

Dear NCME Community,

I'm writing to provide you with an update on the plans for the NCME 2022 conference. I'm happy to finally be able to share that the conference hotel will be the [Westin San Diego Gaslamp Quarter](#). This information was only just made available to us by AERA leadership last week. As you might imagine, this has complicated our ability to settle on a plan for how we can best meet the needs of NCME members that vary in their willingness to attend the conference in person. We still don't have answers to some important questions, such as exactly how many meeting rooms will be available to us, the seating capacities, and the extent to which the rooms have an integrated A/V system and wireless connectivity to support some degree of remote participation. I say all this up front because what I am describing in what follows is subject to some degree of revision as we learn more about the resources we will have available to us at the Westin.

### **Let me start with what we know**

- The 2022 NCME Annual Conference is still scheduled to take place in San Diego from April 21-24.
- The first day, Thursday April 21<sup>st</sup> is reserved for training sessions. For those who are interested, an event that evening will honor and celebrate the legacy of Matt Gaertner.
- The remaining days will be used for concurrent sessions and meetings as in the past.
- The intended mode of attending the conference, as was announced in the Call for Proposals, will be in person.
- Proof of vaccination will be required to register for the conference.
- Masks will be required for all indoor gatherings.

### **Getting your preference**

- Next week we will be letting you know if your conference proposal was accepted.
- You will then route yourself into one of two pools, one for those who submitted a proposal for an organized session, and another for those who submitted a proposal for an individual paper/poster/demonstration.
- You will then be asked to indicate whether you are (a) planning to travel to San Diego to present in person or (b) only able to participate remotely.

We know that many of you would prefer to have a third "unsure" response option. However, in order for us to move forward with our planning, we need to be able to plan

for a best case scenario of in person attendance. For those who coordinated an organized session, we will be asking that you confer with your group of presenters and decide as a group on your participation preference.

### **In Person and Remote Participation**

Based on the results from the survey we sent to membership in September (see the [Fall NCME newsletter](#) for a summary of those results), we anticipate that about 2/3 of those whose proposals were accepted will choose to attend in person, and about 1/3 will opt for remote participation. The plan described below will be adjusted accordingly if the proportions are much different.

- At present, our plan is to take one full day of sessions that we would have typically incorporated into the three days in San Diego, and move these into a full day virtual setting using the same Pathable platform that we used for our very successful June 2021 Conference. We would hold this one day virtual component of the conference on Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>.
- We will take advantage of having two days worth of in-person sessions to schedule over three days to have fewer concurrent sessions in rooms with the most space for physical distancing among session attendees.
- During the in-person meeting, we plan to have *at least one* spotlight session in each slot that can be hybrid in the sense that it can be viewed synchronously by those present in San Diego and those logging in via Zoom. (The number of in-person sessions available for remote participation will depend upon what we learn about cost and capacity at the Westin in the coming weeks.)
- There will be two different conference fees, a full fee for those attending in-person (this will include access to the virtual component of the conference) and a reduced fee for those attending remotely.

### **Last Thoughts**

Folks, none of this is perfect and I'm sure our approach is not going to please everyone. If you have constructive suggestions that can help, please do share them. But also keep in mind we're doing the best we can.

I don't have a mirror ball. It's entirely possible that 5 months from now we will be on the crest of a new wave of the pandemic caused by the theta variant. If that

happens, it is quite likely that the in-person conference will be cancelled, and that decision will be in the hands of AERA. If this were to happen we would do our best to pivot to a full virtual conference.

I want to make a plea to those of you who are on the fence about traveling to San Diego. We are quite likely entering a gray area that will characterize the new normal for the foreseeable future. In this gray area, there will always be a non-zero (but hopefully quite low) risk of contracting COVID, irrespective of the precautions we take to minimize the risk. I know that for some of you, after almost two years of not traveling, there is surely a feeling of nervousness about getting on a plane, and being around groups of people in an indoor setting. So the safe thing to do is to select the remote participation option. But in the years to come, when people are writing about this period in our history, I think we are going to find that we incurred some significant psychological costs in the retreat to our digital screens and home offices. So the safe option of remote participation might not be as safe as we think.

There is no substitute for that feeling when you're giving a presentation and can sense the energy in the room. That moment when the session ends and you strike up an impromptu conversation with someone you've never met before, but who in years to come will be someone you look forward to seeing again. The time when you see a presentation that spurs a new idea and launches you in an exciting direction you had not anticipated. Catching up with friends and colleagues in the hallways; meeting for drinks and dinner out on the town; that karaoke dance party you might regret a bit the next morning, but will talk about fondly forever.

I really hope to see you in San Diego. On behalf of the conference planning committee I promise we will make it worth your while.

Derek Briggs  
NCME President