

The generation of funds (fundraising) and the seventh tradition in Narcotics Anonymous



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This article was generated in December 1991 and revised in 2002 in response to the needs of the fellowship. It represents the views at the time of its writing.

Questions about fundraising and how fundraising relates to the traditions, especially Tradition Seven (“Every NA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.”) have been asked on numerous occasions in the past few years. As groups, areas, and regions grow, the perceived need for finances to help fulfill the Fifth Tradition (“Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers.”) may also grow. When the cost of ancillary services—such as helplines, meeting lists, and literature for use in H&I meetings, among others—is considered, many groups, areas, and regions find themselves in the position of needing or wanting more funds than are provided by members' donations to the “basket” at the group level. It is at these times that questions arise as to how to fund the services that help carry our message to the still-suffering addict. This bulletin will attempt to answer some of these questions as well as offer some simple guidelines about raising funds. We will try to provide a brief historical perspective on fundraising in NA, look at some of the problems that may result from various efforts, and strive to show the relationship of Tradition Seven to this issue. In looking at this topic, it is helpful to understand how fundraising started in our fellowship. Many early groups held a variety of activities such as dinners, picnics, and other social events to promote recovery, unity, and a sense of belonging. While these activities were not specifically intended to raise funds, a number of them turned out to be financially successful, allowing the host group to purchase additional literature or other supplies for their meetings. As the fellowship grew and the need or want for additional services became greater, the purpose of some of these activities changed; instead of celebrating recovery, they were designed to raise funds. As the fellowship continued to grow and more area and regional service committees were formed, the focus continued to change—in some instances, to make up for the perceived lack of funds being donated from the groups’ Seventh Tradition collections. As time went on, more and more service committees began relying on this form of funding, reaching the point, at times, where the success or failure of an event such as a convention

determined the area or region's ability to provide services and participate in the fund flow. In other instances, groups, areas, and regions had such success with their social events that they began to put an extraordinary amount of time and effort into these activities, becoming invested in having a “successful” convention, dance, or campout. A considerable number of problems arose from such practices. The accountability of service committees to their groups was affected as the committees began to rely upon

these events instead of on contributions from the groups' Seventh Tradition collections for their funding. In some cases, the various service bodies began to get diverted from their original purpose by "money, property, and prestige." Some groups and service committees began to amass huge "prudent reserves," in some cases amounting to many thousands of dollars. For some groups and committees, this "prudent reserve" grew so large that the body holding it did not have to rely upon contributions for upwards of six months or more, despite the fact that in various fellowship service publications the recommended amount for a prudent reserve is one month's expenses. Merchandising efforts became a "business" in some cases, leading us away from the spiritual focus of our program. It became harder and harder to insure that donations to our fellowship came only from our members at various social events. And some members began to raise concerns that we could be perceived by those outside our program as a fellowship that is more involved with social functions and merchandising efforts than with helping addicts recover from the disease of addiction. As these problems became apparent, members began to share their concerns and started questioning the need for such practices. Some of the questions focused on the relationship between Tradition Seven and fundraising.

While this tradition specifically talks about self-support—declining donations from outside sources—some of the principles underlying the tradition, such as simplicity and faith, may prove to be of assistance in answering questions about funding our services. Our experience has shown that, as recovering addicts, all of our needs add up to the need for ongoing freedom from active addiction. To attain this freedom, we need the principles contained in the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions of NA; recovery meetings where we can share our experience, strength, and hope; and other recovering addicts to help us apply these spiritual principles in our lives. These three things are simple; they do not require us to obtain college degrees or expend vast sums of money. In our active addiction, most of us seemed to have one thing in common: self-centeredness. As we begin the recovery process, we learn that we "keep what we have by giving it away." We start to learn the value of being a contributing member of our fellowship and of society as a whole. We begin to learn the simple truth that if we want to keep attending NA meetings and help carry the message, we need to contribute our fair share financially as well as contribute our time and energy. Self-support, within the context of Tradition Seven, goes far beyond mere financial support. Along the way, we learn that contributing our fair share is one way in which we can express our gratitude for what has been freely given to us. Over time, we develop faith that as long we are doing what we're supposed to—practicing the principles of our program—the God of our understanding will take care of us and show us a new way to live. When looking at the needs of the group, simplicity once again comes to mind. Our needs are simple: a place where we can hold our meetings, literature to help carry our message and, in most cases, simple refreshments. We do not need spacious, luxurious meeting facilities, excessive quantities of literature, or refreshments of every type to attract addicts to our meetings. The simplicity of our message and the effectiveness of our program are sufficient. We do not need large financial reserves if we have faith that the God of our understanding will take care of our needs. Our experience has shown that, when a group's financial needs are not met and that fact is communicated to the members, those needs are generally taken care of. The simplicity of our needs is reinforced by the simplicity of our primary purpose—to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Our experience has shown that we must carry out this simple task to the very best of our ability, for it is the essence of who we are and what we do in NA. We have discovered that, if everything we do is done to fulfill that purpose, generally, we will find the funds necessary to do what we must. Many groups and service committees have decided to avoid controversy by simply seeking to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. In this manner, they rely solely on attracting new

members to their groups by striving to strengthen their personal recovery, working and living NA's Twelve Steps. As new members are attracted, groups grow, Seventh Tradition collections increase, and more money is available for group needs. Accordingly, funds are donated to the area, the region, and world services. (For further information on this topic, please refer to IP #28, Funding NA Services.) As services are funded more efficiently, the NA message of recovery is carried farther and better than ever before. The result is that more addicts seek recovery through Narcotics Anonymous and more NA meetings begin. This approach is seen as practical and realistic by many members of our fellowship. These members have reported that frustration over lack of funds and the sense of urgency to raise money can be counterbalanced by the spiritual unity that results from this focus on our primary purpose. One of the things that has become evident over the past few years, however, is that large segments of the fellowship want activities and merchandise. If we don't assist in these efforts, members may end up conducting them on their own. Whenever this has occurred, the resulting problems have had considerable impact on all elements of NA, affecting our fellowship's overall success in achieving its primary purpose. We strongly believe fundraising activities that divert us from the spiritual nature of our program are inappropriate and should not be encouraged within the fellowship. Social activities designed to enhance recovery and further unity and members' sense of belonging, however, are not only acceptable but should be encouraged. We believe that fundraising for the sake of fundraising is questionable, at best. There may be times, however, when a group or service committee finds itself in extraordinary financial constraints and begins to consider holding a fundraiser. At such times, we suggest that careful attention be given to the following questions: Are the funds collected from ordinary Seventh Tradition contributions enough to support the group or service committee's actual needs? Are wants supplanting needs? Is the need for the fundraiser of such a nature that not holding it will result in our primary purpose going unfulfilled?

In addition to these questions, we recommend that all aspects of sponsoring a fundraising event be carefully considered. When these events are held, members of the hosting group or service committee should examine the event with respect to all our traditions, lending their collective experience, strength, and hope to these examinations. One of the major points to consider is the motivation for holding such an event. An examination such as this helps keep us in tune with our principles. The following general concepts have arisen from the experience of our fellowship, and we present them here as starting points for your consideration: 1. Fundraising activities at an NA meeting are not usually appropriate because they may detract from our primary purpose and can present an inaccurate impression of the NA message, especially in the eyes of the newcomer or the non-addict visitor. 2. In order to follow the guidance of our traditions, a fundraising event should be planned and held by and for Narcotics Anonymous members. 3. In order to conform to the ideals of the Seventh Tradition, donations from nonmembers should not be accepted. 4. Since there are often times when we sponsor activities where there is a fixed charge for full participation, the term "donation" should not be associated with these types of fees. In this way, we are not confusing contributions with assessed charges for activities. 5. It must be determined whether the local NA community is willing and large enough to support the event. 6. All aspects of the fundraising event should be consistent with our goal of encouraging recovery from addiction. We should avoid hosting events that might encourage gambling, appear to offer "something for nothing," or award prizes that are either not recovery-oriented or that otherwise may be seen as inappropriate. For example, a raffle prize such as a car or a television might make someone's living circumstances more comfortable, but at the same time may not be directly related to his or her recovery, whereas a prize of NA literature or tickets to an NA workshop or convention would be

recovery-oriented. It should also be noted that, in many USA states and in some other countries, raffles are illegal. It may also be helpful to consider whether raffles—and especially cash raffles or lotteries—appeal more to the spirit of self-interest than the spirit of voluntary support implicit in our Seventh Tradition.

All of the solutions we see to the problems addressed in this bulletin involve communication. We believe that improved communication about the needs of our service bodies results in increased support from NA groups and members. Improved communication improves the accountability of the service structure to our groups and members. Finally, improved communication helps us maintain our focus on spiritual principles such as faith and trust, leading us away from fear, distrust, and selfcenteredness