

August 2022 Future of the WSC Report

This feels like a particularly promising time to be discussing options for the future of the WSC, because the pandemic has forced transformation upon the conference and all of World Services.

We are currently in the final year of a three-year conference cycle—the first in our history. We have two virtual WSC meetings under our belt—the first two in our history. We have learned so much, throughout all of NA service, and we are primed for a purposeful rethinking of the WSC.

Ideas to make the WSC more effective and sustainable have been on the table since at least 1996. The conference continues to grow in size and cost, but for the most part, the body has been reluctant to change itself.

The conditions of the past two years have forced the rest of World Services to adapt. We have reduced staff, and while we have brought back some furloughed staff and have recently posted some openings, we are nowhere near pre-pandemic staffing levels. At the beginning of the 2020 fiscal year, we had 46 staff in our Chatsworth office. As of this writing, we have 27, with plans to add two more. We have similarly scaled back the resources related to the World Board. We have budgeted for half the number of in-person board meetings as in past years. The board has been meeting virtually throughout the pandemic, and just met in person for the first time in more than two years.

The WSC is the last piece of the World Service system to adapt to our current circumstances. We may not be eager to embrace change as a body, but we are living through it regardless of our reluctance. The board is recommending we lean into those changes.

Our Recommendations

We recommend:

- *Trying a three year cycle on a trial basis for two cycles until 2029*
- *Holding an interim, virtual WSC between in-person meetings to decide on items selected by conference participants*
- *Posting the English CAR six months before the in-person WSC (rather than five).*
- *Continuing to try new things with the help of a workgroup of zonally selected members to help frame ideas for discussion*
- *Making participant funding opt-in rather than opt-out. Any delegate who requests total or partial funding will receive it.*

We explain each of these ideas in more detail below.

Three-Year Cycle

We are proposing a test drive of a three-year cycle for six years (two cycles) until 2029. After that, the WSC would return to being held every two years, unless there was a conference decision to

This is the third report from the World Board this year about the future of the WSC. All of the reports are posted on www.na.org/conference and in the conference participant Dropbox. We recommend reading the first two reports before this one.

continue a three-year cycle.

We've reported many times about the negative effects of the pandemic on World Services—the decline in income, the need to furlough more than half the staff, and the disruption in activities such as the WSC and the World Convention.

But along with the tragedy of Covid, we have also found many opportunities and learned a lot.

We learned that we can meet online as a conference and we can make decisions virtually. Delegates were able to choose what to address at the virtual WSC meetings. The conference approved policies to continue to meet and make decisions virtually, as needed. We can now survey and e-poll in advance so the conference can take care of some business before and after we meet.

A three-year cycle feels like a radical change to many of us, but the reality is we are living through a three-year cycle right now. And in many respects it already feels like an improvement.

Technology has already bettered the way we do business at the WSC. We do an initial straw poll of motions via e-poll before the WSC, a practice we will continue for the in-person WSC. We have already held a scaled down version of a hybrid WSC with some participants joining WSC 2018 virtually. We have held two virtual WSC meetings. We use electronic clickers to vote at the in-person WSC so that we have an exact count for every motion. We used an e-ballot for elections in 2020 for the first time, and will continue that practice. We have so much in place to make a transition to a new WSC easier!

Communication among conference participants, including the board, is more robust than ever in our history and that will continue. We have conference participant web meetings every other month (sometimes even more frequently). The board sends CPs more frequent email updates than ever before, and participants have access to detailed financial updates every two months.

World Services' focus has been broader, partly because of the three-year cycle. When we stretch the canvas, we can paint more upon it. Despite greatly reduced staffing levels, we've been able to accomplish a tremendous amount. We have held quarterly open webinars on topics important to the Fellowship. We've published more translated material than ever, and we've caught up on posting already published IPs and booklets in 56 languages. We were able to finish a book project, accomplishing workgroup tasks virtually that we typically do in-person. We launched two Instagram accounts. We are upgrading our database. Through open surveys, web meetings, and discussions with conference participants, we've built consensus on ideas about virtual meetings and material to support them. We forged agreements to load NA literature on inmate tablets in a number of places and are working on more. We held a six-month Fellowship review for the first change to the *Fellowship Intellectual Property Trust*: to add zonal delegates. We've posted audio versions of the Basic Text for free streaming. We currently have two surveys online for revisions to *The Loner* IP and a possible new piece of recovery literature on DRT/MAT.

Because of the extended time between in-person WSCs, we've been able to focus more attention

on work that directly carries the message to the addict who still suffers. The conference is extremely important, but it can feel far removed from the life of the inmate who is reading *Welcome to Narcotics Anonymous* on a tablet or the member in Thailand who is able to listen to the audio Basic Text for free in their language. When we are not head-down in preparing for and administering the conference, we have more time and energy for other things. And that's true throughout the NA service system.

In a three-year cycle, some of the resources that might go to *CAR* workshops and decision-making are freed up. That amounts to more time to actually do the work that leads to more effective carrying the message. Often we spend so much time and energy in decision making that the actual service work we are making decisions about can take a back seat. A longer cycle allows for more Fellowship development, public relations, H&I, and more—for World Services, and for regions, zones, and local service bodies throughout NA.

The WSC—not just the meeting but the season leading up to it—requires a lot of human and financial resources. We know the in-person WSC meeting will cost more money than in the past, but we are not yet sure how much more. Airfares have risen. Hotel costs are higher. There are more participants and fewer staff. We will need to hire some temp help to get through. Our technology costs may rise as more participants join virtually. A three-year cycle will allow us to shift some of those resources. The cost savings are not in a vacuum. All parts of the World Service system have cut costs. In some respects, we are still putting out fires, and not really rebuilding yet.

Again, we believe that the service system as a whole can benefit from a longer cycle. This is not just about what would be best for World Services.

Everything that occurs in the course of NA service must be motivated by the desire to more successfully carry the message of recovery to the addict who still suffers.

Basic Text, Introduction

As we've said many times, the decision to try a three-year cycle would just be the start, a beginning. With communication throughout the cycle and the help of a workgroup to frame ideas, we anticipate the conference would come to consensus about other things to try as well.

Interim Virtual Meeting

Mid-way or two years into the three-year cycle, an interim virtual meeting would be held to decide on issues selected by conference participants.

This is an idea many conference participants have expressed enthusiasm for. We would build on our shared experience with an interim virtual WSC meeting. Conference participants can determine via survey in advance of the meeting what items to address. The report with the interim items for decision would be released on the same schedule the CAT is currently, 90 days in advance of the meeting.

Perhaps issues for the next *CAR* could be discussed at the interim decision making session, as well as CP webinars. That too is something many delegates have asked for, and the expanded cycle gives more room for that sort of discussion and early consensus building.

CAR Publication Date:

The English *Conference Agenda Report* for the in-person WSC would be posted six months (180 days) prior to the meeting, with the translated versions posted a month later.

For many, the *CAR* comes out at the beginning of a long holiday season. That can make it challenging to launch *CAR* workshops and inform members. Being able to release the *CAR* a month earlier would make a substantial difference. It would give delegates more breathing room before the holidays begin and avoid some of the crunch created because the US holiday season is right on top of the current publication dates.

Since the onset of the pandemic, we have posted electronic versions of reports on na.org and in the CP Dropbox rather than mailing paper copies. *The largest part of our expenses for paper publications in the past has been translations and mailing. We plan to continue to translate and not to mail.* This is both ecologically and financially responsible, particularly with the costs of paper and shipping increasing so dramatically. We intend to take the same approach for the WSC 2023 *CAR*.

Workgroup

A workgroup comprising one person selected by each seated zone would help frame discussions.

We intend to include motions in the 2023 *CAR* covering the recommendations above. There will be a Future of the WSC Project Plan in the 2023 CAT that will be presented for decision at the WSC 2023 if the *CAR* motion to try a three-year cycle passes. If the WSC approves the project, a virtual workgroup would be formed for the 2023–2026 cycle.

Many conference participants have suggested a workgroup of delegates to help forge ideas for change. Asking each zone to select a member for the workgroup will ensure a geographically diverse group selected by delegates.

The ideas expressed here are just a start, and we can create a better future together in the cycles ahead. We are going to build this road together as we walk it. We are counting on all of you to help us fill in the picture.

Opt in funding

Funding (including travel, food, and lodging) would be available for delegates from seated regions or zones, upon request.

Currently, funding is automatically provided for delegates from all seated regions or zones. Over the years, since we've been reporting about resource challenges at World Services, an increasing number of regions have begun opting out of funding from NAWS and assuming some or all of the cost to send a delegate themselves.

This change would make funding by regions or zones the default, but rest assured, any delegate who requests partial or full funding would receive it—no questions asked.

In Conclusion

We anticipate including motions in the CAR to cover the recommendations we describe here. We are releasing this report before the August conference participant web meeting so that there will be a chance for us all to discuss these ideas again together before the *CAR* is drafted. In the meantime, we always want to hear your thoughts and answer your questions:

wb@na.org.

None of us is likely to be resolute about changes, because no one can see the future. Making decisions like the ones suggested here takes a leap of faith. We don't have all of the answers, but we are hopeful we can find our way into the future together, as a conference. Change was delivered into our lap; let's ride the wave.