

Infrastructure Issue Discussion Topic Session Profile

in.fra.struc.ture 'in-frə-, strək-chər, -frä- n (1927) **1: the underlying foundation or basic framework (as of a system or organization)**

“In preparation for this meeting, I thought I would call what I thought would be a central [NA] office, which turned out to be Dave somebody’s answering machine, and two days later got a call back.”

Psychiatrist/Addiction Medicine Specialist

What is infrastructure? Basically, it is our service structure and the system in place to help us carry the message of recovery. It is the group, area, region, and committees and how they relate to each other. It is the framework that supports what we do in NA.

In our efforts to coordinate discussion within the fellowship, we thought this might be a good opportunity to share a unique global perspective with you. It has become especially clear that our fellowship’s infrastructure is in need of some attention. We have common problems—whether in rural communities or large metropolitan areas, whether our local fellowship is made up of newly clean members or members with longtime recovery. We hear the same things from members throughout the world as we heard from delegates in their regional reports to the World Service Conference:

- ① areas that don’t meet regularly due to lack of trusted servants,
- ② not enough willing members to serve on committees or get involved in service,
- ③ phonelines going down or going unanswered,
- ④ issues with mismanaged funds,
- ⑤ problems with unity,
- ⑥ losing meeting venues, and
- ⑦ unproductive service meetings.

We all know that if there were easy answers to our infrastructure weaknesses we probably would have found them already. Discussing local infrastructure with other members may not produce immediate solutions, but as we know—*not everything of value is quick or tangible*. Sometimes the creativity we need to actually solve our problems can come from having a real discussion outside of the normal business of our group, area, regional, or committee meetings. Just think about the ways our personal recovery has evolved through honest sharing and listening to what others have to say. Solutions come over time and instant gratification does not always serve us in recovery or in service. This much is clear: *in order for us to make NA’s message truly available to any addict seeking it, our fellowship’s infrastructure will have to become steady and reliable*. It will take all of our many ideas, and our various perspectives to *begin* the hard work of strengthening our infrastructure.

Large Group Discussion

You may want to begin the session with a community-building exercise. It is our experience that this type of icebreaker is a crucial component to successful discussions. You could ask each participant to share with the group why they came, what fears they have about being there, what service positions they have held, or simply where they are in their personal recovery?

- ✘ As one group, begin the session by explaining what this session is, what you hope to accomplish, and provide a brief bit of background. Then ask participants the following

question: What are some of the specific issues affecting our local community's ability to carry the NA message?

- ✘ Once you have a list of some specific problems (e.g., no area H&I chairperson, theft of funds, fights at meeting facilities, etc.), then draw out the underlying issue of the specific problem—no H&I chairperson could become *apathy*, problems with funds could become *dishonesty* or *lack of accountability*, fights at meeting facilities could become *irresponsibility* or *selfishness*. The goal here is to find a word or phrase to describe the issue that creates the problem—not just that one particular problem. Be sure to ask the participants if the core issues you have chosen adequately sum up their concerns.
- ✘ As one group, acknowledge how the issues you've listed are relevant to various aspects of your community's ability to carry the NA message to addicts who still suffer.

Small Group Activity

Now break into small groups and distribute a piece of paper with the core issue identified and written on the top (make sure each group has a different topic—if there are more groups than topics, repeat the topic, if there are more topics than groups, give each group more than one topic to discuss).

Each group will be given fifteen minutes to discuss the topic they've been given. Remind participants that this is a brainstorming exercise—it's not the time to edit what might be bad ideas or explain why something won't work! Diversity and creativity should be encouraged, not stifled. Some questions to get the small group discussion started could be:

- ✘ What are some creative solutions that could address ____ [core issue] in our local infrastructure?
- ✘ What's getting in the way of those solutions?
- ✘ What ideas have been ruled out because "*that's not the way we've always done things*" or *it seems unrealistic*?

After each group has had time to discuss one or two topics, have participants gather into one group to share the ideas they discovered in their small group discussions.

Small Group Reports/Wrap-Up

Ask each table to report on a topic. You can keep the reporting session as structured or loosely structured as the group prefers or as time permits. You might close the reporting session by asking if there is anything missing or any "burning desires."

- ✘ How can you relate what you just discussed to strengthening our infrastructure?
- ✘ What can you personally do as a result of this discussion?
- ✘ What follow-up discussions do we need to have?