

IP No.24

Money Matters

Self-Support in NA





“Every NA group ought to be...”

“...Fully Self-Supporting, Declining Outside Contributions.” –Seventh Tradition

A story has been told about the early days of Narcotics Anonymous, when one of our founding members was seen going through the trash outside the NA service office. When asked what he was doing, he answered that he was looking for bottles to return for deposit so he could afford postage to respond to a letter from an NA member in Alaska. Every NA service committee has surely faced this simple truth at some point: The individual efforts of our members can go a long way, but willingness alone will not get a letter from California to Alaska, Brussels to St. Petersburg, or Tehran to Dubai.

This story illustrates two kinds of contributions as described by our Seventh Tradition. On one hand, we contribute our time and energy: showing up to meetings regularly, participating, and sharing with newcomers whenever we can. Our hopes and intentions are important, but it’s what we *do* that matters. We get involved in sponsorship and service. We give of ourselves freely without the expectation of receiving anything in return. Putting our gratitude into action by supporting Narcotics Anonymous gives real meaning to our belief that “we keep what we have only by giving it away.”

“Our hopes and intentions are important, but it’s what we do that matters.”

On the other hand, we give money to help pay for the services that keep NA alive and growing. Both of these types of contributions are important—in fact, most members contribute time, energy, and money—but in this pamphlet we are concerned primarily with voluntary financial contributions. Our groups pass a basket, hat, box, or tray at some point during each meeting so

members can give money.¹ The money we put in the basket allows our groups to keep the doors open, and to create a welcoming atmosphere of recovery for that shaky newcomer in the parking lot debating whether or not to come into the meeting. The money that reaches our service system helps support services that let other addicts, in our own communities and around the world, know that hope is available. Just as the cost of our own personal expenses—rent, food, and so on—go up from year to year, the amount of money needed to fund these basic services rises continually, especially as NA grows and as we seek additional ways to reach addicts.

We may notice some members giving a little more or a little less than others and wonder whether we're giving the "right" amount. Giving our fair share doesn't mean that everyone donates the same amount; it means each of us gives what we can based on what we have. When our lives improve as a result of our recovery, we often find that we can afford to give more. Maybe we feel uncomfortable when we realize that the beverage or snack we bought on our way to the meeting cost two or three times the amount we put in the basket. After considering what is most valuable to us, we usually decide to put more in the basket when we can. Whether we have a lot or a little, giving to our service system is an act of faith that helps us let go of some of our fears. Doing so can remind us that so long as our spiritual needs are taken care of, living problems are reduced to a point of comfort. We have faith that a power greater than ourselves will be expressed through our collective conscience.

“...To Further Our Primary Purpose...” –Eleventh Concept

A frequently quoted line from the Basic Text states, “The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.” Our groups put this idea into action in many ways. After a meeting is over, for instance, a newcomer talks with a few home group members, and one of them asks if the newcomer has a Basic Text. The newcomer might respond by asking how much the book costs, or by saying, “I can probably buy one next week.” The other members smile and make sure the newcomer leaves with a book. The newcomer mentions something about paying them back, and the response is simple: “Just keep coming back, so one of these days you can buy a book for a newcomer, too.”

“The newcomer is the most important person at any meeting, because we can only keep what we have by giving it away.”

Practicing self-support in NA doesn't simply mean each of us pays our own way; we repay NA not just by taking care of ourselves, but by making a way for the newcomer to find recovery. Many of us have heard it shared in meetings that “even if I stayed clean for a hundred years, I could never repay NA for the freedom I've been given here.” In our addiction, all we did was take, which left us empty. In NA we are learning to become givers, and we are finding that giving fills us up. At first many of us felt we had an obligation to give back what was so freely given to us, but over time we began to be motivated by more of a forward-looking desire to contribute as we began to see the bigger picture of what NA can be and do.

¹ In this IP, we will use the term “basket” to refer to any method a group might use to gather contributions.

NA members who came before us made sure we were able to find our way here. They kept the meeting doors open, put money in the basket to pay for a phoneline and posters, and brought literature and panels into facilities to share the NA message. Now we have the opportunity, as well as the responsibility, to give other addicts a chance to hear our message. Our financial contributions help pay for services on every level: local efforts to carry the message; regional support and services to areas; and world services, which not only assists existing NA communities, but also works to make NA available in other communities. Translation efforts, free or subsidized literature, fellowship development workshops—all of these services are carried out on behalf of NA as a whole, to make our message available to still-suffering addicts worldwide.

Most of us feel some level of ownership and responsibility for services provided on NA's behalf. Contributing our time and money to NA gives us an opportunity to manifest that feeling in a concrete way and strengthens our spiritual connection to the service system and the program. The Second Concept reminds us that the NA groups have "final responsibility and authority for NA services." For example, we may have been to a meeting where the basket was passed twice because there wasn't enough collected for rent the first time, only to see members dig deeper the second time around. When there is a clear connection between the money we put in the basket and NA's needs, most of us are willing to give more. After all, NA belongs to us and its well-being depends on our efforts. We begin to realize that we do not have to wait until some part of the service system is suffering before we contribute.

There is a spiritual satisfaction in freely giving to support the fellowship that saved our lives. We give what we can, knowing that our contributions become part of a worldwide effort to share recovery.



Here are some questions we can ask ourselves about how we contribute financially to NA.

- ⊗ How much did we put in the basket in our first thirty days clean? First year? Now?
- ⊗ How have our financial circumstances changed since we got clean?
- ⊗ Does the way we spend our money reflect what is valuable to us?
- ⊗ Do our NA groups have the money they need to operate smoothly? Can our group contribute to other levels of service?
- ⊗ What more could be done to further our primary purpose at each level of service, if we had the money?
- ⊗ What more can we be doing to help others, the way we were helped by NA?

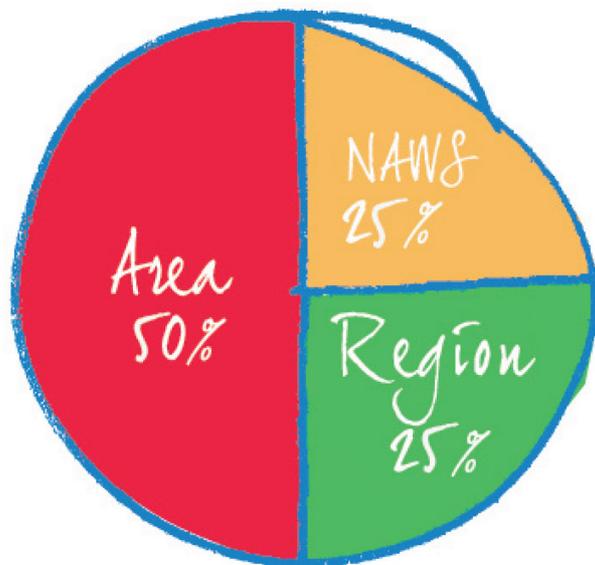
“...And Must Be Managed Responsibly.” –Eleventh Concept

At every level of service in NA, we have at one time or another faced the challenge of trying to carry out our work with limited funds. For example, a Narcotics Anonymous service committee is looking forward to the convention to bring in money to replenish reserves. But the weather gets so bad that hardly anyone can travel, and the convention takes in far less money than expected. By the time the hotel costs and other expenses are paid, the convention has lost money. As a result, reserves won't be filled, literature orders might be cut, or fewer meeting directories will be printed. Trusted servants argue about how the situation could have been handled better, or about how to use the little money that remains available. It might take months, or even years, to recover from such a loss.

This scenario raises questions about both the sources of NA funding and the responsible management of those funds. The money that pays for our services comes from contributions freely given by members, as well as income from our own efforts, such as events, merchandise, and literature sales. There is a point at which these efforts can, however, begin to stray from our basic principle of addicts freely helping addicts. In our enthusiasm and creativity, we sometimes have ideas for events or fundraisers that have little or nothing to do with our primary purpose, and therefore wouldn't be appropriate for us. Group conscience is the means by which we can sort this out and strike the proper balance.

With a steady, reliable flow of member donations we may deal with these types of issues less frequently. Our service committees will then be more able to develop practical, realistic budgets and provide more reliable and efficient services to make our message more available. When we give enough money in our groups, and our

groups contribute directly to each level of service, we stabilize our services and can become a more reliable presence in our communities. The ability of our service committees to make plans and follow through does not have to depend on factors beyond our control, such as how many people attend our events or buy T-shirts. Free from the pressure to generate large profits, our events can stay focused on celebrating recovery and sharing our message.



But the stability of our resources is only part of the story. Taking care of what we have is also an important part of self-support in NA. Our resources are limited, so they must be used wisely. If we want our service system to be successful, we must provide it with the money needed to accomplish the work, as well as the time and energy to make the work possible. The funds we pass along to the service system do not belong to any particular committee; they belong to NA. Our concepts remind us, “When all levels of our service structure receive direct financial support

from the groups, the bonds of mutual responsibility are strengthened between them.” (Eleventh Concept essay) As members, it’s our job to make sure the money we contribute is used responsibly: prioritizing our needs, seeking cost-effective methods of service delivery, selecting capable and qualified trusted servants, insisting on accountability through clear financial reports, and encouraging our groups and committees not to hold on to large sums of money. Our Eleventh Concept discusses the importance of using NA funds responsibly. When we exercise our responsibilities as members, we strengthen the ties that bind us together. We see that our contributions make a difference, and we stay in touch with whether or not our service system has what it needs to function.

Finally, the principle of self-support in Narcotics Anonymous, as expressed in our Seventh Tradition, ensures our ability to carry our message on our own terms. Our Second Concept essay clearly defines the responsibility for funding the services that further our primary purpose: “Since the groups have created the service structure to perform certain tasks, the groups are also responsible to provide the necessary funds.” At all levels, our groups fund our services so we can remain free from outside influences and control. We do not accept any donations from outside of NA; everything has its price.

Self-support in NA is all about taking care of the gift we have been given: freedom from active addiction and the opportunity for a new way of life.

“Together we can help ensure recovery is available to every addict seeking relief from the nightmare of addiction.”



Ways to Contribute

- ⊗ Show up and welcome a newcomer!
- ⊗ Sweep the floor, help stack chairs, or empty the trash. When we leave the meeting room, it should be as clean as, or cleaner than, it was when we arrived.
- ⊗ Give time and energy in service to the group, or any goods and supplies your groups or service committees might need.
- ⊗ Give money at the meetings you attend. Remember, whether it’s dollars, pounds, euros, or any other type of currency, it probably can’t buy as much today as it used to.
- ⊗ Make clean date contributions of money or literature to your home group, or contributions for each year clean to NAWS, or both.
- ⊗ Contribute directly to each level of service.
- ⊗ Set up automatic recurring contributions to NA World Services by visiting www.na.org.
- ⊗ Some members make arrangements to leave a specified amount of money to NA in their will or estate, or contribute in memory of a deceased member.
- ⊗ Be of service.

See IP #28, Funding NA Services, for information about how groups use the money collected in meetings.

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