

AREA 28, PANEL 72
GENERAL SERVICE CONFERENCE EDITION

The Boomerang



What Will the Next Conference Bring?

The plain language translation of the Big Book will be a very Big Deal. A draft will be complete by mid-year, and the General Service Board will have to decide how to present it to the Conference. This year, we were given Chapters 3 and 5, to read for one hour in a secure room after surrendering our cell phones. Actually, there was a good deal more than two chapters, and the hour went fast. It was beautifully written, not at all a Big Book for Dummies.

When everyone had read it, at the end of Conference Week, the Delegates had a sharing session. As each of us stood up, we acknowledged that we came to New York dead set against it (especially the Southwest Region) or that some in our Areas had told us to say “cease and desist.” I said this. And almost everyone said that reading the translation had changed their minds, that it was far better than expected. Only two of the 93 Delegates said anything against it. One of them observed that it was too good, and would come to replace the Big Book. The other, from the Southwest, said it never should have been attempted.

Keep in mind that this plain language translation is not intended to replace the Big Book, which will remain the spiritual voice of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is intended as a tool for the alcoholic in prison, with no sponsor and limited reading skills; a life raft for the still-suffering alcoholic who may not have the cognitive skills or cultural context that we who read the Boomerang possess, enabling us to decipher Bill W’s colloquialisms.

Peter B., Panel 72 Delegate

“A Members Eye View of Alcoholics Anonymous

A Member's-
Eye View of
Alcoholics
Anonymous



This is A.A. General Service Conference-approved literature.

Originally published in the late sixties, this pamphlet was a presentation to aspiring professionals in the field of alcoholism at a university. Its presenter, an AA member, writes from personal perspective but the pamphlet points out that as AA General Service Conference Approved literature its continued use reflects the conscience of our collective membership.

Earlier this year, at the Seventy Third General Service Conference the Cooperation with the Professional Community (CPC) discussed discontinuing this piece of literature. The committee did not make a recommendation to the full conference and this literature continues to be available for our use. It is available online at aa.org. Are we comfortable with reaching out to professionals in our area with literature of this nature? Why were some folks so uncomfortable with it that it got on the agenda of a conference committee earlier this year? I have my personal thoughts but we are talking group conscience here. Perhaps our area should be inventorying how we use literature to carry of message.

In the winter of 1991-92 I began attending online meetings because I was working in the middle of nowhere. I will state very emphatically that I have always preferred in person AA. Online meetings were crude at that time by today's standards, we met without the benefit of video for example. Covid 19 changed AA for many of us. Although in person meetings have come back to life online AA continues to thrive, to the benefit of many. There are numerous reasons folks are unable to attend in person meeting, whether its working in the middle of nowhere, lack of physical ability, financial limitation, or any other reason, online AA carries our life saving message in way we couldn't have managed just a few years ago.

In this edition of the Boomerang Nikki O., Tad J. and Don B. provide valuable insight into the ongoing communication process between the General Service Conference and the General Service Board in regard to online AA being represented in the conference structure. Nikki is from here in Maine, Tad is from Area 48, New York and Don is from Area 29 in Maryland. Thanks to our Past Delegate contributors for your contribution to the Boomerang, it represents a good geographic experience and perspective of online AA.

How many functioning AA groups do we have in the Maine Area? I have attended many online meetings that started here in Maine and some have disappeared and others appear to be thriving. Is there interest in online meetings that are led by Maine AA members to engage in and be a part of the General Service Conference? Could we support an online district similar to what Area 48, District 20 has started? How much interest has this topic generated from around AA? How much communication has been ongoing with our General Service Board and the planning of the 2024 General Service Conference?

The deadline for receiving conference agenda items for next year is next month. With this in mind Area 28 might ask our groups and trusted servants the question, “How well does our service calendar support the flow of communication to and from the General Service Conference in April?”

I hope you enjoy the information in this newsletter. Yours in service.

John D. Editor

General Service Board Ad Hoc Committee Regarding Online AA Groups

The 71st General Service Conference (2021) brought forward several advisory actions. The one focused on in this article is the following: The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups preferred district and area, with the default opinion being the location of the groups primary contact. This supersedes the 1997 Advisory Action that designated online groups as “International Correspondence Meetings.” An ad hoc committee was developed to respond to this Advisory Action. The tool that was primarily utilized to gather information was an initial questionnaire and then a follow up questionnaire was sent to the Delegates of the 72nd General Service Conference (GSC). The participation level of the 93 areas was 76.5% survey completion. The questionnaire was designed for one response per Area. Delegates only, completed these surveys. The first questionnaire asked 12 questions and the follow up survey asked 4 questions. The ad hoc committee gathered more information through Regional Forum workshops and presentations. At the World Service Meeting there was an opportunity to offer workshops to help maintain unity in A.A. One of the workshops focused on the integration of virtual groups into the General Service Conference structure. The workshop responses produced varying opportunities to aid A.A. in its growth. Concerns were also expressed including a perceived lack of interest in service work in virtual groups in alignment with fewer service opportunities. There are currently 883 listings for virtual groups within the U.S./Canada general service structure. 587 of those groups have a GSR as their primary contact. There are currently two virtual districts: District 20, Area 48 (N.E. New York) and District 25, in Area 72 (W. Washington). Based on the responses of the surveys there seems to be an interest in growing the number of virtual Districts and the addition of a virtual Area. Although the 71st GSC passed the advisory action that the U.S./Canada General Service structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, by listing groups who request to be listed in the Fellowship Connection according to the groups preferred district and area, many groups do not know that they can be listed with the General Service Office (GSO); nor do they know the way to connect with possible Districts (geographic or virtual). The ad hoc committee suggested that there be communication capitalizing on the benefits of general service for virtual as well as brick and mortar meetings. The online groups who have registered with GSO, have questions for staff such as: “How do we choose what district to join if we are not tied to a geographic district?” “What if our members are from other countries?”. While the ad hoc committee and we of A.A. Groups, Districts and Areas have gathered much information, we continue to need more to be certain we are moving forward as responsible A.A. members. The GSB ad hoc committee will continue to explore questions and answers regarding virtual meetings being listed at GSO and report the findings and report to the Board and the Conference. This new territory for A.A. to carry the message virtually continues to need more answers. The chair of this GSB ad hoc committee has shifted with new Trustees in place. It will be interesting to see what the 74th GSC delegate have to report about the movement of the Advisory Action. If you have questions or ideas to submit to this ad hoc committee, send them to the Conference Coordinator or to your delegate. This is a great way to be active in the moving forward for A.A.s online groups to increase unity. Are you participating in online groups? Do you hold a service position in that group? Are you in support of online groups being involved in a virtual district? Should the Conference develop a virtual Area? How do you imagine virtual Groups and Districts could be active in the Service Structure? Would there be a virtual delegate and how would they participate at the GSC? In person or online? The ad hoc committee member is a service position requiring commitment and the ability to have our minds changed and the willingness to accept the results. We have the opportunity to be part of A.A.s future through participation in Service work via an ad hoc committee. Are you giving back to A.A.? Do you know what ad hoc committees in area 28 are working on? Do you want to be part of an A.A. committee? Talk to our Area Chair with your desire to be part of the everevolving Alcoholics Anonymous program and fellowship in Area 28 and beyond.

Feel free to reach out to me if you have further questions or thoughts.

Love through Service,

Nikki O. A28 P70 Grapevine & La Vina Committee.

AA - A World of Change in a World of Change Part Deux

Tad J, NorthEastern NY Area 48, Panel 70 Past Delegate

Back in October of 2020, I was asked to write an article for the Boomerang sharing my experience and thoughts on what was happening in AA as a result of the pandemic and being part of an Area that was considering forming a virtual or now the preferred term, Online District. That article was reprinted in the April 2023 edition of the Boomerang and I am honored to be asked by your Boomerang editor to provide some follow up thoughts.

As we learned during the pandemic when our AA world that we were so used to was shut down, we are a group of people that actually handle adversity well, and we adapted and moved forward in very short amount of time to take advantage of the technology available to us and moved almost entirely to the online format, so the message of Alcoholics Anonymous was able to continue to be carried to the next person in need and to those of us that depend on it to continue a better way of living than we had in the past.

I am pleased to report that our Assembly voted in favor of forming such a District, now known as District 20 in Area 48. I take absolutely no credit for the work behind this and to be honest, the first time the proposal came forward, I voted against it because I felt the proposal was too vague and I was trying to wrap my head around the idea of what it actually meant to have a completely online District and it initially failed to pass. An ad hoc committee was formed and in May of 2021. A revised proposal was brought forward and was passed by our Assembly. Now, two years later, the District is a reality, I belong to an online homegroup which is part of District 20, and have the privilege of sitting on an ad hoc committee which is working on the District 20 service manual.

District 20 has a DCM, Alternate DCM, a Treasurer, a number of other District positions are filled, and a bank account was opened for 7th Tradition contributions to be self-supporting. GSR's attend to represent their groups. There is a website for the District: <https://district20.aahmbny.org/>; which has pertinent information about what's happening. There are currently 12 groups in the District, with more interest from other groups from all over every month.

Starting a new District based on a new-to-us platform is not without its growing pains and lessons learned, much as our founders discovered when they started our program of recovery. What does an online district service committee chair do? How does the Corrections chair help carry the message behind the walls when that population does not have internet access? How do we gain access to treatment facilities? And so on. These are questions without clear direction, but I have faith that we will overcome these hurdles as time goes by.

I have heard both negative and positive feedback on the idea of an online District in general, and to my knowledge, there is only one other such District in the US and Canada, in Area 72 in Washington state. But I can assure you that there will be more. There is substantial interest as other Areas consider the idea and my hope is that as they see the success of these two Districts, they too will take that leap of faith.

In Area 48, we have a great tech team and our Area events have been hybrid for a while now. We made the investment in equipment to make this possible. We will vote in May on making it official that all of our Area events are to be hybrid going forward. This helps to enable District 20 to have the same standing in our Area as our physical Districts and that makes it possible for many to have input into the General Service Structure. More voices always make for a more informed group conscience.

All of this goes to say that by forming our online District 20 and making it possible for people with accessibility issues, lack of transportation, weather-related problems, geographic distance, and a host of other things, to participate in our service structure, etc., we have made it possible for many to feel included in AA as a whole, where they previously did not have that opportunity.

So this begs the question: Is a virtual or online District viable and a good idea? The answer is, in my opinion, a resounding yes!

What Do We Do with Our Online Groups?

By Don B., Panel 68 Area 29 (Maryland) Past Delegate

When I was asked recently what I thought was the item most likely to be on the agenda of next year's General Service Conference, I thought immediately of one that has been discussed for several years now yet still remains unresolved. That is the issue of how to best include the members of online A.A. groups in our general service conference structure. With ever-increasing numbers of online (videoconference, teleconference, chat rooms, and other electronic meeting platforms) and hybrid (combined in-person and electronic meeting participation) A.A. meeting formats, this is an issue that is here to stay. Our self-proclaimed democracy of A.A. world service is founded on the Concept I principle that the final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship, so giving a voice and a vote to our online groups is a fundamental need that screams for an expeditious solution.

Online groups have been in existence for several decades, ever since people started communicating via email. A.A. members began communicating through electronic Bulletin Boards as early as 1986, and the first online A.A. group was established in 1990. The Living Cyber Committee hosted a hospitality suite during the 1995 International Convention in San Diego, which led to the creation of the Online Intergroup of Alcoholics Anonymous (OIAA) to provide services to groups existing in cyberspace without geographical boundaries. Now there are literally thousands of online groups listed with the OIAA, and hundreds of thousands of A.A. members who rely on virtual meetings as their lifeline to the A.A. Fellowship and recovery program. Despite this explosion of online A.A. activity, there is still no clear-cut policy for ensuring that online members can exercise their rights and responsibilities under Concept I and Tradition Two to participate in our collective group conscience by taking part in our general service conference structure.

Every A.A. member has a right and a responsibility to become well-informed about the issues facing A.A. as a whole, yet the path remains unclear as to how members of online A.A. groups may do that. How can an online group participate if it does not have a General Service Representative? What does the online group do if it is not a part of a geographic Area that has a voting delegate at the General Service Conference? What do we do with international A.A. groups that are not tied to any local district or geographic area? How can we include A.A. members all over the world in decisions that affect our entire worldwide Fellowship? In recent years, there have been some well-reasoned proposals submitted to the General Service Conference to resolve such dilemmas. Other than the OIAA, which, like all intergroups and central offices, exists outside of the general service conference structure, there exists no recognized online general service committee on which online A.A. group members can do service.

To its credit, in 2021 the 71st General Service Conference passed Advisory Actions 32 and 33. It was recommended that: 32 The U.S./Canada General Service Structure recognize online groups and encourage their participation, listing those groups who ask to be listed within the group's preferred district and area, with the default option being the location of the group's primary contact. This supersedes the 1977 Advisory Action that designated online groups as "International Correspondence Meetings." 33 The General Service Board form a committee to explore future possibilities for the participation of online groups in the U.S./Canada General Service structure.

In 2021, six separate proposals concerning online groups were submitted as proposed agenda items to the 72nd General Service Conference, but all six were referred to the ad hoc committee of the General Service Board, which rejected all six proposals without an explanation. The GSB ad hoc committee did formulate questions about online groups which it sent to the 93 Area Delegates to the 2022 Conference from the U.S. and Canada – with strict DO NOT DISTRIBUTE instructions. The Delegates were asked to give their responses to the trustees' ad hoc committee questions based solely on their own knowledge, experience, and opinions, without any input from the online groups' members in their areas. When several trustees were asked who served on that ad hoc committee, not a single trustee was forthcoming with any names. To this day, the Fellowship – our A.A. groups⁴ – remains in the dark about exactly who is rejecting our Proposed Agenda Item (PAI) submissions, and, more importantly, why?

This lack of responsiveness by the General Service Board has inspired several delegate areas to create their own online districts to which online groups may affiliate. As of this writing, there are six areas in the United States which now have online districts. They are Areas 12 (Delaware), 14 (North Florida), 45 (Southern New Jersey), 48 (Northeastern New York), 58 (Oregon), and 71 (Western Washington). The Area 71 online district now has 38 active online groups. A separate online service committee, the Get Into Action Committee, has conducted several online “town hall” style forums to discuss the issues facing online groups, sharing experience concerning membership, sponsorship, safety, and service. That same Get Into Action Committee also submitted a PAI to the 73rd General Service Conference to create a new online area. That PAI included a 95-page New Area Application for the Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions to consider, but the ad hoc trustees’ committee on online groups (no one seems to know exactly what the actual name of the trustees’ ad hoc committee is) did not pass the PAI to the Conference Committee. Again, this trustees’ action of no action was taken without explanation, and the PAI did not make it onto the Final Agenda.

This lack of responsiveness by the trustees and this lack of concern for the shared experience of online A.A. groups and members flies in the face of Concept I and Traditions One and Two and represents the antithesis of all that A.A. stands for. The Concepts III, IV, and V Rights of Decision, Participation, and Petition and Appeal have been trampled by the trustees. The tail is wagging the dog. The greatest fear of our co-founder Bill W. is being realized, that the “tyranny of the minority” is holding sway. This atmosphere of secrecy, non-transparency, lack of consultation and lack of accountability by an unknown ad hoc committee needs to end here and now! And the only way for that to happen is for the average member of A.A. to get involved in the discussion. Ask questions. Let your G.S.R., your District Committee Member, and your Area Delegate know exactly what you think and how you feel. Go to the Northeast Regional Forum in Burlington, Massachusetts on June 2-4 and ask your questions directly to the GSO staff, the A.A. World Services Board members, and the General Service Board Trustees. Make your voice heard. Make your vote count!

Why Do We Need a Conference?

The late Bernard B. Smith, nonalcoholic, then chairperson of the board of trustees, and one of the architects of the Conference structure, answered that question superbly in his opening talk at the 1954 meeting: “We may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need it to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in A.A. that rebirth that brought us back to life. “We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must ensure can never invade A.A. We need it to ensure A.A. against government, while insulating it against anarchy; we need it to protect A.A. against disintegration while preventing over integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous, and Alcoholics Anonymous alone, is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions, and all of its services. “We need it to ensure that changes within A.A. come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all A.A., and not of any few. We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of A.A. never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel welcome. We need it to ensure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who needs us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is.”

From the AA Service Manual and Twelve Concepts for World Service

Northeast Regional AA Service Assembly (NERAASA) More Than Another Convention

Have you heard the news? Maine Area 28 won the bid to host the 2026 NERAASA that will be held at the Holiday Inn By The Bay in Portland, ME on February 20, 21 and 22. This is a great opportunity for AA members in Maine to not only attend this powerful event but to become a part of hosting, as there will be many volunteers needed. Maine Area 28 last hosted NERAASA in 2009

You may be wondering what happens at NERAASA. NERAASA is a weekend of Panel Presentations and Floor Discussions on issues affecting A.A. today; the Northeast Regional Trustee's Report; Saturday Dinner followed by an A.A. Speaker Meeting. In addition, there are several Round Table Sharing Sessions throughout the weekend. They include (but are not limited to); General Service Representatives (GSR's), District Committee Members (DCM's), Archives, Cooperation With The Professional Community (CPC), Public Information (PI), Correctional & Treatment Facilities (CTF), Grapevine, Area/Panel Officers, Central Office/Intergroups, Website, Alternate & Area Delegates. You don't have a service position! No problem, you may attend any of the Round Tables, (except for the Area Delegate/Alternate Delegate's Round Table); that pique your interest to discover what they are about. Who knows you may just find your next or your first service position.

Maine is part of the North East Region of A.A. The NE Region consists for 18 Delegate Areas from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts (2), Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York (4), Pennsylvania (2), New Jersey (2), Maryland, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. NERAASA is where you can learn about the A.A. movement and what is the glue that unites us. The history of our service structure (the upside-down triangle) will begin to make sense. You'll meet people from the North East Region and beyond that will form friendships that will last for years. Once again, you'll come to the realization that there are other people just like you.

I attended my first NERAASA in 2012, hosted by Area 48 and held in Albany NY. This is after avoiding attendance for many years. What I found was a side of A.A. that I never knew existed. Here's where I met people that were just like me, who had a thirst for serving the sick and suffering alcoholic. There were people attending from all over the US and Canada. I got to meet and talk to committee chairs, General Service Representatives, Delegates, General Service Board Trustees, employees of the General Service Office, and curious A.A. members. What I learned was that no matter what position an individual had; we all loved Alcoholics Anonymous and are seeking new ways to better serve A.A. I was serving as Area 28 CPC Chair bringing honesty, open mindedness, and willingness. The Panel Presentations and Discussions were most informative covering subjects of literature, finances, accessibility challenges, fostering relationships with professionals, and many more. I remember sitting in on the PI/CPC Round table where about a 100 people sat in a circle asking questions and sharing experiences regarding Public Information and Cooperation with the Professional Community. One attendee was from the CPC Committee serving Montreal Canada. He described how his committee members brought presentations into the university medical students describing what A.A. does and doesn't do. Each participant received pamphlets, a Big Book and a Twelve and Twelve as reference material that could be used in the future. The budget for the Montreal CPC Committee was around \$20,000 a year to support their efforts. At that time, it was nearly the same budget as the entire Area 28. For my part I described our "Sponsor Your Healthcare Professional" packets that we distributed to members to provide info on A.A. to the Primary Care Providers.

I've attended a dozen NERAASA's and have had the privilege of presenting on a Panel, facilitating Round Tables, and volunteering to greet first time attendees, providing an overview of what NERAASA is all about. What I tell people is to be open to a new experience for your A.A. life will be transformed forever. For more information, visit www.neraasa.org.

Gene W.

Panel 66, Past Delegate