

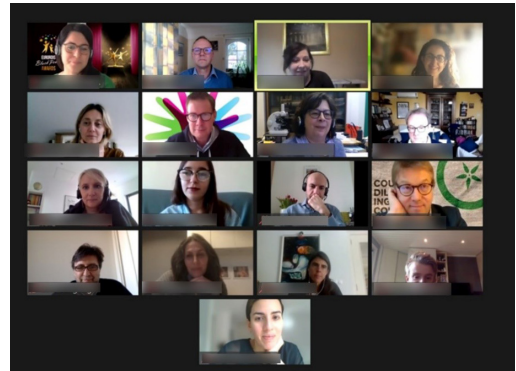


ICCA Association Success Story

The EURORDIS Black Pearl Awards Ceremony

Describe the project/initiative and its objectives

The EURORDIS Black Pearl Awards is an annual awards ceremony and dinner created by EURORDIS-Rare Diseases Europe in 2012. Traditionally, it is a black-tie gala evening that takes place in Brussels, Belgium in February and gathers up to 250 people comprising a broad mix of stakeholders involved in the rare disease ecosystem. This event has three primary objectives: 1) to recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements and exceptional work of people making a difference for the rare disease community, 2) to raise awareness for the rare disease cause, and 3) to raise funds for EURORDIS' programmes. We were able to run our 2020 awards ceremony in-person. In February 2021, this event moved to a fully virtual event.



How was the project realized

We licensed a fully customisable online events platform for one year and customised it for a series of different events we were running the same week as the awards ceremony (and now continue to use for other events). Registration was required but it was a free event. We ran a live fundraising drive during the virtual ceremony. We worked with a specialised agency to adapt the flow and script for an online audience. We reduced the time of the event to 90 minutes. Award recipients were fully briefed in advance on how to pre-record their acceptance speeches. We had more awards than usual opened to public vote. All finalists were waiting in the virtual 'green room' until the winners were announced and sent 'on stage' to give a live speech. Our MC did a tremendous job of interacting with the virtual audience by reading chat messages and soliciting reactions from them, making viewers feel connected.

Were there any innovative approaches taken

Ahead of the live ceremony, on the same day, we ran 10 parallel 'virtual roundtables' (zoom video calls). They were created around each awardee. We handpicked invitees to join them at their table and one of our staff or board members moderated each table. This innovative approach had several advantages. They created interesting multi-stakeholder discussions. They were a nice way to honour the awardees. They provided an intimate and informal networking forum. They also encouraged people to stay online to watch the ceremony. They replaced seats at the physical event for corporate sponsors.

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

Considerably more preparation was needed in the planning phase to prepare the awardees and to coordinate the audio-visual set-up and broadcasting. Our MC was based in the UK. We had a production team in her home to film her. We also had a central AV team based in Brussels as one of our other events held the day before used a studio there to broadcast that event, so we kept the same AV team for continuity. The streaming was managed from Brussels. All EURORDIS staff connected remotely. We dealt with this by hiring a Show Director who briefed awardees on the technical requirements and managed our two highly experienced AV production teams.

What were the results/achievements

- 18 award winners from 12 countries
- 460 attendees (235 in 2020) representing 55 countries
- 35 000 votes for the awardees elected by the public (around 6000 in previous years)

- More than 500 messages exchanged in the chat during the live ceremony (90 mins)
- 17 corporate donors (16 in 2020)

What was the wider impact for the association

We produced a professional, high-standard event that helped to raise the profile and outreach for EURORDIS and the rare disease cause. We maintained the annual rendez-vous for corporate donors, even exceeding the funds raised from corporate packages the previous year. We helped viewers feel connected, built community and empathy, and kept them engaged. The event enjoyed high attendance and outreach and helped to raise awareness for the cause among new audiences via the public voting for the awards and subsequent media coverage for awardees.

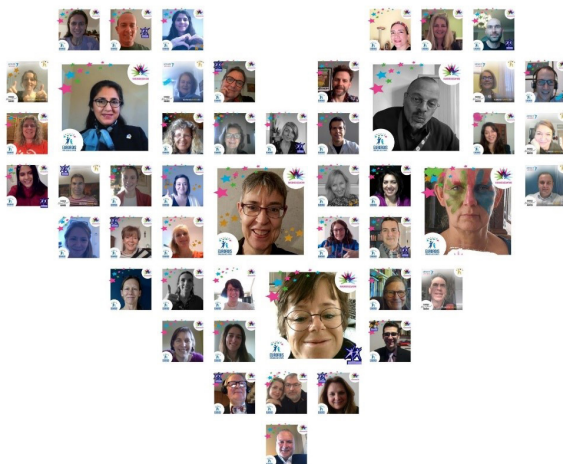
What would you do differently?

We would approach the live fundraising drive differently as fundraising online is more difficult than with a physical audience together in one location. To overcome this, we would work with our Black Pearl Committee to assist them to hold private fundraising dinners in their own homes or companies in the run-up to the event to be able to hit the ground running during the live drive and kick-off with momentum. We would also funnel more of the chat messages to social media as the chat within the online platform killed social media. Post-ceremony networking was also a flop so we would either eliminate this in future or run the event slightly earlier in the day to encourage more people to stay connected and we would promote it more.

Feedback/testimonials

- **Board & Staff:** "Impressive event, very high quality and professionalism with truly inspiring awardees. Successful roundtables with thought-provoking discussions."
- **Person living with a rare disease:** "Thank you for such an amazing event, bringing us together in these times is more important than ever. And seeing all these amazing friends is essential to keep going!"
- **Donor:** "I wanted to congratulate EURORDIS on an outstanding awards ceremony yesterday evening. It was such a humbling and inspiring event, and we applaud EURORDIS for an excellent execution especially in a virtual environment"

<https://blackpearl.eurordis.org/awardees/>



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