

Virginia Area Transforming Electronic Meetings Task Force 2021 Fall Assembly, Oct. 16-17, 2021

Task Force Members: Terry W., VA Area Delegate, Tom S. VA Area Chairperson, Wendy R., Long-Range Planning Committee Chair, Sophie L., DR, Arlington District

Charge: Develop a Policy for the Virginia Area to accommodate the Transformation of Electronic Groups with no representation to AI-Anon Family Groups (AFGs) with representation. The new Policy will need to account for:

- Accepting permanent electronic groups that wish to affiliate with the VA Area.
- Assign these groups into Districts.
- Release any VA Area electronic groups that wish to sever affiliation with the VA Area to join the new Electronic Area.
- Transform VA Area groups temporarily meeting electronically that wish to meet electronically permanently and still retain affiliation with both their original District and with the VA Area.
- Revise VA Area, District, and Group voting requirements to accommodate permanent electronic groups and voting members residing outside of conventional geographic boundaries.
- Review VA Group Records, Web Page, and Area Communications Coordinators requirements to accommodate permanent electronic groups and/or hybrid groups.
- Address anonymity concerns of electronic meetings.
- Update the VA Area Alateen Safety and Behavioral Guidelines to reflect any changes the new Policy may create for Alateen meetings.
- Review the VA Area Bylaws to assess any impact the new Policy may have on the Bylaws.
- **Please note:** There is a distinction between “Electronic Meetings” and AFGs. The *2018-2021 AI-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, p.89, states that “...electronic meetings do not have a Group Representative and are not part of any structure.” AFGs are regular AI-Anon/Alateen meetings with a physical meeting address that are using some electronic means of holding meetings during the Covid-19 shut down. These meetings have GRs and belong to a District and to the VA Area.

Background: from the Delegate’s Report to the VA 2021 Spring Assembly

The Policy Committee Motions passed by the 2021 World Service Conference (WSC), affecting Electronic meetings:

- **This year’s Conference passed 2 transformative and historical motions.**
 - There are currently **449 permanent electronic groups, with 700 meetings**, - phone, virtual, and Alateen Chat meetings. These groups have only a CMA, no GR, and no representation at a District or an Area. They have no Delegate representation at WSC.

- The **first of the 2 transformative Motions passed** changes the status of these **permanent electronic groups** to Al-Anon Family Groups. This means these groups may now elect a GR and will have representation.
- This status change was achieved administratively by amending the Service Manual to eliminate any reference to defining an Area in geographic terms. So, now a new Area is not limited to a specific geographic area.
- The **second Motion passed** allows for all **permanent electronic groups** to form a **new Electronic Area**. All **permanent electronic groups** that are now new AFGs automatically become members of the new Electronic Area, which has not yet formed.
- Once the new Electronic Area is formed, and has petitioned to join the WSC, each new AFG may decide, based on their Group Conscience, whether they want to belong to the new Electronic Area, or if they would rather join a geographic Area of their choice. An AFG may only belong to one Area.
- The new Electronic Area is considered as contiguous to any geographic Area.
- At this point in the process, we will follow the guidelines in the *2018-2021 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, version 2*, (pages 157-158; and pages 165-166)) for changing a group to a new Area.
- **The immediate impact on the Virginia Area** is for us to create a policy regarding this process. The Area Officers discussed this at our June 5, 2021 Officers' Meeting, and at the August 7, 2021 VAWSC.
- The next step in this process is to gain approval from the VA Area Assembly to develop a new policy. We will keep the membership informed as this process unfolds. Right now there are many unanswered questions.
- **Please note: no changes to any Virginia Area group are required right now. There is no time pressure for anything to change.**
- If you belong to a regularly face-to-face or a hybrid meeting that is meeting virtually, you need do nothing now.
- However, this new motion allows for the possibility that a face-to-face meeting that is temporarily virtual and wants to remain virtual, to decide to do so and still maintain its affiliation with its District and the VA Area. It could also decide to join the new Electronic Area.

Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM) Questions:

1. What do we know about the Virginia Area members' needs, wants, or preferences that is relevant to this discussion?

- Within a year or so of the 2021 WSC, the WSO will begin transforming currently electronic meetings to AFG status, with voting rights, into a new Electronic Area.
- Some of these groups may prefer to affiliate with a geographic Area and District, and may wish to join the Virginia Area.
- Such groups will petition their newly established Electronic Area to leave that Area, and petition the Virginia Area to affiliate with our VA Area and a VA Area District.

- Some Virginia Area groups that are face-to-face, but temporarily meeting electronically, may wish to become permanently electronic and maintain their historic affiliation with both their District and the VA Area.
- When this begins happening, the VA Area will need a cohesive policy to accommodate these changes.

2. What do we know about current and future items or trends that is relevant to this discussion?

- The Covid-19 shut down resulted in many VA Area groups moving to electronic and hybrid formats.
- Many members now prefer the electronic platforms for their meetings, having attracted members who they would lose if they returned to face-to-face meetings. These meetings also want to retain membership and representation in their original Districts and the VA Area.
- As part of our policy development, the VA Area will need to consider how to handle potential Group Representatives representing a VA Area group but living outside our geographic boundaries.
- This could present some challenges in accommodating GRs or other voting members' attendance at VA Area Assemblies.
- Some groups may want to have a hybrid meeting format, with some members meeting physically and some members attending that same meeting electronically. We will need a means of getting meeting access information for both variations to interested members.
- Some groups may decide to divide between meeting physically and meeting virtually, splitting into one group with two meeting formats. Some groups may want to separate into two distinct groups. Which one will become the new group? How will they decide how to divide group resources?

3. What are the ethical implication of our choices (pros and cons)?

Pros

- In AI-Anon, we believe all voices are equal and each group has the right to representation in the business of running the VA Area.
- Electronic meetings allow for members otherwise not able to personally attend to participate in a meeting.

Cons

- GRs or other voting members living outside the VA Area attending the VA Area Assemblies may require a commitment to virtual Assemblies indefinitely.
- Or we could face the challenge of increased travel costs for groups, Districts, and the Area.
- No group should be denied representation.
- Anonymity concerns increase with the use of electronic meetings.

5. What do we wish we knew, but don't?

- How many groups may be affected?
- Will the VA Area lose groups? Or gain groups?
- What will be the impact on our District meetings, VAWSC meetings, and our VA Area Assembly?
- How will donations be handled in a virtual environment?

Tentatively, how the Task Force will proceed:

- **In order to keep the Task Force to a reasonable size for the sake of efficiency, the recommended members will be:**
 - The current and incoming Delegates
 - The current and incoming Area Chairpersons
 - The current and incoming Group Records Coordinators
 - Other Area members as needed according to their areas of knowledge and expertise.

- **To keep the VA Area members informed, the Task Force will:**
 - Hold **2 Town Halls**, open to all interested members.
 - Tentative dates are:
 - **Sunday, Nov. 7, 2:00 to 4:00 pm**
 - **Sunday, Dec. 5, 2:00 to 4:00 pm**
 - More Town Halls can be scheduled if needed or wanted by VA Area members.
 - Town Halls will be conducted via WebEx.
 - Town Halls will be recorded (audio only) for members who cannot attend in real time.
 - At the Town Halls, Task Force members will:
 - give a status report of progress to date
 - Ask VA Area members questions they may have of the fellowship
 - Allow ample time for VA Area members to ask questions of the Task Force, make comments, or recommendations.
 - The Task Force will take this feedback into consideration as they proceed with the Policy development.

- **Task Force timeline:**
 - The goal is to have a Policy ready for a GR vote at the 2022 Spring Assembly.
 - The first draft of the new Policy will be ready for review at the January 2022 incoming/outgoing Officer meeting.
 - With approval from that meeting, the Task Force will make any recommended revisions, edits, etc.
 - And have the draft of the new Policy ready for the March 2022 VAWSC meeting for discussion and vote to send the draft Policy to the GRs at 2022 Spring Assembly.
 - The Task Force will distribute the draft of the new Policy to VA Area Assembly members in time to allow for GRs to discuss with their groups and districts in advance of the 2022 Spring Assembly.

Motion: The VAWSC recommends to the Virginia Area Assembly that they approve the following Motion.

The VAWSC recommends that the VA Area Assembly approve the creation of a Task Force to develop a Policy for the Virginia Area to accommodate the transformation of Electronic meetings to Al-Anon Family Groups, beginning sometime in 2022, in accordance with World Service Conference guidance.

The Task Force will keep the VA Area members informed and allow for questions, comments, and feedback from VA Area members while the Policy is being developed. The Task Force will plan on having the new Policy ready for VA Area Assembly vote at the 2022 Spring Assembly, depending on guidance from VA Area Officers and the VAWSC.