



ICCA Association Success Story

International Society for Computational Biology



ICCA

Describe the project/initiative and its objectives

The [International Society for Computational Biology \(ISCB\)](https://www.iscb.org/) has been the first and continues to be the only society representing computational biology and bioinformatics on a worldwide scale. ISCB is a global community of nearly 3,300 scientists dedicated to advancing the scientific understanding of living systems through computation. ISCB convenes the world's experts and future leaders in top conferences and partners with publications that promote discovery and expand access to computational biology and bioinformatics. We deliver valuable information about training, education, employment, and relevant news. ISCB also provides an influential voice on government and scientific policies that are important to our members and benefit the public.

The ISCB is incorporated in the United States as a 501(c) (3) non-profit corporation and registered in the state of California as a Charitable Trust. For more information about ISCB and its initiatives and programs, please visit <https://www.iscb.org/>.

Describe the project/initiative and its objectives

ISCB hosts its flagship conference, the Intelligent Systems for Molecular Biology (ISMB), the world's longest running and largest conference on computational biology and bioinformatics. ISMB alternates between North America and Europe where it is held jointly with the European Conference on Computational Biology (ECCB) every odd-numbered year.

The ISMB conference aims at attracting the top research contributions in all areas of computational molecular biology. Attendees at ISMB are scientists at every career stage from senior scientists to graduate and undergraduate trainees. Registrants come from leading academic institutions, medical schools, private research institutions, government agencies, healthcare facilities and hospitals, and the biotech and pharmaceutical industry. The goal is to create a greater understanding of these topics and enable researchers to make better predictions on how the human responds to disease, illness, and treatment.

How was the project realized

ISMB 2021 was to take place in Lyon, France in July. We had already transitioned our 2020 event into a fully virtual event and knew, that with the pandemic still looming, that our 2021 event would also be completely virtual. The benefit of our 2021 event was that we had far more lead time to plan and restructure the conference for a virtual audience.

As an international society, we knew we would have attendees participating from around the world in a multitude of time zones. We realized our attendees needed the ability to engage in live presentations but also be able to engage with content on-demand and lastly, we wanted to ensure attendees had a place to gather and network.

Where there any innovative approaches taken

Online events are not as personable as in-person events, especially when you have hundreds, if not thousands of attendees all tuning in to listen to a keynote. We needed to ensure that attendees had the ability to know who else was in the audience and chat with them as well as have a separate function to ask questions and upvote the most pertinent questions. It allowed attendees that sense of collaboration that is often lost when participating virtually.

We also wanted to ensure that those attendees who could not attend the live sessions due to their home time-zone had the ability to ask questions of the presenters in an asynchronous manor.

What were the challenges faced along the way and how were they dealt with

Again, being an international society meant we had attendees logging in to participate at all hours. To combat confusion, we set up the program in UTC and ensured the virtual platform had the ability to toggle between UTC and the users own time-zone.

Another challenge was to ensure an equitable registration rate for our members to ensure all would have the opportunity to participate. This challenge created an opportunity for us by allowing us to relook at our registration rate structure and break it down into a tiered system as we do for our membership rates by high, medium and low economic bank rankings. Rates were tied to a participant's country and membership status (professional, postdoctoral or student) to ensure a fair and equitable registration fee was paid by all participants.

What were the results/achievements

With our modified program timeline, ability to watch content on-demand, and an equitable registration fee structure, we saw an increase in participation of members from medium and lower economic countries as well as an increase in attendance overall.

What was the wider impact for the association

Hosting two years of fully virtual events and surveying our attendees after each event was key to cultivating a future program that met the needs of all participants. We asked specific questions regarding virtual and in-person participation and gathered the specific wants and needs for each type of attendee. This has allowed us to redesign our events moving forward as dual channel distribution, ensuring that both in-person and virtual attendees receive the specific key needs for each type or attendance.

What would you do differently

We, the staff, spent many hours organizing and designing various ways for our attendees to chat and network and found that during the event itself, these networking opportunities were highly underutilized. Moving forward, we would eliminate or greatly reduce the networking options/types for our virtual attendees.

Additionally, we would restructure how our virtual audience participates in some aspects of the event as we move forward into hosting for both an in-person and virtual audience simultaneously.

Conference Component Restructure by Attendee Needs:



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<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ In-Person<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Scientific Program and Workshops<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Recorded for later viewing virtually▶ Poster Hall<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Scheduled time for live interaction while keeping the asynchronous questions for virtual▶ Networking<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Scheduled time to include breaks, lunch, receptions▶ Lounge areas to encourage networking with virtual attendees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Virtual<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Scientific Program and Workshops<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Additional volunteers to monitor online presence for a more inclusive experience▶ Poster Hall<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Upload of Poster with 5-minute flash talk and asynchronous questions▶ Networking<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Eliminate most efforts/channels▶ Maintain social media and a Community Q&A
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