# Civic tech community organizer toolkit

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| **Version** | **Date** | **Updated by** | **Notes** |
| 1.0 | August 30, 2017 | Created by Isha Nepal and Emily Kuzan | Hello world! |
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Civic tech communities are being established in cities around the world. They are a volunteer-run hub for innovation and networking between public servants, technology and design professionals, and civic activists. The community generally revolves around a weekly ‘hacknight’. This guide is meant to provide key tips to help you establish successful hacknights.

This toolkit is a work in progress created by Isha Nepal and Emily Kuzan on behalf of Code for Canada for the global civic tech community. Feel free to leave comments and suggestions throughout the documents for updates and improvements.

This toolkit is the collaborative result of several civic tech organizers and enthusiasts. We would like to acknowledge and thank Gabe Sawhney, Meghan Hellstern, Dorothy Eng, Dan Monafu, Kristina Taylor and others for their contributions and insights.

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## About civic tech community groups

The main goal of civic tech groups is to connect individuals from diverse backgrounds including designers, coders and citizens that work together to solve civic challenges using technology and design. This is usually done through a weekly ‘**hacknight**.**’**

Common characteristics of civic tech hacknights include:

* Regular meetings
  + Both Civic Tech Toronto (CTTO) and Civic Tech Ottawa (YOWCT) host weekly hacknights on Tuesdays
* 2.5-3 hours long in the evening
* [Agenda](https://docs.google.com/a/codefor.ca/document/d/14hPTYeXPV_GMubAA847zMwpaxx0pSroXcg26OgtG9Ww/edit?usp=drive_web): introductions, presentation (optional), project hacking
  + Introduce new members to the community with a ‘Civic Tech 101’ session during project hacking time
  + “Hacking vs. Yacking” – some people come to Civic Tech to hack on projects while others come to network

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| **Tip: You don’t need to have meetings every week – you can host hacknights biweekly or monthly. Just keep it consistent!** |

In our experience, there are four main ingredients that make up a successful hacknight:

1. **The environment**  
   It is crucial that the hacknights foster a healthy, collaborative and welcoming environment. There should never be a circumstance where participants feel discriminated against or scared to freely speak their minds.
2. **Attendance**  
   It is important that there is a diverse range of people attending the hacknights. This will encourage cross-sectoral collaboration and allow people with different skillsets to work together.
3. **Projects**  
   Although not necessary, it is a good idea to ensure that there are at least two projects to work on so that people have a choice of projects to hack.
4. **Attention to user needs**  
   Every community group will have different needs – make sure you customize your hacknights to your particular community. Perhaps multiple project choices or food are required for participants to be motivated to attend. Whatever it may be, it is important to listen to the needs of your group.

## How to start a civic tech community group

### Find co-founders

* Identify a group of individuals who are passionate about starting a civic tech group
  + These communities are best organized by a small group that can share the responsibilities of running hacknights
  + Contact colleagues within your network who have expressed interest in civic tech
    - Calling these initial members “co-founders” instils ownership and dedication to the community

### Organize a trial hacknight

* Gauge interest in your region by hosting a trial (prototype) hacknight
  + This will help indicate the potential success of the community, as well as identify individuals who are interested in being organizers
  + Use your existing network and social media (ie. Meetup.com) to promote your event
    - CTTO: hosted an initial hacknight with a small group and named all participants who were interested in continuing “co-founders”
    - YOWCT: ran a six month trial where they tested variables in their hacknights before advertising the event to the public
* Tap into your own and your colleagues’ networks and invite people to the trial hacknight
  + Emphasize the purpose and goals of your community
* Invite people with diverse backgrounds to come
  + You don’t have to have a background in technology to participate in civic tech!
  + Tech (developers, designers, data analysts, etc.)
    - Have the technical skills to realize project ideas
  + Government (current and former civil servants)
    - Have the understanding of government needs and procedures
  + People who are passionate about improving their communities
    - Understand community needs and want to help
* Seed at least one project
  + One key component of Civic Tech is to have projects that members are hacking together
  + Be sure to have at least one [project](http://civictech.ca/projects/) ready for the first meeting
  + As your community grows, encourage people to come forward with new project ideas

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| **Tip: Be flexible! It’s okay if things don’t always go as planned – don’t be afraid to adapt. Every city has different needs!** |

## How to organize a civic tech hacknight

### Find a venue

* Contact people who you know might be able to lend you a venue
  + For example: local tech firms, shared workspaces, universities/schools, conference rooms, libraries, community centres, parks, etc.
  + One organizer should be in charge of securing a venue for the following month
* Minimum requirements:
  + Wifi
  + Projector & screen
  + Workspaces
  + Physically accessible
  + Nice-to-haves:
  + Transit accessible
  + Microphone
  + Whiteboards
* It is ideal that the location change monthly because:
  + - The organization lending you the venue will not have to make a long term commitment
    - Some locations may be more convenient for certain individuals, which will ensure a continuous stream of new participants and diversity in attendees
    - Some venues may have built-in audiences or networks, which can drive attendance at your hacknight

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| **Tip: Tech firms are great potential venues because they love it when their employees get to participate in external “tech-like” events! Their offices are often unused in the evening as well.** |

* Other venue considerations:
* Seating
  + Make sure that there will be enough seats for the audience - use [Meetup.com](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1723XgpqOb1mDXG4TYiwJOYK_tahnIL-pydsZeZJ8o9c/edit#heading=h.fkkkx43zibrp) to gauge number of attendees
* Noise
  + Make sure that other people in the building are okay with a little bit of noise
* Location
  + There are generally more people in downtown, therefore it is more likely that attendance will be higher in downtown locations
* Accessibility
  + Make sure your venue is accessible by elevator so that individuals of all physical abilities are able to attend

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| **Tip: Although food is optional, it can serve as an incentive for people to attend the event. Your sponsor may be able to provide food with the venue.** |

### Find speakers

* Speakers at each hacknight are optional but they are often a built-in draw for the event
  + They provide insight on current civic tech issues and many individuals will come to the event specifically for the speaker
    - CTTO: has a [speaker](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrHZ-KlM_dHYipdk5K59ysA) at every weekly hacknight
    - YOWCT: has a speaker at the first hacknight of the month
  + Usually speakers are found through connections but sometimes speakers also reach out to the community group

### Send out invitations

Who to invite?

* Technologists
* Designers
* Civil Servants
* Social Activists
* Others

Sample invitation

*The following is an example email sent out by Gabe Sawhney (co-founder of CTTO).*

*It is an invitation to the first Civic Tech Toronto Beta Hackday.*







**Alpha** - pages that are labeled as alpha mean that it is a first draft and likely will be updated as comments and feedbacks come in.

**Beta** - beta means that we have updated the page to a standard and the information reflects user inputs and analytics.

**Live** - Usually means that the page is past the first/second draft stage and will only be updated if urgent.

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## Toolkit requests and roadmap

We’ll capture common requests and possible next additions for the toolkit here.

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| **Page Description/Purpose** | **Urgent?** | **Stage of Page Development** |
| More information on the “Am I doing this right page.” This page could include rubrics and tools that organizers could use to measure success. | YES!- When organizers feel lost and need a sense of benchmarking, this page would be the page to go. | Alpha |
| Slack channel organization page | Nice to have- Many have stressed that this page would help them. | Discovery |
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| Hi friends,   On Saturday (June 6th), I'm co-organizing an event – and I'd love your help.  We are 'beta testing' an event format that we'd like to roll out weekly starting in July. It's to bring together technologists, designers, urbanists and engaged citizens to meet, get to know each other, and start working on civic tech projects.  We want your feedback on how to make these events compelling and successful in Toronto. I hope you can join us on the 6th! If you have any questions, please let me know. If you can make it, please RSVP using the link above. (There's also more info there on the event.)  **Background (in case you're interested)...**  If you're receiving this email, it's because we've chatted about the awesome opportunities in civic technology. Though we have lots of amazing people in Toronto interested in the topic, civic tech hasn't taken off here in the way that it has in other large cities.  I recently visited Chicago, to try to understand what makes their civic tech scene there so vibrant. Everyone I spoke to mentioned their weekly civic tech hacknight. Having a regular and reliable venue for talking about and building civic tech projects seems to be really important to get things rolling. So that's exactly what we intend to start in Toronto!   The event on June 6th will be small on purpose, but we think it'll be a lot of fun. And it'll be very valuable for us to be able to try out the event with friends who'll give us honest advice about how to make it better. I hope you can make it! |

## How to keep your hacknights running smoothly

* Keep track of the organizers’ roles with the [Hacknight roles](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PIhpB4m3yp3QwY7UxCgNN0AxWBrbyEd7oWNa0ZJgYf4/edit#gid=351752992) template
* Promote your event with [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com/Civic-Tech-Toronto/) → attendees must RSVP to see the location of the event
* Stay in contact with your organizers and community through Slack
* Keep track of speakers with the [Speaker scheduling template](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HQCYvFwNiCBdzFxZmc9AGb0udMDz2EB4BKxVmc2ZIxk/edit#gid=0)
* Consider using different tools to help you stay organized:
  + [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com/Civic-Tech-Toronto/) - free online social networking portal that facilitates offline group meetings in various localities around the world.
  + [Slack](http://civictechto-slack-invite.herokuapp.com/) - online messenger that allows for direct messaging, group messaging, and channel discussions.
  + [Slackin](https://github.com/rauchg/slackin) - enables public access to a slack server.
  + [Github](https://github.com/CivicTechTO) - web-based Git or version control repository and Internet hosting service, mostly used for code.
  + [Website](http://civictech.ca/)/blog - keep people up to date on the organization through a website or blog (eg. Medium).
  + [Twitter](https://twitter.com/civictechto?lang=en)/[Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CivicTechTO/) - broadcast hacknights and current projects.
  + Email - allows for the public to contact you.
* Consider the structure of your organization and team:
  + CTTO: Has a large group of rotating [monthly organizers](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PIhpB4m3yp3QwY7UxCgNN0AxWBrbyEd7oWNa0ZJgYf4/edit#gid=351752992) to eliminate dependence
  + YOWCT: Has two individuals organizing the events for simplicity

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## Templates you can adapt for your own use

These are templates from Civic Tech Toronto that you can adapt for your own use. If you wish to use them, please select “download as…” and save a copy.

* [Agenda and MC talking points](https://docs.google.com/document/d/187JR9m269y7UXzII-KbeSrbUGMxNFNwClGJqgUipvW0/edit)
* [Civic tech 101 slides](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1bWCyCpRv7H4RRVcg-SY5pI4ulBgxNdOwo3CFQ9iOsho/edit)
* [Code of conduct](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1KRX3NQ6ApjGlCVaZQOY7watquYg-rj7fYLzRYQqISYc/edit)
* [Hacknight roles](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iJ4WbeXXm7SzqLcZUFpiyATaW5wdavNYmmJcBcQCab4/edit#gid=351752992)
* [Toronto slide deck](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Z9O6QQ7Tw5Zx7jCSEMsLxNVBYNaOXrqLqW_exqGMJvo/edit)
* [Speaker scheduling](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1HQCYvFwNiCBdzFxZmc9AGb0udMDz2EB4BKxVmc2ZIxk/edit#gid=0)

## Further reading

* Civic tech communities in Canada
  + <http://codefor.ca/community-network/>
* Code for America Brigades
  + <http://brigade.codeforamerica.org/brigade/>

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## Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

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| **Some of the answers may be blank. That means we’re still working on creating answers to them - feel free to share your thoughts in the comments!** |

### Hacknights

#### How do civic tech hacknights differ from other types of hacknights?

Hacknights are a periodically recurring time set aside for coders or people interested in technology to come together and hack or just hang out. The truth is, civic tech hacknights are hacknight with just an extra element of civic tech included in them. Instead of focusing on problems just related to technology, civic tech hacknights aim to solve various civic issues.

#### Is it a coincidence that both Civic Tech Toronto and Civic Tech Ottawa meet on Tuesdays?

Yes and no - Tuesdays are generally picked because it works out for most people. People usually have plans on weekends and Friday nights, and Monday is just too close to the weekend that passed by.

### Outreach

#### How could we effectively connect local governments and activists?

#### Once the initial email was sent, how was the RSVPs captured?

### Feedback

#### How do I provide feedback and suggestions about this toolkit?

We’re always looking to improve our toolkit so we’re happy to get feedback from our readers! Please share your ideas, concerns or questions by commenting on the document pages directly. You may also suggest any new pages for the toolkit by commenting on the “Pages for Future Consideration” document in the “Feedback” folder.

### Definitions

#### What does [discovery, alpha, beta and live](https://www.ontario.ca/page/digital-service-standard) mean?

As given by the digital service standard, these four things are known as the release stages. Description of the four release stages are as follows:

**Discovery** - if a page is in the toolkit is in the discovery page, it means that we are still doing research within the civic tech community to complete this page.