

**Service Handbook**  
**DRAFT Chapter 3**  
**Electronic Communications**  
**Conference 2025**

The purpose of this guidance is to provide practical help for AA members, groups, intergroups and regions who wish to use electronic communications in their service work.

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches... nothing matters more to AA’s future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination”.

**Bill W, The AA Grapevine, Inc., November 1960**

**3:1 Introduction**

This guidance is not intended to be a technical manual; its purpose is to:

- give guidance on the appropriate use of electronic communication in AA service work
- outline the role of the Electronic Communications Liaison Officer (ECLO) at intergroup and region level
- outline the guidance of Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain (AAGB) in respect of our presence on the Internet

**3:2 Email**

Electronic mail is a widely used and accepted method of communication. It is cheap, effective and very fast, and used regularly as a service tool in AA. It is, therefore, vitally important to ensure that our use of this facility conforms to our Traditions, and special care must be given to guarding the anonymity of our members. It is recommended that the blind carbon copy (bcc) option be used when emailing multiple addresses, unless all recipients have agreed otherwise.

It is recommended that officers at intergroup and region use AA email addresses for service correspondence rather than their own personal email addresses. Not only does it give a more professional appearance, especially when emailing to recipients outside the Fellowship, but it ensures continuity as the AA email address is transferred to the next office holder when rotation occurs.

It is not recommended that business email addresses are used for AA service work. As well as potentially breaching the anonymity of the member, many employers object to employees sending/receiving private emails and actively monitor their mail systems.

### **3:3 Bulk email (spam)**

The term “spam” is widely used as a derogatory term for any kind of unwanted electronic communication and is seen as a major nuisance. Spam is email sent to a recipient not known to the sender, and/or mail that has not been specifically requested by the recipient. Adding inappropriate or out-of-context messages to mailing list communications could also be included under the spam heading. It is, therefore, strongly suggested that AA members do not send bulk unsolicited emails for AA service work i.e., email ‘mail shots’, as to do so could be in violation of UK law and bring the AA name into disrepute, damaging the reputation of AA as a whole.

### **3:4 Online Video Calls**

Conference calls using video are a most cost-effective method of online communication.

Various applications and programmes are available for video and conference calls, and many are freely available on the Internet. These applications enable calls to be made computer to computer – often with additional functionality to transfer documents between the callers as an added benefit. Such systems can be used on Laptops, PC’s and mobile devices, so these can be an ideal way for remotely situated members to engage in discussion.

***Conference calls and internet communication could be considered as a way of reducing the costs of small service meetings.***

### **3:5 Electronic Communications Liaison Officer (ECLO)**

The principal role of the ECLO is one of liaison, communication and co-ordination between groups, intergroup, region, and the Public Information and Electronic Communication Sub Committee (PI & EComms SC) and to facilitate the correlation and dissemination of relevant information between these principal service areas. Therefore, a good understanding of the Traditions and the Service and Structure Handbooks is more important to the role than technical knowledge. A minimum of three years’ sobriety is recommended, as is a general competence with using computers and other digital technology.

If desired, a committee of technically skilled members could be formed to assist the ECLO in setting up, maintaining and updating the digital technology used by intergroup or region, with the ECLO acting as chair of this committee. Such a committee would provide an opportunity for less experienced but technically skilled members to engage in service.

The ECLO:

- is the liaison point between the local Fellowship and the PI & EComms SC, advising the intergroup/region on the availability and use of the facilities available on the AAGB website and other information technology resources
- is responsible for checking the accuracy of any local information posted on the AA GB website (i.e., meeting list addresses and postcodes, local web page content etc.) to ensure that out of date or misleading local information is not published

### **3:6 The AA GB website**

The national AAGB website is located at [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk) and is a multifunction site with dedicated areas allocated to fulfilling our primary purpose and to providing services to the Fellowship.

The website is administered on behalf of the Fellowship by the General Service Board (GSB) via the PI & EComms SC and by the General Service Office (GSO) of Great Britain.

In addition to the PI & EComms SC and GSO staff, website services are supported by third party suppliers for server hosting, managed IT services, security and technical support which may be outsourced by the GSB.

In accordance with Conference 2013 decision, the AAGB website allows the following external links:

- the websites of other national AA GSOs
- mapping software, to aid searches for meetings
- language translation software, to aid people for whom English is not their first language
- secure payment services to allow members to use the online shop

Further, a Conference 2019 decision allows the PI & EComms SC to seek approval from the GSB for appropriate external links, provided a clear disclaimer is displayed, warning that the user is leaving the AA website.

### **3:7 Local websites**

The national AAGB website provides microsite functionality for intergroups/regions so that local service information can be published and updated. This facility is free of charge to the user. Each microsite should be maintained in accordance with our Traditions and the guidance given in our Structure and Service Handbooks. Access to the Content Management System is provided via a secure microsite manager user account, and it allows easy creation and editing of microsite web pages.

The availability of intergroup and regional microsites removes the need to maintain and pay for externally hosted websites outside of the national AAGB website. It is strongly

recommended that any intergroup or region with an external website take advantage of the AAGB website hosting facilities for local information, saving AA money as well as having a centrally maintained meeting finder database, promoting Unity.

The content of local websites should be kept updated regularly by those responsible, generally the intergroup or regional ECLO.

If any personal data is published on a microsite, due care must be taken to comply with all relevant data protection legislation and guidance.

### **3:8 Online Responder Service and Chat Now Service**

AAGB provides two online response helpdesks where members of the public can make enquiries about AA and AA meetings.

**Online Response Service (ORS)** – where emails are sent to help@aamail.org.  
**Chat Now Service (CNS)** – certain pages of our website allow a visitor to open a keyboard chat.

These services are administered by the First Response Online Sub Committee (FROSC).

The aim of these helpdesks is to encourage an individual to call the national helpline number and to attend local meetings.

The helpdesk enquiries are answered by teams of online responders. Qualifications for this are:

- two years' continuous sobriety
- experience of service within AA
- a thorough understanding of the programme of AA and a good understanding of the Traditions
- computer literacy
- ORS requires experience and familiarity with sending email across the Internet
- CNS requires the ability to answer queries quickly and succinctly

When applying to be a responder, applicants will also need to agree to a basic Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Full training is provided to those new to ORS or CNS, before they are expected to act as responders.

The FROSC reviews the activities of the ORS and CNS taking care to ensure that the services are sufficiently resourced, have appropriate leadership in the form of Administrators and have succession plans in place for when the Administrators rotate out. Administrators hold positions on the FROSC, and they may also appoint assistants to help with training and other administrative functions.

### **3:9 Important points to remember**

Although there can be many advantages to using information technology, we must always remember that there can also be disadvantages. Care must be taken to ensure that no member is disenfranchised through lack of digital technology or internet connection.

When using email in PI work, remember that your email may be the first contact the recipient has ever had with the Fellowship – and first impressions matter. Use an AA service email address to send to recipients outside the Fellowship.

Remember the recipient of your email cannot see your smile, or hear the tone of voice you use, so it is easy to give offence where none was intended. Be aware, also, that your email could be passed along to other recipients, unknown to you.

Courtesy and politeness in written communications is always essential, and we need always be mindful of our Traditions and general code of conduct.

A document called 'AA Style and Tone of voice guide' is available from the Document Library on the AAGB website. It contains useful information to assist drafting electronic communications in a consistent and accessible way.

The email accounts supplied by AAGB are protected by individual passwords. Only those users who are authorised should be able to access them.

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship. A 'Hints and Suggestions on Internet Safety' card is available from GSO with suggestions on how to preserve Tradition 11 when using the Internet and social media.

A File Storage platform is available for service work, and is separate to the AAGB website. It is similarly protected by individual user accounts and passwords. Note that using the File Storage area cannot guarantee the security of service documents - whilst every effort is made to maintain stability, it should be used as a working storage repository rather than a long-term archive.

Be aware that anything posted on the AAGB website is accessible to all.

### **3:10. Summary**

Electronic communications are evolving swiftly. New features and services, which are not available at the time of writing this guidance, will appear. There will be greater advantages to be gained – and greater pitfalls to avoid. We are responsible – not only for making the best use of the service and facilities available – but also of ensuring that it is used with integrity and in accordance with our Traditions. If we do this, we will not go far wrong.

(Revised 2024)