

2012-14 Issue Discussion Topic Session Profile: Group Conscience

Session materials: Notes sheet with discussion questions, Ground Rules, Brainstorming Guidelines, Facilitator’s Instructions, Traditions and Concepts sheets, Group Conscience handout.

Purpose of Session

- ◆ Discuss principles of group conscience and delegation as they apply to decision-making and accountability for all NA services.
- ◆ Review some perceived conflicts between principles in the Traditions and Concepts and discuss how we strike the balance.

Session Outline

Introduction — Background, Group Conscience, Delegation, and Our Principles	10 minutes
Large Group Discussion — Home Group Decisions	15 minutes
Small Group Discussion Set-up	10 minutes
Small Group Discussion — Decisions, Delegation, Accountability	20 minutes
Small Group Feedback	15 minutes
Large Group Discussion — Delegation and Responsibility	15 minutes
Session Wrap-up	5 minutes

Introduction – Background, Group Conscience, Delegation, and Our Principles

10 minutes

Facilitators introduce themselves and provide an overview of the session and the goals. Facilitators should let participants know this is a full/challenging session that covers a lot of ground fairly quickly.

- ◆ This session arose in part from some concerns we heard regarding the Service System Proposals—specifically, some members have raised questions about whether making decisions about service body boundaries collectively at the next level of service is consistent with the Traditions. Others had concerns about delegating administrative decisions to a local service board and how that does or does not mesh with the principle of group conscience.
- ◆ In a more general sense, as we discuss changes to our service system, we will need to talk further about what we really mean by “group conscience,” “delegation,” and “accountability” and how these principles work together and complement one another in the proposed service system.
- ◆ The perceived conflict between delegation and group conscience is not new; NA service bodies in some places still view the Twelve Concepts as being in conflict with the Twelve Traditions.
- ◆ This session is designed to help us better understand that “true spiritual principles are never in conflict,” and that our Traditions and Concepts work together in harmony to guide our efforts.
- ◆ In this session we will first talk about the meaning of “group conscience” as we experience it in some of our various groups and service bodies. Then we will discuss balancing delegation and accountability and how that shapes the relationships between groups and other levels of NA service.

Large Group Discussion — Home Group Decisions

15 minutes

Ask a handful of members from various parts of the room to share about how their home group handles various types of decisions.

Large Group Questions Use a PowerPoint slide or handout with the questions below.

1. **How does your group make decisions about group issues, such as meeting format or how much money to contribute to other levels of service?** (Seek at least two responses. Ask for examples, and how the process usually works, whether discussion is encouraged, etc.)

2. **How does your group decide on local service issues, such as area motions that have been sent back to the groups, or does your group even do that?** (Seek at least two responses. Probe for more info, such as what process is used to discuss the issues, etc.)
3. **By show of hands: Does your group have requirements about who is allowed to vote on group issues? On ASC issues? For those groups that do, have you discussed the reason for these requirements as a group, or is it simply accepted as “the way our group has always done it”?**

Facilitator explains that, as this discussion has shown, groups have many different ways of thinking about group conscience, which is fine. The problem comes when we begin thinking one of these ways is the only right way. Even if many groups in one region or zone function in very similar ways, regional reports indicate that the same isn't true worldwide.

Small Group Discussion — Set-up **10 minutes**

Facilitator's note: The following information is available as a PowerPoint slide and/or as a handout. Members can get the details from the handout. You need only summarize. The important point for people to understand and remember is not necessarily every detail of the specifics, but the fact that there is so much variety.

◆ In the regional reports for the 2012 World Service Conference, we asked, “**How does your region reach a conscience about WSC matters?**” The answers varied greatly. Many took this question to mean, “How do you become informed about WSC matters?” However, over 60 regions (out of 112 regional reports received) gave some information about how they develop a regional conscience. Most of these were evenly divided between a group tally, a regional assembly of some form, and an area tally, with the last option being slightly less popular.

❖ Group tally ----- 18	❖ Area tally ----- 16
❖ Regional assembly ----- 14 (those who take a group tally at the assembly are counted above)	❖ Member tally----- 7
❖ RSC ----- 4	❖ RDs only ----- 3
	❖ Don't discuss WSC matters 3
	❖ Through zonal forum----- 1

- ◆ Additional detail in reports included
- ❖ Some regions allow absentee and online voting by groups.
 - ❖ Some allow open participation from any member at the RSC.
 - ❖ Some make a point of giving the delegate a vote of confidence at the RSC prior to the WSC to vote on any additional matters that might arise at the WSC.

Facilitator explains that with so many different ideas about how group conscience “should” function in NA, sometimes it may be best to simply go back to the spiritual principles of our Traditions and Concepts for guidance. We will use a small group discussion to explore this idea.

Small Group Discussion — Decisions, Delegation, Accountability **20 minutes**

- ◆ The following passages from *IWHW* and the Concepts Booklet are available on the session handout. If you have time in the session, you may want members to read these passages out loud and, as a facilitator, talk through the ways these traditions and concepts work together.
- ◆ If you are more pressed for time, you can simply have a member read Traditions 2 & 9 and Concepts 3 & 6 themselves as they appear on the PowerPoint slides.

Tradition Two For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

Handout text: “Our direction in service comes from a God of our understanding, whether we serve as individuals, as a group, or as a service board or committee. Whenever we come together, we seek the presence and guidance of this loving Higher Power. This direction then guides us through all our actions.” *It Works: How and Why*, Tradition Two

Tradition Nine NA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

Handout text: “Groups share information and guidance with the boards and committees serving them. Then these boards and committees report back to the groups to which they are responsible, describing their operations, discussions, and plans. Responsible service boards and committees consult the groups in matters directly affecting them and seek direction from the groups in matters not already covered by existing policy.... Whenever possible, organized service work should be kept distinct from the groups so that they can remain free to simply and directly fulfill our primary purpose, addict to addict. The boards and committees we do organize, we organize on the basis of need only, using the simplest guidelines possible.” *It Works: How and Why*, Tradition Nine

Concept Three The NA groups delegate to the service structure the authority necessary to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to it.

Handout text: “The NA groups maintain final responsibility and authority for the service structure they have created. Yet if they must involve themselves directly in making decisions for all of our service boards and committees, the groups will have little time or energy left to carry the recovery message in their meetings. For this reason, the groups entrust the service structure with the authority to make necessary decisions in carrying out the tasks assigned to it.” *Twelve Concepts for NA Service*, Third Concept

Concept Six Group conscience is the spiritual means by which we invite a loving God to influence our decisions.

Handout text: “We apply the Sixth Concept when we listen not just to the words our fellow members speak, but to the spirit behind their words. We apply the Sixth Concept when we seek to do God’s will, not our own, and to serve others, not ourselves, in our service decisions. We apply the Sixth Concept in our groups, service boards, and committees when we invite a loving God to influence us before making service-related decisions.” *Twelve Concepts for NA Service*, Sixth Concept

- ◇ Let members know there is a handout they can take with them that has passages that illustrate the productive tension between the principles of delegation, group conscience, and accountability in these Concepts and Traditions.
- ◇ Now we will talk through some of the practical application of those principles in small groups.

For the small group discussion each group should choose a facilitator and a recorder. The recorder should write out ideas as clearly as possible even if it means taking more time. World Services wants your input after the workshop is over.

Small group questions Use a PowerPoint slide or handout with the questions below.

4. **A. What level of involvement does your home group want on area or regional (or world) matters?**
B. What specific kinds of area or regional or world decisions do you think your home group should consider?
C. What kinds of decisions do you think your home group should delegate? (Groups may want to give very specific examples of the types of decisions or even make lists.)
5. **If the groups aren’t directly involved in making a decision, how can they hold service bodies accountable?**

Small Group Feedback

15 minutes

Hear back from as many small groups as possible, recording their ideas at the front of the room. Again, try to get specific responses.

Try to connect the reporting from the tables to the concepts of delegation, group conscience, and accountability. This may be an opportunity to highlight the idea of a plan-driven service body and the group’s role in the planning process: in particular the group’s involvement in setting goals, priorities, and the general direction of our services versus being involved in the smaller details of how those services are carried out.

Large Group Discussion — Delegation and Responsibility

15 minutes

In small groups, you just discussed how NA groups can hold service bodies accountable. Now we’ll approach the same issue from the perspective of the service bodies created by the groups.

6. How can service bodies exercise the authority delegated to them by the groups and remain “directly responsible to those they serve?”

It may help to reflect on the idea of a “trusted servant” as someone who is directed by a group or service body - *a servant* - but who also has authority delegated to them - *trusted* - and how this connects the second and third concepts. In addition, a plan-driven system is one way for groups to ensure that service bodies remain “directly responsible to those they serve” while also allowing them the authority needed to fulfill their task. If no one mentions the Eighth and Ninth Concepts, you may want to close with a reference to them and the need for clear communication and responsible decision-making.

Session Wrap-Up

5 minutes

As we discussed at the beginning of the session, true spiritual principles are never in conflict. Our program has many paradoxes, such as “surrender to win” or “giving it away to keep it.” The principles of group conscience and delegation are not in conflict, but complement one another.

Explain to the group that their input today will help inform future service efforts, particularly related to the Service System Project.

Note to facilitator: Please send any input on these Issue Discussion Topic questions to worldboard@na.org. Session profiles and resources are available at www.na.org/IDT.