

HOW DO WE CHOOSE GROUP OFFICERS?

When a vacancy occurs in a group office, the group holds a business meeting to consider how to fill it. Groups should arrange their elections in such a way that they don't have all their trusted servants leaving office at the same time.

There are a couple of things to think about when looking for a group officer. One is maturity in recovery. When those new in recovery are elected to a position, they may find themselves deprived of time and energy they need for their early recovery. Group members with a year or two clean are probably already well established in their personal recovery. They are also more likely than new members to be familiar with NA's traditions and service concepts as well as group procedures.

A second thing to consider is consistent participation in your group. Do the nominees attend your group's recovery meetings regularly? Do they take an active part in your group's business meetings? Have they lived up to previous service commitments they've made? Further questions may occur to you as you read the earlier essay in this guide on NA's Fourth Concept for Service, which squarely addresses the importance of NA leadership and the qualities to consider in selecting trusted servants.

Finally, we encourage you to remember that you're selecting group officers, first, to benefit the common welfare of your group. While service commitments often benefit those who accept them, that should not be the primary reason for selecting one individual or another to serve as an officer of your group. As the First Tradition says, in part, "...our common welfare should come first."

WHAT OFFICERS DOES A GROUP NEED?

In different areas the work is divided differently, and the particular jobs are sometimes called by different names. What's important is not who does the job or what the job is called, but that the job gets done. What follows are general descriptions of some of the most common sorts of jobs NA groups have. For each of these positions, your group should establish realistic terms of service and clean-time requirements.

Secretary

The secretary (sometimes called the chairperson) arranges the affairs of the group, often by asking other group members to help out. One of the first jobs for a new secretary is registering the group's current mailing address and meeting information with the area service committee secretary and the World Service Office. When a new group secretary or GSR takes office or there is a change in the group's mailing address or the time or location of a group meeting, both the area committee and World Service Office should be informed. Other things a group secretary is responsible for may include:

- Opening the meeting room well before the meeting is scheduled to begin, setting up chairs and tables (if necessary), and cleaning and locking the room after the meeting is over.
- Arranging a table with NA books and pamphlets, local meeting lists, NA activity fliers, service bulletins, *The NA Way Magazine*, and NA newsletters.
- Making tea or coffee.
- Buying refreshments and other supplies.
- Selecting meeting leaders and speakers.
- Keeping a list of group members' recovery anniversaries, if the group wishes.
- Organizing group business meetings.
- And doing whatever else needs to be done.

Many groups break all these jobs down separately: someone to open and close the room, another person responsible for refreshments, a third to take care of the literature table, and so forth. Groups that host more than one meeting will often have a different person responsible for all these jobs at each of their meetings.

Treasurer

All groups, even those that host more than one meeting, elect one group treasurer. When the group consolidates responsibility for all its funds under a single treasurer, the group makes it easier to account for the contributions it receives and expenses it pays than if it gives a number of individuals responsibility for its money. Groups that host two or more weekly meetings should make arrangements for contributions to be passed to the group treasurer shortly after each meeting.

Because of the added responsibility of handling money associated with service as a group treasurer, it's important that groups look carefully at those they elect as treasurers. If the group elects someone who is not capable of handling the responsibilities of the job, then the group is at least partly responsible if money is stolen, supplies aren't purchased, or funds aren't properly accounted for. It's recommended that groups elect treasurers who are financially secure and are good at managing their personal finances. Because of the need to keep consistent records, it's also strongly recommended that groups elect treasurers to serve for a full year.

What do group treasurers do? They count the money that members have contributed at each meeting, always asking another member to confirm their count. They take special care not to confuse the group's money with their own personal funds. They pay expenses, keep good, simple records, and regularly provide financial reports to their groups. The group treasurer's job requires close attention to details. To help the treasurer in managing those details, a

Treasurer's Handbook is available from your area committee or from the World Service Office.

Group Service Representative (GSR)

Each group elects one group service representative; even those groups hosting more than one recovery meeting elect just one GSR. These GSRs form the foundation of our service structure. GSRs provide constant, active influence over the discussions being carried on within the service structure. They do this by participating in area service committee meetings, attending forums and assemblies at both the area and regional levels, and sometimes joining in the work of an ASC subcommittee. If we are vigilant in choosing stable, qualified leaders at this level of service, the remainder of the structure will almost certainly be sound. From this strong foundation, a service structure can be built that will nourish, inform, and support the groups in the same way that the groups nourish and support the structure.

Group service representatives bear great responsibility. While GSRs are elected by and accountable to the group, they are not mere group messengers. They are selected by their groups to serve as active members of the area service committee. As such, they are responsible to act in the best interests of NA as a whole, not solely as advocates of their own groups' priorities.

As participants in the area committee, GSRs need to be as well informed as they can be concerning the affairs of the committee. They study the reports of the committee's officers and subcommittee chairpersons. They read the various handbooks published by the World Service Office on each area of service. After carefully considering their own conscience and what they know about how their group members feel, they take active, critical parts in the discussions, which form the group conscience of the entire committee.

Group service representatives link their groups with the rest of the NA service structure, particularly through the information conveyed in their reports to and from the area committee. At group business meetings, the GSR report provides a summary of area committee activities, often sparking discussions among group members that provide the GSR with a feel for how the area can better serve the group's needs. In group recovery meetings, GSRs make available fliers announcing area and regional activities.

At area committee meetings, GSR reports provide perspectives on group growth vital to the committee's work. If a group is having problems, its GSR can share those problems with the committee in his or her reports. And if the group hasn't found solutions to those problems, the area chairperson will open a slot on the committee's "sharing session"² agenda so that the GSR can gather the experience others have had in similar situations. If any helpful solutions arise from the sharing session, the GSR can report those back to the group.

² In the chapter on the area service committee, see the section entitled "The Sharing Session."

Alternate GSR

Groups also elect a second representative called an alternate GSR. Alternate GSRs attend all the area service committee meetings (as nonvoting participants) with their GSRs so that they can see for themselves how the committee works. If a GSR cannot attend an area committee meeting, that group's alternate GSR participates in the GSR's place.

Alternate GSRs, along with other members, may also serve on area subcommittees. Subcommittee experience gives alternate GSRs added perspective on how area services are actually delivered. That perspective helps make them more effective area committee participants if their groups later elect them to serve as GSRs.

ROTATION AND CONTINUITY

Rotation is the practice many groups have of electing new people to service positions at set intervals rather than having the same person serve in the same position year after year. Rotation offers very definite benefits for the groups who practice it. By providing diversity in leadership, it helps a group stay fresh and energetic. It provides assurance that no one individual exercises so much influence that the group becomes a mere extension of his or her personality. The practice of rotation also reinforces the NA emphasis on service rather than the servant, consistent with our belief in the value of spiritual anonymity—what's important is the job being done, not the particular person doing it.

Some groups allow their members to serve more than one term in any given position so that the group can take advantage of its trusted servants' experience. Once group officers have completed their terms, rotation allows them to step aside for a time or accept responsibilities elsewhere in the NA service structure, giving other members the chance to serve the group.

The impact of rotation on the stability of the group is balanced by the continuing presence of its long-term group members. Those who have served in the past as group officers and continue to maintain an active role in the life of the group can provide much-needed continuity and maturity of perspective to a growing group's discussions. They can serve as the group's memory, ensuring that the group never has to "reinvent the wheel." They can also lend a hand to new officers and temporarily pitch in to relieve overloaded trusted servants.

WHAT RESPONSIBILITIES DOES AN NA GROUP HAVE?

The first and most important responsibility of any NA group—its "primary purpose," according to the Fifth Tradition—is "to carry the message to the addict who still suffers." And the single most important thing a group can do to fulfill that primary purpose is to conduct meetings that provide a welcoming atmosphere in which NA recovery can be effectively shared between addicts. Groups conduct the details of their meetings in very different ways, but all of them seek the same