

## **The Role of the SMART Recovery® Volunteer Advisor (VA)**

A SMART Recovery Volunteer Advisor (VA) is an individual who 1) has extensive knowledge of SMART Recovery training materials, or 2) by virtue of professional behavioral health experience is familiar with the scientific and professional literature on empirically supported addiction treatment and also has a basic knowledge of SMART Recovery training materials. The VA is designated by the President. Often these designations acknowledge informal relationships between professionals and volunteers that have existed for some time.

The VA serves as a consultant to volunteers as they apply SMART Recovery principles in their activities. The VA helps the volunteer understand SMART Recovery principles more fully, and consider options for how to apply them. The VA does not give directives about how to apply them. The relationship between a VA and one or more volunteers lasts as long as the volunteers find these relationships helpful. The VA is available for his or her own consultation to the President or any member of the Board of Directors.

Although SMART Recovery provides direction and guidance to its Meeting Facilitators and other volunteers through written, video and audio training materials, annual training events and periodic distance training events, the exact application of SMART Recovery principles to the diversity of issues that participants present, and the group dynamic issues that arise in SMART Recovery meetings, may benefit from the thoughtful interpretation of a VA. Questions about the application of SMART Recovery principles in meetings or similar settings (e.g., the Message Board) are best asked of Volunteer Advisors, if not members of the SMART Recovery Board of Directors. Volunteers may contact the SMART Recovery Central Office for answers to administrative questions.

The VA has no authority within the SMART Recovery organization, and is not responsible for the actions of the organization or any of its volunteers. In addition to providing consultation to volunteers, many VA's also provide a substantial amount of administrative support for local meetings. How much support will depend on local traditions and circumstances, and how involved local volunteers are willing to be in administrative matters.

Among the coordinating activities VA's have engaged in are: providing a phone line and answering machine for inquirers, updating as needed the information on the phone message (which normally includes both meeting information and background information about SMART Recovery), speaking with inquirers, mailing information to inquirers, arranging for publicity, stocking and distributing publications, helping to arrange new meetings, and occasionally facilitating a meeting as a model of how to conduct meetings, though all of these might also be handled by a "Volunteer Coordinator," who like the VA, might or might not also serve as a meeting Facilitator. VAs are especially appropriate for giving media interviews and making public presentations.

Some VAs also function as meeting facilitators on an ongoing basis. This is a completely acceptable practice, and may arise for various reasons. For instance, no one else may be available, or the VA simply enjoys the opportunity to donate his or her time in this way. However, ongoing meeting facilitation is outside of the normal VA role, and is not expected of VAs.

There are possible indirect benefits to taking on the VA role if the VA is in private practice. The VA may become more well-known in his or her community for treating addictive behavior, and may receive referrals of this type. It is therefore essential that a clear distinction between SMART Recovery activities and private practice activities is maintained. For instance, in local SMART Recovery literature and outgoing phone messages it is appropriate to list the VA's address and phone number as a point of contact for inquirers. It is not appropriate to indicate in literature, in the phone message, or to callers (unless they specifically ask) that the VA offers professional services. It is appropriate to discuss with facilitators the occasions when they might suggest that a meeting participant seek professional consultation. It is not appropriate to advise facilitators to make referrals to the VA whenever an opportunity presents itself. Facilitators are under no obligation to refer to anyone, but experience has shown that they do refer some individuals to VA's they have grown to respect.

VA's who do not maintain a clear distinction between their for-profit activities and SMART Recovery's non-profit activities will be dismissed from the organization. However, SMART Recovery would be pleased if competent and ethical professionals who offer scientifically based treatment for addictive behavior become better known in their communities.