

Cartoonathon fact sheet

Many videoconferences that became more widely used during the pandemic seem intentionally designed to strip us of emotion and candour. We can, and must, do better. One option is the cartoonathon – interaction that engages participants in creating tools for risk communication.

Working with the team at [CartoonCollections.com](https://www.cartooncollections.com), we are designing and delivering these innovative events in both face-to-face and fully virtual modalities, for organizations as diverse as the [IFRC](#), the [World Bank](#), Northeastern University, and the [BMW Foundation](#). Here's how our cartoonathons flow.

1. Warm-up: cartoon annotation

We begin with an unconventional activity: after a brief welcome, participants are invited to review about a dozen thought-provoking cartoons, curated to inspire rich discussions that feed into annotations about the event's theme (see this [blog](#), or the [TEDx Talk](#) by innovation lead Pablo Suarez).

2. Substance: with a humourist's lens

Next, participants experience serious presentations. Via live stream, up to six cartoon artists attentively listen in, presentations and breakout group reactions, all while sketching original drawings and captions in real time. They don't aim to synthesize the presentations; instead, their cartoons challenge what was said and its implications. More than aiming to provoke laughter, the creations seek to inspire critical reflection & meaningful dialogue (though of course humour is welcome).

For example, an Afghan government official requested support to “bring the government to the field, where disasters happen.” Participants nodded in acceptance. Yet one of the cartoon artists detected – and depicted – some underlying assumptions. Here is the draft – one of about 20 shared just moments later.



At first glance participants were confused ('Huh?'), then smiled or even burst out in laughter ('HaHa'), then came to an abrupt, useful realization ('A-ha!'). The prolific humourists delivered mirrors depicting the gap between what is and what could be.

3. Reflections triggered by the creation process

In the final phase of a cartoonathon, participants critically examine the draft cartoons and suggest ways to make them clearer, better, and/or more useful. The final version below integrates participant suggestions for more Afghan-like mountains and failed crops around

the bureaucrat's desk to represent a field in times of crisis.

Having gone through this unconventional, bonding activity, participants discuss how the newly created cartoons relate to their own experiences, triggering insights and proposals for next steps.



Created during a cartoonathon on crises and risk financing. (Kendra Allenby/ CartoonCollections)

Cartoonathon topics so far have ranged from “responsible leadership in COVID-19 times” to “grief” to “becoming virtually amazing”. From “failure of the imagination” to humour-infused flow. Humour isn’t merely entertainment. It’s smart, strategic communication. And frankly, we need to get smarter, fast.

Cartoons, and the collective process of cartoon creation and reflection, can harness the power of humour, taking us from darkness to spark illumination and transformative action.

It turns out, fun is FUNCTIONAL.