

Q & A

The General Service Conference & Agenda Topics

Q. *What is The General Service Conference?*

A. The General Service Conference takes place in New York annually in either April or May. It is a week-long, in-person meeting of individuals who form the non-governing, policy-implementing component of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Q. *What happens at the Conference?*

A. The policy of A.A. is discussed and decided.

Q. *How are AA policies decided by the Conference?*

A. The Delegates take the conscience of the groups in their Areas (as expressed at the Assemblies by the GSRs on behalf of their group members) to the Conference. Each delegate serves on one of the standing committees at the Conference, which meet early in the week and do the principal work of the Conference. The committees bring recommendations to the full Conference for consideration. The last two days (or more) are devoted to discussion and voting on committee recommendations.

Q. *Who attends?*

A. Membership of the Conference includes area delegates (who make up at least two-thirds of the Conference body), the directors and A.A. staff of A.A. World Services, Inc. and AA Grapevine, Inc., and the trustees. Today the *Board of Trustees* consists of 21 men and women, 14 alcoholics (Class B) and seven nonalcoholics (Class A), who bring varying backgrounds to their service responsibilities. The Conference may wish to invite visitors from other countries to attend as nonvoting observers.

Q. *Who votes at the General Service Conference?*

A. The voting members of the Conference are:

The 93 Area Delegates (who form a voting majority)

The 21 Trustees of the General Service Board (aka *Board of Trustees*)

The 11 – 13 staff members of the General Service Office and the Grapevine.

The 4 Directors of A.A. World Services, Inc.

The 5 Directors of the A.A. Grapevine.

*Each Conference member has one vote, even if they attend in more than one capacity (for example, a trustee who also serves as a director of A.A.W.S. or the Grapevine as well as the General Service Board).

Q. *What are Agenda Topics (aka Agenda Items)?*

A. As the Conference is basically a week-long meeting, the Agenda Topics provide the literal agenda that structures the whole conference.

Agenda items cover a wide-ranging collection of issues. Most topics have the same origin and intention of any matter being discussed at a group's business meeting: *How can we better meet the needs of our current and future fellowship?*

At the General Service Conference, these topics include: matters of policy for A.A. as a whole; requests from members who express a need among the fellowship that a group or central office cannot meet on its own; suggestions concerning Conference approved Literature; requests from committees for how the General Service Office can better meet the needs of alcoholics who have not yet found A.A., etc.

Q. Where do Agenda Topics come from?

A. The final agenda for any Conference consists of items suggested by individual A.A. members, groups, delegates, trustees, area assemblies, area committee members, and directors and staff members of A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine.

Whatever its origin, any agenda item follows the same path to the Conference agenda: The A.A. staff studies it in the light of previous Conference actions, then passes it on to the trustees' Conference Committee or the appropriate Conference committee. Usually, the trustees' committee determines the most appropriate way of programming it — as a workshop or presentation subject, a proposal, or a committee concern.

Q. What is a Panel?

A. Most GSRs are aware their commitment is for two years. This mirrors the commitment length of the Area's Delegate — who attends two General Service Conferences. Each Area is designated either as an "even" panel or an "odd" panel referring to the year for which the Delegate is elected. So half the delegates at the Conference are there for their first year of their commitment, and half are there for the second year. This way A.A. is assured of continuity at the Conference. Area 06, CNCA, is an "odd" panel with year one being in an odd year, and the second year of the panel being an even year.