

Transforming Electronic Meetings into Al-Anon Family Groups A Guide for Geographically Based Areas in the WSC Structure

About This Guide

Well, we did it! Al-Anon's largest group conscience, the World Service Conference (WSC), has recognized Electronic Meetings as Al-Anon Family Groups and they have become part of our Al-Anon service structure. As a Delegate at the 2021 WSC, you have been part of history! And we bet you may be wondering:

- What does this mean for our Area?
- What do we need to do next?
- How soon do we need to answer these questions?

This document offers **guidance for you and your Area** in holding an informed group conscience to answer these questions!

Definitions

As a reminder, this guide relates to **permanent registered groups which meet only electronically**, i.e., those without a physical component. Groups meeting temporarily via electronic platforms during the pandemic are expected to eventually resume meeting in their physical locations, with or without an electronic component, and source their trusted servants from within the geographic Area. These groups will not need to reregister with the geographic Area. (See Appendix A—Existing Groups in Geographic Areas)

Resources

You may find it helpful to review the “Changing a group/District to a new Area” (p. 158) portion of the “World Service Handbook” section of the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24/27)* version two (2) as you prepare for Area conversations.

Using This Guide

First Things First

Let us begin by stating clearly that **no decisions are immediately necessary**. Geographic Areas **have a year** before the WSO can provide them the opportunity to begin registering groups which meet only electronically. Below is the fastest anticipated timeline. Areas can take as much time as they need before deciding when and how to begin registering groups which meet electronically.

April 2021 – March 2022:

- Areas discuss and decide whether and how they might accept groups which meet only electronically in their service structure—defining Area policies and procedures, if appropriate.
- WSO supports groups which meet only electronically in the non-panel Area to elect GRs, a temporary chairperson, and a Delegate.
- WSO makes changes to group forms, database systems, and the Online Group Records platform to enable geographic Areas to welcome these new groups and begin maintaining their group records.

April 2022: WSC members consider admitting the new Area to the WSC (if the non-panel Area has completed its preparation process).

May 2022: Groups intending to remain geographically local and having the desire to participate in the local service structure may petition a geographically based Area for admission, i.e., permission to move from one Area to another.

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Planning the Process

Delegates are encouraged to begin the conversation about admitting groups which meet only electronically with their Areas as quickly as possible following the 2021 WSC. If the next Area Assembly does not occur shortly after the 2021 WSC, Areas may wish to consider other approaches, such as town hall meetings, workshops, and panel discussions, for holding conversations with their groups. To complete the process, Areas need to:

- Inform Group Representatives (GRs) and District Representatives (DRs) about the questions to be answered and decisions to be made.
- Plan the timeline for DRs to discuss District impacts and share these with the AWSC, if possible, prior to the 2022 WSC.
- Plan when GRs can bring the voice of their groups to an Area Assembly, if possible, prior to the 2022 WSC.
- Define when and who might create Area procedures for admitting groups which meet only electronically from other Areas.

Areas may consider forming a Thought Force to answer the Knowledge-Based, Decision Making questions and understand what else is known or unknown. The Area may wish to consider how to include Al-Anon's spiritual principles in the discussions. Members may find readings on Tradition One, Tradition Two, Tradition Four, Concept Nine, or Warranty Three of Concept Twelve relevant and helpful.

Making an Informed Decision

What Do We Know?

Through conversations held regularly with permanent electronic meetings as part of its representative role, the WSO has gained insight into considerations Areas may need to discuss before making an informed group conscience decision about admitting groups which meet electronically to their Area.

- Groups which meet electronically often attract members and have trusted servants who do not reside within the boundaries of one geographic Area.
- Some groups wish to participate in the local service structure—their trusted servants usually live within the boundaries of the local service structure.
- Hybrid District and Area business meetings can be challenging to host as they require strong Wi-Fi at the physical location, technology to display and hear remote participants, and trusted servants dedicated to ensuring members attending electronically are able to hear and participate fully.

What Do We Need to Know?

To make an informed decision at the Area level, it may be helpful to discuss the following questions at the group level:

Question 1

What are the potential benefits of welcoming non-geographically based groups into our geographically based Area? What are the potential risks? Are there any options for overcoming the risks?

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Question 2

Groups which meet electronically often attract members who do not reside within the geographic boundaries of the Area. These members may be encouraged and willing to serve our groups, Districts, and Area as trusted servants. What impact might this have on our District and Area service structure? What impact might this have on how our Area service responsibilities are fulfilled?

Question 3

Groups which meet on electronic platforms and seek to participate in the local structure may have trusted servants who reside in different locations across the geographic Area. How would the Area determine in which District(s) these groups would participate?

These questions may be helpful to discuss at District and Area levels:

Question 4

How might Areas Assemblies and District meetings need to change to accommodate trusted servants living within and outside the Area? Would Areas need new service roles to support groups which meet electronically? Why or why not? Are our groups willing to financially support additional Area service roles and/or technology?

Question 5

Because Electronic Meetings were not a part of any service structure, some of their members may not have participated in District and Area meetings. How might our Area welcome and support them? How might we help them understand the service structure in our Districts and Area? For example, are members willing to organize service workshops? Are members willing to act as Service Sponsors? What other kinds of support could our members provide? Are there any kinds of support which it would be wise for us not to provide?

What Does the Area Need to Decide?

Recognizing that in accordance with Concept One the ultimate responsibility and authority for Al-Anon services within our Area belongs to its Al-Anon groups, Areas whose groups have discussed these questions may find themselves ready to answer the following:

- Does our Area wish to permit groups which meet electronically to participate in our Area service structure?
- If so, what guidelines and boundaries might our Area need to define regarding service participation in our Districts and Assembly? What other changes to our service structure might be required?

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Appendix A – Existing Groups in Geographic Areas

Hybrid Groups

The 2021 WSC decision to recognize permanent electronic meetings as Al-Anon Family Groups removed the Al-Anon Policy barrier which had prevented registration of groups which meet face-to-face while also providing an electronic platform for those who cannot or do not wish to attend in person, aka hybrid groups. The WSO has no plans to distinguish groups as face-to-face, electronically only, or hybrid. All groups are Al-Anon Family Groups—the only difference is their meeting location or locations.

Groups which were meeting temporarily on electronic platforms due to the pandemic that choose to continue meeting using a hybrid approach once restrictions are lifted do not need to inform the WSO.

Areas can now register hybrid groups without violating Policy; however, the WSO Online Group Records program does not currently permit capturing both a physical address and an electronic platform location for any Al-Anon Family Group. Therefore, Areas which choose to register hybrid groups need to decide how the electronic component will be captured and displayed for the time being.

The WSO's immediate focus following this historical WSC decision is to enable Area Group Records Coordinators to welcome and maintain group records for groups which meet only electronically. In the future, the WSO may expand that capability based on the experience and needs expressed by Areas which have groups meeting in a hybrid manner.

Groups Meeting Electronically Temporarily Which Choose to Stay Fully Electronic

Some Al-Anon Family Groups which have been meeting on electronic platforms temporarily during the pandemic may choose not to return to a face-to-face setting. These groups do not need to reregister; however, technical system limitations will preclude Area Group Record Coordinators, and even the AFG Records Team, from updating meeting location information for these groups through the Online Group Records application until the WSO Staff has completed the application development work. Geographic Areas, which in their autonomy have completed their discussions and reached an informed decision about Area procedures related to groups which meet electronically, can work with the WSO Staff on making any updates possible in the meantime.