



## HACKATHON FAQs

### • What is a Hackathon?

The term "Hackathon" is derived from the words hack + marathon. It is a time-based competitive event where teams collaborate to creatively solve a specific problem using innovative solutions. A hackathon is also a fun and engaging event where an initiating structure (organization, business, institution, etc.) proposes one or several challenges to a group of volunteers. Participants are divided into teams and grouped together for the time set (half a day to two days or more) around the challenge(s) defined. Teams are asked to develop different and innovative solutions in a stimulating and positive competitive environment. The hackathon thus allows people to generate several innovative solutions that meet the objective, thanks to collective intelligence, surpassing oneself and a favorable environment. A hackathon can be held online, on site, or in a hybrid format. A hackathon does not have to involve technology, though outcomes typically include technical proof of concepts or prototypes.

### • What is an online Hackathon?

An online hackathon is simply a hackathon that occurs on the internet instead of in a specified geographic location. It is mostly used to improve an event's reach and participant numbers and geographical diversity without being subject to travel constraints.

### • Who runs the Switchboard Hackathon?

This hackathon is organized by Shabaka—a diaspora-led research and consultancy organization focusing on diaspora humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery—in the framework of the Switchboard project: an innovative pilot project funded by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). This project is implemented in partnership with diaspora organizations engaged with Sudan, Haiti and Syria, namely Governance Programming Overseas (GPO), Haiti Renewal Alliance (HRA), The Syrian Charities & Associations Network in the UK (SCAN UK) and the American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS).

### • Why are we conducting a Hackathon?

The Hackathon will take place over Saturday and Sunday, October 15–16, 2022, and use both online and offline elements to enable participants' engagement in different locations. Participants will have 48 hours to collaborate via an online platform and build solutions within the challenge areas. An information session will be held one week before to introduce the challenges and hackathon platform, as well as enable participants to meet prior to the event.

This pilot focuses on Haiti, Sudan and Syria, countries whose diasporas have been engaged in humanitarian responses to recurrent crises for generations. The aim of the virtual Switchboard Hackathon is to generate the concepts and designs of a mobile app for established diaspora humanitarian actors and those interested in getting involved in humanitarian action, particularly in Haiti, Sudan, and Syria.

### • What is the topic of the Switchboard Hackathon?

The hackathon's topic is: "enhancing diaspora capacity and action to respond to humanitarian crises." Specific examples of situations in the target countries are addressed in the monthly situation reports found here. It is highly recommended that all participants read the situation reports, to ensure a common baseline of understanding.

### • What language will the Hackathon be held in?

The hackathon competition will be held entirely in (the) English (language). However, depending on your team members, you may use the language of your choice for all internal work and meetings.

### • When will the hackathon take place?

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### • What are the challenges?

Hackathon participants will compete to develop possible solutions, concepts and designs in response to three challenges, all of which are linked to the same end goal: "enhancing diaspora capacity and action to respond to humanitarian crises."

**Challenge 1:** Improving communication on the ground with local communities before, during, or after crises

How can we improve communication with people and communities on the ground before, during, or after a humanitarian crisis?  
Points to consider: How can the app help diaspora humanitarians and others communicate with the affected population? Understanding what has happened, where they are located, and how to provide support.

**Challenge 2:** Bringing diaspora and others together to collaborate with local communities during a crisis

How can we bring diaspora and other actors together to collaborate with local actors, both organizations and individuals, during a humanitarian crisis?  
Points to consider: How can the app help to mobilize and support different generations of actors in creating and implementing humanitarian assistance solutions? How can the app help to improve communication, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing with other local actors?

**Challenge 3:** Supporting intergenerational diaspora engagement in humanitarian action

How can we support diaspora individuals from different generations—particularly from second and subsequent generations—who are not engaged with any diaspora organizations or networks to become active/volunteer in humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery?

**Points to consider:** How can the app help diaspora individuals not engaged with any diaspora organizations or networks to become active in humanitarian work and know where to start, the support they can provide, and who they can contact? Participants will be asked to consider at least three of the following application design principles for each challenge:

- **Establishing trust:** The app will have to include mechanisms or features to help develop trust between different humanitarian actors (e.g., diaspora, local actors in origin countries affected by crisis, and users of the platform)

- **Mobilization during crises:** The app should have the ability to mobilize actors and individuals in real-time to support humanitarian initiatives during crises

- **Mobilizing different generations of diaspora:** The app should be accessible and engaging for different generations

- **Understanding legal frameworks:** The app must comply with all the legal requirements of the countries where it will be used, mainly in terms of content and data processing

- **Building sustainable engagement:** The app should include mechanisms to engage communities of users in the medium to long term.

For more information, please access the support documents [here](#)

### • What are the prizes?

The Technical Evaluation Committee (TEC)—a five-member external and independent jury created to assess the concepts produced during the hackathon—will evaluate all proposed solutions to the challenges and award three cash prizes (one prize per team):

First prize: 5000 USD

Second prize: 3000 USD

Third prize: 2000 USD

Non-cash prizes such as software licenses, publication subscriptions, and Amazon/Google vouchers will also be awarded to competing teams that do not win one of the cash prizes.

### • What are the judging criteria?

The TEC will assess the final concepts produced by participating teams at the end of the second day. The TEC will base their final decision on a set of predefined criteria jointly agreed and validated prior to the hackathon. The judging criteria will be made clear to all participants prior to the event. Examples of judging criteria include: viability, relevance to the challenge, user experience, design, and the design's completion by the end of the event.

It is possible that the winning concept(s) may not be used in the development of the mobile application; instead, the TEC may choose to decide which of the concepts will be developed as part of the app. Alternatively, one or several ideas may be used to develop the app.

### • Are there any required skills to participate in the Hackathon?

No, the hackathon does not require any prerequisite knowledge or skills. However, we have prepared a series of documents—such as reports on the humanitarian situations in Syria, Haiti and Sudan, insights from diaspora humanitarian actors, and useful videos and tutorials about app design—that we highly recommend you read [here](#).

### • Who can participate?

The hackathon is open to all diaspora individuals, humanitarian actors, tech developers, creatives, problem solvers, and individuals interested in technological solutions and innovation. However, participants must meet the following required criteria:

- All participants must be 18 years or older to participate in the hackathon.

- Participants can be of diaspora backgrounds from any country of origin or heritage, or, if non-diaspora, either working for, volunteering with, or being members of diaspora networks.

- The hackathon is open to both U.S. and non-U.S. individuals and organizations.

However, participants must be eligible to receive prizes and are responsible for paying any local taxes on winnings.

- Participants must apply as individuals but are able to indicate on the registration form if they are applying as part of an existing team or if they want to join one.

While participation from the Syrian, Sudanese, and Haitian diasporas will be highly encouraged, attendees from all diaspora backgrounds, genders, and geographies are welcome. Attendees will not need to have specific experience in coding or humanitarianism. However, those with coding and humanitarian experience are welcome and will be encouraged to apply.

### • How can I register?

To register please complete the [Registration Form](#)

**Important dates:**

Registration opening: 23 August 2022

Registration closing: 22 September 2022

Confirmation of registration: 28 September 2022

Only confirmed participants will be able to attend the hackathon

[Make sure that you provide an email address that you check regularly as we will ask for additional information during the registration process.](#)

### • What is the maximum number of participants?

The platform can host up to 50 participants. However, we aim to have 30 participants divided into a minimum of 6 teams.

### • What if I do not have a team?

All participants who fit the eligibility criteria are welcome to register. If you don't already belong to a team, we will invite you to join one according to your profile and the challenge(s) you chose to work on.

### • Can we register as a team?

Yes, you can register as a team of no more than 5 members. However, all members will be asked to register individually.

### • Can we register as an entity?

Yes, you can register as an entity with a team of no more than 5 members. However, all members will be asked to register individually.

### • What platforms will be used for the Hackathon?

The hackathon will be hosted on the online platform Veerly. Please have a look at their platform [here](#).

We invite you to check your access the platform (browser compatibility, audio and video setup, and connectivity) prior to the event using this link: [Veerly | Virtual events, virtual networking](#)

### • Terms & conditions

Confirmed participants will be asked to sign a participation agreement and photo consent form prior to taking part in the hackathon. This agreement will set out the hackathon's rules and format, terms and conditions, eligibility criteria, and the expectation that participants engage in hackathon tasks both during and after the hackathon (including app testing).

### • Intellectual Property (IP)

Although credit will be given to the contributing teams, participants will be advised that all concepts formulated during the hackathon will become the intellectual property of the Switchboard project. The Switchboard project will also retain all intellectual property rights related to the mobile application once developed.

### • How will the ideas and solutions from the Hackathon be developed?

The solutions presented during the hackathon will act as inspiration for the final product or mobile application developed by an external professional app developer. It is possible that the winning concept(s) may not be used in the development of the mobile application; instead, the TEC may choose to decide which of the concepts will be developed as part of the app. Alternatively, one or several ideas may be used to develop the app.

### • Security, data protection, and privacy

All personal information collected will be stored securely in accordance with USAID Privacy Act (1974) and EU and UK GDPR legislation, and will be destroyed after the event.

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