

How Hackathons Work

for some of you, this might be the first hackathon - so I'd like to share some of the experiences we had till now, and set the expectations.

However, every hackathon is different, because there is always a new group of people that create their own atmosphere & "rules", and the topic itself does have an influence too.

Therefore, it's on all of us **together** to make **our** hackathon work for us! So, please give your ideas & feedback & suggestions!

Regards,
Vesna

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** hackathons, in general, are "hacking marathons": a long event where people join to "hack" together -- to create a "quick & dirty" solution to some problem; to explore the possibilities of the problem-space; result is mostly a prototype: code, or sometimes physical objects, or clearer documentation or pretty visualizations ...*

Other results are the connections forged between participants, experiences gained from working together, and hands-on knowledge.

There are also "commercial hackathons" where the organising company gets to be the only one to keep the code, and participants might win monetary prizes or get funding for their startup -- this event is **NOT** one of those!

** the accent is on **team-work** & **cooperation**, rather than on competition!*

** we want to produce **free** code, to be shared with the rest of the community -- not appropriated by corporations through NDAs...*

** work is done in "interdisciplinary groups": small teams of 3-6 people, coming from diverse backgrounds, knowledge level, skills -- this diversity leads to unexpected combinations, creative ideas, and genius solutions!*

Before:

- before the start, we communicate on-line: propose projects, introduce ourselves to each other, discuss ideas, brainstorm...

- We use EtherPad & a mailing list & chat

During:

- we start with personal introductions, where participants say something about themselves: what is their goal for this hackathon, their interests, their skills

- several projects get introduced too, mostly by the organiser & possibly sponsors: so-called "challenges" , where the "hacks" are supposed to provide a solution
- participants choose which project they want to work on, and form teams
- these teams start brainstorming, decide on the direction and amount of work they think they can do in the remaining time (one & a half day!)
- the rest of the time is given to work
- we will also have several short "reviews" (like in Scrum!) to see how are the team progressing, to maybe re-group or merge, or change direction completely - everything is possible
- food, refreshments and drinks are provided throughout the event
- there will be T-shirts, stickers and other small give-aways too
- at the end of the second day, teams make presentations of their results, and the jury gives feedback to the teams: what went well, what could have been better - and you might "win" stroopwafels ;-)

And then there's a party! :)

After:

- slides & code are published & shared & re-used
- results are described on RIPE Labs, presented at follow-up meetings
- some projects go on & continue to "live" & be developed further
- some people stay in touch & become colleagues or friends
- and we go on to organise the next hackathon!

This will be the ELEVENTH hackathon the RIPE NCC has hosted, and we've learned that these events are a great way to bring together developers, operators and designers to come up with creative new tools and visualisations that benefit the entire Internet community.

However, this is our first DISTRIBUTED hackathon, in multiple locations — and it's a new challenge and an un-explored territory : there are surprises waiting for us, and there are some plans on how to do it: but let's see what actually happens!

You can find the results from previous hackathon on <http://labs.ripe.net/hackathons> impressions from the events, happy and thoughtful faces, and parties, of course!

Cheers,
Vesna