



## #22 Direct contributions

*The following essay was written in 1991 and revised in 1996 and 2002 in response to the issues at that time. Direct group contributions were first accepted as part of A Guide to Local Services in Narcotics Anonymous, which was adopted in 1997, and further supported in the IP #25 Self-Support: Principle and Practice, adopted in 1998.*

We believe that direct group contributions stand a better chance than the "fund flow" plan of providing adequate funds to each level of our service structure, while at the same time maintaining group autonomy, reinforcing the responsibility and authority of the NA group in service matters, providing motivation for regular fellowshipwide communication and service accountability, and promoting NA unity. However, we do not believe that earmarking direct contributions for specific purposes—whether for H&I, PI, Literature, or translations—allows the service structure sufficient flexibility to effectively coordinate the responsibilities assigned to it.

The earliest editions of our fellowship's service manual (*The NA Tree* adopted in 1976) recommended direct group contributions to each level of service. Those manuals suggested that, after a group had paid its bills and set aside a little extra money for emergency use, "excess funds should be diverted to help NA as a whole. A group can do this by contributing to the area or regional committees that serve the group or through contributions directly to the World Service Office of Narcotics Anonymous."

It wasn't until 1982, when the World Service Conference approved a revision of the service manual sections on the group, area, and region, that groups were encouraged to donate all their excess funds to the area committee. Area committees were then to donate their excess funds to the region, and the region's excess was to flow on to the world. This was the "fund flow" plan for funding NA services.

Various problems have been noted over the years with the "fund flow" plan. First, the funds often don't flow; they are frequently used up at the area or regional levels, leaving little or nothing to fund regional or world service operations. At the regional level, this has led to increasing dependence on profits from fundraising activities, such as conventions, dances, memorabilia sales, and NA literature markups, and to decreasing reliance on group support. At the world level, this has produced a situation where we have a budget that can't be accurately projected, in order to meet the needs of an ever growing worldwide fellowship.

Direct group contributions to all levels of service can provide a more stable financial base for our service structure. Each group decides what proportion of its excess funds to contribute to its area committee, its regional committee, and world services. Each level of service can be assured a source of income as stable as the NA Fellowship itself. With this stability, service committees might be able to reduce their reliance on fundraising activities for operating income, thereby increasing their ties directly to the NA groups they serve.

Certainly, if an area committee found in any given month that it had surplus funds, it would be encouraged to directly donate them to other levels of service. The same would apply to contributions of regional surpluses. However, if an area or regional committee experienced surpluses month after month, it would probably want to inform the groups it served of the situation so that those groups could adjust their contributions accordingly. This would maintain the integrity of the direct contribution system while making allowance for periodic cash flow fluctuations.

Direct group contributions reinforce the autonomy of the NA group. Each group determines for itself how much it gives to each element of the service structure, based on its own evaluation of how well those elements are meeting the group's needs and the needs of NA as a whole. Our groups have created a service structure to serve their collective needs in better carrying the message and should have responsibility for and authority over that structure. Direct group contributions put the groups in a better position to carry out their responsibilities and provide them with a better opportunity to financially impact the service structure.

If the groups were funding each level of service directly, all service bodies would thereby be encouraged to communicate effectively and directly with the groups. This would allow groups the most flexibility in deciding where their money goes. If groups are not aware of the work or needs of a particular service body, the chances would be great that they would choose not to participate in funding that body. Direct funding also provides a way for each level of service to determine the amount of support it has from the groups. If funds are not coming in, service committees would be able to infer one of three things: either the groups do not have the money available, the groups do not understand or know about what services have been requested, or the groups do not support the work being done. As you can see, direct funding also gives the groups a greater opportunity to make their voice heard in service matters.

This is not to suggest that groups should earmark contributions for special purposes. The groups have created the service structure not only to deliver services on their behalf but to coordinate those services, as well. In delegating to the service structure the authority necessary to fulfill its responsibilities, the groups have also delegated the authority to coordinate the allocation of service resources at each level of service.

In studying the financial condition and means of funding employed by several other fellowships, it has become obvious that we are not alone in facing a money crunch at all levels of service. Direct contributions are not a magic answer that will relieve us of all our financial concerns. Our responsibility as members to fund the services we request is an issue that needs broad discussion. If we truly believe that the solution to our financial difficulties rests with our membership, then it makes sense to put the responsibility and ability to impact finances directly in the hands of our groups.

Fully implementing direct group contributions should be a part of the discussion that we must continue to have as a fellowship concerning the funding of our services. Direct contributions can play a part in helping us to provide greater financial stability through enhanced group autonomy, responsibility, and authority. It encourages better communication between the service structure and the groups, provides more direct means of service accountability, and better promotes the NA unity upon which our personal recovery depends.