

Inventory update

The World Services Inventory Composite Group held its first meeting 24-27 June 1993 at the WSO in Los Angeles. The Composite Group was created to coordinate most of the work related to the inventory plan approved by the World Service Conference this April. The group is composed of three RSRs, two trustees, one WSO director, and one member of each WSC committee. Three WSO special workers have been assigned to assist the Composite Group, and two outside consultants were hired to work with the group at its first meeting.

The group had three key tasks for the June meeting:

1. Begin working together as a service body.
2. Develop surveys for the fellowship to use in evaluating world services.
3. Compile tools for world service boards and committees to use in assessing their own operations at a world services meeting to be held later in the conference year.

Early in the meeting the group discussed the various roles each member would play in the project. Members were assigned to serve as contacts between the Composite Group and other world service boards and committees.

The group decided to rotate a new group member into its leadership position at each meeting. The rotating leaders will have the same responsibilities as other world-level committee chairs; however, the Composite Group expects them to delegate responsibility to other committee members as much as possible so as not to become overburdened. If rotating leaders so frequently creates continuity problems in the future, the group will reconsider the idea.

With preliminaries resolved, the Composite Group focused on the development of fellowship surveys. The group began with the surveys because the WSC-approved inventory plan called for the surveys to be translated and mailed in July 1993, while the world service board and committee self-assessment tools were not to be used until October at the earliest.

The Composite Group's two consultants led the group through a very thorough survey development process, identifying the decisions the group had to make at each stage before going further. First, the consultants asked the Composite Group two questions: What had led to the call for an inventory of NA world services? What was the inventory's purpose? Two themes surfaced. Narcotics Anonymous had grown quickly over the past fifteen years, maybe too quickly for world services to keep up. Composite Group members also talked about spiritual rifts that had divided the fellowship's "minority voice" from NA world services. Group members shared their hope that the inventory would identify any problem areas that might exist in world service operations and begin the process of healing any breaks between the fellowship and its world services.

With more than ten thousand NA groups with current addresses logged in the WSO database and more than five hundred area committees, the Composite Group concluded that the mails would provide the only realistic means of administering the inventory survey to the fellowship. Self-addressed envelopes will be included with all surveys to make returning the forms as simple as possible. Return envelopes for responses from the USA will be marked postage-paid for even greater ease in response; unfortunately, it is not financially feasible to mark returns from countries other than the USA postage-paid.

The Composite Group chose to use closed-ended questions in the survey, making it possible to inexpensively tabulate large numbers of responses in a variety of languages. Most questions were framed to accommodate the Likert response scale, asking the respondent to say to what extent she or he disagrees or agrees with a particular positive statement. The consultants told the Composite Group that respondents would probably find it easier to understand the survey if most of the questions used the same kind of response scale, and recommended the Likert scale as being one of the most useful.

Another matter to resolve was, who will answer the questionnaire? When a questionnaire is sent out to an NA group, for instance, will the Composite Group expect the GSR to fill it out on the group's behalf, using his or her own best judgment? Should each survey response show the number of group members who agreed with each option for each question? Or should the responses show a single answer to each question, reflecting the views of each group-as-a-whole? The consultants told the Composite Group that it is important that all respondents answer in the same way; if they don't, the survey results will be skewed.

The Composite Group decided to ask that the survey responses reflect the group conscience of whatever body is being surveyed. The RSC survey should reflect the response of the regional committee, not a tally of all its members or the response of the RSR alone. Similarly, the ASC survey should reflect the conscience of the area committee, and the group survey should register the group's collective conscience. Members responding to the survey who have more input than just their survey responses are encouraged to write out their remarks on separate pieces of paper to ensure their notes are given attention.

With this foundation established, the Composite Group was ready to begin building the group, area, and regional surveys themselves. First, the Composite Group established the categories of inquiry for the surveys--the kinds of issues the group would be asking the fellowship to consider in evaluating NA world services.

The basic categories were drawn from two sources. Four categories were drawn from page 11 of the *Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure*: "The basic purposes of our world services are *communication, coordination, information, and guidance.*" Three more had been identified at the February 1993 world services leadership meeting that developed the original administrative plan for the inventory project: *perceptions, expectations, and service delivery.* Once these categories had been identified and prioritized, the Composite Group divided into three teams and developed the actual questions to be asked in the fellowship surveys.

Composite Group members decided to administer a small number of trial surveys in their home areas in

August and September 1993 to help ensure that the questionnaires were understandable and useful. The questionnaires will then be revised as needed and finalized at the September Composite Group meeting for mailing to the fellowship in October. The returns will be ready for tabulation and analysis in January 1994. The Composite Group will evaluate them at its scheduled meeting in February 1994, and will deliver a complete report on the surveys in particular and the inventory in general at WSC'94 in Atlanta.

Once progress toward completing first drafts of the surveys was well under way, the Composite Group turned its attention to considering whether it wished to make further use of the consultants contracted to help the group at its June 1993 meeting. To engage fully in that discussion, the group had to begin looking at the inventory administrative plan as a whole and consider its viability. The plan is very ambitious, calling for an enormous amount of work to be done in very little time. The consultants presented a program for completing the plan, but the consulting costs involved were substantial.

The Composite Group was overwhelmed by the enormity of the task facing it and the estimated costs for consulting assistance. Some group members suggested that the inventory plan, as originally approved, simply couldn't be accomplished and that it would not be prudent to rush into a decision about consultant spending when the group lacked confidence in the plan. It was time to pause, these members said, and redesign the inventory administrative plan before going any further. Other members said that the next step should be to get a second consulting quote based on the plan already submitted. Still other members said that, without a clearer idea of what the inventory project was meant to produce, no consultant could give such a second quote.

Though this fundamental uncertainty was not resolved, the Composite Group realized it had to make some decisions about future work on the inventory project. The group affirmed its belief in the value of qualified outside consultants to assist with certain technical responsibilities. However, the group did not believe it necessarily had to use outside consultants for every phase of the inventory project, especially given

consulting costs, and left its options open for the future.

The group identified three task areas it intended to complete this conference year:

1. Fellowship questionnaires.
2. World service board and committee self-assessment tools.
3. Planning for WSC'94 as a total inventory event.

The group decided that, at its September meeting, it would finish the surveys first. Then it would begin preparing board and committee self-assessment tools in-group with facilitator assistance. The Composite Group selected four of its members to work among themselves to develop a first draft of the self-assessment tools before the whole group gathered again in September.

One sticking point in preparing for development of self-assessment tools was the identification of standards to use in measuring world service board or committee performance. Should these evaluative standards be drawn solely from approved board and committee guidelines, handbooks, and the *Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure?* The Composite Group felt by-and-large that such an evaluation would only determine whether the boards and committees were living up to their guidelines. The group was more inclined to put its time and energy into developing self-assessment tools that would help boards and committees measure themselves against a standard of usefulness to the fellowship and NA's primary purpose, not just against official guidelines.

Along similar lines, the Composite Group discussed the part of the inventory plan that calls for World Service Office staff to prepare "comprehensive histories" of each world service board and committee as background for the self-assessment process. The question is, *how* comprehensive? For now, WSO staff will gather all relevant files, catalogue them, and make those catalogues available to the respective boards and committees for future use.

The next meeting of the Composite Group will be held 16-18 September 1993 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA. All Composite Group members, all inventory staff members, a liaison from the inventory Support Team created to ensure the availability of the resources needed by the Composite Group, and one consultant are to attend. The

meeting will be open to observers. However, no open forums or other types of structured interaction with the NA community in the Atlanta area will be scheduled so that the fellowship in that part of the US does not have a greater opportunity to impact the inventory project than other NA communities will have.

The Composite Group believes it may need to ask for an additional meeting in November 1993 to complete self-assessment materials for the world service meeting and begin preparing the WSC'94 program. The group will not know whether such a meeting will be necessary until after the September meeting is concluded.

The date and location for the world services meeting during which all boards and committees will assess their own performance have not yet been determined. It had originally been hoped that this meeting could be held in October 1993. However, until the Composite Group has a much better idea of how long it will take to complete the self-assessment tools that will be used as the core of the agenda for that world services meeting, the group is unwilling to make a scheduling recommendation. Right now, the only certainty is that the meeting will not be held in October. The Composite Group is aware that the uncertainty and delay are frustrating for many world service participants. The group encourages you to be patient and asks for your understanding.

The final Composite Group meeting of the 1993-94 conference year called for by the inventory plan is scheduled for February 1994. That meeting is to be used to evaluate inventory information received thus far, prepare reports, and make final logistical preparations for WSC'94 in Atlanta.

This concludes the digest of the Composite Group's 6 August 1993 report to WSC participants on progress made in the world services inventory project. That report was the second made to conference participants on the inventory. The first, dated 9 June 1993, came from the inventory Support Team. If you wish to receive a copy of either of these reports, or if you have any questions or ideas about the inventory, write, call, or fax **World Services Inventory, Box 9999, Van Nuys CA 91409 USA**, telephone (818) 780-3951, fax (818) 785-0923