



2026 Synchronized Skating Community Insights Report

Understanding Culture, Access, and Development in Synchronized Skating

Comprehensive Analysis | 242 Global Respondents | 6 Governing Body Interviews

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OneTeamMVMT

Growing Synchronized Skating, Worldwide

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Canada



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
The Unique Position of OneTeamMVMT.....	2
Report Scope and Limitations.....	3
Key Findings	4
1. Financial Accessibility.....	4
2. Geographic Disparities in Access and Resources.....	9
3. Gaps in Judging System Comprehension.....	10
4. Coach Development Remains Inconsistent Globally.....	12
5. Olympic Aspiration as Unifying Goal.....	14
Recurring Additional Themes	16
Research Notes	17
Research Purpose.....	17
Methodology Overview.....	18
Acknowledgement of Limitations.....	19
Conclusion	20
Summary of Insights.....	20
Research Contributions.....	21
Closing Vision.....	21
About OneTeamMVMT.....	22
Appendix: Recurring Additional Themes	23
Appendix: References	27

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides a holistic review of the current challenges and aspirations of the synchronized skating (synchro) community.

While individual federations track participation within their own jurisdictions, and academic researchers have explored aspects of the sport, this is one of the first studies to survey a large and diverse set of international voices on the subject.



Global Community Survey

Electronic distribution to the international synchronized skating community (skaters, parents, coaches, alumni)

242 Total Responses;
136 skaters, 38 parents, 22 coaches, 46 alumni



Governing Body Interviews

6 in-depth conversations with 7 Governing Body Representatives in Canada (2), Finland (1), Germany (1), Italy (2), and the USA (1)

This report represents insights from 17 countries and 242 active community members, including current skaters, parents of skaters, coaches, and alumni. This was complemented by in-depth conversations with 7 governing body representatives across Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy and the USA.

This research identified five major findings:

1. The cost of participation has created a tiered system, where financial capacity determines advancement.
2. Geographic location determines synchronized skating opportunity, aside from a skater's skill or interest in the sport.
3. Gaps were found in comprehension of the judging and scoring system. While most stakeholders rated their judging knowledge positively, 96% of skaters and parents felt that more judging education was needed.
4. Coach development varied significantly by country, with a lack of time and resources presenting significant challenges for the professional development of coaches.
5. Olympic inclusion emerged as a universal aspiration across federations.



The Unique Position of OneTeamMVMT

Synchronized skating is governed internationally by the International Skating Union (ISU) and nationally by member federations, which together oversee a wide range of responsibilities including rulemaking, athlete pathways, and competitions. OneTeamMVMT operates outside of this governance structure but within the same global ecosystem of the sport, complementing the efforts of the ISU and federations by fostering connection and engagement across the synchronized skating community.

As an independent, not-for-profit organization headquartered in Canada, OneTeamMVMT focuses on connecting participants across national boundaries, sharing knowledge and perspectives from athletes, coaches, and stakeholders, and supporting the growth of synchronized skating at all levels. Through community engagement, programming, and research initiatives such as this report, we aim to amplify shared insights and contribute to the continued development of the sport worldwide.

With this mission in mind, OneTeamMVMT undertook this project to better understand the motivations, experiences, and constraints shaping the synchronized skating community today, with the goal of identifying opportunities that can help support the sport's future growth.

This report fulfills multiple functions:

For the synchronized skating community: It provides evidence-based documentation of the current perceptions of the sport, including barriers to access, ongoing challenges as the sport evolves, and opportunities for advancing the sport. It can validate experiences that may have felt unique or isolated, contribute to important conversations, and inspire solutions to common challenges.

For federations and organizations: It complements existing knowledge with cross-border perspectives, highlighting both universal patterns and regional variations that can help inform policy development, program design, and international initiatives.

For OneTeamMVMT: It offers strategic context for future programming, partnerships, and resource allocation, ensuring organizational efforts meet the needs of today's synchro community while supporting a successful future for the sport.



Report Scope and Limitations

This report documents the current state of synchronized skating globally through analysis of survey responses from 242 self-selected participants, including 136 current skaters, 38 parents, 22 coaches, and 46 alumni. The research also incorporated interviews with 7 governing body representatives who oversee synchronized skating development in 5 countries: Canada (2), Finland (1), Germany (1), Italy (2), and the United States (1). The project was supported through a Canadian government grant and designed and executed by a research lead with experience in academic research, community insights, and brand research for organizations including FedEx.

The purpose of this research is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is intended to establish a baseline understanding of community experiences, perceived barriers, and opportunities for growth within synchronized skating. The findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory insights rather than definitive conclusions about the global synchronized skating population.

Several important limitations should be considered when interpreting the results. Survey participants were self-selected and largely consisted of individuals already engaged with synchronized skating and aware of OneTeamMVMT’s work, creating the potential for selection bias. In addition, the survey was offered only in English, French, German, and Finnish, which may have limited

participation from other linguistic communities and contributed to stronger representation from North American and Western European contexts.

The sample size also represents only a small portion of the broader synchronized skating community. There are an estimated 1,000+ synchronized skating teams in North America alone. Assuming an average roster size of 16 skaters per team, this suggests approximately 16,000 athletes, excluding coaches, families, alumni, officials, and other stakeholders connected to the sport. As a result, the perspectives captured in this study cannot fully represent the diversity of experiences across all regions, competitive levels, and demographic groups globally.

To address this limitation, this analysis prioritizes consistent themes that emerged across multiple participant groups and data sources, while smaller trends and region-specific issues are documented separately in the Appendix (page 23).

Finally, this research reflects synchronized skating during a specific period in late 2025 and early 2026 and should be viewed as a starting point for ongoing research and discussion rather than a final or exhaustive assessment of the sport.

For a more detailed discussion of research limitations, methodology, and interpretation guidance, see the “Acknowledgment of Limitations” section later in this report (page 19).



KEY FINDINGS

Through analyzed qualitative survey data and interviews with governing bodies, this research revealed five major findings:

KEY FINDING 1: Financial Accessibility

Cost emerged as the most significant barrier to synchronized skating participation globally. In this report, all costs were converted to US Dollars (USD) unless otherwise specified, for consistency across international data.

Participation Costs (\$USD)

Beyond factors such as skill and age, financial capacity emerged as a major determinant of participation and advancement in synchronized skating. Survey respondents ranked “cost/financial burden” as the single most significant barrier to participation, with 49% identifying it as their primary concern.

Survey respondents were asked to self-report approximate annual synchronized skating costs, including shared team expenses such as ice time, coaching, competition entry fees, costumes, team makeup, and shared travel or hotel costs, while excluding personal expenses such as skates, sharpening, private coaching, off-ice training, and personal travel upgrades.

Survey data showed that annual costs reported by skaters and parents reached as high as \$30,000 USD per year for elite senior teams. After excluding outliers, North American respondents reported mean annual costs of \$4,217 USD in Canada (n=35, range \$504–\$28,800) and \$11,155 USD in the United States (n=28, range \$1,550–\$30,000), while European and other international participants (Rest of World or “ROW”) averaged \$4,765 USD (n=78, range \$540–\$17,500).

These wide ranges underscore synchronized skating’s dual nature: relatively accessible at grassroots levels (1–2 weekly practices, local competitions) but requiring substantial investment at advanced levels (daily training, specialized coaching, extensive travel). As skaters progress, costs can increase substantially at each level, creating an “affordability cliff,” where continued participation must be repeatedly reassessed based on financial capacity.

Some families choose to leave the sport when their skater moves up to higher levels due to a significant increase in costs required to participate. The data on this is limited by the absence of feedback from parents of former skaters who left the sport as children, although 13 out of 46 alumni (28%) reported that financial reasons were all or part of their decision to leave the sport. These cost barriers mean that progression in synchronized skating increasingly depends not only on athletic ability, but also on a family’s ability to absorb escalating costs.



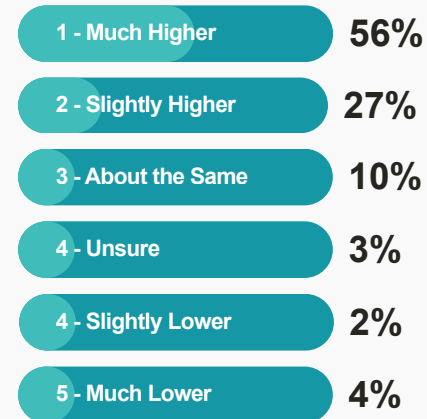
Table 1. Annual Participation Costs and Practice Time Requirements by Region and Competitive Level

Level Tier	Average Annual Cost (\$USD)	Average Practice Time
Entry	USA: \$3,754 Range: \$1,550–\$7,000 (n=12) CAN: \$2,272 Range: \$504–\$7,200 (n=29) ROW: \$1,943 Range: \$540–\$3,700 (n=19)	3.5 hours/week Range: 1-8 hrs
Intermediate	USA: \$9,912 Range: \$400–\$15,000 (n=8) CAN: \$5,640 Range: \$4,600–\$7,200 (n=3) ROW: \$7,113 Range: \$1,900–\$10,000 (n=3)	7.4 hours/week Range: 3-15 hrs
Elite	USA: \$23,500 Range: \$10,000–\$30,000 (n=8) CAN: \$21,600 Range: \$18,000–\$28,800 (n=3) ROW: \$5,597 Range: \$2,180–\$17,640 (n=49)	15.1 hours/week Range: 8-32 hrs

Note. “Entry” includes Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Juvenile, Juvenile, Open Juvenile, and Mixed Age. “Intermediate” includes Pre-Novice, Novice, Intermediate, and Open. “Elite” includes Junior and Senior.

Note. Due to the wide range of responses for elite-level ROW teams, the asymmetric interquartile range (IQR) method was applied to remove the lowest outliers around a median of \$5,450. This was necessary given that responses did not distinguish between ISU and non-ISU Junior or Senior teams.

Figure 1. How Respondents Rate the Cost of Synchronized Skating vs Other Sports / Extracurriculars in Their Area



Survey data also showed that while only 8% of skaters and parents rated synchronized skating as “very unaffordable,” over one-third (35%) found it at least somewhat unaffordable, and 82% indicated costs were higher than other organized activities in their area. When respondents assessed affordability relative to their own family situation, most responses clustered between “neutral” and “somewhat unaffordable.”

These responses suggest that for many families, synchronized skating exists near the upper limit of what is financially manageable. When asked how OneTeamMVMT could better support the community, requests for funding or scholarship opportunities were identified by 59% of coaches, 10% of parents, 7% of skaters, and 4% of alumni.



The financial accessibility challenges documented in this study also reflect broader trends across youth sport participation. Research examining Canadian youth sports provides a relevant comparison: Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities' 2025 Cost and Barriers to Sports Participation Study surveyed nearly 6,000 parents/caregivers of children aged 2 to 17 across Canada about youth participation in organized sports including soccer, swimming, basketball, hockey, dance, baseball, gymnastics, and others. The study found that 44% of Canadian parents report being unable to afford to register their children in organized sports, while 81% of sport organizations indicate that costs to run youth programming have risen (Jumpstart, 2023, 2025). The average yearly spending for all children in organized sports was found to be \$3,064 CAD.

The OneTeamMVMT survey found the average annual cost of synchronized skating participation to be approximately \$6,000 USD (\$8,300 CAD) across all respondents. Because the Jumpstart study measures youth sport costs for participants aged 2–17, responses likely representing adult participants (Junior, Senior, and Adult levels) were excluded for comparison.

Even with these adjustments, the estimated average cost of youth synchronized skating remains approximately \$6,000 CAD per year—nearly double the national youth sport average of \$3,064 CAD. Critically, the Jumpstart research revealed that registration fees represent only a small portion of total family expenditure on youth sports,

with the majority of costs coming from equipment, apparel, tournaments, travel, and coaching—a pattern that disproportionately affects lower-income, rural, Indigenous, and newcomer families (Jumpstart, 2025).

These Canadian findings underscore that the cost barriers facing the synchronized skating community are part of a systemic affordability crisis across youth sports, where access increasingly depends on household financial capacity rather than athletic merit or interest.

Team Sponsorship Patterns and Funding Sources

Teams employ various strategies to offset costs through sponsorship and external funding. Survey findings showed:

- 42% of respondents' teams receive some form of sponsorship or support (financial contributions, in-kind donations, discounted products/services)
- 44% of respondents' teams receive no sponsorship
- 14% of respondents were unsure whether their team receives sponsorship

Among responses from 78 individuals whose teams receive sponsorship, sources included:

- Local businesses (often small business, family-owned, or connected to team members) (10 mentions or 12.8%)
- Parents' workplaces through corporate giving programs (1 mention or 1.3%)
- Skating-specific companies providing discounted or donated equipment (12 mentions or 15.4%)



- Community organizations supporting youth sport development (8 mentions or 10.3%)
- National skating federations, provincial funding, or the International Skating Union (13 mentions or 16.7%)

Survey responses indicated that sponsorship relationships are often informal, inconsistent, and small-scale rather than representing transformative financial support.

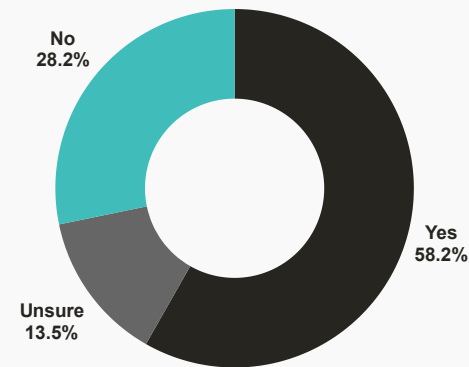
Fundraising Initiatives and Effectiveness

Survey data showed that fundraising emerged as the most common strategy for improving financial accessibility, with 58% of teams actively fundraising to reduce member costs.

“Our annual BBQ raises about \$4,000 which we split among team members to offset costume and travel costs. It's become a community tradition people look forward to it each year.”
 — Parent Survey Respondent

Successful initiatives included BBQ/food sales, performance-based events (holiday shows, exhibitions), competition concessions, and corporate sponsorships. Many fundraising teams also reported using fundraising websites such as GoFundMe as well as soliciting donations from friends and family. Respondents described raising between \$900-\$5,000 per year for their team through these efforts.

Figure 2. Whether Teams Fundraise to Support Skater Financial Burden



However, the survey indicated that while fundraising provides some financial relief, its impact is limited in addressing overall affordability challenges. Most reported fundraising efforts generated approximately \$50–\$300 per skater, which typically covers only 5–10% of average annual costs (based on an estimated mean annual cost of \$6,000 per skater).

These findings suggest that fundraising alone is not sufficient to meaningfully offset participation costs at scale. More targeted research on fundraising practices could provide evidence-based guidance on which approaches maximize financial benefit while minimizing volunteer burden. This would enable organizations such as OneTeamMVMT and federations to offer more structured, evidence-based strategies and resources.



Funding Disparities for Grassroots Development

While some teams competing at an advanced level receive substantial national federation support through coaching subsidies, travel assistance, and technical expertise, federations acknowledge capacity constraints that limit grassroots programming.

“When speaking about finances, this hit our organization hard this year. Our rates went up \$1,000 per skater (across almost 40 skaters) because of changes with ice rates. We would love to find resources on how to ask for sponsorships or financial support from companies or ideas for fundraising.”
 — Parent Survey Respondent

This challenge is compounded by government funding models that prioritize Olympic sports, leaving synchronized skating with limited resources despite growing participation demand.

For example, the Italian Federation’s Technical Committee noted that differences in budget allocation between figure skating and synchronized skating are largely linked to the Olympic status of the disciplines. As synchronized skating is not currently included in the Olympic program, it is subject to different funding frameworks compared to Olympic disciplines such as singles, pairs, and ice dance.

As a result, synchronized skating programs operate within federations alongside Olympic disciplines that are prioritized by national sport funding bodies and National Olympic Committees, reflecting broader institutional funding criteria rather than federation-level preferences.

The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: non-Olympic status limits government funding, which constrains federation budgets for synchronized skating development, which prevents the scale of programming and competitive success that might strengthen Olympic inclusion arguments.

Financial Barriers in Federation Context

Interviews with Skating Federation representatives from Canada, USA, Finland, Italy, and Germany provided additional perspective on financial sustainability challenges. Representatives noted that while federations can provide coaching education, competition infrastructure, and technical support, they have limited capacity to address the fundamental cost-drivers of ice rental and team operations. Financial support from federations typically targets elite-level teams as described in the previous section, but entry-level programs frequently lack similar resources. This creates a challenging paradox: grassroots growth is essential for building a participation base, yet resources are understandably concentrated on supporting elite athletes who represent countries internationally.



One survey respondent highlighted the precarious financial position many teams face. A \$1,000 per-skater increase amounts to \$40,000 in additional costs for a 40-member synchro organization, a transformative burden that likely forces some families to discontinue participation. These sudden cost increases, often beyond a team’s control, highlight the need for diversified funding models that can buffer against facility cost volatility. Understanding and addressing the structural cost drivers of synchronized skating—particularly ice rental—will be essential for improving long-term affordability and preventing cost escalation from limiting participation.

KEY FINDING 2: Geographic Disparities in Access and Resources

Access to ice facilities and synchronized skating programs varies significantly by region, resulting in uneven opportunities to enter the sport in the first place. In some areas, limited rink availability, lack of local teams, or long travel distances mean that participation is not determined solely by athletic skill or commitment, but by whether appropriate infrastructure exists nearby.

Survey data confirmed “Access to ice / limited practice opportunities” as the second-highest ranked barrier globally, following cost/affordability. Challenges were particularly acute in Australia, where respondents reported very limited local ice availability and significant travel

requirements. One skater described driving four hours and staying overnight to access off-season ice time.

In many regions, synchronized skating programs must compete with hockey, figure skating, and recreational programming for limited facility time, often resulting in late-night or early-morning practices. Travel distance further compounds this barrier. Nearly one-third of families (32%) reported travelling more than 20 km (12+ miles) one-way for regular practices, with some travelling 1–2 hours each way. Even in countries with established synchronized skating communities, such as Canada and the United States, rural and regional areas face structural constraints due to smaller skater populations and limited ice infrastructure.

“[My team level] - Open - gets the lowest priority in ice times, resulting in us having incredibly late practices (ending at 11 or later on a weekday). This hurts our retention due to scheduling issues.”
- Skater Survey Respondent

These limitations have direct consequences for athlete development. In Australia, Senior and Junior team members reported practicing only 1–3 days per week compared with Finnish Senior teams reporting approximately 5 practice days per week. Differences in



available training time translate into unequal preparation opportunities, shaping competitive outcomes long before athletes step onto the ice.

Geographic disparities also extend to competition access. While one Finnish respondent reported competing approximately 8 times per year, Australian teams (n=12) averaged only 5 competitions annually, despite comparable participation costs. In established synchronized skating markets, dense domestic competition schedules provide regular performance opportunities, technical feedback, and progression pathways. In geographically isolated or emerging markets, limited event availability restricts these opportunities regardless of athlete dedication or financial investment.

The result is a structural imbalance: geography—not talent, effort, or commitment—often determines the opportunities available to synchronized skaters. Without targeted strategies to address regional infrastructure gaps, these disparities are likely to persist, shaping participation, athlete development, and competitive outcomes across regions. Potential strategies include expanding or improving ice rink access in underserved areas, strengthening regional competition structures, and providing targeted coaching and program development support for emerging communities.

KEY FINDING 3: Gaps in Judging System Comprehension

Comprehension of synchronized skating's judging system varies widely across the community, with many skaters, parents, and even coaches reporting difficulty navigating the technical rules and scoring framework.

Survey data indicates that 25% of skaters and 50% of parents have limited understanding of the judging and scoring system, while 31% of the broader community overall reported low comprehension. Despite this, nearly all respondents (96% of skaters and parents) indicated a desire for increased education on judging, even among those who felt they had an adequate understanding.

This knowledge gap has practical implications for training, performance preparation, audience engagement, and overall satisfaction with the competitive experience. When asked specifically about education needs, 96% of skaters and parents supported increased judging education for at least one group (skaters, parents/caregivers, or fans), with many selecting multiple audiences.

Among the 22 coaches who completed the survey, navigating the complex judging system presented ongoing



Figure 3. Skaters' Self-Reported Understanding of the Judging System in Synchro (1–7 Scale)



challenges, particularly for grassroots coaches less familiar with the technical framework. Beyond comprehension challenges, coaches identified significant frustrations with rule communication and maintenance. Nearly one-quarter of coaches (23%) cited frequent rule changes as a major challenge, with some coaches requesting synchronized

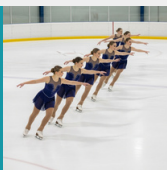
“The rules change every single year, which makes it hard to adapt”
- *Coach Survey Respondent*

skating "leave the rules for some years without changes (see single skating)" as "this would make it easier to learn how to understand the rules and increase the level of performances." Others highlighted structural issues in documentation, with 9% noting the need to cross-reference multiple documents and requesting "one big database or guideline that coaches can refer to" rather than dispersed materials.

A technical specialist further noted that "even some of the best and most experienced coaches in the country contact me weekly to double check the wording of the rules." Together, these findings point to ongoing challenges in rule clarity, consistency, and accessibility, as well as a need for more centralized and plain-language documentation.

Without a clearer understanding of the judging system, competitive experiences may feel arbitrary or opaque, even when performances are technically strong. Improving transparency and accessibility therefore represents an opportunity for targeted education initiatives and more effective communication of rules across all stakeholder groups.

This gap in comprehension has implications across the entire community. Coaches require strong rule knowledge to build successful programs; skaters need it to train strategically and remain engaged; parents benefit from



understanding the system they invest in; and broader audience engagement depends on the ability to follow how performances are evaluated. For synchronized skating to grow as a judged sport, the scoring framework must be accessible enough to be understood not only by experts, but by the wider community that supports it.

KEY FINDING 4: Coach Development Remains Inconsistent Globally

Coach development plays a critical role in program quality, athlete development, and the long-term sustainability of synchronized skating. However, infrastructure for coach education varies significantly across countries and regions. While some federations have established formalized development pathways, many areas still lack synchronized skating-specific training, certification, or continuing education opportunities. These inconsistencies affect not only coaching quality, but also the ability of emerging programs to grow and retain athletes.

Survey data suggests that even highly motivated coaches face structural barriers to professional development. Among the 22 coaches surveyed, half (50%) identified lack of time as the greatest obstacle, followed by limited availability of development opportunities (27%), financial cost (14%), and travel requirements for in-person training (9%).

Time constraints appear particularly significant. Nearly three-quarters of surveyed coaches (73%) reported having employment outside of coaching, including part-time work (32%), full-time employment (23%), or multiple jobs (14%). Many also coach multiple teams or skating disciplines, and some continue to skate themselves on synchronized skating teams. Balancing these commitments can make sustained professional development difficult.

When asked to evaluate the quality of coaching education resources available in their home countries, respondents reported mixed experiences: 23% rated resources as “Good,” 45% as “Fair,” and 27% as “Poor,” suggesting uneven access to training and support across regions.

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"It's not so easy to work with all the coaches, because some coaches are quite, let's say, fixed, in their opinion... It's not only for synchro. It's the same also in the other disciplines."

— *Italian Federation Representative*

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Importantly, coaching development in synchronized skating extends beyond technical rule knowledge and



scoring strategy. Coaches are often responsible not only for athlete development and competitive preparation, but also for recruitment and retention, team culture, budgeting, parent communication, music and costume coordination, ice scheduling, athlete wellbeing, injury management, and navigating body image and mental health concerns. These multidimensional responsibilities require a broader range of leadership and management skills than are typically addressed in traditional technical coaching pathways.

Interviews with governing bodies highlighted several approaches that may help strengthen coach development systems. In Canada, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) provides a structured pathway from entry-level to high-performance coaching, including synchronized skating-specific modules. Virtual mentorship initiatives are also used to connect emerging coaches with experienced practitioners for ongoing guidance and support, highlighting the potential for online learning and digital collaboration to reduce geographic barriers to professional development. Also mentioned was a developing “Specialist Support Model” in parts of Canada, where elite teams are connected with experts such as mental performance consultants, technical specialists, and skating skills experts from other disciplines, reflecting the multifaceted demands of coaching synchronized skating.

Finland similarly integrates synchronized skating into its broader figure skating coach education system while

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"Mental performance coaching plays a critical role in supporting athlete well-being and optimizing performance. Certified consultants work directly with teams and athletes to build focus, resilience, and consistency, while strengthening coach-athlete relationships. This integrated model has proven impactful and is reflected across all levels of sport in Canada.."

— Provincial Skating Organization Representative in Canada

”

offering advanced synchronized skating-specific modules. A key structural difference is its club-based employment model, where coaches are typically employed and salaried by skating clubs rather than working primarily as independent contractors. In this system, clubs have a direct vested interest in coach development and often provide financial support for continuing education and training. According to one federation representative, “In Finland, the coaches are employed by the clubs... and quite often the clubs are then funding and providing coaches with educational courses.” While coach education is federation-led, coaches participate as individuals rather than through mandatory enforcement. Still, Finland’s system is distinguished by two reinforcing factors: clubs frequently fund education for their employed coaches, and the federation substantially subsidizes training course costs to support professional development. Together, these elements create a more integrated ecosystem for coach development among the countries interviewed.



“

"What I truly love about coaching is that it's evolving so much that it's never the same."

— Canadian Federation Representative

”

Despite these examples, many synchronized skating coaches continue to work in relative isolation, particularly in emerging markets or regions with limited federation resources. In these environments, coaches often develop their methods through trial and error, with fewer opportunities to exchange knowledge with peers, access evidence-based resources, or learn from international best practices. Over time, these gaps can contribute to uneven athlete development and slower program growth across regions.

These challenges are often most pronounced in areas already facing infrastructure and geographic barriers. In regions with fewer synchronized skating programs, limited access to mentorship networks, specialized expertise, and formal education pathways can compound existing constraints. As a result, disparities in coaching development reinforce broader structural inequalities,

affecting athlete progression, program sustainability, and long-term competitive outcomes.

KEY FINDING 5: Olympic Aspiration as a Unifying Goal

Across stakeholder groups, Olympic inclusion emerged as a critical driver for synchronized skating's growth. Survey respondents identified visibility and awareness as the third most common concern after ice access and coaching, with many viewing Olympic recognition as the primary mechanism to elevate the sport's global profile and address participation challenges.

Visibility

The synchronized skating community relies heavily on visibility for recruitment and retention. Half of surveyed coaches (50%) cited insufficient athlete recruitment and retention as one of their greatest professional challenges. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of current skaters reported starting synchronized skating after observing a team practice or performance, highlighting untapped potential among youth who simply are unaware the sport exists.



“I would love for it to be an Olympic discipline, I would definitely be the first one to support it.”
— *Canadian Federation Representative*

Survey respondents explicitly linked Olympic inclusion to addressing this visibility gap. In open-ended responses about growth priorities and future aspirations, 57 respondents (24% of total) independently referenced the Olympics, transcending competitive levels, age groups, and geographic regions. Parents and alumni emphasized that Olympic recognition would “provide exposure to have a global audience” and help establish “wider availability of teams and ice.” One alumni respondent reflected this sentiment directly: “This sport is literally the perfect sport for athletes of any race, gender, ability, etc! The Olympics should love this!”

This aspiration was echoed by governing body representatives, who universally identified Olympic inclusion as a long-term strategic priority. The 2034 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, United States is often viewed as a potential opportunity, given the strength of the synchronized skating community in the United States and

their historical role in the sport’s foundation and ongoing development. While IOC decision-making timelines remain uncertain, Olympic recognition functions as a unifying objective across stakeholder groups.

Legitimacy

Beyond visibility, Olympic inclusion is also perceived as a pathway to greater legitimacy within the broader figure skating ecosystem. Federation representatives and community members frequently expressed frustration that synchronized skating does not currently receive comparable recognition to Olympic disciplines such as singles, pairs, and ice dance. Coaches expressed a desire for synchronized skating to be “included on an equal basis in [their federations’] communications and promotions.”

A representative of a provincial skating organization in Canada noted that synchronized skaters are “exceptionally dedicated and talented, committing years of rigorous training, and deserve the opportunity to compete at the Olympic Games.” While acknowledging that Olympic inclusion involves significant structural and logistical considerations, respondents pointed to the addition of newer Olympic sports as evidence that the Games continue to evolve—and that synchronized skating already meets the standard of an Olympic-caliber discipline.



Resource Allocation

This perceived lack of Olympic status also has tangible implications for resource allocation. Several stakeholders noted that national and regional sport governing bodies often prioritize funding and program support for Olympic disciplines, which can result in comparatively limited investment in synchronized skating. This affects programming capacity, coach development pathways, and team support structures across multiple regions. As a result, Olympic inclusion is widely viewed not only as symbolic recognition, but also as a mechanism that could unlock greater financial and structural support for the sport globally.

RECURRING ADDITIONAL THEMES

While the five key findings presented above represent the most significant patterns identified through this research, several additional themes also emerged consistently across both survey responses and governing body interviews. Although these themes did not rise to the level of the primary findings, they nonetheless highlight important dimensions of the synchronized skating experience and provide valuable context for stakeholders seeking to support athletes, strengthen programs, and advance the sport more broadly.

The recurring additional themes documented in the Appendix (page 23) include:

- Sport Awareness and Public Recognition Remains Limited
- Team Culture Affects Experience Quality and Retention
- Performance Opportunities Support Community Building and Awareness
- Persistent Stigma: Synchronized Skating as a "Lesser" Discipline
- Parent Volunteer Labour Sustains Programs
- Mental and Physical Health as Primary Athlete Challenge

Collectively, these themes illustrate the complex social, cultural, and operational realities surrounding synchronized skating. Limited public awareness remains a persistent challenge, with one alumni respondent noting that “most times, when I say I do synchro I have to clarify skating and not swimming,” while simultaneously noting that “people think it’s really cool once they know it exists.” Team culture similarly emerged as an important factor influencing athlete retention and overall experience quality, with some alumni describing environments that “felt a little bit toxic,” highlighting how interpersonal dynamics can profoundly shape whether athletes remain in the sport long-term.

Respondents also described an ongoing stigma surrounding



“I have had a lot of experiences where coaches from other disciplines view it as 'the easy way out' and often imply that I was not talented enough to make it in another discipline”
—Alumni Survey Respondent”

synchronized skating, including perceptions that it is “the easy way out” compared to other skating disciplines. These attitudes contrast sharply with the technical complexity, athletic demands, and training commitment required in modern synchronized skating, particularly at advanced competitive levels.

The operational realities of synchronized skating present additional challenges for athletes and families. Parent volunteer labour emerged as an essential component of many programs, with 86% of parent respondents reporting volunteering “often” or “sometimes.” Ice scheduling was also identified as a recurring concern, with teams frequently assigned late-evening practice times after 9:00 or 10:00 PM, creating logistical and lifestyle challenges for families with young athletes.

For detailed analysis, supporting data, and additional context on each recurring theme, please refer to the Appendix: “Recurring Additional Themes Across the Community” (page

23), where each topic is explored and supported by quantitative evidence, qualitative examples, and implications for stakeholders at various levels of synchronized skating.

RESEARCH NOTES

Research Purpose

To our knowledge, no research or public data exists assessing the state of synchronized skating on an international scale. This study is the first of its kind, gaining a wide view of the synchronized skating community to understand the experiences and perspectives of several stakeholder groups, including skaters, parents of skaters, coaches, alumni, and federation representatives.

The research aims to identify key barriers to participation and growth, recognize successful practices across different regions, and inform strategic decision-making for OneTeamMVMT and the broader synchronized skating community.

By gathering quantitative and qualitative data from diverse stakeholders across multiple countries, this study provides an evidence-based foundation for developing programs, policies, and initiatives that will strengthen and expand synchronized skating globally.



Methodology Overview

This research employed a two-pronged approach:

1. Global Community Survey: Distributed electronically to skaters, parents, coaches, and alumni, collecting 242 total responses (136 skaters, 38 parents, 22 coaches, 46 alumni) across 17 countries and many competitive levels. The survey was available in English, French, German, and Finnish. The survey included over 20 quantitative and qualitative questions that explored a breadth of areas in the community. To distribute the survey, OneTeamMVMT contacted past participants in its development camp programming via email, providing direct access to the survey link and encouraging participation. The survey was also promoted on OneTeamMVMT's website and social media channels, with particular emphasis on Instagram where content reached broader audiences through sharing. Prominent synchronized skating teams amplified this reach by reposting promotional videos about the survey to their Instagram stories, leveraging their established follower bases to extend participation invitations beyond OneTeamMVMT's immediate network. To encourage participation and acknowledge respondents' time commitment, five CAD \$50 gift cards were offered as prizes, randomly awarded to respondents.

2. Governing Body Interviews: In-depth conversations were held with federation representatives from Canada (Skate Canada and Skate Ontario), the United States (U.S. Figure Skating), Italy, Germany, and Finland, exploring governance structures, development and training opportunities, and strategic priorities. Interviews were conducted via video conference between November 2025 and January 2026 following preliminary survey review, and were recorded with participant consent and transcribed using Otter.ai.

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, calculating means, medians, and percentage distributions for quantitative data (Likert-scale ratings, ranked-choice questions, cost figures) and reviewing open-ended responses for recurring themes and patterns. Data were disaggregated by stakeholder group (skaters, parents, coaches, alumni) and competitive level to identify variations in experience and perspective. Interview transcripts underwent thematic coding analysis, with researchers systematically identifying recurring concepts and organizing findings into nine primary theme categories (Federation Structure, Participation Trends, Perception & Culture, Communication, Goals & Metrics, Training Philosophy, Challenges, OTM Collaboration, Priority Changes) within a thematic analysis matrix that enabled cross-federation pattern identification. The mixed-methods approach enabled triangulation: findings emerging



consistently in both surveys and interviews—such as the significance of team culture and judging comprehension gap—were identified as particularly robust insights, while discrepancies between data sources illuminated different vantage points on shared challenges.

Acknowledgment of Limitations

As mentioned in the introduction, as the first research initiative of its kind in synchronized skating, this study has important limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings:

Sample Size: With 242 survey respondents from a global community of thousands of synchronized skating community members, this research captures a meaningful but small proportion of total participants. The findings represent the lived experiences and perspectives of respondents, but may not fully capture the diversity of situations across all regions, competitive levels, and demographic groups. We hope and expect that future iterations of this research will achieve larger, more representative samples that enhance statistical significance and enable more granular analysis.

Geographic Representation: While we intentionally sought diverse international participation and successfully gathered responses from multiple continents, the research team's personal experience and professional networks are

rooted primarily in North America. This background inevitably influences question framing, interpretation of responses, and the lenses through which we understand synchronized skating culture. We have worked diligently to maintain awareness of this potential bias and to interpret findings with appropriate cultural humility.

Cultural Variation: Synchronized skating manifests differently across cultural contexts—what resonates as a priority in one region may be less relevant elsewhere, and barriers that dominate in one context may be nearly absent in another. Additionally, the survey was only available in English, French, German, and Finnish, which may have excluded respondents from countries where other languages are dominant. While this report identifies patterns that appear consistent across respondents, readers should interpret findings through their own cultural and regional lenses, recognizing that universal claims about "what synchronized skating needs" may not hold in all contexts.

Timing and Evolution: This research captures synchronized skating at a specific moment in late 2025 and early 2026. The sport continues to evolve rapidly—technical requirements change, new markets emerge, established programs mature, and global events (pandemics, economic shifts, policy changes, etc.) reshape participation patterns. These findings represent a snapshot rather than permanent truth.



Self-Selection Bias: Survey respondents chose to participate, likely indicating some baseline engagement with synchronized skating and awareness of OneTeamMVMT. Those who have left the sport entirely, or those without access to digital communication channels may be underrepresented, potentially limiting our understanding of certain barriers or perspectives.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Insights

This comprehensive research project describes synchronized skating at a pivotal moment in its development. The sport has achieved remarkable technical sophistication, geographic expansion, and competitive excellence, yet faces persistent challenges in accessibility, organizational capacity, professional development, and global equity.

Several key insights emerge from the convergence of survey data and federation perspectives:

Cost and affordability are the most pressing barriers to participation in the sport. Across survey responses, this was frequently mentioned as a challenge to participation,

with average annual costs for senior levels reported at over \$20,000 USD in North America.

Geographic inequities persist and undermine synchronized skating's global development. Access to teams, coaching, ice facilities, and competitive opportunities varies significantly by location, creating opportunities for some while excluding others. These disparities present a strategic challenge for the sport's Olympic aspirations, as long-term international growth will depend on closing these gaps and expanding and strengthening synchronized skating opportunities beyond its most established markets.

Knowledge gaps limit engagement. Insufficient understanding of judging and scoring systems, technical requirements, and sport fundamentals constrains engagement and satisfaction across all stakeholder groups. These gaps represent opportunities for educational initiatives with potentially transformative impact.

Olympic inclusion is a common, unifying aspiration within the community. Near-universal support for Olympic recognition among interviewed federation representatives suggests its potential as a rallying point for collective advocacy and strategic focus, though immediate operational needs must not be obscured by long-term ambitions.



Research Contributions

This study makes several important contributions to understanding synchronized skating globally:

First, it provides documentation of synchronized skating's current state across multiple countries, competitive levels, and stakeholder perspectives. This baseline enables future trend analysis, comparative evaluation of interventions, and tracking of the sport's evolution over time.

Second, the research identifies synchronized skating's barriers as interconnected systemic challenges rather than isolated issues. Low public visibility limits participant pools, which in turn reduces teams' influence in securing ice time allocation, often resulting in less favourable scheduling such as late-evening slots and limited availability. High ice costs and inconvenient scheduling then create additional barriers to entry, further limiting participation and reinforcing existing constraints. These interdependencies suggest that isolated interventions—such as fundraising without addressing visibility, or education without expanding infrastructure—may have limited impact. Instead, coordinated strategies targeting key leverage points are more likely to generate broader system-wide effects.

Third, the research establishes a foundation for evidence-based decision-making. Rather than relying on assumptions

about community needs, organizations such as OneTeamMVMT and others can develop initiatives grounded in empirical understanding of stakeholder priorities, barriers, and opportunities.

Closing Vision

Synchronized skating is a discipline wherein athletes channel individual excellence in service of collective achievement. Athletes must be simultaneously highly skilled individuals, combining athleticism with artistic expression, and selfless team members, demonstrating cooperation, collaboration, and community.

The sport develops athletes who understand that individual talent reaches its fullest expression when channeled towards a shared purpose, and that the most compelling performances arise when technical mastery serves artistic vision larger than any individual contribution.

This research showcases a global community united by passion for synchronized skating, despite facing diverse challenges across different contexts. From grassroots programs building basic capacity to established programs focused on competitive excellence - and from recreational teams skating for joy and fitness to elite senior teams chasing world championships - synchronized skating operates across a wide spectrum while maintaining



consistent values of teamwork, precision, artistic expression, and collective performance.

OneTeamMVMT and the broader synchronized skating community are positioned at an important point in the sport's development. The insights from this research provide an evidence-based foundation for future planning, program development, and advocacy. Relationships established and strengthened through this research create opportunities for collaborative initiatives that bridge community-level insights with the institutional capacity of governing bodies.

Ultimately, synchronized skating's future will be shaped by sustained attention to its core strengths: collaboration, inclusivity, precision, and collective achievement. Guided by evidence and shared purpose, the community has the opportunity to further develop synchronized skating as a global discipline that builds athletic skill, fosters connection, and supports long-term participation.

For questions, additional information, or to discuss findings and recommendations, please contact OneTeamMVMT.
www.oneteammvmt.org

About OneTeamMVMT

OneTeamMVMT is a globally-minded not-for-profit organization focused on the development of synchronized skating through initiatives that address gaps within the sport's existing structures and support its long-term growth. Founded in 2016, the organization works across the international synchronized skating community, engaging athletes, coaches, and teams across regions and competitive levels.

Its activities include educational programming, athlete and coach development projects, and community-based initiatives designed to support knowledge sharing and strengthen connections within the sport. These efforts are developed in response to identified needs within the synchronized skating ecosystem and are intended to improve access to development opportunities and support engagement across different levels of participation.

Overall, OneTeamMVMT takes a responsive, needs-based approach to sport development, working to identify gaps within the synchronized skating ecosystem and implement solutions that strengthen participation, collaboration, and the advancement of the sport globally.



Appendix: Recurring Additional Themes Across the Community

While the previous sections explored major insights gleaned from this study, several additional patterns emerged consistently across both quantitative rankings and qualitative responses. These themes, though not rising to the level of primary barriers, represent significant opportunities for sport development and merit mentioning in this report.

Sport Awareness and Public Recognition Remains Limited

Synchronized skating operates in relative obscurity compared to other skating disciplines and mainstream sports, creating downstream effects on recruitment, sponsorship, and legitimacy.

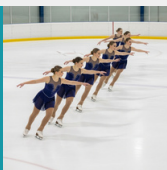
Quantitative Evidence: Survey respondents ranked "Lack of visibility/sport awareness" as the 4th most significant barrier to participation (average rank 4.77 out of 9 barriers), with 11.5% identifying it as their single biggest barrier—making it the third most frequently selected #1 barrier after cost and ice access. This positioning, while mid-range in overall rankings, represents substantial concern given that awareness is foundational to addressing other challenges: without public knowledge of the sport, programs struggle to

attract participants, secure sponsors, and justify resource allocation.

Qualitative Themes: Alumni responses powerfully illustrated the awareness gap. When asked about public perception, respondents emphasized near-universal unfamiliarity: "Most times, when I say I do synchro I have to clarify skating and not swimming." Multiple respondents noted that even within the skating community, synchronized skating faces recognition challenges: "Within the skating community, I think that synchro is looked at by other skating athletes as easy, and people do it because they can't do the other divisions in skating."

Alumni survey data showed that when asked what synchronized skating needs most to grow, awareness, visibility, or recognition was the most common theme mentioned by alumni (30% of alumni answers).

Notably, many respondents observed that when people do encounter synchronized skating, reactions are enthusiastic: "People think it's really cool once they know it exists" and "I think that everyone who isn't in the sport thinks of it as synchronized swimming but on ice, but ultimately think it's cool." This suggests the primary challenge is exposure rather than appeal—people appreciate synchronized skating when they see it, but few have had the opportunity.



Team Culture Affects Experience Quality and Retention

Survey results from skaters and parents indicate that team culture is not a major barrier to initially entering synchronized skating, however, alumni qualitative responses suggest that team environment can have a meaningful impact on long-term experience and retention, with 41% of alumni identifying team dynamics or interpersonal conflicts as a challenge they faced during their synchronized skating career.

While the majority of alumni described positive team environments, a small number of respondents reported negative experiences related to coaching style, team dynamics, or communication within clubs. These comments referenced issues such as perceived favouritism, unhealthy training culture, or challenges with team social dynamics.

One parent respondent noted that their experience improved after switching clubs: "My previous team/club didn't bother to listen to what the skaters and members wanted... we thankfully now have a new club that actually does listen and provides a much more collaborative and encouraging atmosphere."

Overall, alumni experiences were overwhelmingly positive, with 98% rating their experience 5 or higher on a 7-point

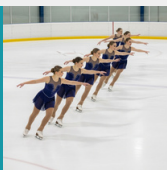
scale. However, the presence of negative experiences suggests that maintaining supportive team environments and prioritizing athlete well-being remain important areas of focus for clubs, coaches, and federations.

Performance Opportunities Support Community Building and Awareness

Beyond competition, synchronized skating teams benefit from non-competitive performance opportunities that serve multiple functions: building public awareness, developing performance skills in lower-pressure environments, creating community connections, and sometimes generating revenue through ticket sales or exhibition bookings.

Survey data revealed that 67% of skaters performed outside of competitions during the previous season, typically at hockey games, holiday shows, community events, and exhibitions. However, 26% did not participate in any non-competitive performances, suggesting inconsistent access to—or prioritization of—performance opportunities across clubs and regions.

The fact that one-quarter of teams did not participate in any exhibitions represents both a missed opportunity and a potential area for development. Federations and clubs could support teams by facilitating connections to potential



performance venues, creating templates for exhibition proposals, and sharing best practices for maximizing the value of performance opportunities.

Persistent Stigma: Synchronized Skating as "Lesser" Discipline

A notable number of survey respondents across all four stakeholder groups identified ongoing perception challenges within the broader figure skating community—specifically, the characterization of synchronized skating as an inferior or alternative discipline for skaters who cannot succeed in singles, pairs, or ice dance. While this did not emerge as a majority concern, its appearance across all distinct stakeholder groups suggests a persistent cultural issue that could be affecting community morale, athlete development, and athlete recruitment.

Survey data quantified the prevalence of this concern: 30% of alumni respondents, 25% of coaches, 11% of current skaters, and 6% of parents identified perception-related barriers when asked about challenges to grassroots synchronized skating development. Several respondents emphasized the importance of ISU recognition and positioning of synchronized skating as an equivalent discipline rather than an alternative pathway.

This finding connects directly to federation interview themes, where representatives acknowledged the historical "if you can't do singles, you do synchro" stigma while noting the sport's dramatic evolution. However, in some cases, perception lags behind reality.

Parent Volunteer Labour Sustains Programs

Synchronized skating programs rely heavily on unpaid parent volunteer labour for essential operational functions such as team management, ice time booking, travel coordination, fundraising organization, costume coordination, and administrative support.

Among survey respondents, 86% of parents reported volunteering with their skater's team often (58%) or sometimes (28%), with only 11% not volunteering at all. Parents reported volunteering an average of 11 hours per week during the season, though the median was 4 hours, indicating that a small number of heavily involved parents significantly elevated the average. Individual volunteer commitments ranged from 1-10 hours weekly and some intensive roles (team managers, board positions) required 15-40 hours per week.

Interestingly, formal volunteering requirements remain



uncommon—only 27% of parents reported that volunteering was mandatory for their team, while 73% indicated it was not required. This suggests that high volunteer participation rates stem primarily from necessity and culture rather than explicit policy.

Many synchronized skating clubs operate with minimal paid staff, making volunteer labour essential to program sustainability. Without parent volunteers, many teams would face dramatically higher costs to hire professional administrators, potentially making the sport even less accessible.

Additionally, the wide range in volunteer hours (4-80 hours weekly at the extremes) raises questions about whether volunteer expectations are clearly communicated and equitably distributed. Some parents may feel pressure to volunteer beyond their capacity to ensure their child's team functions effectively or to maintain positive relationships with coaches and other families.

As synchronized skating grows, programs will need to develop more sustainable operational models that appropriately value volunteer contributions while not creating participation barriers for families unable to contribute extensive volunteer time. This might include:

- Clear communication about volunteer expectations before families commit to programs

- Flexible volunteer options that accommodate varied schedules and skills
- Recognition that financial contributions and volunteer time can substitute for one another
- Professional administrative support for essential functions, with volunteer roles focused on enhancement rather than basic operations
- Careful assessment of whether volunteer requirements disproportionately burden certain demographic groups

The current model works because committed parents make it work—but relying on volunteer labour may limit the sport's ability to expand beyond families with significant time availability.

Mental and Physical Health as Primary Athlete Challenge

When alumni were asked to select all challenges they faced as synchronized skaters, mental or physical health issues (burnout, injuries) was the most commonly cited concern, selected by 58% of alumni—tied with balancing skating with academics or work (also 58%) and closely followed by lack of funding for travel or training (54%). This finding carries particular weight given alumni's distance from competitive pressures and ability to reflect on their synchronized skating experience holistically.

Survey respondents from the coaching community demonstrated awareness of mental health importance, with



the vast majority of surveyed coaches expressing support for increased mental health resources for athletes. This alignment between alumni experience and coaching recognition suggests readiness for mental health programming, and an opportunity for increased athlete support.

Conclusion of Additional Findings

These additional findings complement the major structural barriers identified earlier. Addressing these themes would benefit from coordinated engagement across multiple stakeholders: federations can facilitate performance opportunities and support transparent communication around Olympic advocacy; clubs can develop sustainable volunteer structures and support awareness-building initiatives; and organizations such as OneTeamMVMT can contribute to increased visibility of synchronized skating through content, programming, and community coordination.

Importantly, these challenges are interconnected. Increased public awareness may help attract sponsorship and strengthen the case for Olympic inclusion; Olympic recognition could in turn increase media visibility and resource allocation; and additional resources may help reduce reliance on volunteer labour while expanding performance opportunities. Progress in any one area has the potential to generate positive momentum across the broader ecosystem.

Appendix: References

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