



2006-2008 Fellowship Issue Discussions

The last time we distributed the Issue Discussion Topics in *The NA Way Magazine*, more members seemed to know about and discuss the topics—so we are trying it again. These discussions are giving many of us new ways to talk together about the things we care about in NA. The theme for this cycle's Issue Discussion Topics is “It's All About Carrying the Message,” and we believe that this discussion process is a part of how we will improve our ability to more effectively carry NA's message.

Having Fellowship Issue Discussions

These fellowshipwide discussions give you a chance to talk about the things that affect your local NA communities. There is tremendous value in talking to each other rather than only coming together for motions and business. Identifying common challenges and sharing ideas about how to address those challenges have become an invaluable part of these discussions. These discussions also give us a chance to gather your input about what you need to carry the message in your local communities. By the end of the next two years, our discussions can help all of us hear a common story about the issues affecting us most. Your input will help us know what tools and resources you need, what is working in your local groups, and what you are still struggling with. Your input will also help shape the discussions we have at the World Service Conference in 2008. We can only move forward with our efforts to carry NA's message with your help. The new discussion topics come out of the discussions we've been having the past two years, and it is our hope that these new topics will continue to provide us all with a chance to gain new awareness, find solutions, and talk together about how to improve the ways we carry NA's message.



Go to www.na.org/discussion_boards.htm for all the latest info on Issue Discussion Topics, and participate in Online Issue Discussion Bulletin Boards!

There will be session profiles to help with facilitating these discussions and electronic forms to submit information; both will be available at www.na.org. These tools are routinely updated, so be sure to check the website for new information.

The New Issue Discussion Topics and Where They Came From

**“Building Strong Home Groups”
and “Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?”**

Our discussions about a group's *Atmosphere of Recovery* began in 2002. We finished that first round of discussion with a great sense of the importance of this topic, but no tangible conclusions. The fellowship then asked that we continue our discussions about an atmosphere of recovery in the 2004-2006 conference cycle. We asked members to comment on what makes NA groups attractive and strong. The need to take personal responsibility for unity in NA meetings and the role sponsors play in leading by example were mentioned as crucial in creating an atmosphere of recovery. Participants also offered solutions that focused on the need for tools and guidance to help strengthen groups (strong meeting formats, tools for members at the group level, and recovery literature to strengthen a group).

Because of what we heard from these discussions, world services is planning to develop basic tools to support members in local groups. This list includes:

- ◆ updateable materials that cover group trusted servant roles and responsibilities and how to carry them out
- ◆ discussion tools for running certain types of meetings
- ◆ information about creating a safe environment at meetings that addresses issues like medication, disruptive behavior, etc.

We also asked members to look at what local groups are already successfully doing to create an atmosphere of recovery and carry NA's message. Conversely, we asked what happens when we aren't able to create an atmosphere that is attractive and welcoming in our groups. From these questions, two important themes emerged: first, the need to find ways to preserve and build upon our existing strengths. This is where the topic of *Building Strong Home Groups* came from. This new topic is meant to allow members to take a more conscious look at what we do that works and how we might build upon and improve those efforts.

Building Strong Home Groups

As described above, the conversations we've had over the past four years about a group's atmosphere of recovery have reinforced the need to build on our existing strengths. We know that there is a need for basic tools at the group level, but the importance of strong home groups really seems to resonate with what members are actually doing to carry NA's message. These discussion questions at the end of this piece ask us to take a closer look at what we are already doing and how we could possibly do it better. Having a conversation about what a strong home group means to you, how you are building strong home groups, and how those groups are functioning can only help us better carry NA's message.

The second theme to emerge was a need to take a further look at *Who Is Missing from Our Meetings* and how to reach them. We know we do a good job of creating an attractive atmosphere, but sometimes that atmosphere is not one that appeals to a variety of people. We heard similar input—that we could do a better job of helping addicts identify when they first come to NA—from professionals during the Public Relations Roundtable. In the discussions we've already had about who is missing, we have identified several groups of addicts:

- ◆ racial and ethnic groups (Asian Americans and Native Americans were repeatedly mentioned as specific examples of who is missing from local groups in the USA)
- ◆ those from various language groups
- ◆ both younger and older people in the community
- ◆ professionals
- ◆ members in NA service and members with cleantime

World services is trying to take the first steps to address this issue through the development of targeted literature and holding common needs meetings at the world convention. Our current list of targeted literature includes:

- ◆ youth and recovery
- ◆ medication and recovery
- ◆ the benefits of NA service in personal recovery
- ◆ the spiritual development of members with longer clean time, and how to continue to engage them in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous
- ◆ older members and recovery

- ◆ issues regarding gender.

All of these efforts are only a start and depend on local efforts to make any real difference. There cannot be any issue more important to us, as a fellowship, than what a person finds when they walk into an NA meeting. We hope that this topic of who is missing from meetings will only work to strengthen the ways we carry NA's message.

Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?

The theme of this cycle's Issue Discussion Topics is *It's All About Carrying the Message*, and asking ourselves who is not getting NA's message seems to be a necessary question. Our discussions about a group's atmosphere of recovery already identified the need to reach people from various racial and ethnic groups, as well as young people, professionals, and people with clean time, but how can we do this? And how can we begin an ongoing discussion about how to reach more people in our communities who aren't in our meetings? The discussion questions for this topic focus on ways groups can begin this discussion and start addressing this important aspect of the way we carry NA's message.

"Our Service System"

We proposed the topic of *Infrastructure* in 2004 because of the input we continually heard from members, groups, areas, and regions about the challenges they were having in providing services to their local communities. These challenges seemed to be a result of committees trying to operate in a service structure that doesn't necessarily allow for things such as the ability to easily communicate and cooperate within that structure. We asked members to first look at what is working in the service structure, in local groups, and with individual members. The solutions identified seemed to point to the need for our service structure to operate in a more cooperative and efficient fashion. The goals of an area service committee, for example, were not listed as the problem. The problems that seemed to be challenging local service efforts were subcommittees duplicating service efforts (e.g., three different people, who haven't talked to each other, responding to a call from a local high school) or members volunteering for commitments and then becoming so frustrated and overwhelmed that they leave those commitments after receiving no support or training.

The next step in these discussions really started to ask members to examine the system in place for carrying NA's message. We asked members to think about whether or not the current service structure in their local NA community is best suited to carrying the message, and what about the current structure could be better suited to carrying the message. Again, it became clear that our challenge is not in clarifying the goal of our service efforts; it's in how we reach that goal. Members reiterated this by listing the need for more attractive service meetings, stronger groups, frequent inventories, stronger communication, open-mindedness, and knowledge of the traditions and concepts.

Most of us in Narcotics Anonymous are passionate about carrying NA's message to suffering addicts. What we seem to need is guidance about how to focus that passion so that our service efforts can be more productive, creative, and attractive. This is where the topic of *Our Service System* came from. There seemed to be a need to have a "holistic discussion" about how the various "levels" of service (groups, areas, regions, and zones) relate to each other, the ways in which subcommittees operate within an area, and how neighboring areas communicate and cooperate with each other. The *Area Planning Tool*, presented with the *Public Relations Handbook*, is one way world services has tried to help areas address this need for more effective planning and coordination of services. Yet, this tool cannot be useful without local discussions about how we can better work together to carry NA's message.

Our Service System

The discussion questions for this topic focus on the need to take a closer and more holistic look at our service system. The discussion we had about our infrastructure helped us identify some of the systemic problems we face when trying to provide services. We know from our previous discussion that the goal of local service efforts is not the problem—for the most part, all of us in our local service committees are striving to carry NA's message. Yet, how we reach that goal continues to be a struggle. This topic gives us a chance to hear your voice about what world services can create to support your efforts to carry NA's message. These questions also give you a chance to focus on how we can all work together to improve the ways we provide services.

Your Discussion Sessions

The questions included here are meant to encourage and support your discussions. You may decide to try to answer all of the questions, or you may pick only a few questions for your discussion. No matter how you decide to discuss these topics, we encourage you to try using small groups. Included here are copies of *Suggested Ground Rules* and *Brainstorming Guidelines* to support your small-group discussions. The goal is to share ideas and experiences in a supportive environment.

It's a good idea to ask one person to facilitate the group. That person can give everyone a fair opportunity to speak (keeping time, if necessary). The facilitator can also plan how much time will be allotted for each set of questions and can work to keep the discussions going.

Following is a list of materials that may be useful for a small-group discussion session:

- ◆ copies of *Suggested Ground Rules* and *Brainstorming Guidelines* for all participants
- ◆ a large flip-chart, Post-it pad of paper, white board, or chalkboard
- ◆ markers or chalk
- ◆ clock or stopwatch to keep time
- ◆ a room set up with tables or groups of chairs where small groups can sit together

Be creative! Your discussions could take place at your home group's business meeting, or more informally with a group of members after a meeting. An area, region, or zone could plan a special workshop during, before, or after its regularly scheduled meeting. An NA community could also plan a learning day or workshop, or use the discussion questions as topics for a local convention workshop.

We want to hear about your discussion!

Send your results to world services at:

World Board c/o NAWS, Inc.

19737 Nordhoff Place

Chatsworth, CA 91311 USA

Fax: 818.700.0700 or Email: WorldBoard@na.org

“Leadership” and “Our Public Image”

There were two other important discussions that took place these last two years. The results of the discussions we had about Leadership and Our Public Image are recapped at the end of this piece.

2006-2008 Issue Discussion Topics

IT'S ALL ABOUT **CARRYING** THE MESSAGE

Our vision is 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...*

Building Strong Home Groups

1. What do you personally see as the difference between a home group, a group, and a meeting? Is there a difference in your responsibility or behavior with each of these?
2. What are the benefits of a strong home group (to you, to newcomers, and to other members)?
3. In what ways do strong home groups contribute to our common welfare? How does a home group help you to gain a sense of belonging and purpose?
4. How does participation at a home group teach you how to be of service in NA? How do home groups provide or encourage a foundation for leadership?
5. How do we build strong home groups and what do we need to do to encourage members to join a home group?
6. What are things you can do to keep meetings open, attractive, and welcoming? Does your group encourage and welcome this responsibility? If so, how?
7. How does the principle of "you have to give it away to keep it" apply to your personal contributions?

*Narcotics Anonymous has universal recognition and respect
as a viable program of recovery...*

Who Is Missing from Our Meetings and Why?

8. Does your group identify who is missing from its meetings and discuss its responsibility to carry the message?
9. How can groups help to keep both newcomers and experienced members fully participating in meetings and engaged in the NA program?
10. What actions can be taken to ensure that members and potential members know that our meetings exist? How can we improve these efforts?
11. How can groups and areas work together to help in these efforts? How can local service efforts be targeted to reach those missing from our meetings?

NA communities worldwide and NA World Services work together in a spirit of unity and cooperation to carry our message of recovery...

Our Service System

12. In what ways can we bring recovery principles into our service meetings?
13. How can our current service system better allow for new ideas and creative approaches? In what ways can we improve relationships and communication with other service bodies (committee to committee, area to area, area to region, region to area, zone or world services, etc.)?
14. What are some ways we can evaluate our service efforts? What value is there in following up on these efforts? How can we improve our follow-up efforts?
15. What aspects of the system may need changing? What steps can be taken to help build a more productive and responsive service structure?
16. Who is missing from our service structure? How can we better cultivate, support, and encourage leadership within the service structure? How can we help to get people the information, tools, and support they need to be successful in their service efforts?
17. How can NA communities expand their resources (members, tools, and finances) and better use those resources? How do your group contributions help to carry the message at all levels of the service structure?
18. How can we make service more interesting, stimulating, and rewarding? And perhaps even fun?





BRAINSTORMING GUIDELINES

One good idea leads to another... good idea.

"No" and "can't" do not exist.

Creativity has no limits.

Be part of—participate.

Think fast, analyze later...
judging, evaluating, and criticizing
are not brainstorming.

And above all...

HAVE FUN!



SUGGESTED GROUND RULES

Stay OPEN-MINDED.

LISTEN and SHARE the time.

Remember TO PLAY WELL with others.

Don't forget WHY we're here!

STAY FOCUSED on the subject at hand.

Lively CONVERSATION is productive.

TO AGREE AND TO DISAGREE...that is the process!

One more time—AVOID REPETITION.

It's important to START and STOP on time.

AND

NO KICKING, SCRATCHING, OR BITING ALLOWED...!



Leadership and Our Public Image

Although the discussions we had these past two years about *Leadership* and *Our Public Image* don't directly lead into new discussions topics, a review of what we heard and an outline of the discussions' outcomes are a valuable piece of the discussions process.

We spent a good deal of time these last two years talking about *Leadership*. We repeatedly heard about the challenge of attracting members to service. We heard comments such as “a lack of trusted servants,” “no one wants to be of service,” and “how do we get members to be willing to be of service?” The topic of leadership stemmed from this desire to get members involved, and it made sense that creating and maintaining ways to develop leadership in our local services is crucial to attracting members to service (which, in turn, helps us more effectively carry NA's message). During our initial fellowship discussions about leadership, NA members identified typical characteristics of a successful leader in NA:

- ◆ humility, willingness and love (including things such as compassion, empathy, understanding)
- ◆ leading by example
- ◆ strength and courage
- ◆ knowledge and vision
- ◆ ability to motivate others
- ◆ skill at interacting with others (listens well, is receptive, etc.)
- ◆ knows when to ask for help
- ◆ flexible and open-minded, not judgmental
- ◆ ability to make decisions
- ◆ reliable, honest, and operates with integrity

In addition to identifying leadership characteristics, members began discussing avenues for leadership development and cultivation in Narcotics Anonymous. Several commonly identified approaches for development were:

- ◆ sponsorship and mentoring
- ◆ leading by example
- ◆ sharing the positive side of service,
- ◆ creating opportunities to be of service
- ◆ recruiting members for specific service positions

Members also noted that recognition—offering praise for service well done and providing thanks for being of service—is an important factor. Service may have its own rewards, but acknowledging efforts seems to foster goodwill. Goodwill may help stem the perceived close-minded, apathetic tide that appears to be eroding our services.

In order to focus our discussions on how to move toward helping trusted servants become more successful leaders, we next asked members to discuss what we can do as a fellowship to better match people with positions. Listed below are some of the common responses:

- ◆ identify responsibilities and tasks of positions
- ◆ identify, cultivate, and train members to fill positions
- ◆ do not compromise requirements to fill the positions
- ◆ use forms to identify skills
- ◆ sponsorship

Once we identified characteristics associated with leadership, avenues for matching trusted servants to positions, and approaches for leadership development, we asked members to identify the steps we can take to help trusted servants be more successful through mentoring, training, and orientation. Members responded with the following solutions:

- ◆ Encourage participation before commitment
- ◆ solicit people for positions
- ◆ send trusted servants to workshops and learning days
- ◆ have a clear, written definition of duties

self**L**essness
 int**E**grity
 account**A**bility
 spiritual **D**epth
 hon**E**sty
 trustwo**R**thiness
 willingne**S**s
Humility
 fa**I**th
 o**P**en-mindednes

- ◇ training materials
- ◇ overlap terms of service positions
- ◇ help members find their service “niche”
- ◇ use experienced members as a resource

All discussions identified leadership as an action that includes principles such as giving, inspiring, listening, and educating. Leaders are members willing to accept these responsibilities and be models for others. It seems apparent from these fellowshipwide discussions that we all agree there is value in leadership. We need to attract members to service. We must also provide the resources and training members need in order to be successful in service. Without strong leadership for our services in NA, we will not be able to attract members to recovery. We know that we want every addict to be able to experience the freedom we have found in NA.

Those of us involved in world services also spent time discussing leadership. From the fellowship’s leadership discussions and from our own discussions, we found that there is a lack of a systemic approach to helping and encouraging leaders. A more systemic approach to leadership, or what we are calling a *Leadership Development System*, is one outcome of all of these leadership discussions. We recognize that sponsors often encourage their sponsees to be of service, and we know how important that is in developing leaders in NA. This is, however, only the beginning of leadership development. There seems to be a real need for a systematic and practical path to cultivating leaders in all levels of NA service. We also recognize that every member will not pass through each level, nor should they. Service in NA is an unselfish act of giving back to the fellowship after receiving the gift of recovery, and the ways in which members contribute with their service involvement is a personal decision. However, our discussions highlighted the need to ensure that all members’ potential and contribution can be fully realized. We felt that this can be accomplished through leadership cultivation and development. At world services, we will be spending time these upcoming two years taking the next steps to develop a system that encourages and cultivates leaders in Narcotics Anonymous.

Our discussions about *Our Public Image* initially came as a result of the roundtable conversations we had with professionals who interact with addicts. We learned that our ability to effectively carry the message of recovery is hampered by our public image—how we are perceived by society.

To better understand how we are viewed, we asked members to take a step back and think about NA from the perspective of someone who is not an NA member. What is the image that we are projecting to someone who is approaching and interacting with NA for the first time? Many of the commonly reported perceptions were similar to what we heard from the Public Relations Roundtables:

- ◇ NA is for heroin addicts and/or criminals
- ◇ NA meetings are not safe for young women
- ◇ NA has no long-term recovery
- ◇ NA *has* no public image, and what we do still remains a secret to the public
- ◇ the judicial system seems to have a positive perception of NA, based on their willingness to send potential members to NA meetings

These discussions also identified that a positive public image begins with members accepting personal responsibility. Granted, we cannot change our members’ behavior and attitude, but we can instill a sense of personal responsibility and inform our members that their individual behaviors affect NA’s public image and potential members’ ability to experience the message of recovery. Making our services more responsive, illustrating long-term recovery in NA, and treating our meeting facilities with more respect were identified as crucial points to creating a positive public image. Members also discussed ways to take personal responsibility for NA’s public image and ways in which service bodies can take responsibility for NA’s public image.

The *Public Relations Handbook* is one way we are trying to address the issues raised in these discussions. We hope that this handbook will be a vehicle for members to discuss some practical solutions to the ways our services can work together to create a more positive public image for Narcotics Anonymous. The implementation of the *Public Relations Handbook* is another way we are hoping to address the issues raised in these discussions. By “implementation” we mean ways we can bring the handbook to life for members in local NA communities. New PSAs and training videos, training throughout the fellowship, and resources that support the ideas discussed in the *Public Relations Handbook* are some of the ways we are hoping to do this. Again, these tools can only be successful with the involvement and enthusiasm of local members.