

Guidelines for a Group Conscience Meeting

12 Step groups hold meetings to determine how to best run the meetings, spend funds, organise events, and deal with issues that affect the group or the wider fellowship. These meetings allow members to work together to consider and agree on how best to proceed in the interests of SLAA.

These meetings are conducted by group conscience. Group conscience is about the unique ways individuals are inspired to agree on the best decisions for SLAA.

In *The Twelve Concepts of SLAA Service*, Concept One notes the need to reach an informed group conscience. Our *Twelve Traditions* and *Twelve Concepts* of SLAA are the basis for much of our decision-making and the primary means by which we reach an informed group conscience. We should also note the history of the group, what other groups have done in similar situations, and any other background or local traditions that may be useful to know. When we cannot decide what approach to take, it is always prudent to look first at the *Traditions* and *Concepts*.

Group conscience demands accepting that our own views are just that — our own views — and listening with an open mind and heart to the views of others. We are prepared to see things differently and to adjust our perception and yield to the group conscience to arrive at a consensus.

Not all our group decisions will be wise and practical. We do make mistakes sometimes and must look for better answers to a problem. Another group conscience vote can be taken when something needs to be corrected. Like individuals, SLAA groups learn from their mistakes — and so does the whole fellowship. We find that our Higher Power often leads us through our blunders.

To minimise mistakes, it's important that every voting member be fully informed and understand all relevant facts before voting. Behind all this lies Tradition Two: "For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority — a loving God as God may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Each of us is responsible to be as free of our own bias so we may be open to the good of the whole.

The same spirit of selflessness applies regardless of the size of the group.

Groups often hold group conscience meetings before or after their regular meetings. Groups may set a regular schedule for these meetings, or any member of the group may call for a meeting.

Providing notice of the meeting and agenda topics one or two weeks in advance is a good idea so those attending may have time to think about the items, read background material, and find relevant information when appropriate.

In some meetings, all persons attending may vote; other meetings might restrict voting privileges to regular attendees. While some steering committee meetings might restrict voting on routine matters, such as paying bills, to those who meet the committee's sobriety requirements, all group members vote on matters of major importance, such as format and sobriety requirements for speakers and officers.

Most members have a special affinity for one group and consider it their home group, where they accept responsibilities and try to sustain friendships. Members are encouraged not to meddle in the business or policies of groups that they visit only occasionally, or where they do not accept service responsibilities.

Your group or service body may find it useful to study the *Traditions* and *Concepts* regularly to become better informed about their origin and usefulness. Some groups have a *Traditions* meeting once a month in which the topic of that meeting is a particular *Tradition*.

The following is a suggested format for group conscience meetings. It does not require formal decision-making methods such as motion, amendment, and debate because, as Concept 12 (d) states, "all important decisions shall be reached by discussion, vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity."

But a group may decide that a certain item would be more efficiently discussed by using motions and votes. The size of the group may determine the formality needed. Each group will decide how to conduct their business.

Suggested Format for a Group Conscience Meeting

1. Introduction

Welcome to the group conscience meeting of the _____ group of SLAA.
My name is _____, and I am a Sex and Love Addict and the chair of this meeting.

❖ Serenity Prayer

Will those who wish to, please join in the 'we' version of the Serenity Prayer:

**God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change,
courage to change the things we can,
and wisdom to know the difference.**

❖ Reading of the Steps or Traditions, *if appropriate.*

2. Establishing Ground Rules

The purpose of this meeting is to make decisions that affect our group. I encourage everyone here to participate. If a matter comes to a vote and you do not attend our meeting regularly or do not plan to, please consider whether it would be reasonable for you to vote. However, we welcome everyone's viewpoint; we can all learn from one another.

Always use respectful "I" language when sharing (e.g. 'I think', 'I feel', not 'you should...')
There is no cross talk or interruptions.

We remember Tradition Five: 'Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the sex and love addict who still suffers.' Therefore, anything we decide at this meeting must reflect that purpose. No matter what we believe as individuals, we must be united in our purpose to carry our message as best we can to the sex and love addict who still suffers. That person is our focus. May we do our best for them.

❖ Rules of Order

In the interest of attending to the items on this agenda and allowing everyone the opportunity to speak on the important topics, we use this format (based on *Robert's Rules of Order*):

Each topic for discussion will begin with a motion being made. That motion will then either be seconded or set aside. Upon the motion being seconded, discussion will begin. During discussion, only friendly amendments (where the original mover of the motion agrees with the amendment) will be accepted to the motion. Everyone will be allowed one share on each motion presented. Each share will be limited to two minutes in length. The end of discussion will be the point at which a vote is taken.

3. Minutes from Previous Meeting

"Are there minutes from our last meeting?"

[Secretary reads minutes, if available, or distributes copies.]

"Any corrections or additions?" *[Applicable corrections or additions are made.]*

Note any items that were carried over from a previous meeting.

4. Setting Up the Agenda

At this point, the chair presents the agenda and asks for additions or amendments. The agenda often results from discussions at previous meetings, or people at the current meeting may make suggestions. The chair should make certain that the agenda is clear, in a logical sequence, and agreeable to those attending the group conscience meeting. The attendees address each item on the agenda.

5. Making Decisions

Some agenda items may require collecting information before the meeting: e.g., if one item is “Should the meeting start half an hour earlier?” it would be important to check if the room is available half an hour earlier. Depending on the nature of the issue, decisions can be made in different ways. The issue might not be controversial at all. It might be supported or opposed by most people in the group, but vehemently opposed or supported by a minority. It might have the support of only slightly more or less than half the group. Each possibility can require a different approach. To determine how to handle the issue, the chair might begin with a general statement, such as:

“The issue here is whether this group should change its meeting format to have a Traditions meeting on the last Monday of the month. Does anyone feel strongly one way or the other? Let’s go around the room and have people indicate how they feel, what they think would be best for the group, and why they think this would be helpful to the group.”

(or, “Let’s have a quick vote. Those who like the proposal, please raise your hands. Now, those who don’t like the proposal, please raise your hands.”)

❖ General Consensus

If it becomes clear members generally share the same opinion, the chair can say something like the following:

“It seems that we may have reached a consensus. Let’s make certain. Does anyone oppose (or support) this proposal?”

[If no hands are raised, the chair may say:]

“Let’s go on to other business. Would our secretary please record that we reached a consensus to have (or not have) a [Traditions meeting on the last Monday of the month]?”

❖ Some Support or Opposition

[If it is apparent that some feel strongly for or against the proposal, the chair may say something like the following:]

“It is clear that at least some members feel strongly that this proposal should (not) go forward. We in SLAA try to find a consensus, so it is important that we hear all points of view. Often those who disagree with the majority can best educate us by explaining the reasons for the views they hold. Let us remember that whatever decision we make can always be changed if our experience suggests it isn’t working. Let us have two people who support the proposal and two who oppose it speak for two minutes each, alternating one for and one against, followed by another vote.”

❖ Clear Result from the Vote

[If the results of the vote are clear—very few members either oppose or support the proposal—then the chair may say something like:]

“It appears this proposal has (or does not have) the support of the majority of the group. Accordingly, would our secretary please record that we reached a group conscience on _____?”

❖ A Large Minority

[If the vote doesn’t show a clear consensus, in the interests of developing a true group conscience, the chair should try to work toward a greater consensus in the following suggested manner:]

“Concept Twelve (d) says, ‘all important decisions shall be reached by discussion, vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.’ In my opinion, we have not reached substantial unanimity. Many who are present oppose (or support) this proposal and to go with the majority would not achieve unanimity.

“Does anyone have an idea of how to develop our informed group conscience in this situation?”

Some suggestions are found over the page.

Here are some ideas that groups have used to develop a group conscience:

- Ask for suggestions, changes, or amendments to the proposal that might address some of the reasons it has not found substantial unanimity. Perhaps those in the minority who are opposed to the proposal largely support it but disagree with one or two parts. Amending those parts could result in substantial unanimity.
- Appoint a committee of two, four, or six members, evenly divided on the issue, to discuss it and make recommendations to the group.
- Try the proposal for a limited time and monitor its effectiveness. Schedule a group conscience meeting for one to six months in the future to decide whether to continue using it.
- Hold the proposal until the next group conscience meeting and announce at each SLAA group meeting that it did not achieve substantial unanimity and that it is important for all regularly attending members to be at the next group conscience meeting to discuss the proposal fully.

6. Closing

❖ Open forum

“Is there any further discussion to conduct?”

Does anyone want to raise an issue for a future meeting?

❖ Conclusion

“Thank you for coming. To close the meeting, let us have a moment of silence followed by the *Serenity Prayer (We version)* or *Third Step Prayer*.

Keep doing service!

❖ A note on disruptive behaviour

If someone engages in disruptive behaviour, it is appropriate for the meeting chair to call them out saying something like the following:

“When you said ‘_____’ I felt (sad / angry / etc) because I have a right and need for safety. So would you be willing to abide by the guidelines when you share? If not, then we may ask you to leave and stay away until you can refrain from these types of comments.”

“You are welcome here. Your behaviour is not welcome.”

While the person is welcome, their disruptive and unsafe behaviour is not.

If the person is not able to stop behaving badly, then they will need to leave.

If they can stop their behaviour and stay, that is the better outcome.

This document is not SLAA Conference approved literature.

Document is based on guidelines provided by OA – Overeaters Anonymous.

Version: 1.06 (18 Sep 2021)

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