

Purpose

Carrying the NA message of recovery is a group's greatest responsibility. Groups that take time to have discussions are often better able to create an atmosphere in which this message can be shared. Meeting together allows members to address group problems, connect with one another, and get a sense of the group as a whole. Group business meetings (sometimes called group conscience meetings) also allow groups to discuss business in a way that keeps the recovery meeting focused on effectively carrying the NA message.

Sample Group Business Meeting Format

Group business meetings are usually held before or after the recovery meeting, so the recovery meeting remains focused on its primary purpose. Group members are encouraged to attend, raise questions, and participate in discussion. This sample agenda is meant to give groups a sense of how a typical group business meeting is run. There are many ways to conduct a group business meeting. The size and personality of a group usually dictate how structured the business meeting will be.

1. The member leading the group (usually the secretary) opens the business meeting with a prayer.
2. Group problems and solutions are discussed. These discussions typically involve topics such as the group's relationship with the meeting facility, how well the group is carrying NA's message, or any other issues of concern.
3. The treasurer gives a report about the group's financial state and makes a recommendation about contributing to the area, region, and world services.
4. The GSR gives a report about any area, regional, zonal, or world service items of importance to the group.
5. Other group trusted servants report on their areas of responsibility.
6. The group addresses any open positions or tasks that need to be accomplished.
7. The meeting is closed with a prayer.

Some groups hold business meetings on a regular basis (coinciding with the area service committee [ASC] meeting), while others conduct them when there is a specific issue that needs the group's attention. Group business meetings are meant to give members an opportunity to discuss subjects of importance to the group.

Group Conscience

Group conscience is the means by which we collectively invite the ongoing guidance of a Higher Power into our decision-making process. A group conscience is when addicts whose individual consciences have been awakened come together to consider service related questions. This conscience is demonstrated when group members listen to one another and come to an agreement that makes sense for the group—often compromising and considering new solutions in the process. Calm discussion, mutual respect, and a reliance on the group's conscience helps groups fulfill their primary purpose.

We sometimes use the vote as a rough tool for translating that spiritual guidance into clear, decisive terms. Many times a vote is not needed after a thoughtful and attentive discussion because the group's conscience becomes perfectly apparent, with the group leader asking if there are any objections to the group's consensus. No matter how a group decides to conduct business—either with or without voting—taking time to openly discuss group matters is essential.

One of the best ways a group can solve the various issues that may arise is to remain focused on our primary purpose of carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who still suffer. Practicing the spiritual principles contained in the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Steps can solve most groups' problems. In other cases, the group may seek suggestions from neighboring groups or through its group service representative (GSR) at the area service committee.

Group conscience can be thought of in much the same way as personal conscience. Group conscience reflects a collective awareness of, understanding of, and surrender to spiritual principles. The conscience of the group takes shape and is revealed when its members take the time to talk with each other about their personal needs, the needs of the group, and the needs of NA as a whole.

It Works: How and Why, Tradition Two



This is Board-approved service material.

Service pamphlets should be used by members, groups, and service committees as a resource rather than being read in an NA meeting.

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Group Business Meetings

SERVICE-RELATED MATERIAL
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Decision Making

Each NA group is free to choose a way to make decisions that best suits its needs. Consensus-based decision making (CBDM) is a process that aligns with the principles of group conscience. Other methods of decision making, such as parliamentary procedure, can sometimes be too complex for a group's needs and may exclude members who are not familiar with how the process works. In contrast, CBDM is an easily understood process to reach consensus together through discussion and cooperation.

In CBDM, instead of initiating the process by making a motion, ideas or proposals are introduced and can be adapted to include other ideas and concerns offered by participants throughout the course of the discussion. Each member brings some of their own ideas to the conversation, continuously modifying the original proposal until it reflects the conscience of the group as a body. Because of this, CBDM may be considered more aligned with NA's spiritual principles of anonymity, humility, unity, and group conscience. CBDM can be a very creative process that captures members' ideas in a way that results in something different from, and better than, the original proposal.

"Consensus-based" means that all of the group's members are able to accept the decisions that are made, even if they do not have 100 percent agreement. Acceptance is based on three simple conditions:

- ✓ Each member has the opportunity to voice their opinions;
- ✓ each believes they have been heard; and
- ✓ each is willing to support a choice that may be different from the one they would make.

It is up to each NA group when to use a CBDM process instead of a simple vote. In some situations, such as elections, taking a vote by a simple show of hands may be more practical. Likewise, if a group fails to reach consensus through the CBDM process, such as when a member is unwilling to support a choice that differs from their own, voting may resolve the issue. It can be helpful to decide on a level of support of less than 100 percent if a vote is required to formalize a decision. A number between two-thirds and 80 percent can be a good threshold for the level of support needed to move forward on a decision.

This simple example gives an idea of how the CBDM process might work in a group:

- A member brings an idea to the group business meeting to change the meeting format so that one of the group's meetings each month focuses on discussing one of the Steps.
- The meeting facilitator asks if there is agreement to accept the idea or not, and whether the group wants to discuss it.
- If discussion is requested, the facilitator asks if everyone understands the idea. More information or clarification is provided if needed.
- Modifications or concerns are expressed and discussed by all the members present. During this discussion, the facilitator checks that everyone has had the opportunity to speak and checks periodically for consensus by asking: "Can we all agree on this, or do we need more time?"
- If consensus isn't reached within the available time, the group can decide to not take the idea any further, revisit it another time, or resolve the issue with a vote if necessary.

With ideas that involve more than a simple yes or no, CBDM can be more inclusive of all members' viewpoints and therefore more spiritual. It is how we manifest the idea that "together we can do what we cannot do alone" in a service setting. A more detailed explanation of the CBDM process can be found in *CBDM Basics*, which is posted on na.org/basics.

Delegation

Our Second Concept explains that "The final responsibility and authority for NA services rests with the NA groups." At the same time, our Third Concept states that "The NA groups delegate to the service structure the authority necessary to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to it." The essay on the Third Concept (from *Twelve Concepts for NA Service*) elaborates on this idea:

"Our groups, not required to ratify every decision made on their behalf at every level of service, are freed to devote their full attention to carrying the NA message in their meetings."

Essentially, by delegating some of their decision-making power to the larger service system—the area, regional, zonal, or world level—NA groups can focus on their primary purpose. As Tradition Nine reminds us, this is why the groups created the service structure in the first place. The service system includes service committees that may organize activities and events, maintain public relations services, operate phonelines, or manage relationships with hospitals and institutions. All these duties would be too time-consuming for the groups to do on their own. Instead, the groups grant their local service committees the authority to use their best judgment in making decisions that do not affect the group specifically.

The best way for a group to trust the service structure is to be intentional in choosing trusted servants. When trusted servants are thoughtfully selected, they are exactly that—trusted to carry out the responsibilities the groups have assigned to them.

The role of a GSR is a good example. The GSR represents their home group at the local service committee meeting, and will typically bring back to the groups any decisions that require the group's input. However, there may be matters that come up that the GSR does not have time to bring back to the group. In cases where a decision is needed before a group business meeting can be called, the GSR may be empowered to vote on behalf of the group because the home-group members, through group conscience, have entrusted the GSR with this authority. This is an example of effective delegation.

Good communication and reporting enhance the trust between trusted servants and their groups. A solid understanding of how their group as a whole thinks and makes decisions helps a GSR carry that conscience through the service system. Likewise, groups gain trust in GSRs who clearly and accurately report back what is happening at the other levels of service. Strong home groups are built on this two-way stream of service and communication.

As our trust in a Higher Power grows, it gets easier to let go of our personal desires and stop fighting for what we want. With an attitude of surrender, working together in a group becomes easier.

It Works: How and Why, Tradition One

Maintaining Strong Home Groups

There are many ways for groups to talk about important issues outside of a business meeting. What's important is that groups make the time to develop a group conscience, either during a regular business meeting or during a separately scheduled meeting. Some groups take a regular inventory of the group's effort to carry the NA message, while others address situations as they arise. The *Building Strong Home Groups Worksheet* (which can be found using the search function on the na.org website) is one resource members can use to strengthen their home groups. Groups can also answer some of the following questions in their discussions about how to build stronger home groups:

- How effectively is the group carrying the NA message of recovery?
- How can the group become more welcoming and accessible to more addicts in the community?
- How is the group striving to create a safe environment for newcomers? Are newcomers subjected to inappropriate advances (including sexual or financial propositions)?
- Is the meeting format suitable for the group?
- Does the leader, chairperson, or secretary set a tone of recovery at the meeting?
- Do group members live NA principles and share about them in the group?
- Is attendance steady or growing?
- How is the group maintaining strong public relations with the meeting facility?
- How is the group considering its public image within the larger community?
- Is the group practicing the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Narcotics Anonymous?
- Are the group's funds being used wisely? How is the group using its funds to further the NA message?
- Has the area, region, zone, or world services asked the group for input?
- Does the group introduce new members to group service?
- How does the group prepare trusted servants for other service positions?