



# DCHacks

Location: Washington DC

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Date: August 1st - 2nd 2015

Attendees: 400 Students, 80 Mentors, 10 Volunteers

## What is a hackathon?

A hackathon is a 24–36 hour coding event where people come together in teams and work with each other, to create the coolest and most innovative projects possible.

The product that is created is called a “hack.” That is why a hackathon is called what it is; it’s like a marathon, except for coding. Here is another explanation straight from Wikipedia:

“The word hackathon is a portmanteau of the words hack and marathon, where hack is used in the sense of playful, exploratory programming, not its alternate meaning as a reference to computer crime.” -Wikipedia

## So what is DCHacks?

DCHacks will be the largest high school hackathon in the mid-atlantic. We plan on bringing 400 students from all across the country to participate. Of these 400 students, around 50% will be students that have never ever written a line of code.

What this means is with just one event, we are getting 200 students who have never written a single line of code before, spend their entire weekend learning skills that could be useful for the rest of their lives. You might be wondering how we are going to teach 200 students who have had no experience with programming to create a full application in 24 hours. The two key words are mentorship and resources.

At DCHacks, we will be bringing 80 mentors. Mentors are adults who have had a great deal of experience with computer science and are willing to give back to the community by teaching and directly mentoring these new students. One of the hardest parts about learning how to code on your own is that you lack direction. However, once you have a mentor, the learning curve is not as steep and it is much easier to get started.

We will also be providing all students with resources such as free domain names, web hosting, and a multitude of other tools for them to create marketable applications. We also provide free food and “swag” (branded company materials) so these students can have as much fun as possible and learn a lot without having to worry about anything else.

Another important goal for DCHack is to get more gender and racial diversity in STEM and computer science. We believe that the lack of diversity in computer science is one of the issues which is really holding the profession back. With DCHacks, we want to change that by starting at its roots. We plan to have at least 30% of our students to be females and/or be underrepresented minorities. If we can get 300 more girls and underrepresented minorities interested in computer science and really show them how interesting and fun it can be, the results would be enormous towards having a more diverse career field.

## How Will DCHacks Get More Kids Interested in STEM?

Hackathons are one of the most successful ways to get high school students interested in STEM. Due to the way hackathons are set up, they are very fun and interesting for students while being great learning experiences.

Going to a hackathon is an exhilarating experience. Even at midnight and towards the early hours, many kids are still up working furiously on their projects. A very interesting takeaway is that most first-time coders, who often times don't really have any expectations for themselves or their projects, try so hard to finish their project in the 24 hours. This is due to how hackathons are such intrinsically motivated events.

However, saying all that, there is also some extrinsic motivation for the event. Often times, this is the motivation for many of the more experienced students who have programmed before. At the end of every hackathon, students pitch their projects, and the best projects win thousands of dollars in prizes. This strong combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is the reason why hackathons are such successful events.

However, hackathons are not only for STEM. During hackathons, students also learn how to design and pitch their ideas creatively. Without a good design or a good pitch, no matter how amazing or cool their idea is, it would not be very successful in the event. Hackathons are meant to create well-rounded students, not just simply technical people. This quote from Steve Jobs sums up what we really want students to get out of a hackathon:

## How is DCHacks organized?

DCHacks will definitely be a very organized event. To lead this event, the team and I have been consulting with organizers from some of the biggest hackathons ever, including MHacks, PennApps, and HackRU. We are also speaking with the founders of MLH (Major League Hacking), essentially the NCAA for college hackathons, very often to get their feedback and ideas on our plan for the event. On the event date, many of these college hackathon leaders will also help us out.

To control the students as a whole, we have over 100 adults, of which 80 are mentors and 20 are volunteers, who will be watching over the students and make sure everything is running smoothly. Also, because our adult to student ratio is almost 1:4, we will have at least one adult to watch over each team. One fact that makes it easier to control these students is that once students are in the building, they cannot leave unless their parents come directly to pick them up. We will have enough people helping out with the event so that it can run smoothly with no issues.