

THE AUSTRALIAN AA SERVICE MANUAL

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AA's LEGACY OF SERVICE – Bill W

by Bill W.

Our Twelfth Step, carrying the message, is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives: this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.

Hence, an AA service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer, ranging all the way from the *Twelfth Step* itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA's General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our *Third Legacy of Service*.

Services include meeting places, hospital co-operation, and *Intergroup* offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship.

VITAL TO AA's GROWTH

These services, whether performed by individuals, Groups, Areas, or AA as a whole, are utterly vital to our existence and growth. Nor can we make AA more simple by abolishing such services. We would only be asking for complication and confusion.

Concerning any given service, we therefore pose but one question: "Is this service really needed?" If it is, then maintain it we must, or fail in our mission to those who need and seek AA.

The most vital, yet least understood, Group of services that AA has are those that enable us to function as a whole, namely: the *General Service Office*, *AA World Services Inc*, the *AA Grapevine Inc*, and our Board of Trustees, known legally as the *General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Our worldwide unity and much of our growth since early times are directly traceable to this cluster of life-giving activities.

Until 1950, these overall services were the sole function of a few oldtime AA's, several nonalcoholic friends, Doctor Bob and me. For all the years of AA's infancy, we oldtimers had been the self-appointed Trustees for *Alcoholics Anonymous*.

FELLOWSHIP READY FOR RESPONSIBILITY

At this time, we realised that AA had grown up, that our Fellowship was ready and able to take these responsibilities from us. There was also another urgent reason for change. Since we oldtimers couldn't live on forever, newer trustees would be virtually unknown to the AA Groups, now spread over the whole earth. Without direct linkage to AA, future trustees couldn't possibly function alone.

This meant that we had to form a conference representing our membership which could meet yearly with our Board of Trustees in New York, and thus assume direct responsibility for the guardianship of AA tradition and the direction of our principal service affairs. Otherwise, a virtually unknown Board of Trustees and our too little understood service headquarters operations would someday be bound to face collapse.

Suppose that future trustees, acting quite on their own, were to make a serious blunder. Suppose that with no linkage to AA, they tried to act for us in time of great trouble or crisis. With no direct

guidance from AA as a whole, how could they do this? Collapse of our top services would then be inevitable. And if, under such conditions, our world services did fall apart, how could they ever be reconstructed?

These, briefly, were the conclusions that led to the formation of the *General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Later, I will outline in more detail the events that have now become AA history.

The deliberative body known as the Conference is made up of elected Area Delegates from the United States and Canada now numbering about ninety, together with the Trustees, the directors of *AAWS Inc*, and the *AA Grapevine Inc*, and *GSO* and *Grapevine* staff members numbering forty or more. The Conference held its first annual meeting in 1951. Since then it has met annually in April in New York. (*Except for the 1955 Conference held in St Louis, Missouri*). It has proved itself an immense success, establishing a record of advisory actions that have served the Fellowship well during the intervening years of growth and development.

HIGHLIGHTS OF AA SERVICE HISTORY

To go back to the beginning: One day in 1937, at Doctor Bob's Akron home, he and I added up the score of over two years' work. For the first time we saw that wholesale recovery for alcoholics was possible. We then had two small but solid Groups at Akron and New York, plus a sprinkling of members elsewhere. How could these few recovered ones tell millions of alcoholics throughout the world the great news? That was the question.

Forthwith, Doctor Bob and I met with eighteen of the Akron Group at the home of T. Henry Williams, a steadfast nonalcoholic friend. Some of the Akron Group still thought we ought to stick to the word-of-mouth process; but the majority felt that we now needed our own hospitals with paid workers and, above all, a book for other alcoholics that could explain to them our methods and results. This would require considerable money - millions perhaps. (We didn't know that millions would have ruined us even more than no money at all). So the Akron meeting commissioned me to get to New York and raise funds. Arrived home, I found the New York Group in full agreement with this idea. Several of us went to work at once.

AA's EARLY MONEY PROBLEMS

Through my brother-in-law, Dr LV Strong Jr, my only remaining friend and the confidant of the worst of my drinking time, we made a contact with Willard S. Richardson, a friend and long-time associate of the Rockefeller family. Mr Richardson promptly took fire and interested a Group of his own friends.

In the winter of 1937, a meeting was called at the offices of John D. Rockefeller Jr. Present were Mr Richardson and his Group, Dr William D Silkworth, alcoholics from Akron and New York, Doctor Bob and I. After a long discussion, we convinced our new friends that we urgently needed money - a lot of it, too.

One of them, Frank Amos, soon made a trip to Akron early in 1938 to investigate the Group there. He returned with a very optimistic report, a digest of which Mr Richardson quickly laid before John D. Rockefeller Jr. Though much impressed, Mr Rockefeller declined to give any large sum for fear of professionalising AA. He did, however, donate \$5,000. This was used to keep Doctor Bob and me going during 1938. We were still a long way from hospitals, missionaries, books and big money. This looked mighty tough at the time, but it was probably one of the best breaks that AA ever had.

In spite of Mr Rockefeller's views, we renewed our efforts to persuade his friends of our crying need for money. At length, they agreed that we did need more money, certainly enough to prepare a textbook on our methods and experience.

In the late spring of 1938, I had drafted what are now the first two chapters of the book "Alcoholics Anonymous". Mimeographed copies of these were used as part of the prospectus for our futile fund-raising operation. At Board meetings, then held nearly every month, our non-alcoholic friends commiserated on our lack of success. About half of the \$5,000 Mr Rockefeller advanced had been used to pay the mortgage on Doctor Bob's home. The rest of it, divided between us, would, of course, soon be exhausted. The outlook was certainly bleak.

AA ITS OWN PUBLISHER

Then Frank Amos remembered his old time friend Eugene Exman, religious editor at Harper's, the book publishers. He sent me to Harper's, and I showed Mr Exman two chapters of our proposed book. To my delight, Mr Exman was impressed. He suggested that *Harper's* might advance me \$1,500 in royalties to finish the job. Broke as we then were, that \$1,500 looked like a pile of money.

Nevertheless, our enthusiasm for this proposal quickly waned. With the book finished, we would be \$1,500 in debt to Harper's. And if, as we hoped, AA then got a lot of publicity, how could we possibly hire the help to answer the inquiries, maybe thousands, that would flood in?

There was another problem too, a serious one. If our AA book became the basic text for Alcoholics Anonymous, its ownership would then be in other hands. It was evident that our Society ought to own and publish its own literature. No publisher, however good, ought to own our best asset.

So two of us bought a pad of blank stock certificates and wrote on them "Works Publishing, par value \$25". My friend Hank P and I then offered shares in the new book company to alcoholics and their friends in New York. They just laughed at us. Who would buy stock, they said, in a book not yet written!

Somehow, these timid buyers had to be persuaded, so we went to "*Reader's Digest*" and told the managing editor the story of our budding Society and its proposed book. He liked the notion very much and promised that in the spring of 1939 when we thought the book would be ready, the "*Reader's Digest*" would print a piece about AA, mentioning the new book, of course.

This was the sales argument we needed. With a plug like that, the proposed volume would sell by carloads. How could we miss? The New York alcoholics and their friends promptly changed their minds about Works Publishing stock. They began to buy it, mostly on instalments.

Ruth Hock, our nonalcoholic secretary, typed away as I slowly dictated the chapters of the text for the new book. Fierce argument over these drafts and what ought to go into them was a main feature of the New York and Akron Groups' meetings for months on end. I became much more of an umpire than I ever was an author. Meanwhile, the alcoholics at Akron and New York and a couple in Cleveland began writing their stories - 28 in all.

When the book project neared completion, we visited the managing editor of the "*Reader's Digest*" and asked for the promised article. He gave a blank look, scarcely remembering who we were. Then the blow fell. He told how months before he had put our proposition to his editorial Board and how it had been turned down flat. With profuse apologies, he admitted he'd plumb forgot to let us know anything about it. This was a crusher. Meanwhile, we had optimistically ordered 5,000 copies of the new book, largely on a shoestring. The printer, too, had relied on the "*Reader's Digest*". Soon there would be 5,000 books in his warehouse, and no customers for them.

The book finally appeared in April, 1939. We got the "*New York Times*" to do a review and Dr Harry Emerson Fosdick supplied us with another really good one, but nothing happened. The

book simply didn't sell. We were in debt up to our ears. The sheriff appeared at the Newark office where we had been working, and the landlord sold the Brooklyn house where Lois and I lived. She and I were dumped into the street and then onto the charity of AA friends.

How we got through the summer of 1939 I'll never quite know. Hank P had to get a job. The faithful Ruth accepted shares in the defunct book company as pay. One AA friend supplied us with his summer camp; another, with a car.

AA MAKES NEWS

The first break came in September, 1939. "Liberty" Magazine, then headed by our great friend-to-be Fulton Oursler, carried an article, "Alcoholics and God", written by Morris Markey. There was an instant response. About eight hundred letters from alcoholics and their families poured in. Ruth answered every one of them, enclosing a leaflet about the new book, the book "Alcoholics Anonymous". Slowly, the book began to sell. Then the "Cleveland Plain Dealer" ran a series of pieces about Alcoholics Anonymous. At once, the Cleveland Groups mushroomed from a score into many hundreds of members. More books sold. Thus we inched and squeezed our way through that perilous year.

We hadn't heard a thing from Mr Rockefeller since early in 1938. But in 1940 he put in a dramatic reappearance. His friend, Mr Richardson, came to a trustees' meeting, smiling broadly. Mr Rockefeller, he said, wanted to give Alcoholics Anonymous a dinner. The invitation list showed an imposing collection of notables. We figured them to be collectively worth at least a billion dollars.

The dinner came off early in February at New York's Union League Club. Dr Harry Emerson Fosdick spoke in praise of us, and so did Dr Foster Kennedy, the eminent neurologist. Then Doctor Bob and I briefed the audience on AA. Some of the Akron and New York alcoholics scattered among the notables at the tables responded to questions. The gathering showed a rising warmth and interest. This was it, we thought; our money problems were solved!

Nelson Rockefeller then rose to his feet to speak for his father, who was ill. His father was very glad, he said, that those at the dinner had seen the promising beginning of the *Society of Alcoholics Anonymous*. Seldom, Nelson continued, had his father shown more interest in anything. But obviously, since AA was a work of pure goodwill, one man carrying the good news to the next, little or no money would be required. At this sally, our spirits fell. When Mr Rockefeller had finished, the whole billion dollars' worth of capitalists got up and walked out, leaving not a nickel behind them.

Next day, John D. Rockefeller Jr wrote to all those who had attended the dinner and even to those who had not. Again he reiterated his complete confidence and high interest. Then, at the very end of his letter, he casually remarked that he was giving Alcoholics Anonymous \$1,000!

Only much later did we realise what Mr Rockefeller had really done for us. At risk of personal ridicule, he had stood up before the whole world to put in a plug for a tiny society of struggling alcoholics. For these unknowns, he'd gone way out on a limb. Wisely sparing of his money, he had given freely of himself. Then and there John D. Rockefeller Jr saved us from the perils of property management and professionalism. He couldn't have done more.

AA GROWS TO TWO THOUSAND MEMBERS

As a result, AA's 1940 membership jumped sharply to about two thousand at the year's end. Doctor Bob and I each began to receive \$30 a week out of the dinner contributions. This eased us greatly. Lois and I went to live in a tiny room at AA's number one clubhouse, on West 24th Street in Manhattan.

Best of all, increased book sales had made a national headquarters possible. We moved from Newark, NJ, where the AA book had been written, to Vesey Street, just North of the Wall Street District of New York.

We took a modest two-room office right opposite the downtown Church Street Annex Post Office. There the famous Box 658 was ready and waiting to receive the thousands of frantic inquiries that would presently come into it. At this point, Ruth (though nonalcoholic) became AA's first national secretary, and I turned into a sort of headquarters handyman.

Through the whole of 1940, book sales were the sole support of the struggling office. Every cent of these earnings went to pay for AA work done there. All requests for help were answered with warm personal letters. When alcoholics or their families showed continued interest, we kept on writing. Aided by such letters and the book "Alcoholics Anonymous", new AA Groups had begun to take form.

BEGINNING OF GROUP SERVICES

More importantly, we had lists of prospects in many cities and towns of the United States and Canada. We turned these lists over to AA travelling businessmen, members of already established Groups. With these couriers, we corresponded constantly, and they started still more Groups. For further benefit of our travellers, we put out a Group directory.

Then came an unexpected activity. Because the newborn Groups saw only a little of their travelling sponsors, they turned to the New York office for help with their innumerable troubles. By mail we relayed the experience of the older centres on to them. A little later, as we shall see, this became a major service.

Meanwhile, some of the stockholders in the book company, *Works Publishing*, began to get restive. All the book profits, they complained were going for AA work in the office. When, if ever, were they going to get their money back? We also saw that the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" should now become the property of AA as a whole. At the moment it was owned one-third by the 49 subscribers, one-third by my friend Hank P, and the remainder by me.

As a first step, we had the book company, *Works Publishing*, audited and legally incorporated. Hank P and I donated our shares in it to the *Alcoholic Foundation* (as our Board of Trustees was then called). This was the stock that we had taken for services rendered. But the 49 other subscribers had put in real money. They would have to be paid cash. Where on earth could we get it?

The help we needed turned up in the person of A. LeRoy Chipman. Also a friend and associate of John D. Rockefeller Jr, he had recently been made a Trustee of the Foundation. He persuaded Mr Rockefeller Jr, two of his sons, and some of the dinner guests to lend the Foundation \$3,000. This promptly paid off a \$2,500 indebtedness to Charles B. Towns, (*owner of Towns Hospital in New York; his loan helped to make the 'Big Book' possible*), settled some incidental debts, and permitted the reacquisition of the outstanding stock. Two years later, the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" had done so well that we were able to pay off this whole Rockefeller loan.

JACK ALEXANDER LOOKS AT AA

The spring of 1941 brought us a ten-strike. The "*Saturday Evening Post*" decided to do a piece about Alcoholics Anonymous. It assigned one of its star writers, Jack Alexander, to the job. Having just done an article on the New Jersey rackets, Jack approached us somewhat tongue-in-cheek. But he soon became an AA "convert", even though he wasn't an alcoholic. Working early and late, he spent a whole month with us. Doctor Bob and I and elders of the early Groups at Akron, New York, Cleveland, Philadelphia and Chicago spent uncounted hours with him. When he could feel AA in the very marrow of his bones, he proceeded to write the piece that rocked drunks and their families all over the nation. It was the lead story in the "*Saturday Evening Post*" of March 1, 1941.

Came then the deluge. Frantic appeals from alcoholics and their families, six thousand of them, hit the New York office. At first, we pawed at random through the mass of letters, laughing and crying by turns. How could this heartbreaking mail be answered? It was a cinch that Ruth and I could never do it alone. Form letters wouldn't be enough. Every single one must have an understanding personal reply.

Maybe the AA Groups themselves would help. Though we'd never asked anything of them before, this was surely their business, if it was anybody's. An enormous *Twelfth Step* job had to be done and done quickly.

So we told the Groups the story, and they responded. The measuring stick for voluntary contribution was at that time set at \$1.00 per member per year. The trustees of the Foundation agreed to look after these funds, placing them in a special bank account, earmarking them for AA office work only.

We had started the year 1941 with two thousand members, but we finished with eight thousand. This was the measure of the great impact of the "*Saturday Evening Post*" piece. But this was only the beginning of uncounted thousands of pleas for help from individuals and from growing Groups all over the world, which have continued to flow into the General Service Office to this day.

This phenomenal expansion brought another problem, a very important one. The national spotlight now being on us, we had to begin dealing with the public on a large scale. Public ill will could stunt our growth, even bring it to a standstill. But enthusiastic public confidence could swell our ranks to numbers we had only dreamed of before. The "*Post*" piece had proved this.

Finding the right answers to all our public relations puzzlers has been a long process. After much trial and error, sometimes punctuated by painful mistakes, the attitudes and practices that would work best for us emerged. The important ones can today be seen in our AA Traditions. One hundred percent anonymity at the public level, no use of the AA name for the benefit of other causes, however worthy, no endorsements or alliances, one single purpose for Alcoholics Anonymous, no professionalism, public relations by the principle of attraction rather than promotion - these were some of the hard-learned lessons.

Figure 1 The Jack Alexander Article

SERVICE TO THE WHOLE OF AA

Thus far in our Society story, we have seen the Foundation, the AA book, the development of pamphlet literature, the answered mass of pleas for help, the satisfied need of Groups for counsel on their problems, the beginning of our wonderful relations with the public, all becoming part of a growing service to the whole world of AA. At last our Society really began to function as a whole.

But the 1941-1945 period brought still more developments of significance. The Vesey Street office was moved to Lexington Avenue, New York City, just opposite Grand Central Terminal. The moment we located there, we were besieged with visitors who, for the first time, began to see Alcoholics Anonymous as a vision for the whole globe.

Since AA was growing so fast, GSO had to grow too. More alcoholic staff members were engaged. As they divided the work between them, departments began to be created. Today's office has a good many - Group, foreign and public relations, AA Conference, office management, packing and mailing, accounting, stenographic and special service to Loners, prisons and hospitals. (*Other services have been added since 1955*).

It was chiefly from correspondence and from our mounting public relations activity that the basic ideas for our Traditions came. In late 1945 a good AA friend suggested that all this mass of experience might be codified into a set of general principles, simply stated principles that could offer tested solutions to all of AA's problems of living and working together and of relating our Society to the world outside.

If we had become sure enough of where we stood on such matters as membership, Group autonomy, singleness of purpose, nonendorsement of other enterprises, professionalism, public controversy and anonymity in its several aspects, then such a code of principles could be written. Such a traditional code could not, of course, ever become rule or law. But it could act as a sure guide for our trustees, for headquarters people and, most especially, for AA Groups with bad growing pains.

Being at the centre of things, we of the headquarters would have to do the job. Aided by my helpers there, I set to work. The *Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous* that resulted were first published in the so-called long form in the "*Grapevine*" of May, 1946. Then I wrote some more pieces explaining the Traditions in detail. These came out in later issues of the "*Grapevine*".

TRADITIONS TOOK PERSUASION

The first reception of the "*Twelve Traditions*" was interesting and amusing. The reaction was mixed, to say the least. Only Groups in dire trouble took them seriously. From some quarters there was a violent reaction, especially from Groups that had long lists of 'protective' rules and regulations. There was much indifference. Several of our 'intellectual' members cried loudly that the '*Traditions*' reflected nothing more than the sum of my own hopes and fears for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Therefore I began to travel and talk a lot about the new *Traditions*. People were at first politely attentive, though it must be confessed that some did go to sleep during my early harangues. But after a while I got letters containing sentiments like this: "Bill, we'd love to have you come and speak. Do tell us where you used to hide your bottles and all about that big, hot-flash, spiritual experience of yours. But for heaven's sake, please don't talk any more about those blasted '*Traditions*'!"

Time presently changed all that. Only five years later, several thousand AA members, meeting at the 1950 Cleveland Convention, declared that AA's *Twelve Traditions* constituted the platform upon which our Fellowship could best function and hold together in unity for all time to come.

MEDICINE TAKES AN INTEREST

By this time, AA had found still more favour in the world of medicine. Two of the great medical associations of America did an unprecedented thing. In the year 1944, the Medical Society of the State of New York invited me to read a paper at its annual meeting. Following the reading, three of the many physicians present stood up and gave AA their highest endorsement. These were Dr Harry Tiebout, AA's first friend in the psychiatric profession, Dr Kirby Collier, also a psychiatrist friend and an early advocate of AA and Dr Foster Kennedy, world-renowned neurologist. The *Medical Society* itself then went still further. They permitted us to print my paper and the recommendations of these three doctors in pamphlet form. In 1949 the American Psychiatric Association did exactly the same thing. I read a paper at its annual meeting in Montreal. The paper was carried in the "*American Journal of Psychiatry*", and we were permitted to reprint it. (Now in the pamphlet "Three Talks to Medical Societies" by Bill W).

During the 1940's, two hospitals met all these urgent needs and afforded shining examples of how medicine and AA could co-operate. At St Thomas' hospital in Akron, Doctor Bob, the wonderful Sister Ignatia and the hospital's staff presided over an alcoholic ward that had ministered to five thousand alcoholics by the time Doctor Bob passed away in 1950. In New York, Knickerbocker Hospital provided a ward under the care of our first friend in medicine, Dr William Duncan Silkworth, where he was assisted by a redheaded AA nurse known as Teddy. It was in these two hospitals and by these pioneering people that the best techniques of combined Medicine and AA were worked out.

Since proper hospitalisation was, and still is, one of AA's greatest problems, the General Service Office has detailed this early hospital experience, along with the many subsequent developments and ramifications, to Groups all over the world - still another very vital service.

A RASH OF ANONYMITY BREAKS

About this time a serious threat to our longtime welfare made its appearance. Usually meaning well, members began breaking their anonymity all over the place. Sometimes they wanted to use the AA name to advertise and help other causes. Others just wanted their names and pictures in the papers. Being photographed with the Governor would really help AA, they thought. (I'd earlier been guilty of this, too). But at last we saw the appalling risk to AA if all our power-drivers got loose at the public level. Already scores of them were doing it.

So our General Service Office got to work. We wrote remonstrances, kind ones, of course, to every breaker. We even sent letters to nearly all press and radio outlets, explaining why AA's shouldn't break their anonymity before the public. Nor, we added, did AA solicit money - we paid our own bills. In a few years the public anonymity-breakers were squeezed down to a handful - thus another valuable GSO service had gone into action.

GSO (NEW YORK) SERVICES EXPAND

To maintain all these ever-lengthening service lifelines, the office had to go on expanding. GSO moved to 44th Street, then to 305 East 45th Street, then to 468 Park Avenue South. In 1992 it moved to 475 Riverside Drive. Today, it has an AA General Manager, an AA Chairman of General Services and several well qualified AA staff members.

On its service staff, more than 60 nonalcoholics look after bookkeeping, stenography, filing, records operations and shipping, each managed by a non-AA. An enthusiastic receptionist and a switchBoard operator preside over the outer office. There the visitor gets his first glimpse of his General Service Office. In a display cabinet stands a *Winged Victory*, symbol of the noted *Lasker Award* given to AA by the *American Public Health Association* in 1951. We have a good-sized space where all our shipping and mailing are done. Each year, this busy department (supervised by a nonalcoholic) ships more than 281,500 books and more than 3,800,000 pamphlets, mails more than 295,000 letters and bulletins and does huge quantities of mimeographing (1974 facts & figures).

No description of our world services would be complete without full acknowledgement of all that has been contributed by our nonalcoholic Trustees. Over the years they have given an incredible amount of time and effort; theirs has been a true labour of love. Some of them, like Jack Alexander, Fulton Oursler, Leonard Harrison and Bernard Smith, have given much in their fields of literature, social service, finance and law. Their example is being followed by more recent nonalcoholic Trustees.

Our present array of services may look like big business to some. But when we think of the size and reach of AA today, that isn't true at all. In 1945, for example, we had one paid worker to every 98 Groups; in 1955, one paid worker to every 230 Groups. In 2002, with greatly expanded services, one paid headquarters worker serves more than 731 Groups across North America. It therefore seems sure that we shall never be burdened with a bureaucratic and expensive service set up.

As I pointed out earlier, in the 1940's our headquarters was constantly overhung by one great threat to its future existence: Doctor Bob and I and our Board of Trustees had the entire responsibility for the conduct of AA's services.

In the years leading up to 1950 and 1951, we began to debate the desirability of some sort of advisory Board of AA's. Or maybe we needed a conference of larger numbers, elected by AA itself; people who would inspect the headquarters yearly, a body to whom the Trustees could become responsible, a guiding conscience of our whole world effort.

But the objections to this were persistent and nothing happened for several years. Such a venture, it was said, would be expensive. Worse still, it might plunge AA into disruptive political activity when conference delegates were elected.

Then Doctor Bob fell ill, mortally ill. Finally, in 1950, spurred on by the relentless logic of the situation, the Trustees authorized Doctor Bob and me to devise the plan with which this booklet deals. It was a *Plan for a General Service Conference of AA*, a plan by which our Society could assume full and permanent responsibility for the conduct of its most vital affairs (2004 update based on North American *AA Service Manual 2002/3*).

BIRTH OF THE CONFERENCE

It was one thing to say that we ought to have a General Service Conference, but it was quite another to devise a plan which would bring it into successful existence. The cost of holding one was easily dismissed, but how on earth were we going to cut down destructive politics, with all its usual struggles for prestige and vainglory? How many delegates would be required and from where should they come? Arrived at New York, how could they be related to the Board of Trustees? What would be their actual powers and duties. With these several weighty considerations in mind, and with some misgivings, I commenced work on a draft of a plan, much assisted by Helen B, an AA staff member.

Though the Conference might be later enlarged to include the whole world, we felt that the first delegates should come from the US and Canada only. Each state and province might be allowed one delegate. Those containing heavy AA populations could have additional delegates. To give the Conference continuity, delegates could be divided into panels. An odd-numbered panel (Panel One), elected for two years, would be invited for 1951, the first year. An even-numbered panel (Panel Two), elected for two years, would be seated in 1952. Thereafter, one panel would be elected and one would be retired yearly. This would cause the Conference to rotate, while maintaining some continuity.

But how could we pull the inevitable election pressure down? To accomplish this, it was provided that a delegate must receive a two-thirds vote for election. If a delegate got a majority of this size, nobody could kick much. But if he or she didn't, and the election was close, what then? Well, perhaps the names of the two highest in the running, or the three officers of the committee, or even the whole committee could be put in a hat. One name would be drawn. The winner of this painless lottery would become the delegate.

But when these delegates met in conference, what would they do? We thought they would want to have real authority. So, in the Charter drawn for the Conference itself, it was provided that the delegates could issue flat directions to the Trustees on a two-thirds vote. And even a simple majority vote would constitute a mighty strong suggestion.

THE CONFERENCE PLAN

The *Conference Plan* (sometimes called the “*Third Legacy Plan*”), was drawn up by Bill W. in 1950 immediately after the death of Dr Bob, who had given it his blessing. The intention was to hold a specially designed annual Conference that brought the Trustees together with the AA Delegates, to work together to guarantee that our movement-wide services would continue to function under all conditions.

The *Plan* was to provide a practical successor to the founders of AA. After a 5-year trial from 1951, during which time “Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions” was published and the *Third Legacy Procedure* was developed, the Conference was deemed a great success. The cooperation, *Unity* and understanding it afforded led the way to the full development of AA’s *World Services* and the New York Headquarters – and ultimately the *Twelve Concepts* for World Service (1962).

The *Conference Plan* is what this Manual is all about. It is a method by which AA’s collective *Group Conscience* can speak forcefully and put its desires for Australian services into effect. The Plan is the structure that takes the place of government in AA. It ensures that the full voice of Australian AA will be heard, whether it represents the great majority or a minority.

The Plan’s elements now include especially:

- the ‘**General Service Structure**’
- the **Principle of Substantial Unanimity** –votes requiring 2/3 majorities, and unique to AA, the *Third Legacy Procedure*
- ensuring that the *minority voice* can be heard
- the **Conference Charter**
- the **Twelve Concepts for World Service**, including the **6 Warranties of Conference**
- the **Principle of Rotation** out of AA service positions after a set term.

From “AA Comes of Age” : 208-219

Figure 2 The Conference Plan

DELEGATES ENCOURAGED TO QUESTION

The first Conference was set for April, 1951. In came the Delegates. They looked over our offices, cellar to garret, got acquainted with the whole staff, shook hands with the Trustees. That evening, we gave them a briefing session, under the name of "What's on your mind?" We answered scores of questions of all kinds. The Delegates began to feel at home and reassured. They inspected our finances with a microscope. After they had listened to reports from the Board of Trustees and from all the services, there was warm but cordial debate on many a question of policy. Trustees submitted several of their own serious problems for the opinion of the Conference.

So went session after session, morning, afternoon and evening. The Delegates handled several tough puzzles about which we at GSO were in doubt, sometimes giving advice contrary to our own conclusions. In nearly every instance, we saw that they were right. Then and there they proved, as never before, that AA's *Tradition Two* was correct. The Group Conscience could safely act as the sole authority and sure guide for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nobody present will ever forget that final session of the first Conference. We knew that the impossible had happened, that AA could never break down in the middle, that Alcoholics Anonymous was at last safe from any storm the future might bring. And as Delegates returned home, they carried this same conviction with them.

Realising our need for funds and better literature circulation, some did place a little too much emphasis on this necessity; others were a little discouraged, wondering why fellow members in their Areas did not take fire as they had. They forgot that they themselves had been eyewitnesses to the Conference and that their brother alcoholics had not. But, both here and at home, they made an impression much greater than they knew.

In the midst of this exciting turn of affairs, the Conference agreed that the *Alcoholic Foundation* ought to be renamed the *General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous*, and this was done. The word "Foundation" stood for charity, paternalism and maybe big money. AA would have none of these; from here out we could assume full responsibility and pay our expenses ourselves.

As I watched all this grow, I became entirely sure that *Alcoholics Anonymous* was at last safe - even from me.

A RESOLUTION (NORTH AMERICA)

The following text is the wording of the original Resolution presented to the Twentieth Anniversary Convention of AA in North America in 1955.

(This Resolution Authorises the General Service Conference to Act for Alcoholics Anonymous and to Become the Successor to Its Co-Founders).

We, the members of the *Twentieth Anniversary Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous*, here assembled at St Louis in July of the year 1955, declare our belief that our Fellowship has now come of age and is entirely ready to assume full and permanent possession of the *Three Legacies* of our AA inheritance - the *Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service*.

We believe that the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, as created in 1951 by our co-founders, Doctor Bob S and Bill W and authorised by Trustees of the Alcoholic Foundation, has now become entirely capable of assuming the guardianship of

AA's *Twelve Traditions* and of taking over full guidance and control of the world service of our Society, as provided in the "Third Legacy Manual of World Service" (*Now called "The AA Service Manual"*), recently revised by our surviving co-founder, Bill W (*Bill W died January 21, 1971*) and of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous.

We have also heard with approval Bill W's proposal that AA's General Service Conference should now become the permanent successor to the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous, inheriting from them all their former duties and special responsibilities, thus avoiding in future time all possible strivings for individual prestige or personal power: and also providing our Society with the means of functioning on a permanent basis.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED:

That the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous should become, as of this date, July 3, 1955, the guardian of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the perpetrators of the world services of our Society, the voice of the Group Conscience of our entire Fellowship and the sole successors to its co-founders, Doctor Bob and Bill W.

AND IT IS UNDERSTOOD:

That neither the *Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous* nor the *warranties of Article XII of the Conference Charter* shall ever be changed or amended by the General Service Conference except by first asking the consent of the registered AA Groups of the world. **(This would include all AA Groups known to the General Service Offices around the world)*.**

These Groups shall be suitably notified of any proposal for change and shall be allowed no less than six months for consideration thereof. And before any such Conference action can be taken, there must first be received in writing within the time allotted the consent of at least three-quarters of all those registered Groups who respond to such proposal.

***Resolution:**

It was resolved by the 1976 General Service Conference that those instruments requiring consent of three-quarters of the responding Groups for change or amendment would include the Twelve Steps of AA, should any such change or amendment ever be proposed.

WE FURTHER UNDERSTAND:

That, as provided in Article XII of the Conference Charter, the Conference binds itself to the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous by the following means:

That 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, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive, or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its world services, it shall never enact laws or regulations binding on AA as a whole or upon any AA Group or member thereof, nor shall it perform any other such 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.

(This Resolution was adopted by the Convention by acclamation and, in the Conference, by formal resolution by vote) St Louis, Missouri, July 3, 1955.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AA IN AUSTRALIA

Enquiries from Australia about Alcoholics Anonymous first reached the GSO in New York in the year 1942; but it was 1945 before AA was functioning in Sydney, NSW, on an established Group basis, making Australia the first country outside of North America, to accept Alcoholics Anonymous as a means of recovery from the ravages of alcoholism.

During the next two years, the message of Alcoholics Anonymous spread to other States and the year 1947 saw Group meetings established in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. It took a further two years for the Fellowship to reach Tasmania and the first meeting was held in Hobart in 1949. Perhaps, by reason of its geographical isolation, it was much later before the Northern Territory was to experience the impact of Alcoholics Anonymous. The inaugural meeting was held in Darwin in 1955.

By now meetings were springing up all over the continent and several Central Service Offices were opened in various capital cities, the first being in Sydney.

In 1954 the suggestion, emanating from NSW, was proposed that the States get together for a national forum discussion. This resulted in subsequent pooling of ideas which culminated in the first "*National Convention*" being held in Melbourne in 1959. At this Convention a resolution to establish a federal AA body, to be known as the "*Australian General Service Conference*", was passed by an overwhelming majority of the conventioners. The resolution contained a proviso that it would not become effective until confirmed by the various states.

This confirmation was forthcoming and it was decided to hold a second National Convention in Sydney over the Easter weekend of 1961; and the first one under the auspices of the Australian General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous.

During this Convention, elected representatives from the various States met in session for the first Australian General Service Conference meeting. The Australian General Service Conference was then, and is now, an all Australian body in which Australian AA can act on its administrative side at the national level of General Service. Among many other things, it was resolved at this first Conference to explore the possibility of establishing an Australian publishing body and an Australian magazine, along the lines of the similar services within the parent movement in the USA. It was also agreed to recommend for adoption, this short summary of the purposes of the Australian General Service Conference:

The Australian General Service Conference is a part of the AA Fellowship in which all Groups throughout Australia join together for unity in service to alcoholics who seek recovery. Alcoholics Anonymous is more than a set of principles, it is a society of recovered alcoholics in action. AA's Twelfth Step, carrying the message, is the basic service that our Fellowship gives. The Australian General Service Conference exists to further our collective Twelfth Step work at the nation-wide level.

Further Conferences were held annually in the various capital cities on a rotation basis and, on some occasions, there have been two Conferences in the one year. At the Conference in 1976, it was resolved that future Conferences ought to be conducted in Sydney.

Over a period of years, the *General Service Board* of *Alcoholics Anonymous* situated in New York encouraged the Australian General Service Conference to establish a General Service Board and a publishing operation along the same lines as had occurred in North America.

The year 1967 saw the emergence of *AA Publishing, Pty. Ltd.* which then began to supply most of the literature needs of Australia and other nearby countries. (*AA Publishing Pty. Ltd. ceased operations on January 5, 1979. The General Service Board of AA Australia is now responsible for the literature needs of Australia.*)

Advice was received from America that the *First World Service Meeting* was scheduled to be held in New York in 1969 and, on the invitation of the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous in that city, the Australian General Service Conference was represented by two delegates at that meeting in 1969. A second World Service Meeting was held in 1972. Further meetings have been held every two years and Australia has been represented on each occasion.

At the Conference held in Sydney in 1970, a plan known as "*Operation '76*" was designed to achieve progress towards the formation of the *Australian General Service Board* by the year 1976. This plan was carried out and all necessary preliminary procedures were completed as scheduled. At the same Conference, on March 29, 1970, it was resolved that the *Australian General Service Conference* of *Alcoholics Anonymous* should become, as of that date, "the guardian of the traditions of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the perpetuators of the Australian services of our *Society*, the voice of the *Group Conscience* of our entire Australian Fellowship. This *Resolution* (following) is adapted from, and proffered in the spirit of, the classic *Resolution* passed at the *Twentieth General Service Conference*, St Louis, Missouri, July 3, 1955. It is hoped it will serve the interests of AA in Australia as faithfully as it has done in America.

Following a recommendation from the 1972 Conference a *General Service Office* was opened in Sydney in the same year. This made it possible more smoothly and effectively to operate the General Service function. In 2001 the GSO in Sydney was renamed the '*National Office*' of *AA Australia* because of confusion in the Fellowship between *Central Service* and *General Service* offices (eg 'CSO' and 'GSO' sound very similar, and the distinct national role of GSOs was thereby emphasised).

The *General Service Board* of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, Australia, was incorporated in 1979, and is operated by twelve Trustees, eight alcoholic and four non-alcoholic. This Board carries out the work of the Australian General Service Conference between conferences, is essentially custodial in its character, and truly reflects the voice of the "Group Conscience" of AA in Australia.

A RESOLUTION (AUSTRALIA)

Offered by a Select Committee, under the leadership of the Australian General Service Conference Chairperson at the *Tenth Anniversary Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Australia.

(This Resolution authorises the Australian General Service Conference to act for Alcoholics Anonymous, Australia).

We, the members of the Tenth Anniversary Convention of Alcoholics Anonymous, Australia, here assembled at Sydney on March 29, 1970, declare our belief that our Fellowship has now come of age and is entirely ready to assume full and permanent possession of the Three Legacies of our AA inheritance - the Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.

We believe that the Australian General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous has now become entirely capable of assuming the guardianship of AA's *Twelve Traditions* within Australia and of taking over full guidance and control of the Australian services of our Society, as provided in the AA Service Manual and thus avoiding in future time all possible strivings for individual prestige or personal power; and also providing our Society in Australia with the means of functioning on a permanent basis, in relation to the AA world.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED:

That the Australian General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous should become, as of this date, March 29, 1970, the guardian of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, the perpetrators of the Australian services of our Society, the voice of the Group Conscience of our entire Australian Fellowship.

AND IT IS UNDERSTOOD:

That neither the *Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous* nor the warranties of Article XII of the Conference Charter shall ever be changed or amended by the Australian General Service Conference except by first asking the consent of the registered AA Groups of the world. These Groups shall be suitably notified of any proposal for change and shall be allowed no less than six months for consideration thereof. And before any such Conference action can be taken, there must first be received in writing within the time allotted the consent of at least three-quarters of those registered Groups who respond to such a proposal.

WE FURTHER UNDERSTAND:

That, as provided in Article XII of the Conference Charter (North American Section), the Australian General Service Conference binds itself to the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous by the following means:

That in all its proceedings, the Australian General Service Conference shall observe the spirit of the AA Traditions, 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 principal; 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, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no Conference action ever be personally punitive; or an incitement to public controversy; that though the Conference may act in the service of Alcoholics Anonymous and may traditionally direct its Australian services, it shall never enact laws or regulations binding on AA as a whole or upon any AA Group or member thereof, nor shall it perform any other such 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.

(This Resolution was unanimously adopted by the 1970 Australian General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous held in Sydney). Rockdale, NSW, March 29, 1970.

THE GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

WHAT IT IS - HOW IT IS BUILT

AA *Traditions* say that our program should never be 'organised', should always remain 'non-professional'. Also that there is no 'authority' in AA except that which expresses itself through the Group Conscience. Our belief in these principles has worked wonders for our Fellowship in guiding its growth away from 'bigness' and 'power'.

The same *Traditions* (Two, Eight and Nine) then go on to provide for the setting up of service centres, with special workers and Boards and committees - all responsible to those they serve.

The only 'authority', then, is that which is first expressed in the *Group Conscience* and which is then communicated - and here is where the idea of the Conference structure begins - by the Group to AA as a whole.

The first *Conference Plan*, or, as it is sometimes known, the *Third Legacy Plan*, was originally set up in 1950 by Bill W and Doctor Bob. It was confirmed in 1955 in St Louis on the occasion of the Second International Convention. Bill W took great pains to explain that the Plan was purely suggestive and traditional, not a body of rules or laws. But it has served the Fellowship well since 1955 and no doubt will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

So the Conference structure starts with the Group Conscience - with the Group. Let us look at the structural chart and see how this can be transmitted all the way down the line until it affects AA Australia-wide. (See *Conference Structure* diagram below.)

In this Manual, we should remember that we are speaking only of the *General Service Conference of Australia*. Similar centres of world services are set up in other parts of the globe and there is a biennial *World Service Meeting* to which Australia sends two *World Service Delegates*. There has been no attempt to make New York the world capital of AA. GSO New York is regarded as the Senior Service Centre because of its longer experience.

General Service Representatives (GSRs) elect a *District Committee Member*, so called because this DCM automatically becomes a member of the *Area Committee*. GSRs and DCMs who make up the *Area Assembly*, then elect an *Area Delegate* to represent the Area in the overall Conference picture. The annual Conference meeting in November in Sydney (as explained in Chapter VI) is made up of Area and International Delegates, Trustees, National Office Staff and others that Conference may invite.

Area Delegates carry the major influence in the Conference, which is felt in two ways:

1. They make up the Conference committees, covering just about all kinds of AA activities;
2. all Area Delegates have free access to the Conference platform for the discussion of all actions affecting the movement.

Trustees meet three times a year (as finances allow) and pass along their guidance through their own committees. Actions of the Trustees are reported to the Fellowship through "AA Around Australia" (published quarterly) and the "*Final Conference Report*", sent to all Conference Members free of charge, and is also available for purchase to all AA Members and Groups.

The General Service Board of AA Australia, is responsible for the running and staffing of the National Office and its literature and publishing operations, and may appoint some of its members as a committee to carry out this responsibility.

So, in keeping with the best tradition of AA, we find that whatever 'authority' exists is first expressed in the Group Conscience - then passed along through the Group representative to the Conference - from Conference to Trustees, then to Trustee committees and the Board and its committees - to AA and non-AA staffs -all acting as custodians of our *Twelve Steps* and *Twelve Traditions* and all functioning within the framework of Bill W's *Twelve Concepts*.

Every two years in every Area, each AA Group has the opportunity to build its share of the Conference structure. It elects a *General Service Representative* (GSR). This GSR gets together with other GSRs to elect a *District Committee Member* (DCM) for the District.

Methods of election are handled in some detail in the chapters which follow. The end results are an Area Committee and an Area Delegate. Area Delegates gather each year in Sydney for a Conference meeting. They meet with the other Registered Members of the Conference: AA's Trustees, the National Office staff and World Service Delegates, and other non-voting participants who may be invited, such as Central Service Office personnel or AA visitors from overseas.

The Conference structure is in year-round operation, since the people involved, GSRs, District Committee Members, Area Delegates, are usually very active in Area affairs. The Conference meeting in November then provides a movement-wide forum for the discussion of principles and problems that affect AA as a whole. Every Region has at least one Area Delegate and one Area Committee. More populous Regions have several.

WHAT ARE GENERAL SERVICES?

The newcomer soon learns about the importance of *Twelfth Step Work* - service to another alcoholic which helps both giver and receiver to stay sober. The member then sees such work broadened to include Central Service Office or *Intergroup* service and institutional committee service. Finally, General Services. What are they?

In Bill W's fine introduction to this Manual, he tells how general services grew to fill a need beyond the reach of individual, Group, Central Office and *Intergroup*.

The *Twelve Traditions* make clear the principle that AA as such, should never be organised, that there are no bosses and no government in AA. Yet at the same time, the *Traditions* recognise the need for some kind of organisation to carry the message in ways that are impossible for the local Groups – such as publication of a uniform literature and public information resources, helping new Groups get started, publishing a national or international magazine, and carrying the message in other languages into other countries. Therefore whilst the local Groups, *Intergroups* and Districts are mostly concerned with local *12th Step* work by providing 'Central' Service, ie coalface AA, 'General' Service is concerned with those services which affect AA as a whole - services that these local Groups are unable to provide.

Today, the term 'General Service' is applied to all kinds of activities within the Conference structure, carried on by District Committees, Area Committees, Area Delegates, Trustees and National Office staff. Almost always, they are part of AA's distinctive *Unity* which allows the Fellowship to function so well.

See also "*Working Together: General Services & Local Central Services*" in Section 5: "The Area": Part 2 - "*Area Activities*". Note: The term 'World Service' is used in North America to describe

service for AA as a whole, in situations where we in Australia would say 'General Service'. Thus the '*Twelve Concepts for World Service*' (Section 12: "AA's Traditional Legacy Documents"), describe the checks and balances that sustain the General Service Conference structure, but the term is also used to describe the international 'World Service Meetings', where delegates from many countries come together to share their experience, strength and hope in their General Service work at home and in their Zones. See Section 8: AA's "International Activities".

THE CONFERENCE CHARTER

MEANING OF THE CONFERENCE CHARTER

The General Service Conference Charter of 1955, adopted by the Australian General Service Conference in 1970, is a body of principles and relationships through which AA can function as a whole. It provides, for example, that a majority vote of the Conference shall be considered a 'suggestion' to the Board of Trustees and National Office, but that a two-thirds vote shall be binding on the Board.

The Conference itself, is unincorporated, and its Charter is not a legal instrument in the strictest sense. It is truly an informal agreement between the Fellowship as a whole and its Trustees, setting forth the means by which AA can give worldwide service.

Such is the practical balance of duties, responsibilities and powers as they stand today. Though these arrangements can be changed by Conference action, experience indicates that they are thoroughly practical and are likely to survive all future strain.

FROM THE NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE CHARTER

The North American Conference Charter states:

Other sections of the Conference may sometimes be created in foreign lands as the need arises out of language or geographical consideration. The US and Canada Section of the General Service Conference will then become the Senior Section, related to the other Sections by ties of mutual consultation and a cross linking of delegates.

But no Conference Section shall ever be placed in authority over another. All joint action shall be taken only upon a two-thirds vote of the combined Sections. Within its boundaries each Conference ought to be autonomous. Only matters seriously affecting AA's worldwide needs shall be the subject of joint consideration.

THE AUSTRALIAN CONFERENCE CHARTER

The full *Conference Charter* is located in the back of this Service Manual with the other service documents, for easy Reference (Section 13: “AA’s Traditional ‘Legacy’ Documents”). The *Australian Charter* covers the following:

1. Purpose of Conference
2. Composition
3. Conference Relation to AA
4. Conference Relation to the General Service Board and its Corporate Services
5. Area Assemblies: Composition of
6. Area Assemblies: Purpose of
7. Area Assemblies: Method of Electing Area Committee Members and Delegates
8. Area Assemblies: Terms of Office for Group General Service Representatives, Area Committee Members and Delegates
9. The Australian General Service Conference Meeting
10. The General Service Board: Composition, Jurisdiction, Responsibilities
11. The Australian General Service Conference: Its General Procedures
12. General Warranties of the Conference.
13. The World Service Delegates: Selection, Roles, Terms and Alternates.

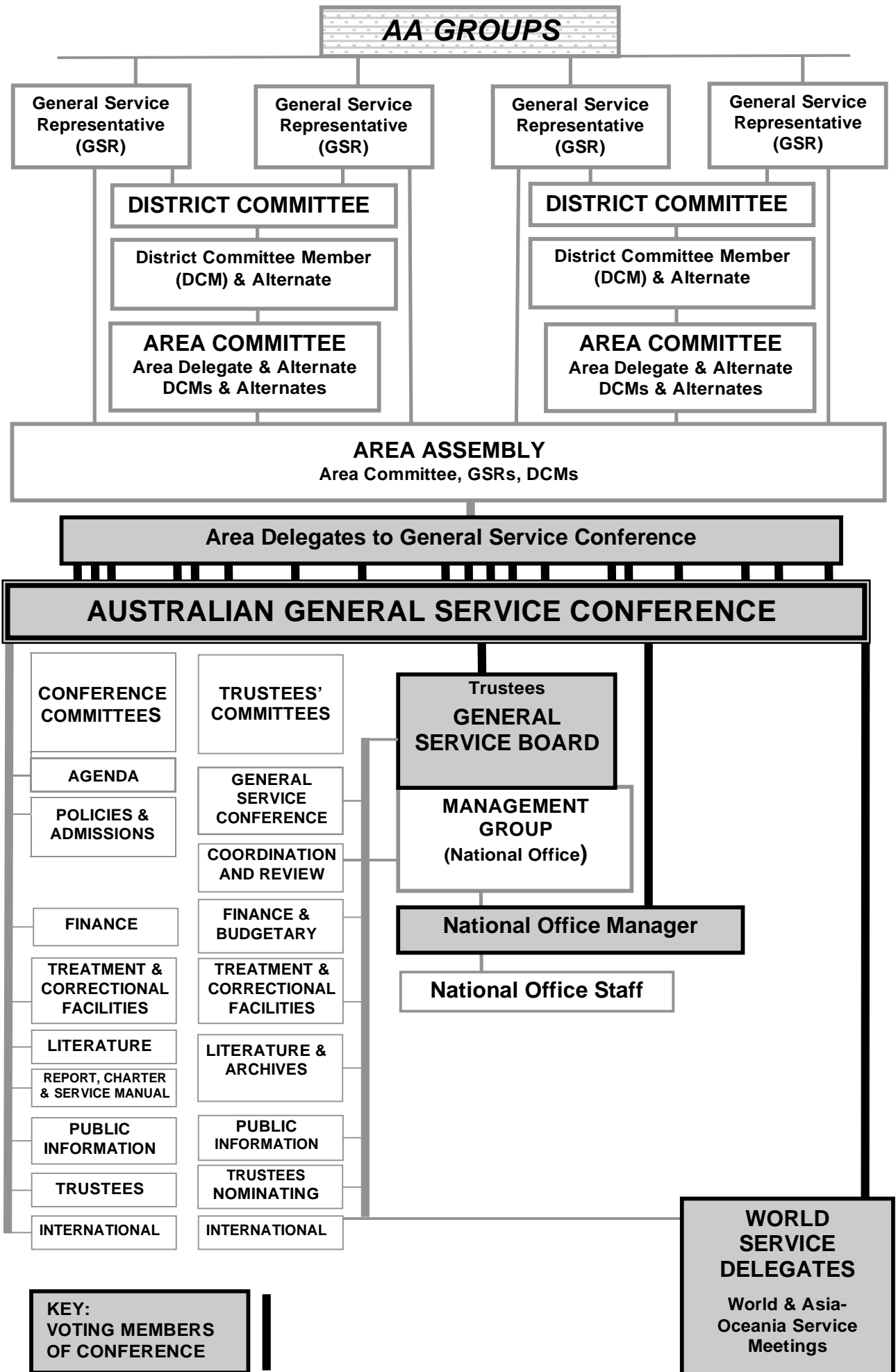


Figure 2 Australian General Service Conference Structure