*This document was created by the Delegate (Marcia M) and Area Chair (Donna E) from California South (CA (S)). The information it contains is a simplified combination of the WSO's response to CA(N)'s May Assembly Ask It Basket questions and CA(S) questions on the same topic regarding* Hybrid Recovery Mtgs *and the GA Area documents on safe meetings (*KBDM Safe Mtgs *and* Safe Mtgs Checklist *).*

*CA(S) consulted with the WSO for accuracy of statements made in this document but it has not been "approved" by the WSO. I have modified it by removing non-pertinent CA(S) references and inserting CA(N) information when needed.*

*I am sharing it because some members and groups may find this document's Q & A easier for their groups and members to use as we try to navigate returning to face to face meetings while practicing the spiritual principles of our Traditions. Districts may also find it helpful to spend time learning from each other by discussing solutions and challenges the groups have experienced as some of our groups prepare to transition back to face to face meetings or a combination of face to face and virtual, which we are calling hybrid.*

*DRs, please share this information with your groups. This will be posted on our Area website* www.ncwsa.org.*, under Delegate's Corner. I hope a Spanish version will be announced and posted soon.*

*As always, thank you all for your leadership but particularly during this time in our service and recovery journey,*
*Rosanna H.*
*Delegate, P58*
*If there are questions, please contact me at* delegate@ncwsa.org*.*


Dear Area Al-Anon/Alateen Members,

Southern California World Service (SCWS) Area members have been emailing questions to us. These questions address Temporarily Virtual Meetings (such as Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.), when and how to return to Face-to-Face (FTF) meetings, and the possibility of having a "hybrid" meeting (some combination of FTF *and* simultaneous virtual meeting).

We developed the Questions & Answers (Q&As) below after consulting with staff at our World Service Office (WSO) in Virginia Beach, as they are also receiving many inquiries from members all over the country about how to "safely reopen" our FTF meetings. The Q&A below is intended to offer some guidance as our members reason things out with one another in order to reach an informed group conscience regarding how their group will meet in the future. This document is long and detailed because of the many issues related to FTF and electronic meetings that we've never had to consider before.

*SPECIAL NOTE*: *Please look on the last page for directions to obtain the free, downloadable Conference Approved Literature (CAL) on the World Service website,* www.al-anon.org *, referred to in this letter.*

## Q & A:

**Question 1:**   Our face-to-face (FTF) meeting switched to a web-based platform due to the COVID pandemic. How long can we stay with that format before we have to go back to FTF?
**Answer 1:**  Many virtual meetings (Zoom, GoToMeeting, etc.) were created in response to the need within our fellowship for members to meet "online" while we were instructed to "shelter in place" by public health officials. Using a virtual platform as a substitute for FTF *was intended to be temporary*.

**There is no time limit imposed on these temporary meetings at this time.** It is possible that Groups in our Area could continue to meet only virtually for many more months, if/until all of the members of the group feel confident that they can meet in person without any concern about COVID-19. Some ongoing considerations regarding meeting virtually are:

1. **Registration**--Your meeting would continue to use its current WSO ID# in all communications with the District, Area, and WSO.
   ● The link to the meeting's virtual component could be posted on the WSO website, and a local AIS office website (or another local directory).
   ● The link might also be shared among regular group members (not on a public site) provided that there is some way for newcomers in your geographic area to access the link.

2. **Access/Newcomers**--At the present time, many meetings have posted links to their temporary virtual meetings on AIS office websites or directories.
   ● Members are encouraged to discuss (in a business meeting) the group's procedures for safely sharing the link to their virtual meeting. We want to ensure that newcomers in your geographic area can find and participate in your meeting, just as you would if you were still meeting FTF.
   ● One way to accomplish this is to create a group email address specifically for newcomers and others to contact the group in order to be given the link to your meeting and/or a password (if necessary).
   *Special Note***:** We've been informed that some groups may be using the special features of virtual meetings to limit attendance to *only* the members who had previously attended their FTF meeting, and to screen out members they don't know. While it is legitimate to address safety concerns and not post the links to your meeting publicly, it is even more important that the **primary purpose of Al-Anon continue to be front and center for *all* groups: to welcome and give comfort to families and friends of alcoholics.**
   Our Traditions are clear: the only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or a friend. Excluding Al-Anon members or newcomers from meetings is not in keeping with Al-Anon's Traditions and principles.

3. **Representation and Voting**. Any and all decisions regarding your meeting's format, ensuring access for newcomers, etc., are appropriately decided by reasoning things out with one another through an informed group conscience. Some meetings hold regular business meetings, while others schedule them as needed.
   ● If your meeting is attracting large numbers of Al-Anon members from outside our geographic area, the question of who has a voice *and a vote* on group matters can become very complicated, very quickly.
   **Our *Service Manual* notes it is within the autonomy of each group to decide who *votes* on group matters**:
   "Many groups request that only members who regularly attend the meeting vote at the group business meeting. Members who regularly attend more than one group may want to consider at which group to vote on District or Area matters, keeping in mind that our principles are spiritual and voting on an issue more than once could be viewed as trying to control or dominate the outcome." (p. 51)
   ● If you have been attracting members *from outside the Northern California area*, you may want to discuss whether members outside our geographic region will have a voice and/or vote on local issues.
   ● Many District and Area policies and procedures (such as Alateen safety issues, Area elections, Area bylaws, etc.,) are only of local concern.
   ● Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) matters only affect local meetings.

4. **Literature.** See Q&A #2 below.

5.  **7th Tradition**--as is true for every area of group business, the decision about how to collect 7th Tradition and when to distribute "surplus" funds to the service arms is decided by the group's members and each group's Treasurer.

● The Treasurer should continue to give regular reports regarding group contributions and expenses (as was done at FTF meetings).
● The group decides the methods of contributing to the group during this time when it is not possible to make cash contributions, and how to pay for the virtual meeting subscription.
● Rotation of leadership could address both a) who is paying for the virtual meeting account, and b) who is "hosting" the meeting? The group's members (versus the virtual account holder) decide these issues.

**Question 2:**   While we are using a temporary virtual platform, what reading materials can be used/displayed?

**Answer 2:**     First and foremost, **only Al-Anon/Alateen CAL is used in Al-Anon/Alateen meetings**.

● Retyping our literature into a Word document/PDF and sending that to other members and/or sharing it on the screen during a virtual meeting *is a copyright violation*.
● Every member of the meeting can go to the WSO website and have **direct access** to an online *Service Manual* at any time via a phone or computer, **which allows our members to read directly from our CAL.**
● For more information, please see the *Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual, 2018-2021, version-2*, pages 63, 89, 111-116. Also see the pamphlet *Why Conference Approved Literature?* (P-35)

A.  **What's O.K. to display on a screen during our meeting?**
    CAL **that is available to be viewed/downloaded** from WSO's website (WSO at al-anon.org) may be displayed.
    o  *Our Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual 2018-2021 Version two (2)* (P-24/27) contains everything needed for the meeting's format, such as Suggested Welcome, Steps, Traditions, Closing, etc.
    o  The *Al-Anon Focus/Declaration Table Card* (S-24) is a Service tool that can be "displayed" by holding it up to the meeting host's camera on his/her computer/phone.

B.  **What about scanning/photocopying/retyping other pieces of CAL literature or excerpts from a page of CAL to be displayed on screen?**
    o  This is a violation of the copyright! Copyright laws do not support posting excerpts from Conference Approved Literature (CAL), even for registered meetings. In this form, the CAL could be reproduced or modified. (This is how daily readers ended up online years ago and were sold by an outside entity.)
    o  ANY CAL can be read aloud by the participants, just as in FTF meetings.

**Question 3:**   We have members concerned about returning to their FTF meeting due to a variety of factors, such as their age, health conditions, young children at home. What are things our group needs to consider regarding "re-opening" FTF meetings?

**Answer 3:**

● Have public health officials in your area given the "ok" for groups of people to begin meeting FTF in your city/county? If so, what are the local restrictions (i.e., number of people, face masks, physical spacing, use of hand sanitizers, etc.?)
● Has the facility at which you meet re-opened? If so, do they have their own restrictions that are more rigorous than the public health restrictions? We have heard of some facilities requiring that: no food/drinks are allowed in the room; all people entering the room must have their temperature taken; all surfaces, handles, doorknobs must be wiped down with disinfectant wipes before/after the meeting.

- Does the room in which you meet allow you to maintain the "social distancing" requirements of your locale and/or meeting location? What happens if more members arrive than your limit?
- How will you handle literature--both selling it and using it? Will literature for readings be passed from member to member to read aloud? Will members be required to wear gloves, if handling literature?
- Do you have enough Group members willing to be of service and responsible for the additional tasks involved with COVID-19 restrictions/requirements?

**Question 4:** Can we hold a "hybrid" meeting (a meeting that is both FTF *and* electronically), at the same day and time/simultaneously? And can we do that indefinitely?

**Answer 4:**

Your currently registered in-person meeting *could potentially* go back to meeting FTF *and* attempt to add a simultaneous electronic component. Some groups may wish to experiment with a "hybrid" model until it is safe to meet only in person. Before doing so, it is crucial that your members discuss at a business meeting: "How do we hold a hybrid meeting and honor our legacies without diluting our program or compromising our principles?" Below are only a few of the *many issues your group will need to consider*:

- Does the meeting location support the technology (such as Wifi) that would be needed? Is there a member willing/able to attend the FTF meeting to handle the technology issues? Will this member attend consistently?
- Do you have enough members to handle the group's service roles (including new ones added due to COVID-19) if the group is split between two venues?
- Participation: Will everyone be able to hear each other? How will members signal that they want to share? Will all members have equal access to sharing.
- Representation and Voting: *The issues we addressed above in Q&A #1 apply here.*
  Since the electronic meeting will become an adjunct to the FTF meeting, it would be appropriate to consider:
  - How and with whom will you share the access to the virtual link? The meeting link might be shared only locally.
  - How to ensure that local newcomers can find both your FTF location and its electronic link?
  - How will you determine if members who want to join virtually do live within the Northern California area?
  - If you have members attending virtually who live in our Area, but not in your District, how will you handle their voice and vote?
- How will you protect the anonymity of members both in the FTF and those joining virtually?
- How will you handle the 7th Tradition so your meeting is self-supporting and able to contribute to our service arms? Will you have enough contributions to pay rent at the physical location as well as pay for the virtual platform?

*Note:* There is *no WSO process or policy* in place at this time to *register* a **new** Al-Anon/Alateen meeting that meets *both* FTF *and* electronically simultaneously (at the same day/time). **Face-to-face meetings and permanent Electronic Meetings are part of two separate service structures** (see Question 5).

**Question 5:** Our group members like meeting virtually and want to continue doing that permanently *without returning to meeting FTF*. Can we do that?

**Answer 5:** Yes, you can. *However,* if your meeting is considering this alternative--only meeting virtually now and in the future--**please read through the points below carefully so that you understand how that will impact your group and your connection to your District and the Area!**

1. Your Electronic Meeting *would become a completely new meeting!*

a. Your current, FTF meeting will be disbanded. Your former WSO identification   number will become "Inactive."
b. You would register your Electronic Meeting (EM) *as a new meeting* with WSO.
c. Your new EM would be given a new WSO identification number.
d. The link to your EM would be posted on the WSO website, along with all of the  other EM meetings listed here: https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/electronic-meetings/.

2. *Access* to your new, EM meeting:
a. All EMs are posted on the WSO website and are accessible to all members and have no geographic boundaries.
b. This meeting would be open/accessible to all Al-Anon members around the world.

3. *Representation* of your meeting:
a. Your EM would register with a Current Mailing Address (CMA)--a Group member who becomes your link/connection with the WSO. The CMA participates in quarterly conference calls with the WSO.
b. Your group would no longer have representation at the local level, as you will no longer be "local" but "international." **Your group's connection to the District by a GR will no longer exist**. As an individual Al-Anon member, you may have voice at District and Area meetings (through participation in other, in-person, local meetings), but your EM Group, as a Group, *will not have a voice or vote at District/Area meetings*. EMs do not have GRs, only CMAs. The direct link of service for the Electronic Meeting is to the WSO through the EM's CMA.

4. Literature
a. When Electronic Meetings register, they agree to abide by the Traditions just as FTF meetings do; only CAL is used during EMs.
b. EMs can request a yearly license to quote CAL, limited to "short excerpts (maximum one paragraph) from Conference Approved Literature (CAL) in text format in their meetings." See *Electronic Al-Anon Meeting Guidelines* (G-39).

5. 7th Tradition -- all funds beyond those needed to pay for the EM electronic link would go directly to WSO, the only service arm serving the EMs.

These are only a few of the issues which our members will be "reasoning out" with one another. Knowledge-Based Decision-Making (KBDM) is the process that the Area uses at our Area World Service Committee (AWSC) meetings, and Assemblies to come to an informed group conscience. You can find information about how to discuss these issues in your group using the KBDM model by going to www.NCWSA.org, then SERVICE, then Group Reps, then scroll down to Group Reps Packet or click this link:  KBDM

*Literature for Electronic Meetings*:  if you do not currently have the literature we have referred to, please access the WSO website and follow these prompts to locate and download it. These CAL selections are free to download by going to: www.al-anon.org

● *Service Manual,* (P-24/27): Place your cursor over the *Members-> Member Resources-> Manuals and Guidelines-> Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*. As you'll see, it's very easy to navigate through the *Manual* using the arrows to turn the pages and the "search" feature to go directly to the readings you use at your meetings.

● *Al-Anon Guidelines:* Access **all** of the *Al-Anon Guidelines* from the *Manuals and Guidelines* page.

● Pamphlets: Free downloadable: https://al-anon.org/for-members/members-resources/literature/downloadable-items/
   ○ *Are You Troubled by Someone's Drinking?* (S-17)
   ○ *Did You Grow Up With a Problem Drinker?* (S-25)
   ○ *Detachment* (S-19)
   ○ *Welcome Checklist for newcomers*

- Other Items available to download for free:
  - *Fact Sheet for Electronic Meetings (S-60)*--for *registered, permanent* Electronic Meetings: https://al-anon.org/for-members/group-resources/group-records/electronic-meeting-change/
  - *Talk about Safety in Al-Anon Meetings!* (Members->Group Resources)

If you have questions, please use the appropriate links of service (GR, DR, Delegate, Group Records Coordinator, etc.) to get support. If that person is me, I will reach out to the WSO if I am unable to answer any questions or direct you to the trusted servant who can help.

Here is a link to the email addresses for the Area's trusted servants: NCWSA Contacts

Thank you for sharing this information with our CA(N) members.