District** in the Area, whom the GSRs have elected to represent their District, and the *Alternate DCMs*. (See preceding Section). There should be enough Districts, each with its DCM, to ensure good communication between the Area Committee and the Groups.

The *Area Delegate* and the *Alternate Delegate* also serve on the Area Committee and all have equal voting rights. Other Area Committee officers are elected by the Assembly, usually *Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer*.

In some Areas, past Area Delegates can serve on the Area Committee without a vote; in others, the outgoing Area Delegate is an ex-officio member. This is left to the Group Conscience of the Area Assembly.

AREA COMMITTEE OFFICERS & QUALIFICATIONS

Leadership must come from the officers. They must have the enthusiasm and know-how of the individual District Committee Member, plus the ability to organise and give the Area Committee direction and incentive.

Past Area Committee Chairpersons were asked to weigh their successes and failures and to decide, judging by the record, what attributes and experience seemed most helpful to them in fulfilling their jobs. Here are their opinions of the qualifications needed by a good Chairperson:

CHAIRPERSON QUALIFICATIONS

AA experience

Many preferred five years of continuous sobriety, some three, but all agreed that a considerable period of sobriety is desirable, plus experience in Group, Central Service Office, or institutional affairs. This would normally include a sound understanding and appreciation of the *Steps*, the *Traditions* and the *Concepts* and, better still, the know-how gained by applying these guides successfully to local problems.

Leadership

Chairpersons should be able to organise and to lead yet act like servants rather than dictators. Their leadership talent should help them instil in others a high interest in Conference service. It should also help them to make sure that **some** action is taken on **all** matters coming before the meeting, leaving no troublesome loose ends. The ideal Chairperson too has considerable planning ability and certainly will be able to conduct meetings in an orderly manner.

Ability to communicate

The ideal candidate is sensitive to the wishes of the Area but is not too sensitive about self.

Such a candidate

- Has an keen desire to see AA thrive and prosper, but is tolerant of those who cannot see beyond their own Group's horizon.
- Has an interesting and meaningful AA history to relate at Group meetings, along with a service talk.

- Is skilled in communication and can serve well as a 'stay at home' Delegate.
- Is aware of what goes on in the District, so as to keep the Area Delegate informed and is also aware of what goes on in *World Services*, so as to keep the Area Committee informed.

Living the example

Ideal Chairpersons know that one of the greatest services they can render AA is to live in such a way that their example may influence many people without their knowing it. Through watching them, members may realise that service to the Fellowship is part of our personal recovery.

SECRETARY QUALIFICATIONS

A good Secretary can add great vitality and drive to the Area Committee. Even the best committee can be greatly handicapped by an inefficient secretary and, conversely, can be much more effective with a competent one. Here is what three former secretaries have to say regarding qualifications:

Sobriety and business experience

"Reasonable period of sobriety" may mean two years in an Area where AA is still young, four or five years in an older Area. Some service in Group or Central Office or General Services is useful, as is some background in general office work. Computer skills are useful."

Sense of order

"Taking minutes of meetings means sifting through quite a few thousand words to get the kernel, the essence of what has been said. The Secretary is also responsible for keeping mailing lists up to date and for getting out mailings. He or she may also be responsible for preparing lively bulletins which will bring people to Area Committee meetings and Assemblies."

Time, interest and energy

"The job demands considerable time and needs to be carried out on schedule; this takes interest, not to mention devotion. The secretary is in a good position to act as liaison between officers and District Committee Members and can play the role of arbitrator when necessary."

TREASURER QUALIFICATIONS

The Area Treasurer should be a responsible person who can keep good records and handle money with integrity. The Treasurer needs to take care to hand on all records, bank account names and numbers and any other essential information when he or she rotates off.

Time in AA

Experience indicates someone who has had a substantial period of continuous sobriety and should be a careful guardian of Area funds, with an eye to preventing foolish or extravagant outlays of Area Committee money.

Accounting experience

If the Treasurer's background includes bookkeeping, so much the better. Otherwise, help will be needed in setting up a system, or in understanding the present system.

Persuasiveness

In many cases, the Treasurer is responsible for raising the money needed for the support of Area and of General Service Office, an activity which calls for firmness and diplomacy. If the Area Committee appoints a *Finance Chairperson*, the Treasurer is free for record keeping and financial controls.

Other Officer Qualifications

Other officers may be elected or co-opted to be responsible for special activities such as *Public Information, Treatment & Correctional Facilities, Finance, Liaison with Central Office, Newsletter editor, Literature etc.*

THE AREA ASSEMBLY

Any meeting of Area GSRs and the Area Committee is an 'Assembly' and the "**Area Assembly**" is the mainspring of the Conference structure. It is the democratic voice of the movement expressing itself. Assemblies are the responsibility of the Area Committee, and they are conducted by the Chairperson. An *Inaugural Assembly* is held to elect an Area Delegate and Alternate, when appropriate, and Area Committee officers; this election meeting is usually scheduled prior to February 1. The newly-elected Area Delegates and officers take office on March 1.

An Assembly of combined Areas may be held in order to choose a candidate for Regional Trustee. See Part 3 under "*Regional Trustee Nominations*".

THE NON-ELECTION ASSEMBLY

Other Assemblies or meetings may be held as the Area wishes. In some Areas they may be called "workshops" or "General Service sessions", but most Areas call them "Assemblies" and include workshops, etc in that title. The election meeting, however, is always called an "Assembly". (More about non-election Assemblies in Part 2).

FOR THE CHAIRPERSON - SUGGESTIONS ON ASSEMBLIES

ORGANISING AN ASSEMBLY

The Chairperson

- Convenes an Assembly in consultation with the Area Committee.
- Makes sure that all Groups in the Area are notified, advising them to send a GSR or to elect a GSR if they have none. This action is usually handled by the Secretary. (Most Areas consider an Assembly to be a 'closed' meeting, for AA members only).

- Consults with Area Officers and DCMs on the agenda for the Assembly, paying particular attention to any need for additional Districts and additional DCMs.

Much depends on the Chairperson's ability to conduct a smoothly-functioning meeting. Those with little experience in chairing business meetings can still do a good job if they will bear these simple suggestions in mind:

- Be responsible for keeping the issues clear. If a motion is offered, be sure that it is seconded and stated clearly and distinctly so that everyone is fully aware of what is being voted upon.
- Adhere closely to *Third Legacy Procedure* for elections and discourage departures from it. (See below)
- A 'sense of the meeting' poll is preferred to a vote. In such cases, the Chairperson asks: "Is it the sense of the meeting that ?" If there are no 'Nos', it is apparent there is accord.
- Meetings may be fairly informal, but the attention of the entire meeting should be kept on one subject at a time, without the disruptive influence of private conversations.
- An Assembly may make its own rules, but the Chairperson should make it clear that the members must decide on any desired change in rules **before** a motion is voted on, or **before** an election is conducted. Be sure the Assembly is aware of suggested procedures in the Manual, before changes are made. (See below - "Who is seated?")

A TYPICAL ELECTION ASSEMBLY AGENDA

Preparations are complete, the GSRs and DCMs are registered, manuals are available and blackboard and chalk are in the front of the room. What next? What is the order of business? Here is a typical agenda for an Election Assembly.

1. The outgoing Chairperson opens the meeting and the Twelve Traditions are recited, either all by one member or one each by successive members.
2. Secretary, Area Delegate and other officers report on the activities since the last Assembly.
3. Chairperson announces procedure for election of Area Committee Officers and acceptance of DCMs already elected by GSRs in their Districts.
4. If a District has not elected a DCM in advance of the Assembly, GSRs from that District convene to elect one. Chairperson announces a recess for this purpose.
5. Chairperson reviews the election procedure (also review subsection entitled "Who Presides? Who Votes?" in Part 2), and asks approval of it and the order of election. Usual procedure is to elect the *Area Delegate* first, then the *Alternate Area Delegate*, followed by the *Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer* etc. The new Chairperson then takes the chair.

The Chairperson then adjourns the meeting.

THIRD LEGACY PROCEDURE

In 2003 Conference approved a version of the *Third Legacy Procedure* which can be found under "AA's Traditional Legacy Documents" in Section: 12.

WHO IS SEATED?

The Assembly comprises the GSRs, the DCMs and the Area Officers. Usually, GSRs attend the Assembly nearest their Group, but they may go to any Assembly their Group wishes them to attend, even across a Regional boundary, if deemed advisable and **approved by the Assembly of the Group's choice.**

Uniform procedures throughout the Fellowship are in no way obligatory or even practical in many cases. Procedures which are suitable in one Area may not be in another. It is desirable that every Area have its own agreed-upon procedure to expedite the conduct of its business. Every Area, operating on the *Fourth Tradition*, will decide what is best for its own needs and capabilities, and each Assembly should be the final judge of whom it will seat.

GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE IS FREQUENTLY ASKED THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

1. Who is eligible to vote at Assemblies? Do incoming or outgoing Area Committee Members and GSRs vote? Do both incoming and outgoing District Committee Members vote? How long should an Area Committee Member or GSR hold office before being eligible to vote?

The question is usually answered by referring to Part 2 of this Section; it is important for each Area Assembly to decide, through its own Group Conscience, the method it plans to use, so that Assembly time is not taken up in the discussion and debate of procedural questions.

2. As each Group has only one vote, what about the vote of DCMs or Committee officers who also belong to one or another of the Groups?

The experience that has been shared with General Service Office indicates that the Area Delegate, Committee officers and DCMs are each members of a Group in the Area which is represented by a GSR. They are, nevertheless, entitled to vote at the Assembly according to their own ideas; the GSRs vote according to the consciences of the Groups they represent.

3. If the District Committee Member also serves as the GSR, should this member have two votes, one as Area Committee member and one as GSR?

At no time should a member have two votes. This Manual suggests that when a GSR is elected to DCM, thus becoming a member of the Area Committee, the Group should then elect another GSR.

4. Do the Chairpersons of special committees - public information, institutions, literature, etc. - have a vote?

In many Areas these Chairpersons are voting members, but this is a decision to be made by the Area Assembly.

5. How long must a Group have been in existence before its GSR is eligible to vote?

Once again, Assemblies can establish their own ground rules on this matter; but usually, if an AA Group has submitted the name of a GSR to represent that Group at the Assembly, that GSR is eligible to vote.

6. Can one GSR represent two Groups?

No. Each Group should have its own GSR, and that GSR may vote for one Group only.

7. When the GSR cannot be present, can a proxy vote be accepted?

If a GSR cannot be present, the Alternate votes in his or her place. A GSR can vote by proxy, but this is not a common practice; it usually applies only in the case of institutions Groups.

8. Are voting restrictions placed on GSRs, DCMs and Area Committee officers who have been absent from the preceding two (or more) Assemblies?

It is suggested that Area Committee members be asked to resign if time does not permit them to assume their responsibilities. This, too, is a decision to be made by the Assemblies themselves, and some do have ground rules relating voting eligibility to attendance at previous Assemblies.

WHERE HELD?

Many Areas rotate their Assembly sites from city to city. Some are held in the same place, and at the same time, as a regional convention. This saves the time and cost of travel to a separate meeting and gives all AAs who attend the convention a chance to see General Services in action. However, the convention programme and convention traffic sometimes get in the way of the orderly flow of Assembly business, and for this reason the combination site is becoming less popular. Most Areas schedule Assemblies monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly. Some are weekend functions, some are one-day affairs, etc.

HOW THE AREA COMMITTEE IS SUPPORTED

Typical of most financial undertakings in AA, the cost of supporting an Area Committee is small in relation to comparable activities in business firms and in many other organisations. Nonetheless, sufficient funds are needed or the work of the Area Committee will be hampered. Most Areas today maintain solvent treasuries and report regularly to their GSRs on the financial picture.

There are, of course, the routine expenses of postage, phone calls and bulletin printing. The Area Delegate needs money for the trip to the Conference meeting each November in Sydney. Area Committee members incur further travel expenses when they report to Groups following the Conference meeting. Many active Area Committees support public information programmes and buy literature for Groups in institutions. Each Area contributes a specified amount of money (determined annually), to General Service Office to help defray the cost of the Conference. This amount is sent to General Service Office no later than August 31 of each year, but normally in quarterly instalments.

HERE ARE SOME OF THE METHODS AREAS USE TO KEEP THEIR COMMITTEES SOLVENT AND EFFECTIVE:

- They take collections at Assemblies and District meetings.
- They ask Groups for annual or monthly contributions based on about \$1.00 per year per member, usually with a \$5.00 minimum for the Group.
- They leave "money boxes" with Groups, pointing out that each member who puts ten cents in weekly will have contributed \$5.20 when the year is done.
- They share in a regular contribution plan whereby groups contribute on a monthly or quarterly basis to CSO, General Service Office, District and Area. See the free pamphlet "Group Contribution Plans" from General Service Office.
- After Group expenses have been met, one suggested division is the 60-30-10 Plan: (60% to CSO, 30% to General Service Office and 10% to Area); another possibility is 50-30-10-10 (CSO 50%, NOAA 30%, Area 10%, District 10%); another could be 40-30-30 (CSO or District 40%, NOAA 30%, Area 30%) – it is up to the Group Conscience.

End of part 1

PART 2: AREA ACTIVITIES – LOCAL

In the beginning, *General Service Assemblies* were held only to elect Area Committee officers and an Area Delegate to the Annual Conference. This was important, for without such elections there would be no service structure in your Area today. But today an Assembly for elections is only a beginning. This part of Section 5 deals with other activities which are the muscle and blood of General Services in the Area. It deals with sharing sessions, public information programs and the kind of discussion that makes AA strong and vital. It deals with activities that have succeeded in stimulating interest in General Service and in helping Groups grow in number, strength and influence.

(The *District Meeting* - for the DCM and his or her GSRs - can use many of the same program activities).

NON-ELECTION AREA ASSEMBLY MEETINGS

HOW FREQUENTLY ARE MEETINGS HELD?

The majority of Areas hold their Assembly meetings quarterly or every other month. Some report monthly Assemblies. When the travel distances are great, Assemblies may be cut to biannual or even annual, with more emphasis being placed on District meetings, which are readily accessible to GSRs.

An Assembly is usually held in a convenient central spot in the Area. Some Areas, however, rotate from one District to another. Growing in popularity are weekend Assemblies, usually held Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, with all AA members invited to attend. Most Areas no longer hold Assemblies in conjunction with local or national conventions. It proves too difficult to tie in business meetings with the kind of AA speaker program that makes conventions so successful. On the other hand, most local Area or Regional Conventions are under the guidance of Area or District Committees.

WHO PRESIDES? WHO VOTES?

Assembly Meetings are usually conducted by the Area Chairperson, with the help of the officers and the Area Delegate. To keep agendas lively and meaningful, some Areas appoint *Agenda Committees* which include the officers and some of the GSRs.

All DCMs and Area officers, all GSRs and the Area Delegate have one vote each in an Assembly. Alternates normally vote only if the regular Area Committee member or GSR is not present. Proxy votes can be used, but this is not common practice.

The Assembly should decide whether or not GSRs of prison and hospital Groups are to have a vote - many do and find it helpful. It should formally fix the amount of time permitted for a participant's discussion, and should determine whether a two-thirds vote or a simple majority is needed for an action. (Some Assemblies find that a simple 'sense of the meeting' is preferable to the more formal vote on most items of business).

Should an Area or District invite a trustee (other than Regional trustee), GSO staff member/s, World Service Delegate or National Co-ordinator to attend an Area or District event (excluding Regional/National Forums and approved special events), the costs for travel, accommodation, meals and registration of the guest/s should be covered by that Area or District.

WHAT KIND OF PROGRAM?

A typical meeting (other than the Election Assembly outlined earlier) could have the following agenda:

1. Chairperson's report on committee activities since last meeting.
2. Area Delegate's Conference report or recent communications from General Service Office.
3. Secretary's report.
4. Treasurer's report. (Usually a good time to remind everyone of the suggested methods whereby Groups may contribute to all their AA service entities).
5. District reports.
6. Newsletter editor's report.
7. Treatment and Correctional Facilities report.
8. Public Information report.
9. Special reports - magazine, literature, convention, etc.
10. GSR time - for ideas, opinions and criticisms from GSRs.
11. Sharing session (see below "*How to Set Up a Sharing Session*").
12. Brief information session on General Service Office services - conducted by Area Delegate.

SOME IDEAS FOR ASSEMBLY AND DISTRICT MEETINGS

General Service Office appreciates copies of Assembly and District Meeting minutes, also letters about the meetings. There is no easier way for the office to keep up with what is happening in the Area, and no easier guide to the kind of help it can best render. Here are some ideas from the mailbag:

"The meeting considered the formation of an Area Hospitals and Institutions Committee. GSRs felt they should first study the "Guidelines" which General Service Office had provided and discuss that matter with their Groups."

"At our Area Assembly, we allow enough time for each DCM to report on District activities. We also encourage participation by as many GSRs as possible. The more sharing, the greater the exchange of ideas and solutions and the richer the harmony. Everyone benefits as the message is shared."

"In election years, we limit committee members' reports to two minutes each."

"We have not shied away from what some think are taboo subjects, such as money and why we need it, length of sobriety for GSRs, etc. We always open the meeting with a 'state of the Area' report - brief, to the point, touching on most of the subjects to come before the meeting. This lets the participants know what is coming and means better use of allotted time."

"Our Assemblies run Saturday and Sunday. The first morning is a GSR sharing session with our Area Delegate as moderator, usually with a pre-announced topic. We put out flyers for each Assembly. The afternoon is a business session, followed by a short session with the Area Chairperson as moderator, and past Area Delegates telling how General Service Office is set up and how it helps AA work around the world."

"We found it best to keep business to a minimum and to use most of the time for sharing sessions. Generally, these sessions are handled by one or two past Area Delegates; we call them 'action meetings'. One meeting, for example, had two short talks, each relating the experience of someone overseas and the help received from General Service Office. These small vignettes bring our worldwide services to light better than anything else."

"One advantage of having District Meetings became obvious when we received a news release from General Service Office. When it came to placing this, GSRs seemed to be much better informed about the newspapers and editors in their particular towns than did the Committee members."

"Our District meetings are held every three months, prior to a regular AA meeting on Sunday afternoon, and the location of the meeting is rotated. Since beginning this system, our GSR attendance has increased from 50% to 95%."

"Each year we have two Area Assemblies which are attended by GSRs or their Alternates. Our Assemblies and our Area Committee have two objectives: firstly, to help the Groups (this *must* come first or AA will surely die); and secondly, to support General Service Office."

HOW TO SET UP A SHARING SESSION

A sharing session is a meeting where **everyone** gets a chance to contribute ideas and criticisms about what is best for AA. It can be set up anywhere for any group of people, but it is especially useful for Assemblies and District Meetings. It is aimed at drawing out the ideas of the shyest member, and somehow it keeps the more articulate from dominating the meeting.

In a sharing session you may offer your opinion and never need to defend it. You have a Chairperson or a leader, who is more a timekeeper than a source of great wisdom. Here is how the session works:

Let's say that the topic is "How can we get more AAs interested in General Services?" The leader, armed with a loud bell and a watch or stopwatch, reads the questions and explains the rules. Each member present may talk for one and half or two minutes or whatever limit the group agrees upon. The leader starts with the first AA on the left or right. When that member's time is up, the bell rings, and on to the next member. After everyone has had a crack at the question, the leader starts around the room again. On this circuit, it is likely that many people will pass. A single topic may take from 20 minutes to more than an hour. The session should not be hurried nor should it be dragged out after the majority feel the topic has been exhausted.

A member should be appointed to take down just the essence of the meeting. These notes will provide a mine of good ideas for use by Area Committee officers, DCMs and GSRs. General Service Office has service literature on sharing sessions, free on request.

Good topics for sharing sessions? The field is limitless. A subject arousing emphatic Group interest is always desirable, such as:

- When a Group's meeting attendance has fallen off, what steps can be taken to rebuild it? How can other Groups help?
- Are 'special' meetings becoming more important - *Young People's Meetings, Women's Meetings, Stag Meetings*? Is this trend good or bad?
- Sponsorship: the hand of AA.
- Group Conscience ... the voice of AA.
- What kind of help do Groups want from General Service Office? How useful is "AA Around Australia" and other regular General Service Office services? How can they be made more useful?

Some sessions may also focus on topics affecting the General Service structure, such as:

- How can an Area Committee work productively with Central Offices in the Area?
- What painless methods are there for encouraging a Group to provide its share of the Area and General Service Office budgets?
- Are the local Groups supporting their Central Office/local *12th Step Committee*, General Service Office and Area Committee by use of the “60:30:10” or similar Plan? What about their District?

General Service Office will appreciate a digest of your sharing session ideas, as well as minutes of all your meetings. Such information on your effective activities can be extremely helpful when it is relayed to other Areas in this country and abroad.

HOW AREAS STIMULATE INTEREST IN GENERAL SERVICES

Time and effort have provided the main stimulation in most Areas. Any AA member's primary interests are, as they should be, in the home Group, in his or her own sobriety, and in helping another drunk. While the work of General Services has the same objectives, the connection is not always direct and obvious. Some stimulators are usually needed to get the attention of AA members, to show them that Service can mean a number of activities that they may not be aware of.

Here are two that DCMs, GSRs and Area Delegates have found useful in arousing an Area:

- Video meetings. See below under “Communication Tools”.
- Sharing session. Already dealt with at some length previously in this chapter.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

These ‘communications’ are available from General Service Office (48 Firth Street Arncliffe NSW 2205). By using them, you can show Groups in your Area the kind of help being offered to Groups everywhere by their own General Service Office.

- Videos: are available which show how *AA World Services* reach out to help drunks all over the world.
- Literature display: poster and format for setting up a display of Conference-Approved pamphlets and books, many of which some AAs have never seen.
- Literature Order Forms: these list all pamphlets and books. Another order form lists non-English literature.
- “Guidelines” display: a sample of all available “Guidelines”, covering service Areas common to most AAs.
- Newsletters: General Service Office will send samples of service bulletins.
- Sharing sessions: these are of great importance in the programming of District and Assembly meetings. Service pamphlet on sharing sessions available from General Service Office.
- The “*I Am Responsible*” banner. This sums up in a few words the service responsibility of AAs as individuals and as members of our Fellowship.
- “Conference Reports”: each year’s Conference is fully covered in the Final Report sent free to all Area Delegates and available for purchase by Area Committees and any interested Member (an abbreviated version is published in “*AA Around Australia*”).
- *Group Starter Kit*: particularly useful to new Groups, which receive it at no charge. It is available to all Groups at nominal cost.

WORKING TOGETHER - GENERAL SERVICES & LOCAL CENTRAL SERVICES

General Service committees and Central Service Offices (CSOs) traditionally have had different functions. Central Offices provide **local** services, while General Service committees maintain the link between the AA Groups and the *General Service Conference*. So these two separate but vital service structures coexist in many Areas in mutual co-operation and harmony, to the benefit of the entire Fellowship.

At the time the Conference was started there were already well-established CSOs in some of our larger cities, providing local services for AA Groups and members. The same offices still provide these needed services and they have been joined by many more such offices throughout the AA world. CSOs are supported by the AA Groups in the communities they serve, each Group electing its own representative to attend CSO meetings. In most cases, these offices provide the following local services:

- Receiving, distributing and following up *Twelfth Step* calls.
- Answering enquiries about AA.
- Establishing local Public Information and Institutions Committees.
- Maintaining information about local hospitals and recovery facilities for alcoholics.
- Providing local AA meeting lists.
- Providing a newsletter about local AA events.
- Ordering, selling and distributing AA Conference-Approved literature.

The Conference structure is the method through which all AA Groups in a Region (or in a specified Area or such) can provide the most effective communication within the Area and between the Groups and their General Service Board and General Service Office on matters affecting AA as a whole. These matters include AA policy on:

- AA Conference-Approved literature.
- AA Public Information.
- AA's relations with professionals in the field of alcoholism.
- AA institutions activity.
- AA finances.
- The "AA Around Australia" Bulletin.
- The election of Trustees to the AA General Service Board.

The First Concept states: "*The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for AA World Services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.*" Each Group may elect a GSR to represent it at an Assembly where the Area Delegate is elected to represent all Groups in the Area at the Conference. Thus, the link between the AA Groups and their General Service Board and General Service Office is established and maintained, and the Conference becomes, as nearly as possible, the voice of AA in Australia.

In Areas where there are CSOs providing the necessary services, General Service committees should not duplicate those services; however, in those Areas where there is little or no CSO activity, the General Service committee has frequently undertaken to provide many of these services.

WHEN THE SERVICE STRUCTURE NEEDS REBUILDING

Today, most Areas accept the need for General Service structure; the chief problem is how to increase Area activity in order to help the Fellowship reach more alcoholics with the AA message. Nevertheless, every now and then an Area Committee finds that it needs to build the Conference structure all over again. Here are two Area situations in North America that Chairpersons found very lean, and what was done about each:

"Let's start with finding yourself elected Area Chairperson, without an Area Committee! How do you put one together? There is probably no easy way. Like our growth in this program, it must be slow and gradual and a continuing process; but we have to begin somewhere.

"In our case, activity was started with letters, phone calls and personal visits to members and Groups all over the Area. AA members will co-operate if you let them know you need them.

"Our Area has a small AA population; at that time there were only thirty Groups in five Districts. Groups were asked to elect GSRs and Alternates and they did. That gave us sixty for an Assembly. Three DCMs for each District gave us fifteen more. Then we added five past Area Delegates, four officers and a current Area Delegate. Starting from nothing we now had eighty-four assembly members.

"Next we picked a central location and started quarterly Assemblies. Urgent letters brought good attendance, but there was still a lot of work to be done - the entire Committee needed educating in General Service. District activities were started next."

"Round robins brought DCMs and GSRs closer together. Later, a Saturday night open AA meeting was scheduled before the Sunday morning service session. Members were urged to make a weekend of it. Al-Anon co-operated, holding its committee meetings separately, of course, but at the same time. The idea caught on. Three times a year, these "little conferences" built service activities. The annual Area convention took over the fourth meeting.

"It has been encouraging to watch the growth of and increased interest in GSC activities, among individuals and within Groups. The picture has changed from a handful of AAs getting together to elect an Area Delegate to an enthusiastic, living, functioning Area Committee assuming its service responsibility. Maybe we are growing up a little and becoming responsible for our service activities.

"We pretty well started from scratch in setting up our Area, following the AA Service Manual. First thing was to reach AA friends all over the Area, people with several years' sobriety who knew something about General Service Office and the structure of AA. We asked them to serve as temporary DCMs.

"I worked with each DCM. I visited Groups and talked General Service Office and GSR to them and, of course, found many members who did not know what either meant. This has been time-consuming and tiring, but it has paid off. We have had many Assembly meetings, Committee meetings and Sharing Sessions.

"All of this has been the most interesting and gratifying experience of my entire life. In my opinion, AAs who never get into General Services are missing much. They are not getting what they are entitled to in this program."

PAST AREA DELEGATES CAN BE HELPFUL

"After I served my term as Area Delegate, the full impact of being a has-been in Conference affairs hit me, with all of its loneliness and feeling of being separated from the heart and core of AA."

This past Area Delegate did something about it. But many others do not, or feel that they cannot. It is true that AA has in past Area Delegates a mine of experience that may not be getting used. The AA practice of rotation prevents Area Delegates from succeeding themselves and frowns on their re-election to the same office at a later date. Now gradually emerging is a role for the past Area Delegate that involves them in Area activities, but leaves the Area Committee and new Area Delegate free to run their own show. It is suggested that past Area Delegates not hold office as GSRs or DCMs, but find other ways to become involved in Area service.

A round-up of Area experience shows that past Area Delegates are frequently ex-officio, non-voting members of Area Committees. They are called in from time to time for consultation or for a special assignment. Frequently, they are found in the chair of committees or Regional or Area conventions. Or they may be appointed by the Area Chairperson to be responsible for Area PI, or to urge more widespread distribution of Conference-Approved literature and the "AA Around Australia" bulletin.

Another approach is the regular annual meetings of past Area Delegates in a Region. It originated in the south eastern US and is described here by one of the originators:

The idea started with a breakfast meeting for past Area Delegates, held in connection with the Southeast Convention (for all AAs). This went on for several years, always functioning in a somewhat informal manner, avoiding all possibility of growing into hierarchy. Then it was decided that a single session each year did not meet the growing needs for complete communication and information. It was suggested that a weekend of informal meetings be tried.

They were, and have become a regular thing each February. At the first one, we found ourselves discussing and recommending actions that were not our concern, but the concerns of the many Area Committees in our Region. We got back on the track, and now it can be said that we are in no way acting like an authoritarian group but are interested in informing ourselves so that we can help to interest other AAs in Area activities. I think loosely knit bodies like ours can help strengthen the lines of communication between the Conference, General Service Office and AA as a whole.

HOW DO WE FORM A NEW AREA?

If the AA population of an Area seems to have grown to the point where the current delegate and other trusted servants can no longer provide adequate service and communication, there may be local interest in forming a new Area. In such a case, the Area committee or committees involved may write to the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous and request application for an additional Area.

This three-page form, adapted from the North American version which was first painstakingly worked out in 1968 and revised in 1992 by that Conference, requests detailed information about the current service structure, such as: How often assemblies are held; whether there is an Alternate Delegate; how often District Meetings are held; the number of active DCMs and whether they assist the delegate and alternate; the number of active GSRs in the Area and its pattern of growth over the last five years, broken down to yearly figures.

The application form is designed to determine problems regarding geography and AA population, as well as whether or not the current Area service structure is as well developed as it might be to provide help for the Delegate (see the Section 4: "The District").

When such a request came up at the 1961 North American Conference, a memo from Bill W provided enlightening opinions on the subject. Our co-founder wrote (in part):

The Conference Committee on Admissions should weigh each application for a new delegate on its own merit, taking into consideration the primary factors of population, geography – and also expense. But this process of adding delegates ought to be gradual, aiming at the remedying of obvious marked flaws in local communications. We should, our budget allowing, continue to remedy obvious flaws in local communications, and that is all.

It should be re-emphasised that the Conference is not a political body, demanding a completely rigid form of representation. What we shall need will always be enough delegates at the Conference to afford a reliable cross section of AA plus enough more to make sure of good local communication.

Adapted from the North American AA Service Manual

PROCEDURE FOR CHANGE OF REGION

1. The Delegate from an Area requesting a change of Region will write, on behalf of the assembly, to the Secretary of the Trustee's Nominating Committee, requesting the change of Region, and will send copies of the letter to the Trustees in the two regions involved.
2. The Delegate will ask the General Service Office to send a letter to all of the Area Delegates in the two Regions involved, requesting them to express their approval/disapproval on an enclosed card.
3. Approval by two thirds of the Delegates from each Region involved is required before the proposal is presented to the General Service Conference for its approval.

THE ROLE OF THE AREA REGISTRAR

In some Areas, Registrars now develop and maintain records of all Groups within the Area. The records include Group information such as Group name, meeting location, time, and GSR. or contact for the Group. Registrars may also be responsible for names, mailing addresses, phone numbers of the GSRs, DCMs, District officers, Area officers and other Area Committee members. Another duty of the Registrar may be to provide mailing labels for Area publications such as monthly newsletter or a mailing of minutes. A willingness to become organised, and computer literacy, may be helpful. There are many benefits to appointing a Registrar to the Area Committee, these include:

- The Area Committee knows how many Groups there are in the Area.
- The Area Committee knows how many meetings there are in the Area.
- The Area Committee knows roughly how many Members there are in the Area.
- Over any given period the statistics can be compared, and the growth (or decline) of the Area can be observed with some accuracy.
- If all Areas have Registrars, or someone who performs the same function, then the above statistics can be regularly conveyed to General Service Office so that more accurate figures about Group numbers and the numbers of members in the Fellowship can be kept. Thus the growth of the Fellowship can be monitored.

- Area Registrars are in close contact with the Groups in the Area. If Groups do not respond to registration forms sent to them, the Area Registrar rings them for the details. This has been proven to draw Groups into taking an interest in Area service, and to lead to greater participation.
- Meetings lists become more accurate as it is known whether Groups/Meetings are operating or not. Defunct meetings do not continue to appear on meetings lists because nobody bothered to inform the publisher. The Registrar would be authorised to act on this.
- The Registrar would have a working relationship with both the General Service Office and the local Central Service Office or Intergroup, keeping Group records up to date.
- Districts can also appoint District Registrars, which eases the job of the Area Registrar.

SUGGESTIONS FOR NEWSLETTERS OR BULLETINS

Newsletters or bulletins published by Area Committees or CSOs may include local AA news, information about Groups and committees, and reprinted material from AA literature. As in most AA service activities, it has been found prudent to make a committee (rather than one or two individuals) responsible for the format, planning and content.

Many local publications quote from AA literature such as the ‘Big Book’, the “Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions”, “The Australian AA Service Manual”, and Conference-Approved pamphlets. When this occurs, please include the proper credit line, in order to ensure that the copyrights of AA literature are protected.

It is very important that quoting and reprinting is done in the correct manner to protect our message and copyrights. Details of these legal requirements regarding copyright, logos, trademarks, copying and reprint permission can be found in Section 11 of this Manual: “AA Literature”.

Perhaps you might consider these ideas, based on local experience with AA newsletters and bulletins:

- Printing your newsletter on A4 paper (most commonly used),
- Scheduling ‘theme issues’ on some aspect of the AA program and using excerpts from Conference-Approved material (with proper credit) relating to the theme,
- Asking for and publishing letters from AA readers,
- Carrying minutes of various committee meetings,
- Running a ‘*Calendar of Events*’ feature,
- Conducting a subscription campaign (perhaps making announcements at Group meetings), to build paid readership.

End of part 2

PART 3: AREAS LOOKING OUTWARD: AREA – REGION – NATION

AREA, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONVENTIONS

In Australia the ‘National Convention’ is the norm, rather than a Regional one, although Area Conventions are occasionally held, but still rare. Whereas Conferences, Forums and Assemblies are about service work, Conventions are about carrying the message, networking and sharing.

A Convention is “a get-together beyond the Group level”. It sets up an opportunity to share the AA experience in a broader way, but requires a great deal of planning and preparation. See Guideline GL-14: “AA Get-Togethers” and GL-15: “*The National Convention*”.

From Guideline GL-14: “As one member puts it, the best AA Convention is ‘just a darned good AA meeting blown up big.’”

North American Area Conventions are a special type of AA meeting, usually weekend affairs, but sometimes extending several days. They are usually set up and guided by Area Committees or by special committees appointed by Area Chairpersons. As mentioned earlier, experience shows that it is not wise to hold Area Assemblies during Conventions, but sometimes they can be held just before or after.

Whether or not an Area Committee is responsible for Conventions, these suggestions from previous North American Convention Chairpersons for setting one up may prove useful for smaller Australian events at Area or Region scale. With both of these, the Regional Trustee should also be involved, and driving the process if at regional scale.

“We have a lot of geography between our two major cities. Made two mailings to all Groups, offered baby-sitting and some rooms in our own homes. We invited Groups from a distance to run our workshops and had unexpected response. We counted heavily on support from local Groups and particularly from GSRs. We timed our meetings to allow for anticipated driving time from remote sections. We made a gentleman’s agreement on turnabout, one year up north and next down south.”

“The greatest problem was to get interested people from four Areas together in one place to make plans. Finally, it was decided that the Area Chairpersons and Area Delegates should meet, with a DCM from the local Area to act as secretary. Our first meeting produced plans for a complete Convention, with location and format settled. Each Area treasury put up \$50, which was repaid after the Convention. We called it a Convention rather than a Conference to avoid confusion with *the* Conference. Now the committee meeting is held regularly at the site of the next Convention, so that all facilities can be surveyed by Area Delegates and Area Chairpersons of the other three Areas. The committee also meets at the close of each Convention to sum up the proceedings and to set a date and place for the next.”

“The first Convention was really a means to an end - we needed some way to bring Groups closer together. We needed something that every AA member could feel part of. Our permanent theme is *Unity*, so everyone knows our purpose. We brought as many in on the planning as possible, at least one member of each Group. This approach has met with a great deal of success, arousing the enthusiasm of both older and younger members. The Convention, we hope, will increase their interest in service work.

REGIONAL FORUMS

Regional Forums are primarily service meetings. Whereas in Australia we often hold District Meetings and Area Assemblies for service purposes, when we get to Region scale, we call it a 'Regional Forum'. In North America it is common to hold Regional 'Service Assemblies' where information is collected and knowledge is shared, but no decisions are made – similar to our Regional Forum in intent. At national scale, of course, the service meeting equivalent is the annual General Service Conference.

One of the duties of Area Delegates is to assist Regional Trustees and General Service Office when an Area in a Region has successfully bid to run a Regional Forum. This takes place at Conference, and must be bid for and have explicit advance support of the Area involved. Where possible, Areas will take turns and a Forum will be run each year. Regional Forums are an opportunity for Areas in a Region to come together to discuss issues and provide information relevant to the Service Structure. Regional Forums are not decision- or recommendation-making structures. Also, unlike Conventions of various scales, their objective is not to run AA meetings, although a meeting where old timers share their experience around particular service themes, has been found to be very interesting and enjoyable as a learning opportunity. See Guideline GL-06 "Regional Forums".

Notwithstanding AA purism, organisers of Regional Forums often find that relaxation opportunities, interesting speakers, dancing etc., in the evening, attract more Members, lend a balance to the hard talking and listening that continue all day, and help energise people for the discussions following.

REGIONAL TRUSTEE NOMINATIONS

Each AA Region has a place on the General Service Board of AA Australia. The Board (which relies heavily on the General Service Office for most implementation), is the service arm of the Conference, and works with Area Delegates to take care of the Fellowship's needs at national level.

When Regional Trustee positions become vacant, normally every four years, Areas have the responsibility for searching for suitable nominees. Ideally this search should begin well before the nominations are due. General Service Office will notify the Areas that an election is due, and CVs must be sent in by a set date.

Areas preparing to present candidates for Board positions are advised to carefully read Section 9 of this Manual: "The General Service Board" beforehand.

Areas have a choice: all a Region's Areas may join together and collectively nominate one candidate, or each Area may send a maximum of one candidate. The *Third Legacy Procedure* is used for important local elections of this type. See Section 12: "AA's Traditional Legacy Documents" for details. Any single, locally chosen candidate will normally be endorsed by Conference and elected to the Board. If Areas choose to send their candidates' applications to Conference, a special *Nominating Session* will select a nominee, who is then presented to the full Conference and subsequently elected to the Board of Trustees. See "*How AA Chooses Regional Trustees*" under Section 9: "The Board", also "*Articles of Association*" under Section 13: "Service Documents" and "*Conference Charter Australian Section*" Clause 10 under Section 12: "AA's Traditional 'Legacy' Documents".

THE AREA & CONFERENCE

HELP ON THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Most of the agenda for the annual meeting of the Conference in Sydney in November comes from the AA Groups by way of the GSR, the Area Committee members and the Area Delegate. Every AA member has something to say about the Fellowship's present and future and a good part of it gets discussed at the Australian General Service Conference. (Section 7 covers this in some detail). So one of the most important program items for an Area Assembly or District Meeting is a good look at what might help AA on a broad basis. A certain problem may appear to be peculiar to your Area but it is surprising how many are found to be common to every corner of AA once someone brings them to light. This cannot be over emphasised: Group problems make up a considerable part of the Conference program. Area Assemblies and District Meetings are the ideal time to find out what problems and what solutions are shared by AA Groups everywhere.

Another important activity of Assemblies and District meetings is reporting the benefits of the annual Conference meeting to the membership. These gatherings provide ideal opportunities for reporting fully on what took place at the November Conference, for querying the Area Delegate in detail and for deciding what problems need more attention at future Conferences. (More on this in Section 7: "The Conference".)

TWO HATS

In AA it seems there are always more service positions than people to fill them. And if we do manage to fill them, we create still more. As a result, some members may feel pressure to shoulder more than one service role at a time. On the surface this may appear to be expedient. After all 'someone has to do it'. However, the following issues need to be considered by any member contemplating donning two hats;

- Holding two service positions simultaneously deprives other members of the opportunity to serve.
- Sometimes it's better to leave a position vacant for a while. Someone will decide to step up, or be encouraged to volunteer, if they understand the need.
- When a member wears two hats, there is a real danger of a conflict of interest and an inclination to undue influence.

When it comes to general service, experience shows it's usually better to do one job well than two jobs poorly."

End
part 3