



TOP TEN TAKEAWAYS

from the 2024 General Service Conference

ERIC L.

PANEL 73 DELEGATE

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Plain Language Big Book

01

Plain Language Big Book

- Discussion about plain language versions and more accessible literature started after the *Big Book* was published (Akron pamphlets were a first attempt, at Bob's request, originally published in 1939)
- The *Twelve and Twelve* was viewed as a more accessible companion guide when it was published
- In 2015, at the International Convention, a speaker requested a plain language *Big Book* for people in Northern Canada who could not understand the book and had no access to sponsors
- In 2021, the Conference recommended that work begin on a translation of the *Big Book* into Plain Language

01

What is Plain Language?

- Plain English is clear, straightforward expression, using only as many words as are necessary
- It is language that avoids obscurity, inflated vocabulary and convoluted sentence construction. It is not baby talk, nor is it a simplified version of the English language
- Writers of plain English let their audience concentrate on the message instead of being distracted by complicated language. They make sure that their audience understands the message easily
- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes plain language in its definition of communication
- Both the EU and the US have laws that require Plain English documents

01

Preface/Doctor's Opinion

- New Preface emphasizes “not a replacement,” but “another tool”
- “This version is different: It offers the same message and ideas as the first *Big Book*, but it is written to be more easily understood. This book is not intended to replace *Alcoholics Anonymous*. It is written to make the ideas presented in the *Big Book* easier to access. It is another tool for sharing the message of Alcoholics Anonymous’ program of recovery.”
- New Foreword gives a history of the project
- Original Doctor’s Opinion side-by-side with plain language
- God still uses a capital-G

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

Glossary

- “Sober/Sobriety: Dictionary definition is focused on not using mood-altering chemicals such as alcohol or narcotics. In A.A., we think about sobriety a little differently. First, in A.A., we focus on alcohol. Second, our definition includes not drinking (or staying ‘dry’) but also includes changing our outlook so that we can lead better, healthier, and more peaceful lives.”
- “Higher Power: A force or power that is stronger than you are. Something that influences events in the universe.”
- “Agnostic: An agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of God or gods, or is unsure if one exists”
- “Atheist: Someone who does not believe in God or gods”
- “Serenity: A state of feeling calm, peaceful, and untroubled”

01

Bill's Story

- The text is written in first person
- First line: “During World War I, I was a young officer in the U.S. military. After spending time at a base of Plattsburgh, NY. I went with some officers to a New England town where the people were very kind to us. They made us feel like heroes. They told us how brave we were for going off to war...”
- “I contracted golf fever” → “I started playing golf and became obsessed with the sport.”
- “I felt lifted up, as though the great clean wind of a mountain top blew through and through” → “Standing at the top of a mountain, and a strong, clean wind was blown through me.”

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

There is a Solution

- Notable use of both male and female pronouns
I can drink and stop when I want to. Why can't she?
That guy...
She has...
- The jaywalker is female
- Same first-drink philosophy, same excuses and irrationality
- “The great fact is this: We have had deeply spiritual experiences.”

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

We Agnostics

- “Connecting to a **Higher Power** is both possible and absolutely critical to your recovery.”
- This is the most beautiful chapter in the Plain Language Big Book

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

How it Works

- Steps are **not** in plain language; there is an explanation side by side, in an appendix in the back of the book
- Step 08 Explanation: “After that, we work on a list of everyone we have hurt. We prepare to make amends to them, and to find ways to heal our relationships.”
- Step 11 Explanation: “In this step, we try to improve our connection to our Higher Power. We use practices like prayer and meditation to do so. While we do this, we ask for guidance and the strength to do what our Higher Power would have us do.”
- ‘Bondage of self’ is explained as ‘prison of self,’ though the Third Step prayer remains the same, with an explanation immediately following

01

Into Action

- Ninth Step promises are remarkably similar; a few minor changes
“No matter how badly we have behaved in the past...”
Economic insecurity → Money worries
Baffle → Confuse or worry
Extravagant → Outrageous or unlikely

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

Working with Others

- Subtle changes to the original text
- “In your conversation, use everyday language to describe spiritual principles.”
- “We have **stopped** fighting anybody or anything.”

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

To Partners / TFA

- A note from the editor about the title change:
“For this plain language version, the title has been adapted. When the book was published, they were mostly men.”
- “The power of God goes deep (no change: page 114).”

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

To Employers

- 'To Employers' is challenging because much of it is bad advice in a modern era
 - Cover the cost of treatment
 - Talking to an employee's doctor
 - Stay calm when they steal money
 - Have another employee tell them about AA
- But this is what we asked for; this is not a reinterpretation or a revision of the book, but a plain language translation of the book

01

A Vision for You

- “For most normal friends, drinking means fun, friendship and carefree enjoyment. It means an escape from boredom and worry. It is joyful time spent with friends and a feeling that life is good.”
- “But alcoholics who are in the final days of their heavy drinking don’t feel this way at all.”
- The four horsemen remain Terror, Bewilderment, Frustration, Despair
- “In this book we have shown how we escaped that place ourselves. But now you are thinking ‘Yes, I am willing to try. But does that mean that my life will become boring and joyless?’”
- “The age of miracles is now. Our own recovery proves that.”

01

A Vision for You

- “Our hope is that when this book is available to all the world’s alcoholic drinkers who have lost hope will find it, read it, and follow its suggestions.”
- “We are sure that many of them will get back on their feet and keep going. They will reach out to other sick people, and fellowships of Alcoholics Anonymous will begin appearing in each city and town, safe spaces for people who seek a way out.”
- The **happy** crowd inside (not gay)
- Transmit → Give

Note: all quotes from the PLBB are subject to minor change

01

And the Back

- Dr. Bob's story is also translated in the first person.
- Traditions and concepts also have explanations
- Tradition 8: "This tradition says that AA is a fellowship of recovering alcoholics who carry the AA message for free, however, our office may hire and pay workers."
- Spiritual experience is paraphrased from Herbert Spencer

01

Voting and What's Next

- After seven hours of discussion on Thursday, and another hour on Friday, the question was called
- We also discussed how to vote for two hours
- Vote: 91-38, substantial unanimity

- A Plain Language Big Book will be published
- More information in the summer, publication target date Fall 2024, depending on printing run and printing/paper availability
- Working title: *Plain Language Big Book: A Tool for Reading Alcoholics Anonymous*

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Pamphlets

02

Three Proposed Pamphlets

- For the unhoused alcoholic (Montana)
 - For the transgender alcoholic (Coastal Northern California)
 - For the Asian/Asian North American alcoholic (Southeast New York)
-
- Equitable Distribution of Workload
 - Unhoused alcoholic → Public Information
 - Transgender → Corrections
 - Asian/Asian North American → Grapevine

02

Unhoused Alcoholic

- Committee did not believe it would be an effective tool to carry the message
- Asked AA to explore other methods to better serve the unhoused population
- Floor action: Conference declined to consider

02

Transgender Alcoholic

- In my committee:
 - Discussion focused on:
 - Requested need and the current LGBTQ pamphlet
 - Cost of a pamphlet – and when it recoups the cost
 - Staff burnout
 - Committee unanimously approved... forwarded to Conference...
 - And Conference, after discussion, approved development

02

Asian Alcoholic

- Grapevine committee did not recommend the development of the pamphlet, citing staff burnout and cost of pamphlet production
- Floor action, citing this a large group of people with nearly no mention of them in our literature (a Grapevine article from 1980 was the first thing found using search engines)
- First vote: fails, but minority opinion resurrects, and a second vote swings 20 votes and a pamphlet will be developed

02

Other Pamphlets

- ‘Black in AA: Experience, Strength, and Hope’ – *updated*
- ‘Bridging the Gap’ – *updated*
- Minor editorial updates to several service pamphlets

02

Retired Pamphlets

- 'It Happened to Alice'
- 'What Happened to Joe'
- 'Too Young?' video project



AA Finances

03

2023 Audit Results

- The Board used an auditing firm ([BDO](#)), an agency that specializes in working with non-profit organizations)
- There are **NO** financial concerns from the auditors; AA's cooperation was "excellent"
- Some 'best practice' recommendations (which GSO has been amendable to)
- Humor: CPA was shocked with the level of questions (nearly 40 minutes) on his report; usually, it's no questions – entire Conference laughed

03

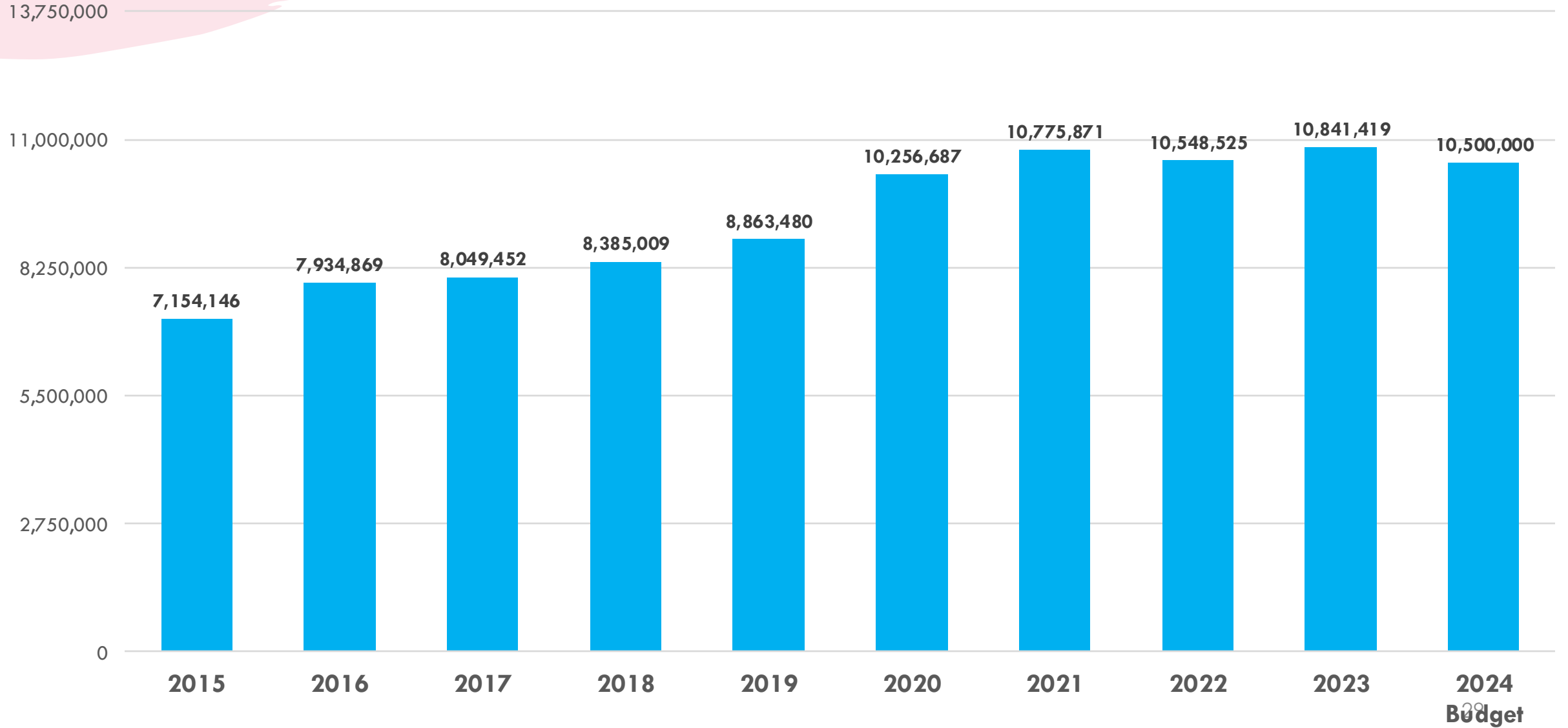
AAWS 2023 Highlights

- **7th Tradition:** \$10.84 million (up 2.8% from 2022 – new record!)
- **AAWS publishing profits:** \$6.76 million (up 38.2% from 2022)
- **Operating Expenses:** \$17.47 million (up 9.9% from 2022)
- Self-support covered 62% of operating expenses

- **Individual challenge number: \$6.43**
- **Group challenge number: \$157.28**
- All our bills are now paid (and on time) – there was a brief moment we were behind

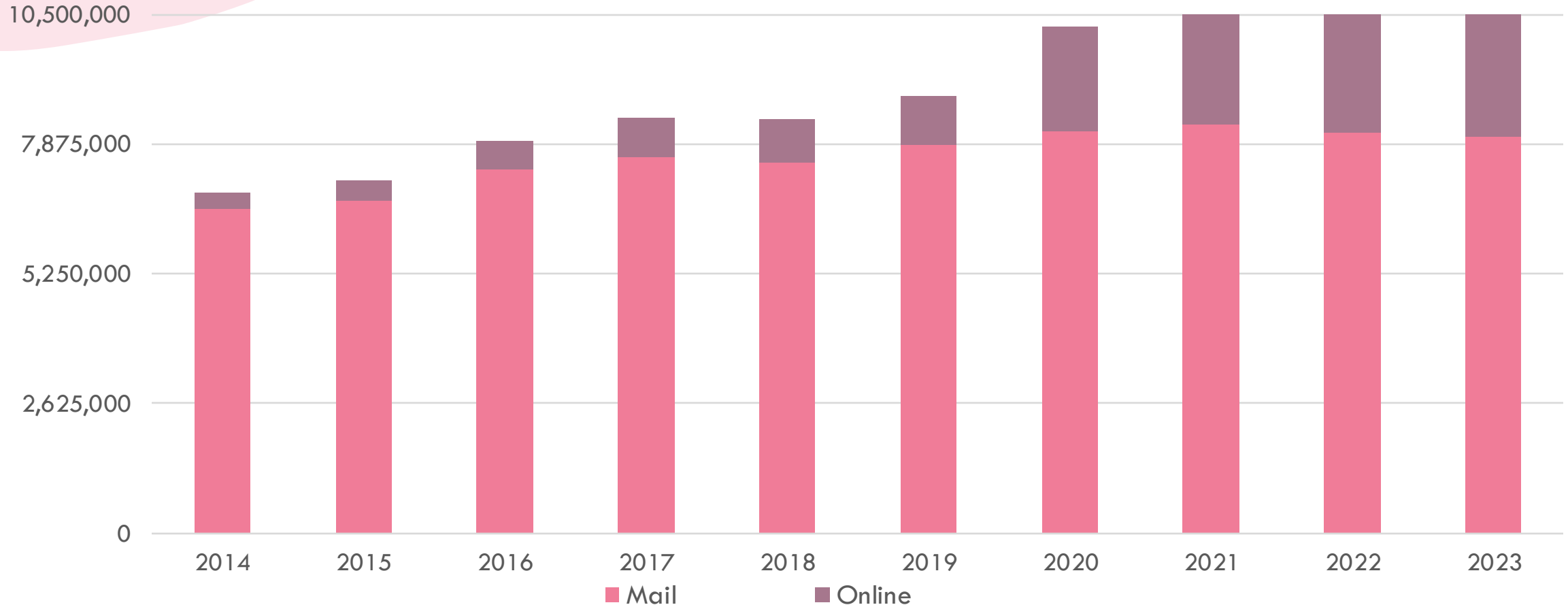
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7th Tradition Self Support Chart



03

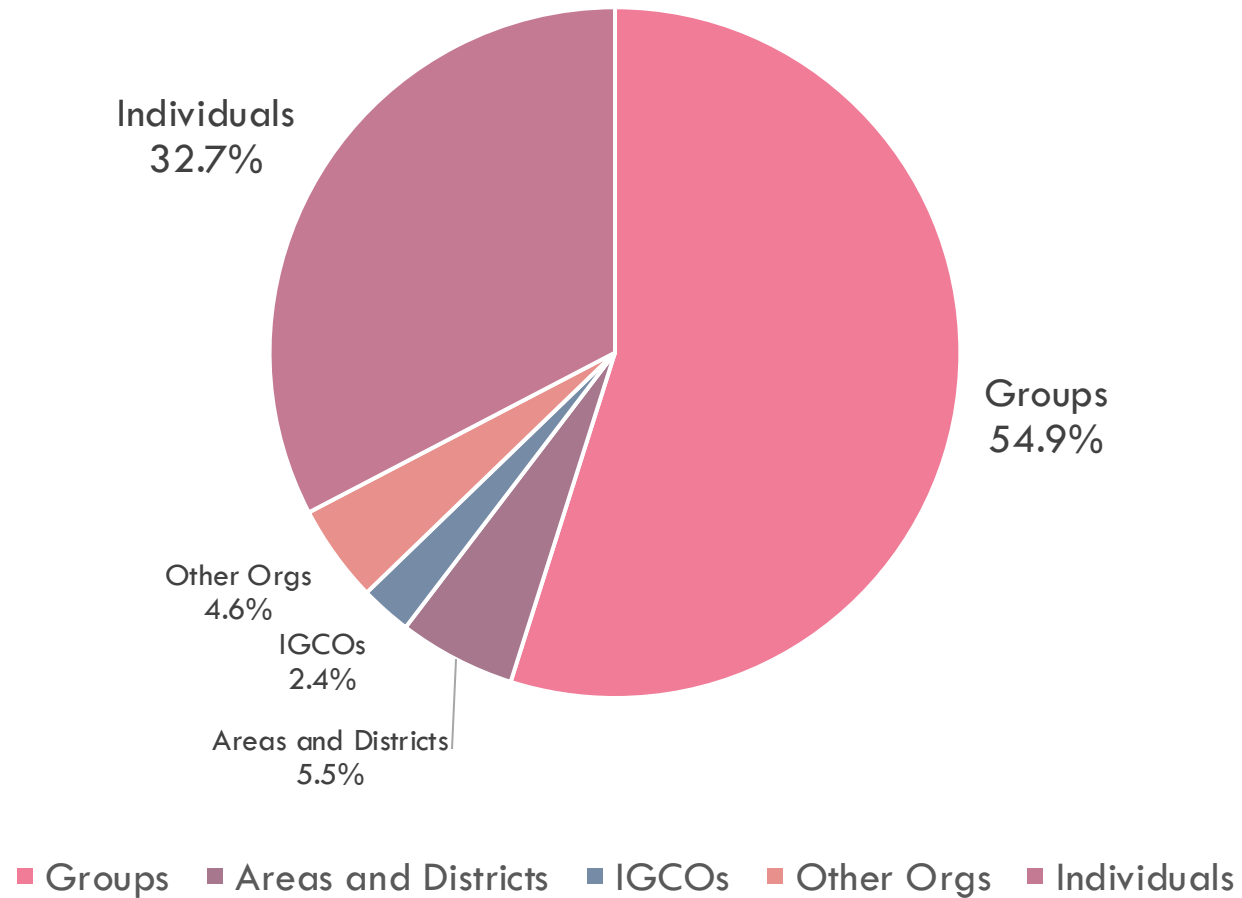
Growth of Online Contributions



A mail contribution costs \$5.60 to process. An online contribution costs \$2.93 to process, a \$2.67 savings. But they love the gratitude letters...

03

Type of Contributor



03

Contribution Statistics (2023)

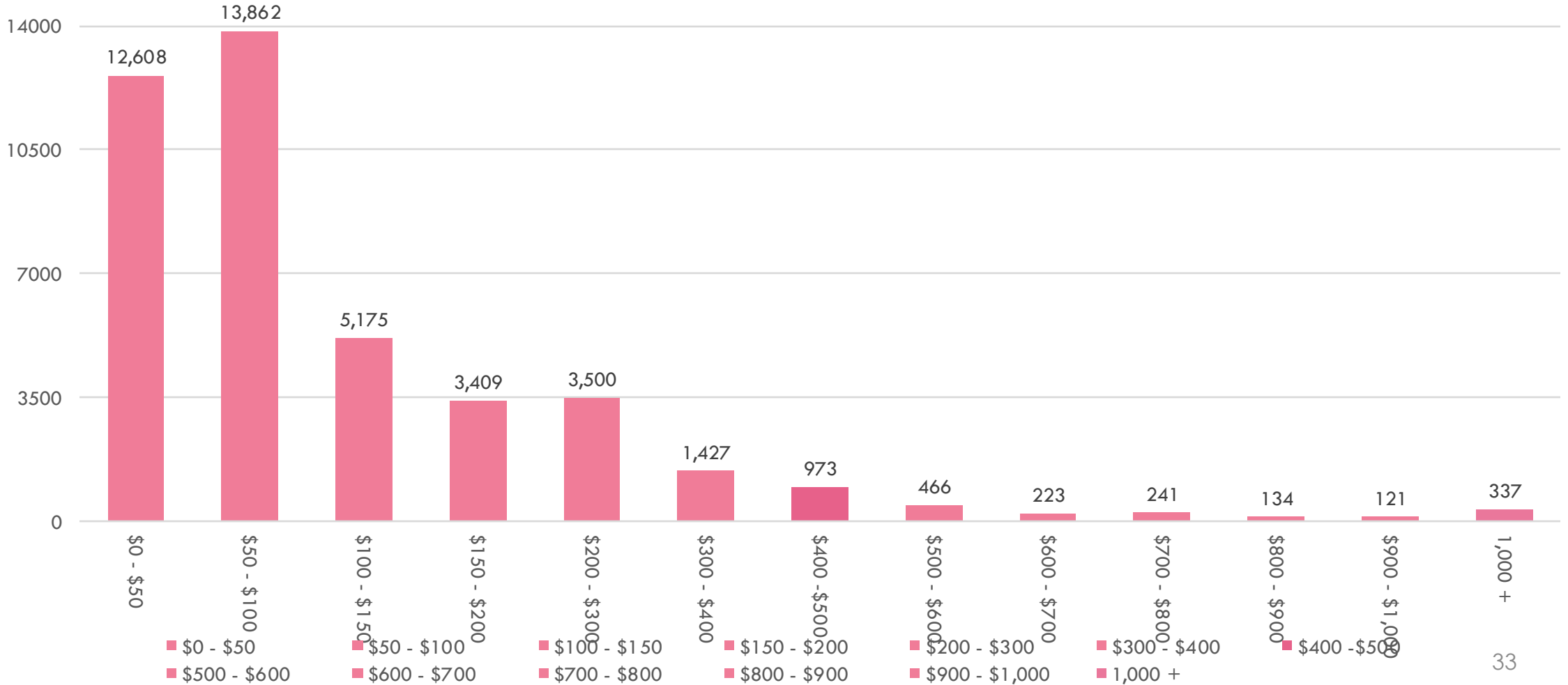
INDIVIDUALS	
7 th Tradition Self-Support Contributions	3,540,104
Average Contribution	129.88
Most Common Contribution	50.00
Number of Contributions	27,235
GROUPS	
7 th Tradition Self-Support Contributions	5,950,279
Number of Active Groups	57,222
Number of Groups Contributing	18,105
Percentage of Groups Contributing	31.64
Average Contributed by a Group During the Year	328.65

03

17500

\$ Value of Group Contributions

Number of Contributions

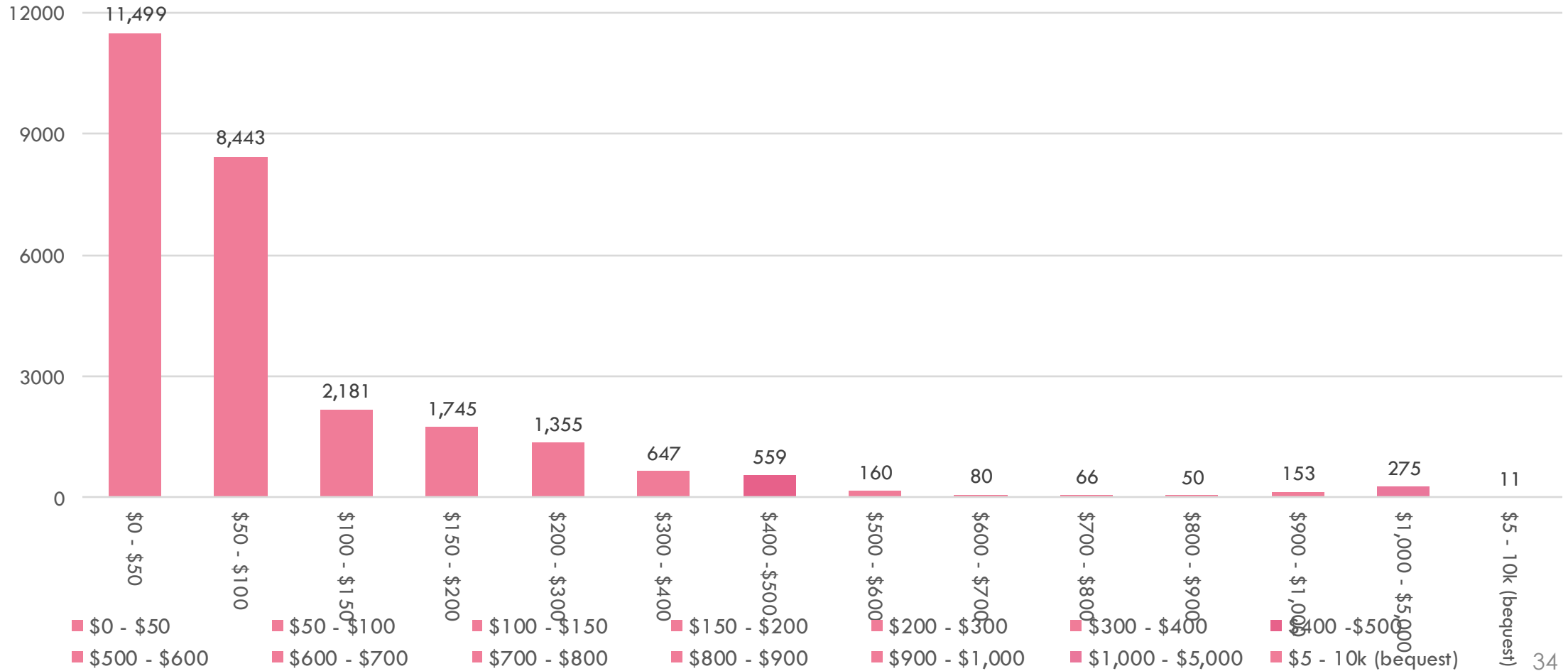


03

\$ Value of Ind. Contributions

15000

Number of Contributions



03

GSO Expenses Under Budget

- ◆ UNDER BUDGET CATEGORIES REPRESENT 90% OF TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSE

EXPENSE	ACTUAL	BUDGET	DIFFERENCE
Payroll and Benefits	10,349,012	10,561,688	(212,676)
Professional Fees	1,841,628	1,860,409	(18,781)
Printing, Postage, Supplies, and Subs	575,949	613,676	(37,727)
Data, Automation, & Website	573,591	642,844	(69,253)
Insurance	70,884	78,015	(7,131)
Travel & Meetings	2,147,709	2,170,916	(23,207)
Total Operating Expense	17,474,874	17,754,154	(279,280)

03

GSO Expenses Over Budget

- ❖ OVER BUDGET CATEGORIES REPRESENT 10% OF TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSE

EXPENSE	ACTUAL	BUDGET	DIFFERENCE
Payroll Taxes	\$ 692,343	\$ 659,745	\$ 32,598
Facility and Equipment	\$ 1,223,760	\$ 1,166,861	\$ 56,899

03

Grapevine 2023 Highlights

- GV/LV App launch: September 1, 2023
- Grapevine print income **declined 12%** in 2023
- Subscription app for online/complete/mobile **increased 72%**
- 2023 Grapevine results had significant investments – so operating loss of **\$888,465** – with a 5-year plan, Grapevine should be cash positive
- General Fund support of La Viña was up to **\$753,376** (up from \$636,604)
- La Viña circulation **decreased by 3%** (in 2022, it had increased)

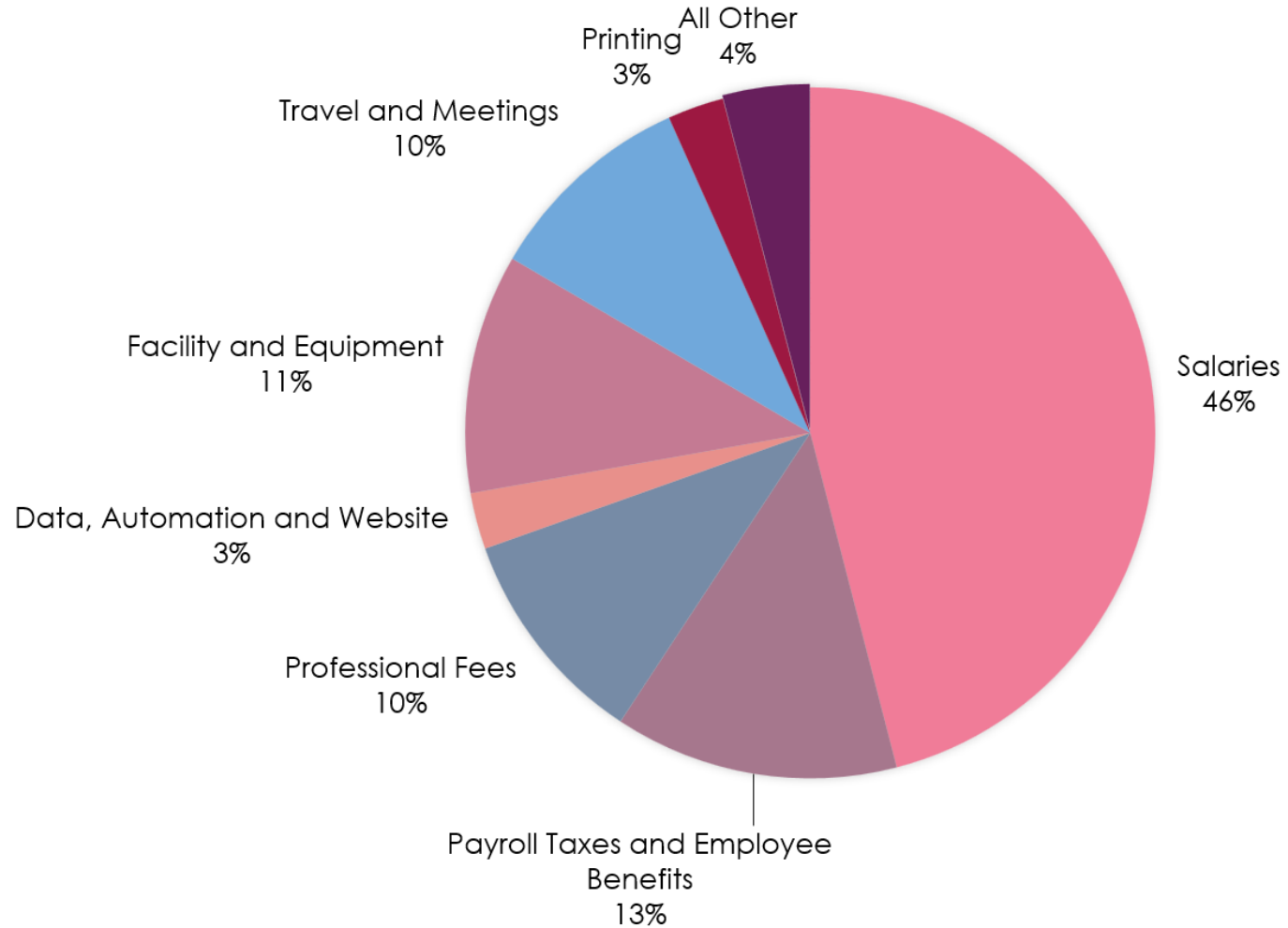
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Grapevine 2024 Budget

- Print subscriptions will continue to decline (another 2,200)
- Online/complete subscriptions likely to increase (by 1,500, to 4,625)
- App subscribers will increase to 10,069 (from 3,400 in 2023)
- La Viña will likely have some increased print subscriptions; app is not expected to increase
- Another expected deficit for 2024

03

Consolidated GV/GSO Expenses



03

The Reserve Fund

- The GSB Prudent Reserve is different than a home group reserve
- The reserve fund covers much more
- The 1967 Conference issued an advisory action that the Board use the reserve fund for “whatever purpose the Board may authorize.”
- That could include operating deficits of AAWS or Grapevine, periodic expenditures, extraordinary expenses outside of ‘normal’ operations.

03

The Reserve Fund

- Maximum is 12 months (1977 Advisory Action); a 1981 advisory action said no lower limit, though a nine-month lower limit appears in finance committee reports GSB adopted a **9-to-12-month** policy in 2022
- We are headed to “normal times...” we have a rainy-day fund but it’s been storming for years.
- We do wish it was at 9 months but its not right now. It’s expected to be around 6.82 months at end of December this year.

03

Additional Financial Information

- Maximum contribution for individuals increased to \$7,500/year
- Supplemental financial reporting on services and projects, including new literature, software, apps, website, maintenance, and international services (reporting be done quarterly); revenue for items we sell, drawdowns from the prudent reserve, and long-term costs (like for server fees)
- Changes to the pamphlet *Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix* to clarify where contributions go
- Clarify regarding contributions vs. donations

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Works in Progress

04

Pending Literature Items

- Fourth Edition of *Alcohólicos Anónimos*
- Fifth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*

- ‘The Twelve Steps Illustrated’ update
- ‘AA for the Native North American’ update
- ‘Do You Think You’re Different?’ update



The Founder's Writings

05

The Founder's Writings

- Historic changes to our Founder's writings
- Defining the Founder's writings
- Confusion within the Fellowship about what was being asked
- There was no need for a policy regarding changes to the founders' writings. They noted that current Conference procedures provide a process wherein future proposals for changes can be considered by the group conscience, negating the need for a mandated policy.

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Meeting Guide App

06

History of the App

- Launched in 2015 by a web developer based in District 04; listed meetings in Austin, Mesa (Arizona), Oakland, Philadelphia, Portland (Oregon), San Francisco, and Santa Clara County
- Added additional intergroups over time
- Given to AAWS in 2018; updated version released in 2019, with additional updates and a “What’s New” section

06

Potential App Updates

- PI Committee requested:
 - Adding literature to Meeting Guide App
 - Listing online meetings not by location in Meeting Guide App
 - Making Seventh Tradition contributions through the Meeting Guide App
 - Clarifying that the location of a meeting doesn't mean affiliation on the Meeting Guide App

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Our Online Presence

07

History of the AA Website

- GSO launched website on December 22, 1995
- By 1998, GSO shared the experience of computer-savvy members by issuing a list of FAQ for AA websites
- In 2000, 2006, and 2014, aa.org underwent major expansions
- PI Committee requested this year that we explore chat functionality on the AA website
- Young Video project to post on website soon

07

AlcoholicsAnonymous.com

- History: Past conversations, tried to buy it, etc.
- Discussed at Conference in 2023
- Under the direction of the General Manager, AA legal counsel approached the owners of [AlcoholicsAnonymous.com](https://www.alcoholicsanonymous.com)
- Sought legal counsel, got different opinions, and signed settlement agreement; no cost to AA
- AA will take ownership effective July 31; will redirect to aa.org

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Board Inventory

08

General Service Board Inventory

- Last year, the Conference asked the Board to undertake an inventory. This was a result of conversation stemming from the resignation of the previous chair of the Board.
- A group of Conference members started developing questions for the inventory, and an outside facilitator was selected. The inventory questions were distributed to Board members, who held their inventory on January 26, 2024.
- The inventory consisted of 23 questions, split into five breakout groups, who were asked to report back, followed by feedback and discussion before prioritizing the action items identified.

08

Inventory Highlights

- 2023 saw unprecedented attacks on individuals and on the Board
- We make decisions as a Board, not as individuals. We support all of our Board when controversy arises from those decisions
- With limited information coming from the Board, social media platforms filled the void.
- The board did not demonstrate an understanding of the urgency for more detailed information, did not communicate with one voice, and there was mistrust.

08

Inventory Highlights

- Improve communication (standard, consistent messaging); manage workflow to match the time available; focus on oversight rather than operations; leadership training for board servants; include all perspectives in discussion.
- There should only be **ONE VOICE** that reflects the group conscience; the minority opinion was provided an opportunity to be heard. Promptly and clearly communicate. Explain why some information may not be communicated (responsibility, legal matters, privacy)

08

Inventory Highlights

- Social media creates haves and have nots. These online groups are not the full fellowship. It does not help with consistent messaging. Need to move faster, perhaps regionals could work together to give one report and perhaps add a narrative. Faster and more consistent reporting. Reporting should go through the structure, not social media.
- We fail in our responsibility by accepting unacceptable conduct, either by participating in it or saying nothing.

08

What's Next?

- Acknowledgment that there was some pain – notably for some Board members – in what had happened, and the gossip/innuendo within the Fellowship.
- Profound faith within the structure and the principles.
- When something goes wrong, a principle is missing... what has happened this year is our confidence is restored.
- The Board was very positive about the incoming Chair.

08

What's Next?

- The General Service Board offers sincere apology for the damage the poor communication (regarding the resignation of the former Chair of the Board) has caused. The Board is now committed to changing how they communicate.
- **Some already-made changes:**
Virtual sharing sessions, quarterly financial reporting, updating Code of Conduct, Whistleblower Policy, and Confidentiality policy
- **Upcoming:**
Board retreat, workload management, and a cross-functional group of Conference members to identify improvements in our communication and reporting between the Board and the Conference members

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The International Convention

09

2025 International Convention

- Theme: 90 Years: Language of the Heart
- Big meetings Friday, Saturday, and Sunday
- 750 speakers in 200 meetings
- Information posted, more in August, and registration opens in September 2024; mailed registration will be sent out in August (but won't open until September)
- **Can't get housing until you register**

09

2025 International Convention

- Cost: \$160 (starting in September); increases to \$185 a few months later through on-site registration
- Partial virtual programming will be available; more details as they become available, but it will require registration (and payment); likely to be \$35 two-day, eight-session virtual program of the International
- Registration is required
- More info on aa.org
- 2030 St. Louis Missouri – New declaration may be adopted

09

Closing Prayers

- Committee recommended five options to close the Big Meetings at the International:
 - Serenity Prayer
 - Responsibility Statement
 - Declaration of Unity
 - Third Step Prayer
 - Seventh Step Prayer
 - A Moment of Silence added as 6th option (amendment)
- A motion to amend the motion to add the Lord's Prayer failed; discussion centered on the disunity of using religious prayers in a non-religious program and Canadian Human Rights Act Section 2.a



The Service Manual

10

New Service Manual

- Recommended Edits to the Service Manual:
 - Improving readability for color-blind members
 - Edits regarding the Board's Custodial Oversight
 - The order of chapters in the Service Manual
 - Footnote about polling between the annual meetings of the Conference
 - That items receiving a simple majority at the Conference be included in the Final Conference Report