

WB recommendations regarding WSC 2022

20 July 2021

As you may know, we have been trying to figure out how to plan for the next World Service Conference: Should it be in-person or virtual or a combination of some sort? The June Conference participant web meeting was partly devoted to the issue, and participants opted to add a CP web meeting on 24 July to discuss plans for WSC 2022. We have also been discussing the question as a board for some time, with two different sub-groups of the board (we called them *hives*) researching possibilities.

We are writing with a recommendation.

The board has considered every idea we've heard from participants and all of the possibilities we could think of. We talked about zones coming together to do some of the work, planning some combination of in-person together with virtual days, having some participants meet in person and some virtually. We created budgets and spread sheets. Every board member has gone to great lengths, and we have finally reached agreement on a recommendation from the board. It has not been easy for us to draft a recommendation, particularly given the gap between what many of us would like to see happen and what actually seems possible. None of us thinks this is an ideal situation, but we believe our recommendation is the most responsible and sensible way forward.

Our Recommendation

Put simply, we recommend that the WSC be postponed until 2023, at which time an in-person meeting may be more possible, and that a short, virtual interim conference meeting be held in 2022 to deal with the most immediately essential business..

One way to think about this idea is that we are recommending this Conference cycle be three-years, from 2020 to 2023. There would be a much abbreviated interim virtual meeting to deal with decisions that cannot wait; then the WSC would recess and reconvene in 2023.

This compromise feels like the best option, given the extreme circumstances beyond our control we all find ourselves in.

We will try to answer some of the questions you may have below. There will be opportunity for discussion with other participants during the 24 July CP web meeting, and as always, we encourage you to email us with any input or questions that this report does not answer.

Q: Does this mean WSC 2023 will definitely be in-person?

A: That is our hope. We will do our best to plan for an in-person meeting in 2023, if this recommendation is a direction participants can support. This approach would give us an extra twelve months to plan for the full WSC and determine what is practical and possible. We can do a lot of work together, board and delegates, between now and 2023.

Q: Is it impossible to have an in-person WSC 2022?

As recovering addicts, we are accustomed to long odds. We regularly defy expectations for what is possible. However, the board believes it is not practical to plan for an in-person conference next year, given the potential health and safety risks, the financial outlay, and the possible travel limitations.

The global health crisis seems to be resurging in many places. Just as a small window into that reality, a quarter of the board members live in countries that are in some form of lockdown as we write this report. As time goes on, it seems more and more obvious that we simply don't know what the travel and health situation will look like in 2022. It seems likely that even the best-case scenario for an in-person WSC would mean a global divide in terms of who could attend and who could not.

Q: Didn't we give you direction already at the last Conference participant web meeting?

The June Conference participant web meeting was not as well attended as many of the CP web meetings in the past. We took a number of straw polls during the web meeting, but the conscience of those who chose to participate was not clear. Here are two of the relevant questions we asked with the poll results:

Do you believe an in-person Conference is prudent or advisable in 2022? Again, we are just trying to take an initial pulse to get a sense of where we all stand.

Yes: 51 (54%) No: 33 (35%) Undecided: 10 (11%)

Given the factors mentioned today, do you believe an in-person Conference is possible in 2022?

Yes: 58 (62%) No: 21 (22%) Undecided: 15 (16%)

These were polls, not decisions, but it's worth noting that at the WSC, it takes a two-thirds majority (66%) to pass a motion, and neither of these questions reached that threshold.

Q: When do we need to make a decision about the WSC?

NAWS has already received pressure about the current hotel contract for WSC 2022. The longer we delay, the more likely we will be subject to financial consequences for a contract cancellation or change, which means we will need to make a decision with roughly the same information we have now. Will travel be possible in 2022 for most participants? What will the global health situation look like? What will World Services' financial situation be? Unfortunately, we need to decide about 2022 before the answer to these questions is clear.

Q: Why can't we have a full virtual WSC in 2022?

As we see it, the two most realistic options are either:

A) postpone the WSC until 2023 in the hopes that it can be in-person and do only the imperative business in 2022, which is the recommendation we are making, or

B) have a "full" virtual WSC 2022—a virtual WSC like the one we had in 2020—and then determine what is possible for WSC 2024, with the hopes that 2024 could be an in-person WSC.

We are not recommending the latter approach for a couple of reasons. First, we believe that most participants would rather meet together in person sooner rather than later. Second, we learned in 2020 that a virtual WSC isn't a real substitute for an in-person conference. We still haven't found the mechanisms and the methods to get through as much business in a virtual WSC as we are able to do in an in-person conference. Although we were able to make many other necessary decisions in the virtual WSC 2020, the WSC only dealt with 6 of the 16 motions from the 2020 *Conference Agenda Report*. The majority of the remaining 10 motions will be rolled to the next WSC.

At least as important to consider is what goes on at a WSC beyond decision-making. There are small-group sessions about important issues, planning sessions, and opportunities for delegates to share

with other delegates. When we meet virtually, we miss all of the intangible benefits of being together, the camaraderie and conversations, sharing meals and relationship building. The power of an in-person WSC is hard to put into words. One of the former board members calls it the “magic” of the Conference.

Q: What about time zones?

The reality of a global conference with participants from more than 40 countries is that time zones are a challenge with no easy answer or solution. Any WSC, whether in person or virtual, involves sacrifices and inconveniences for the participants. If more work is done virtually in the future, it may be that some of the discussions and WSC prep can happen in smaller groups such as zones, where members are closer in time zone. For now, the reality is that some number of members will have to participate in the middle of the night. That is regrettable but arguably less of an inconvenience than taking a week and a half at minimum off work to travel to participate on-site.

Q: What is Essential Business?

The essence of the recommendation is to hold steady as much as possible until 2023—no elections, no seating, only essential business.

When we discussed this question as a board, individual board members had a number of very different ideas about what is urgent or essential. After much discussion, we agreed that we would need to address the decisions that are *legally required*, such as approving a budget for one year, addressing trusted servant term limits and what is necessary related to the *FIPT*, and agreeing to a virtual meeting in 2022 and an in-person WSC in 2023 if possible.

The only item not required by law or policy that we believe the WSC needs to take action on behalf of the Fellowship is the Spiritual Principle a Day book draft because the work will have already been done. The approval draft will be finished in time for the *Conference Agenda Report (CAR)*, and it seems irresponsible to wait another year to begin to have this new piece of recovery literature available to the Fellowship and to begin to recoup the financial investment in the project.

Based upon our recommendation to recess until 2023, we would need to include an adjustment to the effective date of some decisions as part of the motions.

Q: When will the CAR come out, and when is the regional motion deadline?

If participants agree with the approach in this recommendation, we would release an interim report by 24 November 2021, the *CAR* publication date (December for translated versions). The interim report would include the Spiritual Principle a Day Book draft and all of the other decisions to be made at the interim WSC meeting in 2022, including those items that would ordinarily be in the Conference Approval Track material, such as the budget.

Prior to the 2023 conference meeting, a more “normal” *CAR* would be published no later than the customary deadline of 150 days prior to the meeting and perhaps even a bit earlier if that’s something participants want and it seems possible. The *CAR* for 2023 would include any regional motions and all of the substantive motions from the board that we were not required, by law or policy, to make in 2022.

We know some regions and zones are already working on drafting motions for 2022, and this recommendation requires an adjustment for everyone. We regret that challenge, but we still believe this approach makes the most sense. Even if more motions were introduced and passed in 2022, there

would be a delay in starting any new work because of the carry-over not yet accomplished from WSC 2020 and the ongoing task of rebuilding World Services.

Q: What about elections and term lengths?

This is another question that the board and delegates would need to discuss. Terms for relevant board members, HRP, and Cofacilitators would be among the crucial decisions made by the interim conference in 2022. The Executive Committee of the board met with the HRP and the Cofacilitators to have a preliminary conversation, and they will be prepared to help the WSC with whatever it decides. The HRP will be discussing related details and may have more for us as we move forward. Our hope is that, if the WSC takes the approach we are recommending, regions and zones will consider extending delegate terms through 2023, but that would be up to each service body to decide.

Q: What is the financial impact of this recommendation?

World Services has been hit with a metaphorical sledgehammer, and an in-person WSC in 2023 would provide more time for recovery. The future is still only speculation, but by 2023, we would know more about the reshaping of finances and staff.

The idea that the WSC is not financially sustainable is not new. In 2014 the board offered two motions in the CAR to try to control Conference costs—one limiting WSC seating to one delegate per region (no alternates), one to discontinue automatic funding of delegates. The essay preceding the funding motion began with the sentence, “NA World Services has funded all delegates to the past six Conferences, but this is something we simply can no longer afford to do.” Neither motion passed, and since then, 9 more regions and 6 zones have been seated, meaning 15 more funded participants and 30 more seats on the WSC floor.

The pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities of our current structure and model, and the board, other conference participants, and the staff are being forced to envision a new future for our Fellowship’s decision making biennial meeting.

Q: What are the next steps we need to take?

The Conference participant web meeting 24 July will give participants an opportunity to discuss these ideas in small groups. That way everyone gets a chance to talk, even the quietest participants. As always, we will upload those discussion notes to the CP Dropbox afterward. If the board has further details about our recommendation after that meeting, we will report them. The following CP web meeting, scheduled for 21 August, can also focus on plans for the WSC, with the idea that decisions can be made at some time after that web meeting through the polling software we used in 2020.

If the conference is postponed until 2023, that gives us twelve months to talk together about new ideas and creative approaches to deadlines, discussions and preparation.

Q: After 2023, when would the next WSC be?

Honestly, we don’t know. *A Guide to World Service in NA* says that the World Service Conference meeting occurs every 2 years, which would mean 2025 per that policy. But we are not making any recommendations right now beyond 2022 and 2023. First we must determine if participants agree in principle with the approach in this recommendation. If so, there are a number of other decisions that will need to be made. We are all in the position of figuring out our future together.

Q: What about the future?

This recommendation is deliberately limited to the next WSC.

In coming to consensus about our recommendation, we asked ourselves, How can we operate in a way that is not *only* based on hope? Hope is so important in our personal programs and in NA as a whole, but we have to temper our hope with practicality.

The board has begun discussing ideas for a more sustainable WSC beyond 2022 and 2023. We have had brief discussions about possibilities for a more effective and less costly WSC in the future, such as an ongoing three-year Conference cycle, combining in-person days with virtual days, hybrid options, and other ideas. It seems too early in this process of change for us to even consider a recommendation now. We look forward to discussing all of these ideas with you and hearing yours.

We hope to offer proposals for future changes by 2023, after the board and delegates have time to examine a new future together.

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 by providing an event at which:

- Participants propose and gain fellowship consensus on initiatives that further A 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.