

THE GROUP CONSCIENCE PROCESS:

More than a vote

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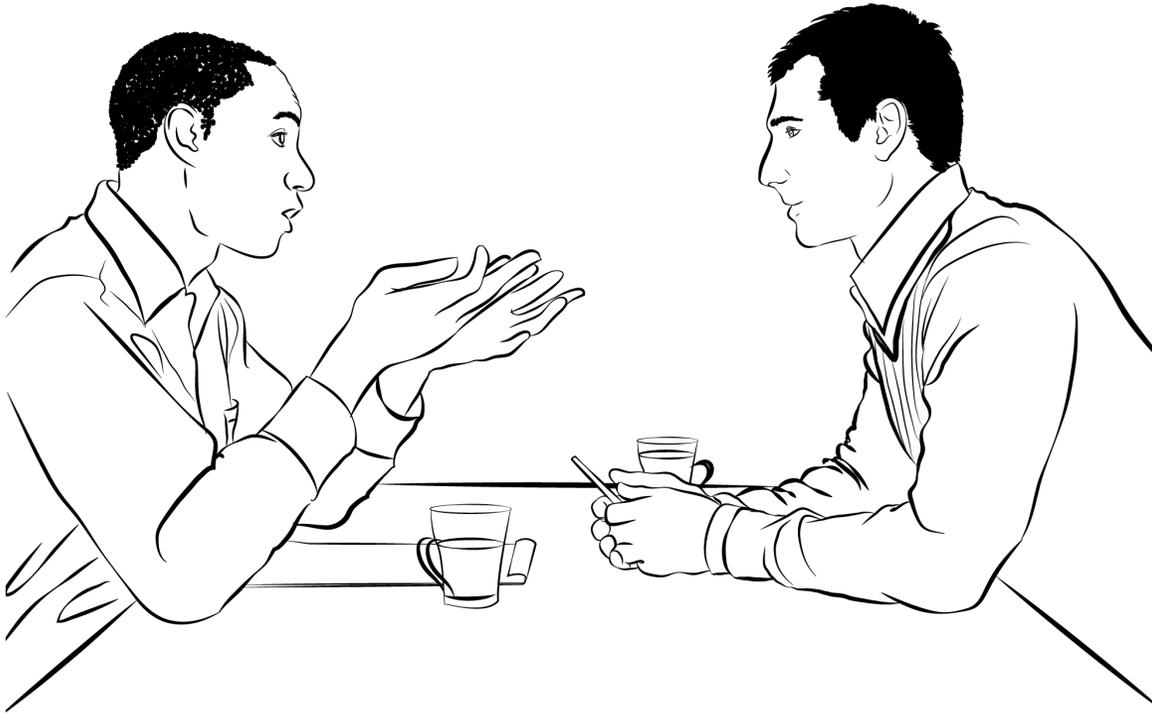


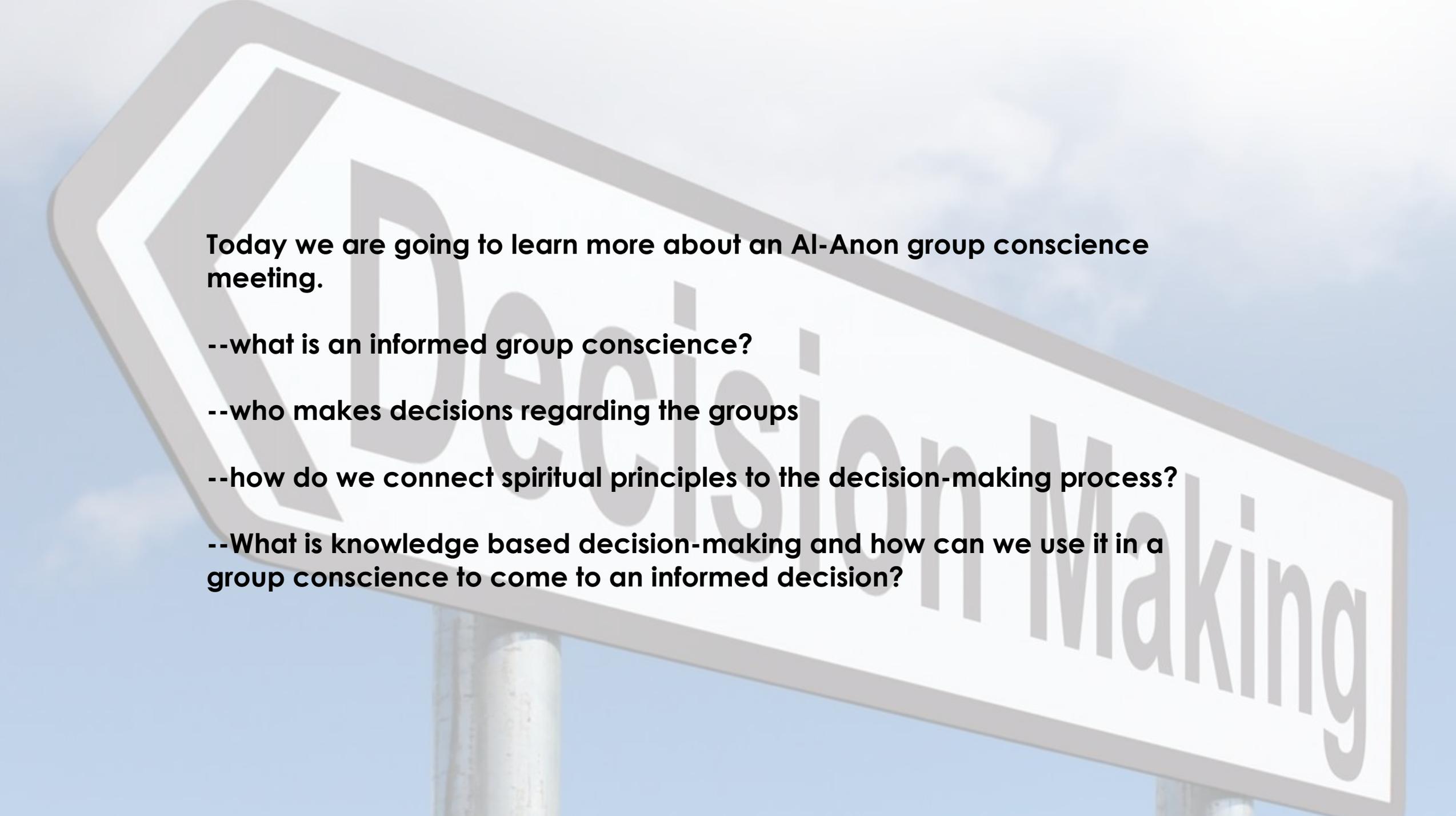
Talk to each other, reason things out...

**Al-Anon has always known how to handle
its business affair in a way that ensures
that:**

**every voice is heard
every voice is important
the good of the group comes first
the outcome is beneficial to most**

We call it a GROUP CONSCIENCE





Today we are going to learn more about an Al-Anon group conscience meeting.

--what is an informed group conscience?

--who makes decisions regarding the groups

--how do we connect spiritual principles to the decision-making process?

--What is knowledge based decision-making and how can we use it in a group conscience to come to an informed decision?

What a group conscience is supposed to produce:

A decision that MOST, if not all, members can support.





An INFORMED group conscience

“in order to make an informed group conscience decision, members need access to all the information about the issue they are being asked to discuss, they need clarity on what their discussion hopes to accomplish, and they are asked to trust each other’s motives and capabilities. By sharing information as equals, taking time for discussion, and maintaining principles above personalities during discussions, groups are often able to reach unanimity in their decisions.

Al-anon/Alateen service manual and groups at work pg 51



What is an informed Group Conscience?

AI-Anon and Alateen Groups at Work, pg 24

- *“The group conscience is the will of the group.”
- * It is based on members’ use of the Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service as guides, maintaining “principles above personalities” and sharing information as equals.
- * A group conscience determines in advance who votes and if decisions will be reached by a simple majority, 2/3 of the votes or 3/4 of the votes.
- * An informed group conscience is obtained when everybody has access to all of the information before discussion.
- * If someone disagrees with the decision, Concept 5 reminds us that members have the right of appeal and can express their opinion



Spiritual principles

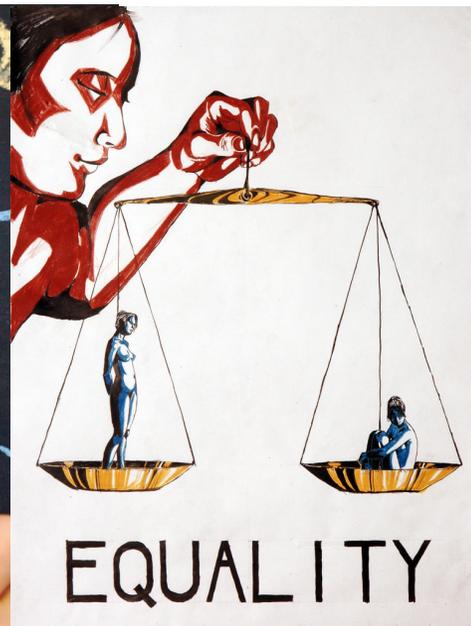
Open-mindedness—every voice is heard

Equality—every voice is important

Unity—the good of the group comes first

Responsibility—the outcome is beneficial to the most

-



Tradition 2 states—that a loving Power greater than ourselves is expressed in our group conscience. It can be hard to get three Al-Anon members to agree on which toppings to put on a pizza, but we somehow manage through this process to come together, despite such differing views and approaches. In combining all our various thoughts, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, “together everyone achieves more” or in the words of the Alateens, “Together We Can Make it”

The CAL process—Al-Anon’s group conscience in action



TRADITION 2—“for our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants—they do not govern.”

Participation is vital to a group conscience. The ability of all members to feel heard, understood, and acknowledged is critical.

“By being part of an informed group conscience, gathering the information we need, letting our loving God guide us, and remaining trusted servants, we are all part of the group and support its decisions.”

Paths to Recovery pg 45



Points to bear in mind during group meetings

- Anonymity must be preserved at all times
- A member's telephone number should not be passed to a third party without the member's express consent
- Anything discussed within a meeting is confidential and should not be mentioned outside of the group
- No one member's voice should dominate discussions
- Criticism of the alcoholic is discouraged
- We avoid gossip, criticism and discussing religion
- Members will be given the space to work through their own issues without pressure or persuasion from others
- Group meetings usually end with the closing and serenity prayer

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the
Serenity to accept the
things I cannot change,
the **Courage** to change
the things I can,
and the **Wisdom** to know
the difference.

- Reinhold Niebuhr -

Suggested Agenda for a Group Business meeting or Group conscience meeting

Aims of the meeting:

- *to promote group unity**
- *to help the group and its officers to make decisions**
- *to give members an opportunity to be heard**
- *to inform members of duties of group officers**
- *to ensure rotation of group officers regularly**

Considerations:

- *Suggest group secretary records decisions or takes minutes of meeting**
- *A quorum is the minimal number of members of a committee or organization, usually a majority, who must be present for a valid transaction of business to take place. It is suggested that 50% of the core group number of members plus 1 more will be adequate to form a quorum**
- *It is always wise to go for consensus, a position reached by the group as a whole, in order to maintain unity. However, where there is none, it is suggested that a vote of 2/3 majority carry the decision.**

- 
- *The minority members are often those who are best informed and are often right. Newer members can easily swing a vote because they do not fully know and understand the traditions and principles used as guidelines in Al-Anon. The minority need to be reassured that their opinions have been heard and considered and in the spirit of Al-Anon Traditions agree to abide by the majority decision without any feelings of resentment or ill will**
 - *Suggest newly appointed group officers assume their new roles at the next meeting**

Preparation:

- *business meetings are an opportunity for members to share their ideas to increase membership, express concerns, plan special meetings or projects, and other group business such as changing the group name, the meeting time and place, finances, meeting format, open or closed meeting status, etc.**
- *Our shared experience suggests that announcing the business meeting 2-3 weeks prior to the discuss and voting gives members of the group the opportunity to be informed, helps the group make decisions and promotes unity**
- *It ensures that as many members as possible can attend the meeting**
- *This also allows matters for the agenda to be given to the group secretary or group chairperson in plenty of time prior to the meeting.**

***Handing out copies of the group officer duties in advance helps members to become better informed of what the service positions involve when considering standing for a service position.**

***In the event of an unexpected serious conflict or item a special group conscience meeting can be called**

Group conscience meeting agenda

***Chairperson (or member who requested the group conscience) can introduce the item(s) for discussion**

***Each member should be encouraged to ask questions, to become informed about the matter, express their opinions and offer ideas for a solution that will ensure personal progress for the greatest number of members of the group**

***After the discussion and all the members have been heard, it is time to come to a decision and then vote to approve or disapprove the item(s) in question.**

***It is always wise to go for consensus, a position reached by the group as a whole, in order to maintain unity. However, where there is none, it is suggested that a vote of a 2/3rds majority carry a decision**

***The minority members are often those who are best informed and are often right. Newer members can easily swing a vote because they do not fully know and understand the Traditions and principles used as guidelines in Al-Anon**

***The minority need to be reassured that their opinions have been heard and considered and in the spirit of the Al-Anon Traditions agree to abide by the majority decision without any feelings of disunity.**

Closing:

The chairperson then summarizes the decisions made and agreed upon. The decisions are recorded and the meeting is closed. Date of next meeting is set.



Open Communication

“Today I believe the process of discussion, review of our literature and a vote is a good way for our group to make decisions that just about everyone can accept”

Paths to Recovery p 149

Dialogue Before Deliberation

“. . .listens to all ideas of the group and collects all pertinent information available before deciding. . .

Paths to Recovery p 151



Common Access

Roberts Rules of Order—may not always allow for common access to information

Knowledge Based Decision-Making—all have access to the same information, allows time for discussion and promotes the practice of principles above personalities during the discussion

It is when we understand how our spiritual principles are applied to the decision-making process, that we experience the element of trust in the concept of substantial unanimity or “choosing from the hat”. WE presume good will. It is base on the following:

- **Mutual trust**
- **Participation**
- **The right of decision**
- **Designated authority—traditional and legal**
- **Leadership**
- **Our spiritual foundation**



What is Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM)?

***KBDM has been around for a long time, but Al-Anon adopted it as a best practice**

***In knowledge based decision making, culture and background information is introduced to frame a topic; then full discussion of the idea takes place BEFORE a motion is presented.**

***KBDM requires considerable research and information gathering before and possibly even during the discussion. At the end of the discussion, further information and knowledge may be necessary to reach an informed group conscience.**

A brief history of Knowledge-based Decision-making to Reach an Informed Group Conscience

From the 2010-2013 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (pg 24/27), page 50, Group Conscience

“In order to make an informed group conscience decision, members need access to all the information about the issue they are being asked to discuss, they need clarity on what their discussions hope to accomplish, and they trust each other’s motives and capabilities. The guiding principles for the group conscience are always the Twelve Traditions and the Twelve Concepts of Service. It may be helpful to review these principles prior to group conscience discussions. . .It is by taking the time necessary to hear from all members who want to participate that a group conscience evolves. Each group sets its own guidelines for how they will reach group conscience (time to allow for discussion, when they will vote, what percentage will reflect unanimity and a majority, etc.) By sharing information as equals and taking time for discussion, groups are often able to reach unanimity in their decisions. Once a group conscience is made, the entire group agrees to support the decision.”

Even though it wasn’t called Knowledge based decision making back then, KBDM was used the very first conference. Our history and transcripts of those early conferences tell us that our co-founders envisioned the Conference as a place to gather Al-Anon representatives from all over to have discussions about the direction of Al-Anon and to exchange ideas as to how to better service the needs of the groups...

5 Essential Elements of the KBDM Process

- 1. Open communication between leadership and membership (Tradition __ our leaders are but trusted servants, we do not govern). Talk to each other and reason things out.**
- 2. Dialogue before deliberation: discuss the info, ask questions, express concerns before we construct the motion. ALL points of view are considered at EACH stage of the decision. Often the discussion reveals that we really don't need a motion; all we need is to have the discussion**
- 3. All decision-makers will have common access to full information. Decisions affecting everyone are not made by a few people at a kitchen table or at the coffee shop after the meeting.
This is often one of the most confusing elements. Sometimes members think they should have access to all information, whether they are part of the decision-making body or not. Concept 4 tells us, "participation is the key to harmony." The concept does not say everyone is invited to participate. We are invited to participate if it is in our role as part of the decision-making body. (ANOTHER good reason to step into service—if you want to be part of the decision making and want access to the info, take a leadership position.) When a decision has been made, it is important that we all recognize and support the group conscience, whatever it is, whether we agree with it or not.**

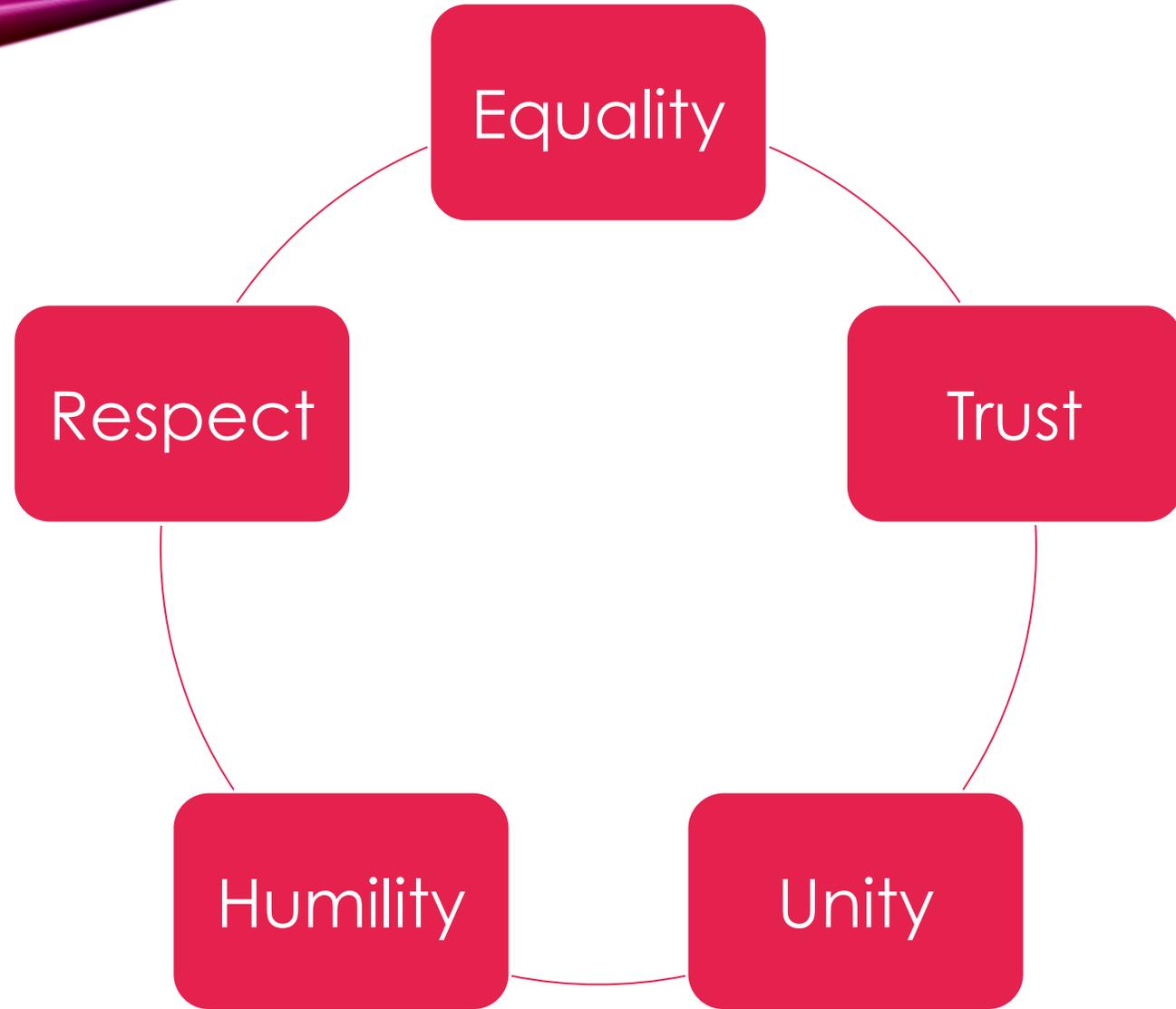
4. We have confidence in the competency of our partners—"presume good will". We have to remember everyone in service is a member of Al-Anon and none of us would ever do anything to hurt Al-Anon. We have learned to presume good will.
5. We exist in a culture of trust. Before coming into Al-Anon, we often learned not to trust others around us. WE didn't talk about things that were not comfortable for fear of retaliation. WE couldn't depend on anyone else in what they did or what they said. The culture of trust is a principle and value we learn in recovery. It is important to remember to take our principles and values along with us in service.



Things to Consider

1. Do we announce the topics on our agenda ahead of time so no one is surprised?
2. Do we provide adequate background information to everyone involved ahead of time?
3. Do members have the opportunity to ask questions?
4. How can we create and maintain an atmosphere of trust in our groups/meetings?
5. Do we have confidence in the competency of our partners?







The KBDM Process

***Provide background information and framing**

***Send out questions**

***Compile responses**

***Share the responses**

***Discuss**

Then and only after all have been given the opportunity to be heard and discussion has ended, a motion may be made (if even needed at this point)

	Traditional Value	Knowledge-based value
Leadership	Take pride in making good decisions	Take pride in seeing good decisions being made
Resource Allocation	Better to miss an opportunity than make a mistake	Doing what's right doesn't necessarily require great resources. It's not prudent to wait when dealing with strategically important issues
What we do	Lots of activities; reward loyalty and hard work	Think critically and analytically to achieve agreed-upon results
Communication	Leaders are responsible for influencing the beliefs and behaviors of others; we avoid mistakes	Make effective use of information and engage in open dialogue before deliberating or decision-making

Advantages of KBDM

- *Discussion does not start with a motion; thereby limiting the discussion to the motion**
- *Allows thorough examination of issues without an end or an action in mind**
- *Avoids a “for and against” atmosphere**
- *Allows for decisions to be more important than who makes the decisions**
- *No time limit on discussion**
- *Allows a minority opinion to be heard**
- *Does allow for conversation. Often that is enough, a motion may be unnecessary**



The 4 KBDM Questions

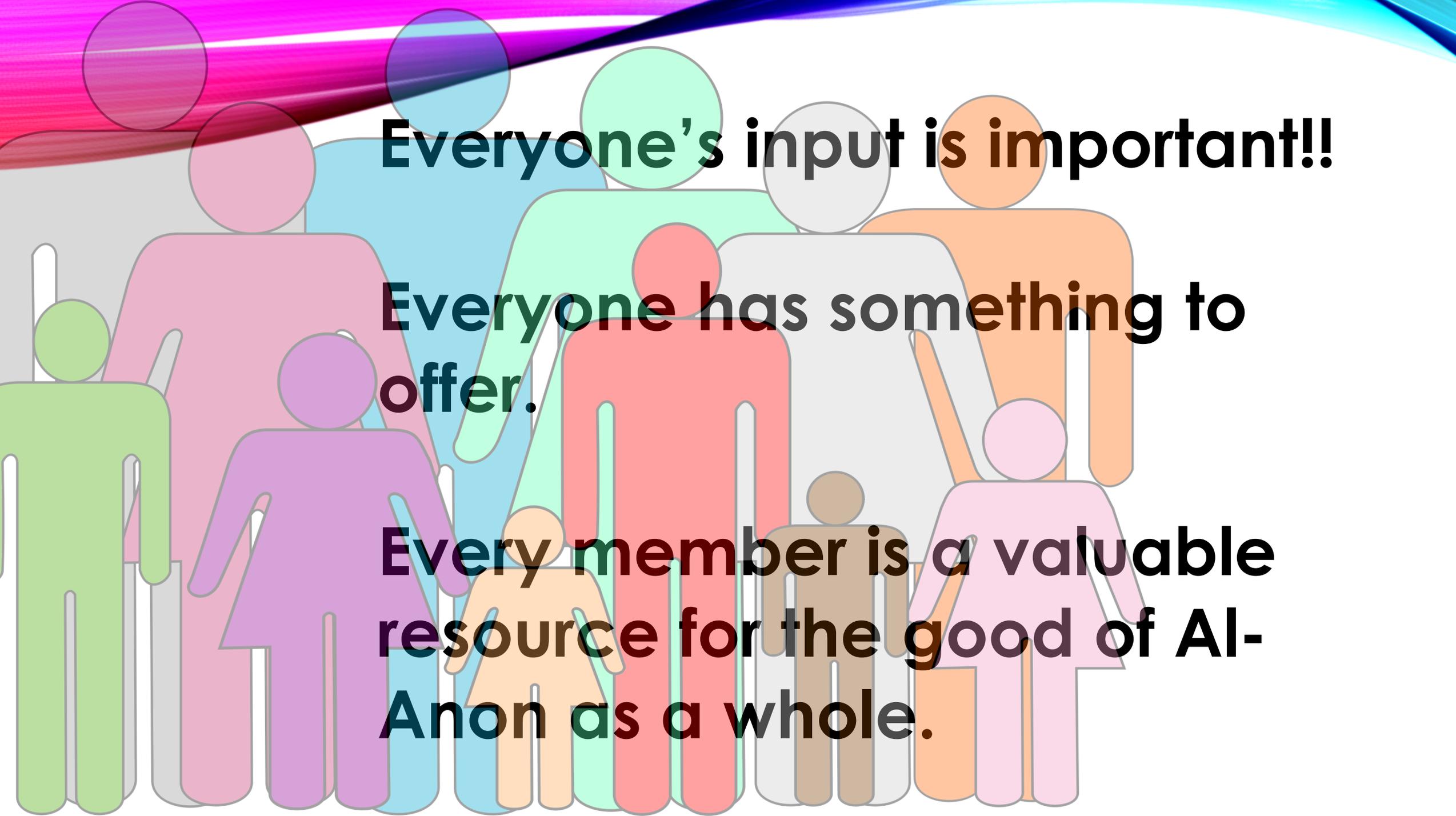
The background information used to frame a topic is usually gathered after the following 4 KBDM questions have been answered.





The 4 KBDM questions:

1. What do we know about our members' or prospective members needs that is relevant to this discussion? What do we wish we knew, but don't.
2. What do we know about the resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion? What do we wish we knew, but don't.
3. What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion? And what are the Pros and Cons? What do we wish we knew, but don't?
4. What are the ethical implications of our choices? What do we wish we knew, but don't?



Everyone's input is important!!

Everyone has something to offer.

Every member is a valuable resource for the good of Al-Anon as a whole.

KBDM is about knowing what you need to know to make a decision. You must be informed because your primary role is to bring your expertise to the meeting, come to an understanding of the information being provided, and then be able to articulate it. It is important that members us each other as a resource. It's about

TRUST





The value of framing is that

- * it brings clarity to the discussion,**
- * helps move the dialogue into new territory by outlining key facts,**
- * helps to keep everyone focused,**
- * and puts the discussion into perspective.**

When developing a frame, consider using one or more of these tools:

- * Al-Anon/Alateen service manual (sometimes the older manuals can be helpful as well—just check for updated policies and procedures)**
- *Conference approved literature**
- *Conference Summaries**
- *WSO Archives, your groups archives, your districts archives, your areas archives**
- *WSO staff**
- *AFG connects boards**
- *specialty consultants outside of the fellowship (sometimes)**
- *Anecdotes from members**



Past, Present, and Future

Create the context of the frame by filling in information regarding background, relevance, context and conclusion. The relevant background and history imparts knowledge about what happened in the past and how we arrived at the present moment.

The topic is discussed for as long as it takes for everyone to understand the information.

We look to the past to preserve the future

3 Key Issues that pertain to the Conference Structure at both the World Service Conference and Area Levels (and I think they apply at the group level as well)

***Communication**



***participation**



***representation**

REPRESENTATION

In using the KDBM process, it isn't necessary to choose sides or develop evidence with an end in mind (manipulation, coming in with an "agenda", forcing solutions, controlling). Rather it provides for open dialogue, so everyone's needs are heard, expectations and preferences are acknowledged and ethical dimensions are considered, being ever aware of the likely evolution of the environment in which members live. The benefits of this process are great:

- *Group members are more likely to support the decision
- *Group effort is more likely to yield better results
- *Participants become part of the process, more voices are heard, more solutions are generated
- *Recognition that responsibility for action rests on everyone
- *Actions tend to lean toward the greater good for the organization
- *Negativity is diffused



A member should be asked/assigned to write down and bullet the items that evolve from the discussion (zoom has a white board function now!) and, at the end of the discussion, the ideas are reviewed. If clarification is needed on anything, members are encouraged to ask questions or share their interpretation of the discussion.

Warranty 3 says—“That all important decisions be reached by discussion, vote, and whenever possible by substantial unanimity.”





***The idea that everyone participates is a spiritual principle. Our knowledge-based decision-making process models this principle. The minority opinion is respected and there is ample opportunity for sharing. It is the right of every group to determine what unanimity is for their group. The common goal of everyone is to do what is best for Al-Anon.**

***If there is not enough information on an issue, keep talking until there is enough to make an informed decision. Appreciate the dissenting opinion but when a group conscience is taken, support it fully. The group conscience is best for the majority. Everyone is heard so that we can support the decisions whether we agree or not.**

***The knowledge based decision-making process gives us the freedom to make decisions easier. The outcome is not as important as the way we got there (discussion and environment that encourages healthy thinking). With enough discussion, a member can accept the group conscience even if it is not what the member thought.**

*** Informed group conscience is the spirituality of the program. Whether we agree with the group conscience or not, God is in the group conscience. The need for substantial unanimity keeps us talking longer. Everyone can feel that they have been heard. We learn the importance of speaking up and feel safe in doing it. Our votes count, and we take time to hear and respect the minority viewpoint. When we are informed, we can make a better decision.**



Rather than debating the pros and cons of a proposed motion, Knowledge-based decision-making encourages non-adversarial discussions; a motion is proposed, if at all, only after the issue has been clarified by discussion and everyone has enough information to make an informed decision.

Since everyone has a common interest in what is best for Al-Anon as a whole, motions that follow open discussion are often passed with unanimity or substantial unanimity. When the discussion indicates that there will not be substantial unanimity on a matter, the issue is usually referred to a Committee or Thought Force for further study and possible reconsideration by a future meeting.

Example of how to use KBDM

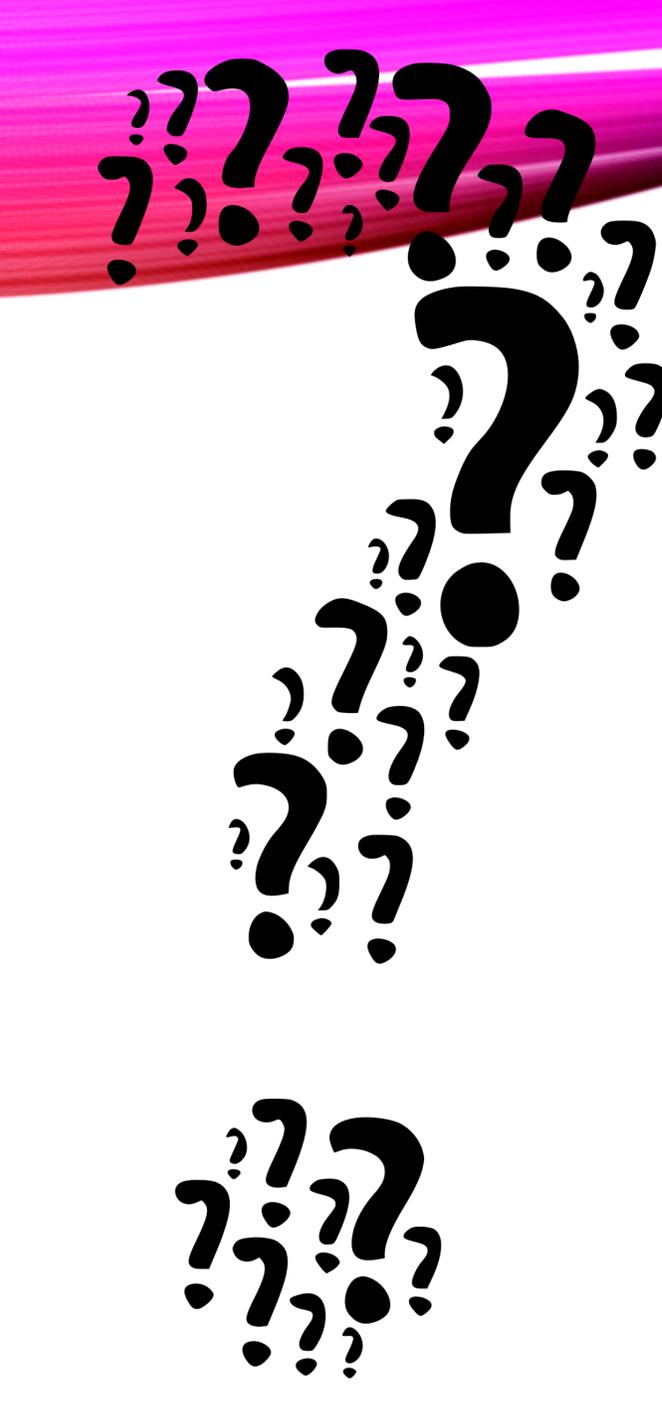
WE are going to use an example that many groups have had to consider in group conscience recently. During covid, many groups went from being in-person only to being virtual only. Now that things are turning more to normal, many groups are in conflict because some want to return to the in-person meetings and some want to stay virtual. So, our group conscience example is going to be to decide what our “group” would like to do.

Question 1—What do we know about our members perspective, members needs, that is relevant to this discussion?

Our current members—2 are disabled and have trouble getting out of the house, 1 is immune compromised, 3 are young people with young children, 2 are middle aged with few health issues and no younger children, 1 is elderly, 1 is a full-time student, 1 doesn't have a vehicle, 1 member is currently homeless, a couple lost family members to covid during the height of the pandemic, a couple believe that covid is no longer an issue we need to worry about because they feel people are not dying from covid any more with the medications and different strains

Anything else we should know?





Question 2—

What do we know about the resources and our vision for the organization that is relevant to this discussion?

What is in our treasury currently? Can we afford rent at in-person location? Is rent cheaper or more expensive than zoom? Can we afford the rent? Is our former location still available? If not, where can meet (new location)? Does the former/new location have restrictions or protocols regarding cleaning, disinfecting, handicapped access for the disabled members? Is the location in the area where all members can access it easily? Do we have/need literature to put out? Is the previous day/time good for all members? Do we have literature? Could we split into 2 separate meetings (one in-person, one on zoom) or can we be hybrid?

Are there other options besides zoom? (free conference call, google meets, webex)

Could we be hybrid so some could meet in person and some could be online? Do we have the equipment/wifi/band-width etc. every week

Question 3—

What do we know about the current realities and evolving dynamics of the world and our fellowship that is relevant to this discussion?

What are the pros and cons?

There are in-person, virtual and hybrid meetings currently.

Which is cheaper? Virtual or in-person? Do we have the money for the more expensive option? Is there a cheaper in-person option or cheaper virtual option? What are the numbers of people in our county/state who currently are sick with covid? Have the members gotten vaccines? Do we require people to wear masks?

Pros of staying on zoom—cheaper, the people who are disabled and immunocompromised would be able to join us,

Cons of staying on zoom—no hugs, no hands-on literature, no zoom bombers, harder to stay focused from home sometimes

Pros of going back to in-person—better ability to stay focused on the meeting, social interaction with actual humans

Cons of going back to in-person—possibility of someone getting sick (not just covid—flu etc), some members will no longer be able to attend

Pros of going hybrid—the people who want to be in person can be in person, those immunocompromised can still attend

Cons—the ones attending virtually may not feel as connected to the rest of the group, we have to pay rent for both an in-person location and a zoom acct.



Question 4—

What are the ethical implications of our choices?

In other words—will our decision be consistent with our spiritual principles?

masks if we meet in person? What does the location require for safety purposes? Is meeting in person against our principles and policies? Is continuing to meet on zoom against our principles and policies? Will either or both help us fulfill our primary purpose? Is there anything in the traditions regarding this issue? If we decide to stay on zoom/meet in person the “right” thing to do? Are there any legal ramifications regarding where we meet? Zoom bombers are a real thing. How can we protect our members?

Question 5—

What do we wish we knew but don't?

What does each member prefer?



Decision—for the good of all members, we are choosing to have a hybrid meeting!! Everyone is happy!



We accept the group conscience because:

- **We trust in our Higher power (both ours personally and the groups and Al-Anon's)**
- **We hear everyone's ideas**
- **We presented all pertinent information**
- **We used our program's spiritual principles**
- **We discussed as much as needed**
- **We adhered to the unenforceable (12 Traditions)**

Even though the decision may not reflect our opinion, we abide by the group conscience knowing that it is our Higher Power's direction.

