Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language FAQ
updated October 2026

Origins of the Project

Q: Why are we discussing this now?

For some members, the gendered language in some of our literature has been at issue for a long time. Fellowship conversations and conference decisions about gender-neutral language go back to at least the early 1980s. (See the Additional Historical Background section at the bottom of the current project page.)

The 2023 and 2026 World Service Conference made several decisions related to gender-neutral language in NA literature that ultimately resulted in this project. (See the answer to the next question.)

Q: Where did this project come from? When was it voted on?

Two regions together submitted a motion for the 2020 *CAR*, but because the 2020 World Service Conference was entirely virtual, and focused on the emergencies at hand, the delegates decided to limit the agenda. This motion (and some others) were not addressed in 2020.

In the 2023 *CAR,* three other regions joined the first two and reintroduced the motion:

> Motion 14: *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.* Motion 14 passed with strong support (74%).

Two other related things happened at the 2023 WSC: the conference voted to change the language in the Vision Statement from "in *his or her* own language and culture" to "in *their* own language and culture." This was a simple change in part because the Vision Statement is not recovery literature, and is not subject to the same arduous decision-making processes.

The 2023 WSC also decided to encourage Fellowship-wide discussion about whether to revise our literature to accommodate gender-neutral language through the Issue Discussion Topic process. A survey was posted throughout the cycle. A summary of those results is included in the 2026 *Conference Report*.

Conference Participants included the issue in the NAWS Collaborative Plan. One of the solutions in the plan listed under the issue Safety and Belonging is *Investigate changes and/or additional wording to NA literature from gender-specific language to gender-neutral and inclusive language.* The Collaborative Plan was included in the 2026 *CAR* as Motion 2, which passed with consensus (93.85%)

The 2026 *CAR* also included an essay on the topic and some questions to help guide discussions at the World Service Conference. An input form was posted to collect responses, and over 4,200 people responded. More than three quarters of them said they were willing to explore these types of changes to our literature. Those results are also included in the 2026 *Conference Report*.

The 2026 Conference Approval Track material contained the Safety and Belonging/Gender Neutral Project as Motion 12. That motion passed with consensus (80.99%), which brings us to this current project.

Project Scope

Q: What exactly does this project cover?

The 2026 *CAR* explains it this way:

> When we talk about gender-neutral language, we are really discussing three separate things: the words we use to describe our members and potential members, the words we use to describe God, and the words of our Steps and Traditions. These three things should not be treated as a single question but addressed individually, as they impact NA's literature differently and, in the case of the Steps and Traditions, require a different revision process. For WSC 2026 as a starting point, we intend to focus just on the language used to describe our members and potential members.

As this FAQ is being drafted, the project is focused on revisions to IP #1. Any next steps will depend on the Fellowship's response to those proposed changes.

Q: Why is the topic split into three categories—the language we use to describe members, the language we use to describe a Higher Power or God, and the language in the Steps and Traditions?

Our experience with projects and decisions makes it clear that the conference and the Fellowship prefer to discuss and address one issue at a time.

Current policy makes any possible revisions to the Steps and Traditions a unique discussion (see *A Guide to World Services in NA*, page 46), and that's why changes to the Steps and Traditions are in a separate category. If the conference and Fellowship decide they wish to discuss those possible changes, the process would be different.

The other two categories—the language we use to refer to a Power Greater than ourselves and the language we use to refer to members and potential members—are related but separate issues. We believe there may be members in support of one set of changes but opposed to the other.

Q: Will the project scope be expanded to include language that refers to a power greater than ourselves?

Currently we are just looking at language used to describe people. The conference may decide to expand the scope of the project to look at the language used to describe a Higher Power, but that decision has not yet been made.

Q: How would possible changes to the Steps and Traditions work?

Changing the Steps and Traditions requires a group tally process that is described on page 46 of *A Guide to World Services in NA*. Three-quarters of the groups around the world who register to be part of the tally must respond, and three-quarters of those who respond must vote yes in order for any motion to be included in the *CAR*. The World Board does not believe this process is practical or even possible, given current challenges in global communication, nor are we certain the Fellowship would actually want to make any decisions by groups tally. (A chart of NA's meeting counts is posted on our maps page na.org/maps.)

Q: Why are we as a Fellowship not doing what needs to be done all at once instead of in stages? Why not take the Steps and Traditions now?

Revising the Steps and Traditions requires a different process, and the Fellowship seems to do better taking things one step at a time. If the Fellowship decides to consider changing the Steps and Traditions, we would first need to discuss possible changes to the process/policy.

Suggested Revisions

Q: What language would change?

The current focus of the project is on revising the gendered language used to describe people. There is no intention to change the stories or references to specific individuals' experience. The first piece of literature being addressed is IP #1. The World Board made four specific recommendations to revise IP #1. They are listed on the project page: na.org/genderproject. Any next steps in the project will depend on Fellowship response to these initial recommendations.

Q: Why are we removing the word "children" from Why Are We Here?

The board suggested a rephrasing of the description of *families* in Why are We Here because it contained gendered terms to describe family members. Many members expressed concern about removing the word *children.* We are open to all of the input about the proposed changes, and this is something we will discuss as a board.

Q. Is this the final draft, or is it possible there will be an updated draft after the input from the survey form and various other fellowship input?

A: The World Board will consider all of the input and may revise the draft again, guided by that input. If so, the changes will be reported to the Fellowship, and the revised draft will be included in the *Conference Agenda Report* for approval.

Q: Have you considered adding an alternative version of We Do Recover?

A: At this point the project is focused on IP #1. The board has not yet discussed next steps.

Q: Will the word *Fellowship* be part of the revisions?

A: The word "Fellowship" hasn't been discussed by the World Board or recent World Service Conferences. The word *Fellowship* is considered by many to be a gender-neutral term.

Politics

Q: Why are we making politically motivated changes to NA literature?

It's a mistake to view this project through the lens of today's political climate. This topic has been discussed in NA since at least the early 1980s.

In 1981, a style guide produced to guide the drafting of the Basic Text said that we should use the words *them* and *their* rather than *he/she* or *his/her*, when possible, to "remove gender" from the writing.

The topic was picked up in a 1989 Literature Committee report which said, in part:

"As fellowship input indicates the need, our literature is constantly revised. Each successive revision of our literature reflects a reduction in gender specific terms. . . .

The WSC Literature Committee believes that revisions are the means by which gender specific usage will be reduced in our literature. The WSC Literature Committee further believes that any changes to our steps and traditions should come as a result of widespread discussion throughout the fellowship. Whatever we as a fellowship decide, the solution may not be entirely linguistic; perhaps we need to change some language and develop a tolerant, well-balanced attitude as well. Our desire to be as unprejudiced and unbiased as possible can be seen as we seek ever-increasing unity and strength in our common welfare."

Both of these historical documents are posted on na.org/genderproject in the Additional Historical Background section at the bottom of the page.

Q: Are these changes consistent with our Traditions and our primary purpose? Won't these changes be polarizing or pull NA into public controversy?

The project is motivated by principles of inclusion and welcome, and the World Board believes that the current recommended changes are in line with our Traditions and our primary purpose.

While we have received plenty of input objecting to this project from a philosophical standpoint, we have not yet heard any offense to the actual changes being recommended so far. We believe that if members look at the *actual* changes being proposed, they won't find anything controversial or divisive.

Q: What safeguards are in place to ensure that changes to our literature are motived by principle and not political or social trends?

Gender neutral language in NA literature is clearly not a new issue. As we mention elsewhere in this FAQ, this discussion dates back to the early 1980s.

Literature changes are approved by the Fellowship of NA through motions in the *Conference Agenda Report*. NA members, groups, areas, regions, and zones around the world will read and discuss these motions. The process is expansive enough to involve any interested member, and in the end, the decisions will be guided by a power greater than ourselves. As the Sixth Concept essay states, "Group conscience is the means by which we collectively invite the ongoing guidance of a Higher Power in making decisions." We trust this process.

Changing Our Literature

Q: Why are we changing the literature? "If it's not broken, don't fix it."

Some of us have strong, immovable ideas about NA literature, and there may not be anything anyone can say that will convince them that revisions to our literature are warranted. Still, it's important to remember those of us reading this FAQ and involved in these discussions have found a home in NA; we likely see ourselves reflected in NA literature. But not everyone who finds NA stays here, and we don't do exit interviews in NA.

The changes being suggested are intended to allow more addicts to see themselves in our literature. Our Basic Text reminds us that Everything that happens in the course of NA service ought to motivated by the desire to more effectively carry the message, and that's the spirit that motivates this project. It doesn't take anything away from those of us who are already here to make space for others.

Many of us believe the Basic Text and other pieces of literature are divinely inspired, but that doesn't mean our literature can't change. It has and it does. In a spiritual, not religious program, NA literature is not stone tablets. Our literature is written by addicts, for addicts. Spirituality is dynamic, not static.

And really, that is part of the beauty of NA: we collectively make decisions about our Fellowship even when we don't agree. You have to have friction to make fire, and NA literature is fire.

Q: Why revise the language?" Do you *honestly* believe that some people do not feel welcome at NA?

We have heard from plenty of addicts who do not feel welcome because of the language NA literature uses to describe members. There are addicts who do not identify as a man or a woman, who perceive their gender as something other than simply male or female. Not everyone reading this may agree with that idea. *And that's okay*. It doesn't matter what *we* believe, because *we are already here*. What matters is whether suffering addicts who find their way to our meetings believe that they can have a place in Narcotics Anonymous.

Our literature has changed over time to be more inclusive in the way we refer to members. Our most recent books (*Living Clean*, *Guiding Principles*, and *A Spiritual Principle a Day*) describe people in an almost entirely gender-neutral way.

Q. Who would it hurt to make these changes? Do people want to drive addicts away because they don't feel included or feel as if they belong?

A number of our nonbinary members have asked this type of question, and, honestly, it's hard to know how to answer. The World Board sees a benefit from making these changes. We believe that NA members share a commitment to our primary purpose, and that much of the resistance to this project stems from misinformation. We are hopeful that, as the Fellowship continues to discuss gender-neutral language in NA literature, more members will come to understand that this is about growing our Fellowship and saving lives.

Decision Making Processes

Q: Are these proposed changes for sure going to be put in place?

A: Changes to NA literature are made through the *Conference Agenda Report*. No changes are decided on until the conference votes on those motions.

Q: Will IP #1 be voted on by the Fellowship in 2029 or at the interim conference?

A: It won't be at the interim WSC, but beyond that we don't know.

Q: Why is this topic was being addressed in a project plan not a motion like the motions in the 1990s?

As the first question in this FAQ shows, the conference has passed several motions related to this topic.

The way NA writes and revises NA literature has changed substantially in the last 35 years. The process formally begins with a project plan, which is published in the Conference Approval Track material for consideration at the conference.

We try to involve as many people as possible in the writing and revising process with surveys, focus groups, review drafts, input forms, and web meetings. We often spend years discussing and gathering input—sometimes before a project plan is even drafted, as is the case with the current project. Then the projects themselves can involve years of discussion, drafts, and input. Only then is a motion to approve specific revisions or new literature included in the *CAR*. That way the literature in the *CAR* is truly the product of our worldwide Fellowship.

As an aside: The 1991 and 1993 motions were specifically concerned with the language used to describe God, which is not currently part of the scope of this project.

Timeline

Q: What is the projected timeline for publishing any of these changes? And will changes regarding God, Steps, and Traditions be considered and included (or not) prior to the publishing of the changes?

At this point, we can't say for sure. It depends on Fellowship response to the recommendations to IP #1.

It is important to remember that we are a worldwide Fellowship, and we make decisions together, which is a process that takes time. Nothing that changes our literature happens without the opportunity for all of our members to participate in the decision.

Q: Why does it take so long?

The process for making changes to our literature is slow on purpose. NA literature expresses the collective conscience of members and groups around the world in 122 countries speaking 105 languages. It takes a long time to gather a conscience in a Fellowship as large and diverse as we are. It can be frustrating when issues feel immediate and urgent, but we don't make quick decisions about NA recovery literature. We must make sure the Fellowship has time to discuss the issues and develop a conscience. And we have well established guidelines for recovery literature.

Continuity of Our Message

Q: Will the Basic Text be revised with gender-neutral language to create a Seventh Edition?

The Fellowship response to the proposed changes to IP #1 will help determine whether there are next steps in this project—and if so, what those steps are. The board will review the Fellowship input and make recommendations, and conference participants will collectively discuss what's next. If you're subscribed to a NAWS email list, you'll be kept up to date with NAWS Updates. The board has not yet discussed whether revisions to the Basic Text would create a Seventh Edition or whether it might be something more like the Sixth Edition revised.

Q: Does the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust* (or *FIPT*) allow a piece of literature like IP #1 to be changed independently of other literature that includes the exact same language (the Basic Text and Little White Book)?

This is not a *FIPT* issue. There's nothing legally preventing that inconsistency in our literature.

Q: Does our literature containing the same language (IP #1, the White Booklet, and the Basic Text) need to maintain consistent wording from piece to piece?

The language in IP #1 is also in the Basic Text and the Little White Book, but the board and the conference have not yet discussed how changes to IP #1 might affect those pieces. We have not yet discussed this as a board. Historically, when a change has been made to one of these texts, corresponding changes have been made to the others to maintain consistency in our message.

The last substantive revisions to what we typically read in NA meetings happened from changes proposed to the Little White Book in the 1986 *CAR*. At the 1986 WSC, the conference chose to make the same changes to IP#1 and the Basic Text so that our language remained consistent. Those 1986 changes were extensive but they did not change the NA message; they simply made it easier for people to hear and understand.

Q: If the Basic Text is revised, would the Sixth Edition no longer be Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship-approved literature?

If the Basic Text is revised, the new edition would be the only one produced and sold by NA World Services. What members use in their personal recovery is a matter of individual choice. What is okay to read on a group level is another question.

One of the other projects we are working on this cycle is revising *A Guide to Local Services* and *The Group Booklet*. *The Group Booklet* currently includes six points that answer the question *What is an NA Group?* The 2026 conference agreed that a seventh point be added: that only Fellowship-approved NA literature is read in NA groups. We believe that means only *current* editions of Fellowship-approved literature. Proposed revisions to *The Group Booklet* may clarify this issue. To stay updated on that project, subscribe to any of our email lists.

Q: How would any changes be reflected in our translated literature?

Gender functions very differently in different languages. The intention would be to make any changes to the English language literature and then allow local translation committees to determine how those changes would or wouldn't translate into their language.

Financial Questions

Q: What would the cost be to change our literature? What is the cost to change IP #1? What is the cost to change the Basic Text in all of the languages it's published?

The cost of changing English language literature is recouped in the sale of the literature. For many other languages, we never sell enough literature to recover the cost of the translations and production of the literature. If profit were our primary motive we wouldn't publish in 61 languages, but we do.

Group Readings

Q: Can my group change the readings to be gender neutral?

The Group Booklet offers this guidance:

> *"What kinds of literature should we use?*
>
> *NA World Services produces a number of different kinds of publications. However, only NA-approved literature is appropriate for reading in Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Selections from NA-approved books and pamphlets are usually read at the beginning of an NA meeting, and some meetings use them as the core of their format. NA-approved literature represents the widest range of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous."*

NA-approved recovery literature is decided on by the collective conscience of the NA groups as expressed at the World Service Conference (WSC). That conscience is an expression of the highest authority in Narcotics Anonymous, and our Second Tradition teaches us to defer to that conscience even when it's uncomfortable.

The NA Fellowship has not provided NA groups the ability to unilaterally change NA recovery literature, but it is very much within the scope of group autonomy to choose which literature is read in a meeting. The reading cards are a convenience, not a requirement. Many groups choose readings from elsewhere in the Basic Text or other NA literature that does not use gendered language. The page na.org/gender has alternative fellowship approved readings for groups.

Q: What if we have members in our group who feel really alienated by some of the gendered terms?

Some groups choose alternative sections of NA literature to read rather than the readings that are on the reading cards—see the collection at na.org/gender. This can be a gender-neutral way to do readings that explain NA to newcomers. Groups are also welcome to add statements to their format that make it clear everyone is welcome regardless of…

Most importantly, the atmosphere of recovery in a meeting is more than just the readings. In every group, members can create an atmosphere of inclusion, love, and harmony for all. Within the bounds of our Traditions, there is room for a great deal of creative action. When we practice our principles in a spirit of love and unity, when we put our primary purpose first and value each other's contributions—including our fears, doubts, and reservations—we can recover together and support each other even when we don't agree. In two different places, our Basic Text reminds us that "we come to an understanding of the program for ourselves." We can make room for each of us to come to our own understanding even when our shared language is challenging. For many of us, honoring that difference may be our first experience of actively working the First Tradition.

Q: Why can't I as an individual member just say "God as we understood God" when I do the readings?

When we share our experience, strength, and hope, we do that from our own point of view. NA encourages us to speak our own truth as honestly and clearly as we can. But when we read the literature the NA Fellowship has written and approved together, it is important that we allow it to speak in its own voice, as well. That expression of unity keeps our message the same from group to group,

meeting to meeting—wherever we are in the world. We honor the collective conscience of NA when we read our literature as it is currently written, and participate together to ensure that it reflects our shared experience over time.

In the past, some of the changes that have happened in our literature were the result of many of us hearing the difference between what we read and what our experience had become. Reading the literature "as written" is how we ensure the clarity of our message, and it may also be how we come to know as a Fellowship that it's time for something to change. Continuing to participate in this conversation is part of how we practice "trusting the process."

Staying Involved

Q: How can I help??

Please keep coming back and participate in the process!

Change takes time in NA, and sometimes the changes we desperately want take longer than we think they should or they don't happen at all. That doesn't mean we should give up on the program. No matter who we are and what we believe, NA has enough cultural diversity that each of us can find a home here, somewhere we feel safe, valued, and heard. Technology has opened doors to connect, go to meetings, and find NA peers around the corner or around the world. And we know that it's precisely the fact that we don't all think the same way that makes NA as rich and inclusive as it is. We can honor the conscience of the Fellowship and our own integrity at the same time. Sharing honestly about our identification with the program—and our differences—can open the door for other members who might struggle with some dissonance. We can love each other, and Narcotics Anonymous, even when change comes more slowly than we think it should or when we feel threatened by the prospect of change.

Q: Is there a focus group for this topic?

We are not sure if there will be a focus group, but there is a place to sign up on the focus group volunteer form in case we do have one: https://naws.formstack.com/forms/26_29_volunteer_form

Q: How can I stay informed about the project?

Subscribe to *NAWS News* to receive project updates and information about other World Services activities and projects: na.org/subscribe.