

# “Electronic Meeting participation in our Area service structure” Thought Force Committee Report

Finalized February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022

This document contains the results of the Thought Force committee meetings regarding including electronic-only groups in the Area 25 (MA) service structure. As part of our conversations, we have identified several guiding principles that have given us grounding in the traditions for our considerations.

- Group Autonomy - Each group makes its own decisions on how to structure itself within the traditions. This should also apply to Districts to structure themselves within the traditions as they see fit. (Tradition 4).
- Electronic-only groups should be treated just like in-person groups, as much as is possible. (Tradition 1)
- The Area and District should not be unduly financially and logistically burdened by the need to include electronic-only groups in their service structure.
- After the pandemic, AI-Anon will not just return to the way it used to be. Electronic meetings are going to be part of AI-Anon for the foreseeable future.

The WSO has provided a list of questions that we considered as part of a KBDM process. These questions follow, with responses from the Thought Force.

**Question 1:** What are the potential benefits of welcoming non-geographically based groups into our geographically based Area? What are the potential risks? Are there any options for overcoming the risks?

**Discussion:**

- Temporary electronic meetings have been created due to the pandemic. Groups that split off from an in-person group to become permanent electronic groups may want to remain connected to the area.
- These groups may still self-identify as Massachusetts groups and wish to remain connected to the Area 25 service structure.
- Since the WSO has decided to consider such meetings as eligible to become full AI-Anon groups, we feel that it is the responsibility of the area to be inclusive of those groups, since they were Massachusetts groups in the first place.
- One potential benefit is that these groups serve a broader function to allow members that are unable to join in-person meetings a way to join electronic groups with people they know even if they are stranded at home, unable to commute, or spending time out of state.
- One potential risk is that a group from outside the state asks to join the Area service structure and proves to be so culturally different that they are not welcomed and included within the area. This is always a risk, since people come from outside the state and join AI-Anon groups here. Following the traditions of being welcoming to newcomers would be helpful to overcome this risk.

**What do we wish we knew, but don't?** We don't yet know exactly how many electronic meetings in Massachusetts plan to become (or remain) electronic-only groups but still wish to

remain connected to the Area's service structure. It may be useful to send out a questionnaire to groups to at least get an idea how many of them have considered it.

**Question 2:** Groups which meet electronically often attract members who do not reside within the geographical boundaries of the Area. These members may be encouraged and willing to serve our groups, Districts, and Area as trusted servants. What impact might this have on our District and Area service structure? What impact might this have on how our Area responsibilities are fulfilled?

**Discussion:**

- Trusted servants that join the Area service structure would need to be accommodated in their District and the Area meetings.
- Districts would need to be willing to be both in-person + electronic if they invite a GR from an electronic-only group to join who is unable to join them in-person.
- This may be a significant burden for the District in terms of the necessary equipment and internet connectivity to include a GR electronically, so it would be up to the District to decide if they can accommodate an electronic group.
- If there is no existing District able to accommodate electronic participation, new electronic-only Districts would need to be created to include electronic meetings in the Area service structure.
- This also implies that the Area meetings and assemblies would need to be either all electronic or in-person + electronic to include DR's and GR's from electronic-only districts and groups.

**What do we wish we knew, but don't?** We don't yet know if *any* existing districts would accept electronic-only GR's in their in-person district meetings. Many district meetings are currently done electronically, so we may not see any conflicts arise until district meetings are more commonly being held in-person. The area meetings are also currently being held electronically, so again there may be no issue there until the area moves back to in-person meetings.

**Question 3:** Groups which meet on electronic platforms and seek to participate in the local structure may have trusted servants who reside in different locations across the geographic Area. How would the Area determine in which District(s) these groups would participate?

**Discussion:**

- If a temporary online group splits off from an in-person group to become a permanent electronic group, it may want to remain connected to the same district where it originated.
- The District should have the autonomy to include those groups if they are all in agreement.
- If no existing District agrees, or such an electronic group only wishes to remain connected to the Area, then one or more electronic Districts would need to be created to include them at the Area level.

**Question 4:** How might Area Assemblies and District meetings need to change to accommodate trusted servants living within and outside of the Area? Would Areas need new service roles to support groups which meet electronically? Why or why not? Are our groups willing to financially support additional Area service roles and/or technology?

**Discussion:**

- Area Assemblies may need to be held in-person + electronically in order to include GR's from electronic groups if they are unable to attend in-person.
- Districts that choose to include a GR from an electronic group would need to conduct their meetings either all electronically or in-person + electronic.
- A downside to including electronic groups in existing geographic districts is that district reps may not always be willing or able to run in-person + electronic district meetings to ensure they are duplicatable in the future.
- AWSC meetings would also likely need to be in-person + electronic to include DR's from all-electronic Districts who cannot attend in-person.
- The Area meetings may benefit from being both in-person + electronic to encourage geographical districts to have DR's, and to attend the area meetings.
- Having electronic participation in Area meetings may also help to promote service for the service positions that are currently going unfilled.
- If groups are contributing donations from international sources, currency differences may need to be taken into account.

**What do we wish we knew, but don't?** We don't yet know if groups (meaning the area as a whole) are willing to create a budget for additional Area service roles or technology.

**Question 5:** Because Electronic Meetings were not a part of any service structure, some of their members may not have participated in District and Area meetings. How might our Area welcome and support them? How might we help them understand the service structure in our Districts and Area? For example, are members willing to organize service workshops? Are members willing to act as Service Sponsors? What other kinds of support could our members provide? Are there any kinds of support which it would be wise for us not to provide?

**Discussion:**

- Electronic meeting members may come from anywhere in the world, so it is important to advertise meeting times in a way that makes it clear when the meeting is. This includes using the proper time zone and the effect of daylight savings in all announcements.
- Online workshops to assist GR's and DR's with their group and District functions would not only assist them, but also provide a means for them to meet their service peers and foster a sense of community with those who serve at the same level.
- Reaching out to current and former GR's and DR's to ask them to become service sponsors for GR's of electronic groups may be helpful to make them feel included and supported.

***Permanent Electronic Groups Decision Tree for Spring 2022 Assembly***

This decision tree is designed to streamline the decision-making process that will be presented at the Spring 2022 Assembly for the GR's to discuss and vote on. The final decisions will be taken up by a Task Force as necessary to implement the decisions made by the GR's.

- Allow Permanent Electronic-Only Groups (PEG) to join the MA Area Service Structure?
  - No:
    - PEG's would join the new WSO Area for Electronic Groups. Electronic groups would have a voice through that area.
  - Yes:
    - Must a PEG have at least one member who resides in MA?

- No: The PEG would be able to join the area regardless of where the members resided.
- Yes:
  - Must the GR of a PEG reside in MA?
    - No: It is up to the group to decide who the GR will be regardless of where she or he resides.
    - Yes: The GR of a PEG must reside in MA.
  - Must the other primary group officers (Secretary, Treasurer) reside in MA?
    - No: It is up to the group to decide who the officer will be regardless of where she or he resides.
    - Yes: The primary officers of a PEG must reside in MA.
- May the PEG ask to join an existing district rather than joining a new electronic-only district?
  - Yes: If accepted, the PEG GR would attend the district meeting of the group's choice. The GR would travel to in-person district meetings if the meetings are not virtual.
  - No: If not accepted, the PEG GR would attend a district meeting assigned by the area.
    - Will all PEG's be assigned to a new electronic-only district?
      - Yes: A DR for the PEG district would attend the area meeting and run district meetings. Multiple districts may be necessary to ensure districts do not become too large.
      - No: The district that the PEG joins will accommodate them by doing an in-person and electronic meeting if necessary.
- If a PEG does not ask to join (or is not accepted by) an existing district, will the assigned district include only PEG's?
  - Yes: All PEG's would join a district for electronic groups. Districts would be created with no more groups than would be manageable.
  - No: The PEG may be assigned to an existing geographic district.
- Will the area meetings (AWSC) need to be both in-person and electronic to include the DR's for PEG districts?
  - No: The DR of an electronic district must be able to attend AWSC meetings in person when they are in-person.
  - Yes: Any member of the AWSC meeting may attend electronically, not just the DR's of PEG districts. This would allow for more participation by members of the AWSC meeting when they live far away or for other reasons.

The following recommendations are based on the discussions we had regarding the inclusion of permanent electronic groups in the Area 25 MA service structure. These are only recommendations to the area GR's, not any kind of final decision. This document will be presented to the steering committee and the AWSC in advance of the Spring 2022 Assembly. Depending on the decision of the GR's at the assembly, a Task Force will be convened to work out the implementation of those decisions. The Thought Force has no decision-making authority, so nothing in this document should be taken to mean any binding decisions have been made.

## Summary of Recommendations of the Thought Force to the Spring Assembly:

1. Allow Permanent Electronic-Only Groups (PEG) to join the MA Area Service Structure? - the thought force recommends yes.
2. Must a PEG have at least one member who resides in MA? - the thought force recommends no. Is there a need to monitor groups to make sure they have active members from MA? We don't believe that is necessary and would prove to be difficult. Any group wanting to join the MA service structure probably has a good reason to do so. It seems harmless to include them if they are dedicated to serving the area.
3. May the PEG ask to join an existing district rather than joining a new electronic-only district? - the thought force recommends yes.
4. If a PEG does not ask to join (or is not accepted by) an existing district, will the assigned district include only PEG's? - the thought force recommends yes.
5. Will the area meetings (AWSC) and assemblies need to be both in-person and electronic to include the DR's and GR's for PEG districts? - the thought force recommends yes.

It is our expectation that, if PEG's are allowed to join the area service structure, they would elect GR's that participate in their districts just as in-person groups do. All aspects of their participation in the area service structure would be the same as in-person groups except for their use of electronic means to meet.

## Ideas to hand off to the incoming Task Force or Technology Committee:

1. Survey the membership to determine how many PEG's will be created by groups that have split off from their original in-person groups and also want to join the area service structure. Also ask them if they want to remain in their current district or to join an electronic-only district. Decide how many electronic-only districts to create, and decide on the timeline for implementation.
2. Assign PEG's to the new districts as needed.
3. Create a process to invite GR's of PEG's to elect a DR for the new district.
4. Create a new coordinator titled "Technology Coordinator", who would make sure that in-person + electronic AWSC meetings, assemblies, and events are run smoothly.
5. Decide how to implement the budget/purchase/maintenance of whatever is necessary to have in-person+electronic AWSC meetings and assemblies.
6. Add an area budget item to pay for equipment necessary to have in-person + electronic AWSC meetings.
7. Consider how to include training for the technology committee and the area membership to run in-person + electronic meetings or events. This would include training for Zoom hosting and other platforms.
8. Complete the implementation of shared Zoom accounts for meetings across the area.
9. Create a publicly-accessible electronic archive for this document and related documents.

## **Appendix A - Additional Notes:**

- Alateen is NOT part of this thought force's considerations.
- Non-English/Disabled-friendly meetings are not requiring all meetings to have translators, etc., so we need to be sensitive to the effort and cost involved in including PEG's in existing district meetings.
- We don't yet know how many MA electronic meetings will become PEG's, but there are enough meetings to potentially merit multiple electronic-only districts.

- The area meetings may benefit from being both in-person and electronic to encourage districts to have DR's, and to attend the area meetings. Having electronic participation in area meetings may also help to promote service for the service positions that are currently going unfilled.
- It may tax existing districts excessively for them to include PEG's. Not all districts even have DR's and it would not make sense to include a PEG in such a district. In addition, a district with an in-person + electronic meeting should be able to continue like that even when the DR changes (duplicatable service).
- Does an electronic district have a special requirement to contribute to the area to offset the costs of in-person + electronic AWSC meetings? We are thinking "NO" to this.

***Appendix B - Additional Questions and Thoughts to Consider:***

- How would the PEG collect donations (and in what currency) and donate to their district and the area?
- Should PEG's joining the area be required to use one of the shared Area Zoom account(s)?
- Would the convention/AWSC/Assemblies need to be in-person + electronic, meaning: New coordinator, electronic-only convention, purchase of equipment for the area, venues with conferencing equipment, money/expenses, projector/screen for events (district event e.g. would a day of recovery be able to borrow equipment?)
- Area service roles may require that the person serving live in MA for legal or financial reasons or to have access to the Westborough office. The area service roles should be reviewed with this in mind.
- Electronic meetings may want to remain online only because they contribute no money.
- Yearly fee for participating as an electronic meeting in the area? Symmetry for in-person meetings?
- Provide a list of reasons why buying equipment for in-person + electronic area meetings is worthwhile.
- Should we create how-to videos and put them on the area website?