



Spontaneous and Ad-hoc Volunteers Integration Toolkit

Tabletop Game Preparation and facilitation guide



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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Spontaneous help matters in disaster management

*“What is invariably lost in the press coverage is the far larger number of victims rescued by family members, neighbours, and other local citizens. Several studies have determined that these **anonymous individuals account for 50% to 95% of survivors** following major earthquakes.”¹*

Disaster events are characterized by their large scale and often the unexpected nature of their impact. These events show over and over that the contribution of the population is a critical part of response and recovery and constitutes a major source of resilience (e.g., the various citizen-based initiatives during the COVID-19 crisis, or clean-up and reconstruction efforts after major floodings, earthquakes or storms around the world).

Members of the population represent **valuable additional resources**: they can extend those of formal actors, allowing the latter to concentrate on critical tasks for which their expertise or specialized equipment is needed. They also provide creativity and flexibility, which can be critical to unexpected situations, but difficult to produce in more formal, highly structured and regulated operational environments.

However, the integration of such additional resources is **not without significant challenges**. Regular members of the population might lack necessary skills, training and/or equipment to act safely in hazardous environments or in highly stressful situations. Their actions might be misguided, due for instance to limited information or understanding of the situation, and simply be counterproductive, creating additional burden in spite of a sincere willingness to help. For authorities and operational actors, such challenges often lead to a negative perception of informal help due to the risks to create a “disaster within a disaster”.

It is therefore critical to better support how informal helpers can be better integrated in disaster management to leverage the resources and resilience they represent while also reducing the additional risks they can create. In line with the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, we are interested in spontaneous and ad-hoc volunteers, defined as: “**individuals or groups of people who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance** during and/or after an event, and who are **unaffiliated** with any part of the existing official emergency management response and recovery system and **may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience**.”²

¹ Peleg, K. (2015). Notes from Nepal: Is There a Better Way to Provide Search and Rescue? *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*, 9(6), 650–652.

² AIDR (2017). *Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers* (Handbook 12). <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5618/aidr-communities-responding-to-disasters-planning-for-spontaneous-volunteers-handbook.pdf>

1.2 The SAVIT Game

The Tabletop Game is a serious game part of the Spontaneous and Ad-hoc Volunteers Integration Toolkit (SAVIT). It uses a board game format and realistic disaster scenarios to support participants' exploration of issues related to spontaneous help, as well as the identification of potential approaches to better integrate informal helpers in disaster management. It is typically used in combination with SAVIT Catalogue.

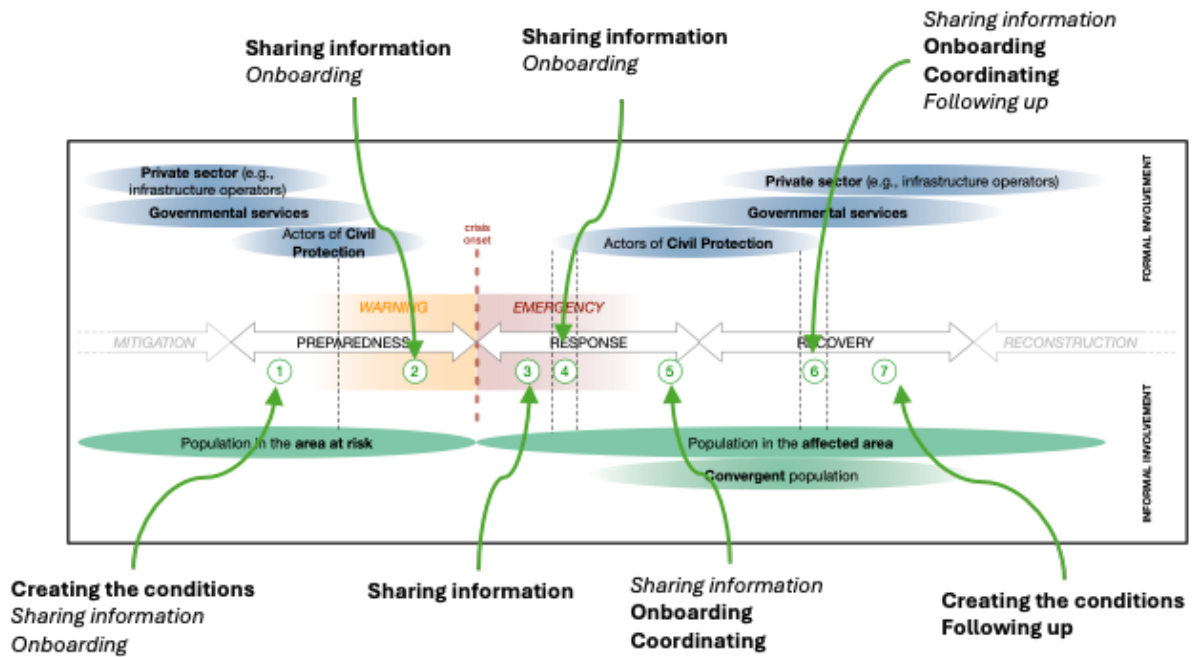
During the game, participants work in teams and, rather than role play, use their own experience, usual perspectives and functions. As a group of experts, their objective is to recommend potential approaches to local authorities and stakeholders (who can then decide on their implementation). Participants are not asked to manage the situations described in the scenario, but rather to reflect on the needs, challenges and opportunities created by actions of the population. This collaborative discussion serves as a basis to identify what tool or approach they would have liked to have at their disposal in the given situation.

Overall, the Game is based on the understanding of how informal actions of the population occur before, during and after events, and of what is needed to better integrate these actions at different moments of disaster management³:

- *Stages of an event*: The large phases of an event (before, during and after) are broken down into 7 more specific stages. These represent moments with important differences with regards to what kind of actors (formal or informal) are addressing the demands of the situation at that moment and what informal actions the population might implement. The rounds of the game implement the different stages (or a subset of them): through the scenario, the participants reflect on the characteristics of these moments of an event, highlighting different needs and suggesting different practical approaches.
- *Functions of the integration of spontaneous help*: what formal actors such as authorities or civil protection organisations can do concretely to better integrate spontaneous help. Five main functions have been identified, each with more specific sub-functions, all listed and defined in the Functions booklet. The functions are a central part of the analysis of the scenario at each round and of the selection of the relevant solutions.

The SAVIT Game builds on the understanding that there is a correspondence between the stages and the functions, captured in the following picture. The Game then structures how the participants reflect on informal help relative to disaster situations and explore practical solutions that are relevant (i.e. would have been useful to have) at different moments of the disaster management cycle.

³ For more details on the conceptual model underlying the Game, see Branlat, M., Floch, J., Roeloffs, E., Clark, N., & Nahkur, O. (2025). *Spontaneous volunteers in disaster management*. Deliverable 4.1 of SYNERGIES: Innovating preparedness by leveraging synergies and enhancing results of DRM projects. Available here: <https://synergiesproject.eu/resources/>



2 COMPONENTS OF THE SAVIT TABLETOP GAME

The components of the game include:

- Main board: A board placed in a central location.
- Player board: A board available for each team at each round.
- Solution cards: A curated deck of solution cards derived from SAVIT Catalogue.
- Handouts for participants: a scenario booklet and a reference function booklet.
- SAVIT Catalogue, accessible for each group during the game

2.1 Main board

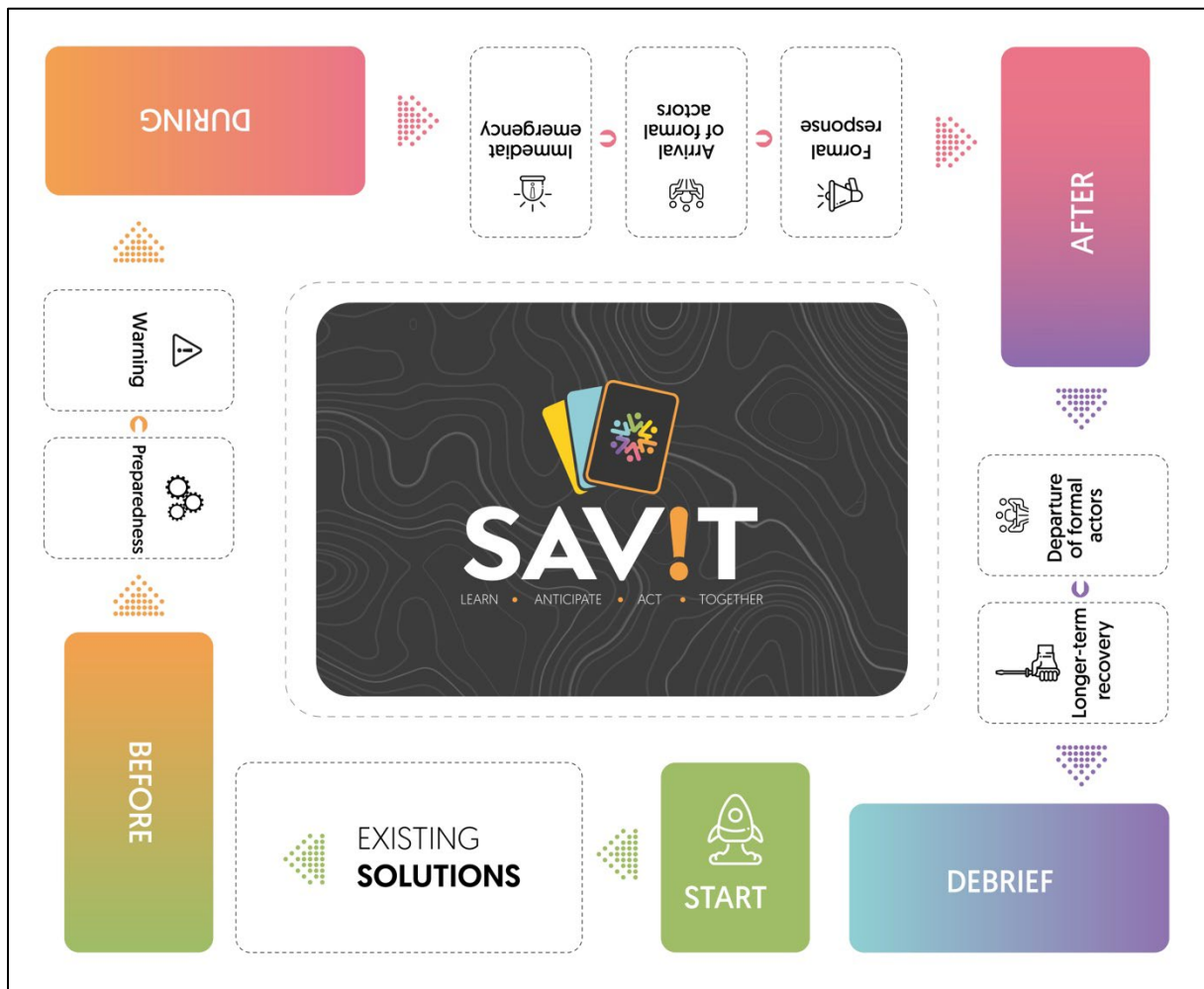


Figure 1. Main board

Positioned at the centre of the playing area, it is used as a reference during collective phases. It displays the timeline and different rounds, helping to keep track of the progress throughout the game.

➔ Expected to be printed on thick paper or vinyl, **actual size 675x550 mm**

2.2 Player board

Available for each team and used to guide:

- analysis of the situation described in the scenario: actors involved, key functions to support,
- identification of relevant solution,
- reflection on conditions of implementation in the local context.

Players use pencil mark to check the relevant choices directly on the board. Different player boards need to be printed for each round. At each round, teams' boards are kept next to the main board.

→ Player boards can be printed on A4 pages

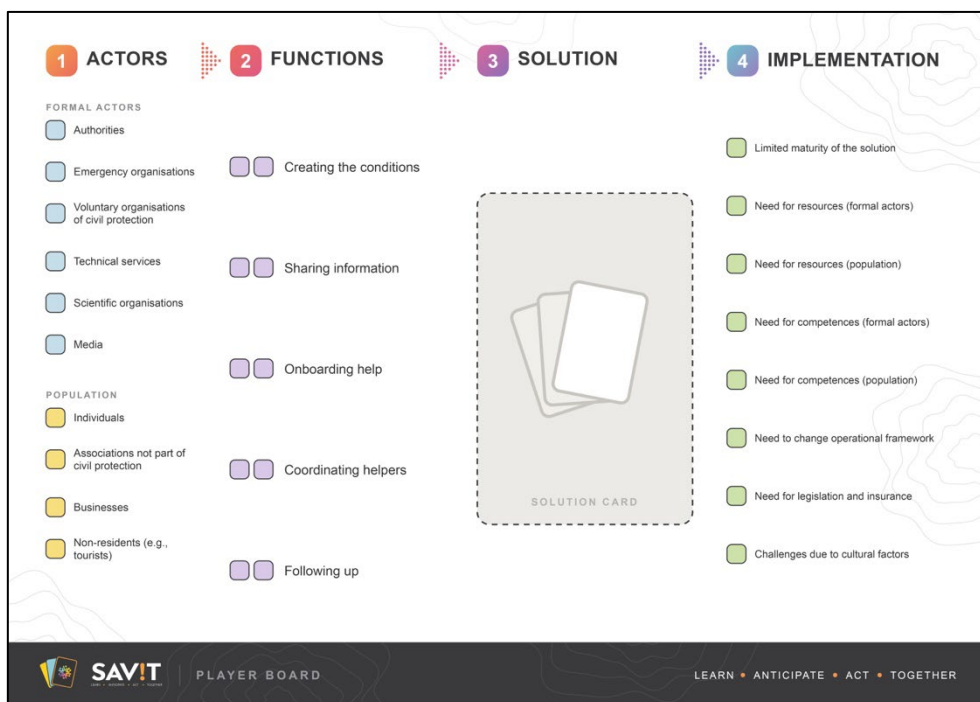


Figure 2. Player board

2.3 Solution cards

Set of solutions extracted from SAVIT Catalogue. Each card provides information about the type of solution, geographical origin, mapping to the main functions and short description. The card deck consists of a set of 32 solution cards.

→ The cards are 65x100mm, should be printed on thicker paper, maybe professionally. Two sets of cards are typically needed for groups to receive a sufficient number of cards (8 to 12).



Figure 3. Front and back of a solution card (with crop and bleed marks)

2.4 Scenario booklet

The initial pages of the booklet provide elements of context for the fictional event considered, as well as basic instructions for the game. For each stage of the event, the scenario describes:

- (1) elements and status of the situation, including key concerns,
- (2) actions carried out by formal actors,
- (3) actions carried out by informal actors.

4 local scenarios were produced for workshops organised in different locations:

- Flooding in Rotterdam.
- Earthquake in Malta.
- Cyclone in La Réunion.
- Blackout during winter in Estonia.

→ *The scenario booklet is printed on a A4 format (e.g., as a booklet) and is provided to each team. In addition, a shortened version might be projected in parallel.*

2.5 Functions booklet

This booklet serves as a reference and provides definitions of functions and subfunctions from the model.

→ *The functions booklet is printed on a A5 format (e.g., as a booklet) and is provided to each team.*

2.6 SAVIT Catalogue

Access to the Catalogue is necessary for consulting additional details about solutions. The interface of the Catalogue provides a compact list of solutions, indicating name, type, short description and level of coverage of main functions. The list can be sorted, grouped and searched. For each solution, a detailed view is available, with more detailed description, mapping to functions and representative use case. A simple URL is provided in the reference booklet for participants.

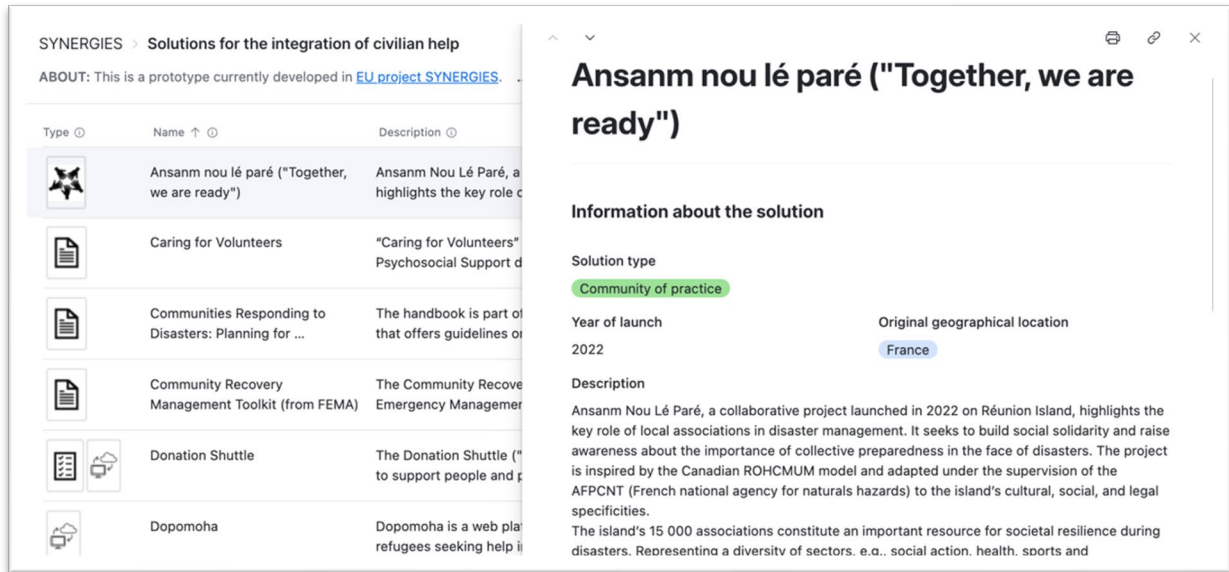


Figure 4. Screenshot of SAVIT Catalogue

➔ Requires internet access and use of a computer or tablet (phone is not recommended due to screen size).

3 ORGANISING A GAME SESSION

3.1 Requirements for use

A game session is meant to occur as a physical event and therefore requires a room that accommodates the number of participants and organisers. For less than 12 participants, a large table is likely sufficient. Beyond that, groups will need to be split in separate small table for group discussions not to interfere with each other. The room therefore needs to be large enough to accommodate as many tables as groups and a central table for the mainboard.

The conduct of the game requires one Game Master for the room, as well as Group Facilitators (who also serve as observers) in each team. More details in Section 3.

One computer or tablet connected to the internet is required for each team to access the SAVIT Catalogue.

The presence of a projector is not a hard requirement, but is recommended to facilitate the introduction, presentation of the game and display of main elements of the scenario.

3.2 Language considerations

We believe it is best to conduct the SAVIT Tabletop Game in the local language if it is organised at the national level. This allows more natural and richer interactions between

participants. The game, developed in English, was translated into French and Estonian for this reason.

The generation of versions in new languages is possible with relatively limited effort but should preferably be done in collaboration with the developers of SAVIT. It requires:

- Linguistic support from native speakers to translate all text elements: scenario, handouts, solutions descriptions for the cards, various field names in SAVIT Catalogue.
- Generation of all translated material for printing (easy for the Word documents, more efforts for the boards and cards)
- Parallel implementation of a SAVIT Catalogue interface in the new language (significant efforts).

In addition of the translation of the game elements, it is recommended to ensure facilitation is available in the same language.

3.3 Preparation

It is important to identify participants in advance, based on the objectives of the game conduct. In our experience, a diversity of perspectives allows for richer discussions, especially combining perspectives from authorities and operational actors, or from formal and informal actors – all stakeholders of the integration of spontaneous help.

A balance needs to be found between having many groups, and many participants in each group. Through conducting game sessions, we have found that about 4 teams of 3-4 participants each is a good number to enable rich and effective discussions within and between groups. We believe smaller or larger groups are possible, but we do not recommend playing with more than 6 groups and 5-6 people per group.

A game session should be at least 1,5-2 hours. A longer session covering all stages requires a complete scenario and 3-4 hours. The game can be played several times if needed, e.g., focusing on different phases of disaster management or using different scenarios.

In preparation for a game, organisers need to:

- Identify a Game Master, as well as Group Facilitators who also act as observers.
- Download and print boards, cards and the various handouts.

The following steps can be used as guidance in the preparation.

3.3.1 Step 1 – Planning for a game session (organiser, possibly with consultancy)

- Action:
 - identify what aspects a game session should address.
 - identify what actors are important for discussing these aspects.
- Decision / next step: decide upon a scenario and invite participants.

3.3.2 Step 2 – Developing context-adapted materials (organiser or consultancy)

- Action:
 - adapt one base scenario to the local context (e.g., locations, type of event, contextual factors).
 - check the full set of solution cards, possibly filtering out non relevant ones.
- Decision / next step: the organiser decides how many sets of the cards (depending on attendance) and other materials are needed; order the printing of all game material (cards, handouts, boards).

3.3.3 Step 3 – Playing the game

See details in section 3 below.

3.3.4 Step 4 – Developing plans/feasibility study after the game session (organiser)

- Action:
 - Analyse the results for the game session and, guided by data collected, investigates whether the solution can be considered for implementation (e.g., to identify what adaptations are required, if any, what resources are needed).
- Decision / next step:
 - Contact solution owner or person of contact identified in SAVIT Catalogue for additional information and insights.
 - Go/no go for implementing the solution.

4 PLAYING THE GAME

4.1 Participants' role and objectives

- Participants play in teams.
- They represent their usual perspective and roles.
- The objective is to collaboratively develop a recommendation of potential approaches for local authorities, who can then decide on their implementation.

4.2 Game conduct

The Game Master should be sufficiently familiar with:

- the topic of spontaneous and ad-hoc volunteering,
- the game content and organisation,
- the content of SAVIT Catalogue.

4.2.1 Initial Preparation

- The Game Master provides player boards, handouts and divides the deck of cards randomly across teams.
- Participants:
 - familiarise themselves with the game elements, solution cards, and roles.
 - identify locally available solution cards in the game and place them on the main board.
 - open SAVIT Catalogue in a browser and familiarise themselves with its content.

4.2.2 At each round

- Together (5 min)
 - Participants read the information elements about the round in the scenario.
- In groups (10 min)
 - Teams fill in the elements of the player board in the proposed order.
 1. *Actors*, considering who is acting at the time described in the scenario, whether these actors are local to the area or come from outside.
 2. *Functions*, trying to identify those that are most critical at this round.
 3. *Solution*, using the cards to identify tools or methods that seem relevant and the Catalogue for more information on the solutions.
 4. *Context*, gathering information from the Catalogue and considering the local context to anticipate factors that could impact (positively or negatively) the implementation or use of the chosen solution.
- Together (5 min)
 - Each group presents their chosen solution with a quick pitch (30-60 sec).
 - Groups vote for their preferred solution (excluding their own choice).
 - The solution with the most votes is placed on the main board.
 - Points are tallied.
 - The game proceeds to the next round.

4.2.3 At the end of the scenario

After having covered all rounds of the scenario, participants conduct a debriefing.

4.3 Group facilitation and observations

The Group Facilitators do not need to have the same level of knowledge of the game as the Game Master. They should nonetheless be briefed and familiarise themselves with the content of the observation notebook prior to the game. Overall knowledge of solutions from SAVIT Catalogue is recommended to provide effective guidance to the participants when needed.

Pay attention to the actions and discussions of the participants, focusing particularly on the aspects of use and perceived usefulness by the participants.

We are interested in two results: the Game, but also the Catalogue.

For the Game, the different elements to consider are:

- maps,
- the player boards,
- the central plateau,
- the function guide,
- the scenario.

For the Catalogue, the elements to consider are:

- general content,
- individual descriptions of solutions,
- the interface.