

# District Website Best Practices

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## Washington Area 72 Standing Web Committee

### Website Hosting

A third party hosting company will be required to make the website available to the public. The hosting company can be a largely unnoticed entity or the source of frequent problems.

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#### Choosing a Host

This decision will depend on a number of factors.

- How much traffic do you expect?
- How many emails will be assigned to the website?
- Will you need more than one domain name or database?
- Will you need E-Commerce tools?
- Do they offer a free domain name?
- Do they have a website moving service?

Hosting companies vary greatly in their reliability, customer service and technical support. Read reviews and speak with others about their experience.

#### Domain Name Registration

Once a host is chosen the domain name must be purchased. The cost is usually from \$10-15/year. Some webhosting companies offer domain name registration free for the first year when you sign up. Registering a domain name will usually require a credit card or PayPal account.

#### Method of Payment

Paying for the website hosting services will depend on the financial structure of your district. The most common forms are;

- District Treasurer sends check
- Webmaster sends check (reimbursed by District Treasurer)
- Credit Card

#### Other Hosting Considerations

Domain registration requires an individual to be associated with the domain name. There are domain privacy services for hiding this information.

#### Changing Hosting Companies

Occasionally it is necessary to move a website to another web hosting company. This requires, first, that the website be removed from its current webhost and then that it be reinstalled on its new webhost. Many of the larger hosting companies have a free website transfer service.

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### The Design Process

There is much that must be considered when an AA district decides to develop a website. Issues regarding anonymity, purpose and the 12 Traditions need to be discussed and a group conscience obtained. The following is a basic guide to one process for designing an AA district website.

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#### Gather Information

Each District is autonomous. The needs of a rural website may be different than the needs of an urban website. The most critical step in the entire process is to gather the information about what the users of the site

really need and want. A questionnaire is a useful tool.

#### Mission Statement, Vision, Objectives, Policies

The mission statement is a short, concise statement of the District's group conscience.

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It will be the guiding principal for all ultimate decisions regarding the website design.

### Design and Development

Ease of use, simplicity and clarity are the design goals. Website users respond best to information which can be seen at a glance rather than studied. Providing too much information on a page results in the users inability to absorb the information offered.

The website can be a very effective tool for the Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community committees. Encourage their participation in the design process.

Few people have the ability to build a website from scratch. By using Content Management Systems, such as Word Press, or website templates, attractive and functional websites can be built with little technical expertise. The design should also allow a growing number of different types of devices to view the website such as smart phones and tablets.

It may be necessary to hire a professional designer if the district doesn't have a member with those abilities. Since the professional will most likely not have an

understanding of AA Traditions or Concepts clear direction and monitoring will be important these principles are upheld.

It is possible to receive contributions online from a district website. The GSO website is an example. A group should consider the cost of these services. The most popular service currently being used is Paypal. Discuss the issue thoroughly with your group or district to make sure everyone is fully aware of the fees involved with this type of service.

### Launching the Website

When the design has been completed a preliminary version of the website can be made available to a limited number of people for their review and opinion After final modifications have been made the website can be uploaded to the chosen hosting company and made available to the public. The website is another way AA makes itself available to the still suffering alcoholic. Adding the district website to printed meeting schedules and adding it to the flyers for AA functions will help alcoholics find it online. If AA has an Intergroup or Area website determine if it would be possible to link to these already established AA websites.

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## Website Administration and Maintenance

Once the website is designed and hosted there should be a mechanism in place to ensure the needs of the district are met as described in the website mission statement.

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### Gather Information

Most districts with a website, or who are planning a website, have a Web Committee and chairperson. This committee will

monitor the website content and bring issues of group conscience to the district.

It is important that the Web Committee have a co-chairperson who can assume full duties in the event the chairperson is unable to continue.

It is suggested that the web committee discuss and document guidelines in the form of a written content policy through a district group conscience for appropriate web content for their group and revise these periodically.

**Administration**

The Web Committee should create an easy to find, hard copy folder with the location, username and password information for all office computers, websites, web hosting accounts, email addresses, account/billing

logins, external hard drives and cloud or online storage.

The Web Committee should decide who will have access to this information within the district as well as possible trusted servants outside the district at the area level such as the Area Web Chair.

**Security**

It is possible that a website can be hijacked by members of the fellowship or unaffiliated hackers. It is important to monitor the website closely and be able to shut it down when necessary. Email notification is usually provided when a password is changed and the email address receiving such a message should be closely monitored.

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**Available Resources**

There are many available resources regarding Alcoholics Anonymous and the internet. It is advised that these resources be used during the process of setting up a district website and reviewed periodically in order to stay abreast of the constant changes in this area.

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**Publications**

The GSO has developed several publications related to this subject which are very helpful resources and provide an AA group conscience of these issues.

- AA Guidelines on the Internet (MG-18)
- Understanding Anonymity (P-47)
- Anonymity Online (F-197)
- AA Grapevine - October 2010
- AA's Legacy of Service, by Bill W (P-44)

**Workshops**

The Area Web Standing Committee has a webmaster training workshop available to groups and districts to attract and inform members who are interested in this type of service.

The Web Standing Committee is working on an Anonymity and the Internet workshop that will be available groups and districts.

**Web Quarterly Meetings**

Once each quarter Area 72 has a Web Quarterly Meeting for everyone interested in this subject. It is an excellent opportunity to meet other web chairs, web masters and interested parties. If you have a question related to AA and websites or the internet this is a great place to connect with others who may have the same question or an answer.

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## Traditions and Websites

Websites are openly available to the general public as well as members of Alcoholics Anonymous. This makes it imperative that the Traditions of our fellowship be followed to ensure that our message is delivered to those who seek it as cleanly and clearly as possible.

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### **Tradition 1 - Unity**

Technology is making it increasingly easy to find meetings and information about our fellowship. Our common welfare depends on current and accurate information.

### **Tradition 2 - Group Conscience**

Having a plain language mission statement is very helpful when obtaining a group conscience involving a district sponsored website. A group conscience can change over time and will need to be revisited over time.

### **Tradition 3 - Membership**

The only requirement for membership is the desire to stop drinking. Our web content must be appropriate for the problem drinker who is looking for a solution to their problem.

### **Tradition 4 - Autonomy**

Each district is unique as are the needs of its fellowship. The webmaster must balance the needs of the district with the common welfare of Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **Tradition 5 - Primary Purpose**

Carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous is the primary purpose of the district website. How that message is presented is determined by the group conscience of the district and the abilities of the webmaster.

### **Tradition 6 - Non-Affiliation**

Links to outside websites and using common internet resources such as Google products can imply affiliation. Statements

expressing non-affiliation should be considered by the webmaster.

### **Tradition 7 - Self-Supporting**

Self supporting includes paying for web hosting services, domain names, etc. Free services usually require payment in other forms such as advertising, placement of logos, or access to information.

### **Tradition 8 - Non-Professional**

We may need to seek the advice and help of a non-alcoholic professional. It is imperative that they be made aware of the Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **Tradition 9 - Spirit of Service**

The website belongs to the group and not the individual webmaster. We usually serve no more than a 2 year rotation.

### **Tradition 10 - Outside Issues**

The opinions of individual members on controversial matters such as politics or religion should not be expressed on district or group websites.

### **Tradition 11 - Attraction Not Promotion**

We do not publish photos of our members or their full names. Some groups publish photos of their meeting location for identification or historical purposes.

### **Tradition 12 - Anonymity**

Every AA website should adhere to AA's primary purpose of carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers. Care should be taken not to promote AA through a website at the expense of its primary purpose.