

# Electronic Groups

## History in the Making

Members began meeting electronically in the mid 90's primarily by telephone. Initially they were thought to be a supplement to face to face meetings (S60) and a means of public outreach. Time and technology have advanced the number of platforms members are meeting on and all platforms from telephonic to internet to app based are considered Electronic Meetings. Currently there are 16 different platforms where you can access an Al-Anon meeting.

Electronic meetings evolved outside of the service structure of Al-Anon Family Groups, with a CMA (current mailing address) as the primary point of contact for the group. The staff at the World Service Office (WSO) fielded questions, registered meetings and met the needs normally fulfilled by trusted servants elected within a group meeting. As the number of meetings has grown, the reliance on these meetings as a sole system of support for many members have made evident the need to incorporate these groups into the service structure of Al-Anon Family Groups. The number of meetings has grown from 252 in 2019 to 700 registered meetings as of March 31, 2021. The global crisis has obviously escalated the need for more virtual meetings. These numbers **do not** reflect the temporary electronic meetings that evolved out of the past year's crisis.

The 2021 World Service Conference voted on key changes to allow permanent electronic meetings to formally reach group status, thereby opening the door to an electronic Area represented by an Area Delegate. The electronic Area will be formed by groups through their newly elected group representatives.

Key changes to the text of the Service Manual were relatively simple to make:

- Eliminating the section on Electronic Meetings from the Digest portion of the Service Manual (pages 88-89)
- Including the definition of 'non-geographically based grouping' to the definition of the World Service Conference Structure in the Handbook.
- Broadening language to indicate location rather than a geographic place to allow for a wider variety of meeting formats.
- The term 'confidential ballot' replaced the words 'closed ballots'.

## Next Steps

Permanent electronic groups are beginning to discuss how this change impacts them. GRs and other trusted servants will need to be elected which means educating groups on the importance of the group representative.

A temporary Chairperson will be elected and call on the GRs to set a date and location for an Assembly. At the Assembly the GRs will vote on DRs, Officers and a Delegate. The Delegate will attend the 2022 World Service Conference where they will petition to be included as an Area.

Permanent electronic meetings will automatically be a part of the Electronic Area. The Electronic Area, because it does not have a physical boundary, is considered adjacent to, or contiguous, with all other Areas.

Districts or groups have sometimes found it beneficial to join another District or Area that they are contiguous to, due to proximity, for instance. This change is done through the group conscience of both Districts/Areas. Both parties must be in agreement. See the section in the Service Manual Handbook on Renaming an Area, Changing a Group/District to a New Area.

Consider this illustration. A meeting was formed in Grinnell, IA when I was district representative. Grinnell is in District 8 but very close to the border with District 7. The Grinnell GR petitioned both of the District 7 and 8 DR's to be a part of District 7 because the town is closer to Des Moines, many of the members attended meetings in District 7 and the District 7 district meeting was closer to the group. The GR's request was granted by both Districts.

## End Goal

Our Area may be petitioned by an electronic group to join us. We need to consider what the benefits and risks would be and how this would impact our service structure. There are many questions and ideas to explore, so we begin this weekend by opening the conversation about what that would look like for Iowa.

## Timeframe

Our timeline looks like this:

- June 2021 - Introduction of Electronic Meetings as Groups to Assembly
- July 2021 – Town Hall to talk further with members
- August 2021 – AWSC meeting – DRs bring unanswered thoughts/questions from GRs
- October 2021 – Assembly - GRs discussion and consensus on including electronic meetings

If the GRs vote to include electronic meetings into the Iowa Area service structure, then:

- January 2022 – AWSC – Develop a KBDM thought force to explore Area procedures for admitting electronic groups.
- March 2022 – AWSC updates on our Area processes/questions/concerns
- April 2022 – Delegate to WSO to vote on new electronic Area
- June 2022 – Assembly – Update groups on the WSC vote and discuss where E meetings are headed.

## Time to Talk

We will review the questions brought to us by the WSO in the Electronic Meeting Guidelines.