

NCSA 2022 Conference Statement about Covid

The Nineteenth Century Studies Association prioritizes the health and wellbeing of our members and our communities. At the same time, our purpose as an organization is to bring together scholars of the nineteenth century to advance our understanding of the period and to exchange ideas and questions. These two missions make it particularly difficult to organize an in-person annual meeting during the Covid-19 pandemic, so we wanted to take some time to explain our approach and philosophy as we plan our 2022 conference.

We believe that an in-person gathering for our annual academic conference is invaluable. Over the past year and a half--and indeed long before that--we have learned new ways to engage with each other and share ideas. Email, social media, zoom events, and online webinars have all proved enormously useful and stimulating. Yet none of these can take the place of an in-person conference. We cannot replicate the energy of in-person gatherings, the serendipity of engaging with a panelist at the book exhibit, the creation of new connections and exchanging of resources after an invigorating session, or the networking at receptions and other social events (which is particularly critical for graduate students and early-career scholars) through digital interfaces.

For these reasons, we are still hoping and actively planning to hold our March 2022 annual meeting in Rochester, New York. In every conversation and in every decision we make, we are constantly mindful of the guidance provided by the CDC and local public health professionals. We are and will be following local, regional, and/or institutional requirements and recommendations.

We are still planning our in-person gathering because, at this moment in time, the data that we have available is telling us that we should be able to do so responsibly by March 2022. But if there is one thing we've all learned through this, it's that this virus is not predictable. Our strategy throughout the pandemic has been to adapt to the changing currents, using the guidance of experts and communicating with our members as openly and as promptly as possible. As we approach the conference, if it looks unlikely that our gathering will be able to be held safely, we will reevaluate our plans, constantly keeping the health and safety of our members and communities in mind. We will aim to make a final determination by early 2022, to give our members enough time to adjust if needed.

Many have asked about virtual options for 2022. Coming off of the success of our virtual 2021 conference, we share our members' enthusiasm for these options. Virtual events allow for greater accessibility for members all over the world and dramatically reduce the carbon footprint of our annual meeting. Unfortunately, our venue for 2022 and its AV capabilities do not support hybrid options, though this is something we will consider in future years. We recognize that many professional organizations will move towards some sort of hybrid conference option in the future. At NCSA, our priority is to do this thoughtfully, making decisions that will keep our conference as productive and equitable as possible. We plan to solicit feedback from our membership for how we can do this and we look forward to hearing from you.

We also want to acknowledge that this virus and this global pandemic impacts our entire membership in different ways. NCSA has members all over the world. Many are parents; many care for dependent family members. We recognize that all of our members face different situations and possess different tolerances for risk. We remain deeply empathetic and respectful to each of our members' individual situations and we try to make decisions that consider all of these different circumstances and perspectives.

As we move closer to the conference and as the situation with the global pandemic evolves, we will continue to communicate as openly and promptly as we can. We thank you for your continued patience as we constantly adapt and problem-solve. We believe in the work of our organization and the spirit of our membership and are doing everything we can to ensure that we are able to do that work and preserve that spirit safely and responsibly.