



Self-Support: Principle and Practice

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Being self-supporting is an important part of our new way of life. For the individual, this is usually quite a change.... We, who were unable to function as human beings, now find that anything is possible of us. Dreams that we gave up long ago can now become realities. Addicts as a group have been a burden to society. In NA, our groups not only stand on their own, but demand the right to do so.

—Basic Text: Tradition Seven

The Principles of Selfless Giving and Self-Support

Gratitude in Action

A recovering addict reaches out to help a newcomer, and, through the therapeutic value of one addict helping another, kindles the spark of hope and willingness in that new member's heart as only a fellow-addict can. A newcomer helps clean up after a meeting, and begins to feel the sense of belonging and acceptance that come from helping other human beings in an act of selfless service. A member shares experience, strength, and hope in a meeting, seeing the nods of recognition and empathy—and hearing the grateful peals of laughter—evoked by their having opened their heart to others who know the sorrow, and the joy, of being addicts in recovery. A member who's been around a little while offers a newer member a ride, and unwittingly begins a friendship that will outlast the car in which they ride together to the meeting. Trusted servants at their home group take great care to ensure that there is literature on the table, that the rent is paid, and that there are modest refreshments, creating a welcoming atmosphere of recovery for that shaky newcomer in the parking lot debating on whether to come into the meeting.

As we learn to live the principles of Narcotics Anonymous, we learn to give of ourselves in ways we could never have imagined in our active addiction. This selfless giving becomes a living principle when we reach out to lend a hand and help others. We begin to understand that the principle of self-support is at the very heart of our program, and the paradox of our growing willingness to be of service is summed up in a line from our steps and traditions book, *It Works: How and Why*: "The more we help others, the more we help ourselves." Discovering this truth lends real meaning to our belief that "we keep what we have only by giving it away." As we learn to live this program, we find that gratitude is an action, and we put our gratitude into action by offering help and support to our fellow members through service.

Similarly, when a member places a donation into the basket at a meeting, he or she is breathing life into that group and the NA service structure. That same individual contribution also brings life to the principle of self-support. Just think of the many ways we support one another, without outside assistance—rides to meetings, regular meeting attendance, basket donations, sponsorship, service: If we did not have each other, we would surely be doomed to that old life of dereliction,

despair, and untimely death. We learn to trust each other as though our very lives depended on the goodwill of the people sitting next to us at a meeting—because they do.

We come to be of service in many different ways in this fellowship, and, through service, we learn that the “logic” of recovery sometimes seems just the opposite of the “logic” of the street: We once thought the world owed us a living, and we justified taking what we thought we deserved when the world didn’t see fit to meet our demands. But in recovery, we learn that taking only leaves us feeling empty, while giving fills us up. We know from much experience that the amount that we are able to give, whether it be measured in time, effort, or money, is far less important than our willingness to give. We find that our willingness is often repaid tenfold in our own recovery. In the course of learning to practice these principles in all our affairs, most of us come to believe that a personal commitment to the principles of selfless giving and self-support stands as the foundation of our way of life.

*NA members around the world contribute money to help our fellowship fulfill its primary purpose.
It is incumbent upon every element of our service structure to use those funds to carry
the NA recovery message as far as possible.*

—Eleventh Concept, long form

Funding NA Services

Our collective responsibility

Self-support starts at the individual and group level. As individual members, we are each responsible for furthering the success of our program in every way we can. As a society of recovering addicts, we are fortunate that the primary purpose of our groups is so clear and simple: to carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers. Self-support ensures that we can carry this message on our own terms, free from outside influences and control. Self-support also allows our groups to be self-governing, guaranteeing each group's autonomy as discussed in our Fourth Tradition. More practically, self-support helps us to ensure that rent for our meeting spaces is paid, and literature is made available to our members and newcomers alike.

Why is self-support so important to an organization like ours? In a word, freedom! As our steps and traditions book *It Works: How and Why* says, "By paying our own expenses, we remain free to carry our own message." The description of our Seventh Tradition in the Basic Text repeats this thought more forcefully: "Our policy concerning money is clearly stated: We decline any outside contributions; our fellowship is completely self-supporting. We accept no funding, endowments, loans, and/or gifts. Everything has its price, regardless of intent. Whether the price is money, promises, concessions, special recognition, endorsements, or favors, it's too high for us. Even if those who would help us could guarantee no strings, we would still not accept their aid. . . . We will not put our freedom on the line." By paying our own way, we remain free to carry our message in our own way, free from outside influences. But this freedom also implies responsibility: We remain committed to supporting our groups, and the services that support them, through our own voluntary contributions.

In addition to this freedom, supporting the NA service structure beyond the group's needs also allows our members to feel a part of a growing fellowship. As a long-time member puts it, "If we don't help support it, we don't own it. Every group should participate in sending money to support our services. That makes a group 'a part of.' It gives them a stake in what's going on." So our principle of self-support ranges far beyond maintaining the group's simple financial responsibilities. Together, we are responsible for the success of all our service efforts. Our collective willingness to shoulder the burden of supporting our services will determine the success of our efforts to better carry our message to addicts throughout the world.

Funding NA services is therefore our collective responsibility. We truly believe in the principles of our program. We also recognize that, paramount among these principles are selfless giving and self-support. In our recovery, we learn to give more than lip-service to these ideals. We breathe life into them (and, thereby, into ourselves) by becoming of service, and by supporting our trusted servants' efforts, making sure that money is the least of our problems in carrying our message to the still suffering addict. The program works—we are all living proof of *its* effectiveness. But what about NA as an organization that seeks to help suffering addicts find a new way to live? If each of us committed just one-tenth of the resources that we spent on our active addiction to providing service in Narcotics Anonymous, what a powerfully dynamic organization we would be!

*Moving from a self-seeking life to a life based on
spiritual principles requires us to change profoundly.*

—It Works: How and Why

Making Recovery More Available

In the end, it's practicing the principle that counts—individual members and groups giving what they can, as they can, in the principles of selfless giving and self-support. It is our goal in both principle and practice to make recovery available to every addict seeking relief from the nightmare of addiction. Supporting our services helps to make that possible. Our Basic Text spells it out clearly for us:

*We cannot change the nature of the addict or addiction. We can help to change the old lie
"Once an addict, always an addict," by striving to make recovery more available....*

—Basic Text

We remind ourselves that, alone, we were doomed, but together, living the principles of selfless giving and self-support, all things are possible. We put these principles into practice by being of service, striving to make recovery more available every day through sponsorship, meeting attendance, service, and our Seventh Tradition donations.

High on our list of priorities should be a commitment to further the goals of NA as a whole. For NA to deliver the services necessary to keep growing and fulfilling our primary purpose around the world, the flow of funds must not bottleneck at any point in our service structure.

—Eleventh Concept, long form

Contributing to NA Services

What Can We Do?

There are many ways that we as individual members can contribute to the success of our program: sponsorship, service in meetings, area and regional service, and, yes, placing Seventh Tradition contributions in the basket. How is this success measured? The discussion of our Twelfth Step in *It Works: How and Why* sums it up for many of us: “Helping others is perhaps the highest aspiration of the human heart and something we have been entrusted with as the result of a Higher Power working in our lives.” Because we know that “we keep what we have only by giving it away,” our members learn the principle of service, and we do our best to practice it in our daily lives.

Our early members created our service structure to help the groups in their effort to better carry the message of recovery. Those members saw that the group needed to focus only upon what it does so very well—carrying our message to addicts. Yet there were other obvious things that our members could do to help make suffering addicts more aware of a new way of life: At the area and regional levels, they saw the need for regularly held meetings in hospitals and institutions; public information presentations; helplines; even area and regional meeting lists. At the world level, they saw the need to provide a central point of information and continuity for all of these services, as well as the ongoing need for the creation and, more recently, translation of literature. These and a host of other services were seen as essential. But our founders also feared that, if the groups themselves were to attempt to provide these services, such a loss of focus would hurt the group’s ability to carry our message. The service structure was created on the group’s behalf to provide such services so that the groups themselves could continue to remain our “grass-roots” support system, focusing solely on the delivery of our message to newcomers and old-timers alike.

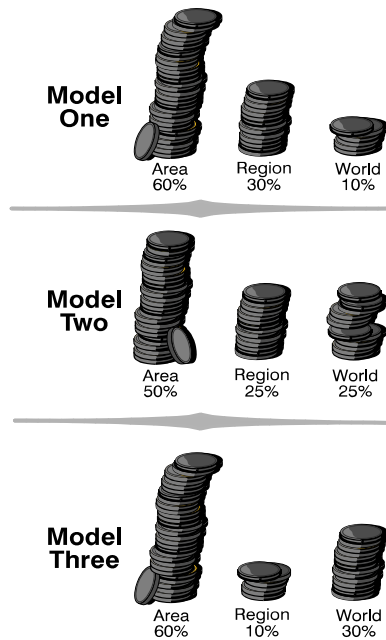
We delegate many vital responsibilities to our service structure, and this practice has proven to be a remarkably successful one over the years. The growth and development of our fellowship throughout the world attests to the fact that our service structure succeeds in helping addicts everywhere to find our groups and, in so doing, to find recovery. In 1972, there were perhaps 200 NA groups in the world. In 1982, there were about 2,000. Today, there are well over 20,000 in 90 countries, and our numbers grow stronger every day. NA is alive and well across the globe!

This progress has depended upon members’ support for its success. Such support comes in many forms: most importantly, in members’ willingness to become active participants in their own recovery by getting involved in their groups, as well as in their area and regional committees. Of course, these services also require money to be successful. Unlike our groups, service boards and committees are not self-supporting: They depend upon the groups’ donations to carry out the work that helps bring newcomers to our meetings. Whether it is in terms of personal service efforts, Seventh Tradition donations, or both, our group members’ support helps ensure that our service structure is as successful as possible in getting our message to addicts seeking a new way of life.

Like our members themselves, groups, areas, and regions are not required to donate anything to the service structure to be a part of Narcotics Anonymous. So long as a group or service committee follows the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of NA, and wishes to consider itself a part of NA, there are no other requirements for “membership.” But traditionally our groups and service bodies have come to assume the responsibility of helping to shoulder the burden of our shared service

efforts at the area, regional, and world levels of service. Our groups elect Group Service Representatives (GSRs) to represent the group at area service, and at their regional assembly. Our areas elect Regional Committee Members (RCMs) to serve at the regional level. And our regions elect Regional Delegates to serve at the world level. Most of our groups, areas, and regions also choose to contribute to the service structure, helping to pay for the costs associated with providing a wide array of services on the groups' behalf.

Should the group choose to donate to the service structure, the method by which it chooses to do so is, ultimately, the choice of the group members themselves. *A Guide to Local Services in Narcotics Anonymous* suggests direct group donations to all levels of service, and here are three suggested donation methods:



In simple terms, these numbers represent percentages of the total money the group has available to pass on to other levels of service after it has covered its own monthly expenses. What is left over is donated to the other levels of service, according to your group's conscience about how to pass on extra money to support our service structure.

Probably the simplest way to determine which method best suits the group is to examine which levels of service (area, region, and world) provide the most obvious service to the group itself. In some geographic locations throughout the world, groups receive their most obvious benefits from their local area committee. In others, for a variety of reasons, their most obvious benefits may come from the regional or even world levels of service. After looking at these factors, the group can decide what donation method is most appropriate for the group's situation. The groups should not feel confined to the suggested percentages described here, but may find another breakdown of donations that best suits their circumstances.

Here is a format for your group to record its breakdown of contributions:

Contribution Plan of _____
(Group Name)

Group Code _____

Area Donation _____ %

Regional Donation _____ %

World Services Donation _____ %

“Our service structure represents all of us in Narcotics Anonymous. It’s not like it’s a separate thing. It’s there to further the message of recovery. I don’t look at supporting our services any differently than supporting a meeting—it all goes to help addicts. And it helps in giving the message where they don’t have the message yet.”

—Long-time NA member

Some commonly asked questions and answers

Q: Where does the money I put into the basket go?

A: Typically, a great percentage of the group’s basket donations are taken up by the group’s own expenses—paying rent, buying literature, and other supplies. Usually what’s left over is passed on to the other levels of service, where our donations help pay for area and regional meeting directories, free literature to addicts in treatment and institutions, even public information presentations to professionals and the public at large.

Q: Can the money I put in the basket really help addicts in other parts of the world?

A: It really can. When your group, area, and region contribute to world services, the money they send pays for literature translations, free literature to addicts in other countries, coordination of worldwide services and communications, even helping ensure other countries’ participation at the World Service Conference. The money donated to world services helps to pay for many activities and services directed toward worldwide fellowship development so that we can continue to grow and carry our message to addicts across the globe. Examining the explosion of NA outside of the US and Canada over the last decade, we see ourselves fulfilling our program’s primary purpose today beyond our founders’ wildest dreams. Supporting world services helps make this growth possible.

Q: Some groups announce their treasury balances at a meeting, and they have hundreds of dollars in the bank. Is it OK to keep a big reserve?

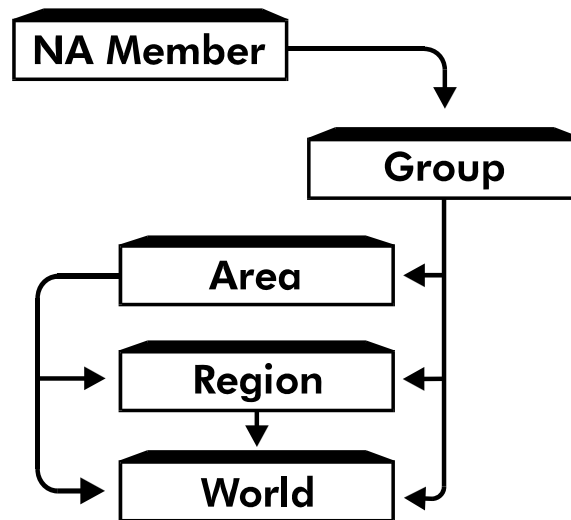
A: In our experience, no. We have found that a number of problems arise when groups, areas, regions, and even convention committees keep more than they need to operate in their reserves. We have seen individuals relapse over stealing NA money that probably should have been passed on to the next levels of service in the first place. We have also seen local fellowships become bitterly divided over “their” money that had been raised by a convention or other activity. Sometimes this disunity lasts years, crippling the effectiveness of the local NA community. Needless problems such as theft of NA funds and trusted servants fighting over money, property, and prestige at service meetings result when our service committees hoard NA funds.

More importantly, the money that sits idly in the bank might otherwise be used to help addicts, both locally, and even in other parts of the world. The principle of self-support means that we use what we need, and we pass along the rest to help others. This principle forms the basis of our way of life.

Q: Is it OK for my area to donate to both the regional and world levels of service?

A: Of course. Your area can donate to your region and to world services if it chooses to do so. As it says in *A Guide to Local Services*, “Narcotics Anonymous groups directly support area, regional, and world services from money left over after covering their own expenses. Area committees ...are encouraged to do the same with their surplus funds, sending it on to the

other levels of the service structure.” Here is a chart that demonstrates how funds can flow through our service structure:



Q: How can an individual member contribute to our service structure?

A: For individual members, there are many ways to be of service in NA. The first half of this booklet describes many of those opportunities to serve. In terms of donating money to NA services, many individuals find that NA birthdays are an excellent time to give something back. Some members make special individual “gratitude” donations on birthdays, contributing a dollar or more for each year clean. Other members like to present their home group with literature to be provided free to newcomers—the ways in which we can express our gratitude and support our members are limited only by our creativity.

You can donate to your local service community by your group deciding that a percentage of the money collected in your meeting’s basket be passed on to the other levels of service.

If you would like to make a direct donation to world services, please send your donation in care of the:

World Service Office
PO Box 9999
Van Nuys, California 91409