

SPONSOR ORIENTATION TO THE CALIFORNIA PRISONER OUTREACH PROGRAM (CAL POP)

1. INTRODUCTION

Thank you for volunteering to sponsor prisoners through the 12 steps. This means a lot to them and it will be a very rewarding experience for you. The California Prisoner Outreach Program coordinates volunteer Fellows to carry the message of SAA recovery to prisoners in a way that is anonymous, safe, secure, and simple.

Our anonymous, safe, secure and simple operations are guided by the 12 Traditions, data governance and technical capabilities (Microsoft 365 platform).

- Anonymity - sponsors use pseudonyms; sponsee's details hidden; use SCISAA/Cal POP mailbox.
- Safe - prisoner sponsee's don't have any sponsor's personal information.
- Secure (digital) - Sponsor and sponsee's personal information is encoded, protect from hackers; Cal POP coordinator volunteers and mailbox buffers communication.
- Simple - One online access point; Cal POP mails letters for you; Sponsor resources available.

This orientation to the California Prisoner Outreach Program will cover the following topics:

1. Our Expectations from Sponsors
2. How to Sponsor
3. Safety for Sponsors and Sponsees
4. Sponsoring Technologies
5. Sponsor Resources to Make it Easy
6. Writing the First Letters
7. Differences between Sponsees Inside and Outside Prison Fences
8. Legal considerations
9. Contact Information

We have a lot to cover in a short time so let's begin!

2. WHAT WE EXPECT FROM SPONSORS

As sponsors, we focus on the SAA steps alone. This is not a pen-pal service talking about a wide range of topics. We don't assist in official Parole Board Hearings (Tradition 6), run errands for sponsees, search for work or housing before their release, etc.

A sponsor cannot give what they do not have themselves. We expect our sponsors to be successful in recovery. This may be based upon time in the SAA program (not other 12-Step programs), time of recovery, time of sobriety, step history, service history, sponsor status, etc. We balance these factors with the desire to be of service.

Depending on how many prisoner fellows you write to, the commitment is minimal in hours per month but there is a longevity commitment.

3. CAL POP SPONSORING METHODS

There are more sponsees than fellows willing to sponsor so we use innovative methods to fill that gap. Sponsoring prisoners can be done through these three methods:

- Individual to individual
 - Traditional method

- Start with 1 to 3 sponsees depending on sponsor availability.
- SAA Group meeting to individual (up to 3 sponsees for now)
 - More than 1 member of a local group sponsors prisoners.
 - 1 person of the group is the point of contact with Cal POP
 - All it takes is a business meeting to obtain group conscience.
- 12 Step curriculum—lecture class method
 - Rey is developing a custom, standardized assignments that draws from Fellowship-wide worksheets and jail/prison experiences/ethnographies.

4. SAFETY FOR SPONSORS AND SPONSEES

Sponsor Safety.

Nearly all correspondences go through the Cal POP Admin Portal. We suggest the following actions to optimize safety and security:

- use a pseudonym, another name, include a fictitious last name because some prisons do not forward mail without it.
- use the SCISAA mailbox for all correspondences to protect your location.
- use our administrative portal to write up your letter.
 - If you prefer to handwrite it, then upload a scan or picture of the letter pages.
 - If you have reading material, then upload them.
 - We will mail the letter contents for you. If you would like to donate for postage that would be nice but unnecessary.
- Remember/remind ourselves that ANONYMITY is the spiritual foundation of our program (Tradition 12).
- Cal POP communications to sponsors is carried out by media outside of the administrative portal (e.g., text) for added security.
- Ask the administrators for “sanitized” suggestions and/or material if the sponsee does not feel safe.

Prisoner Safety.

Prison officials monitor all correspondences so we remind our sponsees to not over disclose. Other inmates may pose risks too: a sponsee may struggle to find a private area to write, theft of private material. Cal POP provides guidelines to sponsors how to “sanitized” letters and sponsor language with SAA material or other means to ensure the rigorous honesty normally practiced in a sponsor/sponsee relationship doesn’t endanger the prisoner’s legal or physical safety.

5. ADMINISTRATIVE AND INFORMATION PORTALS

Cal POP uses two portals for its operations, the information portal and the administrative portal.

Information Portal

Information and updates are located on Intergroup’s website, <https://scisaa.org>. As of today, this web page is basic but has the technical capability and the Intergroup webmaster is available to upgrade its contents.

Administrative Portal

This portal is the communications center between sponsors and sponsee letters. As a Microsoft 365 account using OneDrive, program coordinators can keep track of letters. Best practices for processing letters to/from sponsors and sponsees are documented on internal SOPs (Standard Operating

Procedures). In the future, its capabilities can automate processes increasing our throughput and workflow efficiency.

Other sources

Though we try to consolidate our content to this administrative portal, we occasionally rely upon other specialized web-based platforms. For example, tutorial videos showing how to use the information platform are on a third-party platform.

Cybersecurity

Though no platform is completely hacker secure, we take measures so that no personal information is on the administrative portal. Though not in full compliance, we refer to HIPAA guidelines for our Personal information standards.

6. SPONSOR RESOURCES TO MAKE IT EASY

While we do not provide copyrighted material like the Green Book and pamphlets, we provide access to our sponsors 12 step worksheets and other materials from others in our fellowship, including:

- Chuck S,
- Allan B,
- Houston Area Intergroup,
- New York City,
- Central Florida,
- Indianapolis and San Jose,
- Sponsors helping Sponsors telemeetings
- and more.

These materials can be accessed at <https://scisaa.org/sponsors/>.

7. FIRST LETTERS TO PRISONER SPONSEES

I (Rey) begin writing slowly to prisoners using this format:

Letter 1. Introduction and confirmation of sponsorship

Letter 2. 3 circles

Letter 3. First Step

My letter 1, introduction letter, includes:

- Congratulate them on taking efforts on their recovery.
- Include a paragraph about your recovery.
- Ask if your prisoner sponsee has limits/boundaries of disclosure. Suggest sharing techniques that don't over-disclose so no harm (legal) or ethical dilemma falls on either the sponsor or sponsee.
- Ask if having an SAA Green Book is safe. Do not assume this even though they have committed to recovery because some housing units are in mixed ("mainline" general population and special needs yards, SNY) populations. Later, if they say it is safe then let us know and we will request one from ISO. We have methods and materials that replace 'sex' with addiction, etc.
- Enclose copies of material for them to read (e.g., circles worksheet, Step1 worksheet).
- give them homework assignments along with readings needed for those assignments. Respect their willingness by providing a rationale for doing the assignment.
- Mention your boundaries. For example, we focus only on recovery, don't run errands, don't relay messages to others on the prisoner's behalf, don't receive phone calls.

8. TWO CULTURES OF WIDER SOCIETY AND PRISON: WHAT IS THE SAME AND DIFFERENT?

Is a prisoner addict the same as an addict in wider society? Because sex addiction is carried out in internal spaces of all human beings, in principle we are the same and the 12 steps work for everyone. Some differences may be a matter of degrees, for example:

- Illegal acting out harms others by lack of consent or power differentials.
- It is more advanced (e.g., incest, rape). Remember, this disease makes people do insane things.
- Prisoners may have early traumatic, disadvantaged, dysfunctional or addictive life experiences or home life (e.g., broken homes, early criminal history).
- They simply just got caught and those outside did not.

Here are some key themes that I learned in my (Rey) jail experience that hopefully can assist SAA fellows with no jail/prison experience help the prisoner sponsee.

A California prisoner may be motivated by a lawyer or prison official suggesting they ask for help in their upcoming Parole Board Hearing. Our Tradition 6 says we are to have no affiliation with an outside group or enterprise seeking to increase our influence or credibility as a fellowship.

Prisoners with sex charges carry a serious cultural stigma in prison derived from gang 'politics' that give a 'green light' to harm and kill 'sex offenders.' Prison safety policies separate the general population, where gangs are dominant, from 'special needs' prisoners but this is less than perfect. Some prisoners enter general population 'undercover,' saying their charges are anything else except sex crimes. Inmate culture and hierarchy asks for 'papers' to verify charges.

There are very few rehabilitative programs that focus on sex behavior in prison. I don't know exactly why but if staff identifies—outs--those with sex charges then other inmates could harm them.

There are 5 social orders for those in jail/prison:

1. Wider society - prisoners don't want to lose touch of societal order even though it is a memory. Family is often the only reason that gets them through the day.
2. Legal system – a subset of societal order, rare court appearances are milestones impacting their future.
3. Prison staff – direct interaction with prison guards and policies.
4. Inmates – 'respect' is the supposed currency among inmates; gang 'politics' and socialization to amass power against the guards and other inmates; strategies of coping with dangerous environments
5. God's order – separation from the world gives opportunity for spiritual practices that some take. This is the space where 12 step and religious/spiritual studies occur in a prisoner's life.

Many feelings are dominated by a prisoner, some include:

- Vulnerability. Weakness of the individual, forcing alliances with racialized groups or gangs.
- Guilt, shame and denial – accountability, self-judging, self-evaluating
- Stress – poor health care, dealing with other inmates
- Boredom – what to do down time? Self-reflect, learn, plan more crimes, socialize, etc.
- "negative/positive" actions/view of life and future. Those who use the time to become a better person are considered "positive."

Those in wider society are more at a spiritual disadvantage than those who are spiritual in prison:

- My personal spirituality of 40 years was rarely ever more intense than my short time in jail.

- In jail/prison there are less than a hundred ways to distract one away from a Higher power or God and outside there are thousands of ways.
- Of course, if one is not spiritual then then the stories of prison being like hell are more real.

9. LEGAL

As this program's Architect, I (Rey) am legally liable for your actions as a sponsor at this time. We not only have legal considerations but should adopt the Hippocratic Oath "first, do no harm," or in the words of Step 9, we shall not "injure them or others."

Since we are in the development stage of this program, the 1) legal protection of a registered non-profit and 2) insurance protection for Cal POP administrators and SCISAA do not apply to us so we are slightly vulnerable. Once this program grows to sustainability, we will offer more legal protection for its administrators.

So, if something out of the ordinary happens let us know so we can request legal advice.

10. CONTACT US

<https://scisaa.org/prisoner-outreach>

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Version 1.0, August 14, 2023

This document is authored by Rey G and is not affiliated with ISO and has not been approved by the ISO SAA Literature Committee. Send comments to rey_g@prisonoutreach.org.