

# Serving NA in Rural & Isolated Communities



This tool is designed to provide support and solutions to common problems that NA members, groups, and service bodies face in rural or isolated areas and in developing Narcotics Anonymous communities. While these problems often occur because meetings are far apart or the population is sparse, not every issue or solution offered here may apply to every isolated NA community. Members are encouraged to try the ideas that seem appropriate for their needs and adapt them when necessary. This tool is intended to be combined with existing service materials and online resources as a coordinated approach to providing support to these communities.

## What should we strive for when serving in rural or isolated NA communities?

**Consistency and persistence:** Because it may take some time before an addict seeking help finds NA—especially in an isolated community—letting go of expectations is essential. Simply showing up on time each week to open the doors and set up the meeting is an opportunity for us to practice consistency and persistence. Members often commit to a new meeting for a year or more—even if it means waiting alone, using the time to read NA literature or do stepwork.

**Patience:** We strive to encourage, mentor, and practice patience with newcomers who might not know how NA works. Smaller, isolated NA communities tend to grow at a slower pace, and each newcomer is a precious resource for growing NA, so it is important to take particular care with newcomers. Practicing patience can also be useful as we find our place in a smaller community where the options for meetings and services might be limited.

**Tolerance, kindness, and compassion:** These principles don't just apply when dealing with newer members; they apply when dealing with all members. Practicing tolerance, kindness, and compassion usually aids our service efforts better than an overbearing approach.

**Inclusiveness:** "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions," so we welcome any addict who attends NA. Each of us has an equal opportunity to recover, and our principles should always come before our personalities.

**Attraction:** We embody the principle of attraction when we offer a hug, a cup of coffee, or a conversation. A positive and willing attitude can go a long way to create an inclusive and attractive atmosphere that encourages members to keep coming back.

**Focusing on our primary purpose to carry the message to the addict who still suffers:** In some isolated communities where there isn't an NA meeting every night of the week, some members may attend more than one fellowship, and this increases the potential for mixed messages. Kindly encouraging a focus on our primary purpose, which is the foundation of NA groups and service bodies, can help us carry a clear message of recovery. In addition, encouraging members with more NA experience who live in larger communities to travel to more isolated areas to share or to take service commitments can help support our primary purpose.

**Effective communication:** When we are consistent and clear in our message of recovery, our efforts to reach suffering addicts are enhanced.

**Prudence:** Practicing prudence can help us overcome our limited human and financial resources. We can begin to think more prudently by asking, "What do we need to do first to better carry the NA message?" With this intention, we can cultivate sustainable growth in rural or isolated communities by taking small steps and avoiding over-committing and wasting limited resources.

**Self-support:** Being self-supporting is a key element of unity in all NA groups, but it can be difficult in less densely populated areas. Participation from members who contribute with a spirit of generosity can help overcome this challenge.

**Awareness:** Not every NA community has the same level of resources and member experience, so it's important for a developing community to be aware of its own limitations. Being willing to ask for help from neighboring groups and service bodies can help deliver services as well as create unity and connection in the NA community.

Remember that rural and isolated groups are just as important as any other group and are a part of the overall NA service system.



## These excerpts from *The Group Booklet* may help address some common challenges:

**What is an NA group?** When two or more addicts come together to help each other stay clean, they may form a Narcotics Anonymous group. Here are six points<sup>1</sup> based on our traditions which describe an NA group:

1. All members of a group are drug addicts, and all drug addicts are eligible for membership.
2. As a group, they are self-supporting.
3. As a group, their single goal is to help drug addicts recover through application of the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous.
4. As a group, they have no affiliation outside Narcotics Anonymous.
5. As a group, they express no opinion on outside issues.
6. As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion.

**Where can we hold meetings?** NA meetings can be held almost anywhere. Groups usually want to find an easily accessible public place where they can hold their meetings on a weekly basis.

Holding regular NA group meetings in some types of facilities—addiction treatment centers, clubhouses, or political party headquarters, for instance—can compromise the independent identity of the group.

**What kinds of literature should we use?**

...only NA-approved literature is appropriate for reading in Narcotics Anonymous meetings.

...literature of any sort produced by other twelve-step fellowships or other organizations outside NA is inappropriate for display on our literature tables or reading at our meetings. To do either implies an endorsement of an outside enterprise, directly contradicting NA's Sixth Tradition.

<sup>1</sup> The six points describing a group have been adapted from "The AA Group," published by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

## What else is in this tool?

On the following pages we have divided the content into three groups: *For Members*, *For Groups*, and *For Service Bodies*. These sections will be updated as experience and resources for solutions are gathered.

## Resources – where to find more information

- ✳ [na.org/ruralservice](http://na.org/ruralservice) – Recordings and materials from Rural Service web meetings and locally developed resources related to rural and isolated service
- ✳ [na.org/localresources](http://na.org/localresources) – General service resources, including many locally developed materials
- ✳ [na.org/ips](http://na.org/ips) – Informational pamphlets and booklets in various languages, including *The Group Booklet*
- ✳ [na.org/servicemat](http://na.org/servicemat) – A wide range of NA service material, including service pamphlets that offer guidance to groups on commonly encountered challenges
- ✳ [na.org/handbooks](http://na.org/handbooks) – Service handbooks, including a section on "Area Committees in Rural Communities" on page 65 of *A Guide to Local Services in NA*
- ✳ [na.org/meetingsearch](http://na.org/meetingsearch) – Includes local NA websites and phonelines, and a list of virtual meetings
- ✳ [na.org/subscribe](http://na.org/subscribe) – Subscribe to NAWS periodicals and email updates
- ✳ [na.org/elit](http://na.org/elit) – Links to purchase electronic versions of NA books
- ✳ [na.org/pr](http://na.org/pr) – Public relations materials to assist in developing relationships with organizations and professionals that refer addicts to NA
- ✳ [na.org/IDT](http://na.org/IDT) – Materials to help facilitate discussions on topics of interest to the NA Fellowship and its members and service bodies
- ✳ [na.org/virtual](http://na.org/virtual) – This page contains links and resources to help addicts meet online or by phone, including a [Virtual Meeting Quick Start Guide](#) and [Virtual Meeting Basics](#)



# Serving NA in Rural & Isolated Communities (continued)



## Common challenges and potential solutions for rural and isolated communities

**Note:** Some of these sections need further development. The symbol [?] denotes a request for additional resources or solutions. Please email these to [ruralservice@na.org](mailto:ruralservice@na.org). If there is a resource available online at [na.org/ruralservice](http://na.org/ruralservice) this will be indicated with [W].

### For Members

- Some members move from a place with many meetings and robust service opportunities to an area where both are very limited. Here are some dos and don'ts on how to be a leader in the spirit of the Second Tradition, and avoid becoming “the authority” in a rural community:

DO ☺	DON'T ☹
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ DO consider spiritual principles, particularly those that apply to rural and isolated service.</li><li>✓ DO allow a group to have its own identity.</li><li>✓ DO focus on carrying a clear NA message.</li><li>✓ DO encourage sponsees and other addicts to get involved in service with you.</li><li>✓ DO ask local members to share their service experience to understand what has and has not worked in the past.</li><li>✓ DO become a local member first. Attend as many different meetings as possible in your new community before becoming involved in service.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✗ DON'T try to force new ideas—remember the principle of attraction.</li><li>✗ DON'T assume that there is a “quick fix” or a simple solution to long-standing issues.</li><li>✗ DON'T forget that our behavior can affect others in NA, and NA services generally.</li><li>✗ DON'T create or use complex guidelines or methods for delivering simple services—keep things simple.</li><li>✗ DON'T assume there is only one way to organize NA services—practice open-mindedness.</li></ul>

- Finding ways to maintain personal anonymity in a small community can be challenging.
  - Ask trusted servants at your area or regional service committee, or at neighboring ASCs to deliver services that require identifying as an NA member.
  - Include an anonymity statement in meeting formats.
  - For members who work in local treatment programs and are concerned about keeping their recovery and professional lives separate, Chapter 7 of the *Public Relations Handbook* suggests:
    - When working with treatment professionals, respect the anonymity of professionals and staff who may also be members of NA. Treatment centers are separate from NA; not all employees may be aware of their coworkers' involvement in NA.*
    - Members who are also treatment professionals may need to consider that their role as a treatment professional is separate from their role as an NA member. In the role of a treatment professional, an individual is usually following treatment protocols instead of acting as an NA member talking about their personal recovery in NA.*
- Access to meetings can be limited due to geographical distance, terrain, inclement weather, and/or a small number of available groups.
  - Explore online or telephone-based meetings. Many platforms offer the ability to meet at little or no cost. Some face-to-face groups also offer the ability to participate remotely in meetings via phone or online. [W]
  - Carpool and take road trips to meetings in neighboring communities to find meetings for yourself and to reach out to isolated groups or members in need due to illness or disability. [W]
  - Use audio versions of literature and speaker recordings.
  - Participate in online NA meetings. [W]



- ⚙️ Internet access might be limited in rural areas, providing a barrier to participation in some service activities.
  - Subscribe to print copies of minutes, reports, and Fellowship publications and periodicals.
- ⚙️ There may be limited human resources to support newcomers in terms of support, rides to meetings, etc.
  - Put together a local resource pool to help newcomers with rides to meetings, sponsorship, etc.
  - Create a Twelfth-Step responders list. [\[W\]](#)
- ⚙️ Due to sometimes-sparse population in rural and isolated communities, there may be a lack of available and diverse sponsors.
  - Explore long distance and virtual sponsorship services. [\[W\]](#)
  - Create a temporary sponsor list.
  - Provide information about qualities to look for in a potential sponsor to help members with challenges such as literacy, language, or learning differences.
  - Meet prior to recovery meetings at the same venue to work steps with a sponsor and with other members.
  - Work the Steps in a group with others outside of NA meetings.

**[?] Let us know if you have experience working the Steps in a group setting outside of NA meetings. We would like to make these “group sponsorship” meeting formats available to others.**

**[?] What experience can you share for ways to address the stigma of being an addict in a small community? (This stigma can be particularly challenging for women in many parts of the world.)**

*One member shared this experience:*

“This has been a challenge for me. I am an addict in a small town of about 1,200 people. I also volunteer in the community, and I didn’t particularly want my background to be known. However, there have been some situations where I’ve had to be honest, and that is my suggested way of addressing these kinds of situations. Just be honest. I often frame it as “I WAS an addict” to them, not “I AM an addict” as they don’t really get the whole recovery thing. I also mention I have many years clean. Once they see I am a solid, caring individual, and that my addiction has made me a great person today, I don’t worry about what others think.”



## Notes

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# Serving NA in Rural & Isolated Communities (continued)



## Common challenges and potential solutions for rural and isolated communities

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### For Groups

- ✱ Starting and nurturing new groups in smaller NA communities can be challenging, but are essential for these communities to grow.
  - Remember some basic principles:
    - Begin with a core group of committed members, which sometimes may be just one or two people.
    - Focus group service on actively seeking new members.
    - Share information about the meeting time and place via local ads and newsletters, posters and business cards, and social media.
  - Broaden the experience shared in meetings:
    - Listen to recordings of members' shares from NA events when no in-person speaker is available.
    - Read stories from the Basic Text.
    - Read and discuss other NA literature.
    - Invite speakers to share using internet technology. [W]
    - Ask visiting members to share.
    - Connect to virtual meetings that are happening at the same time. See *Virtual Meeting Basics* for additional guidance ([na.org/basics](http://na.org/basics)).
  - Create a list of the group members' phone numbers.
  - Encourage open participation in home-group business meetings.
  - Maintain contact with the ASC, either in person (when possible), by submitting a written report, or by attending virtually.
  - Engage in group-to-group activities such as capture the flag/rock, road trips, and group anniversary potlucks. [W]
  - Plan family-based activities and functions like picnics and potlucks.
  - Utilize services provided by your ASC and RSC:
    - Keep meeting time and place information up-to-date on local meeting lists.
    - Request funding for local ads.
    - Plan where new groups are needed.
    - Ask if regional or area websites are able to help host online meetings. [W]
  - Assist newer groups with support from more established groups (group-to-group "sponsorship").
  - Organize mobile or "flash" meetings, to temporarily respond to unmet needs, where resources are not available to start a new group. [W]
- ✱ Carrying a clear NA message in smaller communities can be difficult.
  - Hold NA literature study meetings.
- ✱ Rural or isolated NA communities often face limited human resources in groups because there may be few NA meetings or members:
  - Bring enthusiasm and demonstrate positive change to create a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere of recovery.
  - Change group formats to encourage attendance.
  - Plan group-hosted events such as anniversary celebrations and speaker jams to encourage attendance.
  - Use recordings of members' shares from NA events and audio versions of literature during meetings to demonstrate the diversity of our members and their messages.
  - Ask your area or region to organize a local unity or learning day. [W]
  - Utilize distance sponsorship services. [W]
  - Have home groups host service meetings to bring out-of-town members to the meeting.



- ✱ In addition to a lack of human resources, groups in rural communities may also face limited financial resources.
  - Ask for funds or resources like literature or keytags from your ASC when financial resources aren't available.
  - Host service meetings at group locations so that the service body's rent allocation can be added to the group's treasury.
- ✱ Isolated areas might have limited options for purchasing literature.
  - Groups can share information with others about where they purchase their literature.
  - Established groups might include extra materials in their literature orders to assist groups that don't have easy access to a literature source.
  - Access informational pamphlets and booklets online.
  - Access literature via NA apps or electronic literature.
- ✱ Rural and isolated areas, just like any NA community, may face a variety of challenges with new members.
  - Orient new members:
    - Incorporate newcomer and "ask-it basket" meeting formats.
    - Use IP #29, *An Introduction to NA Meetings*, to share information about how NA meetings work.
    - Create a video orientation tool.
    - Create posters that show key facts about NA.
  - Provide PR presentations to organizations that refer addicts to NA:
    - Explain what NA can and cannot do.
    - Provide information about which meetings are best suited to welcome new members.
    - Establish ongoing relationships with local professionals and agencies.
    - Use PR resources such as *Narcotics Anonymous and Persons Receiving Medication-Assisted Treatment*, and *NA: A Resource in Your Community*.
  - Strengthen groups:
    - Organize workshops on building strong home groups and other relevant topics. **[W]**
    - Review and discuss service pamphlets and other relevant literature during business meetings.
- ✱ With limited human resources, dealing with a lack of experience, training, and mentoring can be challenging for groups in small NA communities.
  - Encourage mentorship as a part of sponsorship.
  - Incorporate literature- and Tradition-study meetings (e.g., *Guiding Principles: The Spirit of Our Traditions* and *It Works: How and Why*).
- ✱ Vast distances between NA communities can make it difficult to maintain a connection with the nearest service body.
  - Organize group support forums (GSFs) or rural co-ops to enable a collection of groups to send one GSR to the ASC on their behalf. **[W]**
  - Consider hosting a workshop or recovery meeting at a nearby convention or service event to build a sense of belonging with the wider NA community.
  - Ask if attending service body meetings virtually is possible.

**[?] Finding an appropriate, affordable venue can be difficult in a small community. Are you aware of any options for groups that are struggling with this challenge?**

Suggestions offered include: libraries, churches, restaurant party rooms, and breakfast/lunch restaurants for evening meetings.



## Notes

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### For Service Bodies

- ✱ Communities that are spread out, with very few NA members, may have a limited number of trusted servants available to provide the services needed.
  - Train and mentor new trusted servants.
    - Organize workshops and learning days.
    - Explore overlapping service terms.
    - Make service resources available (e.g., *A Guide to Local Services in NA*, other service handbooks, and service pamphlets). [W]
    - Identify the potential trainers/mentors who succeed in creating an atmosphere of recovery.
    - Identify members with technical skills who are willing to train and mentor others.
  - Encourage attendance and participation.
    - Provide refreshments, support open participation, and hold recovery meetings at service events.
    - Match talents to tasks.
    - Explore project-based service with shorter commitment periods.
    - Use online technology to facilitate communication and virtual attendance. [W]
    - Consider the location of service meetings to allow access to as many members as possible.
    - Create a supportive atmosphere and communicate positively.
  - Pool resources between area subcommittees.
    - Utilize an umbrella structure as described in Chapter Three of the *Public Relations Handbook*. [W]
    - Collaborate on learning days and other events with other area subcommittees.
    - Share services with neighboring areas such as helplines and meeting lists.
  - Build a base of experienced members.
    - Organize Traditions-based recovery meetings and workshops.
    - Utilize existing resources such as *A Guide to Local Services in NA* and locally created materials. [W]
  - Utilize planning and prioritization processes at the local level.
- ✱ It can be challenging to create unity and strengthen the connection among groups in a rural or isolated community.
  - Facilitate group-to-group activities.
    - Capture the flag/rock. [W]
    - Develop social activities with service-oriented workshops.
  - Provide urban outreach to rural communities.
    - Organize carpools and road trips to outlying meetings and consider leaving a seat open for a local member in need of a ride. [W]
  - Organize group support forums (GSFs) or a rural co-op. [W]
  - Use technology so groups can attend recovery events virtually. [?]
  - Encourage communication by using email, social media, and online discussion areas.
  - Publish newsletters, especially if there is limited internet availability for some groups.
- ✱ Vast geographical distances, terrain, and inclement weather can make participating in service meetings and decision-making processes difficult.
  - Utilize virtual attendance at service meetings. [W]
  - Rotate the location of service meetings to increase member involvement and create unity and trust.
  - Hold service meetings in a central location for consistency and equal accessibility for outlying groups.
  - Send minutes via mail and/or email.
  - Create an outreach workgroup or committee to seek out and assist isolated communities. [W]

[?] **Let us know if you have experience with remote participation at service meetings. We would like to compile experience and guidelines and share them with others.**

Suggestions offered include:

- For hybrid meetings, ensure that online participants are involved and include this in the meeting guidelines.
- Any readings or reports used during the meeting should be posted on-screen.
- Utilize technology that allows remote members to see and hear the meeting clearly.
- Assign a trusted servant to monitor the chat feature.



- ✱ Providing public relations service can be particularly challenging in rural and isolated communities due to geography and limited human resources.
  - Carefully plan service delivery to prioritize service efforts and use limited resources more effectively.
  - Only commit to what can be consistently delivered.
    - Organize one-time or monthly H&I events instead of weekly panels.
    - Provide literature and meeting information if a panel is not possible.
  - Cooperate between subcommittees by utilizing an umbrella structure as described in Chapter Three of the *Public Relations Handbook*. [W]
  - Train trusted servants.
    - Encourage attendance at NAWS web meetings.
    - Make *PR Basics*, *H&I Basics*, and other service resources available. [W]
  - Use available regional resources, including:
    - Trusted servants
    - Funds
    - Literature for professionals and incarcerated addicts
    - Experience
    - Prison sponsorship programs
  - Air public service announcements on local media.
  - Consider how the NA community and the general community usually receive information.
  - Add/adopt isolated groups to the nearest existing service body.
  - Keep PR service simple such as holding a flyer-hanging day to distribute information about local NA meetings.
  - Develop cooperative relationships with local authorities, the court system, police departments, social agencies, etc.
  - Keep in mind what it might have been like in the beginning of NA when no structure existed.
- ✱ Dealing with a lack of experience, training, and mentoring can be challenging for service bodies in small NA communities because of limited human resources.
  - Organize regularly-scheduled learning days. [W]
  - Dedicate time to review and discuss sections of guidelines and service material.
  - Allow members to take service positions without having prior experience, then support and guide them.
  - Reach out to more experienced service bodies to learn how to mentor.
  - Organize short workshops before meetings on relevant topics.
  - Create short plays or skits about service *dos* and *don'ts* to perform at local events.
  - Create a pool of experienced members to assist with training and mentoring.
  - Create opportunities for members' ideas to be heard, and don't assume that what didn't work before couldn't work now.
  - Acknowledge different views of what "isolated" and "rural" mean in different parts of the world, and try to assist any group or member that seeks help.
  - Share personal recovery in mentoring roles to gain the trust of those less experienced.

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**World Service Office**  
PO Box 9999  
Van Nuys, CA 91409 USA  
TEL (818) 773-9999  
FAX (818) 700-0700  
WEB na.org

**World Service Office—Canada**  
Mississauga, Ontario

**World Service Office—Europe**  
Brussels, Belgium  
TEL +32/2/646-6012  
WEB na.org

**World Service Office—Iran**  
Tehran, Iran  
WEB www.wsoiran.org



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