



# Meeting without Flying

## A Manifesto for 'Virtually Amazing' meetings

As a well-known and visible international actor on climate change, virtual engagement is increasingly important for the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre. We continue to be invited for short meetings, panels, presentations and sessions around the world. While we want to infuse our vision of enhanced learning and dialogue through interactive approaches in these events, we also seek to promote efforts to reduce carbon emissions, and the necessary behavior change to achieve this.

Recognising the increased need for online engagement - made even more urgent by the current Coronavirus - the Climate Centre aims to become a champion of interactive, meaningful, effective virtual engagements.

Can we accomplish the same impact to address global challenges when people and teams cannot converge in space and time?

Can we design and facilitate events that enable meaningful participation at a distance, reducing health risks -and costs- while taking advantage of all the possibilities offered by digital technologies?

**Yes, we can. It is time to become 'Virtually Amazing.'**

Instead of accepting that videoconferences are inferior to face-to-face meetings, the Climate Centre wants to harness our courage and creativity, turning constraints into opportunities for **reinventing interaction**.



Let's not aim to meet *despite* the distance: let's re-imagine all that we can accomplish if we are liberated from the expectation of having to be physically under the same roof.

*Virtually Amazing* re-imagines virtual engagement to radically enrich events at-a-distance, promote a low-carbon, low-budget, high-energy way to stimulate creative engagement and co-production of knowledge in the fields of climate, risk, humanitarian work, and beyond.

Building on the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre's experience with games, applied improvisation, humor, and other unconventional modalities to awaken the attention and imagination of event participants, we aim to redefine how digital platforms can bridge people and teams.

## Q & A about *Virtually Amazing*

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### **Can virtual events replace the high quality of presentation and discussion that happen at in-person events?**

Most conferences consist of a sequence of uni-directional talks and powerpoints followed by insufficient Q&A. Once, our colleague was in the IT room of a conference to connect to wifi, and noticed the IT staff laughing while pointing out that internet use just spiked. “What just happened?” our colleague asked. “A powerpoint just started in room 17,” laughed the IT team. Seeing people being disengaged during presentations - and valuable meeting time - is unfortunately a reality many of us have experienced.



At a recent global climate conference, a youth representative expressed extreme dissatisfaction at having flown to the event, only to be asked to sit down, remain silent, and listen to a bunch of adults talk. “If I wanted to listen to what you have to say, I would choose to do so via youtube”, complained one of the youth delegates.

*Virtually Amazing* meetings include a carefully designed and facilitated sequence of events, including interactions, discussion prompts, break-out rooms, interactive question and response features, co-creation spaces, and other techniques to ensure that all participants are actively involved in the event.

### **‘What about face-to-face connections? These are critical for our work,’ you may say.**

Yes, we absolutely recognise the value of face-to-face interaction. *Virtually Amazing* does not aim to replace all live engagements, but aims to encourage critical thinking about which events do need to happen face to face and which events may be replaced by a great virtual alternative.

A 2019 study showed that there was no reduction in professional productivity in researchers who fly less, and in fact, the amount of flying had no impact on the number of collaborators a researcher published with. While we can calculate the cost of face-to-face events with relative ease (counting money, CO2 emissions, etc.), we are at a loss when trying to estimate benefits with analytical rigor - let alone argue convincingly for the return on investment of events.

*Virtually Amazing* meetings can include virtual coffee breaks, small group breakout rooms, and facilitated interaction to allow for unexpected connections, just like what can happen face-to-face.

### **What about people with poor internet connections?**

The Climate Centre is exploring to use a range of technical platforms with various bandwidth requirements in order to customize the structure of engagement. In addition, for high-priority international meetings, we will explore opportunities to set up ‘hubs’ in the offices of possible partners including the World Bank, UN, embassies, etc. The Climate Centre will also explore opportunities to collaborate with private entities that can offer hubs or platforms.

It costs approximately \$3,000 on average for someone to participate in a climate COP. More than 25,000 people registered for COP25 in Spain in 2019. This means that the cost of the participants alone was at least \$75 million.

### **What about time zones?**

We are piloting creative solutions to engage across time zones, potentially including multiple regional agendas in multiple languages, for people participating from different parts of the world.

### **Would you like to find out more?**

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