

Chapter 1

THE GROUP AND ITS GENERAL SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GSR

For most A.A.s, membership in a home group is one of the keys to continuing sobriety. In a home group, they accept service responsibilities and learn to sustain connections with other recovering alcoholics. The home group affords individual A.A.s the privilege of voting on issues that affect the Fellowship as a whole; it is the very basis of the service structure. While many A.A. members attend other groups as well, the home group is where they participate in business meetings and cast their vote as part of the group conscience of the Fellowship as a whole. As with all group conscience matters, each member has one vote.

The role of the general service representative, or GSR, is essential to the purpose of general service. Bill W. wrote in Concept I of *The Twelve Concepts for World Service*: “The A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services.” The role of the GSR is essential to ensuring that groups can fulfill that responsibility. Only when a GSR keeps the group informed and communicates the group conscience can the Conference truly act for A.A. as a whole. This communication is a two-way street, making the GSR responsible not only for bringing forward the group’s voice, but for taking back to the group Conference actions that affect the Fellowship’s unity, health and growth.

So what is the role of a GSR?

The GSR is the link between the group and “A.A. as a whole.” This link becomes a channel through which news, information, opinions and ideas can flow back and forth. Importantly, this also gives the group a voice in the affairs of the Fellowship. The GSR is that voice.

There is more than one way for GSRs to express their group’s thoughts and wishes — their conscience — in general service.

When the GSR is present at assemblies, the group’s voice is heard. The presence of a GSR says their group cares about what’s going on in the Fellowship and wants to learn and make its concerns and suggestions known.

When the GSR participates, the group’s voice is heard. It can be through a GSR sharing the group’s concerns across a conference table from other GSRs in a district meeting. It can be through questioning a budget item or proposing an idea important to the group at an area assembly. It can be through making an impassioned plea about an agenda item to the delegate on the eve of the annual General Service Conference meeting.

When the GSR votes, the group’s voice is heard. The GSR votes on the trusted servants to lead the district and the area as well as the delegate to represent the area at the annual General Service Conference meeting. The group’s voice is heard when the GSR votes on how best to use Seventh Tradition contributions to carry out Twelfth Step services.

What’s important is to participate. This manual is intended to help.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR GSR

Experience of the Fellowship suggests that the most effective GSRs:

- Have at least two years of continuous sobriety
- Are familiar with their group's history, priorities, traditions and procedures
- Are able to listen to all points of view
- Have the time to regularly attend district meetings and area assemblies and the group's business meetings
- Have a working familiarity with the Twelve Traditions and A.A. recovery and service literature
- Have an email address or other easy way of maintaining contact with group members
- Are familiar with the G.S.O. and area websites

TERM OF OFFICE

GSRs serve two-year terms. In many areas GSR terms coincide with those of the "panel" covering the area delegate's term of service. (See Glossary for a definition of "Panel.")

DUTIES & RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Regularly attend area assemblies. Your group is in one of the 93 areas that make up the U.S./Canada General Service Conference. (See Map A for a map of the General Service Conference areas.) Each area holds assemblies during the year. GSRs are asked to attend and participate in these assemblies. You have a voice and a vote.
2. Regularly attend district meetings. Your group is part of a district (which is in one of those 93 areas mentioned above). Your district likely holds regular meetings. How frequently your district meets will vary by district. GSRs are asked to attend district meetings. You have both a voice and a vote.
3. Regularly make reports to the group. These reports serve as an important link to A.A. as a whole. Your reports may concern information about what's happening in general service that you think will be of interest to the group. You are asked to convey any thoughts, concerns or wishes from your group's members back to the district. (See the section "Making Reports" later in this chapter.)
4. Participating in district and area service meetings is a great way to learn about all that A.A. and general service have to offer to help carry the A.A. message. What the GSR learns can be shared with the group in a report, either oral or written.
5. Work with the group treasurer to develop Seventh Tradition support for the General Service Board, the area and the district. You can find suggestions for group contributions to A.A. service entities in the Conference-approved pamphlet "Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality

Mix.” This includes contributions to your local intergroup/central office. Groups may veer from these suggestions as they see fit, or not contribute at all. Many groups participate in two special plans to support A.A.’s service entities: the Regular Contribution Plan and the Birthday Plan. More information on these is available from G.S.O. or the local intergroup/central office. (See also the pamphlet “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix” for information about the practical application of the Seventh Tradition.)

6. Keep the group up to date on the latest A.A. literature and service material. The A.A.W.S. and Grapevine literature catalogs are excellent resources. Both are available online (at aa.org or aagrapevine.org) and as printed catalogs. You can also visit onlineliterature.aa.org and store.aagrapevine.org. GSRs are asked to help make their groups aware of:

- New literature. This includes new books, formats or other products published by A.A. World Services and Grapevine.
- New applications of technology. As technology continues to alter how many people receive information, A.A. is exploring applications that are intended to help the Fellowship carry its message to alcoholics.
- Literature and service material to increase accessibility in A.A. While there are no special alcoholics, there are alcoholics who experience access barriers to receiving the A.A. message. General service is always looking for ways to help A.A. and ultimately the groups minimize and ultimately remove those barriers.

7. Supply the DCM or district registrar with up-to-date group information, which is relayed to G.S.O., either directly to the Operations department or through the area registrar in order to keep contact information current for G.S.O. mailings and possible Twelfth Step opportunities.

8. Serve as the mail contact with the General Service Office (and as the contact in the A.A. directory if your group is listed there); receive the G.S.O. bulletin Box 4-5-9; and keep groups abreast of A.A. activities all over the world. (See Appendix I for a sample Group Information Form. See Appendix H for a sample New Group Form.)

9. Keep the alternate GSR informed and involved with all the latest information for the group.

TO THE NEWLY ELECTED GSR

There are often weeks between the election of a GSR and when the term begins. Using this time to become familiar with this manual will prove helpful. GSRs are encouraged to read “A.A.’s Legacy of Service” by Bill W. It is reprinted in Appendix A of this manual. Consider assembling the publications below — and start reading. Your term will likely have started before you get through all of these. Keep reading. And keep them handy.

Pamphlets, Leaflets

- “GSR General Service Representative...your group’s link to A.A. as a whole”
- “The A.A. Group”
- “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix”

- “A.A. Tradition — How It Developed”
- “Twelve Traditions Illustrated”
- “Twelve Concepts Illustrated”

Books

- *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (second half on the Traditions)
- *Twelve Concepts of World Service* (second half of the Service Manual)
- *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*
- *Our Great Responsibility: A Selection of Bill W.’s General Service Conference Talks 1951-1970*
- *The Language of the Heart: Bill W.’s Grapevine Writings*

THE SERVICE SPONSOR

The same impulse that drives some new people to try to “do A.A.” alone drives some new GSRs to try to “do general service” alone. There’s no reason to. In fact, there’s every reason not to.

As rewarding and enjoyable as general service can be, you might find yourself feeling overwhelmed at times. A service sponsor can make the difference between struggling in your service position and feeling a sense of purpose and accomplishment (and having some fun along the way!).

A service sponsor is there to answer your questions about your responsibilities, the structure of general service, the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts and how to apply them, and making reports to your group. They can share experiences on managing time and expectations. Simply put, the service sponsor is there to help.

A service sponsor can be defined as one alcoholic who has made some progress in recovery and/or performance in service and who is willing to share this experience with another alcoholic who is just starting the journey.

Service sponsors often introduce newer members to the various aspects of service: setting up a meeting, working on committees, participating in conferences, etc. In this matter it is important for the service sponsor to help individuals understand the distinction between serving the needs of the Fellowship and meeting the personal needs of another group member.

The basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. Service sponsors can impart to their sponsees the pleasure of involvement in the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith.

Co-founder Dr. Bob said, “I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons: 1. Sense of duty. 2. It is a pleasure. 3. Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me. 4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip.”

When considering potential service sponsors, experience of the Fellowship suggests looking for an A.A. member who is:

- Knowledgeable in A.A. history and the service structure
- Well acquainted with the various service positions and the principles and concepts that guide general service
- Familiar with the Twelve Traditions
- Familiar with The A.A. Service Manual and Twelve Concepts

To find someone with this kind of experience and knowledge, you might consider some of the people you meet or hear at area assemblies and service workshops. For additional information, there is a section on the service sponsor in the A.A. pamphlet “Questions & Answers on Sponsorship.”

MAKING REPORTS

GSRs are asked to regularly make reports to their groups to keep them informed about what’s going on in A.A. as a whole. In some instances, the GSR may be asked to get the group’s feedback on certain topics. A group may have a customary format or time for when a GSR may give a report. Some groups ask the GSR to give a report during announcements in the regular A.A. meeting. Some prefer the report to be given during business meetings. Some welcome both. Most groups prefer the reports to be shorter rather than longer. A group may also decline to hear reports from a GSR at all.

Good sources of information for GSRs to create reports on include:

- G.S.O.’s quarterly newsletter, Box 4-5-9
- The delegate’s report to the area (given at area assemblies)
- The DCM’s report (given at district meetings)
- The “What’s New” button on the aa.org website
- The annual General Service Conference Final Report
- The Quarterly Report of the General Service Board
- The meeting list or newsletters issued by your local intergroup/central office



TRAVEL EXPENSES

Sometimes GSRs incur expenses traveling to and from service events. Weekend events may also incur expenses for accommodations and food. It is up to each group to decide whether it will reimburse its GSR for all or part of the travel expenses, but groups should keep in mind that an individual’s finances should not be a barrier to service.

THE ALTERNATE GSR

The alternate GSR is elected by a group to serve on those occasions when the GSR is not available and is usually elected to the same two-year term as the GSR. This is especially important should the GSR, who has a vote, be unable to attend a district meeting or area assembly. The alternate might also be asked to step in to give reports to the group. Some alternate GSRs are interested in more opportunities to serve. They might attend district meetings and area assemblies along with GSRs (although an alternate may vote only when the GSR is not present). Alternate GSRs may also get more involved in general service by attending and volunteering at workshops and other service events in the district and area.

FAQs

I'm not very experienced in General Service. What if I make a mistake or don't know how to answer a question from group members? Generally speaking, there are many resources available to help those interested in general service gain insight and information regarding any questions that are asked. With a little patience and persistence, you can find the information by reading A.A. service literature or talking with other trusted servants to answer most concerns that arise at the group level.

How should I notify G.S.O. of my election, and what will I receive when I become a GSR?

As soon as a GSR is elected, the group should provide the district and area committees, the local intergroup/ central office, and G.S.O. with the following information: 1) group name and service number, 2) the new GSR's name, address, email and telephone number, and 3) the previous GSR's name (so it can be removed from the mailing list). When G.S.O. has been notified, the new GSR receives a kit containing a welcome letter, The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, useful pamphlets and leaflets, an A.A.W.S. literature order form, and informational materials and order forms from Grapevine. This and all service kits are available for download on aa.org. The GSR will also be added to the mailing list for G.S.O.'s newsletter Box 4-5-9, which contains information of interest to groups.

If I can't make the next district meeting or area assembly, can I ask someone from my group to go in my place? All A.A. members may attend district meetings and area assemblies. In most areas, only elected GSRs and alternates (when the GSR is absent) may vote.

A long-time member of my group keeps asking me what G.S.O. does with the money we contribute; how should I respond? Chapter 10 of this manual concerns what G.S.O. does. Your DCM, delegate and service sponsor will also have information that may be helpful. A.A. service material on this subject is available from G.S.O. both online and in print: F-176 "Services Provided by G.S.O./ A.A.W.S." and F-203 "Seventh Tradition Fact Sheet — Your Seventh Tradition Contributions."

If my group wants A.A. to suggest a theme for the annual General Service Conference, is there a way for me as their GSR to bring this to A.A.'s attention? Most definitely. You might start by bringing this to your next district meeting or reaching out to the area delegate for guidance. Your service sponsor may also be of help. (For additional information on how an item becomes a Conference agenda item, see Appendix U.)

If no one in my group is interested in taking my place as GSR when my term is up, should I continue until they find someone, or even serve another two-year term? The Traditions and Concepts encourage rotation of service, even when it appears the position will be left unfilled. Perhaps consider taking on a different role in general service; your interest and commitment are always needed. (See Appendix E of the *A.A. Service Manual* for a more detailed discussion on the principle of rotation.)