

November 17, 2023

**Please direct all
communications to:**

P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163
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Dear A.A. Friends:

As a Fellowship, we celebrate and recognize November as Gratitude Month. This is a time when we A.A.s reflect on the many gifts and blessings sobriety has given us. The program of Alcoholics Anonymous encompasses many facets: our home groups, sponsorship, the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, Fellowship among each other, service on many levels, and many more. As the General Manager of the General Service Office (GSO), I'm grateful to see firsthand the many services GSO provides that support the spiritual purpose of Alcoholics Anonymous – carrying the message of sobriety to the alcoholic who still suffers. These services assist the many facets of the A.A. program.

With the spirit of Gratitude Month in mind, I write today to share with you the difficult news related to the current financial health of Alcoholics Anonymous and the potential continued challenges ahead as we strive to fulfill our spiritual purpose. I hope this letter will be met with understanding, and that the honesty and sincerity in my heart are apparent throughout. The last four years have been very challenging for A.A. in many respects. This began with the worldwide shutdown in early 2020 due to the pandemic, which immediately forced nearly all A.A. groups to close their physical doors and either stop meeting altogether or find other means of gathering. This was followed by a slow return of groups meeting in person, an economy filled with uncertainty, and a workplace that changed in many ways. During this time, GSO and our Boards, like other organizations and businesses, were forced to change dramatically. We quickly transitioned to working 100% virtual to continue serving the Fellowship.

The office, along with the A.A. World Services (AAWS) and General Service Boards (GSB), have worked hard to manage our finances through these last four years with the hope that many of the challenges we faced would subside and return to pre-pandemic conditions. It is apparent now that the financial challenges we face cannot continue to be met with the deferral of essential projects and office development that are necessary to carry out Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference and support the vital services GSO provides.

Our tradition of self-support has always been vital to the health and future of the Fellowship and been our main source of income. However, there has always been a need for additional support from the sale of our literature. When the pandemic hit in early 2020, the initial impact on our revenue was significant, with a steep decrease in contributions. Income from sales of A.A. literature was also significantly reduced as sales came to an almost complete halt. The Fellowship responded with tremendous generosity, resulting in contributions reaching record levels. That continued in 2021, and contributions in 2022 nearly matched the 2021 level. This year to date, we are on pace to reach similar levels to the last three years. Your generosity is greatly appreciated and heartwarming.

Unfortunately, literature profits have not rebounded back to pre-pandemic levels. In addition to the slow return of sales, inflation has resulted in substantial increases in the cost to produce and distribute literature. Conscious of the challenges facing groups and members, the AAWS board held literature prices steady for as long as possible until earlier this year, when it became apparent the costs to produce and distribute were not going to return to pre-pandemic levels. Despite increased contributions after the pandemic, the loss in literature revenue has left our total revenue short by approximately \$1,000,000 compared with pre-pandemic times.

The pandemic has also had a significant impact on virtually all our expenses. Of note are increased costs related to meetings, events, and travel, which are a key necessity to support the Regional Forums, board meetings, and the General Service Conference. However, we have managed to reduce total operating expenses to an average of \$15,768,000 compared with pre-pandemic levels of \$16,258,000. Reducing total expenses below pre-pandemic levels truly illustrates the diligence the office and the boards applied to the budget and operations to offset losses.

Because of the significant decline in literature sales and revenue and the large cash outlay needed to continue printing and distributing our literature, we have also experienced a very tight cash position. Our reforecast budget for this year estimates a loss of \$997,000, after depreciation and the GSB support of *La Viña*.

The office and all three boards have worked diligently to address these financial challenges. A systematic and dedicated approach to budgeting has been developed over recent years and allows for the most informed group conscience possible. Throughout, budget managers and the AAWS Board work together to find the most effective ways to prioritize and execute services, maximizing the use of each A.A. dollar. In addition to the annual budget process, a reforecast is done midyear to adapt to the direction brought forth by the April General Service Conference and other factors impacting original estimates.

As difficult as this letter is to write, I'm hopeful and optimistic for A.A.'s future. Together we can overcome the challenges we're facing. We need your help to continue to adjust to and plan for the reality of current economic conditions and changes in our Fellowship. As members we often say that when A.A. needs money, the Fellowship will respond. This is one of those times. Your generosity has sustained us through very difficult times in the past. If your group is able, in the spirit of Gratitude Month, please consider a special contribution to the General Service Board. You can make a contribution through aa.org by clicking [here](#) or by mail.

Make your check payable to the General Service Board to:

General Service Office
P.O. Box 2407
James A. Farley Station
New York, NY 10116-2407

Moving forward, more frequent, and incremental contributions would be much appreciated as the office incurs many of its expenses during certain parts of the year. In particular, many of

our more significant expenses are incurred from January to May, due to planning, preparation, and operation of the General Service Conference each April.

[Attached to this letter](#) you will find a summary of the operations of GSO and details of many of the vital services GSO provides. I hope this information gives you a greater understanding of the vital work and services your contributions help to support. Thank you so much for everything each of you do for Alcoholics Anonymous.

With gratitude for all the sacrifices you make for A.A.,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob W." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Bob W.
General Manager, GSO

Services Provided By GSO

The General Service Office (GSO) is composed of 87 dedicated employees, each deeply committed to the mission of Alcoholics Anonymous. Throughout the year, the office responds to thousands of inquiries from groups and members. These requests encompass a wide range of topics that are carefully considered and answered with collected experience from other groups and members. The time and effort put into responding to these requests is substantial and done with exceptional dedication to serving the Fellowship. Other departments at GSO not only support this service, but also help to deliver a wide range of services managed by the office. Among their many functions, our departments support the General Service Board and its operating corporations, AAWS and the AA Grapevine, all of which hold meetings and events throughout the year, such as General Service Board (GSB) weekends, the annual General Service Conference, four Regional Forums, and regular corporate board meetings. The following is an overview of our departments and the vital work supported by the generous contributions of our Fellowship.

Publishing

The Publishing department's primary goal is to **maintain and distribute AA Literature to assist groups and members carry the message to the next person who is struggling with alcoholism**. Publishing strives to maintain high standards in editorial, production, and distribution while looking for ways to reduce backorders and communicate regularly with local groups, Intergroups, central offices, and the Fellowship. Despite the ongoing industry-wide print supply-chain disruptions, we are committed to the ongoing exploration and implementation of new processes and formats to achieve our goals. Overall, the Publishing department is responsible for meeting the publishing goals set by the General Service Board, AAWS, and the General Service Conference.

Communication Services

Communications Services became an official department at GSO in November 2019—previously it was a staff assignment desk.

This department is responsible for the ongoing development, management, and operation of digital platforms and initiatives—with the goal to reach members and the suffering alcoholic where they are—and to communicate effectively with other key audiences, including the professional community. **The department manages aa.org**, our official website; **the Meeting Guide app**; social media channels, which currently include YouTube and LinkedIn, and planning and production for the GSO podcast; analytics for digital platforms; **production and distribution of Box 4-5-9**; and coordination of mass communication distribution to the memberships and across digital platforms, among other areas of responsibility.

The department works closely with the Public Information Staff Assignment on a wide range of public-facing initiatives. In addition, the department regularly collaborates with other departments to support projects and initiatives that serve the evolving needs of the Fellowship in keeping with the group conscience and board directives.

Staff Services

The department was officially launched in September 2020, bringing together GSO staff and staff assistants to form a unified department. **Its primary mission is to provide A.A. services to the Fellowship, guided by the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and Twelve Concepts for World Service.** The department is composed of one director, one manager, **11 staff members (all of whom must be A.A. members)**, and 11 staff assistants. The department's 12 service assignments are performed by its staff assistants, including the 2025 International Convention assignment, which was activated in September 2023. The Convention will be held in Vancouver, B.C., and promises to be a very special event with the theme, "90 Years - Language of the Heart."

The department provides **administrative support and resources to the General Service Board, the General Service Conference, and AAWS.** This includes support for AAWS Internal Audit, Publishing, and Technology/Communication/Services committees, as well as various ad hoc and internal committees. The department is also a key source of information on A.A., providing access to GSO's repository of collected group and member experience. The department receives correspondence by mail, email, fax, and phone calls from around the world, responding to correspondence and phone calls from the eight regions in the U.S./Canada structure.

In addition to day-to-day communication with the Fellowship and the public, **the department staff is responsible for regional correspondence and coordination of several GSO newsletters, including Sharing from Behind the Walls, LIM, and About A.A.** Staff members are also invited to A.A. events throughout the U.S. and Canada, such as assemblies, conventions, workshops, and days of sharing. The International assignment coordinator regularly attends events in different zones and regions worldwide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, events were virtual, allowing greater staff participation. Now, as more events have transitioned to hybrid or in-person formats, staff members are back on the road and excited to participate in your next local event, if invited.

Member Services

The Member Services unit **oversees and resolves member and customer issues in order fulfillment, contributions, and records processes.** They manage warehousing, shipping, and literature delivery to ensure smooth and timely operations. Handling orders from various channels, including mail, phone, fax, email, and the online bookstore, they process daily orders from the U.S., Canada, and overseas. The team also handles invoices, price quotes and provides information on literature ordering. Additionally, **they process complimentary literature, update group information, manage new group applications and serve as a direct link to Area Registrars.** The Member Services team **is crucial in handling contributions**, posting them to group accounts, and addressing research and inquiries related to member contributions.

Legal, Licensing and Intellectual Property (LLIP)

LLIP carries out legal related functions vital to carrying and protecting the message of Alcoholics Anonymous and provides direct oversight and organization of all legal matters

including contract review. This department was created as part of the restructuring of the Publishing Department, with the aim to provide more direct oversight of the licensing function, including **licensing A.A. literature to other international structures and translation and distribution of literature around the world**. The reorganization allowed for a complete overhaul of the licensing process, which involved the development of an automated management tool in close collaboration with Technology services. This enabled the successful resolution of more than a thousand outstanding inquiries related to international licenses and literature distribution.

LLIP also **handles Intellectual Property & Copyrights and responds to hundreds of inquiries from groups and members requesting permission to reprint portions of A.A. literature or use it on local A.A. websites**. Their primary objective is to ensure that A.A. literature is protected in terms of content and integrity of the A.A. message. They are also responsible for ensuring that A.A.'s copyrights remain undiminished by infringing activities.

Meeting Events & Travel Department (METs)

The METs department handles **planning and logistical coordination for GSO-supported events, such as the annual General Service Conference, General Service Board Weekends held three times a year, quarterly Regional Forums, seven AAWS Board meetings at GSO each year**, and technical assistance for virtual meetings among trustees and directors. Their responsibilities include managing travel, lodging, meals, and technical support for trustees, directors, and employees participating in these events.

Technology Services

The Technology Services Department not only **keeps all necessary equipment operating and up to date in today's fast-paced technical world**, but they are also **responsible for implementing software, process, and project management solutions across the office for all departments**. They also **ensure the integrity of our databases and that our networks are safe and secure**.

Language Services

The Language Services Department centralizes the function of **translation of our literature and thousands of documents into several languages each year**. It also **coordinates essential interpretation services** that allow for direct interaction and communication with other A.A. structures around the world. These services ensure full participation and help to unify our worldwide Fellowship. It is staffed by four dedicated employees including a French and Spanish editor, French and Spanish translators, and freelancers when needed.

Finance

The Finance Department takes great care in the **stewardship of A.A.'s finances**, carefully **accounting for all literature sales; managing and processing accounts payable; and, providing regular reporting to the GSB and AAWS Boards**. They also

process more than 80,000 individual contributions from members and groups. In alignment with our Seventh Tradition, they take great care in “scrubbing” each one to ensure they are all from members and groups. They also **lead the annual budget and reforecast processes, working with budget managers across the office to ensure fiscal prudence.**

Human Resources

The Human Resources Department's primary objective is to create a work environment that is positive, safe, and focused on recognizing the contribution and worth of the employees. **The HR team manages all aspects of the employee life cycle, starting from recruitment to offboarding,** encompassing areas such as learning and development, performance management, employee relations, and well-being practices. By working closely with senior management, HR supports the recruitment feedback process while promoting communication throughout the organization by leveraging technology and organizing events. The team ensures that GSO complies with all the relevant laws, communicates company policies transparently, and advises the general manager on industry trends, compensation, and benefits. Additionally, HR provides resources to AA Grapevine as needed.

Office Services

This department has responsibility for all office services: **building services, phones, maintenance, supplies, and reproduction used daily, and** transporting office equipment and supplies within the NYC area for Conferences, Quarterly Meetings, and Conventions.

Operations

The Warehousing unit is **responsible for managing inventory levels and projecting future requirements by monitoring depletion rates and establishing reorder points based on monthly distribution.** They maintain optimal inventory levels, update item records, and handle new item setups. Safety stock for each item is established and monitored through daily safety stock alert reports. The unit is also responsible for addressing goods received reports, resolving inconsistencies, and posting all receipts and transfers. They review warehouse activity reports on a monthly basis, reconciling significant variances.

The Inventory unit is **responsible for researching and negotiating with freight companies to ensure competitive pricing and secure new vendors.** They audit freight invoices for accuracy, assign carriers for shipments, and process invoices from printers and manufacturers. Additionally, the unit updates the production log and reviews warehousing invoices, investigating any discrepancies.

Archives

The main mission of the Alcoholics Anonymous GSO Archives is to **permanently document the organization's work, making its history accessible to A.A. members and researchers. The Archives receives, classifies, and indexes relevant material,**

preserving it while granting controlled access, all aligned with A.A.'s primary purpose of maintaining sobriety and aiding recovery. It serves as a resource for learning and research, providing information services to support A.A. operations and promoting understanding of the organization's origins, goals, and programs.

Mail and Shipping

This team is responsible for **processing incoming and outgoing mail.** They also **manage the assembling, packing, and shipping of various packages including, but not limited to, Conference, Public Information, and DCM packages.** They also **manage the selection and shipping of literature for Regional Forums and Health Fairs.** An additional responsibility of this team is to provide support to AA Grapevine for all matters related to their mail and shipping needs.

Administration

The General Manager is an A.A. member employed by AAWS and General Service Boards. This position encompasses a **wide range of responsibilities, including participation and support for the General Service Board and the AAWS Board, leadership of GSO, and accountability for the oversight and management of GSO operations.**

The General Manager also serves on the AAWS Board as president and co-chairs the annual General Service Conference. After substantial collaboration and research, the General Manager has recently reorganized departments and functions within the office to fulfill the demanding role and various responsibilities. The Executive Assistant role was reorganized to assist the General Manager, and the position of Administrative Coordinator to the General Manager was created.

The Executive Assistant plays a crucial role in handling scheduling and administrative tasks, facilitating communication with the Fellowship and contributing to interoffice communications and special correspondence. As the secretary to the AAWS Board, the Executive Assistant manages corporate records, develops meeting agendas, and supports the Nominating Committee. The Administrative Coordinator, working closely with the Executive Assistant and General Manager, supports administrative functions, including updating confidential directories and filing systems, maintaining bequest files, and providing high-level administrative support focusing on General Service Board and General Service Staff projects.

Overall, this team carries out crucial tasks **to ensure the smooth operation of GSO and provide support to GSB, AAWS, and the Fellowship.**