Amid COVID, computing society releases report on best practices for virtual conferences

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Science and technology conferences are engines of innovation—essential to the incubation of new ideas, the dissemination of research, and the

spawning of new technologies. But this year, with no warning, conferences around the globe are finding themselves in uncharted waters as the global COVID-19 pandemic makes physical meetings impossible. To help organizers cope, the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) has issued a new report, "Virtual Conferences: A Guide to Best Practices," on how to replace face-to-face conferences with virtual ones during the pandemic.

The report is the output of a task force convened by ACM President Cherri M. Pancake to help ACM conference organizers navigate the virtual conference landscape. Composed of heavy users of online technologies, and of researchers responsible for developing them, the ACM community is well positioned to offer advice to other groups dealing with the same problems.

"This report is designed for organizers who must grapple with quickly modifying the format of upcoming conferences or planning future events without relying on traditional face-to-face meetings," explained ACM President Cherri M. Pancake. "Our task force included ACM members with experience organizing online conferences and conducting virtual planning sessions. They developed a practical handbook that will be useful to newcomers and provide helpful pointers to those who already have some experience with virtual conferences. It is particularly timely given the COVID-19 situation. Our hope is that the report will also encourage conference organizers to think about reducing their reliance on face-to-face meetings in the future."

The "Virtual Conferences" report linked from the website as a PDF document, provides concrete advice for events of all sizes. It is a practical guide that covers a wide array of topics that organizers face, including needed technology, high-level planning, accessibility, fostering social interaction, navigation and finances.

Because this is a rapidly evolving topic, the report has been designed as a living document that the task force will periodically update and revise. Conference organizers are encouraged to share their own experiences, make comments or ask questions.

Provided by Association for Computing Machinery