

Q&A ISU Virtual Events Toolkit

Q: What is the ISU Virtual Events Toolkit?

A: The Virtual Events Toolkit is an online guide that teaches you how to host different types of virtual events: seminars, Officials' practice, live and non-live competitions, trial judging, monitoring sessions, test events with feedback, and basically any type of virtual event people would like to host for Figure Skating educational or development purposes.

Q: When, where/how did the idea for a “virtual toolkit” originate and how was it realized?

A: When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, different people started to experiment with virtual events in different parts of the world. At some point, these people got connected through networking, and it was like connecting the dots to create the perfect match group: open rinks (it started with some ISU Centers of Excellence), plus motivated ISU Officials, plus people with experience in hosting virtual events. This group of international collaborators worked together to develop different virtual projects, and eventually, the idea of sharing the expertise with the skating community via the ISU's eLearning platform came up as a result of the success of those events.

Q: What is the purpose of the Toolkit and who might find it useful?

A: The purpose is to share the expertise and teach other people how to host their own virtual events. These types of virtual projects are useful to expand the opportunities for Skaters, Coaches, and Officials, for learning, training, and connecting with the community. The virtual tools allow us to cover distances and save travel expenses, so the benefits of uses are endless. Just to name a few: ISU Members whose Skaters are training abroad can follow their training throughout the season; any other skating organizations, like clubs, for example, can invite international experts to their events and seminars; Judges from all over the world can participate in Trial Judging practices from their homes, which simplifies the logistics for them (for example if they have kids or other jobs); Skaters and Coaches can benefit from receiving feedback from international Officials; developing countries can collaborate in virtual competitions with other ISU Members to motivate their Skaters.

Q: What virtual events have already taken place?

A: During the past months there have been several virtual projects organized around the world:

- Informal meetings and seminars explaining rule changes for this year with shared video examples and presentations from ISU experts
- Technical Panel practice sessions (for Singles and Pairs, Ice Dance, and Synchronized Skating)
- Live contests with feedback for Skaters
- Virtual workshops for Skaters, Coaches, and Officials, on different topics: International Judging System (how it works, how to read a report card, etc.), Olympic Movement; English for Figure Skaters; Nutrition for Skaters; Making the most of monitoring Skaters; and more
- Program simulations and feedback (live and with videos)
- Trial Judging (across borders and locally)
- Off ice challenges (Off-ice Spins and Off-ice Choreographies challenges for Skaters that were not allowed to go to the rinks due to lockdown)

Q: What was the virtual Spin Challenge, both on and off-ice, about?

A: The Spin Challenge was a team event, where each team was represented by Skaters from the Centers of Excellence in Bergamo (ITA) and Oberstdorf (GER), and spinners from Mexico City. The Skaters performed different types of spins both on and off the ice that were scored remotely by a Panel of Officials formed by Judges and Technical Specialists. The event was live from 28 locations around the world! It was streamed live and the audience could benefit from the informative commentating that invited judges and specialists made during the replays. At the end of the event, the Skaters received feedback from the Officials in private breakout rooms with their Coaches. This was one of the first virtual events organized when some rinks were open again after lockdown. The focus was to give the Skaters specific goals to reach, in this case, spins, appropriate to where they were in the season and in their training. This format is very rich as it connects people from the international community to collaborate, and at the same time could be very attractive to engage the audience.

Q: How many countries (ISU Members) have been involved so far?

A: The Officials and Skaters who participated in the different virtual events so far were from Canada, the US, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Italy, Norway, UK, Finland, Spain, Germany, China, Russia, Austria, The Netherlands, France, Switzerland, Poland, Estonia, Belarus, Czech Republic, Korea, Great Britain, New Zealand, Latvia, Lithuania, Australia, and Japan.

Q: Can anyone use the tools and materials in the Toolkit?

A: Yes! That is one of the best aspects of the Toolkit: it is free and openly available for anyone to access on the ISU eLearning platform. We even consider it not to be exclusively for Figure Skating projects: any sports organization could use the guides from the Toolkit and adapt them to organize their own virtual events, including Speed Skating and Short Track!

Q: How complicated is it to create a virtual event using the Toolkit?

A: The Toolkit includes easy-to-follow instructions to host several types of virtual events with different levels of complexity. It is like learning the Waltz Jump first before moving onto the Axel: there is a learning curve just like it is for any new skill you would intend to master. We recommend people to start with some simpler projects first, like online seminars or Officials' practice sessions, and then adding the different components of the toolkit to host more complex types of events. The guided instructions included in each section of the Toolkit are presented in both written and video format and include screenshots and recordings to show how the virtual tools work in detail. And there is also the possibility to ask any questions and receive guidance and advice from the team of experts who created the Toolkit.

Q: How could I get some help if I needed assistance getting started?

A: People can reach the Toolkit team of creators by simply sending an email to virtualeventstoolkit@gmail.com asking for help. The ISU eLearning Coordinator will redirect the questions to the experts regarding the specific section of the Toolkit that needs to be explained, and users will get help and advice from them.

There is also the possibility to ask these experts for professional consulting services if people want them to be involved in the development of their own virtual projects.

Q: What are some of the challenges in organizing virtual events?

A: The main challenge is the learning curve that everyone involved in the event has to navigate. As organizers, you need to make sure everyone understands what they have to do, and sometimes it is not easy to realize the doubts that participants may have. You need to consider that people have different levels of technology proficiency, and they need to balance their expertise in Figure Skating with their technology skills. That is the reason why we strongly recommend putting up a system of training and practice sessions that makes everyone feel comfortable with technology and confident on how to do their job.

One of the aspects we highlight in the Toolkit is the fact that Officials are now responsible for preparing everything by themselves before the event, and this process takes some time. Think about all the tasks that are usually covered by the organizing staff and volunteers during normal competitions: print judging sheets, set up the scoring system, clean the desks, connect the computers, make some coffee, etc. Now every participant needs to do all those things in advance! So organizers need to guide them on how to do it best by preparing guiding documents and practice sessions before the event.

Q: There is a lot of information in the Toolkit, what advice would you give someone who wants to organize a virtual event? Where do they start?

A: There is a useful chart in the Introduction section of the Toolkit called “Possibilities with ISU Virtual Tools”. We would recommend checking that first since it shows the different components included in the Toolkit and how people can combine them to create their virtual events. Again, it is important to highlight that the Toolkit is structured according to the level of complexity that each virtual event has. So we would also recommend users to start with a simpler project, like meetings or seminars, before moving on to the more complex events, like live competitions.

Q: How is the Toolkit part of the Keep Learning campaign?

A: The Toolkit is not intended to replace competitions nor any ISU sanctioned event. Its biggest potential lies in the development aspect of Figure Skating around the world, especially to bring closer together the international community to learn from each other. You can see how it fits under the “Keep Learning” campaign because most of the virtual events presented in the Toolkit have an educational purpose: discussion meetings, seminars, trial judging, practice sessions...

Q: Was the Toolkit developed for the current situation or will it remain available in the future?

A: It all started as a need to keep Figure Skating active during the pandemic, but in the process, we realized that these virtual tools have enormous potential and should be incorporated as regular activities from now on. We want the Toolkit to be seen as a source of inspiration and knowledge that will be regularly updated with the objective of sharing the latest opportunities for the Figure Skating community.

Until now, organizations needed to face high costs in order to work together with international experts, but by using these virtual tools all they need is connectivity. We believe the skating community can bring amazing results by working together: we have seen it, we have done it, and this Toolkit is our contribution for the rest of the world to continue creating shared skating experiences in the same way.

Q: Why would it make sense to develop virtual events further?

A: If you think about how the world is evolving, you will realize that embracing digital tools is a global trend. A clear example is the fact that every day more and more companies announce they are changing the way they operate by allowing their employees to work fully remotely. The world is starting to move towards functioning with an online and offline duality, which brings major benefits such as cost-saving and networking expansion. There are numerous ways in which ISU Members and every skating organization can benefit from incorporating virtual events into their regular programs.

Q: How do you see the future of the Toolkit? What events are coming up?

A: We are happy to see that many people are embracing the idea of starting to host virtual events worldwide. Some of the events we know are taking place are international monitoring sessions, some domestic competitions, trial judging events, national seminars given by international Officials.

Q: How can spectators/fans be involved in watching virtual events?

A: The virtual events can help create an important engagement with fans, because all of them can be streamed live for the audience or shared as on-demand videos. You can also host webinars or virtual workshops to teach spectators about the different aspects of the sport. For example, you can show them how a Technical Panel operates live by hosting a TP practice session and stream it live.

Q: Does the development of virtual events mean that there will not be real competitions anymore in the future?

A: The virtual events are not meant to replace high-end ISU competitions but rather to provide opportunities for all Skaters, Coaches, and Officials to participate in a variety of ways to keep on skating now and in the future when we all get back on the ice.

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