

# From the President

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## A Year of Challenges and Achievements

During this extraordinary year, the Acoustical Society of America (ASA) can be proud of numerous accomplishments. The Executive Council (EC) and Technical Council have met numerous times to decide totally new ways to implement the Society's mission. Executive Director Susan Fox and her outstanding colleagues in the ASA office succeeded in overcoming enormous challenges. For me, I view steering of both volunteers and staff through rough and unpredictable seas as my achievement. Some of the choices ASA made this year will become more permanent features of our Society, whereas others offered a learning experience that did not sink the ship. In this, my final column in *Acoustics Today* as the only virtual president of the ASA (hopefully), I provide insights into some notable activities of this past year. In addition, I discuss how new aspects of communicating virtually will continue to benefit ASA in the future.

## Fall and Spring Meetings

The most disruptive aspect of ASA's virtual year was not having in-person meetings. There are long-standing guidelines and traditions for managing our biannual meetings that were of scant use for online meetings. Since starting my presidential term, meetings in Chicago were canceled twice and Cancun, Australia, and Seattle each once, and these were replaced by two virtual meetings. All scientific societies this year have experienced the same chaos. The ASA can be proud that we have offered two scientific meetings online. In order to restructure our meetings, I became a major organizer of the Acoustics Virtually Everywhere (AVE) meeting in December 2020. Stan Dosso, vice president, stepped up as a major organizer of the Acoustics in Focus (AiF) meeting in June 2021. Insights learned from these two very different meetings are discussed below.

### Fall Meeting

AVE was conceived as a virtual meeting that incorporated all events of an in-person meeting, to the extent possible. There were more than 1,100 abstracts in five

days of scientific sessions, as well as social events, open meetings of technical committees (TCs) and administrative committees. Apparently, this was a good plan because 1,362 people attended.

In the postmeeting survey, 86% rated the program organization good to outstanding and 94% rated the scientific content good to outstanding. Survey instructions strongly encouraged respondents to describe how to improve virtual meetings. Negative comments included that the two virtual platforms contracted for AVE were a disaster, both for the ASA staff trying to support the meeting and for presenters at many oral and poster sessions.

Furthermore, a central role that meetings play in the ASA culture is face-to-face contact between attendees in scientific sessions. However, survey results included negative remarks about not seeing who was in the sessions or at posters, not being able to verbally ask questions, and missing discussions between attendees. Positive comments about the advantages of virtual meetings included full access to recordings before and after the meeting in any time zone and being able to participate without travel and hotel expenses.

### Spring Meeting

During the fall meeting, the leadership realized that the extended pandemic made it necessary to transform the spring meeting to virtual as well. However, there was too little time to prepare for another full ASA meeting. Building on the feedback from AVE, the leadership thought that the major issues were finding a new virtual meeting platform that would permit more attendee interaction while downsizing the number of technical sessions and preserving scientific content. The meeting title, Acoustics in Focus (AiF), and its logo (**Figure 1**) encapsulated these issues. To implement this smaller meeting, new and innovative session types were developed.

Because I am writing this column several months before the AiF meeting, many readers have already experienced this unique meeting. Briefly, I believe that several of the online, interactive session types will be implemented in



**Figure 1.** Logo for the *Acoustics in Focus* virtual meeting, Spring Meeting, 2021

the future by the TCs. For example, the Lightning Round Sessions enable many short 5-minute presentations of new research and ideas, followed by a fully interactive discussion. Lightning Rounds can be paired with a session of invited presentations where these short talks can be added even after the program is published. The other two session types that offer new formats as technical sessions are Tutorials with attendee discussions and focused Panel Discussions.

To address the AVE problem of not seeing faces in sessions, all three of these session types use Zoom in its interactive meeting mode to allow live questions and discussion following the oral presentations. Another important aspect of these sessions is that they are initiated more by a TC as a whole, in contrast to individuals submitting their own abstracts.

Finally, the ASA expects to have an in-person meeting in Seattle, WA, from November 29 to December 3, 2021. This is a long two years since the 2019 San Diego meeting. Nonetheless, it is already obvious that future meetings will incorporate virtual elements into their sessions as hybrid meetings.

## New Approaches

As a virtual president, it was possible to implement new approaches to ASA activities and communication. In my AT winter 2020 column (see [acousticstoday.org/from-the-president-5](http://acousticstoday.org/from-the-president-5)), I discussed that the EC now holds monthly meetings. This has become a cost-effective and efficient way to govern the Society. It is cost effective because for deliberations

of important budgetary and compensation decisions, we have replaced in-person meetings that required travel of ASA officers to headquarters in Melville, NY, with online meetings. These meetings offer efficient use of officer and staff time as well because two-to-three hours of online meetings spread out over a few months replace an overnight trip. Monthly meetings have also made a very efficient use of time for attendees of the EC and Technical Council at the beginning and end of meetings week. Considerable policy, strategic planning, and governing work are conducted during the monthly EC meetings, reducing time during meetings week by 60%.

Other important innovations for meeting events have been implemented by me. The first was the Plenary Session that required a great deal of rethinking for me and the staff to host it on a virtual platform. The hybrid plan of videos for shorter speeches and live presentation of the medals and awards by the president and the recipients was implemented for the fall and spring meetings. Headquarters staff skillfully created videos and slides as well as implementing the complex hybrid scripts for the live broadcast. An unexpected challenge was to broadcast the Plenary Session from my living room while the sun kept shifting (**Figure 2**). For the Spring Plenary Session, a real studio is being used to prepare and broadcast the ceremonies. Due to concerns from the honorees that the Fall Plenary Session was only available to registrants, the spring session is an open broadcast. I predict that making the ceremony available to all colleagues and families of the honorees will become a permanent part of the Plenary Session through hybrid technology.

**Figure 2.** Adapting as necessary, I had to use my sunny living room as a broadcast studio while directing and presiding over the *Acoustics Virtually Everywhere (AVE)* Plenary Session.



Keynote addresses can be very stimulating for communicating advances in acoustics and as a benefit for attending meetings. The ASA often has keynote addresses at joint international meetings but rarely at domestic meetings. Because it was one of my goals as president, I am pleased that keynote addresses were incorporated during my virtual term. For the Fall meeting, Jim West (former ASA president and Gold Medal recipient; see [bit.ly/3kSypyw](https://bit.ly/3kSypyw)) and his daughter Ellington West provided an engaging lecture on digital stethoscopes (video of the keynote session is [acousticstoday.org/AVEkeynote](https://acousticstoday.org/AVEkeynote)). For the Spring meeting, Carol Espy-Wilson (previous associate editor of *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* and on the Advisory Council for the National Institute on Deafness and Communication Disorders [NIDCD]) presents research on speech tools to diagnose mental health issues. In addition, a second keynote address by Sylvester James “Jim” Gates, Jr. (Ford Foundation Professor of Physics, Brown University; president of the American Physical Society; member of the National Academy of Sciences) addresses how to improve the culture in scientific societies to broaden diversity both in the membership and in the science. I am establishing an ad hoc committee to manage the selection and presentation of keynote addresses for future domestic ASA meetings.

## New Programs

An important role of any president is to identify and facilitate new programs for the Society. As a founding member of the Committee to Improve Racial Diversity and Inclusivity (CIRDI; see [bit.ly/348Gbyk](https://bit.ly/348Gbyk)), I have pursued opportunities to facilitate its work. Chair Tyrone Porter has been a dedicated leader of the CIRDI by raising awareness of diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) in the ASA as well as starting an entirely new summer program for Black and other minority undergraduates (see [bit.ly/39rijJ7](https://bit.ly/39rijJ7)).

In this, my last column, I share with you a particularly important statement about DEI for all ASA members to consider. This statement is derived from the report of Daryl G. Smith (senior research fellow and professor emerita at Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA) who was the DEI consultant who assessed problems underlying the ASA’s lack of diversity. The report

also recommended steps that the ASA can take to become a more equitable and inclusive Society. The report states it is an “institutional imperative” for the ASA to embed DEI throughout the Society, from membership to medals/awards, to technical initiatives and to leadership, for the Society to evolve and reach our full potential. Moreover, leadership starting with the EC must guide us through this evolution and inspire the membership to actively participate in our transformation. This is an imperative because the alternative is dissolution of this great Society.

Another new program initiated this year is the ASA Webinar Series. This program became possible because virtual technology is now an ordinary means for learning and communication. Judy Dubno spearheaded the implementation of a monthly ASA webinar series that is open to both ASA members and nonmembers. The webinars focus on topics of interest to the general ASA membership and the broader acoustics community. The first webinar began in January 2021 with Patricia Kuhl’s presentation on infant speech perception. Given the excellent early attendance from around the world (~450), the Technical Council Working Group on ASA Webinars was formed, chaired by Linda Polka and having members from across the ASA TCs. The webpage for the Webinar series with videos of past programs is [acousticalsociety.org/asa-webinar-series](https://acousticalsociety.org/asa-webinar-series). The working group is open to ideas and suggestions from all ASA members, with input directly to the working group or through your TC chair. Because ASA members have very broad interests across TCs, this new program allows us to learn about acoustics outside our own research niche.

Reflecting on my presidency, improving communication across ASA activities underlies many of the efforts I have led. Because speech communication is my primary technical area, perhaps it has influenced my approach and choice of projects. Specifically, I see communication has improved through the implementation of new technology and its application to our meetings and governance. I feel satisfied with my contributions to the ASA during this unique year but, like other ASA members, fervently hope that in-person communication will be restored as planned for the Seattle meeting.