

Conferencing Survey Report – November 2021

P. Ryan, SHCY Editor



Introduction

The Executive Committee of the Society for the History of Children and Youth (SHCY) recently commissioned a survey of researcher’s views of conferencing to prepare for the Society’s June 2023 meeting to be held by Guelph University in Canada. The survey was conducted November 19-27, 2021. After outlining who responded, this report summarizes the perspectives scholars shared on attending SHCY 2023 in-person and their orientations toward virtual technologies. The results confirm that there is a high demand for virtual conferencing options and a persistent concern about the costs and exclusivity of travelling to conferences.

Who Responded?

The survey yielded 187 respondents. A little more than two-thirds (69%) are members of SHCY, and almost three-quarters (74%) had previously attended SHCY’s biennial international conferences. All continents were represented by at least one respondent, but a majority (56%) currently reside in Canada or the United States, and nearly a quarter (24%) are living in Europe. About one-half of the respondents hold permanent faculty status (tenure-track, tenured, and emeriti), while the other half occupy a variety of positions (graduate students, independent scholars, librarians, archivists, sessional faculty, etc.). The profile of respondents was very similar to SHCY’s general [2017 survey](#) of the field.

Q1: Are you a member of the Society for the History of Children and Youth?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	68.93%	122
2	Unsure	10.17%	18
3	No	20.90%	37
	Total	100%	177

Q2: Have you previously attended any of SHCY’s Biennial Conferences?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	73.86%	130
2	No	26.14%	46
	Total	100%	176

Q3: Where do you currently reside?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Africa	0.56%	1
2	Asia East, South, and North; including Russia east of the Ural Mountains	5.08%	9
3	Asia West and Central; including the Middle East	3.95%	7
4	Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific	7.34%	13
5	Continental Europe	11.30%	20
6	Latin America: South America, Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean	2.82%	5
7	U.K. and Ireland	12.99%	23
8	U.S. and Canada	55.93%	99
	Total	100%	177

Q: What is your academic or professional status? (Check all the apply)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Graduate Student	7.00%	14
2	Ph.D. Candidate	13.00%	26
3	Part-Time Sessional, Contract, or Adjunct Faculty	6.50%	13
4	Full-Time Sessional, Contract, or Adjunct Faculty	7.00%	14
5	Tenure-Track Faculty (or) Continuing Position During Probationary Period	9.00%	18
6	Tenured Faculty (or) Continuing Position	35.50%	71
7	Emeritus or Retiree	7.00%	14
8	Secondary or Elementary School Teacher	1.00%	2
9	Independent Scholar or Writer	5.00%	10
10	Archive, Library, or Museum Professional or Related Position	4.00%	8
11	Other	5.00%	10
	Total	100%	200

What outlooks did scholars report for SHCY 2023 – Guelph?

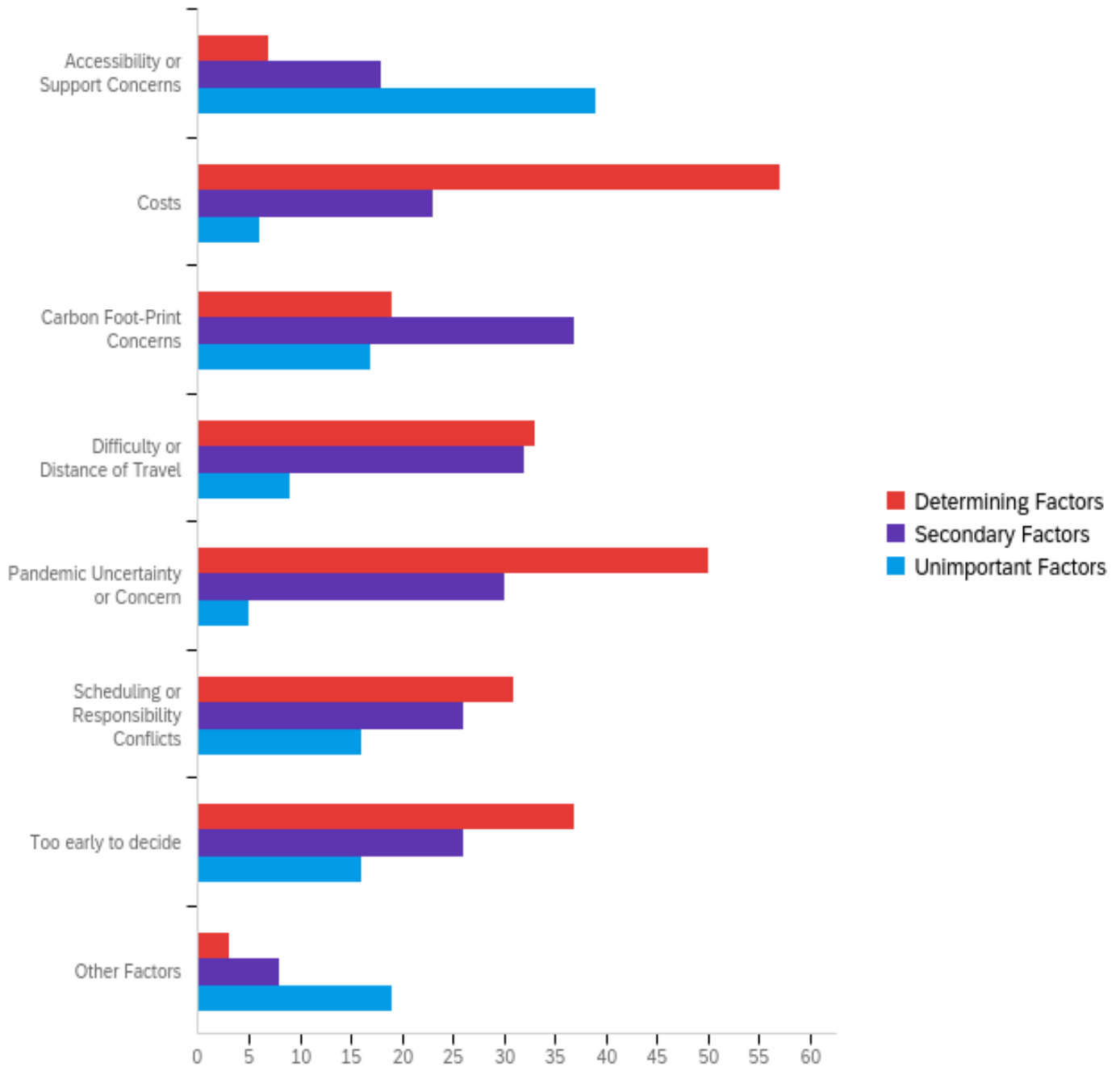
While 62 scholars (or 35%) said they were planning on attending SHCY 2023 **in-person**, most respondents said they were unsure about their plans (52%) or would be unable (13%) to attend in-person. Among the majority who could *not* say they planned on traveling to Ontario, 37 (or less than 1/3^d) listed “too early to decide” as a determining factor. The costs of attendance and the uncertainty of travel restrictions during the ongoing pandemic were the strongest determinants. Concerns about costs (57 respondents) and the pandemic (50 respondents) were two or three times more likely to be listed as determinative of the travel choices than environmental concerns (19 respondents). Scheduling conflicts or the difficulty of travel were middling issues, and both appeared more prominently than climate-change issues.

SHCY's next Biennial Conference will be held June 21-24, 2023 at the University of Guelph in Canada (near Toronto). Do you plan to attend SHCY 2023 in-person?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	35.03%	62
2	Maybe	51.98%	92
3	No	12.99%	23
	Total	100%	177

If you are unsure about or unable to attend SHCY 2023 in-person, please group and rank the factors that make this so. (click on the factor and move it to the appropriate factor box).

QID8 - Groups



What did scholars say about virtual technologies and other conferencing elements?

Holding doubts about travel expenses, restrictions, or difficulties, and potential conflicts in scheduling or responsibilities, **approximately 82% of respondents said they were, or might be, interested in attending SHCY 2023 online.** Only one out of nine respondents positioned virtual options as a low priority for conference planners; a robust 40% said they thought virtual options should be a requirement (a ‘must’) of future conference delivery. And a majority (60%) said they were willing and able to bear the substantial increase in costs that would come with creating a hybrid conference experience.

Proximity to the Ontario event did not seem to determine willingness to consider virtual modes of delivery. More than 4 out of 5 (81.2%) Americans and Canadians indicated some interest in virtual participation for SHCY 2023; their colleagues in the rest of the world responded the same way (81.9%). If travel distance did not determine responses to online options, there may be a relationship between access to resources or status and openness to virtual conferencing. Sessional or temporary faculty members were less than half as likely to say they were uninterested in virtual conferencing than their peers holding (or who had held) permanent positions. **Graduate students were four times less likely than tenure-track, tenured, or emeriti faculty to indicate that they were not interested virtual conferencing.**

The reasons members of the community gave for their views about conferencing were varied (see open-ended responses below). They included hopes for enhanced inclusivity, sustainability, and public health balanced (in tension) with a desire to maintain in-person intellectual engagement and develop professional relationships. When we asked scholars to scale the importance of five conferencing structures (student bursaries, paper submission portal, social activities, time between sessions, and virtual options), costs – again – came to the fore. Graduate student bursaries were ranked as the most important provision for the Society to pursue. Behind it, providing time and space between sessions and virtual options were ranked highly (approximately 7 on a scale of 1 to 10).

Q: Are you interested in participating virtually in SHCY 2023?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	29.87%	46
2	Maybe	52.60%	81
3	No	17.53%	27
	Total	100%	154

Q: How should the Society approach 'virtual' conference technologies going forward?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Highest Priority: Conferences must offer virtual participatory access.	37.91%	58
2	Moderate Priority: Conferences may choose to offer virtual participatory access.	50.33%	77
3	Low Priority: Conferences should focus on in-person scholarly exchange.	11.76%	18
	Total	100%	153

Q: Are you willing and able to pay extra fees to cover the costs of a staging a hybrid (in-person/virtual) conference for SHCY 2023? These expenses might elevate registration fees for all delegates by \$100 US

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	59.60%	90
2	No	40.40%	61
	Total	100%	151

Q: If you have more to say about modes of conference participation (virtual, hybrid, in-person), please do so the box below.

"I really value many of the experiences of being able to attend conferences in person, but I am aware that people from some parts of the globe, and also people with mobility restrictions, are often simply unable to travel long distances to attend conferences in person. I think that doing a really good job of hybrid modes could help expand the global reach and connections of the SHCY and this would be a good thing."

"I was not able to use the "priorities" question."

"I think hybrid is the best approach, if possible."

"In person is much preferable"

"Until it is safe for everyone to return in person, it is imperative that we maintain virtual access, even if this means that the in-person conference must be dramatically scaled back. To do so is at the detriment of colleagues in countries with less access to vaccines, and to colleagues with health needs that make it unsafe for them to commit in advance to attending large events in-person."

"SHCY truly draws participants from all over the world, and for that reason, perhaps it should consider hybrid conferences going forward."

"I support hybrid conferences for several reasons but I am concerned that it will decrease the importance and investment in supporting sessional staff and PhD Students to travel and attend conferences. In-person scholarly exchanges are crucially important for scholarly life and networking."

"There seem to be multiple increasingly important reasons beyond the pandemic itself to have virtual or hybrid events: carbon-footprint concerns, travel expense, time/support concerns, among others all seem significant."

"virtual access helps women with childcare needs."

"A mainly in-person conference with a virtual element is probably a good idea"

"Hybrid is good to improve accessibility but should not replace in-person events."

"I feel that having a hybrid/virtual option for this conference is necessary because of the lingering impacts that COVID will likely impose upon travel. In the future, I think that having a hybrid option would be beneficial (for graduate students/participants who live further afield/those whose time commitments do not allow them to attend in person), but I recognize that the costs and challenges associated with always providing hybrid options might be prohibitive, and there may be other ways (ie travel bursaries, asynchronous participation) to make future SHCY conferences more inclusive."

"Conference and travel funding, from New Zealand universities, has become a critical issue amid continuing uncertainties and pressures for universities around finances (and therefore having to de-prioritise some spending, like conferences, that were once a 'given')."

"Hybrid is not only useful for pandemic and travel reasons, but also means more people can participate, who can't get the travel funding or who may have disabilities, caring responsibilities etc which mean they cannot easily travel and be at an in-person event. The pandemic has shown us that hybrid events are a must going forward."

"'Must' is a little strong but I think especially given the international nature of SHCY hybrid conferences have a strong inclusion value even without pandemic pressures."

"As universities cut travel budgets, or discourage travel for sustainability reasons, virtual participation is becoming increasingly important."

"conferences may be able to exist in person for a few more years, but the carbon footprint is too big and costs are too high to make in-person conferences sustainable over the long haul. This conference is typically my #3 choice. I'd love to attend but feel it is irresponsible to attend too many conferences each year. For now I am likely sticking with #1 for a couple more years. After that I am hoping to attend all conferences virtually."

"You could have portions of the conference that are fully virtual like pre-conference events or the presidential address."

"Hybrid accommodates those with health, cost, and scheduling problems."

"I just attended an in-person meeting last weekend. Lots of people dropped out (some at the last minute), but the meeting was still wonderful. There is NO substitute for the chemistry of being in a room together and the informal discussions that happen in the halls or after sessions."

"Hybrid, hub-based conferences allow for a much lower carbon impact of our scholarly enterprises, something that I think academic organizations need to make paramount to their missions."

"In terms of virtual conferences: I find that the model where presenters upload a paper ahead of time and then speak to it for 10-mins in the session works best for listeners."

"I marked 'moderate priority' assuming COVID is under control by mid-2023- if not, than it should be higher priority."

"I think it likely that all conferences, going forward, will offer virtual elements. There is a demand for this, not least from graduate students who can attend many more events online than in person. The environmental case for blended/hybrid events is also strong, and growing."

"Hybrid formats allow more people to attend, if they can't travel, etc."

"As a society member from Africa, the costs of travel and participation make international conferences very difficult to attend. We also generally have to apply for expensive visas. Having online options means more diverse participation in the conference is possible which is something really valuable for our community"

"Scholars in Asia, Latin America, and Africa must be provided a concessional rate"

"It would be sufficient to offer a modest degree of hybrid participation so that remote speakers could be projected on a screen, and remote listeners could listen."

"I'm open to online as an option, but not as a substitute to in-person gatherings."

"With tight university budgets our usual small professional development funds have been suspended, so costs are a major concern."

"would prefer a mostly in-person modality, but with virtual options for a small percentage of participants who have most serious constraints"

"Online access expanded greatly opportunity to participate, although in-person networking will never be replaced by this means."

"If we do some form of hybrid or online option, it's vital to come up with a strategy that participants can present in a suitable time zone that doesn't require them to be awake in the wee hours of the morning."

"I highly value in-person conferences and don't want to see a permanent move to virtual or hybrid. That said, public health considerations must guide decisions making (and would be happy to financially support in that case). There is just not the same level of engagement if folks are participating virtually or in a hybrid model."

"virtual - zoom seminars"

"I enjoy in-person conferences, but virtual access makes these events so much more accessible; for students who are on limited budgets as well as for people with disabilities or illnesses. Having at least the option available, even at a primarily in-person event, is key."

"All in person and all hybrid seems fair and inclusive. Many of us know from teaching that to do both at once is to make no one happy—the in person folks have to talk to a screen and the folks at home cant hear the people in person. I am glad the society is considering both and surveying everyone."

"I think it's a good idea to have both in-person attendance as well as virtual access. The latter is especially important for those who can't afford travel or for whom it would be physically difficult, as well as for people taking care of family members (kids, older relatives). Reducing the carbon footprint also is important!"

"I participated in the Galway virtual conference; most of the sessions were held at hours that I could not attend (middle of the night). Given the high number of participants from North America, I thought this was unexcusable."

"Organizing conferences with minimal climate/environmental impact is top priority."

"The virtual conferences I have attended this year have been terrific"

"I indicated a preference for in person. But if the conference is online only, I would also participate. If hybrid, I would opt to attend in person."

"My location in Canada makes it easier for me to commit to attending in 2023 in person - I might be less confident about it if the conference was scheduled to be in the US or overseas. I think that embracing hybrid participation is essential to ensure equity on many levels."

"I believe registration fee should be different for virtual and in person participants"

"I do think it's still early to decide. The virtual conferences I've attended have tried to experiment with the conference format a little. I think if people just read papers virtually, I would be hesitant to participate. I'd like to see different kinds of engagement."

Q: On a scale of 1 to 10, estimate the value of the listed conference elements by sliding the knob from left to right. (1 is unimportant or of little value; 10 is most important and valuable)

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	graduate student conference bursaries	0.00	10.00	7.56	2.64	6.98	142
2	paper submission portal for sharing work prior to the meeting	0.00	10.00	5.30	2.65	7.02	138
3	social activities outside of sessions (tours, mixers, meals, etc.)	0.00	10.00	6.00	2.71	7.33	137
4	time/space for socializing between sessions	0.00	10.00	6.99	2.49	6.22	145
5	virtual participation options	0.00	10.00	6.92	2.65	7.01	145

Q: If you would like to elaborate upon the value of the above or other conference elements or services, please do so below.

"Consider personal attendance at workshops and sessions is preferable to virtual attendance."

"I'm afraid that the virtual participation on the long run will make participation in person too seldom, costly and bad for the environment. The arguments are politically understandable, but in my experiences in-person meetings are necessary to create and sustain contact and collaboration across the world."

"I know that a lot of people are aching to get back to normal, and that's understandable. Some of us, however, cannot get back to normal, and a "normal" conference will exclude us. Virtual options for social activities (for instance, mixers/happy hours) are really important. You've noted that it might cost more if virtual options are maintained. If this is the case, then graduate bursaries are even more critical. Funds for other underfunded scholars (sessional instructors without institutional funding, for instance) would also be important."

"I think a hybrid option is crucial going forward - it eliminates travel costs for those who are contingent, adjunct, low-paid, and/or have caring responsibilities that would prevent them from attending in person, not to mention those with other physical disabilities. While those who can attend in person should be able to do so, having a virtual option makes the conference much more accessible to many more people."

"Virtual participation options are important for accessibility due to disability as well as financial/distance equity."

"Again, the main value is the intangible of being together. One of my panels had only two papers, no commentator (started out with four papers). And it was quite wonderful. The audience participated and it turned into a very helpful workshop for the young scholars. That kind of give-and-take is not possible on line."

"I appreciate the fact that you're soliciting people's points of view on this. For me as an academic, the best thing about the pandemic has been the chance to attend events virtually that I would never be able to attend because of distance (and

related costs and travel time). These virtual events have opened up opportunities to create global access and discussion in a way that is wonderful. So, although I am not organizing the conference and don't have a sense of all the things you will be juggling, I would urge you to try as hard as possible to retain the possibility of online attendance for those who won't be able to travel to Guelph, ON —especially since travel in and out of Canada is currently more expensive than it ever has been, and tedious in times of covid too.”

“Conferences in the US seems to be quite a lot more expensive than in the UK, and I'm not really sure why this is, given that the quality is similar. Three-day conferences are about the ideal length in my view, especially when they offer a blend of

presented papers, discussion time, informal mingling, a conference dinner (and prizes) and perhaps an excursion or two. Sydney and Vancouver were excellent SHCY gatherings, providing a great model for how to proceed.”

“Virtual participation options will enable participants to participate who represent a wide variety with regard to place of origin, institution, and socioeconomic status. Many people (for instance, in Australia) might not be able to attend at all without the possibility of virtual participation. Cost and travel restrictions may be a factor.”

“I would really, really appreciate an in-person conference!”

“Support for PhD students is vital, while for us academics intellectual exchange and network is a priority. Full paper long before the conference sometimes an issue due to other commitments.”

“I appreciate the opportunity to see and experience some of local area with guidance from locals.”

“Having attended this conference twice now, I gotta say that it felt kind of clique-ish. But maybe not more so than at other conferences, though I've socialized more easily at those. Anyhow, unless I knew others who would be going, or wanted to meet someone in particular in person, the prospect of social awkwardness would be a reason for me not to go.”

“Keynotes are overrated, well-prepared round-tables are great.”

“As with a lot of our colleagues, I'm very torn. I recognize that conferences are expensive and that they leave a carbon footprint. But as someone who is not at an R1 university, I do relish the opportunity to spend time with other academics. I've gained a lot from SHCY conferences and I don't think I'd be as excited about attending if they were virtual.”

“Hosting in the North Atlantic twice in a row seems like an unfair call. I would like to see a conference travel toward those with the least access to travel, but only with measures for health and safety in the context of the pandemic.”