

General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Response

Update on the 70th General Service Conference

The General Service Board and General Service Office have been closely monitoring developments related to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to a General Service Board team, a GSO task force has been meeting daily to stay up to date on developments and best practices as the situation rapidly evolves; including extensive discussions with colleagues in the fields of epidemiology and public health along with continuous consultation with one of our Class A trustees who is a medical professional.

Considering the rapid spread of the coronavirus and the most recent guidance from the CDC, New York State and City government officials as it pertains to minimizing the risk of contracting the coronavirus and others, it became necessary for us to take certain steps to not only assure the health and safety of our Conference Members, and GSO and Grapevine employees, but also as responsible citizens.

The General Service Board met in a Special Meeting on March 12, 2020 which was held on an audio-visual, digital platform. After thoughtful discussion and consideration for the health and safety of all Conference participants, the General Service Board has voted 1. To cancel reservations at the Hotel Westchester Hotel for the 70th General Service Conference; and 2. to *virtually* host the 70th General Service Conference – April 19-25, 2020 – on a digital platform.

Challenge

In reaching its group conscience to virtually host the 70th General Service Conference, the General Service Board considered many aspects, including the following:

- A State of Emergency has been declared for New York City with the virus continuing to spread rapidly spread (i.e., 43 new cases in one day alone).
- New York's epicenter of the coronavirus is located in Westchester County. In fact, the containment area is located approximately one mile from the Hilton Westchester Hotel – the site of the General Service Conference.
- According to guidance provided by public health officials, those at higher risk of getting very sick from this illness include people:
 - 60 and older
 - With underlying health conditions including heart disease, lung disease, or diabetes
 - Who have weakened immune systems

Given that information, current demographics of A.A. population (i.e., median age of Conference members is 59) make our population particularly vulnerable and at higher risk for serious medical complications.

Further, several GSO and Grapevine employees also fall in the high-risk group or have partners who are at high risk.

- Postponing the General Service Conference to a later date would adversely impact Areas and Districts who might have to reschedule post-Conference events. It also would impact Conference elections and trustee rotation.

Solution

- Virtually hosting the General Service Conference on a digital platform – at a cost to be determined. (Note: Currently, the office is soliciting bids from vendors to manage the virtual Conference.)
- To minimize any further disruption, the General Service Conference will be held within the original timeline of the week of April 18-25.
- The Conference schedule will be modified to focus on essential business including, but not limited to, committee meetings and reports, Regional trustee elections, and board meetings. The modified schedule may also include selected presentations.
- Conference members will receive notification from the General Service Office regarding the changed format and will be provided specificity regarding logistics and technical aspects.
- Questions regarding Delegate fees and additional Area contributions related to the General Service Conference will be addressed in subsequent communications.

Benefits

- Hosting a virtual Conference will give us first-hand experience and will be useful going forward as we learn to use videoconferencing and other communication platforms.
- Under unprecedented global circumstances, we will be able to carry out the business of Alcoholics Anonymous – ultimately assuring that the hand of A.A. is there for the next sick and suffering alcoholic.

March 14, 2020