

Electronic Meeting Work Group: PowerPoint Presentation, WSC-4-2020

I would like to start today by introducing the members of the Electronic Meeting Work Group. Cindy K., South Central Regional Trustee, Karen W-P, Executive Committee At-Large Member, Scot P., Associate Director – Digital Strategy, Sue P., Associate Director – Group Services, Vali F., Executive Director, and I am Lynette K. Trustee at Large and Chairperson of the Work Group. I want to thank the members of the Electronic Meeting Work Group for all of their hard work this past year. It has been a privilege to work with each of you. Today we want to share with you some of what the Electronic Meeting Work Group has accomplished over this past year.

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Our presentation today will cover a number of topics. First, Sue is going to share how our relationship with electronic meetings has evolved, Vali and Scot are going to share about some of the challenges, Cindy will share statistics on the number of meetings and the worldwide affect, and then Karen will share closing thoughts. We will have time at the end for you to ask questions.

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- ▶ March 2015 – Annual Phone Meeting CMA conference calls begin
- ▶ November 2018 – Conference call with all Electronic Meetings CMAs
- ▶ January 2019 – AFG Connects Electronic Meeting Community created
- ▶ April 2019 – Online and Phone Meeting CMA conference calls

The Electronic Meeting CMA conference calls cover a number of topics:

- Use of resources on al-anon.org to support the meeting, like samples of literature, the Slogans used in Al-Anon page, and resources to welcome newcomers.
- Use of the Traditions to resolve conflicts in meetings
- Starting new meetings on new platforms
- How to verify and update meeting information

One topic that gets discussed frequently is service. Electronic meeting members have some different ways of being of service in the meetings on the various platforms. There is a “tech” person to help people navigate accessing the meeting and sharing in the meeting. Participants need to be shown how to mute their line during the meeting. Some meetings have a greeter to welcome newcomers. There are also more traditional service positions like chairperson, secretary and treasurer. Electronic meetings hold regular business meetings. Although some of the service opportunities may be different, service is an important part of recovery for electronic meeting members.

Safety in meetings is another discussion topic. There have been discussions on how to handle members that are disruptive or who make inappropriate comments. Use of the "Let's Talk about Safety in Al-Anon Meetings" service tool have been extremely well-received. The challenge in electronic meetings depends on the platform. Phone meetings may have verbal disruptors and email meetings may have written text disruptors. The conference calls are an opportunity to share solutions the meetings have used so that the focus of the recovery meetings is recovery.

Lastly, sponsorship is often discussed on the calls. Some of the meetings keep a directory of members that are willing to sponsor or are willing to "chat" after a meeting. Sometimes the topic of the

meeting is sponsorship. But there are some limitations around sponsorship with electronic meetings. As someone on a call pointed out, "There is nothing like a real hug and someone to wipe your tears." Do some of these discussion topics sound familiar to you? These sound like the same issues that have been shared at my home group, district, and Area.

Now I will turn it over to Vali to talk about protecting our name.

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Warranty Four of Al-Anon's Twelve Concepts of Service on page 218 of the *Service Manual* states, "It has been said 'Al-Anon is prepared to give away its knowledge and experience—all except the Al-Anon name itself.' ... We simply request that the public use of the Al-Anon name be avoided by those who wish to avail themselves of Al-Anon techniques and ideas. In case the Al-Anon name should be misapplied, it would be of course the duty of our World Service Conference to press for discontinuation of such a practice."

In the world of internet and social media, the challenge for the World Service Office in achieving its delegated responsibility to accomplish Warranty Four is substantial. Wanting to fulfill our primary purpose, well-intentioned Al-Anon members are more and more frequently using social media to create meetings and share information and create mobile apps which use copyrighted or trademarked Al-Anon materials. What most don't understand—and the Warranty Four text does not explicitly state—is that using the trademarked Al-Anon name without WSO approval for good intentions reduces our ability as an organization to protect our name from use by those who seek to profit from it.

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- ▶ Encouraging electronic meetings registration
- ▶ Correcting Legacies posting guidance
- ▶ Clarifying authority and responsibility

The trademark challenge began with the long-held understanding that electronic meetings, starting with the phone meetings, served a public outreach rather than recovery purpose. Given this mandate, it seemed reasonable for well-intentioned Al-Anon members to create social media groups—using the Al-Anon trademarked name—to attract newcomers without being registered as Al-Anon meetings. As our understanding of the purpose of online electronic meetings evolved, so did the need to educate and encourage meeting registration. Registered Al-Anon electronic meetings are given the authority to use the Al-Anon name and logo trademarks.

As the number of registered meetings increased—you'll hear more about the statistics later in this presentation—so did the intensity of conversation regarding posting the Opening and Closing and the Legacies. Registered meetings were feeling constrained by their commitment to do the right thing. Talking to each other and reasoning things out with one another, the WSO and electronic meeting CMAs were able to correct our guidance regarding posting the Al-Anon Legacies—meetings that sign the annual Conference Approved Literature reprint license—are allowed to post the Legacies. We also worked with our attorneys to determine if we could allow more extensive postings of CAL to be permitted. Unfortunately here, the copyright law does not support our desired outcome. We'll continue to explore.

Early this year, we realized we likely needed to revisit the understanding of authority and responsibility for using and protecting AI-Anon trademarks and copyrights across the WSC Structure as well, potentially, for electronic meetings. More will be revealed. In the meantime, we continue to encourage those online meetings which have not yet registered to do so and to ask all AI-Anon members to refer those looking for electronic meetings to al-anon.org rather than to Google which still returns non-registered meetings.

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In the world of electronic meetings, we know the WSO is not alone in facing challenges. This last year, electronic meetings were faced with

- Potential changes in Federal Communication Commission (FCC) regulations which could impact availability of free conferencing applications;
- Dominance and rotation of leadership issues both for phone and online meetings; and
- Technical issues with online platforms such as Facebook, whose Messenger links stopped working suddenly.

In light of its clearinghouse role, electronic meeting members and newcomers visiting our meeting search often contact the WSO for answers.

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Unfortunately, in many cases it is not our purview to help. Our Staff can help support meetings through the electronic meeting registration process. We are learning more and are constantly increasing the experience, strength, and hope we can share with those starting on this journey. Staff also gladly offer their time, facilitation skills, and the AFG, Inc. web conferencing subscription to host CMA meetings to discuss pressing topics and evolving understanding of how electronic meetings can best support our primary purpose.

Where we are unable to assist though is resolving technical issues. Staff has no means of providing technical support for any platform currently hosting AI-Anon meetings. Much like face to face meetings must work directly with their facility manager when issues arise with access or location conditions, so too do the electronic meeting hosts need to work with their platform manager to address technical challenges. Regrettably for those using larger platforms, such interaction is likely to be less personal and immediate than might be experienced in the face to face environment. This is one of the reasons the WSO is developing the AFG, Inc. mobile app. Through this we will be able to offer a confidential online and phone meeting platform for facilitating electronic meetings that we can support. Stay tuned! And now over to Scot

Thanks Vali,

Currently there is no easy way for electronic meetings to give and receive contributions. In most cases the platforms which are being used are free but there are members using electronic meetings as their only source of recovery and the only way to effectively contribute today is via AI-Anon online contributions, which presents a challenge if the member would like their contribution to be credited to their electronic meeting.

Members attending face to face meetings have access to Group-purchased Conference Approved Literature (CAL) to read during their meeting. Electronic meetings do not have a way to pass the book around for reading. So they either have to rely on members who have individually purchased CAL to

read from it or risk the copyright by pasting images of CAL in group chats so others can participate in reading.

Electronic meetings were also not able to provide newcomers with any takeaway information such as the *Al-Anon Newcomer Kit (K-10)*. Some electronic form was requested by Electronic Meeting CMAs. Based on this feedback, the EMWG recommended that Staff create an automated email with newcomer information. The new email in English is live and can be requested by visiting al-anon.org/welcome. Translation will follow. Now, if you put on your newcomer hat and open your email, we have sent the electronic newcomer welcome email to each of you to view.

**{An email will be delivered to all Conference members at about 10 minutes into our presentation.}
{Pause to give everyone a chance to open their emails and look at the electronic newcomer welcome email – Scot will watch the room and when he feels like everyone has had sufficient time he can turn it over to Cindy}**

I would invite each of you to consider whether this presentation is one you may wish to share in your Area. If it is, please save the email we have just sent to you so you will have it to forward to your groups and Area trusted servants during your presentation. Now I'm going to turn it over to Cindy to share some Electronic Meeting Stats.

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Thank you, Scot

The introductory comments on page 9 of the 2018-2021 *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual* version two (2) states, "Al-Anon is a unique fellowship that unites members of different backgrounds, races, and walks of life in an inspiring endeavor: helping themselves and others to lead purposeful, useful lives by overcoming the frustration and helplessness caused by close association with an alcoholic." As of February 25, 2020, worldwide there were 215 English; 42 Spanish; 20 Russian; 5 French; 3 German and Polish; 2 Italian and Greek; and 1 Danish, Farsi, Icelandic, and Portuguese speaking meetings. That is a total of 296 meetings of which 180 are phone meetings and 116 are online meetings. The meeting count as of December 31, 2019 was 236. In two short months, 60 meetings have been registered!!

There are seven continents worldwide: Africa, Antarctica, Asia, Australia, Europe, North America and South America. On the screen meetings sharing the languages listed above are marked in dark blue. The graphic makes it clear the Electronic Meeting community carries the message of recovery to members worldwide.

I will now turn the podium over to Karen for closing thoughts.

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- ▶ **Are your face to face meetings recommending electronic meetings?**
- ▶ **Are your groups recommending these meetings to the people they sponsor?**
- ▶ **Do your members know where to find electronic meeting information?**
- ▶ **Are your AIS' giving out information about electronic meetings?**

A newcomer to electronic meetings shared the following. Frankly, I joined because I was put on the Electronic Meeting Work Group. I wanted to know firsthand how the meetings worked, and if the meetings could work for me. It took me a while to get to the place where I began to feel a part of the

meeting. I only shared a couple of times. It was like that when I first went to face-to-face meetings too. What I have been very encouraged by is the consistent recommendations by members to also attend face-to-face meetings.

After a few months of being in the meetings and being in the Electronic Meeting Work Group, I have been thinking about how are these electronic meetings a part of us? There are still many questions like this to be answered.

I noticed in my home group that we never mentioned electronic meetings even when we shared with the newcomer. Why not I asked myself? So, with a little experience behind me, I decided to share with the newcomer about the importance of going to meetings. I included information on Electronic meetings. I also told them where to find electronic meeting information.

We would like to suggest that you bring the topic of electronic meetings at your next business meeting. Find out if the members know where to find information about meetings in general. Please tell them not to google for the meeting, but to go to the WSO website to connect to meetings. Using the WSO website assures that you find a registered meeting. Speak to your LDC's/AIS's about including information in the same way as the face to face meetings in their publications and on their websites.

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Now we will open the floor to any questions