

The One Ballot Proposal for the 2017 ABM

No: 1	Title:	By-Mail Voting Only for ABM Ballot Proposals		
Submitter:	David H: Member of Group 45105, Walnut Creek, CA	Type:	Amendment to the Bylaws and Standing Rules	

Motion:

Amend the RCA *Bylaws and Standing Rules for the Annual Business Meeting and the Board Election Meeting* to provide that all voting by the RCA member groups on the proposals for each year's ABM ballot shall be accomplished through by-mail voting prior to the date of the Annual Business Meeting.

The specific changes required to the RCA Bylaws and Standing Rules are listed in a separate supporting document entitled: *Bylaw and Standing Rules Changes Required to Implement One-Hundred Percent By-Mail Voting for the ABM.*

Features of One-Hundred-Percent By-Mail Voting for ABM Ballot Proposals

- All voting by the Member Groups will be done by mail prior to the Annual Business Meeting.
- Prior to voting, discussion on the ballot proposals will be **written discussion**, accomplished using discussion forums on the RCA website.
- The votes submitted by the member groups will be tallied by the Structure Committee prior to the ABM.
- The results of the by-mail voting will be announced during the ABM prior to any new business.
- Other features:
 - Discussion-forum debate will have the same rules of decorum as have applied to the face-to-face debate at the ABMs, namely: the effect of a proposal or statement can be debated but not the intent or integrity of the member submitting the proposal or any member participating in the forum.
 - RCA groups will continue to send delegate couples to the convention or assign proxies as before. They represent the group at the business meeting for all matters. Voting on the ballot proposals will have been accomplished beforehand.
 - The time line for the ballot-process events prior to the ABM is unchanged.

Summary of the Submitter's Rationale:

- Provided here is a summary of the submitter's rational. In the rationale section below, details are provided to support each of the points made in this summary.
- **Summary:** These proposed amendments have a number of significant advantages to help "ensure that the services provided by the W.S.O. are guided by the *collective group conscience of the entire membership.*" These include:
 - All member groups will be able to make informed decisions after reviewing the same written information and the same improved discussion forums covering each proposal.

- The new process will fully comply with the relevant RCA Concepts of Service: Concepts 1, 12 part d, and 12 part e.
- These concepts identify three fundamental principles on which the Fellowship's decision-making should be based:
 - ♦ Our whole Fellowship ought to have the opportunity to participate in all Fellowship decisions.
 - ♦ All decisions ought to be reached by discussion. (In this case, **written discussion**.)
 - ♦ Decisions ought to be reached by voting with substantial unanimity required.
- The *warranties* that compose Concept 12 are so fundamental to Twelve-Step principles that Alcoholics Anonymous requires a by-mail vote sent to all the A.A. directory-listed groups with approval of any changes requiring a seventy-five percent majority of all A.A. groups voting. And as our preamble states “we are based on the principles of A.A.”
- By having the by-mail ballot proposals voted on prior to the ABM, the Fellowship will be able to make better use of the limited time available in our one-day business meeting.
- Under our current process, we have voted on seven significant proposals solely on the basis of by-mail voting since 2008. Among the seven was Fellowship approval of the Fourth Edition of our basic text. This is the only item of RCA literature that has been approved by the Fellowship; all other items of literature having been approved by the Boards of Trustees.
- The proposed use of one-hundred-percent by-mail voting is consistent with the suggested criteria that has been published as to when an exclusive by-mail-voting process is appropriate:
 - ♦ Only a small percentage of our member groups are able to send delegate couples to the ABM.
 - ♦ Our member groups are widely dispersed throughout the U.S., as well as through many other countries.
 - ♦ Information is sent out to our member groups so that each may fully understand the proposals. This information includes arguments for or against each proposal and is further supplemented by discussion forums covering each proposal.
- A summary of RCA's by-mail-voting history is available in a separate document entitled: *RCA By-Mail Voting since 2007*. Review of this summary may be helpful when considering the potential merits of this proposal.

Submitter's Rationale:

1. **Background to the 2006 Bylaws Changes:** After the 2005 ABM, the then-current Board's top goal was to transition to voting by delegate couples, giving each group one vote. The intent was to have decisions made by the *collective group conscience of the entire Fellowship*. Prior to this time, voting was by only those RCA members present at the ABM. The proposed 2006 Bylaw amendments were formulated to give every member group the opportunity to vote, whether or not they were able to have a delegate couple in attendance at the ABM. Thus, the proposed 2006 amendments involved a *unique compromise*: by-mail votes would be combined with the votes of those present at the ABM. The proposed Bylaw amendments were adopted by those RCA members in attendance at the 2006 Boston ABM.

- As was stated in the then new Bylaws paragraph 3.6, the fundamental objective of the amendments was to ensure that the services provided by the W.S.O. would be “guided by the *collective group conscience of the entire membership.*”
2. **Objections Have Been Raised:** Since 2007, when RCA first combined by-mail votes with the votes of delegates present in an ABM, there have been objections to this process. The concern was that the by-mail voters did not get to hear the debates which occurred in the meetings and so they may have reached different decisions than they would have, had the discussion occurred before their vote. The present proposal eliminates that concern.
 3. **Importance of the RCA Twelve Concepts of Service:** The RCA Concepts were adopted in 2013 and amended in 2014. The Concepts key to this issue are Concept 1 and Concept 12, parts d and e,
 - Concept 1 states: “Final responsibility and ultimate authority for RCA world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.”
 - Concept 12, part d. states: “All important decisions are reached by discussion, vote, and wherever possible by substantial unanimity.”
 - Concept 12 part e. states: “No RCA service body, including the Board of Trustees and all its committees, ever performs acts of government, and *that, like the Fellowship they serve, they always remain democratic in thought and action.*”
 4. These concepts identify three fundamental principles:
 - Our whole Fellowship ought to have the opportunity to participate in all Fellowship decisions.
 - All decisions ought to be reached by discussion.
 - Decisions ought to be reached by voting with substantial unanimity required.
 5. **Special Significance of Concept 12:** The RCA Concepts of Service were adapted from the Alcoholics Anonymous Concepts with the permission of A.A. A number of the RCA Concepts were necessarily tailored to match the aspects of the RCA–WSO organizational structure that differ from those of AA. But RCA Concept 12 was adapted with no substantive changes. A.A.’s Concept 12 has special significance and status within AA.
 - As noted in the A.A. manual covering A.A.’s *Twelve Concepts of World Service*, A.A.’s Concept 12 consists of Article 12 of the A.A. *Conference Charter*.
 - This manual states that “Article 12 of the Charter stands in a class by itself.” “An amendment or cancellation of any of its vital *warranties* would require the written consent of three-quarters of all directory-listed A.A. groups who would actually vote on such proposals, and the considerable time of six months is allowed for careful deliberation.”
 - The manual goes on to state that: “It is clear that all of these *warranties* have a high and permanent importance to A.A.’s general welfare. This is why we believe we should permit change in them only upon positive evidence of their defectiveness and then only by common consent of the A.A. groups themselves. We have ranked them therefore with A.A.’s Twelve Traditions, feeling that they are quite as important to A.A.’s world services as the Traditions are to A.A. as a whole.”
 - It is important to note that A.A. relies on 100% by-mail voting of its member groups for any changes to the *warranties* of Concept 12, *warranties* that “have a high and permanent importance to A.A.’s general welfare.”

- As stated in the RCA Preamble: “Although there is no organizational affiliation between Alcoholics Anonymous and our fellowship, we are based on the principles of AA.”
6. **Features of Our Current Unique Process:** RCA’s unique process has given as many member groups as possible the opportunity to participate in Fellowship decision-making: all member groups have the opportunity to submit by-mail ballots, if they choose to.
- This proposed amendment will continue this significant advantage of the present system. Fundamental democratic principles require no less. Any suggestion to restrict voting to only those groups that have the financial resources to have a delegate couple attend the ABM is offensive to *democratic thought and action*.
7. Our by-mail-voting procedures require that sufficient written information be provided to all member groups so that they may fully understand the issues to be decided.
8. In our current process, primary reliance has been placed on **written discussion**. Under this proposed process, total reliance will be placed on **written discussion**.
- Under the current process, discussion at the ABM is limited to 18 minutes for each proposal. This limited discussion pales in comparison to the many weeks the groups have had to consider the written materials and the discussion forums.
 - Under the proposed process, the expanded written information, that will be available for consideration, will more than make up for the few minutes of debate at the ABM that will be eliminated.
 - The member groups will all be voting on the same basis: the same written materials and the same discussion forums.
9. **Advantages of the Proposed Amendment:** This 100% by-mail approach to voting focuses on an open discussion well before the ABM. Groups are given additional information to consider the issues thoughtfully and fully.
- With the new RCA web-site, the discussion forums will be easier to use and review.
 - This method of voting has the potential to greatly enhance the consideration of a particular proposal and for the proposers (individuals or groups) to answer questions and rebuttals to other posts.
 - It has the potential to provide a more focused review of the written discussion and for the development of a more thorough group conscience by each group.
 - This will also allow for groups in all countries—for whom it may be more difficult to attend the ABM—to be able to consider and understand each proposal, features important to enable each group to reach an informed decision. This advantage is of special importance to the groups in those countries whose native language is not English.
10. **Better Use of the Limited Time Available in a One-Day Business Meeting:** These proposed amendments will enable the Fellowship to make more efficient use of our one-day business meeting.
- No longer will time be wasted on limited debate on proposals for which many already voted.
 - This change will give the convention delegate couples more time at a one-day meeting to address important matters:

- Sharing sessions and ideas for needed improvements; for example, group wants and needs along with group challenges and successes in carrying the message.
- Detailed reports from each of the Committees with the opportunity for extended discussion of each committee's work.
- More time will be available for more extensive discussion in New Business. There can be more extensive input in formulating the details of proposals that may be considered on the following year's by-mail ballot.

11. **Prior Key Votes Based Only on By-Mail Voting:** The Fellowship has already had substantial experience voting on very significant proposals based solely on by-mail voting. Since delegate-couple voting went into effect in 2007, there have been a number important Fellowship decisions made on the basis of Special By-Mail Ballots.

- The seven significant proposals that have been decided by the Fellowship on the basis of 100% by-mail voting are listed below.
 - Eight of the Twelve *RCA Concepts of Service* were modified as a result of a Special By-Mail Ballot whose results were tallied on July 25, 2014.
 - Additionally, a Bylaws amendment, related to attendance of Board members at the ABM, was approved based on ballot results also tallied on July 25, 2014.
 - *Standing Rules of Order*, applicable to the *Annual Business Meeting* and the *Annual Board-Election Meeting*, were adopted as a result of a Special By-Mail Ballot whose results were tallied on May 8, 2013.
 - Additionally, an amendment to the *RCA Meeting Posting Policy* was approved based on ballot results also tallied on May 8, 2013.
 - The Fourth Edition of our basic text, *Recovering Couples Anonymous: A Twelve-Step Program for Couples*, was approved by the Fellowship based on a Special By-Mail Ballot whose results were tallied on June 14, 2011. The Fourth Edition is the only item of RCA literature that has ever received Fellowship approval, a decision based solely on by-mail voting.
 - A Bylaws amendment, related to the term of service for Board members was approved by the Fellowship based on a Special By-Mail Ballot whose results were tallied on June 9, 2008.
 - Additionally, a proposed Bylaws amendment, to establish an independent Ethics Committee, was **not approved** based on ballot results also tallied on June 9, 2008.

12. **Guidance on Using By-Mail Voting in Manuals Covering Parliamentary Procedure.**

Two such manuals provide this guidance: *Robert's Rules* and the *Standard Code of Parliamentary Procedure*.

- *Robert's* states: "A vote by mail, when authorized in the bylaws, is generally reserved for important issues, such as an amendment to the bylaws ... on which a full vote of the membership is desirable even though only a small fraction of the members normally attend meetings. Situations of this kind frequently occur in scientific societies **or** in alumni associations whose members may be in many countries." RCA qualifies on both conditions: only a small proportion of our groups attend the ABM, and our groups are wide-spread around the U.S. and in other countries.

- The *Standard Code* states: “in organizations whose members are scattered over a wide area who worked on different hours of the day, provision is sometimes made for members to vote on important questions by mail. Voting by mail cannot be used unless it is authorized in the bylaws.” Again these conditions apply to RCA,
- The *Standard Code* provides the following additional guidance: “Any method of voting by mail may be followed so long as it ensures that voters fully understand the issues to be decided and the instructions for returning their votes. Unless the bylaws provide for a particular plan, the ballot containing proposed measures ... is mailed to each member ... together with voting directions... When mailing out the ballot, some organizations enclosed information concerning ... arguments for or against each proposal to be voted on.” Both the present RCA process and the proposed new process comply with these suggestions.
- The use of one-hundred percent by-mail voting will not be unique to RCA.