

Future of the WSC

May 2017 Report on WSC Seating



OBJECTIVE 4 — Future of the WSC: Continue work to make the WSC a more effective resource to help achieve the Vision for NA Service

Strategies:

- A. *Based on the results of the WSC discussions, continue to further the discussion about WSC sustainability and effectiveness, and frame viable options for WSC seating.***

The World Service Conference has been actively engaged in a process to change itself for well over twenty years—from the adoption of Resolution A in 1996 by more than two-thirds of seated delegates, to more recent attempts to focus the discussion of who is seated at the WSC. At the last Conference, more than 60% of delegates were in favor of some change in representation. While 39% of delegates wanted to see no change in representation, more than half of those participants wanted to see other changes at the Conference. In total, more than 80% of participants said they favor some form of change. We have, however, failed to reach consensus on the “how.” The majority of the WSC are in favor of some change in representation, but we do not have consensus. The challenge now seems to be two-fold. One, to determine whether the Conference can build consensus around a model to pursue for who is seated and two, to find a way to bring the minority, those who do not want to see change, along with that consensus.

Final Responsibility and Authority

One of the primary concerns about changing representation at the Conference is the possibility that doing so would undermine communication throughout NA by moving the groups farther away from the Conference and the work of World Services. The caution is well taken. We must always remember the Second Concept: The final responsibility and authority for NA services rests with the NA groups. We must always remain accountable and responsible to our groups. Yet as NA grows and becomes increasingly diverse, communicating throughout the Fellowship and including all in the decision making processes become more challenging. We must work together diligently to ensure we remain true to the principles of inclusion, responsibility, and effectiveness spoken of in our Concepts.

Due to the size of our Fellowship, it has never been possible for every interested group to sit around a table together and make decisions for NA worldwide. Our system of representation was developed to make it possible for the Fellowship to “collectively express itself on matters affecting Narcotics Anonymous as a whole” (World Service Conference Mission Statement). We remain committed to that principle, but to accomplish that effectively, we must be willing to evolve.

World Services tries more new things every Conference cycle to hear from groups and members. For the first time, at WSC 2016, participants set this cycle’s project and Issue Discussion Topic priorities using a Fellowship survey in the *Conference Agenda Report*. Each literature project asks for ideas and input to shape the direction of the piece as early as possible. We’ve developed online forms and often workshop outlines, convention announcements, and, most recently, mini-workshops to encourage home groups to gather input. We take input in whatever form it comes in whatever language it is submitted—emails, photos of notes, even mailed-in giant easel paper. We have started using web meetings for regular conversations among Conference participants as well as for project work so that

any interested member and group can participate. And along with these innovations, we maintain all of the time-tested ways groups are able to express their views and guide our work—the CAR, review and input projects for literature, emails and phone calls, and trips to zonal forums and other service bodies and events.

We would make every effort to hear from members and groups even if this conversation about the future of the WSC weren't taking place. The CAR is an effective vehicle for many, but a huge amount of groups, perhaps the majority of our membership, never read it or engage with it in any way. For decades World Services has been trying to develop ways to hear from members, groups, and service bodies in our increasingly international and multicultural Fellowship.

NA members meet weekly, speaking 82 languages in 139 countries. We are a considerably more diverse and farther flung organization than we were when our seating guidelines were drafted and our Conference reports were first developed. In the ten years leading up to the last World Service Conference, NA grew from 40,660 meetings worldwide to 66,906 meetings. That's more than 50% growth. The figures were similar in the 10 years before that. In 1996 there were 22,721 meetings. We've gone from literature published in nine languages in 1996 to 37 languages in 2006 and 50 languages in 2016. In that time, the basic form of representation at the Conference has not changed, but NA itself has changed tremendously.

NA as a Whole

Previous boards, workgroups, and committees have come up with recommendations for changing the Conference. However, the WSC has never been able to reach a consensus. One of the issues that has helped to derail previous discussions about change is the idea of "equality." It does not matter if the discussion is focused on regions, SNPs (state/nation/province), or any other type of body or entity, service bodies in Narcotics Anonymous are not equal by any objective, measurable criteria. Our equality comes from spiritual principles such as anonymity, unity, and autonomy, not from our numbers or size. Whether it is geography, services delivered, numbers of meetings or members, or any of the other possible criteria that have been suggested, there are huge differences from place to place and service body to service body. Attempts to create objective criteria for seating have always failed us. We have to find a way to acknowledge and accommodate our differences while accepting and respecting that the most important similarity is that our service bodies have been created by NA communities to serve their needs.

Our equality comes from spiritual principles such as anonymity, unity, and autonomy, not from our numbers or size.

If you look at the 66,906 weekly NA meetings, as of WSC 2016, approximately 41% are held in the US, 31% in Iran, and 28% in other countries around the world. If you take Iran out of the equation, the US represents about 59% of the remaining meetings. If you try to look at regions seated at the WSC, the US represents 55% of the 118 currently seated regions. If you compare the existing 15 zonal forums there are even more variances. The US represents about 53% of the current zones. The number of regions within each zone varies from 5 to 30. Of course, not all of those regions are seated; the number of seated regions within each zone ranges from 1 to 16. And there are 34 NA communities or unseated regions that do not participate in a zone.

We are left with the question of what best serves NA as a whole. There are few issues that can bring about as emotional a response at the WSC as the issue of seating. It is one of the reasons we have had seating criteria that do not really serve the Conference for almost twenty years and have no agreement on how to improve them. The challenge is to look at what serves our overall needs with a new perspective. A former Board member often says, listen to the music in NA. We need to find a way to blend the pieces in a manner that serves the purpose of the WSC, where we can come together to create that music without any of our voices feeling drowned out or unheard.

The conference is a vehicle for Fellowship communication and unity: a forum where our common welfare is itself the business of the meeting.

Conference deliberations serve the needs of a diverse membership of different languages and cultures and address the challenge of how to provide effective services to NA groups around the world. The conference works for the good of all NA, taking into account both present and future needs.

GWSNA

The Conference can be a magical and, at times, frustrating event. Many choose to come to the WSC simply as observers, and almost everyone who has attended, in whatever capacity, feels forever changed for the experience. Listening to this gathering of trusted servants say the Serenity Prayer in over 20 languages is not something most people ever forget. It is transformative.

And yet, at our present size, we are not even able to all fit in one room to have discussions, and were we, there is not even time to hear from all tables in a 90-minute session, not to mention time to synthesize thoughts and have conversations that make progress on issues. Though we are able to vote and carry out business, it is difficult to have reasoned, thoughtful discussion and evolve ideas together as a body.

What we are hoping to do with this report is to find a way to actually engage in a dialogue that helps an open exchange of ideas about seating. We look forward to discussing these issues further with you in our next Conference participant web meeting. To that end, we are not making a recommendation but are offering some of the highlights of recent Board discussions that may help us all as a Conference together evolve viable options for seating that are sustainable and effective.

Effective and Sustainable

So what do we mean by an effective and sustainable World Service Conference?

As our Fellowship becomes more diverse and widespread, we need to find ways to accommodate, celebrate, and serve its growth.

For the WSC to be effective, it needs a diverse range of voices to speak for the Fellowship as a whole; it has to have the ability to evolve ideas through discussions, stay focused on the needs of the Fellowship, and be sensible and understandable for rotating trusted servants coming from such a large number of languages and cultures. It needs to have the right delegation to fit the purpose as stated in GWSNA above.

For the WSC to be sustainable it must be in line with our Eleventh Concept, cost effective, and using the appropriate share of NA resources to carry out its responsibilities. Whether paid for by a region or World Services, all of the funds spent are NA funds. Every dollar spent at the Conference is a dollar that could be spent at a regional or area level. It is up to all of us to help determine what is necessary—what is an appropriate share of resources. We owe it to NA to make these choices based on what seems necessary and right, not necessarily what we are used to or what we have done before.

Continuing to increase the size of the Conference and the length of the work day or work week do not seem to be in keeping with either sustainability or effectiveness. As we mentioned in the February Future of the WSC Report about WSC processes, we have increased the length of the new business session to the point where it ceases to be productive and impacts the sessions on the day following. As NA grows, it's reasonable to expect that regions will continue to emerge and divide. We need a sustainable approach to deal with our success.

Determining what actually makes any seating possibility viable or not was a more complicated discussion when we took on the topic in our Board meetings. Obviously the WSC has to have a global perspective, be capable of effective discussions and decision making, adapt to changes with the least

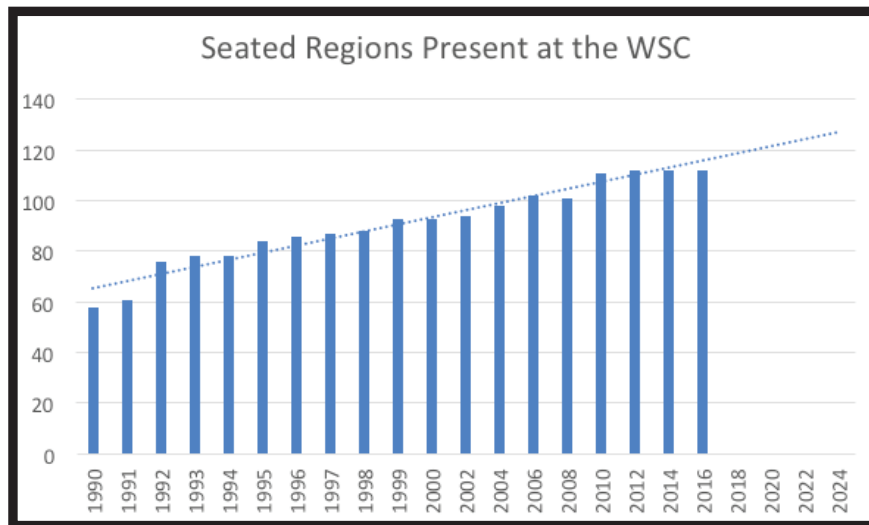
impact on the Fellowship, not overwhelm our trusted servants, and be able to meld representation and delegation. The other reality is that in order to be viable any option has to be acceptable and approvable by at least two-thirds of regions.

Of course there are plenty of other ideas for changes to the WSC, like how often the Conference meets or how it makes decisions between Conferences. We released a report about some of our ideas for improving communication between Conferences. All of these possibilities can be explored further, but they should not distract us from establishing a direction for who will be attending the WSC.

Why Do We Need to Change?

The Conference has come to this issue—the need for change—for over twenty years, stayed engaged in conversations for some number of Conference cycles, and then backed away when there was no ability to achieve a clear majority. When the challenges of navigating in a body of this size are raised again, the issue comes back for discussion. This is not an issue that has ever gone away. For years, the World Board backed away from the issue of seating by offering other changes to the WSC to try to improve effectiveness and sustainability. In 2000, the Board recommended a two-year WSC cycle and World Service funding of delegates. Since then the only related recommendations coming from the World Board have been a moratorium on seating regions resulting from a split from 2008 to 2014, a resolution for State/Nation/Province boundaries for seating in 2012, and in 2014, motions to eliminate automatic funding for delegates and attendance by alternates. We have never made a recommendation for zonal seating in all of those years or even reached consensus that we should.

The chart below shows our seating growth, even with the seating moratorium. We believe that without the six-year moratorium, the rate of growth would have been greater. There are 118 seated regions at present. During this Conference cycle, we have received ten applications for seating to be considered and decided at WSC 2018.



There are numerous statements in *GWSNA* about the purpose of the WSC, including the WSC Mission. There are participants who feel that we cannot make a decision about the composition of the Conference before we discuss the Conference’s purpose. And so we have taken time, as a Conference, at WSC 2014 and 2016 to describe why we gather. The list of reasons compiled by WSC 2014 did not change when the next Conference reviewed it, but WSC 2016 called out a few more details under the five major headings – 1) Legal Responsibilities, 2) Oversight, 3) Global Coordination/ Sharing of Best Practices, 4) Vision and Purpose, and 5) Community Building. The details of this list were included in our February report about the Future of the WSC.

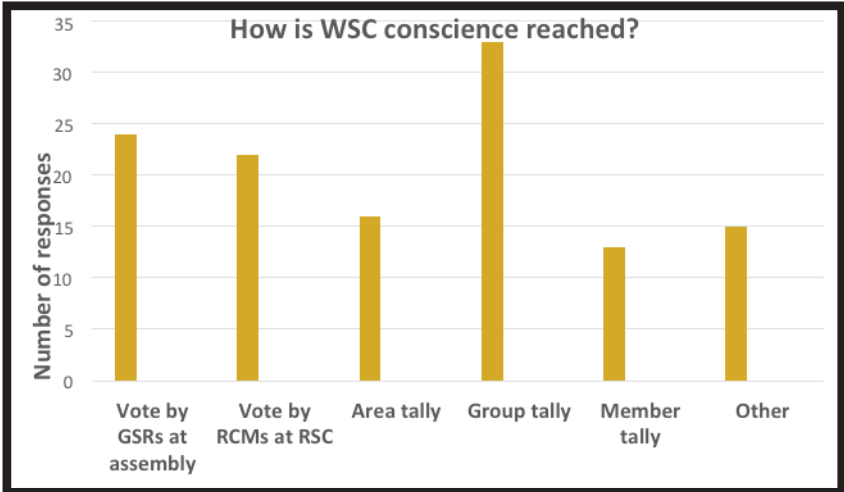
Any size conference seems to be able to fulfill its responsibility of Oversight and Legal Responsibilities. We can make decisions, regardless of the amount of time it takes. Where participants have conveyed that the WSC may fall short is with the other 3 headings – Global Coordination/ Sharing of Best Practices, Vision and Purpose, and Community Building. Our difficulties accomplishing these goals seem to be primarily due to the size of the WSC and the sense that the size and format make it so challenging to have discussions at the Conference. The WSC seems to be a very US and business dominated event to many. The issues we outlined in the 2014 CAR capture the challenges pretty well.

With a group as large as the Conference, it is difficult to work toward developing consensus and evolving meaningful discussions about issues that affect our Fellowship. The current size of the WSC makes moving the Conference closer to a consensus-based decision making model almost impossible. At the last Conference [WSC 2012] there were 112 delegates, 82 alternates, and 15 board members present. In business sessions, there were 127 participants, because delegates and alternates are recognized as one participant. But that meant 209 people were participating in small group discussions, and it's hard to imagine how to have a discussion with such a large group that builds toward any sort of meaningful resolution or conclusion.

If we want to continue moving toward a consensus- and discussion-based body, many of us believe that we have to reduce our size or at least limit our growth. And yet most people or organizations do not choose to change easily. Even when the need for change is evident and recognized as a healthy part of life and evolution, it can be tremendously unsettling to imagine an unknown possible future as compared to a known present regardless of the discomfort.

Many fear that reducing the number of delegates or changing the type of representation at the Conference would inevitably limit participants' voices. Our current guidelines ask each region that is applying for seating, "Do you believe that the voice of your NA community is currently not being heard at the WSC?" Yet even within any one region, there are so very many cultures and voices. When many of us think of the areas within our regions, we can name dozens, maybe hundreds of voices that are contained within the region. No matter how big or small a region is or where in the world it is located, there is probably an honest way it can answer "no" to the question of whether its voice is heard. There are an infinite number of voices in NA. No one body could include or represent them all. What we can do as a Conference is to take an approach to seating that attempts to represent the diversity of our membership as well as possible.

The ways that seated regions collect a conscience about WSC matters also varies more than you might think. Before the last WSC, we asked regions how they collect a conscience about WSC matters and received the following responses from 123 regions.



We seem to have a true plurality of methods. Out of the 123 responses, the most any one category received was 33 for group tallies. Under the “other” category we heard about building consensus and gathering a collective conscience, as well as delegating decisions to the RD. How groups are heard, how they exercise their responsibility and authority, varies a great deal from place to place.

Our Concepts caution us that we must carefully consider all viewpoints in our decision making processes and that our service structure depends on the integrity and effectiveness of our communications. The reality is that our current structure and size already limit or stifle many voices. Small group discussions are the only place all participants speak. Discussions in the risers tend to be dominated by a smaller number of delegates. The type of discussion or debate—formal, sometimes aggressive, competitive rather than collaborative—that characterizes the full group discussions at the Conference is simply not attractive to many of its member communities. If we really want to hear all voices, we must change the ways in which we engage.

A Vision for NA Service may be a simple, clear lens through which to view the Conference. “Our vision is that one day...NA service bodies worldwide work together in a spirit of unity and cooperation to support the groups in carrying our message of recovery.” This is the second of two reports with ideas about how to get closer to this vision at the Conference. The first report includes a number of recommendations aimed at improving the discussion and decision-making processes at the WSC. This report aims to jump start the conversation about seating, as difficult as that subject may be. Our current approach—change nothing and continue to grow unchecked—does not seem to be working. What changes can we make to get closer to our vision of a Conference where we are able to “work together in a spirit of unity and cooperation?”

How Do We Move Forward?

WSC 2016 adopted two proposals that did not come from the World Board that attempt to help to move this discussion forward. The votes on these two proposals indicate that while there is majority support, there is still not consensus (80% using our present WSC definition) on how this issue should be addressed.

Motion #11 Western Russia Region / Second: Finland Region

To allow a delegate from any currently existing Zonal Forum who requests it to be seated at the WSC 2018 as a non-voting participant for one conference only. The expense of attendance will be the responsibility of the Zonal Forum and not the WSC.

Intent: To involve zones at the WSC.

Adopted by 72 yes -29 no -2 abstentions -4 present not voting

Proposal BD Greece Region

To ask the delegates to go back to their regions with the question/workshop below: “What is that your region thinks and feels about zonal representation?”

Intent: To bridge the gap of lacking information about what zones/WSC/seated/unseated regions are and could work better.

Adopted by 72 yes -40 no -2 abstentions -5 present not voting

Even without consensus on these ideas, they represent an opportunity to have a broader conversation about the issues. WSC 2018 will be the first Conference with delegates from some zones. Can we use that opportunity to move this discussion forward? We plan to devote at least the next Conference participant web meeting to the subject of seating in the hopes that talking together helps develop our ideas and build consensus around some new options.

When we initially planned this report we believed we would be recommending some specific options for seating at the Conference. But when we began to discuss the possibilities in our Board meeting, it became clear to us that we need further discussions with all Conference participants before we can recommend a model or models for our collective future.

Alternates

Although we know the issue was put before the Conference in 2014, the inclusion of alternates on the floor of the WSC does not seem sustainable for the future to us, regardless of the options we considered.

At WSC 2016, of 115 seated regions, there were 112 RDs and 89 alternates present— for a total of 201 people seated on the floor and in the breakout rooms. This does not count translators, the World Board, HRP, or Cofacilitators. Numbers closer to 100 than the current 200-plus would make evolving meaningful discussions and interactions more possible while still leaving space for future growth.

We provided quite a bit of information and statistics about this issue in the 2014 *Conference Agenda Report*, including the percentage of US versus non-US regions with alternates in attendance and the number of alternates who serve as delegates at the next WSC. (See the 2014 CAR for those numbers: www.na.org/admin/include/spaw2/uploads/pdf/conference/CAR/2014_CAR_Webposting.pdf). We have not heard the idea of including alternates in any of the models for seating that have been discussed at the WSC except for regional seating. If regional seating is one of the options that participants wish to pursue, this will require further conversation.

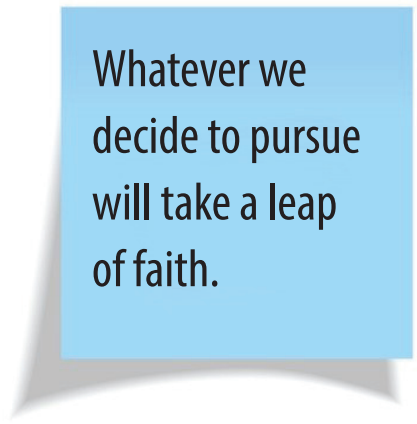
So Where Do We Go from Here? Viable Options for Seating

There are two options that seem viable if delegates are to come from existing service bodies in NA: representation by region or by zone. We do not believe that we have anything new to offer that you have not already heard or considered about either of these choices. In our discussions, we focused on one representative per region and multiple representatives per zone, but we did not try to reach any firm recommendation.

There are numerous other possibilities for collections of regions that do not currently exist in the NA service structure. Our discussions ranged from continental representation to shared representation by the regions' choice, to state/nation/province, to alternating regional attendance at the WSC and using proxy votes.

We think what is most important now is to identify one or two options to develop further this cycle leading up to WSC 2018. Experience has shown that considering more than a couple of options does not serve us. We end up splintering rather than building consensus. We hope that web meeting discussions may help participants set a direction for further development. When we determine a direction, we can try out the approach for one or two Conferences before committing to changes in policy. That way we can be sure the reality lives up to the idea and we can make whatever fine-tuning we need to before drafting new policy or making more permanent change.

Whatever we decide to pursue will take a leap of faith. As *Living Clean* says, "On some level, this is all about faith. Living our dreams requires that we believe they are possible. When we act on faith, we move in a positive direction. It can be very frightening and sometimes a little weird. Taking a leap of faith asks us to trust either that there will be ground beneath our feet or that we will be able to fly. Small steps give us the courage to leap." ("A New Way of Life") This kind of act of courage is as important for us collectively as it is individually. Together we can.



Whatever we
decide to pursue
will take a leap
of faith.

WE WILL PROVIDE AN EVENT AT WHICH:

PARTICIPANTS PROPOSE and *gain* fellowship consensus on **initiatives** that further the *vision for na service;*

THE FELLOWSHIP, through an exchange of *experience*, **STRENGTH**, and **hope**, collectively expresses itself on matters affecting Narcotics Anonymous *as a whole;*

NA GROUPS have a **MECHANISM** to **GUIDE** and *direct* the activities of **NA World Services;**

PARTICIPANTS ENSURE that the various elements of **NA World Services** are ultimately *responsible* to the **GROUPS** they serve;

PARTICIPANTS are *inspired* with the **JOY** of **selfless service**, and the **KNOWLEDGE** that our efforts make a *difference.*

World Service
Conference

MISSION STATEMENT

The World Service Conference brings all elements of NA World Services together to further the common welfare of NA. The WSC's mission is to unify NA worldwide.

