Electronic Funds – Best Practices

The use of technology in our Fellowship continues to grow in ways many of us never could have imagined. In many cases, as a Fellowship we can be slow to adapt to the changes we see happening in the world, from email and websites to group chats and social media. One of the newest developments, electronic funds, is now influencing the Seventh Tradition basket. Many members, especially the younger generations, no longer use cash as their primary payment source. Just as we "meet each other where we're at" in sharing recovery, we can do the same in collecting funds. This piece lays out some best practices and should be seen as a snapshot of the present moment. Our best practices will evolve as the technology changes.

Since the pandemic, many groups have implemented a virtual basket for collecting Tradition Seven contributions. In some places, this practice has grown to include service bodies. While many conventions and events have been accepting payments in new ways for years, we now see how that can be advantageous in our in-person meetings as well.

Setting up accounts

It is best, when possible, to set up these accounts without using individual members' personal information. In some instances, like banking, members' personal information may be required to verify who has the ability to make the changes to the account. In the US, we recommend setting up bank accounts for groups or service bodies using an EIN (Employer Identification Number) or Tax-ID. These numbers are issued by the tax regulating body and are associated with the group or service body for banking and tax purposes. When possible, it is best to set up these electronic accounts using the same EIN or Tax-ID that the group or service body has already established for banking purposes. The issue with using someone's personal information is the risk of potential tax liability for that individual. More information on this specific topic can be read in *Bulletin #32, USA Banking, EIN and Tax Liability Information,* which can be found at www.na.org/wsbulletins.

Some electronic funding accounts are based on mobile phone numbers, but some of them can be set up under email accounts, even if they appear to require a phone number. Username or "tags" can be made to suit the group or service body. Including the name and location of the group or service body makes the account easily identifiable by members trying to contribute. It is always good to use complicated passwords to protect accounts. Regularly updating passwords is also good practice. Keeping passwords private but granting multiple trusted servants access makes sense for accountability.

Receiving Funds

Receiving funds through an app or account like this is relatively simple. However, the individual member sending the funds must also be using the app where the account is hosted. All the individual member needs to know is the account username or "tag." There are a variety of ways for the username or "tag" to be shared with members. Some of these apps have app-specific QR codes that members can scan with the app on their end, to bring the account up for them to transfer funds into. Some groups have chosen to display these codes on printed materials or post the account tag somewhere for others to see. Some groups have the QR code or tag printed and adhered to the physical basket so that when the basket is passed around the meeting, it is easily accessible. When a member sends money through the app they can also add a comment, which can be a helpful way to note the date of a meeting or whether the money is for an event fundraising.

Managing the account

Many of these accounts generate monthly statements, similar to a bank. Keeping track of the income and disbursements is always a good practice, along with accurate and timely record keeping. It may be beneficial to

the group or service body to monitor the account regularly and transfer funds out of the account at periodic intervals. Even after using unique identifiers and complex passwords, these accounts can still be subject to fraud and may not have the same protections and guarantees as the institutions we are used to working with.

Money Movement

Moving money from these types of accounts is simple enough. Communication, cooperation, and accountability work well with all our service efforts, and come in handy with money. Often groups and service bodies already have established bank accounts, which can be linked to these electronic accounts for easy money movement. It is worth noting that many of these accounts offer an "instant transfer" option, usually for a fee. It is not necessary to use this option, as generally there is also a "normal" transfer option, which can take a few days for the money to arrive at the selected destination. Regularly transferring funds makes them less susceptible to fraud or misappropriation.

Accountability is important, especially in a money handling position. Having procedures that ensure the safeguard of NA funds is part of responsible money management. If a group or service body desires, they can ask the treasurer to make money movements during the service meetings so members can see that the money has transferred. Alternatively, the money could be moved while another trusted servant witnesses as a safety measure. Another option would be for the treasurer or trusted servant responsible to capture screen shots of confirmations verifying the transfers that can be shared in reports. Again, many of these accounts also have statements similar to your monthly bank statement, where you can see all the activity on the account.

Moving money from a group to an associated service body can also be done through these accounts if both the service body and the group have accounts with the same application. However, many of these applications only work with like-to-like transfers and do not cross platforms easily.

Conclusion

Finding creative ways to accomplish tasks is something we do well in the Fellowship. Adapting to the changing world around us can seem a bit frightening at times, especially in the realm of technology, but we know from experience that we do our best when we can grow and change together.

For many reasons, we are not making recommendations or observations about specifics apps or account types. One of those reasons is that there are so many choices and, for the most part, the decision to choose a certain one may be more about what works best locally or what other groups and service bodies are using in the immediate community. We recommend that trusted servants research and make comparisons to determine what will work best for their local community. Another reason is that the technology is constantly changing and new companies emerge often. If we were to publish something specific about a particular platform, chances are high that it would quickly become out of date. This piece is meant to be an overall guide to best practices. Even that will change as the Fellowship shares experience and factors that have been faced and overcome.

There are some locally developed resources located on www.na.org/localresources that groups and service bodies may find helpful regarding this topic. If you have resources that your service body has created, please send them to us by emailing wb@na.org.