

Why have a GSR?

Just as "an addict alone is in bad company," the NA group that does not participate in the service structure will most likely struggle without the spiritual support that the ASC has to offer. The participation of the Group Service Representative (GSR) and the GSR-Alternate at the Area Service Committee (ASC) meeting can make a big difference in the chances of a group's survival.

Shared experiences and services are key to helping the group carry the message. Your GSR is the bearer of that experience and service. As long as each group carries out its responsibilities by being an active part of the local area, by choosing a GSR and supporting the service structure, the area will sustain itself and provide services to the addict that a group cannot provide on its own.

Some of the services offered by an ASC may include: operating a phoneline, providing literature distribution, speaking to the public about NA, reaching out to addicts in isolation and in institutions, printing a newsletter, and organizing functions such as workshops and unity activities. These services vary from area to area. Your GSR is your group's voice in how these services are delivered.

Some isolated groups may belong to areas that hold their ASC meetings a long distance away. If your group is in this situation, contact your ASC for possible solutions so that your representative can fully participate. Some suggestions include, but are not limited to, travel subsidization, proxy (mail in) votes on issues sent back to all groups, and hosting an ASC meeting closer to your home group location.

In some cases GSRs from groups isolated in institutions have a hard time participating in their ASC meetings. Some of the ways GSRs in institutions can participate are as follows:

- Members from the outside may get clearance to attend a meeting in an institution, make that their home group, and carry the group's conscience to the ASC.
- Member(s) from within the institution may get clearance to attend the ASC.
- On occasion, the ASC may actually be held within the institution.
- Conscience may be carried by proxy vote as mentioned above.

These examples are being utilized today, but your solution needs to fit your situation and facility.

Who should the GSR be?

Next to the individual member, our groups are the most important unit of the service structure. They have been established to fulfill our primary purpose by carrying the message through holding recovery meetings. The position of GSR is vital to the stability and unity of that service unit.

GSRs act as a resource to home group members by being well informed about most aspects of service in NA and by helping to guide members into the different branches of

service available for all to participate in. There is always much service work to be accomplished in a local area. A GSR who shares the group's enthusiasm and knowledge can help by getting other members involved in the type of service they will enjoy.

The informational pamphlet, *The Group*, suggests that a GSR have the following qualifications:

- The willingness and desire to serve.
- A history of recovery in NA (suggested minimum of one year clean time).
- An understanding and working knowledge of the twelve steps and twelve traditions of NA.
- Active participation in the group they are to serve.

A GSR-Alternate should have the same qualifications as a GSR except for the suggestion of six months continuous abstinence. The GSR and the GSR-Alt. is each elected at the home group business meeting for a one-year term. The position of GSR-Alt. provides the group with a member who is training to be a GSR. The GSR-Alt. is expected to stand for the position of GSR at the end of their term. In some groups, the suggested clean time is waived according to how new the group is and who is interested in serving. The group may also choose to elect a GSR-Alt. only and allow that person to grow into the position.

The GSR should be chosen carefully, because this person will become the group's link with the rest of NA's service structure. The group places its trust in this person to carry group conscience, and usually the group's donation, to the ASC and to return to the group business meeting with clear, concise, objective reports on ASC activity.

What do we do now?

Once a home group has chosen its GSR and GSR-Alt., it is responsible for providing these members with continued support and guidance so that these trusted servants can carry out their duties in the spirit and atmosphere of recovery. By responsibly choosing a GSR, the group is free to focus on its primary purpose -- "to carry the message to the addict who still suffers."

As stated in the Narcotics Anonymous *Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure (TWGSS)*, GSRs are "the link that binds the groups together in the performance of our primary purpose." One of the duties of a GSR is to attend the local Area Service Committee (ASC) meetings. If you don't know which area your group belongs to, contact World Service Office, Inc., PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA, 91409-9999, USA.

The function of the ASC is to serve the groups that are part of it. In order to do this, the ASC usually meets monthly. The ASC is made up of GSRs and GSR-Alternates from the local groups, subcommittee chairpersons (Outreach, Hospitals and Institutions, Public Information, Literature, etc.), and an administrative committee consisting of a chairperson, vice-chairperson, treasurer, secretary, Area Service Representative (ASR), and ASR-Alt.

The GSRs of all the groups attending present group reports at the area meeting that may include the following information: group news and activities, group problems/strengths, location/time/format changes, donations

to the ASC, group size, and subcommittee sign-up sheets. Many ASCs offer a forum for GSRs to discuss group problems and get feedback from other GSRs who may have faced similar challenges.

The GSR may order literature at the ASC meeting for the group from the area or regional literature stockpiles. Another important function is to verify that the group is listed on the area and regional meeting lists and is registered with the World Service Office (WSO).

In turn, the GSR reports matters dealt with at the ASC back to the group at the monthly business meeting. Such matters may include: other group news; elections/vacancies; subcommittee activities; ASC financial status; subcommittee sign-up sheets; area activities, workshops, conventions, campouts, retreats, etc.; regional and world level service information; business items referred to the group's monthly business meeting for group conscience; and shared solutions to group problems.

How to be an effective GSR

In order to fulfill their duties, it is suggested that the GSR share the responsibilities with the GSR-Alt. (who acts as the GSR in their absence). It is suggested that the GSR possess the necessary service materials, including handbooks, guidelines, and area policies. Some of these items can be purchased from the area or regional literature stockpiles, while others are made available to all area level trusted servants at no charge. GSRs are encouraged to ask questions of other ASC members, past and present, to gain shared experiences.

It is suggested that GSRs become involved in other aspects of area service by participating on a subcommittee. Information about these subcommittees can be accessed from the subcommittee chairperson or other subcommittee member, as well as from the handbooks and by attending subcommittee meetings and activities.

While attending the ASC meeting, the GSR should remember that he or she is representing the group. Attending the entire ASC meeting, listening, taking plenty of notes, and voting with the group's conscience in mind (not personal opinion) are of utmost importance. The GSR should remember that their group may have no other way to get the information that is passed along at the ASC meeting. An ineffective GSR could keep a group in isolation; on the other hand, an attentive, objective GSR can help the group stay well-informed and thrive.

When reporting back to the home group, the GSR should cover all the information necessary in a brief, clear, and enthusiastic manner. Caution should be exercised not to offer an opinion unless asked to do so by the group. Some GSRs choose to make all information available in written format, only bringing up for discussion in the business meeting those issues that the ASC has asked be discussed in groups. However a GSR chooses to report, making sure that all group members have access to as much information as possible will go a long way toward promoting unity.

Available resources:

Narcotics Anonymous has the following publications available for further information about GSRs.

IP #2 -- *The Group*
The Group Booklet
Temporary Working Guide to our Service Structure
The Twelve Concepts of NA Service
NA Basic Text
It Works: How and Why
The Group Starter Kit

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