

Subject: \East Central Region: How to Register Virtual Platform Groups and create service positions

From: "Groupservices" <groupservices@aa.org>

Sent: 10/23/2020 1:57:06 PM

To: [REDACTED]

Attachments: Online AA Meeting-Group English.pdf

Dear Cheryl,

Warm greetings from the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm Jeff W [REDACTED] and I currently serve as the Group Services coordinator. Thank you for your email and for the great questions.

Since its beginnings the General Service Structure has been geographic in nature. The US and Canada are divided into 93 areas that follow geographic boundaries and (except for linguistic districts) groups are part of districts and areas based on their physical location. Our office is guided in how we list groups by the General Service Conference and currently we are listing online groups and meetings differently from groups meeting in a physical location. This is in accordance with a 1997 Advisory Action 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."

Once online groups fill out the form and it is processed they receive a number which they can use in correspondence with our office. Members can also use it if they wish their contributions to be attributed to the online group. As you can see on the form there is not a space for a GSR as there is on the in-person form. Before the pandemic, many of the members attending online meetings also had 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 or geographic home group. However, we are hearing from groups and members that this accommodation doesn't seem adequate given how many have moved online.

Online groups fall into several categories – here are some examples:

- Groups that used to meet at a physical location and are now meeting exclusively online. In the past they had a GSR and participated in General Service and want to continue participating.
- Groups that never met in a physical location, that started meeting online has a result of the pandemic, and are made up of mostly local members. They wish to participate in General Service but aren't sure how to proceed.
- Groups that meet exclusively online but rather than have mostly local members, they have members who live throughout the US and Canada, perhaps from all over the world.

- Groups that have adopted a hybrid model, combining meeting in-person and online. Many have implemented technology to hold meetings that are concurrently online and in-person. Others are meeting in-person and online at different times but still under the umbrella of the one group.

In keeping with the autonomy discussed in Tradition Four it is up to your area to decide if you want to create a separate district for online groups as a way to give them a voice in the district, the area, and matters relating to the whole of A.A. Should the area vote to do this, it would be up to G.S.O. to accommodate the area's action. The form we send to online groups wishing to be listed with our office is attached. As you'll see it does not have a place for information such as the GSR's contact information and the date of the group's first meeting. We would develop a new form for online groups if an area voted to have an "online" district.

As we discussed the idea of an 'online district' among staff members, people noted that each area which has one or more linguistic districts has their own unique approach to handling it. Several other questions came up in our discussions as well. For example:

Would all online groups be part of the district or only those who chose to be? What about the different kinds of groups listed above? How would hybrid groups be handled? Would there be any differentiation between groups with mostly local members versus groups with members from other parts of the country or world? How does the area feel about members who live outside the area voting on issues that may feel 'local' in nature? Would there be an obligation for the GSR of an online group to live within the geographic boundaries of the district and/or the area?

In the pamphlet *The A.A. Group*, there is a section on the home group (pgs 15-16). How do we think the experience of having an online group as your home group might be different than with a physical group? That section also says the following:

With membership comes the right to vote on issues that might affect the group and might also affect A.A. as a whole – a process that forms the very cornerstone of A.A.'s service structure. As with all group conscience matters, each A.A. member has one vote; and this, ideally, is voiced through the home group.

How would the new district and area approach this matter, especially with members who live in other areas or other countries with their own structures?

We have heard of two other suggestions from the Fellowship on how members of online groups might participate in General Service. One is establishing a new area (perhaps it would be Area 94?) which would be for online groups. This would require a proposed agenda item which would likely be considered by the Policy and Admissions Conference Committee, and if they chose to forward it, voted on by the General Service Conference. Another suggestion we've heard mentioned is creating a separate structure for online groups through the Online Intergroup of A.A. (OIAA).

We certainly don't want the questions surrounding this issue to feel like barriers to any group or member wanting to participate in General Service. As you know, there is a section in our Service Manual all about stimulating more participation in General Service. Also, 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." Deep down, I think this is what we have been struggling to achieve in our world service structure. Here is perhaps the principal reason why we should continue to ensure "participation" at every important level. Just as there are no second-class A.A.'s, neither should there be any second-class world service workers, either

Our office would want to gather as much shared experience as possible related to your ongoing process for other areas considering this question and for archival purposes as well. We look forward to hearing more about your progress.

Best wishes for your continued sobriety and safety,

Jeff W■■■■, G.S.O. Staff

Contact: (212) 870-3287

www.aa.org

[G.S.O. U.S/Canada: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) helpful resources](#)

Here is your copy of a message sent via a webform to the East Central Regional Correspondent at G.S.O.

Name: CHERYL ■■■■■

Location: OH

Phone: ■■■■■

Email: ■■■■■

Subject: How to Register Virtual Platform Groups and create service positions

Message: I currently serve as the Alternate Delegate for Area 55 Panel 70. We have several groups that have formed on virtual platforms since the Covid19 pandemic. The first question posed is what is GSO's process to register virtual groups that have existed more than six (6) months so that a GSR can be selected to represent the group at General Service Assembly meetings. What does GSO require for registration from newly formed virtual groups if there is no physical address associated with such a group? This leads to the second question, "Is GSO able to share any experience with how other areas have treated virtual group meetings?" Are all virtual group meetings treated as a District and the groups elect a DCM to represent them? In the alternative, if there is no district for virtual groups, "How does an area decide where to place a virtual group within the area's current districts?" Finally, these groups intend to continue beyond the current pandemic, so our area is looking for any experience other areas may have shared with GSO in how virtual groups are included. Your assistance is greatly appreciated. Thank you Yours in service, Sherry S■■■■■, Alt. Delegate Area 55 Panel 70

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