

PREPARATION AND TRAINING FOR INTERACTING WITH THE PUBLIC

This chapter focuses on how to prepare for and build relationships with any public audience. Contained here are training materials and general practices for trusted servants. Detailed information pertaining to specific audiences (such as criminal


justice, healthcare, etc.) is contained in later chapters. The information outlined in this chapter is essential in *any* public interaction. These are our best practices in forming valuable and lasting relationships with the public.


We can show a public audience that we are reliable and knowledgeable by preparing and training for our interactions with them. We want the public to know that we can follow through on our commitments and that what we say is accurate. Preparation and training can help our public interactions improve even if we consider ourselves as having experience with public relations service.

Key topics

Core PR principles
Preparing & training for public interactions
Presentations
Resources

Key icons

-  Practical experience

-  Preparation and training tips

Core public relations principles

Establishing a common set of principles can help trusted servants learn how to interact with public audiences. Shared values, such as trustworthiness and respect, can guide us in a more unified approach to our public relations efforts. The following values or attitudes can be helpful to committee members who may coordinate and participate in public relations projects, and to trusted servants who will be trained to do specific public relations tasks.

Strong relationships are ongoing. An ongoing relationship includes consistent dialogue. If we have decided that forming a relationship with a local organization that helps addicts is a priority, then we continue to stay in touch with that organization after an initial presentation. We present accurate information about NA, follow up after the presentation, and provide the organization with reliable ways to make contact with members in the local NA community.

Strong relationships are flexible. Just as we may ask public organizations to respond to our needs with flexibility, we can work to adapt to their needs. We can listen to what is being asked of us and evaluate whether or not we are able to meet the organization's needs. In some instances, flexibility may mean finding a different way to provide services. We can ask members of the area service body for ideas about how to respond to requests. We always try to respond in a manner that

maintains the relationship with the public while still considering our own abilities and abiding by NA's traditions and concepts.

Strong relationships are trustworthy. The trust we build with the public is a result of consistent, reliable, and diplomatic service efforts. Our traditions and concepts guide our fellowship to act with integrity—we have one very clear goal of helping still-suffering addicts find freedom from active addiction. Our ability to act with integrity makes it easier for public organizations to trust our work. When members understand and follow NA's traditions, our relationships with the public are more likely to be based on this trust.

Strong relationships benefit both NA and public organizations. Effective public relations service comes from our ability to work with other organizations. If we are initiating a new relationship with the local police, then we keep in mind that one of the police department's goals is to make the community safer. Our goal is to help addicts find recovery. One result of addicts finding recovery is that the tendency of addicts to commit crime is lessened, often resulting in a safer community. We use these common goals as a basis of our relationships.

Strong relationships are respectful. When NA members treat each other with respect, that respect is carried into our relationships with the public. We learn about the values of the organization or individuals with whom we are interacting. That kind of respect makes it more likely that the organization will respect our values. If we have a conflict with an organization, we have our traditions, concepts, and a group conscience to guide us. We can inform the organization about our traditions in a considerate and respectful manner.

Preparing and training for public interactions

Preparing and training for relationships with the public includes considering who we are interacting with, and defining and practicing how we will be communicating in those interactions.

With whom are we interacting?

How we communicate depends on the audience. We consider the knowledge, values, and experience of our audience. We may communicate with an audience through written correspondence or through a presentation. Regardless of how we will be communicating (which will be discussed in the next section), we will need to find out about our audience. We can create correspondence and presentations based on what we find out about an audience. Taking time to learn about the organization with which we would like to form a relationship will help us communicate in a way that best reaches that organization.

As NA groups, service boards, and committees, we deliberately and energetically cultivate good public relations, not as a result of our normal activity but as a way to better carry our message to addicts.

It Works: How and Why

What do we know about them?

Just as NA has a primary purpose and set of traditions and concepts, we can research the mission or goals of the organization we will be interacting with. This information can help us to communicate in a way that takes into consideration the goals we may have in

common with a public organization. The following list can help members have a solid idea about the values and aims of an identified public audience.

- ✎ We have identified the organization's goal or mission.
- ✎ We understand the organization's professional practice or discipline (such as a legal practice, medical practice, etc.).
- ✎ We have considered if the organization has known philosophical differences with NA's approach (such as a drug replacement approach to addiction, etc.).
- ✎ We understand the organization's relationship with potential members—if they primarily interact with addicts, the ways they can affect potential members, and whether or not they are required to interact with addicts (such as criminal justice, healthcare, and schools).
- ✎ We have researched the demographics of the organization—we know their culture and language.
- ✎ We have learned if the organization serves various language groups.

After we have considered the previous points, we can decide if a mutually beneficial relationship is possible with this organization. We gain a better understanding about how to communicate with the organization and about whether the organization is likely to cooperate with us. We may also have a clearer picture about what the organization is likely to gain from a relationship with NA.

What do they know about us?

Thinking about what an organization knows about NA can help us communicate with our audience. The following list will help us get a clear idea about what information trusted servants need to include in their interactions with the public, what knowledge the audience already has, and perhaps some of the audience's hesitations about forming a relationship with us.

- ✎ We know if the organization has relationships with other self-help programs or if they are familiar with the twelve-step approach.
- ✎ We have considered the organization's knowledge and perception of NA.
- ✎ We have researched if the organization has had experience with NA and how that experience might affect our current relationship.
- ✎ We have thought about what the organization expects of us and have clarified the nature of our relationship with them.

Whom do we contact within an organization?

Once we have researched our audience, we figure out who is the best person in the organization to contact. First, we consider if there are NA members who may have experience with the organization. These NA members may know whom to contact and if it's best to make a phone call, send an email, or write a letter. A member who has experience with an organization may also be able to introduce us to an appropriate contact person.

We can also find ways to identify the decision makers in the organization, so we know the best people to communicate with throughout the organization. We can consider if the designated contact person is a decision maker and if we have friends (other than our initial contact person) inside the organization. We also want to understand the individual responsibilities of those within the organization. This may seem like a lot of work, but this planning can often be more important than the actual communication. Thoughtful

preparation can help build relationships and make our efforts become more effective in reaching addicts.

Our Twelfth Step says, in part, that “having had a spiritual awakening,” we individually “tried to carry this message to addicts.” Our collective service efforts arise from that same spiritual foundation. Having experienced the results of this program in our own lives, we join together to carry the recovery message further than we could individually.

Twelve Concepts for NA Service

How will we be interacting?

Now that we’ve researched the organization we will be interacting with, we can use that information to shape the way we communicate. We can communicate through a written letter, email, a phone call, a meeting, or a presentation. Presentations require more in-depth preparation and training, but all interactions need to consider the following points.

Create a dialogue. One of the most important things we can do when initiating relationships with the public is to create a dialogue. A dialogue implies an exchange of ideas. We offer information about NA, and we listen to what the public organization has to offer us. We use a dialogue to create realistic expectations about our local resources and the kind of relationship that can be maintained. We set up clear roles between NA and the organization.

A dialogue also means inviting the members of the public to provide us with constant feedback about how we are doing. We can do this through consistent follow-up, asking questions like “Are we still meeting your needs?” “Have your needs changed?” Because keeping this dialogue going is so important, we can create an internal reminder system so we are sure to keep following up. This reminder system can be as simple as designating one member to be accountable for following up with public contacts. This member may want to store public contact information on a computer and program the computer to give periodic reminders to follow up with various public contacts.

Use familiar language. We want to communicate with our audience. We can do this by using language that an audience will understand. Language choices are critical in creating clear and effective communications for various audiences. We want to address any language differences between NA and the organization. We use respectful, clear, and direct language in our communications.

Whether we are sending a written announcement or meeting with the director of a public organization, thinking about what kind of language to use will help us speak to that audience. We will want to refrain from using “NA language” in our communications. Not everyone in a public audience will understand what we mean by “ASC chair” or “home group.” Someone who is not familiar with NA terminology should be able to easily understand our communications; we should work to be professional and courteous. This means that we may seek help from members who have some writing experience when preparing written communications for the public.

Appearance. There is a fine line between showing respect for an audience through our appearance and presenting ourselves as something that we are not. When preparing for an initial interface or an informational meeting, we want to choose clothing that suits the setting. Some of us feel that changing our dress is somehow compromising who we are. Another way to look at dressing appropriately is that clothing choice is a way of showing an audience respect. We can think about it like a job interview: We dress appropriately to make a positive impression. We gain credibility when we are able to play by the rules of those with whom we are interacting. An initial impression can be lasting. We want our audience to remember NA as a beneficial program of recovery. At the same time, we don't want to require that members dress a certain way and present a false image of NA. Inviting a variety of members for presentations would more accurately represent the diverse membership found in NA.

Rehearse. Preparing for introductory interfaces and informational meetings is another way of conveying NA's message to the public. Just as inappropriate attire may distract an audience from the NA message, confusing communications and unprepared meetings distract an audience from hearing what NA has to offer. If we read and reread the materials to be used in the initial interaction, we are more likely to be familiar with and knowledgeable about our material. We can role-play with a mock audience composed of NA members. Role playing can help us anticipate some of the questions that may come from the audience. The goal is to leave the public with accurate information about NA and assurance that our organization and its members are reliable and capable.

Presentations

The presentation material

The goal of presentation material is to leave the audience with two or three important points about the Narcotics Anonymous program. We can use repetition to reinforce important points. And we can prepare handouts that outline the primary messages we want to communicate. There are sample presentation formats in the resources section of this chapter.

We want to be aware of our language choices when presenting to a public audience. We want to be extra careful not to use NA language. For example, a public audience may not understand NA's meaning of the word "fellowship" as clearly as they would "NA members." The goal when creating presentation material is to make it appropriate to the audience. This is where our research will help us form tailored presentation material.

We can also use our research to make NA's message meaningful to an audience. A presentation to healthcare professionals should be tailored to that specific audience. We don't want to overwhelm the audience with too much information. Instead, we want to provide specific, meaningful, and timely data.

We can communicate information about NA more clearly if we create talking points. "Talking points" are the key ideas for a particular presentation (see the next section, "What we want to communicate about NA," for examples of talking points). We can make decisions about

"The goal when creating presentation material is to make it appropriate to the audience. This is where our research will help us form tailored presentation material."

which points are most important to an audience based on our dialogue with and research of that audience.

We want to be sure that supporting materials reflect what we say in the presentation. Supporting materials often include NA pamphlets, the fellowship survey, copies of *The NA Way Magazine*, and whatever else seems appropriate for a given audience. If local information is available (newsletters, surveys, etc.), then those materials would work best at local events. Audiovisual support aides can also strengthen a presentation.

Remember to keep the format of the presentation flexible. A flexible format will keep the audience interested and will help create a dialogue. For example, if members of an audience exhibit puzzled looks, then the trusted servants can ask if everyone is clear about the information being presented. The presenter may then need to explain certain points in a different way or offer new information. This kind of flexibility demonstrates responsiveness and allows for dialogue. Breaking up a large group for small-group discussions, or using question-and-answer sessions, will allow us to hear back from the public audience.

What we want to communicate about NA

Practicing what we want to say about NA is crucial in our public interactions. To be successful with public relations, we need a consistent, well-crafted message. We want to be sure to communicate information like the following to the public:

- 1. A short description of local NA history and NA's overall development;**
- 2. A description of NA—our primary purpose and our sole requirement for membership;**
- 3. The role of the NA group and NA's traditions (a general overview about how groups and service bodies work to forward NA's message of recovery);**
- 4. NA's steps—we provide a brief description of the role of the Twelve Steps in recovery. We explain that the steps contain the spiritual principles of our personal program;**
- 5. We discuss the name "Narcotics Anonymous." We dispel any notions the audience may have that the word "narcotics" in our name means NA is only for those who used opiates;**
- 6. NA is a spiritual, not religious, program; and**
- 7. Where to find NA (phoneline, service office, WSO, website, etc.).**

Communication also includes outlining what NA can and cannot do. We work to help those who are unfamiliar with our program of recovery to understand the principles that underlie the actions of our fellowship. We give nonmembers a snapshot of our traditions: principles like cooperation and self-support. We don't need the public to fully understand our traditions, but we work toward a relationship with the public that honors our traditions.

Providing information about our program of recovery is communication. We share information through our written communications, our recovery and service literature, and our presentations with professionals. We do NA a great service when we clearly state what the Narcotics Anonymous program is. We try to avoid making assumptions that those outside of NA understand our organization. We don't promise that NA will work for everyone, but we offer our experience in seeing the NA program work for many

people from varying backgrounds and experiences. We highlight the diversity of our fellowship and our program—that NA is a global, multilingual, multicultural fellowship.

Following are a few examples of talking points that members might use when communicating about NA to nonmembers in a public setting:

- 📄 *Twelve-step/sponsorship/mutual help:* A professional audience may understand NA as a twelve-step program or a mutual-help program. The Twelve Steps refer to what the program is based on, and sponsorship refers to how the Twelve Steps are applied. Mutual help refers to a peer approach rather than a professional-to-addicts approach.
- 📄 *Spiritual approach:* The NA program is based on the practical application of spiritual principles in everyday life. For example, a member may not believe in God but may gain their freedom and hope from active addiction with the Twelve Steps or the group.
- 📄 *NA is a program based on spiritual principles:* The principles of NA’s program are able to cross cultural boundaries. This is gained by working NA’s Twelve Steps. Through working the steps, each member can gain their own experience with principles like honesty or faith.
- 📄 *What a newcomer can expect at an NA meeting:* Meetings often function in the following fashion: A newer member may be asked to say their name, members might share about the program working in their lives, and groups usually close with a circle and prayer.

“...we work toward a relationship with the public that honors our traditions.”

The presenters

It is important to choose a panel of presenters who represent a realistic picture of the NA community. We can do this by inviting a mix of members. We want to take a team approach in our presentations because we don’t want one person to represent NA. We work together and support each other when presenting NA to a public audience. We want the public to see that we are a diverse group of volunteers.

We need to consider who in our NA community is best suited to do the presentation. We try to match presenters with an audience. Some NA members will be better at presenting than others. Presenting is not simple; it takes time and preparation. We may decide to encourage people who lack presenting skills to volunteer for other service positions, or we may provide training for members so they can improve their presentation skills.

“We want to take a team approach in our presentations...”

Presenters can look at the Fourth Concept to be clear about the leadership role they are about to undertake. A question-and-answer session at the end of a presentation is a time when presenters may get asked questions that go beyond NA’s scope. This is a

situation where leadership qualities can be important. If a presenter is asked to give a television interview or state NA’s position on an outside issue, they should be prepared to say “No comment” and briefly explain why. Rehearsed answers to these questions can allow presenters to say “no” in a way that is respectful.

Effective leadership is highly valued in Narcotics Anonymous. Leadership qualities should be carefully considered when selecting trusted servants.

Twelve Concepts for NA Service

Nonaddict presenters

Two points to consider if we use adequately trained nonaddicts to speak for NA at community events are that (1) they can help us protect our anonymity at local events, and (2) they can advocate for NA using the language of the public audience. We want to be careful of using the same presenters so much that they become the “face” of NA.

Exhibits and booths

If we are not presenting and we are staffing a booth at an event, we take the same considerations of preparation and personal appearance. We want someone to be at the exhibit or booth at all times. We can invite experienced NA members to come join in events, yet we want to be sure to limit the number of members at an exhibit so that the booth isn't overcrowded; usually, three members are adequate. We provide local NA contact information to those who visit the booth. If a question to which we don't have the answer is posed, we offer to contact a member in the local NA community to get the answer to their question. We can make it a practice to ask those who visit the booth for their business cards. Getting this kind of contact information will be most useful if we are sure to follow up by sending a letter and information packets about NA. We try to be helpful and reliable when providing information about NA.

The audience

The audience is the reason for giving presentations. We encourage audience participants to network and invite their own contacts. We can also create ways for the public audience to give us feedback on our presentation. An evaluation form that asks participants about the usefulness of the presentation, the effectiveness of the presenters, the values of the material handed out during the session, and if there was anything else that could have been included can help our presentations continue to improve. We can solicit contact information from attendees and be sure to follow up with that contact information.

We can ask NA members to sit in the audience. We can train members from the local NA community by inviting them to observe the presentation and listen to the question-and-answer session. NA audience members can ask the first questions in the question-and-answer session. They can also help set the tone and provide the presenters with encouragement and support.

One of the more important things we can do is to listen to the audience. By listening to the audience, we can respond with more relevant information. We can also get their feedback and begin practicing having a dialogue with this public audience.

Rehearsal and preparation

Practicing with NA members can be a fun way to prepare for presentations. Trusted servants can ask each other the most difficult questions they can think of in a rehearsed presentation. Practicing with a friendly audience of NA members can also help presenters build their confidence. Rehearsing in this way will also ensure that our presentation fits into the allotted time frame.

Another way to prepare for presentations is to rehearse a Q&A session and have prepared answers for what seem to be typical questions. Presenters may also want to find organizations in the local community that offer training in public speaking.

Finally, we will want to be sure that we are aware of the variables at the event: Do we know what to expect from the venue? Do we know how many people are expected to show up? Can we control the temperature and room setup? Are we aware of the presentation start time, so we can be punctual? Are we dressed appropriately?

Organizing presentations

Members who coordinate public relations events and presentations have to keep a broader perspective in mind. The following points can be important when organizing presentations:

- ✎ The local NA community could provide a questionnaire for NA members to find out who has presentation or organization skills.
- ✎ Make sure that the presentation tools and resources are current.
- ✎ Schedule presentations during the time of day most convenient for invited participants.
- ✎ Trusted servants will also want to be sure to coordinate with other committees so the local service body can offer unified support to an event.
- ✎ If the local NA community has decided to use nonaddicts to present, be sure to have oriented and trained them to communicate accurate information about NA.
- ✎ There may be opportunities to set up an exhibit or booth at a local event. We can use this opportunity to seek out future contacts by getting business cards.

Tips for how to make our presentations more successful:

1. Be prepared
2. Know your audience
3. Keep it local—bring local materials
4. Be knowledgeable about NA resources
5. Be enthusiastic
6. Keep the presentation within the allotted time frame
7. Be simple and direct
8. Listen
9. Learn to “read” the audience
10. Send a thank-you letter
11. Survey the audience
12. Use feedback to improve for next time
13. Share information about NA and minimize personal experience

Our interactions with the public can become even more successful when we take some time to plan and prepare for them. Our primary purpose is to carry NA’s message to addicts around the world—many members of the public are more than happy to help us fulfill this purpose. We can do our part by presenting clear, reliable, and meaningful information about what NA is and how NA can help addicts.

Resources

Sample correspondence letter
Sample referral letter
Sample frequently asked questions
Sample presentation format
Use of the PI basics, meeting schedules, phonenumber
Area PR roundtable format

Organizational contact suggestions

Following is a list of general public organizations. Each chapter will provide a list of contacts that relate to the audience in that chapter (such as treatment, healthcare, and criminal justice).

- ❖ Industry: unions, employee assistance programs, human resource directors;
- ❖ Religious groups: check their church meeting times and office hours to find out when the best times are to make contact;
- ❖ Educational: teachers, colleges and universities, junior and senior high schools, guidance counselors;
- ❖ Service organizations: neighborhood groups, youth groups, social and cultural groups, service clubs, homeless and battered women's shelters, soup kitchens.