

# Area 75 Conference Guidelines

*Adopted by Assembly Action on  
June 24, 2007*

**Current Revision May 15, 2014**

The purpose of all Area 75 Conferences is to provide a sharing experience, which incorporates the three legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.

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**These guidelines are a compilation of the collective conference experience in Southern Wisconsin (Area 75) – what has worked and what has not. This experience will prove useful in bidding, planning and hosting an Area conference. The goal of these guidelines is to make the job of the conference committee easier.**

These guidelines are available for download from the Area 75 website ([www.area75.org](http://www.area75.org)).

## SECTION I. BIDDING THE CONFERENCE

### GENERAL INFORMATION

- The Area 75 Conference is held in October or November of each year. Each conference is an **AREA 75 FUNCTION**.
- Consideration must be given to the dates of any regional functions and the Area Delegate should be consulted regarding these dates.
- Conferences cannot be held on holiday weekends.
- The General Service Office suggests that no conference be held within six weeks of (either before or after) an A.A. International Convention.
- One person from the hosting district should be selected to gather bidding information.
- The first duty of the person selected is to contact the Area Conference Advisory chairperson for direction in proceeding through the bidding process.
- Two or more districts may jointly host a conference.
- If you are unsuccessful in your first bid for a conference, keep trying. Many districts receive a subsequent bid.

### THE FACILITY

#### Suggested Minimum Requirements

- Assembly Meeting room – 200 people
- Two rooms for AA panels – 75-100 people
- Two rooms for Al-Anon panels – 75-100 people
- Meeting space for ten Standing Committees – 30-50 people
- Banquet/Breakfast facilities – 500 people (including extra seating for main speaker meetings)
- Space for registration tables
- Locked room for literature sales
- Locked Archives/Literature/Grapevine display area(s)
- Locked room for taping equipment
- Hospitality/Coffee area

## NOTE:

- 1) Some rooms may serve more than one purpose; e.g., the assembly room may also serve as the banquet/breakfast room, or two standing committees may meet together.
- 2) It is preferable that all display and meeting rooms be located in the same general area of the facility.
- 3) Space in the banquet room must be made available for extra seating for those attending only the speaker meetings.

## Additional Information

- Two to three years' lead-time is generally needed to book a facility.
- The facility does not need to be in the hosting district.
- Area 75 assembly action allows conferences to be bid three years in advance.
- Public buildings are not recommended for insurance reasons.
- A member of the Area Conference Advisory Committee **must** be consulted before selecting a site.
- It is best if only one or two people serve as contacts for the facility to avoid conflicting information and decisions.
- If a deposit is required, that information should be provided to the Area with the bid.

## THE CONTRACT

- **NO** contract or other binding document may be signed during the bidding process.
- The contract should refer to our organization as “**The Southern Wisconsin Area 75 Assembly**” (not Alcoholics Anonymous).
- Be sure to inform the facility that our organization is non-profit and sales tax exempt. A copy of the Certificate of Exempt Status is available from the Area Treasurer or the Conference Advisory Committee Chairperson.
- Request that a **reservation code** (such as WAA) be noted in the contract, and include this code on the registration flyer. This will help insure that the conference receives proper credit for all sleeping rooms booked by attendees.

## SECTION II. PLANNING THE CONFERENCE

### CONFERENCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Conference Chairperson, Co-Chairperson, Treasurer, Co-Treasurer & Secretary -

- Four to five years (a reasonable period) of continuous sobriety is recommended for the Chairperson.
- Two to four years of continuous sobriety is recommended for the Co-Chair, Treasurer and Co-Treasurer positions.
- One year of continuous sobriety is recommended for the Secretary.
- Previous conference experience is very beneficial.

## Subcommittees –

- Registration
  - Program
  - Greeting
  - Hospitality
  - Printing/Publicity
  - Entertainment
  - Decorations
  - Volunteer Coordinator
  - Alkathon
  - Al-Anon & Alateen
- 
- A minimum of one year of continuous sobriety is recommended for the above subcommittee chairpersons.
  - The individual subcommittees should be kept to ten people or less, excluding conference weekend volunteers. Co-chairs are highly recommended.
  - Two positions/subcommittees may be combined; e.g., Decorations & Entertainment or Greeting & Hospitality or Treasurer & Registration.
  - Specific duties are outlined in Section III.

**NOTE:** Subcommittee chairpersons should attend all meetings of the Conference Planning Committee. Two unexcused absences will be considered as a resignation.

⇒ Only the Conference Chairperson and Co-Chairperson serve as contacts for the facility to avoid conflicting information and decisions.

## FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Upon approval of the Conference Advisor and subsequent to finalization of the facility contract, the Area 75 Treasurer will provide seed money and deposit money (if required) from the Conference Fund to cover the conference start-up expenses.
- Area 75 has both a Federal ID number and a Wisconsin sales tax exempt number for conference use.
- **NO** contract, letter of understanding or other binding document can be signed until approved by two (2) Area Conference Advisory Committee members.
- It is the responsibility of the Conference Committee to pay the expenses of the main AA, Al-Anon and Alateen speakers and one guest each, as well as the Delegate and guest and the Regional Trustee and guest. These expenses include travel, registration, one hotel room and any meals submitted for reimbursement.

⇒It is a matter of Area assembly action that the Regional Trustee be invited to **all** Area conferences. If the Regional Trustee is unable to attend, another Trustee or GSO staff member should be invited. The invitation(s) should be coordinated through the current Delegate.

**NOTE:** The Trustee (or replacement guest) should be asked to actively participate in the Conference. This may take the form of panel participation, an ask-it-basket session, inclusion by the Area Chairperson on the agenda for the Area Assembly, etc.

- It is the responsibility of the Conference Committee to pay the hotel room expense for the Conference Treasurer. The Treasurer's room should be equipped with a safe.
- The registration fee for the conference includes everything except meals and accommodations.
- **Only the Conference Treasurer or Co-Treasurer is authorized to handle conference funds.**

### PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

- All main speakers (Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday morning) must be members of Alcoholics Anonymous.
- When selecting main speakers, it is advisable that the committee listens to a tape/CD or has previously heard the speaker. This reduces the chance of inviting a speaker who will use offensive language. The tapers are an excellent source for speaker recommendations.
- Consideration should be given to arranging for Alternate main speakers in the event of illness or other unforeseen problems.
- An effort should be made to contact all DCMs in the Area to help find panelists. Panel members should not all be from the host District. However, it is advisable to have a list of local members willing to cover last minute cancellations and "no shows".
- The anonymity statement should be read prior to each panel and speaker meeting.
- Each meeting chairperson and panel emcee should be provided with the anonymity statement and a checklist of instructions – including format, announcements, information on taping, etc.

### PROMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

- In an effort to increase attendance, notices regarding the conference should be submitted to the Grapevine online calendar and Box 4-5-9.

- ✓ Guidelines for submitting events to the online Grapevine calendar can be found at [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org). You will post the date of the event, the city and state of the event, the name of the event and a website and/or email address. To protect anonymity, phone numbers and emails that contain a last name are not accepted.
- ✓ To be included in the **Box 4-5-9** Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. four months prior to the event. Each **Box 4-5-9** includes the form requested by G.S.O. for submission of the information to:

Editor  
PO Box 459  
Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163 **OR**  
[literature@aa.org](mailto:literature@aa.org)

NOTE: Follow-up to confirm receipt of the publication requests is strongly suggested.

- An announcement and/or registration flyer should be placed in all newsletters in the Area and all Central Offices/Intergroups should have a plentiful supply of registration forms. The addresses of the Central Offices are available from the Area Secretary.
- Registration flyers should be distributed to the DCMs in packets at the Spring Service Assembly for dissemination to the groups and clubhouses in the districts.
- **PROMOTE THE CONFERENCE** throughout the Area. Visit other districts; contact DCMs and groups. Be enthusiastic!

***The success of the conference is directly proportional to the effort put into promoting it.***

## SECTION III. CONFERENCE COMMITTEE DUTIES

### The Chairperson / Co-Chairperson

- Selects members for conference committee positions and subcommittee chairs
- Selects conference theme and writes statement of purpose with committee input
- Schedules conference committee meetings (time and place) and prepares meeting agendas  
NOTE: Have meetings regularly but not so often it is a burden for committee members. The facility often allows on-site committee meetings during the planning process.
- Invites Al-Anon and Alateen participation
- Keeps close check on all phases of planning and progress
- Maintains close contact with facility/catering
- Cooperates with facility management in designating smoking areas
- Arranges room reservations for Delegate, Trustee, speakers and Conference Treasurer
- Ensures selection of taping people and central office for sale of literature
- Contacts Area standing committee chairpersons regarding displays and meeting space/time
- Arranges for signers and interpreters for the Area Assembly, Saturday night speaker and Sunday morning speaker, upon 30 day advance request  
NOTE: Be sure to provide appropriate seating for signers and interpreters and the attendees using those services.
- Maintains communication with host district DCM and requests “Bill W. Donations” from groups to cover registration fees for members in need of financial assistance
- Reports to the Area on conference progress at Area assemblies, including the one immediately following the conference
- Schedules final wrap-up meeting after conference
- Provides final report to the Area as detailed in Section V. The Wrap-Up (page 10)

### Secretary

- Maintains Conference committee roster (names, addresses, phone numbers, email etc)
- Records meeting minutes and attendance
- Forwards copies of minutes to all committee members, the conference advisor(s), the host district DCM, the Conference Advisory Chairperson and the Area 75 chairperson, no later than one week prior to the next scheduled meeting
- Handles all conference correspondence, including notes of appreciation
- Sends conference information to the newsletters, the Grapevine and Box 4-5-9 for publication  
NOTE: Include the Conference PO Box as the contact address, not a personal address.

### Treasurer

- Opens conference P.O. Box with two authorized signers
- Opens conference checking account with three authorized signers (Chairperson, Secretary & Treasurer); the opening deposit will be the seed money from Area 75
- Prepares Conference budget (a break-even scenario is suggested)  
NOTE: Refer to previous conference budgets for guidance.
- Picks up mail
- Makes deposits and writes checks for all conference expenses
- Balances checking account bank statement monthly
- Transfers registration forms to Registration chairperson if applicable
- Provides cash box(es) and petty cash for registration table
- Coordinates regular money pick-up with Registration Chair during registration hours



- Returns seed money to the Area Conference Fund, along with any additional proceeds from the Conference
- Prepares financial statement and final report for the Area within 60 days of conference
- ▶ It is suggested that the deadline for refunds of registration money generally be the cutoff date indicated on the flyer for meal reservations.

### Registration Chairperson

- Verifies registration forms received from Treasurer
  - Maintains record of registrations and meals
  - Develops name tag/envelope system for use at the registration table
  - Arranges for volunteers at the registration table and provides schedule with assigned time slots
  - Sets up procedure for receiving attendees at the registration table
- NOTE: Everyone attending should register (unless they come only for the Area Assembly or an open speaker meeting).

⇒ See Section IV – Volunteers/Registration Tips

### Program Chairperson

- Plans program format in consultation with the full Conference Committee
  - Selects panel topics that relate to the conference theme. Arranges for main speakers, MCs and panel members. A minimum of 6 months of sobriety is suggested for panel members.
- NOTES: 1) Panels usually consist of a chairperson and 3 speakers. Careful selection and good communication is important. 2) Attempt to have a wide variety of people from throughout the Area. 3) Panelists are encouraged to register in advance. 4) Panel members should have experience pertinent to the panel topics.
- Forwards pertinent information to participants at least two weeks before the conference
  - Arranges for speaker transportation if necessary
  - Provides detailed information to Printing Chairperson at least one month in advance of the conference date
  - Arranges program schedule to accommodate Area service committee meetings and the Al-Anon and Alateen speakers on Saturday afternoon
  - Schedules Al-Anon speaker opposite no other activities
  - Arranges for hosts for main speakers if needed

### Printing & Publicity Chairperson

- Plans layout of flyers, registration forms, posters and program
  - Determines exact quantity of flyers and programs needed in consultation with the Conference Committee
- NOTES: 1) Quantity 5000-7500 flyers and 750-1000 programs are the recommended minimums. 2) Registration forms/flyers must be available at the Area 75 Spring Service Assembly and should be posted on the Area 75 website no later than April 1 of the year preceding the conference.
- Provides comparison pricing and lead time on printing; places orders pursuant to full committee recommendation
  - Provides informational posters for use throughout the conference site

### Greeters Chairperson

- Arranges for volunteers and provides assigned time slots
- Selects greeter locations throughout conference site
- Facilitates training session and tour of facility for volunteers

⇒ See Section IV – Volunteers

### Entertainment/Decorations

- Arranges for banners, table decorations etc. as needed
- Makes arrangements for dance (usually following Saturday night speaker)
- Obtains gifts for main speakers

### Hospitality Chairperson

- Determines hospitality room/area set-up
- Arranges for supplies (coffee, snacks, cups etc.) and donation cans
- Arranges for volunteers and provides assigned time slots
- NOTE: The hospitality area should be set up no later than 3:00 on Friday afternoon.
- Facilitates training session for volunteers
- Ensures that the hospitality area is kept neat and clean throughout the conference
- Ensures the area is cleaned up at the end of the conference

NOTE: The hospitality room should be closed during ALL main speaker meetings.

### AI-Anon/Alateen Chairperson

- Arranges for AI-Anon/Alateen speakers and panel members
- Selects AI-Anon panel topics
- Provides pertinent information to Printing Chairperson at least one month in advance of conference date

### Alkathon Chairperson

- Determines hours of Alkathon with consideration of full conference program
- Schedules volunteers to chair meetings
- Selects meeting topics in consultation with the Conference Committee

## SECTION IV. HOSTING THE CONFERENCE

### *AS THE CONFERENCE TIME APPROACHES.....*

- Many committee members, especially those new at planning conferences, will become highly anxious. Reassurances from the more experienced committee members and the conference advisor(s) are helpful at this time.
- A comprehensive conference review with the facility manager must be arranged approximately one month before the conference. Items to cover should include, but not be limited to, room set-up, sound systems, meal menus/times, facility provided equipment/tables, and smoking area designation.

### HOURS

- Registration hours should be stated in the registration flyer and program
- No matter what start time is indicated, people will begin to arrive around noon on Friday. It is good to have greeters available and the hospitality room set up no later than 3:00PM.

### VOLUNTEERS

- Volunteers should be encouraged to register in advance for the conference
- Keep volunteer shifts to two hours maximum
- Send people a copy of the schedule with their time slot highlighted
- Arrange a facility tour/training session
- Remind people of their commitment prior to the conference
- Ask them to arrive 10-15 minutes early for their shift to facilitate a smooth transition and to observe procedure
- Supervise volunteers well; be available to them
- Thank them for their service

### REGISTRATION TIPS

- Pre-registrations –
  - ✓ Maintain master list of registrations with all pertinent information
  - ✓ Place pre-printed name tag with meal designation(s) in an alphabetic file
  - ✓ Keep all original registration forms in alphabetic file
  - ✓ Prepare name tags for conference speakers/guests
- Registration Table -
  - ✓ Make sure all pre-registration lists are up-to-date
  - ✓ Get cash box and petty cash from Treasurer
  - ✓ Separate the area into a pre-registered section and an unregistered section with adequate signage
  - ✓ Set up an adequate number of volunteer stations to avoid congestion

- ✓ Have adequate supplies available, including –  
Conference programs, pens, blank nametags  
Walk-in registration sheets (name, city, AA/Al-Anon, meal sale)

⇒ **Name tags must be worn by all conference attendees**

⇒ **Everyone attending should register (unless they come only for the Area Assembly or an open speaker meeting)**

### COFFEE SALES/ICE CREAM SOCIALS

- Based on previous conference experience, it is advised that coffee sales be the responsibility of the facility, except in the hospitality room (if permitted by facility regulations).
- Donations of coffee and supplies for the hospitality area should be solicited from the districts/groups.
- Ice cream socials are optional and are left to the discretion of the conference planning committee.

### SECTION V. THE WRAP-UP

- ❖ The conference chairperson will schedule a meeting immediately following the conference, while problems/suggestions/successes are fresh in committee members' minds. Candidates for the Conference Advisory Committee should be selected at this meeting.
- ❖ A final committee meeting may be scheduled to review the financial report completed by the Treasurer, and to provide input for the conference report required for the next Area 75 meeting. Two copies of the final report should be provided.
- ❖ Any monies remaining (after payment of all conference expenses) are paid to the Area 75 Conference Fund no later than 60 days following the conference.
- ❖ Conferences will provide the Conference Advisory Committee Chair with two copies of a conference summary report to include the hotel contract, flyer, program, committee summaries, a detailed financial report, budgets, and attendance and banquet/breakfast numbers. The Conference Advisory Committee Chair will give the original to the Area Archives and keep a copy for committee usage.

**These guidelines have very generally covered the aspects of conference planning. There is a wealth of conference experience in Area 75. Answers to all questions not covered by this document are available from your Conference Advisory Committee.**

## Attachment A

### Area 75 Conference Planning Timeline

Although bids for the conference are submitted three years in advance for the purpose of procuring the facility, the conference planning process does not need to begin until two years prior to the conference. However, it is suggested that the committee chairs and main speakers be selected during Year One of the conference planning process.

The Conference Chairperson should schedule the first committee meeting and confirm the date with the Conference Advisor(s).

#### YEAR TWO (two years prior to event)

##### **November-December-January**

- First Meeting – Thoroughly review Area 75 guidelines and the A.A. Guidelines for Conferences, Conventions and Roundups (Attachment C).
- Decide on a date, time and location for conference committee meetings.
- **NOTE:** It is recommended that the conference committee meet, at the same time and location, at least quarterly during Year Two of the timeline and monthly during Year Three, as well as both of the two weeks immediately preceding the conference. Agendas for the meetings are recommended and are the responsibility of the Conference Chairperson.
- Selection of Committee members should be finalized by the subcommittee chairs.
- Confirm main speakers by letter or email.
- Contract with Conference taper.
- Discuss conference theme suggestions.

##### **February-March-April**

- Select conference theme.
- Print informational "Save the Date" flyers.
- Treasurer should open checking account.
- Request seed money from Area 75 Treasurer through the Conference Advisor.

##### **May-June-July**

- Select and confirm Band or DJ.
- Choose Central Office for literature sales.
- Take a field trip. Tour the conference facility to learn more about room accommodations, menu selections, prices, etc.
- Prepare subcommittee budgets.

##### **August-September-October**

- Finalize subcommittee budgets and full conference budget.
- Discuss menu selections.
- Discuss registration fees, meal costs, etc.
- Treasurer should open mid-sized P.O. box (one year out).
- Discuss publicity (distribution of flyers to districts, groups, central offices; free set of tapes; visiting GSR meetings, etc.)
- Discuss and select panel topics.
- Attend Area 75 Conference.

## **YEAR THREE (one year prior to event)**

### **November-December-January**

- Review conference guidelines to ensure all duties are being covered.
- Decide on registration fees, meal cost etc.
- Finalize registration flyer layout. **Proofread carefully.**
- Print registration flyer.
- Discuss nametags and organization of registration area.

### **February-March-April**

- Choose MCs for speaker meetings.
- Contact DCMs regarding panel participants.
- Distribute registration flyers to DCMs at the Spring Service Assembly.
- Post registration form on Area website.

### **May-June-July**

- Discuss table decorations, banners etc.
- Contact Area 75 Standing Committee chairpersons regarding displays.
- Submit information to Grapevine online calendar and Box 4-5-9.
- Reconfirm all speakers, panelists and volunteers.
- Organize Alkathon.
- Check on availability of interpreters for Spanish speaking and hearing impaired with Area 75 Special Needs Chairperson.
- Finalize layout of program. **Proofread carefully.**

### **August-September-October**

- Final meeting with conference site staff (banquet, sales, sound system...)
- Confirm travel arrangements with speakers.
- Finalize greeters and hospitality volunteer schedules. Reconfirm participation 2 weeks prior to conference.
- Choose person to do invocation(s).
- Arrange for hosts for main speakers if needed.
- Print conference program.
- Review all subcommittee details.

**IT'S CONFERENCE TIME! HAVE FUN!**

<b>AREA 75 - CONFERENCE BUDGET WORKSHEET</b>					<b>ATTACHMENT B</b>
Submitted by:					
Date:	Estimated		Estimated		Estimated
	Quantity	@	Cost	=	Subtotals
					TOTALS
<b>PRINTING/PUBLICITY</b>					
Registration Flyers			\$		\$
Programs			\$		\$
Postage			\$		\$
Posters/Signs			\$		\$
					\$
<b>REGISTRATION/OFFICE SUPPLIES</b>					
Name Badges/holders			\$		\$
Envelopes			\$		\$
Pens/Miscellaneous			\$		\$
CD Set (first 100)					\$
<b>TREASURER/SECRETARY</b>					
PO Box Rent			\$		\$
Committee Meeting Room Rent			\$		\$
Copies			\$		\$
Postage			\$		\$
Checks/Bank Charges			\$		\$
Miscellaneous			\$		\$
Treasurer's Room					\$
<b>SPEAKERS/DELEGATE/TRUSTEE/GUESTS</b>					
Travel			\$		\$
Rooms			\$		\$
Meals			\$		\$
					\$
<b>ENTERTAINMENT/DECORATIONS</b>					
DJ/Band			\$		\$
Banners			\$		\$
Flowers			\$		\$
Gifts					\$
<b>MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER COSTS</b>					
(Specify on back)					\$
			<b>SUBTOTAL =</b>		\$
			<b>RESERVE =</b>	+ 10% of Subtotal:	\$
			<b>GRAND TOTAL =</b>		\$
Estimated Number of Attendees =					
Cost Per Attendee =	\$				
(Divide Total Expenses by Estimated # of Attendees)					
Suggested Registration Fee =	\$				
Revenues Expected =	\$				
(Registration Fee x # of Attendees)					

A.A. Guidelines are compiled from the shared experience of A.A. members in 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.

### HOW A.A.s MAKE THEIR GET-TOGETHERS ENJOYABLE AS WELL AS EFFECTIVE IN CARRYING THE A.A. MESSAGE OF RECOVERY

#### WHY HAVE AN A.A. CONVENTION?

It's clear that A.A. get-togethers beyond the group have become an established part of A.A. life. The calendar of events in any *Box 4-5-9* or in the Grapevine shows some conventions, conferences, and roundups that are being held by A.A.s.

What makes an A.A. convention click for its participants? It's probably not style or form that matters so much as the spirit and feeling behind it. As one member puts it, the best A.A. convention is "just a darned good A.A. meeting blown up big." Just watch enthusiastic members at any A.A. convention and you'll get what he means. The atmosphere alone is worth the trip. Here you'll find fellowship, laughter, warmth, and understanding—"heaped up, pressed down, and running over."

#### CONVENTIONS COME IN MANY SHAPES AND SIZES

An A.A. convention is almost any A.A. get-together beyond the group-meeting level. These range from special meetings of one evening's duration to longer events-area, statewide, or regional weekend conventions. They will, most likely, be one of the following:

**1 The special open meeting.** This kind of gathering can serve useful purposes. It will, of course, bring together the A.A. members in a city or area. But it also provides a good opportunity to invite interested friends of A.A. to the meeting. Certainly, it's proper on such occasions to send special invitations to members of the clergy, doctors, lawyers, social workers, public health officials, and others who may have a special interest in A.A.

**2 The one-day session.** This might include several general meetings throughout the day. For a start, there's a "welcome" meeting in the morning, followed by other activities. There may be another open meeting in the afternoon, while the main open meeting with the featured speaker is saved for the windup meeting in the evening. If the convention is held in a school, civic hall, or other building with additional rooms, it's likely that the program for a one-day session can also include A.A. workshops and panels, service meetings, assemblies, and closed meetings.

**3 The banquet.** Many intergroups or central offices now sponsor annual banquets, often to help support their office operations. Some groups and areas also have banquets (or informal buffet and potluck dinners) as anniversary or gratitude observances. The banquet often features an after-dinner speaker or some other program of interest to A.A. members.

**4 The weekend convention.** This is an ideal form for a state, provincial, or regional convention. Members often arrive for an opening meeting session or "coffee & conversation" on Friday evening. Additional meetings and workshops—as well as other activities—continue through Saturday and even into Sunday afternoon. The convention may include a banquet, luncheons, special breakfasts, Saturday-night dancing and entertainment, and perhaps a spiritual meeting on Sunday morning.

#### THE CONVENTION BEGINS WITH A PLANNING COMMITTEE

Once a get-together has been scheduled, it needs a planning committee. The work in setting up a convention is too much for one person. He or she will need at least a dozen assistants, frequently more.

One method of forming the committee is simply to appoint a general chairperson who then completes the committee by finding able volunteers to chair the various committees.

Another method—popular when a number of groups sponsor a convention—is to send a committee representative from each group. Once in session, representatives can elect a chairperson and receive assignments to specific committees.

In some cases, the convention may be the responsibility of the general service committee from the area. In others, the convention committee may be organized separately. Either method works well if it corresponds to the wishes of the A.A. groups in the area.

In some areas, there is a permanent convention committee, set up within the area committee, so that valuable experience of convention planning can be carried over from one year to the next.



Membership on such a committee is, of course, on a rotation basis, so that new members are added yearly, but a proportion of experienced convention planners is retained at any given time.

Once assembled, the convention committee is usually organized along functional lines, with each chairperson responsible for a phase of the planning. Here's how a typical committee might be arranged:

**1 Chairperson** (assisted by one or two co-chairpersons) oversees the entire convention; coordinates the work of subcommittee chairpersons; keeps informed on the progress of all the arrangements; calls committee meetings when needed.

**2 Secretary** keeps all written records, including minutes of the committee meetings; also sends out notices of committee meetings and other mailings to committee members.

**3 Treasurer** is, of course, responsible for all money, including revenues from registration and banquet tickets; pays all bills; usually advises the chairperson on cash supply and income flow as well as rate of expenditures.

Experience indicates it's best if the treasurer is a person with four or more years' sobriety and some solid business experience. Each check usually calls for two signatures. Most convention committees require a complete report from the treasurer within a month or two of the convention. Some committees have the report audited as a further safeguard for convention funds.

**4 Program Chairperson.** Since this is often a very complex job, its objectives are discussed under the separate heading "What Makes a Good Convention Program?" This person usually sends invitations to speakers and panel members who chair various meetings.

**5 Registration Chairperson** supervises the printing and distribution of all tickets, giving special attention to the task of bringing in the collections.

**6 Public Information Chairperson** has the sensitive task of encouraging a large attendance without abandoning A.A.'s principle of "attraction rather than promotion." Publicity efforts can be kept within the dignity and spirit of A.A. through the following means:

a. Preparation and distribution of material about the program, speakers, and time and location of the convention (perhaps including map of area, if necessary). It's advisable for the convention committee to rent a post office box and use that on all mailings, with no reference to A.A. on return addresses.

The convention publicity material could also be sent to the press, radio, and TV outlets in the immediate area, (The Public Information Workbook, available from G.S.O., gives useful advice on approaching the media.) If media or the general public are invited be sure to attend to the details of how they will be greeted and if special meetings or contacts will be set up for them.

b. Regular flyers about the convention are usually mailed monthly to all groups in the area, with the first mailing beginning about six months before the convention date.

c. Dates and location of the convention, with a mailing address for information or registration, should be sent four months in advance to the A.A. Grapevine and to *Box 4-5-9*, to be published in their calendars. Only Area, regional, state, or provincial events of more than one day's duration are listed. Send A.A. Grapevine notices to the G.V. Editorial Department, 475 Riverside Dr., New York, NY 10115 or submit to the online calendar at [www.aagrapevine.org](http://www.aagrapevine.org). Send *Box 4-5-9* notices to *Box 4-5-9*, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

**7 Entertainment Chairperson** will arrange for the convention dances and floor show if there is one. The chairperson hires the band and other performers (or arranges for taped or recorded music). At some conventions, the local A.A.s provide entertainment by putting on a play about A.A. Traditions (for script, write to G.S.O.), or putting together choruses and variety shows. This chairperson might also arrange to make sightseeing available for conventioners.

**8 Hospitality Chairperson** serves as convention host, organizing a committee that will greet out-of-town guests, arrange transportation for them when necessary, and see to any other needs they might have while attending the convention. Usually members of the hospitality committee wear special identification badges and are available to answer questions and provide assistance to conventioners.

**9 Display and Literature Chairperson** is responsible for displays and posters and for having A.A. literature available for all. G.S.O. provides a literature display to all conferences and conventions. (See "Displays" on page 5.)

**10 Recording Chairperson** is responsible for negotiating with the individual or company who will be recording the convention. That individual will be directly responsible to the convention chairperson (see Recording Guidelines on page 5).

## PAYING THE BILLS

How are the costs of a convention covered and what can be done to make sure that the venture won't go deep in the red? Some conventions may involve spending several thousand dollars, so the committee must have a fair picture of the financial arrangements long before the convention opens. There's no substitute for common sense here; the committee must take a businesslike approach to finances and keep expenditures somewhere within a conservative estimate of anticipated revenues. As for financing the convention, several sound methods seem to be in general use:

**1 The Underwriting Method.** The groups in the area, perhaps through their representatives on the convention committee, agree to underwrite the complete costs of the event. Since the registration fees can be established at a level sufficient to cover the total

costs, this should result in no actual out-of-pocket costs to groups. It's a good idea, though, to put the tickets on sale well in advance of the convention and to know where the break-even point lies. Registration fees cover costs for special events.

**2 The Convention Fund.** In some areas, the groups make year-round contributions to a convention fund. Then, there is no registration fee, except possibly for out-of-state visitors.

One method of covering deficits, provided it is done with tact and sufficient explanation, is to take up a special collection at the convention. But if the groups have already been consulted and have agreed to underwrite the convention, making up the deficit is their ultimate responsibility.

Most conventions, however, make a profit. What's to be done with these surplus funds? In most cases, part of the surplus is held in trust for next year's convention. Then the committee may use the balance to help support local service offices or the General Service Office. In accordance with our Seventh Tradition, only funds from A.A. members attending the event should be contributed to support A.A. activities.

**3 Self-support.** Based on A.A. experience shared with G.S.O., committees have found it best not to solicit for outside donations of any kind. This is in keeping with our A.A. principle of self-support. (This does not pertain to ordinary business negotiations with the facility where the event is taking place.)

## WHAT MAKES A GOOD CONVENTION PROGRAM?

One A.A. member shared his opinion that the program wasn't really the most important thing at a convention. He looks for something in addition- the joys of meeting new and old friends, working together for our common good, and sharing our experience, strength and hope with each other.

He goes on to say that there can also be a letdown feeling when we leave a convention if the program hasn't been imaginative and inspiring. This takes careful thought well in advance of the convention date. A well-balanced program might include:

**1 The Convention Theme.** Often, it's easier to plan the overall program by organizing it around a simple theme. Such a theme might be "Unity," "We Came to Believe. . .," "First Things First," or a similar A.A. saying or topic. This does not mean that the entire program must be devoted to the theme idea; it does, however, serve as a reminder that an A.A. convention advances the common purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous.

**2 Main Features-Banquets, Open Meetings, etc.** In planning a convention, program chairpersons usually schedule several **large open** meetings throughout the event, although not necessarily in immediate succession. A Saturday-night banquet may also serve as an open meeting, with a speaker following the dinner.

The large open meeting brings unity to the convention and gives the opportunity for presenting certain matters-such as the selection of the next year's convention site-before the entire assembly of A.A.s attending. But too many open meetings in any single convention can be tiresome; as a general rule, three or four such meetings are sufficient in a weekend convention.

**3 Panels.** Many program chairpersons schedule workshops and panel sessions to provide suitable convention activity without overloading the program with open meetings.

Workshops and panels may take a variety of forms; one popular arrangement is to set up a panel with three speakers and a chairperson. Each speaker may be assigned a topic and a time limit. The session may be followed by a short question-and-answer period, if time allows.

On the subject of panels, experience has shown that topics such as "How the General Service Office Works" or "Why G.S.O.?" attract only a small audience and therefore do not carry the message in a satisfactory fashion. G.S.O. staff members can best be used as speakers on regular panels-where their familiarity with A.A. worldwide can add an extra dimension to the presentation.

Any one of the trustees (especially your own regional trustee) would be invaluable on such topics as "A.A. and Responsibility." They are in a crossroads position where they are aware of our Fellowship-particularly on the public level-and also have an overall perspective on our purposes, strengths, and weaknesses. They can be of great value in helping us learn more about worldwide A.A.

Don't forget your own G.S.R.s, committee members, and delegates and past trusted servants. From their work in carrying the message outside their own groups, they'll have many ideas on such subjects as "Is A.A. Changing?," "A.A. at Work, Then and Now." Many other A.A.s oldtimers and not-so-oldtimers- also have worthwhile information and thoughts on such subjects.

Here are some suggested topics appropriate for workshops and panels:

Correctional Facilities

Treatment Settings

Public Information

Cooperation With the Professional Community

Sponsorship

Service

G.S.R.s

Twelve Traditions

Twelve Concepts

Intergroups and Central Offices

A.A. Grapevine/La Viña

Special Needs

(Some program committees select phrases from A.A. literature as workshop or panel topics.)

"Balance" and "flow" are two key words in the planning of a convention program, particularly in setting up the panels. It's important that the program flow smoothly, with one feature following another in a pleasant, logical series. It's also important that the panel topics and participants be balanced, so as not to give the audience too much of any one subject, too many speakers from one area, or too many panel participants of similar experience and viewpoint.

One effective way to insure maximum interest and participation in the convention is to farm out each meeting, workshop, or panel to a different group or area within the convention territory. Thus, the groups themselves plan and organize the meetings, always working closely with the general program chairperson to assure balance.

**4 Care of Speakers.** Most conventions feature speakers from out of town, sometimes A.A. members living a thousand miles or more from the convention site. This means that program chairpersons have a responsibility to see that certain important matters are properly handled on the speakers' behalf:

a. **Expenses.** It should be clear, when the speakers are booked, what terms are being made for expenses. Unless it's otherwise specified, speakers have a right to assume that all their travel, meal, and hotel expenses will be paid for the entire trip. Speakers will also expect hotel or motel accommodations as a matter of course; if they're to be guests in private homes, this should be explained before their arrival.

b. **Speaking Arrangements.** Speakers should know when they're expected to speak, as well as on what topic and length of time, and whether their presence is also required elsewhere in the convention. (Some speakers may be unable to attend the entire convention.) No other commitments besides speaking should be made for speakers without their knowledge and consent. Most speakers will also appreciate knowing something about the conditions under which they'll speak; let them know whether there'll be a podium, public address system, etc. If the speaker will be taped, be sure that the speaker is aware in advance.

c. **Speaker Hosts and/or Hostesses.** Responsible members from the local group should be assigned the duty of being host to the visiting speakers and making sure that they have proper accommodations, as well as transportation and other conveniences.

## PROVIDING SERVICES FOR A.A.s WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

### For Deaf Members

A.A. members who are deaf or hard of hearing may need special considerations when attending an A.A. conference or convention. For those who have a fair amount of hearing and/or who read lips, seating near the speaker may be all that is required. Others who are deaf may require the use of a sign language interpreter. Here are some points to consider when planning a conference or meeting that will be attended by deaf or hard of hearing A.A.s.

1 Reserve interpreters well ahead of time because they are in great demand.

2 Budget the interpreting expenses. Find out early what the estimated cost will be, whether by the hour or by the day. If you are holding concurrent workshops, you may need more than one interpreter at the same time. If your event is small (and short) you may be fortunate to find a qualified volunteer, but do not expect to rely on volunteers.

3 In arranging preferred seating for deaf or hard of hearing members, designate the reserve area clearly: "Please reserve for hearing-impaired members."

4 Sensitize workshop leaders and meeting chairpersons to the use of the interpreter.

5 Stick with your plans once you have announced that an event is sign-language accessible. Deaf people are very likely to travel far for the few events that are interpreted. If the event is a large one with concurrent meetings and workshops, plan for continuous availability of several interpreters.

6 If you are listing the event with the General Service Office, your local intergroup, or in any A.A. publication, specify that it is sign-language interpreted. If possible, have a T.D.D. number that deaf people can call for more information.

### For A.A.s With Other Special Needs

For blind people, some convention committees provide programs in Braille.

Also, if meetings are wheelchair accessible, this may be noted in the program.

## GUARDING ANONYMITY

### Announcement For Press

When A.A. conventions are being covered by members of the press, it's customary to begin meetings by asking their cooperation in protecting members' anonymity. Such an announcement might go like this:

"Our anonymity, like our sobriety, is a treasured possession. We ask the help of our guests-especially those representing the press or broadcasting media-in protecting the anonymity of all alcoholics present or mentioned here today.

"We hope you hear something at this meeting which you can take away with you and use. We respectfully request, however, that you eliminate any mention of names in reference to members of Alcoholics Anonymous."

It's unusual that any newspaper or broadcasting station these days will fail to cooperate with this request; not only is the A.A. principle of anonymity well known generally, but our G.S.O. in New York City

has advised the press and broadcasters year after year of A.A.'s position on this matter.

But it's possible that members' anonymity may be violated through indirect methods. There's a likelihood, for example, that too much promotional zeal on the part of the convention committee may lead them to reveal a great deal of information about speakers without actually disclosing last names. This means, in the case of some well-known individuals, that their anonymity is technically protected but actually broken, since their identity can be readily recognized by anybody familiar with them or their work.

In one case, for example, a university professor had been invited to address a large A.A. banquet in the same state where he lived and worked. Only his first name, nickname, and last initial appeared on the announcement posters, but the name of his school and a previous academic connection were fully displayed. The professor's actual identity couldn't have been more clearly revealed if his last name and photograph had been included.

Is there a safe way to avoid making such de facto anonymity breaks? Well, one good procedure is to ask speakers how they wish to be listed on posters and advance notices. They'll know better than anybody else how much information about themselves ought to be revealed. In any case, whatever the speakers' feelings, the practice of using initials rather than last names should always be followed for the protection of A.A., as well as the individual.

### **PICTURE TAKING GUIDELINES**

Many A.A. event committees announce that the taking of photographs during A.A. meetings might make some attendees uncomfortable regarding their anonymity. Even when photographs are permitted to be taken, some committees provide reminders that any photographs taken should be away from crowds, to ensure that no images are taken of people who have not given permission to be in the picture. The A.A. Anonymity Display Card (M-61, available from G.S.O.) is often used for such announcements.

Finally, as the long form of Tradition Eleven reminds us, "Our names and pictures as A.A. members ought not be broadcast, filmed, or publicly printed" (this would include on digital media such as social networking, Internet and other nonpassword protected Web sites).

A further note about anonymity: out of respect for others, please do not take photographs during any of the meetings. Also, be considerate when taking photographs around convention venues. Take care that you do not capture images of A.A. members, family members, and friends who did not give permission and may not wish to appear in your pictures. Please do not post recognizable photos of identifiable A.A. members on Web sites accessible to the public, including unrestricted pages on social networking sites.

### **AUDIO RECORDING GUIDELINES**

Shared experience makes it clear that recording of an A.A. convention cannot be left to chance. It is a difficult and time consuming job, including preliminary work with the speakers and decisions about who will record the convention, the conduct of the recorder during the convention, and his/her staff and follow-up after the convention. Following are some suggestions if the convention committee decides to use an outside vendor.

**1** The recording chairperson may represent the convention in reaching agreements with the person who will be recording that particular convention, and in developing a written agreement.

**2** The convention recording chairperson may develop a release form on which speakers agree to being recorded or decline to be recorded.

**3** Experience shows that it is best to encourage speakers not to use full names and not to identify third parties by full names in their talks. The strength of our anonymity Traditions is reinforced by speakers who do not use their last names and by recording companies or recorders whose labels and catalogs do not identify speakers by last names, titles, service jobs or descriptions.

Experience also indicates that speaker recordings are being disseminated over the Internet, a public media outlet. In addition, some A.A. members, if being recorded for future play on a public Web site, may choose to leave out other details of their lives that may make themselves or their families identifiable.

**4** The recording chairperson ensures that a recorder has an understanding of the Traditions.

**5** The agreement prepared by the convention committee determines what the recorder sells or displays on-site.

**6** The convention committee clarifies that recording may be done by an outside vendor, is not an official part of the convention.

**7** Convention committees discourage any recording royalties to the convention committee.

### **VIDEO RECORDING GUIDELINES**

In keeping with a 1980 General Service Conference recommendation, it is suggested that speakers not be recorded on video.

### **MISCELLANEOUS TIPS ON GOOD CONVENTION MANAGEMENT**

When your committee is discussing the convention, try to go over the things you liked and didn't like at past conventions, especially matters that caused petty irritations and annoyances; most likely, they can be avoided. Here are a few suggestions:

**1 Badges.** A.A. conventions don't seem to be right without identification badges. See that they're in bold, colorful letters, so they can be read at a glance.

Try not to subject guests to more than a few minutes' wait in registering for the convention and picking up their badges. Organize the registration so the process will flow smoothly and quickly.

**2 Coffee.** It's an essential feature—plenty of coffee sessions throughout the convention. Don't forget, some A.A.s come more to talk to each other than to listen to speakers, so be sure they have lots of opportunity to gather 'round the coffeepot.

**3 Accessibility.** At large conventions, it's sometimes necessary to hold some of the open meetings in buildings other than the one used as convention headquarters. Try to plan the meetings so members do not have to go more than a few blocks for a meeting or panel session. One exception to this might be the last open meeting of the convention, from which the guests will most likely be making their departure.

**4 Hotel & Motel Registrations.** Often, printed lists of local accommodations, giving prices and other information, are available from local chambers of commerce and similar offices. If possible, send these lists out with the registrations and give members a chance to make their reservations long before the convention.

Don't assume, in sending out the lists, that all A.A.s intend to stay in medium- or high-priced accommodations; also include the lower-priced hotels and motels. In some places, hotels or camping facilities are also listed, for the A.A.s who may arrive in campers.

**5 Professional Assistance.** Don't hesitate to avail yourself of assistance from local chamber of commerce officials and convention managers. They already know all about the problems you'll be facing, and they can give invaluable advice and assistance.

**6 Displays.** You can pass along important A.A. information in an attractive way by requesting the convention literature package to make up an A.A. literature display. This complimentary package is available in English, Spanish or French from G.S.O. for local

conventions/conferences/roundups in the U.S. and Canada and contains one copy of all A.A. book dust jackets; one copy of all A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets; A.A. Guidelines; flyers; List of Central Offices, intergroups and Answering Services for the United States and Canada; List of General Service Offices, Central Offices, Intergroups and Answering Services Overseas; List of Service Material Available from G.S.O.; *The A.A. Service Manual*; and the Conference-approved Literature & Other Service Material catalog.

You can also purchase the current Membership Survey Display (M-13, *English only*) that illustrates a typical A.A. meeting through survey-based statistics on age, sex, occupation, length of sobriety, etc. This display is 27" high, 39" wide; has a double easel in back.

**7 Don't Compete With Last Year.** While it's best not to try to compete with previous conventions, if you're the convention chairperson, you will naturally want to benefit from the experience of previous, convention committees.

## A.A. AND AL-ANON

The following questions often arise:

### How may A.A. and Al-Anon cooperate in area and regional conventions and get-togethers?

In accordance with the Twelve Traditions, a convention would be either A.A. or Al-Anon—not both. However, most A.A. convention committees invite Al-Anon to participate and plan their own program, and the committee arranges for facilities for the Al-Anon meetings.

### Should an A.A. convention committee make a contribution to Al-Anon from the financial profits of the convention?

In accordance with the self-support Traditions of both Fellowships and to abide by the concept of "cooperation but not affiliation," it is suggested that A.A. should not make gifts or contributions to Al-Anon. By the same token, A.A. should not accept contributions from Al-Anon. If separate registrations have been kept for both A.A. and Al-Anon, however, income may be easily assigned.