

PHONELINES

A call to an NA phonenumber may be someone's first interaction with Narcotics Anonymous. These calls are vital; a phonenumber call can make a major difference in whether or not an addict makes it to an NA meeting. We need to respond to callers in a way that makes them feel like they matter. We can encourage volunteers to bring all their experience and all their public relations awareness to this important service opportunity.

This chapter outlines ways an area can **evaluate its own resources**, choose a **phonenumber provider**, **train and prepare phonenumber volunteers**, and **coordinate services** in a way that makes local phonenumber more successful.

Core public relations principles

This section is excerpted from Chapter Two.

Cooperation, not affiliation

One of our public relations goals is to build long-lasting relationships that further our primary purpose through the pursuit of those mutual goals we may share with other organizations. Compromising any of our traditions in an effort to build these relationships is never beneficial to individual members or NA as a whole. We maintain a consistent focus on our primary purpose with the public. By creating positive relationships with those outside of NA and with our own members, we foster unity and harmony with each other and the community around us. We put the common welfare of NA first, and we remember that we are only autonomous as long as our actions do not affect NA as a whole.

Key topics

Core PR principles

PR & phonenumber

Planning & preparation for areas & committees

Discussing & addressing known challenges in phonenumber service

Putting your plan into action

Resources

Key icons

 Practical experience

 Preparation and training tips

 PR principles for discussion

 How can our phonenumber be used to cooperate with various outside organizations (such as the phonenumber service provider, an organization we may use as a referral, other public organizations in the community, etc.)?

 What cooperative actions can committees and groups take to ensure a smoothly running phonenumber?

Attraction...

What is likely to be attractive to the public and to professionals who interact with addicts is reliable communication, responsibility, commitment, and behavior that reflects recovery. We can demonstrate the reliability of NA by showing up and fulfilling the obligations we make, whether it is to return a telephone call for information about NA or supplying meeting directories at a public library. We can learn to draw on the experiences of NA members to fulfill the commitments we make to professionals.

- 📖 Are phonline volunteers trained to carry an attractive message for Narcotics Anonymous?
- 📖 How can we make phonline service an attractive NA commitment?

Public relations and phonelines

The way an area prepares its phonline volunteers is connected (in part) to the type of phonline service provider used. In order to determine the best service provider, trusted servants may want to first look at the needs of the area, such as the size of the local NA community and the geographic area, and how they can prepare NA volunteers to meet the needs of callers. This section focuses on ways to assess the area's resources and how to train volunteers. Ideas for how to choose a phonline service provider are covered later in this chapter. Preparing and training phonline volunteers can help a local committee to make a more informed choice about various phonline options.

Planning and preparation for areas and committees

Financial and human resources

Evaluating the area's financial resources is important in planning phonline service. The area needs to look at its budget to see what they can realistically afford. Trusted servants can evaluate the area's long-term financial ability before shopping for a phonline service provider. The area is more likely to maintain positive relationships with the public if the phonline service is consistent and reliable.

Evaluating the area's human resources can also help in deciding what kind of phonline service provider is the best for that area. An area that is financially healthy but lacks willing trusted servants may choose a phonline service provider with a professional answering service. An area with a larger pool of trusted servants may decide that a call-forwarding option will work best for them.

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An area can also think about ways to attract more trusted servants to take phonline positions. More members may volunteer for phonline positions if the area considers the length of time slots and the flexibility of the system. Maintaining volunteers for two- or three-hour slots may be easier than eight-hour time slots. The area can also choose a phonline service where trusted servants have the option of forwarding the NA phonline

to their cell phones. Using the area website to sign up for phonline slots can also encourage members to be of service. Flexibility and creativity can help the area find a larger pool of willing volunteers. The area can also remind members that a phonline

commitment can be done from the privacy of home. There are a variety of ways to attract phonline volunteers—a committee simply needs to discuss their options.

Most projects depend as much on ideas, information, conscience, and members' time and willingness as they do on money. If we have the funds needed to carry out a project but lack the time or ideas, we'd best wait until we've gathered all the needed resources before proceeding. If we don't, we will have wasted NA service funds.

Twelve Concepts for NA Service

Training and preparing trusted servants

When considering how to train and prepare phonline volunteers, we can look at who calls our phonelines: addicts (both potential members and current NA members), nonaddicts, family members and loved ones, and professionals. Our training and preparation can work to address the opportunities and challenges that arise with each of the above audiences. The following checklist can help an area develop training that empowers phonline volunteers to help addicts find NA and to provide information about NA:

-  Responsiveness is a key principle for phonline service. This means that trusted servants are trained to engage with callers in a sensitive, appropriate, and helpful manner.
-  Training for phonline service will include all those who represent NA on the phonline: trusted servants, special workers (if there is a regional or area office), and employees of an answering service (if one is used). The area can schedule continual and ongoing training.
-  The area can require that volunteers attend an initial hands-on training (see Chapter Four for details). This training can be supported by a written document of the area's expectations of phonline volunteers.
-  An ongoing training program might include providing NA literature (such as the *Who Is an Addict?* pamphlet), discussing NA principles, practicing mock phone calls, and presentations to new volunteers by more experienced members. Once trained, volunteers can be provided with basic materials such as a brief description of NA, updated meeting lists, and community referral phone numbers (see referral section).
-  Employees of an answering service will most likely benefit from a current meeting schedule and a short, one-page training handout that is regularly updated. (See addendum material for an example.)
-  The area may want to identify particular qualities of an ideal phonline volunteer. Leadership qualities such as integrity, the ability to listen, and sound judgment (see the Concept Four essay in *Twelve Concepts for NA Service* for more details) are essential in providing phonline service. Other qualities relevant to phonline service are an understanding of the importance of public relations, the ability to relate well to other people, and the abilities to communicate and to stay calm under pressure. These traits are important because phonline volunteers often have to perform in higher-pressure situations and because they are likely to be the first contact that people have with NA.
-  Volunteer guidelines that address issues such as avoiding or explaining NA jargon (such as “it works when you work it,” “home group,” “get a sponsor”), how to get volunteer time slots covered, and how to respond reliably to requests from the public will help support trusted servants in their commitment.

- ✎ Volunteers can be trained to use NA literature to present an accurate and positive message of recovery as well as to clarify that the NA program is separate from treatment centers or other twelve-step programs.
- ✎ Clean-time requirements should be established. Areas that lack human resources may need to be flexible with clean-time requirements. A strong training program will help phonenumber volunteers who may not have the desired clean time.
- ✎ Phonenumber volunteers need to be instructed to make no commitments on behalf of the area, region, or NA fellowship. If a professional or member of the public contacts an NA phonenumber, volunteers should be trained to provide as much information about NA as they can, solicit information from the public contact, and follow up with the appropriate trusted servant such as a committee chairperson or the area’s media contact person.
- ✎ The committee needs to train phonenumber volunteers on how to handle difficult calls, such as calls from addicts who are under the influence of drugs, prank calls, and calls from those who suffer from mental illness. One strategy is to continually bring the conversation back to how the caller can get to an NA meeting and end a problem call before the situation escalates.

“...we also know that first impressions count and that the principle of attraction is important to an addict’s ability to hear the NA message.”

✎ The committee can be prepared to quickly respond to a variety of phonenumber calls made by the public, including simple requests for information or calls made about problems created by the behavior of NA members.

✎ If phonenumber volunteers receive a call from a person in crisis, they should be very clear about where their responsibility ends. Phonenumber volunteers are not counselors or crisis workers. Threats to commit suicide, a drug overdose, or talk about

being a victim of violence are all examples of crisis calls. Refusing to refer such callers to qualified outside crisis agencies could have legal implications, depending on local laws. An area may want to research local laws to find out about individual legal responsibility. See the referral section below for more information about referring callers to outside organizations.

The purpose of our services is to help the fellowship fulfill its primary purpose: to carry the message to the addict who still suffers. Honest, open, straightforward communication is essential to both the integrity and effectiveness of the NA service structure.

Twelve Concepts for NA Service

Discussing and addressing known challenges in phonenumber service

Meeting recommendations

NA is frequently contacted by potential members and professionals looking for meetings they believe will allow for identification. Many volunteers have been faced with the question: Do you know a meeting that would help this person? We know that our traditions encourage a spirit of anonymity, and that anonymity allows us to meet equally as addicts. Yet,

we also know that first impressions count and that the principle of attraction is important to an addict's ability to hear the NA message. Trusted servants can respect callers' requests and recommend a meeting where they are likely to find addicts with whom they may identify. We do not, however, automatically assume that because someone is of a certain age, gender, ethnicity, or sexual identity, they will want a meeting recommendation.

Area service committees will probably want to discuss this issue and implement guidelines for how to recommend NA meetings to callers. Some areas have common needs meetings in which the group serves the needs of a specific population in that area, such as young people's meetings, women's and men's meetings, etc. These groups make it easier for an area to make meeting recommendations.

If there are no common needs meetings in an area but there are meetings where, for example, a larger population of young people regularly attends, then phonline volunteers can suggest these meetings to a caller asking for a recommendation. This may allow potential members to more easily identify and connect with NA. In making these recommendations, phonline volunteers can explain that many NA members feel a sense of unity within a very diverse fellowship.

Twelfth Step calls

A Twelfth Step call is usually a request for assistance to get to a meeting. We carry NA's message through Twelfth Step calls; this kind of service gives each member an opportunity to make the newcomer feel welcomed. The area can work to ensure that volunteers are willing and trained to do Twelfth Step calls. The most important concern is that NA members are safe. Before training volunteers to respond to Twelfth Step calls, the area should discuss and determine its policy on these calls. The following points can help areas consider how to create guidelines for responding to Twelfth Step calls:

- ✎ A Twelfth Step call can mean that two or more addicts provide a ride to an NA meeting or that volunteers simply talk with the caller, helping the potential member get to a meeting on their own.
- ✎ Trusted servants need to understand that any sexual interaction is inappropriate when performing Twelfth Step calls or when representing NA in any fashion on the phonline.
- ✎ When possible, members meet those requesting a ride to a meeting in a public place.
- ✎ In some areas, phonline volunteers do not perform Twelfth Step calls. Instead, there is a Twelfth Step call list containing the contact information of members who have volunteered to respond to Twelfth Step requests.
- ✎ Due to the likelihood of being exposed to drugs and addicts who are under the influence of drugs, some areas require those who make Twelfth Step calls to have over five years clean.
- ✎ The area will need to discuss what is appropriate for trusted servants performing Twelfth Step calls. An area may decide to create guidelines for the variety of requests often received during Twelfth Step calls (such as a ride to a meeting or to a detoxification center after attending an NA meeting).
- ✎ The area may want to choose volunteers who have service experience and who have gained the ability to be productive members of society. This may reduce the likelihood of incurring legal problems. Those members under legal constraints (such as parole or probation) are usually not appropriate for making Twelfth Step calls. A guideline that requires trusted servants to have current auto insurance may be one way to prevent legal problems.

Referrals

Many phonenumber calls are from nonaddicts or potential members looking for services other than what NA provides. There may be liability issues, which vary between states and countries, that make it important for us to offer emergency numbers at a minimum. We don't give referrals to one specific treatment center or detoxification unit. That would cross the boundary of cooperation into endorsement. Instead, we can provide a list of any and all local treatment centers and not align or affiliate ourselves with one in particular, or we can inform members of generic treatment referral numbers, such as the National Treatment Referral Line in the United States. If a caller has a phone directory, we can direct them to the services listed there. The same principle is true for suicide prevention numbers and other community service numbers. If an area decides to provide community referral numbers, they will want to verify if the phone numbers are valid. Area service committees can work to form relationships with other community organizations, since we often share similar goals of helping addicts live without the use of drugs.

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Family members and loved ones of addicts frequently call our phonelines. The area can decide to provide numbers for Nar-Anon and Families Anonymous or other similar information. We don't recommend one program over another or offer our opinions about any of these programs; we simply provide contact information. Not providing this information

can be harmful to our public relations. We run the risk of prolonging or spoiling a chance for an addict to find NA. The area service committee may want to create a document for trusted servants that describes why NA does not endorse or affiliate itself with outside organizations (see sample at the end of the chapter); we provide contact information for other organizations in a spirit of cooperation.

Coordinating services

When thinking about how we coordinate phonelines, we can look at how best to structure and support these services. The area may decide to delegate the responsibility of the phonenumber to a coordinator, who is accountable to the ASC. A phonenumber coordinator could be responsible for gathering and training volunteers and planning guidelines for following up on any NA requests made through the phonenumber.

Cooperation and collaboration with other committees, areas, and regions can also help in the coordinating of phonenumber services. Areas often work collaboratively with the region or other areas for support. In an effort to strengthen services, some area committees—such as public information and phonelines—merge into one committee. A phonenumber committee may also want to team up with the trusted servants (or the committee) who update meeting schedules to be sure that meeting information is accurate.

Areas can share their best phonenumber practices with other areas. Committees from neighboring areas can share what is working—and what mistakes they've made—with their phonelines. A trusted servant who regularly checks the phonenumber can report if the phonenumber service is functioning properly. Malfunctions may have to do with the answering service, training methods, or a shortage of volunteers. Working cooperatively within the area and with the region (or neighboring areas) can help to strengthen the way the phonenumber functions.

Multi-area phonline service

Some areas have created a multiregional or multi-area phonline service, sometimes called a cooperative phonline service. Neighboring areas will combine their resources and share the responsibility of providing phonline service. This usually eases the burden on one individual area's human and financial resources. Each area or region contributes financially to the phonline so that financial accountability is shared. Meeting schedules can reflect all meetings in the multi-area.

There are some challenges with the multi-area model. One of the biggest challenges is establishing a single point of accountability. It is important to decide issues such as who will pay the phone bill and who will coordinate volunteers. Another challenge is that the involved NA communities may cross several area or city telephone codes. It is also a challenge to train volunteers to be able to identify meetings and services in neighboring areas. These multi-area models often recruit members in participating areas to train phonline volunteers so that all are aware of the meetings and services in neighboring NA communities.

When we work to ensure the validity of NA, we're not working just for ourselves but for those yet to join us.

It Works: How and Why

Putting your plan into action

Phonline service provider

Choosing a phonline service provider depends on the needs of the area. (See Chapter Three, "Effective Services", for detailed information about assessing the needs of the area.) An area may be financially healthy but lack human resources; it may make more sense for that area to choose a phonline system that may be more expensive but that can accommodate the lack of human resources. As always, an area will want to make a smart business decision when spending NA funds. One way to make an informed decision is to research the cost of various providers and evaluate if the various service providers accommodate the area's needs. An area can list the costs with the various advantages, disadvantages, and total monthly cost in order to get a picture of their choices.

Because of the ever-changing nature of technology, the following list is not exhaustive but contains some examples of the types of phonline services an area may consider:

-  NA members answering calls
-  Call-forwarding service
-  Answering machine or voice mail
-  Answering machine or voice mail with pager
-  Answering machine or voice mail with live operator and/or pager
-  Professional answering service
-  Toll-free number

Each of the options listed above has various advantages and disadvantages, based on an area's human and financial resources. An area can decide which option is best, based on its needs and abilities. The following is an example of how an area can determine the pros and cons of various phonenumber options. This same process can be used for any type of phonenumber service being considered by the area.

NA members answering calls

Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excellent ability to communicate with addict 2. Accurate information 3. Trained members handle calls 	Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Requires major effort on part of ASC 2. Expensive 3. Reaching the majority within a geographic area in local calling adds expense 4. Requires significant fiscal responsibility and liability for area
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Total Monthly Cost: \$ _____

Answering machine or voice mail

Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accurate information 2. Least expensive 3. Requires minimal effort on part of ASC 	Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No ability to communicate directly with addict 2. Requires fixed location 3. Requires fiscal responsibility and liability for area 4. An answering machine or answering service is usually checked every two or three days. The area needs to be sure to indicate that in the recorded announcement.
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Total Monthly Cost: \$ _____

☞ When listing the phonenumber number in a local phone directory, be sure to use a geographical marker instead of the area's name; for example, instead of listing a phonenumber as "The Biggest Heart of NA Area," use the city or town name. We want those outside of NA to be able to locate the phonenumber number in their community. The names of our areas don't always communicate to those outside of the program the geographical location of meetings.

☞ TDD (hearing-impaired capability) may also be a consideration when choosing a phonenumber service provider. As technology changes, so will our phonenumber options. What's important is for the area to base its choice on a realistic assessment of its own abilities and needs.

☞ Areas may decide to list the NA phone number in the community resource or crisis section of a telephone directory. Listing the NA phonenumber in this section may require the area to undergo a more extensive process, but can add credibility to NA as a community resource.

Our ability to effectively carry the NA message greatly depends on strong local phonenumber services. A strong local phonenumber helps us help addicts. Our phonenumber are an opportunity to form cooperative relationships that may benefit potential NA members. Our NA phonenumber is a service that we provide on other people's terms. We have heard members share about how their first call to an NA phonenumber either helped them find NA or made it more difficult. Our ability to respond to callers in a sensitive, caring, and helpful way can make a real difference in whether or not an addict gets clean and finds recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

Resources

Phonenumber training session

Phonenumber flowchart

FAQ: Phonenumber volunteers experience with calls

Referral form

Community referral list

