

Third Strategic Planning Report

A Strategic Plan for Phase II of Turning the Lights On in Area 50

Introduction

This is the third strategic planning report created for the Area Committee and the Area 50 GSA.

Building on the previous two Reports, this Report lays out specific suggestions for “Turning the Lights On, Phase II.” The idea is to begin implementing Phase II during 2017.

The proposals in this Report are meant to provoke discussion. I do not know where that discussion will lead. My hope is that a specific plan will emerge containing concrete steps to further the revival of general service in Area 50, and that we can devote 2017 to implementing this plan.

The Strategic Planning Process So Far

The First Strategic Planning Report sought to show how general service, and the GSA in particular, are essential in Bill’s vision to the survival of the Fellowship and the recovery of each AA member – whether the member is directly involved in general service or not.

General service is service directly to AA as a whole. By serving AA, we help ensure that it survives and flourishes. We bring to life in our daily practice the unity of the Fellowship embodied in the Traditions. We thus support the recovery of each AA member and ensure the availability of a strong, vibrant and unified Fellowship for the alcoholic who still suffers, whether inside or outside our program.

General service thus embodies the Three Legacies of the AA Program: Recovery, Unity and Service. As Bill says, the “group of services” encompassed in general service is *“the most vital, yet least understood, group of services that AA has[.]”* Service Manual at S2 (italics added.)

These are strong and sobering words indeed.

As the First Report documents, general service works through the structure outlined in the AA Service Manual. The AA home groups have “ultimate responsibility” and “final authority” for the success of the service structure, and thus for the survival of AA itself. The groups discharge this responsibility through election of a General Service Representative (GSR), through participation in service activities outside the home group, and through participation in the District and the Area General Service Assembly (GSA).

Bill calls the GSA the “mainspring” of the AA service structure. Service Manual at S36. Unless the home groups discharge their “ultimate responsibility” to support the GSA, the service structure will fail to function properly, and AA as a whole will be threatened – along with the recovery of each AA member.

Our Second Report documents that in recent years, only about 10% of the home groups and meetings in Area 50 have participated actively in the GSA. As we all know, over the past several years, Area 50 has become what is known as a “dark area.”

The Second Report documents some possible reasons for this development, as well as recent developments in what might be called Phase I of an effort to “turn the lights on” in Area 50. These

recent developments include increased group participation and financial support for general service and Area 50, as well as the beginnings of a revival of the GSA and its service committees.

Given the “vital nature” of general service, however, it seems clear that these efforts are only the beginning, and that much more needs to be done.

The Second Report identifies six areas that, it suggests, should be the focus of “Turning the Lights On, Phase II.” These are:

1. Clarify the Roles of the Area Committee, the GSA, the Groups and the Membership in Carrying Out the Mission.
2. Increase Outreach to and Encourage Participation by the Membership and Home Groups in All Aspects of General Service, including GSA Itself.
3. Enhance the Functioning and Visibility of the Area Service Committees.
4. Increase Cooperation and Coordination with the Intergroups in Area 50, Particularly in the Area of Service Activities.
5. Re-Imagine the Structure and Function of the GSA Meetings.
6. Revive and Revise the District Structure.

The Second Report describes these goals in broad, conceptual terms. This Third Report will track these concepts. It proposes specific steps to be taken throughout 2017 and thereafter, to turn these concepts into a living reality.

Turning the Lights On, Phase II: A Plan for 2017 and Thereafter

Here are several specific suggestions for a plan in 2017.

- 1. Make Communication with the Groups and Membership a Primary Focus Throughout 2017. Develop Specific, Concrete Plans to Realize this Goal.**

(a) Introduction

The overall goal of our strategic plan is to increase awareness of, and participation in, general service throughout Area 50.

We all know that in AA, we cannot tell anyone to do anything. Accordingly, what we do is simply share our experience, strength and hope. If our experience teaches that there is a solution, there is a better way, then AA teaches us to display this kit of spiritual tools to another alcoholic, and to help them incorporate these tools into their own lives.

I have come to believe this approach is the only workable path toward the revival of general service in Area 50. I take comfort from the fact that Bill seems to believe the same thing:

[W]hen it comes to general service, communication has a tendency to break down. It can take hard work to get the attention of alcoholics, but with a creative approach, they can be encouraged to take time out from the nuts and bolts of recovery to think about another phase of their new lives. *Once AA members are well informed about service, they often want to become involved and to take on their own service responsibilities.* Service Manual at S23 (emphasis added.)

I have come to understand that the AA way of life requires the practice of *all three legacies* – recovery, unity and service. Bill calls the services embodied in general service “the most vital, yet least understood,” aspect of our third legacy. Service Manual at S2. I have come to understand, therefore, that general service is vital to the survival and thriving of our Fellowship, and thus to the recovery of each AA member.

I have come to believe, therefore, that the weak state of general service in Area 50 represents a threat to the Fellowship in our Area, to our membership, and to the alcoholic who still suffers, both inside and outside the Fellowship. For this reason, I believe that the issues addressed in this strategic plan are of profound importance to AA in our Area.

We have a solution to the weakness of general service in Area 50. I believe that communicating that solution should be the first goal of Phase II. The idea is, to paraphrase Bill, that once the membership understands what general service is, how it works, and why it is important, they will support and join in our efforts to “Turn the Lights On” in Area 50.

(b) According to Bill, Communication About General Service Throughout AA is “Vital.” As Bill Cautions, However, Communication About General Service Is Also “Hard Work.”

To be successful, “Turning the Lights On in Area 50” will require AA’s membership to embrace a vital aspect of our program that many do not understand or even know about. It requires “the adoption of attitudes and actions that almost no alcoholic . . . can dream of taking.” 12 & 12, page 24.

Bill explains that communication about general service work is difficult because, for self-centered alcoholics, “the connection [between general service work and their own recovery] is not always direct or obvious.” *Id.*

Accordingly, Bill says, “it can take hard work to get the attention of alcoholics” on this topic. *Id.*

Once again, however, Bill’s own personal experience with general service points to the solution.

Bill observes that “some stimulators are usually needed to get the attention of AA members – to show them that service can add a rich dimension to their sober lives and Twelfth Step work, and that their participation is vital to the future of AA.” *Id.*

Bill cautions that good communication about general service is “hard work.” It requires “some stimulators” and a “creative approach.” Providing these stimulators, and a creative approach to communication, should be the first goal of our Phase II plan.

(c) What Do We Communicate?

Given the situation in Area 50, we should communicate two things to the membership:

- The Substance: What general service is, how it works, and why it is important.
- The Plan: The specifics of our plan to reinvigorate general service in Area 50.

The next section will address the substance of our message. That is followed by some comments on how we communicate a substantive message in AA. Specific steps for carrying this message are addressed in the third section, and throughout this Report.

(d) The Substance of Our Message

As noted already, the vast majority of AA members in Area 50 do not understand what general service is, how it works, or why it is important. A great many members have never even heard the term.

General service is a multidimensional process, and there is a lot to explain to describe it fully. The Service Manual is a dense and rich document that cannot be grasped in one reading; like all of our program, service must be experienced to be understood.

A key to success in Phase II will be our ability to explain general service, or at least provide an introductory overview, in a brief and simple message. I have tried to work on that goal in parts of this and previous Reports.

Here is a further attempt to summarize our substantive message. A summary like this could be used to carry the Phase II message as part of the communication effort, for example as part of a flyer circulated throughout the Area.

- **What Is General Service?**

According to Bill, general service is “the most vital, yet least understood,” aspect of AA’s Third Legacy of Service.

General service is service to AA itself. General service provides a structure to aggregate the group conscience of each AA group, so that AA is guided in all its affairs by the combined group conscience of all AA groups in a given region and ultimately around the world.

Through this combined group conscience, general service ensures that our message is carried in a fashion consistent with our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and that our Fellowship remains unified (our second legacy), healthy, vibrant, and available to “carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers” – both inside and outside the Fellowship.

- **How Does General Service Work?**

How general service works at the group and area level is summarized on page 1 of this Report:

General service works through the structure outlined in the AA Service Manual. The AA home groups have “ultimate responsibility” and “final authority” for the success of the service structure, and thus for the survival of AA itself. The groups discharge this responsibility through election of a General Service Representative (GSR), through participation in service activities outside the home group, and through participation in the District and the Area General Service Assembly (GSA).

Bill calls the GSA the “mainspring” of the AA service structure. Service Manual at S36. Unless the home groups discharge their “ultimate responsibility” to support the GSA, the service structure will fail to function properly, and AA as a whole will be threatened – along with the recovery of each AA member.

GSA “provide[s] a forum for discussion of all matters of concern to AA in the Area.” In Bill’s words, the GSA is “the democratic voice of the movement expressing itself.” The GSA also works through service committees, which coordinate Twelfth Step service activities like Treatment, Corrections, Grapevine, Cooperation with the Professional Community, Public Information, etc., throughout the Area. The service committees integrate service activities in our Area with the broader movement, by working with regional resources and the General Service Office in New York.

The GSA is led by the Area Committee, consisting of GSA officers and the service committee chairs. GSA also elects an Area Delegate, who carries our Area group conscience regionally and to the annual General Service Conference in New York, where Delegates from throughout North America gather with AA’s leadership in New York to address matters of concern to AA as a whole.

- **Why Is General Service Important?**

General service is service directly to AA, to AA’s Twelfth Step service efforts, and to the unity of our Fellowship. General service thus supports the foundation of our Fellowship and its Three Legacies, insuring that the Fellowship survives and thrives.

General service thus insures that our program remains healthy and available to the alcoholic who still suffers – both inside and outside the Fellowship. That is why Bill describes general service as the “most vital” aspect of our Twelfth Step service work.

Again, an overview of general service along these lines – what it is, how it works, and why it is important – should be an important communication tool in carrying out the Phase II plan, for example by circulating throughout the Area as part of the communications outreach.

(e) How We Communicate

We all know that ours is a program of *experience*, not just knowledge. To paraphrase, “knowledge alone avails us nothing.”

As important as sharing knowledge and information about general service is, therefore, we know that we need to go further. We need to speak the language of the heart, by sharing our own experience, strength and hope – in this case, our personal experience with general service and the Three Legacies, and how this experience has enhanced and strengthened our personal recovery.

This form of sharing is key to the spiritual nature of our program. We know that in the end, it is the only effective way to communicate with another alcoholic.

My personal experience is that this approach, so effective in other parts of AA, has been sorely lacking in general service. To the contrary, my initial experience was that general service was unwelcoming of the newcomer and closed and elitist in its atmosphere. I believe there is still a substantial component of lecturing, explicit or implicit, in the way we talk about general service today.

If Phase II is to succeed, we will need to approach communication about general service with the same tolerance, patience, love and language of the heart that we bring to the rest of our program.

In a dark area like ours, there is a lack of widespread personal experience with general service to share with others. This reality places a special burden on those with direct experience in general service.

Those of us with less personal experience must take hope and guidance from our own study, the guidance of others, our own increasing experience in general service, and through events like NYSIW and NERASSA, where our personal experience can broaden and deepen. Our situation in Area 50 places an extra urgency on these efforts, if this “most vital aspect” of our Third Legacy is to be restored in our Area.

Ultimately, to paraphrase the Big Book again, our Third Legacy “is not a theory; we have to live it.” And, to paraphrase again, our living the Third Legacy of Service may be the only Service Manual many members will ever see.

In summary, we must explain what general service is, how it works, and why it is important. More fundamentally, however, I believe we have to live our explanation, and share our personal experience. It is only by understanding and living general service that we will have a personal message to carry to the rest of Area 50.

(f) What Are the Specific Steps to Take to Further Good Communication?

As the Doctor’s Opinion states, “frothy emotional appeal seldom suffices.” That is certainly true of generalized calls for better communication.

Specific opportunities for communication are discussed throughout the balance of this Report. Discussion at the Area committee, the GSA and our service committees will undoubtedly identify additional opportunities, such as flyers, days of sharing, speakers on service, etc. We will want to discuss, develop and look for these opportunities throughout the year, and we will want to seek input from the groups and membership on this topic.

One obvious opportunity for communication, however, is the General Service Assemblies themselves.

A basic suggestion of this Report is that the assemblies in 2017 be devoted to the extent possible to all aspects of the Phase II plan. This suggestion is discussed further in the balance of this Report, and summarized in Recommendation 6 below.

I recommend that the first Assembly in 2017 be devoted in significant part to introducing the Phase II plan and reviewing the plan in detail.

The idea would be to give the GSA a clear and specific sense of mission and direction for the balance of 2017. Attendees at the GSA would be encouraged to carry this message to their Home Groups, and to other groups and meetings in Area 50.

If this suggestion is adopted, we might want to consider advance notice to the membership of this plan for the first Assembly, and encourage broad attendance and discussion, in order to carry the message of our plan to Area 50 as broadly as possible.

Again, developing other specific opportunities for communication throughout 2017 should be a critical goal of the Phase II plan.

(g) Summary

Increased awareness of and participation in general service is the core goal of the Phase II plan. This first recommendation proposes to advance this goal through a strategy of communicating what general service is, how it works, and why it is important, throughout our Area.

Based on Bill's guidance, the premise of this recommendation is that improved communication is vital to improved awareness of the importance and value of general service, and thus to increased participation.

To be successful in Phase II, we will need specific plans and specific commitments as to how this communication will be carried out, as well as a specific message to carry. Looking at the Responsibility Declaration, each of us will need to take on specific commitments to make the communication plan work.

2. The Role of AA's Constituencies in Carrying Out Our Plan

Goal 1 of the Second Report sought to identify the AA constituencies implicated in a plan to "turn the lights on." This Recommendation will address in concrete terms the role of each constituency in the Phase II plan.

(a) The Area Committee

The Second Report quotes the Service Manual as follows: "perhaps more than any other group of people in AA, the area committee is responsible for the health of the Conference structure and thus for the growth and harmony of the AA Fellowship." Report at 5, Service Manual at S44.

I am convinced that a small group taking front line responsibility for the formulation and implementation of the Phase II plan is the only practical way to proceed. Under the structure envisioned in the Service Manual, I believe the area committee is that group.

Even if a separate group is constituted for this purpose, I believe that body should report to the area committee, and that the committee should be ultimately responsible for the plan's formulation and implementation, or at least the careful monitoring and management of that process.

The area committee is the trusted servant of the GSA, and thus of the groups represented there. Ultimately, to be successful, any plan to "turn the lights on" must be embraced by the Assembly, its constituent groups and their members. But the area committee constitutes the leadership of that structure and is the only group in a position to take the practical steps necessary to lead this effort.

If there is agreement on this concept, the committee, and its members better versed in the Service Manual, should discuss the details and mechanics by which the committee, the assembly, the groups and the members would interact in the formulation, adoption and implementation of the Phase II plan.

(b) The GSA

The Service Manual states that "the Area Assembly is the mainspring of the Conference structure – the democratic voice of the movement expressing itself." Second Report at 4, Manual at S36.

While I think it is only practical for leadership on this project to be the responsibility of the area committee, no plan to “turn the lights on” will be successful unless it is embraced and implemented by the GSA, the membership, and the groups themselves.

Providing a forum for the groups and their members is the basic function of the assembly. For this reason, the assembly must take ownership of any strategic plan if it is to be successful. It will be the responsibility of the members of the assembly to carry this message back to their groups for discussion and implementation.

Of course, this communication will be a back-and-forth process. As stated above, we all know that nobody in AA can tell anyone to do anything.

As with the area committee, however, the GSA and its members have a leadership responsibility to AA in our Area. That is the essence of our service structure. If this plan is to be successful, therefore, the GSA must be a key forum for its implementation, and its individual members must be personally responsible for the back-and-forth communication with the groups and members that will be essential to this process.

(c) The Groups

As the Service Manual makes clear, the groups bear “ultimate responsibility,” and hold “final authority,” for the general service structure. Manual at S15. Increasing group participation in general service is thus perhaps the most important goal of the Phase II plan.

As discussed already, many groups do not understand, and are often unaware of, their general service responsibility and authority. As a result, most groups and meetings do not participate actively in general service. That is why Area 50 is a dark area.

A primary goal of Phase II must be to carry this message to the groups and meetings in Area 50, receive their input on the plan, and encourage their participation in general service as the Service Manual contemplates. To paraphrase the Manual, it is our hope that once the groups and meetings “are well informed about service,” they will want to fulfill their responsibility to ensure the continued health and flowering of the Fellowship.

The challenge will be to develop specific methods for reaching out to the groups – particularly to those groups and meetings that do not participate in GSA.

This Report suggests using the assemblies as the first forum for carrying the message of our strategic plan. Obviously, however, that approach will be inadequate in the first instance to reaching those groups that do not participate in GSA directly.

Developing specific plans to reach these non-participating groups will be one of the most important tasks for Phase II. This should be a topic for discussion at the area committee and the assembly, as well as among the groups and membership as a whole. Ultimately, bringing this message forward to the groups and meetings is the personal responsibility of each AA member who practices our Third Legacy – which should be all of us.

See Recommendation 5 (page 13-14) for one suggestion for outreach to non-participating groups.

(d) The Membership

The role of the individual AA member in general service is discussed at length in the Service Manual; a lengthy quote appears on page 3 of the Second Report.

Obviously, general service can function only with the participation of individual AA members. As discussed already, Bill makes the point that “*good communication* [italics Bill’s] is of vital importance” to the process of encouraging participation. Manual at S23.

However, the Service Manual recognizes that not all AA members will participate directly in general service, even if they understand its importance. (“Most AA members are primarily interested in their groups, in their own sobriety, and in helping other drunks one-on-one. And that is as it should be.” Manual at S23.)

Nevertheless, it is the clear vision of the Service Manual that a healthy service structure is essential to the healthy recovery of every AA member, whether they participate directly in general service or not.

We know that ours is a spiritual program based on living all three legacies, including our third legacy of service. In an area like ours, where the third legacy is less than healthy, the spirit that nurtures the recovery of each AA member is not healthy either. And we know that the health of our program is a matter of life and death for us. “With us, that is just the way it is.”

In summary, a healthy and thriving third legacy is critical to maintaining the spiritual health of our Fellowship, and thus of each member. A critical goal of Phase II is to do everything possible to ensure that every AA member in Area 50 understands this fact.

(e) The Districts

Certainly, the Districts play a key role in the general service structure envisioned by the Service Manual.

Unfortunately, as we know, the Districts are essentially non-functional in Area 50. Addressing this problem is one of the goals identified in the Second Report; it is discussed further in Recommendation 5 below.

For the present, I note that communication about the vision of the role for the Districts should be part of the message communicated during Phase II. It might also be possible to make some preliminary efforts to revive the District structure as part of the communication strategy. See Recommendation 5 for a further discussion of these issues.

(f) The Delegate

The Second Report did not specifically examine the role of the Delegate in our plan to “turn the lights on.” However, it seems clear that the Delegate could and should play an important role.

The Delegate is, or should be, an embodiment of the group conscience of our Area. That is certainly my understanding of the Delegate’s role from the perspective of the General Service Conference.

As such, the Delegate would presumably be deeply informed regarding the status of AA in our Area. The Delegate's sense of these matters should be extremely helpful in formulating the Phase II plan and guiding its implementation.

The Delegate could also play a critical role in carrying the message of the Phase II plan to the rest of the Area. My personal sense is that our current Delegate enjoys deep respect and affection throughout our Area. His personal participation in carrying the message would be extremely valuable for this reason.

(g) A Further Note on the First Recommendation

The First Recommendation addresses improved communication with the groups and membership as to what general service is and how it works.

Each of the constituencies discussed in this Second Recommendation has a critical role in general service. Other constituencies, such as the Area service committees, have critical roles as well.

So, it is worth remembering that an improved understanding of general service throughout Area 50 would call for an understanding of these roles. This fact needs to be considered in developing the message to be communicated under the First Recommendation.

Again, because general service is a multifaceted concept, it will not be captured easily by a simple message. We may well be able to provide an overview of general service to the membership during Phase II. But, like the rest of our program, a true appreciation of general service can come only through experience over time. Communication of this reality to the membership would itself be a valuable contribution to an enhanced understanding of how our Third Legacy actually works!

(h) Summary

A critical element of the Phase II plan is to insure that each AA constituency discussed in this Recommendation understands and embraces its role in general service and the plan to continue the effort to "turn the lights on" in our Area. Carrying this message to each constituency will be crucial to the success of the Phase II plan.

3. Enhancing the Functioning and Visibility of the Area Service Committees

Enhancing the functioning and visibility of the Area Service Committees is the third recommendation in the Second Strategic Planning Report. The Second Report addresses this goal in general terms at pp. 5-6.

To get down to specifics of a Phase II plan for this goal, I see two elements:

- Defining the mission of each service committee, doing an inventory of where the committee stands today in fulfilling that mission, and developing a plan for further progress.
- Consistent with the first recommendation, communicating the results of this effort to the GSA, the groups and meetings, and the membership at large.

What follows are some specific thoughts as to how to move forward with these goals.

(a) Developing the Mission of the Committee

The Second Report notes that as part of Phase I, the revival of the service committees has begun. The goal of this Recommendation is to continue that effort. An inventory of the committee's mission, and a plan for moving forward based on that inventory, is the essence of this Recommendation.

The first step of this process might be to identify as specifically as possible the nature of the service function the committee is designed to meet.

Taking treatment as an example, is it the function of treatment to make AA available to residents of treatment facilities? To provide residents with transition services ("bridging the gap") on discharge? To educate the staff of the treatment facilities on what AA offers, what it does not offer, and to open a dialog on what we can do to support their mission? To share the experience of AA as a whole with those active in treatment in Area 50? To coordinate these efforts? Some combination of these and other elements?

Similar questions can readily be developed for the other service functions.

The next question might be to ask the role of the Area committee in this service function.

Using treatment again as an example, is the function of the area treatment committee to work directly with treatment facilities and their residents and staffs? To coordinate this kind of effort with the Intergroups and their service committees? To work with corresponding committees in other areas, for example through NYSIW and NERASSA? To access support for the service function available through the General Service Office in New York? Again, some or all of the above, or other tasks not mentioned?

A closely related question would be the relationship of the particular service committee to other area service committees. For example, does treatment work with CPC in communicating with the staff of treatment facilities? How about the use of Grapevine materials at the facilities?

Questions like these would help formulate a vision for the service function and how it might work best at the Area level.

The next question would be a rigorously honest assessment as to how that vision is being implemented in the Area today. What is being done well? What could be done better? What is not being done at all? For example, does the treatment committee have an inventory of all treatment facilities in Area 50? How is the service function being conducted at each of these facilities? What is the relationship between the area committee and its intergroup counterparts? What resources could help enhance the mission, from the area committee, the GSA, the groups or the membership at large? From New York?

From an exercise like this, each service committee would be able to develop a vision for how it would like to function, an assessment as to where it stands in implementing that vision, and what steps could be taken to enhance the effectiveness of the committee itself and the fulfillment of the service mission in Area 50.

(b) Communicating the Results of this Effort

As stated in the First Recommendation, the primary goal of this Phase II proposal is improved communication regarding general service throughout Area 50. The goal of improved communication should apply to the service functions in particular.

Each service committee would communicate with several audiences, including the Area committee, the GSA, the intergroups, the groups, and the membership at large, in addition to regional communication and communication with New York.

The goal of this communication would be twofold: to carry the service message as the committee sees it, and to receive input and help from the audience. Hopefully, improved communication would result in enhanced performance of the service function, and enhanced awareness of and participation in that service by the membership.

Recommendation 1 identifies as a core goal for Phase II the development of specific, concrete plans for this kind of communication. Each service committee could develop its own communication plan, in coordination with the Phase II communication plan for the Area as a whole.

Recommendation 1 recommends using the assemblies themselves as part of the communication strategy. I suggest that one or more of the assemblies in 2017 be devoted to the service committees, with presentations from the committees explaining the service function, the results of the inventory suggested above, and how the GSA and the membership can better support this function.

Each service committee could consider other outreach measures, such as the preparation of a flyer like the one suggested above, outreach to the intergroups, and outreach to the groups themselves. The committees may well develop other outreach ideas of their own – e.g., in the case of treatment again for example, outreach to the treatment facilities, their staffs and residents.

4. Increase Cooperation and Coordination with the Intergroups in Area 50, Particularly in the Area of Service Activities.

I believe my thoughts on this topic are captured pretty well at pages 6-7 of the Second Report.

Basically, the idea is to improve communication and cooperation with each intergroup, and thus improve the overall service structure and function throughout Area 50.

To make concrete suggestions to bring these thoughts into reality, I suggest the following:

(a) Area Committee/GSA Representatives Should Attend the Intergroups, and Be Responsible for Liaison with Them.

The area committee and/or the GSA should consider appointing a representative or representatives to act as the liaison for the committee and the assembly to each of the four intergroups in Area 50.

That representative would be responsible to convey to the intergroup what is happening in AA at the area level. The representative would also be responsible to carry back to the committee and the GSA the situation at the intergroup, his or her assessment of the working relationship between the area and the intergroup, and what the area committee and the GSA can do to support and enhance the intergroup mission.

The Service Manual indicates to me that the scope of matters that should concern the area committee and the GSA is broad. Liaison with the intergroups is critical to the success of the area mission, most obviously in with regard to service functions, but more broadly with regard to the health and functioning of the intergroup structure and thus to the health of the Fellowship in our area.

I am by no means suggesting that the area has any form of control or authority over the functioning of the intergroups. What I am suggesting is that the area has a duty to be of service to the Fellowship in our area, and that being of service to the intergroups is part of discharging that duty.

As the Second Report points out, the overlap between the intergroups and the area/GSA is the source of significant confusion and frustration within the membership.

This overlap, confusion and frustration is a concern that should be brought to the surface and addressed during the Phase II process. Appointing representatives to each of the intergroups would be one way to begin addressing this issue in a concrete fashion.

(b) Encourage the Intergroups to Have Their Own Active Liaison With the GSA

I believe this structure is already in place in theory, but it seems to be largely inactive as a practical matter. The Area should do what it can to encourage the intergroups to take active advantage of this opportunity for improved communication and coordination. If there are active liaison representatives from both the intergroups and the GSA, these two representatives could form a small committee to coordinate the relationship between GSA and each intergroup more effectively.

(c) A Note on Communication

Again, improved communication regarding general service throughout Area 50 is a primary goal of this Phase II proposal.

The Area has a real opportunity to enhance its communication with the groups and members by participating more actively in the intergroups. Our Phase II plan should be explained to the intergroups, and through the intergroups to their participating groups and members.

Improved communication with the intergroups should also enhance the performance our joint responsibilities, and should help address the confusion and frustration of the membership regarding our respective service roles.

(d) Devote an Area Assembly to the Relationship With the Intergroups

One continuing theme of this Third Report is the use of the area assemblies to enhance communication. Continuing with that idea, I suggest we consider devoting to the extent possible one of our assemblies in 2017 to the status of the intergroups and their relationship with the area. We could invite representatives from each intergroup to participate. I think the assembly could be a good forum for discussion of these issues, which again I think are ones of confusion and frustration for the membership and concern the healthy functioning of AA in our area.

5. Revive and Revise the District Structure

This topic was the sixth goal identified in the Second Report. I do have a few additional specific suggestions on this topic beyond what appears at pp. 7-8 of that Second Report.

First, as with the other Phase II goals, we might want to consider devoting all or part of an assembly to this topic.

Secondly, it occurs to me that a “grass roots” approach to reviving the District structure might be in order. Obviously, the Districts will work only if they are supported by the groups and meetings. So perhaps there is a way to encourage contiguous groups to begin to work together on specific topics.

For example, one practical way to carry the Phase II message to non-participating groups might be to try to set up joint meetings of a number of contiguous groups to discuss the Phase II plan. This might be a more practical way of reaching out to these groups than trying to get to each group separately, and might provide a basis for beginning some form of District-type communication.

Groups that are already active in AA could take the lead in arranging meetings like this, inviting members of nearby groups that do not participate in GSA. Such District-level meetings could have support from the area committee as appropriate. That effort could be a step in beginning the revival of the District function.

Another idea I have heard on this topic is a radical re-imagining of the District structure – by, for example, creating a small number of Districts based on the structure of the intergroups. This might be a way to reduce any duplication of effort between the intergroups and the general service structure.

Basically, this is an issue on which I do not see a clear and effective path forward. As suggested in the Second Report, it might be wise to address this issue in more detail after a further round of efforts to increase group participation and better coordination with the intergroups.

6. Re-Imagine the Structure and Function of the GSA Meetings

(a) Suggestions Made So Far

Recommendation 5 in the Second Report suggests a re-imagining of the structure and function of the GSA meetings. The goal would be to move away from the current “business meeting” format, toward a format that is more “useful, substantive and interesting to the membership.” Second Report at 7.

Specific ideas for a new approach appear at page 7 of the Second Report. Also helpful are comments from the Service Manual at pp. S36-S42, which are summarized at pp. 7-8 of the First Report.

Rather than repeating these ideas here, I respectfully refer the reader to the earlier Reports. I believe these already existing recommendations, if implemented, could go a long way to making the GSA more accessible to the membership, and a more valuable vehicle for general service in our Area.

(b) Add an “Open Mike” for the Membership at Large to the GSA Agenda

I also suggest that the meeting format should be revised to encourage members of the GSA, and AA members at large, to raise issues not on the agenda, but which they believe are or should be of concern to the Fellowship in Area 50.

There is really no outlet for raising such issues in Area 50 today. To the contrary, GSA still operates in a relatively top-down, insular manner, concerned with its own agenda, and does not provide a forum that encourages members to raise issues that are of concern to them.

I believe the current approach tends to isolate the GSA from the membership, in conflict with the spirit of the Service Manual. This only increases the frustration, resentment and lack of appreciation for general service that has led Area 50 to become a “dark area.”

In addition to the suggestions referenced above, therefore, I suggest that each GSA include an “open mike” segment during which members would be encouraged to raise issues they believe are important to the current status of AA in Area 50. This agenda change should be featured as part of the outreach program described in Recommendation 1 and explained as an effort to ensure that GSA provides a forum for the entire membership, and thus for the “democracy in action” envisioned by the Service Manual.

I think a step like this might be significant in reforming and improving the communication between GSA and the membership. As a practical matter, time limits on this agenda segment, and on individual comments, could be useful in maintaining focus.

(c) Devoting the Meetings in 2017, at Least in Part, to the Phase II Plan

Finally, this Report has already suggested making each of the first five Recommendations a focus of one of the assemblies in 2017. If appropriate, Recommendations 1 and 2 could be combined in one meeting, while more than one meeting might be necessary to address all the service functions adequately (Recommendation 3.) If the concept is agreed to, these kind of specific agenda questions could be left to the area committee and the Chair.

As this Report has suggested already, making these Recommendations the focus of the assemblies during 2017 would be a truly important and substantive step toward advancing the kind of communication and discussion envisioned in the Phase II plan, and thus advancing in a material fashion the goal of “Turning the Lights On in Area 50.”

(d) Summary

I believe that restructuring the assemblies along the lines suggested in these Recommendations could go a long way toward making the assemblies more meaningful for the membership at large, and thus go a long way toward our goal of “turning the lights on.”

Conclusion

As stated in the Introduction, my hope with this Third Report is to present specific suggestions for bringing to reality the concepts discussed in the first two Reports.

I have come to understand that a healthy general service structure is critical to the health of AA in our Area and thus to the recovery of every member, and to the hope for every alcoholic who still suffers, inside or outside the Fellowship. That is why I believe the mission of “Turning the Lights On” for general service is such a critical one.

As stated in the Introduction, the suggestions in this Report are made to provoke discussion. My hope is that out of this discussion will emerge a specific plan for the next phase of “turning the lights on,” and that we can begin to implement that plan in 2017.

Yours in service,

Hank K.

Area 50 Strategic Planning Committee

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