

ACRL Virtual Vote Doc 1.0
Voting period: 10/20/21-10/26/21

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Board of Directors Action Form

To: ACRL Board of Directors

Subject: RBMS 2022 Conference (In-Person Component)

Submitted by Heather Smedberg, RBMS Section Chair, Heather Cole, RBMS Conference Co-Chair, Emilie Hardman, RBMS Conference Co-Chair, Tory Ondrla, ACRL Conference Manager and Margot Conahan, ACRL Manager of Professional Development

Date submitted: October 12, 2021

Background

The Rare Books and Manuscripts Section (RBMS) Conference had 60 years of prior success before the cancellation of its 61st Annual Conference in 2020 due to COVID-19. The conference pre-pandemic would typically draw about 500 – 550 people. The content for the 2020 conference was postponed for one year and became the section's first fully virtual conference in June of 2021 with a record attendance of 751 online participants. While the RBMS 2022 conference is still over eight months out, health, safety, and travel concerns remain, as well as uncertainty about evolving variant strains of COVID-19.

In May of 2021 the RBMS Conference Development Committee accepted Yale University's generous proposal to host the RBMS 2022 Conference with up to \$75,000 worth of support. Plans for this event in June of 2022 include hybrid capabilities using the same successful virtual event platform as in the previous year, Pathable. As hybrid plans continue to evolve, the in-person component of the hybrid conference plan is still in question. In efforts to keep their students and community safe, Yale is currently not allowing outside groups on campus. Visitors are allowed only by special permission and with vaccination status documented in advance. Meeting spaces have yet to be fully secured and hotels are available, but not yet contracted.

The RBMS 2022 Leadership, ACRL Conference Manager, and Manager of Professional Development, continue to monitor the situation and will consider the following factors in making a recommendation to the ACRL Executive Board and ACRL Executive Director if the in-person portion of the conference on June 21 – 24, 2022 at Yale University seems not feasible or inadvisable no later than **January 14, 2022**.

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CONSULTATIONS PRIOR TO DECISION-MAKING

If the factors below make the in-person portion of the RBMS 2022 hybrid conference not feasible, the RBMS Section Chair and Conference Co-chairs will consult with the RBMS 2022 Conference Committee and RBMS Executive Committee prior to making a recommendation to the ACRL Executive Board. If the in-person portion of the RBMS 2022 hybrid conference is not feasible, the recommendation will be to offer the section's second fully virtual RBMS Conference.

TIMING

We plan to make this recommendation if the factors below indicate that an in-person conference is commercially impracticable, illegal, or impossible **as soon as the situation is evident and/or no later than January 14, 2022** (approximately five months out from conference dates). Five months out is advisable to not further conference expenses, staff and/or supplier output, and to be able to inform membership in a timely way, while leaving enough time to build sponsor, bookseller, and member engagement in a virtual conference. The ACRL Executive Board and Director will need to act on this recommendation within one week of receipt (**by January 21 at latest**) to ensure timely decision making.

FACTORS

Below are the primary factors for consideration. While these are not the only factors to consider, an exhaustive list could be overwhelming, and it is important to establish primary factors as guides for making this decision.

STATE AND FEDERAL GUIDELINES AND RESTRICTIONS

The following resources will be consulted for recommendations and guidelines for events to ensure public safety.

- [Yale University COVID-19 Information for Events, Gatherings and Meetings](#)
- [City of New Haven Stay Safe, Stay Healthy Guidelines](#)
- [Connecticut Department of Public Health COVID-19 Data Tracker](#)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) Guidance for COVID-19](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\) COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

HOST INSTITUTION AND VENUE CONDITIONS

- Host institution is ready and willing to host future groups no later than **Jan. 14, 2022**
- Host institution preparedness and outbreak containment prevention plans and procedures
- Condition of New Haven hotels, and procedures put in place to provide safe and sanitary environments.
- Are places of interest/history/culture/restaurants/dining open and available, if so what are the conditions of visiting?

MEMBER PARTICIPATION SURVEY

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- Results from survey that closed September 24 and was distributed to all RBMS 2021 Virtual Conference attendees, shared on RBMS communication channels. We received 261 responses and 49.5% indicate they would be willing to attend in person.
- Is the conference environment still appealing enough face-to-face that it could realistically draw a significant group of attendees?

SAFETY AND SECURITY OF MEMBERSHIP

- Size and international attendance; the RBMS Conference typically attracts about 500 attendees from about 5 different countries.
- Longer events present more opportunities for transmission. The RBMS Conference is typically 2 full days and 2 half days with a significant amount networking and interactive opportunities for transmission.
- As older adults are at increased risk, we will consider what is known about conference and membership demographics. This particular audience tends to have a higher portion of the older age range of membership.
- Requirements of social distancing at the host institution. What are the current policies, how does that effect capacity and feasibility of networking events that are traditionally some of the most successful parts of RBMS conferences?
- Air travel. What are there what are the conditions of flying? Travel guidelines, processes, restrictions as outlined by the [U.S. Department of State Travel Restrictions and Exemptions](#) will be reviewed.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Risk of litigation

- From Attendees: There is a risk that ACRL/RBMS could incur lawsuits relating to the spread of COVID-19 if we do not cancel.
- From Providers: Risk of litigation from vendors, sponsors, presenters, speakers, hotels, production companies, service providers and other third parties for breach of contract or other related claims.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Implications of a potentially significantly decreased or potentially canceled in-person conference (along with potential additional health and security measures) will be weighed against those of providing a virtual-only conference. In weighing these financial factors, the following will be considered:

- Sponsorships and Booksellers Showcase, potential lost revenue and how to provide sponsors exposure and engagement at a virtual event
- Attendee Registrations, potential lost revenue from in-person registrations at a higher rate

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- Revised budget will be prepared if we need to switch from a hybrid to a virtual-only event
- Staff will consider and take into account projections and implications for a potentially smaller in-person event as necessary

PERCEPTION

Backlash and Goodwill: Both canceling the in-person component or continuing with it could be damaging to the association and the event depending on the circumstances. Not canceling may create backlash if perceived as contributing to the spread of illness (socially irresponsible) and/or by placing paid attendees, vendors, and staff in a position of deciding to put themselves and families at risk. Cancellation may also cause backlash or disappointment from those already vested and looking forward to the event; Attendees/Host/Sponsors/Booksellers/Providers.

Stakeholders

In drafting this decision-making guide, conversations were held among RBMS 2022 Section Chair, Conference Co-Chairs and ACRL Staff. The RBMS Executive Committee has also reviewed and approved this plan. A broader range of stakeholders will be informed as appropriate, if the recommendation to cancel the face-to-face event is acted on by the ACRL Executive Committee.

Fiscal and Staffing Impact

Financial impact will be assessed continually as planning for the event continues in whichever format is decided. Staffing is not expected to be impacted by this decision.

Actions Recommended

- **Action 1:** That the ACRL Board of Directors approves the above factors are sufficient for making a “Virtual-only” recommendation to the ACRL Executive Board and Director if circumstances warrant, when evident and/or no later than January 14, 2022, and
- **Action 2:** That the ACRL Board of Directors approves that the ACRL Executive Committee and Executive Director will have the final decision-making authority on the feasibility of the in-person component of the RBMS 2022 Conference and decide no later than January 21, 2022.

Strategic Goal Area Supported

Please see the [ACRL Strategic Plan](#), and select from the drop-down the goal area that will be affected most by this action.

☐ Value of Academic Libraries

Goal: Academic libraries demonstrate alignment with and impact on institutional outcomes.

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☐ Student Learning

Goal: Advance innovative practices and environments that transform student learning.

☐ Research and Scholarly Environment

Goal: Librarians accelerate the transition to more open and equitable systems of scholarship.

☐ New Roles and Changing Landscapes

Goal: Academic and research library workforce effectively navigates change in higher education environments.

☒ Enabling Programs and Services

ACRL programs, services, and publications that target education, advocacy, and member engagement.