

A.A.® Guidelines

Public Information

from GSO, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

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.

PURPOSE

Like all of A.A., the primary purpose of members involved with Public Information service is to carry the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Working together, members of local Public Information committees convey A.A. information to the general public, including the media.

HISTORY

The 1939 publication of our Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, was the first A.A. information available for the public. By 1941, several articles on A.A. in national publications helped to encourage understanding and acceptance of A.A. Also significant were good relations with professionals, such as Dr. W. D. Silkworth, Rev. Sam Shoemaker and Dr. Harry Tiebout.

In 1956, the Public Information Committee of the General Service Board was formed, with a corresponding Conference PI Committee established in 1961. The General Service Conference established this policy for A.A. Public Information:

In all public relationships, A.A.'s sole objective is to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making known to the still-suffering alcoholics, and to those who may be interested in their problem, our own experience as individuals and as a fellowship in learning to live without alcohol.

We believe that our experience should be made available freely to all who express sincere interest. We believe further that all efforts in this field should always reflect our gratitude for the gift of sobriety and our awareness that many outside of A.A. are equally concerned with the serious problem of alcoholism.

By 1973, the General Service Conference confirmed that *"We must recognize that our competence to speak about alcoholism is limited in subject matter to Alcoholics Anonymous and its recovery program."*

COOPERATION WITH THE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

Responding to an expressed need, the Conference recommended formation of a separate Conference Committee in 1971. Now known as the Cooperation with the Professional Community Committee (CPC), its purpose is to better distribute A.A. information to those in contact with alcoholics through their professions. In some locales, CPC and PI committees are separate; elsewhere they function as one committee covering two services.

It is clearly understood that both of these committees work within our primary purpose and are not in competition.

LOCAL PI COMMITTEES

Whether sponsored by an area assembly, district, or A.A. central office (intergroup), PI committees are responsible to the A.A. entity they serve.

Getting Started: PI chair listings can be updated by the area registrar or you can send your contact information directly to GSO. Once new chairs are listed, the General Service Office (GSO) sends them a welcome letter along with basic PI information and places them on the *Box 4-5-9* mailing list. A PI Workbook is sent to all new PI chairpersons. Others are asked to purchase them.

To get shared A.A. experience regarding PI service, contact with others in your area/region is helpful. There is also a staff person at GSO who handles PI activities and maintains contact with local committees.

Committee Members: The first qualification for doing PI, or any other service work, is sound sobriety. All committee members need to be thoroughly familiar with the A.A. program and able to provide consistent and accurate information about the Fellowship. Experience in public relations is not essential.

An understanding of the Twelve Traditions, including a firm grasp of the Anonymity Traditions, is most important. This is often enhanced through committees studying basic PI material together. Many local PI committees find it beneficial to review the PI Workbook at their initial meeting, familiarizing themselves with it before setting goals.

From one area PI committee: "After the assembly acted to establish a PI committee, a few interested members met together and realized that we needed participation from the districts and background from GSO. Individually, we purchased basic PI pamphlets and the PI Workbook through our local intergroup or GSO. The committee decided to meet monthly to read and discuss the pamphlets 'Speaking at Meetings Outside of A.A.' and 'Understanding Anonymity,' the service piece 'Information on Alcoholics Anonymous' and the PI Workbook.

"Our study meetings gained in enthusiasm as we read together from one basic PI pamphlet at a time. New members joined, and before long we each began to enjoy taking part in 'practice talks' during our monthly meetings.

"A 'practice talk' session was led by a committee person who had prepared a presentation, asking us to 'pretend' to be a certain audience (high school students, church or business group, etc.). After the talk, the 'audience' would ask questions suitable to the supposed group. We concluded by offering loving suggestions for improvement or clarification.

"After six months, we informed the local community of our availability. The next year, we were able to visit 20 schools, sharing A.A. information with more than 7,300 people."

In locations with sparse populations and small number of A.A.s involved in PI service, the need to regularly share experience and information is just as vital, and may be conducted by phone or mail. PI committee meetings are less frequent, but the purpose, need for guidance and link to an A.A. service entity remains the same.

Box 4-5-9: PI committees can benefit by the shared PI experience

through articles in GSO's newsletter. Collected A.A. service experience in carrying the message is valuable to the Fellowship, and GSO welcomes the opportunity to receive sharing on local activities and projects from local PI committees so that it might be shared with others.

Financing: Most often the cost of doing PI service work is met from group contributions to whatever body forms the committee — general service area, district, central office/intergroup or, in smaller communities, one or more A.A. groups.

Usually, funds for the committee's work will be included in the budget of the A.A. entity served, and PI expenses are regularly reported. Occasionally, there is consideration of a special allocation for PI projects, such as distributing Big Books to local libraries.

BASIC COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

What follows are the essential services, which may be altered or amplified by the group conscience of the PI committee or the A.A. entity supporting the PI work.

PI Visits: Some examples of visits might include schools, local businesses, church and civic groups. Where no CPC committee exists, PI committees might also be in contact with professionals such as the clergy, health care providers, lawyers and teachers. In advance of initial contacts, PI committees often distribute a simple letter describing their availability and how interested persons can make contact for more information. They might also plan a visit by two or more committee members.

A PI visit might include distribution of A.A. literature, a brief talk and/or showing an A.A. video. It is essential that participating A.A.s agree on the basic outline for the visit, and are familiar with the details in "Speaking at Meetings Outside of A.A." and "Understanding Anonymity."

A few points to remember:

- Open by describing the need for personal anonymity at the public level; give your first name and A.A. membership.
- Avoid drunkalogs, keep your A.A. story general and brief. Use humor with good taste; what's funny to A.A.s may not be laughable to nonmembers.
- Confine your comments to A.A. information; remember that we're not experts when speaking as A.A. members. We don't try to speak for A.A. as a whole.
- As nonprofessionals, we do not give any information concerning the general subject of alcoholism, including on treatment, medication, prevention, advocacy and legislation.
- If appropriate, offer A.A. literature, such as "A.A. at a Glance," "A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous" or the A.A. Membership Survey pamphlet. Include information on local open A.A. meetings.
- Be on time. First impressions are important.

Public Meetings and Luncheons: Some PI committees host informational meetings that are open to the public. Careful advance planning is important to assure a successful outcome.

The gratitude luncheon is another way of thanking non-A.A.s who have given a PI committee an opportunity to carry the message. Committees have also invited public representatives to a special luncheon as a means of introducing them to Alcoholics Anonymous. Brief talks may be given, but the atmosphere is kept informal. For both these and the gratitude luncheons, it has been suggested, the seating arrangement should alternate hosts and guests, to give the latter a

chance to meet some live examples of recovery in A.A.

Staffing an A.A. Booth: Many PI committees are active in staffing "A.A. booths" at health fairs in the communities they serve. The invitation to participate may come directly to the local PI committee or through the GSO staff person on the PI desk. The local PI committee ascertains if taking part serves A.A.'s primary purpose. The invitation is acknowledged with appreciation whether or not the invitation can be accepted.

Many times, a simple table is provided by the organization hosting the function, and two or more committee members staff the booth. PI committees rotate this responsibility to assure that all have an opportunity to participate.

A.A. literature specifically for the public is set out on the table and offered to interested passersby. PI committees may collect contact details from those interested in more information and can follow up with a request to GSO to send information packets.

GSO can help by sharing experience and by furnishing basic literature to the committee undertaking this service ("A.A. at a Glance," the most recent A.A. Membership Survey pamphlet, "A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous," etc.). It is vital that requests for special-event literature be received by GSO in ample time to allow for packing and shipping — usually three weeks notice is sufficient.

COOPERATING WITH THE MEDIA

A.A. has enjoyed excellent relations with print, radio and television journalists.

Anonymity: By Conference Advisory Action, GSO annually sends several thousand Anonymity letters online, requesting that those working in journalism observe our Tradition of personal anonymity at the public level for all A.A. members. Some PI committees distribute copies of this Anonymity letter locally, while others use the text on their letterhead for a mailing to local media outlets.

Information on Local Events: Upon request, some PI committees assist by distributing information about upcoming A.A. conventions or Regional Forums to community and local newspapers.

For Small Communities: PI committees may request that A.A. information be included in the public service page or community bulletin board. The committee offers a simple description of whom A.A. serves and how to obtain more information locally.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs): A.A. Conference-approved PSAs are widely accepted as a way to provide information on A.A.

Historically, local radio and television stations have offered free airtime for public service announcements from nonprofit organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous. Although stations are no longer mandated to donate airtime to PSAs, local broadcasters are generally quite willing to air them.

In most locations, you can reach out to the radio station's public service director who often handles PSAs. Many times, PI committees find that a personal request to air the PSA often results in an opportunity to share A.A. information, emphasizing the principles of anonymity and nonaffiliation. It is always helpful to request that the station lead into an A.A. radio or TV PSA with a statement such as "Here is a public service announcement from Alcoholics Anonymous."

If you would like more information about working with radio or television stations, please write or call GSO and ask for the service piece “Suggestions for Working with Your Local Radio and Television Stations to Help Carry the Message.”

A.A. Videos: Conference-approved videos are listed in the literature catalog and on aa.org and serve as an excellent way of telling the A.A. story visually. Occasionally, a TV station is willing to air information on A.A. in more detail than can be included on PSAs. “Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous” is suitable for this purpose, as are the “Young People’s Videos.” Keep in mind that no A.A. video or PSA can be altered without the permission of A.A. World Services, Inc.

In addition, HD broadcast-quality versions of A.A.’s public service announcements are available at no cost to U.S. and Canadian broadcasters. You can access these through the Public Information Committee webpage.

Requests for A.A. Presence on Radio or TV: Such requests are carefully considered to assure that: a.) Anonymity of members will be protected; b.) A.A. cooperation will adhere to our primary purpose and Traditions.

Two suggestions seem to be essential for a good outcome: 1) Discuss the request with other A.A.s involved in service, seeking input from a wider group conscience beyond the PI committee; and 2) If the decision is to proceed with A.A. participation, use members with good experience in discussing our program with the public.

The 1969 General Service Conference considered this matter and approved this resolution:

“We will endeavor to avoid participation on radio and TV programs, unless:

- a. We are given adequate time for preparation;
- b. Our presence will serve an A.A. objective;
- c. The primary discussion is appropriate for A.A. — not concerned with crime, sex, controversy or any other sensationalism;
- d. We are satisfied that our anonymity is guaranteed.”

LITERATURE AND ONLINE RESOURCES

The Conference-approved Literature and Other A.A. Material catalog has information on PI (and CPC) specific items, including the PI Workbook and pamphlets mentioned in these Guidelines.

The aa.org website provides resources for local committees on the “Public Information Committees” page. Committees may also wish to refer media professionals to the online Press/Media page on www.aa.org. Additionally, GSO has PI Discount Packages for sale to help PI committees with quantity purchases of basic A.A. information for the public.

Displays of A.A. literature are often placed in public areas in cooperation with the responsible officials. Such displays might be placed in libraries, schools, bookmobiles, church literature racks and hospital reading rooms or carts. An example of how this works is where a PI committee cooperated with the local library system to determine a suitable location in each branch, along with a system for replenishment. The result was a small, attractive A.A. literature display with information on how to obtain local A.A. meeting information.

Some literature for PI committees is listed. For information about Discount Packages, please contact GSO, Grand Central Station, P.O. Box 459, New York, N.Y. 10163, or call (212) 870-3400.

BASIC PI LITERATURE (Available in print and online)

For Committees:

Public Information Workbook

A.A. Guidelines (on) Public Information

A.A. Guidelines (on) Internet

“Speaking at Meetings Outside of A.A.”

“Understanding Anonymity”

“A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous”

A.A. Fact Sheet

Anonymity Statement for Public Meetings

Anonymity Wallet Cards

Box 4-5-9

Frequently Asked Questions about A.A. Websites (service material)

For the Public:

“A.A. at a Glance”

Information on Alcoholics Anonymous

“Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey”

“Problems Other than Alcohol”

A.A. Preamble placard

“A.A. in Your Community”

“Members of the Clergy Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous”

“If You Are a Professional, A.A. Wants to Work with You”

“Is There a Problem Drinker in the Workplace?”

“Is There an Alcoholic in Your Life?”

PI SERVICE CARDS

GSO has created five PI Service Cards in digital template format which are available to download for local use. The digital templates include two sections on the cards that allow for input of local contact information or a locally developed QR code to be placed on them by local AA members performing PI service. These cards can be produced as posters, flyers, distributed digitally, or added into a presentation.

CARDS AND SIGNS

These are often used to offer the telephone number or website of the nearest central office, groups, or A.A. contact (depending upon the size of the community), or to give the times and places of nearby meetings. Cards and signs have been placed in offices, police stations, sheriffs’ offices, hospitals, county infirmaries and hotels. Signs may be in the form of car cards (in buses or subway trains) or of road signs or billboards.

WEBSITES

Many local A.A. entities have created their own A.A. websites to offer information on local meetings and events. Often the PI committee is responsible for the maintenance of these websites.

PI COMMITTEE SHARING

As part of PI shared experience, the following is a list of goals from a district PI committee:

1. Be sure every public library has at least one Conference-approved book, e.g. the Big Book, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* or *Living Sober*.
2. Let the Fellowship know how to reach out to those who are Deaf/hard-of-hearing or blind.

3. Place a literature rack in every high school, college, police station, library and hospital in the district and keep the rack stacked with appropriate literature and meeting schedules.
4. Send an email or letter to high schools, offering A.A. literature and/or a presentation on A.A. — what we do and what we do not do.
5. Contact assisted-living facilities and senior centers in the district offering A.A. literature and/or a presentation on A.A.
6. List open A.A. meetings in newspapers and community websites in the district.
7. Place a small (paid if necessary) announcement in every district newspaper around the holidays.
8. Work with the newspapers — generating interest in our Fellowship.
9. Respond to speaking requests at non-A.A. meetings in the district.
10. Place Public Service Announcements with radio and television stations.
11. Put meeting schedules behind the front desks at every hotel, motel and bed and breakfast.
12. Participate in district and state A.A. seminars and conventions.
13. Fight apathy within the Fellowship, find a co-chair and interested people in order to achieve all the above, and most importantly, keep your sanity and stay away from the first drink.

INFORMING THE FELLOWSHIP

Though the “public” in “public information” refers to non-A.A.s, many local PI committees consider that helping to keep the Fellowship itself informed is also among their responsibilities.

Building wider understanding of the Twelve Traditions among A.A.s, especially as they pertain to online social networking sites, is a common PI activity; special meetings are often held for this purpose. Committees everywhere have been successful in explaining the PI applications of Tradition Eleven. The A.A. Guidelines on the Internet are a helpful resource.

Many PI committees provide local members with reports on all PI activities in the area. This is an excellent way to enlist the cooperation of local groups in planned projects. Information is disseminated through:

- A regular PI newsletter or a PI section in a local A.A. bulletin, including list of all completed PI projects in a given year. For instance, the types of outside groups that requested PI speakers may be shown.
- Visiting local groups to give brief talks about Public Information service.
- Setting up PI workshops at assemblies, conventions, conferences, and other A.A. get-togethers.
- Inviting members of local A.A. groups to attend a special meeting on PI.
- Informing local groups when a TV or radio program produced with the cooperation of the PI committee is about to be aired.

GSO'S A.A. WEBSITE

GSO's A.A. website, www.aa.org, is available in English, French and Spanish. In addition to available online resources already described, here are more items on the website that may be helpful to local PI efforts:

- A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets “Is A.A. for You?” and “A Newcomer Asks...”
- Contact information for Central Offices/Intergroups/Answering Services in the U.S. and Canada
- Contact information for international general service offices
- Anonymity letter to media
- *About A.A.*, newsletter for professionals
- Frequently Asked Questions page
- Resource page for professionals
- Media Library page

GSO's A.A. website has been successful as a PI tool. We have received positive comments from media professionals, librarians and students who are interested in Alcoholics Anonymous. We invite you to visit this website and provide information about it in your PI presentations.

GSO'S YOUTUBE CHANNEL

GSO's YouTube channel can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/c/%20AlcoholicsAnonymousWorldServicesInc>.

The channel provides an additional platform from which AAWS-produced videos can be easily shared with a broad audience in order to enhance carrying the message to alcoholics, the general public and the professional community. AAWS offers local service structures and Intergroups the ability to embed our video content directly into their local websites. For any questions or feedback related to the AAWS/ GSO YouTube Channel contact publicinfo@aa.org.

AA GRAPEVINE AND LA VIÑA (IN SPANISH)

Founded in 1944, AA Grapevine is the International Journal of Alcoholics Anonymous. Often described as “our meeting in print,” the monthly Grapevine and bimonthly Spanish-language La Viña maintain two websites (www.aagrapevine.org and www.aalavina.org) where members can sign up for the Grapevine app or print version of the magazine, access Grapevine and La Viña archives, listen to the Grapevine podcast and read stories on a variety of topics related to recovery from alcoholism

MEETING GUIDE

Meeting Guide is a free app for iOS and Android with meeting information for Alcoholics Anonymous. Over 100,000 weekly meetings are currently listed; information is updated twice daily. Learn more and download the app at aa.org/meeting-guide-app.