

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN AA GROUP HISTORY

Compiling and writing your group's history will be an exciting and rewarding experience. By the time you have finished, you will probably know more about the group's past experience and evolution than any other member. You will gain a better understanding of what past members went through to establish and maintain your group, and how the local AA service structure developed. Knowing your group's history will help you better understand how it fits into the total AA experience, and you will see that it is a vital part of the living fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The ideal group history should trace the evolution of your group in story form-- some combination of descriptive information and the group's past experience, strength, hope and tribulations. (See the information form and a list of suggested questions below.) For a group that has been in existence for several years, your history might only be a few paragraphs. A long-established active group's history might be a number of pages long. Don't worry about form. The important thing is to get the information down on paper; you can worry about literary style later when editing.

A good way to start is by talking to the old-timers in your group, who can help compile a list of names of the earliest members. Some key people may no longer attend group meetings or may have moved; track them down if possible. You might want to have a meeting of old timers; they often jog each other's memories when they get to reminisce about the "good old days!" Consider having a joint meeting of old-timers from a number of groups in the District. Be sure to tape such meetings, as it is difficult to keep up with accurate note taking, and send copies of any tapes to your District Archivist.

As you sketch out the group history, you will begin to detect gaps in the story. Talk to the old-timers one-on-one. You will know better what questions to ask at this point, and your increasing awareness will help you guide the conversation to fill in the information you need. You may be surprised at how many events outside of the group itself are vital in explaining its history.

With members' consent, include their full names in the original history so researchers and historians can separate members with similar or the same first name. Also note any nicknames the members used. If copies are distributed for checking, etc., it's wise to replace last names with an initial to preserve anonymity.

When your history is drafted, share it with old timers and other members. Remember that it is their history. They will be helpful in filling in missing information and putting that final touch on the group history. When the history is complete, make copies for your group, email it to your District Archivist (or DCM), and mail the original to the Area Archivist. This last step is very important. We need to have a central location for the histories of all the groups in our area so we will know where to find them. This will be the resource from which the histories can be retrieved in the event the copy at the district level is lost or misplaced-- a not-uncommon experience.

We are particularly interested in some anecdotes and "color". Our history will be far more interesting if it is about people as well as facts. Ask your members to tell about the most unforgettable characters they know in AA. Which members have been the most dedicated and helpful? There must be some wonderful stories in your area. Let's preserve these stories for posterity.

Please email histories to: jdsc9archives@gmail.com
or mail;
JDSC Archives
PO Box 7552
Charlottesville, VA 22906

AND send a copy to:

Virginia Area Archives
1320 Ohio Street, Suite C
Waynesboro, VA 22980

Group Name: _____
Previous Group Name: _____
Date Founded/Registered: _____
Founder/Founders Names: _____

Names of Early Members: _____

Prepared by: _____ Date: _____
Group Number (if known) _____
District Number: Jefferson District 9
Area Number: Virginia Area 71

Suggested Questions - Group Histories

- When and why was the Group first formed; was it a "spin off" from another group?
- Who was instrumental in forming the Group; who were the first officers?
- Where/when did the Group meet? Have locations/meeting times changed? Why? Have meetings been added over time?
- Has the Group kept the original name; if not, why did it change and to what?
- How many members did the Group start with? Do any still attend meetings? How has the composition of the Group evolved?
- What is the average meeting attendance currently? How many home group members?
- What was the original meeting format (discussion, Big Book, Step Meeting, other literature, speaker, preselected topic, etc)? How has that changed?

- Was the Group created to serve a particular population (e.g., newcomers, young people, men/women, gay/lesbian, treatment center patients)? Does it still serve that clientele?
- Has the Group been involved in any special activities as a group? For example, hosting workshops, conventions, outside speakers; carrying the message into hospitals or institutions; organizing social events (holiday celebrations, dances, picnics, potlucks)?
- Does the Group celebrate members' sobriety anniversaries? With chips--poker, brass, aluminum? Does the Group celebrate on the member birthday or at a special monthly meeting? If there is a cake, does the group or the member provide it?
- Does the Group have any particularly close relationship with another group? Have any other groups spun off from this group? Do the members of this Group also attend other groups together?
- Has the Group ever had serious disagreements or other problems? How did it handle them? Does the Group now have any weaknesses; has it ever had any? If the Group is no longer active, when and why did it fold?
- What do you feel makes the Group unique? What are its good qualities? Have there been "unusual" or "unforgettable" characters associated with the Group? Are there other aspects or events in the Group's history which make it particularly interesting? Does the Group have any new plans for the future?