



Updated FAQ for Virtual #ica20

Tuesday, 10 March 2020

As you know by now, the Executive Committee of the International Communication Association—in the face of numerous health concerns, bans on mass gatherings, and university bans on faculty travel—made the difficult decision last week to cancel the physical ICA conference in May in the Gold Coast, and move the conference to a virtual format. [The full statement from Friday, 6 March can be read here](#). The ICA staff are working nonstop to ensure we can give you the best conference possible under the circumstances, and the staff are readying the virtual option as we speak. **Please do not call or email the ICA office at this time asking for a refund or for answers on virtual conferencing details; as you can imagine, that would result in flooding our emails and phone lines with requests, and we only have limited staff who are working overtime on getting the virtual conference platform constructed in the space of just two months.**

In the meantime, here are a few answers to what are surely the first practical questions on your mind:

WHAT IF I WASN'T GOING WHEN IT WAS IN AUSTRALIA BUT I WANT TO REGISTER NOW?

If you have not yet registered and want to, now that there is a virtual option, the discount is 25% off the original price. Please select the correct tier and member type here and process your registration on the updated page here: <https://www.icahdq.org/event/ICA20>

Please note that you can also choose to donate in \$20 increments to the Hardship Fund to help cover expenses for early career scholars who can't get their flights reimbursed.

HOW WILL THE VIRTUAL CONFERENCE WORK?

- You will need to retain your (discounted, see below) registration in order to log in to upload your own presentation or view others.
- The conference will be largely pre-recorded with some live elements and a chat function, making it easy to ask questions of presenters (with more time to do so than in the live conference setting, actually).
- The conference will take place over a week or so, incorporating the same dates as the conference was originally going to happen live plus time on either side to accommodate for time zones. **You can watch and comment on presentations at your leisure, according to your own time zone.** If we do have some live “events,” we will attempt to schedule them with as much of an eye towards “ideal time zones globally” as possible.
- The platform can handle small committee meetings, the exhibit hall, posters, and even pre-conferences and post-conferences, if you wish to use it for that. **Pre and post conference planners, see your own section below.**
- If you were planning to have a committee meeting, we will include instructions for how to do that in a future email.
- **You are expected to participate virtually as a presenter if you had committed to presenting your paper at ICA20 physically; this is a commitment each of you made when you submitted your work.**



With the exception of those who may have vision or other accommodations the virtual conference is, if anything, *easier* than traveling abroad, so the expectation is that everyone will uphold their commitment to present. In this way, the virtual conference will be a robust experience and you can preserve the ability to list your presentation on your CV as being presented at the 70th Annual ICA conference.

- **This is the statement everyone reviews when submitting: “Conference attendance:** If your panel, paper, or interactive display presentation is accepted for an ICA conference, you have made a commitment to register for and attend the conference and perform your assigned role. All chairs and respondents also make this commitment.”
- If you do have an accommodation that makes a virtual conference format difficult for you, please contact [Laura Sawyer, Executive Director](#) to discuss so that we can find a way to make it work for you.

WILL WE HAVE A VIRTUAL OPTION FROM NOW ON?

That remains to be seen, depending on the feedback and attendance we get after this forced “experiment.” For many months we’ve been hearing from attendees that climate change should lead us to have more virtual options, but once we made the decision to take ICA20 completely virtual in light of COVID-19, we received numerous messages lamenting the loss of face to face contact. There is no perfect answer. We recognize that climate change is its own form of emergency. This will be a good opportunity for us all to examine how the virtual atmosphere does and does not replicate the f2f conference.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FEE?

Please note:

- Every registration received thus far will be automatically converted to a virtual registration, allowing access to the online platform where you can upload your presentations and access all pre-recorded and live aspects of the conference when it goes live, including an exhibit hall, posters, and other events such as business meetings and pre & post conferences.
- Every current registration* will receive a refund of 25% of the price you paid per your member style and tier, automatically, plus a refund of the GST (tax) you paid. These will be processed over the next 6-8 weeks (we cannot do them all in one day due to the constraints of our payment system). We will start processing these on 1 April. Before then, please answer the SurveyMonkey (see your email, coming soon) letting us know if you want your 25% refund or, as some have suggested, you would like to donate that 25% to the Hardship Fund to help early career scholars with the cost of non-reimbursable flights.
- **Why 25%?** ICA will pay stiff penalties to the venues in Australia for cancellation, in addition to the costs of utilizing the virtual platform; this discount reflects the missing services you would have received (such as morning and afternoon food breaks) while recognizing the value we retain by allowing you to present your work virtually, retain the listing in your CV, and interact with the work of your colleagues.
- *if you are in a **group that already receives a heavily discounted** rate such as a group rate negotiated by your university, you will not be refunded the additional 25%.
- *if you have a **conference waiver** for the physical conference, that will still entitle you to free access to the virtual conference.



WHY DO I HAVE TO REGISTER TO PARTICIPATE? I DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE; I'M IN IT FOR THE FACE TO FACE INTERACTION

- Many (senior) scholars, especially, will feel this way; we understand. If you are tenured, you might not attend the conference to present yourself, or even for the papers; you might just go for the networking and to see old friends. That's great! **But early career scholars need you to go even if it's virtual.** They (and ICA) need your support, they need an "audience", your comments and presence for their work as much as ever.
- **Note that those who do not register will *not* be cleared to use the virtual platform** (the company that provides the platform will cross-check registrations with our list). If you don't register, you can't access the platform to upload your work (or see the work of others).
- **If you do not upload your presentation, it will not be considered to have been presented at the 70th Annual ICA conference for the purposes of your CV. We will have a record of who participates and who does not, and we do receive reference check calls when universities are considering hiring and tenure. Make sure your CV is accurate.**
- **How do I reflect this on my CV?** Your work has still been accepted, and will be presented, at the 70th Annual ICA Conference. The only notation of the changed situation that you may want to add is a parenthetical "(Virtual)" or a more robust "Converted from Australia to virtual due to COVID-19" next to that line.
- **What about my membership dues?** We will not be refunding membership fees. While the member discounted rate is a benefit of membership, we are still having the conference, merely in a different format, and membership has other benefits.
- ***The only full refunds we will process at this time for the conference will be those which are related to accommodation for physical disabilities, such as vision impairment, that may make a virtual conference less than ideal.***
- **If you have submitted a request for a refund for any circumstance other than the above, we have your message and are holding it in abeyance until we get the more pressing matters dealt with (such as building the platform for the virtual conference, which we now only have two months to do). Please note that we have only four staff who handle everything to do with the conference. We are very, very busy as a result of this change.**

WHAT IF MY UNIVERSITY WON'T PAY FOR ME TO ATTEND A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE?

We have had this question raised a few times and each case, it turned out to be a presumption not based on policy. Your university may not pay for you to attend a webinar that was online from the start, but ICA is recognized as a legitimate conference that happens to be going online due to unforeseen extenuating circumstances, and universities have been supportive of this. If your university does have this policy and maintains that they will not pay even after you have explained, send us a **signed letter from your provost or dean on university letterhead** confirming the policy and stating that "this policy is being applied to the 70th Annual ICA Conference, which was to be held in Gold Coast Australia but will now be an entirely virtual event for one week in May due to the COVID-19 outbreak."

WHY CAN'T ICA REFUND EVERYTHING AND JUST DO THIS VIRTUAL THING FOR FREE?

ICA is incorporated under US law as a nonprofit 501(c)3 membership association. This designation means



that money you pay for attending a conference or to have an ICA membership does not go to line the pockets of a CEO or of shareholders. Any revenue ICA makes beyond breaking even on expenses—any surplus—goes directly back into accomplishing our mission. As a gross over-simplification, our income budget consists of three main pillars: membership fees, conference registrations, and publishing royalties. If we refunded one third of our entire budget on top of paying the penalties we have paid in order to protect the health and safety of our attendees and their loved ones, we would not have enough income to pay our expenses. We are still doing a conference, and there are additional technology fees incurred from making that choice. Please be understanding with ALL conference organizers during this time, who have similar budget structures. If we refund all conference registrations, membership fees, and reimburse you for your flight, we would cease to exist and would not be there for your future needs (journals to publish in, conferences to present at, awards to win, receptions where you might meet your next collaborator or mentor).

WILL ICA REFUND MY FLIGHT COSTS?

Unfortunately we cannot; please see above for the financial reality related to this question.

WILL PRESENTING VIRTUALLY COUNT AS PUBLICATION AND KEEP ME FROM SUBMITTING TO JOURNALS?

No. You will still have the option of uploading your actual full paper (optional) to the ScholarOne site before the conference happens, to be accessible for up to 60 days after the conference before being taken down. This upload has never counted as publication, and having a video of you presenting your work up for only one week online, behind a firewall, will not count as publication either.

WHAT HAPPENS TO MY LODGING RESERVATION?

- If you have booked a room at the **Star or Sofitel**, good news: Experient hadn't given your actual payment information to the hotel yet (that wasn't to happen until mid-April). **You will not be charged.** We will simply purge the reservations at these two properties that were blocked by ICA. The penalties on those missing reservations will be covered by substantial attrition fees ICA will pay to the hotel.
- If you are at the Star or Sofitel and **want to still have a holiday** and retain your reservation, we regret that this is not possible as ICA's contracted, discounted rate is negated by the cancellation of the overall event. You will need to make a new reservation.
- If you booked at one of the **apartment properties**, you will need to contact them directly, as your contract is with them directly (as we mentioned in several places); we are not an intermediary for your reservation. **NEW INFORMATION: We have negotiated with the Qube/Synergy, the two apartment properties, to be more lenient than they are required to be. For those of you who booked refundable/changeable bookings, you will receive a refund minus the \$200 deposit. If you booked the early bird/non-refundable rate, while they are under no obligation to give you anything back, they have agreed to give a 50% refund as a good faith gesture in recognition of the truly extraordinary circumstances. We are delighted to have been able to get this refund in place. You must contact them directly to process your cancellation.**
- If you booked **anywhere else** for your lodging, obviously those details will be up to you and the lodging venue to determine according to the details you agreed to when booking. ICA cannot assist with those negotiations.



WHAT ABOUT MY FLIGHT?

Some airlines are being lenient about COVID-19 related cancellations and rebooking; experiences vary by airline. If your university has banned your travel, that letter is likely an even better proof for your case in getting your money back than our letter will be. In many cases, universities banning travel have agreed to absorb the costs of cancellation. In other cases, airlines may allow you to simply change your flights to another destinations with a later date. *If your airline will not let you cancel or change, you may want to just hold onto the reservation in hopes that the airline cancels on you at a later date (in which case you might receive a refund).*

WHAT ABOUT MY GROUND TRANSPORT?

If you booked ground transport via Con-X-ion to get from the airport to Gold Coast and back again, you will need to inform them of your cancellation in order to have them process your refund.

WHAT ABOUT BUSINESS MEETINGS?

Planners and Board Members, thank you for your patience and the hard work you have put into this year's conference. We are happy to have the virtual conference as an option for ICA so that your carefully constructed sessions and panels can be salvaged. We are still building the platform behind the scenes so the answers below are preliminary. We will let you know how to conduct your **business meetings** and other unique formats, such as escalator sessions, should you wish to do so virtually, in a later email.

OFFSITE RECEPTIONS & EVENTS

IF YOUR DIVISION OR INTEREST GROUP WAS PLANNING AN **OFFSITE EVENT**, *don't forget to cancel your venue rental*. If ICA headquarters paid your venue deposit from your div/IG budget, *you are responsible for securing a refund*. Once the refund is back in ICA's account, it will be credited back to your division/IG. **The headquarters office is not the main contact for your contract and a venue would not cancel without that person's permission. Therefore, you must do this yourself.** If you forget and are charged the full amount, this will negatively affect your division budget.

WILL WE STILL HAVE A BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING?

Yes, but of course it will have a different format than usual. You will hear from Julie Arnold on that as soon as we have a complete plan in place. It will likely include a two-week long chat on uploaded agenda items, followed by a survey to conduct the votes. This method is supported by the bylaws. Your deadlines for reports and action items for the board meeting REMAIN THE SAME.

WHAT IF I HAD A RECEPTION HAPPENING ONSITE?

- If you were planning a **division or interest group reception in the Star or GCCEC** and had not signed your own contract (ie you were operating as part of ICA), the significant penalties we will pay on the venues' missing food & beverage revenue will cover your event and you don't need to do anything.
- If you were planning a reception at Star or GCCEC that was an external **satellite event** and I had connected you directly with the hotel or convention center staff to arrange for your event, and/or you had signed your own contract, you will need to refer to that contract as to your obligations.
- If you had an **event at Sofitel or any other property**, you likely have a contract you have signed to which you should refer for cancellation penalties and details. ICA cannot be an intermediary for those contracts.



WHAT DO I DO IF I AM A PRE/POST CONFERENCE ORGANIZER?

You have several choices for how to proceed; **please let conference@icahdq.org know your decision:**

1. You may continue to hold your offsite pre/postconference as a physical event if you think you will retain many local attendees.
2. You may move your once-onsite pre/postconference to an offsite location and continue to hold it as a physical event.
3. You may decide to use the virtual platform to hold your pre/postconference (in which case we would advise a 25% discount on registrations, but as that is your budget that you have to break even with, we cannot enforce that)
4. You may decide to cancel outright (in which case we would refund 100% of pre/post conference registration paid).
5. MORE COMPLICATED: If you have a physical event you are still going to hold, but some attendees are no longer coming because the MAIN conference is going virtual, so they won't be in town, it is up to you how you handle those refunds.
6. MORE COMPLICATED, PART 2: If you had attendees who were ONLY coming to your pre/post conference and NOT the main conference, and they have only paid for the pre/post conference, that does NOT give them access to the virtual platform for the main conference and therefore you may want to use a different platform for your virtual pre/post conference, such as Zoom. We regret that there is no way around that. You are either in or out of the platform, we cannot grant partial access.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

We thank all members of our community for their understanding and patience as we attend to all the issues emerging from this unprecedented situation. Associations are a crucial part of your career: we are there to help you present and share your research, publish your work in our journals, maybe receive awards that enrich your CV, to meet colleagues and collaborators, make lifelong friends, and even to interview for a job. We ask that you stick with ICA for this virtual conference format and support an organization that has supported you; we ask that you support ALL the associations you belong to, in spite of cancellations or format changes. The government is unlikely to "bail out" small associations along with airlines and cruise ship companies. We know that the virtual conference is a disappointing option to some, and that face to face is preferable, but it allows us to protect the safety and health of our attendees and their loved ones while retaining the ability for (especially early career) scholars to present their work and build their CVs, and to make those connections, however virtual they may be.