



Basic Public Information Guide

The purpose of Public Information work in Narcotics Anonymous is to inform the public that NA exists and offers recovery from the disease of addiction. A Public Information Committee helps to ensure that information about our fellowship is available and is accurate for the public.

The following guidelines were compiled in 1994 by the former World Service Conference Public Information Committee to support emerging NA communities needing some basic guidance in fulfilling our primary purpose in the public arena.

Public Information, or P.I., is an area of service work in our fellowship that has matured greatly in recent years. However, our P.I. service manual, "A Guide to Public Information" needs to be translated into other languages to reflect our Fellowship's experiences and worldwide membership. We wish to help our worldwide fellowship by giving some basic and simple guidelines in doing this type of NA service.

Our primary purpose as a fellowship is to carry the message to the addict that still suffers. P.I. is a vital part of "carrying the message". Doing this type of service calls upon us to communicate and participate in areas of the community in which, as using addicts, we were once unwelcome. Courage and humility are necessary ingredients in our recovery when approaching the public about our fellowship. We hope that you find this part of NA service as rewarding and challenging as we have.

Public Information and the NA Member

Every member of NA has a place in helping us carry the message to the still suffering addict. Much of the goodwill that exists between NA and the community is based on the relationships that we maintain as NA members. We can improve these relationships for our Fellowship by taking care to treat others with courtesy and respect. This is especially important when we represent the Fellowship to professionals and members of other organizations who may spread their good or bad impressions of us to others. We need to project a positive image of NA so that these individuals feel comfortable directing addicts seeking recovery to our meetings.

When we participate in a public information event, we need to accept responsibility for our behavior. If we are rude, use profanity, or show a lack of respect for a facility or for other organizations, we bring into question the effectiveness of our program.

We can also be seen as members of Narcotics Anonymous when we wear a NA T-shirt in public, stand around outside a group meeting, or attend a NA convention or service conference. We, as a Fellowship, have no control over the behaviors of individual NA members. As members, however, keeping our spiritual principles in mind, we can share our concerns about our public image with other members. We can communicate to them that a bad image of Narcotics Anonymous can easily keep the message of recovery from reaching the addict that still suffers.

Public Information and the NA Group

Members of NA groups can and often do some basic P.I. work to help carry the message of recovery to addicts, as well as to the public. If there is no public information committee to assist the group, P.I. efforts by groups are often limited to posting bulletins, printing and distributing meeting schedules, and informing other addicts about their meetings.

Groups should always be careful not to make statements or commitments that overstep their abilities when engaging in these activities. Members acting alone or independently of the group and the Fellowship can seriously damage our spiritual foundation of anonymity. We never do speaking engagements, presentations and interviews alone.

As the number of meetings and groups increases, the need for additional services to the groups is usually met by the formation of an Area Service Committee (ASC). The reason we start these service committees is so that the groups are not distracted from their own primary purpose. Our groups need to stay focused on their primary purpose and provide a safe environment in which to practice the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Public Information and the Hospitals and Institutions Committee

Understanding the purpose and need for cooperation between committees is an important part of providing service in NA. We may understand our own functions well, but often know little of how other committees operate. It is critical to understand the relationship between the Hospitals and Institutions Committee and the Public Information Committee.

The purpose of the Hospitals and Institutions Committee, or H&I, is to carry the NA message to addicts in hospitals or other institutions who do not have full access to regular Narcotics Anonymous meetings. The H&I Committee will organize a team of NA members, called a panel, who go into these institutions to introduce the basics of the NA program to members of that institution. The difference in function is that H&I panels present the program primarily to addicts and the P.I. Committee makes its presentation primarily to non-addicts.

Here is an example to illustrate our different responsibilities and cooperative spirit: If a hospital contacted the local fellowship to request a presentation of the program to their doctors and nurses, the P.I. Committee would be primarily responsible to do a presentation. However, the local H&I Committee should be informed of the event and invited to participate. A member from H&I would be most knowledgeable about the local H&I Committee and answer questions about its ability and requirements to bring panels to the hospitals. Using the same example, if the request received were to present the program to the patients at the hospital, it would be the H&I Committee's responsibility to make this presentation. The P.I. Committee should be available to the H&I Committee if this contact were to become an opportunity for a presentation to the staff at the hospital.

Starting A Public Information Committee

An important part of most area service committees is a public information subcommittee. If there is an ASC available to you, attend a scheduled meeting with other NA members interested in doing P.I. work and express your willingness to serve or start a P.I. Committee. From this point on, public information efforts should be done with the support and guidance of your ASC.

If there is no Area Service Committee available to you, schedule a meeting of local group members interested in public information to form a P.I. committee. You may want to begin by establishing the committee's purpose, functions, responsibilities, and then deciding how the committee should serve the local members of the fellowship. A P.I. committee should initially handle such things as: creating, updating, and distributing meeting schedules, responding to requests for information, establish a stable mailing address, helping a Hospitals and Institutions Committee when asked, and managing other P.I. projects within that area or region.

A Contingency Plan

As Narcotics Anonymous grows, representatives of the print and electronic media will show increasingly more interest in our Fellowship. When the media becomes interested in NA, their reporters often approach us without an understanding of the principle of anonymity. Maintaining personal anonymity at the level of press, radio and films must be our highest priority when contacts are made with the public and the media. We have found that having a "contingency plan" is of great value for a P.I. committee.

A contingency plan is one of the first things that a new P.I. committee needs to create. Such a plan is a strategy intended to organize our response to public and media requests for information. Very simply, it should state what to do when certain types of requests are received from the public. Use of the plan can help ensure that our most experienced P.I. members are involved, so that the local Fellowship can keep to its primary purpose and stay consistent with our Traditions. This plan should also include a list of members involved in public information who are familiar with NA media responses.

This plan should also include guidelines for handling those requests that will affect other groups, areas and regions. If a request does affect other service groups in NA, then coordination and cooperation are needed in order to facilitate an effective response.

The Narcotics Anonymous World Services has a contingency plan for those media events that may be significant to Narcotics Anonymous as a whole. If your committee has received a request to participate in such an event, it is imperative to contact the closest World Board member, or the Narcotics Anonymous World Services P.I. coordinator in order to plan the response.

The Work Itself

It is clear then that we cannot be everything for everybody. We are a recovery organization whose members meet regularly to help each other stay clean. It is all right for us to decline a request that is outside our Fellowship's primary purpose. It is also reasonable for us to decline a request that is within our purpose if we do not have the time, money and members to honor the request. The important thing to remember is that we respond! Failure to respond, even if we are declining a request, demonstrates a lack of integrity on behalf of our Fellowship.

To carry a clear NA message to the public, we as members need to have a clear knowledge of our Traditions. It takes practice to learn the Traditions and how to apply them. We have reserved a portion of this guide for a discussion on the Traditions, and how they impact PI work.

Our objective in doing public information work should be simply to get the word out that the Fellowship is available, that it works and that it's free. Here are some frequently used methods to accomplish this:

A. Meeting List(s) -- If there is more than one meeting in your community, creating and maintaining a listing of meeting information should be your highest priority. This list should contain information such as the day, time, location (a street address is preferred), and if the meeting is open to the public. It may also contain information such as, type of meeting (step study, speaker, or discussion, for example), smoking or non-smoking, and any other special information needed. Meeting lists also need to be updated on a regular basis. We are responsible to make sure that newcomers to our program are given accurate information on how to find us when they reach out for help.

B. Posters -- These are notices used to inform the public about how and where to contact us. It is critical that when we post these notices, we obtain permission to do so. Some possible posting locations are: detoxification facilities, hospitals, police stations, schools and universities, churches or missionary outreach offices, government service offices, drug treatment centers, or other places where addicts seeking recovery or people who help addicts might congregate.

We need to stress that "attraction rather than promotion" is an important concept when doing public information work such as this. Good judgment should be used when creating and posting these notices. We need to refrain from provocative, promotional statements or artwork that may convey a negative image or appear to be promotional. Even how and where we post them needs to be evaluated before we follow through on the project. A simple message that we are available and how to contact us is the desired result.

C. Contents of Printed Media -- Bulletins, posters and newspaper ads usually consist of an attention grabbing statement or question, followed by information on how to contact the local meeting, group, or phonenumber. One example for a bulletin, poster, or newspaper ad might be as follows:

Drug Problem?

Narcotics Anonymous can help!

[Your Contact Information]

Samples can be obtained from the World Service Office to help you create your own bulletin, poster or ad. The WSO also sells an approved poster in different sizes.

D. Introductory Mailings -- We can introduce the program to professionals in health organizations and social services, and to others who deal with addicts, by mailing them information about our Fellowship. A mailing should consist of a letter to explain who you are, where you can be contacted and some basic information about Narcotics Anonymous in your community, including the fact that we are a world wide Fellowship. Normally we include a local

meeting list and, if possible, some NA pamphlets. If appropriate, the cover letter could also mention that speakers are available to meet with them and/or their staff if your local Fellowship is able to fulfill these types of requests.

Pamphlets such as "NA-A Resource in Your Community", "Who, What, How and Why," "The Little White Book", and "Welcome to Narcotics Anonymous" are good choices for introduction to our program. You may find that "Am I an Addict?" "For the Newcomer", and "Sponsorship" are also helpful. We acknowledge that not all of these pamphlets are available in your language. Use what you have. If you don't have any translated pamphlets available, you may be able to give the professional pamphlets in another language.

The local P.I. Committee can create a standard "packet" for mailings and distribution during presentations. Use realistic ideas regarding costs and choice of pamphlets, whether mailing them or just passing them out at a presentation.

E. Presentations -- You may receive requests to give a presentation about Narcotics Anonymous to professionals at an institution or to an organization at a conference. You may also receive an invitation to set up booths or tables in at a public event in order to provide some basic information about NA. If you agree that it is appropriate and you have the resources to do it, remember:

- Do presentations with others.
- To help establish a good impression, start with a good appearance.
- Avoid using obscenities.
- Be aware of the composition of your audience. If you are addressing non-addicts, as is usually the case, remember that the sort of NA language which is commonly used and understood by members of the fellowship in our meetings is not typical outside those meetings. Too much "program talk" or emphasis on the finer details of our recovery program is simply a foreign language to non-addicts and, therefore, should be avoided.
- While some personal disclosure is encouraged, the focus must remain on a clear NA message. Its not who we are as individuals, its how we became clean addicts through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of NA
- Avoid telling "drug stories". We are there to speak about how we found a new way to live, free from active addiction through NA, not how it was when we were using.
- Our attractions are: it works, it's free and we are available to the addict that still suffers

F. Public Service Announcements (PSA)-- These are notices that can reach the public by the way of press, radio and television. Public service announcements are commonly posted in specific areas of various media in which members of the public are allowed to announce items of interest to the community, free of charge. This is an accepted form of informing the public about NA, and is not viewed as a direct contribution by an outside source. However if the announcement must contain a sponsoring organizations name ("this ad presented by the ABC Company") attached to the PSA, then this would be unacceptable in light of our Traditions.

The local P.I. committee can create printed PSA. We caution local committees against creating their own videos at this time. The cost and process involved in creating a video PSA can greatly distract a P.I. committee from carrying the message as well as strain the resources of the local Fellowship. If you wish to be involved with the production of PSA and videos, please contact the WSO Public Information Coordinator.

The Narcotics Anonymous World Services has conference-approved scripts for radio PSA which can be adapted for use in your community. These scripts are contained in the Guide to Public Information. Video PSA are also available through the Narcotics Anonymous World Services Fellowship Services.

H. Phonelines -- A telephone number may be established in your community as a contact for addicts seeking recovery and receiving inquires about our Fellowship from the public. You should only establish a phonenumber service when you are physically and financially able to support it. There is a lot of hard work and responsibilities involved with a phonenumber, and the decision to start one should be taken cautiously. Think of the consequences if an addict seeking recovery or

a professional called and the telephone number were disconnected: an addict would continue to suffer and a poor impression would be given to the professional. Information on starting and maintaining a phonenumber is covered in a separate guide available from the Narcotics Anonymous World Services.

I. Learning Days and Workshops -- These are an internal service offered to the members of our Fellowship. Often a few dedicated members will set aside time to share their experience with other interested members and NA groups on how to do some of the basic work done by P.I. committees. One of our responsibilities is to inform the Fellowship at large about our function in service and how to get in touch with us if the public and the media contact anyone. More information on this topic is contained in the Guide to Public Information.

The Twelve Traditions and Public Information

Public information work is done by service committees or groups created by, and directly responsible to, those they serve: NA members. We do the best we can with what we have while upholding our Twelve Traditions. Our experience has taught us that we need an understanding of the Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous as they apply to public information. It has proven beneficial to spend time studying and discussing the Traditions. The knowledge gained helps us to be more confident in our presentation of NA. This confidence is apparent to our audience and assists in the development of a positive image of our fellowship. The following traditions play an important role in doing P.I. work and have direct applications to P.I. service.

Our Sixth Tradition states: "An NA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the NA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary purpose. ... This tradition is the basis for our policy of non-affiliation and is extremely important to the continuation and growth of Narcotics Anonymous." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Page 66, 5th Edition, English). While it is important to reach as many people as possible with our message of recovery, it is imperative that we not risk our independence by becoming reliant on any outside source. If NA becomes strongly identified with any "related facility or outside enterprise" (club houses, drug treatment centers, other Twelve Step fellowships, for example) our primary purpose and independence will become confused with the priorities of others.

Cooperation with those who come in contact with addicts is important when carrying the message of NA. Without this cooperation, many addicts would never have found the Fellowship. We want to work with other organizations, but we do not want to be merged with them in the mind of the public. To give the impression that we are one and the same would threaten our independence. Our aim is simply to make it known that NA is available. It may require additional efforts to make clear the distinction between NA and other organizations. However we will be rewarded as more addicts find us through other sources and our fellowship continues to grow.

Our Tenth Tradition states: "Narcotics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the NA name ought never be drawn into public controversy. ... Our recovery speaks for itself. Our Tenth Tradition specifically helps protect our reputation." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Page 71, 5th Edition, English). We have no recommendations for any outside organizations, nor do we participate in their politics. To do so would invite controversy that would jeopardize our fellowship's standing in the community. If we voice an opinion on any public issue, we may block the path for a new member to join our fellowship. It is critical that we remember this aspect of keeping our fellowship open to any addict who has the desire to stop using.

Our Eleventh Tradition states: "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. ... Our attraction is that we are successes in our own right. As groups we offer recovery. We have found that the success of our program speaks for itself." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Page 72, 5th Edition, English). This tradition tells us that we do not have to promote recovery; the changes in our lives will be apparent to those around us. The positive effects of our own personal recovery are a powerful element of attraction to our program.

We do need to inform the general public of our existence. The difference between attraction and promotion deals with the content of the message and its presentation. Providing basic information and informing the public of whom, what and where we are is well within the definition of attraction. When we go beyond the act of simply informing the public that we exist, we cross the borderline into promotion.

Participation by NA members in public information events is not a violation of anonymity. It is a personal choice by those who serve to give up some of their anonymity. Obviously to give our full names to the press, allow our faces to be photographed, or appear on television or film and be associated with or identified as a member of Narcotics Anonymous is plainly a violation of the Eleventh Tradition. This can threaten an individual member's personal recovery and give a false impression to newcomers that they will have to reveal their identities to others.

Our Twelfth Tradition states: "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. The spiritual foundation becomes more important than any one particular group or individual." (Narcotics Anonymous Basic Text, Page 72, 5th Edition, English). This tradition reminds us that this is a "WE" program, and that the sacrifice of personal ambition is inherent to the spirituality of anonymity.

When we act upon our own in public information we lose the spirit of humility inherent in a "we" program. The damage done to our reputation by individuals acting on their own can take the fellowship as a whole a long time to repair. Being of service in P.I. gives us a glimpse of humility every time a newcomer comes through the door of a NA meeting. We can then recognize the spiritual aim of the fellowship and our own place within it. We are grateful to be able to carry the message of recovery and can acknowledge the actions of a power greater than ourselves.

What We Do and What We Don't Do in Public Information

We Do:

- We follow our Traditions, contingency plans and guidelines.
- We try to be consistent. We follow through on our plans of action.
- We keep updated records of contacts, posted flyers, PSA, etc.
- We remember that quality is better than quantity.
- We present a good image of recovery (we are punctual, dress appropriately, and avoid using obscenities when we speak).
- We consult with members experienced in P.I. work before contacting the media.

We Don't:

- Do Public Information alone.
- Abuse our precious resources. When we don't complete a project, we create a negative image of NA.
- Present ourselves as the only spokespersons for NA.
- Accept contributions from outside our Fellowship.
- State an opinion, or take a stand on any controversial or public issue.
- Give out personal information about individual NA members.

Narcotics Anonymous Does Not:

- Operate hospitals or recovery houses for addicts.
- Solicit, advertise or persuade others to join it.
- Engage in or sponsor scientific research on addiction.
- Keep membership records or case histories of its members.
- Make medical or psychological diagnosis.
- Provide marriage, family or vocational counseling.
- Provide monetary or social assistance.
- Provide or participate in primary drug prevention education.
- Accept money for its services and is not funded by any public or private agencies.

Additional Resources

A more complete list of guidelines for beginning a P.I. committee may be found within A Guide to Public Information. Other related materials are "A Guide to Phonenumber Service" and resource papers on specific topics pertaining to Public Information. Contact Narcotics Anonymous World Services to obtain any of these materials. More information may also be obtained from neighboring Public Information Committees. The Narcotics Anonymous World Services P.I. Coordinator can assist you in contacting others close to you with P.I. experience. Sharing our experience, strength and hope in this area of service can greatly expand the ties that bind us together.

We recognize that there are legal restrictions in many countries prohibiting the congregation of addicts. Please contact the Narcotics Anonymous World Services for additional information before moving forward with public information efforts in areas where these restrictions exist.

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