

SSP Video Script for Release with the 2014 CAR

This is the second of three videos covering the material in the 2014 *Conference Agenda Report*. Please visit www.na.org/conference to download all three videos and access any other conference material.

INTRODUCTION

Hello. This video has been put together by the World Board of NA to cover some of the highlights of the Service System Project and Proposals as those ideas have evolved as of October 2013. After covering the basics of the proposals, we will explain the service system motions that will be in the *Conference Agenda Report*. Much more information about the project can be found on the project webpage: www.na.org/servicesystem.

We want to start by clearly saying: the Service System Proposals are not a mandate. The most important aspect of the proposals is the broad principles that underpin them—things like group support, planning, and collective decision making. The proposals offer a model to help communities improve how they put these principles into practice. In an international fellowship as large and far-flung as Narcotics Anonymous, one size will never fit all, and so we are working to get more practical understanding of the different ways that communities implement the ideas in the proposals.

We have just finished a field test of the local aspects of the service system proposals and these experiences should help us to create a frame with enough shared experience that communities can make choices about what will best help them carry the message. This video attempts to explain some of the basics of the proposals, with the understanding that local communities will adapt the details of any system to fit their specific needs.

BACKGROUND

First to back up a bit: The Service System project grew out of a need to try to address some of the issues that service bodies throughout NA struggle with—too few trusted servants, a poor atmosphere of recovery at service meetings, duplication of efforts, poor communication, and the list goes on.... If you are involved in service, chances are you are familiar with many of the issues. Most of us have encountered them in our service experience.

But where to start? We began where one must always begin—we looked to the Traditions and Concepts. And we realized we must start with a shared vision, as a fellowship. So our first task was to offer “A Vision for NA Service” which passed unanimously at the 2010 World Service Conference.

We asked ourselves, “How can the service system help NA achieve our vision and better carry the message?” Our Basic Text is clear: “Everything that occurs in the course of NA

service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the NA message to the addict who still suffers.”

We felt the most important job of the service system is grounded in the Fifth Tradition, to support the groups in achieving their primary purpose.

And so we proposed a forum to help support the groups.

GROUP SUPPORT FORUMS

The group support forum is a place to discuss group problems and successes away from budgets and motions. It is the service equivalent of one addict helping another. Here newer members can get introductory or basic information about NA, including how the service system works.

Group support forums can also be a place for literature distribution, workshops and training sessions, for finding members to serve on H&I panels, planning picnics, and other neighborhood based activities. The exact activities of a group support forum will vary from place to place, but the key is that it focuses on the needs of the group.

All interested members, not just group representatives, are encouraged to come. It’s a friendly, discussion-based gathering where newer members can get their feet wet and learn more about NA, and veterans can share their experiences and actively mentor others.

The proposals describe group support forums as neighborhood-sized—the idea was that each local service committee as described in the proposals (or today’s area service committees) would have several small GSFs within it. A smaller sized group support forum means less distance to travel for those who are interested, and it can be easier to keep discussion informal and more like a conversation in a small group. After field testing, however, we found that some communities prefer a group focused meeting that includes all of the groups in their community to improve communication across the community. In these communities holding a group support forum has simply meant changing the focus of the majority of what were their area service committee meetings, leaving four meetings a year for planning and business and the others for group support.

In communities with smaller group support forums many of those GSFs have a delegate who attends the local service conference and reports on the groups in the GSF. In some cases, groups have elected to attend the group support forum and not the local service conference, delegating that responsibility to the GSF delegate. More often, groups attend both the group support forum and the local service conference. Along with group-focused, flexibility is one of the foundational principles of the proposals and again, each community will adapt things according to their needs.

LOCAL SERVICE CONFERENCES

We've already mentioned that two of the foundational principles of the Service System Proposals are "group focused" and "flexible." The other three foundational principles—purpose-driven, collaborative, and geographically based—are each integral to the local service conference and the local service board. These two bodies together accomplish most of NA's service delivery.

The proposals describe the local service conference as a quarterly, plan-driven meeting attended by all of the GSRs and/or GSF delegates, along with trusted servants of the LSC and interested members. One of the meetings of the local service conference is an annual assembly where all interested members of the community gather to set service priorities for the year ahead. This annual planning assembly ensures that the groups get to set the general direction of services. The other local service conferences are opportunities for communication, oversight, and careful selection of leaders.

As much as possible the discussions and decisions at the local service conference are concerned with strategic direction and oversight. Administrative decisions and details are delegated to the local service board, which is then accountable to the local service conference. The combination of the local service conference and the local service board balance the delegation spoken of in the Third Concept with the group responsibility and authority called for in the Second Concept.

The proposals suggest the local service conference meets quarterly, and the local service board and the committees and workgroups meet monthly in order to fulfill their functions. In practice, some communities have found they prefer having all GSRs meet together more often than quarterly. Some have quarterly service conferences and hold group support forums with the whole community the other eight months of the year, as mentioned above. Others alternate service conferences and group support forums, whether those GSFs are neighborhood-sized or consisting of the whole community. These are just a couple of alternatives.

Decision making itself is consensus-based where practical although voting may still be the preferred way to handle items like elections or urgent decisions where the body fails to reach consensus.

LOCAL SERVICE BOARD

The local service board is more detail oriented than the conference. The board does the day-to-day work to accomplish the goals and realize the vision directed by the conference. The local service board administers the work prioritized by the LSC planning assembly. The conference are the architects; the board are the builders and contractors.

The local service board reports to and is overseen by the local service conference. The board creates plans and a budget, which are approved by the LSC to carry out the work of the plan. The hands-on service delivery may be accomplished by workgroups led by coordinators or by committees. The board will make recommendations to the local

service conference depending on what seems to make the most practical sense. Form should follow function.

In short the service system proposals suggest a separation between these three types of concerns: 1. Group issues and needs are handled at the group support forum. 2. Strategic decisions and general oversight of local services are handled at the local service conference. And 3. day-to-day administration of local services is handled by the local service board.

One of the more controversial elements of the Service System Proposals is the idea that service bodies are, where practical, defined by geographic boundaries. This is, in fact, one of the five main foundational principles of the proposals. For the local service conference, in the US that would mean county, town, or city boundaries.

The reasons for this recommendation are three-fold: 1. To avoid duplication of services, 2. To make sure all parts of a state or nation are covered by a service body, 3. To make NA more visible to addicts who are trying to find us as well as members of the public who refer addicts to us. All aspects of PR efforts, including H&I, outreach, and fellowship development, are enhanced when service bodies conform to recognized geographic boundaries.

Still, it's important to recognize that for some ASCs, being defined by geographic boundaries could mean unifying with a neighboring service body—possibly a daunting task. What seems crucial is better communication and collaboration with our neighbors with an eye to having a conversation about *possible* unification down the road.

The first step for many communities would just be to open communication with neighboring service bodies. Most areas do not have a full awareness of what their neighboring areas do. Bringing trusted servants together, whether through a shared learning day or a series of meetings with trusted servants of the areas, will help open the lines of communication, and communication is a necessary first step toward any possible collaboration—another foundational principle of the service system proposals.

Over time, neighboring service bodies may want to consider sharing services where it makes sense to do so (e.g., sharing a phoneline where two service bodies occupy the same area code; cooperating to do public outreach to a school system when two service bodies exist within the same county).

Eventually, at some point that may lead to discussion and ultimately decisions about whether it makes sense to combine neighboring service bodies. And it may not. Again, these are decisions that will be made locally and collaboratively.

The proposed system involves a number of changes. In any transition to a new system, communities may want to take the changes piece by piece rather than all at once. An evolution rather than a revolution. Change can be difficult. Nonetheless, we owe it to

ourselves and to those we serve to do what we can to improve our ability to carry the NA message. Our Basic Text tells us “We must realize that we are not perfect. There will always be room for growth.” Just like our personal program, our service delivery will never be perfect. There will always be room for growth.

WORLD SERVICE CONFERENCE AND CONFERENCE AGENDA REPORT

At the 2014 World Service Conference, the Fellowship of NA through their elected delegates will take the next step and decide whether they agree in principle to move forward in the direction of a service system that includes group support forums, local service conferences, and local service boards. Those questions will be separate and they will be presented in the form of motions

There will be a motion devoted to the group support forum:

Motion 4: To agree in principle to move in the direction of a service system that contains group support forums: discussion oriented gatherings focused on the needs of the group, as described by the characteristics below.

Following the motion is a list of essential characteristics of a GSF—that it be discussion-oriented, group focused, training-oriented, and open to all—and a list of recommended characteristics—that it be neighborhood sized and that it meet monthly.

There is also a motion devoted to the local service conference:

Motion 5: To agree in principle to move in the direction of a service system that contains local service conferences, strategic service oriented planning conferences as described by the characteristics below.

Again, following the motion is a list of essential characteristics of a LSC—that it be plan-driven, form follows function, it is strategic, and consensus-based. And there are also recommended characteristics—that it meet quarterly and is defined by county, city, or town boundaries.

The third motion is devoted to the local service board:

Motion 6: To agree in principle to move in the direction of a service system that contains local service boards, a body overseen by the local service conference that administers the work prioritized by the LSC, as described in the characteristics below.

The characteristics that follow the motion that are essential to the LSB are that it is responsible to the local service conference, it carries out the LSC’s priorities, and it meets monthly. The LSB organizes the annual planning assembly and coordinates the LSC meetings. It is recommended that the LSB consist of the admin body and service coordinators.

Typically, these ideas would not even be offered in the form of motions until there was a service manual or something similar to consider for adoption. However, despite

unanimous support of the Service System Project plan in 2008 and 2010, strong support of the project plan in 2012, and adoption of a series of resolutions related to the project at the 2012 WSC, there still seems to be some sentiment that the project lacks clear support. We offer these motions in the spirit of unity. Hopefully, this is a step forward together to try to evolve into a service system that helps us better carry our message.

These motions are not a mandate. The conference cannot tell communities how to deliver services locally. World Services has no ability to mandate or enforce how structures, processes, people, or resources are set up on a local level, nor do we desire such ability. As described in *A Guide to World Services*, World Services purpose is “communication, coordination, information, and guidance.” It is in the service of that purpose that we have undertaken the work of the Service System Project.

If these motions pass, the conference will then vote on a transition plan—probably similar to a project plan—that will be included in the Conference Approval Track material mailed out at the end of January.

The Service System Proposals also include ideas about state-, province- or nationwide service bodies, as well as conference seating and the role of zones. None of those aspects of the proposals are up for decision at the next World Service Conference. They are still under discussion. If the motions related to local services are passed at the next conference, we will release a video related to these ideas next conference cycle.

We hope this video has helped to clarify the service system proposals. If you have any questions, please reach out and let us know: worldboard@na.org.

You can download a copy of the *Conference Agenda Report* online at www.na.org/conference or order a hard copy from NA World Services.