

## VIRGINIA AREA 71

### 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. 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 most important thing is to get the information down on paper. You can worry about literary style later when editing. At this point your history should be a compilation of descriptive data and the group's past experience, strength, hope and tribulations. It will become the source we seek out learn of our group's past experience without fear that the history might have been distorted.

With the members' consent, you should include their full names and sobriety dates in the original history. The use of full names helps the researchers and historians separate members with similar or the same first name. It is important to note any nicknames the members used. If copies are distributed for checking etc., it would be wise to have the last names replaced by an initial so as to preserve the member's anonymity. Keeping in mind our Traditions **USE OF FULL NAMES WILL NOT BE REPRINTED IN ANY PUBLICATION.**

Your first step in compiling a history will be to talk to the old-timers in your group. With their help you can make up a list of names of the earliest members (or their spouse) that still might be around. Many of the key people may no longer attend the group meetings or may have moved to other nearby communities. No source of information should be overlooked - we all have spotty memories! You might want to have a meeting of old timers. You will be surprised how they jog each other's memories when they get to reminisce about the "good old days!" You may also want to consider having a joint meeting of old-timers from a number of groups within your community or district(s). Be sure to tape these meetings, as it would be difficult to keep up with accurate note taking. Please remember to send copies of any tapes made by old-timers to your district Archivist.

Once you start writing your group history from what you have learned from this first old-timers meeting (or meetings), you will begin to detect gaps in the story. Now is the time to talk to the old-timers on a one-to-one basis. 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.

As soon as you think your history is nearly complete, share it with oldtimers and other members. Remember that it is their history. They will be a lot of help in filling in missing information and putting that final touch on the group history. When you feel your group history is complete, make a copy for your group, a copy for your District Archivist (or DCM if you don't have a District Archivist), Intergroup Archivist and mail the original to the Virginia 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. Our experience has been that the latter is a fairly frequent occurrence.

We are particularly interested in some anecdotes and "character". Our history will be 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 by sending them preferably in a digital format to Virginia Area Archives. Feel free to call the Archives Office at (540) 943-8003 if you have questions

[archivist@aavirginia.org](mailto:archivist@aavirginia.org)

Or

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

Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Previous Group Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Group Founded: \_\_\_\_\_

Founder/Founders Names: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Names of Early Members: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Present Membership Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Number (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

District Number \_\_\_\_\_

Area Number 71 \_\_\_\_\_

## **Beginning questions**

When and why was the Group first formed and where did it meet?

How many members did the Group start with?

What was the original meeting format and how has it changed to the current form (discussion, speaker, preselected topic, etc)?

Do any of the original members of the Group still attend meetings?

Was the Group a "spin off" from another group?

Did the Group keep the original name; if not why did it change and to what new name?

Was the Group meant to fill the needs of a specific segment of the Fellowship?

What segment of the fellowship is currently represented in the Group?  
(old-timers, treatment center patients, young people, professionals, DWI's, men/women)

Who was instrumental in forming the Group and who were the first officers?

Have any "unusual" or "unforgettable" characters ever been associated with the Group?

Have any other groups spun off from this group?

Does the Group have any particularly close relationship with another group?

Do the members of this Group also attend other groups together?

Has the Group been involved in any outside activities as a group? (potlucks, institutions, Public Information, 12 step work, workshops, holiday events, dances, conventions, outside speakers, etc.)?

Does the Group celebrate its member's sobriety anniversaries?

Does the Group give out chips and if so what style (poker, brass, and 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?

How has the Group evolved;

Has it changed names?

Has it changed its meeting places or times or locations?

Has the makeup of group membership changed?

Has it added book study, literature study, beginner's tables, Grapevine meetings, etc?

Has the Group ever been involved in any unusual projects or disagreements?

Has the Group had any problems; how did it overcome them?

Does the Group now have any weaknesses - has it ever had any?

What do you feel makes the Group unique - what are its good qualities?

Is there any other thing or events in the Group's history, which is particularly interesting?

Does the Group have any new plans for the future?

If the Group is no longer active, when and why did it fold?