



North Carolina FFA Association Board of Directors State FFA Convention Committee Report January 6, 2021

The State Convention Committee met and reviewed factual information relative to the ability to conduct an in-person North Carolina FFA State Convention in June 2021.

The committee recommends transitioning the in-person state convention to an online/virtual state convention in June 2021.

Health and Safety

- First and foremost – we want to do all we can to protect the health and safety of our students, teachers, volunteers, and staff.
- We do not want to expose our students to the virus, nor do we want the state convention to be a spreader or super-spreader event for the virus.
- We continue to see a rise in COVID cases, and the state continues to see a rise in percentage of positive tests.
- Many hospitals across the state are nearing, at, or over capacity.
- We are hopeful with the vaccines that have been developed; however, in our state and across the nation, the deployment of vaccinations is behind projected schedules.
- We know that in NC, teachers will be able to get vaccinated during Phase 1B and students will be able to get vaccinated in Phase 3. The timeline of phases is unknown. (Document: NCDHHS-Vaccine-Infographic.pdf)

Ability of Students and Teachers to Travel

- We know that many school systems are not allowing travel outside of the school district and many are not allowing any travel. We are not aware of any school systems that are allowing overnight travel or even considering it for the spring semester. We also know that many school systems do not have a formal statement about if or when travel restrictions will be lifted. This has not changed since the survey that was conducted in October 2020. (Document: October 2020 Participation Survey Results.pdf)
- State CTE Director, Trey Michael, issued a letter to hotels and event venues explaining the difficulties of CTSO travel due to COVID.
 - *“Due to COVID-19, it is becoming more clear schools and districts will most likely not allow student or teacher travel (particularly overnight) through the end of the 2020-21 academic year. ”*
 - *“CTSO events are most likely to be held in a virtual platform through the end of the 2020-21 academic year in order to ensure the safety and well-being of our students and teachers. ”*
- The NC Department of Health and Human Services is advising schools to suspend activities that bring together large groups such as assemblies. (Document: NC Schools rules.pdf)

- Other CTSOs in the state are transitioning to online events for their state conferences.
- The NC CTE Summer conference will be delivered as an online conference in July 2021.

The Meeting Planning Perspective

- According to many sources in the meeting planning industry – including the Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Raleigh Convention Center – they do not anticipate any large in-person events until the third quarter of 2021 (July – September) at the earliest. Even then, they are estimating that in-person participation should or will be a fraction of the typical or projected attendance.
- Don Neal, founder and CEO of 360 Live Media shared this statement, *“Plan on a fully virtual event from now through the end of June. Could there be an opening for some in-person element to your event? Yes. Is it worth investing in and delaying the decision? No.”* 360 Live Media produces in-person and digital events. (Document: Decide Now.pdf)
- *“There is a general consensus among the business community and the travel industry that Q2 2021 is the earliest realistic time horizon for when a recovery will even begin.”* (Document: 2020-BusinessTravelReport.pdf – page 1/30)
- *“... small B2B exhibitions will partially resume in November 2020 but large shows will not resume until Q3 2021.”* (Document: 2020-BusinessTravelReport.pdf – page 11/30)
- *“26% of meeting planners, are planning on resuming face-to-face meetings in Q2 2021 while 31% (and increasing) are not planning on meeting in person until the second half of 2021.”* (Document: 2020-BusinessTravelReport.pdf – page 14/30)

Protocol for the Raleigh Convention Center

- If we do plan an in-person state convention, there are a variety of rules and regulations required at the Raleigh Convention Center to ensure the health and safety of participants. The following points come from the Raleigh Convention Center’s Re-Opening Protocols & Procedures Guide. (Document: Complex Reopening Guide.pdf)
 - Laws and rules from Raleigh, Wake County and North Carolina will be followed at all times.
 - Fourteen (14) days prior to the event, the Raleigh Convention Center will let us know our maximum capacity for the event.
 - Daily health screenings will be required for everyone who enters the building – no exceptions. This health screening is set up where we currently have our registration and alumni silent auction.
 - If a participant does not pass the health screening, then they are isolated and removed from the building.
 - Participants that pass the health screening are given a wristband and are required to wear that wristband while they are in the building.
 - Health screenings are required each day of the event for all participants.
 - Facemasks and wristbands are required at all times while in the building.
 - The North Carolina FFA will be responsible for paying for the personnel needed to provide the daily health screenings.
 - A specific traffic plan will be established and must be followed at all times by all participants.

- Extra signage will be needed to show the traffic flow pattern. The North Carolina FFA will be responsible for paying for the extra signage required.
- The North Carolina FFA will be responsible for paying for additional personnel to monitor traffic flow, social distancing, and mask usage.
- Current maximum capacity of the ballrooms that are used for the convention sessions is around 300-350 people (depending on the set up) to ensure appropriate social distancing.
- The North Carolina FFA would be responsible to provide contact tracing and participants would have assigned seating in the ballroom areas.
- If a career show was hosted, there would be a specific traffic pattern for all attendees that must be followed.
- The Raleigh Convention Center requires a liability waiver for all participants.

Maximum Safe Capacity Calculator

- A website, (<https://indoor-covid-safety.herokuapp.com/>) developed by Kasim Khan in collaboration with Martin Z. Bazant and John W. M. Bush, uses a theoretical model to calculate safe exposure times and occupancy levels for indoor spaces. By adjusting room specifications, ventilation and filtration rates, face-mask usage, respiratory activities, and risk tolerance, you can see how to mitigate indoor COVID-19 transmission in different indoor spaces. When entering the specifications for the state convention, the website calculated that occupancy should be limited to 328 people for 2 hours to remain safe. After 2 hours, thorough cleaning and disinfecting would be required prior to another event in the same area. (Document: Room Specs for convention center.pdf)

Financial Implications

- Regardless of the number of participants that may attend the state convention, the North Carolina FFA Association will still be responsible for the full contracted discounted amount of \$23,000 for use of the Raleigh Convention Center.
- The typical contracted amount for sound, light, and staging at the convention center is \$36,000. This would still be paid in full regardless of the number of participants.
- With a reduction in the number of attendees that would be permitted at the convention, there will likely be a reduction in the number of hotel rooms that will be used; thus, causing the attrition clause to be enacted with the Marriott hotel.
 - "If the group's actual usage is less than 65% of the room night commitment (296 total room nights), the group agrees to pay, as liquidated damages and not as a penalty, the difference between 65% of the room night commitment and the group's actual usage, multiplied by the average group room rate (\$182), plus applicable taxes. If the hotel achieves occupancy of 98% or higher, attrition fees will be waived for those nights."
- The Raleigh Convention Center has agreed to apply the \$200 deposit fee to the next time we are able to have the convention in person. They have also offered the 2026 date/contract for our consideration.
- The Sheraton has agreed to cancel the 2021 contract and move it to 2026. They need to know the intent of the NC FFA in February.

- The Marriott has agreed to cancel the 2021 contract and move it to 2026. They need to know the intent of the NC FFA in February. If we do not take advantage of this offer and we cancel convention at a later date, then the North Carolina FFA will be responsible for paying the cancellation fee of \$20,930.
- The North Carolina FFA Association has liability insurance and policies that cover our events; however, we do not have any type of pandemic or COVID-19 insurance coverage. This type of insurance coverage can be purchased; however, our insurance agency (Marsh & McLennan Agency LLC) advised against purchasing it due to the extremely high cost of the policy. (Document: NC FFA Insurance COVID exceptions.pdf)

Thoughts and Considerations

- This decision is not an easy decision nor has it been entered into without careful and deliberate consideration of the health and safety of our students.
- If convention was conducted, it would not “feel” the same due to a much lower number of participants and the requirement of everyone to wear masks.
- Equity is a big factor in providing the opportunity for our students regardless of their geographic proximity to Raleigh.
- If a teacher has one student that does not pass the health screenings at the Raleigh Convention Center, then that student has to leave the building immediately. What does that teacher do if they have other students who did pass the health screening? This is problematic from a supervision perspective.
- Our host hotels have typically asked for reservations in the block of state convention rooms to be made approximately one month prior to the event. The Raleigh Convention Center will share the maximum capacity with us 14 days prior to the event. This is problematic from a planning aspect.
- Based on NCSU employee guidelines, the state staff would not be allowed to attend the state convention since it is indoors and would have an attendance greater than 10 people. It is not a fair request to ask any other groups or individuals to shoulder the responsibility of conducting this event.
- Students and their parents have to feel safe to travel to this event.
- Many parents have been negatively impacted by COVID and may not be able to afford the cost to send their child to the state convention.
- The per student cost would be higher as lodging costs per person would increase (due to not sharing a bed) and the convention registration amount could also increase.
- Many FFA chapters have been limited or restricted from conducting fund raising events this school year which could impact their ability to attend state convention.
- It is unknown how many people will choose to be vaccinated.
- A significant portion of our volunteers for state convention are retired and are in the higher risk category for contracting COVID. It is unknown – even if they are vaccinated – if we would have enough volunteers in 2021 to conduct multiple events at the same time.
- Our students/teachers/partners along with a host of businesses are waiting on us to make this decision so they can plan accordingly.
- The earlier we make this decision, the more time we have to plan for quality online delivery.