



Dear Friends,

As most of you already know, we canceled this year's International Festival due to concerns about the Coronavirus. This was a very difficult decision for us, and one that took a lot of deliberation and agonizing.

The International Festival is unique in that, while most are Triangle residents, both our participants and our attendees are comprised of a large number of world travelers. We are, as the name says, *international*. Additionally, we attract large crowds and weekend attendance is usually around 25,000 with a good number of our stakeholders elderly or frail.

International travel is cited among the major risk factors for transferring the virus, and so we have been watching developments as the festival grew closer over the last month or so. The timeline below informed our decision:

As the virus spread from Asia to Europe and the Middle East and eventually the west coast of the US, we continued planning and watching its behavior.

Last week, we heard reports of spread to the East Coast with cases in New York, Rhode Island, and Florida (and now also Tennessee, Georgia, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New Jersey). At that point, our Board of Directors convened to assess the risk. We planned for handwashing stations throughout the festival, hand sanitizers on all tables, and disinfectant cleaning routines for all surfaces. With these safeguards in place, we decided on Monday to proceed as planned.

The Coronavirus can take up to two weeks to show symptoms, and people are unaware of being carriers before they experience symptoms. On Tuesday, reports alerted to the first case in Wake County. We received numerous phone calls and emails from dancers, food vendors, exhibitors, and sponsors urging us to reconsider holding the festival. Some participants and volunteers cancelled their involvement. Among the calls were a local health professional and a travel professional who both expressed their concern about a high number of international travelers in a crowd setting. Even though official local health recommendations do not include avoidance of crowds, the CDC does recommend social distancing. We felt that, given the unique demographic of the festival, it would be irresponsible to risk holding the event and cancelled it for 2020.

The International Festival is our major fundraiser for the year. We are a small nonprofit and this development has left us with a significant deficit. The decision was not reached lightly or gladly. Were we a different kind of event, we would have stayed the course, but in the interest of our stakeholders' and the public's safety, we decided to take the action that would most protect them.

I hope this explains a little more about our decision. I'm very sorry we won't see you at the festival this year, but please save the date for February 26-28, and we will celebrate together then!

Sincerely,

Clodagh Bastian
Executive Director
InternationalFocus.org