

Sathya Sai International Organisation

Prasanthi Council

PUBLIC MEETINGS



International Guidelines for Public Meetings

Introduction

When Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba established the Prasanthi Council in November 2004 as the managing body of the Sathya Sai International Organisation (SSIO), He met with its members and gave them clear instructions about its purpose and objectives. One of His divine instructions was: "*Go into all corners of the world and bring my message.*" This divine instruction was not just directed at members of the Prasanthi Council, but to all members of the Sathya Sai Organisation. Spreading the message of love, selfless service and the works of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba is a privilege and one of the major goals of the SSIO. Conducting Public Meetings is one way to achieve this goal.

In several discourses, Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba states that there is no higher service than working in the Organisation that bears His holy name. The objective of the Organisation is to help each individual become aware of his or her innate divinity, and then to behave accordingly—bringing into everyday life, divine love in thought, word and deed. Spreading Bhagawan's message, His love, and His works is the duty of each member of the Sathya Sai Organisation.

Public Meetings are a means of spreading the divine message. Hence, official guidelines are provided for conducting public meetings, based on the experience of the SSIO in Latin America.

Overview of Public Meetings

First, it must be understood that public meetings are not an occasion for devotees and members of the Organisation to meet as usual, outside the premises of the Sathya Sai Centres. Rather, public meetings are for the public. Therefore, they must be organised, planned, and designed for the public, which is primarily composed of those who are not yet aware of Bhagawan's life and message.

The process of planning and executing a public meeting provides us with an opportunity to work together with intensity and unity – this energizes the Organisation and gives SSIO members the opportunity to experience the self-transformation process through *love in action*. Sharing the love and divine teachings of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba with as many people as possible is the highest service to mankind.

This service can be performed at different levels:

1. Through exemplary behaviour of each SSIO member in their daily lives.

Since Sathya Sai Baba's greatest miracle is the spiritual transformation of the human being, the best SSIO communication strategy is to be a living example of this transformation. This must be the primary goal of every devotee. The best way of spreading Sathya Sai's message, and safeguarding His good name is the example set by SSIO members in their own lives following the divine teachings. It is essential that anyone representing the SSIO be established in the values being promoted.

2. Through meetings arranged for new comers at Sathya Sai centres.
3. Through meetings organised by Sathya Sai members in their homes with relatives, friends and neighbours.
4. Through meetings held at public venues.
5. Through major public meetings organised at country level. These meetings may be conducted in large theatres with seating for at least 400 or 500 people. It will require dedicated and intense work in order to make the public aware of these meetings and maximize attendance.

All SSIO members should work to ensure that the divine message is correctly transmitted in order to inspire the participants to learn more about Bhagawan's teachings and the activities carried out by the SSIO.

It must be clear that the SSIO is not seeking to proselytise or aggressively market the Sathya Sai message. However, any communication should be carefully studied and planned so that the message is clear, inspiring and attractive.

Not everything that is said by speakers and/or published by media can be checked in advance. SSIO members, in good faith, sometimes make declarations that can be very easily misunderstood. Hence, it is appropriate to conduct internal training for SSIO members. We should also provide for:

- Regular communication with media coordinators, so that they become familiar with the activities of the SSIO by first-hand contact. This may be done by inviting media coordinators to attend service or educational activities, etc.
- Familiarity with media outlets, journalists and their agenda, so that communication teams can predict the risks of faulty communication. The presentations should be truthful, authentic and inspiring.

If our preparations and efforts do not seem to be working as planned, we should act in a peaceful and calm manner by utilising crisis management strategies.

It should be noted that journalists frequently have their own agendas and are seeking sensational stories and attention. Documentation in any form (video/audio) of a declaration/interview made in front of witnesses, (e.g. a public meeting) is legally

valid and unassailable. Also, journalists do not always present themselves as such and are known to use any means they can to get the information they want. To underestimate the possible unwanted consequences of any relationship with the media would be naïve, and possibly to our disadvantage. Therefore, all SSIO members should be aware of this responsibility before interacting with the media.

Visitors coming to Sathya Sai centres and to our public meetings will observe us closely to determine whether we are examples of the Sathya Sai message.

In conclusion, the message SSIO transmits, more than the words said, speaks through the actions and behaviour of SSIO members. The love that SSIO members emanate is the best and most effective service to the Sathya Sai mission.

Dealing with the Media

Anyone participating in events dealing directly or indirectly with Bhagawan's teachings or the SSIO (such as seminars, meetings, TV or radio programmes, or press releases) must contact the National Council President and receive written authorization from the Central Coordinator or senior office-bearer. In case of any doubt, the Zone Chair should be consulted so that he or she may seek guidance from the Chairman of the Prasanthi Council.

Meetings featuring public speakers, organised at all levels, even when not open to the public, must be approved in writing by the NCP, who will consult with the Central Coordinator and the Zone Chair.

Before granting an interview to newspapers or participating in TV or radio programmes, it is necessary to have written permission from the Central Coordinator and Zone Chair. It will be necessary to draw up a specific written agreement, stating that the SSIO holds the right to preview the entire content and to cancel or edit anything that it considers not in conformity with its objectives and policy.

Inviting foreign speakers is not recommended; instead the use of local speakers is encouraged. Foreign guests may be invited as speakers only upon prior agreement between the Central Coordinators and Zone Chairs of both the hosting country and of the guest's country and the approval of the Chairman of the Prasanthi Council.

Spreading the Divine Message

Sathya Sai Centres should organise activities to spread the Sathya Sai message on a regular basis; this must be considered an important part of their regular activities. The same should be done by Coordinating Committees and Central Councils at regional and national level for a wider dissemination with the support and guidance of the Prasanthi Council through the Event Coordination Committee.

Also each region or country should promote events for wider dissemination to large audiences that directly involve Coordinating Committees and Central Councils, with the support and guidance of the Prasanthi Council.

The Event Coordination Committee has the following objectives:

1. Promote widely the dissemination of the Sathya Sai Message and SSIO mission through public meetings.
2. Provide guidance on the organisation of public meetings.
3. Monitor and ensure that the name of Sri Sathya Sai Baba and SSIO are correctly used and represented.
4. Train and coach speakers to spread the Sathya Sai message.
5. Create a list of authorized speakers.
6. Carry out tasks assigned by the Prasanthi Council.
7. Prepare reporting formats at the end of each public event and send reports to the SSIO leadership.
8. Create and issue a "digital stamp" "authorized by Prasanthi Council" on videos that are official and authorized by the Sathya Sai International Organization and prepare a list of videos authorized for use at public events.
9. Prepare a work plan with specific goals, work schedule and expected progress for the next 365 days.
10. Designate leaders and trainers for zonal and regional public events, who will be working with the guidance of the International committee.

These guidelines aim to clearly identify all aspects of the organisation of public events and establish its essential features.

Sathya Sai members at country, region and centre levels should spread Sathya Sai Baba's teachings. However, it is very important to understand the difference between the terms "spread" and "advertise".

Spreading the message of Sathya Sai begins when the Sathya Sai Organisation member demonstrates his/her good character and exemplary behaviour. It continues when he/she practices Sathya Sai teachings in his/her daily life and by doing so inspires and attracts the interest of others to learn more about Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba.

While the SSIO puts forth its best efforts and dedication in preparing and arranging for a public meeting, it must be always remembered that the real *doer* is Sathya Sai Baba. He decides who will attend the public meeting and who would be later attracted to a Sathya Sai centre to learn more about His message.

We should not measure the success of a public meeting by the size of the turnout or the number of people who afterwards approach a Sathya Sai centre. Success is guaranteed by careful preparation and especially by proper circulation of information about the event.

A very important aspect of conducting a public meeting is outreach to the public. Without adequate means to reach the largest possible audience, we will attract only Sathya Sai members and their family and friends. Therefore, we should use all available means for outreach, including leaflets, posters, newspapers, radio, TV, internet and social networks like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc.

To fill a theatre with a capacity for 1,000 or 2,000, the outreach effort should be substantial. Announcements must be made in important newspapers and if possible, radio programmes about the meeting, inviting all to attend the public meeting. Posters must be placed in locations of greatest visibility. The best way to reach the most people and publicise a public meeting is by television.

Some years ago, the SSIO held a public meeting in the city of Asuncion, Paraguay, and in preparation, published announcements in prominent newspapers, major radio programs and TV news channels. Articles were published in newspapers about interviews with Sathya Sai devotees about the meeting, the work of the SSIO, and the message and life of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Posters were placed in many streets in the city of Asuncion. As a result, the theatre was filled to capacity, but this was not the most important outcome. Due to the intense outreach efforts, hundreds of thousands of people in Asuncion, Paraguay saw the photograph of Bhagawan Sri Sathya Sai Baba, learnt of His divine name, and the SSIO and its activities. The divine form and the divine name were imprinted in the eyes, ears, minds and souls of numerous people of Paraguay. This a very important and sublime service to humanity.

The key aspect of any public meeting is to plan and develop a very strong awareness campaign for the event. A few years ago the SSIO held 108 public meetings in important cities in Latin America. The theatres were packed with people and thousands of people had the blessed opportunity of knowing about the SSIO and its divine mission.

Public Meeting Planning

For any public event, an organising committee should be formed with different teams and team leads to cover all important aspects of the event.

1. **Media Team** to promote the event (brochures, posters, website, social media, and media coverage: press, radio, TV, internet, etc. Additionally, there is a need to organise video, audio, and photography support.
2. **Venue Team** to organise and supervise volunteers/staff, food and beverage, information desk, facilities, security, care to special guests, etc.
3. **Logistics Team** to allocate staff to select the proper venue for the meeting; organise setup, decorations, and supply equipment, security, accommodation, transportation and on-site support, etc. This will include requirements before and after the event, transportation of persons and materials; accommodation and transportation of invited guests. Book Stand with a booth for books, digital media, etc. should be organised.
4. **Programme Team** to select/supply conference theme, speakers, translators, video/audio content, etc.
5. **Finance Committee** to generate a budget and provide a report to the committee

Media Team

Announcements

Communications issued to promote the event must be of high quality, both in design and content. Special care should be given to layout design, and picture selection (e.g., photographs of Sathya Sai Baba can be full length or a face close-up). Pictures showing only His hands or feet should be avoided. Photographs should be of high resolution without any special effects which may distort the picture.

We recommend the use of officially authorized videos. Other videos should first be approved by the International Media Committee.

Always credit the Sathya Sai International Organisation with the Copyright icon (© Sathya Sai International Organisation). Other organising entities may also be added (e.g., SSIO of country, region, city, centre, Sathya Sai Foundation, ISSE, etc.).

It is very important to emphasize in all communications that the public meeting is free of charge (no cost to participants). Open envelopes or similar means can be used to place leaflets/booklets at the bottom of posters, with a sign indicating "*Public Meeting on Sathya Sai Baba... please take one*".

The following avenues (after obtaining permission and payment of any fees involved) should be considered for placing posters and distributing leaflets:

- Universities
- Bookshops
- Vegetarian Restaurants
- Yoga Centres
- Meditation Centres
- Libraries (especially related topics: spiritual, yoga, etc.)
- Organic Stores (vegetarian, vegan, health, food etc.)
- Public locations
- Indian Consulates
- Cultural Centres

Photography, Audio and Video

Professional photographers and cameramen (preferably Sathya Sai members) should be assigned the task of taking photographs and videos of the event. Furthermore, the meeting should be recorded on digital audio format for archiving.

It is very important to follow the current international guidelines on photography, filming and audio recording issued by the SSIO Media Committee (see attached guidelines).

Technical Equipment

A sound system, DVD player, professional quality multimedia projector and other equipment should be made available (Please refer to the attached audio checklist). It is extremely important to check the whole system before the meeting starts with enough advance time to resolve any possible problems. It is best to have a backup plan for emergencies and contingencies.

Distribution of Materials

When the event is over, attendees may be given a copy of the DVD shown at the meeting, a book on/by Sathya Sai Baba or other approved materials to provide more information on the message, life and work of Sathya Sai Baba.

Upon request, a contact information form can be provided to receive more information about SSIO. Privacy policies must be stated clearly in the form, and honoured, as per legal requirements.

A leaflet with information about the SSIO, its activities, and the location of local Sathya Sai centres should be given to each meeting participant.

Media

Press releases with details on the public meeting (highlighting that attendance is free of charge) should be prepared by the media coordinator and sent to radio stations, television channels, and newspapers, requesting publication in the local news or calendar of events.

Special invitations can be sent to media outlets/sources that have good relationship with the SSIO, for possible coverage of the event, with prior approval of the Central Coordinator or Zone Chair.

Paid advertisements to promote the event can also be considered/budgeted.

Logistics Team

Location

The Logistic Team should locate a good location to hold the event and submit a proposal for approval by the senior leaders of the SSIO. Regional or national public events venue should accommodate at least 400 to 500 people, and should be within the budget allocated. The venue should be centrally located, easily accessible, well served by affordable local transportation, and have good parking facilities.

In order to protect the public and the SSIO, liability insurance must be obtained and security and safety regulations prescribed by local regulations and law must be followed. An on-site medical team must be organised to handle medical emergencies at the event.

The following locations should be considered for a public meeting:

- Convention Centres
- Theatres

- Auditoriums
- Hotel Conference rooms
- Schools
- Museums
- Public Libraries

Dates and Times

The time and day of the event should be decided by the Organising Committee, after careful consideration to maximize participation. Weekends (avoiding bank holidays) should be preferred, but if the event is held on week-days, working hours should be avoided. The organisers may wish to take advantage of long weekends.

Book Stand

A public meeting is a wonderful opportunity to share information about Sathya Sai Baba and His teachings. Appropriate books should be available for display and sale. Particular attention should be given to books written by Sathya Sai Baba Himself. It is also important to provide links to the website Sai Universe, Sathya Sai.org, the web page of the national Sathya Sai organization, and how to subscribe to the SSIO bulletin mailing list.

Ushers and Security

During the public meeting, volunteers (ushers and hosts) are vital to welcome the public. It is also recommended to consider including an information stand (table or booth) staffed by volunteers to provide information regarding the Organisation and its founder, Sathya Sai Baba. The volunteers provide information about Sathya Sai Baba (His life, His message, His works), the SSIO mission/objectives and the local SSIO activities. A team of volunteers should help the guests with seating. The first two rows should be reserved for special guests. It may be necessary to consider hiring extra security personnel, aside from Sathya Sai volunteers.

Snacks and Beverages

After the conference, soft drinks and snacks may be offered – however, this is optional and depends on the location and number of attendees. Water can always be offered.

Parking

It is important to provide convenient and free parking. If parking is not free, please consider arranging a discount for attendees. Valet Parking should be considered for special guests and dignitaries, if possible.

Badges and Dress Code

It is recommended that all SSIO members/volunteers/officers wear badges with the official logo of SSIO, name of the volunteer, and the task performed (security, welcome, usher, etc.). All volunteers should dress conservatively: men must wear shirt, tie and jacket, or suit, and ladies should wear appropriate clothing.

Items to be avoided

- *Vibhuti* distribution,
- Images or idols of any deity
- Performance of Aarathi

Programme Team

The following factors are recommended for the Programme Team:

1. Consider background music prior to the event to create a peaceful atmosphere while participants are taking their seats.
2. Ideally, a public meeting should not last more than two hours.
3. Select an experienced Master of Ceremonies (MC) to introduce the programme and speakers.
4. Select a main speaker for the event (40-50 min).
5. Consider a second speaker, if possible (25-30 min).
6. Arrange for a slide presentation or video (20-30 min).
7. A Question and Answer session may be considered, but is not mandatory.
8. The MC should close the programme after giving a vote of thanks.

Speakers

Speakers should be women or men recognized as good people, and of good character and reputation. They must have a thorough and in-depth knowledge of Sathya Sai teachings and the mission and activities of the Sathya Sai organization. It is impossible to transmit Bhagawan's message if the speaker does not have a clear understanding of the topic and His message and is able to communicate from the heart.

A good speaker should:

- Be able to stand in front of the public
- Be charismatic
- Be calm, cool and collected in all situations
- Be always in control
- Be clear
- Be firm
- Be natural

When speaking in public, it is important to keep in mind that the audience not only “hears” what is said, but also “sees” the speaker and the stage. Therefore, it is important to focus on the delivery of the message. The public interprets what they hear through what they see. The gestures of the speaker are very important; and she/he should try to simplify gestures while maintaining a natural delivery. The speaker should:

- Avoid reading documents.
- Never get nervous.
- Learn from mistakes.
- Control the situation. Never lose equanimity when faced with difficult and controversial questions.

Irrespective of the content of the talk everyone transmits a message. People are more transparent than they think, and honesty with ourselves and others is important. The speaker should not:

- Attribute qualities they do not possess.
- Show false modesty.

A speaker must take into account her/his image from head to feet, and be aware of the following items:

- The clothing
- The jewellery
- The shoes
- The hair

- The make-up
- The posture
- The look
- The smile

The Message

Factors pertaining to the perception of the message being transmitted are:

- The rhythm
- The pauses
- The silences. A badly placed silence can be interpreted as a “fall”!
- Firm conviction in what is expressed
- Knowledge of how to chain ideas
- Ability to listen with respect and attention to any question
- The way in which the speaker reacts to a question and answers them (including unpleasant questions), which indicates the attitude of the speaker.
- The emotional atmosphere created, which has a ‘domino effect’ on the audience.

Therefore, it is most important to master the topic of the lecture and thus engage and inspire the audience. The message itself must be:

- Inspiring
- Clear
- Exhaustive

The speaker should:

- Avoid repetition and boredom
- Never touch a topic that she/he is not familiar with
- Never hurt the feelings of others

How to deliver the talk

- Introduction: present the idea in a few phrases (one or two may be enough).

- Development of the idea: present the concepts, examples, and data to illustrate the topic.

- Conclusion: close the talk with a final “rounding up phrase”.

During the talk, one topic should lead to the next in a seamless and natural manner for a smooth flow of ideas.

How to win the audience

In order to hold attention and win the audience, the speaker must:

- Relate the subject of the talk with the interest of the listeners.

- Win the respect and approval of the audience first. If the speaker starts talking about what the audience rejects, then the audience is antagonised. If the speaker starts with what the listeners accept and agree with, a positive scenario is created. The speaker can then slowly broach the subject of the talk.

- Use direct language. The speaker should avoid projecting complex ideas or use bombastic language which the audience does not understand.

- Use anecdotes and examples which may help to clarify the concept and connect with the audience.

- Use personal experiences with a message related to the theme of the talk.

- Respect the reactions and feelings of the listeners.

Topics to Cover and Topics to Avoid

The speakers know **what to say** about Bhagawan. But when a speaker presents information about Sathya Sai publicly, it is difficult to know **what not to say**. Generally, SSIO members are eager to share their own personal experiences with Baba which are often misunderstood and misinterpreted. The talk should be about how these personal experiences have changed their lives, how Sathya Sai teachings have transformed them, how the Sathya Sai message of love can change hearts and benefit all mankind.

What to say

- His Life story

- The Works of Sathya Sai Baba.

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- Human Values
- Education
- Selfless Service to society

As speakers, we should share our personal experiences of spiritual transformation, within our culture, within our religious beliefs, within our family, our workplace and society and how our lives have improved by putting into practice the teachings of Sathya Sai Baba. Let us never forget that we are not here to convince anybody about anything. We only share the information we have; we talk about what we know and what we have experienced – with simplicity and common sense.

What to highlight:

- The universality of His spiritual message and teachings in order to reach as many people as possible,
- The fact that the SSIO was founded 50 years ago and is a spiritual and humanitarian organisation active in more than 120 countries.
- The fact that the SSIO does not belong to any particular religion and does not proselytise. It encompasses all faiths and all nationalities. It is not a religion and the SSIO is not recruiting followers. Sathya Sai Baba did not come to create a new religion, but to help people revere their own religion and also respect all other religions. SSIO respects and values all religions as true and valid paths to the same goal.

All activities are free of charge. There is no solicitation of money; no one receives any remuneration for participation in the Sathya Sai organization.

There are no membership fees for joining a Sathya Sai Centre, nor are donations solicited from members or the public. The expenses to cover the various projects are offered voluntarily by members.

- Transformation into better human beings and the manifestation of love through thoughts, words and deeds is the mission of its approximately 2,000 Sathya Sai Centres spread in 123 countries all over the world. This mission is carried out through educational and selfless service activities.
- Educational activities include the teaching and practice of the five Human Values: Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love, Non-violence through classes for children and parents and training seminars for teachers.

These values help the student enter the social fabric while keeping faith in the principles of honesty, righteousness and commitment to serve the needy.

Many school administrators have recognised the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) programme and adopted it fully.

SSEHV is non-denominational and compatible with all cultures and religious creeds. The programme is adaptable to all curricula and offers a meeting point for current trends in value oriented education. It supports the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26 - December 10, 1948) which says: *“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace“.*

Sathya Sai Education in Human Values is administered by 31 Institutes of Sathya Sai Education present in 31 countries. There are 42 Sathya Sai Schools around the world.

- Service Activities are an important function of the Sathya Sai organisation. Selfless service is a spiritual discipline for the realization of the divinity latent in every being. It should be carried out regularly and become a way of life as it facilitates the process of self-transformation.

Selfless service is love in action, love for the planet, love for all creation and in particular for human beings. It consists of taking care of the physical and psychological well-being of the needy, without any intention of proselytization.

It co-ordinates and develops projects and social initiatives directed towards the sick, needy families, the aged, the disabled and children through a network of medical camps and clinics , home-assistance with distribution of food, clothes and care of environment, nature and animals.

Please mention the major humanitarian works started by Sathya Sai Baba in India through medical institutions, educational Institutes, and massive drinking water projects.

Sathya Sai Baba's teaching, that sums this up very well, is:

"Hands that help are holier than lips that pray"

In a 12-month period, on a worldwide level, 148 Medical, Dental, Vision Camps were held in 18 countries and 48,000 patients were examined. In the same time period, 31 Medical Clinics were operated in 10 countries and 155,000 patients were seen including 28,000 patients in the Sathya Sai Mobile Clinics, neurosurgery and veterinary camps.

Disaster Relief humanitarian assistance has been offered recently all over the world in such instances as USA Hurricane Sandy, Haiti Earthquake, Philippines Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) and Nepal earthquake. Many types of community service projects are held worldwide on 20th October each year under the “Serve the Planet” programme.

What not to say

We should be very careful not to refer to Sathya Sai Baba as an Avatar and God incarnate in public meetings so as not to be misunderstood. We must highlight the universality of His teachings, universality of faiths, teachings of human values and harmony of religions.

After the SSIO Public Meeting

After the event the Organising Committee should meet to evaluate the feedback in order to improve future events, and prepare a final report with recommendations.

The numbers of attendees should not be utilised as a measure to establish the success or failure of the event. Likewise, the number of newcomers approaching local Sathya Sai centres soon afterwards should not be used to gauge the success of the event, although such information can be included in the report for reference.

A final report with photographs and/or a short video in English should be sent to the SSIO Events Committee and the SSIO Media Committee within thirty days after the event.

Jai Sai Ram.