

Financial Transparency Report

NarraScope 2023

NarraScope 2023 ran June 9-11 in at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, PA. We operated as a hybrid event, with talks both presented on site and streamed live over Discord. Talks ran in three parallel tracks through the weekend.

This year we extended the Friday workshop schedule to include both online workshops (Friday afternoon) and in-person workshops (Friday evening).

Our aim was to accommodate both the original NarraScope audience who had attended in Boston in 2019 and the remote audience which grew up around our online events from 2020 to 2022. To this end, we charged on-site attendees a fee of \$95 (with higher and lower price tiers, on the honor system). Remote-only attendance was free, although we offered an optional “online with donation” tier. As we will discuss later, this financial plan was not entirely successful.

Attendance

A total of about 400 people registered for the event, including speakers and volunteers. Of these, almost 300 were remote-only. Of the 100 or so on-site registrations, nearly all showed up for some or all of the conference.

Our program listed 44 speakers including workshop presenters. Our original call for proposals specified on-site talks (aside from the Friday afternoon remote workshops). However, a handful of the accepted speakers were unable to attend. As a result, eight talks were presented as either pre-recorded videos or remote Zoom sessions. Nearly all of these were short-form talks rather than one-hour sessions.

The workshop sessions received 15 to 20 registrations each, except for the online Twine workshop which reached its enrollment limit of 30.

Financials

<i>Income</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Net After Fees</i>
38 Regular registrations	\$3610.00	\$306.66	\$3303.34
8 Limited Budget registrations	\$280.00	\$32.88	\$247.12
3 Community Support registrations	\$510.00	\$39.03	\$470.97
2 Community Extra Support registrations	\$480.00	\$35.26	\$444.74
36 complimentary* registrations	\$0.00		
263 Online registrations	\$0.00		
28 Online With Donation registrations	\$915.00	\$26.56	\$888.44
Total registrations	\$5795.00	\$440.39	\$5354.61
Individual donations (PayPal)	\$2621.00	\$75.68	\$2545.32
Institutional sponsorships	\$5032.15	\$114.04	\$4918.11
Total income	\$13448.15	\$630.11	\$12818.04

** Not all of our speakers requested a complimentary registration through EventBrite.*

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Total With Fees</i>
Keynote speaker travel	\$1083.24	\$2.00	\$1085.24
Web, Zoom, Discord hosting	\$362.42		\$362.42
Printed material and badges*	\$1465.72		\$1465.72
KN95 masks	\$182.50		\$182.50
Catered breakfast and lunch (two days)	\$4849.75		\$4849.75
Event space	\$900.00		\$900.00
A/V support	\$2835.00		\$2835.00
Total expenses before honoraria	\$11678.63	\$2.00	\$11680.63
Net income before honoraria			\$1137.41
Honoraria	\$4000.00	\$36.00	\$4036.00
Net cost to IFTF after honoraria			\$2898.59

** Printed programs were not shipped in time by our printer, necessitating a last-minute run to the copy shop.*

As mentioned, we charged on-site attendees \$95, with a low-cost option of \$35 and extra-donation options of \$170 and \$240. This was meant to cover food for each attendee with a generous margin for fixed costs. (Fixed costs included event space, A/V, and complimentary speaker memberships.)

The amounts were roughly in line with the first NarraScope (which charged \$85 for on-site attendance and broke even with 230 attendees). We hoped to reach a similar on-site attendance in Pittsburgh with a large remote audience on top of that.

That did not happen. We found that our free remote attendance option undercut the paid on-site option, rather than adding to it. Only about 100 people attended in Pittsburgh – which number included about 35 speakers, 10 students, and six volunteers. This left barely 50 *paying* attendees, where we had expected about 200. This led to a serious prospective budget shortfall in the weeks before the event.

We addressed this with a hasty fundraiser and an open appeal for more institutional sponsors. The IF audience responded generously and filled most of the deficit.

In hindsight, and for next year, we draw two conclusions:

- IFTF fundraisers are effective and usually meet their stated goals. If we had set our fundraiser goal line at \$10000 instead of \$8000, we would have come close to breaking even.
- When running a hybrid event, we should charge for remote registrations, with a price similar to the fixed-cost margin for on-site attendance. (About \$30 for this year.) With that plan, an individual's decision to attend remotely or in person would not impact our overall budget.

We can still offer low-cost and extra-donation options for remote attendance. The NarraScope audience has proven willing to support these options and not abuse them, even on the honor system. (This year, the in-person extra-donation options more than offset the low-cost options.)

Hybrid Operation

This was our first attempt at a hybrid event. With the invaluable support of Pitt's technical staff, we succeeded in broadcasting all our events. However, our technical solutions were imperfect. Video was streamed from cameras set up pointing at the presenters. This meant that presenters' slides were streamed from a camera view of a projector screen, which was not ideal for legibility. Similarly, remote presentations were streamed as a camera view of a screen, rather than a direct video stream.

The setup required two laptops per presentation room: one for the presenter (with swappable video if the presenter brought their own device), and another dedicated to camera and Discord streaming. Keeping the presenter and the streaming setup on separate machines minimized problems. Nonetheless, we had some technical hitches on

Saturday as we figured out how to get the entire A/V chain working. By Sunday, operations were generally smoothed out.

We recorded video of all events. However, as of this writing, only a few of the video files have been transferred from Pitt's equipment to our account. We are working with Pitt staff to transfer the remaining files. We are also working to get the files edited and posted on our Youtube channel; we will announce them as they become available.

Discord permits live broadcast of any number of "stage channels". The attendance limit is 300 viewers per channel at tier 3, which was easily sufficient for our needs. The NarraScope Discord normally operates at tier 1; boosting it to tier 3 for the month of the conference was a small expense.

Given the ongoing COVID situation, we adhered to a strict policy of checking vaccination status and requiring on-site masking. Attendees were supportive of these policies.

We relaxed the mask rules for meals, and indeed most attendees ate communally without masks. However, only one attendee reported COVID symptoms or test results a week after the event. Either our precautions were sufficient or we got away with it.

The Future

We intend to run NarraScope 2024 and continue our hybrid format. We have had preliminary discussions with people at various California universities who are interested in partnering with NarraScope next year.

The Discord streaming solution is adequate for our needs at our present scale. This is not to say that we will not consider alternatives; Gather was also usable in 2022. Whatever platform we use, we will need to think about possible solutions for streaming live camera and presenter slides together.

With a modest charge for remote attendance, and better-planned fundraising, we should be able to return NarraScope to financial self-sufficiency. Charging for remote attendance will certainly reduce the number of people who sign up, but we hope it will not deter the loyal audience – the people who intend to watch the remote talks and participate in discussion. It may even tip some remote attendees back to attending in person.

As always, please keep in mind that NarraScope is run by IFTF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization which is supported by your donations. Leave a note mentioning NarraScope with your contribution, and it will be accounted under "Individual donations" for next year's conference.

Thank you for supporting NarraScope and the community of narrative games!