

A.A.® Guidelines

Literature Committees

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 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.

LET LITERATURE CARRY THE MESSAGE, TOO

Today, as in the early days of Alcoholics Anonymous, the A.A. message of recovery from alcoholism is carried by one alcoholic talking to another. However, since the publication of the first edition of the Big Book in 1939, literature has played an important role in spreading the A.A. message and imparting information about the A.A. Twelve Step program of recovery.

A.A. co-founder Bill W., who often called the influence of A.A. literature “incalculable,” wrote in the May 1964 issue of the Grapevine, “Suppose, for instance, that during the last twenty-five years A.A. had never published any standard literature. . . no books, no pamphlets. We need little imagination to see that by now our message would be hopelessly garbled. Our relations with medicine and religion would have become a shambles. To alcoholics generally we would today be a joke and the public would have thought us a riddle. Without its literature, A.A. would certainly have bogged down in a welter of controversy and disunity.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 348) Bill’s words ring just as true today.

The newcomer, walking into an A.A. group for the first time, may be given a meeting list, basic recovery pamphlets and, depending on the individual group conscience, perhaps a copy of *Living Sober* or the Big Book.

In 1992, the Conference Literature Committee suggested that the trustees’ Literature Committee develop literature committee guidelines comprised of shared experience from the Fellowship.

These guidelines provide a summary of shared experience of A.A.s in the groups, central and intergroup offices, general service areas and districts who have formed literature committees and shared how they “Let Literature Carry the Message, Too.”

BASIC COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

- Inform groups, district or area assembly members, through displays and other suitable methods, of all available Conference-approved literature, audiovisual material and other special items.
- Become familiar with the information on GSO’s A.A. website (www.aa.org).
- Provide literature for groups, area, and district functions.
- Consider suggestions regarding proposed additions to and changes in Conference-approved literature and audiovisual material.
- Encourage A.A. members to read and purchase A.A. literature.

HOW TO GET STARTED

- Contact Member Services to be listed as a Literature Chair.
- Contact GSO for the current Literature Catalog and information on ordering AAWS and Grapevine publications.
- Become familiar with literature and audiovisual material.
- Ask GSO for a complimentary literature package to create a display.
- Discuss literature needs of the intergroup/central office, groups, area and districts.
- Form a literature committee and make a traveling literature display.
- Prepare a budget.
- Plan ahead where you want to exhibit A.A. literature.

AREA LITERATURE CHAIRS

Experience indicates that a thorough knowledge of A.A. literature is a good way to assure that our primary purpose remains the focus for successful A.A. groups and members. You can be a part of the solution by emphasizing our books, pamphlets, audiovisual and service material.

Some areas hold workshops to help local groups and district chairpersons learn about where A.A. literature comes from and the Conference process.

DISTRICT LITERATURE CHAIRS

- Maintain a stock of suggested literature to give new GSRs.
- Keep a limited stock of catalogs for A.A. literature for members needing printed catalogs.
- Inform members about the Online Bookstore through aa.org.
- Keep an ample supply of current General Service Conference-approved pamphlets, books and audiovisual material, as well as other A.A. material.
- Set up this material for viewing and sale at functions, including: workshops, conferences, conventions, roundups and meetings.
- Order literature for district activities as needed.
- Become familiar with the general contents of all literature, in order to provide information to inquirers.
- Be represented at and participate in literature committee functions, and, from time to time, communicate with the General Service Office.

GROUP LITERATURE REPRESENTATIVES

The group's literature representative makes certain that A.A. literature, purchased from the local intergroup (central office) or ordered from the General Service Office, are on hand for meetings and properly displayed.

Sharing for a group literature representative can be found in "Does Your Group Have a Literature Chair," *Box 4-5-9*, Vol. 59, No. 3/Fall 2013, which is available on www.aa.org.

Digital subscriptions to *Box 4-5-9* are also available on GSO's website, www.aa.org. Some groups also have bulk subscriptions to the AA Grapevine. Digital magazine subscriptions and other AA Grapevine resources may be accessed at www.aagrapevine.org.

REFERENCES FOR LITERATURE COMMITTEES

- An overview of the substance and content of our literature is found in *The A.A. Service Manual*.
- A "job description" for a literature chairperson and/or representative is found in "The A.A. Group" pamphlet.
- The Online Bookstore and the catalog of Conference-approved Literature and Other A.A. Material with corresponding order form.
- Service Material Available from GSO. This service piece is an excellent source of information.
- What is Service Material? Service material, available to A.A. members upon request, differs from Conference-approved literature in that it has not come about through Conference Advisory Action. It is produced when there is a need for readily available information on a specific subject. Service Material reflects A.A. group experience as well as specific and timely information that is subject to change.
- *Box 4-5-9* subscriptions website. A.A.'s quarterly newsletter carries A.A. announcements and news from the U.S. and Canada, as well as A.A. worldwide. Encourage the GSRs to suggest that their group members subscribe to *Box 4-5-9*.
- The Literature Chairperson Information form (available from GSO) may be filled out and sent to GSO's Literature Coordinator. Please make a copy available to your area literature chairperson. GSO sends literature activity reports and updates to literature chairs/contacts, two to three times a year.

SHARING FROM LITERATURE COMMITTEES

We formed guidelines for literature committee elections, meetings, subcommittees and district liaison persons, budget, officers and their duties, and members' responsibilities.

Our committee displays A.A. literature and audiovisual material at every possible area and district function and selling literature at those functions helps to carry the A.A. message and fulfill our primary purpose.

We try to stock at least two of each book and five of each pamphlet. The reasoning behind multiple copies of books and pamphlets is that someone wants an item desperately, we will sell or give it to them depending upon the need.

We have three or four tables of literature for sale and display. This helps to get members interested in the literature. Tables are always neat, with literature catalogs in plain sight and easy reach. We have a traveling

display board with all pamphlets, book covers, Guidelines, A.A. Fact File, Box 4-5-9, local intergroup's newsletter and business cards from our central office, with address and phone number.

We always have a supply of meeting lists and, since we have a large Spanish community, we keep a supply of Spanish literature.

One area committee reviewed all A.A. literature and submitted a report, summarized here:

In carrying out this project, we have completed an inventory, not unlike the Fourth Step, of our literature. The result has not been an increased negative attitude towards our literature, but rather an awakening to our wealth of literature and the many possibilities for its use. Along with this awakening has come a spirit of cooperation in striving to make our literature the most effective possible.

Another area committee has formed guidelines for their literature committee elections, meetings, subcommittees and district liaison persons, budget, officers and their duties, and members' responsibilities.

Both committees concluded displaying A.A. literature and audiovisual materials at every possible area and district function and selling literature at those functions helps to carry the A.A. message and fulfill our primary purpose.

A district literature chairperson reports:

We have an inventory of all pamphlets and books and also most of the other items, such as tapes, directories, etc. We sell these items to the groups at the prices published by GSO. We do not give the groups the 20% discount that we get for pamphlets because that amount helps offset the cost of pamphlets we give away through our H&I, Public Information and Cooperation With the Professional Community committees.

We have a monthly literature meeting with the groups in our district at which we talk about any new items that have been released by GSO. We also try to pick one literature item to discuss to help everyone learn about how important the literature is when it comes to carrying the message.

I also have made myself available to take a literature display to group business meetings, as well as group meetings for literature studies. This seems to be a very good way to get the literature message to several people at the same time.

My own opinion is that the literature is the best way to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic. There can be no confusion with words when you see them in black and white. To this end I think that anything you can do to make people aware of literature is very acceptable.

An area literature chair shares:

My experience is limited to one year on the area committee and my observation of it for the prior year. We only deal with Conference-approved items listed in the catalog. Grapevine is a separate committee. Our purpose at this time is to display the materials so that GSRs and others see what is available to their groups.

We display all of the hardback and softback books, plus pamphlets and an assortment of the other lower-cost service items. We set up our display at all area assembly and district committee meetings,

our mini conference, the state conference when hosted and any other time we are asked, i.e., district workshops, area workshops and PI type events.

We are not displaying any other Twelve Step literature or anything not in the catalog or available from GSO as a service item. We try to stock at least two of each book and five of each pamphlet. We carry one of all other items that we can justify costwise.

We do not stock many copies of the Final Conference Report or The A.A. Service Manual, but they are for sale. We also tend to have more than five of the service pamphlets, such as "The A.A. Group," "Your GSR," "The Twelve Traditions Illustrated." The reasoning behind multiple copies of books and pamphlets is as follows: If someone wants an item desperately, we will sell or give it to them depending upon the need. This is kind of a gray area and we could probably use some sort of policy. We try to present one item per month to the assembly/district meeting. Sort of a "If you never looked inside this, here's what's in it" deal.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO MAKE AN ATTRACTIVE DISPLAY

- Order a complimentary Literature Display package from GSO and buy enough pamphlet racks to display all the pamphlets.
- Order a complete set of A.A. books for display.
- You might decide to purchase three-fold 3'x4' display panels from a local office supply store and make some attractive displays of service pieces, foreign pamphlets, newsletters, etc.
- Display some of the lesser known items, such as Braille publications, audiovisual materials such as the video of *Alcoholics Anonymous* in American Sign Language, Conference reports, etc.
- Display the large poster-size items, such as anonymity declaration, unity statement, Bill and Bob's last messages, etc.
- Provide extra copies of literature order forms for individuals/groups.
- Make a banner of the book covers of foreign editions of the Big Book and hang it above the literature display.
- Have a computer with the Big Book on CD, with instructions on how to word search.
- Have equipment available to view films, such as "Bill's Own Story," and to listen to A.A. literature in nonprint format.

One committee had a literature display and was setting it up at district and intergroup functions, but they were frustrated at the way it would just sit there with members walking right by it. So they sought suggestions from other literature committees for ways to attract members' attention to the display. Four ways that they found worked very well were:

Making a banner of color Xeroxes of the book covers of the foreign editions of the Big Book and hanging it above the literature display.

Having a computer with the Big Book on disc loaded up, with some simple instructions next to it on how to word search.

Having a DVD and a TV with one of the videos, such as "Bill's Own Story" which has been known to draw a crowd at our local events.

Having a tape recorder and earphones with A.A. cassettes or CDs.

Another area reports:

Our area assemblies always have three or four tables of literature for sale and display, consisting of all books and pamphlets. The area literature chair usually asks the DCM of the host district to get some volunteers from local groups to help staff the tables. This helps to get members interested in the literature. One lady, who had sat in only a couple of times before she moved from the area, helped get a literature committee started in another area.

All recovery material is placed together and in plain sight, including all formats of the Big Book, Braille and audio tapes, and extra Spanish material in areas where there is a large Spanish community. All PI and CPC pamphlets and video and audio cassettes are kept together and arranged neatly. Other service pamphlets, Guidelines, and the Fact File are in another section with all Workbooks. Tables are always neat, with literature catalogs in plain sight and easy reach. Any literature chairperson should be informed of what is in stock and have a good idea of what is in each item, so, if asked a question, they would know where to look for the answer:

The area bought one Big Book in every language for a display (50th year) which was to be turned over to the archives at a later date, but most were sold at the assemblies.

Our local district has a traveling display board with all pamphlets, book covers, Guidelines, A.A. Fact File, Box 4-5-9, local intergroup's newsletter and business cards from our central office, with address and phone number.

One district chair reports:

I took a suitcase of literature out to different groups and would ask the chairperson of the group for a few minutes for a short pitch of what they had available in Conference-approved literature. This was received well, especially at groups in small towns that were some distance from our central office. One district in our area has a literature chair that writes an article in their district newsletter. He tells of some interesting parts of the book that he is reading at present.

A central office shares:

We have a good relationship with our general service committees, lending literature for display at district functions. The central office has a display rack with all pamphlets. These are placed near meeting schedules so a person looking for the schedules might see a pamphlet that would interest him or her. All books are at the catalog price. We have a fairly large Spanish community so we keep a supply of Spanish literature. At all social events, we have a literature drawing and ask all groups to donate some literature for the event. This keeps sales up at the central office and gets the message out. Many times when someone wins a book they ask if a newcomer needs it, or it may go to one of our committees.

SOME GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE LITERATURE COMMITTEE ADVISORY ACTIONS

It was recommended that:

1968: Conference-approved literature and GSO Guidelines be displayed and distributed at assembly meetings.

1969: One group member be chosen to be solely responsible for the distribution of Conference-approved literature and its display.

1971: The delegates assume responsibility for informing A.A.s of all available Conference-approved literature, and that the updated spring and fall literature order blanks which are mailed with *Box 4-5-9* be reviewed at district and assembly meetings.

1972: It be suggested that when a local A.A. facility (central office, intergroup, group, etc.) sells non-Conference-approved literature, it be clearly designated as such.

1977: It was suggested that A.A. groups be discouraged from selling literature not distributed by the General Service Office and the Grapevine.

1986: In an effort to strengthen our network of literature representatives to ensure that A.A. literature is available at meetings, as well as catalog order forms for books and cassettes that individuals are likely to want, it is suggested that groups appoint literature coordinators.

The spirit of the 1977 Conference action regarding group literature displays be reaffirmed, and recommended the suggestion that A.A. groups be encouraged to display or sell only literature published and distributed by the General Service Office, the A.A. Grapevine and other A.A. entities.

EXTENDING THE HAND OF A.A. THROUGH TRANSLATIONS

Translations of A.A. material come about in two different ways:

The AAWS Board has pamphlets and/or the Big Book and/or *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* translated for countries where A.A. is in its earliest beginnings.

OR

AAWS grants licenses to A.A. offices or entities in foreign countries so that they may translate, print and distribute A.A. literature in a language or languages appropriate for that country.

At the present time there are at least 64 General Service Offices operating worldwide in addition to our U.S./Canada General Service Office. A.A. literature has been translated into 109 languages, and the Big Book has been translated into 75 languages. This is an amazing achievement and leap forward from A.A.'s beginning with two members in Akron, Ohio on June 10, 1935.

RELATIONSHIP TO GSO

GSO maintains a mailing list of literature chairpersons and representatives (U.S. and Canada). All are sent *Box 4-5-9*. Each newly elected literature chairperson receives a welcoming letter from the Literature Coordinator at GSO, which includes a link to *Box 4-5-9*. Some enclosures include: "The A.A. Group" pamphlet; literature catalog; and service piece on Conference-approved literature.

Please keep in touch so your activities and experience can be added to our files.

TO REACH US...

GSO's Publishing Department has a direct phone number for customers placing charge orders, (212) 870-3312. To research orders, or for problems with your order call: (212) 870-3023.

If you wish to be sent a catalog: (212) 870-3023.

Online ordering is also available: www.aa.org.

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