

## **District 23 Proposes that Area 59 conduct all Pre-Conference Sharing Sessions and Delegate's Conference Report Meetings in a Hybrid Format**

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The Covid pandemic provided an opportunity for many of our District and Area events to go all virtual.

The success of these events leads us to the conclusion that we could better serve our fellowship by continuing to offer an online option (along with any opportunities for in-person attendance) at our Pre-Conference Sharing Sessions and Delegate's Conference Report meetings. We believe that an informed and broadly based group conscience is of the utmost importance to the fellowship and long-term survival of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) Obtaining a broader group conscience clearly serves the best interest of the General Service Conference in setting policy and direction for A.A. as a whole.

We believe one of the primary impediments to obtaining a wider Area conscience is the lower attendance as a result of the time, expense and inconvenience of travel.

Our expectation is that by offering both an in-person and on-line option for Area Meetings and Pre-Conference sharing events we will increase participation and therefore gain a broader and more informed group conscience.

We intentionally avoid prescribing anything about implementation. We presume that, if this proposal is adopted, the Area Delegate will do something like assign this to an existing committee or appoint a new *ad hoc* committee and charge such committee with recommending how to implement this proposal.

We have also intentionally avoided prescribing a date by which this should be implemented. Obviously we would prefer it begin with calendar year 2022, but we also realize the Area Committee as a whole might prefer to take longer.

## Background Information

### The “vital” nature of participation:

(The quotations in this section are all drawn from *The AA Service Manual* and *Twelve Concepts for World Service*.)

One of the most important factors in obtaining an informed Area-wide conscience is the widest possible participation. As the A.A. Service Manual notes,

... the home group is where they [A.A. members] participate in business meetings and cast their vote as part of the group conscience of the Fellowship as a whole....

The role of the general service representative, or GSR, is essential to the purpose of general service. Bill W. wrote in Concept I of *The Twelve Concepts for World Service*: “The A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services.” The role of the GSR is essential to ensuring that groups can fulfill that responsibility.

The GSR is the link between the group and “A.A. as a whole.” This link becomes a channel through which news, information, opinions and ideas can flow back and forth. Importantly, this also gives the group a voice in the affairs of the Fellowship. The GSR is that voice.

When the GSR is **present** at assemblies, the group’s voice is heard. The presence of a GSR says their group cares about what’s going on in the Fellowship and wants to learn and make its concerns and suggestions known.

When the GSR **participates**, the group’s voice is heard. It can be through a GSR sharing the group’s concerns across a conference table from other GSRs in a district meeting. It can be through questioning a budget item or proposing an idea important to the group at an area assembly. It can be through making an impassioned plea about an agenda item to the delegate on the eve of the annual General Service Conference meeting.

When the GSR **votes**, the group's voice is heard. The GSR votes on the trusted servants to lead the district and the area as well as the delegate to represent the area at the annual General Service Conference meeting. The group's voice is heard when the GSR votes on how best to use Seventh Tradition contributions to carry out Twelfth Step services.

What's important is to participate.<sup>i</sup>

The Service Manual also lists one of the duties of the Area Delegate to be "Help the area generate greater interest among A.A. members in serving as GSRs and DCMs and in area positions. Inspire greater participation in area assemblies and other activities among GSRs and DCMs."<sup>ii</sup>

Furthermore, note that the Bylaws of both Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. and AA Grapevine, Inc make provision for electronic meetings of their directors:

**Section 5. Participation in Meetings by Conference Telephone:** In connection with any meeting of the Board of Directors or of any committee, any Director or member of such committee may participate in the meeting by means of conference telephone or similar communications equipment or by electronic video screen communication, provided that all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other at the same time and each director can participate in all matters before the Board or committee, including, without limitation, the ability to propose, object to and vote upon a specific action to be taken by the Board or committee; participation by such means shall constitute presence in person at the meeting.<sup>iii</sup>

Appendix V of the Service Manual addresses the topic of *Stimulating Interest in General Service* and emphasizes the importance of participation:

Most A.A. members are primarily interested in their groups, in their own sobriety, and in helping other drunks one-on-one. And that is as it should be. While the work of general service has precisely the same objective — carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers — the connection is not always direct or obvious. Some stimulators are usually needed to get the attention of A.A. members — to show them that service can add a rich dimension to their sober lives and Twelfth Step work, and that their participation is vital to the future of A.A.

Good communication is of vital importance. In personal Twelfth Step work, there is no end to communication. The sponsor talks with the drunk; speakers share their experience; we share with each other. But when it comes to general service work, communication has a tendency to break down. It can take hard work to get the attention of alcoholics, but with a creative approach, they can be encouraged to take time out from the nuts and bolts of

recovery to think about another phase of their new lives. Once A.A. members are well informed about service, they often want to become involved and to take on their own service responsibilities.

... areas encourage participation in general service in many ways,...<sup>iv</sup>

The Table of Contents of Bill W.'s *Twelve Concepts for World Service* lists Concept IV as "Participation' Is the Key to Harmony".<sup>v</sup>

In the introduction to *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, Bill says about Concept IV, "Participation' further guarantees that each service board or committee will always possess the several elements and talents that will insure effective functioning."<sup>vi</sup>

Bill's essay on Concept IV directly addresses what we are trying to achieve with this proposal.

There is another good reason for "participation," and this one has to do with our spiritual needs. All of us deeply desire to belong. We want an A.A. relation of brotherly partnership. It is our shining ideal that the "spiritual corporation" of A.A. should never include any members who are regarded as "second class." Deep down, I think this is what we have been struggling to achieve in our world service structure. Here is perhaps the principal reason why we should continue to ensure "participation" at every important level. Just as there are no second-class A.A.'s, neither should there be any second-class world service workers, either.<sup>vii</sup>

### **Current participation in Area 59:**

Eastern PA has been cited<sup>viii</sup> as having one of the highest degrees of participation among 21 areas surveyed over a number of years. Yet our rate of participation—the percentage of GSRs who attend Assemblies—is hardly over 30%: roughly 1 out of 3. That means that 2 out of every 3 groups are not represented. Increasing this rate to even 1 out of 2 would put us far ahead of virtually all other areas in our rate of participation and would vastly improve our confidence that we really do know the actual informed group conscience of Eastern PA.

By the way, anecdotal evidence accumulated from many visits over decades to Area 9's district meetings indicates that the same percentage of participation occurs at this level of service as well: about 1 in 3.

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*The A.A. Service Manual*, 2021-2023 Edition, p. 7

ii Ibid, p. 12

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- iii *Ibid*, pp. 141-142, p. 150
  - iv *Ibid*, p. 165
  - v *Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. vii
  - vi *Ibid*, p. C1
  - vii *Ibid*, p. C15
  - viii *Areas with High Participation Rates In General Service—Preliminary Findings*, presentation by Antonio G., Oct 2021 revision (available upon request)