

people a chance to serve and to participate in decision-making, and ensures that no one can impose his or her personal desires on any part of the Fellowship as a whole. At G.S.O., too, it discourages the tendency to accumulate power, keeps principles before personalities, and in addition guarantees the Fellowship a staff that is well equipped to handle any situation, no matter what may happen to any individual worker.

As A.A. has grown over the past 70 years, the scope of its activities, and thus the demands on the office staff, has expanded tremendously. In addition to taking responsibility for one facet of service, most staff members correspond with A.A.s in one geographical area of the U.S. or Canada, and each acts as secretary to a committee of the General Service Board and a Conference Committee. While there is a basic body of work that needs to be done, situations change and from time to time new assignments are added and existing ones are reconfigured in light of emerging needs or the particular background of the current staff. In the recent past, for example, one person was assigned primarily to corresponding with the growing number of Spanish-speaking members. Currently, there are two staff members who speak Spanish, and there is no longer a need for a separate Spanish services assignment. This September, as a result of shifting workloads, a new assignment has been added: secretary of the trustees' Nominating Committee and of the Conference Committee on Trustees, formerly tasks that were part of another assignment.

The transition from one job to another is a challenge, but long years of experience make the process remarkably smooth. Each staff member prepares a rotation memo, with an overview of the assignment and an update on current projects. Anyone who has questions about his or her new responsibility can find help not only from the person who just rotated out, but from others who have done the assignment in the past. Weekly staff meetings, too, provide a regular opportunity to bring problems and current information to the group as a whole, whether to "pick the brains" of others with more experience or to make sure that everyone is well informed about what's going on around the Fellowship.

When asked, staff members generally appreciate the variety in their work, and agree that rotation, while it has its difficult moments, serves to keep them on their toes and teaches them to rely on the voice of collective experience. A staff member who retired several years ago remarked that two-year rotation keeps the staff "a little off balance" and forces them to ask for help. "Because we rotate we always have to depend on other people, include other people. Otherwise it becomes my assignment, done my way." Another longtime staff member, now retired, remarked, "Rotation was good for my ego—it meant I didn't have to know everything."

Rotation has been described as "anonymity in action"; it keeps reemphasizing the importance of the message over the messenger. As a *Box 4-5-9* article from ten years

ago explained: "It teaches that none of us is the center of the universe and that what matters is the survival of the Fellowship as a whole. So the principle of rotation connects quite directly with all of our Twelve Steps and with the Traditions that address our primary purpose, anonymity, and the authority of a Higher Power."

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## ■ Districts and D.C.M.s Link Together A.A. Groups

The geographical units known as districts link A.A. groups in local areas to each other and to A.A. groups across the country. The term "district" was mentioned during early General Service Conferences, and both "district" and "district committee member" were used informally in the 1950s. The term "district" was included in the 1955 draft of *The Third Legacy Manual of World Service* (now called *The A.A. Service Manual*). A 1975 supplement to *The A.A. Service Manual* formalized use of the term "district."

The current edition of the Service Manual defines a District as "containing the right number of groups—right in terms of the committee member's ability to keep in frequent touch with them, to learn their problems, and to find ways to contribute to their growth and well-being. In the majority of areas, a district includes six to 20 groups. In metropolitan districts, the number is generally 15 to 20, while in rural or suburban districts the number can be as small as five."

Some areas have formed districts along linguistic lines, with boundaries independent of geographic district boundaries. There are, for instance, districts comprising only Spanish-speaking A.A. groups; Illinois now has a Polish district.

Individual groups elect general service representatives (G.S.R.s) who attend district meetings. This group elects the district committee member. The D.C.M. conveys the group conscience of their district's A.A. members to the area committee.

D.C.M.s may in the course of their terms make the rounds of A.A. groups in the district. According to Tracey K., District 9, Area 43, New Hampshire, "I went off to visit a meeting in my district that hasn't had a G.S.R. in many years. I had been invited to attend the business meeting and talk to them about general service."

Districts may be part of areas that range widely in size. Area 79, British Columbia and the Yukon, for instance, has 46 districts that contain 750 groups spread over 800,000 square miles.

As *The A.A. Service Manual* explains, the "district committee member is an essential link between the group G.S.R. and the area delegate to the General Service Conference. As leader of the district committee, made up of all G.S.R.s in the district, the D.C.M. is exposed to the group conscience of that district."

What qualifies an A.A. member to be a D.C.M. is that the person have sufficient time in A.A. (generally four or five years), along with the time, energy, and commitment to devote to this service position. The D.C.M. is expected to attend all district meetings and area assemblies and to hold regular meetings of all G.S.R.s in the district. The D.C.M. also keeps the G.S.R.s informed about Conference activities.

On the other side, it is up to the D.C.M. to keep the area delegate informed of what the groups are thinking.

“Taking responsibility for protection of traditions and minority opinion without stifling growth, encouraging participation and camaraderie without pressure or demands, and participating in discussion of controversial issues without dominating or giving offense has been an exciting journey,” says Tracey.

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## ■ Revised A.A. Guidelines on Finance Address Issues of Money and A.A.

The recently revised and expanded A.A. Guidelines on Finance cover such topics as rent, the role of the treasurer, reimbursement for service workers’ expenses, and the role of the General Service Board.

The Guidelines also include information on opening bank accounts and obtaining tax I.D. numbers. A.A. groups are more and more frequently being asked to supply an I.D. number to a bank when opening a checking or savings account, whether or not it is interest-bearing.

Many groups have asked G.S.O. if they can use its I.D. number. The answer, however, is no.

A group must obtain its own I.D. number, a relatively simple process. The first step is to obtain a “Federal ID Number.” Each group must file form SS-4, “Application for Employer Identification Number.” To obtain the form, call your local IRS office. You can also access the IRS Web site and download the form at [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov).

One question on the form is whether there is one group exemption number that applies to all. There is not; each group must obtain its own number.

Another issue is tax-exempt status. An A.A. group is not automatically a nonprofit or charitable entity, nor can it be included in G.S.O.’s tax-exempt status. (G.S.O. is exempt under Section 501 (C) (3) of the code.)

In fact, very few groups undertake the process of becoming a nonprofit organization recognized by the state and federal government. For more information, obtain IRS form, Publication 557, “Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organizations.”

If your group then decides it wants tax-exempt status, contact the IRS for Package 1023, “Application for Recognition of Exemption,” under Section 501 (C) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. You will also need Form 8718,

“User Fee for Exempt Organization Letter Request.” An accountant or tax lawyer can be helpful in dealing with the rigorous reporting that may be required,

These topics and more are covered in detail in the Finance Guidelines (MG-15), which are available by mail from the General Service Office and online at [http://www.aa.org/default/en\\_pdfs/mg-15\\_finance.pdf](http://www.aa.org/default/en_pdfs/mg-15_finance.pdf).

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## ■ Mobile Meetings Keep Shut-Ins Connected to A.A.

Every alcoholic knows the isolation of the active drunk, and the relief that occurs in sobriety when we don’t have to be alone anymore. It’s easy to assume that we need never be lonely again—but members in several parts of the country have begun to realize that there are many A.A.s who are becoming isolated in sobriety when, because of physical or other limitations, they are unable to get out to meetings. Some are confined to their homes, others to nursing homes or hospitals, and there is a growing need to provide help for them.

In several parts of the country, members are getting together and taking “itinerant meetings” to these A.A. members. Moe M. from Huntington Beach, California, helped start the Doorstep Drunks: “My sponsor encouraged us to start this project, because there was a need that wasn’t being taken care of. We began taking meetings to a friend of my sponsor’s at his home, and he was able to stay in touch with his group and not become lonely or withdrawn. After he passed away, South Orange County H&I helped us get the project going—and kind of adopted us.

“For the most part, we take meetings at the request of a member or someone else familiar with the situation. The meetings last about an hour, and we keep taking them as long as the people need them. Oldtimers say they are reminded of A.A. in the 1950s and ’60s, when meetings were mostly in people’s homes and were more intimate than they are today.”

Moe continues: “We now have an e-mail list of about a hundred people, and when we have a request we call on them. A typical e-mail request would read like this one: ‘We are bringing a regular meeting to J---’s house this Tuesday night at 7 p.m. J--- is feeling and looking a lot better and will soon be back attending his regular meetings, so if you have not had a chance to experience this meeting, please join us. If you’d like to attend, please e-mail back, or call so that we can get a head count.’”

Steve C. in Rockport, Illinois, his area’s special needs coordinator, says that they found a lot of A.A.s in nursing homes. “Some of them knew that if they left, they’d drink. We work with the directors of the nursing homes, and we’re now taking regular weekly meetings to two homes.”

Both projects have been helped by their local H&I committees, but they are careful to avoid overlap, and they