# VIRTUAL NETWORKING BETWEEN EDITORS AND EARLY CAREER SCIENTISTS
## Benefits, Silver Linings, and Lessons Learned

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Face-to-face interactions between journal editors and scientists can be valuable for both parties. For early career scientists, however, approaching an editor can be intimidating. The Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) provides space for editors and early career scientists to interact at conferences—typically in the form of workshops on various aspects of the editorial process. These structured events can then be followed by more informal interactions throughout the conference. For early career scientists, these events and interactions can help clarify journal scope and key aspects of the editorial process. For editors, talking with authors earlier in the process may ultimately make their jobs easier in the formal stages of a manuscript review.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the cancellation of many scientific conferences, with current guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention categorizing large events where attendees travel from outside the local area in the highest risk category (CDC 2020). In lieu of the canceled ASLO meeting during the COVID-19 pandemic (which was to be in Madison, Wisconsin in June 2020), the Raelyn Cole Editorial Fellows designed a virtual event with the aim of connecting ASLO journal editors with students and early career scientists. The virtual event was designed to mimic both structured and informal opportunities for interactions between editors and early career authors. The goal was to provide a space for scientists to put faces with names and ask the editors questions. All ASLO editors in chief and deputy chiefs were enthusiastic to participate, but there was some collective hesitancy given the limited experience with large virtual events.

Support was provided by our publishing partners at Wiley, who took the technical lead. This support included finding the best virtual platform to meet our goals, developing a meeting banner (Fig. 1), and arranging registration details so that participants could join the meeting seamlessly. The event was deemed an "experiment" as we had few examples to follow.

The "Meet the Editors" event was designed in two parts to meet our goal for both structured and unstructured time. The first part was a 50-min prerecorded session of brief introductions by each editor followed by a panel moderated by the Raelyn Cole Editorial Fellows. The fellows selected and asked the editors a series of questions that participants submitted ahead of the event. The prerecording allowed for a seamless presentation (e.g., without delays or connectivity issues) and minimized the dependence of presenters on a stable internet connection (a key consideration for virtual conferences; Bonifati et al. 2020). We strived to maintain the "live" feeling during this portion of the event via our online presence in the chat box. Both editors and fellows were available to chat while the prerecording played as questions arose. In the second part, participants were routed to breakout rooms (Box 1) with different topics based on preferences indicated on their registration form. For this portion of the event participants' microphones and video feeds were unmuted for a more informal face-to-face discussion with the editors and Raelyn Cole Editorial Fellows. On the day of the event, participants were made more comfortable by an up-front description of the event layout and how the transition between panel and breakout rooms would work.

In terms of the logistical preparations, our partners at Wiley created a running sheet for the meeting that laid out each stage of the event, how long it would last, and who was doing what. They also put together a step-by-step guide to support self-recorded introductions by each editor. Equipment checks before the event and assigning back up hosts also allowed for a very smooth event.

We consider the event largely successful. We achieved a 63% attendance rate which is higher than average for virtual events (Alice Smith pers. comm.). With 63 attendees, the event rivaled in-person conference workshops, but with the ability to reach new constituents, with at least 30% of attendees coming from outside the ASLO society, and scientists from outside of North America representing ~14% of the total attendees (discussed further below). We attribute this broader audience to our promotion on Twitter, including the use of a banner visual (Fig. 1). Attendees were largely student (48%) and early career scientists (29%), meeting our goal to link early career scientists with editors. Of the 15 attendees who filled out our post-event survey, all were either student or early career scientists and 14 out of 15 were "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied" with the event (Fig. 2).

One benefit of a virtual meeting is that participation is open to everyone, and not limited to those in physical attendance at a meeting. In-person meetings can be challenging for those with less funding, those with disabilities, or those further from the meeting venue geographically (Fleming 2019; Vervoort et al. 2020). Given the international membership of ASLO, and our society goal to grow international membership, we made a point to advertise the event on Twitter with reference to international time zones in Asia, Africa, Australia, and Europe (Fig. 3). Overall, scientists attended the event from 11 different countries. Attendance outside North America spanned Australia, Europe, South America, and Africa, with these

## Virtually Meet the Editors of the ASLO Journals
Virtual Panel with Topic-based Breakout Room Discussions
Tuesday, June 9th
4:30pm EST

K. David Hambright
Limnology and Oceanography

Adrienne Sponberg
Limnology and Oceanography Bulletin

Paul F. Kemp
Limnology and Oceanography: Methods

James E. Cloern
Limnology and Oceanography: Letters

**FIG 1.** Meeting banner developed by our partners at Wiley and used to promote the event via email and Twitter. The banner lists the editors in chief of the four ASLO journals from left to right in order of journal establishment.

**FIG 2.** Participant satisfaction with the overall event, the prerecorded panel, and the breakout sessions ($n$ = 15).

participants making up ~14% of the total attendees. Of the 37 scientists who registered but did not attend, 24 were outside North America (and represented 11 additional countries). Thus, international registrants were disproportionately likely to cancel thei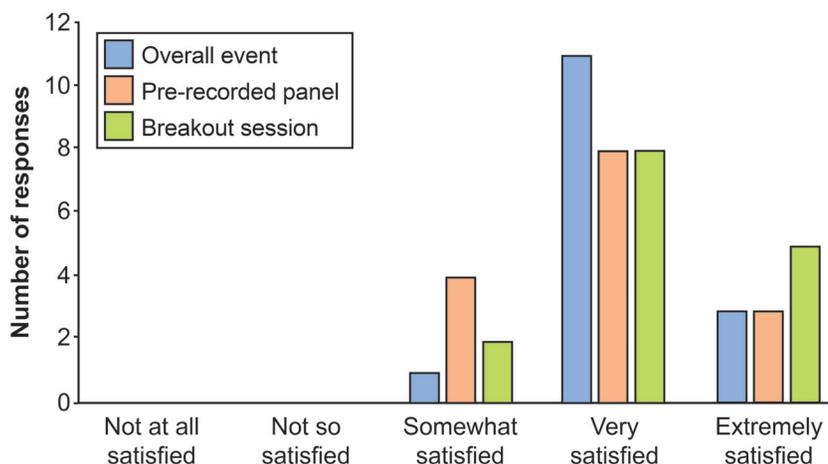r attendance. We expect that this was in part due to a time zone issue. The event was held at 4:30 pm in New York (EST, UTC-4), making it especially difficult to participate from many locations in Europe, Africa and Asia. This time zone issue is unavoidable. There was some discussion among the fellows and editors of hosting a second event at a different time to accommodate those left out of the first time slot, but instead we opted to post the pre-recorded portion of the event on YouTube to allow greater access to the content (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFq7KAvGA0U).

A key lesson learned from our experience is the need to appropriately balance structured (prerecorded) and unstructured (small/interactive) portions of the event. Our survey responses show a stronger skew towards "extremely satisfied" for the breakout sessions than for the prerecorded panel (Fig. 2). We also had direct qualitative feedback that supports this outcome: "I wish the pre-recorded segment was shorter and the breakout sessions were longer...," "The breakout sessions were too short," and "I wish the breakout room had been more interactive (although our facilitator did a good job)." This speaks to the importance of interaction and networking, especially for early career scientists who may benefit from conversations about projects on tight timelines (Weissgerber et al. 2020). Synchronous events can promote the interaction and discussion that define conference settings, but the use of such approaches must be balanced with a need to minimize dependency on stable internet connections (Bonifati et al. 2020). Feedback from a data management conference that was moved online due to COVID-19 suggests very little differentiation in preference for live talks with live Q&A vs. streamed talks with live Q&A (Bonifati et al. 2020). This feedback suggests one tool for striking a balance could be to adopt a streamed talk (which has less reliance on stable internet connections) with a live Q&A.

In implementing virtual events, our experience highlights the importance for networking facilitators to keep in mind the diversity of communication styles, comfort with the online platform, and potential accessibility issues. We



**Raelyn Cole Editorial Fellowship**
@rcef_aslo

Thrilled we are currently at 30% international registrations for our #ASLO virtual event to meet the editors. The event will be held on Tues June 9 at 4:30pm New York, 9:30pm London, 10:30pm Cape Town, and Wed June 10 at 5:30am Tokyo and 6:30am Sydney.
tinyurl.com/yb6hbljb

11:22 pm · 26 May 2020 · Twitter Web App

**FIG 3.** Promotional Tweet highlighting the different international time zones for our "Meet the Editors" virtual event.

employed several strategies to encourage broad participation including: (1) getting participants to answer a general question early to help them feel comfortable with the chat box; (2) encouraging participants to use whatever communication they felt comfortable with (either asking via video, chat box to the group, direct message to moderator in chat); and (3) having some prepared questions to start the discussion. Nonverbal cues are much more difficult to detect during online conversation (Fish et al. 1992) and different norms of interaction may make the forum intimidating to some groups (Niner et al. 2020). Discomfort may be particularly felt by minority groups such as those who do not speak English as a first language (Vervoort et al. 2020). Importantly, some participants may experience accessibility issues with a particular form of communication (e.g., audio, visual). Strategies that employ multiple modes for communicating can help overcome this discomfort and enhance accessibility (e.g., live chat alongside live discussion, and live polls; Vervoort et al. 2020). Importantly, we note that accessibility could be further improved in future events. That is, when asked about suggestions to improve future events, one participant stated "captioning to increase accessibility." Such built in flexibility may empower attendees to be more involved participants (Vervoort et al. 2020).

As many events move online in response to COVID-19, there are silver linings in the potential for more equitable access to virtual conference material (Vervoort et al. 2020; Weissgerber et al. 2020). By creating a free virtual networking event, rather than the traditional in-person workshop at an ASLO conference, we believe it was more accessible to a range of early career scientists from different geographic locations who may not have attended if it had been run as an in-person session. While scientific conferences come with substantial barriers to low- and middle-income socioeconomic classes (Vervoort 2020) and attendance by an international audience, the virtual exchange of information and ideas could be an important tool for creating more equitable opportunities. Time will tell if the move toward virtual networking and knowledge exchange will outlast the immediate needs of a global pandemic (Vervoort et al. 2020) and become integrated into the regular functioning of our scientific society.

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