

Final Report
“Reaching Out to African-American Alcoholics”
October 28, 2018

Background:

On two separate occasions in two separate locations, Rich Purtell, Northeast regional trustee and Carole Boerner, general service trustee, were approached by A.A. members asking that the General Service Board do something to help suffering African-American alcoholics. (The most recent 2014 Membership Survey estimates that only 4% of A.A. members are black, while white membership is estimated at 89%.) Rich and Carole discussed their separate conversations and decided to conduct a conference call with a number of African-American members within the service structure, reaching out to black members currently serving as delegates, G.S.O. staff, trustees, past trustees, and including Ed and Mac, the members who approached Rich and Carole. Conference calls were held on June 12, June 24 and July 22, 2018.

Some of the findings of this group dovetail with the G.S.B. Strategic Plan. Within this report, the group suggests actions that will help reach African-American alcoholics. When these actions are in line with actions outlined in the G.S.B. Strategic Plan (“Strategic Plan”), it is so noted. The actions of the Strategic Plan that are related to this work are listed at the end of this document.

[Item P1.2 of the Strategic Plan relating to contacting Area delegates to identify underrepresented sectors of the A.A. population in their Areas was exercised relative to the African-American A.A. community by the formation of this informal work group.]

Within the Fellowship:

In some places, meetings are segregated. In others, there are very few black members in meetings. Comments from the group covered a number of perspectives:

- “In many meetings, including service events, I’m the only black person in the room.”
- “I got sober in an all-white group.”
- “We focus on white professionals and don’t consider black professionals.”
- “The G.S.B. membership reflects what the fellowship looks like.”
- “There have only been eight black trustees in A.A.’s 80 years.”
- “I was so happy to meet Elaine McDowell when she was chair. I went home and told my home group that a black woman was chair of the General Service Board. I was so excited.”
- “I was shocked that my area elected a black person as their delegate.”

- “As a black area delegate, I have not been invited to districts to give my report because of my color.”

Racism exists within the meetings of A.A. When it is brought up, people often say it is an outside issue; yet members being mistreated, called names based on their skin color, is an inside, not outside, issue.

Reaching Newcomers:

Some things were noted that could be done to reach out to African-American alcoholics, some as simple as welcoming black people at all A.A. meetings, trying to make them feel more comfortable.

Additionally, many African Americans are lifelong members of sororities and fraternities. There are eight national and longstanding black fraternities and sororities. At the alumni level, these groups, through their corporate offices, historically have involved themselves in matters of deep concern to black people. (P1.4).

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity: <http://www.apa1906.net/>
 Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority: <http://www.aka1908.com/>
 Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity: <https://kappaalphapsi.org/>
 Omega Psi Phi Fraternity: <http://www.oppf.org/>
 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority: <https://www.deltasigmatheta.org/>
 Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity: <http://phibetasigma1914.org/>
 Zeta Phi Beta Sorority: <http://zphib1920.org/>
 Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority: <http://www.sgrho1922.org/home>

This would be a natural resource for sharing information about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Reaching Professionals (CPC) & Using Public Information (PI) Sources (Items P1.4 and 4.2 of the Strategic Plan):

Alcoholics Anonymous needs to build ongoing and consistent relationships with black pastors and social workers, working with the following organizations and others:

National Bar Association
 National Associations of Black Social Workers
 National Medical Association
 National Hispanic Medical Association
 Association of Black Psychologists

Reaching out to black media outlets, e.g., radio, TV, and print, to carry the A.A. message, would also provide greater contact and awareness of A.A. within the African-American community.

Here are examples of the top ten African-American Influenced Radio and TV Stations:

<https://www.cision.com/us/2012/06/top-10-african-american-influenced-radio-stations/> <https://www.steveharveyfm.com/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Joyner_Morning_Show
<https://www.bet.com/>
<http://www.oprah.com/app/own-tv.html>.

Getting involvement from Class A trustees, especially but not exclusively the African-American and other minority members of same (both past and present) is vital in the CPC/PI context.

Conventions:

The Hispanic membership and YPAA conventions are enthusiastic. Some thought has been given to having a convention for African-American A.A. members. On a broader scale, however, efforts should be made at all A.A. events to include black A.A. members and nonalcoholic friends of A.A. as speakers/panelists.

A.A. Literature:

As part of the current initiative to ensure that A.A.W.S. Conference-approved literature is accessible to all (i.e., those with visual, auditory and learning challenges), G.S.O. staff is looking at how our literature could be more inclusive. For example, the pamphlet "A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic" has not been revised since it was originally published in 2001. Additionally, a number of CPC, PI, and other pamphlets could be updated to be more inclusive.

It was also discussed that the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, is in part disconcerting to many black people. (Some use the Akron Central Office pamphlet "A Guide to the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous" rather than the Big Book.)

Regional/Special Forums:

Much discussion has been had about Special Forums and it is not clear that this is the best option for expanding the discussion of diversity and inclusivity. The G.S.O. staff suggested it might be better to have ongoing inclusivity workshops at Regional Forums. (Item P1.6 of the Strategic Plan)

Spotlighting the Topic of Diversity and Inclusivity within the Fellowship:

Use *Box 4-5-9* and *AA Grapevine* to include ongoing columns on diversity and inclusivity, specifically stating that this is not an outside issue and affects us reaching the still-suffering alcoholic. Racism, gender identification, sexism, religion and related barriers are outside issues except as they relate to Twelfth Step work.

AA Grapevine has run stories from African-American members, some of which do speak of issues of fitting in or inclusion. In the last few years, *Grapevine* has run at least two special issues dealing specifically with diversity which included African-American members. The editors are very conscious that African-American members be pictured as often as possible in photos and illustrations. (Item P1.7 of the Strategic Plan)

Another action step would be to ask for presentations or workshops at the General Service Conference to discuss the topic of inclusivity.

Additionally, text could be added within the pamphlet "The A.A. Group" to discuss how groups could be more inclusive (i.e., add to suggested questions under group inventory).

From G.S.B. Strategic Plan

Goal 1: The A.A. Fellowship will become more inclusive and accepting, and thereby A.A. will experience an increase in membership as more people are introduced to recovery.

- P1.1: The G.S.B. will bring an inclusivity focus to all aspects of our services. The G.S.B. will suggest each service committee and the two affiliate boards will first undertake an inventory of its materials and services with an eye toward inclusion and acceptance.
- P1.2: The G.S.B. will contact Area delegates to identify underrepresented sectors of the A.A. population in their Areas.
- P1.3: The G.S.B. will suggest to A.A.W.S. that it make electronic versions of select foreign-language pamphlets available on aa.org and allow them to be made available on Area websites (or linked from).
- P1.4: The G.S.B. will pursue relationships with professionals who work with ethnic/cultural groups that are underrepresented in A.A. as a proportion of population and will encourage the Fellowship to do likewise.

- P1.5: The G.S.B. will suggest to the General Service Conference that they utilize Conference time to focus on how the fellowship can engage in sustained outreach with diverse populations as part of doing service.

Goal 4: Identify new places and audiences to bring the A.A. message of hope:

- P4.2: The G.S.B. will request management and staff to analyze staffing and responsibilities, and suggest to G.S.B. a list of potential events that a trustee or nontrustee director might attend. This should include identifying and contacting leadership of professional organizations.