Dear Summer Institute Meeting Organizers and Program Directors -

 The logistical and contracting timetables for the 2020 Summer Institute span several months, which means that we must decide now on whether we can hold in-person meetings. I sincerely hope that by early July, the number of COVID-19 cases will be low, and that many of the social distancing requirements of the last few weeks will have been lifted. However, there is a significant chance that this will not be the case, and that it will be very difficult to host a conference with high levels of interpersonal contact in crowded spaces. In light of this situation, I have reluctantly concluded that shifting to a "virtual Summer Institute" is the best course of action. We will all miss the in-person networking and fellowship that the Summer Institute permits, but people’s health and well-being must take precedence.

 In light of this decision, please review the submissions for your Summer Institute meeting with the goal of the best possible virtual conference. I have sensed in the last month that there is demand for the interactions and intellectual exchange that even virtual meetings offer, so I expect that most meetings will be held virtually. On-line meeting do have drawbacks, so c

 I hope that you will keep several basic principles in mind as we go virtual.

• Meetings will be held on their usual dates, but the on-line structure may call for some changes in timing. Summer Institute participants span the world and many time zones. Starting at 10:30am or 11am EDT and ending earlier than usual will let us welcome the wide audiences that Summer Institute has always drawn.

• On line presentations tend to work better when they are shorter than their in-person counterparts. Planning for 30-40 minutes (typically without interruption) for the presenter seems like a good rule of thumb.

• Assigned discussants generally work well, but open Q&A can be more difficult to manage, particularly in very large groups. Our conference team will be available to assist conference chairs in moderating meetings.

• Please allow for occasional breaks so that even the most dedicated participants can stretch their legs.

• Rob Shannon will need meeting agendas by June 1. He will be also be contacting you to make sure that the invitation list is current.

On-line meetings offer some flexibility, and the NBER conference team will try to accommodate reasonable requests. Please try in particular to think of ways to promote interactions between meeting participants that could compensate for the lack of in-person networking.

 I look forward to working with you to make this year's Summer Institute a great success. Thank you for playing a critical organizing role -- all best wishes.

Jim Poterba