

Gender-Neutral Language

As you know, gender-neutral and inclusive language was one of the Issue Discussion Topics prioritized at the 2023 World Service Conference. The summary of the input on that IDT is included as [an addendum](#) in this report.

One of the best ways to prepare for this session is to read the CAR essay on this topic.

That essay explains that we see three facets to this issue: the language we use to describe humans (e.g., “men and women” or “people”), the language we use to describe a power greater than ourselves, and the language that we use within the Steps and Traditions. We are currently concerned with the first of these facets—the words we use to describe people.

One thing both the IDT input and the CAR question input made clear is that some members believe this issue is related to current political “culture wars.”

It’s worth noting that, despite that conception, this is not a new issue for us as a Fellowship. As early as the fifth World Literature Conference, in 1981, the style guide developed by that conference cautioned those working on the Basic Text to use the words *them* or *their* instead of *he*, *she*, *his*, *him* or *her*. “Remove gender,” the style guide says.

Use the word/phrases:	In reference to (instead of):
CLEAN	Condition of abstinence from drugs (Sober)
CLEAN TIME	Sobriety
ADDICT/ADDICTION	Identity as people powerless over chemicals (Drug Addict, Alcoholic, Drug Dependent, Drug Abuser, Dope Fiend)
USING	Operating, Practicing
STOP	Quit (i.e., I didn't quit, I stopped using drugs)
WE	Those, Those who, Those who have come to a period of addiction/recovery)
THEM'THEIR	He/She/His/Him/Her (remove gender)
USEFUL	Normal
WORKING THE STEPS	Taking steps
LIVING A DAY AT A TIME/LIVE TODAY/JUST FOR TODAY	One day at a time
TAKE IT EASY	Easy does it
IT WON'T LAST	This too shall pass
RECOVERY	Recovery

This isn't a new issue for us as a Fellowship, and it need not be tarred with the same brush as the political forces that divide people outside of the rooms. Inside of the rooms, we are trying to create space for everyone *regardless of*.

The CAR essay concludes with two questions about changes in the language we use in NA literature to describe people: Are we willing to explore these types of changes and if not, why not?

The response to the questions in the CAR was unambiguous. More than three quarters of those who responded said yes, they are willing to explore these types of changes, and the percentage of delegates who responded in the affirmative was even higher at 89% (though only 26 delegates responded).

When we were putting together this session for the conference we struggled with what further questions we could ask. Within the Issue Discussion material, we asked about the effects of changing (or not changing) the literature to a more gender-neutral way of talking about members. In the CAR questions, we asked if we are willing to explore these types of changes in our literature. Between the IDT questions this cycle and the CAR questions, we don't believe we have other constructive questions to ask concerning the language we use to describe people in our literature. The results seem to indicate strong support—perhaps even consensus—to explore possible changes in the way we describe people in our literature.

Our role as the World Board is to facilitate and listen, not to drive the body (or Fellowship) somewhere, but to hear the body's voice. But we do not have new questions to ask about gendered language and members. And now we are wondering if the conference is ready to move forward with drafting some possible

changes for members to look at.

We are not talking about making a decision whether to revise literature, but about developing materials for members to respond to.

We would like to use this session at the WSC to discuss what's next. Are we ready to move forward? In the cycle ahead should we begin creating review drafts of identified literature for the Fellowship to respond to? If so, where should we start, and how we can support you in your role as delegate in moving this issue forward? If not, how should we focus discussion on this topic this cycle or what more information would we need?

Having this discussion in breakout rooms at round tables will give everyone a chance to share their views and represent what they believe their home region or zone wants or is willing to consider. Because this is such a big discussion and because we have to build in time to move from the risers to the breakout rooms, we are scheduling this session for two hours rather than the typical 90 minutes.

We are having this discussion early in the week, because we intend to collect, record, and summarize the results to report to the body. That session will take place on Thursday. Then we will discuss the project plans on Friday and affirm the direction the body decides on during the Moving Forward session. Once we know where we are as a body, we can collectively decide where we are going.

If we have enough time in this session, we can also discuss whether we want to start asking questions about the other facets of this discussion—the language we use to describe God and the language in the Steps—during the cycle ahead

Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language *CAR* Question Responses

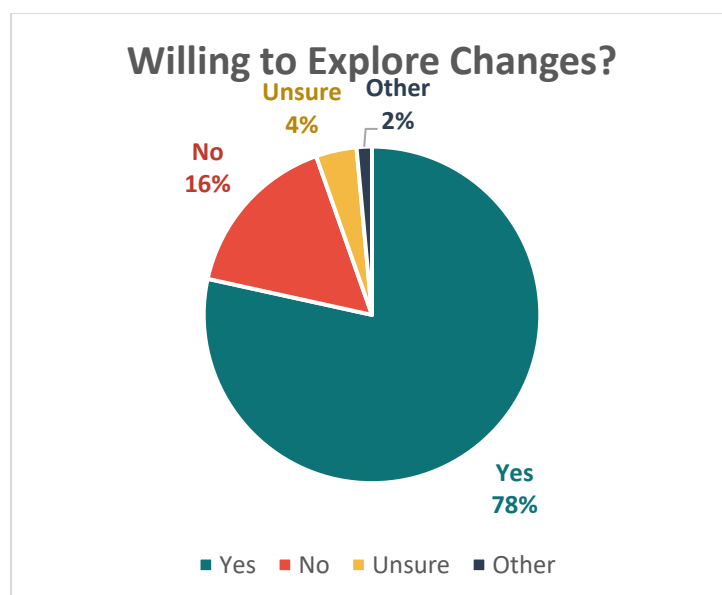
This is what we asked in the *CAR*:

For the purposes of these questions, we intend to focus on gender-neutral language in NA literature as described in the *CAR* essay—changes in the language that describes people (members and potential members), not language that describes a Higher Power. These changes in wording—from “men and women” to “people,” for instance—don’t change the meaning of the message in our literature; they allow more people to identify with it. Issues of the wording of our Steps and Traditions are for a future discussion.

1. Given that we all want to provide a safe, welcoming, inclusive Fellowship where everyone can recover (regardless of . . .), **are we willing to explore these types of changes in our literature in order to carry the message more effectively?**
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
 - d. Other (please specify)
2. **If not, why not?**

We received a total of 4,216 responses, just over 91% of which were from members. The rest were from groups and service bodies. Responses were in 15 languages: English, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Portuguese, French, Hebrew, Polish, Ukrainian, Finnish, Arabic, Swedish, Slovak, and Norwegian.

More than three-quarters of respondents (78.4%) said yes, they are willing to explore changes. 16.2% said no. 3.9% were unsure, and 1.5% other.



Of the 29 delegates who replied, 87% said yes

Willingness to Explore Changes	
Response	% of Total
Yes	88.5%
No	3.8%
Unsure	3.8%
Other	3.8%
Total	100.0%

Just over 18% of survey respondents answered the second question, “if not, why not?” The most common reasons given were that the language in NA literature is already inclusive—phrases such as “regardless of...” adequately welcome everyone—and, along similar lines, that the literature is “not broken” or working fine. Some identified the issue as political or “an outside issue,” and others expressed the view that there are only two genders (male and female). Another frequently cited reason was that NA’s core strength lies in focusing on what members share and that we should be focusing on similarities.

Again, these members were the minority responses 775 of the 4,216 responses to the survey. More than three-quarters of members who responded indicated a willingness to explore changes.

Don’t forget about these resources:

Alternative, gender-neutral readings from NA literature in use by groups na.org/gender

[Gender neutral and inclusive language FAQ](#)

IDT Input Summary:
Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language in NA Literature

Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language in NA Literature IDT input

The 2023 World Service Conference (WSC) had consensus to select Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language in NA Literature as one of four Issue Discussion Topics (IDTs) for this past cycle, and members and regions prioritized it in the *Conference Agenda Report (CAR)* Survey. It was chosen second of 15 options by individuals, and third by regions/zones.

The Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language in NA Literature IDT was workshopped around the world for nearly 3 years. Although facets of this conversation have been taking place for decades. The workshop resources were translated into six languages and posted on na.org/idt. The input survey was translated into eight languages and the results are below.

Over the course of the last three years, several resources were developed to answer questions that repeatedly came up during workshops and to provide resources for groups that may be struggling to address their needs. The first is the [Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language FAQ](https://na.org/idt) which is posted with the workshop material at na.org/idt. It outlines the history of the discussion, answers questions about what specific changes may be under consideration, and what might happen in the future. The second resource was suggested by quite a few responses to the input survey, which stated that group readings that were gender neutral would certainly help all members feel welcome “regardless of” gender. The World Board decided to create a hub for groups to share solutions with each other. Groups can send wb@na.org their unaltered readings from NA literature and we are posting them for everyone to use at na.org/gender.

The questions that were asked in the input survey were:

- **What would be the effect if the literature were to change to a more gender-neutral way of talking about members?**
- **What would be the effect if the literature were to change to a more gender-neutral way of talking about God/Higher Power?**
- **What would be the effect if the literature didn’t change?**

If you attended a workshop on this topic:

- **What was the most interesting thing you heard in the workshop?**
- **How did your understanding change from the beginning of the workshop to the end?**

There was a total of 6,036 responses to the input survey: 3,997 English, 1,277 Russian, 352 Portuguese, 146 Spanish, 119 German, 96 French, 30 Italian, 12 Finnish, and 7 Polish.

The responses provided were either enthusiastic about possible changes or were opposed to any changes. There were relatively few middle-of-the-road or ambivalent responses. Those who supported change when talking about members mentioned “inclusivity,” “give a whole group of underserved people a voice,” and “help reach more addicts with a clear and cleaner message.” And when referring to God/Higher Power they said, “It would help NA to fulfill its promise to be a spiritual, not religious program.” While those who were opposed to changes said, “looking for the differences instead of finding the similarities,” “this is an outside issue,” and “this will create disunity.” A very large percentage of those opposed to changes when talking

about God/Higher Power believed there was a request to remove the word God altogether, which was not the nature of the question—use of the word *God* is not part of the scope of this discussion.

404	Positive effect for change when talking about members	7%
169	Positive effect for change when talking about God/Higher Power	3%
2,478	Positive effect for change when talking about members AND God	41%
3,051		51%
2,046	Opposed to any change of literature	34%
292	Changing the literature would provide little or no effect	5%
316	Changing the literature would have a negative effect	5%
2,654		44%
331	Respondents were not sure or made other comments	5%

Russian respondents had a very pronounced reaction to the topic, perhaps due to general beliefs and concerns of government intervention. Their responses were approximately 10% for changes and 90% against.

With the Russian responses removed the totals are:

282	Positive effect for change when talking about members	6%
169	Positive effect for change when talking about God/Higher Power	4%
2,478	Positive effect for change when talking about members AND God	52%
2,929		62%
1,029	Opposed to any change of literature	21.6%
185	Changing the literature would provide little or no effect	3.9%
316	Changing the literature would have a negative effect	6.6%
1,530		32%
300	Respondents were not sure or made other comments	6%

Those who attended an IDT workshop on gender-neutral and inclusive language mentioned that talking about the issues in the workshop gave them, “true sense of how to move forward and be part of the change,”

and they “gained a different perspective.” Of the 1,512 respondents who said they attended a workshop: 116 (8%) felt their understanding had changed. Of those 83 (5% of total) felt their understanding had changed to include more gender inclusive language, while 33 (2% of total) had changed to not wanting to change the literature. 1,016 (67%) did not have their understanding change. The remainder only stated that they had more understanding but did not elaborate or left comments about the workshop itself.

The 2023 WSC passed a motion that read: To direct the World Board to create a project plan for consideration at the next WSC to investigate changes and/or additional wording to NA literature from gender specific language to gender neutral and inclusive language. That project plan is on page 17 of the 2026 Conference Approval Track (posted on na.org/conference). If the project plan passes, the information collected from the IDT input survey—along with input from the 2026 CAR questions on the topic and discussions at WSC 2026—will help frame and inform the project.