

## Online GA Meeting Committee Report Los Angeles, CA Fall 2011

Thanks to the committee for the thought and work they put in. You did a great job.

This committee's mission was to explore the possibilities and challenges of having an on-line meeting that is recognized by Gamblers Anonymous and added to the ISO website meeting list.

Let's start with WHO can benefit from an on-line meeting and how it adheres to our primary mission which is to help the compulsive gambler who still suffers. Many gamblers just don't have access to a gamblers anonymous meeting. Here are some who can now be reached:

1. Military personnel that are out of country
2. Elderly, or anyone, who may have mobility problems
3. Medical reasons may prevent a member from attending meetings
4. Deaf members can now "hear" others therapy by reading them on-line. This resolves an actual situation at a meeting where a deaf member writes their therapy in advance and has someone else read it to the group. However, the member cannot hear the other therapies which makes it challenging to recover since the member does NOT get to share in the experience, strength, and hope present in the room.
5. People who live in rural areas. There are two separate issues: rural areas, where inclement weather makes it impossible to attend a regular meeting – and the other is the increasing 'on-line' gambling, often by young people, middle school and high school children at home, in their pajamas who use parents' credit cards to gamble. Anyone can gamble on-line, but cannot participate in an on-line GA meeting to help them stop. We are currently NOT meeting the needs of the on-line gambler: adult or child, by giving them an alternative 'on-line' support group.
6. Members who travel, especially to foreign countries where language barriers or lack of meetings can be an issue

Now on to the objections. As our committee began discussing these issues it quickly became evident that an on-line meeting can adhere to the Gamblers Anonymous Guidelines.

**Article VII, Section 1, states: "Whenever two or more persons with a desire to stop gambling meet together on a regular, weekly scheduled basis to discuss their gambling problem, they will be known as a group, only if they commit themselves to follow the Gamblers Anonymous Guidance Code and limit their use, display and distribution to only approved and appropriate Gamblers Anonymous literature. They are also to notify the International Service Office (I.S.O) of their existence."**

All of these criteria can be met. Here are the objections or concerns we discussed:

**1. Access – how do we determine who may enter the virtual room? We need to develop guidelines**

We will treat the virtual room just as any other room. The secretary will function as a moderator.

**2. Supervision – Who will be the Secretary of the meeting and authorize access?**

Secretary will be elected in the same manner as any other room and will welcome all who want to stop gambling

**3. Disruptive Members – How do we handle disruptive members or people who may misuse the system by harassing or berating others?**

The Secretary will have administrative access through the software running the meeting to communicate privately with a member to request change in behavior, will have the ability to “mute” the individual, and finally, deny access if so warranted. An on-line meeting will have more options of dealing with a disruptive member than a traditional room.

**4. How do we ensure adherence to the Guidance Code and Rules and Procedures?**

The room will adhere to the Guidance code and use only approved Gamblers Anonymous literature and material.

**5. How do we avoid people copying messages and making them public or misusing them in some way?**

Just as in any other room it is almost impossible to stop someone from sharing what they heard in a meeting. However, we will offer suggestion on how to avoid sharing personal information, for example, use generic email address with only first name and last initial on account, allow only Secretaries or other trusted servants to have access to contact information and will share it ONLY with the approval of the parties involved. Additionally; on-line paragraphs move quickly to the top of the page, making copying messages very difficult at best.

**6. Does moderating the meeting violate the Unity program?**

Just like any other meeting the Secretary performs his/her duties and no member is above the others.

**7. How do we decide where to host the meeting? Can it be hosted on the trustee website?**

If the BOT approves this form of meeting a new committee can be established to explore the various options available to us, the challenges they present, and the cost involved

**8. How do we distribute literature? Downloading it currently violates Guidance Code.**

GA materials and literature can be ordered on line just like any group meeting or any individual. Members can read the material prior to the meeting or decide that everyone for example can take a couple minutes to read page 17 while on the chat.

**9. Is the meeting run by ISO or an Intergroup? If an Intergroup how do we decide which IG is in charge?**

It will be the on-line meeting's group conscience that will determine the outcome of this question. It does not have to belong to an Intergroup.

**10. How do we handle donations from the room?**

There are some challenges accepting donation, especially from other countries. It will be the responsibility of the on-line meeting to decide how they want to handle it as each group is self-governing. This committee did look into it a little bit and know there are options but feel it is up to the actual on-line meeting to make the decision.

**11. How can this be called an actual meeting if it does not meet in the same physical location on a consistent basis? Or does it? Can the fact that the meeting is held on the same server weekly be considered "same location"?**

Our conclusion is that an on-line meeting can be almost identical to a regular meeting and meets ALL the requirements set forth by the Guidance Code of what constitutes a meeting. It would also have a stationary/constant address (web address) that can be posted and the meetings would be held at a specific time and day and on a server that is in a stationary physical location.

**12. Make sure the chat is not on a searchable site, for example, AOL.**

The concern here was more that it was not posted on a site like AOL where people who are NOT looking for help with a gambling problem will easily find it. A link with in the gamblersanonymous.org website will be available, just like any other meeting.

**13. How do we protect anonymity?**

Depending on the software that is used, we will have a variety of ways to protect anonymity. Possible feature include having anonymous emails, only the Secretary has access to all contact information and shares it only when all parties involved agree, and no will be no visual provided.

**14. In a chat format how do we read the literature? Do we start the meeting by reading the combo book?**

Each room can determine which pages are to be read. Please see Q. 8 for more details.

**15. How do we track attendance for 39 meeting requirement for pinnings and some offices?**

Attendance does not need to be taken. Our program is based on honesty and it is up the individual member to track the number of meetings they attend and if they meet the requirements for a pinning.

Most of the concerns can be addressed by selecting appropriate software to be used to conduct the meeting. We can protect anonymity better than at a "normal" meeting and conduct a meeting that adheres to the Guidelines. The committee believes that recognizing an on-line Gamblers Anonymous meeting is vital to the effort of helping our fellow compulsive gambler.

Respectfully submitted,  
James H. – Committee Chair – Area 8, Chicago