

Bridging the Gap Guidelines - Utah, Area 69

The purpose of Bridging the Gap in Utah, Area 69 is to assist the new member who is confined and preparing for release from a treatment or correctional facility. It is designed to help them make the transition to the A.A. Fellowship where they will be living. The activities of this program are based on and governed by the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Bridging the Gap should be thought of as basic twelfth step work. The idea is to accompany a new member to several of their first outside meetings and introduce them to A.A. members in the community. Once a patient or an inmate has expressed an interest in A.A. and would like to attend meetings after being released, the Bridging the Gap program offers a solution to support this important adjustment. New members who attend an A.A. meeting within the first two days after returning home have been shown to have a much better chance of staying sober.

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I. Basics of the Utah, Area 69 Bridging the Gap Program

A. The inmate or client completes a request form including their name, age and gender, current contact information, release date, and contact information after their release.

B. These details are returned to a local district BTG coordinator or to the appropriate committee chairperson from corrections or treatment for processing.

C. The information is then given to a local temporary contact volunteer unless the request being made is outside of the district. In that case the information will be forwarded to the district or area where the new member will be going.

D. The volunteer will make arrangements to accompany them along with another member to an A.A. meeting within 24-48 hours after their release. They will then attend as many as six meetings together.

II. Duties and Responsibilities of the Utah, Area 69 Committee

A. Volunteer Database

Area 69 will maintain a database of temporary contact volunteers contributed by the districts. This database is administered by the communications committee. The Area 69 treatment and corrections chairpersons will maintain and distribute a list of Area 69 BTG coordinators and committee members. They will keep lists of Nationwide Long Term Contacts and current BTG chairpersons of the General Service Conference. District chairpersons needing information for "Bridges" outside of their districts may contact the Area 69 treatment and corrections standing chairs for assistance. They may also use the International BTG web site, www.btgww.org

B. Area 69 Bridging the Gap Program

Area 69 will provide a uniform Bridging the Gap program the districts may follow along with supporting materials for duplication. These materials can be modified to address the specific needs of each district. The Area will continue to gather information helpful in revising and improving this program. Each year one of the Area standing chairs from treatment or corrections attends the National Bridging the Gap Conference.

The Area treatment and corrections standing chairs are responsible to inform and to share the combined Area 69 Bridging the Gap experience with the districts. They will maintain the Bridging the Gap documents and procedures and review them on an annual basis. These documents will be updated and revised as necessary through the joint cooperation of the Area treatment and corrections standing committees.

In general, the only direct involvement of the Area 69 corrections and treatment standing chairs in Bridging the Gap is to assist making "Bridges" involving contacts between districts of Area 69 and between other areas of the A.A. General Service structure.

Bridging the Gap District Kits and supporting documents will be available on the www.utahaa.org web site to be downloaded and duplicated. These documents are meant to be used by each district relevant to their needs and may be changed to include local district names, addresses, and telephone numbers as determined by each district committee.

C. Bridging the Gap Workshop

A Bridging the Gap workshop will be held each year on the third Saturday in June. This workshop will be rotated among districts. The selection to host the event will be made one year in advance. The purpose of the workshop is to provide a joint forum for the corrections and treatment standing committees to share experiences and discuss ways to better serve Area 69 and its members. The area standing chairs of these two committees have joint responsibility for setting the agenda for the workshop. This workshop is a one day event beginning at 9:00 am.

III. Duties and Responsibilities of the Districts

In Utah, Area 69, each district manages its own Bridging the Gap program. The districts find volunteers, present the program at facilities, and maintain a database to match new member requests with temporary contact volunteers.

The information contained in this kit is a collection of suggestions based on the experience shared within the Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous. The letters, pamphlets, and other documents in this kit are meant to be used in a manner that best fits the needs of each individual district. They can be used in any combination and adapted to contain appropriate mailing addresses, etc. relevant to the district.

Managing the activities of the Bridging the Gap Program is the basic responsibility of the district BTG coordinator. In the absence of a BTG coordinator, the corrections and treatment committee chairpersons generally assume these responsibilities. As a final option, the district committee members, the DCM or DCMC depending on the district, could administer Bridging the Gap procedures. The Bridging the Gap structure can be organized in a variety of different ways. The following are four possibilities:

- 1) A Bridging the Gap Coordinator with a committee.
- 2) A BTG Coordinator utilizing the corrections and treatment committees.
- 3) Corrections and treatment chairpersons working through their committees.
- 4) DCMCs in cooperation with the district committee.

IV. District Bridging the Gap Program Procedures

Bridging the Gap has three main components; preparation, presentation, and implementation. These responsibilities may be approached in a variety of ways. Each district determines what works best for them considering their circumstances. The following ideas are suggestions for each of these areas.

A. Preparing Bridging the Gap Volunteers

- 1) Area 69 has prepared a volunteer sign-up sheet the districts may use. It lists the common information needed to match the temporary contact with those requesting a bridge. These sheets can be circulated at A.A. gatherings such as regular group meetings, assemblies, and workshops. This information is to be considered confidential and for use by Bridging the Gap only. Some members are sensitive to their contact information and may wish to apply by using an individual card or mailing the application directly to the coordinator instead of the group sheet.
- 2) Once a volunteer has submitted the *temporary contact* application, it is a good idea to call and verify their intentions and contact information. The Area 69 pamphlet "*Temporary Contact Volunteer*" along with the Do's & Don'ts page will help them understand what they are being asked to do. The suggested "*Volunteer*" packet will prepare them in greater detail for becoming a temporary contact (*refer to the section for "Literature Packets"*)
- 3) It is suggested that the BTG volunteer has at least one year of current and continuous sobriety and that they are comfortable within the fellowship. It is also strongly suggested that two members accompany the newly released contact to their first outside meeting. It is sometimes helpful for the volunteers to have a "*New Member*" packet available to offer during the first outside meeting. (*refer to the section for "Literature Packets"*)
- 4) Many of our members who have experienced making twelfth step calls can readily adapt to Bridging the Gap. They may only need to be briefed on the details about the individual and/or institution policies before being called on to provide a "*Bridge*" for a new member.

B. Presentation to Facilities and New Members

Facility Administrators

- 1) Meet with appropriate staff members and explain what Bridging the Gap is and how it works. The area has prepared an introduction folder for facility administrators which may be used by volunteers when making this presentation. Usually this discussion is made by the BTG coordinator and at least one other committee member. Ask for permission to explain the program to the inmates or clients and distribute the pamphlets and supporting documents.
- 2) Ask about rules the institution may have in regard to contact with outside members. For example, some facilities will not allow the same person bringing meetings into the facilities to be a temporary contact to a newly released member.

New Members

- 1) Bridging the Gap may be introduced in many different ways. One method is to hold a special meeting entirely devoted to Bridging the Gap. Another approach is to have the members who take A.A. meetings into the facility explain the program periodically. New members will find the Area 69 pamphlet called the "*New Member Guide*" helpful in understanding what to expect from the program.

- 2) Emphasize the need for complete and accurate contact information. Stress the importance of timely submission of their request and any correspondence with the *temporary contact* in order to assure processing before their release date. By using the small sign-up cards it allows them to register more easily and saves the time and expense of postage.
- 3) Inform the new members about how to reach Alcoholics Anonymous in case they are released before the temporary contact has been made or in the event they make their decision to participate after they have returned home.

C. Volunteer Database and Temporary Contact Requests.

Database

- 1) Each District maintains its own database. Area 69 has developed a volunteer sign-up sheet outlining the basic information required to organize a database. Once a group of volunteers have submitted their contact information it is suggested that the coordinator separate them into two categories, one for men and one for women. Designate whether they wish to volunteer for treatment, corrections or both. It is also recommended to keep a list of the new members who request a bridge and comments concerning the results of the BTG effort.
- 2) It is suggested that the database be refreshed periodically to insure the temporary contacts are still available and willing to participate. Direct phone calls made to the volunteers are generally more successful than mailings.
- 3) Once a comfortable number of volunteers have been entered into the database it might be well to suspend recruiting activities until demand overtakes volunteers again. An excessive database can have a negative effect if the volunteers lack an opportunity to participate.
- 4) It is important to share the district Bridging the Gap volunteer database periodically with the Area 69 communications committee. The information will be stored on the web site for future access and convenience to the district. The district is responsible for managing their own file, including updates, additions and deletions in cooperation with the communications committee.

Temporary Contact Requests

- 1) It is recommended for the district to establish a P.O. Box as a neutral location to send and receive correspondence for temporary contact requests. A disposable cell phone may also be useful as a means of confidential communication.
- 2) A timely response to requests is essential to preserve the hope and confidence of the new member. If a volunteer is available it is good to have them make the initial contact and begin the "Bridge" process. If no one is readily available, the coordinator should let the new member know a temporary contact will be located as soon as possible.
- 3) It would be helpful to the area for the districts to share the experiences of those who have been involved in Bridging the Gap in order to make future improvements to the program.