

The future of virtual conference access

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Given the role conferences play in disseminating research and building professional networks, and the opportunity that exists as conferences navigate the return to in-person gatherings, I propose a discussion of how to make hybrid conference formats accessible and engaging. The ability to attend conferences virtually is critical for many different community members, including:

- People with disabilities who prefer not to/cannot travel or for whom traditional conference venues and formats are inaccessible (e.g., people who have sensory sensitivities)
- People with young kids
- People who do not have the funding to physically travel to and stay at a conference
- People with visa complications

Especially in the wake of the pandemic, our community is creating hybrid conference experiences that include a virtual way of engagement. I argue these methods of virtual engagement need to persist in the post-pandemic world, as they make possible the attendance of the above important, and often minoritized, HCI community members. Moreover, if community members without academic backgrounds are viewed as core contributors in a project, they deserve to be able to attend/be a part of the presentation. However, as Dr. Gillian Hayes discussed in her CHI [Social Impact Award](#) keynote it is costly and burdensome for disability community members who are not involved in academia to attend our conferences. Virtual conference participation can be a step to be able to better support this engagement. To do so, we need to make sure these virtual experiences are available and accessible.

I present these questions to begin discussion:

- What are the core considerations in creating a hybrid conference?
- More specifically, what are the core access considerations in creating a hybrid conference?
- How can conferences balance considerations of the number of attendees required to make in-person events feasible while not discouraging those who would benefit from doing so to attend online?
- How can we create an equitable experience between the virtual and in-person events? Are there structural checks we can put in place? What does equity between the in person and virtual events look like?
- What elements of a virtual format can we leverage to create new richer and more accessible experiences? Are there opportunities to better engage non-academic community members with this format?
- Should conference formats include a fully virtual conference in the rotation once every N years, and if so how should this differ from the virtual portion of a hybrid conference?

For full disclosure, these issues are top of mind for me as I am one of the virtual co-chairs for ASSETS 2022. Thank you for considering this proposal.