

Supplement Report Ad Hoc Newsletter Committee Report

Committee Members: John B., Sooz B, Debbie B, Mike M. L, Jennifer R, Lupita, Keith, Theresa, Jim, Charlie, Erin, and Geene D.

Meetings: April 15, 2025, June 22, 2025, and June 30, 2025

Introduction:

We were asked to gather more information for the July Quarterly to help answer questions raised during the April meeting about the newsletter.

During that meeting, the Newsletter Ad Hoc Committee was asked to continue researching specific topics that came up in the discussion. Our work focused on the following areas:

1. **Accessibility** – How can remote groups get the Area business info shared in the newsletter?
2. **Printable Version of Newsletter** – Can people easily print the digital version at home if they want a paper copy?
3. **Archival Process** – How do we make sure the newsletter format still works for keeping our Area's history safe and organized?
4. **Digital Newsletter and Cost** – What does it really cost to print the newsletter, and how does that compare to going digital?

Purpose of the Newsletter

The Area 72 newsletter exists to keep groups and districts informed about the business activities of the Area. Its primary role is to support the structure of the upside-down triangle, where trusted servants are guided by the fellowship.

The newsletter helps ensure that information flows from the Area to the groups through their GSRs and districts. This allows members to stay informed and provide feedback, helping maintain a strong connection between the groups and Area service work.

At times, there's been some confusion about the newsletter's purpose or content. Simply put, it's a tool for communication—not just a bulletin or event flyer, but a way to keep the groups in the loop on what's happening at the Area level.

Accessibility – How can remote groups get the Area business info shared in the newsletter?

Without addressing accessibility, moving to a fully digital newsletter would be difficult. According to AA.org, remote groups are those that face challenges such as language, culture, geography, or limited internet access. In our Area, this includes people with language barriers, those in rural locations with poor internet, or individuals in custody.

Thankfully, we have some very talented folks in our Area who put their heads together. John B. taught us how easy it is to make digital newsletters. Then Charley introduced an HTML-based solution that makes the newsletter easy to load and print: khosmology.github.io/d56website. After reviewing it, John B.

jumped in and created code that takes the digital newsletter and formats it into a simple, printable version.

We're intentionally skipping the technical details here because the key takeaway is this: a solution exists, it's not overly complicated, and the Ad Hoc Committee unanimously agreed it's the best option to recommend moving forward.

If you're a tech-savvy member and want the technical breakdown, feel free to reach out to john@johnbarry.com or languagechair@area72aa.org.

The HTML-based newsletter solution also improves accessibility in several key ways:

- **Language Barriers:** The site can be easily translated into Spanish by selecting the Spanish version. This reduces the need for manual translation and helps stretch the limited translation budget. It also allows more Area business information to be made available to the Spanish-speaking community when needed.
- **Rural Locations with Poor Internet:** The lightweight HTML format loads quickly, even on slow or limited internet connections.
- **Individuals in Custody:** During our research, we learned that many individuals in custody are more familiar with and interested in the Grapevine, and may not always distinguish it from the Area newsletter. That said, if interest in the Area newsletter grows, this digital format could still be used to meet that need. Members who carry the message into correctional facilities can easily print the newsletter and bring it with them, ensuring that those inside have access to Area business information if they wish. Some may be able to access the information online.
- **Visual Impairments:** The digital format allows users to adjust text size, use screen readers, or apply high-contrast settings, making it more accessible for those with visual challenges.
- **Young People:** Many younger members are more tech-savvy and prefer digital formats. This solution meets them where they are—on phones, tablets, and other devices they already use.

The HTML format would make it easier for more people to stay informed and engaged with Area business.

Printable Version of Newsletter – Can people easily print the digital version at home if they want a paper copy?

To support members who prefer or need a printed version of the newsletter, we explored several practical solutions. Fortunately, the same HTML-based solution developed to improve accessibility also solves the printing challenge:

- **Plain-Text Version:** The HTML version of the newsletter makes it easy to print at home using standard letter-size paper. We'll demonstrate this option at the July Quarterly.
- **Individual Printing:** Readers can print specific articles directly from the digital newsletter, allowing them to choose only what they need.
- **Page Count and Cost:** The current newsletter is about 28 pages when printed on regular printer paper. Printing costs range from approximately \$4 at local print shops to free at some public libraries.
- **District Support:** Districts may consider helping remote GSRs who cannot print or access the newsletter digitally by providing printed copies.

This solution is simple, effective, and was unanimously supported by the Ad Hoc Committee as the best path forward.

Archival Process – How do we make sure the newsletter format still works for keeping our Area’s history safe and organized?

To ensure we maintain the integrity of Area 72’s historical records, our Archives Chair, Jen, reached out to the General Service Office (GSO) Archives for guidance on preserving digital content. The digital newsletter format proposed satisfies all archiving needs per GSO. Their response, along with the attached Digitizing Archival Materials Guidelines (2024), provided helpful insights.

Key Takeaways from GSO:

- **Website Content:** GSO does not archive its website content directly. Instead, content is preserved by the departments that create it. The only exception was when the old website was retired—those pages were saved as PDF/A files.
- **Preservation Tools:** GSO recommends using the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine (<https://web.archive.org>) to view and preserve snapshots of public web content over time.
- **Searchability:** For digitized documents, GSO uses OCR (Optical Character Recognition) to make text searchable. Handwritten documents may be retyped if needed.
- **Security & Privacy:** Digital files should be protected using password protection, user permissions, and secure storage. Archives must also safeguard anonymity and sensitive information.
- **Digital Preservation vs. Digitization:** Digitization is the process of converting physical materials into digital format. Digital preservation involves maintaining long-term access to those files, which includes regular backups, format updates, and secure storage.

Storage Best Practices:

- Use both “preservation” (high-quality, unedited) and “access” (lower-quality, shareable) copies.
- Store files on multiple media types and in different locations (e.g., external drives, cloud storage).
- Avoid digital obsolescence by regularly checking file formats and storage devices.
- **File Formats:** Use open, preservation-friendly formats like TIFF for images, PDF/A for documents, and WAV or FLAC for audio.
- **Metadata:** Maintain consistent, descriptive metadata (e.g., file names, dates, locations) to ensure files are searchable and well-organized.

Digital Newsletter and Cost – What does it really cost to print the newsletter, and how does that compare to going digital?

Summary:

- **Printed Newsletter:** ~\$35,644.06 est. per year
- **Digital Newsletter:** ~\$1,495 per year

This shows a potential annual savings of over \$34,000 by transitioning to a digital format.

Cost of Continuing the Monthly Printed Newsletter (Status Quo)

If Area 72 continues printing the newsletter as it has in the past—12 issues per year, with no page count limit and mailing to over 1,400 recipients—the financial impact is significant and growing:

- **2024 Total Cost: \$29,709.22**
- **Est. 2025 Cost (projected 20% increase due to tariffs and inflation): \$35,644.06**

(It was decided at the Jan. 2025 quarterly to limit to 4 printing this year to reduce cost while an ad hoc committee could explore other options due to the exorbitant cost. Could this large amount of money be spent on other activities that could reach benefit the still suffering alcoholic?)

Printed Newsletter Cost Include:

The Ad hoc committee explored other options and formats of printing and found no other print options that would reduce costs.

Items that make up the full cost include:

- **Printing the newsletter**
- **Postage**

Additional cost not factored into the annual cost is Spanish Translation & Printing (4x/year):

- Translation: ~\$950 per issue
- Printing: ~\$900 per issue
- Total: ~\$7,400 annually

Additional Considerations:

- Page count significantly affects cost. Newsletters over 48 pages require two print runs, increasing expenses.
- A 35% cost increase is anticipated due to paper tariffs and inflation, though not yet fully implemented.
- Are there other ways to spend \$34,000 on other activities that could reach benefit the still suffering alcoholic?

Digital Newsletter Cost

As part of our exploration into a more sustainable and accessible newsletter format, the Ad Hoc Committee evaluated the cost of transitioning to a fully digital newsletter. The goal was to create a secure, user-friendly, and multilingual platform that could serve the entire fellowship while significantly reducing financial strain.

The estimated annual cost of maintaining the digital newsletter platform is approximately \$1,495. This includes essential tools and plugins that support content management, email distribution, security, accessibility, and translation. Here is how those costs break down:

Description	Cost per Year	Purpose
Content Views Pro plugin	\$20.00	Controls how articles show on the home page and archives
MailPoet email system	\$120.00	Sends the newsletter and subscriber updates directly from the site
Mission News Pro theme	\$25.00	WordPress theme that controls the site's layout

Wordfence security plugin	\$150.00	Protects the site and keeps WordPress security up to date
WP Mail SMTP plugin	\$50.00	Ensures site emails (like subscriptions and contact forms) are delivered reliably
WPForms Pro plugin	\$200.00	Used to build and manage forms—story submissions, surveys, etc. Recommended version allows uploads to Google Drive and supports polls
WPML Multilingual CMS	\$106.00	Adds support for Spanish and other languages across posts, pages, menus, and categories
WPML translation credits	\$324.00	Needed for machine translation of content
Single Sign-on system	\$500.00	Allows users to maintain one profile across area72aa.org and the new newsletter site. Final approach to be selected by the transition team
Total	\$1,495.00	

While it may be tempting to focus solely on the financial savings, we in AA understand that there is a place where spirituality and money mix. Our decisions are guided not just by cost, but by how well they serve our primary purpose—to carry the message.

That said, the digital approach not only modernizes how we share information, but also offers significant cost savings—over \$30,000 per year compared to the traditional printed newsletter. More importantly, it allows us to reach more members, provide timely updates, and offer greater flexibility in how content is accessed and shared. This shift supports both financial responsibility and spiritual unity, ensuring that our message continues to reach those who need it most.

A Proposed Solution

Key Findings

1. Accessibility

The Ad Hoc Committee recommends adopting the HTML-based digital newsletter format as the most inclusive and practical solution for reaching all members of Area 72. This format:

- Supports Spanish translation, helping stretch the translation budget and better serve our Spanish-speaking members.
- Loads quickly, even in rural areas with limited internet access.
- Is compatible with screen readers and adjustable for those with visual impairments.
- Meets the preferences of younger, more tech-savvy members.
- Can be printed easily by individuals or carried into correctional facilities by members doing service work.

2. Printable Version

The same HTML solution that address accessibility issues allows members to print individual articles or the full newsletter on standard paper.

- For a person who wanted to print the paper at home it would be approximately \$4.00
- Districts can support GSRs who need printed copies.
- This approach is simple, flexible, and cost-effective.

3. Archival Process

- GSO confirmed that digital formats are acceptable for archival purposes.
- Best practices include using PDF/A, metadata, and secure storage.
- The digital format allows for searchable, well-organized, and easily preserved records.

4. Cost Comparison

Format	Estimated Annual Cost
Printed Newsletter	\$35,644.06
Digital Newsletter	\$1,495.00
Annual Savings	\$34,109.06

- The printed newsletter is not financially sustainable.
- The digital format offers significant savings that could be redirected to outreach, translation, or public information efforts.

Where Spirituality and Money Mix.

Spiritual and Practical Balance

While it may be tempting to focus solely on the financial savings, we in AA understand that there is a place where spirituality and money mix. Our decisions must be guided by how well they serve our primary purpose—to carry the message.

The digital newsletter not only reduces costs but also expands our reach, improves accessibility, and preserves our history. It is a solution that aligns with both our spiritual principles and our responsibility to be good stewards of the Seventh Tradition.

Recommendation to the Body

The Ad Hoc Committee recommends that Area 72:

1. **Transition to a digital newsletter format** using the HTML-based solution such as the one demonstrated at the July Quarterly.
2. **Cease regular monthly printing of the newsletter**, while allowing for limited printing as needed.
3. **Form a Newsletter Steering Committee**

- Purpose: To support the continued development and implementation of a monthly digital newsletter, we recommend that the Area 72 Newsletter Editor appoint a working Newsletter Steering Committee. This group would assist with the format, content, and distribution of both the digital and printer-friendly versions of the newsletter.
 - Composition: Include at a minimum, AA members with a desire to serve, and representatives such as the Newsletter Editor, Language Chair, a member of the Web Steering Committee, a Past Delegate, and a DCM.
 - Tasks should include but are not limited to:
 - Develop a simple article submission process, including a user-friendly template and submission tool.
 - Create a clear framework for how the editorial steering committee will function.
 - Draft a transition plan so that, if the Area Assembly chooses to move forward, implementation can begin smoothly.
 - Assist in the monthly preparation and publication of the Area newsletter.
4. **Implement a subscription option** on the Area website to automatically notify members with a link of the monthly newsletter.
 5. **Support districts and GSRs** in printing copies for members who need them.
 6. **Establish a digital archival process** in line with GSO guidelines.
 7. **Redirect savings** to support outreach and other 12th Step efforts.