

The Delegate

A delegate represents the groups in his or her area or district. Since it is the Group that is considered to hold final responsibility and the ultimate authority for AA as a whole, it follows that those that represent the groups carry a huge responsibility, for they are entrusted with the future well being and the very survival of our fellowship.

The delegate has a demanding job, not only because large amounts of time and work are involved, but also that is the delegate's responsibility, to serve the South African Conference as a whole. As voting members of the Conference, delegates bring to its deliberations the experiences and viewpoints of their own areas. Yet they are not representatives of their areas in the usual political sense; after hearing all points of view and becoming fully informed during Conference discussion, they vote in the best interests of A.A. as a whole.

Duties

Though the high point is the Conference meeting, the delegate's job goes on year-round and involves all aspects of the Conference structure. The delegate should:

- Attend the annual Conference meeting fully prepared. Immediately upon election, every delegate is put on the G.S.O. mailing list to receive Conference materials.
- Communicate the actions of the Conference to area committee members and encourage them to pass on both the information, and the delegate's enthusiasm. As well as the area/district committees the delegate should pass the Conference message on to all the groups he or she represents. If an area is too large for the delegate to cover in person, he or she will ask area officers and committee members to share the load.
- Be prepared to attend all area and regional service meetings and assemblies applicable to his/her respective area. From these meetings, delegates come to better understand their own areas and can make suggestions for the Conference agenda. Here too, they come in contact with A.A. members who might not be reached otherwise.
- Help area committees obtain financial support for the area and G.S.O.
- Provide leadership in solving local problems involving the A.A. Traditions.
- Remind G.S.R.s to inform groups and individuals about the Regmaker, the "AA in SA" newsletter, the Alco Solo and Conference-approved literature.
- Promote awareness of Regmaker and source articles. All Delegates receive a free subscription in order to equip them to act as champions for the Regmaker.
- Cooperate with G.S.O. in obtaining information — for example, making sure that up-to-date information reaches G.S.O. so that our web-site and national directory are as accurate and relevant as possible.

- Respond to all correspondence, questionnaires or requests timeously, even if there is nothing to report.
- Visit groups in the area/district whenever possible.
- Work closely with committee members and officers, sharing experience throughout the year. After reporting to groups ask the G.S.R.s or AA s how members have reacted. Learn from these reports.
- Assume added responsibility if the area chair and alternate chair are unable to serve. Or, if an area committee is not functioning effectively, the delegate may take an active role in remedying the situation.
- Keep the alternate delegate fully informed and active, so that the alternate can replace the delegate in at any time
- Late in the third term, work with newly elected delegates to pass along a basic knowledge of Conference proceedings and problems.
- Whenever possible, back up any guidance given with conference approved literature and recommend appropriate literature which could be helpful on the matter concerned. We need to spread the AA message, not our own opinions.

Term of Office

A delegate serves one term of three years, and the Conference strongly recommends that a delegate serve only one term — with the exception of an alternate delegate who, after attending one Conference in place of the delegate, may be elected to serve a full term. This ensures that at any Conference, there is a core of experienced delegates along with first and second year delegates.

The delegate term commences in the September month and ends on 31 August three years hence; it is mandatory that the incumbent sponsor the new delegate into the duties and requirements of the position.

Expenses

A delegate's expenses to the Conference are covered in this way:

The total cost of the conference, including, but not limited to, all flights, transportation, accommodation, meals, venue, printing etc, are divided up and split equally between all attendees. Areas/districts are responsible for paying their respective delegate/s costs GSO picks up the tab for the balance of the expenses for the resources.

In this way all areas/districts pay exactly the same for representation at the Conference, regardless of the distance and cost of travel.

No recompense is made to any member for any of the many incidental expenses the delegate will have during Conference weekend.

Some areas/districts may provide funds to cover travel and incidental expenses the delegate incurs in reporting back to groups within the area/district. This is decided on, and dependent on, area/district finances and Group Consciences; it is not a Conference decision.

Qualifications

Like other A.A. members, delegates come in all shapes and sizes. But some characteristics seem to make for well-qualified delegates. For example:

- Several years of active participation in local and area affairs, as a G.S.R. and as a committee member.
- Time available, not only for the Conference weekend meeting in May, but for all the efforts needed before and after the Conference.
- Five or six years of continuous sobriety. The sobriety requirement varies from area to area; in any case, a delegate should have been sober long enough to be responsible and informed.
- The ability to make and take suggestions — and criticisms, too.
- Experience in chairing meetings.
- Knowledge of A.A. affairs, and of where to find the correct information when they do not know the answers.
- Thorough familiarity with the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts and how they apply to local problems.
- The ability to be open-minded, to sit down with A.A.s in the area and with other delegates to discuss and act on matters vital to A.A.
- A knowledge and working experience of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, this so he or she ***“may practice these principles in all our affairs”***

If you are thinking about standing for a term as delegate, ask yourself these questions:

- How well did you do: As G.S.R.? As a committee member? Did you enjoy the responsibilities? Were you active?
- Have you discussed the possibility with your family and your employer? Will the time be available for the amount of work required?
- Are you familiar with the South African Service Manual? With *A.A. Comes of Age*? And of course, with the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts?
- Have you talked with past delegates to get an idea of the time and effort required and the sort of work you will need to do?
- Have you worked the 12 steps in your own life, and do you accept the program of Alcoholics Anonymous as contained in the book ***“Alcoholics Anonymous”***

The Alternate

The Conference recommends that all areas/districts elect alternate delegates. The alternate serves as a valuable assistant, often travelling with the delegate or giving reports for him or her. In some areas/districts, the alternate serves some special function of the committee. The area/district committee treasuries will need to support the alternate's expenses separately from the delegate's. An alternate who replaces the delegate at the annual Conference meeting will remain on the G.S.O. mailing list as the delegate until G.S.O. is informed otherwise by the area/district committee.

Preparing for the Conference

Although you may have been involved in A.A. service for some time, don't take your knowledge for granted. Do some reviewing as quickly as possible.

- Read and reread the South African A.A. Service Manual, *A.A. Comes of Age*, and *Twelve Concepts for World Service*.
- Get copies of the full Conference Reports for the past two or three years for further study.
- Seek out some past delegates to share their experience.
- "Start a Conference file, because you'll get lots of letters from the Conference coordinator at G.S.O. Read them thoroughly.
- Make notes on what you're asked to do; do it. You may receive questionnaires; expedite replies.
- Respond timeously to all correspondence.
- G.S.O. may request material from you; expedite this, too. Promptness is necessary so that, by the time the Conference opens, your material will have been compiled for use in a report, a panel discussion, a workshop, a floor discussion, or a committee agenda item.
- "Early on, you'll receive two important communications. One will ask your area treasurer to pay for your area's share of expenses. Be sure this deadline is met.
- Another will seek information on your travel requirements, your accommodation preferences and any meal/food restrictions or specifications. Be sure this is supplied at once. The conference co-ordinator needs time to make the necessary arrangements.
- Finally, don't plan any social or business appointments during the Conference weekend. The Conference schedule runs from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., or even later at times. There will be no time for anything else.

Remember, even if you're the new kid on the block, you're just as important to the Conference proceedings as anyone else. Your voice expresses your informed area conscience. Your thoughts and your questions must be shared — loud and clear — for the benefit of all."

In a joint decision with full participation by all, Conference 2014 revoked the voting ratio of 2:1 (delegate body vs. the Board/GSO); all participants now have equal voting rights, one vote per attendee.

Reporting on the Conference

Reporting to groups, districts, and the area back home is a big part of the delegate's job, and one that can prove challenging. One past delegate says: "On my return from the Conference, I travelled some 2,000 kilos in the first six weeks visiting groups. If I was not asked to speak at group meetings, I asked them to let me speak. I made a point of never talking too long, I talked of service and unity and G.S.O.

and area assembly. After my report I would - if time and circumstance allowed it - follow up with a short AA talk”

That same delegate reports the results: more new groups, a revival of interest in service and a stronger service structure, “We have grown” he says “and if I were asked to pick out the one part of our activities that contributed most, it would be improved communications.”

“My report on the Conference consisted of a description of what I saw and heard and felt at Conference (I also made copies of my report available.) He goes on to say:
“I try to follow up with a bulletin every month, on one or more subjects. My Conference report gives me all the material I need.”

Further Suggestions:

- Make an announcement of your intention to visit groups a month before you give your report;
- Set up dates with G.S.R.s Ask to be invited — or invite yourself. Get in somehow! A lot of time effort and money goes into Conference: make sure your groups are informed.
- Give as much of your time to the small group as to the large one. Don’t pass up the opportunity to share with them all. Let them know about the staff at G.S.O. and the service work that is happening in all areas of South Africa and our neighbours.
- With the support of G.S.R s invite groups to attend special area meetings with programs of questions and answers about services and G.S.O. Include one or more past delegates. Hold meetings often — and at different groups.
- In addition to your report make sure that the official minutes and reports on the Conference are available at Area/District level; tell members this so that should they want full details they can obtain them from their local office.