

# SELF-SUPPORT: WHERE MONEY AND SPIRITUALITY MIX

This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.



service

*ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS*<sup>®</sup> is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism.

- The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership; we are self-supporting through our own contributions.
- A.A. is not allied with any sect, denomination, politics, organization or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes.
- Our primary purpose is to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.

*Copyright © by A.A. Grapevine, Inc.;  
reprinted with permissions*

Copyright © 1995  
Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.  
475 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10115

*Mail address:* Box 459, Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163

[www.a.a.org](http://www.a.a.org)

## **Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix**

*The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their own members.*

*We think that each group should soon achieve this ideal; that any public solicitation of funds using the name of Alcoholics Anonymous is highly dangerous, whether by groups, clubs, hospitals, or other outside agencies; that acceptance of large gifts from any source, or of contributions carrying any obligation whatever, is unwise.*

*Then, too, we view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.*

—Tradition Seven (long form)

## **Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix**

*“The first time I had to talk about finances at a district meeting when I was my area’s treasurer, a fellow in the back of the room yelled out: ‘Why in the world are you always talking about money when this is a spiritual program?’ The guy threw me and I didn’t know how to answer him.”*

From its earliest beginnings, A.A. has always incurred expenses — whether it be the cost of a pot of coffee or the price of a place to meet. In the early days, these costs were often absorbed by individual A.A.s or nonalcoholic friends who offered their parlors and livingrooms for A.A.s to meet in. However, as A.A. outgrew the generosity of these early friends and members, the Fellowship’s need for income became more and more apparent.

Bill W., A.A.’s co-founder, and some of the early A.A. members initially felt the only way for the Fellowship to survive was to solicit financial support from philanthropic institutions or individuals outside A.A. These “high rollers” could then supply the funds the Fellowship would need to carry out the vital Twelfth Step work the early A.A.s envisioned — to bankroll the army of paid missionaries, the chain of A.A. hospitals, and the library of books they were certain to write.

One potential A.A. patron, however, when approached by the pioneering members for money, instead helped to lay the groundwork for A.A.’s Tradition of self-support: “I am afraid that money will spoil this thing,” said John D. Rockefeller Jr., while at the same time endorsing the work of the fledgling Fellowship.

This marked a turning point in A.A. history and, as the reality of Mr. Rockefeller’s statement sank

in and A.A. members began to see the truth in the old cliché, “Who pays the piper calls the tune,” the seed of the Seventh Tradition took root.

### ***“We cannot skimp”***

With the realization that A.A. must steer clear of outside contributions in order to maintain its autonomy and independence came the understanding that the money necessary for A.A.’s survival would have to come from individual A.A. members and groups. As Bill W. put it in 1957, “Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a Society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility — one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and A.A. as a whole will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid.

“When we meet and defeat the temptation to take large gifts, we are only being prudent. But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 221)

## **Where Money and Spirituality Mix**

*“Self-support begins with me, because I am part of us — the group. We pay our rent and utility bills, buy coffee, snacks and A.A. literature. We support our central office, our area committee, and our General Service Office. If it were not for those entities, many new people would never discover the miracles of A.A.”*

Twelfth Step work is the lifeblood of Alcoholics Anonymous — carrying the message to the next suffering alcoholic. Without it, the Fellowship would wither and die. Yet, even at its simplest level this vital contact between one alcoholic and another involves an investment of time and money.



“Let’s begin with my own sponsor, Ebby,” writes Bill W., in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age*. “When Ebby heard how serious my drinking was, he resolved to visit me. He was in New York; I was in Brooklyn. His resolve was not enough; he had to take action and he had to spend money.

“He called me on the phone and then got into the subway; total cost, ten cents. At the level of the telephone booth and subway turnstile, spirituality and money began to mix. One without the other would have amounted to nothing at all.

“Right then and there, Ebby established the principle that A.A. in action calls for the sacrifice of much time and a little money.”

### ***Footing the bill***

“Now, where do A.A.’s services — worldwide, area, local — fit into our scheme of things?” asked Bill W. in an October 1967 article in the A.A. Grapevine. “Why should we provide these functions with money?”

According to Bill, “The answer is simple enough. Every single A.A. service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible, whether it be a group meeting place, a central or intergroup office . . . or the world service Headquarters . . . .

“Though not costly, these service agencies are absolutely essential to our continued expansion — to our survival as a Fellowship. Their costs are a collective obligation that rests squarely upon all

of us. Our support of services actually amounts to a recognition on our part that A.A. must everywhere function in full strength — and that, under our Tradition of self-support, *we are all going to foot the bill.*”

### ***How can groups participate?***

To help support A.A.’s essential services, the General Service Conference suggests that individual groups, through an informed group conscience, adopt a specific contribution plan tailored to meet the group’s financial situation.

Once the basic group expenses have been taken care of, for example: (rent, refreshments, A.A. literature, Grapevine literature, local meeting lists, G.S.R. travel expenses to attend service functions), and a “prudent reserve” has been set aside to cover any emergency contingencies that might arise, the group may decide to further carry the message by sending money to the following A.A. service entities.

- **The local district**, which communicates directly with the groups, providing the district group conscience for the area assemblies, and serving as a link between the area delegates and the G.S.R.s.
- **The area committee**, which coordinates vital A.A. activities over a broad geographic area; sends a delegate to the annual General Service Conference; holds area assemblies to determine the needs of the Fellowship; and provides information at all levels of service.
- **The local intergroup or central office**, which may provide phone service for Twelfth Step calls and other inquiries; coordination of group activities; A.A. literature sales; institutions work; public information and cooperation with the professional community activities.
- **A.A.’s General Service Office**, which functions as a storehouse of A.A. information, communicating with members and groups around the world; publishes A.A.’s literature; and supplies information and experience to professionals and others interested in A.A.

## Whose Job Is It?

*“The paradox of A.A. is that financial independence and the support of our Fellowship by alcoholics and alcoholics alone not only enhances A.A.’s importance to each of us, but stimulates our engagement in our own recovery . . . A.A. is ‘our thing,’ from our group’s treasury to the balance sheets at the General Service Office.”*

Money has never been a requirement for A.A. membership, and to keep it that way all of A.A.’s trusted servants have an ongoing obligation to inform groups and individuals about the value of self-support and the need for voluntary contributions throughout the Fellowship.

Many groups in reaching an informed group conscience look to their general service representatives (G.S.R.s) for specific information about A.A. finances, or to their intergroup representatives or group treasurer. Many find that participation in local, area, and regional A.A. service events provides a good source of information about A.A.’s financial needs. And at the General Service Office, A.A.’s financial affairs are an open book, with financial summaries published quarterly and a full accounting printed each year in the *Final Conference Report*.

## The Bottom Line

*“Now that we are sober in A.A., the word ‘support’ has to do with sharing, people, self-respect, gratitude, and what we are privileged to give — not take — in material terms.”*

While the Fellowship has always faced problems of money, property, and prestige in one form or another, through the wisdom of the Seventh Tradition we have never been diverted from our primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers — wherever he or she may be. This is the fundamental work of Alcoholics Anonymous, and to ensure that the hand of A.A. will always remain outstretched, money and spirituality must continue to mix. And for that, we are all responsible.



## **Some Questions and Answers About A.A.'s Finances**

### **Q What is a “prudent reserve”?**

**A** Any suggested prudent reserve for a group should be dependent on local needs. A suggested prudent reserve for central offices, intergroups, and area committees could be one to twelve months' operating expenses, depending on local needs.

### **Q Does the General Service Office have a “prudent reserve”?**

**A** In 1954 A.A.'s Board of Trustees established a reserve fund whose principal purpose is to provide the financial resources necessary to continue the essential services of G.S.O. and the Grapevine for up to a year in the event of an unexpected and substantial reduction in the normal revenues of the organization.

### **Q Is there a limit on how much an individual can contribute to G.S.O.?**

**A** Yes. That limit is \$3,000 a year.

### **Q Can people leave money to A.A. in their wills?**

**A** Bequests in wills are acceptable only from A.A. members on a one-time basis, and not in perpetuity. The limit is \$5,000.

### **Q Can a group have too much money?**

**A** As stated in the long form of Tradition Seven, “We view with much concern those A.A. treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves, to accumulate funds for no stated A.A. purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money, and authority.”

### **Q Who manages G.S.O.'s share of your group contributions?**

**A** The General Service Board's Finance Committee meets quarterly to review and approve G.S.O.'s budget and the audited financial accounts.

The A.A. World Services Board meets monthly and maintains direct control of income and expenditures.

The annual General Service Conference reviews A.A.'s finances through its own Finance Committee.

A.A.'s financial affairs are an "open" book. A summary is published in each *Quarterly Report* and a full accounting is in the *Final Conference Report*. The account books themselves are available at the General Service Office for scrutiny at any time.

**Q Who manages the other portions of your group contributions?**

**A** Intergroup or central office funds are generally administered by steering committees composed of representatives of the groups they serve.

Areas and districts generally have volunteer treasurers who administer funds contributed by groups.

**Q How can an individual member contribute to G.S.O.?**

**A** On your A.A. birthday: Contribute \$1.00 for each year of sobriety — or as much as you wish to give (up to \$3,000). You may request that your group be credited.

**Q Are there other kinds of contributions?**

**A** *Special contributions*: funds realized from conventions, conferences, dinners, area get-togethers, etc. (no limitations on these contributions.)



**Q Do all groups contribute to A.A.'s service entities?**

**A** No. Contributions are strictly voluntary and some groups simply cannot afford additional contributions after covering their basic needs. Additionally, there are groups who, for whatever reasons, choose not to be a part of the self-support network. These groups, nevertheless, will receive basic services from the district, area, and inter-group if they wish, and are welcome to register with G.S.O., where they will receive the same basic services as other groups. In 2010 and 2011, the percentage of all registered groups who contributed to G.S.O. was 43.9% and 42.4%, respectively.

**Q What do contributions to G.S.O. cover?**

**A** The 2011 service dollar was spent on the following activities: Group Services 33.1% (which includes various group contact-type costs in addition to *Box 4-5-9*; A.A. Directories; records and files; contributions processing; and French services); the General Service Conference, 15.3%; Loners, Internationalists, and Overseas Services, 8.7%; trustees' and directors' activities, 5.8%; Regional Forums, 6.6%; Archives, 9.0%; C.P.C., 5.5%; Public Information, 5.1%; Correctional Facilities, 4.0%; Treatment Facilities, 2.4%; Special Needs; 2.0%, Nominating, 1.9%; and others, 0.6%.

**Q How much does it cost, per group, for G.S.O. to supply basic services?**

**A** At the end of 2011, the annual cost of services per group was \$137.00, while the average contribution per group was \$97.00. The shortfall between these two figures is made up from income from A.A. publications.

**Q My group doesn't have a lot of money. Is it better not to send anything at all until we can afford to make a sizeable contribution?**

**A** In the spirit of participation, no contribution toward carrying the message can be too small. Bill W. spoke about our "collective obligation" to support A.A. services, and if everyone waited until they had a "sizeable" amount, it's more than likely that A.A.'s bills would go unpaid.

**Q Does G.S.O. have any specific information for our group or group treasurer about how to handle our group's finances?**

**A** Yes. There are two excellent publications available from G.S.O., A.A. Guidelines on Finance and the pamphlet "The A.A. Group Treasurer," that provide specific information to groups regarding practical matters related to their group finances, such as setting up bank accounts, obtaining tax ID numbers, and outlining the responsibilities of a group treasurer.

**Q Doesn't all A.A. money go into one pot? In other words, when our group contributes to central office (intergroup), isn't our money distributed to the area, district and G.S.O., as well?**

**A** No. Each A.A. entity — group, district, area, central office and G.S.O. — provides a specific service and is autonomous. Each is separate from the other.

**Q Can our group make financial contributions to A.A. Grapevine.**

**A** No. A.A. Grapevine Inc. is not set up to take contributions from groups or individuals. Groups and individual members support the Grapevine by purchasing Grapevine and La Viña magazine subscriptions and other Grapevine publications and using them in their Twelfth Step work.

**Q After group expenses for rent, prudent reserve, etc.; what is your informed group conscience for distribution of excess funds?**

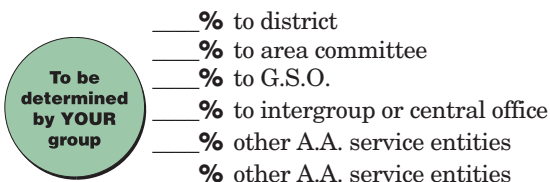
**A** Sample distribution plans follow:

## Samples of Group Contributions to A.A. Service Entities

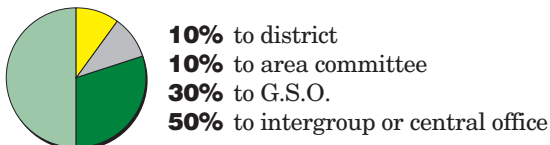
Distribution Plan of \_\_\_\_\_  
(YOUR GROUP NAME)

Your Group Service # \_\_\_\_\_

(Be sure to write group name and service # on all contributions.)

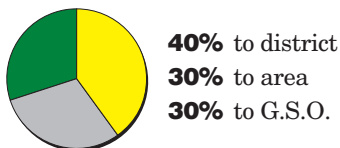


OR



OR

If you have no intergroup/central office.



### Q Where should I send contributions?

A For contributions to G.S.O., make checks payable to "General Service Board" and send to:

General Service Office  
P.O. Box 459  
Grand Central Station  
New York, NY 10163

or visit Contributions on line at [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

For contributions to other A.A. service entities, contact your district committee, area committee, and local intergroup/central office for addresses. You can enter the addresses in the spaces provided on the next page to save for easy reference. And remember that these addresses may change when a treasurer rotates.

**DISTRICT**

---

---

---

**AREA**

---

---

---

**INTERGROUP**

---

---

---

**OTHER**

---

---

---

**OTHER**

---

---

---

**A.A. PUBLICATIONS** Complete order forms available from  
General Service Office of ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS,  
Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

## **BOOKS**

---

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS (*regular, portable, large-print and abridged  
pocket editions*)

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS COMES OF AGE

TWELVE STEPS AND TWELVE TRADITIONS

(*regular, soft-cover, large-print, pocket and gift editions*)

EXPERIENCE, STRENGTH AND HOPE

AS BILL SEES IT (*regular & soft cover editions*)

DR. BOB AND THE GOOD OLDTIMERS

"PASS IT ON"

DAILY REFLECTIONS

## **BOOKLETS**

---

CAME TO BELIEVE

LIVING SOBER

A.A. IN PRISON: INMATE TO INMATE

## **PAMPHLETS**

---

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT A.A.

A.A. TRADITION—HOW IT DEVELOPED

MEMBERS OF THE CLERGY ASK ABOUT A.A.

THREE TALKS TO MEDICAL SOCIETIES BY BILL W.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS AS A RESOURCE FOR

THE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL

A.A. IN YOUR COMMUNITY

IS A.A. FOR YOU?

IS A.A. FOR ME?

THIS IS A.A.

IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN THE WORKPLACE?

DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DIFFERENT?

A.A. FOR THE BLACK AND AFRICAN AMERICAN ALCOHOLIC

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON SPONSORSHIP

A.A. FOR THE WOMAN

A.A. FOR THE NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN

A.A. AND THE GAY/LESBIAN ALCOHOLIC

A.A. FOR THE OLDER ALCOHOLIC—NEVER TOO LATE

THE JACK ALEXANDER ARTICLE

YOUNG PEOPLE AND A.A.

A.A. AND THE ARMED SERVICES

THE A.A. MEMBER—MEDICATIONS AND OTHER DRUGS

IS THERE AN ALCOHOLIC IN YOUR LIFE?

INSIDE A.A.

THE A.A. GROUP

G.S.R.

MEMO TO AN INMATE

THE TWELVE CONCEPTS ILLUSTRATED

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS ILLUSTRATED

LET'S BE FRIENDLY WITH OUR FRIENDS

HOW A.A. MEMBERS COOPERATE

A.A. IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES

A MESSAGE TO CORRECTIONS PROFESSIONALS

A.A. IN TREATMENT SETTINGS

BRIDGING THE GAP

IF YOU ARE A PROFESSIONAL

A.A. MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

A MEMBER'S-EYE VIEW OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

PROBLEMS OTHER THAN ALCOHOL

UNDERSTANDING ANONYMITY

THE CO-FOUNDERS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

SPEAKING AT NON-A.A. MEETINGS

A BRIEF GUIDE TO A.A.

A NEWCOMER ASKS

WHAT HAPPENED TO JOE; IT HAPPENED TO ALICE

(*Two full-color, comic-book style pamphlets*)

TOO YOUNG? (A cartoon pamphlet for teenagers)

IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL

(*An illustrated pamphlet for inmates*)

## **VIDEOS**

---

A.A.—AN INSIDE VIEW

A.A. VIDEOS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

HOPE: ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

IT SURE BEATS SITTING IN A CELL

CARRYING THE MESSAGE BEHIND THESE WALLS

YOUR A.A. GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE,

THE GRAPEVINE AND THE GENERAL SERVICE STRUCTURE

## **PERIODICALS**

---

A.A. GRAPEVINE (monthly)

LA VIÑA (bimonthly)

## A Declaration of Unity

This we owe to A.A.'s future:  
To place our common welfare first;  
To keep our fellowship united.  
For on A.A. unity depend our lives,  
And the lives of those to come.

## I am responsible...

When anyone, anywhere,  
reaches out for help, I want  
the hand of A.A. always to be there.  
And for that: I am responsible.