

Virtual Workshops: Connecting the Dots 2020

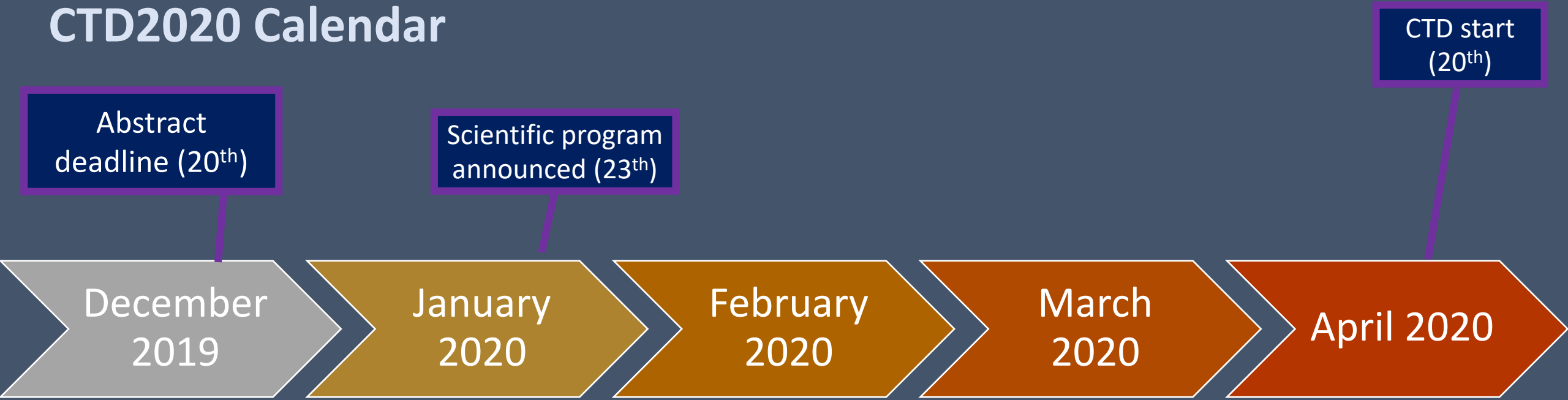
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What is Connecting the Dots

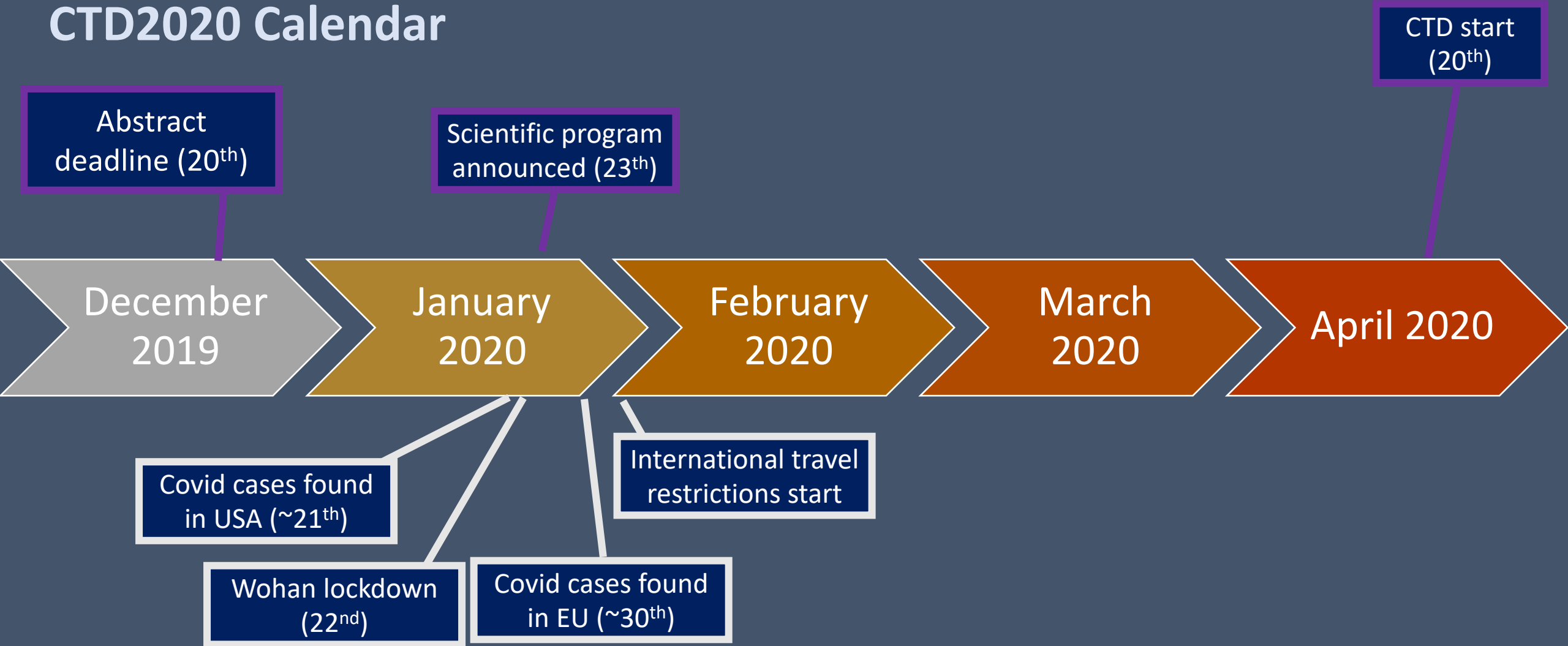
- The Connecting The Dots workshop series brings together experts on track reconstruction and other problems involving pattern recognition in sparsely sampled data.
- The CTD scientific program is nominally 2.5 days with a fully plenary format
 - Three types of presentations: Plenary talks; Young-scientist talks; Posters
 - We were expecting about 80 people to attend CTD in April 2020



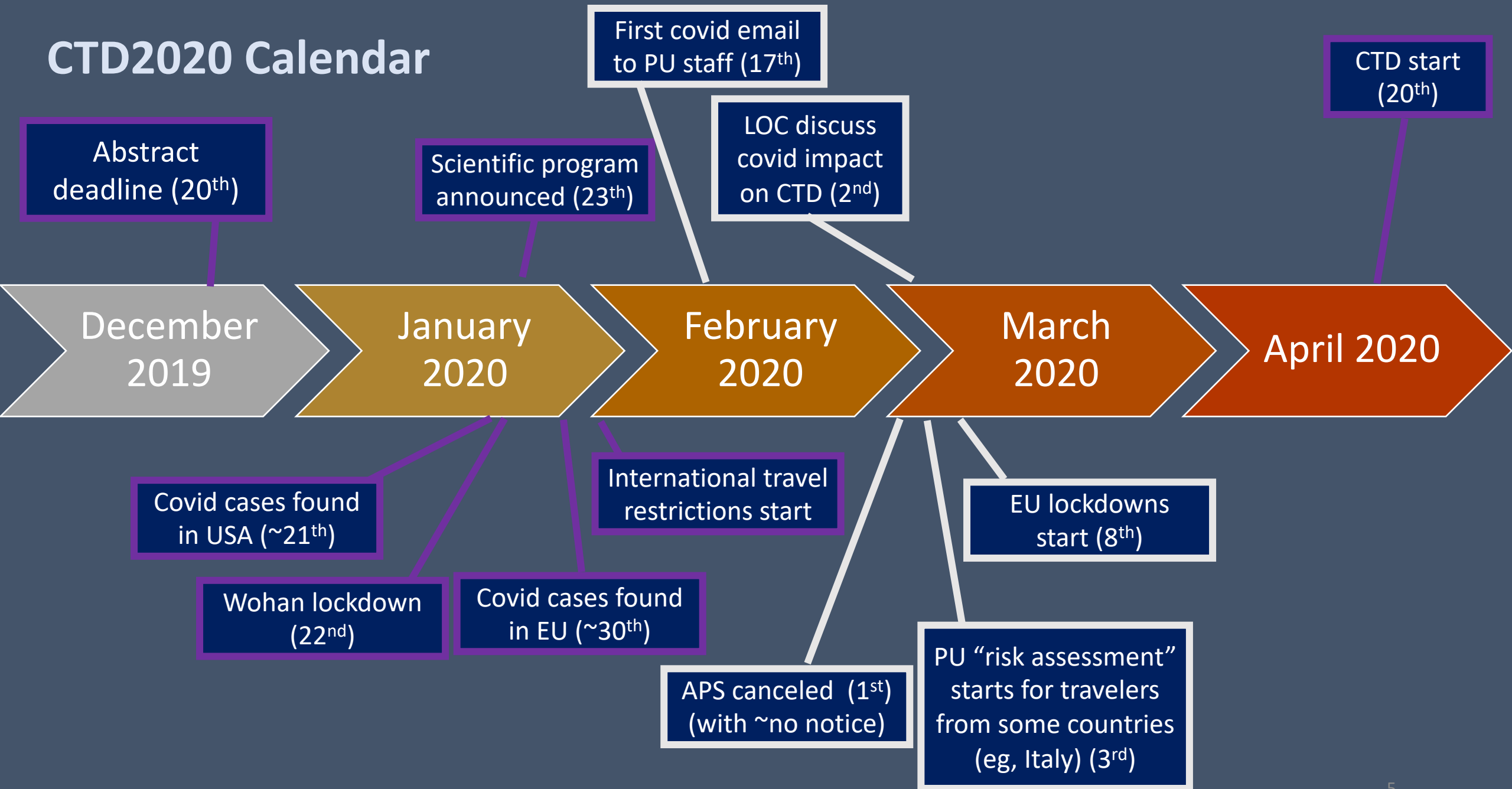
CTD2020 Calendar



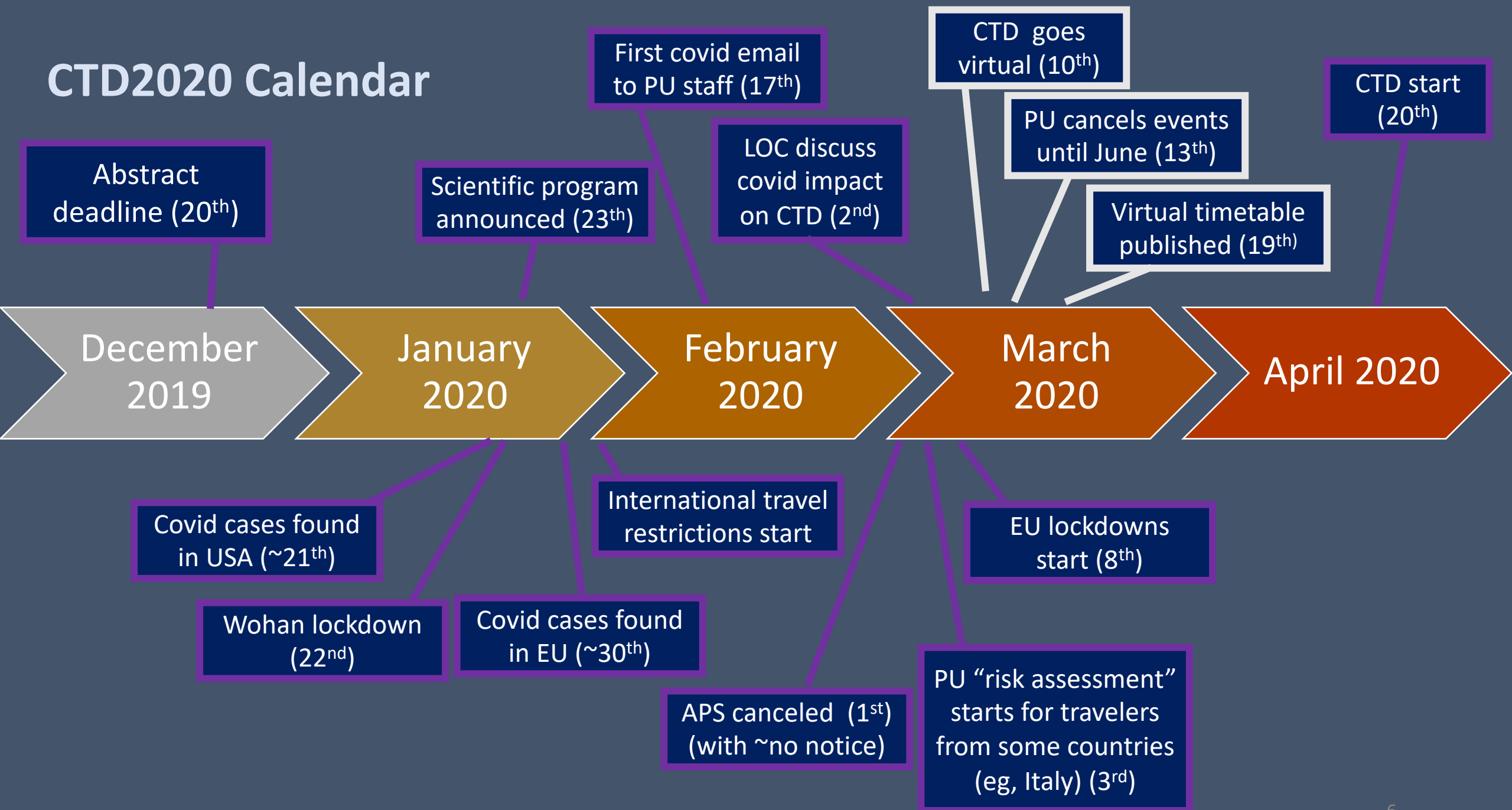
CTD2020 Calendar



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Going virtual - Constraints and desires

- Once it was clear that an in person event was not possible, the local organizers and international committee were both strongly in favor of a virtual conference rather than no conference
 - We did reach out to several groups that had organized around approaches to virtual meetings for ideas and help
- We had ~10 days figure out the approach
 - We had already accepted abstracts, etc - so our speakers needed to know how/what/when to prepare
 - Meeting (and life) schedules were uncertain
- Wanted to preserve
 - The full scientific program as planned for the in-person meeting – talks and posters
 - The planned length of oral presentations
 - The planned opportunities for interacting with all presenters (oral and poster)

Going virtual – Constraints and desires

- We judged it to be not possible to schedule the entire scientific program during the overlap between the EU extended-working day and the US extended-working day
 - We had ~no abstracts from Asia, so we did not prioritize other time zones
- We felt we had limited flexibility in rescheduling as speakers needed time to get results approved (eg, could not move presentations forward)
 - The workshop was small enough that we had some freedom to reschedule as to accommodate the needs of a virtual meeting
 - However, talks submitted by “an experiment” experienced some communication gaps. The experiment conference teams were also having to get use to “virtual” conferences
- Positive note: We did not lose any contributions due to switching to a virtual meeting

Our solution

- Two main program components
 - “Recording sessions” outside of “prime time” with audience and small window for Q+A
 - Videos available for 1+ week for viewing
 - Dedicated Q+A sessions in “prime time”
- What about posters?
 - Insufficient time to converge on a “creative” solution. As posters had essentially all been proposed as talks, we just promoted them to short talks.

Implementation: Recording sessions

- Approach: Six 3-hour sessions spread over 3 days
 - Early afternoon CERN time (1300 GVA, 0700 Princeton)
 - Evening CERN time (1900 GVA, 1300 Princeton)
 - Recordings done via ZOOM; and recorded to ZOOM Cloud (Princeton had this service already available for us to use)
 - Asked speakers to share their video while speaking if they could (90% could)
 - Raising hands worked for audience participation
 - Timetable in Indico; slides uploaded to Indico
- Results: Worked smoothly
 - Reasonable audience (~20 people on average) for all sessions
 - Essentially all speakers stayed on time;
 - ZOOM worked without problems.
 - Cloud recording meant that we didn't depend on any one local computing infrastructure always working, and nor did we need to have N people recording each session (and it was automatic)
 - Each session recording had a different resolution/aspect ratio. It is not clear why
 - Typically 1-3 questions per speaker. We cut off discussion as needed, knowing there was a Q/A session to follow

Implementation: Recordings

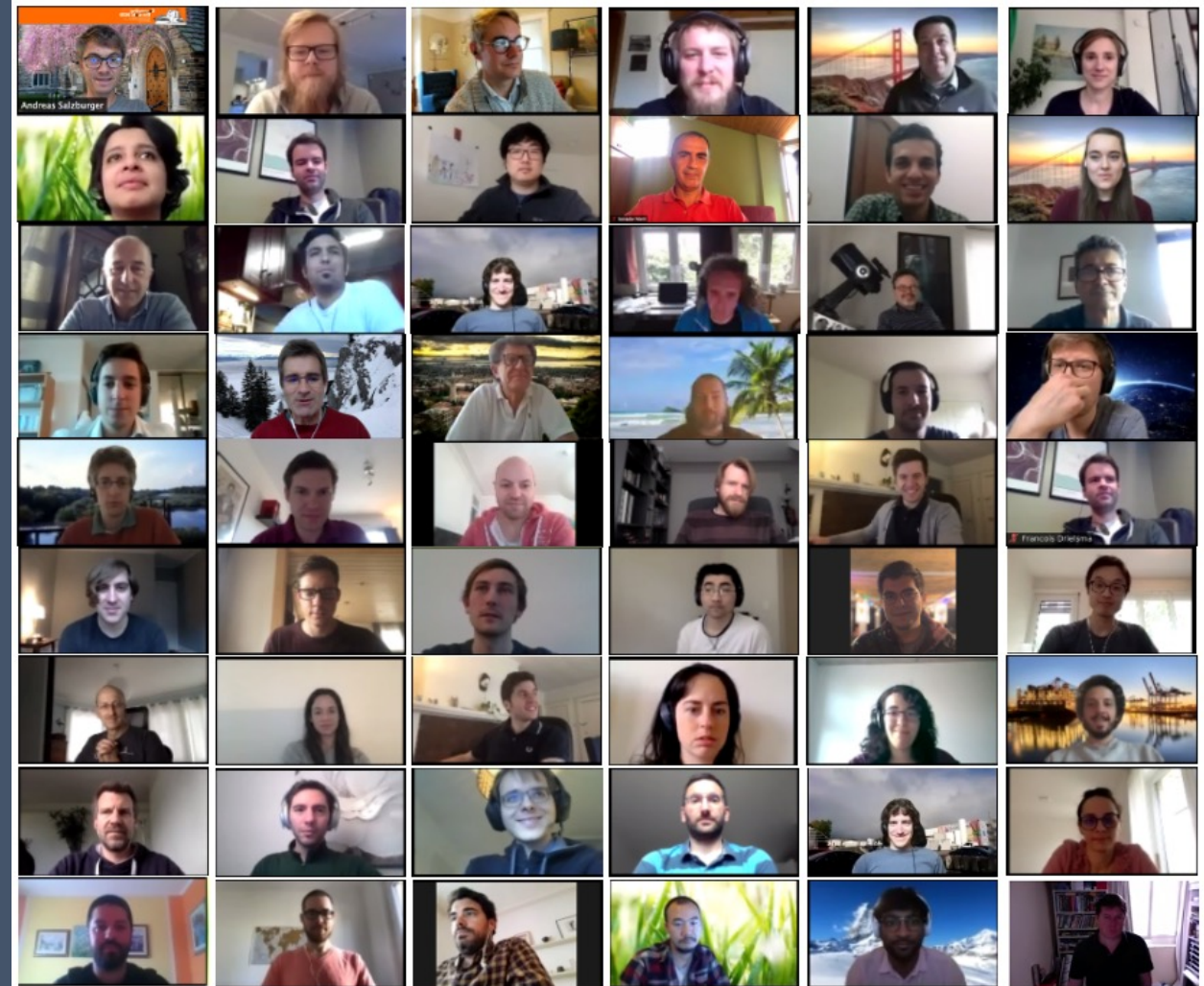
- Recordings available on ZOOM cloud about 1 hour after recording session ended
- Developed scripts to splice recording session into individual talks, add CTD graphic and title to the beginning of each contribution [done via ffmpeg+python]
- Recordings up on indico and youtube before next recording session started (partly thanks to having a fiber connection to upload content...)
 - YouTube upload was automated; however, we did not buy the needed Youtube API quota to be able to upload all videos automatically each day. So most done by hand..
- A Mattermost was set up for each talk for questions/interaction based on recording
- Outcomes:
 - Did anyone watch these recordings? Clearly yes; however no concrete viewing statistics on indico uploads.
 - The Mattermost went essentially unused → An integrated system for interactivity is important

Implementation: Q/A sessions one week later

- Three 2-hour sessions during EU/USA extended working day (1600 GVA). These were also recorded and uploaded.
- Each speaker had a 1 minute / 1 slide introduction to their talk to get the discussion started
- Comments:
 - Good attendance; however the discussion was largely driven by a few “experts”.
 - I see this issue affecting many ZOOM meetings...
 - The short introduction to each talk worked well. Speakers followed the format and generally successfully conveyed the important conclusions of their work.
 - We did eventually have a problem with our ZOOM usage – the host left the meeting without appointing a new host; the new host left and “ended the meeting for all”.. We recovered by rescheduling a few affected speakers for the next day
 - Indico timetables do not handle events without events every day very well.
 - Days without contributions are shown in the agenda

Remembering and thanking our attendees

- Using Indico's registration system to give out the ZOOM coordinates means that we do have a good record of attendees
 - 200 registered, clearly less than that attended
 - We did not attempt to track who attended what (just like we would not have done so in a physical workshop)
- Our approach to a workshop photograph:
 - Multiple zoom screenshots over multiple days (still not getting everyone that attended – maybe 50%?)
 - Sent images through a splicing tool
 - Identified and removed duplicates
 - Recombined into one image



Wrapup

- **CTD2020 became a virtual meeting just a month before it was held.**
 - The organization happened very much “on the fly”. Even Zoom was pretty novel meetings in the LHC community at the the time.
 - We found an audience preference towards real-time interactivity rather than recordings
 - The Earth is still round, so this is a challenge for even 2 continents as virtual attendees tend not to be only following your workshop as they might have in person.
 - Free/open discussion was clearly more difficult in virtual setting. Perceived higher barrier to speaking up and coffee/lunch/evening discussion time is lost.
- **Sidebar on going back to physical events.** Both organizers and attendees face financial risks leading up to conferences
 - We did not consider the potential impact of up-front cost commitments when planning CTD2020.
 - Fortunately
 - We picked a registration system without fees if you canceled your event (Eventbrite)
 - We made a hotel booking that did not charge guests to cancel ahead of time.
 - Aside from the conference hotel, we were using on-campus venues (and have a great local team that dealt with all the scheduling/cancelation issues that came up)
 - The next 6 months is also a good opportunity to think about best-practices for in-person event organization (often it’s the first time being an organizer as it was for us).