

DIGITAL PLATFORM MEETING GUIDELINES

CONTEXT

There are a number of groups which have opened online meetings by single members without a group conscience. While most are well run and organised, some groups do not have a proper preamble and others are closed groups. The purpose of this guideline is to bring some uniformity and consistency to the fellowship. It may be used by groups. However, it is largely directed to Area Assemblies to assist them in helping groups conform to a standard and thereby safeguarding the fellowship from a breach of Traditions. We respect the autonomy of areas and groups; this document was prepared out of concern for this beloved fellowship. We trust that in this spirit you too will take up the baton to protect what is so precious to each of us.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Covid-19 outbreak and the closing of AA Group meetings due to the lockdown, a number of meetings opened on digital platforms. Many selfless members of the fellowship immediately took out subscriptions to the Zoom as well as other platforms and opened digital online meetings. We commend the members for their passion and love yet in the same breath have to remind these very members that they are also the custodians of our non-negotiable 12 Traditions which are not always being adhered to.

2. DIGITAL MEETING PROGRAMS

Members meant well by opening up meetings and in the rush to get them going, not enough thought has been put into preparing the meeting program. In order to ensure that we carry one message and there is consistency, we suggest the following:

- The reading of the AA preamble should not be negotiable.
- Singleness of Purpose is of ultimate importance.
- Cyber or any form of bullying (private text chats) can be avoided if attendees are asked to report bullying or abuse to the host(s) as part of the program. Also, by blocking of person to person text chats and only allowing communication with the hosts or "everyone" in zoom meetings this can be avoided.
- We are self-supporting through our own contributions and as such a screen can be shared with your local banking details and those of GSO with attendees. Attendees can be reminded and encouraged to contribute as we still have area office, GSO and digital media subscriptions to pay.
- Some members are displaying their first name as well as their surname on the zoom platform. This goes against our anonymity tradition. Remember that in open meetings and especially on the internet, anybody, including the media has easy access and could compromise your anonymity as well as bring AA into controversy.

3. ZOOM AND OTHER VIDEO CONFERENCING MEETINGS

In some cases, individual members are paying the subscription on behalf of the group which is akin to a member hosting a meeting at his home without charging the group rent. This goes

against our traditions of being self-supporting through our own contributions. Sometimes, the member discloses that it is equivalent to what he/she would contribute to the kitty anyway. The member should at least be reimbursed for the cost of the subscription and it is then up to the member to personally make that contribution to the fellowship in any way he/she thinks fit.

Another delicate discussion to have is that a member takes up the “free subscription” offered by zoom in his or her personal name and then becomes the custodian of the meeting. Without that particular member logging into the meeting, the meeting cannot continue. So we become dependent on that particular person to start the meeting. It is like holding the keys to the group meeting. It should not be left to one person.

4. SOLUTION

There could be a number of solutions or a variation in the suggestions provided as follows:

- The group should take out its own subscription or pay the member the full cost of the subscription. The group should have full access to the account and sign on access and privileges rotated within the group. (PS: Inter-Group New York offers free subscriptions to Zoom accounts).
- A number of groups could share one account provided their meeting times do not clash. Ideally, 21 meetings can be hosted with one zoom account if the area chooses to have 7 mornings, 7 lunch and 7 evening meetings or a variation of the same.
- The area assembly could take out a number of subscriptions depending on the number of groups and the need for digital meetings.

It is important for the Area Assembly to recognise that there are a large number of members who cannot or do not wish to attend online meetings.

5. WHATSAPP MEETINGS

This is another digital platform on which meetings can be encouraged. Areas could set up and have members manage these meeting for those who cannot make use of other media platforms. The meeting program will also apply (include the comments about abusive behaviour as attendees will have access to other member’s contact phone numbers).

Here are some tips on how to setup a WhatsApp meeting

Timeline

1. The WhatsApp Meeting Group must be separate from the regular WhatsApp Home Group to give members the choice if they want to be on the Meeting Group or not. Remember, a meeting can sometimes have over 100 messages including voice notes so using your Group chat would force members who do not want to attend the meeting to receive the messages. Further, scores or hundreds of members may join and your home group chat is no longer private if you use the same group.
2. Set out a preamble and program for the meeting (include singleness of purpose).
3. Remind members that online meetings ought to still enact the anonymity protocol and avoid using full names.
4. Determine who would chair, read literature and share (it could be a topic) in advance.
5. Chairman, readers and speaker to pre-record their part to be shared before the meeting.

6. Warn members meeting starts in 2 minutes
7. Chairman to copy/paste the preamble on group chat (or share pre-recorded message)
8. Chairman calls for 1st reading (normally Big Book) – by Text Message
9. Nominated person shares pre-recorded reading.
10. Chairman to listen to recording to ensure all members have had time to listen to the reading.
11. Chairman calls for the additional readings Follow steps 8 and 9 above until readings are complete.
12. Chairman introduces speaker by sharing pre-recorded message.
13. Person sharing shares pre-recorded share.
14. Chairman to listen to pre-recordings and shares by text or live recording.
15. Some members may start sharing sooner – no problem.
16. Chairman opens meeting for members to share via live recordings or text messages.
17. Chairman to close with 7th tradition (post banking details) and pre-recorded serenity prayer or however else you close meetings.

This guideline is work in progress and any feedback or suggestions could be sent to gso@aasouthafrica.org.za – Attention ASA