

Financial Transparency Report

NarraScope 2020

NarraScope 2020 took place online. Nearly all of its presentations were streamed on Twitch as video from May 28th to June 4th.

When we began planning NarraScope 2020, late last year, we envisioned an event like NarraScope 2019 – an intense face-to-face gathering. The Electronic Literatures and Literacies Lab at UIUC offered us a venue and we proceeded through the winter on that basis. Of course, in the spring, the pandemic mooted all of those plans. In mid-March we announced that NarraScope would become an online event.

Our cost of operation in this format was minimal. Twitch's infrastructure meant that we could support a viewing audience of any size with no marginal cost. Therefore, we did not charge an attendance or viewing fee. We offered a registration form, but only for the purpose of building a contact list.

We did, however, solicit donations to support honoraria for our speakers. The shift in focus from registration fees (charging each attendee a share of the expected cost) to donations (soliciting voluntary support to a fundraising goal) was not on our original roadmap. It was, however, a gratifying success. We received over \$6000 in donations and distributed most of it to our speakers.

While NarraScope's financial costs were low, the event was carried through by the sustained efforts of the committee and our volunteer crew. We cannot thank our volunteers and community moderators enough for the success that we achieved.

Attendance

As participation was unrestricted, there is no way to exactly quantify attendance. Here is an array of statistics:

A total of 513 people registered via EventBrite. (To reduce our workload, we closed EventBrite registration once the event began, so this total does not include people drawn to the talks in progress.)

97 people chose to donate to NarraScope, either directly through our web site or as an option while registering.

Viewership of Xalavier Nelson's keynote talk peaked at 238 people according to Twitch's analytics. Viewership of other talks varied, but we typically saw 100 viewers during the first half of the conference, and perhaps 50 in the latter half. (We attribute the difference to initial excitement for the opening day and increased viewer availability during the following Saturday and Sunday, as contrasted with the work week that began on Monday.)

Our free Discord chat drew nearly 700 unique users during the week of the conference.

Financials

<i>Income</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Net After Fees</i>
EventBrite registrations for UIUC	\$2620.00	\$217.69	\$2402.31
Individual donations	\$4450.00	\$155.94	\$4294.06
Sponsorships	\$2094.26	\$78.32	\$2015.94
Total income	\$9164.26	\$451.95	\$8712.31

<i>Expense</i>	<i>Amount</i>	<i>Fees</i>	<i>Total With Fees</i>
EventBrite refunds for UIUC	\$2411.80		\$2411.80
Web hosting	\$80.33		\$80.33
Zoom Pro account	\$78.62		\$78.62
Honoraria	\$5350.00	\$51.00	\$5401.00
Total expenses	\$7920.75	\$51.00	\$7971.75

Net for NarraScope 2020	\$740.56
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The picture is slightly complicated by the fact that we opened registration for the UIUC event in February. When we announced that the on-site event was cancelled, we had already collected \$2402 in registration fees, which we immediately refunded. (The refund amount was \$2412 due to slight mismatches in the way Eventbrite handled refunds.)

All our revenue for the online event came from individual donations and institutional sponsorship. We took in \$4294 from 97 individual donors, for an average of \$44 per donor. Our three sponsors were articy Software, Talespinners Studios, and Failbetter Games, who contributed a total of \$2016.

Our fixed expenses were a year of web hosting and a few months of Zoom Pro conferencing service. (Speakers transmitted their presentations to us via Zoom; we relayed the video stream to Twitch.) As these costs were minimal, we were able to return the majority of our revenue to speakers as honoraria for their contributions.

We had a total of 69 speakers, panelists, and presenters. We offered \$750 to our keynote speaker and \$100 to each of the others. Of these, 22 declined the honorarium. We therefore paid out \$5350, plus \$51 in Paypal fees, for a total of \$5401.

As you see, this left NarraScope 2020 with a surplus of about \$741. This was a policy decision, not a miscalculation. Honorarium payments were the last financial transaction of NarraScope, so we chose a payment level which would leave us with a small surplus. We could have chosen to break exactly even, but it seemed wiser to leave a hedge against the possibility of last-minute surprises.

As last-minute surprises were minor, we will retain the surplus and apply it to the budget of NarraScope 2021.

The Future

We intend to run NarraScope 2021. Its form, like so many other events of 2021, is impossible to foresee.

If on-site conferences remain inadvisable, we will endeavor to run another streamed event. Given the difficulties of 2020, we are certain to reassess the scale, duration, and level of volunteer support needed to run NarraScope 2021. This does not mean that we want to run a smaller event next year! It means that we want to ensure that NarraScope 2021 has the resources it needs to succeed.

If an on-site conference *does* appear possible, we will consider that course. The attractions of face-to-face conversation are undeniable. But we do not want to lose the benefits of streaming our conference to a worldwide audience, most of whom would be unable to attend any given physical location.

We will also consider the possibilities afforded by continued fundraising. By untethering our income from the idea of a fixed or expected registration fee, we may be able to subsidize attendance and travel for some number of people who would otherwise be unable to attend an on-site conference.

As with all these issues, we have much to discuss and decide in the coming months.

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!