



ALDA NOTE #3 **FORMING AN ALDA CHAPTER**

Introduction... Individuals who come together to pursue one or more of the objectives of ALDA generally begin their effort as a new and informal ALDA group. For many ALDAnS who first gather together, it takes time to get to know one another, become comfortable in the presence of other ALDAnS, develop a workable group communication strategy, and perhaps come to agreement regarding the specific ALDA objective(s) toward which the group will direct its energies. The building of a group identity, cohesiveness, program and procedure takes time, and is the necessary first step toward becoming an ALDA Chapter.

How did ALDA Chapters get started?... The first meeting of an ALDA group was on March 28, 1987, at the apartment of Bill Graham in Chicago, Illinois. It was attended by a brave band of thirteen late-deafened individuals who had been invited from a list developed by Kathie Skyer Hering, a Chicago area social-service worker. That initial social gathering led to regular contacts, the wide dissemination of a popular newsletter, and the incorporation of ALDA as a not-for-profit corporation in 1989. Since then, ALDA has continued to grow, with ALDA groups forming in various locations across the country. ALDA now has members from coast to coast (and several foreign countries), hosts an annual convention, has a national Board of Directors, is recognized as being tax-exempt by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and the Illinois Department of Revenue, and grants charters to both official ALDA Groups and official ALDA Chapters. Appropriately enough, the first ALDA Chapter Charter was granted to ALDA-Chicago on January 20, 1991, making that group the first official ALDA Chapter. [Also see ALDA NOTE #1]

How does a group obtain an ALDA Chapter Charter? ... Starting a new ALDA group is almost completely a function of local initiative, motivation and activity. On the other hand, when the group is ready to become a formal ALDA Chapter, it is required that the group complete and file a petition with ALDA asking to be granted "a charter as an affiliated Chapter, operating under franchise of ALDA, Inc". In other words, when your group wants to officially, legally and publicly use the ALDA name, then you have to ask ALDA to recognize your group and give its permission for you to use the ALDA name by granting your group a charter as an ALDA Chapter.

It's sort of like the idea that if a person decides to open a hamburger joint they can just go ahead and 'do it,' but if they want to hang a McDonalds sign outside they need to ask (buy) permission – and if they don't they can be in big legal trouble. The petition to ALDA has to include the names of four members of your group, who affirm that they are of legal age (over 18), current members of ALDA, Inc., and that they will be the original officers of the requested chapter

How do ALDA Chapters communicate?... When a group submits a petition to become an ALDA Chapter, one of the promises that they make is to "strive for the creation of a stress-free communications environment" at all of their functions. In order for your members to discuss, plan, share, or argue, you need a system for accessible and effective communication at your meetings. As ALDAnS we should be most sensitive to "being left out" of discussions, so your chapter needs a communication strategy for its formal meetings that tries not to leave anyone out.

Your communications strategy should give everyone total access to your group dialogue. As an example, if your chapter is composed of a few people all of whom know and use sign language, the reliance upon sign language in the group setting may be a workable strategy for you (at least for a while, until your chapter begins to grow). Similarly, speechreading may suffice if there are only five or six persons that regularly attend your chapter meetings and they all speech read very well.

However, experience has shown that with the variety of communication skills that are used by ALDAnS it quickly becomes difficult to handle group communication without some form of captioning system – otherwise, someone gets left out. With few exceptions, the bottom line for ALDAnS is that they can all read, and thus your group communication strategy should probably always be based on a system of text reading. The precise form of your captioning system depends on your human and technological resources. You may use a person with a conventional typewriter and a photocopy machine; or a notebook computer with enlarged text display passed around to everyone; or keyboard typing displayed on a television monitor or LCD panel and overhead projector; or a court reporter using stenographic equipment to create real-time captioning.

Your group's communication strategy may vary under different circumstances... For example, you may need to work with the cheapest system possible at first, but later you may gain the financial resources needed to upgrade your system. Or, you may rely on a fairly portable and cheap captioning system for some of your activities which involve only a few people at various locations, but obtain the assistance of a local court reporter to provide an expensive (or volunteer) real-time captioning system for your big meetings. Indeed, the nature of the communication strategy for ALDA Chapters may vary not only from chapter to chapter but within the same chapter as a function of time and circumstance. Do the best you can, but make an honest effort to implement a stress-free communication strategy which doesn't leave anyone out!

What are the objectives of an ALDA Chapter?... If you want to contribute to the conservation of the world's natural resources (a perfectly commendable goal), you might be well advised to start a local chapter of the Sierra Club – but not an ALDA Chapter. Or if you want to make a lot of money, you would definitely be better off buying a commercial franchise – but not starting an ALDA Chapter. The general objectives of ALDA are to provide Education, Advocacy, Role Models, and Support for late-deafened adults. The pursuit of one or more of those objectives necessarily becomes the purpose of an ALDA Chapter. However, it should be pointed out that an ALDA Chapter does not have to pursue all of the above objectives, nor does it need to pursue different objectives with equal fervor. Some ALDA Chapters may stress the educational objective of ALDA. Other chapters may prefer to concentrate their energies primarily in the area of advocacy. Still others may largely restrict their activities to providing personal and social support to their members. And, of course, some chapters will choose to maintain a balanced program in pursuit of all of the objectives of ALDA. Which objective of ALDA, or set of objectives, that your chapter decides to focus on is completely up to you – so long as you are focused on one or more of the objectives of ALDA. [Also see ALDA NOTE #1]

What kind of people can join an ALDA Chapter?... Now that you have a group communication strategy in place, and are committed to the pursuit of one or more of the objectives of ALDA, you can begin your recruiting efforts. The most frequent question concerning the eligibility requirements for ALDA Chapter membership is “Does the person have to be a late-deafened adult?” No, absolutely not! The hearing status of members of an ALDA Chapter is unimportant. Your chapter might be composed of only late-deafened adults, or it might be a mixture of late-deafened, born-deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing individuals. Furthermore, there is no distributional requirement for an ALDA Chapter. Your memberships may be 100 percent late-deafened, or only 30 percent late-deafened. The only requirement for membership in an ALDA Chapter is that a person must actively endorse the objectives of ALDA. In the most simple of terms, they must be interested in improving the lives of late-deafened adults.

How large must an ALDA Chapter be?... People often want to know “Is there a minimum number of members that an ALDA Chapter must have?” Yes, when you file a petition to become an ALDA Chapter your group must have a minimum of five (5) members. However, you should remember that anyone can become a member of an ALDA Chapter regardless of their hearing status, so it's perfectly all right to accept hearing spouses, parents, and friends as part of the minimum membership – you don't have to have five late-deafened adults. This minimum size requirement is logically necessary because the Board of Directors of an ALDA Charter must consist of five people. More important, however, this minimum size requirement is there in an effort to ensure that an ALDA Chapter will have enough people and resources to successfully pursue its chosen objective (s).

Some ALDA Chapters may always have relatively few members, especially chapters in small towns or rural areas where there just aren't many late-deafened adults within driving distance of each other. Other chapters may begin quite small, but go through a long period of slow continuous growth in membership. Still other chapters may start out relatively large. Although the size of the chapter may constrain its activities (for example, you can't enter a chapter team in a summer softball league with only five members), you should not confuse the quality of the chapter experience with the size of the chapter. Very small ALDA Chapters can have very rewarding experiences, and be very successful in the accomplishment of their chosen objective(s).

What should an ALDA Chapter call itself? ... When an ALDA group's petition to become an ALDA Chapter is granted, a chapter name will be assigned by the ALDA, Inc. Board of Directors.

However, the group itself may, in its petition, provide the ALDA Board with one or two requested names in order of preference. Whenever possible, the desires of the petitioning group will be accommodated, so in almost all cases the group really chooses its own name. Therefore, one of the things that you are going to want to do fairly early is to decide upon possible names for your chapter to include on the ALDA Chapter Charter Petition.

The name of an ALDA Chapter can be almost anything, so long as it begins with the word ALDA. For example, an ALDA Chapter in Boston, Massachusetts, might call itself ALDA-Boston. A chapter in New York city might choose the name of ALDA - Big Apple. Or a chapter in Nashville, Tennessee, might call itself ALDA - Music City. However, in order to retain the organizational flexibility necessary for the possible development of statewide and/or regional ALDA structures at sometime in the future, ALDA Chapters are strongly discouraged from requesting either a statewide name or a regional name that encompasses several states.

Furthermore, such statewide or multi-state regional names may well serve to inhibit the development of other ALDA Chapters within the area. Names such as ALDA - Nebraska, ALDA -

Texas, ALDA - Northeast, or ALDA - West Coast should be avoided.

To facilitate instant geographic placement of the location of ALDA Chapters, to enhance our ability to direct new ALDA members to ALDA chapters in their area, and to provide a degree of fairness for future ALDA Chapters that will come into being, whenever possible the name to be assigned by the ALDA Board of Directors will be the name of the city in which the ALDA Chapter is located (or a common nickname of that city) – for example, ALDA-Dallas, ALDA-Big D, ALDA-Chicago, or ALDA-Windy City. If an ALDA Chapter already exists in your city, and has been assigned the name of that city, then the ALDA Board may assign the name of a suburb, borough, neighborhood, building or landmark which seems most appropriate for your chapter, such as ALDA-Manhattan, ALDA-Fifth Avenue, ALDA-Empire State Building, or ALDA-Central Park. ALDA Chapters in relatively rural areas of their state will be assigned names indicative of their area within their state, such as ALDA-Southern Illinois. In all cases, historical, cultural, and environmental creativity in naming chapters is most welcome, such as ALDA-Canoe Country, ALDA-Land of the Seminole, ALDA-Grand Canyon Vista, ALDA-Big Sky Country, ALDA-Little Big Horn, or ALDA-Bunker Hill.

How often do ALDA Chapters meet?... An ALDA Chapter should meet fairly regularly in order for the members to get to know each other, enjoy the fellowship that comes with mutual interest, and derive the benefits that flow from group activity. Accordingly, when you submit a petition to become an ALDA Chapter, you promise to “hold meetings on a regular basis, a minimum of two (2) per year.” However, exactly what this means may vary from chapter to chapter.

For example, many rural chapters may prefer to meet no more than every other month given the long distances that some of their members may have to travel, whereas some urban chapters may desire to meet monthly with every other meeting being strictly a “social” affair. Other chapters may generally hold only quarterly meetings, but add an extra meeting a couple of times a year for special events or outings. However, experience suggests that weekly meetings of an ALDA Chapter are definitely too frequent, and all too quickly lead to group burnout. In short, you should let the needs, desires, and capabilities of your members determine the actual frequency of your meetings, but an ALDA Chapter must hold meetings on a regular basis, a minimum of two (2) per year..

Where do ALDA chapters meet?... The regular meetings of ALDA chapters are held in all kinds of places. Some chapters have no permanent meeting place, and meet on a rotating basis in the homes of their members. Other chapters have made arrangements for a permanent gathering place, which may be in a hospital, church, civic center, community building, Center for Independent Living, senior citizens’ facility, Elk’s Lodge, or almost anywhere. The definition of a “meeting” is very broad, and includes all educational and social events. So some “meetings” may be in a bowling alley, movie theater, local museum, historical structure, local restaurant, and so forth.

What do ALDA Chapters do? ... Once you have this group of people who are interested in improving the lives of late-deafened adults, what do you do at your gatherings? As an ALDA chapter, your primary concern is to do only one thing, and that is to develop an enjoyable program of activities in pursuit of one or more of the objectives of ALDA – and that leaves you a lot of room for being creative, expressive and individualistic, as well as satisfying local and personal lifestyles, interests and needs.

If the members of your chapter primarily like to party, then get to it! You can have a Christmas party, a Halloween party, a pool party, a 4th of July party, a “no reason for a party” party! Providing social enrichment is certainly one of the objectives of ALDA. But if your chapter is more interested in the educational purposes of ALDA, you might coordinate a series of guest speakers at your meetings, sponsor a sign language, speechreading, or cued-speech workshop, or take educational field trips to places of interest to late-deafened adults. Maybe you want to put your emphasis on advocacy, and would prefer to visit your local TV station urging that they improve captions on the local news, or prepare and send out flyers to all city and county governmental units making them aware that the law requires them to provide “effective communication” when dealing with people with hearing loss, or canvass all the hotels and motels in your area urging them to provide portable visual fire alarms for their deaf guests. Or, perhaps you can help others who are late deafened by providing good role models of competent, involved, and coping late-deafened adults.

For example, one of your members might run for city council; your members could engage in a well-publicized letter writing campaign to your state legislators informing them of the needs of people with hearing loss; or some of your members could volunteer to visit recently deafened persons in your local hospital. Better still, perhaps the program of your chapter could contain some activities in each of the above areas.

The program of an ALDA Chapter is limited only by the imagination, interests, energy and resources of its members, and it is quite likely that the program of almost every ALDA Chapter will be somewhat different. ALDA welcomes and encourages this diversity! Just as different kinds of people become late-deafened, so too the specific programs of ALDA Chapters will vary to meet the needs and interests of their members. [Also see ALDA NOTE #2]

Are there any other promises in the ALDA Chapter Charter Petition?... In petitioning to become an ALDA Chapter, a group agrees to “accept the Chapter Bylaws provided by ALDA. Inc.” and to “abide by them and any policies approved by the national Board of Directors which are relevant to local Chapters.” This general affirmation of the philosophical, organizational, and policy dimensions of ALDA represents an ethical, legal, and public commitment to the objectives and procedures of ALDA. For ALDA Chapters, the promises which they make in the ALDA Chapter Charter Petition, as well as the ALDA Chapter Bylaws and the

policies approved by the ALDA Board of Directors which are relevant to local chapters, become “rules” – but rules which the groups themselves have freely chosen to follow when they ask for the right to hang an “ALDA Chapter” sign on their door.

When a group promises to abide by the ALDA Chapter Bylaws, it obligates them to certain organizational forms. For example, in order to provide back-up leadership, as well as to facilitate structural recognizability and accountability, an ALDA Chapter agrees to elect a president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer. In order to ensure that the policies of the ALDA Chapter reflect the desires of its members, and that the chapter is controlled by late-deafened adults, an ALDA Chapter agrees to have a Board of Directors consisting of five people, more than fifty percent of whom are late-deafened adults, who set the policies for the chapter. And, to ensure that the general membership is kept programmatically and fiscally informed, an ALDA Chapter agrees to hold an annual business meeting. Beyond this, there are only a very few other minor organizational constraints which a group must accept when it becomes an ALDA Chapter, and these can be found in the Chapter Bylaws, which are available on the ALDA website (www.alda.org).

Is there anything a group must submit besides a petition to become an ALDA Chapter?... No, there are no other supporting materials that must be filed with an ALDA Chapter Charter Petition. The ALDA Chapter Charter Petition basically requires only three things:

1. A list of the names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of all of the persons who will serve as officers of the chapter if the petition is approved.
2. The desired chapter name.
3. A brief summary of the activities which the group has carried out during the past year or since its formation (if the group has been in existence less than a year).

These requested materials are necessary in order for ALDA to be able to accurately monitor its growth, identify and communicate with its chapter leaders, and describe the nature and extent of its organizational programs for federal reporting and fundraising purposes.

Once you become an ALDA Chapter do you remain an ALDA Chapter forever?... Very few things in this world are “forever” – but remaining an ALDA Chapter forever is a very, very easy thing to accomplish. An ALDA Chapter Charter is renewed at the end of each calendar year when a simple ALDA

Chapter Charter Renewal Form is submitted to ALDA. In essence, this form says “we want to renew our ALDA Chapter Charter for another year,” and includes the following:

1. A list of the names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses of all of the persons who will serve as the officers of the chapter for the renewal year.
2. A brief summary of the activities which the chapter has carried out during the past year.
3. Some brief information concerning the structure of the chapter, such as the number of members, whether or not the chapter has a newsletter, and whether or not the chapter has a website.

With this simple, easy renewal process, a group of people may maintain an ALDA Chapter and carry out an energetic and successful program of ALDA activities for many years.

Organizing an ALDA Chapter can be a time consuming, sometimes frustrating, and always challenging task; but it can be a very richly rewarding and beneficial experience for both yourself and all of the other members of your group. Try it; you’ll like it! In brief, the characteristics and requirements of an ALDA Chapter are as follows:

- Consists of a minimum of five (5) persons.
- Consists of any mix of late-deaf, born-deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing persons.
- Accepts as a member anyone who endorses the purposes and objectives of ALDA.
- Meets on a regularly basis, a minimum of two (2) time per year.
- Adopts a group communication strategy for its meetings which allows all members to follow and participate in the discussions (some form of captioning system usually works best).
- Maintains an enjoyable program in pursuit of one or more of the objectives of ALDA.
- Must file an ALDA Chapter Charter Petition that provides contact information for all of its officers, and gives a brief summary of its activities during the past year.
- Accepts the ALDA Chapter Bylaws and agrees to abide by any policies approved by the ALDA Board of Directors which are relevant to local chapters.