

Review revision to the *Structure Handbook*, p.126 Conventions

Background

Conference 2022 (Committee 5, Question 2) requested a review of the chapter to avoid ambiguity, correct outdated references and include previous Conference decisions.

Conventions

- 1) Local conventions
- 2) National conventions

Conventions offer an opportunity for members to gather and share their experience, strength and hope.

“Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers” (Tradition Five)

Separate social events may add to the enjoyment of a convention, promoting fellowship. The following offers basic guidance for all conventions. A planning checklist follows in Annex A, and suggested Terms of Reference in Annex B.

1. Local Conventions

Organisation

The decision to hold a convention is usually made by the group conscience of the appropriate intergroup or region (the sponsoring body). A committee should be elected for the purpose of planning, organising and running the event. The Convention Committee should:

- Have overall responsibility and be accountable to the sponsoring body for financial and all other matters
- Bear in mind the need for conventions to be self-supporting
- Appoint a chair, convenor or both
- Follow the normal principle of rotation across the whole of the Convention Committee

Children and babies: Conference recommends that accompanied children should not be excluded from conventions. Organisers must therefore be mindful of relevant safeguarding issues.

Finance

In all financial matters Tradition Seven should be adhered to:

“Every AA group ought to be self-supporting, declining outside contributions”

Where it is felt necessary to charge a registration fee, the organising committee should have the final decision. All projected costs should be covered through the registration fee, remembering that the “pot” is traditionally AA money used for primary purpose work and not to be used to cover expenses.

Funding of the convention: The sponsoring body should provide the committee with sufficient funds to start organising the convention. Thereafter income from registration fees should be used. If excess funds are generated, the sponsoring body may consider retaining a prudent reserve to fund the next convention.

All accounts should be independently audited.

Chairperson and Speakers

Conventions usually invite chairs and speakers to participate well in advance. If speakers are invited from outside the local area, and their reimbursement for travel is to be paid, this should be borne in mind when assessing the registration charge. Fees should not be paid to AA speakers, as to do so would imply professionalism and violate the spirit of Tradition Eight. When planning the programme, committees may wish to consider the various types of AA meetings outlined in section 1 of Group Meetings above and consider sharing platforms by inviting speakers from Al-Anon and Alateen.

At each meeting during the convention, the chair should remind the audience of the importance of Tradition Eleven by reading the AA anonymity announcement:

“There may be some here who are not familiar with our tradition of personal anonymity at the public level: ‘Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press radio and films.’ Thus, we respectfully ask that no AA speaker – or any AA member – is identified by full name and that no photograph is published or broadcast in reports on our meetings. This includes taking photographs and/or videos at convention social events (as well as the meetings) and publishing on social media. The assurance of anonymity is essential in our effort to help other problem drinkers who may wish to share our recovery program with us, and our Tradition of anonymity reminds us that AA principles come before personalities.”

Literature

Literature stalls should be attractive and well stocked with AA conference-approved literature. The sponsoring body is responsible for ordering, and for payment.

Ideally, orders should be received at GSO at least one calendar month before the event. Final payment should be made within the same period after the event.

When considering the sale of literature, the sponsoring body should be aware of the importance to AA finances of revenue from the sale of conference-approved publications. If non-AA material is to be sold, separate facilities should be provided for its display: AA money should not be used to purchase this material.

Souvenirs

Conference 2022 reconfirmed the following recommendation from 1980, recognising that it is not possible or desirable to attempt to interfere with the buying of souvenirs by individuals for their personal use or for gifts for others.

However, the committee recommended that the convenors of conventions and the officers of intergroups and groups should examine the motives of individuals for the sale of souvenirs and the profits involved, taking into account the Traditions of A.A. Private individuals should be discouraged from making profits from A.A. members. Any money from the sale of souvenirs should be used for A.A. purposes.

Recording at Conventions

The sponsoring body and the organising committee should decide whether to record the convention; they should consider legal and financial issues, and bear in mind that recording can be a difficult, expensive and a time-consuming task; a high level of expertise may be required. No video recording should take place.

Advance publicity should indicate that the convention will be recorded and chairs, speakers and reserves should be advised individually of the recording well in advance of the

convention. A thorough briefing of each speaker is vital to ensure that no inadvertent breach of anyone's anonymity occurs.

The sponsoring body and the organising committee have the right to edit recordings.

Safeguarding

It is strongly recommended that all applicable safeguarding guidance is adhered to.

Catering Arrangements

Convention organisers usually elect an individual to take overall responsibility and form a sub-committee to deal with catering.

Where food or drinks are supplied, costings and sales prices should be established and prices displayed. If outside caterers are used, it would be prudent to discuss provisional costs. Some Conventions invite participants to bring their own lunch.

2. National Conventions

The General Service Board (GSB) is responsible for the appointment of a trustee to National Convention Committees (NCC), in order to ensure that the convention programme is in conformity with the spirit and the Traditions of AA and to oversee all financial accounting. All surpluses from National Conventions are to be paid over to the General Service Office (GSO).

NCC meetings are reported back to the GSB. The following National Conventions are financially supported and serviced by their local regions:

- Southern National
- Northern National
- Scottish National
- Welsh National

At the national level each NCC elects its own chair or convenor from experienced members. A local GSB member serves in an ex-officio capacity on the committee of each National Convention. The GSB suggests that trustees attend at least two meetings, or as agreed with the committee.

National conventions can use either the AAGB website or create their own websites for the purposes of online marketing.

ANNEX A – Check List for Convention Committees

The following list is not exhaustive comprehensive but is intended to be an aid to cover all conventions from Mini/one-day to National:

- Ensure that all decisions taken lie within AA's Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts
- Gain support of the sponsoring body and establish a regular system for reporting
- Define broad principles, venue, cost and theme
- Investigate the facilities available at the venue
- Consider safeguarding implications
- Set target dates for task completion and try to stick to them
- Set a budget business plan and theme
- Assess transport and any parking details
- Publicity

- Agree a detailed plan on AA meetings and workshops:
 - 1) Entertainment
 - 2) Al-Anon and Alateen participation
 - 3) Printing and publicity flyers, possibly to include a location map
 - 4) Publicity on national, regional, and intergroup websites
 - 5) Convention details to SHARE and/or Roundabout, being aware of copy deadlines
 - 6) Health and safety implications, fire precautions etc.
 - 7) The overnight security of Collection monies, literature money and books
 - 8) Raffle tickets in accordance with the gaming laws
 - 9) Convention design: banners, top table arrangements
 - 10) Registration area
 - 11) Accommodation and refreshments
 - 12) How and when any collection is to be passed
 - 13) Literature stands, and ordering from GSO
 - 14) Archives and security thereof
 - 15) Raffle ticket sales and a secure display of prizes
 - 16) Information stand for newcomers
 - 17) Technical systems: communication, light and sound systems
 - 18) Access and facilities for the disabled

ANNEX B – Terms of Reference for Convention Committees

Convention committees are formed by intergroups and regions to plan and execute conventions in accordance with the recommendations of the General Service Conference. The following terms of reference may be adapted for use by all Convention Committees.

- 1) Convention Committees comprise delegates elected from the regions or intergroups that sponsor the convention. Their objective is to prepare and provide for a convention to promote our primary purpose within an agreed budget and according to Tradition Seven.
- 2) These committees are accountable to the sponsoring intergroups and regions, which exercise their responsibility for the Convention by the provision of elected delegates for the committee and through the regular reporting back of these, at their assemblies, and the auditing of accounts.
- 3) An appropriate number of members are elected as delegates to serve for three years on the Convention Committee. The committee elects its officers from these delegates to serve for a suitable term, ensuring the principle of rotation.
- 4) Committee officers rotating out of service are ineligible for re-election during the next three years. Other delegates rotating out are ineligible for re-election during the next twelve months.
- 5) Delegates who miss two consecutive meetings without adequate explanation, or who miss three consecutive meetings, are deemed to have resigned.
- 6) The frequency and location of committee meetings is at the discretion of the Committee, but costs and cost-effectiveness should be borne in mind. All expenses should be approved.
- 7) Dates proposed for conventions by the committee ought to be checked for possible clashes with other significant AA events.
- 8) All meetings should be reported, and copies of minutes sent to the secretaries of the sponsoring bodies and to GSO.
- 9) All conventions should be run in accordance with this guidance.