

Fellowship Discussion Sessions

Roundtable discussions have become our standard way of sharing ideas throughout the fellowship. These sessions can be used to discuss a wide variety of material, including issue discussion topics, literature review and input, service training workshops, CAR discussions, and so on. Coming together in this way encourages greater participation and interaction among those who attend, inspiring members to engage in the topics and share enthusiasm and ideas.

The following are some of the basic tools and approaches necessary for having successful discussion sessions. With effective facilitation based on the strategies outlined here, our basic session outlines can be turned into vibrant, lively events with far-reaching results. A crucial element of successful sessions is adequate preparation. Familiarity with these approaches and the outlines for each session, as well as some knowledge about the audience, will go a long way in helping to make the necessary preparations.

Materials Needed for Sessions:

In general, most sessions will require the following materials. Make note of any additional items needed in the session outline as part of the preparation.

- ◆ *Pens and note sheets with session questions*
- ◆ *Large Post-It pad, chalk board or white board in front of room*
- ◆ *Large Post-It sheets and markers for tables, if available*
- ◆ *Ground Rules, Brainstorming Guidelines, and Facilitators Instructions*

Introducing the Session:

First session of the event/day: Introduce yourself and any other session leaders, review the length of the session, and make any necessary announcements (schedule for the day, bathrooms, parking, smoking, etc). Depending on the size and makeup of the group, consider having each member introduce him/herself by name and current service position. This can provide a snapshot of the level of experience in the room. This may not be necessary if those present already know each other.

Icebreaker exercises

Icebreakers help orient members to the small group process and build community. To get people started, have each table come up with a name for their small group, or have members share interesting personal details and then decide as a group which detail to share with the rest of the room. As another option, try to come up with an icebreaker related to the session topic.

Introducing the Topic: Begin a session by explaining the desired atmosphere and outcomes for the session. Stress the need to share ideas and experience, to stay focused, and to listen and learn with an open mind and heart. Ask for help to preserve a mutually respectful tone, much as we would find in a meeting.

Discuss the purpose and focus of the session, touching on bullet points from the session outline. A brief overview of the importance of the topic and the information to be discussed will help members get a frame of reference. Sharing a brief related story or personal experience may be a way to highlight the impact of the issue being discussed.

Large Group Discussions

Introduction: Spend a few minutes introducing the material to be discussed using points from session outlines as a framework. After the lead-in, ask large-group discussion questions one at a time, allowing members to take turn sharing answers with the whole group. The amount of time spent on each question will depend on the material (and the energy about the material) as well as the length of the session, schedule for the day, etc.

The Questions: Some questions may be used as primers, just to get members to start sharing ideas on a particular topic. It is not necessary to capture answers to these questions on note sheets. When the group begins to discuss main questions for a session, one of the facilitators will want to write down answers given on the pad at the front of the room for everyone to see. Asking questions can help to distill the ideas offered to the clearest and strongest points possible. NA clichés are common answers; encourage members to give specific examples.

Small Group Discussion

Introduction: Spend a few minutes introducing the material to be discussed using points from session outlines as a framework. Once the material has been presented, explain the small group discussion process: review the brainstorming guidelines, ground rules, and facilitator's instructions. Have each group select a facilitator and recorder; remind everyone to share the time equally. Recorders at each table should write answers on post-it sheets in large and clear print, including the session name and question number on each sheet.

The Questions: Depending on the session outline, how the questions will be divided up among the groups will vary. A common approach would be to divide the room up into two or three sections, assigning each section different questions to discuss. If groups are given more than one question to answer, be sure to tell them how much time to spend on each. Remind everyone when it's time to switch questions. If background or reference materials on the topic have been provided, remind members to refer to them in their small-group discussions. If time allows, it may help to have groups spend a few minutes prioritizing their answers.

Reporting Back: When time is up, ask groups to put their completed post-it sheets on the walls. Working one question at a time, allow members from each group to share their answers. Depending on the time available and the topic discussed, groups may be allowed to give a single answer, their top three answers, or even all of their answers. The session outline may provide guidance on this. If necessary, ask follow-up questions to help develop or explore ideas.

Session Wrap-up

Spend a few minutes reviewing the main points of the session, linking back to the opening statements of the session. Give examples of how the ideas shared or work accomplished in the session can help us to better meet our goals as a fellowship. Remind participants to try to take away as many new ideas as possible from the session and share them with others. That is how we help Narcotics Anonymous and our service system continue to grow and thrive.

*Remember to share your experiences and input on topics with NA World Services—
new ideas often lead to solutions for old problems.*