



To our APRA Industry Partners,

Apologies in advance for the length of this letter, but we felt it appropriate to personally update everyone regarding our annual conference after some extensive conversation and research had been completed. First and foremost, let me clarify, **conference is still taking place**. This year, we are not just “having” conference, we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the annual **APRA Conference & Expo!** Who doesn't love a celebration?!

Truth be told, I think we have all been holding our collective breath, waiting to exhale. Waiting for our nation and the world to reopen and regain traction. Although difficult at times, APRA has been actively engaged in discussions surrounding the rapid shifts in decisions and responses to COVID-19 and rest-assured we remain deeply committed to our partners, our members and the parks and recreation industry.

This unparalleled journey is forcing all of us to rethink the constructs of life, work, and play. It forces us to view all that we do through a lens of health and safety. It forces us to change. Motivational writer and artist, Mary Anne Radmacher put the idea of change in check with her quote, “*Change of any sort, requires courage.*” For APRA, our members and YOU, our change will be met with an equally unprecedented display of flexibility and courage.

We are not alone in this virtual trend. Businesses around the globe are faced with similar choices in the wake of our current reality. They can opt to either stay the course or reinvent, however, history has shown, that favor goes to those who reinvent and remain viable. Each of us now have the chance to raise the bar, discover new inventive ways to forge connections and foster current relationships. We get to challenge old patterns of thinking and replace them with resources that may help you make the APRA virtual conference a smashing success.

As exciting as the opportunity is, we admit the success of our 70th celebration hinges on some level of risk. We understand there may be concern with the virtual unknown and recognize some vendors may not see the value in a virtual conference without the “tangible” leads from direct foot traffic. With complete honesty we can say the greater risk may lie in failure to participate.

APRA has done their research on the benefits of offering a virtual trade show and let me tell you there are many! The first and most obvious advantage of participating in a virtual exhibit hall is that exhibitors can save a lot of money on travel, lodging, promotional items, and other costly expenses typically associated with in-person trade shows. Increased exposure – The event “lives on”. A physical conference lasts for two days, then it is done. Our virtual conference attendees will be able to access booths, presentations, documents, videos, etc. anytime for up to 60 days. Virtual events come with increased participation, allowing those who may not typically be able to attend in-person the opportunity to attend. Virtual trade shows are interactive – Just because you are not there in person does not mean you don’t get to interact with other attendees. With virtual events the ability to tap into the tremendous data they generate can reveal much more about the interests and intentions of audience members than a physical event might provide.

Risk is inherent in business, but the negative effects of risk are lessened when the entire team is focused on success. While APRA and its governing board refuse to risk the health or safety of our vendors and members, we will absolutely risk the reinvention of conference, together with you.

In the coming weeks, the Conference Committee will be inviting you to a sneak peek of the virtual exhibit hall via guided tour by Will Curran, the founder, and Chief Event Einstein of Endless Events. Will and his team of experienced virtual event producers are going to be there to help guide all of us through this process. We encourage you to research virtual conferences in advance and take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions. In the meantime, the Conference Committee and APRA staff are evaluating the unique array of event and schedule options and anticipate bringing you final decisions and additional details very soon.

We extend our profound thanks to the APRA community and our loyal supporters for their understanding and dedication to the Association during this challenging time. We would ask that our exhibitors please give the committee time to work through the process of the virtual exhibit space and allow us a chance to help you present your services in this new normal and remember....

We are all Better Together!