

May 19, 2021

Area 53 Ad Hoc Committee on Virtual-Only Group Registration

(Dan S., Nita S., Brenda B., Rick A.)

Recommendation to Add New Area for Virtual-Only Groups:

The Area 53 Ad Hoc Committee on Virtual Group Registration recommends that GSO consider adding a new Area to the service structure as a virtual-only Area for those groups that have no affiliate Area. This Area could include all virtual-only meetings/groups that would like to remain/become active in the General Service structure. This new Area would function completely as a virtual-only Area, having groups organized virtually. This new Area could elect a Delegate who is willing and able to attend GSO events and fulfill the responsibilities of an Area Delegate. This would ensure all groups have the opportunity to participate, have a voice, and receive service support, which is a right of all AA groups. After this proposal passes, this new virtual-only Area will have a vote at the General Service level. Once they are formed within the operating structure, decision of this area will be left to this Area.

Background:

Since its beginnings, the General Service Structure has been geographic in nature. The 93 areas in the US and Canada are defined by physical geography, the districts within those areas are as well (with the exception of linguistic districts) and groups are generally part of a district that is geographically closest to them. When online groups began to emerge in the 1990s, it led to a 1997 Conference Advisory Action about how to list those groups which was confirmed and updated in 2005 to read:

On-line A.A. meetings that request to be listed in A.A. directories be added to the "International Correspondence Meetings" in A.A. directories, that each listing include the internet address of the on-line meeting, and that each on-line meeting requesting to be listed in our directories furnish G.S.O. with the name and physical address of a member willing to serve as "mail" contact. This information is provided in the A.A. Directories in a special section titled "Online Meetings/Online Groups."

This Conference Advisory Action has guided how GSO currently lists online groups. It's why there is a different "New Group Form" for online groups, one that doesn't have a space for the location of the group or for the group's "GSR" because they are International rather than part of a district or area. Before the pandemic, many of the members attending online meetings also belonged to a home group that met in a physical location. If those members wished to participate in General Service, they often did so through their physical home group. However, the situation has obviously changed since the pandemic. Many members are only attending online meetings and that may be the case for some time. Also, many online groups have more of an international feel because their membership has grown beyond a specific geographic location during the pandemic. So, having them participate in a new Area rather than in a district within an existing Area makes sense versus an online group with a very "local" membership.

We know that the topic of listing online groups and meetings is being discussed in district meetings, sharing sessions, and area assemblies throughout the US and Canada. So that all groups will have a voice and be able to participate in General Service, creating a new area (Area 94?) specifically for online groups only makes sense.

We certainly do not want the questions surrounding this issue to feel like barriers to any group or member wanting to participate in General Service. Concept IV explores the “Right of Participation.” As it says in that Concept:

The preservation of the principle of “Participation” in our service structure is, to those of us who already understand its application and benefits, a matter of the highest importance to our future.

And near the end of the essay on Concept IV is another passage that feels relevant to these discussions:

There is another good reason for “participation,” and this one has to do with our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to belong. We want an A.A. relation of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the “spiritual corporation” of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as “second class.”