

2021 Conference Committee on Report and Charter

ITEM B: +Discuss A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S.)

Background: +Agenda item forwarded from the 70th G.S.C.

1. Report on Regional Directories 2.10.2020
2. Advisory Actions and additional Committee considerations
3. Samples of one or more of the current directories (see note)

Note: Copies of the current directories were made available, if needed, to members of the committee only.

Report on Regional Directories 2.10.2020

From the History & Actions of the Report and Charter Conference Committee:

- In 2019, the committee considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) especially in light of the new ERP System and the Meeting Guide App, and requested that the General Service Office explore alternative methods of accessing and distributing the contact information contained in the A.A. Directories. The committee requested that a report be brought back to the 2020 Report and Charter Conference Committee.

This report will focus on the role directories currently play, what is involved in continuing to print directories, and what an alternative to printed directories might be. The report will hopefully provide context and background for further discussion by the committee and by the Fellowship.

History of Regional Directories

The History & Actions of the Report and Charter Conference Committee offer insight into many aspects of regional directories. Over the years there has been discussion about what kind of groups should not be listed in directories, how much information to include about groups and what format might work best for that information.

Maintaining the confidentiality of directories has also been an ongoing concern, with suggestions to eliminate last names of GSRs (not adopted), to exercise discretion in distributing directories, and to increase the prominence of the front-cover statement that directories not be used for any form of solicitation or commercial venture.

A review of Committee History & Actions can also shed light on the *purpose* of directories:

- In 1984, that directories are not intended to be used as a local meeting list so meeting addresses and times shouldn't be included.
- In 1993, that no monetary contributions be included since the purpose of the directories is to help traveling A.A. members find meetings and for Twelfth Step purposes.
- In 2002, that in keeping with the purpose of the A.A. directories to provide A.A. members with contact information, the "List of General Service Conference Area Web Sites" be added.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

Several times, beginning in 1985, the committee has considered whether or not to suspend or discontinue publication of regional directories. For example:

- In 2003, the committee discussed the purpose and usefulness of the U.S. Eastern and Western, and Canada A.A. Directories, and International A.A. Directory and agreed that the directories continue to be useful and serve the Fellowship.
- In 2007, the committee considered a request to have A.A.W.S. discontinue publishing regional directories (Canada, Western U.S., and Eastern U.S.) and took no action.
- In 2010, the committee recommended that the A.A. Directories (Canada, Western U.S., and Eastern U.S.) be published annually and that the General Service Office continue exploring other methods of providing the information in the directories. (Note: Not adopted by the Conference)
- In 2013, in light of the recent decision not to publish regional directories this year, the committee asked the staff secretary to communicate their concerns to the A.A.W.S. Board about the still existing, albeit decreasing, need for print resources by A.A. members in rural and remote areas, and those members who may travel frequently.
- In 2014, the committee considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) and requested that the General Service Office explore alternative methods of accessing and distributing the contact information contained in the A.A. Directories.

Each of the three regional directories currently available are the 2017-2018 editions. The reason new versions of regional directories have not been printed is referred to in this History & Actions entry:

- In 2018, the committee reviewed a memo from the G.S.O. General Manager informing the committee that the A.A. Directories, Canada, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S. would not be printed in 2018 due to the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

What information is in regional directories?

For those not familiar with regional directories, all contain similar front matter:

- Estimates of the number of A.A. groups and A.A. members
- The names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers of Regional Trustees, At Large Trustees, Area Delegates, and Area Chairpersons
- A list of area web sites
- Special International Contacts
- International Correspondence Meetings
- Telephone Meetings

- Online Meetings, Online Groups, and Online Intergroup of A.A.
- Central Offices, Intergroups and Answering Services for the U.S. and Canada, including addresses, email addresses, websites, phone numbers, and more.

In addition, the front matter offers insight into what an A.A. Group is, based on our Traditions, and communicates that “Groups listed in the directory are listed at their own request. A directory listing does not constitute or imply approval or endorsement of any group’s approach to or practice of the traditional A.A. program.”

A listing of individual groups follows the front matter. How complete the information is on a group depends upon what that group has provided to the Area Registrar and/or the Records Department of G.S.O. A complete listing would contain the following:

Group name, Service #, Area #, District #, the day or days of the week the group meets, a primary contact (first & last name and phone number) and an alternate contact (first & last name and phone number).

Who uses directories and why?

As the past History & Actions mention, regional directories are to provide A.A. members with contact information about groups, especially members who are travelling or who live in rural or remote areas. Directories generally aren’t used *by* newcomers but they may be used *for* newcomers, to supply them with a phone number of a member in a group near where they live or will be going.

Intergroups/Central Offices (IG/COs) have traditionally purchased and used regional directories. A survey mailed to IG/COs in January 2015 asked whether or not they still used regional directories. Ten of the twelve respondents said they did occasionally use directories. Here are excerpts from some of those responses:

“Our volunteers get calls from out of our area and, not having computer access, they use the directories to guide people to meetings.”

“If a person is looking for a meeting in a specific small town outside of our state I go there first to see if there are any meetings in that town and what the area/district is. Then I go to the computer to find locations.”

“We place the directories in the front office reception area as resource material for members – photocopied upon request.”

“When asked about meetings in areas beyond our current location, we use them to contact GSRs about meetings in their area. We also have them available to truck drivers and members going on vacation.”

“We do not use regional directories because we have never noticed any need for them.”

“We stock them but it is just easier to access the computer.”

In December of 2019 a similar question was posted on icoaa.org, (a website that supports the Intergroup/Central Office/A.A.W.S./AAGV Seminar and has a forum for exchanging ideas and sharing experience.) Here are excerpts from those responses:

“People occasionally ask for the directories, so we keep them in stock. My understanding is some/a lot of the information in them is outdated.”

“We have never been asked for it or use it.”

“We carry 1 copy each – but generally never sell them before the new one comes out. Although members seem to get excited if they think they can’t get them.”

“We keep a copy of each on hand to answer questions from members who will be travelling/moving. A digital version would be great!”

“I have had requests for them, mostly from old-timer’ who have used them before. Anymore it is easier to use the Meeting Guide, or F-25 Central Office Intergroup guide so a person can contact the locality they are going to!”

“I have never used it.”

As referenced above, technology has changed the way some A.A. members contact A.A. Those who go to the “A.A. Near You” section of aa.org are given contact information for district/area websites that list meetings, the local hotlines, and often the nearest IG/COs with websites and phone numbers. Remote call forwarding, VoIP phone systems, and other technologies are making it possible for 24/7 phone coverage by local A.A. volunteers.

The Meeting Guide App has also changed how members contact A.A. Now owned and managed by A.A.W.S., it can be downloaded for free on smart phones (iOS and Android) and provides meeting information from A.A. service entities in an easy-to-access format. Meeting Guide syncs with the websites of participating areas, districts, intergroup/central offices and international GSOs. Over 100,000 weekly meetings are currently listed, and the information is refreshed twice daily, relaying meeting information from more than 300 A.A. service entities. There are currently about 235,000 active users and usage is steadily increasing. In December 2019, one month, there were 1.4 million visits to the app.

The Meeting Guide App does not offer a personal contact and phone number but does offer the contact information of whatever local entity is providing the meeting information. The more travelers learn that they can search a variety of locations with the app the more it may be used for planning trips (though many international travelers still like the International Directory.) A search of websites for sober truckers revealed that many use the Meeting Guide App or contact local offices when they are on the road.

The process for producing directories *before* the NetSuite ERP System.

Here is a snapshot of the process used *before* the conversion to the NetSuite ERP System to produce printed regional directories:

- Front matter is compiled and checked for accuracy by Records and Group Services.
- Area Registrars are given a cut-off date to update group records (usually the first Friday in May) and that information is processed by Records.
- The IT department converts group records to directory entries and pulls proofs.
- Records reviews proofs, deleting duplications and checking each entry for spelling, formatting, completeness, and uniformity.
- Irregularities in group information are checked against other sources.
- Five rounds of proofs and reviews take place over 4-6 weeks for each directory. The members of the Records department do the work in addition to their regular duties during the week and work overtime on Saturdays.
- The final proof goes to the Senior Production Manager who works with a vendor and oversees the printing process and production.
- The printed directories are sent to the three warehouses for distribution.

(For estimates of the costs related to printed regional directories please see Appendix I at the end of this report.)

What changes to the process are anticipated with the NetSuite ERP System?

The transition to the ERP system brought many challenges, some that we were anticipated and some that were not. There is a learning curve with every first-time process and there would certainly be with preparing data to be printed in a directory format. Given that ERP is an open system, with more internal departments and even outside users touching the data, we can anticipate there will be more variations in spelling and formatting, and more inadvertent changes to records. It will likely take more time to make the data uniform for printing than it has in the past. Also, groups now have both legacy service numbers and 'NetSuite' service numbers to include for printing.

The Records department is still working on the clean-up of data from the ERP migration, has a backlog of records to process, and is currently rolling out "My Portal" and offering training to area registrars. Current estimates are that work on printing regional directories may have to wait until the Spring of 2021.

One additional consideration is the changing landscape of privacy policies. Both A.A.W.S. and A.A.G.V. recently updated their privacy policies and may need to continue doing so as legal and societal standards change. In 2019 a decision was made to not list contact information of Conference members in the 2019 *Final Report* and that may extend to the front matter of directories. Discussions may also be needed about possibly using just the first name and last initial of group contacts.

Is there an alternative to printed directories?

We conducted brainstorming sessions with members of various G.S.O. departments including Publishing, I.T., Records and Staff, as well as ERP business analysts and a communications consultant. We began by focusing on who was currently receiving printed directories and what an alternative might be for them. Alternative formats to paper such as CDs, DVDs, and USB flash drives were discussed but they all require computer access, the information goes out of date just like with print, and they present shipping challenges as well. Developing a print-on-demand option was discussed and could be researched more but the group thought the cost would be much higher than the current directory price of \$3.60 (U.S.) Some sort of digital solution that could be accessed by smart phone, computer, or other devices was seen as the best alternative.

For DCMs (and DCMCs) who currently receive the printed directory of their region, one thought was to expand “My Portal” access to them, which could be accomplished with little to no development cost. It would be read-only access, at least at first, and would be contingent on the DCM going through a training session. Access would be limited to their district’s information (just as registrars are limited to their area’s information.) The front matter currently in printed directories could be provided through service material that could be included in the DCM kit and be available digitally. “My Portal” access would ensure that DCMs have current contacts for all listed groups in their district as well as access to group service numbers. Compared with printed directories, the group information would be more current and could be updated regularly. Also, area registrars and DCMs might find it easier to work together in maintaining more accurate group records if DCMs had access to “My Portal.”

In addition to being included in the DCM kit, a printed directory is also currently included in the Group Handbook. In discussions, no one could recall ever seeing a regional directory at their home group. As with all A.A. services the first question we ask is: “Is there a need?” How many members would miss it if a printed directory was no longer included in the group handbook? How often do members require a phone contact for a meeting? Should it be up to A.A.W.S. to provide that in printed form? Currently A.A. members can call G.S.O. to get a group contact and many international travelers do take advantage of that option (though calling G.S.O. is limited to business hours.)

While the Meeting Guide App does not supply a group contact it does offer times, locations, and maps to help members find meetings where they may make face-to-face contact. The app also offers the phone number of the A.A. entity providing the meeting information.

We also discussed how difficult it can be to reach someone using a phone number from a directory. People move or change numbers, some no longer attend A.A., sadly others pass away. Also, because of all the spam calls these days, many people are reluctant to answer their phone unless they recognize the person calling on their caller-id. Compare this with the phone line at an IG/CO or an A.A. hotline where volunteers strive to answer calls 24/7, 365.

Perhaps the best alternative is for members to use the phone numbers of local offices and hotlines that they can get on “A.A. Near You”, on the Meeting Guide App, or for those without computer or smart phone access, in the leaflet-size directory of *Central Offices, Intergroups and Answering Services for the U.S. and Canada* (F-25). It is not currently included in the Group Handbook but could easily be added. F-25 is currently sent to members in prisons and jails asking for pre-release contacts and is used by Bridging the Gap committees (who also provide contacts for those coming out of hospitals and treatment centers.) F-25 is also in need of an update (the current version is from 2017) and many members have asked that the next version have a more user-friendly design. However, it would be far less work and take far less time to update, redesign, and print F-25 than to produce new regional directories.

Five years ago, in his Keynote address at the 65th General Service Conference, Northeast Regional Trustee J. Gary L. warned about a technological divide in A.A. “As we think about new technologies and social networks and emerging modes of publication, let us be mindful of the risk of creating two Fellowships, those with access, and those without.” However, in the five years since that keynote address we have seen smart phones become even more ubiquitous and seen the Meeting Guide App be adopted more widely than anyone imagined.

Recently on the Technology in A.A. Forum a member posted about hosting “tech nights” to help members of the local A.A. community get more comfortable with smart phones, tablets, and computers. Several on the forum commented that they were involved in similar efforts. A consultant for A.A. framed the challenge this way: “How do we work together to make sure we have the most up-to-date, accurate information about groups and make it available to all those who need it while protecting the privacy of the contacts we provide?” If we continue to ask these kinds of questions we are sure to find the right answers.

APPENDIX I:

COSTS RELATED TO THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF PRINTED DIRECTORIES

Looking briefly at the costs of producing printed directories, there are three areas to consider: labor costs, print production costs, and distribution costs.

Karen H., Senior Manager of the Records Department, estimates that the proofing process for each directory incurs about \$20,000 in labor costs. While other departments also work on directories the primary labor cost is in Records.

Ed N. Senior Production Manager, Print, put together these figures for recent printing costs. As you can see, the cost depends on the size of the directory, the quantity printed, and whether or not it's a reprint.

2014-2015 Canadian Directory (Order Quantity: 3,000)

MFG: \$3,590.00

Mail Costs: \$258.86

Postage: \$878.64

TOTAL: \$4,727.50

2017 Canadian Directory (Order Quantity: 750)

MFG: \$3,493.00

2019 Canadian Directory (Order Quantity: 1,000) – exact reprint from 2017

MFG: \$3,854.00

2014-2015 Western Directory (Order Quantity: 5,000)

MFG: \$8,929.00

Mail Costs: \$258.86

Postage: \$2,383.01

TOTAL: \$11,570.87

2017 Western Directory (Order Quantity: 1,500)

MFG: \$6,536.00

2019 Western Directory (Order Quantity: 1,000) – exact reprint from 2017

MFG: \$6,148.00

2014-2015 Eastern Directory (Order Quantity: 6,000)

MFG: \$13,072.00

Mail Costs: \$258.86

Postage: \$3,135.81

TOTAL: \$16,466.67

2016 Eastern Directory (Order Quantity: 2,000)
MFG: \$9,329.00

2019 Eastern Directory (Order Quantity: 1,000) – exact reprint from 2016
MFG: \$7,879.00

In terms of distribution costs there are costs related to warehouse space for the printed directories which were not available for this report. There is also the difference in postage costs for shipping DCM kits and Group Handbooks with and without directories.

Shipping Group Handbook with the Eastern directory is \$5.87 vs \$4.83 without the directory.

Shipping Group Handbook with the Western directory is \$5.35 vs \$4.83 without the directory.

Shipping DCM Kit with the Eastern directory is \$5.98 vs \$4.92 without the directory.

Shipping DCM Kit with the Western directory is \$5.45 vs \$4.39 without the directory.

From 2017 through 2019 there were 6,486 Group Handbooks shipped from U.S. warehouses.

From 2017 through 2019 there were 2,731 DCM Kits shipped from U.S. warehouses.

The weight of the Canadian directory is not significant enough to affect postage costs so they are not included here.

Here are a few relevant excerpts from the Conference Committee on Report and Charter History and Highlights of Actions:

1984 Advisory Action

It was not feasible at this time to include meeting addresses and times in the A.A. directories, since not only would this add greatly to the printing and mailing costs of the directories, some groups do not have addresses, and the directories were not intended to be used as a local meeting list.

2005 Advisory Action

Online meetings in languages in addition to English, French and Spanish be listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" with the meeting language indicated next to the listing and in accordance with the 1997 Conference Advisory Action that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the 'International Correspondence Meetings' in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

From 2009 Additional Committee Consideration of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The committee reviewed a list of proposed editorial changes to The A.A. Directories and forwarded them to the Publications Department.

From 2011 Additional Committee Consideration of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The committee briefly discussed the A.A. Directories and noted that there were no requests for changes to the A.A. Directories.

From 2012 Additional Committee Consideration of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The committee briefly discussed the A.A. Directories and noted that there were no requests for changes to the A.A. Directories.

From 2013 Advisory Action of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

In light of the recent decision not to publish regional directories this year, the committee asked the staff secretary to communicate their concerns to the A.A.W.S. Board about the still existing, albeit decreasing, need for print resources by A.A. members in rural and remote areas, and those members who may travel frequently.

From 2014 Advisory Action of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The committee considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) and requested that the General Service Office explore alternative methods of accessing and distributing the contact information contained in the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.). The committee requested that a report be brought back to the 2015 Report and Charter Conference Committee.

2015 Advisory Action

A limited run of the A.A. Regional Directories (Canadian, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S.) be printed annually for purchase upon request.

From 2016 Advisory Action of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The category title “Online Meetings” be changed to “Online Meetings/Online Groups” on page vi and vii in the A.A. Directories.

From 2017 Additional Committee Consideration of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter:

The committee discussed the A.A. Directories and noted there were no requests for changes at this time.

2018 Additional Committee Consideration

The committee discussed the A.A. Directories and noted there were no requests for changes at this time. The committee also reviewed a memo from the G.S.O. General Manager informing the committee that the A.A. Directories, Canada, Eastern U.S. and Western U.S. would not be printed in 2018 due to the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

2019 Additional Committee Consideration

The committee considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) especially in light of the new ERP System and the Meeting Guide App, and requested that the General Service Office explore alternative methods of accessing and distributing the contact information contained in the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., and Western U.S.) The committee requested that a report be brought back to the 2020 Report and Charter Conference Committee.