

Launching and Growing a District Literature Committee

Background

A.A. co-founder Bill W. often called the influence of A.A. literature “incalculable.” Bill wrote in the May 1964 issue of the *Grapevine*:

“Suppose, for instance, that during the last 25 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.”

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. But beginning with 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.

Literature committees at the district and area level exist today to educate the Fellowship about Conference approved literature and related service material. More important, they exist to maintain the integrity of the A.A. message. Most literature committees strive to maintain this level of integrity by following the suggestions outlined in the General Service Office’s A.A. Guidelines on Literature. These guidelines resulted from a Conference Literature Committee suggestion in 1992 that the trustees’ Literature Committee develop literature committee guidelines comprised of shared experience from the Fellowship.

So what is the purpose of Literature service work in Alcoholics Anonymous?

- To inform groups and districts, through displays and other suitable methods, of all available Conference-approved literature, audiovisual material and other special items
- To help groups and districts understand the vital role Conference-approved literature has in carrying the A.A. message
- To consider suggestions regarding proposed additions to and changes in Conference-approved literature and audiovisual material

- To encourage A.A. members to read and purchase A.A. literature

It seems like individual A.A. members could carry out this work. Why do we form committees to do it?

The most important reason:

Because being a “worker among workers” helps us to keep our ego in check and advances the concept of humility:

“ ... anonymity is real humility at work. It is an all-pervading spiritual quality which today keynotes A.A. life everywhere. Moved by the spirit of anonymity, we try to give up our natural desires for personal distinction as A.A. members both among fellow alcoholics and before the general public. As we lay aside these very human aspirations, we believe that each of us takes part the weaving of a protective mantle which covers our whole Society and under which we may grow and work in unity.”

-- Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, p.187

Another important reason:

Because we can accomplish more of the crucial work of carrying the A.A. message through committees rather than individually; there truly is strength in numbers, even if the committee is small.

And:

Because working within a committee provides us with a more cohesive way to do Literature service work, allowing us to present a unified and cohesive face to those members of the public we want to attract to our Fellowship. Keeping Tradition 9 in mind:

“A.A., as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

So what can a newly elected Literature Committee chairperson do to get a committee off the ground?

- Find a meeting place and establish a time for a monthly Literature Committee meeting.
- Get the meeting place and time published in your monthly Intergroup newsletter.

- Start making announcements at A.A. meetings that your district has a Literature committee that's looking for members. Ask anyone who wants to learn more to see you after the meeting.
- Show up at the committee meeting every month, without fail, even if you're the only attendee. Keep in mind the old adage: "If you build it, they will come."

Once the basics are in place, what comes next for Literature Committee members?

- Review the [list of activities](#) recommended by the General Service Office for Literature committees. Select with your committee members one or two activities that you can do with even a small committee and start tackling them.
- As soon as possible, elect an alternate Literature Committee chairperson, as well as a secretary-treasurer, so there will be back up to the chairperson and to ensure the committee's continuation at the end of the chairperson's two-year term of office.
- If your Literature Committee is not already funded by your district, prepare a budget for your committee that will support your needs (i.e., copies of material you want to share at GSR orientations, A.A. literature you want to include in your literature display and the materials to create the display, etc.) and bring it to your district body for approval.
- Attend you district meeting and give a report about what your committee is working on. Ask members of the district committee (officers, DCMs and GSRs) to consider joining the Literature Committee.
- Order a complimentary literature display package from the General Service Office and begin building a literature display. Add to the display as finances permit.
- Write and submit articles about the work your committee is doing and your need for additional volunteers to your Intergroup newsletter.
- Make sure the information about your committee, including your meeting date and time, is on your district's website.
- Encourage home groups to designate a Literature Committee representative who can attend your monthly meetings and bring information back to the group.
- Stay informed about proposed changes to A.A. literature; share this information in your district reports and communicate it to GSRs and group literature representatives.
- Update your district via your report and keep GSRs and group literature representatives informed of any new literature or changes to existing literature that result from Conference action.

- Attend the Literature meetings/workshops at Area 15 assemblies, share your progress, listen to the experience of other district Literature Committee chairs, and ask for help.

Sharing the experience of District 1

State of the committee in January 2016:

- There was a chairperson who had been a member of the committee during the previous rotation, but there was only one additional committee member.
- The monthly committee meetings were being held in the southern part of the district and were difficult for A.A. members in the northern part of the district to get to.
- The literature display had become tattered and unattractive.
- There was no record of past committee projects or accomplishments.

What those two committee members were able to accomplish within three months:

- Found a more central location for the committee meeting and started announcing it at A.A. meetings
- Contacted the literature desk at GSO to obtain a literature kit
- Reviewed GSO guidelines for literature committees and wrote a new Composition, Scope and Procedure for the committee
- Wrote new content for the committee's landing page on the district website
- Created a document explaining the value and purpose of a group Literature Committee representative
- Crafted a series of announcements to make at A.A. meetings encouraging home groups to elect or appoint a literature representative
- Coordinated with Pinellas County Intergroup to ensure a collaborative effort in displaying A.A. literature at local A.A. events
- Reached out to district literature chairs in South Florida Area 15 to learn how they create literature displays; began creating a District 1 Literature Committee display featuring recovery, unity and service literature
- Made a literature presentation for GSRs at a districtwide GSR orientation
- Reviewed Advisory Actions pertaining to literature from the 2016 General Service Conference
- Studied background material pertaining to literature on items that would be presented at the 2017 General Service Conference and began formulating the

committee's group conscience in preparation of attending the April Area 15 Assembly

Status of the committee two years later:

- Working with the District 1 Chairperson and Alternate Chairperson to be a regularly scheduled part of GSR workshops and orientations to introduce GSRs to A.A. literature of special importance to their groups
- Working with the District 1 DCM Coordinator to bring literature presentations to DCM quarterly sharing sessions
- Continuing to work on expanding the number of group Literature Representatives
- Encouraging group literature representatives to create beginner packets to share with newcomers who attend their meetings
- Finding more opportunities to feature the Literature Committee display beyond district and Intergroup events, such as group anniversaries and holiday parties
- Building an archive of Conference agenda items pertaining to Literature and the background material connected to those items to provide a historical perspective on A.A. literature from the Conference perspective

Sample announcements to make at A.A. meetings to attract participation in your district Literature Committee:

If you're looking for a great opportunity to carry the A.A. message, please consider becoming a member of our district's Literature Committee. The goal of this committee is to inform home group members of all available Conference-approved literature, audiovisual material and other special items and how it helps us carry the A.A. message. If you want to learn more about joining the Literature Committee, please see me after the meeting.

A.A. co-founder Bill W often called the influence of A.A. literature "incalculable," stating that without it, our message of recovery would become "hopelessly garbled." Here in District XX, we have a committee that meets monthly to talk about how we can better inform home group members of all available Conference-approved literature, audiovisual material and other special items and how it helps us carry the A.A. message. If you'd like to learn more about joining the Literature Committee, please see me after the meeting.

All A.A. members are familiar with the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve and the Daily Reflections. But did you know that the Big Book was recently published in Farsi? Or that we have a new service piece that focuses on safety in A.A.? Or that we have a new pamphlet called “The God Word” that features the experience, strength and hope of atheist and agnostic A.A. members? You can learn about new and updated A.A. literature as well as how we use A.A. literature to help us carry the message by becoming a member of the District XX Literature Committee. If you’d like to learn more, please see me after the meeting.