

2023 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions

ITEM E: Review report of the GSB Ad-Hoc Committee on Participation of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada Service Structure.

Background notes:

2022 Committee Consideration of the Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions

The committee reviewed the Progress Report from the trustees' Ad Hoc Committee on the Participation of Online Groups in the U.S. and Canada Service Structure and expressed appreciation for the ad hoc committee's work. Given the Fellowship's interest in this topic and a desire for accountability to the Conference, the Conference Policy/Admissions Committee requests a progress report be provided as part of their background material in advance of the 73rd General Service Conference.

2021 Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference

It was recommended that:

The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation by listing groups who request to be listed in Fellowship Connection according to the group's preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group's primary contact. This replaces the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as "International Correspondence Meetings."

It was recommended that:

The General Service Board form a committee to explore future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada General Service structure.

Background:

1. Report of the GSB Ad Hoc Committee on Participation of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada Service Structure.

General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous

2022 PROGRESS REPORT

AD HOC COMMITTEE ON

Participation of Online Groups in the U.S. / Canada Service Structure

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Progress report from the 2022 Final Conference Report

Section 1 – Background, History and Current Reporting

BACKGROUND

The sudden onset of the pandemic in 2020, as we all well know, created a brand new (for most) environment for Alcoholics Anonymous groups around the world – the virtual one. Suddenly unable to meet in a face-to-face setting, the quick pivot to available, inexpensive meeting platforms using internet technology by many groups has led to interesting new challenges and has pointed up the need for new ways of thinking regarding the incorporation of this new platform into A.A. life in a manner that respects our Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

Participation in A.A. life up to 2020 had logically relied on geographic structural organization, particularly for general service work. What new opportunities have arisen? What are we missing? What are the challenges? What are the constantly changing emergent concerns? The virtual reality will be with us long past the pandemic, and we need to be looking to the future.

These and many other questions were top of mind for delegates to the 71st General Service Conference in the spring of 2021. Two advisory actions were passed directly pertaining to the topic:

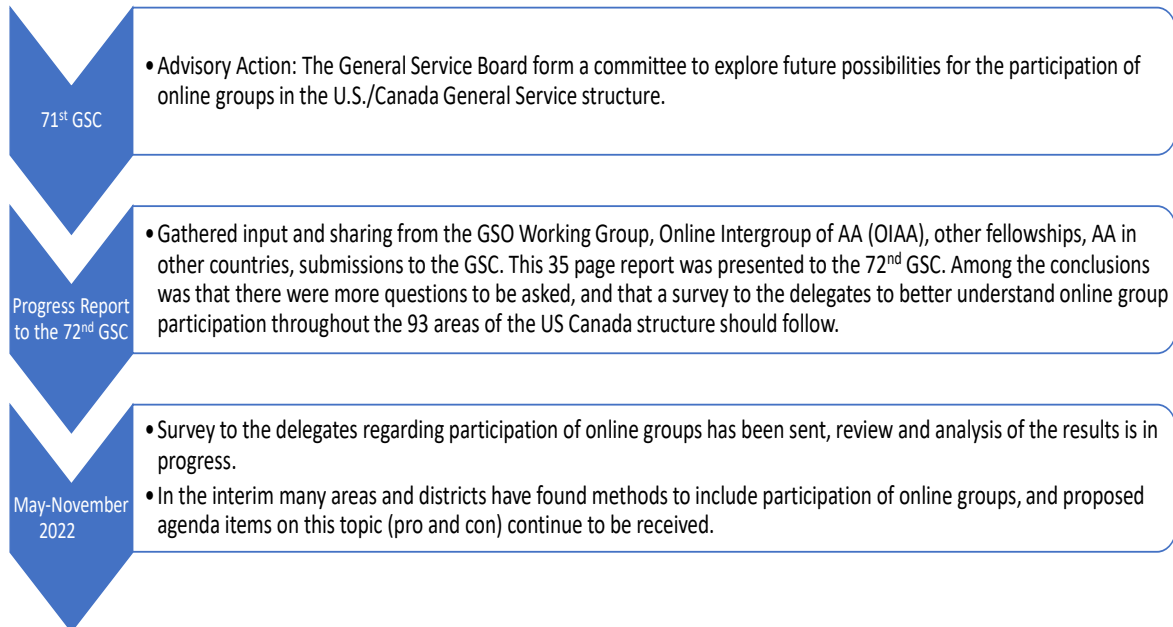
- I) *The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups who ask to be listed within the group's preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group's primary contact. This supersedes the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as "International Correspondence Meetings."*
- II) *The General Service Board form a committee to explore future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada General Service structure.*

An office working group was formed to respond to Advisory Action I, regarding the listing of virtual groups. It is important to note that Advisory Action I clearly recognizes online groups, and that the Working Group revised the New Group Form to facilitate that change. It is now called the new group listing guidelines/Form and is available at <https://www.aa.org/gso-new-group-listing-guidelines-form>

Regarding Advisory Action II, the General Service Board chairperson constituted an ad hoc committee of the GSB to explore the participation of online groups in our U.S./Canada general service structure. The ad hoc reported out to the 72nd General Service Conference. That full report is included as an appendix at the end of this 2022 report, and is also available in the Final Conference Report of the 72nd General Service Conference, available through your District Committee Member, Area Delegate or by emailing conference@aa.org. We are now offering our 2022 progress report, building on the first one in 2021. As well as attending various events pertaining to the topic through the US and Canada, the Committee has focused on communication within the general service structure through the Delegates, as can be seen in the survey results in this progress report. Analysis and work continues.

Participation of Online Groups

GSB Ad Hoc Committee



Section 2 – Current Database Information

As of December 6, 2022, the GSO database had 883 listings for virtual groups in the U.S./Canada general service structure. Of these 883 groups, 587 of them have a GSR as their primary contact. In April 2022, there were 595 active virtual groups in the database. That is a steady increase in the number of groups

There are currently two virtual districts that are listed in the GSO database: District 20 in Area 48, and District 25 in Area 72. Other areas may be in the process of forming or accepting virtual districts, but only two are currently listed by GSO. Both of the virtual districts have seen a steady increase in the number of virtual groups joining them.

Section 3 – Delegate Survey

A – Survey Data

The ad hoc crafted a series of questions for the Delegates. The initial survey was sent out on September 28/22 and 67 responses were initially received. A reminder notice went out on October 8 and an additional 4 responses were received. Total responses were therefore 71, for a 76.5% return rate.

A follow up survey was sent out on November 4, seeking additional information about question #6 in order to try and get some clarity about the composition of virtual groups. 51 responses were received.

B – Survey Questions

The actual survey as distributed follows:

General Service Board Ad Hoc Committee on Participation of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada Service Structure

Dear Delegates,

Thank you for your help with gathering information regarding online/virtual groups in your Area.

As you likely know, the 71st General Service Conference passed two advisory actions related to the participation of online groups:

“The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups who ask to be listed within the group’s preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group’s primary contact. This supersedes the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as ‘International Correspondence Meetings.’”

“The General Service Board form a committee to explore future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada General Service structure.”

The Trustee’s Committee, created as a result of the second advisory action, gave an interim report at the 72nd Conference, and now, is looking for more information from your Area. This is a check-in with you. We want to know the kinds of experiences and discussions you are having in your Areas. Our objective is to accurately reflect the current state of online/virtual participation of our Groups in the General Service Structure, and we sincerely appreciate your help in doing that.

Please note the following instructions:

- We are looking for **one response** per Area. We realize there are a few surveys being conducted right now, some of which have asked for broad distribution.
- For the purposes of this survey, we are requesting that **Delegates ONLY** fill out and return the survey.
- We encourage you to share as much as you wish. All comment boxes, large and small, allow for responses of 20,000 characters.
- The deadline for returning the survey is **Friday, November 4**.

(Begin Survey)

CONFIDENTIAL: 73rd General Service Conference Background

1. Area Number
2. In your Area, are both the Area and Districts welcoming participation of online/ virtual groups?
3. What discussions regarding participation of online/virtual groups in your Area /Districts have taken place? Are there discussions underway regarding future participation?
4. Are you aware of any online/virtual groups in your Area that have chosen to not connect to the General Service structure, either by choice or by circumstance?
5. What is your sense of the kinds of online/virtual groups in your Area? For instance, are they mainly new groups? Are they groups that transitioned from live to online/virtual? Do you know if they intend to stay in whatever their current format is?
6. To the best of your knowledge, do online groups in your area have members from multiple districts, from outside of your Area or from other countries?
7. What motions around this subject are underway or have been made/passed in your Area?
8. What is your Area doing as far as participation at District meetings and Area assemblies for online/virtual groups?
9. Has your Area invested in equipment for hybrid service events?
10. What is the cost to facilitate online/virtual group participation in your Area?
11. Are there virtual Districts in your Area?
12. In your Area, have there been any questions or discussions about forming a virtual Area?

Thank you for your participation!

C – Survey Response Overview

The Delegates from 76.5% of 93 areas responded to the survey with great enthusiasm. The conversations received were wide and varied and very well discussed at the area. Several were fascinated with the variety of the responses and both the similarities and differences from area to area.

The complexity of the issues was acknowledged. It was also noted that many of the challenges facing online groups are the same as those of brick & mortar groups, that they are universal challenges for A.A. groups.

Based on the surveys there are many areas that have found viable solutions to issues related to the participation of online groups. Rather than a dilemma needing to be solved, there may simply be a need for collated shared experience.

It was also shared that areas are figuring it out. Those who haven't had the conversations yet will do so. This is an illustration of how sharing back and forth helps move the process forward.

CONFIDENTIAL: 73rd General Service Conference Background

While unity was recognized it was also noted that in one survey, the delegate answered “Yes, online groups are welcome” but further comments revealed that online groups were not actually being included.

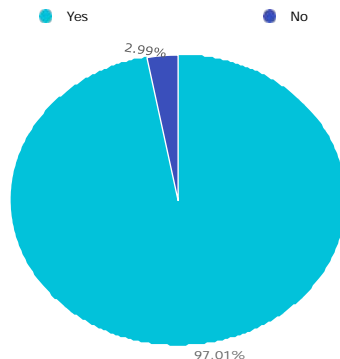
It was shared that there is a desire in the Fellowship for clarity and guidance, a thirst to know “what we’re supposed to do.” Some are waiting for that answer from the GSC. While the Conference can “generate some rules” it may be preferable to provide guidance through collated shared experience rather than binary answers and finite responses. It was noted the GSC can provide clarity when it comes to processes related to listing groups.

Sample Survey Responses

The following sample responses show the variety of perspectives and experiences throughout the service structure.

QUESTION 2

In your Area, are both the Area and Districts welcoming participation of online/ virtual Groups?



- We're paying attention to inclusive actions so that online folks at the hybrid assembly are truly a part of the business
- There is a Linguistic District that will not allow online / virtual only groups to participate
- They are welcome to participate in-person at Area
- One County currently considering addition of a virtual District
- We were clear as an area that if your virtual group elected you as a GSR, you could participate at our area assemblies with the encouragement to register
- Area and district service events and general service meetings encourage the participation of online groups
- Some of our members who choose to only participate via in-person meetings have not necessarily been so “welcoming” of the online groups
- Though it's not the preferred practice of meetings with many, it's welcomed
- Waiting for the GSB to create the guidelines so we have something to follow
- Our Registrar sends a welcome letter and CCs the DCM to invite the group to fully participate with their voice and vote at both district and area
- They have allowed us to keep A.A.'s hand extended. We also recognize that they are here to stay.

QUESTION 3

What discussions regarding participation of online/virtual groups in your Area /Districts have taken place? Are there discussions underway regarding future participation?

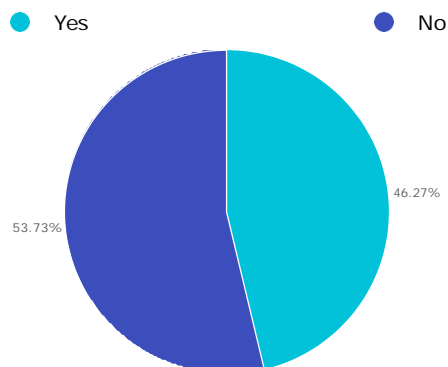
- We treat them as any other group and looking to GSO for guidance
- Our Area is waiting for information from the Conference that is conclusive and gives adequate direction

CONFIDENTIAL: 73rd General Service Conference Background

- Concerns about members from other countries serving as GSRs (or being the majority of the members) and following the proper process for listing with GSO were discussed
- A virtual forum in addition to the in-person regional forums would be appreciated
- We have had many local discussions generally, without it necessarily resulting in formal motions
- Things start to get a little interesting when we start discussing HOW they should be included
- Some are more tempted to encourage A.A. as a whole to make a unified decision via the Conference
- Curious on a larger scale how a virtual area would work in our general service structure
- We are watching the information coming from the subcommittee on online groups and sharing this information with the Area
- Few online groups that we have now do not want to participate at the District level, Area level, or register with GSO
- How can we fully integrate virtual only groups into the service structure of Area
- Discussions center around whether a virtual group should join the virtual district or the geographic district of their choice
- Area has seemed to embrace online/virtual groups as if they are any other groups
- Our last two election assemblies have been hybrid and two members online were able to stand for Area positions and were chosen to serve
- They are asking how do they fit into the service structure
- Still awaiting clearer guidance from GSO on fitting online groups into the service structure

QUESTION 4

Are you aware of any online/virtual groups in your Area that have chosen to not connect to the General Service structure, either by choice or by circumstance?



- As with in-person meetings, the online meetings are challenged to get and keep GSRs
 - One comment has been that the group sees their role as being national /international and the current response from GSO to virtual groups is to frame them in terms of geography or affiliation with existing service structures
- Many groups are confused about the difference between being a "registered group" and having their meeting listed
 - Too early to know
 - There were some meetings set up by individuals that never participated in General Service
 - Some want absolutely nothing to do with the General Service structure
 - Only groups listed with GSO are on our current schedule
 - People are unsure of how to proceed. At the 71st Conference, we awaited direction Then we were told it would happen at the 72nd. Didn't happen there, either
 - They are not connected because they do not know how to do it. This is the purpose of guidelines

QUESTION 5

What is your sense of the kinds of online/virtual groups in your Area? For instance, are they mainly new groups? Are they groups that transitioned from live to online/virtual? Do you know if they intend to stay in whatever their current format is?

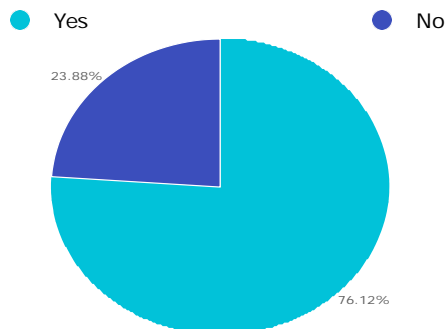
- Some online groups were in-person meetings before the pandemic and have chosen to remain virtual
- Other groups decided to convert to a hybrid platform after the pandemic
- Groups are new with hybrid or virtual platforms and intend to stay that way
- Some do intend to stay with their current virtual-only platform
- There are MANY more than that that are still meeting virtually that have not changed their status
- An online group is formed as an online group and intends to stay online
- An in-person group transitions from in-person meeting to online/virtual and intends to stay online
- An in-person group transitioned online, half of the group wants to remain online while half of the group returns in-person
- Majority intending to stay virtual
- We have many that are not structured and are not interested in becoming part of the General Service Structure
- New groups being developed for the purpose of reaching more people outside the area
- Decided to remain online/virtual
- Plan to stay in their current format
- Have several new virtual groups
- Not aware of any groups that were previously physically meeting that have transitioned to online/virtual only
- A lot of new groups. Some that transitioned from in-person to either online only or Hybrid. They plan to continue this process
- Our area is open to online groups
- Strong resistance to online assemblies
- We have a number of very strong virtual-only groups that began during the pandemic, all of which plan to remain virtual
- Have a few virtual groups that transitioned from live to virtual
- Have out-of-state participation and indicate they wish to continue in a virtual format
- Wanted to stay virtual created and registered a new group
- Will continue to offer virtual/hybrid to support the members from out of the area who are regularly attending the group
- Some groups and meetings seem to want to meet without any connection to the District, Area and AA as a whole
- Seeing a substantial decline in online groups and online groups going dark as we move back to in-person groups
- Some groups have decided to permanently stay as online groups, discontinuing in-person meetings
- Some people with accessibility issues have opted to remain connected online as independent groups
- Some AA members seem to prefer to meet online, whether for convenience or safety or both
- Most intend on staying online
- Most intend to stay in their current format
- There was a natural elimination when face-to-face meetings became available again

CONFIDENTIAL: 73rd General Service Conference Background

- Some face-to-face groups have chosen to remain virtual due to the difficulties of finding trusted servants

QUESTION 6

To the best of your knowledge, do online groups in your area have members from multiple districts, from outside of your Area or from other countries? (See also follow-up questions after Question 12)



- Members of the group include U.S. members and Ireland members (among other countries). The group is trying to figure out where they belong, where they should send their 7th Tradition funds, etc.
- Most of them have members from all over the U.S. and in some cases, other countries. That is primarily due to them sharing meeting codes on social media
- For the groups that have contacted us we encourage them to use the Traditions to guide the group conscience when making the decision on what District and Area to join
- Some with members from multiple Districts, and possibly other Areas
- Many are worldwide attended online groups
- Mainly multiple districts
- Many have members from across the state at the least
- Other states, not necessarily other countries
- One group who has home group members from Italy, CO, and PA
- Have members from other states and multiple districts, no other countries
- Have regular members from around the country and the world
- Some members of Europe participate in our virtual meeting
- GSRs from other Regions (and other provinces) and French-speaking members from everywhere where French is spoken (Canada and Europe)

QUESTION 7

What motions around this subject are underway or have been made/passed in your Area?

- Motion to have a two-year hybrid trial for assemblies
- Motion to separate Website Coordinator as a separate position
- Ad hoc committee to review this complex Tech. Coord. position
- Currently have an ad hoc investigating the question (maybe hybrid area assemblies e.g.)
- Passed: to include virtual groups that register in our area to have a vote and GSR at the area level
- We passed a motion almost 2 years ago to offer Hybrid Assembly and have been offering it ever since
- The only motion is to provide a means for online/virtual to participate.
- Motion - Should we list meeting times on website for online groups that are not registered with GSO
- Motion to create a technology committee to run the hybrid meetings, rather than volunteers
- We passed a proposal in October 2021 to welcome a virtual district

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- Our votes have been roughly 50/50 that the ACMs move to virtual only, rather than hybrid as they are now.
- The Area committee voted in June 2021 to "resume Area meetings and events to in-person beginning with our September Area quarterly meeting; as long as all safety and health requirements are met." We do not offer an online or hybrid option to participate
- We have an ad-hoc committee looking into the feasibility of hybrid assemblies with two-way participation to include all groups in Area
- We voted to continue hybrid meetings through this year
- There's a motion in one district to "force" all groups into a hybrid format
- Area has agreed to make its committee meetings hybrid, but otherwise has not moved beyond listing meetings that districts choose to list
- Develop an Online District
- Motion was made and passed to hold all Area service meetings in a Hybrid format
- Our Area has adopted GSO actions
- We plan to create a separate (virtual) District to bring them together within our area

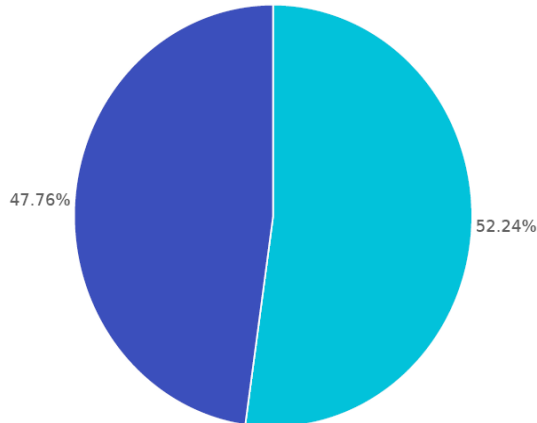
QUESTION 8

What is your Area doing as far as participation at District meetings and Area assemblies for online/virtual groups?

- Must have group number from GSO in order to participate in the Assembly
- We are hybrid for Assemblies and Area Committee Meetings
- All voting meetings/assemblies at our area level are hybrid
- First hybrid election assembly in November. Eligible members may qualify or vote in either space, but the eight area officers we are electing must be willing and able to attend all future assemblies and area meetings, etc. in person
- The plan is to have hybrid capabilities for our February 2023 Assembly
- We have a virtual component to our business meetings and Delegate pre- and post-Conference reports
- All voting must be in person
- Holding in-person Area Committee Meetings and Assemblies with an online component (or hybrid)
- Leaving the districts to make their own decision
- Some districts are operating hybrid to accommodate online/virtual groups
- Hybrid if they have an online group
- We are holding our area committee meetings and assemblies hybrid for now
- Area meetings are hybrid. Many Districts are also either online or hybrid
- Currently looking into devices for the committees to use at Area Assembly to allow participation on Service Committees that meet during the assembly for those who attend virtually
- We are now offering participation by virtual as well as in person
- Districts are taking various approaches to include groups, but the Area is not
- Added an additional assembly each year that is virtual
- Voted not to have any online or hybrid District or Area meetings
- Most district meetings remain virtual, and area meetings and assemblies are hybrid
- Hold all our Area service meetings in a hybrid format
- Our Area Committee Meetings are hybrid. Our Assemblies have been virtual since the start of the pandemic
- Our quarterly Area events are now all hybrid. We have ad hoc committee defining hybrid events to eventually incorporate into Area handbook

QUESTION 9

Has your Area invested in equipment for hybrid service events?



- Have invested in the equipment
- Purchased zoom account
- Technology purchases for hybrid capability
- Relying heavily on tech 12 for assemblies

- Purchased four identical laptops with cameras so all cables could be interchangeable, with warranty protection and carrying cases
- May need to purchase a portable soundproof booth for assembly interpretation
- Two districts have invested in some equipment
- We will be voting on funding additional equipment
- Zoom subscription
- Purchased a new laptop and some other type of equipment
- Purchased cameras
- Spent \$3800 to have the ability to hold the assembly meetings in a hybrid format.
- Around \$7.5k CDN

QUESTION 10

What is the cost to facilitate online/virtual group participation in your Area?

- \$1,000 per year
- We're currently \$4,600 over our \$5,000 budget for the year
- Approximately \$150 - \$200 per quarter
- Hotspot -\$500 initial fees and purchase, \$50 per month to use
- Onetime hardware purchases (laptops with cameras, wi-fi routers, cables, carrying cases, etc.): approx. \$4000
- Hotspot data plan (multiple devices): currently \$235/month
- Travel reimbursement for tech committee members: average \$345/month
- Equipment for the hybrid meetings was approximated \$2,500 - laptop, two-way Mixer/interface, Shure microphones, mic cables, \$700 360degree camera, \$700 iPhone for wi-fi hotspot. Four tables for committee use - \$900. Zoom account (\$250)
- Price of zoom to approximately \$1000 per quarter
- Zoom license, a MiFi, an investment of maybe \$1600
- Less than 20 dollars a month. Zoom subscription
- Zoom account which cost us roughly \$40 a month
- Zoom account (around \$150 annually)
- Zoom account each month equaling approximately \$17
- Equipment and services, it is up to around \$4000
- Spent under \$2500 for all the equipment
- The budget is \$2900
- Cost of making our assemblies fully hybrid was approximately \$1,500
- Spent less than \$2000
- Tech 12 runs at about \$2,500 per assembly
- Have a budget of \$3000 for the year for doing Zoom and hybrid
- \$150.00 for zoom account

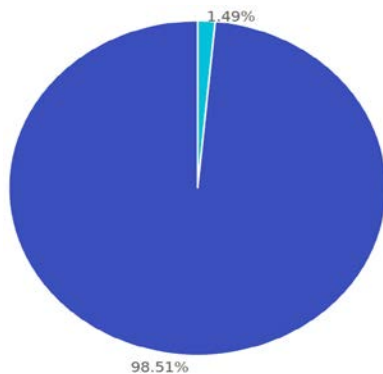
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- \$500-\$1,500 per year
- Approximately \$2000 per assembly
- Cost to purchase equipment was approximately \$1,500 – cost is \$150 per year for a zoom subscription
- \$1000 per year
- For a group of less than 100 people: +/- \$200; for a group of more than 100 people: +/- \$800
- \$500, more or less
- Estimates are in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 region

QUESTION 11

Are there virtual Districts in your Area?

(The majority of the answers were no comment – below are some of the comments)

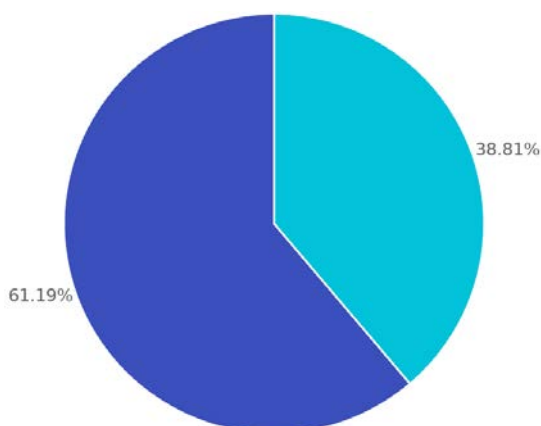


- I do not sense that that is an interest at this time
- Mixed feelings about the need or desire in our area
- Not come up as a formal motion at any point yet
- Not yet but some are discussing
- Possibility was studied and not retained

- Asked the body of area if they wanted a district or area for virtual. Very little participation discussing developing one

QUESTION 12

In your Area, have there been any questions or discussions about forming a virtual Area?



- Discussed a separate conference. No definitive action
- Majority of our area was in favor of participation of virtual groups but had mixed feelings about a virtual area being the best answer
- There have been questions about the process for forming a virtual district or Area
- How much a virtual Area still potentially be limited?

- If a virtual Area was created, would all virtual groups be forced into it? Or only those virtual groups that choose to join it?
- Is a virtual service structure of its own (with its own GSC and GSO) possible?
- What about groups with international participation?
- Where does hybrid fit in?
- Ad hoc committee now studying this topic

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- Discussed the logistics of this with regard to U.S. Canada being GSO's purview
- Discussions to see what GSO is going to do about a virtual area
- Received many questions regarding a virtual Area
- During my Conference report backs, some discussion was had regarding a virtual area. Many comments indicate this would be a good idea
- More of a question of what is GSO doing and the Ad Hoc subcommittee on Online groups
- Discussed about whether or not we need another Area
- Tons of discussions - creating even more divisiveness of thoughts and groups
- Have already discussed this without further details from GSO, pending
- The issue was raised at one assembly, but there was no final suggestion/recommendation reached. The general consensus seemed to favor having online groups be a part of the General Service Structure in the geographic location in which the majority of the members lived.

Follow-up Questions:

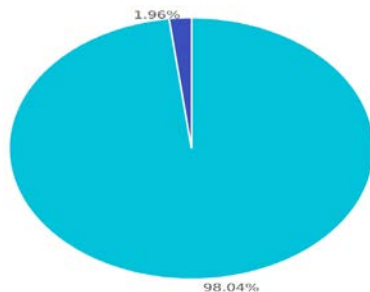
Sent as a separate survey, to clarify Question 6 responses concerning make-up of online groups

QUESTION 1

Area Number

QUESTION 2

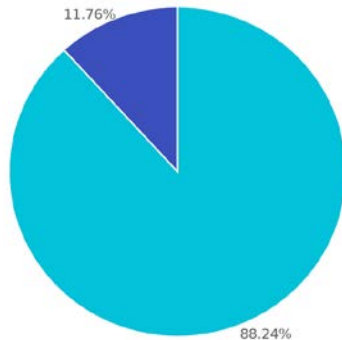
Do online/virtual groups in your Area have members from multiple Districts?



- Yes, there are members from multiple districts
- People can login from anywhere, they are not all in the same districts
- I know that one group does, and the plan is for the GSR to attend the registered District meeting Zoom, right now the GSR & Alt attend and are in the local district. I believe the same is true for another, but it has been a long time since I attended that one. Not sure about others
- I will say yes because that's what I understand but I have not personally polled any groups
- Membership in virtual groups seems to be independent of physical location
- Members from different areas and at least at one point international
- Some do and some do not
- But anchor in one district they choose

QUESTION 3

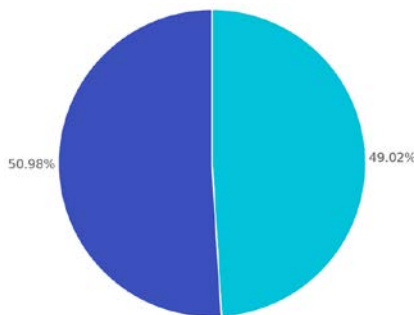
Do online/virtual groups in your Area have members from outside of your Area?



- Zoom has reunited many members of my home group who have moved away from the area
- A few, but not many
- I again have heard that this is probable but have not personally investigated
- Membership seems to be drawn by the topic of the virtual group, the time held, and the members in attendance
- One group has a GSR who lives in Texas
- Yes, these groups have members from around the U.S. and Canada. It is also common for members who have relocated from the original district/area to stay connected with the group and its members. One online group has an annual in-person picnic to allow its members to meet; members fly in from around the U.S. to attend.
- Members from different areas and at least at one point international
- But anchor in the area and district the operator lives
- Yes, there are groups near other areas that have members from outside the area. This includes both virtual groups and physical groups. For example, there are several groups from Illinois that have asked to participate in Area 24 structure. Those groups participate in District 10 in Dubuque, Iowa
- Some do and some do not
- Yes, some regular attendees are from other Areas, but do not hold or want to hold office

QUESTION 4

Do online/virtual groups in your Area have members from outside of your Country?



- Unknown, but I assume so
- I don't know
- There are two very large meetings that have hundreds of people attending virtually from around the world
- Some virtual groups have members in Mexico and Europe
- The numbers are small but yes, they do have regular members attending from other countries besides the U.S. and Canada
- I did hear that a group had some members who joined that were from other countries
- Some virtual groups have members in Mexico and Europe
- Not at the moment, but there is nothing to stop it in the future
- Members from different areas and at least at one point international
- Don't know
- None that I am aware of
- I am forced to enter an answer here, but the truth is I honestly don't know :)
- Not that I know of

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- Not consistent/not core members
- Not yet
- I am aware of one group that meets this description. I am unsure if there are more. Additionally, a different twist on the question: there are some A.A. members in this Area who consider their home group to be a virtual group that is in another country
- Only one does but that group is linked / registered to Online Intergroup ONLY
- Australia

Section 4 – Regional Forums Workshops and Presentations

Through our Regional Forums (the virtual Forums in 2021 as well as the Regional Forums in 2022), opportunities were provided for interactive sessions on topics of concern and interest in the various Regions. And of course, some of those topics included the current state of online groups. Reports from the workshops and presentations brought up some specific ideas and themes, including:

- A perceived need for guidelines from GSO regarding guidelines for hybrid and virtual meetings, as well as for virtual/online newcomers
- Finding unusual approaches to service work as an online group
- Concerns from members whose home groups are meeting online that there is a perception that “people on Zoom are not really there”
- Interesting perceptions on how online might affect certain current meeting /group structures
- A question about how we use the technology to bring people together who wouldn’t be able to otherwise, without just tacking onto geographic structure
- Further guidelines and information regarding anonymity available to newcomers
- A comment that virtual/online newcomers are chomping at the bit to serve, and let’s show them how
- Sharing regarding the “nuts and bolts” of how to set up and use formats such as online and hybrid meetings, as well as how to adhere to Traditions (7th and 11th, for instance, among others)
- Concerns about what happens as brick-and-mortar meetings start up again, and the longevity of virtual/online, and costs involved with hybrid
- It was noted a few times that there are some online/virtual meetings that are reluctant to share their information publicly and are distributing spreadsheet lists of virtual meetings
- Primary purpose remains the same no matter what kind of meeting, so perhaps we should stop differentiating

The workshop attendance and discussions tended to reflect the perspectives of members who are actively involved with virtual groups. A consideration going forward might be programming full Forum workshops on the topic so all in attendance can both hear and share experiences.

Section 5 – International Perspectives from World Service Meeting

The World Service Meeting held virtually October 1-6/22 provided a vital opportunity to continue international discussions that had been started at the 2020 World Service Meeting regarding online and virtual meetings. The WSM is not a policy making body, but rather is a global sharing session that is one of the ways worldwide A.A. unity is maintained. The theme, “Carrying the Message of A.A. in the Digital Age,” allowed for

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the creation of workshop and presentation topics which gave a snapshot of where the world is right now in terms of incorporating groups into their service structures.

Much as in 2020, internationally, various structures are in various stages of discussions about online/virtual groups. In many places, there is a great deal of engagement and some movement forward. In others, there are still questions about the place of online groups or meetings within their structure.

It is important to note that the ways the members communicate, and the manner in which structures have organized themselves, varies greatly from structure to structure. In the U.S./Canada structure, virtual groups are recognized, and then it is up to the local level to determine the way that groups will be incorporated. That is not necessarily the case around the world.

In one workshop focused on integration of virtual groups into the General Service Conference structure, there were a series of interesting observations. Among them:

- For many countries, online groups are listed in order for alcoholics who want to attend can find them, but at this time listing the groups does not necessarily mean they have been accepted into the service structure in that country or region
- Many European countries reported that they have incorporated online groups into their structures with full participation with both voice and vote
- In some countries, online groups have no voice and no vote, and in some countries, online groups may take part at the local or intergroup level but not at the Conference. In some smaller structures, groups participate at the Conference directly and again some include online groups with a voice and a vote, and some do not
- Some countries do not recognize online groups at all while some countries felt it was important to have a vision for acknowledging online groups as part of A.A. in their country
- Some countries only include geographically based online groups in their structure with a voice and a vote but not international online groups. Online groups need to join a structure if they want to participate

Some opportunities to aid in A.A.'s growth, among them (and unique to the WSM discussion):

- Reaching alcoholics in remote areas – in one instance a vibrant online group led to a physical meeting and the development of an online district
- An influx of young people through online groups
- Gives members around the world an opportunity to connect and share just as we do here at the WSM with speakers and members from around the world
- Able to start meetings in areas and countries where there are not meetings currently
- Potential cost savings by having service meetings online so more could be available for Twelve Step efforts of all kinds

Some concerns about virtual groups were expressed including:

- Some feel online groups lack the spiritual impact of talking with each other after the meeting that is typical in physical meetings
- A perceived lack of interest in service in online groups as well as a lack of service opportunities

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- Concern about privacy and confidentiality
- Seventh Tradition contributions
- Concerns that online A.A. groups may erode personal contact or service activity
- Online meetings where people sleep or just socialize, that don't seem to be A.A.

Much as we have heard in the U.S./Canada, there were comments regarding the development of guidelines, as a useful and important tool.

Of the countries that are actively examining how best to incorporate groups into the service structure, many are in the same place as we are (committees examining the best way for their structures to approach the challenge), and at least one - Australia - has started the process to set up a virtual Area. South Africa is looking at creating a virtual Area. Other countries are in the process of developing what we would consider to be virtual Districts, although in their structural language it is referred to as an Area – Portugal is an example of that. In Ireland, newly formed groups are asked to identify with one of the geographic areas in their structure.

The question still remains regarding those groups which have no geographic “tether” and how to preserve unity throughout the process of determining what is best for all of A.A. One delegate expressed concern about young groups engaging in a global structure through an international entity and what that might mean.

There are still more questions than answers, but as the Delegate from Poland said, in the keynote address, quoting our co-founder Bill W.: “Our Twelve Steps probably won't change. Our Twelve Traditions? Not at all likely. But our manner of communication, our manner of organizing ourselves for service – let us hope that this goes on changing for the better, forever. “

Section 6 – Proposed Agenda Items submitted pertaining to Online Groups

PAI 83:

Reviewed by the Trustees' General Conference Committee and not forwarded to Conference as a separate agenda item.

“That Zoom or hybrid groups not be included in the structure of Alcoholics Anonymous.”

Some of the points made in the submission:

- *Attendees cannot know whether the others present at the meeting are sober.*
- *Online groups are not able to build unity – they cannot feel the group spirituality or fellowship if they are not face-to-face.*
- *Online platforms restrict ability to welcome newcomers resulting in less 12th Step work.*
- *Reduced service by member of online groups.*
- *Potential recording by attendees raises anonymity concerns.*

PAI 181 and ADDITIONAL AREA APPLICATION:

Reviewed by the Trustees' General Conference Committee and Trustees' Ad Hoc Committee on Participation of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada General Service Structure not forwarded to Conference as a separate agenda item

"To create a Delegate Area for Online Groups."

This proposal was 96 pages in total, was prepared by a group of approximately 20 people from 15 groups throughout the U.S./Canada General Service Structure after considerable effort on the submitters' part in gathering information from online groups.

Some of the points made in the submission:

- *Online groups have existed for over 25 years, but still lack access to the service structure if the existing structures do not accommodate online participation. They are existing outside the current Service Structure.*
- *An Online Area would "restore the full Right of Representation to online groups."*
- *The exclusion of an online delegate affects the Conference's ability to be fully informed.*
- *This Area would bridge the gap for members excluded by accessibility barriers including members who are elderly or in residential treatment, people unable to get to meetings because of inclement weather, the voices of diverse minorities and groups unable to afford the costs associated with physical meeting space.*
- *The submission of the Additional Delegate Area Application for Online Groups is the culmination of the effort to learn if online groups have an expressed widespread need for general service participation.*

The extensive and very thorough PAI attachments included poll and survey results collected over an 18-month period through a series of meetings, town halls and other research. The background provided many examples of the depth and variety of service work online groups are currently providing, and a clear desire to have a stronger voice. It also included a completed application for a new Delegate Area. The application was supported by fifteen groups from throughout the U.S./Canada structure.

The proposing group/committee is continuing to conduct electronic surveys.

Section 7 – Suggestions Going Forward

More Shared Experience Needed Regarding Online Groups

While Conference-Approved literature needs to go through the Conference process to be updated, service material has fulfilled the important role of providing shared experience to groups and members when there is a need for timely sharing of information. However, the magnitude of change A.A. has gone through in the last few years has sometimes outpaced our ability to collect shared experience, especially in areas related to online groups. It is clear from the survey responses, sharing at workshops, and correspondence from A.A. members and groups, that there is a desire for more information regarding online groups. Below are links to materials currently available on the aa.org website, in the Group Handbook, and in service kits that have information related to online groups.

[Anonymity Online and Digital Media](#)

[A.A. Guidelines on the Internet MG-18](#)

[GSO New Group Listing Guidelines/Form](#)

[Is Your Group Linked to A.A. as a Whole?](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions on Practicing the Seventh Tradition at Virtual Meetings](#)

[Serving All Alcoholics: Making the A.A. Message Accessible](#)

While they offer helpful information, more shared experience needs to be gathered from online groups on their practices and procedures, the challenges they've faced and the solutions they've found so that it can be integrated into these service pieces. Sharing from one group to another, one GSR to another, one DCM to another, and one district to another will do a great deal to fill the need.

In addition to the resources above, many intergroups and central offices, districts, and areas have guides on their websites that can be helpful to online groups.

As you might expect, the Online Intergroup of A.A - OIAA (<https://aa-intergroup.org/>) offers a number of resources for online groups including: an introduction to A.A. online; a presentation on Safety and Security Settings for online groups; a link to a Zoom Security Guide, a Google doc that is regularly updated; information on anonymity, accessibilities, and service opportunities available to groups and members through a number of OIAA committees and by becoming an Intergroup Rep.

The Technology in A.A. Forum (<https://tiaa-forum.org/>) is for A.A. members (and non-members who support A.A. services) to share about using technology for accomplishing the primary purpose of A.A. There is a guide to hybrid meeting considerations created to help groups think through the challenges of holding hybrid meetings. Information is available on hybrid set-ups for A.A. meetings, service assemblies, and other events This includes lists of the equipment needed, ways to optimize participation, and information on conducting voting procedures at hybrid events. There are also threads on ways to welcome newcomers at online meetings as well as shared experience on safety and anonymity online. Members are also able to pose questions to the TIAA community.

In addition to updating existing service material, new FAQs, guidelines, and other sources of shared experience could be developed. Here are some topics related to online groups that may want to be explored.

While the 71st General Service Conference passed an advisory action in 2021 recommending "that the U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation by listing groups who request to be listed in Fellowship Connection according to the group's preferred district and area" many members of online meetings are still not aware that they can be listed with GSO or how they might get connected with a geographic district or even a virtual district. A service piece using infographics, an FAQ and/or short video could be great tools for reaching out to online meetings not currently in the service structure to explain the process and their options. Communications conveying the benefits of participating in

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general service are needed for brick & mortar meetings as well as online groups but short term there may be a greater need and opportunity among online meetings and their members.

Online groups who do understand that they can be listed by GSO often have other questions. Common questions heard by the office are: “How do we choose what district to join if we are not tied to a specific geography?” “What do we do if our district or area is unable to accommodate our need to participate online?” “What kind of permission would we need to join a district in another area?” “Are virtual districts accepting groups from outside of their area?” “What if our members are from other countries?” While there are rarely simple answers to these questions a good beginning is to find out what other groups have done.

Similar questions come from groups who are divided over whether to return to meeting in-person, adopt a hybrid format, or continue meeting exclusively online. If they cannot agree on a common format, groups ask if they should split into several individual groups or form an umbrella group with individual meetings. Groups that split ask who gets to keep the name? And who gets to keep whatever money exists. One group shared their experience of being at odds about who could get to keep the treasury until one member said, “Well, who needs it more?” There’s no underestimating the value of shared experience.

A need we continue to hear about is for shared experience on the practices and procedures of online groups. One area of focus could be descriptions of new service positions needed for online groups such as “Tech Chair” and “Troll Patrol.” Other more traditional positions have been adapted to fit online groups. For example, a literature chair for an online group won’t be setting books out on a table or filling a literature rack but instead may be providing digital resources or links to literature using a glide app. Members are also exploring what Grapevine Reps and La Viña Reps can do at online groups to bring the magazines to life. Some online groups have “newcomer chairs” to encourage more interaction with those who are new. “Fellowship Chairs” have considered how that experience of going to the diner after the meeting can be translated to the virtual world.

When it comes to group safety, practices and procedures for online groups continue to evolve. Providing links in service pieces to frequently updated materials about security settings could also be helpful for online groups.

It might also be helpful to gather shared experience on ways that online groups have used their particular expertise in working with district and area service committees to:

- Bring online meetings to treatment facilities, correctional facilities, nursing homes, and rehabilitation centers
- Reach out and connect with remote communities
- Help members who are homebound or have mobility issues
- Offer more options for the Hard of Hearing, Blind members, and Deaf members
- Use simultaneous interpretation to offer meetings in more languages
- Provide meetings for immunocompromised members
- Offer meetings 24/7 for A.A.s who are shift workers, new parents, or caregivers.

- Make meetings accessible to those who have lost their driving privileges

Lastly, it would be helpful to collect shared experiences from districts and areas who are holding assemblies or other events in a hybrid format. What considerations went into the decision to try a hybrid format? What have the challenges been? Has it led to greater participation of online groups? What were the costs? Some survey responses touched on this, but more sharing would be helpful.

Section 8 – The Ongoing Conversation

There are still, as there were with the first progress report, more questions than answers. However, the shape of the questions continues to evolve and change. It is apparent that many conversations are happening at Area, District and Group levels, and that there is a need and an appetite for continued shared experience. There are voices that we continue to need to seek out and hear from in this still-evolving picture and process. It is a remarkable one to be a part of.

Trustees' Ad Hoc Committee on Participation Of Online Groups in the U.S./Canada General Service Structure

Please note that the following progress report, submitted as background for the 72nd General Service Conference, will continue to be updated up until Conference. It will be presented at Conference with the latest information.

PROGRESS REPORT

SECTION 1 — Background

The sudden onset of the pandemic in 2020, as we all well know, created a brand new (for most) environment for Alcoholics Anonymous groups around the world — the virtual one. No longer able to meet in a face-to-face setting, the quick pivot to available, inexpensive meeting platforms using internet technology by many groups has led to interesting new challenges and has pointed up the need for new ways of thinking regarding the incorporation of this new platform into A.A. life in a manner that respects our Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

Participation in A.A. life up to 2020 had logically relied on geographic structural organization, particularly for general service work. Has A.A. now outgrown a solely geographic structure? What new opportunities have arisen? What are we missing? What are the challenges? What are the constantly changing emergent concerns? The virtual reality will be with us long past the pandemic, and we need to be looking to the future.

These and many other questions were top of mind for delegates to the 71st General Service Conference. A result were two advisory actions directly pertaining to the topic:

- I. *The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups who ask to be listed within the group's preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group's primary contact. This supersedes the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as "International Correspondence Meetings."*
- II. *The General Service Board form a committee to explore future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada General Service structure.*

An office working group was formed to respond to Advisory Action I, regarding the listing of virtual groups. Advisory Action II, led by the General Service Board chairperson constituted an ad hoc committee of the GSB to explore the participation of online groups in our U.S./Canada general service structure. The following is a progress report from the ad hoc committee on our efforts.

It is important to note in the progress report that when we say "virtual," we are referring to not only online groups but also telephone groups including the various formats our groups choose to use such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, What's App, email, etc.

As an ad hoc committee, we have developed a Composition, Scope and Procedure document, approved by the General Service Board, to guide our work. An important part of our scope is to be useful to groups as they list and to learn how to support changes, make improvements and provide services needed. We are in the gathering of information phase — the experience that we will need to draw on is being created as we work on this. Since the ad hoc committee was formed in August 2021, and after the Composition, Scope and Procedure document was developed and approved, the committee has met seven times, thoughtfully moving forward with the subject. Since this is new territory, without a parallel, our research is of necessity forward-looking rather than historical. We have therefore been meeting with other entities to try and gather shared experience, strength and hope from many perspectives.

As a committee, we are also keenly aware of our international responsibilities and perspectives. While our committee is looking at participation specifically in the U.S./Canada structure, we are also mindful of any impact that policy and/or procedural decisions may have on other service structures. It's important to the Board and to this ad hoc committee that there is always global unity and strength as the A.A. message is carried around the world. We as an ad hoc committee understand that we can learn from our friends around the world in terms of their experience.

SECTION 2 — Existing tools to help the Fellowship

A number of possible agenda items were submitted to the General Service Conference coordinator for consideration as agenda items for the 2022 General Service Conference. The Conference coordinator forwarded these items to the appropriate trustees' committee, and that committee chose to forward those items to this ad hoc committee. All of these possible agenda items were discussed, and while the trustees' General Service Conference Committee ultimately did not recommend the forwarding of the items as agenda items, they did give a snapshot of current ideas and thinking. Primary among them was the formation of virtual areas. The current process for forming a new delegate area is outlined in the Service Manual, pages 108 and 109, and there is an extensive application form that can be found online on aa.org.

Another important document is the updated New Group Listing Guideline Form, which has been developed by the GSO Working Group. This document can also be found online on aa.org.

SECTION 3 — Shared experience that we have been able to gather so far:

SOURCES: GSO Working Group

This group has been tasked with implementing the advisory action mentioned before: The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups

who ask to be listed within the group's preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group's primary contact. This supersedes the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as "International Correspondence Meetings."

The ad hoc committee was grateful to attend one of the working group's regular meetings and heard from Craig W. (Group Services coordinator), Jeff W. (staff coordinator) and Racy J. (International coordinator) about the progress they have been making.

As part of the implementation of the advisory action, there was a thorough review of the New Group Form and a new one was created. This new form is both service material and a listing form in one. Discussion points include listing in the U.S./Canada service structure, meeting lists versus listing for communication purposes throughout our service structure, the recent advisory action regarding online groups, suggestions for how new groups can make a good start, helps inform the discussion of a group versus a meeting and of course the form itself which assists all groups including virtual groups listing with GSO.

The working group has consistently come across the question of geographic service structure with non-geographic groups and how to help most effectively facilitate that conversation. From an international perspective, the office continues to get inquiries from members from other countries wanting to weigh in on our Conference and list with us. The working group has also frequently been asked about how to allow an international member to be a GSR. Considering we are a U.S./Canada structure and as far as listing goes, we only have the capacity to list those trusted servants in the U.S. and Canada. The biggest challenge the working group has come across is an advisory action that gives direction but also asks the GSO to list groups in districts and areas we have not even had the chance to communicate in detail with or they themselves are just starting to have conversations about. Again, we are all learning...

Online Intergroup of A.A.:

Virtual meetings are not new — far from it.

From the OIAA website *"The first A.A. meetings online used Bulletin Boards and were around 1986. Email groups started forming in the early nineties and the development of the worldwide internet rapidly fueled the growth and variety of groups. The first online A.A. group, Lamp-lighters, was formed in 1990, and has met by email continuously since then. Now there are hundreds of A.A. groups with thousands of members, connected together through this Online Intergroup. Using various mechanisms such as video conferencing, phone conferencing, message boards, email list-serve, and chatrooms, the A.A. community is constantly connecting and finding new, creative ways to communicate the experience, strength and hope of recovery in Alcoholics Anonymous.*

Ad hoc members attended, along with our staff resource person, a meeting with the Unity Committee of OIAA. We were to find out more about OIAA and their current concerns and experiences. There were about 45 participants in the meeting, coming from very different perspectives and experiences. It was quite international — there were at least four countries other than the U.S. and Canada in the meeting. If there was a common concern, it was expressed as a certain amount of frustration at a lack of recognition of the value and place of virtual meetings, particularly at the district level. It has active service committees, with a Twelfth Step Committee, PI Committee, Website Committee and others. While it cannot offer groups participation in the General Service structure (and there was some frustration voiced in that regard), it does provide service opportunities.

Other Twelve Step Fellowships

The Group Services desk stays in communication with other Twelve Step fellowships both through regular communication, and through the Day of Sharing (last held on December 7, 2021). Some fellowships are in the same position as we are, transitioning and going through growing pains. Others are further along a path forward. Here is some shared experience. Please note that each of the fellowships have their own structure — and all of them are different from our A.A. structure. Many of them for example, have a single World Service/General Service structure, so their experiences and solutions may not be directly applicable to the U.S./Canada situation. All fellowships agreed that the virtual world is part of a permanent reality.

Al-Anon Family Groups: Al-Anon recently formed an electronic area with 640 groups with 920 meetings. There are over 200 GRs (equivalent to GSRs). A temporary area chairperson was elected and will facilitate the assembly with elections for a delegate, chairperson and secretary. The virtual groups include Zoom, Second Life, phone, Discord, What's App, Skype, Jitsi. The process was in place for a couple of years and the plan is to have the newly elected delegate come to the GSC in April for official seating. Each area is discussing what their process is and how they will connect their local structure and the virtual groups. International groups are allowed to participate currently but where in the International Structure there is willingness to list virtual groups, they are encouraged to create their own areas in their respective country. The group's contact needs to communicate in English, Spanish or French.

Narcotics Anonymous: NA has been collecting survey data to find out what is happening in its communities in terms of needs. They want to continue discussing how virtual meetings are connecting to NA by listening at this point, before developing policies and tools. That's very similar to where we are.

Overeaters Anonymous: OA has a virtual region with its own trustee in its structure. They have had online meetings since the late 1990s. It was decided in 2018 to create a virtual region, with a dedicated trustee (their current trustee lives in Brazil). Since March 2020, virtual activity has of course exploded. Virtual groups have the choice to affiliate with a land-based service board or intergroup, rather than a virtual one. Anecdotally, many, if not most of the current virtual meetings are affiliated with land-based service boards — they went virtual only due to the pandemic. It's not clear what may happen with these pandemic-related virtual meetings once they have the option of face-to-face meetings again.

Cocaine Anonymous: CA's history with online and virtual meetings goes back to the early nineties. Their online groups were supported by IT services based in Southern California and when they decided to petition Conference to be recognized as an area they joined the Pacific South Region, even though the group's membership was spread across the globe. The Online Service Area (OSA) stayed fairly static at about 20 groups until the pandemic. What has become a little contentious is where the various types of groups "should" be aligned within the service structure. Some members of the OSA thought that all "Online Groups" should be part of that area. Within the first three months of the pandemic the OSA grew to approximately 80 groups. There was some reaction to this quick growth and groups started contacting the regional trustees asking if they really had to leave their areas to join another area aligned to a region on the other side of the world. During the pandemic the Board tried to steer away from any decision-making that wasn't absolutely necessary, both to avoid creating governance and to allow the situation to play out. Holland and the UK have both created online districts, aligned to areas within which their membership resides. There is an Online Service Area Manual, and at the next CA World Service Conference, a suggestion to form an Online Services Committee may be put forward.

International Experience

European Service Meeting (ESM): The trustees-at-large/U.S. and Canada attended the European Service Meeting, October 22–24, 2021, specifically to see if other countries are incorporating virtual groups into their service structure. Much as we are finding here, many ESM countries are unsure at this point what integration into a structure will look like. One comment that had a lot of heads nodding was that these questions will answer themselves, a solution will be found, and structures will be created to support those solutions. Ireland has agreed to incorporate virtual groups into its structure. Portugal is still seeking a way to do that. It was noted that the Central European Region — the English-speaking meetings of Continental Europe, which are part of the ESM, have long had both online meetings as well as regional participation in service as virtual groups. Their "First164yp" groups have been meeting using virtual technology for a number of years, and they send two representatives to regional assemblies.

REDELA (Meeting of the Americas): The countries in our home zone are in very different places in terms of their discussions about virtual groups (and meetings). Acceptance of them has not been universal, so for some countries, incorporation into the service structure is not an issue that is even on the radar yet. Other countries are, like us, seeking ways to make sure groups' voices are heard. In Brazil, many virtual groups want to become part of the structure, but there is also some resistance to the idea. Their GSB is working to find a way to build discourse. Other countries, such as Uruguay, are finding that virtual groups are participating through contributions, and are beginning to have group representatives. Argentina is, like us, working on a way to have virtual groups in the structure. The U.S. and Canada trustees-at-large meet with their REDELA colleagues monthly and will be updating as situations change.

SECTION 4 — What data do we have? What data do we need?

Here's what we have:

Currently in the GSO database there are over **595** active virtual groups in the U.S./Canada general service structure. All these virtual groups, like any other A.A. groups, have a district and an area they are listed with. Out of these over **595** virtual groups more than **300** have a GSR and more than **10** of those have an Alt. GSR. There are approximately **350** groups in our database that are in the process of being contacted regarding what district/area they would like to be a part of since there is no address associated with them currently. This is because of the previous practice of listing virtual groups prior to the most recent General Service Conference advisory action.

Here's what we know:

The highest number of groups in any given area is 2,300. The lowest number of groups in any given area is 159. The average number of groups per area is currently 765. As seen, the current number of virtual groups, spread across all 93 areas, is over 595. The Group Services desk reports there has been an increase in virtual listings consistently since the 2021 General Service Conference. It seems based on experience that this pace of virtual groups being listed, and the virtual groups still left to be contacted without a district or area, will easily reach the current "average" number of groups in an area in less than a year.

And here's what we really need:

Information/data from Area Delegates: We have some suggestions that may help create informed discussions locally. We also have a few questions we can send to the area delegates in survey form.

a. Suggestions for delegates:

- If you do not already have your "read only" access to Fellowship Connection, please contact memberservices@aa.org to get that.
- Once equipped with the "read only" access, please work with your area registrar to become aware of how many virtual groups there are in your area.

- Please contact these virtual groups and gather some information regarding participation in the U.S./Canada service structure.

b. Questions for delegates:

- What discussions regarding participation of virtual groups in your area/districts have taken place?
- Are your area/districts welcoming participation of virtual groups?
- What motions around this subject have been made/ passed?
- What is your area doing as far as participation at district meetings and area assemblies for virtual groups? Hybrid?
- What is the cost to facilitate virtual group participation?
- Does your area have virtual districts?

SECTION 5 — From submissions for consideration at the General Service Conference

As noted, a number of submissions for agenda items concerning virtual groups came to the Conference desk in September 2021.

Since the 71st General Service Conference passed an advisory action for the GSB to form this ad hoc committee to explore possibilities, it was felt that bringing these items to Conference at this point in time might work against a full exploration of the issues.

While the trustees' General Service Conference Committee did not forward them to the Conference, they were forwarded to this ad hoc committee to inform our discussions, and the committee is grateful for the time and thought that went into the submissions.

Some excerpts follow:

Hypothetical Scenario 1: A virtual group consists entirely of A.A. members in Connecticut. If the group decides to be listed as a group in Nebraska, even though all its members live in Connecticut, the 71st GSC advisory action indicates that this group would be listed in Nebraska.

Hypothetical Scenario 2: A virtual group consists of seven A.A. members — six from Connecticut and one from Tennessee. The group makes no preference about which district in Area 11 (Connecticut) to join. The one member from Tennessee serves as the group's primary contact and registers the group with the General Service Office. The group is now registered in Tennessee because the address of the group's primary contact serves as the default location.

Hypothetical Scenario 3: A virtual group has existed for many years and has thirty different members living in thirty different areas throughout the United States and Canada. Which district or area makes sense for them to be part of?

“How does a new area usually form? How does a new area form when it is not separating from an already-existing area? How do various international service structures differ from the U.S./Canada service

structure? What is the value of being registered with the General Service Office as a group and why do group records matter? How does an Intergroup/Central Office differ from an area? What are the different reasons members belonged to virtual groups prior to the Covid-19 pandemic? What is a linguistic district and how do the needs of virtual groups differ? What are some of the ways that different areas are autonomous in how they are structured, and how might that be relevant for a virtual area? **What exactly makes an A.A. group an A.A. group, anyway?**”

“(An international group) started on June 10th, 2019, on the WeChat platform as an English-speaking group. We moved to the Zoom platform in January 2020 with one meeting which focuses on the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of Alcoholics Anonymous. Today we have two other meetings. ... We are a group which has homegroup members, active in service, from 16 countries across the globe. We are not limited by one geographical location and have no physical address. Therefore, we are not eligible to participate in the existing service structures based on national or language guidelines. We are self-supporting through our own contributions.”

SECTION 6 — Moving Forward

Yes, we still have far more questions than answers.

This committee will continue with its exploration and research into future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada general service structure. While many of the ideas that have come forward concern virtual areas, is there some broader, bigger, visionary thinking that we are missing? Perhaps the online groups might want to form their own service structure, not attached to any geography? (Something along the lines of what our Board chair called “Intergalactic A.A.”)

We will continue to report to the Board and to the Conference as we work together, in unity and with respect, to chart new territory in carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. We cannot do that without you, and we thank you for your part in it.

Respectfully submitted by the GSB Ad Hoc on Participation of Groups in the US/Canada Service Structure, February 23, 2022.

Trish L., Trustee-at-Large/Canada

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