

Thought Force - Al-Anon Assembly

Background:

As invited guests of AA, Al-Anon participates at a secondary level in the planning of our Assemblies. A review of the benefits and deficits of maintaining this role will help us understand if we are effectively planning for the primary business event for our Group Representatives. Consider Traditions 1, 4, 6, 7 and 10 when discerning the function and effectiveness of the Area Assembly for the Group Representatives.

Charge:

Conduct a Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) process among the members of this Thought Force to determine what is currently known about this topic and what remains unknown.

- Compare the current AA Conference Guidelines with our Assembly needs and provide a list of discrepancies and improvements that reflect our current needs.
- In what ways would holding our own Assembly or remaining with AA affect our primary purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics ?
- Consider opportunities and barriers to planning and hosting our own Assembly.

Report back at the March AWSC meeting. Provide a report to the Area Chairperson by February 26th.

Members:

Linda A. D11 - Chairperson
Dawn B. D11
Ashley C. D7
Carolyn S. D8
Kate D. D13
Luanne T. D2
Maddie P. D2

Assembly Thought Force KBDM Questions

KBDM Question #1 - What do we know about our member's or prospective member's wants, needs, and preferences that are relevant to this discussion?

1. Discussions and decisions may be emotionally charged.
2. All members, especially GRs, would need to be well-informed before making a decision/vote.
3. Members want and need a safe and comfortable venue to hold assemblies.
4. GRs need to attend Assemblies as information liaisons between the Area and their groups, conducting Al-Anon business in shared leadership by discussion and group conscience vote or consensus. Also electing Area Officers.
5. Area Officers, Coordinators, and DRs need to attend Assemblies, to conduct Al-Anon business in shared leadership, by sharing reports and info from WSO and AWSC.
6. Some GRs and members do not, or rarely, attend assemblies for variety of reasons - distance, financial, work, don't realize importance.
7. Some Iowa members are not even aware that our Assemblies are in cooperation with AA.
8. Some members travel/carpool and lodge with their AA partners and friends.
9. Iowa Al-Anon, as a whole, have a good working and spiritual cooperation with AA, enjoy AA speakers and fellowship at Assemblies. (Some Areas don't have this.)
10. Some members prefer 3-day assemblies with more meetings, workshops, speakers and fellowship. Some only want to attend certain parts or the business meeting which would affect fellowship. Some prefer a different format (1 or 2 days?)
11. Most Members prefer lodging close to or attached to venue. Most venues are handicap accessible, but some not walking distance is not user friendly for members with physical needs.
12. Some members prefer assembly meetings face to face. Some prefer virtual/hybrid.
13. Some members do not prefer traveling long distances to assemblies. Variety of locations helps even out driving time and costs all Iowa members.
14. Some like to register for lunch and banquet. Others like to have meals on their own.
15. Some members feel registrations are high while some feel reasonable if nice venue.
16. Some members find on-site registration costs for assembly and another registration for GRs confusing. Also on-line virtual registrations, then separate area location for payment.
17. Some members feel it would be very helpful to have our own flyer with AA registration info along with our own assembly info on it. Or Al-Anon agenda on AA Flyer.
18. Alateen members must be 12-19 years old, accompanied by AMIAS or parent, legal guardian and submit completed Iowa Alateen Consent and Release Form to attend.

What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- What is the opinion of Iowa members regarding hosting our own Assemblies? Would some want to continue with AA or would some prefer not?

- Are there adjustments that could be made to alleviate issues of confusion, frustration and problems surrounding our Joint-hosted Assemblies. (ie: Registration confusion, Al-Anon agenda on flyer, better communication with AA planning committee).
- Logistics – Where would we hold?
- Can we be financially self- supporting due to the expenses of venue, speakers, meals, etc.?
- Will hosting our own Assembly reduce attendance?
- Would Self-Hosting Assembly, on a different date than AA's, help eliminate elder/child/pet care issues for Al-Anon and AA caregivers who are both in Service? Both would not away from home at once.

KBDM Question #2 - What do we know about the capacity and strategic position of the organization relative to this issue?

1. Strategic planning – would be at a minimum of 3 years out.
2. Iowa has a very complete and routinely updated Al-Anon/Alateen Policy Procedure Guidelines booklet available to all members. Full Assembly guidelines are covered in this booklet.
3. A condensed list of Iowa Al-Anon Assembly needs (ie: Rooms #/size/set up, audio/visual, speaker info, Alternate Delegate assembly duties are included in the AA Area 24 Conference Guidelines. *AA Guidelines requests a current copy of Al-Anon Guidelines for each AA Planning Committee*).
4. Refer to Al-Anon P/P Guidelines for specific physical details for capacity and needs of the 3-day assembly.
5. The host district establishes an Assembly Planning Committee of Chair, Co-chair and supporting volunteers to work in cooperation with AA Committee. Some Committees struggle to get enough volunteers. Can we continue to get enough volunteers in service?
6. Al-Anon Luncheon/Speaker seems to be poorly attended by AA.
7. Iowa Area Alternate Delegate acts as liaison between AA Conference Committee, AWSC and assists as needed. Duties listed in P/P Guidelines.
8. Four recent Hybrid Assemblies attendance, per previous minutes, GR attendance ranged from 27-42 with 4-9 attending virtually.
9. Al-Anon Assembly attendance is much less than AA Conference attendance.
10. The number of Electronic or Hybrid formatted groups are increasing, changing the virtual/hybrid needs of holding assemblies. Iowa already has 12 Electronic Groups.
11. Iowa Area has willing members to serve in a variety of service positions, open to additions and changes to positions, duties, policies and procedures as growth requires to benefit Iowa members.
12. Iowa Area continues to search and implement ways to improve communication, share info with all members, be welcoming and inclusive (ie: changes to Assembly format, posting agenda to AA website and flyer, GR & DR Salons, workshops, efficient use of Webpage and technology, Hybrid meetings, Town Hall meetings, EBlasts, enthusiasm, to name a few).

What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- If Self-Host Assemblies, what changes would need to be made to our Assembly Policies, Procedures and structure? Add an Assembly Planning Coordinator position and/or Standing Committee? Stay 3 day? 2 day? 1 day? One central location?
- Financial: What would cost be? Would our Assemblies be self-supporting through registrations? Would the Area need to establish a Prudent Reserve?
- How would Districts without a DR be handled? How can we make sure that all Districts will have an opportunity to be involved at the Assembly level.
- If having our own Assembly does not prove to be beneficial to members, would we be invited to return by AA?

KBDM Question #3. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics that are relevant to this discussion?

1. Venue, catering and lodging prices have increased. As well as personal cost of living, causing some members to budget more closely.
2. There are other free resources available to family and friends of alcoholics: free family counseling, treatment center family help, crisis centers/shelters, internet websites for self-help could affect our membership.
3. Demographics changing – aging members, few newcomers and less people getting involved with service.
4. At this time AA's Purpose for Conference is very parallel to that of Al-Anon's Assembly purpose: Business meetings, Delegate Report, Workshops, Speakers, Fellowship.
5. AA has been willing to make adjustments to attempt to meet the changing needs of the Al-Anon Assembly agenda format. IE: Breakout rooms, more microphones, Alateen requirements, etc.). 6/4/16 - abbreviated Iowa Al-Anon Assembly Guidelines were added to AA Conference Guidelines for better communication of Al-Anon needs.
6. Unexpected issues occasionally occur and Al-Anon accommodations can be less than expected/requested. This may occur if co or separately hosting.
7. Al-Anon's interest in attending AA Saturday evening banquet and activities is about 50%. (Results of 2018 & 2021 Area Inventories.)
8. Changing Al-Anon panels every 3 years, AA's every 2 years and new planning committees each Assembly bring new ideas and info shared by both organizations.
9. Al-Anon members proactively review policy, procedure and structure for opportunities to enhance and benefit the growth of Iowa Al-Anon and its members.

What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- What responsibility does Iowa Al-Anon have to insurance for Al-Anon and Alateen members while

attending assembly? Or is insurance the responsibility of AA?

- How can we improve communication between Al-Anon Assembly and AA Conference Committees to the benefit of both?
- If we separate to Self-Host our assembly, and discover this decision is not to the benefit of members, would AA consider holding Conferences in coop with Al-Anon again?
- Were there specific changes, concerns, problems that occurred to bring this question up for discussion again?
- Did the 2020 Pandemic cause some members to stop attending assembly, even virtually, and not return to assemblies? Lower attendance?
- Could this cause division among AA members and even within Al-Anon?
- What would attract more attendance of other non-serving members?

KBDM Question #4: What are the *ethical implications* of our choices (pro and cons)?
includes consideration of how the Legacies apply. Identify both pros and cons.

This

1. Tradition 6: Joint Assemblies/Conferences are opportunities to fulfilling our Primary Spiritual Aim. "...we are a fellowship separate from AA with a different focus, but we often cooperate to bring recovery to all in need of it." *Paths to Recovery Pg 187*
2. Tradition 6: "...we should always co-operate with AA". "While we remain a separate entity from AA, we cooperate whenever possible as a reflection of our special relationship with AA." *Ser Man, Pg 52*
3. "Although Al-Anon is a distinct entity, our fellowship has its roots in AA." *Ser Man, Pg 179*
4. Step 12: Assemblies are opportunities to practice principles in all our affairs and carry Al-Anon's message to Al-Anon Members and, at present, AA members and families as well.
5. "Concept 1 - GR's are Service Link, Voice and Vote for groups. Tradition 1 - Personal recovery depends upon Unity. A thorough discussion and distribution of info regarding this subject, to all Iowa Al-Anon members, is a must. If Self-Hosting is to be considered, GR's and all Iowa Members must be involved in open dialogue before deliberation or decision."
6. Tradition 2 - Iowa Al-Anon respects and guards our 3 Legacies. All Al-Anon decisions are made through discussion and vote, seeking a Higher Power lead Group Conscience for our common welfare and good of the whole.
7. Concept 5 - All Al-Anon members' voices, minority, newcomers and long-timers, must be heard, considered and respected in all Al-Anon discussions concerning this topic.
8. Our Assemblies respect Tradition 7 through members/groups financial contributions, Al-Anon Service, Al-Anon registration fees are set by AA and go to AA Conference fund to cover expenses.
9. Tradition 9: A planning committee may be formed for Assembly responsibilities whether joint or separate hosting.
10. Tradition 3 & 10: Joint Assemblies/Conferences could cause confusion for some members regarding "cooperation" and "affiliation".

11. Tradition 11: Some members, Al-Anon and AA, might be concerned their anonymity may be compromised as a result of Co-Hosting, newcomers may be uneasy at Co-Hosted event.
12. Present guidelines for holding Al-Anon Assemblies in cooperation with AA Conferences does not allow Iowa Al-Anon the choice of date, duration, location or registration cost.
13. Tradition 4: Areas are autonomous in how they hold Assemblies, Self-Host or Co-Host.

What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- How would Al-Anon's choices and/or changes in this matter affect Iowa Area AA? (Independence with Consideration-Tradition 4)
- What are Iowa Area AA's thoughts and/or preferences on us separating?
- What percent of Iowa Al-Anon members feel we are respecting our 3 Legacies while holding Assemblies jointly with AA? Why or why not?
- Would separately hosted Iowa Assemblies be self-supporting? Would this affect the Iowa finances, budget?
- Do Iowa Al-Anon members feel we are doing the best we can to build a culture of trust and communication (ie: Assembly procedures, agenda, activities, registration, shared AWSC discussions and WSO information)?
- What is the most efficient method of Communication to distribute information and include all Iowa Al-Anon members in discussions on this subject? (ie: Zoom Town Hall Meetings? Face to face breakout meetings at Assemblies or Districts?).

Summary of Key Points and Reoccurring Thoughts Revealed though our KBDM Process and Thought Force Discussions:

Communication and Technology:

- To continue building a culture of trust, it is vital that clear communication occurs for all Iowa Members, GRs and unrepresented Districts & groups, to make a knowledge based decision on this subject. All voices must be heard with all involved in open discussion, prior to deliberation or decision.
- Ultimate authority belongs to AI-Anon groups. GRs act as Liaisons between groups, the District and Area. Good communication and accurate information is a must to be informed, conduct AI-Anon business, vote and gather information for their groups.
- Our KBDM reveals the Iowa Area continues to apply technology for effective methods of communication with AI-Anon and AA members. Communication is always a work in progress, not perfection.
- Continued communication efforts will help alleviate most Assembly confusion, frustrations and problems. IE: Face to Face, Online & Hybrid Registration, Agenda/Reports/Info Posting, AI-Anon member's needs.

Assembly Format:

- Assembly attendance declining. Last 5 Assemblies Attendance 27-67 with 4-11 attending Virtually. Currently Iowa has 12 Electronic Groups. Hybrid format may attract members and increase attendance.
- Presently AI-Anon Assemblies are a 3-day format offering time for workshops, speakers and fellowship in addition to the business meeting. Some members may prefer 2-day or only business meeting format.

Finances:

- With the current reality of rising venue costs, Area budget and finances may be a concern for Self-Hosting if Assembly is not self-supporting.
- Registration, travel and lodging cost is a concern for many AI-Anon Assembly attendees. Varied Assembly locations averages out travel time and costs.

Iowa Guidelines for Participation in AA Conference and Area 24 Conference Guidelines:

- AI-Anon Assembly Guidelines are detailed, frequently reviewed and updated to meet AI-Anon's growth and needs. A condensed list of AI-Anon Guidelines is found in the AA Guidelines. Our comparison revealed discrepancies and needed updates. It is important AI-Anon and AA's Planning Guidelines match and are current. *See Attached compiled list for Area Guidelines Policy/Procedure Committee's attention.

Relationship with AA:

- AI-Anon Assembly/AA Conference Planning begins well in advance. Any strategic plan to change hosting would need to be several years out to gather more information and to honor our commitment to AA.
- Iowa AI-Anon, as a whole, has a good working & spiritual relationship with Iowa AA. Concerns - How our decision will affect Iowa AA, permanent damage to AA relationship, cause division in both AI-Anon and AA.

Ethical Implications - Adherence to and respecting AI-Anon Legacies and Primary Purpose:

- Findings from our KBDM and Thought Force discussions indicate we are adhering to our Legacies and fulfilling AI-Anon's Primary Purpose while holding Iowa AI-Anon Assemblies as a joint effort in participation with AA. *Please see specific Step, Tradition and Concept -references on KBDM Question #4.

As the result of our Thought Force KBDM research, we respectfully Submit these Recommendations for Consideration:

1. **We recommend a Task Force develop a Survey of info gathering questions, focusing on the Assembly Hosting subject, to be distributed to all Iowa Al-Anon members.**

Supporting Text - Many of our KBDM and "What we wish we knew but don't" questions can only be answered by Iowa Al-Anon members themselves. More information and member input is needed to determine if it would be agreeable or beneficial to Iowa Al-Anon members to move forward with Assembly Hosting subject. Area Inventory possible good starting point of distribution.

2. If information indicates to move forward with the Assembly Hosting subject:
We recommend creating a Task Force to research the most inclusive communication formats to reach the majority of Iowa members.

Supporting Text - Every reasonable effort must be made so Iowa members, including unrepresented Districts and groups, will have ample opportunity and time to be involved in shared information and open dialogue on this discussion from the beginning. IE: Town Hall meetings-Face to Face and/or virtually, Discussions and/or Breakout groups at Assemblies, District & group visits, Conference Calls to name a few.

3. **We recommend the Iowa Area Policy and Procedures Committee review our attached AA Conference and Al-Anon Guidelines list of discrepancies, additions and changes. Also, update/add any new technology needs required by Al-Anon to make Hybrid meetings available to Assembly attendees.**

Supporting Text - Please consider making these revisions for better communication, accuracy and more clarity in our Guidelines. Upon completion, and AWSC approval, of revisions please give updated Al-Anon Guidelines to AA requesting they review and make needed updates to the Al-Anon and Alateen participation in an AA Conference section of the Area 24 Conference Guidelines.

4. **We recommend an on-going, 3 year member rotating, Assembly Work Group be established with the continued focus of trouble-shooting varying new and continuing Assembly issues and brainstorming solutions.**

Supporting Text - History has revealed as Iowa Al-Anon grows and changes, Assembly issues, needs, questions, frustrations and problems will continue to occur. An on-going Work Group would eliminate creating a new Thought or Task Force, with all new members, for each separate Assembly issue. This Work Group could seek assistance/information from Officers, Coordinators, DRs or Committees as indicated by issue. (IE: Assembly Agenda, Info, Report Posting issues- Consult with Web Page or Tech; Discrepancies or needed updates found in Assembly Guidelines-Consult Area P&P Guidelines Committee.

AA Conference Guidelines and Al-Anon Assembly Guidelines comparison:
Discrepancies, needed changes, additions, deletions to pass on to P&P Guidelines Committee

AA's Guidelines are not updated to our most recently approved Al-Anon Guidelines.

Page 15 - 1st Bullet - Noted "not an all-inclusive list of needs for Al-Anon...each conference planning committee needs to obtain the most current Al-Anon guidelines." Is this sufficient?

2nd Bullet - Al-Anon/Alateen logo stickers. Lately AA or Al-Anon is typed on the badge. Are stickers needed any longer?

3rd Bullet - Provide the conference planning committee with Al-Anon/Alateen schedules for program. Due Date? Provide for on-line schedule? Due Date?

Page 16, Room Needs- Al-Anon meeting room needs to accommodate 100, not 150 people. Alateen 25, not 30-40. Arrange for possibility of up to 3 breakout room (including Al-Anon business room and/or Alateen meeting room in count).

Possible more clarity or specific timelines in our Al-Anon Guidelines?

Page 51, Para 6 - "Ample time" for agenda to AA - Should be on a timeline? AA's states 6 month prior.

Page 53, Area Tech Coor - Perhaps add "Have list of basic needs for AA for facility selection"?

Page 53, Committee Info, Bullets 2,3,4,5,7 - Approx timeline? Perhaps establish a general timeline on all things concerning AA deadlines & contact?

References Used by Assembly Thought Force Members:

Past Area Inventory Results *See Attached Chart

Past Area Minutes

Area Archives

Al-Anon Principles and 3 Legacies

Personal Experience of Thought Force and Iowa Members

Service Manual and Various pieces of CAL

IA Area Al-Anon/Alateen Policy /Procedure Guidelines (see Web page) & Area 24 Conference Guidelines

History found in Area Archives regarding this subject.

1. Motion made at 1993 Fall Assembly: GRs to take question back to groups and discuss separating Assembly from AA Conference.
2. Vote taken at 1994 Spring Assembly. Needed 57 yes votes to pass, only 48 yes votes. Did not pass.
3. Motion made that this subject not to be brought up again for at least 3 years. Passed. Date?
4. Flyers were found back to 1955 inviting AA members to the Conference. The 1968 flyers have Al-Anon on them. Will see if can find more to confirm info.

Based on Area Inventories from 2018 and 2021:

Question	2018	2021
Who is filling out?	Mostly GRs	People who have or are in a position
Number of assemblies attended	2-5 range and 21+	1-5 range and 21+
Feel welcome?	51 yes; 3 sometimes	49 yes; 1 no; 4 maybe
Informed of issues voting on?	45 yes; 6 no	49 yes; 5 no
Barriers?	family commitments; full weekend; distance; costs; childcare; work conflicts	Time; a lot of walking; long periods of sitting
Overcome barriers?	priority; plan ahead; carpool; share rooms	
Good experience?		85% yes; 15% maybe
What did you gain?	fellowship; unity; service; learning; improved self-esteem; getting informed; seeing a new place in Iowa;	Better understanding of service and concepts; friendships; confidence; fellowship; staying informed
Follow AFG principles?		49 yes; 5 maybe
Length of assemblies?	Business meeting is too long; too long to sit	Too long; prefer virtual
Recommendation to improve?	Copy of agenda for all; no action committees; ways to take back info to group (email/website); better use of Fri. night AWSC time together; business	Omit candlelight meeting; engage GRs and welcome newcomers; time for fellowship