
**T_EX conferences and General Meetings,
this year and next**

Jonathan Fine

I'm writing about our T_EX Conference next year (2021), and our T_EX Conference and General Meeting this year (2020). A satisfactory result in difficult circumstances counts as a success, or perhaps even better. So adverse were the conditions for this year's T_EX Conference that it must be counted as a success, even though flawed in several important ways.

A major flaw is that ordinary participants had little opportunity to speak after the talks, or with each other at other times. In short, for most participants the social aspects were limited. In addition, there was not a TUG General Meeting. So far as I know, every previous TUG conference had a General Meeting as part of the event.

On 5 May 2020 the TUG Board decided unanimously to cancel both the T_EX conference and the TUG General Meeting (both scheduled to take place in-person at RIT, Rochester, New York). On 2 June we were told that the T_EX conference would go ahead online. (There's no recorded Board decision enabling this.)

It would be unfortunate if, in 2020, TUG does not have a General Meeting. Such a meeting is, I believe, a formal legal requirement arising from our bylaws and also our non-profit status. However, it's not too late. We can hold the General Meeting later this calendar year!

Many were surprised that our community was able to hold an online conference, for the first time, and in these adverse circumstances. I'm so pleased that so many of us, including myself, went outside our comfort zone, and contributed what we could. This includes a wider than usual range of speakers.

And together, this was enough. Once it became clear we would overcome adversity, and the conference would happen, then doubt and fear reduced, and we became stronger and more capable.

Much of the credit must go to Paulo Ney de Souza, particularly his calm and supportive presence, his commitment and initiative. It seems to me he was the main force and lead for the organisation of the conference this year. He did the same for the 2018 T_EX conference that coincided with the International Congress of Mathematicians in Rio de Janeiro. Paulo has never been on the TUG Board. I think this energy and view from outside was helpful.

Whatever the public health situation, having a large on-line component to the 2021 T_EX Conference would be very valuable. It will increase attendance

and diversity. It will enlarge the community. And where allowed, as part of the Conference we can meet in small socially distanced events. This would help restore the social element to all of us. I'd like an international on-line General Meeting and social events to be part of next year's Conference.

I can think of nothing more important now, for ensuring success next year for both Conference and General Meeting, than there being an online General Meeting this year, to follow on from the Conference. Let our present success be the foundation for better circumstances and outcomes next year!

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