

# 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 the various 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.

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A.A. GROUPS AND CLUBS

Since the early days of A.A., some members have sought a place to go for coffee and conversation; a spot where they could have lunch with friends; a place where they could gather socially on weekends and holidays. Clubs developed organically to fill this need, with the first one in New York City followed by many more throughout the country. In a Grapevine article from 1947, Bill W. wrote, "There would be thousands who would testify that they might have had a harder time staying sober in their first months of A.A. without clubs and that in any case, they would always wish for the easy contacts and warm friendship which clubs afford."

In the same article Bill acknowledged, "But we have A.A.'s, rather a strong minority, too, who want no part of clubs. Not only, they assert, does the social life of a club often divert the attentions of members from the program, they claim that clubs are an actual drag on A.A. progress. They point to the danger of clubs degenerating into mere hangouts, even 'joints'; they stress the bickerings that do arise over questions of money, management, and personal authority; they are afraid of 'incidents' that might give us unfavorable publicity."

A.A.'s relationship with clubs is long and varying in detail. The idea behind clubs was to offer a place large enough for members to meet and gather after the meeting, one imbued with a "home atmosphere." After starting the first, individual members quickly learned the benefits of having a club — and the liabilities as well.

For those who want to know more about the extensive history and shared experience of A.A.'s relationship with clubs, the Grapevine article referenced above can be found in the pamphlet "A.A. Tradition — How It Developed." In the years following the publication of the 1947 article, the Twelve Traditions of A.A. became a set of guiding principles and the General Service Conference began passing Advisory Actions, and together these have helped to shape the current conscience of A.A. as a whole, including its relationship with clubs. For a copy of the Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of A.A. please contact the General Service Office, your area delegate, or your local intergroup/central office.

### A.A. GROUPS MEETING IN CLUBS

Today, a good number of A.A. groups meet in clubs. Experience suggests that the relationship of the A.A. group to the club is often similar to relationships A.A. groups have with the church, hospital, community center or other facility where a group might rent space for its meetings. Even though many members of a group may also be club members or even serve on the club's board or steering committee, the A.A. group and the club are separate entities. Experience has shown that being a member of the club's board or steering committee can contribute to confusion

surrounding the clear separation of A.A. and clubs. For example, if an A.A. member serves as a GSR, DCM or other trusted servant role in the district where the club (an outside organization) is established and at the same time serves as a member of the club's board or steering committee, this can bring confusion about the two entities being separate.

Other confusing issues that are frequently shared include the exclusion of an individual from one of the club's functions. This is not in violation of A.A. Traditions because the club is not A.A. and therefore is not required to use A.A.'s guiding principles. It is also critical to keep the group's funds separate from those of the club where it meets. GSO declines contributions from clubs as these are "outside" contributions. It is the A.A. group (and not the club) that decides its own group conscience, is self-supporting, and keeps its relationship with its landlord within A.A. principles by paying rent and keeping to A.A.'s primary purpose.

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

- The group use a name different from that of the club.
- The group be 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 intergroup/central office, the district, the area and to GSO.
- The group, within its group conscience, decide its own practices including meeting formats and other considerations of A.A. group life.
- The group consider the Twelve Traditions as they relate to its actions, understanding that outside entities such as clubs may or may not consider the Traditions.

Traditionally, each A.A. group negotiates its own financial terms with its landlords. There is a wide variety of arrangements between groups and clubs. Most groups simply make monthly rent payments, while other groups work out a percentage of its Seventh Tradition contributions in exchange for the club providing space, refreshments and other supplies. A.A. groups with an online hybrid component have explored passing the "virtual" basket. For more information about that please see the service piece "Frequently Asked Questions on Practicing the Seventh Tradition at Virtual Meetings."

### CAN A.A. MEMBERS START A CLUB?

Individual members wishing to start a club do so on their own, and not in their capacity as A.A. members or on behalf of A.A. in any way. In addition, they should consider the club a separate entity — that is,

a non-A.A. entity. Members might refer to similar clubs that host or, essentially, serve as a landlord to A.A. groups to explore how those clubs are set up and function.

Our A.A. experience as described in the “Long Form” of A.A.’s Sixth Tradition has taught us the following:

“Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim. We think, therefore, that any considerable property of genuine use to A.A. should be separately incorporated and managed, thus dividing the material from the spiritual. An A.A. group, as such, should never go into business. Secondary aids to A.A., such as clubs or hospitals which require much property or administration, ought to be incorporated and so set apart that, if necessary, they can be freely discarded by the groups. Hence such facilities ought not to use the A.A. name. Their management should be the sole responsibility of those people who financially support them. For clubs, A.A. managers are usually preferred. But hospitals, as well as other places of recuperation, ought to be well outside A.A. — and medically supervised. While an A.A. group may cooperate with anyone, such cooperation ought never go so far as affiliation or endorsement, actual or implied. An A.A. group can bind itself to no one.”

In accordance with Tradition Six, which suggests 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, a club so incorporated should not have “A.A.” or “Alcoholics Anonymous” in its name.

### **CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO CLUBS**

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 that 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 GSO 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 GSO to decide whether or not money received from a particular club was contributed by A.A. members only. (GSO *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 continue to be listed in the Fellowship Connection Database.

Some A.A. members question the discussions from 1967, especially regarding recommendations that clubs should avoid accepting money from outside sources. They don’t feel it is in the spirit of Traditions

Six or Ten for A.A. to tell an outside entity how to run their business. They believe it is appropriate for A.A. groups to communicate directly with their landlords about things like rent, heat and the condition of the facilities, but not about a landlord’s rules or policies. Said one member, “We would never think it appropriate for an A.A. group meeting in a church to tell the church administrators that they couldn’t receive a donation from an outside source. Thus, why would it be appropriate for A.A. members or groups to tell an Alano Society that they couldn’t receive a donation from an outside source?”

### **SHARED COLLECTED EXPERIENCE RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The worldwide pandemic affected many parts of the relationship between A.A. groups and landlords, including between A.A. groups and clubhouses. The cleaning and sanitizing of a location, the available space for social distancing, ventilation, “hybrid” technology and other considerations related to the safety of A.A. members became part of the decision-making process for A.A. groups meeting at clubs. Through good communication and in the spirit of cooperation, A.A. groups and members worked with clubs to decide what was best for the A.A. group and its meeting amenities. Shared experience indicates that some groups found it necessary moving forward to have a written contract or lease to make clear their rental obligation such that groups would not be committed to using or paying rent to the facility should meetings move to online-only formats again. In general, many groups prefer to have their rental terms in writing so it is as clear as possible for the group. This has been a learning lesson for some.

During the pandemic, clubhouses’ compliance with local public health ordinances meant that most clubs had to close their doors for a period, and, as with those meeting in any other facility, many groups that would typically meet in person at a club began meeting online. Further on in the pandemic some groups came back to their clubhouses and added a virtual hybrid component to their meetings. A typical set-up often included a podium and microphone at the front of the room from which the leaders and speakers could share so that both in-person attendees and those attending via the online platform could hear and see those speaking. Cameras were generally positioned so that there were seating areas in the room for those not wishing to be seen on camera. In addition, some A.A. groups were able to mount a monitor on a wall for better viewing by those attending in person.

Some A.A. groups reported using their local club’s virtual meeting account, which was paid for by the clubhouse. In some cases, it was included already in their rent, while in others there was a rent increase. We have heard mixed sharing on using the clubhouse-provided virtual platform. Some groups have found this very useful and cooperated well with the club, while other groups felt they did not have the ability to operate the platform as they wished and so preferred to manage their own accounts.

As with all matters in A.A., each A.A. group is autonomous and has the freedom and the responsibility to interpret the Traditions and set their policies, formats and practices according to their informed group conscience.