

Stepping Stones - Beyond the 2025 World Service Conference

At the 2024 World Service Conference (WSC), a task force will facilitate the continuing conversation regarding the location of Conference in the New York area beyond the 2025 WSC.

Background: Prior to the World Service Office (WSO) moving from New York City to Virginia Beach in 1996, Conference members visited Stepping Stones in Katonah, New York, the birthplace of the Al-Anon Clearing House, once every three years. It was also the home of Bill W. and Lois W., Cofounders of Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon Family Groups, respectively.

Beginning in 1999, the New York Conference site required extensive searches “to find a location that would fit our meeting room space and budgetary needs” (1998 WSC Conference Summary). From 1999 to 2008, Conference was held in Connecticut every three years, and Conference members rode buses from the hotel to visit Stepping Stones. In 2011, Conference was held in Virginia Beach, since it was the 60th anniversary celebration. Panel 49 members had an opportunity to visit Stepping Stones before the Conference convened, then fly down to Virginia Beach for Conference and the celebration. This trip was included as part of the Conference budget and Equalized Expense and was organized by Staff. In 2012, Conference was held in Connecticut, and again Conference members rode buses from the hotel to Stepping Stones for a visit.

Due to the rising cost of holding Conference in the New York City area, in 2015, Conference was held in Virginia Beach with the Conference members having the option of visiting Stepping Stones after Conference. Fourteen of the 67 Delegates opted out of the visit. The optional trip to Stepping Stones was included as part of the Conference budget and Equalized Expense. In 2018 and 2022, Conference was held in Westchester County, NY. Due to the pandemic, the 2021 Conference was held virtually, and the WSO arranged for WSC members to watch a virtual presentation about Stepping Stones presented by its Executive Director.

Holding Conference in New York resulted in a net Conference cost to the WSO operating budget of \$98,962 in 2018 and \$110,708 in 2022. Holding Conference in Virginia Beach resulted in a net Conference cost of \$75,214 in 2019 and \$45,333 in 2023. The net Conference costs each year are paid from the WSO General Fund. The remaining costs to host the WSC are paid by the Areas. The gap between the cost of hosting the event in New York and Virginia Beach post-pandemic is continuing to increase, and initial estimates for 2025 suggest it will do so again.

The Board of Trustees has the right and responsibility to decide upon the WSC location each year. In keeping with its fiduciary responsibilities, the Board presented the question of continuing the triennial trip to Stepping Stones at the 2023 WSC. Much of the feedback from the Delegates at the microphone was in favor of continuing; however, the discussion did not include the financial implications nor ways to cover the additional cost. At the close of the discussion, a survey was presented to WSC members, and the

results were tabulated and sent to the Board to glean additional information in order to move forward.

Seeking to balance its fiduciary responsibilities and the feedback from the Delegates at the 2023 WSC, for 2025, the Board of Trustees decided as a one-year trial to:

- Look for a venue in New York or the surrounding area.
- Invite the Delegates to form a team to organize, coordinate registration, and handle the logistics for a visit to Stepping Stones either immediately before or after WSC.
- Commit the WSO to connecting the Delegate Team with Stepping Stones, transportation, and other logistical contacts needed.
- Have WSO communicate the costs to Areas along with the WSC Equalized Expenses payment, collect payments from Areas (only when paid by check), and forward the funds to the Delegate Team.

Discussion 2024 WSC: As we begin the conversation, consider the spiritual principles of balance, responsibility, abundance, and prudence. Reflect as well on Traditions One, Five, Seven, and Ten; Concepts Two, Three, Six, and Seven; and Warranty Three. We will start the conversation with these questions:

- Do the groups in your Area believe it is important for their Delegate to visit Stepping Stones?
 - If yes, how do they see it helping their Area?
- What are the most important elements of the visit to maintain?
- How might it be best to cover the additional cost of Stepping Stones and a New York visit?
- What ideas do you have for administratively making this happen? Do you want the WSO to administer the process? Do you want Delegates to be involved?

We are providing these questions now so that Delegates have the opportunity to gather feedback from their Areas in advance of the 2024 WSC to ensure that all are prepared to participate in a thoughtful and generative conversation.