

THE AA GROUP CONSCIENCE

SUGGESTIONS FOR HOME GROUPS

*For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority-
a loving God as he may express himself in our group
conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants: they do not govern.*
Tradition Two

What is a *Group Conscience*?

The AA *Group Conscience* is the collective voice of the members of an AA group, from any part of AA's service structure.

The *Group Conscience* is a shared decision reached by a careful and respectful process where everyone has a voice, and everyone listens. The process is used whenever a considered decision is required. The goal is to reach a position of '*substantial unanimity*'. This means that the decision made is one that all support or are prepared to accept.

About Home Group Meetings

Apart from "ID" (identification) and other types of Recovery meetings, Home Groups may also run different types of "maintenance" meetings, which are often referred to as "*Group Conscience*"

- Meetings. These include meetings for group business or "steering", hearing short reports, discussing issues, elections or taking of inventory.
- Custom varies a lot because each group is autonomous.
- Meetings may be held either, just before or just after a regular AA meeting, or at a separate time and day.
- They can vary in length and may be very short or quite long depending on what needs to be discussed.
- Groups may hold regular monthly or quarterly meetings or only when needed.
- Or they may be held at short notice when something urgent needs be dealt with
- Any member of a *Home Group* can ask the Secretary to call an actual *Group Conscience Meeting* about an issue as the need arises.

The following suggestions come from the experience of many groups in the AA Fellowship. Exactly how you run a *Home Group* meeting, how often, for how long, how formal and when you conduct *Group Conscience* processes, depends on your needs and is the choice of your *Home Group*.

How is an informed *Group Conscience* achieved?

The *Group Conscience* is the spiritual expression of an informed group. This is reached by remaining mindful of AA principals, the Steps, Traditions and Concepts, and using the language of the heart. It is not simply a majority overriding a minority.

Be mindful of

- Gathering all information needed
- Placing Principals before Personalities
- Listening carefully, respectfully and with an open mind
- Inviting each person to speak in turn, before speaking a second time.
- Encouraging new members and silent or shy people to speak
- Being prepared to compromise
- The need to be wary of dominant opinions and angry outbursts
- Discouraging formal motions and voting until a clear collective view emerges
- The key to AA unity is working with others not against them
- Being prepared to postpone a decision if more information is needed or substantial agreement is not reached
- As with all voices in AA, giving any minority voice a good hearing and the last word after a vote if there is something new to say.

“When a decision taken in substantial unanimity does happen to go wrong, there can be no heated recriminations. Everybody will be able to say, “Well we had a careful debate, we took the decision and it turned out to be a bad one, Better luck next time!” Warranty Four New Zealand AA Service Manual 2009.

What problems or issues might need a *Group Conscience* Decision?

- **Group Problems:**
How to deal with disruptive behaviour, Members advising others to stop taking their medications?
- **Group Decisions about Tradition 7:**
Rent rise, can we afford it and shall we stay put? Surplus Funds: what *Group Donation Plan* shall we support?
- **Group Activities:**
Should we donate a Big Book to the library? Can we manage a newsletter? Celebrating AA Birthdays, Helping and supporting AA events and services.

NZAA Guidelines

- **Newcomers:**
Do we know they are there? Are we offering Group Sponsorship? Do they have phone numbers?
- **Receiving & Discussing Reports:**
From your GSR after Area Assembly of District/Inter group Meeting
News from GSO or in the *GSO Newsletter*
- **Taking Group Inventory:**
A Group Step 4: an honest and fearless examination of Groups Strengths and weaknesses
- **Group Elections:**
Secretary, Treasurer, GSR, Literature Officer etc
- **Conference Area Assembly Topics:**
Any issues that the group wishes to take up with the wider service structure.

Suggestions for a more Formal (Business) Meeting:

- Have one person to chair (usually the Group Secretary or Chairperson)
- Have another member to take the minutes
- Decide how the Group would like to vote on any issues that may arise: “sense of the meeting” show of hands or written (usually for sensitive issues).
- For most voted, most Groups use a show of hands, and either a simple majority “for” (50% +1), or 2/3 for “substantial unanimity” as decided beforehand.
- If voting for positions, use *Third Legacy Procedure* for large groups (See New Zealand AA Service Manual)

Who attends:

All available members of the Home Group who identify as members of the Home Group and regularly participate in the Group Conscience, and any invited observers (who may be invited to contribute).

Sample Agenda

Opening

Chair may like to welcome everyone then have a minute’s silence or say the *Serenity Prayer* and / or read all of the *12 Traditions*.

Ensure that there is a minute taker.

Roll Call

Record who is present and any apologies.

Minutes of Previous Meeting:

NZAA Guidelines

Ask if they have been read and are correct

Ask that they be accepted, find a proposer, a seconder and then vote to accept.

Business arising from the minutes:

Correspondence: In / Out

Reports (if any; read, discuss and question; propose, second and vote to accept):

- Treasurer
- Secretary
- Public Information Initiatives
- GSR (General Service Rep)
- Other

Any other business:

Tradition 7 as appropriate

Close: Serenity Prayer

*“Not always understood, the **Group Conscience** as expressed in Tradition Two is a basic and powerful principle that makes it possible for people of diverse backgrounds and temperament to rise above personal ambition and unite in one common purpose - to stay sober and help the still suffering alcoholic. In the words of our Declaration of Unity, “This we owe to AA’s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on AA Unity depend our lives, and the lives of those to come.””* [Box 459, v51n2 2005: 7.](#)