



# Working virtually and sustainably

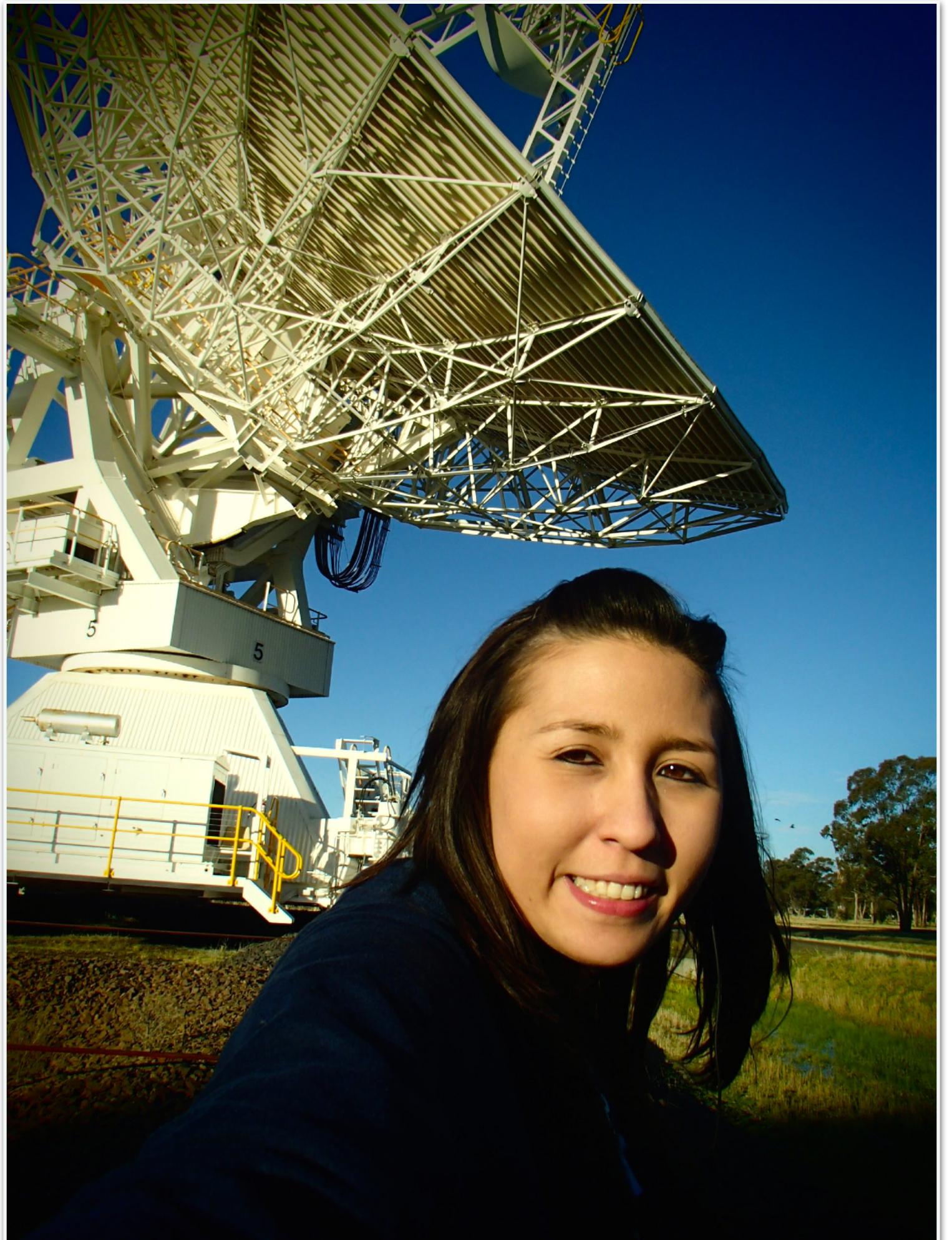
*Astronomy, The Future of Meetings, and our future*

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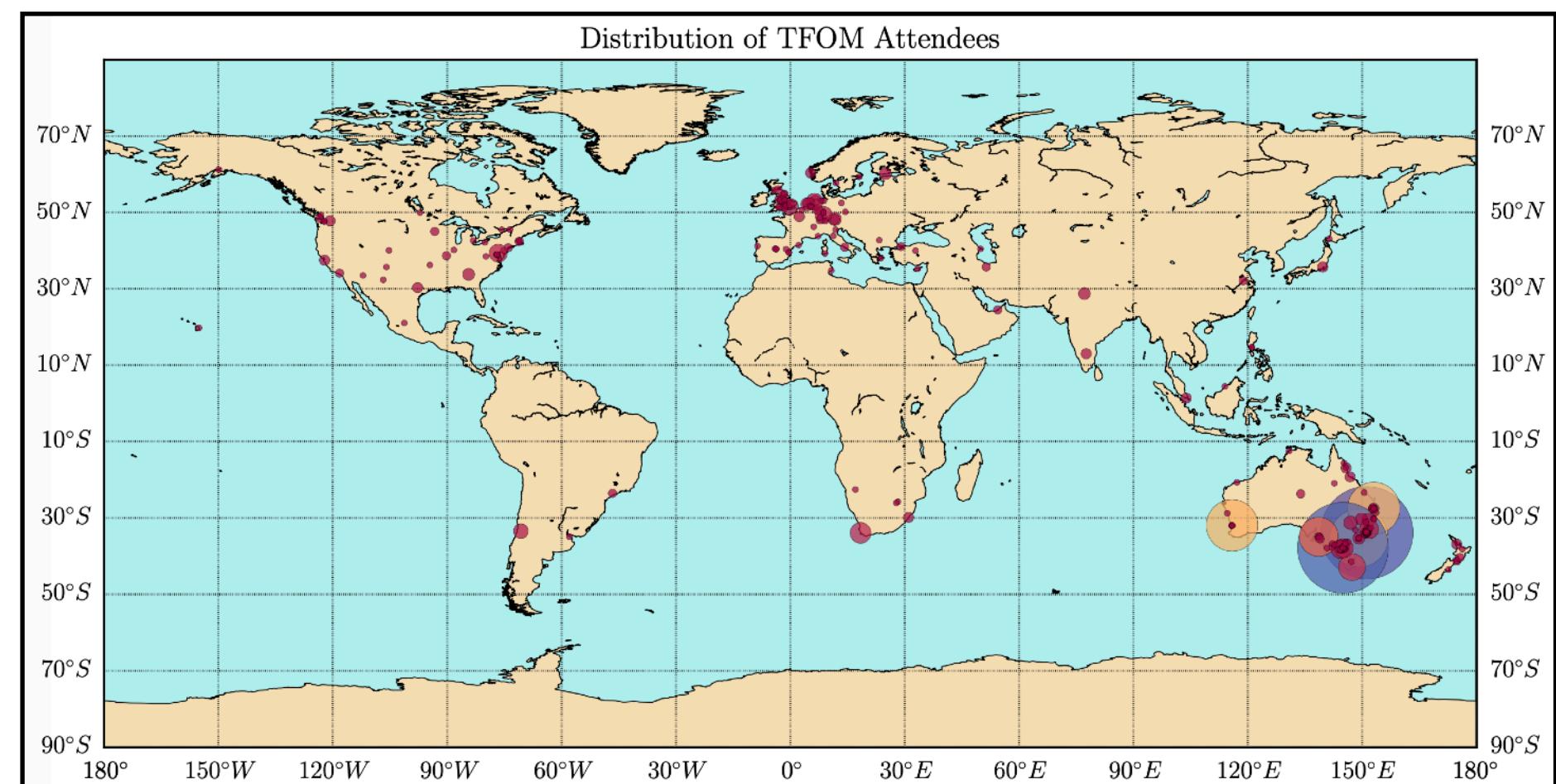
# Introduction

- Based at **CSIRO Space and Astronomy** since June 2019 - prior **ASTRON** (2017-2019) and **University of Sydney\*** (2010-2017)
- Current key roles in S&A include:
  - 👉 **Head of ASKAP Science Operations** focusing on survey science specification to ingest
  - 👉 **ATCA DA Coordinator** responsible for training duty astronomers to support the telescope
  - 👉 **Ongoing Chair** of the Future of Meetings Organising committee (post-TFOM phase)
- Very keen to promote **digital first** attitudes and work on improving processes wherever possible



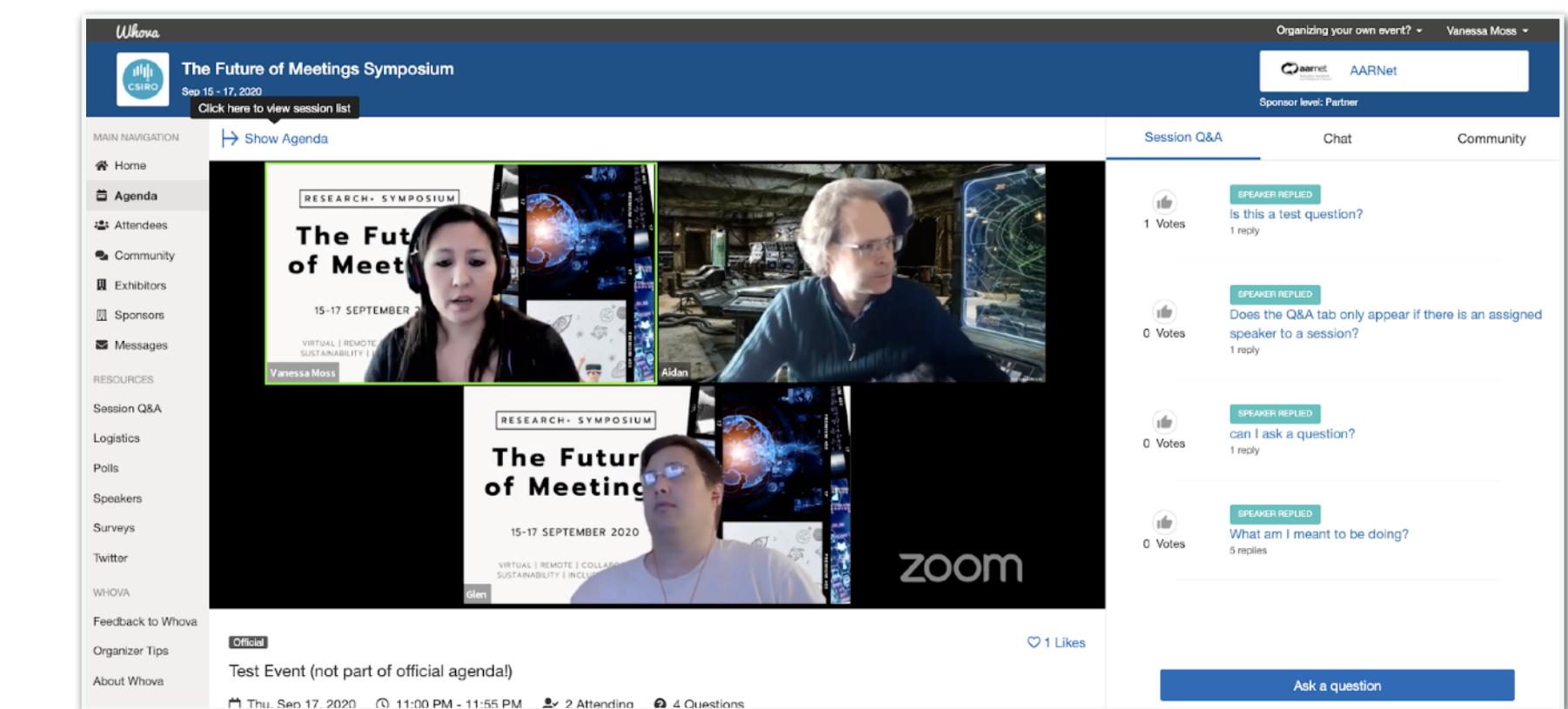
# The Future of Meetings?

- Completely virtual CSIRO-hosted symposium that took place **15th-17th September 2020**
- The **first ever virtual** Cutting Edge Science Symposium funded by the Research Office
- Intended as a **holistic, cross-disciplinary** look at the theme of future meetings, seeking to address best practice and lessons learned
- TFOM key themes: **accessibility, inclusivity, sustainability and technology**
- **1166** registered (live) attendees, **30%** from CSIRO, **80%** from Australia, **70%** academic-related, and **43** post-event registrations

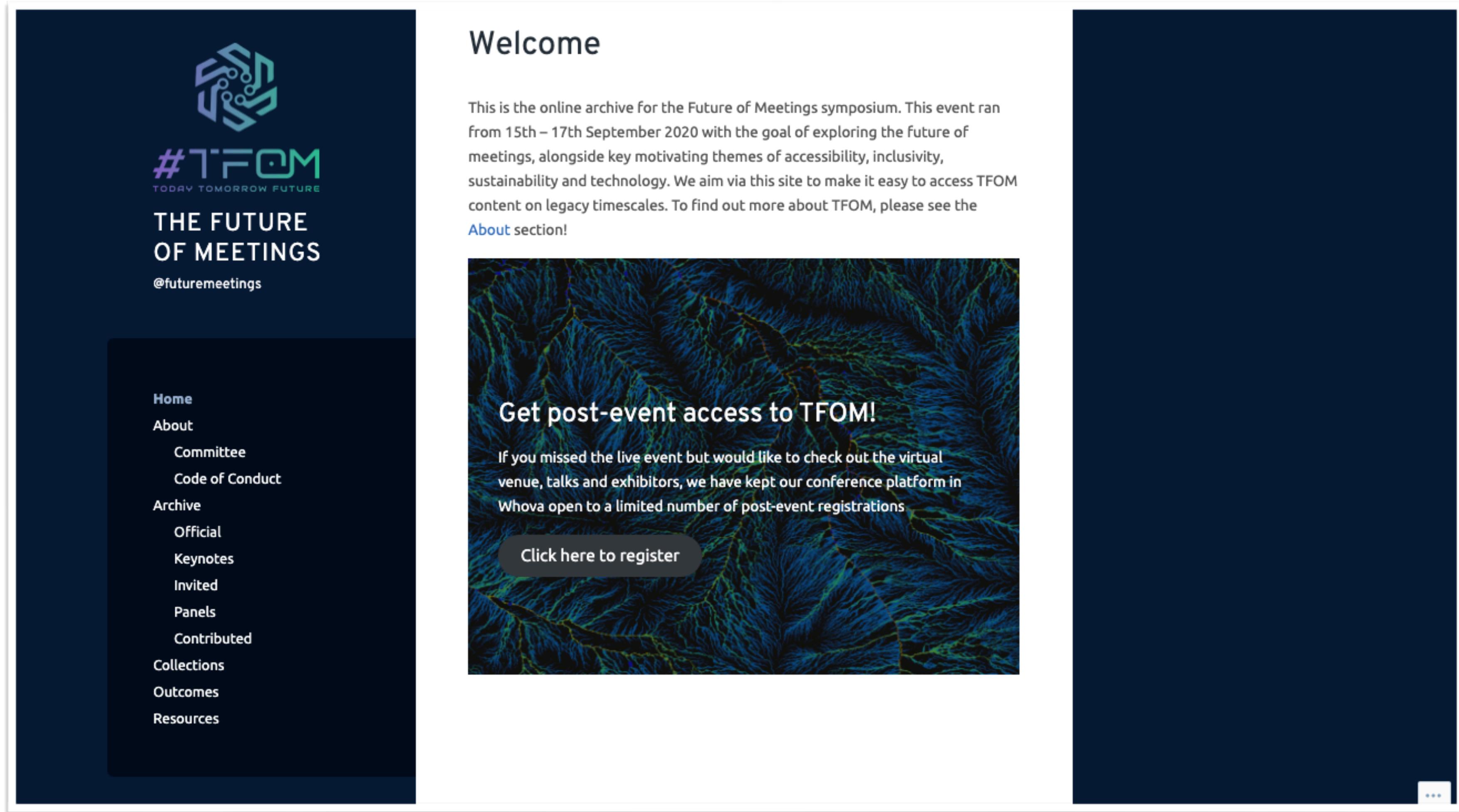


# What made TFOM different?

- **Experimentation** - we adopted an experimental attitude in everything we did and wanted to try many new approaches to see what worked, to **maximise learning** and search for **best practice**
- **Digital first** - we never planned anything in person as part of TFOM, it was always meant to be a **virtual-only conference by design**
- **Technology as a conduit** - we felt technology was and is the **key** to better interaction practices
- **Ownership** - we did almost everything **ourselves**
- **Social** - we incorporated a number of different experimental **socially-focused** events in TFOM



# TFOM: Wordpress archive



The screenshot shows the homepage of the TFOM Wordpress archive. On the left, there is a sidebar with the TFOM logo, the text '#TFOM TODAY TOMORROW FUTURE', 'THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS', and '@futuremeetings'. Below this is a navigation menu with links: Home, About, Committee, Code of Conduct, Archive, Official, Keynotes, Invited, Panels, Contributed, Collections, Outcomes, and Resources. The main content area has a dark background with a green and blue abstract pattern. At the top, it says 'Welcome'. Below that is a paragraph of text about the event's purpose and a link to the 'About' section. In the center, there is a call-to-action: 'Get post-event access to TFOM! If you missed the live event but would like to check out the virtual venue, talks and exhibitors, we have kept our conference platform in Whova open to a limited number of post-event registrations'. A button below this text says 'Click here to register'. On the far right edge of the main content area, there is a small white box with three dots.

Welcome

This is the online archive for the Future of Meetings symposium. This event ran from 15th – 17th September 2020 with the goal of exploring the future of meetings, alongside key motivating themes of accessibility, inclusivity, sustainability and technology. We aim via this site to make it easy to access TFOM content on legacy timescales. To find out more about TFOM, please see the [About](#) section!

Get post-event access to TFOM!

If you missed the live event but would like to check out the virtual venue, talks and exhibitors, we have kept our conference platform in Whova open to a limited number of post-event registrations

Click here to register

<https://tfom.org>

# Outcomes from TFOM

Revision 0.1  
October 21, 2020

## THE FUTURE OF MEETINGS

Authors: TFOM Organising Committee

### Outcomes and Recommendations

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Check for updates comment

### Forging a path to a better normal for conferences and collaboration

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic forced a string of cancelled conferences, causing many organizers to shift meetings online, with mixed success. Seizing the opportunity, a group of researchers came together to rethink how the conference experience and collaboration in general can be improved in a more virtual-centric future.

Vanessa A. Moss, Matt Adcock, Aidan W. Hotan, Rika Kobayashi, Glen A. Rees, Coralie Siégal, Chenoa D. Tremblay and Claire E. Trenham

**D**oes the future of scientific progress (our conferences, our collaboration, our communication) really rely on a rush back to in-person interaction? Digital-meeting fatigue, loss of serendipitous hallway conversations, impersonal interactions, challenging time zones: these have been commonly cited as reasons why virtual interaction fundamentally falls short of its in-person counterpart and as justification for a speedy return to 'normal'. But what kind of collaborative future could we, and *should* we, be aiming for?

There has already been considerable discussion of whether the future of conferences and meetings might be in-person, purely digital, or a hybrid of the two. While some have expressed a desire to return to face-to-face meetings as they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, many see an altered future for academic collaboration (alternating in-person and virtual, local hubs linked via the internet, or purely virtual have been among popular suggestions). More still sit somewhere in between, empirically aware of the challenges of the virtual format but also acknowledging the benefits gained by collaborating through these new technologies. Parallel to these discussions, a new future of work is already upon us. Many parts of academia and industry are discussing dramatic changes to expectations about the role of the physical office<sup>1,2</sup> while other parts have essentially, where possible, returned to 'normal'. It is now widely acknowledged that working from home is often feasible and can be more productive, while arguments in favour of the office often focus on the importance of the hallway conversation, sense of community and performance management<sup>3</sup>.

To explore what future interaction might look like, in September 2020 we brought together a cross-disciplinary community for The Future of Meetings (TFOM) symposium (Fig. 1), an event hosted by the

**Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO, Australia's national science agency) that took place in an entirely virtual venue. Our approach, from conception of TFOM to the collation of recommendations, was founded on experimentation and evaluation, with the aim to share a current perspective on what best practice might look like for future meetings, especially conferences. In planning we identified four key themes that we felt were critical to bring focus to: accessibility, inclusivity, sustainability and technology. We recently shared our experience and lessons learned from TFOM through a publicly available report<sup>4</sup>. The report provides extensive coverage of our process, outcomes and recommendations, and forms a comprehensive reference for those organizing conferences or interested in this topic.**

**For all the challenges faced in 2020, the disruptive nature of lockdown rapidly accelerated many trends that had been predicted and visible for years<sup>5,6</sup>. We are now at a critical turning point where we have the opportunity to benefit from these experiences and define what we want the future of scientific collaboration to be, but only if we actively choose to resist a return to 'normal' and strive for 'better' instead. We consolidated our core learnings from TFOM in a short list that can be abbreviated to DAISERVE: Digital-first, Accessibility, Inclusivity, Sustainability, Experimentation, Right tool/approach, Value and Evaluation. If these aspects are considered when designing interactions including but not limited to conferences, then this will facilitate our proposed template of current best practice.**

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Fig. 1 | TFOM Organising Committee photo in AltspaceVR. Members of The Future of Meetings Organising Committee gathering in the virtual TFOM space, hosted in the social virtual reality platform AltspaceVR.

# Implications for sustainability

- **Adapting the way we meet and collaborate**
  - Digital-first is the most robust strategy
  - The rise of asynchronous communication
  - Geographically-distributed teams
  - Redefining how, where and when we interact
  - Using "in person" for where it makes sense to
- **Increasing accountability at institution level**
  - Sustainability as a part of organisations
  - Carbon control and ways to offset emissions
  - Flexibility as a core theme in how we work
- **Ensuring EMCRs are not adversely affected**
  - EMCRs need ways to effectively build networks
  - Developing careers should be location agnostic

