

# From the World Board—Final Report on the Communications Task Force Project

## Introduction/Summary

Communications have always been a challenge in Narcotics Anonymous. This dates back to the beginning when NA was just a handful of members, then a handful of groups, before we had either a fellowship service structure or any “world services.” As we’ve become a truly worldwide fellowship—existing as of August 2000 as about 27,000 registered NA groups holding about 28,200 weekly meetings in 104 countries—our communication challenges have become more complex. NA is not standing still. Our most heartfelt desire is to carry the message to every addict who still suffers. We do this so that no addict anywhere need ever die from the horrors of active addiction without knowing the way out that we have found. This desire to share freely and gratefully the recovery we have found in NA is at the heart of our efforts to improve our communications. We share our experience, strength, and hope about recovery and service to help strengthen the NA unity upon which personal recovery depends. We foster unity through our communications to help keep our fellowship alive and growing. Our service communications help the service structure at all levels to hear the voice of the NA groups. This helps to ensure accountability, in keeping with our Ninth Tradition (“NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”) Likewise, our Eighth Concept reminds us that “our service structure depends on the integrity and effectiveness of our communications.” In NA worldwide, we are constantly motivated by the vision that one day, every addict in the world has the chance to experience our message in his or her own language and culture and find the opportunity for a new way of life.

Now, perhaps for the first time in NA’s history, NA World Services has tried to take a comprehensive look at our fellowship communication problems and begin a process with the board’s Communications Task Force Project to suggest some specific areas of communications activity and their respective shortcomings that will merit our focus and concentration. This report summarizes the problems uncovered to date. The Organizational Identity Statement above is one

### **NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS WORLD SERVICES ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY STATEMENT**

#### **WHO WE ARE:**

NA World Services is comprised of the World Board, the World Service Office, and the World Service Conference.

#### **WHAT WE DO:**

NA World Services provides services supporting the unity of NA and facilitating the continuation and growth of NA worldwide.

#### **WHY:**

So that every addict in the world has the chance to find a new way of life.

#### **HOW:**

NA World Services achieves its purpose by always acting in accordance with the principles of our program, emphasizing honesty, trust, goodwill, and integrity. We use fair, fiscally sound, efficient, and effective decision-making, policies, and practices.

#### **WHERE:**

Internally: among our fellowship, conference participants, board and committees, and WSO staff. Externally: among the general public, treatment and correctional personnel, medical professionals, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and families.

tool we have developed to anchor our communications strategy. We hope this will help in attempting to communicate who we in world services are, what we offer, and how our members across the globe can most easily access our collective resources. Our findings indicate, in fact, that one of our most basic challenges is a need to communicate more effectively to improve the limited awareness and understanding that our members now have about the functions, services, and resources of NA World Services.

We have tried to make this report as simple to understand as possible, because we know this is what you want. The information we have researched, however, is complex. It is always challenging to try to simplify complex information and balance the needs of different audiences. Some want to know every last detail. Others only want the headlines. We have a number of different audiences in Narcotics Anonymous. We must do a

better job of tailoring our written communications to the differing needs and interests of different parts of our fellowship. This is, in fact, one of the principle communication challenges this report highlights. We have tried here to strike a balance. This six-page executive summary contains only the highlights. A fifty-page version for conference participants contains all of the details of our research results. The addenda to this most detailed version of the report include:

- The detailed problem profile based on the CTF's research to date (Addendum A);
- Detailed background and history of the CTF and research overview (Addendum B);
- The questionnaire used in each of the eight focus groups worldwide and the quantitative survey results (Addendum C);
- The quantitative results from the WSC 2000 survey (Addendum D); and
- The results of the CAR 2000 workshop survey (Addendum E).

We have posted this summary along with Addendum A and Addendum B on our website, [www.na.org](http://www.na.org). It's also available on request from NAWS.

### ***This Report Is About Problems, NOT Solutions or Implementation***

This report covers seven basic areas of communications between NAWS and the fellowship as a whole: (A) Correspondence; (B) Internet; (C) Periodicals; (D) the *Conference Agenda Report*; (E) Products and Services; (F) Translations; and (G) the Worldwide Workshop System. Our Communications Task Force developed these categories as major areas of research. We are focused here on identifying perceived problems and putting them into context. Identifying solutions and implementing standards to improve NAWS communications with the fellowship are not the subject of this report.

But the problems and challenges identified in this report are rarely stand-alone, isolated problems. The danger of dividing these problems into these falsely separated categories,

#### **Concept Eight:**

“Our fellowship’s service structure is founded on the unity of our groups; to maintain that union, we must have regular communications throughout Narcotics Anonymous. Together, our groups have created a service structure to help them fulfill their common purpose. The effectiveness of the service structure depends on the continued unity of the NA groups, and on their continued support and direction. These things can only be maintained in an atmosphere of honest, open, and straightforward communication among all parties concerned.”

--From the booklet,

*Twelve Concepts for NA Service*

therefore, is that we may get lost in the details and miss the overall picture. That is to say, it may be tempting to try to tackle each identified problem without seeing the larger picture of how each of these difficulties relates to the others.

In essence, we suggest focusing on who we in NA World Services are, who we serve, and why, as the reference point of examining these problems. We haven't done such a great job in the past of keeping this in mind. In fact, when the CTF sat down to create an organizational identity statement (see page 1) to clearly focus on this—the CTF realized that it was the first time anyone had attempted to do so with regard to communication responsibilities in a very long time. We recommend using this NAWS Organizational Identity Statement as the touchstone for analysis of the identified problems and the development of their solutions.

## **Research: Focus Groups, WSC 2000 Survey, Staff Interviews**

We developed a focus group questionnaire, which we used at the eight focus groups held around the world. The eight groups met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Rockford, Illinois; Spokane, Washington; Mumbai (Bombay), India; Berlin, Germany; Montevideo, Uruguay; Calgary, Alberta, Canada; and Woodland Hills, California. We deliberately chose specific limited areas within a larger region in order to get a balanced mix of distinct communities (rural, suburban, urban—established and developing, etc.) In addition to the qualitative data we gathered at each individual workshop, each focus group generated an average of 17 individual questionnaires from members who participated in the groups, as well as a written narrative summary from staff and trusted servants attending those groups. The quantitative and qualitative results have been integrated into a problem profile narrative (Addendum A). However, for those wishing additional detail, the complete quantitative results (including the original survey used for the focus group participants) are available as Addendum C.

The planned setup for each eight-hour focus group was to have 20 participants total. Demographic considerations included mixing members who have various lengths of time clean with all types of service backgrounds (including no service structure experience); male and female; English-speaking and non-English-speaking. We also considered racial diversity, educational background, and work experience where appropriate. Overall, the methodology of the focus groups was not perfect. The survey instrument was originally designed as a way of recording and capturing the data from each focus group uniformly, not as a questionnaire for quantitative or statistical data. Caution should also be used in generalizing the results from the focus groups to the entire fellowship in a literal way. Nonetheless, we believe we have gathered some highly relevant and useful input from the fellowship.

We also conducted a survey of the WSC 2000 conference participants. We did this because the regional delegates are actually the main audience for various WSC publications. We also wanted to find out what perceptions regional delegates thought members in their local region had about NAWS communications. We thought this would give us some basis for comparing points of agreement and disagreement between the perceptions of the delegates versus the perceptions of the focus group participants—and it has. The details about that survey are available as Addendum D.

The information gathered here mostly represents various communities' *perceptions* about our communications. By communities we mean members

### ***Improving Communications Is Everybody's Business:***

Staff, management, the board, its committees, the conference, and the fellowship at large will all be involved and will have to work together and engage in genuine dialogue to make lasting and effective changes in NAWS communications.

at the group level, trusted servants among our fellowship, regional delegates and their alternates, and so on. To find out whether you are communicating successfully, you have to find out how the people you are trying to communicate with *perceive* that communication. We have tried to ask: “Are we communicating effectively?” The perceptions of the members we are trying to communicate with are the best judge of the effectiveness of our attempts to communicate, from their perspective. This may seem unscientific or like a liability to some. But we aren’t trying to prove the existence of these problems, scientifically or statistically. We suggest judging these problems based upon our fellowship’s collective experience and common sense.

The contents of this report aren’t especially encouraging, but we also don’t think our findings are especially surprising. This report confirms a truth we already knew—we have significant challenges before us in our ongoing efforts to improve world services’ responsiveness to our membership. This is especially true in the areas of service-related communications and our members’ general awareness of the availability of services and information. We’ve found that most of our members really have little or no idea what NA World Services is or what services are provided. Nearly all of the identified problems grow out of this major reality. But the specific problems are not by any means “smaller” ones.

For example, it’s evident that the fellowship does not understand the finances of NA World Services, what services cost and where the money to pay for them comes from, the limits of NAWS current resources, and the areas where we are unable to provide needed services due to lack of resources. Our shortcomings in communicating about resource needs have a huge impact on the willingness of the NA groups to contribute funds to the service structure in general and directly to NA World Services in particular. Of about 27,000 registered NA groups worldwide (according to our imperfect database records as of August 2000), fewer than 500 groups (less than 2%) chose to make direct contributions to NAWS. However, at the same time, there has been a 400% increase over the last five years in the number of groups making direct contributions. This is a very encouraging trend. Still, it highlights how far we have to go to put the finances of NA World Services on the most stable and desirable foundation in existence: direct Seventh Tradition contributions from the NA groups themselves rather than indirect and less stable income derived from either literature sales or events. Poor communication about money in world services is just one aspect of the fellowship’s limited understanding of the who, what, how, and why of NA World Services, but the effectiveness of our communications about finances strikes at the heart of the integrity and effectiveness of our service structure.

## ***So, What’s This All About?***

This report identifies and discusses 29 specific and significant fellowship communication problems. In examining all of these communications challenges, we want to remain focused on the bottom line. Simply put, most, maybe even all, of our fellowship communication difficulties add up to a very simple truth: *We’re not serving our members as well as we could be.* When members don’t know what products and services are available from world services, they aren’t being served as they should be. When addicts with special needs don’t have access to products or services that meet their needs, those members aren’t being served as well as they could be. When our members can’t understand our service-related communications, we must strive to make them more understandable. When service committees don’t understand how to contact world services or aren’t aware of what products and services are available to help them with their service efforts, we must strive to do a better job of raising that knowledge and awareness.

These communications problems, perhaps as much or more than any other thing world services does, affect our members at their home group level. It’s our number one priority to communicate more effectively with our members regarding both the products and services we

provide and all pertinent service information. By doing so, NA can remain a vital, growing, and well-informed worldwide fellowship—connected by the knowledge, information, and power contained in our literature, our products, and our services.

**So, What’s the Problem? — “What we have here is a failure to communicate.”**

The last page of this summary lists the 29 problem statements from the problem profile report (Addendum A). Members lack knowledge and awareness of world services’ functions and services. There are difficulties with both the NAWS voicemail system and with NAWS telephone callers being shuttled around from one staff person to another to get the help desired. Members have limited world convention awareness, don’t understand world services communications, and are often unable to participate in NAWS efforts to gather fellowship input through surveys. And in the area of the Internet, unknown and limited member access raises questions about how to integrate Internet communications into NAWS overall strategy.

In the area of publications, we see a need to reexamine the unity of the entire NAWS periodicals program. We’ve found very limited member awareness of existing periodicals, lack of agreement how easy they are to read, and problems with the identified audiences for various periodicals and the overall level of complexity/language used in service communications. Distribution is also a serious problem due to unreliable or incomplete mailing lists. Historically, much of our service communications have relied on indirect communications passed through multiple levels of the service structure—from NAWS to the regions to the areas to the NA groups. But this indirect system has its own set of limitations due to breakdowns and bottlenecks along the route. We examined one particularly important service periodical separately: the *Conference Agenda Report*. Much of the fellowship does not even know what the *CAR* is. The *CAR* (if known about at all) is often perceived to be difficult, uninteresting, and/or irrelevant. A related problem is the lack of knowledge regarding how to engage in effective fellowshipwide discussions. At the same time, our members want to talk about a very large number of discussion issues. This may also be a communication problem in itself because of fellowship confusion about the whole WSC issue discussion process.

In the area of NAWS products and services, our members want a large number of new products and services. Also, some perceive that some existing products and literature are outdated. Our members also lack an understanding of the translations process, which is really just another example of an area where members misunderstand NAWS functions and services. And regarding the worldwide workshop system, we found no clarity regarding the purpose(s) of the workshops, and no consensus as to how often they should occur. Finally, we found an overall lack of understanding of world services’ limited resources.

***The Communication Standards Project (July 2000 - June 2002)***

The board will work in partnership with staff to refine the problem profile (as required) over the next two years. Although some staff and executive management have had significant impact on the development of the problem profile (Addendum A), others have not yet had much involvement. It will be desirable for other key staff to review and contribute ideas as the Communication Standards Project unfolds. Together we will develop recommendations to deal with the identified problems and then begin to implement new communication standards as time and resources permit.

**Goal Eight of the Fellowship Development Plan:**

“Improve world services’ written and face-to-face communication with the fellowship.”

## **The Problem Statements** (see Addendum A for problem discussion)

Here are 29 problems (in no particular order), divided among the seven categories of research:

### **Correspondence/Direct WSO Contact:**

- #1: Members' limited awareness of world service functions/services.
- #2: Members' lack of understanding of world service communications.
- #3: Members' lack of knowledge of specific world services contact information.
- #4: Difficulties with the NAWS voicemail system and frustrations with front-desk call-routing.
- #5: Other barriers to contacting NAWS: members' negative experiences, feelings of fear/intimidation, and/or distrust.
- #6: Additional non-US difficulties contacting NAWS.
- #7: Limited awareness of world conventions.
- #8: Surveys are hard to understand and harder to access.

### **Internet:**

- #9: Unknown and limited member access to the Internet raises questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of efforts to integrate Internet communications into NAWS overall strategy.
- #10: Lack of usage/access to NAWS website (www.na.org).
- #11: Lack of agreement about what the NAWS website's functions should be.

### **Periodicals:**

- #12: Need to re-evaluate the coherence of the periodicals program (including the purpose/philosophy and the function(s) of the program overall and of each component periodical).
- #13: Audience(s) may not be appropriately matched for each periodical in terms of audience interests, desire for access, use of language, publication length, and level of detail (or complexity).
- #14: Awareness of periodicals is low and access is limited.

- #15: Service-related information is too complicated or uninteresting to NA members.
- #16: Lack of agreement about the ease of understanding of periodicals.
- #17: Unreliable or incomplete mailing lists (database accuracy problem).
- #18: The breakdown in NAWS communication, filtered through the layers of the service structure—from the regions to the areas to the groups to the NA members.

### **The Conference Agenda Report:**

- #19: Lack of awareness and/or use of the *Conference Agenda Report*.
- #20: Service issues in the *CAR* are too complicated.
- #21: Lack of understanding about how to participate in fellowshipwide discussion.
- #22: The diverse range of topics members hope to see discussed fellowshipwide.

### **Products and Services:**

- #23: The large number of pieces of new literature and products focus group participants would like to see developed.
- #24: The large number of "special needs" literature products members would like to see developed.
- #25: Some products and services are outdated.

### **Translations:**

- #26: Communities that are not directly involved in translations don't understand the needs and issues faced by communities that actually do translations with help from NAWS.

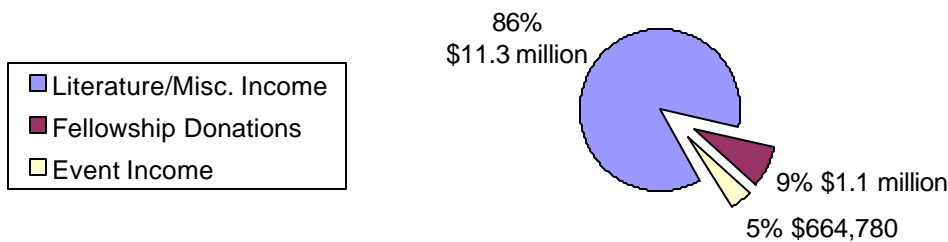
### **Worldwide Workshop Experiment:**

- #27: Lack of clarity regarding the purpose of experimental worldwide workshop system.
- #28: Lack of clarity as to how often worldwide workshops should occur.
- #29: Little understanding of world services' limited resources.

**A Snapshot of NAWs Resources Today:**

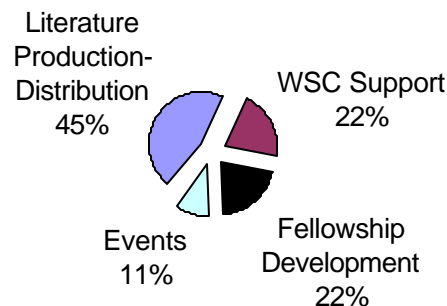
NA World Services now has a two-year consolidated budget system known as the Unified Budget. The Unified Budget now combines into one budget plan what once were three separate budgets for the World Service Office, the World Convention Corporation, and the World Service Conference. The budget matches the two-year conference cycle and covers the period from 1 July 2000 through 30 June 2002. The 2000 World Service Conference approved the 2000-2002 Unified Budget, which estimates total income of \$13,082,204 and total expenses of \$12,609,928 (with excess revenue projected at \$472,276).

**Where the Money Comes From (2000-2002):**



Where does the estimated \$13,082,204 in income come from? There are three main sources. The largest source (86%) is from the sale of recovery literature and other products. Income of \$11,291,502 is projected from this source, net of other miscellaneous income (which includes interest, shipping income, and both sales discounts and allowances and developmental subsidies). The second largest source is fellowship donations (9%). Fellowship donations are expected to account for \$1,125,923 during this period. The third and smallest source is event income (5%). Budgeted income from this source was projected at \$664,780 (this includes Unity Day, WCNA-28 in Cartagena and WCNA-29 in Atlanta).

**Where Your Money Goes (2000-2002):**



Projected expenses of \$12,609,928 are divided among four major budget categories: (1) Literature Production and Distribution (45%); (2) World Service Conference Support (22%); (3) Fellowship Development (22%); and (4) Events (11%).