

2013 General Service Conference Inventory Questions

The following are the inventory questions listed in the "INVENTORY PLAN," which were approved by the 2011 G.S.C. and assigned by the 2012 G.S.C., that will be discussed at the 2013 General Service Conference:

A. Effectiveness of the Conference/Conference Process Overall

1. Reflecting on Concept One, how does the Conference ensure that it is the conscience of A.A. as a whole?
2. How well is the use of floor actions serving us?
3. Reflecting on Concept Ten, how well is the authority of the Conference defined?
4. How well does the Conference fulfill the General Warranties of Concept Twelve?

B. Composition of Conference

1. Should delegate areas be more consistently based on actual membership numbers?

C. Committee System

1. Could the committee process be improved to more effectively introduce change in the Fellowship, and if so, how?

D. Yearlong Process Effectiveness

1. What improvements could be considered to make sure the agenda selection process is more effective?
2. How well do all Conference members communicate to the Fellowship about why we have a Conference and how the committee system works? How could we improve in this communication?

E. Conference Preparation (background, content, delivery, etc.)

1. How well do the delegates balance their preparation for the Conference, especially in keeping with Concept Three and Article Three of the Conference Charter? How could we improve in the practice of our rights and responsibilities under Concept Three and Article Three of the Conference Charter?

F. Conference Week Schedule

1. How can we improve the way time is allotted during the Conference for reports, presentation/discussion/workshop topics, and thorough discussion of agenda items?
2. How are leadership and participation affected by late night work sessions?

(Over)

G. General Service Board/Corporate Boards (A.A.W.S. & A.A. Grapevine)

1. Is the current makeup of the board (numbers and proportions) still the most effective? If not, what changes should we consider?
2. How could we improve the methods used to solicit trustees and directors to get the most appropriate people interested in the positions?
3. What more could be done to insure the General Service Board remains transparent and thorough in their reporting to the Fellowship?

H. Leadership

1. Reflecting on Concept Nine, are the qualities of leadership, as identified in the leadership essay in the Service Manual, still the qualities that we should try to encourage in Conference members? If so, how successful are we in encouraging those qualities? If not, what changes should we consider?

###

Report of the 2013 General Service Conference Inventory

“The General Service Conference Takes its Inventory — Our Solution in Action”

As suggested by the 2013 General Service Conference theme, taking inventory, in the best sense of the word, is a fundamental aspect of A.A.’s program of recovery. As cofounder Bill W. reflected in *A.A. Comes of Age* (page 231), “Just as each A.A. must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole society if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well.”

An inventory, then, at the level of general service is a natural outgrowth of that which is done to maintain individual sobriety throughout the A.A. Fellowship. However, when applied to A.A.’s general services and for the purposes of the General Service Conference inventory, the “Twelve Concepts for World Service,” not the Twelve Steps for Recovery, provide the lens through which to evaluate current Conference practices and procedures, to determine how they relate to the original plan, purpose and structure of the General Service Conference, now in its 64th year.

As noted in the Keynote Address at the opening of the 2013 General Service Conference, “Self-assessment is a pervasive part of our A.A. program; fully half of our Steps are directly related to it. Inventory of the Conference and personal inventory in the Steps are not quite the same, however. At the Conference, the emphasis will be on effectiveness in carrying out the purposes of the Conference, not on ‘character defects.’

“Honesty, both with ourselves and with others, is a core value of A.A.... We don’t take inventory simply because it is, in and of itself, a good thing (like kindness, or generosity), but rather because it is an important element of our continued sobriety. The same holds true for our service inventories, including the Conference inventory which we are now undertaking. We are not here to take pride in doing the responsible thing by taking an inventory. We are here to help assure the unity and effectiveness of A.A. in its mission to carry the great message of hope to anyone, anywhere, who has a desire to do something about his or her drinking problem.”

In terms of the General Service Conference Inventory, the question could be asked: why now? In response, one delegate wrote in a 2013 Conference presentation titled “The General Service Conference Inventory — Why Is It Necessary?” “Alcoholics Anonymous is on the precipice of change. In the new Grapevine title, *Happy, Joyous & Free*, there is a great quote. ‘There are just two things an alcoholic doesn’t like — the way things are, and change.’

“Our primary purpose hasn’t changed, but there are things that are changing. Our self-support model has been shifting. The logistics of publishing, commerce, distribution and communication — these are changing. Significantly.

“We have choices that we need to make to ensure that we use our precious resources prudently. Our inventory is an invitation to participate in a transparent, honest and loving dialogue about how we go about making these choices. It’s an opportunity to review the logistics of leadership, while preserving our beautiful Concepts.”

History

In his introduction to the *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, Bill W. wrote about the importance of the Concepts as an interpretation of A.A.’s world service structure. “They reveal the evolution by which it has arrived in its present form, and they detail the experience and reasoning on which our operation stands today,” he said. “These Concepts therefore aim to record the ‘why’ of our service structure in such a fashion that the highly valuable experience of the past, and the lessons we have drawn from that experience, can never be forgotten or lost.”

In that spirit, in 2005 the General Service Board began the process of taking an inventory of itself, including its two operat-

ing corporations, the A.A. Grapevine, Inc. and Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. As the inventories continued throughout 2006, the chairperson of the General Service Board appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Inventories to review the three Board inventories (A.A. Grapevine, A.A.W.S., and the GSB) and to prioritize suggestions for Board consideration. As this process was nearing completion, in April of 2008, a sitting regional trustee suggested to the General Service Board that the inventory process might also expand to cover the General Service Conference itself, examining its structure, processes and procedures.

Some of the possible items that could be given thorough study, it was suggested, were: the effectiveness of the current committee system, the impact of new technologies on A.A.’s group conscience process, a creeping politicization of the Conference process versus the policy of delegation and trust, and the role of the trustees in the Conference process — as principal planners and administrators or mere order takers?

A General Service Board subcommittee was formed in August 2008 to discuss this proposal for a General Service Conference Inventory and presented a final report to the GSB in February of 2009. After reviewing the history of other Conference inventories, the conclusion of the subcommittee was that while presentations and workshops had been held at the 1963, 1981 and 1993 Conferences, where the theme of each Conference was “A.A. Takes Its Inventory,” an actual inventory of the General Service Conference itself had never been conducted, and the subcommittee agreed that it seemed reasonable to conclude that “a thorough and soul-searching examination” of the GSC was warranted.

The Idea Moves to the Conference

The subcommittee recommended that the General Service Board forward a recommendation to the 2009 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions proposing that a comprehensive inventory of the GSC be undertaken. The GSB accepted the subcommittee’s recommendation and forwarded such a proposal to the 2009 Conference. Provided as background were the full report of the subcommittee, including some detailed suggestions for conducting a GSC inventory, and the original proposal for a Conference Inventory.

The 2009 Conference Policy/Admissions Committee reviewed the material and recommended to the full Conference that: “The General Service Board develop a plan for the General Service Conference to conduct an inventory of itself that includes a planning committee consisting of representatives of delegates, trustees, directors, nontrustee directors, and staff, and that a progress report be presented to the 2010 Policy/Admissions Committee.”

The recommendation was passed as a Conference Advisory Action, and in August 2009 the GSB established a subcommittee to fulfill the charge of putting together a process or procedure by which a Planning Committee with representation from all membership segments of the General Service Conference could be established. The subcommittee determined that representation should be proportional, as representation is at the GSC, and that participants be selected by lot, with consideration given to other responsibilities and ability to serve. These conclusions were accepted by the GSB, along with some additional suggestions regarding the establishment of a Conference Inventory Planning Committee, and were referred back to the Conference Policy/Admissions Committee in 2010.

After evaluation and discussion by the 2010 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions and deliberation by the entire Conference, a detailed Advisory Action was passed recommending that “The General Service Conference conduct a thorough inventory of itself and that a Conference Planning Committee be established to develop a comprehensive inventory plan to bring

forward to the 2011 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions for consideration, along with an estimated cost for conducting the inventory.” The Advisory Action also included directions articulating the specific composition of the proposed planning committee.

Planning Committee Takes Shape

Once constituted following the 2010 GSC, the Conference Inventory Planning Committee (made up of 17 individuals: 11 Panel 60 delegates, one Class B regional trustee, one Class B general service trustee, one Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, one non-trustee director, one G.S.O. staff person and one Grapevine staff person, along with a nonvoting G.S.O. staff member to serve as secretary to the committee) began to conduct its business in early June 2010, breaking the work up into a series of subcommittees whose task, collectively, was to answer the “Who, What, Where, When and How” of conducting an inventory of the Conference.

Four subcommittees were charged with looking into the mechanics of doing an inventory (Participation, Logistics, Reporting and Finance) and four additional subcommittees were charged with developing proposed inventory questions (Structure, Concepts, Communications and Leadership). All subcommittee recommendations were discussed and voted on by the full committee during monthly conference calls and eventually, after several months of deliberation and reporting, the committee had a set of approved recommendations from which to begin drafting the overall inventory plan.

At this time, the eight subcommittees were pooled together and two larger subcommittees were appointed to develop the overall specifics of “mechanics” and “content” for the proposed inventory. Similarly, these two subcommittees presented their conclusions for discussion and approval by the Planning Committee as a whole, ultimately creating a consensus document — the Conference Inventory Plan — which was forwarded to the 2011 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions for review.

The 2011 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions reviewed the inventory plan and proposed to the full Conference “that the General Service Conference conduct a thorough inventory of itself in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan formulated by the Conference Inventory Planning Committee.” The areas covered by the inventory plan were:

- I. **Logistics** (suggesting that the inventory be conducted at three consecutive Conferences: 2013, 2014 and 2015);
- II. **Participation** (outlining the categories and terms of rotation of Conference members to serve on the Planning Committee);
- III. **Reporting** (detailing a methodology for reporting the Conference inventory, including publication of a thorough report in the *Final Conference Report* of each year of the inventory, along with summaries of each year’s inventory for publication in the A.A. Grapevine, La Viña and Box 4-5-9, and a separate comprehensive report of all three years’ input to be prepared after the inventory process is completed);
- IV. **Finance** (developing a cost structure for conducting and reporting the inventory);
- V. **Inventory Questions** (covering the overall effectiveness of the Conference and the Conference process; the composition of the Conference; the committee system; the effectiveness of the yearlong process; Conference preparation, in terms of background, content, delivery, etc.; the Conference week schedule; the General Service Board and corporate boards; and the question of leadership and what might be the most desirable qualities considered for leaders in A.A.)

The recommendation was accepted by the full Conference and passed as an Advisory Action of the 2011 General Service Conference.

With the process and procedures for the inventory finally set, the 2012 Conference Agenda Committee made a series of recommendations, accepted as Advisory Actions, suggesting that the theme of the 2013 GSC be “The General Service Conference Takes Its Inventory — Our Solution in Action”; selecting presentation/discussion topics for the 2013 GSC; and presenting the specific inventory questions to be taken up by the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Conferences.

2013 General Service Conference

To address the 15 inventory questions proposed for the 2013 GSC and to allow for an equitable and representative cross-section of Conference members, three different groupings were created to address questions 1-5, 6-10, and 11-15, with each segment further broken down into 5 subgroups for each set of questions. Conference members were then assigned to one of the 15 different workshop groups, each with a moderator and reporter, and each containing 9 total participants. Meeting for two-and-a-half hours during the Conference on Wednesday, April 24th, the full range of inventory questions was covered by Conference members, with reports prepared from each workshop group.

Subsequently, each group reported directly to the full Conference on Friday, April 26th, with additional discussion held after each grouping of workshop reports.

Summary of 2013 Inventory

Question 1:

Reflecting on Concept I, how well does the Conference ensure that it is the conscience of A.A. as a whole?

The Conference, as designed, is highly effective in ensuring the conscience of A.A. as a whole, taking the place of Bill W. and Dr. Bob; communication has to travel in both directions — from trustees/delegates to the groups, and back; as the Conference becomes more transparent it allows delegates to better collect the area’s voice and ensure that the groups can weigh in on topics they feel are important.

Under the guidance of the Concepts, the collective conscience of A.A. is achieved through full and open debate, minority opinions, right of decision, floor actions, right of participation and other similar practices; however, we could do better at reaching out to our membership regarding the Conference process; the Conference meets to “take A.A.’s temperature,” but there are concerns about how informed the Fellowship actually is due to inadequate background material, arbitrary agenda deadlines and language barriers; there is not sufficient delegate participation in development of Conference agenda items and the year-long Conference process concept needs to be highlighted to better serve the needs of the local A.A. communities.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Encourage groups to participate more fully in the Conference process.*
- *Feedback from the areas is very important to delegates and the current schedule for distributing background material and the agenda makes it difficult to have area membership discussions; reevaluate timing of current schedule for developing, selecting and submitting agenda items.*
- *All Conference members should have information in their mother tongue; Conference communications with the Hispanic community need to be more inclusive; if it is too unwieldy to do it beforehand, consider translating agenda items and background material after the agenda is distributed.*

Question 2:

How well is the use of floor actions serving us?

Floor actions can provide a failsafe mechanism to get an issue back on track or provide an opportunity for an issue to be heard;

floor actions emphasize that everyone has a place to express their opinion; they are a protection for the minority voice; however, there are very few emergencies in A.A. and the Conference has the power to decide whether or not to hear a floor action.

Not being on the agenda, floor actions bypass the committee system and often need time for thought, consideration, input from the Fellowship and pertinent background information; floor actions should generally be discouraged, but in certain instances are needed.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Provide background information to delegates on floor actions and the process by which they are handled at the Conference.*

Question 3:

Reflecting on Concept X, how well is the authority of the Conference defined?

Overall, the Conference Charter and the scope of Conference authority are clear, with checks and balances defined by tradition and spiritual principles; sometimes, though, there is a difference between definition and application, with a fine balance between too little definition of the Conference's authority and too much; the Conference and the General Service Board are interdependent and need to work closely together to avoid creating given responsibility without commensurate authority.

The Conference is the place where business and spirituality mix, and the current composition of the Conference continues to provide an adequate balance of authority and responsibility.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Delegates should stay better plugged into board activities throughout the year.*
- *Concerns exist regarding the unequal authority of the GSB to set the Conference agenda; review how agenda items are developed and consider greater inclusion of delegates in this process.*

Question 4:

How well does the Conference fulfill the General Warranties of Concept XII?

The Conference is excellent at encompassing a wide variety of abilities, shows impartial restraint and is an honest and open process — ever evolving, ever changing — and the Conference structure itself provides an adequate safeguard to protect A.A. from any misuse of authority, whether actual or perceived; the Warranties provide us with a dock of safe return, teaching us how to treat one another, guiding us away from “us” and “them” and tying us together as one.

Rotation helps to avoid accumulation of power; democracy, fairness and equality ensure that all levels of service are the same; substantial unanimity and insistence on the minority opinion are highly valued principles; the Conference exercises stewardship, not governance; however, politics can enter into the picture and there is room for improvement in reducing the influence of past trusted servants on current Conference members.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *In response to an expressed concern about the disenfranchisement of groups and A.A. as a whole from the general service structure, consider holding the Conference at a less expensive location, perhaps rotating it around the US and Canada to reduce costs and increase participation.*

Question 5:

Should delegate areas be more consistently based on actual membership numbers?

Conference composition should not rely on rigid proportional representation by population alone; a variety of factors should be considered, all with the collective goal of good communication within the area.

Small areas and large areas face different challenges; large areas may want to consider the value of breaking down into smaller pieces to spread out necessary service work, while some

smaller areas, perhaps, might want to consider merging.

There is a cost in time and money to unity that is different for each area; high and low population density, geography, cultural differences and diversity must all be considered by areas evaluating a change.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Further discussion is needed on the question of whether or not our largest member centers should consider resizing.*
- *When evaluating the possible resizing of areas, the “domino effect” that changing areas would have on groups, districts, regions, boards, committees and the Conference should be considered.*
- *The redistricting of delegate areas is not thought to be feasible or necessary at this time and if it is to be considered in the future a clear census and rationale should be provided.*

Question 6:

What improvements could be considered to make sure the agenda selection is more effective?

Agenda selection is a year-long process which could be enhanced by more education at the group level regarding the ability of groups to participate in the formulation of items; agenda items need to be for the good of the whole Fellowship.

The Fellowship could be better informed about trustee discussions — some trustees supply minutes from their meetings, though this is not universal and the G.S.O. reporting is seen as too general; the role of the regional trustee is vital in developing awareness of agenda items that may be coming up throughout the year.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Increased communication throughout the Fellowship is necessary for an informed Conference; create/distribute a simple “how to” description or FAQ outlining the process of getting agenda items submitted.*
- *Agenda selection should be emphasized as a year-long process, with more involvement from the Conference Agenda Committee.*

Question 7:

How well do all Conference members communicate to the Fellowship about why we have a Conference and how the committee system works? How could we improve in this communication?

Most Conference members are informed about the committee system and how it works; the difficulty is in reaching those who are “not part of the choir.”

Increasing participation in the Conference process throughout the Fellowship is a primary concern, with some areas having great success and others finding it more difficult to engage and educate members; areas with mock-Conferences, mini-committees, or pre-Conference assemblies find this an effective way to educate the Fellowship about the Conference; the use of technology could be helpful in reaching out to D.C.M.s and G.S.R.s, especially through videos.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *While we encourage areas to come up with agenda items, if they're not “selected” it can be very discouraging for those at the local level. Perhaps agenda items that don't make it to the Conference should go to the appropriate Conference Committee anyway, for discussion at a time outside the week-long duration of the Conference.*
- *Make Conference agenda information and background material available to the Fellowship and continually update throughout the year.*
- *Develop/distribute guidelines that explain exactly how a Conference committee operates and what their options are when they meet.*

Question 8:

How well do the delegates balance their preparation for the Conference, especially in keeping with Concept III and Article Three of the Conference Charter? How could we improve in the practice of our rights and responsibilities under Concept III and Article Three of the Conference Charter?

Delegates sometimes feel overwhelmed with the amount of information that must be gone through and so must prioritize; Concept III acts as a reminder that the job of the Conference is to set policy, not set practice.

Right of Decision is a great responsibility, carrying with it the importance of providing reasons why a decision was made; explaining the “reasoning” behind conclusions reached at the Conference is helpful throughout the Fellowship.

Importance of Concept III in making distinction between sharing experience and lobbying; put Conference decision-making experience in personal terms when sharing with the Fellowship.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Use technology to develop a secure electronic location where delegates could share and store pertinent Conference information online, clustering information more effectively.*
- *Have a brief delegate orientation at the start of the Conference, similar to the new trustees orientation; might be helpful in generating a more even level of preparedness for delegates (delegate luncheons do not necessarily fulfill this purpose, as they are not uniform and may all cover different topics).*

Question 9:

How can we improve the way time is allotted during the Conference for reports, presentation/discussion/workshop topics, and thorough discussion of agenda items?

Committee time is precious and there may be too many other Conference activities that draw away from the primary business at hand; it may be helpful to dispose of routine information throughout the year rather than taking actual Conference time.

Conference week is laid out well, has evolved and been improved upon by the process of natural selection; however, Conference could be more dynamic, with presentations eliminated or shortened on the basis of the Conference workload at the time.

Conference is amazingly efficient at cramming a lot of stuff in, but there is a delicate balance between moving the Conference along and ensuring thoughtful, deliberative and inclusive discussion; Conference members need to be concise and respectful of the limited time the Conference has to do its work; stick to the topic, don't repeat sharing; having a clear understanding of time allotted and work to be covered helps committees reach an informed conscience with all voices heard from.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *If a floor action doesn't pass, wait at least one year to resubmit.*
- *Reevaluate the comparative value of area service highlights and consider fewer presentation/discussions or regional lunches, which would allow for more Conference business; perhaps have area highlights recorded throughout the year and made available electronically, or have them available in a separate room at the Conference or presented at the Delegates Only Meeting.*
- *Set aside time at each Conference to look at future agenda items so that post-Conference reports could be forward-looking to generate year-long sharing.*
- *Consider distributing minutes of all trustee meetings to all delegates.*
- *Consider moving the first “sharing session/what's on your mind?” slot to later in the week, where it might be more valuable.*
- *Utilize technology for electronic voting/tabulation at the Conference.*

- *Consider moving the 2014 and 2015 inventory to a time slot after the Conference to allow for full discussion of current agenda items.*
- *Regional trustees might consider ways to standardize their reports to allow for equally informed delegates, perhaps holding more Q&A sessions at the regional level throughout the year.*

Question 10:

How are leadership and participation affected by late night work sessions?

Late night work sessions may create a negative “badge of honor” that belies the reality that cognitive processes regress and personality conflicts increase as sessions go late, decreasing ability to make informed decisions.

The pace of the Conference should be even, not rushed at the end of the week; Conference members are here to conduct A.A.'s business and while that may take additional time on occasion, we need to reduce repetition: “Is the comment serving me or is the comment serving the body?”

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Implement a time limit for different sessions and close them when the time is up.*

Question 11:

Could the committee process be improved to more effectively introduce change in the Fellowship, and if so, how?

Change should come from the Fellowship and be introduced in a measured way, keeping the flow of information positive; flexibility is a key ingredient in change, and not everything has to be in black and white.

Good communication with the Fellowship is key to dispelling the perception that something is “hidden”; better communication following the Conference and before the July board meeting between the Conference committees and their corresponding trustees' committees could help in the development of appropriate agenda items and background material; cross-pollination between committees could help to alleviate workloads; more involvement from delegates in the development of the agendas would be beneficial; Conference materials needs to be made available in other languages to accommodate diversity and facilitate change.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Review the scope of all Conference committees — new committees may be needed.*
- *Sharing between committees throughout the year can help facilitate better understanding of the issues and help introduce change; cross-pollination between committees could ease workloads.*

Question 12:

Is the current makeup of the board (numbers and proportions) still the most effective? If not, what changes should we consider?

The current ratio of board members (Class A/Class B) is adequate, and the continuity of the “pathway” from appointed committee member to nontrustee director to general service trustee is beneficial, especially for those with professional backgrounds; Class A trustees could benefit from more training on the Concepts and Traditions, and service sponsorship for board members, including Class A trustees, can be helpful.

Professional expertise is an important qualification for trustees, though it can also be beneficial to lean on Conference committees for input and suggestions.

Some feel the corporate boards are still not effective and that the numbers and proportions could be revised.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Trustees need to focus on bigger issues and concerns for the Fellowship and not get caught up in administrative details better handled by staff.*
- *Consider increasing the role of nontrustee directors and better describe their purpose to the Fellowship.*
- *Are there still too many Grapevine board members?*

Question 13:

How could we improve the methods used to solicit trustees and directors to get the most appropriate people interested in the positions?

C.P.C. committees can be helpful in recruiting new Class A (non-alcoholic) trustee candidates, and broadly advertising board openings is necessary to cast a wide net; International Conventions can provide good “auditions” for potential Class A positions; Forums are also extremely helpful.

Balance needs to be struck between vision/leadership skills versus professional background when soliciting trustees.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *When soliciting for new trustees and directors, send a mailing to all GSRs regarding openings, don't just rely on delegates.*
- *Focus on the social sciences, technology, finance, publishing, journalism and media worlds for new Class A candidates, with lesser emphasis on the medical and religious fields.*
- *Consider the trustee-at-large positions for inclusion on the corporate boards.*
- *More nonalcoholics could serve as appointed committee members to increase the pool of Class A candidates.*
- *Seek younger candidates for trustee positions, and focus on language/cultural diversity.*
- *Consider shorter terms of service for trustees.*

Question 14:

What more could be done to insure the General Service Board remains transparent and thorough in their reporting to the Fellowship?

Good communication is the key to transparency at the board level — let the Fellowship know what's really going on, keep the at-large A.A. member in mind when transmitting information; recording the reasoning behind board decisions helps keep the GSB transparent; transparency brings trust.

Regional trustees need to be more consistent in passing on information to their delegates — an uneven flow of information to delegates can create ill will and lack of trust toward the GSB; continuity in reporting will help the Fellowship better understand what goes on at the board and Conference level.

Communication needs to flow both ways and members need to recognize that all information cannot always be made available due to business concerns, privacy, matters of confidentiality and such, and sometimes information must be held until discussion has been completed on a particular topic; in such cases, patience and trust must be relied upon.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Create continuity on how and what board minutes and reports are distributed to delegates.*
- *A graphic presentation on how the GSB does its work could be prepared/distributed to help the Fellowship better understand what goes on at the GSB level of service.*
- *More articles by trustees in the Grapevine to help familiarize the Fellowship with the board's vision.*
- *Consider regional teleconferences with delegates/regional trustees after board meetings to increase communication and help with transparency issues.*
- *Utilize technology to disseminate information through the G.S.O. Web site or perhaps provide an interactive live webinar to connect members with G.S.O. staff or trustees.*

Question 15:

Reflecting on Concept IX, are the qualities of leadership, as identified in the leadership essay in *The A.A. Service Manual*, still the qualities that we should try to encourage in Conference members? If so, how successful are we in encouraging those qualities? If not, what changes should we consider?

Leadership, integrity, conviction — we need these qualities now more than ever; sponsorship is a key ingredient; humility and working with others.

“Leadership” is not a bad word in A.A. — there must be some for A.A. to function effectively at all levels; we should encourage each other to lead and be willing to follow as well.

Leadership in A.A. should not be a competition; passion and desire are as important as professional background; we should not fear challenging authority; leadership must listen to criticism.

The Conference needs more of the vision quality and a continued willingness to look at what is good overall, not just what may be good for one particular area or segment of the Fellowship.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *To avoid “reading between the lines” by members, it would be helpful for trustees' committees to include more of the motivation behind their proposals, the reasons why they might make a particular suggestion or recommendation.*
- *More awareness of the Concepts throughout the Fellowship will benefit individuals, groups, districts, areas, regions, the Conference and our boards. Consider ways to make these principles more widely understood and available.*

2014 General Service Conference Inventory Questions

The following are the inventory questions listed in the "INVENTORY PLAN," which were approved by the 2011 G.S.C. and assigned by the 2012 G.S.C., that will be discussed at the 2014 General Service Conference:

A. Effectiveness of the Conference/Conference Process Overall

1. Reflecting on Concept Four, how effective are we in treating all Conference members as equals (no one regarded as second class)?
2. Reflecting on Concept Five, how well does the Conference facilitate the hearing and resolution of minority appeals/report? How could it be improved?
3. Does the structure encourage each individual in the Fellowship to feel and act as a member of a "society of alcoholics in action?" If not, how could we improve?
4. Does the yearlong Conference process effectively encourage all Conference members to lead (or serve) in the spirit of our upside-down service structure? If not, how can we encourage all Conference members to do so?

B. Composition of Conference

1. Should regional divisions be based on membership numbers, the number of areas contained in each region or some other criteria? Please explain.

C. Committee System

1. What is the right balance of participation among committee members (delegates, staff) and how can we best achieve that balance?

D. Yearlong Process Effectiveness

1. How well is the message of the Conference theme being carried out throughout the year?
2. What other suggestions do we have for how to improve the effectiveness of the yearlong process?

E. Conference Preparation (background, content, delivery, etc.)

1. How can we improve the manner in which Conference background material; is developed and distributed?

F. Conference Week Schedule

1. At the Conference, what is the difference between being a leader or being a reporter? Can a person be both at the same time?

(Over)

G. General Service Board/Corporate Boards (A.A.W.S. & A.A. Grapevine)

1. Reflecting on Concept Eleven, does the General Service Board exercise serious care in having the best possible assistance in carrying out their duties? How can this process be improved?
2. Does the current role of the board most effectively address the needs of the Fellowship? If not, how should their role be changed?
3. Is the selection/election process for trustees and directors effective and impartial/fair? How would you change it?

H. Leadership

1. How can we improve the methods of selecting effective leaders and nurturing leadership qualities in our trusted servants?
2. What more could be done to ensure broad diversity of representation in our A.A. leaders?

###

■ Report of the 2014 General Service Conference Inventory

“Since effective communication is the keystone of our general service structure, I am grateful the three-year General Service Conference Inventory is affording our Fellowship the opportunity to discuss new suggestions to ensure that information flows up and down the service structure. Learning from past experience will grant us vision for tomorrow.”

— Patrick Claymore, Southeast Texas delegate
“Inventory — A Guiding Tool to Our Future”
2014 Conference Presentation

Setting the stage for the second year of the General Service Conference’s three-year Inventory Plan, as seen through the lens of the 2014 General Service Conference theme, rotating general service trustee Roberta Lindeman, spoke directly to Conference members in her Keynote Address: “It is most exciting to be at the 64th General Service Conference and to focus on ‘Communicating Our Legacies — Vital in a Changing World.’ This theme is no surprise as better communication is usually the motive for everything we do. Each of you in this room is well aware of our Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity and Service, and we know how essential these three are to the survival and effectiveness of Alcoholics Anonymous.

“Our agenda for this particular Conference,” she continued, “includes many important items that will impact the Fellowship today and in the future. Some items will stimulate animated and maybe even slightly heated discussion, or a motion, a vote, a minority opinion, or even a change of outcome with the final vote.

“As we continue our Conference Inventory and work on agenda items in this 64th General Service Conference, we must look for ways to better carry the message in a world where the barrage of media and the Internet can be utilized to reach the still-suffering alcoholics. Along with this consideration, we must continue to retain the proven Twelfth Step face-to-face interaction of one alcoholic talking with another. The issues we deal with here have not really changed. What is different now is the explosion of technology that adds a new dimension when communicating our Legacies.

“Most likely we will begin something here that could be the start of something bigger, that might be enhanced and enriched by those who come after us. It is our responsibility to make sure that whatever that is, we are ‘Communicating Our Legacies’ in a complete and accurate manner.”

A Brief History

Dating back to 2005, when the General Service Board began the process of taking its own inventory and subsequent inventories of its two operating corporations, A.A. World Services, Inc. and the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., it was suggested that the inventory process might also expand to cover the General Service Conference itself, examining its structure, processes and procedures.

Some of the possible items that could be given thorough study, it was suggested, were: the effectiveness of the current committee system, the impact of new technologies on A.A.’s group conscience process, a creeping politicization of the Conference process versus the policy of delegation and trust, and the role of the trustees in the Conference process.

The idea developed over time and a General Service Board subcommittee was formed in August 2008 to discuss the proposal for a General Service Conference Inventory. Such an inventory, it was determined, would be a natural outgrowth of that which is done to maintain individual sobriety throughout the A.A. Fellowship. However, when applied to A.A.’s general services and for the pur-

poses of the General Service Conference inventory, the Twelve Concepts for World Service, not the Twelve Steps for Recovery, would provide the context through which to evaluate current Conference practices and procedures.

As noted in the Keynote Address at the opening of the 2013 General Service Conference, the inaugural year of the Inventory Plan, “Self-assessment is a pervasive part of our A.A. program; fully half of our Steps are directly related to it. Inventory of the Conference and personal inventory in the Steps are not quite the same, however. At the Conference, the emphasis will be on effectiveness in carrying out the purposes of the Conference, not on ‘character defects.’

“Honesty, both with ourselves and with others, is a core value of A.A. ... We don’t take inventory simply because it is, in and of itself, a good thing (like kindness, or generosity), but rather because it is an important element of our continued sobriety. The same holds true for our service inventories, including the Conference inventory which we are now undertaking. We are not here to take pride in doing the responsible thing by taking an inventory. We are here to help assure the unity and effectiveness of A.A. in its mission to carry the great message of hope to anyone, anywhere, who has a desire to do something about his or her drinking problem.”

In August 2009 the GSB established a subcommittee to fulfill the charge of putting together a process or procedure by which a Planning Committee with representation from all membership segments of the General Service Conference could be established. The subcommittee determined that representation should be proportional, as representation is at the GSC, and that participants be selected by lot. These conclusions were accepted by the GSB, along with some additional suggestions regarding the establishment of a Conference Inventory Planning Committee, and were ultimately referred back to the Conference Policy/Admissions Committee in 2010.

The Inventory Plan

After evaluation and discussion by the 2010 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions and deliberation by the entire Conference, a detailed Advisory Action was passed to develop a comprehensive inventory plan.

The 2011 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions reviewed the inventory plan and proposed to the full Conference “that the General Service Conference conduct a thorough inventory of itself in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan formulated by the Conference Inventory Planning Committee.” The areas covered by the inventory plan were:

- I. **Logistics** (suggesting that the inventory be conducted at three consecutive Conferences: 2013, 2014 and 2015);
- II. **Participation** (outlining the categories and terms of rotation of Conference members to serve on the Planning Committee);
- III. **Reporting** (detailing a methodology for reporting the Conference inventory, including publication of a thorough report in the *Final Conference Report* of each year of the inventory, along with summaries of each year’s inventory for publication in the A.A. Grapevine, La Viña and *Box 4-5-9*, and a separate comprehensive report of all three years’ input to be prepared after the inventory process is completed);
- IV. **Finance** (developing a cost structure for conducting and reporting the inventory);
- V. **Inventory Questions** (covering the overall effectiveness of the Conference and the Conference process; the composi-

tion of the Conference; the committee system; the effectiveness of the yearlong process; Conference preparation, in terms of background, content, delivery, etc.; the Conference week schedule; the General Service Board and corporate boards; and the question of leadership and what might be the most desirable qualities considered for leaders in A.A.)

The recommendation was accepted by the full Conference and passed as an Advisory Action of the 2011 General Service Conference, with implementation to begin in 2013.

First-Year Results

In 2013, the first year of the Inventory Plan, a number of common and interconnected themes surfaced which were reported to the Fellowship through the 2013 *Final Conference Report*, The Grapevine, *Box 4-5-9*, and La Viña. The major topics were: *COMMUNICATION* and the flow of information throughout the Fellowship, from the trustees to the delegates, from delegates to the areas, from areas to districts and groups; *USE OF TECHNOLOGY* in today's changing digital world, for the dissemination of information and communication at and relative to the General Service Conference; *CONFERENCE ORIENTATION AND PREPARATION* to help provide delegates and the Fellowship a clearer picture of what happens at the Conference and how decisions are arrived at; *PARTICIPATION AND TIMING* for the development and distribution of agenda items and background information to best facilitate thorough discussion and review by the Fellowship; *INFORMATION* on which much of the Conference is based: its volume, dissemination, purpose and derivation.

These issues and the suggestions made by 2013 Conference members, along with the sharing and suggestions of this year's Conference and the upcoming 2015 Conference (the final year of the Inventory Plan), constitute the focal point of the inventory process for the General Service Conference.

Noted Southeast Texas delegate Patrick Claymore in the 2014 presentation "Inventory — A Guiding Tool to Our Future," "The first ever General Service Conference Inventory is underway, and this week all of us will participate in the second of a three-year process. In reviewing the 2013 *Final Conference Report*, I found that the inventory has already provided insightful recommendations and suggestions to enhance and change the Conference process in the areas of effective communication, leadership, and increased Fellowship participation."

Year Two — The Inventory Continues

To address the 15 inventory questions proposed for the 2014 GSC and to allow for an equitable and representative cross-section of Conference members, three different groupings were created to address questions 1-5, 6-10, and 11-15, with each segment further broken down into 5 subgroups for each set of questions. Conference members were then assigned to one of the 15 different workshop groups, each with a moderator and reporter, and each containing 9 total participants. Meeting for two-and-a-half hours during the Conference on Wednesday, April 30th, the full range of inventory questions was covered by Conference members, with reports prepared from each workshop group.

Subsequently, each group reported directly to the full Conference on Friday, May 2nd, with additional discussion and commentary on the Conference floor following each workshop report.

Some Common Concerns

Over the course of the second year of the Inventory, a number of significant issues relating to Conference practices and procedures surfaced that cut across many different questions and Concepts:

- **Language Equality:** An overriding concern expressed throughout a number of different workshop reports was the issue of language equality and the need to reach a level of parity in terms of the preparation and distribution of Conference agenda items and background information in all three languages represented by the Conference to ensure full participation throughout the Fellowship and to make certain that the Conference is not giving the impression that there are second-class members. Timely translation of Conference materials into French and Spanish was seen as tangible evidence of the statement made in one workshop, "There is no us or them — it's all us." Recognition was made that the timely translation of Conference materials represents a difficult task, given the schedule, deadlines and fiscal constraints under which the General Service Office operates to provide support services for the Conference as a whole. However, consensus suggested that this was a highly compelling issue for Conference members and should be given appropriate attention by the trustees, evaluating all professional and volunteer resources that might be necessary to facilitate timely implementation.

(Note: the following Advisory Action was passed at the 2014 GSC: "It was recommended that: Because all Conference members are considered equal, all members should have equal access to Conference material and that a plan be created by the General Service Office to translate Conference Material (background material, Conference Manual, etc.) into French and Spanish for use during the Conference, with a report being presented to the 2015 General Service Conference. This plan may include coordinating the use of the volunteer network throughout the Fellowship, hiring professional translators or any other facilities that the office deems necessary. The report should include costs and any other considerations deemed necessary to allow timely translations to occur.")

- **Diversity:** Full participation in the Conference process was also related to the question of diversity, as many workshop groups reported, and it was noted that the Conference itself could pay attention to this issue — especially to the question "where are the young people?" — as the average age at the Conference was reported as 59. It was suggested that the Conference, and delegates in particular, find ways to reach out to underrepresented populations of all kinds. Said one Conference member, "I would like to see a deaf delegate one day." It was understood that this effort required strong leadership and the ability to encourage and support members of the Fellowship, and while the structure provides opportunities for members to serve, many may choose not to participate. "We need to recognize the value of all kinds of leaders: good organizers, good talkers, good listeners, good cheerleaders, and the multiple roles we need to fill." Noted one workshop report, "We need to be mindful of how we carry ourselves: We may be the only copy of *The A.A. Service Manual* some A.A.s ever see."
- **Conference Agenda:** In the spirit of full representation at the Conference and to reflect more of the Fellowship's ongoing concerns, the question of how agenda items are developed was widely discussed, with requests made for more input from delegates in the determination of agenda items. It was expressed by some that the lack of input into each year's Conference agenda by delegates can create a sense of inequality, as those who ultimately make the decisions about the agenda can be perceived as having unqualified authority over others.

A number of avenues were suggested to allow for greater delegate input, including broader participation by Conference committee chairs at the January board meeting, greater involvement of the Conference Committee on Agenda throughout the year, and refinements to the schedule soliciting agenda items to encourage broader and ongoing input.

(*Note:* the 2014 Conference Agenda Committee requested that the trustees' Committee on the Conference explore the potential role that the Conference Committee on Agenda might play in the selection process of Agenda items in the future and provide a report to the 2015 Conference Agenda Committee.)

- **Conference Deadlines:** The Conference itself is a model of cooperation and collaboration throughout the Fellowship, yet the suggestion was made that full participation in the Conference process from groups and delegates is sometimes curtailed. Recognizing the need for deadlines, many felt that the timing and distribution of Conference agenda items and background information limited input from the Fellowship, noting that getting an informed conscience from the groups depends on providing the information to them in a timely manner, which allows the Fellowship as a whole to better understand the issues and to respond. In this vein, requests were made for the trustees to reevaluate the scheduling and deadlines for the final receipt of Conference agenda items, redefining the process to facilitate greater exposure, discussion and reporting throughout the Fellowship. One suggestion made was to consider expanding the agenda development process to a full year. This would create time for the Fellowship to discuss topics in advance, time to develop more balanced and complete background material, and time to have that background material translated into Spanish and French.
- **Conference Theme:** It was expressed that the Conference theme could be a powerful way to encourage greater involvement in the Conference process from the Fellowship, but that the themes, in general, were not utilized in any meaningful way throughout the year. The themes are often unwieldy and unrelated to the general membership. Delegates and G.S.O. were encouraged to incorporate the Conference theme more prominently on a yearlong basis to help establish focus on the Conference and increase participation throughout the Fellowship.

(*Note:* the 2014 Conference adopted the following theme for the 2015 Conference: "Celebrating 80 Years of Recovery, Unity and Service — the Foundation for Our Future.")

- **Communication:** It was noted that the concept of hearing minority opinion and reports was well utilized throughout the Conference and was a concept that could be more fully utilized throughout the Fellowship itself. Continued and regular focus on the minority voice is a helpful and beneficial element in fully evaluating the issues and concerns that come before the Fellowship, yet we should always encourage full debate before voting, which may preclude the need for minority views to be expressed. Additionally, regarding the flow of information throughout the Fellowship, from the board of trustees to the delegates, from delegates to the areas, from areas to districts and groups and back, concern was expressed that key information was sometimes missing in the two-way system of communication. Communication is a key element in the Conference process and is one of the facets upon which trust is built. It was generally felt that more intensive year-round communication between trustees' committee chairs and Conference committee chairs would be beneficial to help keep the Fellowship current on board meet-

ing topics and discussions, and that the flow of information from regional trustees to delegates helps provide a bridge between the board and the Fellowship at large. When these channels are not well utilized or become clogged, misunderstanding can grow, the perception of "us-versus-them" takes root, and we lose our spiritual focus and effectiveness. Transparency regarding decisions taken on behalf of A.A. and the spirit of true collaboration throughout the Conference structure help to build trust and restore effectiveness.

Conclusion: 'Vision For Tomorrow'

As planned, the General Service Conference Inventory will continue in 2015 with a new influx of Conference members, new questions to evaluate, and new perspectives to inform the comprehensive process undertaken by the General Service Conference in the spirit of Bill W.'s reflections in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 231), "just as each A.A. must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole society if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well."

"Self-assessment through inventory," noted Southeast Texas delegate Patrick Claymore, "is a tool that can provide insight into the specific actions we need to consider.... Using the tool of inventory, should we determine if Alcoholics Anonymous is off track with practicing our Fellowship's singleness of purpose? Do our current actions, public relations policies, and messages to newcomers help or hinder our common welfare and legacy of unity? Is there something we need to change?"

In closing, said Patrick of the Inventory, "Since effective communication is the keystone of our general service structure, I am grateful the three-year General Service Conference Inventory is affording our Fellowship the opportunity to discuss new suggestions to ensure that information flows up and down the service structure. Learning from past experience will grant us vision for tomorrow."

Summary of 2014 Inventory

Question 1:

Reflecting on Concept Four, how effective are we in treating all Conference members as equals (no one regarded as second class)?

The use of Concept Four throughout the general service structure ensures that we are all treated as equals — with different service roles, but each serving the Fellowship equally; mutual respect and finding similarities are key; trustees want to hear from delegates — whether they have good things to say or bad; people sometimes hesitate to ask questions, however, and we need to transcend ego to bring forth all the issues that need to be discussed; communication styles based on kindness and courtesy reflect the spirit of equal participation; "We want to hear from everyone, but we need to use good judgment on how often we speak on a particular subject"; There is no us or them — it's all us; this is "our" Conference, we each have one vote.

Nevertheless, we can give the impression that there are second-class members due to the level of language accommodations made throughout the Fellowship relating to Conference background material; additionally, the lack of input into each year's Conference agenda by delegates can create a sense of inequality, as those who ultimately make the decisions about the agenda can be perceived as having unqualified authority over the others.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Pay more attention to linguistic minorities; translate all Conference background material into Spanish and French.*

- Encourage diversity; think about who is not in the room — for example, young people — as the average age at the Conference is 59.
- Review process of selecting Conference agenda items to include more input from delegates.
- Continue utilizing the “buddy system” at the Conference, as it encourages camaraderie and the feeling of equality.

Question 2:

Reflecting on Concept Five, how well does the Conference facilitate the hearing and resolution of minority appeals/reports? How could it be improved?

There is a difference between minority opinion — usually verbal and taken after every vote — and minority appeals/reports — which are written and follow a specific process for submission to the Conference; the minority appeal/report is the last resort for issues to be brought to the Conference and the process should be respected; the spirit of the principle of minority reports is stressed through the understanding that what is done at one Conference can be changed or corrected at another; however, “as important as the use of minority appeal is, we should always encourage full debate before voting, which may preclude the need for minority views to be expressed.”

The concept of minority opinion, reports/appeals doesn’t just happen at the Conference — an area can bring back an item if they don’t agree; the concept should be used in many places, in many ways; floor actions are sometimes also a form of appeal; through minority opinion we have the opportunity for our voice to be heard — we may not get our way, but we have been heard.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *The process for submitting minority appeals/reports is not well known and needs to be clarified to Conference members.*

Question 3:

Does the structure encourage each individual in the Fellowship to feel and act as a member of a “society of alcoholics in action”? If not, how could we improve?

The structure allows everyone to serve, regardless of the language and origins; all service is equal — even Class A (non-alcoholic) trustees feel like members; however, while the structure provides opportunities for members to serve, many choose not to participate.

Throughout the Fellowship, membership is not increasing and many groups are not contributing at the same levels as in the past; demographics and geography pose challenges; the structure can sometimes be a hindrance to transparency; negative perceptions can be developed, as in the confidentiality statement signed by trustees, which can be perceived as the flip-side of transparency; members often don’t participate in their group’s business meetings and so are uninformed about the service structure; sponsorship and service sponsorship is vital; delegates need to “connect the dots” of service to the alcoholic who still suffers; demonstrate that each voice can be heard; transmit the passion.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Find ways to reach out to underrepresented populations — young people, etc. “I would like to see a deaf delegate one day.”*
- *Translate all background material.*
- *Find avenues to pass the service message along to those who are unaware of how the structure works to support A.A. In this effort we need to be mindful of how we carry ourselves: “We may be the only copy of The A.A. Service Manual some A.A.s ever see.”*

- *Explore ways to utilize P.I. and C.P.C. to create excitement and enthusiasm about A.A. membership.*
- *Encourage attendance at Regional Forums.*
- *Promote greater use of unusual service connections and innovative service tools that have aided and enhanced the sobriety of members in many different circumstances.*
- *Continue to acknowledge and support all types of service, not just general service.*

Question 4:

Does the yearlong Conference process effectively encourage all Conference members to lead (or serve) in the spirit of our upside-down service structure? If not, how can we encourage all Conference members to do so?

For delegates, the Conference is a yearlong process as they visit districts and take the pulse of the Fellowship in their areas; communication takes place throughout the year through the website, Dashboard, board weekends and the minutes generated from them; some areas are quite participatory in responding to agenda items while others have more work to do to get individual members to understand their importance in the upside-down structure and to interact with the delegate.

Most Conference committees do not meet or communicate much during the year — perhaps more regular communication could be encouraged; some committees need more time at the Conference, as the workload can be overwhelming; the upside-down process can be made more transparent by providing information more widely throughout the Fellowship — “by providing everyone with whatever I receive,” says one Conference member.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Delegates need to teach people what to do with the information they get from our service entities.*
- *Preparation of background material could benefit from more participation and oversight from trustees’ committees.*
- *Delegates should share amongst themselves online or otherwise about how to be more effective in getting out the information from the Conference.*
- *Consider establishing or supporting “G.S.R. schools,” where everyone is invited to learn more about their service responsibilities, how agenda items are developed, and how the upside-down process works.*

Question 5:

Should regional divisions be based on membership numbers, the number of areas contained in each region or some other criteria. Please explain.

There is a process in place to split areas when they become too big, but nothing similar for regions; nevertheless, regional divisions should not necessarily be made on membership numbers or number of groups; it is critical that the regional trustees be able to visit all areas in their region.

But, some ask, “is it fair for an area with 300-500 groups to have the same vote as an area with 2,000 groups?” — perhaps creating more or reconfiguring existing regions would even things out.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *More information is needed on the history of how regions were created and how they grew; more data is needed before an informed decision could be made, though many felt the situation is fine as it is.*

Question 6:

What is the right balance of participation among committee members (delegates, staff) and how can we best achieve that balance?

The balance of participation between staff and delegates in Conference committees is good; staff role is supportive, not directive — extremely helpful as resources in gathering information; when asked, staff should feel free to voice opinions; balance of first- and second-year delegates is also important within each committee; committee system works well.

Balance in joint trustees/Conference committee meetings can pose challenges, especially for first-year delegates — 10 or more trustees, directors and staff members can be a formidable presence, particularly when contentious agenda items are up for discussion.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *It could be helpful for new delegates to develop a document that explains the role of staff in committee to give clear expectations ahead of time, or have the secretary remind the committee of staff's role within the committee.*

Question 7:

How well is the message of the Conference theme being carried out throughout the year?

Throughout the year, in most areas, the Conference theme is given very little attention: the theme often gets lost and the focus shifts to agenda items, especially controversial ones; theme is sometimes complicated, seems more like a corporate theme; in many areas the theme is never mentioned until it starts into Conference time.

Conference as a whole needs to acknowledge the importance of institutionalizing the practice of observing the Conference theme all year long to establish it as part of the area culture; delegates, trustees and G.S.O. need to encourage use of the theme throughout the Fellowship and build it into yearlong events.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Long themes can be unwieldy — short themes are more easily utilized.*
- *Keep theme for two years for a better and more complete discussion by the Fellowship.*
- *Utilize present technology to inform members of the theme.*
- *Develop Conference theme material to come from G.S.O. — one Box 4-5-9 article is not enough: put Conference theme on letterhead (like International Convention logo), add Conference theme as home page banner on G.S.O.'s A.A. website, use theme as a header on office e-correspondence throughout the year.*
- *Delegates can make sure to mention next year's Conference theme in delegate's report and suggest districts do workshops on it; put Conference theme and logo on area communications throughout the year; put theme on newsletter banners.*
- *Grapevine could assist with series of articles on the theme and how it relates to the Fellowship.*
- *Develop special literature packets related to the theme.*
- *Regional trustee reports could focus on Conference theme in addition to raw data and business information.*

Question 8:

What other suggestions do we have for how to improve the effectiveness of the yearlong process?

Ongoing communication throughout the service structure is the key; the flow of information goes both ways — from Conference

to the Fellowship and from the Fellowship to the Conference; find ways for G.S.R.s to stay involved and interested — educate and engage G.S.R.s in the Conference theme.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *General Service Board should get board reports out as quickly as possible.*
- *Send out background material — in English, French and Spanish — throughout the year.*
- *Use the Dashboard year 'round; post information as it comes in.*
- *Trustees' committee chairs can correspond regularly with Conference committee chairs to keep current on board meeting topics and discussions.*
- *Reorganize committee structure to focus on areas of interest to the Fellowship, like anonymity or how to carry the message, to keep group members interested in the work of the Conference.*
- *Consider moving back the deadline for agenda items to avoid huge crunch in the beginning of the year.*
- *Consider a two-year process, with a Conference every other year.*

Question 9:

How can we improve the manner in which Conference background material is developed and distributed?

Gratitude was expressed for the three formats available for the delivery of background material; however, an overriding concern was voiced that background material be distributed, at the same time, in all three languages of the Conference, to clearly manifest the right of decision and the right of participation; “we aren't operating as a society of equals.”

It was recognized that this would have to come at a cost, though consensus seemed to indicate that the issue is critical enough that it should be addressed sooner rather than later, with funding pulled from other services, derived from literature price increases, developed through volunteer resources, or solicited from increased Fellowship contributions.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Translate all background material into Spanish and French and distribute simultaneously with English.*
- *Consider expanding the agenda development process to a full year. For example, the 2016 agenda would be proposed at the January 2015 board meeting. This would create time for the Fellowship to discuss topics in advance, time to develop more balanced and complete background material, and time to have that background material translated into Spanish and French.*
- *Dashboard could be more user-friendly with updated technology.*
- *Take proposed Conference agenda items that the trustees' committees and/or boards declined to move forward and pass them through the Conference Committee on Agenda for further review and possible consideration.*

Question 10:

At the Conference, what is the difference between being a leader or being a reporter? Can a person be both at the same time?

The delegate is both a leader and a reporter — one job is subjective and the other objective; reporting to the areas requires delegates to be both: sharing facts in a balanced way, while reflecting thoughts, feelings and emotions; leader has the capacity to accept the ideas of others, while reporter informs the Fellowship about what happens; can be both, but may have a tendency to move more toward one and may not accurately carry the group's thoughts.

Being both is difficult because one leads from passion and one reports facts; one can't *do* the tasks of leader and reporter simultaneously, but one can *be* both at the same time.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *"As members of the Conference, if we have a solution or something we can bring to the Conference, as leaders we have a responsibility to go to the microphone and say it. We also have a responsibility as reporters to bring our local conscience to the Conference and to bring back the conscience of the Conference."*
- *"Listen like you have no opinion."*

Question 11:

Reflecting on Concept Eleven, does the General Service Board exercise serious care in having the best possible assistance in carrying out their duties? How can this process be improved?

The General Service Board has exercised due diligence and informed care to insure the best assistance in carrying out its duties; "with the lens that I have as delegate, I see qualified people serving as nontrustee directors, G.S.O. staff, etc."; in selecting people for service positions on the boards, "we look for the person who will best serve A.A."

Communication issues can sometimes be problematic, however, as board reporting is not detailed enough in some instances regarding the activities of the trustees (ie, quality of minutes) and the distribution of information about openings on the board and staff can be too limited; trust is important, but so is transparency; the time, respect and willingness to have disagreements and extended discussions are important to healthy functioning; it may be that pockets of the Fellowship think that service at the board level is about being part of the "in crowd": if a person is a delegate, then appointed committee member, then nontrustee director, then general service trustee, they may be around for too long, like "when a G.S.R. keeps the position for many years — it's not good"; taking an honest inventory and raising awareness of challenges the board faces can help develop trust; there is a tricky balance between flexibility and openness, which are important to innovation, while still maintaining the principles that sustain A.A.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *The board should encourage balance and trade-offs in utilizing consultants, staff and appointed committee members to insure that we stay current in both functional expertise and being up-to-date in utilizing the latest technology.*
- *Consider allowing nonalcoholics to serve as nontrustee directors.*
- *Discussion about the selection of executive editor/publisher and general manager positions must be very transparent and open. To do otherwise will deepen mistrust/ suspicion.*
- *Continue to encourage new initiatives for better communication between boards.*
- *Involve Class As more deeply at the area level to help them learn more about us and how we function — "it's up to us to get our Class As up to speed."*
- *Expand the distribution of announcements for open positions — being limited to the advertisement of positions to Box 4-5-9 may be restricting who we recruit.*
- *Consider having a more extensive trustees' orientation program.*
- *The board might want to look at developing a communications position at G.S.O.*

Question 12:

Does the current role of the board most effectively

address the needs of the Fellowship? If not, how should their role be changed?

The board does an admirable job of addressing the needs of a diverse and far-flung Fellowship; we need the board to be an anchor for the core principles of A.A. — "to always have a beacon to find our way back."

To address the needs of the Fellowship more effectively, however, there needs to be more communication between the board and the delegates regarding the Conference agenda; is the less-than-half level of group participation in contributions and general service an indication of a deep problem between the Fellowship and the board; Communication is a two-way street and needs encouragement in both directions; the challenges of dealing with policy matters, the balance of power and questions of delegated authority have always been with us; when we seek to criticize or place blame it is hard, if not impossible, to keep the focus on spirituality and unity; throughout the Fellowship we need to admit when things are difficult and ask for help; "the service structure is only as good as the people in it."

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *The board is responsible for vision for the future, but sometimes seems to get bogged down in details — perhaps even minutia — and may not be looking at some of the critical issues.*
- *Strategic planning for communicating with the Fellowship about self-support and the Seventh Tradition is vitally important.*
- *Forums could be more interactive and responsive regarding questions and concerns brought up by the Fellowship — a patronizing/pandering tone that sounds like agreement with the assurance that action will occur (when the idea is later forgotten or ignored) isn't helpful, nor are short answers from the board such as "we don't have the time" or "we don't have the money." If a question isn't answerable at the Forum, someone could follow up later with pertinent information.*
- *The board should encourage more participation from Conference committee chairs during the January board weekend.*
- *Develop a mechanism for greater involvement of the delegates in the yearlong process of the Conference, allowing for more active participation, especially as it relates to developing the agenda.*

Question 13:

Is the selection/election process for trustees and directors effective and impartial/fair? How would you change it?

"A.A. is like a self-cleaning oven. I don't believe any one person can make or break A.A. I trust the process. I believe what Bill said — that A.A. will be around as long as God will have it. I believe in the Alpha and the Omega in the entire process."

The system for selecting regional trustees, with regional delegates, randomly-selected nonregional delegates and trustees, etc., really helps to deter manipulation of the election; the selection of nontrustee directors is vigorous and thorough; widening the pool of candidates would help develop diversity, as sometimes we miss the quieter-voiced candidates; we need more information on the slate of officers proposed for each board to better evaluate candidates; trustee-at-large elections can be strongly influenced by size of the regions; it takes real courage and dedication to set aside personal/geographic loyalties in the selection of the most qualified candidates.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Widen the pool of candidates for Class A trustees to encourage diversity; utilize About A.A. to announce openings and solicit applications; have potential Class As serve on trustees' committees; find more grassroots Class A candidates instead of high-*

level professionals.

- Consideration needs to be given to the impact of large regions vs. small regions in the selection of trustees-at-large.
- Consider persons outside the service structure for board positions, A.A.s who may have a different and refreshing perspective.

Question 14:

How can we improve the methods of selecting effective leaders and nurturing leadership qualities in our trusted servants?

“In my area, when I see someone I think has something that would be a great help, I encourage them to get involved”; “train, support, share, walk with, review reports, get notes on reports — these are what people have done for me. It is so important to help the person along. It’s our responsibility”; sponsorship at all levels is essential; “leading by example can only be encouraged by leading by example. Leadership that drives by mandate generates more leaders of that nature”; emphasis on selection of G.S.R.s is the foundation for good leadership throughout the Fellowship.

We need to recognize the value of all kinds of leaders: good organizers, good talkers, good listeners, good cheerleaders, and the multiple roles we need to fill; for elections at the Conference, a review of the qualifications for the *position*, not the candidates, prior to voting would be helpful in keeping the focus on what A.A. needs; it is our responsibility to educate people to serve and to provide a much more extensive orientation for our trusted servants — the investment would be well worth it.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- Continue explaining the broader picture of our service structure at Forums and throughout the Fellowship.
- Consider the possibility of A.A.W.S. and Grapevine chairs serving for two years instead of automatic rotation after one.
- Utilize our service pamphlets such as “Circles of Love and Service” to help explain the service structure throughout the Fellowship and develop literature specifically on the topic of service sponsorship.

Question 15:

What more could be done to ensure broad diversity of representation in our A.A. leaders?

How are we encouraging A.A. members to be active at all levels of our service structure? “Efforts like translation to increase inclusivity at events are helpful, but what needs to be broadened is personal acceptance of others”; “we have a lot to do as a Fellowship in the area of diversity. Lots of barriers. If we can show we are making advances in language areas, we can make a difference in diversity”; “diversity is not a reason to elect someone. Diversity is a concern for our entire Fellowship. We need to nurture people into leadership. Service teaches loud people how to listen and quiet people to have a voice”; “we not only need to reach out, but to do so in a sensitive and informed manner”; “differences should be recognized and respected, but if emphasis is kept on our common problem and our common solution these differences don’t need to be perpetuated or become problematic to overall unity.”

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- Include and encourage more diverse members, including special needs members, into leadership roles throughout the Fellowship.
- Continue addressing the language needs of members throughout the service structure.
- Consider having a military or ICYPAA service desk at the General Service Office.

2015 General Service Conference Inventory Questions

The following are the inventory questions listed in the "INVENTORY PLAN," which were approved by the 2011 G.S.C. and assigned by the 2012 G.S.C., that will be discussed at the 2015 General Service Conference:

A. Effectiveness of the Conference/Conference Process Overall

1. Reflecting on Concept Two, how can we better serve as the actual voice and be an effective conscience for our whole society?
2. Reflecting on Concept Three, how can we effectively balance the freedoms and responsibilities that come with the right of decision?
3. How might any one of the Concepts be revised in essence or wording to more effectively and relevantly guide our leaders?

B. Composition of Conference

1. Is the size and structure (proportions of delegate/trustee/staff) of the Conference the most effective for conducting the work of the Fellowship? If not, how could it be made more effective?

C. Committee System

1. Committee system (Structure, Composition, Effectiveness, etc.): Does the Conference committee system function in accordance with our principles? If not, what changes should we consider regarding: a) structure b) composition c) effectiveness?

D. Yearlong Process Effectiveness

1. How can we better communicate that the Conference process is more than one spring week in New York?
2. How do the delegates and regional trustees support the yearlong process effectiveness?

E. Conference Preparation (background, content, delivery, etc.)

1. What more could be done to prepare delegates for the Conference?

F. Conference Week Schedule

1. What Conference activities give participants the most opportunities to be leaders?
2. Does the time allotted and the manner in which information is communicated from the trustees and board members allow delegates to adequately understand and/or question their reports? How could this be improved?

(Over)

G. General Service Board/Corporate Boards (A.A.W.S. & A.A. Grapevine)

1. Reflecting on Concept Six, how can the Conference ensure that the authority we delegate to the General Service Board is commensurate with the responsibility we have entrusted to them?
2. Reflecting on Concept Eight: (a) How well is the General Service Board exercising custodial oversight and how effectively are they serving as the principle planners and administrators of policy and finance? (b) What are the boundaries between oversight vs. delegation? When is each practiced?
3. Should the Fellowship have more direct influence in the selection of Class A trustees, corporate directors, and General Service trustees? If yes, how might that be accomplished?

H. Leadership

1. How well is the Third Legacy Procedure serving us? How could it be improved?

###

Report of the 2015 General Service Conference Inventory

“We cannot underestimate the importance of this first-ever General Service Conference Inventory. It challenges us to look at how well the Conference functions as the voice and the conscience of our society. It asks us to consider how well the principles of our Twelve Concepts are reflected in Conference actions and composition. It calls upon us to examine how well the Conference maintains communication throughout the Fellowship’s structure. It requires us to look at how well the Conference does when selecting A.A.’s leaders today and inspiring its leaders for tomorrow.”

— Cathi C., Southern Indiana Delegate
“Inventory — Looking Back to Move Ahead”
2015 Conference Presentation

Taking inventory, in the best sense of the word, is a fundamental aspect of the A.A. program. As cofounder Bill W. reflected in *A.A. Comes of Age* (page 231), “Just as each A.A. must continue to take his moral inventory and act upon it, so must our whole society if we are to survive and if we are to serve usefully and well.” An inventory, then, at the level of general service is a natural outgrowth of that which is done to maintain individual sobriety throughout the A.A. Fellowship. However, as noted in the Keynote Address at the opening of the 2013 General Service Conference, the inaugural year of the General Service Conference Inventory Plan, “Inventory of the Conference and personal inventory in the Steps are not quite the same. At the Conference, the emphasis will be on effectiveness in carrying out the purposes of the Conference, not on ‘character defects.’”

The address continued, “We don’t take inventory simply because it is, in and of itself, a good thing (like kindness, or generosity), but rather because it is an important element of our continued sobriety. The same holds true for our service inventories, including the Conference inventory which we are now undertaking. We are not here to take pride in doing the responsible thing by taking an inventory. We are here to help assure the unity and effectiveness of A.A. in its mission to carry the great message of hope to anyone, anywhere, who has a desire to do something about his or her drinking problem.”

A Brief History

In August 2008, following successful inventories taken by the General Service Board and its two operating corporations, A.A. World Services, Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc., a General Service Board subcommittee was formed to discuss a proposal for a General Service Conference Inventory. After considerable discussion, a year later the GSB established a subcommittee to fulfill the charge of putting together a process or procedure by which a Planning Committee with representation from all membership segments of the General Service Conference could be established. The results of the subcommittee’s deliberations were accepted by the GSB and referred to the Conference Policy/Admissions Committee in 2010.

After evaluation and discussion by the 2010 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions and further deliberation by the entire Conference, a detailed 2010 Advisory Action was passed to develop a comprehensive inventory plan.

The 2011 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions reviewed the inventory plan and proposed to the full Conference “that the General Service Conference conduct a thorough inventory of itself in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan formulated by the Conference Inventory Planning Committee.”

The Inventory Plan

The areas covered by the inventory plan were:

- I. **Logistics** (suggesting that the inventory be conducted at three consecutive Conferences: 2013, 2014 and 2015);
- II. **Participation** (outlining the categories and terms of rotation of Conference members to serve on the Planning Committee);
- III. **Reporting** (detailing a methodology for reporting the Conference inventory, including publication of a thorough report in the *Final Conference Report* of each year of the inventory, along with summaries of each year’s inventory for publication in the A.A. Grapevine, La Viña and *Box 4-5-9*, and a separate comprehensive report of all three years’ input to be prepared after the inventory process is completed);
- IV. **Finance** (developing a cost structure for conducting and reporting the inventory);
- V. **Inventory Questions** (covering the overall effectiveness of the Conference and the Conference process; the composition of the Conference; the committee system; the effectiveness of the yearlong process; Conference preparation, in terms of background, content, delivery, etc.; the Conference week schedule; the General Service Board and corporate boards; and the question of leadership and what might be the most desirable qualities considered for leaders in A.A.)

The recommendation was accepted by the full Conference and passed as an Advisory Action of the 2011 General Service Conference, with implementation to begin in 2013 and each year’s results to be shared with the Fellowship through the *Final Conference Report, Box 4-5-9, Grapevine and La Viña*.

First-Year Results

In 2013, the first year of the Inventory Plan, a series of Inventory workshops were held for Conference members during the 2013 Conference, with the results of each group’s discussions reported back to the full Conference. A number of common and interconnected themes surfaced through the reports.

The major topics were summarized to include:

- **Communication:** When the flow of information throughout the Fellowship, from the trustees to the delegates, from delegates to the areas, from areas to districts and groups, is transmitted unevenly, it can lead to misunderstanding and misapprehension on the part of the Fellowship. As much as possible, communication (at all levels) should focus more on the “why” of particular actions/suggestions/recommendations. This will help improve transparency and offer greater insight into the issues at hand.
- **Use of Technology:** In today’s changing digital world, particularly at the Conference level, where the dissemination of information and communication is so critical, technology can help to reach new people (both in terms of service and recovery) and to provide for the wide dispersion of materials related to the General Service Conference. Technology could also be well applied at the Conference itself, facilitating communication between committees, for voting and tabulation, and for presentation of items to the Conference as a whole.
- **Conference Orientation and Preparation:** Providing delegates and the Fellowship with a clearer picture of what happens at the Conference and how decisions are arrived at

is an important aspect of the Conference experience. It was noted that some areas and regions prepare their delegates very well, while others do not; a consistent presentation prior to the beginning of the Conference could provide all delegates with the same level of preparedness.

- **Participation and Timing:** The development and distribution of agenda items and background information is critical in facilitating thorough discussion and review by the Fellowship. Suggestions were made that full participation in the Conference process from groups and delegates may be curtailed because agenda items and background material are not getting out to the Fellowship early enough. In addition to concerns about the timing of deadlines, there was the sense that delegates, as representatives of the groups, were not well utilized in the selection of yearly agenda items. Emphasis was encouraged on the “year-round” concept of the Conference and the idea of having Conference committees in general and the Conference Agenda Committee in specific more involved in the development of committee agendas was frequently expressed.
- **Information:** Many delegates expressed being “overwhelmed” with the amount of material that must be gone through and some found the background materials to be inadequate in terms of providing the “reasoning” for certain agenda items. It was felt that more frequent communication and exchange of information between the Conference committees and their corresponding trustees’ committees could help refocus the Conference process throughout the year, rather than pushing everything into a narrow timeframe during and just preceding each Conference.

Second-Year Results

In 2014, the second year of the Inventory Plan, additional themes surfaced covering the overall effectiveness of the Conference and the Conference process itself. The major topics were summarized to include:

- **Language Equality:** An overriding concern was expressed about the issue of language equality and the need to reach a level of parity in terms of the preparation and distribution of Conference agenda items and background information in all three languages represented by the Conference to ensure full participation throughout the Fellowship.

(Note: The 2014 Conference voted that a plan be created by the General Service Office to translate Conference Material into French and Spanish for use during the Conference, with a report being presented to the 2015 General Service Conference that should include costs and any other considerations deemed necessary to allow timely translations to occur. See 2014 Conference Advisory Action #111. for clarification)

- **Diversity:** Full participation in the Conference process was also related to the question of diversity, as many workshop groups reported, and it was noted that the Conference itself could pay attention to this issue as the average age at the Conference was reported as 57. It was suggested that the Conference, and delegates in particular, find ways to reach out to underrepresented populations of all kinds. “We need to recognize the value of all kinds of leaders: good organizers, good talkers, good listeners, good cheerleaders, and the multiple roles we need to fill,” noted one workshop report.
- **Conference Agenda and Deadlines:** In the spirit of full representation at the Conference and to reflect more of the Fellowship’s ongoing concerns, the question of how agenda items are developed was widely discussed, with

requests made for more input from delegates in the determination of agenda items. Additionally, many felt that the current timing and distribution of Conference agenda items and background information limited input from the Fellowship, noting that getting an informed conscience from the groups depends on providing the information to them in a timely manner.

(Note: The 2014 Conference Agenda Committee requested that the trustees’ Committee on the Conference explore the potential role that the Conference Committee on Agenda might play in the selection process of Agenda items in the future and provide a report to the 2015 Conference Agenda Committee regarding the current and historical process of Agenda item selection.)

- **Conference Theme:** It was expressed that the Conference theme could be a powerful way to encourage greater involvement in the Conference process from the Fellowship, but that the themes, often unwieldy and unrelated to the general membership, were not utilized in any meaningful way throughout the year. Delegates and G.S.O. were encouraged to incorporate the Conference theme more prominently throughout the Fellowship on a yearlong basis to help establish focus on the Conference and increase participation.

(Note: The 2015 Conference selected the theme for the 2016 General Service Conference: “Our Spiritual Way of Life: Steps, Traditions and Concepts.”)

- **Communication:** Communication is a key element in the Conference process and is one of the facets upon which trust is built. It was generally felt that more intensive year-round communication between trustees’ committee chairs and Conference committee chairs would be beneficial, and that the flow of information from regional trustees to delegates helps provide a bridge between the board and the Fellowship at large. Transparency regarding decisions taken on behalf of A.A. and the spirit of true collaboration throughout the Conference structure help to build trust and restore effectiveness.

- **Technology:** The 2014 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions recommended that electronic voting at the Conference be given a two-year trial at the 2015 and 2016 Conferences, and that the trustees’ Committee on the General Service Conference provide a report to the 2017 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions on electronic voting for their evaluation. *(See 2014 Advisory Action #22).*

Year Three — The Inventory Continues

To address the inventory questions proposed for the 2015 GSC and to allow for an equitable and representative cross-section of Conference members, 15 separate workshop groups were established, each with a moderator and reporter. Meeting for two-and-a-half hours during the Conference on Wednesday, April 22nd, the full range of inventory questions was covered by Conference members, with reports prepared from each workshop group.

Subsequently, each group reported directly to the full Conference on Friday, April 24th, with additional discussion and commentary on the Conference floor following each workshop report.

Some Common Concerns

Over the course of the third year of the Inventory, a number of significant issues relating to Conference practices and procedures surfaced that cut across many different Inventory questions and a number of different Concepts. The major topics were

summarized to include:

- **Working Together and Increasing Trust:** Three familiar areas were articulated in terms of creating a more balanced working relationship between the trustees and the Conference: a) making sure that agenda items are received as far in advance as possible to ensure full participation throughout the Fellowship; b) finding ways to keep the trustees and Conference committees in meaningful contact throughout the yearlong Conference process; and c) cultivating more input from delegates regarding agenda items. “For authority to be commensurate with responsibility,” said one report, “there should be ready access between the general membership and service leaders.... Communication among equals helps ensure this.”

(Note: The 2015 Conference Agenda Committee again requested that the trustees’ Committee on the Conference fully explore the potential role that the Conference Agenda Committee might play in the selection process of Agenda items in the future and provide a report to the 2016 Conference Agenda Committee — See the Additional Committee Considerations section of the 2015 *Final Conference Report*.)

- **Engaging the Fellowship:** Engaging the Fellowship with relevant and ongoing information about the Conference is not a new problem. Many reports recognized the historical gap between individual A.A. members and the Conference itself. “If we are not working locally to engage the full Fellowship,” said one report, “the disconnect between the GSC and the average member will remain. The connection needs to be made between what happens at the Conference and how it helps the drunk on the corner.” Many obstacles can come between the membership and general service — such as family and work obligations, health issues, time constraints, etc. — but trying to limit such obstacles will help attract a broader spectrum of people. “Participation by the average A.A. is blocked by the idea that the Conference is complicated, intense,” noted one report. “Can we simplify communication about our process? Find a way to de-mystify the language?”
- **Carrying the Message in a Diverse and Changing Society:** To be truly representative of the Fellowship, the Conference and the board need to keep inviting diversity by reaching out to members of all ages, races, income, education and language levels, those with special needs, and those with differing professional backgrounds. More diversity on the board would help establish trust throughout the Fellowship as our population changes in the future, and reaching out to underrepresented population groups expands our inclusivity. “Diversity begins with us, one-on-one,” said one report. “We can’t have a democratic organization without having the top of the pyramid fully participating.”
- **Improving Communication:** Progress was made in having Conference material available as soon as possible in English, French and Spanish, as requested by the 2014 Conference, and the 2015 Conference approved two items to keep that progress moving forward (see 2015 Advisory Actions #4 and #5). One common theme expressed through many reports was the importance of listening as a fundamental aspect of good communication. As one report noted, “We can get so caught up in A.A. rigidity, but if motivated by the spirit of listening, our group conscience can result in good decisions.”
- **Looking Toward the Future:** One report indicated that the Conference Inventory itself is going a long way to ensuring balance between responsibility and authority, and that continuing some sort of regular review/assessment will help

avoid future discrepancies between authority and responsibility. And now that the Inventory is done, perhaps it is time to take a similar approach to the Concepts and develop a plan to look at them in depth to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of the Conference, the board, and the entire general service structure.

CONCLUSION: ‘Interconnected Circles of Love and Service’

In all its actions, the General Service Conference seeks to be of maximum usefulness as the guardian of A.A.’s services, Steps and Traditions, and to be the voice and conscience of the Fellowship as a whole. As planned, the General Service Conference Inventory has spanned three Conferences and will come to a close with publication of a comprehensive report covering all three years.

“We cannot underestimate the importance of this first-ever General Service Conference Inventory,” noted Southern Indiana delegate Cathi C. in the 2015 Conference presentation, ‘Inventory — Looking Back to Move Ahead.’ “But the inventory itself is mere information,” she continued, “an account of the Conference’s assets and liabilities. What happens when the inventory is over is critical to the current and future success of the Conference. To paraphrase the Big Book, ‘having made an Inventory of the General Service Conference, what shall we do about it? Is the Conference’s work then done?’....

“Knowing that solitary self-appraisal is insufficient, we will gain much by sharing the report throughout our interconnected circles of love and service. We will benefit greatly by discussing our shortcomings with trusted servants at all levels of our structure. It will give everyone who is willing the opportunity to help create plans for the betterment of our Conference. Let us involve and inspire our leaders of tomorrow as they continue the challenging assignment we have only just begun.”

In closing, said Cathi, “As we look at where we are today, celebrating 80 years of Recovery, Unity and Service, let us also celebrate our General Service Conference Inventory. We have begun a journey of strengthening our foundation and moving ahead toward the future.”

Summary of 2015 Inventory

Question 1:

Reflecting on Concept Two, how can we better serve as the actual voice and be an effective conscience for our whole society?

We need to educate ourselves, our groups, our areas, and the general public through clear and ongoing communication, connectivity and planned initiatives; to engage and communicate with A.A. members and groups regarding how necessary their input is. Utilizing, and living, all three Legacies is important to gaining full participation throughout the Fellowship. “We can’t have a democratic organization without having the top of the pyramid [the groups] fully participating.” To do this, it is important to see other perspectives and to be as informative, loving and available as possible. “We can get so caught up in A.A. rigidity, but if motivated by the spirit of listening, our group conscience can result in good decisions.”

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Give more time to the minority opinion at the area level.*
- *Reaffirm that the groups are in charge; show how the Conference impacts groups; involve D.C.M.s in the communication process*

to and from the Conference.

- Reach out to those groups not listed and nonparticipating groups — attend and absorb what these groups value and what their message is.
- Consider video conferencing to reach geographically remote communities.
- Translate background material into French and Spanish.
- Involve delegates more in the Conference selection process for agenda items.
- The make-up of the board of trustees could better reflect the diversity of the Fellowship.
- Many obstacles can come between the membership and general service — such as family and work obligations, health issues, time constraints, etc. Try to limit obstacles and make it easier and less time-consuming for members to participate in general service. This will help attract a broader spectrum of people.
- The A.A. Membership Survey could be an effective tool to reach underrepresented groups.
- Delegates should try to involve more groups in the pre-Conference process.

Question 2:

Reflecting on Concept Three, how can we effectively balance the freedoms and responsibilities that come with the right of decision?

Keeping “the good of A.A.” foremost in our thinking — respecting the roles represented by all parts of the triangle — is critical in maintaining balance within the Fellowship. “We have to make A.A. better, not just our areas,” said one report. Actions should be measured against the effect they might have on the alcoholic who still suffers and we shouldn’t underestimate the knowledge and interest of the Fellowship. “Responsibility involves listening to all sides,” stated one report, adding that we have to be careful not to be so critical as to demoralize those we are trying to serve. “Provide the best and most timely information that you can to the group that you are responsible to so that they can participate fully and effectively in giving you their initial input; if their initial input is well-informed you are less likely to need to exercise the right of decision.”

Complete reporting of Conference actions, including an explanation of any new information that may have affected the vote, is part of the delegate’s responsibility, along with trying to balance majority and minority opinion relating to Conference decisions. “Just because we don’t *have* to consult or report about a particular item, doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t,” explained one report. And it’s important, said another, to stay friendly with those we are trying to serve, even those with whom we may disagree. “We may learn more from the minority than the majority.”

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- More time at the Conference should be spent on substantive issues, not word-smithing. When Conference members get microscopic it takes away from important issues.
- Some decisions can/should wait until we obtain a fuller group conscience. It’s important to better involve the groups in the Conference process, even if it takes more time.
- Concepts workshops at the local level can help the Fellowship better understand the right of decision.
- Increasing the time between releasing the agenda and background material and the start of the Conference itself may help to increase the Fellowship’s understanding of issues facing

A.A. as a whole.

Question 3:

How might any one of the Concepts be revised in essence or wording to more effectively and relevantly guide our leaders?

“We don’t need to change the Concepts — just live them,” was a sentiment often expressed. Yet, many recognized the difficulties of applying these principles in a changing society and engaging the Fellowship to learn more about our Third Legacy. “Participation by the average A.A. is blocked by the idea that the Conference is complicated, intense.... Can we simplify communication about our process? Find a way to de-mystify the language?”

Some felt that the Concepts can be seen as separate entities, with some more important than others, rather than as an interconnected group of matched principles. Additionally, it was expressed that without cooperation and communication, ideas like the right of decision can be pitted against the right of participation. It’s important to focus on the relevance of the Concepts at the group, district and area level in order to engage the interest of individual members and to communicate in ways that resonate with diverse groups and all ages.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- Annotated, narrative and simplified Concept tools need to be developed for use throughout the Fellowship — along the lines of the Concepts Checklist and the Concepts Illustrated.
- The Conference process does not provide enough time to focus on and address the future needs of the Fellowship; it is important that the Conference not become entirely reactive, but also extend a vision for A.A.’s future.
- Now that the Inventory is done, take a similar approach to the Concepts and develop a plan to look at them in depth at next year’s Conference, and beyond.
- Have more workshops on the Concepts at the local level; include more stories about the Concepts in Grapevine, La Viña and Box 4-5-9; create a summary table of contents similar to what is in The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
- The Concepts are not a history book or a policy document. The Conference could take three Concepts a year for four years and develop clearer narratives reflecting current experience, including examples of how we actually use the Concepts within the Fellowship. These examples could then be included in The A.A. Service Manual.

Question 4:

Is the size and structure (proportions of delegate/trustee/staff) of the Conference the most effective for conducting the work of the Fellowship? If not, how could it be made more effective?

It was the general consensus that the proportions and structure of the Conference are good, but that more work needs to be done to develop diversity within the Conference body. To be truly representative of the Fellowship, the Conference needs to keep inviting diversity, not quotas, by reaching out to members of all ages, races, income and education levels, those with special needs, and those with differing professional backgrounds. “Diversity begins with us, one-on-one,” said one report.

In terms of participation at the Conference, it was noted that a good idea can come from anyone, and that staff, delegates and trustees have equal access to share information. Some questions were raised about increasing the representation of staff at the Conference and the possibilities of adding new areas as ways of expanding the Conference body itself. However, in general, it was felt that the current size of the Conference is workable and

while expansion is something to keep on the radar for continued discussion, no changes were needed at this time.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Perhaps linguistic districts could become areas with their own delegates?*
- *Translation of background material is needed to empower and strengthen participation for all members.*
- *Greater use of technology will enhance communication.*
- *The time may be approaching to consider new delegate areas/regions to achieve greater equity in terms of numbers of groups represented and geographic area covered, as it relates both to delegates and regional trustees.*

Question 5:

Does the Conference committee system function in accordance with our principles?

If not, what changes should we consider regarding:

a) structure b) composition c) effectiveness?

Most reports recognized the benefits of working within the committee system, but questions of balanced workloads and expanding collaboration between Conference committees were also raised. Some committees (for example, Literature) characteristically seem to have a heavier workload and can be over-taxed for time, while other committees are lighter. Finding ways to balance these workloads is important. Additionally, it was felt that there could be more collaboration between committees and that cross-pollination is a good thing. Committees can become insular and this may lead to micromanaging agenda items and getting bogged down in excessive word-smithing rather than

keeping the focus on substantive issues.

The benefit of working in small groups was noted, which helps achieve transparency among delegates, trustees and staff. "Quit separating us," added one report, "Delegates need more interaction time with trustees and staff."

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *There is not enough time at the Conference. More communication throughout the year between the trustees' committees and the corresponding Conference committees could help ease the time crunch. Perhaps it's necessary to add more days to the Conference schedule?*
- *Make the agenda item deadline earlier to allow for greater input from the Fellowship.*
- *It is important to trust the informed group conscience and not get bogged down in microscopic analysis and word-smithing.*
- *Give delegate chairs a larger role in the agenda selection process.*
- *Consider giving trustees and staff a voice and vote at the committee level.*
- *Utilize technology (conference calls, Skype, etc.) to allow committees to meet before the Conference.*
- *Allow a broader segment of the Fellowship to view proposed material before the Conference (i.e., PSAs) to gain a wider conscience.*
- *Since trustees get to express a preference about the Conference committees they are assigned to, why not let delegates also rank their committee preferences? This might bring more relevant experience to committees.*

Question 6:

How can we better communicate that the Conference process is more than one spring week in New York?

Reaching — and engaging — the Fellowship with relevant and

ongoing information about the Conference is not a new problem. Many reports recognized the historical gap between individual A.A. members and the Conference itself. Communication remains the principal means of bridging this gap and it was suggested that communication is best achieved on a face-to-face basis and be framed in language that is meaningful to an A.A. member rather than using "academic" language or service jargon. Said one report, "If we are not working locally to engage the full Fellowship, the disconnect between the G.S.C. and the average member will remain. The connection needs to be made between what happens at the Conference and how it helps the drunk on the corner."

Several reports mentioned the low percentage of participation in general service in their areas, making the importance of communication even greater. Also discussed were breaks in the chain of communication, sometimes occurring at the D.C.M. and G.S.R. levels.

While it is primarily the job of the delegate to make the Conference connection throughout the Fellowship, G.S.O. can help facilitate communication about Conference matters and can reach out to the general A.A. population on an ongoing basis with information about the Conference.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Things that G.S.O. can do: use the A.A. website homepage to carry information about the Conference throughout the year; place G.S.C. banners across all communication pieces (newsletters, contribution acknowledgments, etc.); have a brief Conference Planning update in Box 4-5-9 at regular intervals throughout the year or communicate the progress of Advisory Actions throughout the year; utilize Grapevine and La Viña to share information from past delegates and past trustees about the Conference; communicate information to G.S.R.s about new agenda items as soon as they are approved by the trustees; use dashboard to post final trustee committee reports; have Conference committees meet via conference call prior to the Conference to discuss their agendas.*
- *Things that delegates can do: use Conference workshop topics for local roundtables; hold pre- and post-Conference assemblies; highlight the ownership of the Conference by the groups; explain the process — connect the group with the Conference through examples; use local events to share about the Conference and underline matters of relevance or importance to the local groups; use the Conference theme throughout the year to generate and maintain interest; track ideas or items from the area and show their progress and development through the Conference process; explain what the words "Conference-approved" mean on our literature and how they get there; throw out a hot topic occasionally to get people involved and point out that participating in the process is the only way to effect change; share your area highlights with groups; utilize the essay by Bernard Smith, "Why Do We Need a Conference?" as a way to reach members emotionally and spiritually.*

Question 7:

How do the delegates and regional trustees support the yearlong process effectiveness?

All levels of the service structure — G.S.R.s, D.C.M.s, delegates, trustees, etc. — serve together to accomplish the task of supporting the Conference process. However, when the delegates and trustee within a region form a strong bond, each delegate has many sources for help. Keeping past delegates and past trustees involved can be very helpful in carrying the message of how the Conference process works, and coordinating and collaborating

with area chairs can help provide the Fellowship with pertinent Conference information.

Having regular conference calls between regional trustees and delegates, delegate chairs and committee members, delegates and alternate delegates, delegates and D.C.M.s/ GSRs can be invaluable. Additional technologies can also enhance effectiveness and magnify the reach of our communication efforts: podcasts, CD recordings of the delegate's Conference report, password protected area websites. Ongoing communication about the Conference strengthens unity.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Engage the Fellowship, don't just "report" data.*
- *Creative presentation of the delegate's report and Final Conference Report can generate interest: one delegate distributes the Final Conference Report along with a mock "stock certificate" and emphasizes that each member is a shareholder in A.A. and that the Final Report will give them all the details they need. Another gives the analogy: the Final Conference Report is to the area what the group business meeting minutes are to the members.*
- *Increased communication from trustees' committees throughout the year will help support effectiveness in the areas.*
- *Expand use of the dashboard to allow sharing and posting by delegates throughout the year; allow constant access to board reports, agenda items and background material as they are approved by the trustees.*
- *Share A.A.W.S. Highlights throughout the year with Intergroup/ Central Offices.*
- *Continue the discussion on how to attract more agenda input from our French and Hispanic members.*

Question 8:

What more could be done to prepare delegates for the Conference?

Given the time constraints of the Conference process, it was felt by many that what materials there are for committee members are well-delivered via either the dashboard or CD. However, three general issues came to the forefront in the discussion of this question: the timing of delegates receiving agenda items and background material (they are needed earlier), the languages that the materials are available in (should be English, French and Spanish), and the most effective use of time at the Conference (more focus on the yearlong process would be helpful).

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Are the Area Highlights and the preparation they require the best use of our time? Could they be submitted as a written report and then allow the delegate to speak extemporaneously on three burning issues in their area?*
- *Rather than asking delegates to read opening and closing fragments from our literature, would it be more beneficial instead to ask delegates to prepare a mini-presentation on topics important to A.A., forcing them to learn more about a particular issue?*
- *Encourage areas to hold mock or mini-conferences to help prepare the delegate.*
- *Have a more systematic buddy/mentoring system at the Conference.*
- *Have agenda items and background material posted on the dashboard as soon as they are approved, better utilizing the yearlong Conference process.*
- *Present delegates with more information regarding what to expect at the Conference — schedule, process, logistics, personal*

details (travel, dress, accommodations, etc.), and more information on what is expected during committee meetings.

- *Have more time for delegates to ask for additional information.*
- *Utilize past delegates for pre-Conference mentoring and information.*
- *Provide delegates access to all proposed agenda items submitted, with a full explanation of why a proposed item did not make the final agenda.*

Question 9:

What Conference activities give participants the most opportunities to be leaders?

It was generally felt that all Conference activities provided opportunities for leadership. Committee work, being present and prepared, the responsibility of considering the area conscience and voting for what is best for A.A. were all cited. Said one report, "It is important to remember that we are leaders and that we are also servants. Some of our leadership derives from how well we perform as servants to the Fellowship." And another: "Leadership is not a thing but an attitude of service." It was noted, as well, that even after rotation, the mantle of leadership does not dissipate, it just changes.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Listening and waiting for our opinion to form before speaking can be an aspect of leadership.*
- *A good leader learns patience and tolerance by asking questions.*

Question 10:

Does the time allotted and the manner in which information is communicated from the trustees and board members allow delegates to adequately understand and/or question their reports? How could this be improved?

Recognizing that board and trustee reports provide a lot of detailed and critical information, it was generally agreed that more time would be helpful for these reports to be digested and questions formulated, perhaps spreading them out over more than one day. The finance report was mentioned specifically as needing more time, along with the A.A.W.S./Grapevine reports and the joint meetings between trustees' and Conference committees. One report noted, "A.A. should not go the way of the world, where everything is accelerating. We should take the necessary time to do our business well and fully."

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Provide one-page executive summaries along with the A.A.W.S., Grapevine and Finance presentations.*
- *Post the A.A.W.S., Grapevine and Finance reports on the dashboard at least one week before the Conference to allow for more time to assimilate the information and ask questions.*
- *What if the Conference process was on a two-year cycle? It would allow more time for all our activities, including board reports, and would provide a chance for our most important topics to be more broadly discussed among the Fellowship.*

Question 11:

Reflecting on Concept Six, how can the Conference ensure that the authority we delegate to the General Service Board is commensurate with the responsibility we have entrusted to them?

Recognizing the unusual relationship between the board of trustees and the Conference, many reports expressed gratitude for the structure of checks and balances as it is set up. This is not the

typical business experience, and provides continuing evidence that “the A.A. way” works. It was felt that transparency and open communication between the trustees and the Conference lead to trust and a truly informed group conscience and that, along the way, we should not shy away from difficult discussions. Additionally, it was noted that the need for transparency goes beyond the week at the Conference. “For authority to be commensurate with responsibility, there should be ready access between the general membership and service leaders... ‘communication among equals’ helps ensure this,” said one report.

Three familiar areas were articulated in terms of creating more balance between the trustees and the Conference: making sure that agenda items are received far enough in advance to ensure full participation; finding ways to keep the trustees and Conference committees in contact throughout the yearlong Conference process; and allowing more input from delegates regarding agenda items. Progress in these areas, it was felt, would go a long way toward keeping the flow of information to and from the Fellowship open. “We need a balance of authority and to outwardly look for demonstrations of trust,” said one report. “A great start happened this year allowing delegates to participate at board weekend, but we must continue to talk, eyeball-to-eyeball.”

Keeping the focus on “what will help the still suffering” is a good way of keeping ourselves on track, as the focus can sometimes veer too much toward the business details related to the work of the trustees. Ours is a fellowship of the spirit and we need to maintain that outlook.

One report indicated that the Conference Inventory itself is going a long way to ensure balance between responsibility and authority, and that continuing some sort of regular review/assessment will help avoid future discrepancies between authority and responsibility.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *The problem is not that the GSB has too much authority, it is that the focus is and should be on balance between the Conference and the board.*
- *Conference committees should be more proactive in asking trustees for more information in order to gain a clearer understanding of specific issues or concerns.*
- *More continuity and clarity regarding communication from the trustees to the delegates would be appreciated. When an item has been discussed by the trustees and reported out as simply “no action taken,” it can create uncertainty. Perhaps a fuller explanation of why no action was taken would help develop greater understanding.*
- *The flow of information between all three boards, delegates and groups needs to continue so that the A.A. shareholders are aware of what happens at the Conference and throughout the year.*
- *More diversity on the board would assist with establishing more trust throughout the Fellowship as our population changes in the future.*
- *Is the decline in contributions to G.S.O. and the drop in Grapevine subscriptions the “power of the purse” in action?*

Question 12:

Reflecting on Concept Eight: (a) How well is the General Service Board exercising custodial oversight and how effectively are they serving as the principal planners and administrators of policy and finance? (b) What are the boundaries between oversight vs. delegation? When is each practiced?

The general consensus was that the board is exercising its custodial oversight well, and that the administrative aspects relating to A.A. operations take a great deal of time. Nevertheless, there

are a number of areas in the operation of A.A.’s essential services where the Fellowship would like to have input. “This Fellowship is unique as a large nonprofit corporate entity,” explained one report. “Individuals who have recovered from cancer cannot or dare not suggest how the American Cancer Society run its board. Yet we in A.A. have a cooperative, almost interpersonal, relationship between board and members.”

With issues of interest ranging from self-support and Reserve Fund management to organizational initiatives to improving communications and the use of technology in today’s changing world, it is important for the trustees to recognize that there are matters the Fellowship would like to have input on. And by asking questions about these and other issues, delegates and A.A. members are not implying that the trustees are not fulfilling their oversight responsibilities. Questions and answers on matters of interest to the Fellowship lead to the ongoing flow of communication — often repetitive (as something may be clearly explained to one panel of delegates but not as clearly explained to the next) — that ultimately leads to understanding.

It can be difficult for the Fellowship to assess GSB oversight of the corporate boards, as reports provide mostly business criteria and it is difficult to know if the actual interactions between the entities are good, bad, or indifferent. So trusting the process is a key element, especially when boundaries between the corporate entities must be flexible in order to achieve necessary goals. “We are only as good as the information we are provided with,” added one report, and “there is room for improvement in clarity and accuracy when communicating mistakes in large fiscal or policy matters.”

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Trustees might benefit from service on both corporate boards rather than just one.*
- *Continued oversight from the board is needed in matters involving significant monetary investment or major changes in policy.*
- *Some concerns have been raised that A.A.W.S. and Grapevine are being pushed closer together by the board and are losing some of their corporate boundaries, which raises the long-term question of how they can maintain two distinct corporate identities.*
- *Grapevine and A.A.W.S. oversight is impossible without the support of the Fellowship.*
- *More time could be spent on the board regarding strategic planning.*
- *Are the services we are providing the ones the Fellowship wants?*

Question 13:

Should the Fellowship have more direct influence in the selection of Class A trustees, corporate directors, and general service trustees? If yes, how might that be accomplished?

The Fellowship should not necessarily have more direct influence in the selection of board members and trustees, but should have more influence in generating the pool of candidates from which these A.A. servants are chosen. Often the actual roles of these trusted servants are not well known, so disseminating more information throughout the service structure on what these people are asked to do for the Fellowship might help enlarge the pool of available candidates.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *Openings for board members and directors need to be widely announced and well in advance in order to provide for timely and appropriate submission of candidates from the Fellowship.*
- *The Conference Committee on Trustees should have greater*

involvement in the actual selection process.

- *The selection of nontrustee directors should extend more often beyond past delegates and emphasize candidates with solid professional experience.*
- *What if the Fellowship were asked what skill sets they think are needed on the boards, not just a one-way communication from the boards themselves?*
- *Limiting terms and condensing the amount of time trustees and directors are required to commit to might help to enlarge the pool of available candidates.*
- *Consider including nonalcoholics as appointed committee members. This might provide a pathway for Class A trustees.*

Question 14:

How well is the Third Legacy Procedure serving us?

How could it be improved?

“The Third Legacy procedure embodies our best principles of trust, love, humility and service,” stated one report. “It is more than just the hat. It’s thoughtful concern with the welfare of the whole and the well-being of the individual.”

Some concerns were raised, however, that while pulling a name from the hat takes the ego and politicking out of the selection process, are we getting the people with the best qualifications? For some the process seemed to be “a crap shoot,” while most seemed comfortable with how the procedure is used not only at the Conference but throughout the Fellowship.

Recommendations/Suggestions:

- *When voting on trustees at the Conference, people often don’t know all the candidates. When submitting resumes, perhaps candidates could all be asked to answer the same five or six uniform questions in writing. That would provide voters with a better comparative basis for all candidates.*
- *Perhaps we should consider pulling the name of the next chairman of the GSB out of the hat?*