

Welcome to Iowa's Town Hall on Electronic Groups and the potential inclusion of them into the Iowa Area Service Structure. Welcome to all of our visitors from different areas. We hope that viewing our process might help your Area with yours. We have been grateful to learn from your Experience, Strength and Hope too. Many of you are here to listen to Ozzie share at the end of our evening. Ozzie, as the newest Delegate of the World Service Conference, and since we are all now your neighbor, we extend a special welcome to you. I imagine this is a very, very busy time for you so again, thank you for accepting our invitation.

It was an historical, momentous, and emotional moment when the 2022 World Service Conference voted to include the Global Electronic Area into the World Service Conference structure. The inclusion of this new Area has broadened our structure in ways we are all striving to understand. There are many questions for which answers will be revealed in time.

With over 700 groups and more than 1000 meetings, the new Global Electronic Area is larger than many of the Areas that have been in existence for decades. I find myself processing the idea that the GEA is not only our neighbor, but the neighbor to all Areas. This is a very unifying position to be in. I am processing the idea that members in my Face to Face groups are also currently members of the GEA. I was at an anniversary recently where I mentioned to two members that their new Delegate will be speaking at the Iowa Town Hall. It's an interesting concept to share physical meetings and also share Electronic space. As an attendee of electronic meetings, I guess Ozzie is my new Delegate too. Smile. Pause. What a concept!

Let's review how this all came to be.

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 Groups now. Currently the E Groups meet on 17 different platforms and there are over 700 registered groups with over 1000 meetings. (Some groups support multiple meetings.)

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, rather than a GR. The staff at the World Service Office (WSO) fielded questions, registered meetings and met the needs normally fulfilled by a group or district representative. As the number of meetings has grown so has the reliance on the WSO staff and I would imagine that managing this, on top of a standard workload keeps our staff very busy. I am very grateful for their calm, consistent responses to the needs of Al-Anon Family Groups.

Along with regular business meetings with the CMAs, the WSO created a CMA community on AFG Connects to offer mutual support and share common solutions to group problems. The number of meetings has grown from 252 in 2019 to currently over 700 groups with 1000 meetings. The global crisis has obviously escalated the growth in electronic groups and also the demand on the WSO staff. I am interested in hearing how the GEA envisions its future. A desire by the electronic community prompted the Board of Trustees and the Electronic Meeting Work Group to begin discussion on moving the meetings to group status which was what transpired at the 2021 World Service Conference.

Iowa took the temperature of our members at our Spring 2021 Assembly and with the GR's consensus, formed a work group, called the Electronic Groups Work Group (EGWG) to investigate the pros

and cons of including an electronic component into our Area structure. Our 7-person electronic workgroup consists of the Chair, Delegate, Treasurer, Past Delegate, Group Records, Public Outreach and a DR.

Since the 2021 Conference, Iowa has held multiple presentations and discussions covering the questions in the Guideline presented by the WSO. The work of our EGWG culminated in a Gallery Walk presentation and discussion to elicit member feedback. Our investigative process is preparing us for a crucial vote at our upcoming Assembly in June.

This Town Hall offers the members of Iowa a chance to refresh their memories through this review of how we got to this point and to ask any questions or further clarify ideas before the Assembly. Now that the World Service Conference has voted to include the Global Electronic Area into the WSC structure, our perspective is shifting from **what if**, to **now what**. Now we get to take another look at how this might impact our Area. Depending on the direction our GRs take us, groups might have the opportunity to determine which Area is a best fit for them, always keeping in mind our primary purpose of helping families and friends of alcoholics.

Many groups in Iowa are back to face to face meetings. Many are choosing to include an electronic component to allow virtual members to attend a physical group. Some groups may be deciding that they want to stay in a virtual format and never return to face to face meetings. When a group votes to remain permanently electronic they will automatically be a part of the GEA. If their Area has an electronic option, the Electronic group can bypass the GEA and join that Area, in accordance with that Area's process. Members of Electronic Groups will have the choice of staying in the GEA or moving into the structure of Areas that choose to incorporate them into their structure. As we go

forward, principles of unity, singleness of purpose, inclusion, avoiding double headed management, and being self-supporting come to mind. The Steps, Traditions and Concepts will be fantastic tools for staying in our lanes as we move forward.

In keeping with ideas of inclusion, and unity, the Iowa Area has been preparing for this vote at our upcoming Assembly in June.

Our Electronic Group Work Group, in exercising vision, will present three ideas at our Assembly:

- The EGWG would like to propose that Iowa establish District 16 as an Electronic District with all electronic groups filtering into this District first.
  - We felt that creating an electronic district would be helpful for maintaining group records and would ease the transfer from the E district to a physical district if the Electronic group wants to join another district. Basically, we thought it helped connect the dots.
  
- The EGWG proposes that the Iowa Area Alternate Delegate, in cooperation with the Area Group Records Coordinator, will assist the initial formation of the Electronic District (16), and with the election of a DR for this District (if needed).
  - If the first idea is approved, the Area wants to ensure this district is supported but not managed long term by the Area. The EGWG is hopeful that a new DR will step forward quickly and we look forward to registering them with the WSO.

- The EGWG would like to recommend, for the 2023 – 2025 term, that Officer and Coordinator resumes only be accepted from those members who physically reside in Iowa.
  - There are so many unknowns that we felt that by initially keeping our trusted servants within our geographic boundary, we could avoid controversy around money in regard to reimbursements and mileage, etc.

Additionally, exercising foresight has led us to consider the role of a Technology Coordinator to help facilitate hybrid events. This is another key vote we will make in June. We are updating our website to include electronic contributions and payment for events. We are updating our document retention and communication by incorporating cloud-based storage. All of these avenues have come together to put us on an electric highway. All of these upgrades will still be beneficial to our Area regardless of the vote of our group representatives in June.

Considering the large size of the GEA, some of our members have expressed interest in staying closer to home when it comes to business. Others are excited about belonging to the new Area. We have choices and will continue to expand our understanding as we move forward.

In preparation for the vote, our Policy committee has been meeting regularly to discuss changes that will be necessary should Iowa decide to include an electronic district. A virtual policy review after our Assembly to allow the AWSC to digest and direct our Policy Committee, with an approval at our August AWSC and a traditional approval in October. That is where we are to date. We look forward to using this opportunity to answer any questions so that all feel prepared for our Assembly.

Now I will turn it back over to our Area Chair for questions.

## Timeframe

- June 2021 - Assembly (hybrid)- Introduction of Electronic Meetings as Groups to Assembly
- July 2021 – Town Hall (virtual) Open to all members. We discussed the first three questions in the Guidelines that were issued at the 2021 WSC.
- August 2021 – AWSC meeting (hybrid)– DRs brought unanswered thoughts/questions from GRs and focused on Questions 4 and 5 from the Guidelines.
- October 2021 – Assembly (hybrid) - GR discussion. Received GR consensus to consider including electronic meetings in our Area structure. The GRs voted to move forward with creation of a work group we call EGWG Electronic Group Work Group. EGWG consists of Delegate, Chair, PO, Past Delegate, DR, Group Records, Newsletter. This group is meeting on an ongoing basis to discuss WSO questions and ideas specific to our Area.
- January 2022 – AWSC – Electronic Group Work Group (EGWG) provided Powerpoint and Gallery Walk Thru shared via Zoom.

Our January Walk -Thru focused on expanding on the questions that arose during our EGWG discussions. Key points are noted below.

1. Electronic District
  - a. The EGWG feels it would benefit our Area to create an Electronic District to initially house electronic groups. The groups can then either stay in the E-District or move to a physical district.
  - b. Could groups in districts without DRs join the Electronic District?
2. Eligibility to Serve
  - a. Should the trusted servant live in Iowa or a contiguous state?
  - b. Would there be a requirement to attend business meetings physically
3. Technology and Service
  - a. Technology Coordinator
  - b. Accepting Electronic Payments
  - c. Incorporating Google Admin to assist us in communication, document storage, etc.

## Next Steps

- March 2022 – AWSC updates on our Gallery Walk. Workshop on our Area processes/questions/concerns
- April 2022 – WSC Delegate to WSO to vote on new electronic Area
- June 2022 Assembly - GRs will vote on incorporating Electronic Groups into our structure based upon WSC and electronic group requests.

