

# Our Public Image Issue Discussion Topic Session Profile

“When you’re working with adolescents, it’s even more difficult, because I may say, I may be thinking emotionally I think this adolescent will really connect with this particular meeting, but this particular meeting is also pretty well-known for its predatory males, and so I won’t send a young woman to that meeting.”

Treatment Program Counselor

NA’s public image is often directly dependent on the strength and stability of our fellowship’s infrastructure. When we conducted the Public Relations Roundtable meetings with professionals who interface with our fellowship, their concerns sounded familiar:

- ② confusion about which NA phone number to call in a large city (and no one available to answer the phone once a number has been found),
- ② a lack of confidence in the safety and recovery available at NA meetings (that is, predatory behavior at meetings is a direct reflection upon NA’s image to the public),
- ② NA being overwhelmed by potential members sent from drug courts,
- ② lack of identification in some meetings by target populations—youth, prescription drug addicts, professionals, etc.,
- ② not seeing NA as stable or reliable, and
- ② a lack of awareness of the existence of various NA literature or periodicals.

These are only examples of how professionals see us and don’t even include the difficulty most of us face with NA’s public image when trying to find a meeting facility or start a new H&I panel. Whether it’s a professional considering sending an addict to one of our meetings or a high school administrator taking a chance with a presentation to their student body, a positive public image is crucial to our primary purpose. We feel that it is time to begin squarely facing some of the messages we’ve been putting out to the public. Our relationship with the public is something we cannot avoid. We are not a secret society—we are an effective and viable solution to drug addiction and it’s time we consistently behave that way. The first step is being honest about the challenges we face in our own local communities, which is the place where practical solutions can arise. As our literature says, “if a solution isn’t practical then it isn’t spiritual.”

## 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 questions: What is NA’s image in our local community? Why is it important to improve? What are your personal experiences with NA’s public’s image? (positive and negative)
- ✘ Next, ask participants to discuss what some of NA’s public image problems are in the local community. List the various responses and then draw out the underlying

concern (behavior at meetings, no volunteers to answer the phone, meetings closing, lack of trusted servants, outdated meeting schedules, no plan on how to work with professionals, treatment, or institutions, etc.). Be sure to ask participants if the key areas you have chosen adequately sum up their concerns.

### Small Group Activity

Now break into small groups and distribute a piece of paper with the underlying concern discussed in the large group and written on the top (make sure each table has a different topic— if there are more tables 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:

- ✘ How might our group, area, region, or committee improve this particular challenge?**
- ✘ What tools or resources do we need to make those changes?**

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.”

- ✘ What can I personally do as a result of this discussion?**
- ✘ What can our local service community do?**