

BACKGROUND for SURVEY REGARDING CHOOSING A GROUP NAME POLICY AND PROCEDURE

This background information was gathered to provide information on the “Choosing a Group’s Name” Policy and procedure. It is not intended to advocate either for or against this or any Al-Anon Policy. Please read it and then answer the survey questions. **Thank you for your participation!**

During the April 2024 World Service Conference, Conference members discussed and approved updating the language of the “Choosing a Group Name” Policy in the [2022-25 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual](#) Policy Digest (pages 85-86). On the basis of the updated Policy, the Policy Committee and World Service Office Staff then created a new Choosing a Group Name procedure that:

- allows registration of new groups **only** if the group name does **not** include any “community-identifying designations,” such as Men, Women, Adult Children, or People of Color;
- will also update the names of existing groups only if they do not include such designations; encourages “groups seeking to encourage community-specific participation” to use the Participant filters, found under Advanced Search on the [al-anon.org](#) meeting search, instead of having any designation in the group name; and
- will be “communicate[d] widely through the links of service so that existing groups with names containing such designations would be encouraged to practice ‘obedience to the unenforceable’ by aligning their group name with the new Policy.”

(Quotes are from the [July 2024 “Policy Committee Update.”](#))

What follows is a history of how the new Choosing a Group Name Policy and the associated procedure came to be.

2010: The [2011 World Service Conference Summary](#), page 89, reported that in 2010 the Policy Committee discussed “Special Focus Groups” (what area now termed Participant groups—Women, Parents, etc.) in order to:

look at whether or not special focus groups were divisive within the fellowship. Because of this letter, many aspects of special focus groups were considered: • Whether the name “special focus” is appropriate. • Whether the groups were divisive to Al-Anon as a whole. • Whether all members are welcome at all groups. • What is the importance or place of special focus literature? • Is Alateen a special focus?

The Summary reports it was decided that no action would be taken at the 2011 WSC.

However, the [Approved Minutes from the October 2011 NCWSA Assembly](#), page 22, report that the “Group Focus...box has been frozen and will be deleted. All groups are now registered as Al-Anon groups with no group focus field. If your group has one of the focuses it is suggested to include that in your name.”

2012: According to the [2012 WSC Summary](#), page 94, the Board of Trustees approved many interim actions of the Executive Committee, including “To register all groups as Al-Anon groups, eliminate the field on the Al-Anon Registration/Group Records Change Form (GR-1) titled ‘Group Focus,’ and to suggest to groups whose members are of similar life situations, such as Al-Anon adult children, parents, men, women, and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT), to include that designation in their group name.”

Groups did not like this decision. For example, the [Approved Minutes of the 2012 NCWSA Assembly](#), page 7ff, presents the findings of a Thought Force on whether NCWSA wanted to keep the “Group Focus boxes” in its own meeting listings (which were then separate from the WSO listings). The Thought Force findings are well worth reading, since they also apply to many of the issues raised by the current Choosing a Group Name Policy and Procedure. (“Our very existence is about meeting the needs of our members and future growth”; “Our perspective may be limited by the lack of diversity in our fellowship.”) A motion for the NCWSA to retain the “focus boxes” passed by substantial unanimity. (This was rescinded in 2019, [NCWSA Assembly Minutes October 2019](#), after the new WSO website restored the “focus boxes.”)

“When the ‘focus’ field had been removed earlier [that is, in 2012], trusted servants reported their groups still wanted that feature to help members search for a meeting in which they felt comfortable,” says the [July 2024 Policy Committee Update](#) presenting the new Choosing a Group Name procedure. The “focus field,” now called Participants (in the WSO meeting search), was reinstated. The Update cites this as evidence of “the historical preference of groups across the WSC Structure for using the ‘focus’ (now called ‘Participants’) field for community identification.”

2021 or early 2022: According to the [WSC Highlights newsletter](#) (page 2), members of the Staff Policy Implementation Round Table (SPIRiT) proposed to the Policy Committee that the Policy on “Choosing a Group Name” laid out in the *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* needed to be updated, because Staff had seen a growth in the volume of names which “were perceived as unwelcoming, reflecting affiliation, or emphasizing differences over Al-Anon principles.” The Policy Committee agreed to make this the topic for the 2022 World Service Conference’s Open Policy Committee meeting.

April 2022: The open meeting provoked robust discussion. Subsequently, the Policy Chairperson and three other Policy Committee members determined that a Thought Force should be developed to make a recommendation to the Policy Committee about whether the “Choosing a Group’s Name” Policy in the *Service Manual* required

clarification to incorporate the principles and concepts identified during the April conversation. ([World Service Conference Summary 2022](#), pp. 48-49/124.)

October 2022: At the Policy Committee meeting the Thought Force recommended forming a Task Force to update the Policy to ensure clarity and inclusion of our Traditions, Concepts, and spiritual principles. The Policy Committee approved this recommendation by consensus.

A task force was created to revise the “Choosing a Group Name” section to reflect the fellowship’s shared experiences and identify the spiritual principles that the Policy supports. The Policy Committee recommended the following changes, which the Board of Trustees also approved:

Choosing a Group’s Name

~~Having~~ When choosing an appropriate Al-Anon or Alateen group name ~~is very important because it is included in local~~, consider the welcoming and ~~online~~ comforting focus of Tradition Five. Anyone affected by someone else’s drinking is welcome at an Al-Anon meeting ~~directories~~. It is vital that group names are inviting, attractive, and ~~avoid public controversy~~. Our spiritual growth has its roots in the ~~principle of anonymity, to enhance the sense of belonging and unity~~.

~~A group’s name~~ may be a ~~potential member’s~~ ~~person’s~~ first impression of Al-Anon. ~~Anon~~. Consider the ~~lasting impact the group name can have on newcomers, members, the public, and professionals~~. The group’s name ~~should be inviting to all and reflect Al-Anon and~~ meeting information may appear on local ~~meeting lists, printed materials, websites, as well as other venues for sharing public information. (see “Publicizing Meeting Locations” in the “Policies” section of this Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual).~~

~~Members weigh the guidance of the spiritual principles. A group’s name should found in the Twelve Traditions when choosing a group name:~~

- ~~Common welfare and unity for the greatest number in Al-Anon~~
- ~~Al-Anon does not imply affiliation~~ ~~affiliate with or endorse any outside enterprise, such as other Twelve Step groupgroups, self-help group, commercial venture, agencygroups, religiousgroupgroups, rehabilitation facility, or other outside enterprise even if the namefacilities, or commercial businesses.~~
- ~~The only requirement for membership in Al-Anon is associated with its location—e.g., “the Church AFG” or “the Hospital AFG.” that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.~~
- ~~To help avoid confusion with other entities, it is suggested that groups~~ ~~impactaffect another group, Al-Anon, or A.A. as a whole.~~ ~~The name does not~~
- ~~Al-Anon has no opinion on outside issues.~~

~~Members honor the policies out of respect for Al Anon unity and the group conscience process.~~

April 2024: At the World Service Conference, the Conference was asked to give its approval to the changes. Excerpt from the [Conference Summary](#), page 19:

Some discussion took place about the implementation of these changes and how they would affect existing groups with participant designations such as children of alcoholics. The Task Force offered that the new Policy is designed to help trusted servants communicate about how Traditions apply to group names and the importance of welcoming all potential members to the group. After determining that all Conference members were ready to vote, a motion was held and passed to approve the proposed changes to the Policy Digest. (See Motion #3 on page 35 of the [Conference Summary](#).)

Once the Conference approved the updated Policy, the Policy Committee and WSO Staff were tasked with deciding how to implement the Policy change by creating a new Choosing a Group Name procedure.

Comment from Delegate Chris M.: The updated Policy appeared to add clarifying language and specify the importance of our spiritual principles within the Traditions and Concepts. WSO already had the ability to deny registration to a group name that was thought to not reflect the Traditions. Conference members were told that the new procedure based on the Policy update would only affect new group registrations, since the WSO did not have the administrative staff to address existing group registrations. The changes passed with substantial unanimity. The details of how the Policy would be implemented by WSO Staff were not shared at the time of the Conference.

July 2024: A [“Policy Committee Update”](#) lays out the new Choosing a Group Name procedure based on the Policy voted up at the April 2024 WSC:

As a result of the 2024 WSC’s approval of the “Choosing a Group’s Name” Policy, the Staff Policy Implementation Round Table (SPiRiT) brought forward recommendations for the Policy Committee related to WSO implementation of new procedures to reflect the updated Policy. The recommendations were accompanied by background on the WSO procedures related to group names, including the historical preference of groups across the WSC Structure for using the “focus” (now called “Participants”) field for community identification. When the “focus” field had been removed earlier, trusted servants reported their groups still wanted that feature to help members search for a meeting in which they felt comfortable.

A thoughtful and spiritual discussion occurred, which resulted in the Policy Committee confirming that the proposed WSO procedures align with the new Choosing a Group’s Name Policy. Through this confirmation, the WSO was directed to:

- *Register new groups and update existing group names only when their name does not contain community-identifying designations.*
- *Guide groups seeking to encourage community-specific participation to use the “Participants” designation.*

The Committee directed Staff to communicate widely through the links of service so that existing groups with names containing such designations would be encouraged to practice “obedience to the unenforceable” by aligning their group name with the new Policy.

October 2024: Service Manual pages are [updated](#) to include the “Choosing a Group Name” Policy revisions approved at the April WSC Conference.

October 2024: In a letter, WSO AFG Group Records reminds groups that if their Group Name is denied, they can instead add a Participant type to the meeting information. Here is an excerpt from the letter::

*Thankfully, we can offer a very effective alternative for helping newcomers and members find groups that align with their specific needs: **the “Participants” filtering option on the al-anon.org meeting search, which includes categories such as People of Color, Adult Children, LGBTQIA+ to name just a few.***

The WSO receives many calls from potential newcomers asking if they are welcome at certain meetings with names similar to the one you were seeking to register. On the other hand, the data assures us that many people search and find groups with relevant “Participant” designations which assure them that they will feel welcome. We hope your group will reconsider the group name and submit a revised registration indicating the appropriate “Participant” designation and a name that offers welcome and comfort to all those affected by the family disease of alcoholism.

October 2024: Some members and groups express concerns over the new group name procedure and relay their concerns to District Reps, the Delegate, and the WSO Policy Committee. The Delegate scheduled visits to a couple of Districts to discuss the new group name procedure.

October 2024: At the Northern California World Service Assembly, the Delegate shared an update and background on the changes at the Assembly. Concerns about the new Choosing a Group Name procedure were shared by some members, including the procedure’s possible negative effects on inclusiveness, likely confusion about whether a meeting has a Participant focus, and difficulties for groups that seek to serve more than one Participant type (such as Women of Color, Gay Men, or Young Adult Children).

The Delegate accepted a request to survey groups and members in the Area to see how they feel about the new Choosing a Group Name procedure in order to decide on next steps, which might include a Thought Force that can take a closer look at the new procedure, using the KBDM questions and inviting the participation of members who support the new procedure and of those who don’t.