



Special Statement on 2021 Meeting from the SER President

January 29, 2021:

Fresh from the success of the 2020 meeting, SER's 2021 annual meeting is fast approaching, and many members are overwhelmed by compressed timelines and continuing uncertainty around in-person gathering, travel and other unknowable vicissitudes of the coming months. To reduce the uncertainty that we can, we thought it prudent to communicate to the membership a few things that we do know now, in an effort to reassure you about your participation in the June 2021 meeting.

- 1) The 2020 meeting in December was by many measures a tremendous success. We had 1244 attendees, which broke previous records. We also set a record with workshop participation by having 1488 registrations (many of this number reflecting individuals attending more than 1 workshop). Meeting attendees came from 33 different countries, again an unprecedented number, showing a greater geographic diversity afforded by the virtual format.
- 2) We did delay the 2020 annual meeting by 6 months in response to the pandemic crisis, and there has been some speculation that the 2021 meeting could be similarly postponed. For various reasons, from contractual to logistical, we have decided to stick firmly with the original dates: **June 22 – 25, 2021.**
- 3) While the dates of the meeting are fixed, the format is not. Realistically, a fully in-person meeting is unlikely. Many members have expressed hesitation about traveling, are not permitted to travel by their institutions, or cannot access funds to do so. This seems an especially acute concern for international members, who would face additional uncertainties such as potential quarantines and visa delays. On the other hand, many members expressed disappointment about the possibility of another fully virtual meeting given how challenging it is to emulate the networking and interpersonal connections that we enjoy during an in-person meeting. **Between this rock and hard-place, we simply promise that we will work hard to enable some in-person features at the meeting if it is safe to do so. We will however ensure that anybody can attend and give presentations at the meeting 100% virtually, should they need to or choose to do so.** The potential for in-person functionality is enhanced by large outdoor spaces provided by the San Diego hotel, agreeable climate for outdoor activities, and the option for daily rapid testing of attendees should we determine that this would be attractive to members. We are weighing these options now and **we are committed to communicating a final format**

decision to the membership by April 1, 2021. This is to allow sufficient time for pre-recording of any virtual contributions.

- 4) Registration for the meeting will have the same price structure for in-person or virtual attendees, so that there will be no pressure to opt for one over the other and no need to decide before registering. Moreover, success of the 2020 meeting left us in a stable financial situation, unlike so many other professional organizations. This allows us to commit to further reductions in student registration costs, and more generous support through scholarship programs including awards to international students, Rothman Travel Scholarships and SPC Travel Awards. If there is no travel for virtual attendees, these can be redeemed against registration costs or workshop attendance.
- 5) Abstract and symposium submissions have now officially closed. From February 2 to March 2, we will open the submission period for “Late-Breaker” abstracts. Typically, we restrict these submissions to truly late-breaking work, prohibiting submissions from people who simply missed the previous deadline. This year, we recognize the tight timeline between meetings and the uncertainties about dates and format may have led some members not to submit. Therefore, we will allow late-breaker abstracts without restriction during this period. So please send your work by the March 2 deadline and participate in the June meeting.

In solidarity and commiseration, we remain your SER in 2021. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months, but plan for a great meeting in 2021 no matter what.

Jay S Kaufman, President 2020-2021