



2020 Kentucky Travel Industry Annual Conference Cancelled

Sadly, we are announcing that the KTIA Board of Directors has unanimously voted to cancel the 2020 Kentucky Travel Industry Annual Conference. Please do not mistake unanimity for an easy or pleasant decision. You can be assured that this decision was not made lightly. Social distancing protocols and their impact on venue capacity and event quality played a part, as did financial limitations expressed by members in a recent membership survey. The survey showed that while 64% of respondents said they would have definitely attended in a normal year, only 21% said they would definitely attend this year with financial issues among the primary attendance barriers. Uncertainty about the spread of the virus by the time of the November conference was another consideration.

We all know that ours is a relationship business. In that vein we want to express our profound gratitude to our hosts, the Marriott Griffin Gate and VisitLEX for their support as we arrived at our decision. Although it was in their best interests for us to hold the conference and they worked closely with us in our attempts to make that happen, they could not have been more gracious in their understanding and support of our decision. We are very pleased to announce that the 2022 conference will be held in Lexington at the Marriott Griffin Gate. Plans remain in place for the 2021 conference to be in Louisville at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

Apart from the survey comments describing financial and other difficulties, there were also compelling comments from some respondents encouraging us to send a message by holding the conference. Although that was our overwhelming preference, too, there is also an important message in the cancellation, one that we have been making and will continue to make. That message is that our industry continues to suffer from being the first hit by the COVID-19 crisis, the most deeply impacted, and although destined to rebound, will require time and support to do so. That message has and will be continued to be pressed with Governor Beshear, the Kentucky General Assembly and members of Congress.

With the conference cancellation, we are now turning our attention to considering alternative programming, including virtual presentations. We are conscious of the high level of 'webinar-fatigue,' and are considering other initiatives beyond only virtual. We welcome ideas members would like to suggest, including virtual formats and content that would provide genuine value and avoid the 'not another webinar' reaction when another Zoom invitation appears on our screens.

In closing, we began this year with plans for the annual conference to be a celebration of KTIA's 40th Anniversary. The conference cancellation does not alter those 40 years of service and support of Kentucky's travel and tourism industry. What it does do is shine a bright light on the fact that never in those 40 years has that service and support been more needed than it is right now, a need that we will do everything in our power to meet.