

A.A.® Guidelines

Bridging the Gap

from GSO, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

The A.A. Guidelines below are compiled from the shared service experience of A.A. members throughout the U.S. and Canada. They also reflect guidance given through the Twelve Traditions and the General Service Conference. In keeping with our Tradition of autonomy except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole, most decisions are made by the group conscience of the members involved. The purpose of these Guidelines is to assist in reaching an *informed* group conscience.

HOW DO A.A. MEMBERS BRIDGE THE GAP?

All across the U.S. and Canada, A.A. members find ways to introduce new and potential A.A. members to their first meetings. Many of these new and potential members are in treatment facilities and other settings,¹ and need help finding A.A. in their home communities (this is “the gap.”) A.A. temporary contacts step in to “Bridge the Gap.”

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous meet new members and potential members upon their completion of a program or release from a facility, and accompany them to their first few A.A. meetings.

GETTING STARTED

Start simply when forming a committee.

Experience suggests that even though a soon-to-be released alcoholic may have been participating in an A.A. group or meeting inside a treatment or correctional setting, there is often anxiety about the transition to an A.A. group on the outside.

Remember, BTG is not intended to become a long-term A.A. relationship, but simply to help ease the newly-released member's transition to outside A.A. and to help get them started on the road to sobriety in their home community.

BTG RESPONSIBILITIES (VARIES BY LOCATION)

In most parts of the U.S. and Canada, the work of organizing a Bridging the Gap program or Temporary Contact program is best handled by a committee of A.A. members. The responsibilities of these committees often includes:

- Meeting and corresponding with staff and administration at local settings to ask for permission to share about BTG/Temporary Contact service.
- Finding and organizing temporary contacts: Make announcements in local newsletters at A.A. Groups, meetings, or ask to present at local intergroup, district and area meetings and events.
- Making contact with alcoholics desiring transition help on release.

- Communicating and cooperating with other A.A. service entities, so as not to have overlapping services. Without this thoughtful approach, this can be particularly confusing to the non-AA entity or professional when being contacted by multiple committees.
- Maintaining communication with appropriate staff members at the General Service Office in New York.
- Sharing AA literature and other appropriate service materials.
- Providing reliable, consistent contact information, receive requests, and routing requests to temporary contacts locally or across areas.
- Making presentations: As a standalone committee, or make a joint presentation with PI, CPC, Corrections, Treatment, H&I committees.
- Practicing unity: Contact other local trusted servants to help find A.A. members to chair committee meetings, coordinate temporary contacts, and/or present to staff and participants.
- Respecting autonomy: The bridging the gap activity is done differently in each location. Local trusted servants can look for help and inspiration from other areas, but ultimately create a system that works for your particular local circumstances.
- The A.A. temporary contact contacts the alcoholic client/participant and arranges to meet that person on the day of release to help in bridging the gap between the setting and A.A. on the outside.

LOCAL EXPERIENCE WITH BTG

Across the U.S. and Canada, local circumstances dictate how BTG temporary contacts connect newcomers with A.A. in their communities. In some places, there are many treatment centers, in others, potential members are encountered in detox centers, hospitals or other settings.

Our experience has shown that attending an A.A. meeting on the outside on the day of release from medical, psychiatric, therapeutic, or treatment setting is one of the most effective tools for making a sober transition and maintaining continued sobriety in the outside world.

¹ The type of setting can vary. Such settings include: hospitals; clinical, psychiatric, behavioral health, detox, inpatient/outpatient, community based, military and veteran programs; shelters, halfway houses, transitional centers.

Experience has also shown that temporary contacts work best when care is given to match with newcomers by gender and, if possible, age.

Special care should be taken to ensure that any requests for temporary contacts that come from minors or other vulnerable members be handled carefully.

Experience suggests that it is particularly helpful to bring the newcomer to a variety of meetings.

BTG EXPERIENCE: WORKING WITH PROFESSIONALS

One local committee suggests that BTG temporary contacts need to set up a consistent way to communicate, "While it is part of my service to track down the current BTG Chairperson in an area, I doubt if a professional attempting to assist a discharged client feels the same. If a clinician/professional gets bounced around trying to help a client, they may lose interest in that case. They may also lose interest in dealing with our organization."

"It's important to remember that treatment and other therapeutic settings are managed differently through private, community, church, state or federal agencies, and may have specific requirements that A.A. volunteers should respect."

Another BTG trusted servant shared, "I found the professionals are very adaptable to do what is needed to assist their residents. We typically begin by emailing, then speak on the phone, then a zoom call to ensure all elements are in working order."

"We, the temporary contacts, need to be very clear with the newly released AA's what AA is and what AA is not. We should talk to the newcomer about our primary purpose, our singleness of purpose, our unity, and our anonymity."

Below is some shared experience from BTG temporary contacts/coordinators in the US and Canada.

GETTING ORGANIZED

"We coordinate volunteers by logging into our database and determining which town the person is being released to. We then find a member that is willing and able to reach out to them on the very day they are released."

"Our committee has a male and a female BTG chair to coordinate the contact lists of volunteers."

"We made it a priority to get the BTG lists up-to-date and involving districts so BTG will become the communication point for referrals."

"All of us on the area committee send temporary contact requests to each other when people from our respective Districts are being released to their districts so that the gaps can be adequately bridged."

"When calling a newcomer's home, remember that someone else may answer the phone who may not know about the newcomer's desire to attend an A.A. meeting. Protect their anonymity by not

disclosing your own association with A.A. or your purpose for calling."

CHALLENGES FACED BY BTG TEMPORARY CONTACTS

"The biggest challenge is getting the members with time involved.."

"We announce at meetings the need for volunteers and the BTG program but find this is not effective. I would love to do a workshop, but I have not been able to get any participation/direction from other entities."

"We are trying to be more inclusive....but are struggling with how to do it on our volunteer application."

"Our committee noted a gender gap. When we make a BTG presentation for volunteers we do not get a lot of female participation. We do try to appeal to women specifically in our presentation, with an emphasis on safety and anonymity. When this issue is directly discussed, women's participation is greater."

"Due to confidentiality policies and schedules, visiting a newcomer in a facility may prove to be impossible."

RELATIONSHIP TO GSO

When GSO receives a request for A.A. temporary contacts, it is forwarded to the local area.

Note: For A.A. members in custody, the pre-release temporary contact program run by Corrections Committees is a separate program. Similarly, the Corrections Correspondence Service is not a part of this temporary contact program. It is intended for alcoholics who have six months or longer remaining on their incarceration.

A.A. COMMITTEES, AND SERVICE ENTITIES

The alcoholics requesting help to transition to A.A. outside of their setting are best served when A.A. service entities and committees work together to provide the full variety of A.A. services.

Cooperation with the Professional Communities (CPC) and Public Information committees can also help to share about this service. Areas can provide pre-release contact services via dedicated transition committees at the Area/District level.

There are many instances of overlapping responsibilities. It should be clearly established that A.A. committees are not in competition with each other. Local circumstances determine who does what.

Depending on the location, the work is done by a shared committee, or the work is split into separate committees.

Local A.A. committees and members will have the best experience for each location, and can help provide bridge services and coordinate temporary contacts. Some local committees will host BTG/Temporary workshops and events for local professionals or members.

An annual workshop on BTG is coordinated by and for A.A. members from all across the U.S. and Canada. To find out more, contact coordinator@btgww.org

HISTORY

Bridging the gap activities by A.A. members go back to the late 1930's. Trying to reach alcoholics in correctional, therapeutic, and treatment settings and escorting them to meetings was an important part of early twelfth step work, but was often not organized.

This changed in the 1970s, when the growth of in-patient treatment centers led A.A. members to realize that many alcoholics would need help finding A.A.

Most BTG programs today include regular visits to treatment settings by AA members, who offer "temporary contact" to newly sober alcoholics to help them become part of AA when they leave the setting.

Today we have many forms of Bridging the Gap, Temporary Contact and Contact upon Release, and Re Entry Programs throughout our fellowship.

RESOURCES AND LITERATURE

- Meeting Guide App <https://www.aa.org/meetingguide> — helps members find meetings based on location
- Treatment Committee page on <https://www.aa.org/treatment> request and temporary contact forms are available
- A.A. Guidelines https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/aa-guidelines
- "Bridging the Gap" pamphlet
- A.A. videos and Audio. https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/videos-and-audios
- Corrections Committee page on <https://www.aa.org/corrections> request and volunteer forms are available

