

Memo

To: World Service Conference
From: Policy Committee Chairperson
Re: Choosing a Group's Name Policy & Implementation Statement
(Updated from May 2, 2025)
Date: May 9, 2025
cc:

On Friday, April 25, 2025, I shared the following statement with the 2025 World Service Conference (WSC):

As the Policy Committee Chairperson, I want to reinforce that it was never the Policy Committee's intention to one day direct the WSO Staff to enforce this Policy on existing groups – EVER!

This statement is consistent with the Policy Committee's intention described in the July 2024 Policy Committee Update: "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." The statement was offered and appeared to help resolve the misunderstanding and confusion which arose from the July 2024 Policy Update. With this new mutual understanding, the Conference was ready to participate in the thoughtful, principle-based discussion about the Policy implementation that occurred at Conference over several sessions.

Given the nature of the conversation, the facilitation process for the Appeals sessions had to evolve and unfold organically. We had little time to prepare documentation which left many Delegates wondering how to adequately report on the WSC discussions, the outcome, and next steps. What follows is information that you may find helpful to share with your Area' groups and our current understanding of how we can all work together to prepare for further discussion at the 2026 WSC.

Policy Committee Acknowledgements

- The Policy Committee acknowledged concerns that the 2024 Delegates were not able to discuss the proposed Policy with their groups prior to last year's Conference so their groups could express any concerns to allow the Delegates to be informed when discussing at the 2024 WSC.
 - The Committee made a commitment to discuss how to address this concern in the future.

- The Policy Committee acknowledged that our Updates could have provided clearer, more detailed information since decisions during the July 2024, and subsequent Policy Committee meetings, involved implementation of the Policy. The Committee realizes the information regarding implementation that we shared could have been interpreted as Policy.
 - We made a mistake by not having the foresight to recognize that possibility and we regret the harm that oversight caused.

Information Shared to Support an Informed Group Conscience

- The World Service Office (WSO) Staff process for reviewing names, which may not be in alignment with the Policy, includes thoughtful reflection on the applicability of the Policy.
 - WSO Staff notify Area Group Records Coordinators when names are not accepted.
 - In speaking with those registering groups with names containing identifiers, Staff are regularly told the group will not welcome or even accept those who do not match the identification.
 - When sharing with groups whose name is not accepted, Staff share education about the Traditions and our primary purpose of welcoming at any meeting all those struggling with alcoholism in a loved one.
 - When reviewing names, Staff do not interpret identifiers as affiliation.
 - For reference, Staff practice is *not* to apply new policies retroactively, in other words, Staff do not enforce new policies on existing groups.
- Searching for groups by participant designation has been simplified on both al-anon.org meeting searches to make these searches easily accessible.
 - Searching by name is not available on the geographic meeting search and cannot be added given current technology.
- Newcomers and even long-standing members have shared and demonstrated that they do not understand they are welcome at meetings with group names or participant designations with which they do not identify.

WSC Understandings Achieved Through Conversation

- We are all committed to presuming goodwill, share the same intention to serve the best interests of Al-Anon Family Groups as a whole, and recognize that even a thoughtful group conscience may not satisfy everyone.
- Delegates are aligned in wishing to ensure all groups and members in their Areas are aware of and understand the significance of Tradition Three in terms of welcoming all those struggling with the family disease of alcoholism to their groups, regardless of their group's names or participant designation.

- The Policy language is consistent with our Traditions and Concepts, but the implementation was unexpected, and Delegates felt unprepared to address the concerns groups raised.
- As group registrations are being submitted frequently, WSO implementation of new group registrations and name changes cannot be paused until the Conference meets again. Staff need guidance to operate in their delegated authority.
- We are aligned to ensure the implementation is principle-based.
- The Conference agrees that when a group name implies affiliation or reflects something outside of Al-Anon, Staff are within their delegated authority to reject the name, offering suggestions as appropriate.
- The groups are concerned that disallowing identifiers in the names will reduce the number of newcomers and members who can find their group and the help Al-Anon has to offer.

Next Steps

So where do we go from here? The motion approved by the 2025 WSC called for a temporary suspension of the implementation of the 2024 WSC approved “Choosing a Group’s Name” Policy as relates to identifiers in group names. The 2026 WSC will decide how to proceed based on Area feedback. The specific wording of the motion is as follows:

MOTION #7: Allow group names to continue to include identifiers such as those currently listed on page 28 of the 2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27) v4(a) including “men, women, parents, adult children, young adults, other gender identification/sexual orientation, etc. with the understanding that in keeping with Traditions Three and Five, the groups will welcome anyone affected by someone else’s drinking” until the 2026 World Service Conference to allow WSC Structure Areas to discuss the implementation of the 2024 WSC-approved “Choosing a Group’s Name” Policy.

Delegates/Areas

The goal of the motion is to provide Conference members the opportunity to bring the discussion to their respective Areas to explore concerns, thoughts and opinions on the Policy and its implementation through spiritual conversations with the groups.

It is our sincere hope that this information provides the Delegates with the resources necessary to offer their groups clarity about the WSC discussions and how the Policy will be implemented until the 2026 WSC.

WSO Staff

Between now and the 2026 WSC, WSO Staff will continue to review group names for adherence to the Traditions as was supported by the 2025 WSC members. Their ongoing effort:

- Avoids registration of groups with outside affiliations
- Permits registration of new groups and updates to existing group names that include identifiers such as those listed in the motion.

In the meantime, WSO Staff are reflecting on the Delegates' 2025 WSC requests that were heard frequently during the discussions. The Delegates indicated their desire to be invited into the conversation when a group submits names with identifiers. Delegates shared that they wanted to contribute to encouraging all groups to be welcoming in accordance with Tradition Three. Staff are exploring ideas about how this might work.

World Service Conference

At the 2026 WSC, time will be allocated on the agenda for Conference members to resume this conversation. We look forward to continued engagement on this topic when we meet at future Chairperson of the Board Letter Presentations and then again at our April 2026 WSC.