

## FNPS Conference Committee Report

August 16, 2022

Chairs: Ginny Stibolt & Athena Philips



The Conference Committee is currently a small group, of about 7-8 regular participants.

- ❖ We are working with the theme of “Adaptations”.
- ❖ In June/July we sent and reviewed the responses to the Conference survey. 127 people replied, and 53% had never attended an in-person Conference before.

The top reasons they liked the Virtual Conference were no travel time or expenses, the 6-month access and the ability to take care of their home responsibilities. Top picks for an in-person event were the educational presentations, field trips, research reviews, and the plant sale.

Given the option, they’d prefer (in this order): a hybrid in-person/online event, an in-person event with some recordings, and online with in-person meet-ups. 76% said they’d attend an in-person Conference, 58% would go in-person to a hybrid event, and 63% would register for a virtual Conference.

Amazingly, 79% of respondents said that they’d volunteer for the Conference. Valerie is checking on how these people breakdown by chapter.

- ❖ Unfortunately, we have two major factors against holding an in-person Conference: we started with less than a year to book a venue and the new strains of extra-contagious Covid.
- ❖ The next best proposal was to plan for a virtual Conference, and try to solicit chapters to hold day events for interested participants. We think this also fits with the theme of “Adaptations”. (I’ve attached the letter we sent to Chapter leadership after this report.)
- ❖ Chapter response has been approving of the concept, but not too willing to be hosts for in-person events.

We have no thank yous from: Villages, Mangrove, Pawpaw, and Sweetbay. Pawpaw and Sweetbay did say they could have volunteers to assist another chapter in their area.

Dade is consulting their Board

Cuplet Fern has volunteered and put in a proposal for their event. There are costs that we have to review before we can determine if it’s a go.

- ❖ We continue planning for the virtual portion and will hopefully be able to accomplish the hosted meetups.

On this front we have reviewed a first draft of the budget, have a couple artists interested in helping, we’ve discussed some potential speakers, and we’ve decided a poster session should return to our Conference (Whova does offer this as an option).

- ❖ We are currently debating the merits of moving the Conference up to April, or leaving it in May. We also need to decide by the end of this year, if we will be holding the next Conference in-person and where.

That is all,

Athena Philips

## Chapter Leadership Letter:

We have begun the discussion on how to proceed with next year's Annual Conference. The survey that was sent out last month showed an appreciation for the virtual format, but **a great interest in getting back to an in-person format**. We can't know the future or whether that would be a sound decision, and for large events like our Annual Conference, **it usually requires over a year of advance preparation**. So, we've hit upon what we think is an innovative solution and that's why we are reaching out to you.

We'd like to propose **keeping the sessions online**, with all the benefits that the virtual experience has offered: broader accessibility, more variety in speakers, social networking, easier scheduling, and reduced cost. Then **combine that with in-person gatherings around the state**, with all the things we love about the old format: plant sales, field trips, and reconnecting with friends from around the state.

This new idea could bridge the best of both worlds and does require Chapter involvement, but not at the level of holding an in-person Annual Conference. **We have not set anything in stone and want to hear back from Chapter Leadership: you**. We don't think these smaller gatherings would be overly burdensome and could allow for some chapter fundraising opportunities. Flexibility is our mantra and while we have some ideas, we'd love to hear what you think your chapter or even partnering chapters might like to do to make this work.

Here's what we thought these regional Big Days Out might look like.

- We'd like to have **2-4 locations around the state**. The two virtual Annual Conference days will be on a weekend, with in-person days following one each weekend. Attendees may come to more than one location.
- Conference guests pay a day fee to attend each location during their Conference registration. This fee will pay for expenses and participating chapters will share in net income (details to be worked out). **We estimate attendance between 50-100 people**, depending on how many chapters participate.
- Guests will find their own lodgings, but your area must have existing capacity for an influx of guests.
- A venue will be needed that has parking, bathrooms, ideally space for a plant sale, possibly an indoor or outdoor workshop. This could be an Extension office, private hall, Nature Preserve, etc. **You know your area best and what might be cost effective!** Indoor space in case of bad weather is a plus.
- **4-6 field trip locations and/or workshops** would be ideal for the 1st part of the day. This is where our members get to see the shining stars you love and want to share. Past Conferences have had trips within 45 minutes distance of the meeting hub.
- For the 2nd half of the day, this is where you can get creative. People could shop the plant sale, play games like plant ID or cornhole, visit a chapter Silent Auction, listen to a presentation, do karaoke, or what-have-you. Ideas for feeding our guests could be through a food truck or renting a small local establishment such as a beer garden. Having a local sponsor to help with services or costs would be beneficial, but not essential.

So, what do you think? For this to work, we'd definitely need **local assistance to organize contacts** and **Conference Committee meeting attendance** (currently Fridays @ 2pm) would be helpful. Someone should also be on-site to make sure there are no issues with the set-up and operation. If chapters wanted to get more involved, in addition to inviting plant vendors, chapters could hold a plant sale themselves, set up a silent auction, or sell chapter merchandise to raise funds.

If you decide to host one of these conference days you would have the support of FNPS staff (Lilly, Val, Lynda) and the Conference Committee in planning and execution of the conference day.

We know you work hard to make your chapter great and we're hoping you might share that with the rest of the Society. If your chapter is interested in participating or getting more information, please contact Athena Philips at ConferenceChair@FNPS. We'd appreciate hearing from you by August 15th, as we have lots of Conference planning to do.

Eagerly awaiting your reply,

Athena Philips & Ginny Stibolt, Committee Co-Chairs and the Conference Committee