

Vice President's Column MAC Meetings and Symposia Update

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In normal times, as summer heat turns to fall colors, MAC members would be busy submitting session proposals for the 2021 Annual Meeting in Madison, Wisconsin; the Program Committee (PC) would be in the throes of reviewing and selecting proposals; the Local Arrangements Committee (LAC) would be working on the meeting web page, finalizing fund-raising plans, and coordinating spaces; and the Education Committee would be confirming workshops and formulating Friday open forum topics. But these are not ordinary times, and ordinary timelines no longer apply.

For those who attended this spring's Member Meeting, you know that professional travel allocations for the coming year were largely unknown, but that they play a significant role in making members' attendance at the Annual Meeting feasible, and many expected those allocations to diminish. You also know that members were concerned about the health risks of attending an in-person conference and that institutional travel bans were expected to impose additional barriers. For these reasons, we recognize that many members would be unlikely to attend an in-person meeting, and we want to think carefully about the viability of such an event.

With the assistance of Debbie Nolan at AMC Source, we asked the MAC 2021 conference hotel to consider a number of alternate scenarios that would amend our signed contract (such as backup dates, reduced guarantees, etc.), but we have been unable to come to an agreement. As of the time of my writing, MAC will have to pay a significant penalty to the conference hotel if we cancel the in-person Annual Meeting next spring. While state guidelines in Wisconsin do not currently support the hotel hosting a conference of our size, the hotel hopes that the trajectory of the pandemic improves and that rules surrounding gatherings relax. We, too, wish to see the COVID numbers diminish, but financial concerns—as the hotel has had to lay off staff, as we and our intuitions grapple with

budgets, and as MAC meeting planners recognize that past attendance targets are unlikely for the foreseeable future—will be framing our decisions.

Late September and early October may better portend how spring 2021 might shape up, so MAC president Erik Moore and I have asked the LAC and PC to put their work on pause for the time being. They have agreed, while recognizing that their timelines will be much reduced if we choose to sponsor a remote meeting instead. Announcing or moving to an online event at this point could trigger hotel fees, so we are continuing to monitor the situation while waiting to make a final decision.

We are also aware that educational opportunities are an important membership benefit and that cancellation of the Annual Meeting in Des Moines and the Fall Symposium in Indianapolis have left large holes in MAC's normally robust offerings. This would be compounded if we were unable to come together in early 2021. Although we may be unable to meet in person, we believe alternate venues and formats offer opportunities to meet educational needs. Thus, we have asked the Education Committee to put together a proposal for distanced learning opportunities in 2021 and expect their report in the coming weeks.

These are interesting times. It seems that plans of all sorts are being written and rewritten as circumstances change. What is recommended today may be out of favor tomorrow as new evidence becomes available. Your colleagues throughout MAC—officers and committee members—are doing their best to make responsible and informed decisions in this ever-changing environment. We promise to share information about next year's educational offerings as soon as we are able; in the meantime, if you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to be in touch. Stay healthy and safe!