

2021 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions

ITEM J: Consider requests regarding participation of online groups in the General Service Structure.

Background notes:

From the January 30, 2021 meeting of the trustees Committee on the General Service Conference:

The committee agreed to forward to the 2021 Conference Committee on Policy and Admissions six proposed agenda items related to the topic of online groups not affiliated with a physical meeting space having a voice and a vote in the General Service structure.

While each of the six agenda items are related to the same topic of the participation of online-only groups in the General Service structure, they are unique in how they are worded, their path to becoming an agenda item, and what if any background they have included with the submission; all have a unique way of wording the request. Each individual proposal is listed below, and the submission documentation provided is what makes up the majority of the background. In the case of, and with the help of the International assignment, a request was sent to all the General Services offices outside the U.S./Canada structure asking for any shared experience they might be able to offer regarding online groups and their participation in general service.

J.1 - Consider a request from a local district that recognizes "Online Groups" as voting members of the district and asks that the Conference take action to grant "Online AA Groups" the same privileges as "Brick and Mortar Groups".

J.2 - That the General Service Conference consider allowing participation of all virtual groups, not affiliated with a physical meeting space, by creating a 94th Area to our Service Structure that will encompass those A.A. groups.

J.3 - Adapt the General Service structure to recognize online-only groups as official groups. Without that recognition, members have no voice and are denied access to service opportunities.

J.4 - Consider allowing Virtual or Online Groups to register under their respective district and area instead of the Online Intergrroup.

J.5 - Consider holding a discussion about how to give online only (virtual) meetings a voice and a vote in the General Service Structure and access to General Service Offices (GSO) services.

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J.6 - Discuss the current procedure of referring non-face-to-face Groups to an entity outside the A.A. service structure to be listed and consider creating a Traditions based policy that meets the needs of the Fellowship and its Groups.

Background documents:

1. Submitter letter District 10/Area 15
2. Submitter letter Area 51
 - a. Area 51 Additional information
 - b. Application for Additional Delegate Area (for reference)
3. Submitter letter Portland Eye Opener Group
4. Submitter letter Area 20
 - a. Area 20 Additional information
5. Submitter letter District 17 Area 72
 - a. District 17 Additional information
6. Submitter letter Tues. Night Traditions & Concepts Study Group
7. Sharing gathered from International G.S.O. offices



GENERAL SERVICE DISTRICT 10

www.district10miami.org

December 10, 2020

To the General Service Conference

District 10 Miami, South Florida Area15, voted with substantial unanimity on December 1, 2020 to forward to the 2021 General Service Conference for their information and consideration that District 10 recognizes "Online Groups" as voting members of our District and requests that the Conference take action to grant "Online AA Groups" the same privileges as "Brick and Mortar Groups".

During the beginning of the Pandemic, Groups in District 10, like groups everywhere, rushed to continue to help alcoholics get and stay sober by using online platforms (mostly using ZOOM) to continue to have AA meetings. At one point there were over 300 meetings in our District which encompasses Miami-Dade County Florida. As the pandemic and online meetings continued, the District became aware that there were meetings being held without association with any particular groups. One such online group, Early Risers, approached the District and asked how they could formally become a group and were counseled to get organized by calling a business meeting to elect officers, open a bank account, set a meeting schedule and file for a group number with the General Service Office. All of that was accomplished and a representatives from the group participated in District activities. The Group asked that they have voting ability just as other groups have. Thus began a conversation among our District, the Area 15 Panel 69 Delegate, the Area 15 Chair and the Area 15 District Chairpersons. The outcome of those discussions were that: other Districts in Area 15 had similar situations evolving in their Districts; the Area Chair agreed that online Groups would be able to vote at the next Quarterly Business meeting if they had a group number, had elected officers, held business meeting and had their meeting schedule published by the local Intergroup or Central Office; and the Panel 69 Delegate would pursue appropriate action at the Conference level. District 10 voted unanimously in November 2020 to grant the Early Risers Online Group the same privileges granted to all Groups. The Panel 71 Area Chair has agreed to continue to grant Online Groups voting ability at the Area level through our April Quarterly in hopes that the 2021 General Service Conference will provide direction on this matter.

Thus, the Early Risers Group, and other such groups throughout South Florida, have a VOICE in Alcoholics Anonymous. They will be heard at the District Level. They will be heard at the Area Level. Their voice will be included in the deliberations that our Panel 71 Area 15 Delegate brings to the 2021 Conference. District 10 asks that the Conference take immediate action to

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embrace Online Groups as they would any other Group and not prohibit their complete participation in decisions made by Alcoholics Anonymous because of the Way they wish to meet.

In Fellowship and Service with prayers for your good health and safety,
Gerry S., Chair,
District 10 Miami
Panel 69
Chair@district10miami.org

Cc: Shirley P., Delegate Panel 69 Area 15
Tom W., Delegate Panel 71 Area 15
Cary W., Chair Area 15 Panel 69
Lisa D., Chair Area 15 Panel 71
Alex V., DCM District 10 Area 15
Ric B., Chair District 10 Miami Panel 71
Erica ., General Service Representative, Early Risers Group

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POLICY/ADMISSIONS

Item J

Doc. 2

From: Katy P.

Sent: Friday, December 11, 2020 2:37 PM

To: Conference <conference@aa.org>

Subject: Re: Proposed Agenda Item Submission Deadline - December 15, 2020

Happy Friday Patrick! Thank you for the reminder. In Area 51, at our Fall Assembly October 31, we voted to propose two agenda items. I will send one to you in this email, and the second one separately.

On October 31, 2020, Area 51 voted to support the following proposed agenda item for the 71st General Service conference:

Area 51 requests that the GSC consider allowing participation of all virtual groups not affiliated with a physical meeting space by creating a 94th Area to our Service Structure that will encompass those A.A. groups.

There was much discussion, and the informed group conscience was attained with substantial unanimity. Our Area feels very strongly that the online groups need to have a voice and a vote in our service structure, and the formation of a 94th area would help accomplish that intent. I have attached the agenda item and the background that accompanied it as presented at our Fall Assembly.

I would be happy to complete the detailed application for an Additional Delegate Area, referenced in the Service Manual, if deemed necessary. Let me know about that.

Thank you for your service! And Happy Holidays to you!

In AA love and service,

Katy P.

Panel 69 Delegate ~ Area 51 NC

Area 51 requests that the GSC consider allowing participation of all virtual groups not affiliated with a physical meeting space by creating a 94th Area to our Service Structure that will encompass those A.A. groups.

Background Information:

This motion comes from District 18. Currently there is no way for a virtual group to be registered with GSO, have a group number, or a voice in AA affairs. While many of the new Zoom meetings are affiliated with face-to-face meetings, there are also virtual meetings which serve a need in AA but are not associated with a home group that has a GSO number and listing. In addition to the new meetings created in response to COVID, the On-Line Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA) has supported virtual meetings for years. Allowing them to have a GSN would ensure their voice in the AA service structure.

The OIAA Directory features 1,000+ online AA meetings worldwide, ranging from video or telephone conferences to email or chat groups in many languages, available 24/7.

Virtual groups utilize technology to conduct their meetings.

- Current technology in use includes video conference platforms such as Zoom, phone conference,

message boards, email listservs, chatrooms. As technology evolves, the tools Alcoholics use to get and stay sober will undoubtedly change.

- AA is not a place; a home group doesn't need a permanent physical address.
 - Our service manual states "the home group affords individual A.A.s the privilege of voting on issues that affect the Fellowship as a whole; it is the very basis of the service structure."

Service Manual S25

- Tradition 3 states "any two or three alcoholics may call themselves an A.A. group,

provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation."

- Providing a Group Service Number for Virtual Groups creates communication from the GSRs through the Delegate to GSO.
 - "The GSR represents the voice of the group conscience, reporting the group's thoughts to the district committee member and to the delegate, who passes them on to conference." Service Manual S26

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- “To assure direct and regular communication between the group and GSO, each group is assigned a service number.” Service Manual S28
 - The A.A. virtual population has grown but their voice is not heard through a Delegate.
- “If the A.A. population seems to have grown to the point where the current delegate and other trusted servants can no longer provide adequate service and communication, there may be local interest in forming a new area. In such a case, the area committee or committees involved may write to G.S.O. and request an application for an Additional Delegate Area.” Service Manual S42
- Are we including the whole fellowship when virtual groups are excluded from the service structure? Concept 1: The final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

Since all Areas are autonomous, the new Area should organize in the way that is most effective for the groups and members involved.

By allowing virtual groups to become part of the service structure, AA as a whole will benefit from the unique experiences of members that are unwilling or unable to attend traditional meetings. In addition, members that are only able to attend virtual meetings will become knowledgeable of the larger AA world and resources available to them through GSO.

"Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination." -- Bill W., The Grapevine, November, 1960

TO: Conference Policy/Admissions Committee
General Service Office
P.O. Box 459
Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

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Doc. 2.b

APPLICATION FOR ADDITIONAL DELEGATE AREA

Please return to G.S.O. no later than January 1st preceding the General Service Conference

When completing this form, the Area may add response space as needed. Responses should be typed or printed, with clear and concise details. Inclusion of applicable dates is helpful.

From: _____ Date _____
(Area)

1. Reasons and origin of request for additional delegate area.
2. What measures has the area taken to resolve the area's specific problems short of adding an additional delegate area?

When?

What were the results of those measures?

3. Number of groups in current area: _____
4. Describe the process by which the area decided to submit this application.
 - a. Number of groups that participated in the request for a new delegate area. _____
 - (1) For _____
 - (2) Against _____
 - (3) No Opinion _____
 - (4) Comments of minority opposing new delegate area:
 - b. Past Delegates' Comments:
 - c. Regional Trustee's Comments:

5. Over the past twelve (12) months:
 - a. What was the average number of G.S.R.s present at area assemblies?
 - b. How many G.S.R.s were present at the assembly that approved this application?

6. Historical five-year A.A. growth in existing area on a yearly basis:

Groups

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Districts/Etc.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

7. Structure and function of existing area:

- a. List area officers
- b. List alternate area officers
- c. List standing committees
- d. Assemblies
 - (1) How often held?
 - (2) Do assemblies rotate?
 - (3) Where held over past 2 years?
- e. Area committee meetings
 - (1) How often held?
 - (2) Do area committee meetings rotate?
 - (3) Where held over past 2 years?
- f. Districts
 - (1) Number of districts in area?
 - (2) Number of active districts?
- g. District meetings
 - (1) How often held?
 - (2) Do district meetings rotate?

h. Number of active district committee members in area?

Do the DCMs assist the delegate and alternate?

In what ways?

i. When, if ever, did the area redistrict or subdivide districts?

j. Number of active GSRs in area?

8. List languages spoken in existing area.

a. In what languages are A.A. meetings held?

b. What linguistic districts are in the area?

c. How will an additional area affect any of the above?

9. Attach map of area as it now exists.

10. Attach map of proposed boundaries for each area. (Identify one area as A and one as B)

11. What criteria were used to develop the proposed boundaries?

12. Geography of existing area:

- Size (square miles)
- Terrain and effect on area, if any (mountains, desert, bodies of water, isolated areas, etc.)
- Current maximum travel distances
- Current maximum distances to assembly/committee meetings

13. Geography of proposed new areas:

A. Size (square miles)

- ° Terrain and effect on area, if any (mountains, desert, bodies of water, isolated areas, etc.)
- ° Maximum travel distances
- ° Maximum distances to assembly/committee meetings

B. Size (square miles)

Terrain and effect on area, if any (mountains, desert, bodies of water, isolated areas, etc.)

Maximum travel distances

Maximum distances to assembly/committee meetings

14. Has the existing area considered the financial impact of a new delegate area?

Describe the financial impact of a new delegate area on each resulting area.

A.

B.

15. A.A. population of existing area? (Data reported to GSO)

16. A.A. population of proposed areas?

A.

B.

17. How many groups in proposed areas?

A.

B.

18. Describe specific plan for implementing new areas.

19. Describe timetable for implementing new areas.

20. What specific problems, if any, do you anticipate in implementing the new areas?

21. Additional comments (use separate sheet of paper).

Signature _____
(Delegate) (Area)

Date _____

Request to Include Online AA Groups in the General Service Structure

Proposed Agenda Item:

Adapt the General Service structure to recognize online-only groups as official groups. Without that recognition, members have no voice and are denied access to service opportunities.

Submitters:

Two of us are former members of groups in District 5 Area 15 but have now joined the Eye Opener Online Group of Alcoholics Anonymous (<https://www.portlandeyeopener.org/WebMeeting>, Tax ID [REDACTED]), which began in Portland Oregon but is now global in membership. This online-only group has been in existence since 2016 and is a robust group in every way except that we cannot do service beyond the group level or take part in decisions that affect A.A. as a whole. We plan to remain members of this online group when the pandemic is over. The third submitter is a cofounder of the Eye Opener Online Group.

Anne H. - Anne has served as the District 5 Area 15 Literature committee chair and has and would like to continue service on a Literature Committee.

Gayle F - Gayle was a member of the District 5 Area 15 Literature committee and would now like to serve on an Accessibilities committee. Gayle created a digital newcomer packet for the groups in District 5, which was quickly copied and utilized by other districts in Area 15 and then by other Areas.

Cole B. - Cole was a cofounder of the Eye Opener Online Group and former GSR in Area 58, and is now serving as Alternate DCM for Area 58, District 9, even though he considers his homegroup to be the Eye Opener Online Group.

Justifications Based on Traditions (long form):

- **Tradition 1** - *Each member of Alcoholics Anonymous is but a small part of a great whole.*

Without a group ID, members of Eye Opener Online Group of Alcoholics Anonymous:

- can have no GSR
- have no voice in General Service activities and decisions
- are denied access to service opportunities beyond the group level.

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- **Tradition 3** - *Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an A.A. group.*
 - Eye Opener of Alcoholics Anonymous has been gathering since 2016 and currently has 70-120 members gathering each day. See Appendix A.
- **Tradition 5** - *Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose - that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*
 - At the group level, the group functions well but our ability to work with corrections, accessibility, treatment, etc., is hampered.
- **Tradition 6** - *Problems of money, property, and authority may easily divert us from our primary spiritual aim.*
 - Online only groups greatly reduce the problems of money and property. With no leases to negotiate and sign, buildings to maintain, or expensive rents to pay, diversions are minimized. The cost of video conferencing accounts are often much less than building leases, leaving more money available for general service work.
- **Tradition 7** - *The A.A. groups themselves ought to be fully supported by the voluntary contributions of their members.*
 - Eye Opener of Alcoholics Anonymous is fully self supported with a prudent reserve. The group conscience is currently donating 90% of funds, after expenses, to GSO amounting to hundreds of dollars each month.
 - For the last couple of years we have been a leading contributor to the [Portland Deaf Access Committee](#).
 - Without a group ID, significant financial contributions cannot be recognized as coming from the group.
- **Tradition 9** - *Each A.A. group needs the least possible organization. Rotating leadership is the best.*
 - The group has a strong commitment to operating with full respect for the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous.
 - The group has a strong service culture, with 49 daily service positions (7 people on the service team for each day of the week) that rotate every month. See the current service roster for the main room [here](#).
 - The group conducts training sessions after meetings several times a week, focussed primarily on bringing new people into AA service as quickly as possible, and on spreading the blessings of AA service around the group as evenly as possible.

- The group has a strong team of Elected Servants who begin their terms of service each January.
-
- The group uses (and helps alcoholics around the world learn to use) procedures and tools that come directly from the AA service manual, including "Sharing Sessions" for discussion of group-business issues.

Group History

If you're not familiar with the Eye Opener Online Group of Alcoholics Anonymous, here is some of why AA as whole should be open to the involvement of groups like ours in the General Service Structure:

- The group started years before the pandemic began, and was one of the first AA groups in the world to begin using Zoom, after experimenting for months with about a half-dozen other video-conferencing technologies. We are only aware of one other AA group -- the 5th Dimension Young Person's group -- that started meeting on Zoom before we did.
- Attendance before the pandemic began had already reached an average of 50 to 60 alcoholics per day. It now averages somewhere between 70 and 120 alcoholics per day.
- The group has a strong commitment to operating with full respect for the Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, and within the bounds of less formal traditions hammered out on the anvil of experience by many face-to-face AA groups over decades. For example, we ask that only AA-conference-approved literature be read aloud in our meetings. We limit sharing to those with a desire to stop drinking. We strenuously discourage crosstalk. We have written procedures for dealing with safety issues, and have now built up considerable experience in dealing with them. We honor the principle of rotation in every part of our service structure. We encourage sponsorship, and make twelve side-rooms available primarily for sponsor/sponsee and committee meetings at all times.
- The Eye Opener made the transition from "meeting" to "group" long ago. It has a strong service culture, with 42 daily service positions (6 people on the service team for each day of the week) that rotate every month. You can see the service roster for the main room [here](#). The group also has a strong team of Elected Servants who begin their terms of service each January. We conduct training sessions after the meeting several times a week, focussed primarily on bringing new people into AA service as quickly as possible, and on spreading the blessings of AA service around the group as evenly as possible.

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- The group uses (and helps alcoholics around the world learn to use) procedures and tools that come directly from the AA service manual, including "Sharing Sessions" for discussion of group-business issues that are not yet ready to be voted on, and 3rd-Legacy Elections.
- The group has its own group-owned bank account and is formally incorporated in the State of Oregon, separately from the face-to-face Portland Eye Opener which meets at 7:00 a.m. in the basement of the First Baptist Church.
- The group has long contributed generously to other levels of AA, steadily increasing over time, and now averaging hundreds of dollars in each month's distribution of 7th Tradition contributions exceeding our prudent reserve. Most recently we distributed \$900 to GSO in one month. For the last couple of years we have been a leading contributor to the Portland Deaf Access Committee.
- The group has always been unusually open and welcoming, and did not change after "Zoom bombing" made its way to meetings like ours. Instead, the group learned to deal with disruptions compassionately but effectively, and became a leader in helping other online meetings do the same.
- More than a handful of other Zoom-based AA groups have spun out of the Eye Opener Online Group, usually with encouragement and substantial support from our group. At least two of those spin-off groups are now stronger (by some measures) than the Eye Opener Online Group itself, but we remain close to them, with lots of overlapping attendance and mutual support.
- The group continues to work on better practices, particularly for creating meeting environments that are welcoming and accommodating of both those newest to AA and those with long-term sobriety in the program. As well-run online meetings can enjoy large attendance with easy accessibility, every meeting now includes a small-group breakout session that accommodates those who want to share in a less crowded but still structured setting.

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Item J

Doc. 4

December 12, 2020

Dear Conference Coordinator,

At the Northern Illinois Area 20's Winter Assembly on December 12, 2020, the attached Floor Motion to have the Delegate to forward a letter to the Conference Coordinator at the General Service Office with the following request: **To allow Virtual or Online Groups to register under their respective district and area instead of the Online Intergroup <https://aa-intergroup.org/>.**

This was discussed and voted on and approved by 84% of the voting members.

The motion is attached.

Respectively submitted,

Marilyn F., Area 20 Northern Illinois Delegate.

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Motion: The Area 20 Registrar and Alternate Registrar motion to request that the Area Delegate forward a letter to the Conference Coordinator at the General Service Office prior to the December 15, 2020 deadline, with a request to allow Online Groups to register under their respective district and area instead of the Online Intergroup “<https://aa-intergroup.org/>”.

Background Material:

The Area 20 Registrar contacted the Records Department at the General Service Office to determine what process is used to register virtual meetings. The following response was received:

“As you are aware, our structure encompasses the U.S. and Canada. Because online groups and meetings are by nature international, they are not listed as regular groups in G.S.O.s records. Whether an bunch of alcoholics meeting online consider themselves a group is up to them, as laid out in the Third Tradition (any two or three alcoholics...).

In keeping with a 2006 General Service Conference Advisory Action, G.S.O. provides contact information for online groups and meetings that request us to have this information:

Online meetings listed in A.A. directories under “ONLINE MEETINGS” continue to be listed with an e-mail contact address only, in keeping with the 1997 General Service Conference recommendation that: On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the “International Correspondence Meetings” in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as “mail” contact.”

This information is provided in the A.A. Directories in a special section titled ““Online Meetings/Online Groups.” The Online A.A. Intergroup is also listed in our records and in the A.A. Directories.

Area 95 is sort of a catchall area in our records system. It was created for any individual or entity which has a record in our system, but that isn’t part of the U.S./Canada general service structure. It includes international G.S.O.s, World Service Meeting delegates, intergroup/central offices, online and phone meetings, etc.

G.S.O.’s listing of online groups and meetings is not comprehensive. A much more complete list can be found through the Online A.A. Intergroup: www.aa-intergroup.org. An online group or meeting can be listed with either or both entities.”

When a New Group Form from an online meeting in District 28 was received, it was forwarded to the records department at GSO requesting that they process the new group form and that although this group is only meeting virtually right now we would like to register it under Area 20 and not an online meeting. We received the following response from the Group Services coordinator.

“The Records Department forwarded your email to me. It would be helpful for us to know more about this. First off, has District 28 discussed this and approved having this group participate in the district? And likewise, has Area 20 discussed this and approved having this group participate in the area?”

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As many groups were forced to go virtual, new online groups were formed. We feel that each group should have the option of continuing to be a part of the service structure in the district and area that they reside.

The AA Group:

1. The AA Group registers with the General Service Office (GSO) and assigned a group number.
2. The AA Group receives a complimentary handbook and a small supply of literature at no charge when it registers with the GSO.
3. The AA Group provides a strong bond between the AA member and the Fellowship.
4. The AA Group has a General Service Representative (GSR) and Alternate that is the group's link with the General Service Conference via the district and area.
5. The AA Group is the shared experience and voice of AA's collective conscience.

The Online Intergroup:

1. The Online Intergroup is a service entity.
2. The Online Intergroup operates outside of the service structure and does not have representation at the General Service Conference.
3. The online Intergroup maintains their own online meeting information.
4. The Online Intergroup identify members as voting or non-voting members of the online intergroup.
5. The Online Intergroup is self-supporting through voluntary contributions of its members.

As it says in Concept I:

The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.

The A.A. Group — the Final Voice of the Fellowship

"Alcoholics Anonymous has been called an upside down organization because "the ultimate responsibility and final authority for world services resides with the groups — rather than with the trustees, the General Service Board or the General Service Office in New York."

"Twelve Concepts For World Service Illustrated"

Advisory Actions relating to Online Groups

2005 Advisory Action recommended that:

Online meetings in languages in addition to English, French and Spanish be listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" with the meeting language indicated next to the listing and in accordance with the 1997 Conference Advisory Action that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

Online meetings listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" continue to be listed with an e-mail contact address only, in keeping with the 1997 General Service Conference recommendation that:

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On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the “International Correspondence Meetings” in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as “mail” contact.

2008 Advisory Action recommended that:

The Online Intergroup of A.A. (OIAA) be listed in a new section titled “Online Intergroups” under the section “International Correspondence Meetings” in the A.A. Directories above where “Online Meetings” appear; the listing will include the online intergroup Web site and e-mail addresses.

The statement “This Directory is not to be used as a mailing list or for any form of solicitation or commercial venture” that appears on the cover of A.A. Directories be made significantly more prominent, e.g. use borders, larger type face, etc. (Rescinded by Floor Action)

The Advisory Action of the Conference Committee on Report and Charter, Item B2, which recommended that the statement: “This directory is not to be used as a mailing list or for any form of solicitation or commercial venture” that appears on the cover of A.A. Directories be made significantly more prominent, e.g. use borders, larger type face, etc., be rescinded. (Floor Action)

2016 Advisory Action recommended that:

The category title “Online Meetings” be changed to “Online Meetings/Online Groups” on page vi and vii in the A.A. Directories.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol H.
Area 20 Panel 70 Registrar
Cell:
registrar@aa-nia.org

Rob M.
Area 20 Panel 70 Alternate Registrar
Cell:
alt-registrar@aa-nia.org

Mailing Address: PO Box 524, Crystal Lake, IL 60039-0524

From: AREA DCM17 <dcm17@area72aa.org>

Sent: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 5:07 PM

To: Conference <conference@aa.org>

Subject: District 17 (NW Seattle in Area 72) Agenda Item Request for 71st GSC to Consider

Hi Patrick,

Thank you for your direction and for past GSO Staff member Doug R. guidance (on behalf of Pacific Regional Correspondent at GSO Rick W.) to District 17.

District 17 of Area 72 (NW Seattle) requests that the 71st General Service Conference (GSC) to be held in the spring of 2021 consider holding a discussion about how to give online only (virtual) meetings a voice and a vote in the General Service Structure and access to General Service Offices (GSO) services.

Although our area is being cautious and waiting another year to bring the matter through a full year of quarterly discussions at the Area level, District 17 and Area 72 have done significant work on the subject already in 2020. In our additional material you will find:

(1) Summary of District 17's Rationale for its Request for an Online Meeting Discussion Topic at the 71st GSC (pp 1-3), **Timeline** (pp 4-5) & **Supporting Information** from District 17 Meetings, discussions, informed group consciences and DCM and Alt DCM presentations to Area Committee and Discussions at Area 72 July Quarterly, Pre-Conferences, Annual Assembly and 5 months work of an Ad Hoc Committee (pp 6-33) in PDF and Word.

(2) Area 72 Ad Hoc Committee Report dated October 2020

I understand that our Panel 69 Delegate Alan F may have already shared the October 2020 Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Online Meetings with AAWS (Recommendation 1 of the Report). To be sure that GSO has it, a copy of the Area 72 Ad Hoc Committee Report on Online Only Meetings is also attached in PDF. Portions of this report are included in District 17's supporting information.

Thank you for all you do to serve us! Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions that you have for District 17. I wish you all GSO staff a Healthy, Safe and Happy Holiday Season!

Yours in Service,

Karen S.

DCM District 17 (NW Seattle)
in Area 72 Western Washington
dcm17@area72aa.org

71st General Service Conference - Proposed Agenda Item

Discussion Topic by District 17 (NW Seattle) for Consideration

District 17 (Northwest Seattle) of Area 72 (Western Washington) requests that the 71st General Service Conference (GSC) include a discussion topic to address the following challenge:

The AA General Service Structure as described in the Service Manual is geographically based and does not allow online-only meetings to participate in the General Service Structure.

Online-only meetings are without either a voice or a vote in the AA General Service Structure and cannot access services from the General Services Office (GSO).

Given the sudden proliferation of online-only meetings and their very likely continuation beyond the duration of the global coronavirus pandemic, and given the real potential to better serve a broad range of populations through online-only meetings, it seems urgent that GSC amend AA's General Service structure to allow online-only meetings to participate in General Service and benefit from GSO's services and support. Service Concept Four states that "At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional "Right of Participation," allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge." To do that, GSO needs to provide a clear (and clearly communicated) means by which online-only groups can register and participate in the General Service Structure.

History: Online-only meetings are not a momentary phenomenon. AAs have been meeting online for 25 years. The Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA) directed Area 72's Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee to an article in Grapevine entitled, "How do cyber meetings act like F2F AA meetings?" (AA Grapevine, **May 1996**), whose author raises the same questions we ask today:

"Questions facing online groups are: Are they to be registered at GSO as face to face meetings are? How do online meetings fit into the existing service structure? GSO does not register online meetings at present.One anonymous online argues that online entities are indeed groups and that "it is up to my home group and my online group to determine whether they meet the definition of an AA group as established by the Forty-First General Service Conference and as reflected in the service manual." He continues: "AAs communicate in a vast variety of ways: F2F, TDD for the deaf, correctional facilities mail, telephone, Loners and Internationalists, and now online. *What's important is that we share our experience, strength, and hope, and stay sober--not how we communicate. [emphasis added]*"

Proliferation: Not only are the vast majority of AA's attending online meetings during the pandemic because their in-person home group is not able to meet face-to-face and has shifted to online, thus normalizing online meetings, COVID-19 has brought about a veritable super-bloom of new meetings that are online-only.

Using Area 72 as an example:

- Pre-COVID-19, Area 72 had NO online-only meetings.

- Pre-COVID-19, 3,553 meetings were listed on Area 72's website, www.area72aa.org. In the early months of the pandemic (March to early July), 28% of those groups formed online meetings -*1000 groups are meeting online*.
- In Area 72, at least 53 online-only meetings were discovered to have formed in four months, between March 6 to early July 2020.

Looking at OIAA as a broader reference, Pre-pandemic, OIAA listed 175 online-only groups. From the start of the pandemic thru August 2020, OIAA's online-only list topped 1,700 virtual meetings. *This is a ten-fold increase in four months*. As of Dec 13, OIAA reports the following regarding online meetings currently listed in the OIAA Directory:

- 3,000 online meetings
- Zoom-enabled meetings estimated at 2,750
- 17 languages, 21 Countries

AAWS Technology Committee has fielded dozens of queries about online-only meetings and has been talking about this issue. Their so far informal discussions have touched on two ideas:

- (1) Have virtual groups geographically anchored and send GSRs to local district meetings, thus folding those groups into the current service structure
- (2) Create a virtual area for the US/Canada region that would conduct all business virtually and send one delegate in person to the annual General Service Conference.

Breadth of Service and Outreach: Online-only meetings or groups offer vital connection and support to elderly or immune-compromised people, people in remote communities, homebound or time-bound people, and provide the opportunity to attend meetings in myriad languages, time zones, and flavors.

They offer a more comfortable avenue of entry to young people who are tech natives, and people who may be intimidated by (or entirely averse to) in-person meetings. This seems clear from OIAA numbers (again, 12/13/2020):

- OIAA website currently averages over 22,000 views a day, with that number growing
- 650,000 visitors a month

Online meetings/groups also offer entirely new opportunities to reach alcoholics in treatment centers and potentially in corrections facilities.

Further, they pose a viable alternative for groups struggling to meet rising in-person meeting costs such as rent and insurance.

Proposal for GSC

We look to GSC to explore the pros and cons for options to integrate online-only meetings into and then define a clear path that meets the needs beyond our area and even our region.

As the discussion moves forward in the GSC, we ask that the GSC consider **Tradition Four**, which states, "Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or

A.A. as a whole." Online-only groups' potential in service and outreach has a *profound* effect on the evolution of A.A. as a whole.

As well, please consider **Service Concept Four**, which states that "At all responsible levels, we ought to maintain a traditional "*Right of Participation*," allowing a voting representation in reasonable proportion to the responsibility that each must discharge." This Concept fairly demands that GSO reach out to online-only groups to give them a voice in the process of determining a solution to this issue, which in some sense transcends limited geographical units like "District" or "Area."

We understand that other Areas are also seeking solutions and submitting their requests and/or specific motions to address this issue. We wish to add District 17's (NW Seattle's) voice to the upswell of voices urgently requesting this change from the GSC in the AA Service Structure and GSO's policies and practices. We are willing to participate in any ad hoc committee exploration at the GSC and/or GSO committee level.

As Bill W wrote in the November 1960 issue of the AA Grapevine:

"A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches [...] Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination."

Contact: Area 72 District 17 DCM at email address: **dcm17@area72aa.org**
(current DCM Karen S, 2019-2020, Panel 69 and incoming DCM Seonaidh D 2021-2022, Panel 71)

Attachments:

Please note that we included a brief timeline of the actions within District 17 and Area 72 in 2020.

The second attachment provides supporting and background information from Area 72 including an Ad Hoc Committee on Online Only Meetings created after District 17 brought the matter for discussion to Area 72's July 2020 Quarterly.

District 17 submits this Area 72 information and documentation to support District 17's request.

- 1) Timeline of District 17 and Area 72 Exploration of Online-Only Meetings in 2020 (pp 4 and 5)
- 2) Brief Summary, Area 72 Ad Hoc Committee on Online Meetings (including documents gathered and presented in reverse chronological order) (pp 6-ff)
 - a) Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee Reference Sheet (November 15, 2020)
 - b) Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee Report (presented at Area 72's October 2020 General Assembly and published in the November 2020 issue of the Area 72 Newsletter)
 - c) The 2020 Area 72 Assembly Online Only Meeting Presentation and Discussion Topic #3 Remarks (group comments are in Area Assembly minutes and available upon request)
 - d) Six Pre-Assemblies Discussion Summary Notes on Online Meetings from Area 72's six pre-assemblies – includes general feedback, benefits, concerns and possible solutions
 - e) Area 72 July 2020 Quarterly Introduction of the discussion topic by District 17 to the Area Committee at the July Quarterly (group comments are in Area Quarterly minutes and available upon request)
 - f) The original District 17 agenda item discussion topic presented and discussed at June 11, 2020 meeting (district minutes available upon request)
 - g) District 17's Initial correspondence to/from GSO (June 11/ June 15, 2020)
 - h) GSO Archives: History, Actions and Discussions: Listing Online Meetings/Groups and General Service Structure (September 2020)

2020 Timeline of District 17 and Area 72 Exploration of Online-Only Meetings

- June 11, 2020 at the District 17 Meeting, District 17 members discussed the fact that online-only meetings are springing up but are not currently able to engage in the General Service structure, which is geographically based. District unanimously votes to request that it be raised as a possible discussion topic at the July quarterly:
“How can Area 72 optimize the ongoing use of online only meetings and give participants who can only participate in online only meetings a voice in the service structure?”
- July 11, 2020 at the July Area Quarterly, the Area Committee discussed District 17’s discussion topic:
“How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?”
- After the Area July Quarterly, the Area 72 Chair created an ad hoc committee to investigate the need in our area and appointed the Alt DCM of District 17 to Chair the Committee. The Ad Hoc committee is composed of GSRs, Alt DCMs, DCMs, and other district positions, together representing 14 districts (2, 4, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 28, 32, 39, 44, 46, and 57), as well as area appointeds, area electeds, and past delegates. They researched history and conducted outreach to online meetings to ask about their future, their interest in being part of the service structure, etc.
- October 3, 2020 the Area 72 Assembly, the Area body discussed the following topic from the July Quarterly along with information gathered by the Ad Hoc Committee:
“How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, & provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting & ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?”

The ad hoc committee made four recommendations:

1. The Delegate share a copy of the Ad Hoc Committee report and work of the ad hoc committee to the AAWS chair in response to his interest in learning more about what Area72 thinks about this topic
2. Area 72 request that GSO find a solution to this issue of lack of inclusion into the service structure during the 71st GSC in 2021
3. Area 72 create a new virtual district, similar to a linguistic district, to serve the unique needs of online only groups (not hybrid groups)
4. The Online Meeting Ad Hoc Committee continue through the end of this rotation to incorporate feedback from today's body and report additional findings at the January 2021 Quarterly

- Before October 3, 2020, a group's GSR provided a floor motion and background information to the Area Chair and the materials were posted on the Area website along with other materials for the 2020 Annual Area 72 Assembly. The floor motion asked Area 72 to create a virtual district (recommendation #3 in the Ad Hoc Committee report, above). The floor motion was the last item on the Assembly agenda and at 12:40 AM on October 4 the Area body majority voted to postpone the discussion of the floor motion until the Area 72 January 2021 Quarterly.
- November 12, 2020, because of the outcome of the Assembly and not wanting its original work to languish for a year, the District 17 DCM included the matter on the November 12, 2020 district agenda. District 17 discussed what occurred at the Assembly and voted to move forward and DCM called for volunteers for a committee to draft a request for GSC to consider how to resolve the urgent issue. The committee agreed to bring their proposal back to the district for an informed group conscience vote on the proposal at its December 2020 business meeting.
- December 10, 2020 the District 17 committee presented a recommendation to submit the issue of online only meetings inability to participate in the General Service Structure as a discussion item rather than a motion. They provided a two-page framework, to which they are adding a timeline. District 17 unanimously voted to approve the two-page framework and timeline. The DCM is to submit the revised district's request for an online meeting discussion item (and not as a motion) to GSO for consideration to be placed as an agenda item on the 71st GSC. The deadline for submission to GSO is December 15th.
- December 10, 2020 DCM17 shared the district meeting agenda/discussion with current Area leadership and the Area Alt Delegate (and incoming Area 72 Delegate Panel 71) asked the DCM to provide District 17's submission to GSO for GSC Consideration to all of the incoming Area 72 electeds and DCM17 agreed to follow-up.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS for
DISTRICT 17 (NW Seattle)'s
REQUEST for
ONLINE MEETINGS DISCUSSION ITEM on
AGENDA of
71ST GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE

BRIEF SUMMARY OF
AREA 72
AD HOC COMMITTEE WORK

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee Reference Sheet

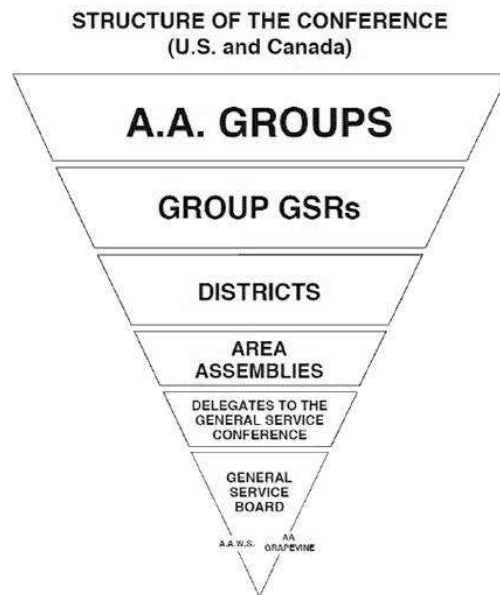
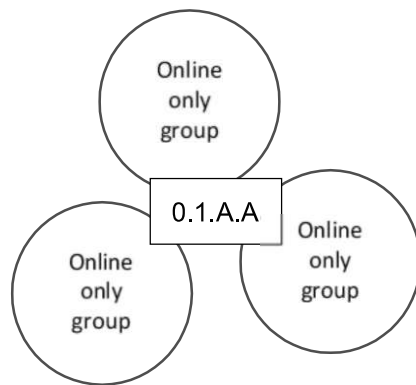
(as of 11.15.2020)

Mission: The Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee was created at the July 2020 Area 72 Business Quarterly following a presentation by District 17 to investigate the need for inclusion of online only meetings into the general service structure. The Ad Hoc committee will continue to meet bi-weekly through the end of the year. The committee researched the issue and concluded that there is a desire and need in Area 72 for online only groups to be included into the service structure. Following discussion at the October 2021 Area 72 Assembly, the Ad Hoc Committee recognized a need for clarity around this. The aim of this document was drafted to provide clear information for General Service Representatives, District Committee Members, and all A.A. members.

Goal: Provide possible solutions for online-only groups (not hybrid groups or brick and mortar groups temporarily online) that want a voice in the General Service structure, namely through election of a G.S.R. to represent their group within the district and area structure.

Issue: Online-only groups are not represented within the General Service Conference.

At present, listing an online group with G.S.O. only provides the group with a customer ID number (for tracking 7th tradition contributions) but does not provide a group ID number (which designates that group as part of the general service structure). Online groups are associated with the fictitious Area 95 for record keeping only and encouraged to connect with the Online Intergroup (O.1.A.A.) if they want to be listed and part of this international intergroup.



Online Only Groups that want to exercise their Right of Participation and communicate within the general service structure are not able to and are instead encouraged to register with the Online Intergroup of A.A. and have an intergroup representative instead.

Choice of Virtual Platforms is not part of this issue: An online group may use whatever tool(s) they wish. Zoom is a commonly used tool, but other connection modes are also being used.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

For the purpose of this document, we offer the following definitions:

G.S.O.:	General Service Office in New York City, NY
A.A. Meeting:	Any gathering of alcoholics focused on recovery from alcoholism
A.A. Group in General Service:	A meeting that has received a group number from G.S.O., which has a physical meeting address, and assigned district and Area numbers. They may or may not have a General Service Representative (GSR) who attends meetings at the Area and District levels.
Hybrid Meeting or Group:	A meeting or group that streams their physically located meeting virtually for simultaneous participation.
Online Only Group:	Any virtual group with no physical or hybrid connection <i>that wants involvement in general service</i>
A.A. District:	A geographic area coordinating a collection of groups, as well as linguistic districts; however, online only groups are excluded
Area :	A section of the U.S., Canada, and Puerto Rico coordinating a collection of districts and represents the groups at the general service conference; 93 Areas at present
Intergroup/Central Office:	An office representing a collection of meetings and groups providing services for meetings and groups for literature distribution, web sites, schedules, call centers, etc. and can represent anything from a single district to a metropolitan area

Recommendations of Ad Hoc Committee to Assembly Body and Responses:

1. The Delegate share a copy of this report and work of the ad hoc committee to the AAWS chair in response to his interest in learning more about what Area72 thinks about this topic: *The Delegate plans to email the AAWS chair*
2. Area 72 request that GSO find a solution to this issue of lack of inclusion into the service structure during the 71st GSC in 2021: *A motion about this would need to be made by an individual, group, or district by December 15th*
3. Area 72 create a new virtual district, similar to a linguistic district, to serve the unique needs of online only groups (not hybrid groups): *Floor motion at October Assembly to create an online district in Area 72 was not discussed it will be an agenda item for discussion at the January Quarterly . As a result of the discussion, a motion may be created, and if passed at a Quarterly meeting, then it would be placed on the agenda at the Area Assembly in 2021.*
4. The Online Meeting Ad Hoc Committee continue through the end of this rotation to incorporate feedback from today's body and report additional findings at the January Quarterly: *The committee will meet 5 times between the Assembly and the end of December to further this research and exploring additional options.*

Resources:

GSO pamphlet, P-16, The A.A. Group...where it all begins:

"Is There a Difference Between a Meeting and a Group?

"Most A.A. members meet in A.A. groups as defined by the long form of our Third Tradition (see page 44). However, some A.A. members hold A.A. meetings that differ from the common understanding of a group. These members simply gather at a set time and place for a meeting, perhaps for convenience or other special situations . The main difference between meetings and groups is that A.A. groups generally continue to exist outside the prescribed meeting hours, ready to provide Twelfth Step help when needed."

GSO pamphlet P-19, G.S.R. General Service Representative:

"You transmit ideas and opinions, as well as facts; through you, the group conscience becomes a part of "the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship," as expressed in the General Service Conference."

GSO other material F-12, Your D.C.M. District Committee Member:

"The heart of A.A . is the group, which elects a general service representative (G.S.R.). The G.S.R. attends district meetings that are made up of the groups in that district. The G.S.R.s elect a district committee member (D.C.M .). Thus, the D.C.M. is the vital link between the group's G.S.R., and the area service structure, including the area's delegate to the General Service Conference."

GSO service material SMF-129, Structure of the Conference

Upside down triangle image

Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee Report

Area 72 Assembly

October 2020

Ad Hoc Committee Members

The committee is composed of GSRs, Alt DCMs, DCMs, and other district positions, together representing 14 districts (2, 4, 8, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 28, 32, 39, 44, 46, and 57), as well as area appointeds, area electeds, and past delegates from panels 59 and 61. Specific members include Lisa S (chair), Jack J (secretary), Lupita Y-M (technology host), Angel GR, Crystal S, Dale B, Dave T, Eric S, Frank M, Geene, Jordan L, Juan MV, Keith M, Kristee M, Lee R, Linda L, Meghan K, Karen S, Noah, Patty S, Thomas L, Will L, Geoff, Peeps, Andrea Z, and David G.

Formation of the Ad Hoc Committee

The ad hoc committee was formed on July 11, 2020 at the Area 72 July Quarterly by the Area Chair, Heather. Alt DCM 17, Lisa S, was appointed the ad hoc committee chair.

Purpose of the Ad Hoc Committee

This committee was formed to investigate the discussion question *"How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?"*

Specifically, the committee aimed to answer the following questions:

- "What need does this serve?"
- "Is there really a problem?"
- "Is this actually a different problem?"
- "What are different options that would help solve the problem?"

Additionally, the ad hoc committee would allow those who have had experience with the same or similar issue to share how that situation was handled and whether there are details around the topic that are historically recorded but possibly mostly unknown by the current body.

Ad Hoc Committee Meetings Overview Summary

Since the July 11, 2020 creation of the ad hoc committee, five meetings were held on the virtual platform Zoom. Committee meetings took place on July 26th, Aug 9th, Aug 23rd, Sept 6th and Sept 20th and totaled 9.5 hours of focused discussion.

Members of the committee attempted to attend 56 online meetings, targeting the 53 meetings that had been designated as online only on websites of Intergroups and CSOs in early July and adding a few extra since not all CSOs or district websites stated whether or not the meeting was truly online only. The committee sought to collect information regarding whether those groups currently meeting online intended to return to face-to-face meetings, to adopt an online and physical presence (hybrid meetings) or continue online only after the end of

pandemic restrictions. Additionally, committee members hoped to hear whether groups knew of and desired to participate in general service.

Investigation of Need/ Outreach to Online Meetings

The table below demonstrates the outcome of the outreach by commit members. 11 of the 56 assigned meetings (20%) could not be accessed due to an incorrect website link, missing password, or no host present. Of the 45 meetings they did attend (100%), 18 meeting (42%) members said that they would not be staying online after the pandemic ends. The remaining 26 meetings {58%} were either planning to stay online or had not decided with certainty. Of those 26 remaining groups, 12 groups (27%) said they might be online only, 5 meetings {11%} reported that they would be going hybrid, and 9 meetings (20%) said that they were probably staying online and 7 of the groups {16%} said that they wanted to be involved with a district and general service.

Online Groups Attempted to Attend	56	100%
Bad Password, Link, No Host	11 <i>this number will be removed from the count</i>	(20%)
Attended Meetings	45 <i>new adjusted total</i>	100%
Not staying Online post-COVID	19	42%
Might be online only	26	58%
Undecided about which online format	12	27%
Going hybrid	5	11%
Probably staying online	9	20%
Wants involvement with District and General Service	7	16%

The first two sessions were focused on reviewing background data, assigning tasks to gather more information, and dividing up suspected online only groups for committee members to visit and survey. Most discussions were enlivened by reports from the six Pre-Assemblies held in August. The Discussion Topic was presented at each Pre-Assembly by the committee chair. Raw capture of those discussions was made, compiled, and distributed to committee members for summary (see pp. 4-6).

Consistent experience of committee members was that social media pages, central offices, and intergroups too often posted misinformation for online group meetings, which complicated surveying 20% of attempted group visits. Already out-of-date links and changed or not posted passwords are just two barriers to gaining a stronger pulse on the desire for general service by members of online groups. Members researched ways that the General Service Office in NY registers online groups; the history of online groups (see attachment at end of this document); and compiled spreadsheets to track the attended meetings and feedback. Members reached out to other Areas and to general and elected servants across the country.

Throughout the committee discussions, similar to the issues raised at Pre-Assemblies, are questions as age-old and ever-present as any in Alcoholics Anonymous: what constitutes a group, what differentiates meetings from groups, and how can we reach the still suffering alcoholic? How does the Right of Participation tie into this situation? Was there a demonstrated need? We discussed the quick mobilization to online meetings in the

response to the pandemic limitations. For some, the unexpected efficient urgency highlights the need to act quickly to form a virtual district within Area 72 to allow current and future servants of online groups an opportunity to be in service to the fellowship.

Acknowledging the cautious history of the General Service Office, mandated in the Service Manual written by Bill W., members discussed the role of the Ad Hoc committee to research and bring to the larger body of the assembled General Service Representatives ideas, pros and cons, and determined that there exists a stated need for inclusion.

The ad hoc committee would like to offer 4 recommendations based on our findings thus far. We acknowledge that today's assembly discussion will provide a wealth of understanding regarding the extent of the need and are eager to hear what the body thinks about this topic.

Recommendations

The Online Meeting Ad Hoc Committee recommends the following 4 actions:

1. The Delegate share a copy of this report and work of the ad hoc committee to the AAWS chair in response to his interest in learning more about what Area72 thinks about this topic
2. Area 72 request that GSO find a solution to this issue of lack of inclusion into the service structure during the 71st GSC in 2021
3. Area 72 create a new virtual district, similar to a linguistic district, to serve the unique needs of online only groups (not hybrid groups)
4. The Online Meeting Ad Hoc Committee continue through the end of this rotation to incorporate feedback from today's body and report additional findings at the January Quarterly

Thank you, Heather.

Hi everyone. My name is Lisa and I serve as the Alt DCM for District 17 and the Chair of the Online Meetings Ad Hoc Committee. I am very excited to share the work that our committee has done.

Our ad hoc committee was formed by our Area Chair after rich discussions took place during the July 11th Area Quarterly. Our committee is comprised of 26 Area members including GSRs, Alt DCMs, DCMs, other district positions, area electeds, and area appointeds. It would have been 27 members had I not misplaced the contact information of one person. The committee was formed to investigate discussion topic #3.

Our focus and purpose have been to identify and quantify the need for inclusion of Area 72s online only meetings into our service structure. If a need was identified, then we would consider the pros and cons of possible solutions. We also sought to understand the history of this topic and experience of others with this or similar issues.

Committee members attempted to attend and survey all 53 virtual meetings that were specified as "online only" on intergroup or CSO websites by the end of June, plus a few other online meetings. In total, we attempted to attend 56 meetings.

20% of those meetings were not reachable due to incorrect website links, lack of contact information to obtain passwords, or no hosts to start the meeting.

We were able to attend and gather feedback from members of 45 online meetings. We learned that:

- 19 of those groups did not plan stay online post-COVID.
- 12 meetings were undecided about whether they would go hybrid or stay online only.
- 5 meetings indicated that they planned to take a hybrid format.
- And 9 meeting representatives said they planned to remain online only.

That means that nearly 50% of all 45 meetings attended planned to stay online in some capacity.

The main point of observation we discovered was that 7 of the 45 meetings, or 16% of those surveyed, said that they wanted involvement with a district and in General Service. We have learned of other new online only groups that have formed since the initial list was created.

The committee discussed the expressed desire for participation from those groups surveyed, the Right of Participation from Concept IV, and comments made at the mic from participants at each of the 6 pre-assemblies. The end result was that the committee saw a need to find a way to include online groups so that the voices of those members could be included in our Area's group conscience.

We then began to talk about pros and cons regarding possible solutions and reached out to other areas to see how they were responding to similar situations.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

We confirmed with GSO that currently physically located groups and by extension hybrid groups, would be recognized as part of the service structure and provided a group ID number. In contrast, those meetings without a physical address would be provided a customer ID number and placed in the fictitious Area 95, which is merely a designation in their system that the group is online.

We also learned that 2 other areas planned to submit motions that GSO find a way for inclusion of online groups into the service structure. A different area has been envisioning what a virtual area could look like.

After reviewing the history of online meetings, the current practice of GSO to exclude online only meetings from the general service structure, and the identified need in our Area, we recommend the following 4 actions:

1. The Delegate share a copy of this report and work of the ad hoc committee to the AAWS chair in response to his interest in learning more about what Area 72 thinks about this topic
2. Area 72 request that GSO find a solution to this issue of lack of inclusion into the service structure during the 71st GSC in 2021
3. Area 72 create a new virtual district, similar to a linguistic district, to serve the unique needs of online only groups (not hybrid groups)
4. The Online Meeting Ad Hoc Committee continue through the end of this rotation to incorporate feedback from today's body and report additional findings at the January Quarterly

This concludes the ad hoc committee report.

Okay, let's get ready to discuss this. Discussion topic #3 is about this question:

How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?

The issue we are concerned with is that there are online groups in Area 72 that desire participation in general service, but they are not currently able to participate given the existing service structure.

Physical meetings can send a GSR to their local district meeting; *online only meetings are not attached to any district. They have no physical meeting placement that aligns them into a District.*

We would like to continue thinking about how to include online-only meetings into the General Service Structure.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

Online meetings allow inclusion of the elderly, the permanently ill, or otherwise remote members who are unable to maintain a physical homegroup. They carry the message, include sponsorship, and can function as a real homegroup. They are here to stay. But, again, there is not currently an avenue for them to become part of the general service structure.

It is through this structure, visualized as an upside-down triangle, that the voices of alcoholics reach the general service conference to help make informed decisions regarding the future of AA. We all have a voice in Alcoholics Anonymous. Each member can vote or express their opinion on topics or motions that *could change the future of AA*. But *only* if our groups participate in the upside-down triangle.

GSO currently recognizes online only meetings as those that fall outside of this service structure due to the international geography of online meetings. Online only groups can register with the Online Intergroup. Intergroups are entities that provide services to AA, groups, and the public, but are not included in the upside-down triangle.

The A.A. Online Intergroup reported that pre-pandemic, they listed less than 175 groups and by July 23rd, they reported 629 groups providing nearly 2,000 meetings to alcoholics. We can see that the continuance of online meetings is impacting not just Area 72, but our *entire* conference area.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services knows this is an issue. On July 9th, the AAWS Chair reported to our Area Delegate that the AAWS Technology Committee has already been talking about this issue. Their *so-far-informal-discussions* had at that point touched on two ideas:

- (1) Have virtual groups geographically anchored and send those GSRs to local district meetings, thus folding online groups into the current service structure
- (2) Create a virtual area for the US/Canada region that would conduct all business virtually and send one delegate in person to the annual General Service Conference.

The AAWS Chair also said that they would like to hear *our* thoughts on this.

We are eager to continue this discussion today at the Area Assembly so that we can get a solid pulse on what the Area thinks about this.

As stated during the ad hoc committee report, some in-person meetings *currently meeting online* are considering transitioning to online-only meetings after the pandemic restrictions are lift ed. New online groups continue to pop up in our area . At least 7 online meetings plan to remain online only and another 12 are unsure if they will become a hybrid group or an online only group.

We would like to hear if this is something *districts and groups* view as a problem. If so, what are some possible solutions? What might a virtual district look like? We also want to know if this is *not* a problem in other parts of our Area.

Bill W wrote in the November 1960 edition of the AA Grapevine:

*"A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches [...]
Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination."*

Thank you for allowing me to introduce this topic.

Discussion Summary from Pre-Assemblies 1-6

How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?

Discussion Summary

General Feedback

- Online meetings represent a growing trend, not limited to scope of today, but future as well
- Pandemic was a blessing in disguise; more remote groups getting involved
- AA and technology move snail-pace to catch up; AA has moved forward Sx faster than usual
- A solution to this meets a whole new need: a new audience is participating
- Older members are now participating and embracing online meetings more often
- Some groups want to stay online; some groups want to return to in person meetings
- How many groups plan to stay non-tethered-strictly virtual meetings, not groups?
- 4 other Areas are talking about this; 2 Areas plan to submit a motion to general service conference
- Tying this topic to GSO representation is the key
- Spiritual parity: "Us" and "Them" needs to be pointed out
- The group conscience will decide where they want to be represented - in person or virtual

Online Meetings (Issues)

- At least one pre-COVID group had to splinter over issues of control
- Some [elders, and others] are confused by Zoom; need training
- Zoom info changes and not updated
- Trouble getting info on group meeting links/IDs & passwords, contact person
- Not excited about getting back to face-to-face; online is the way some will go

Online Meetings (Benefits)

- Serves health needs
- People are welcome to form groups that speak in different languages
- May be the only way some members can attend meetings due to mobility issues
- People with different schedules can attend meetings around world
- People 60+ years old, those with health needs or with disabilities are able to go to meetings more often
- Several new meetings started in Area 72 drawing people from around the nation and world

General Service Structure

- Bill W. built service geographically, intergroups serve groups, but aren't part of area structure
 - This is the wave of future: Bill said communication will expand, he was really looking down road and saw communication as important
- Can online meetings register with GSO with an email as the address or must they have a physical address?
 - Online meetings can register with GSO and will be assigned a customer ID# (for tracking) under the fictitious Area 95; they can then register with the online intergroup, but remain outside the general service structure

In-Person District Involvement

- **General Feedback**
 - At least one new online only meeting opened a PO Box and bank account in their district, assigned themselves to that district, and are functioning as a group
 - Two other meetings are already tethered to districts (previously in-person groups)
 - Some groups plan to participate in their district meetings
- **Benefits**
 - It's cool to be centered in a district for potential face-to-face contact
 - it could be a beneficial contact, possibly for Bridge connection
 - Many groups want to stay part of their current district and are comfortable with that connection
- **Concerns**
 - May limit participation if online only group GSRs are required to attend in-person district meetings and can't for health, location proximity, or other reasons
 - What if virtual and in-person district meetings are held at the same time?
 - Could members from different Areas be GSRs in Area 72 online only groups?
 - If participating in person without geography issue solved, how do other online only groups become part of the general service structure?
 - Online-only groups will have unique needs that require different support from districts

Virtual District Creation

- **General Feedback**
 - Why is A.A. staying geographically anchored in changing times?
 - Why can't we just join the current service structure without requiring a physical address? (would PO Box, someone's home, or IP address be sufficient?)
 - This pandemic presents us with an opportunity to create a virtual district
- **Benefits**
 - Online Group GSRs won't have to wait 12-18 months to have voices heard, if we act now
 - Opportunities to outreach young people, women and other needs across the world
 - We already have a working model in the linguistic districts, DI & D57, to use as an example
 - Could allow full area-wide general service participation, being inclusive
 - Different needs of the online community may be better met
 - Adds positivity to the Area; as an upside-down triangle, we need to be all-inclusive

- **Concerns**

- With world-wide members, where do anchor? How do we vet Area 72 groups? Who decides?
- Logistical constraints of a virtual district- it's not an inter-area service (no virtual area exists)
- Some disparity because GSRs/DCMs won't be allowed to serve Area 72 if they live in other areas
- What about the newcomer's sobriety?
- Would this cause separation? Will there be double voting (one virtual, one local)?
- Is there enough need to create this new district?
- Would service positions need to be parallel to face to face districts?

Possible Solutions

- Create an overlain district as has been done with the Spanish-speaking districts
- Creation of an online-only district that serves virtual meetings
- Hold online and in-person district meetings at separate times to avoid splitting the District
- Recreate a platform for AA (look at experience in BC Yukon)

I want to thank Lisa for her presentation today. I want to thank Heather for this opportunity to discuss this with the Area Committee today. I also want to thank Eddy for posting our research to-date and four documents on the Area website. I am talking about **Virtual Representation in the Service Structure**.

I am DCM of District 17 and a grateful recovered alcoholic and my name is Karen S.

First things first, GSO verified that:

The AA General Service Structure as described in the Service Manual is geographically based and does not allow online only meetings to participate in the General Service Structure.

“A change in the General Service Conference structure [in] U.S./Canada would need to be discussed and approved by the Conference

“Bringing your idea to your district meeting is certainly where this ought to be discussed. If there is agreement, it might go to the Area for wider discussion and possibly a proposal for a Conference agenda item.”

District 17 discussed this issue in June and unanimously agreed to bring this to the Area Committee Quarterly.

**What suffering alcoholics are we trying to serve and provide AA meetings for?
People who are:**

- Physically unable to attend in-person meetings, including vulnerable from COVID-16
- Those over 60 years old (28% of our membership from GSO's 2014 membership survey)
- At home with an illness
- Not quite ready to go to an in-person meeting, but want to check out AA
- Unable to attend a meeting due to lack of childcare, transportation, or other requirements needed to attend in person
- Want to continue online and not lose people from AA when AA land-based meetings cease online

In addition to GSO, we talked with several webmasters, Intergroups and Central Service Offices, past Delegates in multiple areas, Area 72 Archivist and Delegate, Online Intergroup of AA (OIAA), Technology in AA, and learned:

- Pre-COVID-19, Area 72 had NO online only meetings.
- Pre-COVID-19, 3,553 meetings were listed on the Area website. 28% of those groups formed online meetings – 1000 groups. (new numbers from Eddy today)
- In Area 72 at least 52 new online only meetings do not have a physical location.
- The Online Intergroup of AA began 25 years ago and had 175 groups. Since the pandemic began, OIAA has roughly 1700 virtual meetings. This is a 10-fold increase in four months.
- With the COVID-10 pandemic raging, nearly 1/3 of our membership is vulnerable and over age 60 years and unable to return to in-person meetings for some time.

I look forward to hearing from other districts committee members about their experience with online only meetings and HOW we might address the gaps in getting online only meeting members a seat at the table in Service Structure of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I close with Four Questions for DCMs and Groups to further discuss:

1. Are we willing to lose 1/3 of our elders/vulnerable members' participation in our General Service Structure since their home groups are not land based?
2. Wondering whether Area72 needs to establish a Remote Communities Committee? RC is the likely committee to research, discuss and bring this issue to the General Service Conference.
3. Do we want to consider piloting a Virtual District in Area 72 for the approximately 52 existing groups to address the unique challenges AND allow them to elect GSRs and a DCM and participate in the Area and GSC and share what we learn?
4. Can we create an Ad Hoc Committee to further research this issue?

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Hi everyone. My name is Lisa and I serve as the Alt DCM for District 17.

The issue we are concerned with is that there are over 50 new online only meetings in Area 72, created during the pandemic, and online only meetings are not currently able to participate in the General Service Structure.

Physical meetings can send a GSR to their local district meeting; *online only meetings are not attached to any district. They have no physical meeting placement that aligns them into a District. Therefore, it is not possible, currently, for online-only meetings to have a GSR, and thus these meetings cannot participate in the General Service Structure.*

We would like to think about how to include online-only meetings in the General Service Structure.

Online meetings include the elderly, the permanently ill, or otherwise remote members who are unable to maintain a physical homegroup. They carry the message, include sponsorship, and can function as a real homegroup. They are here to stay. But, again, there is not an avenue for them to have a GSR.

We all have a voice in Alcoholics Anonymous. Each member can vote or express their opinion on topics or motions that could change the future of AA. But *only* if those groups participate in the General Service Structure.

Since the pandemic hit, 23% of all area 72 meetings have gone online. In addition, 52 meetings that do not have physical locations were created.

Online only meetings will continue after the pandemic. Some in-person meetings currently meeting online are considering transitioning to online only meetings because they can financially stay afloat with only a \$15 monthly overhead for Zoom.

The A.A. Online Intergroup (which is not part of the General Service Structure) said that before the pandemic they listed less than 175 groups in their directory in all 5 formats: email, discussion forums, text-based chats, phone, and zoom/skype. Now they are at roughly 1700 virtual meetings.

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services knows this is an issue. Last week the previous AAWS Director forwarded the current AAWS Chair an email I sent to the Online Intergroup about the inability to bridge online meetings into the general service structure. In fact, mine was only one of 20-30 emails with a similar inquiry sent to the Online Intergroup.

On Thursday, the AAWS Chair reported to our Area Delegate that **the AAWS Technology Committee has already been talking about this issue.** Their so far informal discussions have touched on two ideas:

- (1) Have virtual groups geographically anchored and send GSRs to local district meetings, thus folding those groups into the current service structure
- (2) Create a virtual area for the US/Canada region that would conduct all business virtually and send one delegate in person to the annual General Service Conference.

The AAWS Chair also said that they would like to hear our thoughts on this.

This impacts not just Area 72, but our entire conference area.

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District 17 has talked about how a virtual district could be a solution for anyone unable to access a physical meeting. This would allow others to become homegroup members of an online only meeting and still have a voice in the Area.

District 17 would like to ask the Area Committee to consider this issue, and to respond to the request from the AAWS Chair to hear our Area's perspective and ideas.

We would like to hear if this is something other districts view as a problem and if so, what are some possible solutions. We want to know if this is *not* a problem in other parts of our Area.

Bill W wrote in the November 1960 edition of the AA Grapevine:

"A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches [...] Nothing matters more to AA's future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination."

Thank you, Heather, for allowing us to bring this discussion topic to the Area today.

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Discussion Topic for Area 72 July 2020 Quarterly from District 17:

“How can Area 72 incorporate online only meetings, those without a physical address, and provide homegroup members of online only meetings a voice in the AA Service Structure while supporting and ensuring that online only meetings are able to carry out our primary purpose?”

INTRODUCTION

At District 17's business meeting on June 11, 2020, a fourth item of new business was discussed. Lisa S (Alt DCM) presented a discussion topic regarding a need for inclusion of online only meetings into Area 72. The purpose was to obtain District support for a possible discussion topic at the July Quarterly: *What can we do to incorporate online only meetings into our district structure / AA as a whole in order to provide AA meetings for those who are only able to attend online meetings.*

BACKGROUND

Lisa hosts two online only meetings each week, which began on Friday, March 6th. The meetings occur on Monday and Friday nights at 7 pm. Both meetings are called Our Primary Purpose. Attendees include out-of-state residents, and one regular attendee from out of state refers to it as his “Seattle Home Group.” Three business meetings have been held to-date.

Lisa explained that there is not currently a known way to bring problems from online only meetings to a district or the Area or to bring district and Area information to those groups. Furthermore, if online only meetings could be organized into a district, then they could participate in the Area and learn about how to set up 7th tradition contributions, which could help support a district, the Area and GSO. Finding a way to include the group conscious of those members whose homegroup meets online only into a district and our Area so that their voices are heard and that Area business is carried to them, would support our 5th tradition, which states “Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.”

DISTRICT DISCUSSION

District 17 reviewed the discussion topic during its June district business meeting; see attached PDF titled, “District New Business Discussion Item at June 11 2020 District 17 Business Meeting” Comments, suggestions and questions from groups included:

- Recommend reviewing current online meeting information at aa.org
- Recommend reading the pamphlet SMF-124 [“Online Meetings/Online Groups”]
- This seems like an Accessibility issue (NOTE: D17 does not current have an Accessibility Chair to speak about this topic.)
- One GSR who also serves as the Greater Seattle Intergroup Webmaster said that there are going to be more online only meetings and that this is an important discussion topic to bring forward to the Area

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- The DCM suggested the need to investigate how online meetings in remote communities and active military members are connected to the AA Service Structure.
- Question of whether this was for hybrid meetings that some groups will possibly form (i.e. groups with a physical meeting space who moved to online meetings when the state locked down may bring a laptop to the meeting to pull people in via Zoom when in-person meetings resume)
- The Alt DCM clarified that this need was specific to online only meetings. She offered one possible solution of the creation of an online only meeting district that has a DCM and each online meeting elects its own GSR who participates in their own district to carry the message to/from the groups and Area.

Lisa suggested that others in the area may have additional ideas that could be heard if this topic was discussed at the upcoming Area Quarterly.

DISTRICT OUTCOME

- One-third of the district vocalized support of this discussion topic being brought to the July Area Quarterly.
- When voted upon using a poll, the idea passed with 100% support. 23 members were present in the meeting with 19 people voting, excluding Alt GSRs and a visitor.
- The Alt DCM and GSRs from three groups (Serenity at Week's End, The Solution Group and Cute But Dangerous), stated that they would help do necessary research if this topic were to be moved forward to the October Assembly.
- Suggested wording was provided by GSRs on how District 17 could ask that this topic be placed on the upcoming Area July Quarterly agenda.
- District 17 proposes the following as a discussion item at Area 72's upcoming July Quarterly:

"How can Area 72 optimize the ongoing use of online only meetings and give participants who can only participate in online only meetings a voice in the service structure?"

GSO

In addition to including the issue on the June 2020 district agenda and as a new discussion item, Karen S, DCM District 17 encouraged Lisa to also write an email request to GSO seeking advice.

On June 11, Lisa wrote an email to GSO. On June 15th she received a reply from GSO, which she forwarded to Karen. The email exchange with GSO is attached.

Two important excerpts from GSO's email are:

1. **"A change in the General Service Conference structure U.S./Canada such as you suggest would need to be discussed and approved by the Conference - it is this body that represents the group conscience of A.A. in the U.S. and Canada and is responsible for defining its structural parameters."**

And

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2. **“Bringing your idea to your district meeting is certainly where this ought to be discussed. If there is agreement, it might go to the Area for wider discussion and possibly a proposal for a Conference agenda item.”**

AREA 72

On June 16, Karen S, DCM, called Heather C, Area 72 Chair, and discussed the issue. Karen relayed what had occurred at the June District 17 meeting, the response from GSO and requested that this item be placed on the July Area Quarterly business meeting agenda as a discussion item. The Area Chair raised many questions which would need to be answered. In addition, the DCM asked that the Area Chair consider creating an Ad-Hoc committee to carry out the research into Accessibility, Remote Communities, Military Meetings, how existing online meetings remain connected to the Service Structure and all other questions that arise from Area Committee members if and when the item is discussed at an Area Quarterly.

The Area Chair agreed to include the discussion item on the Area July Quarterly agenda and to take under advisement consideration of creating an Ad Hoc Committee to research the issue. Heather asked that District 17 provide the handout from the district meeting, a summary of the district meeting discussion and polling and the email correspondence with GSO.

Heather informed Karen that if an Ad Hoc Committee were created it would have to be chaired by District 17's DCM or Alt DCM. Because an Area Ad Hoc committee is created by the Area Chair and we rotate every two years, such Ad Hoc Committee would only operate until the end of this rotation, December 31, 2020. If the work needed to continue, the District would have to ask the new Area Chair, serving 2021-2022, to again create and appoint an Ad Hoc Committee to continue the work.

Karen committed to getting the information to the Area Chair by the end of the week so that there is ample time for translation and posting of the information on the Area website for review by DCMs and groups well in advance of the Area July Quarterly.

*This document was written by District 17's DCM, Karen, and Alt DCM, Lisa.
Questions can be directed to: Karen at dcm17@Area72aa.org or Lisa at altdcm17@Area72aa.org*

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

District New Business Discussion Item at June 11 2020 District 17 Business Meeting

Proposed Discussion Topic for July Area Quarterly - Lisa

Purpose: Obtain District support in the following discussion topic

What can we do to incorporate **online only** meetings into our district structure/ Area/ AA as a whole in order to provide AA meetings for those who are :

- Physically unable to attend in-person meetings
- At home with an illness
- Not quite ready to go to an in-person meeting, but want to check out AA
- Unable to attend a meeting due to lack of childcare, transportation, or other requirements needed to attend in person
- Want to continue on-line (not lose people from AA when AA stops meeting on-line)

What need does this fill?

- People will have a voice in the service structure (the online meeting burst was created due to COVID-19)
- Increased financial contributions
- To reach more alcoholics in need of recovery (our primary purpose)
- Tie in online members to the service structure so that we can hear all members' voice

Possible solutions:

- Create an online meeting district so that those voices can receive information from GSO and vote on issues.
- Lisa willing to offer herself as chair an ad hoc committee (if the Area Chair is willing to create this committee) to do the research on how military and remote communities gets plugged into the service structure to educate the area and suggest possible solutions to the continuance of online meetings.

Goal:

Have this issue discussed at the Area Annual Assembly in October, which requires discussion at the Area July Quarterly.

Questions:

1. Is the district behind this discussion topic?
2. If yes, who from the district would be willing to help on this committee

6/19/2020

Gmail - FW: Pacific Region: Request Phone Call



Lisa

FW: Pacific Region: Request Phone Call

2 messages

Staff Correspondence <staffcorrespondence@aa.org>

To: "LISA."

Mon, Jun 15, 2020 at 8:40 AM

Dear Lisa,

Warm Greetings from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous! My name is Doug; I am a past GSO staff member helping out with the large amount of emails coming into the other staff assignments here. It is good to have this chance to be in touch.

Just to clarify, the General Service Office publishes A.A. literature and also houses a readily available accumulation of A.A. history and experience.

GSO does not coordinate or have guidelines related to setting up any online meetings nor does it possess the authority to make changes in the A.A. service structure. A change in the General Service Conference structure U.S./Canada such as you suggest would need to be discussed and approved by the Conference - it is this body that represents the group conscience of A.A. in the U.S. and Canada and is responsible for defining its structural parameters.

Bringing your idea to your district meeting is certainly where this ought to be discussed. If there is agreement, it might go to the Area for wider discussion and possibly a proposal for a Conference agenda item.

Thank you for writing. Our best wishes and gratitude for your willingness to serve A.A. are sent along with this note.

In fellowship,

Doug R.

For Rick W.

Pacific Regional Correspondent at G.S.O.

From: noreply@aa.org [mailto:noreply@aa.org]

Sent: Thursday, June 11, 2020 2:51 PM

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=a90a760f9e&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-f%3A1669580093856744362&simpl=msg-f%3A1669580093856744362&...> 1/2

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6/19/2020

Gmail - FW: Pacific Region: Request Phone Call

To: Nominating <nominating@aa.org>
Subject: Pacific Region: Request Phone Call

Here is your copy of a message sent via an aa.org webform to the Pacific Regional Correspondent at G.S.O.

Name: Lisa
Location: Washington

Email:

Message: Dear trusted servant, I would like to speak with someone at GSO about online meetings. I am of the opinion that they are going to stick around. I would like to see online meetings have one new district per area, lead by a DCM that participates at their area level, and that amongst all district DCM's, a delegate could go to the conference next year. I also want to generally know if GSO already has a plan about this. The benefit to organizing the online meetings is to keep those people who won't attend in person AA meetings an opportunity to attend and have their voice heard as part of a group conscience. Furthermore, with education by online district DCMS, online meetings can learn more about how to follow the 7th tradition and how to deal with incoming money so that GSO is financially supported. I am going to bring this concern to my district meeting tonight and also want to understand what GSO thinks (is something like this reasonable? possible? if something else is already in motion?). I'm generally available most of the time including early mornings EST after 8 am. Thank you for your service and for helping me grow in my understanding of matters such as this. Warmly, Lisa

DISCLAIMER: This email message and any attachments are for the sole use of the intended recipient(s). Any unauthorized review, use, disclosure, copying or distribution, without the express permission of the originator, is strictly prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, please contact the sender by reply email and destroy all copies of the original message and any attachments.

Lisa To: Karen S dcm17@area72aa.org Mon, Jun 15, 2020 at 9:46 AM

This just in.

Lisa

[Quoted text hidden]

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0?ik=a90a760f9e&view=pt&search=all&permthid=thread-f%3A1669580093856744362&simpl=msg-f%3A1669580093856744362&...> 2/2

CONFIDENTIAL: This is background for the 71st General Service Conference, and as such may be a confidential A.A. document. Distribution is limited to A.A. members. Placement of this material in a location accessible to the public, including aspects of the Internet, such as Web sites available to the public, may breach the confidentiality of the material and the anonymity of members, since it may contain members' full names and addresses.

History, Actions and Discussions: Listing Online Meetings/Groups and General Service Structure

The earliest recorded discussions regarding online groups may have occurred in the late 1990s. The findings are presented chronologically below.

1996

In 1996, the Conference Committee on Report and Charter considered an agenda item relating to online groups. However, the committee's recommendation was not approved by the Conference body. The failed recommendation read:

Recognizing the unique characteristics of online groups with membership in many areas throughout the U.S. and Canada and also internationally, the committee recommended that members of online groups/meetings participate in the general service structure through regular face-to-face groups meeting in one location. (Note: Recommendation Did Not Pass)

1997

Two advisory actions relating to online groups.

Conference Advisory Actions, Report and Charter Committee

1. Online A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the Internet address of the online meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.
2. An intergroup serving online A.A. meetings should be listed adjacent to online A.A. meetings in the section on "International Correspondence Meetings."

1998

At the Western Canada Regional Forum in 1998, there was a Workshop on Online Meetings/Web Sites and a summary of the Workshop published in the Forum's Final Report read:

Online Meetings/Web Sites

In wondering where online meetings fit into the structure, it was noted that these meetings will be listed in the next printing of the directory. It is difficult to assign service structure for some worldwide electronic meetings. It has been suggested that eventually there be an Internet Region created. Some online meetings have hundreds of members, while others have only a few. Interactive online meetings correspond to real-time meetings, rather than an e-mail format. Regarding online meetings and the Seventh Tradition, contributions could be affected as more and more people "attend" meetings online, although some of the meetings provide

GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE ARCHIVES

contribution addresses. The A.A. website is the responsibility of the A.A.W.S. Board; and the A.A. Grapevine also has a website. Areas that set up a website need a group conscience to do so; and the site should have someone assigned a protective password, with that person authorized to make necessary updates.

2005

In 2005, the Conference Committee on Report and Charter considered two subjects concerning online meetings; both subjects were grouped under the standing agenda item, "Discuss A.A. Directories." See image below:

C. Discuss A.A. Directories.

- C1. Consider request to include online meetings in languages other than English, French and Spanish in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS."**
- C2. Consider request to include adding Web site information for online meetings listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS."**

Following discussion, the Conference approved the committee's recommendations.

2005 Conference Advisory Actions:

1. Online meetings in languages in addition to English, French and Spanish be listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" with the meeting language indicated next to the listing and in accordance with the 1997 Conference Advisory Action that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the 'International Correspondence Meetings' in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

2. Online meetings listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" continue to be listed with an e-mail contact address only, in keeping with the 1997 General Service Conference recommendation that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the 'International Correspondence Meetings' in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-

line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

2006 - 2007

In 2006, the Intra-Office Website Committee (I.O.W.C.) of the A.A.W.S. Board (now known as the Technology/Communication/Services Committee T.C.S.) discussed a suggestion to add to the GSO AA website, an online Intergroup website address for online AA meetings. The Board approved the committee's recommendation and forwarded the item to the 2007 Conference Report and Charter Committee.

A.A.W.S. Meeting minutes, December 2006:

The committee forwarded a recommendation to the A.A.W.S. Board that the 2007 Conference Committee on Report and Charter consider adding to the A.A. Directories (Canada, Western U.S., and Eastern U.S.) a separate subsection within the section "INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE MEETING" for listing "Online Intergroups" that request to be listed, and that online intergroups thus listed provide an e-mail and/or Website address to be included on those directories. A motion to approve this recommendation was passed by the Board and will be forwarded to the 2007 Conference Committee on Report and Charter.

The 2007 Conference Committee on Report and Charter took "no action" on the suggestion.

- The committee considered a suggestion to add to the A.A. Directories (Canada, Western U.S., and Eastern U.S.) a separate subsection within the section "INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE MEETINGS" for listing "Online Intergroups" that request to be listed, and that online Intergroups thus listed provide an e-mail and/or Web site address to be included in the directories and took no action.

2008

In 2008, the Conference Report and Charter Committee considered the following agenda item:

Consider listing the Online Intergroup of A.A. (OIAA) in a new section titled "Online Intergroups" under the section "International Correspondence Meetings" in the

GENERAL SERVICE OFFICE ARCHIVES

A.A. Directories where "Online Meetings" appear and include the online intergroup web site and email addresses.

The background supporting the 2008 proposal is depicted below:

In keeping with the scope of the Conference Report and Charter Committee, I would like to request that the 2008 Conference Committee on Report and Charter consider listing Online Intergroup of A.A. (O.I.A.A.) in a new section titled "ONLINE INTERGROUPS" under the section "INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE MEETINGS" in the A.A. directories where "ONLINE MEETINGS" appear, and to include the online intergroup website and email. I have attached a mock sample to illustrate this. Please note that while O.I.A.A. has been listed with G.S.O. since 1997 per Advisory Action, it does not appear in the current 2007-2008 printing of the directories because G.S.O. did not have a current email address for O.I.A.A. at the time of the printing, which we since received.

Based on inquiries I have received over the years and my experience, the question has been raised many times as to why O.I.A.A. is listed in the section "ONLINE MEETINGS." The answer to this is simple in that the following 1997 Advisory Action reflects the current policy: "It is recommended that an intergroup serving on-line A.A. meetings should be listed adjacent to on-line meetings in the section on International Correspondence Meetings."

As most of us know today, online intergroups are not online A.A. meetings. In some respects online intergroups are similar to face-to-face intergroup offices in that they provide online A.A. meeting information to Internet users; however, because it serves an international community on the Internet where there are no geographic boundaries, in this sense it is international in scope and one reason why it is not listed as an intergroup/central office of the U.S./Canada structure.

Having been at the 1997 Conference and participating in the loving discussion, there was limited Internet experience amongst the Conference body and knowledge of O.I.A.A. The Conference felt it would be best to list O.I.A.A. with online meetings at the time. At this point in time, to continue listing an online intergroup as an A.A. meeting in A.A. directories is misleading and I suggest that the Conference Committee on Report and Charter consider listing O.I.A.A. in a new section titled "ONLINE INTERGROUPS" under the section "INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE MEETINGS" in the A.A. directories where the section "ONLINE MEETINGS" appear.

The subject resulted in the following 2008 Advisory Action:

The Online Intergroup of A.A. (OIAA) be listed in a new section titled "Online Intergroups" under the section "International Correspondence Meetings" in the A.A. Directories above where "Online Meetings" appear; the listing will include the online intergroup Website and email addresses.

2014

In 2014, the Trustees' Committee on the General Service Conference discussed two requests regarding online groups. One request pertained to the policy established by the 2005 Conference Advisory Action regarding listing of online groups and the other pertained to the participation of online groups in the General Service Structure. Following discussion, the committee "agreed to forward to the General Service Board, a request to consider changing the structural relationship between online groups and the General Service Structure."

In November, at the GSB's Planning/Sharing Session, they "discussed a request to include online groups in the General Service Structure and, after thoughtful consideration, agreed to take no action."

2015

Committee Consideration, Conference Report and Charter Committee

The committee considered the A.A. Directories (Canada, Eastern U.S., Western U.S. and International) and suggested that the section currently called "Online Meetings" be reviewed and possibly renamed "Online Meetings/Groups" to reflect the Twelfth Step work that some online groups carry out beyond the meetings.

2016

Advisory Action

The category title "Online Meetings" be changed to "Online Meetings/Online Groups" on page vi and vii in the A.A. Directories.

December 15, 2020

General Service Office of Alcoholics of Anonymous

Attention: Conference Coordinator, Patrick C.

Grand Central Station, P.O. Box 459

New York, New York 10163

Dear Patrick,

We are members of Alcoholics Anonymous who belong to various Home Groups across the United States. We have been meeting on a weekly conference call for over ten years to share our experience, strength and hope in the study of applying our A.A. Traditions and Concepts in our daily lives and service work. We serve and have served our AA Fellowship in various service positions from the Group to the corporate board levels of our AA service structure. As a result of the rapid and widespread changes brought on by the global pandemic, the following has come to our attention through our in-depth discussions about our principles.

We unanimously agree and humbly request inclusion of the following item on the 71st General Service Conference agenda in order to allow for full Fellowship discussion and an informed Conference to offer spiritual guidance and direction to the Trustees and staff to lead us through these worldly times:

Discuss the current procedure of referring non-face-to-face Groups to an entity outside the A.A. service structure to be listed and consider creating a Traditions-based policy that meets the needs of the Fellowship and its Groups (see enclosed email and Advisory Actions).

Some additional points that we discussed which would be helpful in your consideration include:

- Preservation of the principle that the Group is the most important entity in the A.A. service structure.
- The shift in wording from “registering” Groups to “listing Groups” or “adding Groups to the database” without Conference input or explanations of the principles that guided that shift and how this serves our Fellowship.
- Tradition 5’s statement that an A.A. Group ought to be a “spiritual entity” which does not define a Group as a physical entity that meets face to face, nor does it limit a Group’s right to be served by our service structure. The platform in which a Group functions and the method of accessing its meetings are a matter of “autonomy “ (Tradition 4).
- Review “Area 95” (already created for bookkeeping purposes, not approved by the Conference) in light of past Advisory Actions concerning creation of new Areas. If such an Area is requested by the non-face-to-face A.A. Groups, should it be created by the Conference? Should it be used to communicate with Groups that do not meet face to face and wish to participate in the service structure but don’t have ties to a particular physical Area (compare with linguistic districts)? Would its creation need to follow the instructions as given in The A.A. Service Manual (2018-2020, pS33)? If the Area were created, which region would it join?
- The difference between the purpose of the general service structure versus the purposes of intergroups/central offices and whether the current procedure of only referring a Group

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to an intergroup ignores the Group's right of participation in the service structure and is in opposition to the A.A. Service Manual (2018-20 Chapter 2, pS28).

Our experience suggests that this item would be best discussed in the General Service Conference Policy and Admissions Committee which is why we will also attempt to send this to that committee's chair.

Godspeed,

A Tuesday Night Traditions and Concepts Study

Cc: Mike L., West Central Regional Trustee
Jimmy D., Southwest Regional Trustee
Mark E., East Central Region Trustee

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Hi Irene,

Thank you for your email and response to my inquiry. My other question is do these online meeting register directly with GSO or as an area registrar would I complete the registration process?

Thank you,

Carol [REDACTED]

Area [REDACTED] Registrar

On Wed, Aug 19, 2020 at 10:03 AM Access <access@aa.org> wrote:

Dear Carol,

Greetings from you virtual G.S.O. office!

My name is Irene, I am an alcoholic, and I am responding to emails from your region.

Carol, I am writing to you regarding an email that was forwarded to me from the Records Department.

Thank you for your question! Here is the shared information I can provide to you:

As you are aware, our structure encompasses the U.S. and Canada. Because online groups and meetings are by nature international, they are not listed as regular groups in G.S.O.s records. Whether an bunch of alcoholics meeting online consider themselves a group is up to them, as laid out in the Third Tradition (any two or three alcoholics...).

In keeping with a 2006 General Service Conference Advisory Action, G.S.O. provides contact information for online groups and meetings that request us to have this information:

Online meetings listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" continue to be listed with an e-mail contact address only, in keeping with the 1997 General Service Conference recommendation that: On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

This information is provided in the A.A. Directories in a special section titled "'Online Meetings/Online Groups.'" The Online A.A. Intergroup is also listed in our records and in the A.A. Directories.

Area 95 is sort of a catchall area in our records system. It was created for any individual or entity which has a record in our system, but that isn't part of the U.S./Canada general service structure. It includes international G.S.O.s, World Service Meeting delegates, intergroup/central offices, online and phone meetings, etc.

G.S.O.'s listing of online groups and meetings is not comprehensive. A much more complete list can be found through the Online A.A. Intergroup: www.aa-intergroup.org. An online group or meeting can be listed with either or both entities.

I hope this information is helpful. We are all here grateful for your service and efforts to keep A.A. doors open.

In fellowship,

Irene [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

G.S.O. U.S./Canada: Coronavirus (COVID-19) helpful resources

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From: Carol [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, July 30, 2020 10:24 AM

To: [REDACTED] Karen [REDACTED]

Subject: Registration of Zoom Meetings

Hi Karen,

The question has been raised as to how to register virtual meetings. Many existing meetings have migrated to virtual and some new meetings have sprung up as virtual.

What is the policy now regarding virtual meetings? Should we do group change forms for meetings that have changed to virtual? Can we register meetings that are virtual only as long as we have a contact or GSR?

Thank you,

Carol [REDACTED]

Area [REDACTED] - Panel 70 Registrar
[REDACTED]

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for *World Service* on page 66, third paragraph, fourth line: "This set income to the groups..." be corrected to "This net income to the groups..." in the next printing, noting that this typographical error has existed since the first printing of *Twelve Concepts for World Service*.

For clarification, third paragraph of the *Preface* to *Twelve Concepts for World Service* be revised as follows:

"Following the recommendation of an ad hoc committee of the A.A. General Service Board, the 1985 General Service Conference recommended that future publication of the Concepts in *The A.A. Service Manual* and the booklet *Twelve Concepts for World Service* be in the original 1962 version...."

Special International Contacts be listed in A.A. Directories if they serve special populations (young people, doctors, gays and lesbians, etc.) which meet some of the following criteria: (1) Large membership, (2) Annual international meetings, (3) Regional and state contacts, (4) Maintenance of membership lists and/or directories of special interest meetings for our Twelfth Step purposes, (5) Serve as a "bridge" into the Fellowship.

International correspondence groups such as International Deaf Group by Mail and Groupe Bonjour le Monde be listed in A.A. directories under the category of "International Correspondence meetings" in order to provide additional sharing opportunities for A.A. members.

1997 It was recommended that:

The selected diagram, as modified, illustrating the Third Legacy Procedure be added to the next edition of *The A.A. Service Manual* adjacent to page S41 to help people new to general service understand the process described on pages S41, S63-64 and S118 of the 1996-1997 edition of *The A.A. Service Manual*, and that each description of the Third Legacy Procedure in the next edition of *The A.A. Service Manual* refer to the diagram.

The paragraph on page S41 of the 1996-1997 edition of *The A.A. Service Manual*, reading "After the second ballot (assuming no candidate receives the necessary two-thirds on the first ballot), any candidate having less than one-fifth of the total vote will be withdrawn *automatically*, except that the TWO TOP CANDIDATES must remain. (In case there are ties for second place, the top candidate and tied second-place candidates remain.)" be replaced by "Withdrawals start after the second ballot. If any candidate has less than one-fifth of the total vote, his or her name is *automatically* withdrawn—except that the top two candidates must remain. (If there are ties for second place, the top candidate and all tied runners-up remain as candidates.)"; that paragraph (i), page S64, be replaced with the same language; and, that a sentence be added to the description of the Third Legacy procedure on page S118 at the beginning of item 1 "The first candidate to receive two-thirds of the total vote is elected."

Because of the importance of this principle to A.A. unity worldwide, there be no change to Article 2, paragraph 4 of the Current Conference Charter.

A thorough review of *The A.A. Service Manual* be undertaken by the Publications Department of the General Service Office for the purpose of increasing readability, consolidating and clarifying the text, and that a preliminary draft be sent to the 1998 Conference Committee on Report and Charter no later than February 1, 1998, for consideration.

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the Internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting

to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

An intergroup serving on-line A.A. meetings should be listed adjacent to on-line A.A. meetings in the section on "International Correspondence Meetings."

1999 It was recommended that:

The review of *The A.A. Service Manual* undertaken by the publications department of the General Service Office as the result of a 1997 Conference Advisory Action be accepted, and that the revised manuscript distributed to all Conference members in April 1999 be approved as the 1999-2000 Edition of *The A.A. Service Manual*.

2000 It was recommended that:

The description of the A.A. Group (Long Form Tradition Three and a section of Warranty Six, in Concept Twelve) be added in Chapter Two: "The Group and Its G.S.R." in *The A.A. Service Manual*.

In the section "Area Newsletters or Bulletins" in Chapter Four: "The Area Assembly and Activities," the following sentence "Many local publications quote from A.A. literature such as the Big Book, the Twelve and Twelve, *The A.A. Service Manual*, and Conference-approved pamphlets" be removed from *The A.A. Service Manual* and replaced with the following:

"Local A.A. publications are permitted to quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from A.A. literature such as the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *The A.A. Service Manual* and Conference-approved pamphlets without a prior, written request to do so."

The phrase "to use their experience, strength and hope" be inserted in the first sentence under "Sharing Sessions" in Chapter Four: "The Area Assembly and Activities" on Page S36 in *The A.A. Service Manual* to read as follows:

"In a sharing session, everyone has a chance to use their experience, strength and hope to contribute ideas and opinions about the welfare of A.A."

On Page S69 in the subsection titled "Financial Support" under A.A. World Services, Inc., in Chapter Ten: "The Board's Operating Corporations" the sentence "Some groups set up a regular contribution plan, using various methods" be removed from *The A.A. Service Manual* and replaced with the following two sentences from the previous edition of *The A.A. Service Manual*:

"Many groups have found it convenient to set up a *regular contribution plan* whereby they send in a predetermined percentage each month or each quarter. For part of this—or to make additions to it—they use various methods."

2001 It was recommended that:

In the section titled "Third Legacy Procedure" in Chapter One on Page S21 referring to the fifth ballot, the sentence "At this point, balloting usually involves only the top two or three candidates" be removed from *The A.A. Service Manual* and replaced with the following:

"At this point, the top two candidates remain. In case there are ties for first place, all tied first-place candidates remain. In case there are no ties for first place, the top candidate and any tied second-place candidates remain."

"Telephone A.A. meetings" that request to be listed in A.A. Directories be added to the section "International Correspondence Meetings" on page v under a section to be titled "Telephone Meetings."

2002 It was recommended that:

The Publications Department add a map of U.S. areas, and a map of Canada areas to *The A.A. Service Manual*.

In keeping with the purpose of the A.A. Directories to provide A.A. members with contact information, the "List of General Service Conference Area Web Sites" be added to the Canadian, Eastern and Western United States A.A. Directories.

2003 It was recommended that:

The first sentence of the third bullet under "Delegates Duties" in Chapter Six in *The A.A. Service Manual* be replaced with: "Be prepared to attend all area and regional service meetings and assemblies applicable to his/her respective area."

The following two new bullet points be added as the first and second items under the section titled "Duties" in Chapter Two: The Group and Its G.S.R. in *The A.A. Service Manual*:

- G.S.R.s attend district meetings,
- They also attend area assemblies

In *The A.A. Service Manual* the words "to reprint the Steps, Traditions, and/or the Concepts, and" be added to the first sentence in paragraph three under the section "Area Newsletters or Bulletins" in Chapter Four: The Area Assembly and Activities, to read:

"Local A.A. publications are permitted to reprint the Steps, Traditions, and/or the Concepts, and to quote a phrase, sentence or brief paragraph excerpted from A.A. literature such as the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, *The A.A. Service Manual* and Conference-approved pamphlets without a prior, written request to do so."

2005 It was recommended that:

The existing chart of the "A.A. Grapevine, Inc." in *The A.A. Service Manual* be replaced with the updated version.

The following text pertaining to the A.A. Grapevine Digital Archive be added to *The A.A. Service Manual*:

The A.A. Grapevine Digital Archive

In June 2004, Grapevine articles were preserved electronically and posted on the website, making it possible for A.A. members, professionals working in the field of alcoholism, and others interested in the Fellowship to access almost every Grapevine article and letter ever published.

With articles written by A.A. members from June 1944, when the magazine was first published, to the present, the archive offers a vivid account of A.A. history as well as a view of the Fellowship today. It also makes stories easy to find. Using keywords, visitors can search the archive by location, author, or subject to find the first version of the Traditions, to learn what A.A.s have said about such topics as sponsorship and self-support, and to explore how much—and how little—A.A. has changed. Readers may also browse through the collection by department, topic, or date to find hundreds of jokes and cartoons, along with thousands of articles.

The following text pertaining to the A.A. Grapevine Reprint Policy be added to *The A.A. Service Manual*:

General Guidelines for Reprinting Art and Articles from the A.A. Grapevine

Permission to reproduce articles or other A.A. Grapevine or La Viña material, either in print or via electronic media (such as web pages), must be obtained from the A.A. Grapevine, Inc. Each article or item must be reprinted in its entirety and carry the following credit line:

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Reprinted with permission.

Organizations, publications, or websites outside of A.A. must add the following:

Permission to reprint the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., copyrighted material [in this publication, organization, or website] does not in any way imply affiliation with or endorsement by either Alcoholics Anonymous or A.A. Grapevine, Inc.

Logo and Artwork

Only the Grapevine cartoons Victor E. and Clara T. may be reprinted with permission.

The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., does not grant permission to reproduce either its logo or registered trademarks (The A.A. Grapevine, Inc., Box 1980, The Grapevine, La Viña, etc.) or its artwork or any other cartoons on any other website or in any other publication.

Online meetings in languages in addition to English, French and Spanish be listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" with the meeting language indicated next to the listing and in accordance with the 1997 Conference Advisory Action that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

Online meetings listed in A.A. directories under "ONLINE MEETINGS" continue to be listed with an e-mail contact address only, in keeping with the 1997 General Service Conference recommendation that:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact.

2006 It was recommended that:

The graphic, "Service Structure Inside the A.A. Group," as it appeared in the 1998-1999 edition, be restored in Chapter 2 of *The A.A. Service Manual*.

The following descriptive sentence be added to the second paragraph on page S63 of *The A.A. Service Manual* in the section "Trustees-at-large":

"In the year between the World Service Meetings, the trustees-at-large may attend a Western Hemisphere zonal meeting, the Meeting of the Americas, as delegates representing the U.S. and Canada."

The statement on page ii of each A.A. Directory located below the box "An A.A. Group" be revised to read:

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION
ABOUT THIS DIRECTORY**

As embodied in the Fourth Tradition, the formation and operation of an A.A. group resides exclusively within the group conscience of its members. While, hopefully, every A.A. group adheres closely to the guiding principles of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, A.A.W.S. neither monitors nor oversees the activities or practice of any A.A. group. Groups listed in this directory appear at their own request. A directory listing does not constitute or imply

Thanks to the help of the International Coordinator at G.S.O., a request for shared experience was sent to International General Service Offices around the world. It included a few simple questions:

- *Did online-only groups participate in your general service structure before the pandemic?*
- *Are they able to participate now?*
- *If online-only groups do participate in your service structure, are there any concerns that members from outside of your structure have a voice and/or a vote?*

The responses follow below:

ARGENTINA

I am sending you the answers that the International Committee of Argentina gave to the following questions:

Q: Did online-only groups participate in your general service structure before the pandemic?

A: We did not have online groups. We did have WhatsApp groups with specific purposes, namely, communication among members of face-to-face groups, fellowship, trusted servants, etc., but these groups were not in the general service structure as online groups.

Q: Are they able to participate now?

A: No policy has been defined yet. In some cases, groups take the physical location of the founders of the online group and they place themselves in the corresponding geographical area. Other times, they do not. GSO, when asked by the group in question—and provided they do not have any other purpose—will include its meetings in a directory that is posted in the A.A. Argentina webpage: <https://aa.org.ar/grupos-virtuales-argentina/>.

Q: If online-only groups do participate in your service structure, are there any concerns that members from outside of your structure have a voice and/or a vote?

A: We have not gathered experience regarding group conscience actions about this topic.

With gratitude from Argentina - Alberto C. Chair, International Committee of the GSB

AUSTRALIA

Advisory Action #009/2020

Conference resolved that the creation of a virtual Area be included as part of the review of the General Service Structure by the Conference Policies & Admissions Committee.

All Conference members are requested to advise of any concerns so they can be addressed in a guideline for creating a virtual Area. A draft of this guideline will be circulated to Conference members for input, following which a mail poll will be conducted for approval of the guideline prior to Conference next year.

Voting: 25 For: Against: 3 Abstain 2 The motion carried.

It was noted that the Conference Policies & Admissions Committee will hold review meetings once a month starting in February.

Manager - General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous Australia

BOLIVIA

With regard to online groups, the first experience of this sort in Bolivia occurred in March 2020, because of the pandemic. In fact, we do not consider them groups, but A.A. meetings, and they currently do not take part in our service structure.

Approximately 70% of the groups have reverted to having face-to-face meetings but, unfortunately, at this time, our country is going through a second wave of the pandemic—much more severe than the first one—and we are certain that virtual meetings will come back and the issue of virtual groups will be discussed at our 2021 Conference.

We are also paying attention to the decisions and experiences of larger structures, so we may follow their example.

In closing, we would like to express our feelings of love and gratitude.

BRAZIL

Online meetings have been taking place for over twenty years [mainly in southern Brazil, using their own platform] but our Conference did not approve these meetings as part of our structure as either groups or areas. However, during the pandemic, our General Service Board designed and approved a proposal called Integrated Internal Communication Project, which includes a paid master Google Meet account contracted by JUNAAB, with dedicated addresses available for areas, districts, and groups.

Districts are meeting on line and each area committee has its own Google Meet link. Many area committee meetings and area assemblies have been held virtually, as their regular meeting places were closed.

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Here is the link for the project: <https://sites.google.com/aa.org.br/g-suite/reunioes-a-distancia/lista-das-reunioes>, including daily reports from our 45 areas and addresses for people interested in A.A.

Some groups have chosen to meet using the Zoom platform, but these meetings are not part of our integrated communication system created by JUNAAB in March 2020, at the start of the pandemic.

An interesting development in our structure is hybrid meetings. Hybrid meetings are face-to-face meetings [frequently with limited attendance] which install a computer or cell phone hooked to a projector. An online connection is established, streaming the face-to-face meeting, and the platform is projected onto a wall or screen at the physical location. Thus, both online and face-to-face attendees can participate and share, leading to unity in the groups.

I would like to quote from Warranty Four in Concept XII, which I believe should always be our guide:

“That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and, whenever possible, by substantial unanimity.”

“Here on the one hand we erect a safeguard against any hasty or overbearing authority of a simple majority; and on the other hand we take notice of the rights and the frequent wisdom of minorities, however small. This principle further guarantees that all matters of importance, time permitting, will be extensively debated, and that such debates will continue until a really heavy majority can support every critical decision that we are called upon to make in the Conference.”

Thank you for asking us to share our experience. That is how A.A. works!

Links provided by Brazil:

- <https://www.aa.org.br/reuniao-a-distancia>
- <https://sites.google.com/aa.org.br/g-suite/reunioes-a-distancia/lista-das-reunioes>
- <https://sites.google.com/aa.org.br/g-suite/reunioes-a-distancia/relatorios-de-utilizacao?authuser=0>

COSTA RICA

We are writing to you to share our experience on the creation of virtual groups. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, online groups have been created, but this experience is new for us at Alcoholics Anonymous in Costa Rica. Therefore, we have not included this type of groups within our structure as described in our Service Manual.

Sincerely,
Rosemary C. L. Class A Trustee, Class A Trustee

FRANCE

Thank you for your mail. We ask about the same questions here in France. As we are still in the process of reflection, here is the answer we are able to provide you regarding exclusively online groups in France.

We had eight such groups before the pandemic. In order to be considered as groups in their own right, we asked them to set up a committee, in the same way as a physical group, so that they could elect a Representative to the General Services. Some did, some did not. And for those who did, the GSR could certainly attend General Assemblies if it was integrated into a physical area.

In view of the creation of many online groups, and in response to a request from some of them to be integrated into the structure, our Board charged our Structure and General Policy Committee to reflect on the position to be given to these groups within our structure. This committee is working on this issue, and finds that it is very complex. A first report on its work should be presented to our General Service Conference in April 2021.

The members of the committee are wondering in particular how these groups could integrate the structure of the Conference (attachment to a region by the geographical location of the GSR, creation of a virtual region...), but it is very difficult at this time to come up with a clear and satisfactory position for the Fellowship. And the question of members from outside our structure will, of course, be a crucial issue that will be taken into account by our Structure and Policy Committee.

We will be happy to keep you informed of the progress of our reflection.

GREAT BRITAIN/CONTINENTAL EUROPEAN REGION (CER)

Online meetings have been a vital part of my recovery for some years. Living in Turkey (although I got sober in Great Britain) our local group is a part of the Continental European Region (CER). Because of size and, in some areas, the sparsity of English speaking meetings, online meetings have been a part of recovery for some time.

Thus, in 2015 the following question was asked of our Conference:

Would the Fellowship share experience and then make recommendations whether to recognise online groups?

Resulting in the following response:

This Committee shared experience and recommends the recognition of online groups. We request that the General Service Board GB investigate the implications and practicalities of this recommendation. They should also consider how such groups can be incorporated within the structure of AA GB.

The Board to report back to the General Service Conference 2016.

Voting:- unanimous.

Report from the Board to Conference 2016 in response to above.

Online Meetings

This is coming from Conference last year, Committee 1, Question 1:

"This Committee shared experience and recommends the recognition of online groups. We request that the General Service Board GB investigate the implications and practicalities of this recommendation. They should also consider how such groups can be incorporated within the structure of AA GB. The Board to report back to General Service Conference 2016".

I investigated this and I talked to other GSOs, Germany in particular, who have been discussing this for about two years and they said that they are still talking because they are finding it difficult to get it into the structure. What I concluded from that discussion was basically we need to keep it simple. If we are going to do it we need to do the recognition through our existing structure.

Technically we can meet the challenge by amending the Meeting Finder on the Website to show online as a separate meeting type so that they will not get mixed up with the other meetings which are geographically based. Allow autonomy to join Intergroups or not, it's up to the group as long as they follow group meeting guidelines and are self-supporting etc.

We cannot stop them starting up the only thing that is missing is recognition. It's a different way of meeting in the Fellowship and, as I said to you at the beginning, this is about communication, it is about improvement and it's another unique opportunity. I put this proposal to the Board at the last Board meeting and they said come back with a statement which we can present to Conference. Our initial findings are that it is feasible to include an online group on the AAGB Meetings database and thereby recognise that group from a search on the website. This may require some minor changes to the meeting finder function of the website. It is envisaged that the group would register with GSO in the normal way using a pink form or online, ideally it would attach itself to an existing intergroup as is custom for all new groups although this is not mandated by the Fellowship. It is then up to the group/intergroup to facilitate the meetings, appointment officers and arrange pot collections etc. as is done by any group in becoming self-supporting.

Would Conference like to adopt this option to be taken forward by the General Service Board? Conference approved the above with a two-thirds plus majority.

How it works in practical terms...

English speaking meetings in Continental Europe form a separate Region (our structure is Groups / Intergroups / Region / Conference / – we have 15 regions based in Great Britain, and Continental European Region (CER) is our 16th). The area covered is massive (more extensive than the US), but some countries have few or no English-Speaking meetings. Because of this, online meetings

have long been a part of the landscape, and have been recognised by the Region, if not fully accepted until more recently by the broader service structure. Because of the Region's size and the cost of sending officers and representatives of the Intergroups to Regional Assemblies, the Region has been holding at least some of its Regional Assemblies online for a number of years, to reduce both cost and travel time. Whenever possible, it has also held hybrid meetings when holding face-to-face meetings, enabling those that can't travel to attend. This has enabled representations from groups across the whole of the Region.

Also, because of the distances involved and sparsity of meetings in some areas, many groups are not a part of an Intergroup, but the Region does give them a voice at Regional Assemblies as directly affiliated groups. It is one of the Region's objectives to provide access to AA services and support, particularly in isolated and remote areas.

In 2017 the online groups got together and formed the European Online Intergroup to serve them. The Intergroup was accepted as part of CER and allowed online groups to take a more active role in the service structure (one online group attended Regional Assemblies for some years before this as a directly affiliated group, sending a representative to Regional Assemblies).

The meetings, being online, there are no practical limitations to the groups' point of origin. However, suppose the Intergroup is to have representation at Regional Assemblies (bearing in mind that some will be face-to-face). This must be affordable; which can place some restrictions on where trusted servants can come live. For example, a group with many members in South Africa (SA) could join the Intergroup they would not be able to serve in any capacity at the Regional Assembly, including being a representative of the Intergroup at Region, simply because of the cost of travel. (Note that while the Region tries to provide online access to face-to-face meetings, this is no guarantee due to connectivity issues in some of the locations where Regional Assemblies meet. Because of this for the face to face meetings, we need to send the standard two representatives from our Intergroup. In time this might change, but not yet. We have seen in the past year, of course, a massive surge in numbers meeting online, and indeed our Intergroup and Regional assemblies are currently all held online. For groups, this can create some question as to where their roots are. I have tried to answer this for some groups recently. I will share my thinking with you, and you can make of it what you will.

When I first got sober in Bristol, there was just one Intergroup (called Avon) for the whole area, part of the West Midlands Region. As group numbers rose, the groups decided to split into two Intergroups. The city is divided by the river Avon running east-west through the city, it naturally formed a North and South divide. So the Intergroups were named; with the idea that groups South of the river would join Avon South, and those north of the river would join Avon South. However, the groups had other thoughts about this, and quite a few groups north of the river joined Avon South, and those south of the river joined Avon North. In practical terms, it made no difference at all. The groups were entirely free to exercise their autonomy. So, across the country, we might draw lines on

the map to indicate a region, the groups themselves have no obligation to follow that line. Mostly this occurs around boundaries, but sometimes because of a difference of opinion, we can find the group from one Intergroup in the middle of a different Intergroup's area. I guess we were never too good at colouring within the lines...

When newly formed online groups have asked me "*which Intergroup should we join?*" I have suggested that they look at their origins. If the roots were in a group that was part of an Intergroup, then why not merely join that intergroup, especially if the majority of the attendees are local to the area.

If, however, they simply formed online (as so many online groups within Europe have), why not join the Online Intergroup of CER? There are clear advantages to an online group being part of an online intergroup, in that all the groups will probably be facing similar problems, but for the most part, there is no real difference.

The Online Intergroup is looking into safeguarding policies for such groups, for example, people who are threatening self-harm or suicide. How best to help these poor souls when often we might not even be sure where they might be. They might not have all the answers, but the structure is working well. Of interest to me too, is what the groups think of themselves, especially those with some years of experience. They say: "*We are not online groups; we are groups that meet online; we too seek to fulfil our primary purpose.*"

It is perhaps rather sad that the Forward the 4th edition of the Big Book was changed. Sometime after the second printing, the wording on (page xxiv) changed. The first and second printings read:

"Fundamentally, though, the difference between an electronic meeting and the home group around the corner is only one of format. In any meeting, anywhere, A.A.'s share experience, strength, and hope with each other, in order to stay sober and help other alcoholics. Modem-to-modem or face-to-face, A.A.'s speak the language of the heart in all its power and simplicity."

The line "*Fundamentally, though, the difference between an electronic meeting and the home group around the corner is only one of format*" has been removed. Perhaps in the light of what we have learned in the past twelve months, it is time to revisit that decision?

Best wishes with your deliberations. I hope you will be able to share some of the thinking that goes into them. Nigel P. Chair - The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous (Great Britain) Limited.

GREECE

Dear friends,

We inform you that in our country pre-pandemic we had an internet group running which had been taking part in General Service Committees with voice and vote.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

Today during pandemic all our groups have gone on line skype and zoom.

Two groups have appeared after the pandemic to be as only on line (they had no previous existence) and are now participating at our Service Structure which in Greece is the Intergroup, with voice and vote.

With much heart –felt A.A. gratitude, from Greek GSO

ICELAND

The discussion remains in Iceland what to do regarding surge in online meetings. We have had few online meetings before and we have always listed the meetings on aa.is and we also do that now with all the new meetings. One thing I can add to this is we invite all the online groups like regular groups to participate in the general service meeting in Iceland that will be held in May next year.

IRELAND

Summary: online and physical are recognised as equal. A group with no former affiliation can now be part of the structure as an online meeting so long as it has a contact. All meetings have official AA Ireland email addresses.

Our chronological experience in Ireland for online meetings is as follows:

1. Prior to the pandemic there were no A.A. online meetings in the Irish A.A. structure (or even outside the structure). Information on physical meetings was always on our AA Ireland website and can be found here.
2. When the pandemic hit, two things happened:
 - a) Physical groups migrated to online using their same group name.
 - b) A lot of meetings with no previous physical location or group identity opened up.
3. In response to this, the GSBAA of Ireland guided GSO to set up an additional page on our website which is exclusively for online meetings: See here. Attached as a PDF also.
4. The original web page for physical meetings still also exists because many groups were able to reopen when the government made 12 step programmes an essential service. But groups can very quickly change their information to online if anything happens and their group cannot meet. Check here again and you'll see what I mean.
5. Initially the virtual meetings without a former geographic identity were not part of the online meeting page on our website. But due to the number that had formed they have now been incorporated and are part of the structure.

This has all come about with a lot of trial and error, pain and in some cases outright resistance! It will be discussed at length at our next Conference in early March.

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

There are some who do not recognise online meetings at all and obviously do not agree that they are part of the structure, in particular meetings that were set up with no former fixed abode. But our GSBAA did decide early on that we had to respond to the crisis outside of Conference which was a whole year away when it all started.

In fellowship: Moira S. WSD Ireland

ITALY

From the Gruppo “Disposti a crescere” (“Willing to grow” group) - Italy 2021. We are happy to be able to share our experience as a group born and raised completely online. Our group started in March 2020 soon after the beginning on the lockdown in Italy. We meet every Friday at 7pm CET via Zoom. From the very beginning we had attendees from many different parts of Italy and Switzerland. In September we held elections for the steering committee and decided to write to our national GSO in order to be listed on the national AA website and be able to contribute with our 7th tradition. What they basically told us is that we cannot be listed anywhere because we are not linked to any physical group. So we cannot participate to the service structure in our country and as a consequence we do not have a right to vote. In the meanwhile our group attendance continues to grow and many members from southern Italy, where AA is sparsely represented and alcoholics have to travel long distances to meet, rely on us to be able to participate to meetings. Thank you very much Cristina, Group Secretary

LATVIA

Did online-only groups participate in your general service structure before the pandemic? Before the pandemic, we had one small online group in Latvian. Member of this group attended our annual General Service Conference, but in the status of the guest/observer. There was an idea to grant the right to vote for this delegate, but this decision hasn't been made til now.

Are they able to participate now? We haven't had the Service Conference since the beginning of the pandemic. But we are planing to held it this Spring or Summer. Now we have very strong online group plus many groups which usually meet in person, but now are online. We think now is the right moment to take online group seriously and grant the right to vote. All the more so because these groups donate to our common needs.

If online-only groups do participate in your service structure, are there any concerns that members from outside of your structure have a voice and/or a vote? As far as I know there are no such a concerns. There are not many Latvian speakers in the world (about 2 million), so, if someone joins Latvian language AA group, we presume it is ok she/he is a part of AA Latvia Fellowship.

NORWAY

The situation you are addressing was discussed at the last board meeting here in Norway. Several online groups have been established during the pandemic

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

and the problem with how they could fit into the Conference Structure soon came along. So far the issue has been handled in the following way:

First of all the GSO used some time to clarify if this really was a group or just a meeting place. Some just wanted to have the listing at the web page and had not even considered if they were a group or not. Some understood that they were an offspring of an already existing group and then just could be listed as one more meeting in that structure. Eventually some considered themselves to be a group, with regular business meetings, an elected GSR and a unifying group conscience. They were then urged to decide in which district they belonged and the necessity to have a postal address. So far this arrangement has functioned well. We have representation by these groups through the structure, and they contribute to the common welfare, both practically and spiritually. This is, of course, a very new phenomenon, so we will pay close attention and hope to hear from other parts of the AA community on this matter.

All the best – Morten vK, GSO, Norway

PARAGUAY

Good morning and warm greetings from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous of Paraguay.

In response to your request for experience on online-only A.A. groups, we would like to let you know that we do not have virtual groups in Paraguay. A few were created during the pandemic in order to maintain contact among members. However, we have no record of such groups remaining active as independent groups. What we have are groups that offer both virtual and face-to meetings.

Whenever possible, groups are meeting face to face. Therefore, in our service structure, for the time being, we only have members who belong to face-to-face groups.

Without anything else to share at this time, in closing, I would like to wish you happy 24 hours.

Secretary, General Service Office
Alcoholics Anonymous of Paraguay

PORTUGAL

We are now discussing how to integrate the four only-online groups in our service structure. Using our service manual procedure, they formed an “intergroup” (pre-Área set), to start to talk and discuss how they can be active part, with voice and vote of our structure.

If they succeed organizing and preparing themselves, they will be proposed to be part of Portuguese structure in a conference, after being sponsored by an Área during a given period of time (usually 2 years).

CONFIDENTIAL: 71st General Service Conference Background

Now we are discussing this, and we are very interested in your conclusions and if you can share other countries experience with us. We tried to have more information but didn't had success.

Kind Regards - Porfírio S. Chair, Portuguese GSB

RUSSIA

In Russia we had before pandemic and still have some only online group which are part of AA structure of Russia. These group are part or some districts. In 2016 online groups wanted to organise the Internet Area. They put this idea as a conference topic. But after discussion during conference they changed their mind and resigned this topic because felt the online groups not ready yet to be organized as a area. We don't know do online group member voting anywhere else. It doesn't worry us. We are looking at them as a members face to face group which we can't control as well. In 2013 we had member of online group who use to live in London. Online group recommended him as a ESM delegate and in the conference elected him as a international delegate.

Yours in service Uliana M. WSM delegate Russia.