

A.A.[®] Guidelines

Relationship Between A.A. and Clubs

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A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in various service areas. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference (U.S. and Canada). In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy, except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

These Guidelines offer shared experience for A.A. members responsible for clubs and similar facilities that provide meeting space for one or more A.A. groups.

Experience has shown that it's important that club members and A.A. groups respect A.A.'s Twelve Traditions, including the long form of Tradition Three that defines an A.A. group: "Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought A.A. membership ever depend on money or conformity. Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."

The relationship between a club and an A.A. group is mutually beneficial when all involved respect the autonomy of the group. Members of a group may also be "club members," and pay dues to enjoy the privileges of the club. However, there are no dues or fees for membership in an A.A. group, and each group is self-supporting with regard to rental payments for meeting space, coffee arrangements and literature.

A.A. GROUPS MEETING IN CLUBS

The A.A. group: The importance of each group maintaining its autonomy and identity separate from the club in which it meets cannot be emphasized too strongly. The group's responsibility is to the suffering alcoholic and to the Fellowship as a whole, rather than to the club. In order to fulfill this primary purpose:

- The group uses a name different from that of the club.
- The group is self-supporting through its own contributions. This includes paying a fair rent for use of the facilities, maintaining a separate treasury, and making its own contributions directly to the local central/intergroup office, the district, the area general service committee, and to G.S.O.
- Remember, an A.A. group is available to any alcoholic, as the only requirement for group membership is a desire to stop drinking.
- Even though the group meets in a club that may be composed exclusively of A.A. members, and many members of the group may be club members, too, the relationship of the A.A. group itself to the club should be the same as it would be to a church, hospital, school, or other facility in which it might rent space for its meetings.
- Being autonomous from the club, the A.A. group, within its group conscience, decides its own practices including meeting formats, use of Seventh Tradition contributions and other considerations of A.A. group life.

SINCE THE EARLY DAYS...

There have always been A.A.s who have sought a place to go for coffee and conversation; a spot where members could gather for lunch; a place where they could gather socially on weekends and holidays.

In 1947, Bill W. wrote a Grapevine article on clubs that became part of our pamphlet "A.A. Tradition — How It Developed." The title carried the question, "Clubs in A.A. — Are They with Us to Stay?" Today, the answer to that question can be "yes." The success and the endurance of the club idea can be ascribed to the wisdom and guidance expressed in Bill's article and to the willingness of club-minded A.A.s to help make them work. These A.A.s make it possible for a club to function effectively without detracting from A.A.'s base of recovery — the A.A. group. Experience demonstrates that a club can live in harmony with the A.A. community and serve a very useful purpose for those who find a club helpful.

A.A. PRINCIPLES AND THE OPERATION OF CLUBS

Even though a club is not "A.A.," many will think of the club as A.A. — particularly the non-A.A.s in your community. To clarify how clubs can operate most effectively and within the Twelve Traditions, the following suggestions can be helpful:

It is suggested that the name of the club not include "A.A." or "Alcoholics Anonymous." Historically, club members stick carefully to A.A.'s Twelve Traditions and accept funds only from club members; this includes any kind of fund-raising that would involve the public. Dues and contributions from club members keep the club going, in addition to rent money from A.A. groups that hold their meetings in the club.

It is important to define the purpose of the club and look for space that will meet the club's needs. It is also important to determine the amount of money needed for such an operation, and work out a budget that will cover getting started, rent, utilities, custodial care, and any other known expenses.

Once some of the initial questions have been addressed, it would be helpful to call a meeting of all interested A.A.s — *separate from an A.A. group meeting* — to discuss the plans and financial needs, and determine how many dues-paying members can be counted on from the beginning. Also, ask the local A.A. group or groups whether they would be interested in renting space from the club for meetings and, if so, how much rent they would consider reasonable.

Sometimes, charter members of the club are willing to pay a little more in the beginning to help get the club off the ground. It seems better to ask all to participate in this financing than for one or two

people to assume this responsibility. Let every A.A. participate who wants to, so that the club has the support of many members.

Qualifications for club membership should also be discussed. Most clubs require 30 days of A.A. sobriety, while a few require 90 days. But new A.A.s may use the club facilities as guests until they qualify for club membership. All dues-paying members are normally eligible to hold office and to vote at the club business meetings.

WHAT KIND OF DIRECTORS?

Here are some additional questions for interested members to consider: Who will serve as club directors? What should their qualifications be?

Directors handle the business affairs of the club, are responsible for the lease and pay all bills for maintenance of the property. Many clubs require approximately three years' A.A. sobriety for directors. Most agree that A.A. members serving as club directors should not hold offices in the A.A. groups meeting in the club. This practice avoids confusion and conflicts.

BUSINESS DECISIONS AND CLUB FUNCTIONS

If enough A.A.s are interested to make financing possible, it is time to consult a lawyer and have the club incorporated as a nonprofit business organization, under the rules of the state or province in which it will function. G.S.O. does not gather shared experience on legal topics. Legal consultation related to nonprofit status is recommended. Needless to say, *a club so incorporated should not have "A.A." or "Alcoholics Anonymous" in its name.*

This should not be a very complicated or expensive project. Incorporation is in accordance with Tradition Six, which implies that property to be used by A.A.s should be separately incorporated and managed, "lest problems of money, property, and prestige" divert A.A. from its primary purpose. If bank loans are necessary, they are held by directors of the corporation, and payments are made from club funds. It is better to start small and enlarge as growth and finances warrant.

After the club is incorporated, a meeting of the directors may be held to determine details of club operation. This might be followed by a meeting of dues-paying members to obtain approval of overall plans and club rules.

Frequently, there is a temptation for a club to accept building materials, furniture, kitchen equipment and supplies from well-meaning, civic-minded non-A.A.s. In keeping with the spirit of A.A., in operat-

ing the club, everyone will want to respect Tradition Seven and the principle of self-support.

Experience proves that intergroup or central offices, answering services, and central service committees need to be separate from clubs — *physically separate and separate as far as administration is concerned.* In some cases, a newly formed intergroup or central office is invited to use club facilities. At that point, A.A.s should take a good look at Tradition Nine and remember that a service office is responsible to all A.A. groups and members, while a club is responsible chiefly to its dues-paying members and the groups that rent space from the club.

Card games, billiards, table tennis, and TV-watching are activities that many club members enjoy, if they are played for the fun of it, not for money (gambling, placing bets, etc.).

Many difficulties have been caused in already-existing clubs over the years because of gambling; and in some cases, publicity and notoriety have resulted. Because so many club members are also A.A. members, this kind of thing can be damaging to A.A.

CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

A discussion on clubs during the 1967 General Service Conference noted that, although there is no such thing as an "A.A. club," many clubs have been identified with A.A. because they are often organized and directed by A.A. members and membership may be limited to A.A.s. Clubs where meetings are held and which are maintained for Twelfth Step as well as social purposes can avoid difficulties by abiding by A.A. Traditions. Conference members agreed that clubs should not use the A.A. name, should be organized apart from A.A., and rather than accept money from outside sources, should be supported by membership dues and individual contributions from club members. Since A.A. meetings held in clubs are open to all, the question of a paid membership in A.A. does not arise.

Further guidance was given by the 1972 General Service Conference, which advised that G.S.O. no longer accept contributions from clubs. This decision was based on returns from a questionnaire sent to all clubs. The answers indicated that the difference in club operating procedures was too great to enable G.S.O. to decide whether or not money received from a particular club was contributed by A.A. members only. (Of course, G.S.O. does accept contributions from A.A. groups that meet on club premises.)

In 1989, the General Service Conference recommended to discontinue listing clubs in A.A. Directories. However, groups that meet in clubs will continue to be listed in the Directories.