



The A.K. Rice Institute

for the Study of Social System

UPDATE FROM THE PRESIDENT

March 30, 2010

Dear Group Relations Colleagues,

I'm pleased to report that AKRI has accomplished a very smooth presidential transition and that with minimal redecorating and carpet cleaning the presidential palace is now fully occupied.

The board has just completed a strategic planning retreat in Baltimore which was for me (and I believe others) a very powerful and hopeful experience. It perhaps carries significance that the retreat was occurring on the weekend that saw the vernal equinox, the passage of the healthcare bill and March madness. I see these three events in a metaphorical way as excellent reflections of our process, accomplishments and challenges at the retreat. In the coming weeks and months I will provide more details in what I hope will be regular emails. Perhaps you can send me your associations to these three milestones.

Executive Summary:

- The board has just completed a strategic planning retreat in Baltimore
- We reviewed results of the membership survey and follow up calls
- AKRI needs to expand its economic base and sources of revenue
- We are creating a **Financial Sustainability Plan**
- There are limits to what a mostly volunteer organization can expect to accomplish
- The board affirms the strong sense of community felt by people who are passionate about group relations often as a result of powerful conference experiences.
- We do not believe that AKRI exists primarily as a holding environment for Group Relations devotees however our other external purposes cannot be achieved unless our members have a personal stake in AKRI and continue to provide their time and money towards our educational mission.
- We have identified 7 common themes (listed below in the full text section)

We are seeking your active participation in the future of AKRI.

- Help us recruit members to the [International Conference in June](#)
 - Join us at the 40th Anniversary [Symposium in October](#)
 - Invite friends and colleagues to [join AKRI](#)
 - Take on a leadership position in AKRI
 - Connect us to your home organizations and professional association
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Overview: the board began to digest the results of the membership survey and follow up calls completed by board members. We received 92 online responses to the survey - an extraordinary 50% of last year's membership. In addition to the surveys we also considered input from the affiliate presidents and representatives. Some affiliates are struggling and a few have chosen to discontinue a formal relationship with AKRI.

Economic realities: Our retreat was focused on holding both our most optimistic aspirations along with a realistic appraisal of our economic reality which is: that AKRI needs to expand its economic base and sources of revenue beyond dues and the unpredictable income generated from the symposium, the International Conference (formerly the Leadership Institute), Belgirate and voluntary contributions. In response we are creating a **Financial Sustainability Plan**. This plan will integrate our current revenue elements with a number of new initiatives and a clearer statement of our Value Proposition. Our financial condition reflects the current external economic conditions and the "market" speaking to us about the *perceived* value of what we offer reflected in part by low (non university based) conference attendance and by declining membership in AKRI and affiliates as an indirect consequence.

Our Resources: In addition to funds needed to maintain our very basic infrastructure (primarily our fulltime program officer and website), we explored the implications of depending on very busy volunteers to accomplish the lion's share of our work. This applies to all parts of our organization including the affiliates. We were clear that whatever new or expanded programs that we could imagine that there needed to be a realistic sense of sustainability, accountability and benchmarks to track progress.

Is it a breath mint or a candy mint? Some of you may remember the Certs breath freshener TV Commercial with this tag line which had the response "It's two,two,two mints in one." Based on our survey data, it seems that we may in fact be two mints in one. The board affirms the strong sense of community felt by people who are passionate about group relations often as a result of powerful conference experiences. We do not believe that AKRI exists primarily as a holding environment for Group Relations devotees but our other external purposes cannot be achieved unless our members have a personal stake in AKRI and continue to provide their time and money towards our educational mission. The board examined what elements would support our financial stability plan and reflect what we learned from members. There were common themes which summarized are:

1. **This is a community with a long and very complex history.**
2. **Personal relationships are an important part of why people get and stay involved.**
3. **Splits and fights seem to be an overly dominant part of our culture, with little capacity to examine rather than enact them.**
4. **Conferences are our "core technology"**
5. **There is a strong desire to introduce our work to a wider audience.**
6. **There are many untapped opportunities for partnership and collaboration in the public, private and educational sectors. These collaborations can enliven our theory, our practice, our visibility and our bottom line.**
7. **We are rather insular and may be missing the opportunity to connect with other national and international groups doing similar or complimentary work.**

As we develop our plan we will provide opportunities for interaction and feedback.

AKRI historic context: Examining our history, one does not need to look too far to uncover many of the themes listed above. What may be different is that we are now 40 years old and there is a developmental process at work as well as external conditions that remind us of our mortality and perhaps even our irrelevance. AKRI finds itself in a very different world than that which enthusiastically embraced Group Relations in the 1970's. The concept of the unconscious is ubiquitous as if its significance has been appreciated and applied in a meaningful way. We all know that this is not the case and at a time when the stakes are very high it is particularly frustrating (but not surprising) that our influence has so significantly waned.

Our Invitation: We are seeking your active participation in the future of AKRI.

- **Help us recruit members to the [International Conference in June](#) "Knowing the Other and Transforming Our Work."**
- **Join us at the 40th Anniversary [Symposium in October](#)**
- **Invite friends and colleagues to [join AKRI](#)**
- **Take on a leadership position in AKRI**
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Stay tuned, more to come....

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President