

The N.A. group

A GUIDE TO SERVICE IN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

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1 Introduction

2 Narcotics Anonymous groups are self-governing (the Twelve Traditions use the
3 word *autonomous*). N.A.'s Service Charter reinforces that idea: "In the conduct of
4 its own affairs, the group is responsible to no authority other than its own
5 conscience." So what we offer here is not a "rule book," but the shared experience of
6 how many of our groups have met with success in conducting meetings and tending
7 to business. Newer members may find this chapter helps them understand who does
8 what to keep the group going, and how to help. For more experienced members, it
9 may lend some perspective to their group involvement. But no matter how much
10 information we pack into this chapter, you're still going to find that the best source
11 of guidance for your group is in your group itself.

12 There is no one right way to do things in Narcotics Anonymous. And just as all of
13 us have our own individual personalities, so will your group develop its own identity
14 and its own way of doing things. The particular "feel" of your group will depend on
15 the effort you and your fellow group members put into it. That "feel" may be very
16 different from the "feel" of other groups. That's the way it should be. In N.A. we
17 encourage *unity*, not *uniformity*. As the months and years go by, your group will
18 develop its own individual identity, and its own special knack for carrying the N.A.
19 message.

20 This chapter does not even attempt to say everything that could be said about
21 operating an N.A. group. What you'll find here are some brief answers to a few very
22 basic questions: What is an N.A. group? How does the work get done? What kinds
23 of meetings can a group have? When problems arise, how are they solved? We
24 hope this chapter proves useful as your group seeks to fulfill its primary purpose: to
25 carry the message to the addict who still suffers.

26 What is an N.A. group?

27 When two or more drug addicts come together to help each other stay clean, they
28 may form a Narcotics Anonymous group. Here are six points which describe an
29 N.A. group:

- 30 1. All members of a group are drug addicts, and all drug addicts are eligible for
31 membership.
- 32 2. As a group, they are self-supporting.
- 33 3. As a group, their primary purpose is to help drug addicts recover through
34 application of the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.
- 35 4. As a group, they have no affiliation outside Narcotics Anonymous.
- 36 5. As a group, they express no opinion on outside issues.
- 37 6. As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than
38 promotion, and they maintain personal anonymity in the public media.

39 The primary function of an N.A. group is to conduct Narcotics Anonymous
40 meetings. Some groups host a single weekly meeting; others host a number of
41 meetings each week.

42 Sometimes specialized N.A. groups form--men's or women's groups, for example--
43 to provide additional identification for addicts with particular needs in common.
44 But the focus of an N.A. meeting is on recovery from drug addiction, and any addict
45 is welcome to attend any N.A. meeting they choose, regardless of whether the
46 meeting is held by a specialized group or not.

47 **What is an N.A. meeting?**

48 While it's the primary function of N.A. groups to conduct Narcotics Anonymous
49 meetings, not all Narcotics Anonymous meetings are necessarily hosted by an N.A.
50 group. An N.A. meeting is an event at which drug addicts freely share with one
51 another their recovery and their experience in applying the Twelve Steps. And
52 while many--if not most--N.A. meetings *are* in fact hosted by an N.A. group, other
53 kinds of N.A. meetings occur all the time: informally among friends, at large area or
54 regional speaker meetings, at conventions, in correctional facilities, in schools, and
55 so forth. The N.A. group is an *entity*; the N.A. meeting is an *event*; and N.A.
56 meetings are often held without the sponsorship of an N.A. group.

57 **What is a "home group"?**

58 In some N.A. communities, it has become customary for members of the
59 fellowship to make a personal commitment to support one particular group--their
60 "home group." Though this custom is not universal, many believe its practice can
61 benefit the individual member as well as the group. For the individual member, it
62 can provide a stable recovery base--a place to call "home," a place to know and be
63 known by other recovering addicts. For the group, it insures the support of a core of
64 regular, committed members. A strong home group can also foster a spirit of
65 camaraderie among its members that makes the group both more attractive and
66 more supportive of newcomers. The home group is one very specific way in which,
67 by making a personal commitment to N.A. unity, group members can enhance their
68 own recovery as well as insure that the same opportunity exists for others.

69 While the home group concept is the accepted norm in some N.A. communities,
70 it's unheard of in others. There are many, many ways of talking and thinking about
71 the bond established among addicts in their groups. Do what seems most suitable in
72 your own N.A. community.

73 **Who can be a member?**

74 If a drug addict wants to be a member of Narcotics Anonymous, all he must have is
75 a desire to stop using. Our Third Tradition insures that. Whether the individual
76 member of Narcotics Anonymous chooses to be a member of a particular group as
77 well is entirely up to the individual.

78 **What are "open" and "closed" meetings?**

79 "Closed" N.A. meetings are only for drug addicts or those who think they might
80 have a drug problem. Closed meetings are the norm in many places, because they
81 provide an atmosphere in which addicts can feel more certain that those attending
82 will be able to identify with them. Newcomers may be more inclined to show up at a
83 closed meeting for the same reason. The leader often reads a statement at the
84 beginning of a closed meeting, explaining why the meeting is closed and offering to
85 direct non-addicts who may be attending to an open meeting.

86 "Open" N.A. meetings are just that: open to anyone who wants to attend. Some
87 groups have open meetings once a month to allow non-addict friends and relatives
88 of N.A. members to celebrate recovery anniversaries with them. Groups that have
89 open meetings usually structure their format in such a way that opportunities for
90 participation by non-addicts are limited, so that the meeting retains its focus on
91 recovery shared one addict to another. It should also be made clear during the
92 meeting that N.A. groups do not accept monetary contributions from non-addicts.

93 Other groups use carefully planned open meetings--particularly open speaker
94 meetings--as an opportunity to let members of the community at large see for
95 themselves what Narcotics Anonymous is all about, and even to ask questions. At
96 such public meetings, a statement regarding our tradition of anonymity is often read,
97 asking visitors not to use full-face photographs, last names, or personal details when
98 they describe the meeting to others. A sample anonymity statement appears at the
99 back of this book.*

100 **Where can we hold N.A. meetings?**

101 N.A. meetings can be held almost anywhere. Groups usually want to find an easily
102 accessible public place where they can hold their meetings on a weekly basis.
103 Facilities run by public agencies and religious and civic organizations often have
104 rooms for rent at moderate rates that will meet a group's needs. Others in your
105 N.A. community may already be aware of appropriate space available for your
106 meeting; speak with them.

107 Before securing a location, it may be well to consider whether or not the room will
108 be accessible to addicts with physical limitations. Does the building have ramps,
109 elevators with wide doors, and bathroom facilities able to accommodate someone in
110 a wheelchair? There are other similar considerations your group may wish to make
111 itself aware of.**

112 It's generally recommended that group meetings not be held in members' homes.
113 Most groups find it desirable to hold their meetings in public facilities, for a variety

* The following sentence was deleted, because concern was expressed that the material it referred to would only be available in the United States: "For more information on public meetings, see A Guide to Public Information, available through your group service representative or by writing the Fellowship Service Office."

** Reference to U.S. FSO material deleted: "Ask your group service representative for the bulletin, Addicts with Additional Needs, or write to the Group Services Department at the Fellowship Service Office."

of reasons: Stable meetings held in public places tend to enhance N.A.'s credibility in the community. Because of varying work and vacation schedules, it is often difficult to maintain consistent times for meetings held in individuals' homes. Holding a meeting in an individual's home may affect the willingness of some members to attend. A group asking a member to host meetings in his home is asking him to risk potential personal loss from theft and property damage. Although some groups may hold their first few meetings in a member's home, it's generally recommended that they relocate their meetings to public facilities as soon as possible.

Some groups hold their regular meetings in drug addiction treatment facilities. Before deciding to locate your meeting in such a facility, your group may wish to consider a few questions: Is access open to any addict wishing to attend? Does the facility administration place any restrictions on your use of the room that could challenge any of our traditions? Will holding an N.A. meeting in such a facility compromise the group's independent identity?

Some N.A. groups hold their meetings in clubhouses run by people who may or may not be N.A. members. It should be noted that such clubhouses are in no way affiliated with Narcotics Anonymous. Before deciding to hold your meeting in such a clubhouse, your group may wish to consider these questions: Is it clear to all concerned that your N.A. group, not the clubhouse, is sponsoring the meeting? Will holding an N.A. meeting in such a facility compromise the group's independent identity? Do you have a clear rental agreement with clubhouse management, and is the rent you're being charged moderate enough to allow your group to contribute funds to the rest of the N.A. service structure? Are so many of your community's N.A. meetings already located in this particular clubhouse that, if it were to fold, your N.A. community as a whole would be crippled?

What kind of meeting format can we use?

Groups use a variety of formats to provide an atmosphere of recovery in their meetings. Most meetings last an hour or an hour and a half. Some groups have a single format for their meetings. Other groups have a schedule of rotating formats: one week a step study, the next week a speaker meeting, and so forth. Still others divide their large meetings into sessions after the meeting has opened, each with its own format. Here are a few basic descriptions of some of the meeting formats that, with variations, seem to be among the most common. For reference, we've also included a sample meeting format at the end of this book.

Participation meetings. The leader opens the meeting up for members to share on any subject related to recovery.

Topic discussion meetings. The leader selects a particular recovery-related topic for discussion, or asks someone else to provide a topic.

Study meetings. There are a number of different types of study meetings. Some read a portion of an N.A. conference-approved book or pamphlet each week and discuss it--for example, a Basic Text study. Others have discussions focussing on the Twelve Steps.

Speaker meetings. Some meetings ask a single speaker to share his recovery story, or his experience in a particular aspect of recovery. Others ask two or three speakers to talk for a shorter period. Still others use a combination format, with a speaker sharing first, and a topic discussion afterward.

Newcomer meetings. These meetings are often conducted by two or three of the group's more experienced members. The "oldtimers" share their experience with drug addiction and with recovery in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous. If time allows, the meeting is then opened for questions from the newer members.

Newcomer meetings are sometimes held a half hour before or after the group's regular meeting. Other groups conduct them as smaller sections of a large meeting. Still others hold a newcomer meeting one day of the week, their regular meeting another. Whatever the format, newcomer meetings provide a means for your group to give addicts new to N.A. an introduction to the basics of recovery.

Question and answer meetings. At Q&A meetings, people are asked to think of questions related to recovery and the fellowship, write those questions down, and place them in "the ask-it basket." The leader of the meeting pulls a slip of paper from the basket, reads the question, and asks for someone to answer it. After one or two members have spoken to one question, the leader selects another question from the basket, and so forth, until the meeting is over.

Developing your format

These are basic descriptions of just a few of the many different types of formats used in N.A. meetings; the variations on even these few format types can be endless. Feel free to innovate. Vary the format in whatever way seems to best suit the "personality" of your group and the needs of addicts in your community.

Often, a meeting will grow far larger than the group originally foresaw. A meeting format that worked well for a small meeting may not work as well for a larger one. When one of your group's meetings experiences that kind of growth, you may want to consider making some adjustments in your format, perhaps even replacing it altogether. Many groups experiencing such growth break their larger meetings down into smaller sections (although many do not) to allow more members the chance to participate. Some even use a different type of format in each section.

What kinds of literature should we use?

It's up to each group to determine for itself what N.A. literature is appropriate for use in its meetings. Various service boards and committees in Narcotics Anonymous produce a number of different kinds of publications. When

determining whether to use a particular publication, a group may want to consider whether the publication or particular article is *recovery* oriented or *service* oriented. Most groups find that reading recovery oriented material in their meetings better supports the primary purpose of the meeting than reading handbooks or bulletins. And while groups may not wish to have service oriented publications read aloud during their recovery meetings, they usually make those publications available on their literature tables.

The group may also want to consider the process used to insure the publication's fidelity to the N.A. message. Each individual piece of Narcotics Anonymous *conference-approved* literature--N.A. books and pamphlets on recovery--is subject to the most rigorous kind of approval process. Selections from conference-approved books and pamphlets are usually read at the beginning of an N.A. meeting, and some meetings use them as the core of their format. N.A. conference-approved literature represents the widest range of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.*

Groups often make other kinds of N.A. literature available at their meetings: the national service newsletter, various N.A. service bulletins and handbooks, the national fellowship magazine, and local N.A. newsletters.

Literature produced by other Twelve Step fellowships, or by other organizations, is inappropriate either for display on group literature tables or for reading at group meetings.** To do either implies an endorsement of an outside enterprise, directly contradicting N.A.'s Sixth Tradition.¹

What is a group business meeting?

The purpose of the group business meeting is fairly self-explanatory: to conduct the business of the group in such a way that it remains effective in carrying the recovery message. Some of the questions a typical group business meeting addresses are:

- * Is the group effective in carrying the N.A. message?
- * Are newcomers being made welcome?
- * Do solutions for problems at recent meetings need to be sought?
- * Is the meeting format providing sufficient direction?
- * Is attendance steady, or growing?

* The following paragraph was deleted: "In each issue of The N.A. Way Magazine, N.A. members share their experience in recovery, unity, and service with the rest of the fellowship. Although it's not possible for the Fellowship Service Conference to approve each individual issue, the concept of the magazine is conference-approved. Each month's N.A. Way is carefully reviewed by an editorial board to insure that the magazine consistently represents the N.A. message. Many groups read articles from The N.A. Way Magazine in their meetings, using them as springboards for study or discussion."

** Deleted the words "generally considered" from the sentence, "Literature produced by other Twelve Step fellowships, or by other organizations, is generally considered inappropriate..."

¹ Sixth Tradition: "An N.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the N.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose."

- 229 * Are there good relations between the group and the facility in which the meeting
- 230 is held?
- 231 * Between the group and the community?
- 232 * Are the group's funds being used wisely?
- 233 * Is there enough money being donated at meetings to meet the group's needs and
- 234 also provide for contributions to the rest of the service structure?
- 235 * Are literature and refreshment supplies holding up?
- 236 * Is there a service vacancy in the group?
- 237 * Has the area, the region, or the national service conference asked the group for
- 238 advice or support?

239 Group business meetings--sometimes called steering committee meetings--are
240 usually held before or after a regular recovery meeting, so that the recovery meeting
241 remains focused on its primary purpose. The group selects someone to lead the
242 business meeting. Group officers give reports on their areas of responsibility, and
243 subjects of importance to the group are raised for discussion. Some groups hold
244 business meetings on a regular basis; others only call them when something specific
245 comes up that needs the group's attention. All group members are welcome--even
246 encouraged--to attend, raise questions related to the group's work, and take part in
247 discussion.

248 The group, as the foundation of the N.A. service structure, is guided by both the
249 Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Principles of Service for Narcotics Anonymous.
250 A good understanding of both will help a group business meeting steer a straight
251 course. N.A.'s step and tradition book, *It Works: How and Why*, provides a wealth
252 of information about the Twelve Traditions. And members interested in the
253 principles of service can read essays on the Twelve Principles in another chapter of
254 this book.

255 **How does the work get done?**

256 Setting up chairs, preparing refreshments, buying literature, arranging for
257 speakers, cleaning up after the meeting, paying the bills--most of the things an N.A.
258 group does to host its meetings are pretty simple. But if one person had to do them
259 all, those simple things would quickly become overwhelming. That's why a group
260 elects officers (or, in the language of the Second Tradition, *trusted servants*): to help
261 divide the work among the group's members.

262 Electing officers is one way the group practices N.A.'s tradition of self-support:
263 "Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting . . . " Sometimes it seems that
264 groups run all by themselves, but the fact is that someone has to do the work needed
265 to support the group. By dividing the work, the group insures that the group as a
266 whole is self-supporting, and that the group's burdens don't settle unevenly on the
267 shoulders of just one or two individuals.

268 Electing officers provides the group with an opportunity to strengthen its members'
269 recovery. When a group member agrees to serve as secretary or treasurer or tea- or

coffee-maker, that acceptance of responsibility often helps advance his personal growth. It also gives that member a chance to help enhance the group's ability to carry the recovery message.

You don't have to be a group officer to be of service to the group. Every week, there's work to be done: helping set up the meeting, greeting newcomers, cleaning up, bringing refreshments, and other things of that sort. Asking new members to help with these kinds of jobs can make them feel a part of the group more quickly.

What qualifications should a group officer have?

There are a couple of things to consider when looking for a group officer. One is maturity in recovery. When those newly clean are elected to a position, they may find themselves deprived of time and energy they need for their early recovery. A group member with a year or two clean is probably already well-established in his personal recovery. He is also more likely than a new member to be familiar with N.A.'s traditions and service principles, as well as group procedures.

A second thing to consider is consistent participation in the group. Do the candidates attend meetings regularly? Do they take an active part in the group's business meetings? Those who've demonstrated their commitment to the group by showing up every week will probably make better trusted servants than those who only attend sporadically.

What officers does a group need?

In different areas the work is divided differently, and the particular jobs are sometimes called by different names. What's important is not who does the job or what the job is called, but that the job gets done. What follows are general descriptions of some of the most common sorts of jobs N.A. groups have.

The **secretary** arranges the affairs of the group. What he doesn't do on his own, he finds other group members to do. One of the first jobs for a new secretary is registering the group's current mailing address and meeting information with the area committee secretary and the national service office. Each time a new secretary or group representative takes office, each time there is a change in the group's mailing address or in the time or location of a group meeting, both the area committee and national service office should be informed. Other things a group secretary is responsible for may include:

- * Opening the meeting room well before the meeting is scheduled to begin, setting up chairs and tables (if necessary), and cleaning and locking the room after the meeting is over.
- * Arranging a table with N.A. books and pamphlets, local meeting lists, N.A. activity fliers, service bulletins, the national fellowship magazine, and N.A. newsletters.
- * Making tea or coffee.
- * Buying refreshments and other supplies.

- * Selecting meeting leaders and speakers.
- * Keeping a list of group members' recovery anniversaries, if the group wishes.
- * Conducting group business meetings.
- * And doing whatever else needs to be done.

Many groups break all these jobs down separately: someone to open and close the room, another person responsible for refreshments, a third to take care of the literature table, and so forth. Groups that host more than one meeting will often have a different person responsible for all these jobs at each of their meetings.

The **treasurer** is responsible for the group's money. Because of the peculiar pitfalls associated with service as a group treasurer, it's important that groups look carefully at those they elect as treasurers. If the group elects someone who is not capable of handling the responsibilities of the job, then the group is at least partly responsible if something goes wrong. It's recommended that groups elect members who are financially secure, are good at managing their personal finances, and have at least a year clean. Because of the need to keep consistent records, it's also strongly recommended that groups elect treasurers to serve for a full year.

What do group treasurers do? They count the money that members have contributed at each meeting, pay back the people who buy group refreshments and literature, and keep good, simple records. The group treasurer's job requires close attention to details. To help the treasurer in managing those details, a *Group Treasurer's Workbook* is available from your area committee or the national service office.

The essays on N.A.'s Twelve Principles appearing later in this book offer a basic description of the role of the **group service representative**: Groups "send a steady stream of new group service representatives into the service community . . . These GSRs form the foundation of our entire service structure. For that reason, the groups must exercise great care in responsibly selecting the best possible GSRs."² "In the person of its GSR, elected directly at the group level, each group sends a delegate into the service structure, and then trusts that servant to become a part of a team which will do together what the groups cannot--and should not--do for themselves."³

Group service representatives bear great responsibility. While GSRs are *elected* by the group, they are not mere group *messengers*. They are selected by their groups to serve as active members of the area service committee. As such, they are responsible to act in the best interests of N.A. as a whole, and not solely as advocates of their own groups' priorities.

As full participants in the area committee, GSRs need to be as well informed as they can be concerning the affairs of the committee. They study the reports of the

² See the First Principle of Service.

³ Second Principle.

committee's officers and subcommittee chairpersons. They read the various handbooks published by the national service office on each area of service. After carefully considering their own conscience, they take active, critical parts in the discussions which form the group conscience of the entire committee.

Group service representatives often serve, along with others, on one of the subcommittees of the area service committee, thus providing the participation necessary to accomplish the work of the area.

Once a year, the group service representative attends the regional assembly. Since a later chapter in this book is devoted to the regional assembly we won't go into any detail about it here, except to mention that attendance at the regional assembly is one responsibility of the GSR.

Group service representatives link their groups with the rest of the N.A. service structure, particularly through the information conveyed in their reports to and from the area committee. At group business meetings, the GSR report provides a summary of area committee activities, often sparking discussions among group members that provide the GSR with a feel for how the area can better serve the group's needs. In group recovery meetings, GSRs make available fliers announcing area and regional activities.

At area committee meetings, GSR reports provide perspectives on group growth vital to the committee's work. If a group is having problems, the GSR can share those problems with the committee in his report. And if the group hasn't found solutions to those problems, the area chairperson will open a slot on the committee's "sharing session"⁴ agenda so that the GSR can gather the experience others have had in similar situations. If any helpful solutions arise from the sharing session, the GSR can report those back to the group.

Groups also elect a second representative called an **alternate GSR**. The alternate GSR attends all the area service committee meetings (as a non-voting participant) with the regular GSR, so that she can see for herself how the committee works. And if the regular GSR cannot attend an area committee meeting, the alternate GSR participates in the regular GSR's place.

The alternate GSR can also serve on an area subcommittee. Subcommittee experience will give the alternate GSR added perspective on how area services are actually delivered. That perspective will make her a more effective area committee participant if her group asks her later to serve as its regular GSR.

How do we elect group officers?

When a vacancy occurs in a group office, the group holds a business meeting to consider how to fill it. Some groups use a simple nomination and election procedure. Others use what we call the *trusted servant selection procedure*. It works like this: Everyone attending your group business meeting who meets basic

4 In the chapter on the area service committee, see the section titled, "The Sharing Session."

eligibility requirements, except those who make it known that they're not available for the job, are considered nominated for the open position. Basic eligibility requirements might be a year clean and a history of support for the group. The individual nominee, not the group, determines whether they meet those eligibility requirements. Written ballots are cast, then collected and tallied by the secretary. If no one person receives a majority on the first ballot, a second written vote is taken between the two people who received the most votes the first time.

What about rotation?

Rotation is the practice many groups have of periodically electing new people to service positions when one comes open, rather than having the same person serve in the same position year after year. Rotation offers very definite benefits for the groups who practice it. By providing diversity in leadership, it helps a group stay fresh and energetic. It provides assurance that no one individual exercises so much influence that the group becomes a mere extension of his personality. The practice of rotation also reinforces the N.A. emphasis on *service* rather than the *servant*, consistent with our belief in the value of spiritual anonymity--what's important is the job being done, not the particular person doing it.

Some groups allow their members to serve more than one term in any given position, so that the group can take advantage of their trusted servants' experience. Once group officers have completed their terms, rotation allows them to step aside for a time, or to accept responsibilities elsewhere in the N.A. service structure, giving other members the chance to serve the group. The impact of rotation on the stability of the group is balanced by the continuing presence of its long-term group members. Those who have served in the past as group officers, and who maintain an active role in the life of the group, can provide a much-needed maturity of perspective to a growing group's discussions.

What responsibilities does an N.A. group have?

The first and most important responsibility of any N.A. group--its "primary purpose," according to the Fifth Tradition--is "to carry the message to the addict who still suffers." And the single most important thing a group can do to fulfill that primary purpose is to conduct meetings that provide an atmosphere in which N.A. recovery can be effectively shared between addicts. Groups conduct the details of their meetings in very different ways, but all of them seek the same end: to make recovery from drug addiction available to any addict in the community who seeks it.

As the foundation of the worldwide N.A. service structure, groups have another responsibility: to develop an understanding of the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Principles of Service. By doing so, they take part in the continuing evolution of the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous, as well as providing for themselves an understanding of how the highest ideals of our fellowship are to be applied in their group activities.

How can our group support other N.A. services?

The First Principle of Service speaks of the N.A. group's final responsibility for the services of the larger N.A. Fellowship. Each group should send stable, active GSRs to participate in the work of the service structure on the groups' behalf. And each group should consider how best to provide the funds the N.A. service structure needs to do its work.

Most groups establish a *prudent reserve*--usually an amount of money equal to a month's average expenses--to set aside for emergencies. Oddly enough, groups usually find that too much money in the till causes far more problems than too little money. See the Eleventh Principle of Service for more discussion on this phenomenon.

If there's any money left after paying bills and establishing a reserve, most groups contribute funds to the area committee, the regional committee, and the national service office. Groups often use a percentage formula to decide how much of their extra money to send to each of these service units--70% to their area committee, 20% to the region, and 10% to national services, for example. Your group should decide on whatever plan seems best to you.

How can our group better serve our community?

By its very existence, the group is already providing a substantial service to the community. It's providing the support addicts in the community need to reenter the mainstream of society. But how can a group become more effective in reaching out to addicts who've not yet found N.A.? There are two general ways in which a group can better serve its community: through activities coordinated by the group itself, and through the area service committee (ASC).

Some N.A. groups reach out to their communities themselves. This is particularly the case in small communities, and in areas where Narcotics Anonymous is very new. An N.A. group in a rural town obviously does not have as many people or as much money available as an area service committee in a large city, but opportunities exist nonetheless for carrying the recovery message effectively to others who may be seeking the solution we've found.*

Most N.A. groups are served by an area committee.⁵ Area service committees coordinate efforts to carry the N.A. message on behalf of all the groups they serve. Community public information services, telephone contact lines, and panel presentations to addicts in treatment centers and jails are three ways in which most area committees carry the message, either directly to the addict who still suffers or to those who may refer an addict to an N.A. meeting. Your group service representative can tell you more about how you and your group can more effectively

* Deleted sentence referencing material available only in the U.S.: "If your group needs help in reaching out to the community, write to the FSO Group Services Department. Ask for their bulletin, N.A. Groups in Small Communities."

5 If you don't know how to contact your area service committee, write to the FSO Group Services Department. They'll be happy to put you in touch.

join in the work of your area service committee. For further information, see the chapter later in this book on the area service committee.

How can our group solve its problems?

N.A. groups encounter a wide variety of problems: meetings are disrupted; treatment centers bus in large numbers of clients when the group is ill-prepared to receive them; the format goes stale; "N.A. language" becomes an issue; the coffee tastes like industrial strength cleanser; the readings at the beginning of the meeting go on, and on, and on. These are just a few of the problems the average N.A. group must deal with from time to time. This book doesn't "lay down the law" on how to deal with these problems. It does point out some effective tools group members can use in solving their own problems.

The best source of solutions for the group's problems, in most cases, is the group itself. "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps," our Twelfth Step says, "we tried . . . to practice these principles in all our affairs." When we collectively apply the insight received from that spiritual awakening to our group's problems, we call that *group conscience*. Common sense, open minds, calm discussion, accurate information, mutual respect, and healthy personal recovery enable a group to deal effectively with almost anything that comes its way.

There are a number of printed resources the group may choose to use in gathering the information it needs to reach sound decisions. The Basic Text and our step and tradition book, *It Works: How and Why*, both provide a great deal of information about how N.A.'s Twelve Traditions can be applied to given situations. The chapter in this book on the Twelve Principles of Service gives in-depth explanations of the essential ideals underlying service activities in Narcotics Anonymous. Periodicals such as the national fellowship magazine and the national service newsletter often have articles addressing problems the group might face. And bulletins available from the national service office deal in detail with a variety of subjects relating to the group's work, from starting a new group to conducting a business meeting.

Another source of information the group might tap is the experience of other groups in its area or region. If the group has a problem and can't come up with its own solution, it might want to ask its group service representative to share that problem at the next area service committee meeting. Many ASCs set aside a portion of every meeting for exactly that purpose. And while the area committee can't tell a group what to do, it can provide a forum in which groups can share with one another what's worked for them. Workshops conducted by the regional service committee provide the same kind of opportunity on a larger scale. For details on how the area or regional committee can help with group problems, see the chapters on those committees later in this book.

Sample meeting format

This sample meeting format is just that: a sample. It's designed so that, if your group chooses, you can use it exactly as it is. However, you're encouraged to change it and rearrange it according to the needs of your group.

Leader: *Welcome members to the meeting and introduce yourself.* Hello, my name is _____, and I'm an addict. Welcome to this meeting of the _____ Group of Narcotics Anonymous. I'd like to open this meeting with a moment of silence (15 to 20 seconds) for the addict who still suffers, followed by the Serenity Prayer.

We like to extend a special welcome to newcomers. Is there anyone attending their first N.A. meeting? Would you like to introduce yourselves? Is there anyone attending this meeting for the first time?

If this is a closed meeting: This is a "closed" Narcotics Anonymous meeting. "Closed" N.A. meetings are only for drug addicts or those who think they might have a drug problem. Closed meetings provide an atmosphere in which drug addicts can feel more certain that those attending will be able to identify with them. If there are any non-addicts visiting, we'd like to thank you for your interest in Narcotics Anonymous. Our local N.A. meeting list on the literature table will direct you to an N.A. meeting in our community that is open to non-addicts.

If this is an open meeting: This is an "open" Narcotics Anonymous meeting, which means that non-addict friends, relatives, and community members are welcome to attend. Other N.A. meetings are closed to non-addicts. We'd like to welcome our visitors, and thank you for your interest in Narcotics Anonymous.

Leader: *You may want to read an anonymity statement at the beginning of an open meeting. A sample anonymity statement appears immediately following this sample meeting format.*

For the protection of our group as well as the meeting facility, we ask that no drugs or drug paraphernalia be on your person at the meeting.

It costs nothing to belong to Narcotics Anonymous. You are a member when you say you are.

Leader: *Recognize those with various periods of clean time. Keytags, chips, or medallions may be given out.*

Select people before the meeting to read one or more of the following short pieces.

These readings can be found either in our Little White Booklet or the group reading cards.

- a) Who is an addict?
- b) What is the N.A. program?
- c) Why are we here?
- d) How it works.

e) The Twelve Traditions.

Leader: *Ask for topic or step for discussion, and call on people to share, or introduce the speaker.*

Leader: *About ten minutes before the meeting is scheduled to close, announce:* That's all the time we have tonight. I'd like to thank you for attending.

Leader: *Begin passing the basket around, announcing:* The basket being passed around is one way of practicing our Seventh Tradition, which says, "Every N.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions." The money we collect pays for rent, literature, and refreshments. Through contributions from this group to various N.A. service committees, it also helps carry the N.A. message of recovery in our area and around the world.

If this is an "open" meeting: I'd like once again to thank our non-addict guests for the interest they've shown in Narcotics Anonymous. Because of N.A.'s tradition of self-support, this group asks that you not contribute any money when the basket passes your way.

Does the group service representative have any announcements? *(The GSR will make announcements of upcoming group activities and N.A. events in the area.)*

After the basket has come back around: Again, thanks for coming tonight. Would all those who care to, join in a circle to close? *Various groups close in different ways: with prayers, brief recitations from N.A. literature, etc.*

Keep coming back--it works!

Sample anonymity statement

N.A.'s Eleventh Tradition reads, "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films." We ask everyone attending to respect our members' anonymity by not using full-face photographs, last names, or personal details when describing this meeting to others.

579 **Group service bulletins**
580 **(available in the U.S. from the Fellowship Service Office)**
581 *Starting a New N.A. Group*
582 *Conducting a Group Business Meeting*
583 *Addicts with Additional Needs*
584 *N.A. Groups in Small Communities*
585 *N.A. Groups in Long-Term Correctional and Treatment Facilities*

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591 **Other publications of group interest**
592 **(available in the U.S. from the Fellowship Service Office)**
593 *Narcotics Anonymous*, the Basic Text of recovery.
594 *It Works: How and Why*, essays on N.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
595 *Group Treasurer's Workbook*
596 *"Hey! What's the Basket For?"*, a pamphlet on N.A.'s tradition of self-support.
597 *A Guide to Public Information*
598 *The N.A. Way Magazine*, the national fellowship magazine (published monthly).
599 *Fellowship Report*, the national service newsletter (published quarterly).