

Southern California World Service (SCWS) Electronic Groups Task Force Presentation

Part “A”: Group Representatives Answer the First Question

Does SCWS want to welcome Electronic Groups into our Area service structure?

**SCWS Assembly Meeting
November 19, 2022**

Task Force Members:

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Glossary of Terms

- **Area:** A state, province, territory, or non-geographically based grouping represented at our World Service Conference by a Delegate. (*SM p.141)
- **Districts:** Convenient segments into which an Area is divided by the Area World Service Committee, with the approval of the Assembly. (*SM p.141)(SCWS has 29)
- **Electronic Groups (EGs):** are not attached to a physical location and do not have an “in-person” component. They meet using platforms such as: Phone, Chat Room, Email, Mobile App, Zoom, Bulletin Board. (Previously called: “*Permanent Electronic Groups*”. This term is no longer used.)
- **Global Electronic Area:** a new Area formed in 2021 for Electronic Groups; this is a non-geographically based Area. Registered EGs are placed in this Area.

*NOTE: Service Manual References (SM): See *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual*

Glossary of Terms, continued

- **Hybrid Meetings/Groups:** the group is meeting at a physical location with a virtual platform in real time. The group is registered through its physical location.
- **Overlay District:** a collection of groups typically aligned by a commonality, such as language or electronic format. Groups may belong to either the District or Overlay District based on their group conscience. (**SM, p. 74*) *SCWS has a Spanish language “Overlay District”(D-64) with groups participating from across our Area.*
- **“Service structure”**, refers to service “beyond the group level”, as in... Registered groups elect a Group Representative (GR) to represent them at District meetings and Area Assemblies. (See *SM, p. 63-67*) **Groups are the core of our SCWS service structure!**
- **Temporary Electronic Meetings/Groups (TEMs):** were originally formed to temporarily take the place of an “in-person” meeting as a result of COVID. TEM’s are still attached to their physical meeting location because that is how the groups were registered in our Area.

Background Information

- **The May 21, 2022 SCWS Assembly*** approved creating an **Electronic Groups Task Force (TF)** to explore the possibility of **welcoming Electronic Groups (EGs)** into the SCWS Area service structure.
- The 7 member TF (representing 7 Districts) began meeting June 8th.
- After reviewing their “charge” (details of their task), the TF decided to divide the work into two parts: **Part A** and **Part B**.

***NOTE:** The Electronic Groups Thought Force Assembly presentation can be found: <https://www.scws-al-anon.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Accepting-Electronic-Groups-into-a-Geographic-Area-5-13-22.pdf>

Background Information, continued

- **Part A:** Research the question “**Does SCWS want to welcome Electronic Groups into our Area service structure?**” using Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM).
 - Prepare a draft presentation for the August 20, 2022 AWSC
(Note: the AWSC suggested small revisions which are now included)
 - Bring the presentation to November 19, 2022 Assembly for Group Representatives to vote.

- **Part B:** *If our Group Representatives (GRs) approve welcoming Electronic Groups into the SCWS Area’s service structure, the Task Force will reason out the criteria for welcoming Electronic Groups. This information will be brought back to the Assembly.*

Background Information, continued

➤ Currently:

- Registered SCWS Groups meeting at a physical location can elect a Group Representative (GR) to have a voice/vote in their District and at the Assembly.
 - Groups that meet at a physical location can add an electronic component (“Hybrid”) that connects the physical/electronic sections in real time. **These groups are still registered as a “physical group”** associated with our SCWS geographic Area.
- After the 2021 World Service Conference (WSC), all registered Electronic “Meetings” became Electronic “Groups” and were moved into the **Global Electronic Area (GEA)**. As an Electronic **Group**, they could elect a GR to participate in the GEA Assembly and have a Delegate represent them at the WSC.

Background Information, continued

- There are now approximately 285 “**Temporary Electronic Meetings**”(TEMs) in our SCWS Area that were originally formed to *temporarily* replace physical meetings as a result of COVID. Most are meeting via “Zoom”.
- Some TEMs that split from their physical groups registered with the **Global Electronic Area**. Ten of these groups communicated with our Group Records Coordinator (GRC) that they would like to return to our SCWS Area if SCWS develops a plan to welcome Electronic Groups.
- Many TEMs do not want to, or are unable to return to a physical location and are waiting for SCWS to decide if we are welcoming Electronic Groups into our service structure.
- TEMs that are staying united and want to remain virtual, do not need to make any changes at this time.

Background Information, continued

- Some TEMs “split”: a portion of their group decided to return to meet in person, while a portion wanted to remain on a virtual format. These two groups are not connected to each other in real time (not a “hybrid”). Many of these TEMs are unregistered and don’t have a voice/vote in our Area.
- Our GRC has noted that more groups are splitting and are not united.
- In addition, there are some TEMs listed in local Al-Anon Information Service (AIS) directories that were never associated with a physical meeting and are unregistered.
- The TEMs that have split from the physical group, or were never connected with a physical location, are “floating” without any attachment to our Al-Anon service structure. In many ways they are in “limbo”, waiting until our Area makes a decision.

Knowledge Based Decision Making (KBDM)

Summary: Knowledge-Based Decision-Making means information gathering and discussion before a possible solution is crafted and a decision is made.

Step 1: Frame the Topic

Step 2: Gather Information

Step 3: Informed Group Discussion on Topic

Step 4: Coming to an Informed Group Conscience

For more information about KBDM: <https://www.scws-al-anon.org/knowledge-based-decision-making/?highlight=KBDM>

There are four KBDM Questions:

1. What do we know about our members' (and prospective members') needs, wants and preferences that relate to this issue? What do we wish we knew, but don't?

We know...

- This is an important issue, especially for Temporary Electronic Meetings (TEMs) that originated in our geographic Area and still want to identify with SCWS.
- Many of these TEMs are waiting to be included in our Area service structure. Including Electronic Groups in our Area service structure would indicate they are recognized and supported.

KBDM Question One continued:

We know...

- Some members in our Area prefer/need to attend virtual meetings and yet still want to be connected with our SCWS Area.
- If SCWS welcomes Electronic Groups (EGs) into our Area, these groups can have voice/vote in our SCWS Geographic Area.

We don't know...

- How many Electronic Groups fall into the category of wanting to officially belong to our SCWS Area and participate in Area business.
- The details of how this will work out (Part B)

KBDM Question Two:

- 2. What do we know about the resources and our vision for Al-Anon and our meetings that are relevant to this issue? What do we wish we knew, but don't?**

We know...

- We have the financial resources. Our members have historically financially supported the Area and we have closed each fiscal year with a surplus.
- Spanish Language groups have been welcomed/supported: Spanish Coordinator; Translation Equipment; translating Area documents. A Spanish Language overlay District was added to give Spanish Language groups the option of joining their geographic District or the overlay District. We know how to welcome, accommodate, and support differences.

KBDM Question Two continued:

We know...

- Having Electronic Groups welcomed into our Area is consistent with our **Vision for Al-Anon**, which is to
 - Welcome all newcomers/members (Al-Anon/Alateen Declaration)
 - Encourage younger members to join/participate in meetings
 - Continue to be inclusive so members of both physical meetings and electronic meetings feel welcome and a part of our Area
 - Encourage participation in service beyond the group level

KBDM Question Two continued:

We don't know...

- If our members will step up and volunteer for a position(s) that may need to be filled to support Electronic Groups in our Area.
- If our Area Assembly will need to stay “virtual” (currently on Zoom), have an electronic component (hybrid) added if we return to meeting at a physical location, or only meet face-to-face. (*Note: last Assembly survey indicated that 80% of members prefer to hold our Assembly virtually.*)
- If contributions to the Area will change (increase or decrease) if Electronic Groups are added to our Area.
- If there could be an unforeseen Area expense associated with adding Electronic Groups to our Area.

KBDM Question Three:

3. What do we know about our “culture” and “environment” that is relevant to this discussion? In other words--Will our decision be consistent with our principles, policies, and legacies: the Twelve Steps, Traditions, and Concepts? What are the implications of our choices? What do we wish we knew, but don't?

We know...

- Tradition 1: Our common welcome should come first; personal progress depends upon unity.

This decision could help unite Temporary Electronic meetings that were formed in our Area as a result of COVID. Accepting EGs into SCWS is the essence of unity, not separation.

KBDM Question Three continued:

- Tradition 3: The relatives of alcoholics, when gathered together for mutual aid, may call themselves an Al-Anon Family Group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. The only requirement for membership is that there be a problem of alcoholism in a relative or friend.

Electronic Groups ARE Al-Anon Groups. We can focus on commonalities not the differences. They fit the “requirement for membership”.

KBDM Question Three continued:

- Tradition 5: Each Al-Anon family group has been one purpose: to help families of Alcoholics. We do this by practicing the 12 steps of AA ourselves, by encouraging and understanding our alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of Alcoholics.

Welcoming Electronic Groups into our Area supports our primary purpose.

- *Supports public outreach to younger members who are comfortable using technology, and may prefer it as an option for an Al-Anon meeting.*
- *Supports members who are unable to attend physical meetings.*
- *Supports members who prefer to attend electronic meetings.*

KBDM Question Three continued:

We know...

- **Concept 4:** Participation is the key to Harmony.

Electronic Groups would be encouraged to elect a GR that participates in their District meetings and the SCWS Area Assembly.

- Our spiritual principles of Cooperation, Participation, Responsibility, Singleness of Purpose, Unity or Common Welfare (SM p. 91) are supported by welcoming Electronic Groups into our Area service structure; “We are a fellowship of equals” (SM p. 39).

KBDM Question Three continued:

We know...

- Electronic meetings have been around since the 1990s and before.
- Our “culture” and “environment” has moved more into the electronic age; electronic meetings have blossomed and are now accepted into the world wide Al-Anon Fellowship. Our Service Manual now has multiple references to Electronic Groups.

We don't know...

- If members who only attend “Physical Groups” will welcome Electronic Groups as equals.
- If Electronic Groups will want to participate in the Area service structure.

KBDM Question Four:

4. What are the ethical implications of our choices? Would we be practicing our “principles in all our affairs”? What do we wish we knew, but don’t?

We know...

- *“Practicing our principles in all our affairs”* means we are recognizing not only Al-Anon Groups that are meeting at a physical location, but also those Groups that are meeting electronically.
- The World Service Conference (WSC) and the Al-Anon Family Groups (AFG) Board of Trustees have encouraged Areas to develop a plan to welcome Electronic Groups in their Area.

KBDM Question Four continued:

We know this is still about choices:

- The Electronic Group would still have the choice to belong to our SCWS Area, or the Global Electronic Area, depending on their group conscience.
- When newcomers ask for guidance about which meetings to attend, our first question now is “Do you want to attend a physical/in person meeting, or an Electronic meeting?”

We don't know...

- All of the details regarding the process of registering Electronic Groups in our Area, and how EGs in our Area will be listed on the World Service Office (WSO) website. WSO staff is working on this now and has ongoing communication with our Group Records Coordinator!



Are you still wondering about the main differences between an Electronic Group being registered in the Global Electronic Area or being registered in the SCWS geographic Area?

Electronic Groups in the Global Electronic Area (GEA):

- These Electronic Groups (EGs) are listed on the WSO website under Electronic Meetings and are readily available for all members from around the world to join.
- These EGs are often larger groups since they can be found/accessed easily.
- The group can elect a GR that will participate with voice/vote in the GEA Assembly.
- They have no connection with a physical Area.

If Electronic Groups are welcomed and registered in the SCWS Area...

- These Electronic Groups (EGs) would be listed on the WSO website connected to our SCWS Area. (WSO Group Records is working on this detailed process!)
- Members in our Area may wish to find an Electronic Group in SCWS because...
 - some prefer sharing in a smaller/more intimate group (like they did at a meeting in a physical location).
 - some prefer to find an Al-Anon Sponsor in our Area, or meet up with other local members that reside in our Area.
- The group can elect a GR that will participate with voice/vote in the SCWS Area service structure. They would still feel connected with Southern California Al-Anon and topics important to our Area.

Task Force Summary

The KBDM information gathered by the Task Force indicated that:

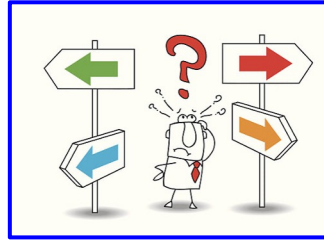
- Electronic Meetings have been an integral part of our Al-Anon/Alateen Family Groups (AFG) for a long time.
- Electronic Meetings are now officially recognized by the WSC/WSO as “**Groups**” with all of the rights and benefits that a Physical Group has.
- Our Legacies and Spiritual Principles support recognizing and including Electronic Groups into our service structure, equal to Physical Groups.
- We have Temporary Electronic Meetings in our Area that want to stay connected to our Area service structure.

Task Force Recommendations

The SCWS Area Electronic Group Task Force Recommends:

- **A vote in favor of welcoming Electronic Groups into our Area Service Structure.**
- **That the Task Force completes “Part B”:** bringing the details of this process and the criteria back to the Area Assembly.

Let's start with Questions, then Comments.



Reminder:

- Only “members” of the Assembly have “voice”
- Raise your Zoom hand (click on “reactions”, “raise hand”)
- 1 minute at the “mic” for Questions; 2 minutes for Comments
- Please lower your hand if another member asks your question or makes your comment.

Note to Assembly members:

We would continue on with the next slides if the GRs vote to agree to welcome EGs into our Area.

If our GRs vote to “Welcome Electronic Groups into the SCWS Area” in November, how soon could EGs register in our Area?



- Currently, WSO has an interim process to register an EG into a geographic Area.
- Our Area would need to agree upon minimum registration criteria before we register EGs in our Area. WSO is deferring to Area autonomy to make this decision.
- Could we agree on this minimum criteria at our Assembly today?
(Part B- first phase?)

Task Force Proposal: Part B (First phase)

- **The TF proposes to welcome all Temporary Electronic Meetings (TEMs) that were formed in our Area to transition to “Electronic Groups” with the same criteria that would apply if they were a physical meeting. This is because...**
 - We want members of these groups to feel connected and a part of our Area.
 - We want to welcome these members to participate in our Area service structure.
 - We may be returning to having our Assembly in-person/at a physical location, and District meetings may return to meeting in-person.

The simplest way to welcome EGs into our Area would be to require that...

- **Group Current Mailing Address (CMA):** the member of the EG holding this position would need to reside in the SCWS Area. (CMA information: *2022-2025 Al-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (SM)*, p. 31)
- **Group Representative (GR):** the member of the EG holding this position would need to reside in the SCWS Area. (GR information: *SM* pgs.73,143)
- **The Electronic Group meets the criteria in our Service Manual:** “The WSO will register any group designating itself as an Al-Anon Family Group with the understanding that it will abide by the Traditions and that meetings will be open to any Al-Anon member.” (*SM* pg.85)

The other details for “Part B” will need to be reasoned out by the Task Force and presented at an Assembly at another time.

Such as:

- How will an Electronic Group that is currently registered in the Global Electronic Area return to the SCWS Area? (*This process is being developed by WSO now and answers will be coming soon*)
- Will Electronic Groups join a geographic District in our Area, an Electronic Overlay District created in our Area, or have the option of doing either one?
- How will we welcome and include our Spanish Language Electronic Groups?

**Questions, Comments regarding the TF proposal:
Electronic Groups who wish to register in our SCWS Area will
need their CMA and GR to be residents of the SCWS Area.**

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(Blank slide to separate out the idea of a Special Assembly from the main presentation)

- **The TF proposes that the rest of our TF Charge/presentation could be given at a Special Assembly before the May 2023 Assembly.**

This is suggested because...

- Area Members (especially those belonging to EGs) may want/need the information before May, 2023.
- The presentation will likely be long due to the details and time needed for questions/comments.
- There may not enough time for the presentation in May.
- Members would be notified of a Special Assembly (held on Zoom) at least 2+ months in advance.
- As always, all interested members can attend, with GRs having “voice and vote”.