

**Area Meeting List Publishing Policy
Development Resources
(Materials to support Areas
develop a fair and balanced policy)**

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Overview and Table of Contents

At the July 2018 meeting of the Board of Trustees, a motion was made, seconded and carried that the Board of Trustees direct the World Service Office (WSO) Staff to utilize the Policy Committee criteria presented at the 2012 World Service Conference (WSC) to ensure that if an Area establishes “Meeting List Publishing” policy, it is fair and balanced. These criteria allow the WSO to support Area “Do Not Publish” group conscience decisions and remove group meetings from the WSO meeting list. Groups not being published by the WSO remain active and registered.

The material in this document is compiled from Policy Committee discussions at the 2011 and 2012 WSCs on the topic of “Do Not Refer” and the presentation by the Policy Committee Thought Force on “Do Not Refer” at the 2012 WSC. The material is designed to support Areas in establishing a fair and balanced Meeting List Publishing policy founded on the spiritual principles contained in Al-Anon’s three Legacies. Fair and balanced policies, including a process for groups to apply to have their meetings published again, enable the WSO to support Area decisions to remove group meetings from display on local printed meeting lists and in meeting search results, whether online or via phone, while maintaining the status of the group as active and registered. WSO support involves removing Area “Do Not Publish” meetings from display in the al-anon.org meeting search results and from the resources used by the 1-888-4AL-ANON phone operators.

Areas that have developed a Meeting List Publishing policy may submit it through their Delegate to the Executive Director, who will coordinate the review.

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Policy Committee's Thought Force on "Do Not Refer" Presented to the 2012 World Service Conference

Charge:

Develop a list of principles that Areas can use when determining that a group is not adhering to the Twelve Traditions, principles the groups can use to remediate their lack of adherence, and principles the Area can utilize to support groups to successfully adhere to the Twelve Traditions.

What are the principles that Areas can use to discuss and develop policies and criteria for groups that are not adhering to the Twelve Traditions?

➤ The well-being of the group must come first.

- **Tradition One** - *Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.*

The focus of the discussion should be on the "common welfare," or on how all parties involved—groups, Areas and Al-Anon as a whole—are best served. Our links of service between Areas and groups can help ensure all "stakeholder" voices are heard.

➤ Every group should reflect Al-Anon's Traditions and policies.

- **Tradition Four** - *Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or Al-Anon or AA as a whole.*

Each Al-Anon group has its own personality. The combined recovery and personalities of its individual members make an Al-Anon group a dynamic entity that welcomes newcomers and practices the Al-Anon principles. Each group has the autonomy (within Al-Anon guidelines and principles) to decide what works best for it. It is important that every group reflects the Al-Anon Traditions and policies; if a group is not doing so, then it is presenting something other than Al-Anon to the newcomer.

➤ It is important to talk to each other and reason things out.

- **Concept Five** - *The rights of appeal and petition protect minorities and insure that they be heard.*

Has there been a minority appeal? What is the minority position? "The well-heard minority, therefore, is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty, or angry majority." (2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, p. 186) "We believe the spirit of democracy in our fellowship and in our world service structure will survive despite any countertendencies that may beset us." (2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, p. 189) Have the group members talked to each other? Have they reasoned things out?

➤ It is best to presume goodwill: Treat all members with respect.

- **Warranty Four** - *that no Conference action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy*

In our Al-Anon groups, this means that we treat all members with respect; we “presume goodwill.” Any members involved in the process of group review need to be objective; anyone with a conflict of interest regarding a group member should excuse themselves from any review process. We need to be able to trust each other and a loving God, as expressed in the group conscience.

What principles can Areas use in their ongoing discussions that will help them support their groups so that the groups can successfully follow policies and criteria?

➤ Communication and unity are essential.

- **Tradition One** - *Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity.*

The Area should keep communicating with all the groups and have an open dialogue with them about what some groups may need to change in order to be displayed again on the meeting list. The emphasis would be on unity within Al-Anon and our common welfare. The Area could inform groups of the links of service and of how they do not operate in isolation, as they are part of a District, Area and worldwide fellowship.

It is crucial that Areas keep their lines of communication open and provide all mailings that groups receive. They should also be inclusive, involving the groups in Area activities that will help include them and serve as an example to them of how to practice Al-Anon’s principles.

➤ Our Traditions guard against distortion and dilution.

- **Tradition Three** - *The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.*

The Area could encourage mutual aid between all the groups by inviting and encouraging all members to actively participate in all District and Area events. The Area could also put on workshops on the Traditions and Concepts and encourage members of the groups that are not displayed on the meeting lists to be presenters.

➤ **Mutual respect is fundamental. Dominance should be avoided.**

- **Concept Four** - *Participation is the key to harmony.*

All of us deeply desire to belong. Participation helps us fulfill this spiritual need. This is why we work hard to achieve participation at every level of service. The Areas could put on workshops on the Traditions and encourage members from all groups to be presenters. Encouraging groups to participate keeps a link open to the Assembly, the District, and the groups.

➤ **It is important to talk to each other and reason things out; we need balance in our relationships.**

- **Warranty Three** - *that all decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible by unanimity*

It is important that all parties concerned communicate as much as possible in a climate of trust. This way, any actions taken will not be seen as punitive but will be seen as the result of an enlightened group conscience. A decision that is a consensus or that, at least, has substantial unanimity will give legitimacy to the action and can be easily explained. These two characteristics will be especially important when transmitting the decision to others, especially the groups in question, so they may know what the basis of the decision was and how they can remedy the situation.

➤ **We should all trust in our Higher Power. All voices are equal.**

- **Tradition Two** - *For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.*

If Areas determine policies and criteria by following the Traditions and Concepts, they will allow the spiritual principles of our program to shine through. They will be but purveyors of a message from their group conscience and a loving God.

In other words, they, as trusted servants, will ask other trusted servants at the WSO to carry out a group conscience that was lovingly conducted with respect for all concerned.

➤ **We must have mutual trust in one another. The ultimate responsibility rests with the groups.**

- **Concept One** - *The ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon world services belongs to the Al-Anon groups.*

Our entire Al-Anon program rests squarely on the principle of mutual trust: We trust God, we trust Al-Anon and we trust one another.

Our goal is to “support” Areas, not to make decisions related to policies. This responsibility rests in the hands of the Areas and groups themselves.

The WSO can only “support” Areas when the links of service are operating effectively.

Policy Discussion – Do Not Refer (2011 WSC)

Extract from the 2011 World Service Conference Summary

The Policy Committee Chairperson opened the session by stating, “Several Al-Anon districts, Al-Anon Information Services, or Areas have made the decision to discontinue listing a group that has been determined not to reflect Al-Anon principles or procedures. For purposes of this discussion, the term ‘delist’ is defined as ‘remove from a printed or electronic meeting list as published by an Area.’ The delisted group would still actively participate in all links of service, with voice and vote.

“The Policy Committee discussed whether or not the World Service Office (WSO) should get involved in an Area’s dispute with a group, when the Area maintains that the group is acting in violation of Al-Anon’s Traditions. The Policy Committee has discussed the issue, including what the Al-Anon entity has done or might do to eventually relist the group.

“The WSO’s philosophy is to provide meeting information for all ‘active’ status groups in the WSO database to callers on the toll-free meeting line. In 1996, when the WSO moved to Virginia Beach, the toll-free meeting line was for members to call for meeting information when they were travelling, etc. (The meeting information was formerly published in the World Directory that was sent to groups.)

“Districts, Al-Anon Information Services, and Areas provide local meeting information in hard copy formats and on their Web sites. The WSO Public Outreach Web site provides a link to Area Web sites, most of which contain local meeting information. Persons using the WSO Web site would be referred to the meetings listed on those Area sites.

“The topic of removing a meeting from a list (and eventually reinstating it) has been referred to the Conference for discussion, in order that we can all gain a better understanding of what Areas have done and what the philosophy behind such decisions might be.”

Conference members focused on three sets of questions.

If your Area has a delisting criteria and procedure, please share that with us. Specifically, what principles were discussed when making the decision to delist? Who makes the decision not to list or refer members to a group? How does your Area feel about this decision/process? For everyone present, please share your feelings about deciding not to refer to a group?

Comments:

- District Representatives visited the groups and discussed the Traditions. Groups that changed their name and/or agreed to abide by the Traditions were reinstated.
- My Area has a couple of very strong high-pressure groups, four of which were delisted by the Intergroup. These groups control everything in your life. The groups were given a list of violations and a list of things to do to correct the violations. It is unfortunate that there is no policy in our Area. Rather than address the list of violations, the groups filed an appeal.

- A group is using adult children literature. The District Representative (DR) requested to delist the group, but instead the Area sent the DR to talk with the group and offer an option of being an adult child group outside of Al-Anon or an Al-Anon group. The group held a group conscience and decided to comply and remain an Al-Anon group. While traveling once, I called the WSO's toll-free number and went to a meeting where the only literature used was the A.A. "Big Book."
- Our Officers and Coordinators are trying to come up with a process so that the Assembly can vote on this.
- We have no official procedure, but a District Representative brought this concern to the Area World Service Committee. It was suggested that the DR go back to the group. The group did not comply; the Area decided to delist the group.
- The district is informed of the problem and the District Representative visits the group three times, attempting to educate and talk with members, and encourage the members to have a group conscience. After three visits, the group is told that if they do not comply, they will be delisted.
- Our current panel went to the high-pressure meetings and became "regulars." After three months, we began to talk and encourage them to reconsider. We have drafted criteria created by the Group Records Coordinator and we sent these to the groups. We have invited these members to the district meetings to have a direct conversation with them.
- We found that reaching out to the group and bringing the members back to the Traditions works. We need the support at the WSO to deal with the problem.
- One individual who made up the actual meeting directory on her own refused to list a particular meeting based on her own opinion. I find it very scary and do not feel we can survive governing our groups.
- We are moving toward electronic group registration and we ask District Representatives to contact groups that are inactive to see if they are still active. One member in another group took it upon herself to delist a meeting and process it through the WSO.

If your Area has criteria and procedures for relisting a group that has been delisted, please share that. How are the principles applied? Who makes the decision? Have you worked through this process? What was the result? What are your Area's thoughts about this decision/process? Then everyone, please share your thoughts about a process to relist a group that has been delisted.

Comments:

- We keep the channel of communication open with the Group Representative. The Group Records Secretary (Coordinator) is the link to that group. In order to be re-listed, the Officers and Coordinators write a letter listing the changes needed and ask the group if they are willing to change. The Group Records Secretary visits the group to observe and check to see if the

group is in compliance with the Traditions. In order to get the meeting re-listed, there is a process of visiting the meeting and keeping in contact with the Group Records Secretary.

- There is a concern surrounding an AI-Anon group that has decided to rewrite the preamble and Steps. A District Representative visited and spoke to the group, but then she resigned. Several Area Officers spoke with the Group Representative, but there have been no changes. There seems to be a lot of fear involved in taking the group off the list. We need to establish guidelines at the Area and have WSO as a backup.
- The fulltime person who works in the (AIS) office probably uses her discretion in referring a member or newcomers to meetings. We do tell newcomers to try six to 12 different meetings. I have a concern about the AI-Anon police image that may be created by such a process.
- I changed home groups due to my schedule. When deciding on a new group, I looked at what group really needed help. I began to attend that group regularly. "Let It Begin with Me."
- Sometimes Past Delegates think they can "fix it," but they are really the "big thumb." I would like guidelines, so I don't go from one end of the spectrum to the other. I am looking for balance. I believe we should give the group an opportunity to vote, define what they want to be, and move forward.
- When there is a problem in an Alateen meeting, I have a clear set of guidelines to follow. I don't have this when dealing with AI-Anon meetings. I need this so my personality is taken out of it and I can refer to the Service Manual. I need action steps to take when groups are in violation of the Traditions. The Alateen process was hugely painful for our Area, but we passed it unanimously. Are we not just as important? When I came into AI-Anon, I was a walking 13 -year -old in a 30 -something -year -old body. Do we not deserve the same respect?
- We are trying to encourage people who are using the Traditions to stand for service positions.

What, if anything, might the World Service Office do to support Areas in regards to referring members, newcomers, and professionals to groups that an Area has determined do not follow AI-Anon's principles?

Comments:

- I would like it inserted in the "Digest of AI-Anon/Alateen Policies." The WSO sends a letter of welcome to every group. A letter could be composed by WSO stating that a group is not following AI-Anon principles, therefore, the group has been marked as "Do Not Refer."
- We need a Task Force to draw up guidelines.
- I suggest members study Warranty Four under Concept Twelve because there is great information that does empower local entities.
- The sponsorship bookmark worked really well; maybe one could be created for this topic.
- I need clarification. When someone goes on the WSO Web site looking for a meeting, they are forwarded to an Area Web site. If they phone WSO, does WSO look on-line?

- If WSO makes up guidelines, could they take this information about delisting only from one person in the Area?
- My Area does not have the resources to follow up. If we have guidelines, who is responsible for checking up on these groups within the Area? I am concerned that there needs to be clear definition of how to relist this group.
- Personalities are driving some of these decisions and deciding what is “good” Al-Anon. Some objective criteria would be valuable.
- I like the idea about guidelines, but I prefer a Thought Force appointed to provide information and maybe a PowerPoint presentation for the Delegates to use. If I have tools, then my job as Delegate is to help people understand that this is a collective group conscience, not a WSO tool.
- Sending a letter to the group seems to create more of an “us and them” atmosphere and this affects Al-Anon/Alateen as a whole, as well. The Traditions are about “obedience to the unenforceable,” so we have to be careful of our motives, when we do it, how we do it. I would appreciate a tool that helps me walk through this.
- This does affect us all and Al-Anon as a whole. Delisting does not mean the group is not registered as an Al-Anon group, it just means the meeting is not referred to newcomers. I would like to see WSO support the Areas that have had to delist. If we are the Al-Anon police, then so be it. It’s our name and program we are protecting. I’ve seen too many of these people ruin people and ruin Al-Anon. This is an urgent issue and an incredibly important issue. Please support those entities that have had the courage to take a stand.
- In regard to talking about the development of a guideline, let us remember that sometimes those closest to the group can be part of the problem.
- I am hoping that the WSO will look at the broad picture that these people are doing something right, that they are attracting people for some reason. When I was a newcomer, I was grateful for the person who told me what to do because I couldn’t make a decision to save my life. We didn’t call them Al-Anon police, we called them “oldtimers.” I don’t mind reflecting back and taking my own inventory. Why is this successful? We’re trying to better understand why this is working.
- We decided in our Area that the District Representative would get a buddy and visit these groups. This is everyone’s responsibility, not just WSO’s. If something seems wrong, it needs to be addressed.

Policy Discussion – Do Not Refer (2012 WSC)

Extract from the 2012 World Service Conference Summary

The Policy Committee Chairperson opened the session by stating, “At the 2011 World Service Conference, Delegates shared their Areas’ experiences with, and concerns about groups that the Areas believe are operating outside of the Legacies. This discussion was about groups that do not use Conference Approved Literature, high pressure groups, groups with only dual members, etc. Some Areas have addressed their concerns about these groups and the potential impact on newcomers by delisting them from Area, Al-Anon Information Service, or district meeting schedules. As a result of the delisting, some Areas have requested that the World Service Office support their decision by applying a code so that callers to the toll-free meeting line would not be referred to these groups. This topic is designated as ‘Do Not Refer.’

“It is important that Area policies concerning these groups are based on the Al-Anon principles, the Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Concepts of Service. This is best accomplished through a group conscience with the input of the groups, districts, and Assemblies. Through this dialogue we allow a Higher Power into our deliberations by listening to everyone’s viewpoints. We are all important voices when it comes to participating in the decision-making process.

“Today, we will have a discussion on some of the principles that can be utilized by Areas developing policies (now or in the future) related to groups they believe are operating outside of our Legacies. Once Areas have developed a principle -based policy, they will be better prepared to offer suggestions to the World Service Office on ways to support the Area’s decision.

“On your worksheet, identify some principles that you believe are important for an Area to consider when developing a policy for dealing with groups that are believed to be operating outside of the Legacies. For example, based on the principle in Tradition One, the focus of the discussion should be on the ‘common welfare’ or on how all parties involved—the groups, Areas, and Al-Anon as a whole— are best served. Our links of service between Areas and groups can help ensure that the voices of all members, groups, and service arms are heard. Explain your rationale for choosing each principle.

“Then identify some principles that you believe are important for the Area to use as they encourage, support, and educate the groups to return to operating in a manner that the Area believes is within the Legacies. Again, as an example, in using Tradition One, the Area would continue communicating with the groups and have open dialogue with them as to what the group may need to change to be relisted on the meeting schedule. The emphasis would be on unity within Al-Anon and the common welfare. The Area could inform groups of the resources and links of service that are available to support the groups’ return to operating within the Legacies.”

Conference members focused on these topics from the worksheet:

The principles Areas can use to discuss and develop policies for groups not adhering to the Legacies.

The principles the Area can use to support groups to successfully follow the Legacies.

- Principles above personalities. Groups that set themselves above the group conscience of Al-Anon Family Groups as a whole are acting as a personality rather than abiding by the principles. There's an ego factor when a group says, "We can do whatever we want."
- There needs to be a neutral, clear guideline so there isn't a subjective method of making such decisions. Example: you have to use CAL. Once you're in grey areas of interpretation, you have opened the door to people to impose their personal views and personalities get involved.
- Presume goodwill. Use dialogue; we're not the Al-Anon police.
- Tradition Four allows a group to continue to operate outside of the Traditions as long as they are not using the Al-Anon name.
- While it's important to presume goodwill, groups in our Area have been given the option of registering with the WSO within six months. We need to educate the groups about our policies and Traditions.
- We struggle with dual members and sponsorship. We had some groups delisted. Our solution is to look at cooperation with A.A.
- It would be very difficult to define what affects Al-Anon as a whole. Look at the Three Obstacles to Success and study the Four Primary Ideas. I need to change my attitude, my actions. We keep gifts by sharing them with others.
- Tradition Ten suggests that A.A. is an outside issue at Al-Anon meetings. When our singleness of purpose is compromised, this creates a lack of unity and dilutes my program, it erodes my spiritual base. Always remain democratic in thought and action, unless effecting Al-Anon as a whole.
- I refer to Concept Four. I began attending an Al-Anon Adult Children meeting and got to know the members of this very weak group. We held a business meeting because people were changing the words when reading the Steps. I became a part of the meeting before suggesting changes. I like the word "inform" rather than "educate."
- I use Warranty Three, Warranty Four, and Tradition Five. Whenever a group problem appears, it should not be one person who takes a look at that and throws it out. Those of separate opinions should review the actions. We do not set ourselves up as judge/punisher.
- I use Concept Four. I would recommend not cutting off these groups but continue to communicate with and visit the groups. Otherwise, we'll never know if they changed.
- An Area needs to be careful how it approaches a meeting that is breaking a Tradition. If the Area is laying down a law and trying to control, the Area may come off as being something the members of the meeting do not want to be a part of.

- Our district is in the process of doing an inventory because of the use of outside literature in meetings. Using A.A. literature is really an endorsement of A.A. in our meetings. I need to be willing to be uncomfortable.
- I visit the meeting and attempt to reason things out with one another. I may say, “What you’re doing is lovely, just don’t call it Al-Anon.” I try to provide a clear, concise, and kind explanation on what I perceive as the problem and I let them know what they need to do in order to be relisted.
- Warranty Five states that no member can be expelled from our fellowship.
- The spiritual principle that comes to mind is the sharing as equals. I didn’t know how to be an equal. The act of dominance is what strikes me. People find their voice in service, some more than others. Combining that with the responsibility of being a trusted servant reminds me it is sharing as equals.
- I need to use all the Traditions, and all of each Tradition. Anything that the group does that affects one or more member, affects Al-Anon as a whole. If I use the Tradition to judge them, I need to also use the Traditions to judge my response.
- The Group Services Department hears about the groups’ problems. We need to consider all of our Legacies. We need to not be personally punitive as stated in Warranty Four. We need to remember anonymity. There was a problem with an Alateen Group Sponsor and there were members who wanted the WSO to ban that Alateen Group Sponsor from ever being allowed to sponsor an Alateen group again. The WSO suggested those members share the name of the Alateen Group Sponsor with the Area, so that the decision could be made locally, and not by the WSO.
- Are we supposed to be creating a “Do Not Refer” policy in our Area?
That is up to your Area’s autonomy to decide.
- Weren’t there talking points in the works for Delegates to take to their Area?
*Yes, that’s what this discussion is about. We jumped ahead of ourselves last year and realized we needed to look at the principles of the policy before composing talking points.
This discussion will help us to look at what those should be to help the Areas.*
- It is important to avoid public controversy. Don’t get so focused on correcting the bad meetings. Remember our Higher Power and have faith that even the bad meetings can’t ruin Al-Anon and even bad meetings have a Higher Power.
- The Policy Committee is asking you to take this discussion back to your Area and have a discussion on how to handle groups operating outside of the Legacies. To clarify for those who weren’t here the last few years, this is a topic that came from the Delegates, not the WSO. We asked what practices did the Area have in place to delist the groups and what the groups need to do to be relisted. If the Areas have a process in place and the WSO sees it as fair and balanced, then the Policy Committee would discuss whether they would have a “Do Not Refer” policy. We may consider not referring, but not delist. The WSO was trying to get the talking

points for the Areas that need help to develop a policy, but the WSO is certainly not demanding anything. At this point, the WSO does not have a policy in place. The WSO continues to serve all groups.

- How does the WSO find out when a group is not registered?

The Area notifies the WSO. Some Areas have a policy that the meeting won't be put on a meeting schedule until they are registered. This is a question of local autonomy.

Appendix: Policy Discussion “Do Not Refer” Worksheet

Directions: Identify some principles that you believe are important for an Area to consider when developing a policy for dealing with groups that are believed to be operating outside of the Legacies. Explain your rationale for choosing each principle.

1.

2.

3.

Directions: Identify some principles that you believe are important for the Area to use as they encourage, support and educate the groups to return to operating in a manner that the Area believes is within the Legacies. Explain your rationale for choosing each principle.

1.

2.

3.