Registered Electronic Al-Anon Groups: The Big News

As of March 31, 2021, there are 449 registered electronic groups. Some meet multiple times a week. This grows the number of electronic meetings to 700.

At WSC (World Service Conference) 2021, motions #6 and #7 passed that join Registered Electronic Meetings into the links of service. Through these motions, electronic groups became Al-Anon Groups that meet electronically. They will belong to an Area.

This is a report from Joanne P., VT Area Delegate, Panel 59 on Electronic Al-Anon Groups for the VT Spring May 15, 2021 Assembly.
Definition of a Registered Group

Registered Electronic Groups are listed on the WSO site. Registered Electronic Groups are not face-to-face groups that meet virtually. Registered Electronic Groups are not face-to-face virtual hybrid groups.

An Al-Anon Group registers as a group meeting in a physical location, or it registers as a group that meets virtually. It belongs to one area, a new non-panel area or a geographic area if that geographic area allows it.

None of the Al-Anon Groups in VT are registered electronic groups. We are all registered groups registered to meet in a physical location.
The Motions Passed at WSC 2021

**Motion #6:**

Matter under Consideration: To eliminate the restriction of an Area to be defined by geographic boundaries and to simplify language [in the manual] to incorporate both physical and electronic meeting locations.

Motion #6: Amend the Text throughout the Manual as Identified in the Track Changes Document.

**Motion #7:**

Motion #7: Amend pages 88-89 to Remove the portion titled “Electronic Meetings” entirely
Sue P, WSO, Associate Director of Group Services said:

The purpose of the text changes to the World Service Handbook is to incorporate a non-geographically based Area into the World Service Conference Structure. The non-geographic Area is where the Al-Anon groups that meet electronically will belong. The process to change an Al-Anon group from one Area into a neighboring Area is already outlined on page 158, "Miscellaneous: Renaming an Area, Changing a group/District to a new Area." This section was also modified [through the motions] to incorporate the ability for an Al-Anon group that meets electronically to request admission to a geographic Area.

The following are answers to questions from Sue P, about the motions and electronic groups.
Question #1

May an area accept any geographic group from anywhere?

**Answer:** No. Groups that are meeting outside your geographic Area but near the borders of your Area may request admission to your Area.
Question #2

May an area accept any registered electronic group?

Answer: This is an Area decision to make based on the 2021 WSC discussion.
Question #3

A group may belong to a geographical area or a non-panel area but not both. Is that right?

Answer: Yes. This is correct.
Question #4

If a group wants to switch areas, they have to be released from the one they're in first and then be admitted to the other area. Is that right?

Answer: Yes. See page 158: "Miscellaneous Renaming an Area, Changing a group/District to a new Area."
Question #5

There will be one non-panel area to start but later there may be more than one. Right?

Answer: Yes. This is correct.
Question #6

WSO will not be able to register groups into the non-panel or geographic area until March 2022 or after WSC 2022 when the conference will vote to accept the non-panel area. Is that right?

Answer: Al-Anon Family Groups that meet electronically will continue to be registered through the current registration process. Groups do not register into an Area. Once a group registers, it is assigned to an Area and District based on the registration information.
Question #7

Posted by another delegate at WSC 20210

We have electronic meetings that are not represented in the WSC by a delegate. Currently they are represented at WSC By WSO group services [and no delegate]. The motion would grant a new electronic Area for these electronic meetings.

This [the motion] would also affect every current Area within the WSC. The effect would be that each current Area would need to decide if they want to accept electronic meetings into their Area. If the Area says Yes, then the Area would need to create a new process on how to accept or deny electronic meeting into there Areas.

Do I have this process correct?
In my opinion, you are essentially correct. There are some caveats.

When a group asks an Area to join, then the Area needs to make or have made a decision. EMWG suggests Areas start addressing it now while the non-panel Area is being formed. An Area doesn't have to create a new process so much as it needs to determine the acceptable parameters of a group that only meets electronically joining the Area if/when asked.

The process is simple and is expressed in the Handbook. The parameters are up to the Area autonomy.
Question #8

This answer is from Vali F, WSO Exec Director.

The Electronic Meetings currently registered with the WSO will automatically become Al-Anon Family Groups which are part of a non-panel Area upon the 2021 WSC approving the EMWG (Electronic Meeting Workgroup) Policy Digest and World Service Handbook recommendations. [They were approved.]

Geographic Areas will have the opportunity to decide whether they want to admit groups which meet electronically into their Areas along with face-to-face groups in the year following the 2021 WSC. The EMWG has prepared a four-page guide and accompanying graphic to help geographic Areas reach an informed group conscience on this topic. These materials are ready for distribution pending WSC approval of the Policy and Handbook motions. [See Guides on the next page.]
The Guides

These are the guides for Areas from WSO.

1. Transforming Electronic Meetings To Al-Anon Family Groups 2021-22
2. Transforming Electronic Meetings to AFGs - A Guide for Geographically Based Areas Apr 2021
The History

Registered electronic meetings - up until WSC 2021 - were not part of the Area service structure; did not have a GR and had no voice at the WSC through a delegate. Motion #6 and #7 changed this. Registered Electronic Meetings are now Registered Electronic Groups.

Back in Oct 2020 at the WSO Board of Trustees (BoT) meeting, the EMWG (Electronic Meeting Workgroup) was tasked by the Bot to proceed with these ideas.
EMWG Tasks

This was excerpted from the 2/26/2021 Memo to WSC Members from the WSO EMWG and is part of the guidance the EMWG received from the Bot in October 2020.

1. Make permanent electronic meetings Al-Anon Family Groups
2. Per prior discussions, an Area serving groups which meet electronically being created and added to the WSC to provide support and representation to AFGs Meeting Electronically that choose to be a part of that Area.
3. The option for AFGs Meeting Electronically choosing the Area/GSO/emerging structure where they want to register and through which they want to have representation. These groups would be registered as a part of the chosen Area the same as face-to-face groups in the chosen Area.
4. The AFGs Meeting Electronically language(s) supported would be determined by the service structure with which they registered. (unanimous)
Background

Members of the Al-Anon fellowship have been meeting electronically since the mid-90’s, originally by telephone. Since then, members share experience, strength and hope through a diverse set of electronic platforms. These gatherings of members were originally viewed (and treated) as public outreach where non-members would hear about al-Anon and then seek full recovery.

In keeping with Tradition Three, these gatherings of relatives of alcoholics for the purpose of mutual aid meet the requirement to be called Al-Anon Family Groups. They were only recognized as only Al-Anon meetings and not groups. They register with the World Service Office with a Current Mailing Address (CMA) but did not have Group Representatives.

This all changed with Motions #6 and #7 passed at WSC 2021.
Changes/Recommendation

At WSC 2021, we were asked to consider to allow these electronic meetings to be re-registered as Al-Anon Family Groups. These groups, like face-to-face groups, will have the same service positions in the Service Manual, including a GR. Everything in the manual will apply equally to groups whether they meet face to face or electronically.

The EMWG reviewed the handbook and determined existing procedures already in it will guide and support an Area forming to support electronic groups.

For example, the process for selecting a Temporary Chairperson to hold a first Assembly is on page 145. The Conference Procedures portion is on pages 165-166 and describes the steps to form a new Area to request admission to the World Service Conference.
A Big Change

One big change involves eliminating the restriction for an Area to be defined by geographic boundaries. The definition of “non-geographically based grouping” was added to the definition of Areas throughout the Handbook through Motion #6. [See the tracked changes WSC 2021 motion 6 document.]

The terms “place” and “central location” were simplified to “location” to include both physical and virtual locations.

Since closed ballots is often thought to involve physical paper, the term “confidential ballots” was adopted.
We’re All Al-Anon Groups Now

There is no longer a difference between electronic and face to face meetings except how we meet and what Area we belong to. The 449 registered electronic groups are now Al-Anon Family Groups. They will have all the service positions like face-to-face groups.

They will be part of an Area - a new virtual “non-panel area” or a geographic area but not both. The non-panel Area will have a Delegate to the WSC - same as a geographic Area.

If the electronic group wants to join a geographic Area, they need to receive permission from the area to join it. It is up to the geographic Area to decide whether or not to accept that group into their Area. The Area needs to create a process for deciding to permit registered electronic groups to join their Area, or the Area may decide they don’t want to accept registered electronic groups.

WSO suggests that Areas begin this discussion now while the non-panel Area is being formed. The parameters are up to Area autonomy.
Thank You