

WORKSHOP NOTES

followed by list of Frequently Asked Questions for our groups to consider

REOPENING MEETING SPACES: GROUP CONSIDERATIONS & ISSUES

Saturday, June 6, 9:00am

The purpose of the workshop was to discuss considerations and issues that our groups are likely to encounter when they develop their individual group consciences on in-person meetings and other group matters in light of COVID-19.

Presented by Area 61 RI General Service, RI Central Service, Southern RI Intergroup

Approx. 150 people in attendance at peak.

Opened with Declaration of Unity

Traditions

Ken D. –

- Tradition One – Unity – cornerstone. Groups must survive, or I will not. Must become willing to make sacrifices remaining traditions ask of me.
- Tradition Two – have to have faith that God will provide answers.
- Tradition Four – group autonomy. But so many issues impact other groups or AA as a whole. If there's an outbreak within AA, and governor reports it out, it will certainly impact AA as a whole.
- Five – singleness of purpose. What sacrifices do I need to make? Leave, so newcomer can come in. Keep my opinions to myself on pandemic, racial relations, etc. Help keep the meeting sanitized.
- Seven – Self-supporting. Without self-support, we cannot fulfill our primary purpose. Take extra steps? Consider setting up Venmo; recurring contributions to service entities; etc.

Sandy K. – read excerpts from 12&12.

- Tradition 10 – no opinion on outside issues;
- Tradition 11 – attraction, not promotion. Anonymity at the level of the media.
- Trad 12 – anonymity is spiritual foundation – principles before personalities

Public Health

Mary K. – Public Health. Currently in RI - Gatherings up to 15 people within one room – cannot move from room to room. Can have 15 inside and 15 out. No vaccine currently. Wash hands frequently. Hand sanitizer with > 60% alcohol. Observe good hand-washing protocol. Maintain 6-foot distance. Note higher-risk categories of people (e.g., over 65). If you have symptoms, stay home. In meetings, must use face mask, which must cover nose and mouth. Suggestions for groups: non-compliant member can be brought outside by two other members; create new job of “spiritual sanitizer;” consider no touching when greeting; closing; BYOB (drink & book); have one person handle PPE. Each individual needs to decide what works for them.

Fed/State Regulations

Brett S. – How would reopening guidance pertain to AA? All state-issued guidance depends on voluntary compliance. Primary question: Is AA social group or religious organization? Dr. Scott considers it to be a social group – so 15-person gathering limit would apply. Confusion with church guidance (25%). Theory: sanctuaries are much larger, and can accommodate more with social distancing. If meeting wanted to talk to church and have meeting in sanctuary, then 25% limit would apply. Phase II will likely extend through July 4. Phase III will likely have 50-person social gathering limit. Encouraged masked-wearing and hand-washing. Also encouraging health screening, and consider CDC-compliant questionnaire (used by some places of business) – can ask individuals; can create a poster; etc. Worthwhile to think about restaurant guidance – at table, can take mask off to talk should replace mask when in common areas (e.g., restrooms). We will likely be wearing masks at least through the end of the year or until vaccine is available. Social distancing recommendation will remain the same.

Other Legal Issues

Sue C. / Anne M. –

In addition to the many suggestions for groups to consider, there are also ‘musts’ that groups need to abide by to stay within the regulations and mandates of our state.

- A.A. must abide by the mandates of local jurisdictions where our groups meet. As an organization and as individuals, we are not exceptions to the law.
- Groups must have permission from their churches and facilities to resume meeting on the premises—either inside or on the grounds or parking lot.

Legal Questions to Consider:

- Can we mandate that AA members abide by COVID-related state and federal regulations and guidelines?
 - No. Neither AA service entities (GSO, Area 61, Central Service) nor groups have a legal relationship to individual members.
- Can the AA Area, Central Office or Intergroup be held legally responsible if groups do not abide by the regulations laid out by the CDC or State Department of Health?
 - No. Liability rests at the individual level. Individual members assume the risks inherent in attending in-person meetings in COVID environment. If one member willfully disregards health guidance and protocol and infects another, that willful individual member would be liable for damages incurred by newly-infected member.
- Can groups or individuals be held legally responsible if an attendee contracts the virus and the groups has not followed the CDC and State mandates?
 - No – see question 1 above.
- Are AA groups legally obligated to do contact tracing; and if so, how can we meet this obligation while maintaining our principle of anonymity?
 - No, although contact tracing is suggested in state guidelines, it is not mandatory. Groups can determine if/how to proceed.
- Does a group need permission from attendees to transmit a live in-person meeting electronically (e.g., via Zoom) if group decides they would like to have an in-person/Zoom meeting combination?
 - Rhode Island is a one-party consent state, so only one party involved in a conversation needs to consent to having a conversation recorded. Regarding simultaneously conducting and “broadcasting” an in-person meeting via Zoom, consider members’ expectations of privacy. (There is an expectation of privacy in a shower, but not in an open AA meeting, anonymity notwithstanding.) Consider getting participants’ permission, and allowing members in attendance at physical meeting to sit off-camera.

Environmental Issues

Prescott C. – His group voted to not open yet. He has heard another group has decided to open without regard for meeting numbers; Control Plan; etc. Difficult for people to understand guidelines. Encourages any group without GSR to get one.

Joe H. – Reiterating points:

- Substantial unanimity – traditions are forged out of experiences
- Open windows – air flow is good
- Beware of air conditioners with dirty filters
- Fans – be aware of blowing droplets – angle away from people and possibly out the window

- Be mindful of capacity
- Commitment groups are an issue – make sure everyone’s healthy going in
- Opportunity for new services positions – greeter functions changing;
- Virtual baskets – maintain anonymity
- Contact tracing – consider using this as opportunity to update phone list; consider having visitors sign in with phone info – keep for a couple of weeks, then toss.
- I am responsible. Anonymity is important, but so is health.

Q&A

- One member mentioned that a church is permitting a group to meet without regard for capacity / compliance with guidelines
 - Not sure about whistle-blowing, but if CS, Area, Intergroup learns of groups who consistently do not comply, can consider delisting that meeting until they comply
- One member does Venmo for group. Group Venmo privacy settings are “Private”
- One group has located space for outdoor meeting. For any outdoor gatherings, understanding is 150 square feet per person. Confirm? Also, can groups be broken into smaller clusters to comply with distancing?
 - No. Social gathering for outdoors is also 15. Science suggests it’s safer outdoors. Asked whether outdoor meetings could allow greater numbers, but not yet.
 - We want to remain within the same groups – so if large groups break into series of smaller groups, recommendation is that the subgroups should remain the same - because if one gets sick, only smaller group will have to be quarantined.
- State boundaries. RI/MA – Mass is at a different phase.
 - Complicated. Northeast states are trying to work together. RI is slightly ahead. State law of venue controls. Phase 2 did away with travel restrictions for the most part.
- Can groups purchase masks/hand sanitizer from Central Service? Any provisions for churches to provide masks to parishioners.
 - Possibly. Central Service has none available, but will raise issue at next business meeting to explore purchasing and selling to groups at cost.
 - Remember anything can be used as a mask. Also, masks are more readily available.
- Would like to hear from attendees as to whether/which groups are considering reopening.
 - Anecdotal, we’ve heard that some groups are opening, many without regard to additional precautions.
 - There are resources. District meeting is a wonderful forum for GSRs to discuss, in addition to Central Service meetings
 - Central Service reports four groups notifying that they are reopening.
- Where to get information on Venmo or other methods of collecting seventh-tradition funds.
 - Area Finance Committee is working on a guidance document to distribute. Keep in mind that all require a connection to a bank account. So a group might want to consider establishing a group bank account. Also, consider using online banking – no contact.
 - Central Service website has best practices for 7th tradition funds in virtual environment.
- One member of a large group has question about what will Phase 3 look like.
 - Any phase 3 info is speculative at this point. Phase 3 will include mask-wearing – again, likely until end of year and/or vaccine. Six-foot social distancing guidance will not change – based on scientific research.
- Be aware of taking precautions regarding handling physical money – gloves; don’t pass basket, have members put money in; cautions regarding paying church.
 - Hand sanitizer can be applied directly to cash.
- Will Central Service consider posting guidelines as they become updated, rather than removing groups from meeting list?
 - Central Service has upcoming meeting – will raise the issue of whether to remove meetings who are not complying with COVID guidelines. Can certainly post state guidelines as suggestions. Central Services does post all Zoom meetings, and has not yet posted in-person meetings.
- Is there a difference between Executive Order and a suggestion?
 - Executive Order has the force of law. Question is enforcement.
 - Enforcement is not meant to be heavy-handed. Very few fines have been assessed.
 - We do need to follow the law, but there are no AA police.

SURVEY

Please complete survey. Survey purpose is to take the temperature of groups regarding reopening face-to-face meetings. Deadline to return survey is Sat., June 13, at Noon.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ReopeningSession>

Close with the Responsibility Statement

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS for our groups to consider

- Has your home group scheduled a group conscience or business meeting to consider resuming face-to-face meetings?
- Is your group familiar with the latest CDC, state and federal regulations regarding gatherings (such as wearing masks, meeting size limits, social distancing)?
- Has your group had a discussion with its landlord to learn if it will be allowed to resume meetings and if so with what guidelines?
- Will your group provide hospitality service?
- Will your group provide supplies, such as hand sanitizer and masks?
- Will the group institute new protocols for cleaning/disinfecting common surfaces?
- If a literature meeting, will your group share literature between members?
- Will your group expand the Greeter's role? Create new service jobs?
- Has the group discussed concerns around the common handling of the basket, secretary book, bookie calendar, chips, tickets, pamphlets, etc?
- Does the group have access to additional rooms for overflow or an alternative space?
- If the group typically attracts more attendees than can now be accommodated with the new restrictions, how will it handle this challenge?
- What will the group do at the point it reaches its capacity as defined in the latest regulations?
- Has the group considered how it will respond if requested to cooperate with health department contact tracing efforts?
- Has the group considered not reopening its in-person meeting until such time as it can meet unrestricted?
- Has your group considered how its actions and decisions could affect other groups or AA as a whole?
- If your group has been meeting on a virtual platform, will those meetings continue in any form after the group reopens?
- Are there ways to combine face-to-face meetings and virtual meetings as one?
- Has your group discussed its processes for accepting contributions? Electronic contributions options? Making contributions in keeping with its group conscience?