

IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)
New Worlds - Non-Traditional Space Education and Outreach (7)

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‘THE ASTRONAUT MENTALITY SERIES’: REIMAGINING ON-SITE COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH THROUGH ONLINE INTERACTIVE WEBINARS IN THE ERA
OF COVID-19

Abstract

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced all space and STEM organizations to rethink their usual in-person outreach and engagement strategies, prompting a move to online and virtual worlds. Project PoSSUM (Polar Suborbital Science of the Upper Mesosphere) and the International Institute of Astronautical Sciences (IIAS) were no different. As a citizen-scientist bioastronautics, planetary science, and educational not-for-profit organization, PoSSUM/IIAS typically engages in on-site operational activities such as parabolic flight testing, planetary geology tool development field testing, intravehicular/extravehicular activity (IVA/EVA) spacesuit operations, and operational space medicine simulations. The COVID-19 pandemic placed on-site operations on hold, and the organization instead focused on engaging its members and the greater public with the ‘Astronaut Mentality Webinar Series’. This series consisted of ten one-hour long panels focusing on exploration perspectives to help the public cope with quarantine and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each episode consisted of a different panel of IIAS/PoSSUM members and focused on a unique skill or outlook, including resilience, resourcefulness, and austere environment preparedness, with time dedicated to interactive online discussion with the audience afterwards. This presentation will focus on the webinar series structure, engagement, lessons learned, and future opportunities.