

Special interest meetings

The following is a synopsis of a report that was delivered to the World Service Conference at its annual meeting in April 1989 by the WSC Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings. Formed the previous year, the committee was chaired by the vice chairperson of the World Service Board of Trustees. This bulletin was revised during the 1995-96 conference year.

The WSC Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings was formed by vote of the 1988 World Service Conference. The intent of this motion, as stated in the WSC minutes, was to help us as a fellowship come to grips with and perhaps find a solution to the issue of special interest meetings. In addition, this committee could provide some forum for the input of ideas about the issue.

Purpose of the Committee

The committee spent a great deal of its initial meeting discussing what the conference wanted it to accomplish. As a result of the discussion, the committee set the following goals:

1. To provide a definition of special interest meetings;
2. To investigate precisely what role special interest meetings play in the Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship;
3. To allow the fellowship an opportunity to comment on this issue by means of conducting open forums; requesting input directly from groups and members via the Newsline, the Fellowship Report, and *The NA Way Magazine*; and by direct mailings to regions; and,
4. To provide a report which could be used by NA members as a basis for the discussion of the issue of special interest meetings.

Definition of Special Interest Groups

At the beginning of its deliberations, the committee attempted to define what, precisely, a special interest meeting is and how that definition fits into existing NA guidelines on the subject. We were informed in this part of our task by both the Temporary Working Guide to Our Service Structure and the Basic Text.

The Temporary Working Guide told us that "an NA group is any meeting which meets regularly at a specified place and time, providing that it follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions," and that the "primary purpose of an NA group is to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers by providing a setting for identification and a healthy atmosphere for recovery." (*Temporary Working Guide*, 1988 Edition)[&]

The Basic Text provided more clarity in its discussion of Tradition Four, stating that "There are two basic types of meetings; those open to the general public and those closed to the public (for addicts only). Meeting formats vary widely from group to group; some are participation meetings, some speakers, some are question and answer, and some focus on special problems discussion." (Basic Text)

In some NA communities there are groups consisting of men, women, gays, professionals, etc. These members host NA meetings where the focus is on recovery from drug addiction in Narcotics Anonymous.

[&] This publication is no longer in print. For current or additional information, please see *The Group Booklet*.

Types of Special Interest Meeting

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Groups wrote to each RSC chairperson and RSR requesting information concerning special interest meetings in their regions. Of the fifty-eight NA regions, twenty-four responded to this request. Here are the results of our survey:

- Of the twenty-four regions responding, twenty indicated that special interest meetings were held in their regions.
- The twenty regions have reported a total of 184 special interest meetings. Some regions, however, reported that not all areas responded to their request for information and that their data was therefore incomplete.
- The regions reported a variety of types of special interest meetings. These types include: Men's, Women's, Gay and Lesbian, Young People/Youth meetings, Couples meetings, one Agnostic meeting, one Illness and Recovery meeting, and one "Pills" meeting. It was also reported to the committee from other sources that in some regions there are meetings for Vietnam Veterans, people with AIDS, people who are HIV positive, and various types of professionals.
- Of the regions that reported how long special interest meetings had been in existence within their boundaries, a number indicated that meetings had been occurring for over five years, and one region reported a group soon to celebrate its tenth anniversary.
- Although the committee was informed that some areas have a policy of excluding special interest meetings from their meeting schedules, no region reported written area or regional policies on this subject.

Final Observations

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings understood almost from its beginning that resolving the issue of special interest meetings in Narcotics Anonymous might be impossible, that the varying opinions on the subject seemed to be irreconcilable, and that we might not be able to offer a perspective that would be so fresh and profound that the entire membership of NA would immediately accept our conclusions. We did, however, feel that if we were able to make some objective observations on the subject—devoid of passion and emotionalism—we might be able to perform a service. Here then are our conclusions:

Special Interest meetings have existed in Narcotics Anonymous for some time. There does not appear to be anything in the Twelve Traditions which cautions groups against holding special interest meetings, provided that the group has no requirement for membership other than the desire to stop using. Special interest meetings tend to survive and flourish in local NA communities where there is a need and desire for such meetings and do not exist in NA communities where there is no need nor desire.

In Narcotics Anonymous, the World Service Conference does not have the authority to dictate policy to groups, and regional and area service committees do not have policy-making authority over the decisions of their groups. The only authority present in the groups is a loving God expressed in a group's conscience.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Special Interest Meetings concluded that special interest meetings must be appropriate in some NA communities since they exist and flourish with little controversy in these communities. In NA communities where special interest meetings do not exist, and where the need for them is not apparent, there is no reason to create them.

The findings in the report remain true for Narcotics Anonymous today. In some areas, special interest meetings have expanded formats and topics while other areas continue to have no perceived need for these meetings. Groups, exercising their autonomy, are best suited to decide whether there is any necessity to have special interest meetings.