

Project: MULCH

Name: Parke Wilde

School: Friedman School of Nutrition

Role: Faculty

Description: Multi-site Conference Hosting (MULCH) In this time of climate crisis, academic and professional associations need alternatives to traditional in-person conferences. This collaboration led by Tufts University will develop and pilot an innovative format for hosting simultaneous conferences in several linked sites or “hubs.” This format builds on two prior initiatives. Parke Wilde gave one of the talks in 2016 for the first Nearly Carbon Neutral (NCN) format from Professor Ken Hiltner at University of California Santa Barbara (UCSB), and Tufts served in 2017 as a pilot hub for the Low-Carbon Multi-Hub from Professor Richard Parncutt at Uni Graz in Austria. These formats are reviewed in a 2018 AASHE webinar, for which Tufts Sustainability Director Tina Woolston was the moderator. We will develop hub-based modifications for 4 main conference components: (1) Major Keynote Presentations. Using existing broadcast technology, we will develop procedures for remote questions and effective testing protocols to avoid mishaps. (2) Smaller Panel Discussions. For panels of 1 to 4 people, we will enable varying combinations of in-person and remote participation. (3) Receptions and Social Settings. In perhaps the most notable feature of our format, we will develop and pilot an arrangement for numbered camera/screen locations along a wall in a reception hall, linked across sites. (4) Participant-centered Networking. We will select an appropriate social media platform informal networking. By enhancing ease and feasibility, this initiative will empower academic associations to use hub-based formats. We envision an ongoing business partnership among at least three universities – most likely Tufts, Northwestern (near Chicago), and University of Washington (in Seattle). Early investment in equipment, space arrangements, and linking procedures will pay off over multiple conference events.

People Involved: Parke Wilde is a professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science at Tufts University and co-organizer of the #flyingless initiative (flyingless.org), which encourages universities to set goals and measure progress in flying reduction while preserving the good that we do through our research and global citizenship. Two Tufts undergraduate students on the Medford campus will contribute. Caitlin Colino and Yuemeng Li both have experience with event organizing, and Colino is a student leader on climate action at Tufts. Among Tufts staff and administrators, we have support and participation from Chris Sedore (Chief Information Officer), Jason McClellan (Senior Director of Auxiliary Services), and Adam Cotton (Director of Conference and Event Services). Feel free to contact them for input on this proposal. At the partner universities, I have support from Professor Steve Franconeri at Northwestern University and Professors Aseem Prakash and Nives Dolsak at the University of Washington, which gives a nice geographic spacing from east to west across the United States. Finally, I have a network of thinkers and researchers at other universities with interests in long-distance communication in a time of climate crisis.

Budget: The initial budget for demonstration testing and pilot is \$10k. We seek time coverage for one intern position each in spring semester and summer session 2020, and printing costs for a marketing flyer and mailing in summer 2020. For the demonstration testing, we anticipate using borrowed cameras and screens in spring 2020 and free contribution of meeting space for the pilot in summer 2020. If the demonstration and pilot testing are successful, we will develop a business plan in late summer 2020 for extending this initiative to real conferences on a revenue-earning basis, but those further costs and revenues are beyond the scope of this initial proposal. This

proposal assumes that it is wisest to start small, demonstrate feasibility, and then scale up. Yet, if this proposal is received favorably, we will be delighted to revise and built more of the full anticipated project into this initial submission.

Timeline: The initial budget for demonstration testing and pilot is \$10k. We seek time coverage for one intern position each in spring semester and summer session 2020, and printing costs for a marketing flyer and mailing in summer 2020. For the demonstration testing, we anticipate using borrowed cameras and screens in spring 2020 and free contribution of meeting space for the pilot in summer 2020. If the demonstration and pilot testing are successful, we will develop a business plan in late summer 2020 for extending this initiative to real conferences on a revenue-earning basis, which will require investment in dedicated equipment, but those further costs and revenues are beyond the scope of this initial proposal. This proposal assumes that it is wisest to start small, demonstrate feasibility, and then scale up. Yet, if this proposal is received favorably, we will be delighted to revise and built more of the full anticipated project into this initial submission.

Benefit to Tufts community: This initiative builds on Tufts' proud history of leadership, as exemplified by the Talloires Declaration, the Tufts Institute for the Environment, and other globally recognized projects. It will position Tufts as a business innovator and climate action champion in conference services that are central to academic life. We anticipate that pressure will grow intense, perhaps quite suddenly, for universities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through academic travel. This initiative will help Tufts demonstrate foresight in anticipating the need and preparing a vigorous response.