



# Annual Meetings 2021



San Antonio, TX  November 20–23

14 September 2021

*At this time, we continue to plan for an in-person Annual Meeting as we evaluate the science and health data weekly and look at each and every option. We recognize, too, that members with health concerns, accessibility challenges, and travel restrictions are overburdened and disproportionately affected. These are major factors in our planning. For now, we are writing to speak to our present considerations, plans, and protocols.*

The recent surge in COVID-19 cases brought about by the increasing predominance of the Delta variant in the United States and around the globe has increased the uncertainty surrounding how the pandemic will affect a 2021 Annual Meeting. While the increasing COVID numbers over the past weeks are of deep concern, evidence also suggests that vaccines remain highly effective. In recent weeks, transmission numbers in Bexar County, Texas have begun to fall, and most models predict that they will continue to do so in the coming weeks. When coupled with additional preventative measures like masking and the increased air movement and filtration systems already implemented by the various properties that will host the meeting, we believe that a safe, in-person Annual Meeting in November is still possible. In order to do this, some special protocols will be necessary this year. SBL and AAR are consulting with Epistemix, a professional firm that specializes in developing data-driven models for safe events, to develop dynamic plans for these protocols. These are likely to include:

- All in-person attendees must either be fully vaccinated (i.e., a full regimen of a [WHO-approved vaccine](#)) or present a negative test dated no earlier than 16 Nov. In the strongest possible terms, we encourage all members who can be vaccinated to do so as soon as possible. Following current CDC guidance, a booster is not required in order to be considered fully vaccinated. Registrants will be given information about how they can verify their vaccination in a secure, private way in future communication.
- Masks of attendees are required while attending sessions. Presenters may remove masks during their presentation in sessions.

- Meeting rooms are set with reduced capacity in order to increase space between seats. When attending a programming session (sessions that have A, S, or P IDs), attendees must sit in an available seat. If all seats are taken, the session is full. Standing/sitting around the walls and in the aisles is not permitted during sessions. The front row of seats will be reserved for session presenters and those with accessibility needs so that additional space is available compared to a traditional head table.
- Masks are required while traveling through indoor common areas like hallways and lobbies.
- In sessions where food and beverage are served, masks may be removed when actively eating and drinking. Masks must otherwise be worn in these sessions.
- Hand sanitization stations are available throughout the meeting facilities.
- Employees of the facilities hosting the meeting are required by those facilities to be masked. Many facilities also implement temperature checks at the start of each shift.
- Meeting facilities are being cleaned and sanitized nightly. The Henry B. González Convention Center is a [GBAC STAR facility](#).
- The facilities have invested heavily in HVAC systems that filter the air and mix in substantial amounts of fresh air as the air is cycled through the system.

In addition to consulting with Epistemix, we continue to work closely with facility management as well as civic and public health authorities in San Antonio to monitor guidance, as the meeting gets closer. The above protocols are subject to change in light of updated guidance. We recommend bookmarking the [Annual Meeting website](#) for quick access to the most up-to-date protocols.

We recognize that even with the measures described above, many members will not be comfortable or able to travel to San Antonio and attend an in-person meeting. We also recognize that travel to the United States from some parts of the world remains restricted. For those members who will not be in San Antonio, we continue to provide options for virtual attendance and participation.

As we noted in our announcement about holding a dual-format meeting, we are not able to provide truly hybrid sessions (i.e., a mix of in-person and remote, live-video presentations) due to the prohibitive logistical and financial challenges of a hybrid meeting at our scale. However, we will be able to offer the opportunity for all presenters, whether of virtual or in-person sessions, to pre-record presentations and make those recordings available to all who register for the meeting. We hope that this will be particularly useful to presenters scheduled in in-person sessions who decide they cannot travel. Details on how to record and upload pre-recorded presentation videos will be sent to presenters soon. As was the case last year, all paper presenters will have the option to share presentation documents like handouts and full-text papers in SBL Central as well as through the app/online planner.

We will continue to be as flexible as possible making adjustments to the programming as the meeting approaches. Program unit chairs should contact [SBL Programs staff](#) about any changes and updates needed to sessions. Attendees may make changes to

registrations through 21 October without any change fees. Presenters must be registered in order to remain on the program. Presenters planning *in absentia* presentations in an in-person session, including pre-recorded presentations, may register for the virtual-only meeting if they are not planning to travel to San Antonio. We note that many members have been able to purchase travel insurance or flexible tickets.

Over the last month, the guidance for dealing effectively with the pandemic has shifted dramatically. In the two months between now and the start of the meeting, it is likely to shift again. We will continue to develop the best possible plans to meet the needs of members in safe, responsible ways and will keep you informed as quickly as possible regarding any changes.

These are challenging times, and we are grateful for your membership and support.

Sincerely,

Tat-siong Benny Liew  
Chair of SBL Council

John F. Kutsko  
Executive Director