

Appendix 4: Literature Distribution and Fund Flow in a New Service System

Our ideas about literature distribution and fund flow in a new service system are still preliminary, but we wanted to share our thinking thus far so that members have a beginning idea of how a literature distribution system and fund flow might work in a restructured service system. We plan to continue discussing these issues and we may have more information or ideas before the next conference.

In this report we will outline a range of ideas about how groups could obtain literature and contribute funds in a new system using methods that are similar to the methods we use now. The “best” solutions for fund flow and literature distribution are those that will most easily put literature in the hands of addicts who need it and ensure that funds reach the bodies that deliver services. We offer a range of ideas because NA communities differ in their characteristics and needs. Currently groups use a variety of methods to purchase literature and that variance may not change in a new system. We need to ensure the availability and reliability of literature and funds in a new system. We’ve tried to offer information here to help communities think through what method or combination of methods might work best for them, and in that spirit, have included some questions to consider.

The Challenge with the Proposed System

The proposals currently describe two different bodies on a local level. One body is smaller and informal and is devoted exclusively to directly addressing group needs. The group support unit would function as a forum where members of groups come together to discuss their struggles and successes and mutually support one another. The second local body, the local service unit, is larger than the group support unit; several GSUs would make up an LSU. The LSU would provide most local services. It would be comprised of a board that meets monthly and oversees the day-to-day administration of ongoing services and projects, and a quarterly planning assembly where group and GSU delegates gather to create a plan, elect trusted servants, and monitor progress on goals, among other tasks.

The challenge in the proposed system is that neither of these two bodies is, perhaps, ideal as a literature distribution point or a place to collect financial contributions. To distribute literature and accept contributions at the GSU would involve some level of money handling and administration, both of which may undermine the informal character of the meeting. On the other hand, while the LSU may be better suited to literature distribution and accepting contributions, it only meets quarterly, and most groups are used to buying literature and making a financial contribution to their area service committee monthly.

Present Practices

When we initially began thinking about how groups would get their literature, the dilemma outlined above seemed, while not insurmountable, certainly very grave. But after we began researching our current practices, we started to realize that monthly literature distribution at a local service body may be the norm, but it’s far from the rule. We *already* employ a wide range of strategies to distribute literature and financially contribute to service bodies. According to the regional reports submitted for

WSC 2010, many areas and regions buy their literature from NAWS, while others purchase from regional service offices, and a few buy from an area service office or area “store.”

The variety of places groups get their literature varies even more widely. While many of us may be used to the ASC as the distribution point for literature, anyone who has been to an ASC recently knows that many, many groups do not attend an area meeting regularly. Those groups are already purchasing their literature elsewhere. What’s more, many ASCs don’t make a practice of distributing literature at all. Currently, a very large number of groups order directly from a regional office or from world services. Most groups contribute money to an ASC when they purchase literature, but many make a financial contribution less often or not at all. Some groups contribute money through electronic means, and an increasing number of groups financially contribute to region and world services as well as their ASC.

It seems that whatever changes are made in the service system in the years ahead, we want to make sure that groups continue to have flexibility in how they can obtain literature and contribute financially to service bodies.

Possible Ways for Groups to Get Literature and Contribute Funds in a New System

Attend the LSU quarterly planning assembly:

This method is convenient in that groups would already be sending a delegate to the quarterly assembly. In this option, that delegate would also be responsible to carry the literature order and make the group’s financial contribution to the LSU. The disadvantage to this method is, as mentioned above, that it would mean literature gets ordered and money is contributed quarterly rather than monthly. It necessitates good planning—in many cases, better than we have now. It also means that groups would have to hold more funds than they may be accustomed to holding. If, however, a group can anticipate its literature needs well enough, a monthly financial contribution could still be made via post or electronically even if literature is only ordered quarterly.

Stop by the LSU board meetings:

While the planning assemblies would happen three or four times a year, the LSU board would meet monthly. In some cases, those meetings might take place electronically, but in many perhaps most, cases they would be face to face. The board could take time during the monthly meeting to fill literature orders and take financial contributions from groups. If desired, the board could even have a designated literature coordinator or workgroup so that the board as a whole wouldn’t need to stop business to distribute literature and collect contributions. Ordering from the local service board would mean that groups would need to send a delegate or other trusted servant just for that purpose during months that the LSU planning assembly didn’t take place. Nonetheless, for many groups this may be a convenient enough option.

Utilize the GSUs to consolidate orders:

Groups could consolidate orders through the GSU and then either order directly from NAWS or from an RSO. If orders were placed in advance, the literature could be distributed at the GSU. The disadvantage to this method is that it necessitates money handling and some degree of business at the GSU which ideally would be an informal body free of business and finance. Were that to be the case, however, it

could function as a sort of trusted servant training opportunity for members of the GSU. Another drawback of this method is it doesn't address how groups contribute financially to the LSU. If groups are carrying a check or cash to the LSU as a contribution, that contribution could still happen quarterly. Nonetheless, for some GSUs, particularly those comprised of rural groups, for whom travel to the local service body is challenging, this might be the most practical option.

Have the LSU distribute literature and collect financial contributions at the GSU

Groups could invite the LSU to come to the GSU to take financial contributions from the group and fill literature orders. This would keep the business and finances at the LSU; the GSU would just be used as the occasion to fill the literature orders. The trusted servant handling the money and literature would be elected at the LSU level. This might be a practical option in places with relatively short distances between the LSU and GSU and a relatively small number of GSUs. In places with many GSUs it could place a burden upon the LSU, however.

Order electronically from a local service office or NAWS

Many groups already order online from a service office or equivalent or from NAWS. In a new system, those groups may want to continue ordering electronically and others may want to consider doing so as well. The disadvantage to this method is that it would mean more small orders getting filled by service offices or world services and that's not always the most efficient way to distribute literature. Also, it would mean that groups need access to a means of electronic payment and as in the first option above, would either need to make contributions to the LSU quarterly or could make them electronically more frequently. It's worth mentioning that some of our service materials, such as the Treasurer's Handbook, are badly in need of revision. The practicalities they recommend, such as ensuring that each group has a dual signature bank account, may not necessarily be up to date—in fact, electronic fund transfers can actually be considered more secure—but the principle of oversight is timeless. Regardless of the method a group uses to purchase literature and contribute financially, accurate records should be kept and receipts filed for reference.

Questions Groups May Want to Ask Themselves

As groups try to figure out what method of ordering literature and making financial contributions makes the most sense for them, they may want to ask these questions:

- How often do you want to buy literature and make financial contributions (e.g. monthly, quarterly)?
- How informal do you want your GSU to be?
- What proximity do you have to existing literature outlets and/or service bodies where you can make a contribution?
- Do you have an electronic means of ordering literature and making contributions?

The above ideas tackle the issue of group financial contributions to the local service bodies to varying degrees. Groups will still need to determine how to best contribute to state or national services as well as world services (and possibly for the administration of an intermediate body in the cases where one exists). This suggests that groups will increasingly want to look into electronic means of making

contributions, and of course, this same method could be used to order literature electronically if a group determined to do so. In some cases, service bodies may want to encourage use of a contributions portal, either through their bank's e-commerce services or through a separate service. As technology becomes more available and easier to implement, this option may become more practical in many places.

Conclusion

As we've said, the board will continue to discuss this issue and may have further recommendations as it gets closer to the conference, or perhaps during the next cycle as part of a transition project, if one is approved. What is clear is that there are a number of possible means for groups to get literature in the proposed service system. For many groups, particularly those outside the US, this may not represent a change at all from their current practices. It may be that the best option is simply to outline the range of options groups have to order literature and make financial contributions to their local service body and help them figure out the method that makes the most sense for them as we've begun to do here. We will report any new thinking we have about these issues if our ideas develop further, as we have with all aspects of the service system project. Watch www.na.org/servicesystem for the latest updates.