

# **San Mateo County Fellowship Central Office**

## **SECRETARY HANDBOOK**

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## **BRIEF HISTORY OF A.A.**

Our first members in A.A. were Bill W. and Dr. Bob S., whose meeting in Akron, Ohio in 1935 led to the formation of the fellowship as we know it today.

Bill W. had been a successful New York stockbroker who had been given up as a "hopeless" drunkard. While hospitalized in the fall of 1934, he underwent an experience which seemed to release him from the compulsion to drink. He talked to other alcoholics, trying to help them, but none stopped drinking.

In Akron, on a business trip the following spring, Bill again felt the need to talk with another alcoholic. He was introduced to Dr. Bob, a well-known surgeon whose practice had been seriously affected by his drinking and who had sought many ways to solve his problem.

The two men noted that their own desire to drink disappeared when they tried to share their recovery experience with other alcoholics. The chain reaction resulting from this discovery has been responsible for the consistent growth of the A.A. movement. Dr. Bob died in 1950 and Bill W. in 1971. You can find their stories in the Big Book -- "Alcoholics Anonymous". Their legacy is our lifesaving fellowship.

## **SAN MATEO COUNTY CENTRAL OFFICE HISTORY**

When A.A. was pioneering in San Mateo County, our only contact with the sick alcoholic was a small advertisement in the Personal column of the San Mateo Times. As we grew in numbers, it was decided that we needed a facility that would render fast response to appeals for assistance and an answering service was employed, which enables our 12th Step workers to contact applicants within a short period of time.

in 1962 we realized that A.A. on the Peninsula had "come of age" and that consideration should be given to opening a Central Office somewhere in this area in order to render a more direct personal service to those who desired information or assistance. Therefore, our Central Office was opened October 1, 1962 with the financial support of ten groups.

Every year we handle a large number of calls for help from alcoholics or members of their families. This is one of the principal advantages of a Central Office.

It is essential that your San Mateo County Fellowship Central Office receive adequate financial and moral support of all A.A. groups and members in the county so that it may continue to support the A.A. program for the alcoholic who lives, works, or visits here. As of 1995, the San Mateo County Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous serves over 300 Groups and Meetings.

## TO THE NEW SECRETARY

Congratulations on being elected secretary of your group. It can be a wonderful and rewarding experience for you.

This handbook is designed to answer any questions you may have about your specific responsibilities as secretary of the group and about A.A. in general.

Action is the magic word to insure sobriety.

Never hesitate to ask for help from Central Office, and don't forget Tradition 2, which says:

“For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority -- a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience. "Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

When you find it's time to pass this work of love on to your successor, please make his or her appointment known to the San Mateo Central Office by phoning (650) 577.1310, so that they may be welcomed. Our fax number is (650) 577.1385, and our web site contains a trusted servant form. [www.AA-san-mateo.org](http://www.AA-san-mateo.org). We also have an e-mail address: email: [AA@AA-san-mateo.org](mailto:AA@AA-san-mateo.org).

If your successor happens to be a secretary for the first time, you will want to be available to them for the first few meetings of their term, or if you're eager to try other meetings during that time, leave your phone number with the new secretary.

It is recommended that new secretaries have at least six months of continuous sobriety, when assuming the responsibilities of Group Secretary.

Part of the responsibility of the rotating secretary is to PASS IT ON. Rotation is one of the important principles in the structure and operation of a local group (and, indeed, throughout the fellowship).

It means simply that A.A.s shy away from the idea of an individual, no matter how competent, serving too long as a group officer or member of a service committee. The suggested term of office for Group Secretary is six months; for co-secretaries, one year. In A.A., it's the program, not the personalities that count.

## **REQUIREMENTS AND DUTIES OF A GROUP SECRETARY**

A group Secretary should have at least six months of continuous sobriety; be free to attend all meetings during the recommended term of officer and to be early at the meeting place to insure it is properly "set up" -- coffee made, arrange bulletins in order by number, etc.

1. Start and close all meetings on schedule.
2. Obtain chairperson in advance (Speaker and Speaker Discussion meetings). Speakers should be advised in advance of the type of meeting and A.A.'s primary purpose.
3. Before the meeting starts, select members to read "How it Works", "Traditions" and other Group approved readings.
4. Have books and literature available and on display.
5. Make A.A. related announcements -- Request reports from Treasurer, Delegate, GSR, and H&I representatives on a regular basis.
6. Facilitate Group business matters (oversee elections, group consciences, etc.)
7. See that collection baskets are passed around the room and are returned to the secretary.
8. Make sure that facilities are clean and dishes put away after meeting. Turn off lights.
9. Maintain good relations with the landlord, and insure that the rent is paid on time.

### **A SPECIAL NOTE TO GROUP SECRETARIES**

The Group Secretary is responsible for maintaining orderly conduct of the meeting. Should a disturbance arise during the meeting, the secretary should stand and perhaps say something like this: "Pardon me, but I think we should continue with the general discussion. Perhaps we can discuss this after the meeting. "A good secretary should never interrupt the discussion to interject his or her own thoughts. He/she seldom participates in the discussion unless the group is small and time is plentiful.

## **FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GROUP SECRETARY**

For the peace of mind and protection of the secretary from any criticism, it is suggested that each group have a treasurer. Suggested continuous sobriety of a Treasurer should be 2 years and willingness to serve a 2 year term.

If your group does not have a treasurer, then this is an important part of your job as secretary.

### **TREASURER**

It is highly desirable to keep a simple but formal record of funds received, costs and disbursements of monies. This serves as a record to assist your memory and as a point of pride to the group with respect to their contributions. A regular financial report should be made to the group. After each meeting, take a few minutes to make a summary report of contributions received and expenses.

At the end of each month, make a monthly report on forms provided by Central Office and distribute your contributions to the Central Office and GSO in New York and in your district.

A.A. experience has taught us that it is not a good idea for a group to hoard money. The funds should be distributed on a monthly basis. Ask your steering committee about this. Below are suggested contribution distributions found in the A.A. approved pamphlet, "Self-Supporting Through Your Own Contributions":

**FIRST:**        To your own group  
Each A.A. group is self-supporting. This means you must pay rent, buy coffee and the refreshments (if any) and attend to all other expenses of the group (like coffee pots, A.A. wall-hanging signs, A.A. books, etc.)

**SECOND:**     To you own area 70% of the remainder of your balance after Group Expenses should be mailed or delivered monthly to the Central Office: **Make checks payable to "San Mateo County Fellowship"**

**San Mateo Central Office  
2215 S. El Camino Real, Ste. 204  
San Mateo, CA 94403**

**FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE GROUP SECRETARY (continued)**

**THIRD:** To the General Service Office  
The services provided by General Service Office (GSO) in New York and your district are important. 20% of the remainder of your balance should be mailed to:

**General Service Office  
P.O Box 2407  
James A Farley Station  
New York, NY 10116-2407**

**IMPORTANT: Make check payable to : "General Fund"**

**FOURTH:** To your Area Committee: Your contribution supports Area Assemblies, Delegate's expenses, Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community and Institutions work. 5% to:

**California Northern Coastal Area  
P. O. Box 884222 San Francisco,  
CA 94188-4222**

**FIFTH:** To your District: Your contribution supports District communication with groups, providing group conscience at an assembly level and serving as a link between Area delegates and GSR's. Send 5% to:

**District 5 - San Mateo County  
P.O. Box 6332  
San Mateo, CA 94403**

**H&I:** send contributions to:  
**H&I  
P.O. Box 192490  
San Francisco, CA 94119-2490**

**NOTE: Never send cash in the mail!**

## **GROUP ORGANIZATION**

Each A.A. Group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, therefore the type of Group Organization is usually determined by the group conscience.

The following suggested Group Organization is based on the experience of many successful groups and should be used as a guide to establish an organization best suited for your group. The size of your group and type of meeting your members may help to determine the organization required.

### **Steering Committee**

**Secretary** (Some groups also have a co-secretary)

**Treasurer**

**GSR General Service Representative to the District Committee**

(and alternate)

**Delegate to Central Office Delegates Committee** (and alternate)

**Grapevine Representative**

**Greeters** to welcome newcomers and members to meetings

**Coffee maker and coffee servers**

**Literature** person to obtain books and literature for the group

**Hospitals & Institutions Committee Representative**

People to set up and take down chairs, tables, etc.

Dish washers and dryers when necessary.

Program Chairperson or Speakers Committee to get speakers.

Consideration should be given as to who will provide these services when a person delegated for any such service is unable to assume responsibilities.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE**

The steering committee serves the group by providing convenient, experienced cross section of group membership to whom problems of the group can be referred and for handling "policy questions" that may arise within the group. It does not represent management of a group; no individual or committee can do that.

The steering committee may be comprised of the GSR, present and past secretaries, treasurer and other concerned members of the group. Individual groups may set certain suggested minimum of sobriety for members of steering committees, normally one year's sobriety.

Based on the experience of a number of groups, here is a guide on how large your steering committee should be:

### **Members in Group**

10 to 20

20 to 40

0 to 75

75 to 100

125 to 200

### **Steering Committee**

3 to 5

5 or 6

6 to 8

8 or 9

9 to 13

## TYPES OF MEETINGS

Each Group should determine by "Group Conscience" the type and format for its meetings. Here are some common formats used:

**Speaker Meetings:** The secretary opens the meeting with the recommended meeting format and then introduces the speaker who shares their experience, strength and hope. It is recommended that speakers have at least six months of continuous sobriety and have an inspiring story of recovery. If the speaker has had addictions other than alcohol, he/she should be requested to emphasize the alcoholism and hold discussion of other addictions to a minimum.

Speakers should be advised in advance of the meeting time and the maximum time they should speak. If a speaker exceeds this time schedule, the secretary should pass a polite note to the speaker advising him or her that the time is up.

**Speaker-Discussion Meetings:** The same general format as speaker meetings, except that the speaker may talk for about half of the time left after the "opening". He/she then selects a topic for discussion, which is related to alcoholism or the A.A. Program.

**Book Study Meetings:** Meetings to review and discuss A.A. books, such as the "Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions". These meetings are usually opened in the same manner as "Speaker" and "Speaker-discussion" Meetings, but instead of a speaker the Secretary arranges to have an A.A. member who understands the topic under discussion at that meeting, lead the discussion as chairperson.

It is suggested that as many members as possible participate in the reading and discussion of the topic being considered. For this reason, it is suggested the chairperson briefly qualify as an alcoholic and then share his/her overall thoughts on the subject under consideration.

Usually a copy (or copies) of the book being discussed is passed around the room and each member present is given an opportunity to read one or two paragraphs (the number of paragraphs to be read should be announced at the beginning of the meeting) until the chapter is completed.

After the chapter has been read, the chairperson will usually ask for volunteers or will call on members to explain their understanding of, or experiences with the subject being considered.



## **TYPES OF MEETINGS (continued)**

**Discussion Only Meetings:** Same opening format used by other meetings. Then the secretary or chairperson asks the group if they have a subject related to alcoholism or A.A. they would like to discuss. If such a topic is suggested, it will be used, otherwise the secretary or chairperson will announce a subject to be discussed. The members will then discuss the topic or other subjects related to alcoholism for the balance of the meeting.

**Special Interest Meetings:** A.A. members who have special interests sometimes start special interest groups, such as doctors, lawyers, women only, airline pilots, men's stag, teenage, pre-teenage, gay, etc. Such special interest groups are neither encouraged nor discouraged, however before starting such groups, the members involved should determine if such groups are in the best interest of unity in our A.A. Program as a whole and be governed by the group conscience.

### **Open, Closed and Public Meetings:**

A closed meeting is for A.A. members, or for those who “have a desire to stop drinking.”

An open meeting is for alcoholics, their families and interested friends.

A public meeting is designated to acquaint key people in the community (doctors, clergy, etc.) with the local availability of the A.A. recovery program. An announcement of this type of meeting generally appears in the local newspapers. The meeting is open to the general public and professional people interested in A.A. and alcoholism are especially invited to attend.

## SUGGESTED MEETING AGENDA

The order of meetings varies somewhat from area to area, but you can feel safe by following this outline:

1. "Good morning/afternoon/evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is the regular open/closed meeting of the \_\_\_\_\_ group of Alcoholics Anonymous. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am an alcoholic and your current Secretary/Co-Secretary."

2. "Shall we open the meeting with a moment of silence to do with as you wish, followed by the Serenity Prayer."

"God, grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
courage to change the things I can,  
and the wisdom to know the difference."

3. "I shall now read the definition of Alcoholics Anonymous, taken from our monthly publication, the A.A. Grapevine:"

"Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions. A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety."

4. "\_\_\_\_\_ will now read the beginning of Chapter 5 of the Big Book." (This may be substituted by the beginning of Chapter 3 or other portion from the Big Book. It is suggested only A.A. approved literature be read.)
5. "\_\_\_\_\_ will read the Twelve Traditions of A.A. which are to the group what the twelve steps are to the individual."

## SUGGESTED MEETING AGENDA

(continued)

6. Ask any new members to introduce themselves by their first names. Explain that this is not to embarrass them; but rather so we may get to know them. (A new member is defined as someone new to the Fellowship or in early sobriety.) You may wish to ask if there are any visitors, any A.A. members attending this meeting for the first time, and if anyone is celebrating an A.A. birthday.
7. Ask for announcements from the group pertaining to A.A. Be sure to make your own A.A. announcements about the availability of free literature, books for sale and any other general A.A. announcements. Make sure your delegate to Central Office, GSR, H&I and Grapevine representatives have a opportunity to give a report of their activities, when they have important information to report.
8. Introduce the Chairperson (speaker, speaker-discussion meetings).
9. The Chairperson conducts the meeting in accordance with the format agreed upon with the secretary.
10. Thank the Chairperson after his/her presentation.
11. Pass the basket. (The time for passing the basket is optional -- some groups do so before the speaker, some after the speaker or discussion.) Usually the secretary precedes this by saying:

"We have no dues or fees in A.A., but we do pay our own way. In accordance with the Seventh Tradition, your contribution will be appreciated. The money in the basket pays the rent, buys coffee, and helps support General Service and our Central Office."

It is also suggested that the H&I Pink Can should be passed separately from baskets to avoid confusion of support .

12. Close the meeting with the Serenity Prayer or a prayer of your choice for those who wish to do so, if that is the custom of your group.

### NOTE:

Make every effort to open and close the meeting on time. Be sure to tell your chairperson what time he/she should finish his/her part of the meeting.

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## SAN MATEO COUNTY CENTRAL OFFICE SERVICES

Our Central Office is a service office for Alcoholics Anonymous...

- Maintains A.A. listings in the area telephone books.
- Maintains and prints a schedule of A.A. meetings in San Mateo County.
- Maintains a web site of AA meetings - [www.aa-san-mateo.org](http://www.aa-san-mateo.org)
- Answers telephone calls for help and routes these calls to volunteer "Twelfth-Step" workers; maintains an answering service for calls "after office hours".
- Answers all letters for help, sending along pertinent information and literature.
- Assists groups by making A.A. books, literature and supplies, such as this handbook available on a local basis.
- Serves as a public relations office for A.A. in the community.
- Serves as a clearinghouse of information relating to all participating groups, issues bulletins, reports, significant group activities, special events of area-wide interest, changes in group secretaries, etc.
- Sponsors an Annual Anniversary Dinner for our service area.
- May publish and distribute literature containing special interpretations of the A.A. Program (such as this handbook).
- Maintains up-to-date listings of all group meetings ; the time and location of each and publishes meeting schedules.
- Central Office is supported **solely** by the groups it serves and by members of AA.
- The address of our Central Office is:

**2215 El Camino Real, Ste. 204**  
**San Mateo, CA 94403**  
**Phone: 650 577-1310**  
email:[AA@AA-san-mateo.org](mailto:AA@AA-san-mateo.org)  
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## ANONYMITY

Always remember: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities".

A.A. is important. Without it, the alcoholic is lost. Who we are, what we do for a living and where we live is not the important thing. Our primary purpose is "to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety".

### **At the public level**

Personal anonymity is our assurance to the world that none of us will use the A.A. name for personal profit, prestige or power -- and our assurance to the newcomer that his identity will not be revealed.

### **At the private level**

We are asked to respect the anonymity of the other fellow. We should never reveal to others the names of people we meet in A.A. The individuals themselves are the only people who can determine whether or not they want to tell of their association with A.A. A.A. experience has taught that no A.A. need to be anonymous to family, friends or neighbors; disclosure there is usually right and good. But this, of course, is up to the individual involved.

**Special Note:** At open or public meetings, the secretary is requested to remind visitors of the importance of anonymity. Clubs, halfway houses and other institutions and organizations cannot represent themselves as Alcoholics Anonymous since by tradition this is not permitted.

## WHO "RUNS" A.A.

A.A. has no "leaders" in the usual meaning of the term. No individual is authorized to speak for A.A. on a local, regional, national or international basis.

A.A. gets things done largely through service committees, and positions of responsibility or authority are filled on a rotating basis.

There are a few paid workers in the fellowship. These are found in the General Service Office in New York and in Area service offices (Central Office) where the burdens of full-time responsibility are too great for volunteer workers.

You are helping "get things done" by taking your turn as secretary of this group.

## **A.A.'s WORLD SERVICES**

With A.A. reaching all over the globe, we must have some way of keeping track of all the groups and loner members, and some way of furnishing them with literature and information.

To do this job, we have:

### **The General Service Board. (a board of trustees)**

Safeguards traditions and service fund.

Oversees the operating service units, the General Service Office, "A.A. World Services, Inc.", and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

### **The General Service Office (GSO)**

Handles inquiries from groups and the general public.

Prepares literature, issues periodic bulletins, corresponds with "Loners", Institutional Groups, and Overseas Groups (people in remote places where there are no meetings.).

### **A.A. World Services, Inc.**

Handles all details involved in the publication and distribution of A.A.'s basic texts -- Alcoholics Anonymous, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and A.A. Comes of Age -- as well as all pamphlet literature.

### **A.A. Grapevine, Inc.**

Publishes and distributes our monthly magazine.

### **General Services Conference**

Is the link between A.A. groups and services committees. It makes policy decisions on matters that affect A.A. as a whole.