

Our Service System— from the 2008 *Conference Agenda Report* IDT Essay

In one way or another, we have devoted an issue discussion topic to our service structure and how to improve it for four years. During the 2004–2006 conference cycle, one of the four IDTs was Infrastructure. In workshops around the world, members talked about issues that affect their communities' ability to carry the message and how they can creatively solve some of the problems they've experienced in their infrastructure. The results of those discussions were reported in the March 2006 *Conference Report* and helped to inform the IDTs and projects for this cycle.

During this conference cycle, we took up some very similar questions with the issue discussion topic, Our Service System. At first we issued a series of seven questions under this broad heading, including “How can our current service system better allow for new ideas and creative approaches?” and “What aspects of the system may need changing?” As we mentioned above, part way through the conference cycle, we used the input we were hearing to reframe the questions on all three IDTs. In the case of Our Service System, we released a new set of questions that were more focused; some addressed bringing an atmosphere of recovery to service; others concentrated on issues related to leadership; the third pair asked members to talk about planning and self-support.

Repeatedly over the course of these four years, we have heard that we need better communication, less duplication of efforts, more training, and more effective delegation, among many other responses. We need to find a way to make service more attractive, more accessible, and more supportive. Interestingly enough, these are all observations that were repeatedly made about world services in the 1980s and early 1990s. Many of you will remember that we ceased all but essential services to devote our attention to an inventory, and the results of that inventory led to a restructuring of world services, including the adoption of our vision statement in 1996 and the creation of the World Board in 1998. Almost immediately, we began to see improvements, and we continued to suggest smaller improvements to the structure (e.g., reducing the size of the board). While, of course, things aren't perfect in world services today, they are greatly improved on every front.

But while we made huge structural changes to world services, little has changed on the local level. We're not suggesting that local service bodies should cease all but essential services for a years-long inventory process, but we are thinking that we need to reexamine our service structure in a broad sense. Perhaps some of our chronic problems mentioned above can be alleviated through restructuring local services in some way.

We have begun to make some changes on a local level. Most notably, of course, we have a new *Public Relations Handbook*, approved at the 2006 World Service Conference. The handbook is being implemented in different ways in regions and areas around the world. Some committees have developed a position for PR coordinator and

are consolidating what used to be three separate committees (PI, H&I, and Phonelines) under that one PR umbrella, for instance. It may be, however, that developing a new handbook for one focused area of service is like building a new room onto an old house. We want to hear from you how well this addition improves the house as a whole and whether we need to continue “renovating.” As part of the *PR Handbook* endeavor, we also put together an Area Planning Tool that was approved at the 2006 World Service Conference as well. We have heard back from a number of areas (and regions) who are using the APT and finding it helpful. If you haven’t sent any feedback to world services about the planning tool, please do.

More broadly, we want to know what is and isn’t working well in your local service efforts. The *PR Handbook* and the Area Planning Tool were both created in response to local needs, and we know in many cases that the implementation of these two new tools would fall into the “what’s working” category. But we are also hearing that the APT and the *PR Handbook* may be stop-gap measures—that areas and regions are looking for new, more creative ways to imagine their structures, increase communication, and simplify service delivery.

Another thing that we’re beginning to hear at workshops is that we need a stronger sense of shared vision and purpose. This is where we would like to begin moving forward with the topic of Our Service System. In the course of the next several months, between now and the conference, we hope that you will share with us your ideas about what works well and what needs to change in your local service bodies.

We know from our own experience at world services that having a common vision is crucial in our efforts. The NAWS Vision Statement explains that “our vision is our touchstone, our reference point, inspiring all that we do,” and that is the truth. Yet there is no corresponding touchstone for local services. Let’s work together on trying to establish that shared vision in the cycle ahead.

From that vision we can move forward to discuss our service delivery and whether or not we need to consider any changes in our system so that our groups can better carry the message. We are not sure how it will all unfold, but we see this discussion as potentially leading to changes in our service system and eventually a corresponding revision of *A Guide to Local Services in NA*. This is one reason we are encouraging as wide a response as possible to the questions below. The input and ideas we hear may become building blocks for a revision of *GLS* or for new tools to help local service bodies.

Questions for Discussion

3. If you are using the Area Planning Tool, how has it helped, and how can it be improved?
4. If you are not, is there a reason why? What would convince you to use the APT?
5. What do you think is working well in your local service structure?
6. What do you think is not working in your local service structure?

We are interested in hearing not just from delegates and RSCs, but also from areas, groups, and subcommittees. In fact, delegates might want to consider collecting input area-by-area or encouraging areas to submit information directly online rather than trying to come up with one response for the whole region. We have posted an online form for all of the discussion questions in this *Conference Agenda Report*, and we hope to get plenty of responses before the conference. You can access the form from the link on our conference page: <http://www.na.org/conference>. The more input we get before the conference, the better able we will be to frame an effective session on this topic. Our time at the conference is best used discussing what we have found rather than simply collecting the data