



# A.A. Internal/External Communications Audit Report

Bringing Bill W.'s vision into the 21st century

(Abridged)

Presented to the  
General Service Board  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
August 21, 2018  
26 Pages Total



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## Introduction

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The General Service Board (GSB) of Alcoholics Anonymous is concerned with all matters affecting the Fellowship’s primary purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the still-suffering alcoholic.

**INTRODUCTION TO THE GENERAL SERVICE BOARD OF A.A. STRATEGIC PLAN (2016)**

Communication is at the heart of A.A.’s mission to extend the hand of recovery from alcoholism to anyone who seeks help. It begins with one alcoholic sharing his or her experience, strength, and hope with another alcoholic. From there, it takes on more forms: group meetings, District committees, Area assemblies—an entire Conference structure that is served by three Boards and two corporations. This “upside-down triangle” is the pathway for A.A.’s communications.

How effectively the lower tip of that triangle communicates—internally, and to the larger Conference structure, friends of A.A. (e.g., professionals, media, employers), Intergroups, members at various stages of sobriety and, most importantly, the alcoholic who still suffers—will have a profound effect on A.A.’s impact and relevance in the face of a rapidly changing world. The GSB chose to take the step to uncover “what they don’t know,” and commission a thorough communications audit of A.A. as a whole.

Impact Collaborative (IC) was engaged to perform a comprehensive evaluation of A.A.’s (GSO, AAWS, and AAGV) ability and effectiveness in sending, receiving, and sharing information with various audiences within the organization, as well as with key external constituencies.

IC divided this work into two distinct phases: (1) Research and Discovery, and (2) Synthesis and Recommendations; addressing each with the primary goals of:

- Understanding the current state of A.A.’s internal and external communication assets, channels, and processes.
- Identifying key audience segments that need to be reached and the best means of reaching them “where they are.”
- Defining gaps between key audience segments and current communication.

- Exploring the fine line between attraction and promotion.
- Proposing solutions for how A.A. can:
  - Map the pathways for more efficient and profound connectivity between A.A.'s three boards (GSB, AAWS, and AAGV).
  - Be more effective in attracting and retaining those in need of recovery by (1) engaging the Professional Community and A.A. members in stewardship, and (2) improving public perception.
  - Develop processes and employ best practices to unify overall messaging and more effectively manage content and communication.
  - Leverage A.A.'s rich history of storytelling in becoming more effective communicators.
  - Utilize social media, cross-platform content strategy, and other interactive platforms to more deeply engage key audiences.

The ultimate objective is to assist A.A. in becoming a stronger, more unified organization in which the Boards, office and administration, and Fellowship work together to fulfill A.A.'s mission of helping those who struggle with alcoholism to achieve and maintain sobriety.

Impact Collaborative is delighted to present to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, the AAWS Board, the AAGV Board, the General Service Office, A.A. World Services, and A.A. Grapevine, our findings and recommendations. For purposes of wider distribution, this abridged report details the methodology and findings in the following pages.

## Methodology

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### **PURPOSE/GOALS OF RESEARCH**

Communication is an organization's gold. Uncovering true meaning and impact on key audiences is much like prospecting—working deeply and patiently with the right tools to discover their value.

In designing the research for A.A.'s Communications Audit, our overarching goal was to develop strategies and tools that would uncover the current state and value of A.A.'s communications, as well as understand gaps and needs. Our work was engineered to invigorate and create engagement; provide a mechanism for contribution; and establish a forum for exchange, identification, and reflection. An unforeseen byproduct was that it cultivated trust and meaningful impact on participants.

Our research, conducted September–December 2017, addressed four key objectives:

1. Better understand the current state of GSO, AAWS, and AAGV internal and external communication assets, channels, and processes—assessing each for its effectiveness in (directly or indirectly) supporting A.A.'s primary purpose.
2. Identify primary audience segments that need to be reached, and the best means of reaching them “where they are.”
3. Define gaps and opportunities in current communication.
4. Explore the fine line between attraction and promotion.

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### **METHODS**

IC employed qualitative, ethnographic research methods in order to foster a deep understanding of each stakeholder and audience. Personal connection was the cornerstone of our approach; we employed research tools flexibly to fully engage and capitalize on the resources available to us. Our methods included:

- **One-on-one Interviews:** Semi-structured interview protocols allowed investigators from IC to gather structured and unstructured information, and permitted the interviewee opportunity to explore topics openly.
- **Multi-person Interviews:** When necessary or helpful (logistically or tactically), we interviewed subjects in pairs.
- **Discussion Groups:** Informal interviewing within small groups (6–10 participants), selected as an alternative to formal focus groups.
- **Field Observations:** Blending into the background to observe and record at meetings, as well as formal and informal gatherings.



- **Surveying:** Using digital surveying, we collected responses to structured, predefined questions (anonymously).
- **Asset Review:** Heuristic evaluation based on five criteria for various forms of communication collateral.

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### METHODS BY THE NUMBERS

Employing these methods, IC connected with key internal and external stakeholders in the following ways:



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### KEY AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION

Eight key audiences were targeted during our investigation—a variety of internal and external stakeholder groups.

Internal Audiences	External Audiences
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. GSO, AAWS, and AAGV Administration</li> <li>2. General Service Board</li> <li>3. AAWS and AAGV Boards</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Members               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Active in Conference structure</li> <li>b. Not active in Conference structure</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. Former Members</li> <li>6. Intergroup/Central Office Staff</li> <li>7. Professional Community</li> <li>8. The General Public</li> </ol>



## **Internal Audiences**

### **A.A. Administration**

This category included GSO Staff, Staff Assistants, management, and employees, as well as AAWS, and AAGV management and employees.

#### **GSO and AAWS**

- 22 one-on-one interviews (10/17/17–12/21/17): 12 Staff, 2 Staff Assistants, and 8 Directors/Managers/Supervisors
- Employee/Staff survey: 43 respondents (11/13/17–11/21/17)
- Observations at 4 events: 1 Staff meeting (9/27/17) and onsites at the Intergroup/Central Office Seminar (10/6/17–10/8/17), Board weekend (10/27/17–10/29/17), and East Central Regional Forum (11/17/17–11/19/17).

#### **AAGV**

- 4 one-on-one interviews (10/25/17–10/27/17)
- Employee survey: 9 respondents (11/13/17–11/21/17)
- Observations at 6 events: Management meeting (9/27/17), Annual all-employee meeting (10/19/17), Editorial Advisory Board call (10/19/17), and onsites at Intergroup/Central Office Seminar (10/6/17–10/8/17), Board weekend (10/27/17–10/29/17), and East Central Regional Forum (11/17/17–11/19/17).

#### **General Service, AAWS, and AAGV Boards**

- 14 interviews (10/7/17–12/11/17): 12 one-on-one interviews with current Board members and 2 interviews with former Board members
- Group discussion with 10 individuals across GS, AAWS, AAGV Boards (10/27/17)
- Board survey: 29 respondents (12/6/17–12/15/17)

## **External Audiences**

External audiences include all those who are not GSO, AAWS or AAGV employees, or members of the three boards.

### **Members**

This broad audience included those active in the Conference structure and those who are not. Though it wasn't possible to account for all measures of diversity in the members' sample, every attempt was made to collect data from as wide a range of participants as possible.

#### **Members active in the Conference structure**

- 13 one-on-one interviews
- 14 digitally surveyed
- Field observations



- Demographics: 8 regions; 16 states (U.S.) and 2 provinces (Canada); 33–87 years of age; 82% Caucasian/11% African American/7% Hispanic; 2–39 years of sobriety; >1–24 years of service

**Members not active in the Conference structure**

- 15 one-on-one interviews
- 23 digitally surveyed
- 2 group discussions
- Demographics: 8 regions; 22 states (U.S.) and 2 provinces (Canada); 19–84 years of age; 40% Caucasian/21% African American/21% Hispanic/10% Asian/Pacific Islander/8% Native American; >1–42 years of sobriety

**Former A.A. members, still sober**

- 5 phone/Skype interviews
- 31–76 years of age; 6–32 years of sobriety

**Intergroup/Central Office Staff**

- 5 one-on-one interviews (10/6/17–10/24/17)
- One group discussion (5 people)
- Observations and ad-hoc discussions at Intergroup/Central Office Seminar (10/6/17–10/8/17)

**Professional Community**

- 5 one-on-one interviews with professionals across corrections, legal, treatment, medical, and psychiatric (11/6/17–12/8/17)
- Insights from interviews with Board Trustees and Directors

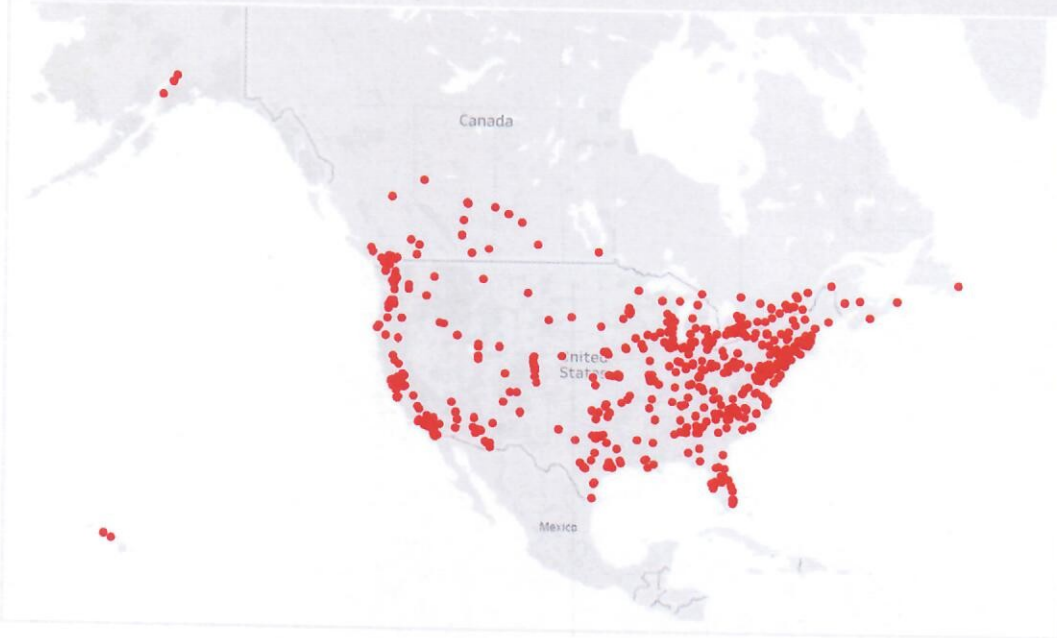
**General Public**

In an online survey of the general public conducted in December 2017, we had 1,386 total respondents—970 U.S.-based respondents and 416 Canada-based respondents. The demographics breakdown as follows:

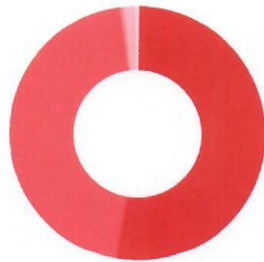




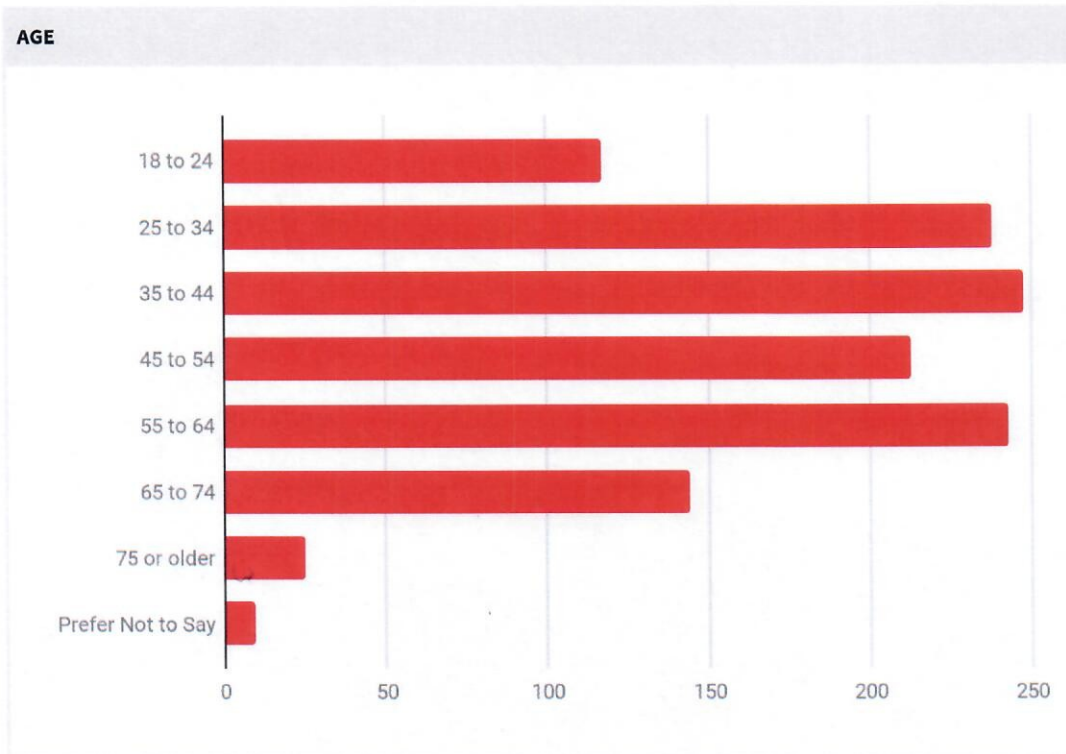
**GEOGRAPHY**



**GENDER**



● Female	• 649 / 52.5%
● Male	• 558 / 45.0%
● Transgender	• 6 / 0.5%
● Prefer Not To Say	• 18 / 1.5%
● Other Self-Identified	• 6 / 0.5%



### SETTINGS

IC conducted its research in multiple settings, with the intention of making participation convenient, comfortable, and empowering for each interviewee. This flexibility provided IC with access to a diverse cross section of audiences.

One-on-one and multi-person interviews were conducted in-person or by phone. When in-person, interviews occurred in a variety of locations: personal offices, eateries, small meeting rooms, and quiet corners of open spaces. Group discussions were held in meeting rooms.

Field observations occurred on location during Board, Regional Forum, and Intergroup weekends, and during visits to GSO, AAWS, and AAGV offices.

Digital surveying captured a broader audience in each category: employees, Board members, A.A. members, former A.A. members, and the general public.

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**RECRUITMENT**

IC found participants primarily through personal and professional connections. Potential participants and introductions were identified by GSO and AAGV management and employees, as well as GSB leadership. We then used snowball sampling to find additional participants. Additional connections were made during scheduled meetings and events where IC was in attendance as observers, resulting in impromptu interviews onsite or via phone follow up.

We deployed a digital screener to the professional and personal networks of IC team members. Respondents were engaged for phone or in-person interviews, discreet surveying, and group discussions.

For digital deployment of the employee and Board surveys, IC was given access to all Board members and employees. Selection for the larger, general public survey was built into the survey design through our selected online provider, SurveyMonkey.

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**TRUST AND ANONYMITY**

Though data collection methods varied, the key to IC's successful accumulation of relevant data was gaining the trust of participants. In line with the founding premise of A.A., IC assured participants of anonymity protection, outlining the data collection and storage procedures to protect that anonymity (described below). With the establishment of such trust, we were able to solicit relevant information while maintaining privacy among participants and others involved.

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**DATA COLLECTION AND STORAGE**

At the onset of each interview, discussion, and survey, participants were informed that their personal information and contributions would be held confidentially. All information collected was to be shared only among the IC team. If shared further, data from participants would only be shared in the aggregate, or in manners protecting each person's identity by redacting any information that might identify participants.



## Findings: The Current State of A.A.'s Communications

This section encapsulates the research phase of the audit. The findings found below were then synthesized and rolled into 32 recommendations. These recommendations were detailed in the unabridged version of this report, and are currently under review and consideration by the General Service Board.

The findings are organized by main thematic categories and subcategories that emerged as a result of the research. Quotes and any supporting points are representative of widespread opinions that were shared with us, observed by us, or culled from the in-depth assets review.

By design, our investigation focused on understanding the current state of A.A.'s communications. However, due to the breadth and scope of our discovery phase, we have learned much about strategic, structural, and cultural challenges—all of which directly or indirectly affects communication.

The unabridged version of this report contained anonymous quotes, garnered through the research, that support the findings. Because of the broad distribution of this version, those quotes have been removed.

It also contained appendixes as noted throughout, that have been removed to make the report more manageable for the reader and that can be found here.



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### **PRIMARY PURPOSE/MISSION**

Findings in this category focus on how A.A.'s primary purpose—staying sober and helping other alcoholics achieve sobriety—is being prioritized throughout the structure.

- A.A.'s primary purpose is alive and well at the group level, as expressed nearly unanimously by members (both active and not active in the Conference structure).

“”

A.A. saved my life

A.A. member

- A.A.'s primary purpose is getting somewhat lost at the Board and administrative level.
  - A.A.'s primary purpose is getting lost in the Conference structure.
  - Current and former GSRs expressed a high level of frustration at the lack of focus on member and still-suffering alcoholic issues at District meetings.
  - The majority of questions asked at various events had little to do with issues of carrying the message.

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### **VALUE PROPOSITION**

Findings in this category focus on how the value propositions of A.A., GSO, AAWS, and *Grapevine/La Viña* (the publications) are being communicated and perceived.

- The “magic” of A.A.'s Fellowship and program of recovery—offered at the grassroots level (in the rooms of A.A.)—is nearly unanimously understood and valued by those who have been touched by it.
  - Members across age, geography, race, gender, and years of sobriety consistently spoke of A.A. as “lifesaving” and “a program for living.”
  - One of our most surprising findings was culled from interviews with those who got sober in A.A. but no longer participate. All in that category spoke passionately about how A.A. “saved their lives.” Their reasons for not participating any longer had little to do with A.A.
  - Family and friends of A.A. members expressed much gratitude for A.A.
  - A.A. members number more than 2,000,000 recovered alcoholics globally.
  - The general public survey (see Appendix #7 and #8) found that A.A.'s name is recognized and widely respected. However, the public sees little

differentiation between A.A. and other recovery/sobriety programs. The survey also showed that:

- A.A. is perceived by many as religious.
- A.A.'s value proposition is getting lost in a crowded "competitive" environment of recovery programs that communicate in clear and compelling ways.



#### WORD ASSOCIATION

Confidential Sobriety Religious Life Sponsor Addiction  
 Anonymous Friendly Meetings Drinking  
 Support Accountability Group Caring Effective Recovery  
 Spiritual Steps

The top 5 words respondents associated with A.A.: Support, Group, Meetings, Anonymous, and Effective.

- Members who are not involved in the Conference structure (the majority of members) have little understanding or connection to GSO's value proposition.
- *Grapevine/La Viña's* value proposition—providing an A.A. meeting in print (and on the web)—is widely understood and deemed necessary by internal and external audiences, with the exception of the general public.

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**STRATEGY**

Findings in this category focus on plans and methods used to support A.A.'s primary purpose.

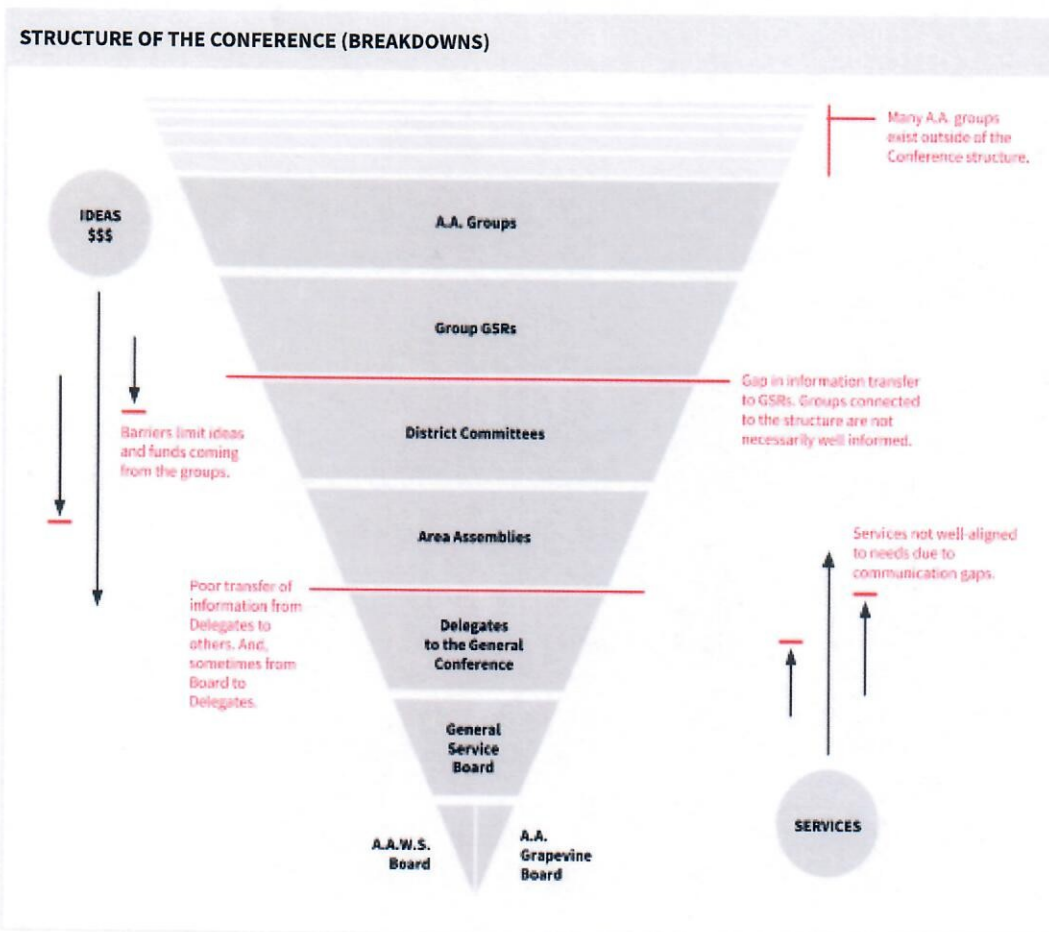
- The foundation for strategic planning is in place through GSB's 2016 Strategic Plan, a document that squarely addresses critical organizational challenges.
- "Expressed need"—which drives many of A.A.'s communication decisions and expenditures—has no succinct definition; the need can come from one person or many. For such a critical driver of strategy and tactics, it's notable that there's no defined process for how an expressed need emerges, is vetted, gains traction, and is implemented. Also, some "expressed needs" that have sound backing don't get on the Conference agenda, with little explanation as to why.
- Reactionary vs. strategic responses.
  - While individual inquiries from within and outside the Fellowship are generally responded to in a timely, appropriate manner, Board members, Delegates, and employees alike reported on the reactive nature of the "bottom tip of the triangle".

**ORGANIZATIONAL**

Findings in this category focus on systems, structures, and people.

**Overarching**

- Information is not traveling up or down the Conference structure effectively or efficiently.



- Gratitude is consistently communicated through service.
- Stakeholders are passionate, dedicated, and mission-driven.
- Wealth of talent has the potential to be utilized in more efficient ways.
- Tremendous capacity to develop and manage large volumes of materials, communication, and activities.
- Insular conversations are perpetuated between voting members of the Conference. Even within those insular conversations, critical communication is often not being transmitted and/or received.





- Adherence to institutional orthodoxies—“we’ve always done it that way.”
- Tendency towards indirect vs. direct communication.
- Conference structure is labor intensive, time consuming, and inefficient.
  - Employee effectiveness and efficiency are negatively impacted.
  - Boards are often working on tactics vs. strategy.
  - Huge barrier to entry for the greater, more diverse Fellowship.

### **Administration**

#### **GSO and AAWS**

- People love working at GSO and AAWS.
- Inconsistent, unclear communication from management to employees.
- A significant percentage of employees conveyed a high resistance to change.
- A significant percentage of employees conveyed a desire for change, and communicated (or displayed) fear toward progress.
- A small percentage of employees have a large appetite for change, and take opportunities to make change “under the radar,” often without consideration of the bigger strategic outcomes.

#### **AAGV**

- People love working at AAGV and feel protective of *Grapevine* and *La Viña*.
- There is a cooperative and convivial work atmosphere.
- Employees have a desire to understand more about bigger picture strategy and projects.
- Some frustrations exist around process communication.

#### **Governance**

- Wealth of experience, both professionally and personally.
- Everyone we encountered is there for the right reasons. (Compared to most Boards, this is extremely rare.)
- Although communication within, and between, the three Boards have vastly improved in recent years, it is still felt that there is room for improvement.
- Over a quarter of the Board members who responded to the survey felt that Board meetings are not always a safe place to share ideas.
- Processes are seen by many at the Board level as antiquated and inefficient.
- Class A Trustees are not being used effectively.
- High level of discomfort with what many Board members see as an air of secrecy.

#### **Broader Conference Structure**

- Communication is inconsistent throughout the Conference structure.
- Strong desire for more effective, efficient, useful communications at GSR level. However, resistance to change at many other levels of the structure make improving communication with GSRs and Groups challenging.

- Major blocks in communication within the Conference structure:
  - How and what information is shared with Delegates.
  - Delegates have varying levels of communication skills.
  - Many Groups (estimates range from 30 to 70%) are not active in the service structure and, therefore, receive little or no communication from GSO.
  - Even those groups that are connected to GSO rarely receive information beyond a thank you for contributing. Many in the Fellowship are confused about what GSO actually does.

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## **RELATIONSHIPS**

Findings in this category are concerned with relationships that have the potential to extend the hand of A.A. to the still-suffering alcoholic, either directly or indirectly.





### **GSO, AAWS, and AAGV**

The lack of consistent, cohesive collaboration between AAWS and AAGV is not only detrimental to both corporations, but also to A.A.'s primary purpose.

- Many missed opportunities exist to engage members, still-suffering alcoholics, and professionals through increased, strategic cross-pollination of AAGV and AAWS content.
- Lack of cross-collaboration between corporations that could greatly benefit both and enhance engagement.
- Glacial processes around opt-in usage of AAWS databases, which could significantly help AAGV's circulation (a vital strategic necessity).
- Oftentimes, AAGV is brought into decision-making at the last minute, as an afterthought (this was noted by GSO, AAWS, and AAGV).
- Many within the Conference structure feel that *Grapevine/La Viña* is not "true A.A." However, many members perceive AAGV as the only current communication published by A.A.



**Intergroups/Central Offices and Areas**

COMPARISON: INTERGROUP/CENTRAL OFFICE VS. AREA DATA			
 <b>Minneapolis, MN</b>		 <b>Oklahoma City, OK</b>	
<b>INTERGROUP</b> <b>391 Meetings</b>	<b>AREA</b> <b>301 Meetings</b>	<b>INTERGROUP</b> <b>428 Meetings</b>	<b>AREA</b> <b>382 Meetings</b>
<b>243</b> are present in the <i>Area</i> data, <b>148</b> are not.	<b>248</b> are present in the <i>Intergroup</i> data, <b>53</b> are not.	<b>339</b> are present in the <i>Area</i> data, <b>89</b> are not.	<b>306</b> are present in the <i>Intergroup</i> data, <b>76</b> are not.
 <b>Topeka, KS</b>		 <b>Tulsa, OK</b>	
<b>INTERGROUP</b> <b>86 Meetings</b>	<b>AREA</b> <b>101 Meetings</b>	<b>INTERGROUP</b> <b>214 Meetings</b>	<b>AREA</b> <b>210 Meetings</b>
<b>46</b> are present in the <i>Area</i> data, <b>40</b> are not.	<b>47</b> are present in the <i>Intergroup</i> data, <b>54</b> are not.	<b>49</b> are present in the <i>Area</i> data, <b>165</b> are not.	<b>10</b> are present in the <i>Intergroup</i> data, <b>76</b> are not.

- In many geographies, there is confusion and lack of cooperation between Intergroups and Areas.
- Even when there is cooperation, the online presence is often uncoordinated.
- Intergroups seem to have a closer relationship with the broader Fellowship than the Areas within the Conference structure.
- Intergroup/Central Office information is deemed much more reliable and accurate.
- Meeting information is often outdated at the Area and GSO level (FNV database).
- Overall, interactions between Areas and Intergroups range from working relationships up to open hostility.

### A.A. & The Media

- Relationships with the media are thought of as good by PI desk and categorized as being “friendly with our friends,” yet there is little to no coverage.
- Interactions with media and press are somewhat limited (e.g., press releases, and annual *Why Anonymous* email/letter).
- Press releases are not well crafted and contain too much insider A.A. jargon.
- No process for leveraging Class As to respond to media requests, leading to missed opportunities.

### A.A. & Professionals

- Good relationships between local and regional committees and Corrections.
- Assets designed for the Professional Community do not speak in a language that is germane to their respective professions, or delivered across platforms that they use.
- Those within the Conference structure are not necessarily trained (or armed with tools) to forge and nurture relationships with the Professional Community.
- Professionals are hungry for relevant and helpful information to address alcoholism.

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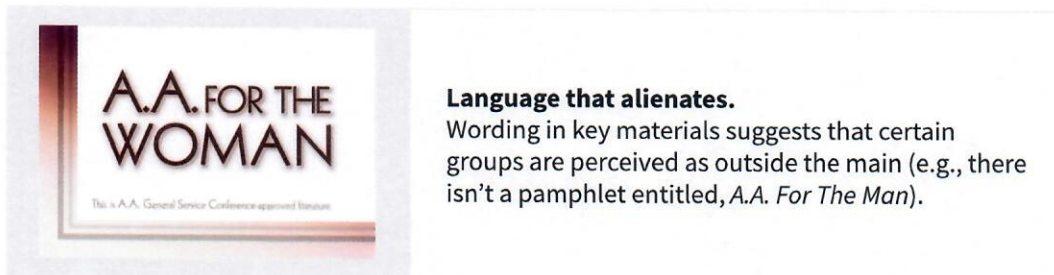
## CONTENT

Findings in this category focus on the information and experiences that are directed towards key audiences. (See Appendices #1–#5)

### AAWS

- A.A. has an extensive library of content at its fingertips. With repurposing, they could easily speak to key audiences more effectively.
- *Alcoholics Anonymous* (the “Big Book”), *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *Living Sober*, and *Daily Reflections* are seen as cornerstones of sobriety. A.A. materials are translated in over 90 languages.
- Few internal communication guidelines, processes, protocols, and/or procedures.
  - Little effort or control exerted over the A.A. identity—internally or externally.
  - No formal process for adding information to the website’s homepage (e.g., disaster support information posted after the Fall 2017 hurricanes showed up in Google search as “Alcoholics Anonymous: Disaster Relief.”)
  - Redesign of the pamphlets (a very visible A.A. communication tool) was ad hoc, creating a confusing, poorly designed look and feel.
  - Content tends to be dense, inconsistent, and, in some cases, outdated. There is a propensity for “over-explaining” that is confusing to audiences who are not in the Conference structure.
  - Doesn’t use the language familiar or relevant to key audiences (e.g., “helping professionals” vs. using better descriptives such as treatment facility staff, nurses, social workers, etc.)

- Extensive use of jargon/“A.A. speak” in communication for external audiences that confuses, and in some cases, alienates:
  - “When I was looking for my first meeting, I saw ‘open’ and ‘closed’ meetings, which made me feel like I didn’t belong.” - Current A.A. member.
  - Use of terminology, such as “Cooperation With the Professional Community,” “singleness of purpose,” “friendly with our friends,” “Conference-approved literature,” “cooperation but not affiliation,” “A.A. as a whole,” “A.A. has no real government,” “pass the hat,” “the Big Book,” “shared experience, “A.A. is not professional” etc.
- Multiple variations/inconsistencies in how A.A. defines itself (e.g., *A Brief Guide to Alcohol Anonymous* vs. *A.A. Fact File*).
- Many assets lack the most basic descriptions about what A.A. is—the How, What, and Why— which is essential for understanding and engagement for outsiders/the general public.
- Many assets are missing a consistent, easy, and inviting way to contact A.A. (e.g., no email or telephone information for follow-up).
- Communication is often predicated on historical context, which causes confusion and positions messaging as out of touch and insular.
  - A.A. Guidelines: Finance, Internet, Public Information, Literature Committees, etc.
  - Pamphlets: *Understanding Anonymity, Questions & Answers on Sponsorship*
  - Other: *Why Anonymous?* (letter); *World Service Meeting* (press release)
  - *Three Talks to Medical Societies* pamphlet, with extremely outdated information, took years to get out of circulation.
- Titling can be awkward and confusing (e.g., *Bridging the Gap - Between Treatment and A.A. Through Temporary Contact Programs*).
- In some cases, language or content is insulting to the audience it strives to serve.
  - “As an African American woman, I find it insulting that A.A. has special pamphlets for African Americans and women, as if Blacks and women are special classes of alcoholics who need extra help.” —Current A.A. member
  - “I was surprised to learn that Hispanics are lumped in with “accessibilities.” —Current A.A. member.



**Language that alienates.**

Wording in key materials suggests that certain groups are perceived as outside the main (e.g., there isn’t a pamphlet entitled, *A.A. For The Man*).



- Although A.A. is non-religious, language and activations are very Christian in nature.
  - The Riverside office—a destination for many—was decorated for the December holidays with only Christmas references.
  - Referring to members as a “Fellowship.”
  - Identifying ‘prayer’ to open and/or close meetings in video and in AAGV’s I-Poll.
- Little (or no) user-testing is done with target audiences prior to the creation and launch of new material.
  - The *Safety Card for A.A. Groups*, which was developed from an “expressed need,” wasn’t user-tested before its creation—resulting in a somewhat mixed and confused reception.
  - Of all pamphlets reviewed, only one—*The A.A. Member - Medications & Other Drugs*—notes that subject matter experts (physicians in A.A. and those who are “friends of A.A.”) were consulted in its creation.

“”

A.A. shares what they want to tell audiences *vs.* what is relevant and meaningful to the audience.

**A.A. member active in the Conference structure**

#### **AAGV**

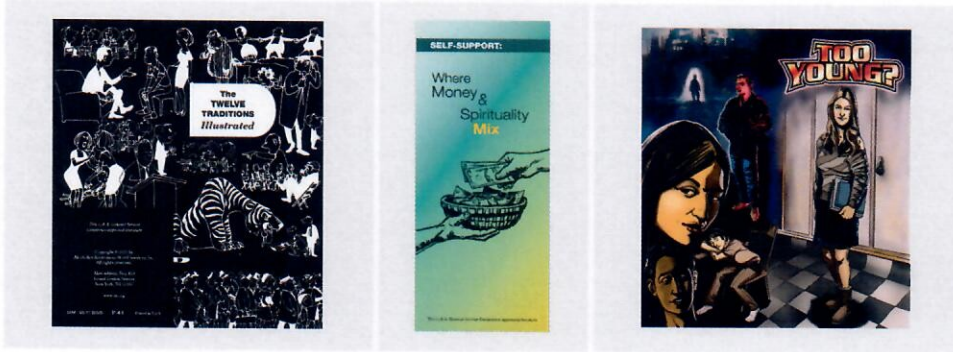
- A.A. has a rich, decades-long history of inspirational storytelling that works, and *Grapevine/La Viña* helps A.A. tell stories of current members. There’s an enormous wealth of AAGV documents and publications that can be leveraged to attract and retain those in need of recovery, enlist the Professional Community to be more involved, and improve/update the general public’s perception.
- There are very compelling invitations to participate in materials as outlined in the various assets: attend meetings and events, read stories written by fellow members, read historical documents, sobriety calendar, contests, materials for purchase, etc. AAGV is quite strong in this regard, making A.A. by extension a more inviting and welcoming support for people.
- AAGV’s website is generally quite good. Though there is a lot of room for improvement, the site provides value, well-written resources, and a mix of engaging publications/content.
- The excessive use of A.A. and AAGV ‘insider terminology’ and unclear abbreviations throughout AAGV assets are unwelcoming and confusing—making it seem like a closed club for insiders.

## IDENTITY/LOOK AND FEEL

Findings in this category focus on use of name and design.

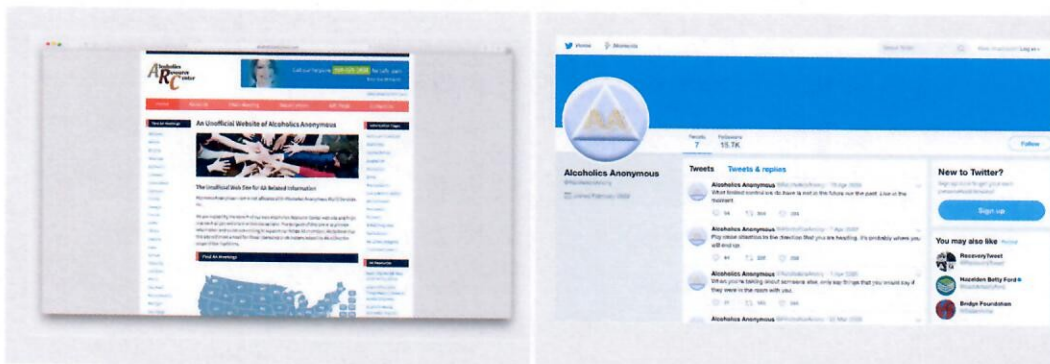
### AAWS

- Little control exerted over A.A.'s identity, internally or externally.
- The lack of style and identity guidelines, and inconsistencies across assets, give a very confused message about what AAWS is, and in turn, what A.A. is.
- There's a muddled mix of fonts, styles, colors, etc. The all-important A.A. identity gets lost in the confusion.
- "Blue People" logo does not stand alone; intention and reality are far apart, and usage is difficult.
- Weak "Look & Feel" of assets: clarity, organization, prioritization, images, fonts/formats/colors, extra pages, and copyright standardization need improvement.
- Materials do not work together visually, which sends an unclear message to the user.



Various A.A. pamphlets illustrating disparate design elements

- Poor image/design quality: images across the assets are often quite poor—clipart, old-fashioned looking, stock photos, and many that don't add any visual value that aligns with the corresponding message AAWS is trying to put forth.
- Use of A.A. name and logos are used by many other entities, which is confusing to key audiences, and most importantly—to the still-suffering alcoholic.



<http://alcoholicsanonymous.com>

<https://twitter.com/AlcoholicsAnony>



### AAGV

- The lack of editorial and identity guidelines and inconsistencies across assets give a very confused message about what AAGV (and A.A.) is. There's a mix of fonts, styles, colors, etc. Unfortunately, A.A.'s identity gets lost in the confusion.
  - There's inconsistency with how AAGV and *Grapevine/La Viña* are noted across assets. It's listed 5 different ways: (1) AAGrapevine, (2) AA Grapevine, (3) AAGrapevine Inc., (4) The AA Grapevine, Inc. (5) A.A. Grapevine, Inc.
  - There's inconsistency with how AAGV's website is noted on assets. It's listed 3 different ways: (1) AAGrapevine.org, (2) aagrapevine.org, (3) www.aagrapevine.org.

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### MESSAGE DELIVERY/TECHNOLOGY

Findings in this category focus on how messages are transmitted and received.

### GSO and AAWS

- Most of the technology in place is ineffectual, unattractive, and underutilized. This includes the intranet, which could help strengthen and streamline internal communication. It's not user-friendly or inviting, so no one uses it.
- In most cases, GSO and AAWS are not using communication platforms that are relevant for the external audiences they are trying to reach and engage.
  - Inefficient, time-consuming manual processes (e.g., blue cards at conferences, registrar process) are used for information gathering, when most audiences have come to rely on automated, online processes.
  - Attachment to paper/manual processes vs. leveraging technology to accelerate and streamline, burdens precious Staff time and limits effectiveness of communication.
  - Limited use of social media—although a significant majority of Board members, administration, and members (inside and outside of the Conference structure) are in favor of social media being used with care.
  - No use of webinars, video trainings, fillable PDFs; little use of virtual meetings.
- When current communication platforms are used, they are often times not well executed.
  - A.A. has a fractured and messy online identity, and hence is not easily accessible for the still-suffering alcoholic.
  - Website is not being used well for communicating to most key audiences.
  - Many videos are of poor quality and outdated.
  - Intranet is poorly constructed and underutilized—a missed opportunity.
  - Dashboard tool is not user-friendly, welcoming, or intuitive.
  - Mass email tool is not intuitive and limiting.
- Reliance on static content, rather than dynamic content (e.g., most information on the website is in PDF format).





- Databases are not being utilized effectively:
  - There's an abundance of information that is not being updated properly, nor utilized for maximum benefit of the two corporations or their external stakeholders.
  - Lack of opt-in usage limits communication potential across databases (e.g., over 60,000 records in the International Conference database presents a huge opportunity to engage with Fellowship for both GSO and AAGV).
  - FNV database: Semi-manual process/singular log-in; FNV records and Area records are sorely outdated.

#### **AAGV**

- Good use of newer technologies that meet audiences where they are (e.g., SMS, App).
- The lack of social media is a missed opportunity.
- Website navigation and organization can definitely be improved, but it's possible to find what one is looking for.
- Lack of access to databases severely inhibits promoting interest in AAGV and its products.

## Conclusion

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The greatest problem with communication is the assumption that it has taken place.

**GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

Effective communication connects people. At its best, it's a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, ideas, and needs, but they also create and share meaning. So, the true value of any organization's communication efforts is the response that it receives.

At its very core, Alcoholics Anonymous is an organization whose primary purpose is to communicate effectively. Thankfully, in many ways, A.A.'s stage is already set for more dynamic, engaging, and impactful communication. It has passionate, talented, engaged internal stakeholders; a membership that unflaggingly believes in A.A.'s purpose for being; "friends of A.A." who are at the ready to help; a positive public perception; and a proven solution to a life-threatening problem.

However, the proven solution to the alcoholic problem is in critical need of solutions itself. As illustrated through our audit findings, there are significant challenges in communication that are negatively impacting A.A.'s relevance and impeding its effectiveness in reaching the still-suffering alcoholic.

Inherent in every challenge is an opportunity. And the opportunities for A.A. are rich, exciting, and implementable. The recommendations proposed to the GSB reflect the realization of those opportunities. They will enable A.A. to:

- Lay the pathways for more efficient and profound connectivity between A.A.'s three Boards.
- Be more effective in attracting and retaining those in need of recovery; engage the Professional Community and A.A. members; and, improve public perception.
- Develop structures, processes, and procedures that strengthen and unify overall messaging, and more effectively manage identity, content, and communication as a whole.



- Leverage A.A.'s rich history of storytelling in becoming more impactful communicators.
- Guide A.A. in utilizing social media, cross-platform content strategies, and other interactive tools to more deeply engage the Fellowship.

This is just the beginning—understanding the current state—the first step in improving communication within A.A., its corporations, Boards, and service structure; and, externally, with its key audiences—the Fellowship-at-large, traditional media, Professional Communities, the general public, and the still-suffering alcoholic. The next steps A.A. takes have profound implications that depend completely on how willingly A.A. acts on the changes needed to advance its reach. The future of the Fellowship and the still-suffering alcoholic rests on its success.

On behalf of the entire Impact Collaborative team, we thank you for the opportunity to serve such an important and invaluable organization. It has been our sincere pleasure and privilege to conduct this all-important work. We look forward to assisting A.A. in its efforts to improve communication so that anyone, anywhere who seeks help for their alcoholic problem will find the hand of A.A. within easy reach.

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The future depends on what you do today.

**MAHATMA GANDHI**