

The Role of In-Person Meetings in Mathematics

The American Mathematical Society emphasizes that the ability of mathematicians to attend meetings (including conferences, symposia, and seminars) in person remains essential to the profession. This is evidenced by the commitment of the National Science Foundation and its counterparts abroad to creating and funding institutes whose principal purpose is to bring mathematicians together in person.

Meetings play a number of roles in mathematics.

- Meetings whose scope is different, or wider, than the traditional research meeting may include activities such as workshops or professional development sessions that can best, or only, be done in person.
- Informal encounters at meetings give mathematicians the chance to share ideas and fundamental insights. These in-person encounters provide the time and space needed for communicating complex ideas between participants, which often leads to new insights and understanding.
- While formal lectures at meetings let mathematicians highlight their own recent results and learn of those of others, the lectures have greater impact when their themes enrich the informal interactions described above.
- Not only do those encounters foster the research of meeting participants, but they often lead to fruitful collaborations between participants. These collaborations help mathematicians broaden and deepen their research program and often lead to some of the most important developments in the field.
- Networking at meetings provides a powerful mechanism to increase the visibility of individual mathematicians and to integrate them into the wider mathematical community. This is particularly important for early-career mathematicians and mathematicians at institutions where there is limited support for research.

Online meetings have a role to play in mathematics, and they provide an opportunity for mathematicians to participate who would not be able to do so otherwise, due to constraints of time, expense, family commitments, etc. We expect that many meetings will continue to be available remotely.

While these remote meetings can replicate the formal aspects of in-person meetings, they cannot provide the informal opportunities for contact and the serendipitous interactions that characterize in-person meetings. Indeed, these opportunities are no less important than the formal presentations.

In-person meetings play an irreplaceable role in the creation of mathematics, the development of the mathematical community, and the advancement of individual mathematicians.