INTERNATIONAL YEAR
OF CAVES AND KARST 2021
“Explore, understand and protect”
www.iyck2021.org

PLANNING GUIDE FOR
VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES
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Early 2020, the UIS published a Planning Guide to help our members and partners develop events for 2021, the International Year of Caves and Karst (IYCK). Two months later, the world’s activities closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and many found it difficult to use the ideas of the Planning Guide. As 2021 begins, this new guide gives directions on how you and clubs can create virtual IYCK events and conduct other valuable activities safely during the pandemic.

Visit the IYCK website
The website has a lot of general information about caves and karst. Share it with the people so they can learn more. Go to the Download page for the logo, leaflet, posters, and other materials to help you. You do not need special permission. The information is free and open to everyone. Also, remember to share the UIS Facebook page.

Understand the IYCK goals
The purpose of the IYCK is to teach the world about caves and karst. Think about the best ways to reach people who need to know what speleologists understand. If you organize meetings for cave explorers and scientists, that is good, but it is important that they include the public too, or at least some influential people who need to learn about caves and karst. I’ll give some examples below but remember to stay focused on the public.

“International” does not always mean “big”
Some people think that because this is the International Year, they need to plan big and complicated activities. If you can do that, excellent! But many times, several small activities can be better at reaching the public than one big event. The UIS has said from the start that you should “do what you can.” No activity is too small!

Use virtual tools
There are now many ways to connect with people. Use teleconference tools like Zoom to give lectures about caves and karst. Do you know teachers? Offer free lectures for their students about caves. You can do the same for meetings of non-speleological organizations. You can also record your voice in PowerPoint as you give your lecture, then load it on YouTube or social media for download. Go out into the karst with your camera or camera phone and record a field trip that you can share. For a small amount of time and effort, you can reach hundreds or thousands of people this way over the year. You can also use your virtual presentations in the ideas below.

Call the news media
Television, newspapers, magazines, radio, and Internet news media are always looking for something different and exciting to report. They like stories of scientific curiosity. Call and tell them about interesting discoveries and caves in your area. Show them your virtual presentation. What may not seem interesting to you could be very interesting to the media. Always connect your story to the International Year to show that caves and karst are internationally important, and that your words stand with a worldwide community that knows caves are important. Through the media, you will reach thousands of people!
Ask for proclamations

Many elected officials make proclamations that say they recognize an important event. Ask the mayor of your town, governor of your region, or other officials to proclaim that your town or region recognizes 2021 as the International Year of Caves and Karst! Be prepared to give a virtual presentation, as above, to explain the importance of the Year. These proclamations will get even more attention from the news media and will help with other outreach ideas below.

Contact policymakers

Who makes the laws in your area that protect your environment, water, ecosystems, and cultural heritage? Are their laws good at protecting caves and karst? If not, call them. Show them what they need to understand and help them develop better and more effective laws.

Contact land managers

Sometimes you have good protection laws, but the managers don’t understand caves and karst well enough to use them properly. Some managers don’t understand caves and karst are important. Teach the managers. Make them excited about caves and karst. They will become better at protecting caves and, when the pandemic is over, they may become good partners in helping you find new caves to explore!

Call your show caves and karst parks

The International Show Caves Association (ISCA) supports the IYCK but not all show caves are ISCA members. Tell show caves in your area about the IYCK and ISCA. Also, contact parks in karst areas. Show caves and parks are always looking for new ways to attract tourists. By connecting them to the IYCK, they can prove their importance to the regional economy and bring in more tourists when the pandemic is over by showing they are not just local curiosities but parts of a globally recognized valuable natural resource. Also, encourage them to connect with caves and parks in other countries to develop sister-cave or sister-park relationships. If they work on that during the pandemic, it will result in more tourism, media attention, and public education later. In 2019, more than 144 million people visited show caves. Show caves are our best partners at reaching and teaching millions of people about caves and karst. Work with them!

Work with partners

Several of the steps above involve developing partnerships for the IYCK. Think about other partners who can join you. Of course, you will first think about speleological organizations, but then contact groups that are not involved with caves. Remember that we need to teach others about caves, so
tell your local hiking, climbing, water protection, nature, archaeological, or other groups that their area has caves or is karst. Join their virtual meetings and give presentations. Help change them from groups that only use the karst to groups that understand and protect it.

Create virtual conferences

Conferences are usually for specialists, not the general public. If you organize a virtual conference, invite some of the people mentioned above, such as lawmakers, land managers, and others whose work affects caves and karst, but who do not understand it. Give them free registrations to the conference so they can learn and create partnerships. They probably would not join the conference if they had to pay, but their attendance at a virtual conference will cost you nothing but may gain you a lot.

Be creative

You are not limited to the ideas in this guide. Think of other ideas that can engage the public during the pandemic, such as art, video, and music contests for caves and karst. Create fun programs for young people on Tik Tok, Instagram, and other social media. If you are at a university, company, or organization with its own magazine and social media, send articles for posting about your cave and karst work. It will benefit the IYCK and will be good for your career. There are many other creative possibilities.

Post your activities to the IYCK website

It is important that you announce your events, no matter how small, on the Events page of the website. Use the Contact Us page to send your information in the format shown on the Events page. After your event, send a website or social media link, PowerPoint, PDF, or other report that describes your event’s attendance, activities, and results. If you create a video, online story, or are part of a news report, send those links for posting on the Events page too. At the end of the year, we will compile all IYCK activities into one report that can be used by anyone in the years ahead to demonstrate the importance of caves and karst. This report will help future speleologists find funding and support for exploration, research, and better management of caves and karst.

Everyone is welcome and encouraged to because part of the IYCK. We are trying to reach the world and need your help. Please join us and contact me if you have any questions (gveni@nckri.org). Remember, Explore, Understand, Protect.