

Virginia Area Policy: Transforming Electronic Groups to AFGs

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Introduction

The need for a Virginia Area policy regarding the transformation of Electronic Groups to Al-Anon Family Groups (AFGs) grew out of the 2021 World Service Conference (WSC) approval of two motions. The first of these motions changed the status of permanent electronic groups with no representation to Al-Anon Family Group status entitled to elect representatives. The second of the motions allowed for all permanent electronic groups to form a new Electronic Area and petition the WSC for admittance to that body.

Now that the new Electronic Area has formed and has been admitted to the WSC as of April 25, 2022, each newly formed AFG may now decide whether it wants to remain affiliated with the newly formed Electronic Area or if it wants to petition an existing geographic Area for admission to that Area. Now that the new Electronic Area has been admitted to the WSC, the new Al-Anon policy is that all groups are AFGs and are entitled to elect their representatives and to have voice and vote at the District, Area and World Service levels.

To change a group to a new Area, the Virginia Area's policy will be guided by the *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, p. 162, (p. 158 in the 2018-2022 version), "Miscellaneous: Renaming an Area, Changing a group/District to a new Area." Since an AFG may belong to only one Area, the petitioning AFG must also petition to leave their Electronic Area at the same time as it is asking for admission to the Virginia Area. The newly formed Electronic Area is considered as having a contiguous boundary with every other Area.

The Virginia Area Policy for transformation of electronic groups to AFGs will account for 1). Permanent electronic groups petitioning to join the Virginia Area; 2). A Virginia Area AFG that wishes to leave the Virginia Area and petition to join a contiguous Area, such as the new Electronic Area; 3). A Virginia Area AFG that was previously face-to-face and now wishes to be permanently electronic and maintain its historic District and Area affiliation.

1. Permanent Electronic Groups Petitioning to Join the Virginia Area

In keeping with the current Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual recommendations, the Virginia Area will accept the petitioning group, provided that the following conditions are met:

- The group belongs to an Area that is a recognized member of WSC.
- The Area that the petitioning group is leaving is contiguous to the Virginia Area.
- The group has held a Group Conscience and the members agree to this process.
- The group petitions the Area it wishes to leave and is granted approval. That Area sends a letter to the Virginia Area indicating that it agrees to this process.
- The group agrees to give up participation in the first Area. A group may belong to only one Area.
- The group petitions the Virginia Area for approval to join. Once the Virginia Area grants approval, the Virginia Area will send a letter stating such to the Area that the petitioning group is leaving.
- The petitioning group agrees to abide all the recommendations for starting a new group in the current version of the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*, and in the WSO Guidelines G-12, "Starting an Al-Anon Group," or in the G-19, "Starting an Alateen Group."

District Affiliation of the Newly Admitted Group

If the new group has some connection to an existing Virginia Area District and that District is willing to accept the new group, the newly admitted group will be assigned to that District, and Virginia Area Group Records procedures for indicating such will be followed.

If for some reason, the new group *does not* have a connection to an existing Virginia Area District, the Virginia Area Officers may assist the new group in establishing a connection. Factors to take into consideration for this potential situation may include whether or not the District in question holds their District meetings either virtually or in a hybrid format, to allow for a Group Representative (GR) from outside of Virginia to participate in District business. The District may agree or not agree to accept the new group, based on their District's Group Conscience.

Another factor to be considered in admitting a petitioning electronic group to an existing District is the cost of sending a representative to the Virginia Area Assemblies. Traditionally in the Virginia Area, the groups pay the fees for their GR to attend Assemblies. If the group's treasury cannot pay that fee, the group may appeal to their District for financial aid. If the District also cannot afford to cover the costs, the District may appeal to the Virginia Area. The Virginia Area maintains some funds for this financial aid, but the Area treasury has limits. If a group has a GR from a distance so far from the Virginia Assembly site that transportation costs would be prohibitive, the group will need to carefully consider what an appropriate action is. Every group has the right to representation, but it also will need to be practical in selecting how to get their representative to the Assembly.

Currently the Virginia Area has a contractual obligation to hold its Assemblies at a hotel in the Richmond area. The contract is valid for two more years, until the end of the 2023 Fall Assembly. The 2022 Spring

Assembly is hybrid. This is a one time trial. No final decision has yet been made as to whether the remaining Assemblies affected by the hotel contract will be face-to-face, hybrid, or virtual. So, the cost of sending a representative to Assemblies will continue for the immediate future. Groups and Districts will need to weigh all these factors as they exercise their autonomy in choosing who to best represent them.

Additionally, the District considering accepting a petitioning electronic group, should consider the electronic group's prior experience with Al-Anon's service structure. Since Electronic Groups were not a part of any service structure prior to the 2022 WSC, some of its members may have not participated in any District meetings or Area Assemblies. Is the District considering admitting this group willing and able to undertake service orientation and provide a Service Sponsor for a new GR? Is the District willing and able to welcome and support the new group?

2. A Virginia Area AFG Petitioning to Leave the Virginia Area and Join a Contiguous Area

In the case of a Virginia Area group that wishes to leave the Virginia Area and petition to join another Area, either the new Electronic Area or a physically contiguous Area, the process is similar to that of a group petitioning to join the Virginia Area.

- The Area to which the Virginia Area group wishes to join is a recognized member of the WSC.
- The Area that the leaving group wishes to join is contiguous to the Virginia Area, either an Area that borders Virginia geographically, or the new Electronic Area, which is considered contiguous to every other WSC Area.
- The leaving group has held a Group Conscience and the members agree to this process.
- The group petitions the Virginia Area and is granted approval to leave the Virginia Area. The Virginia Area sends a letter to the Area the group wishes to join, indicating that the Virginia Area agrees to this process.
- The leaving group agrees to give up participation in the Virginia Area once it is accepted into the new Area. A group may belong to only one Area.
- The leaving group petitions the new Area for approval to join. The new Area sends the Virginia Area a letter indicating that the leaving group is accepted into the new Area.
- The leaving group agrees to abide by the new Area's guidelines for participation in that Area.

3. A Virginia Area AFG That Was Previously Face-to-Face and Now Wishes to Be Permanently Electronic and Maintain its Historic District and Area Affiliation

Some Virginia Area groups that changed from meeting face-to-face to temporarily electronic, either via phone or a virtual platform, during the Covid-19 shutdown, now wish to remain permanently virtual. They also wish to retain their historic affiliation with their District and with the Virginia Area. That is now possible, since the WSC has now admitted the new Electronic Area and changed AI-Anon/Alateen policy, making electronic groups full AFGs, with voting rights. Previously a group that wanted to list their group's electronic contact information with the WSO was required to register as a permanent electronic group and then ceased belonging to the Virginia Area. Acceptance of the new Electronic Area into the WSC and instituting the new policy does away with that requirement. A group may now become permanently electronic and remain a member of the Virginia Area and their historic District.

The Virginia Area Group Records procedures will facilitate the listing of permanent electronic groups in the Virginia Area and the WSO Group Records.

Formerly Face-to-Face Virginia Area Groups that Wish to Become Hybrid

Prior to the 2022 WSC 's acceptance of the new Electronic Area, AI-Anon policy prevented registration of groups that met face-to-face while simultaneously providing an electronic platform, also known as a hybrid group. The WSO currently has no plans to distinguish groups as face-to-face, electronic only, or hybrid. All groups are now considered as AI-Anon Family Groups by the WSO.

The Virginia Area has established a Group Records procedure to list hybrid groups' meeting information at both the Virginia Area and the WSO levels.