MLH Community Values

Major League Hacking (MLH) believes that every student on the planet should have access to high-quality events where they can learn, build, and share their creations.
Through supporting hundreds of hackathons around the world and working closely with the MLH Community, we've come up with the following Core Values that MLH and MLH Member Events share.

MLH Member Events serve as examples of excellence to other hackathons and communities around the world. By following these Core Values, they set an example of excellence and help create the highest quality experience possible for hackers, organizers, and sponsors alike.

MLH Member Events set a standard of excellence for attendees.

Have a **confirmed date and location** that attendees can depend on.

Events must be **at least 24 hours** and the **venue must be available for attendees overnight**.

Have **enough food on-site** to reasonably feed attendees during the event.

Events should **provide healthy food options** and have options available for hackers with dietary restrictions.

Ensure that **participants own any intellectual property** they produce at the event.

Clearly **communicate** any major changes to the event (Ex. venue, location, schedule, theme, etc.) as soon as they occur.

Check in all attendees as they arrive at the event and make sure they have an up-to-date name, email, mobile phone number, and school for each of them.

Have **at least one lead organizer** who has full ability to make decisions on-site at any time during the event.

MLH Member Events are open and accessible to all students.

Do not have entry fees.

Advertise well enough in advance for hackers in the area to learn about the event.

Do not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, economic status, veteran status, disability, or age.

Aren't secret or invite-only events**.**

Have a straightforward and publicly known **general application process**.

Publish the **criteria for admission** to their event.

Publish the **rules and regulations** for competing in their event.

MLH Member Events are fair.

Organizers don't compete in any event they are organizing**.** They extend the same rule to judges, sponsors, and other staff.

Are **open to hackers who are students** at the time of the hackathon or who have graduated within the last 12 months**.** Students can include high school students, university undergraduate, postgraduate students, and people who are in vocational training such as apprenticeships. They welcome non-students as volunteers, mentors, sponsors, and judges.

MLH Member Events are safe and welcoming spaces.

Adopt, make available, and enforce the **MLH Code of Conduct**.

All **organizers sign and agree** to the MLH Code of Conduct.

Have a clear and widely known **reporting system for incidents**.

Have a link to the Code of Conduct on their website and ask **all registrant to agree** to the Code of Conduct during registration (e.g. a compulsory checkbox).

Make it clear that the **Code of Conduct extends to all attendees**, including hackers, volunteers, organizers, sponsors, judges, mentors, and MLH staff.

Make sure that bad actors and attendees who violate the Code of Conduct or rules will not attend the event.

Respect and enforce the drug and alcohol laws and customs of the local country **and only allow moderate alcohol consumption in locales where drinking is allowed.

Have a **first aid kit** on-site during the event.

If minors are attending, the **child safeguarding** requirements for the region/state have been met.

Whenever possible, events **provide sleeping spaces for attendees** and encourage attendees to take advantage of them.

Creating an empowering environment where hackers of all skill levels can create amazing things is MLH's main priority. The MLH Community Values codify this belief in a way that describes not only the MLH Member Events but also the types of events that MLH wants to work with because of their positive contributions to the student hacker movement.

More detailed MLH Policies can be found at https://github.com/MLH/mlh-policies

Hackathon Timeline

A typical timeline while planning a hackathon is listed below. Different articles will be sorted accordingly here for a better reference.

4 to 9 Months Before

    Finding the Date & Purpose

    Building your Leadership Team

    Locking Down a Venue

4 months before

    Setup a Placeholder Website

    Understanding Sponsorship

    Make your Hackathon Budget

    Putting Together a Sponsorship Prospectus

    Start Sponsor Outreach

Apply to become an MLH Member Event!

3 months before

    Start your Hackathon Outreach

    Make your main website live!

    Collecting Registrations for the Hackathon

    Start thinking about the experience of your hackathon

    Start planning our your hackathon logistics

2 months before

    Draft up your Judging Plans

    Draft up your Mentorship Plans

    Start booking your judges/mentors

Start working with your vendors

Start Brainstorming Mini Event

Plan Engaging Workshops

Hackathon Software

1 month before

Create a detailed Run of Show

Get the Final Headcount

Finalize your Food Requirements

Organize Transportation

1 week before

Sending Reminders to the Participants

Set up your Event

Prepare your Emergency Plan

Do a schedule run-through with the team

Judges & Mentor Followup

Game Day!

Check in Process

Distributing Meals

Running Judging

Doing Mentorship

Running Workshops

Opening & Closing Ceremonies

Rules for Your Hackathon

Being extra clear ahead of time can prevent headaches down the road
Check out our full recommended rule list at
https://github.com/MLH/mlh-hackathon-rules/blob/master/Rules.md

Making your rules clear will help you keep your hackathon fair for all attendees, and easily
be able to point to specific rules if you have to disqualify hackers for cheating.

We know that some hackathons vary though, so are including some specific rules your team
should decide on.

How many people per team?

    Can hackers participate solo?

    Can the teams be as large as they want, and you might just have only 4 prizes?

    We see hackers have the most success with teams of a maximum size of 4

Can they crosspost to other hackathons on the same weekend?

    If there is a digital event in the same timeframe of your event can they submit to both?

    We generally recommend no but you should very clearly state this

Do they have to submit code?

    Is there a specific format?

        GitHub link, repl.it, Google drive link, etc?

Can they use publicly available frameworks?

    Do they need to list said frameworks in a readme?

    What about LLM/ChatGPT/AI usage?

        We generally recommend having a rule to credit any tools used/be clear on what they made vs what they are using by having a detailed readme. Clarify it should not be a reskin of an existing AI tool. While LLMs can be great tools, focusing on what was created/changed/built on during the weekend vs what was just used is how we recommend framing it. If they do not credit it, disqualify/report to cheating@mlh.io

Can they make multiple projects?

    Recommend No

Can they submit to multiple challenges?

    Recommend Yes

Deadline for submissions / time they can work on their projects

    Make it very clear they cannot work on their project before the event.

Will judging will be in person?

    Will it be science fair style?

        Recommended

    Or will everyone demo to the larger group

        Recommended only for very small events

Who is allowed to participate

    Students only?

    Age Range?

    No mentors/volunteers/organizers

Are there any categories that require hackers to be a specific demographic?

> Example: Beginners track where at least half the team must have this be their first hackathon.
>
> Make sure to state how many of the team members must fit the category in your rules before the event.

Mentorship

People are interested in spending time learning about new projects and meeting new people as much as they are in having fun during the hackathon! Here are a few things you can do to organize the whole process

Mentor Recruitment

To encourage mentors to help out at the event, spend some time thinking about ways to bring value to the mentors. We recommend reaching out to existing tutors or teaching assistants to mentor because they already find the value out of mentoring and teaching others. Invite alumni from your school, industry professionals, and your professors to join during shifts throughout the event.

To facilitate the process, set up a webpage mentioning a mentor's responsibilities as a mentor for your hackathon. Set up a form to get the interested people to register, asking them to pick a timeslot to help facilitate mentorship.

Quality of mentorship

Mentorship is one of the key ways your hackers can get the help they need and be the difference between them finishing a project or not.

As your team finalizes mentorship, we highly encourage creating a guide to help elevate the quality of your mentors and include items like: questions to ask hackers, how to troubleshoot with the hacker, and useful beginner tools/resources.

Day of Management

Managing mentors during the day-of means can be enhanced by taking advantage of your chat platform. To make a smooth process for everyone, we recommend to set up the following

> Give slots to each mentor so that they know their timings better, though encouraging them to be present throughout the hackathon
>
> Create a #mentorship channel for hackers know where to ask for help and mentors know where to look for requests

Create an @mentor role and add all mentors to there so hackers can easily differentiate mentors

Have a set of guidelines for mentors on what to do during mentorship, giving them a process

Encourage volunteers to stay alert on Discord to look for hackers who need help and push them to the above-mentioned mentorship channel.

Have a dedicated mentor area that hackers can walk up to with questions

Connecting Mentors to Hackers

As often as possible, encourage mentors to hop on voice and/or video chats with the hackers seeking help, or for In-Person events go to the hacking space where the team is.

Have organizers be active on chat and see if some hackers have problems, connecting them to mentors accordingly

Ask mentors to be active on the chat channel

Have mentorship office hours: A peer group type of experience where people can ask questions during the assigned time.

What is Cup Stacking?

Cup Stacking is a historic hackathon mini-event that lets hackers take a break from coding and screen time in a silly activity with their friends and fellow hackers. In teams of up to four, participants attempt to create the tower of cups stacked on each other.

Cup Stacking is typically run as a tournament bracket, with winning teams from each round moving on to the However, Cup Stacking is flexible. Hackers can spend hours figuring out the optimal method as a group rath competing. Feel free to tweak the guidelines below to fit your venue and needs.

Materials

You will need 100 cups per team to run this game. We recommend having 400 cups on hand.

You'll need a watch or phone to set a timer to keep each round the same length.

Make sure your venue has space for this. Teams need about five square feet of space to stack, and you'll likely have a crowd watching, too. Make sure your ceilings won't restrict the total height either!

Optionally, a megaphone or microphone can help call teams when it is their turn.

Procedures

Open up a spreadsheet, doc, or note. You'll be recording team names.

As hackers come to the event, encourage them to find a team of 4 hackers and then come to you with a team name.

Protip: If folks are struggling to form teams of 4. Have them hold up their hands with the number of hackers they currently have. They should look for another group with a corresponding number of hackers.

While hackers make teams, set out four stacks of 100 cups each where teams will play.

Once you have a suitable number of teams or are ready to start, explain the rules. See the Rules Checklist below for a great spiel to give to your hackers.

We recommend running cup stacking in short rounds. Call out your first four team names from your list and assign them to one of the stacks of cups.

Once hackers are in position, please give them a countdown and start the clock!

We recommend moving around through the space during the stacking and chatting with groups. Work the crowd and get folks excited and engaged.

As the round nears its end, start a countdown from ten.

Count each stack and announce the winning team. Remember to record them in your doc, sheet, or note.

It helps the event run more smoothly if the teams restack their cups into two neat piles after competing.

Repeat as needed until you have an overall winner!

Rules Checklist

The rules of cup stacking are exceedingly simple. It's your hackers and the cups. Chances are, if folks ask a they're trying to cheat! /s

No chairs/tables/other furniture to stand on. You can use your partners' backs for more height if they let you!

Once time is called, participants must put their hands straight up in the air! No cheating!

The cup tower must stand during the whole counting period.

Want to up the difficulty? Put 4 strings on a rubber band. The only way they can add cups to the tower is to u rubber band (see pic).

Raise the difficulty by using a rubber band and 4 strings as the only way to add to the tower.

Tie Break Rules

While ties don't happen that often, they do occur. We recommend one of two silly solutions;

Jenga rules. Teams must remove one cup at a time each from somewhere on their tower without reducing the overall height.

Add a cup. Teams must add a cup (making their total height one taller, no side towers!) without their tower crumbling down.

MS Paint Bob Ross

Presented to you by Mary from MLH
MS Paint Bob Ross is MLH's new favourite mini-event and hopefully yours too. You'll be watching a Bob Ross video alongside hackers and creating a masterpiece.

Pro Tips

You should paint something alongside the hackers and Bob Ross. You get to participate too.

Regularly check in with folks and schmooze a bit. This should be a silly interactive stream.

Make sure hackers know they're going to post their creations at the end.

Setup

Make sure you're logged into the appropriate Zoom account

Head to https://www.twitch.tv/bobross/videos

Open up https://jspaint.app/

Find a video to use for your event. Your choice!

Running the Event

Share the video you selected with hackers and ask them to queue up the video.

Have hackers open up https://jspaint.app/ or the paint application of their choice.

Share your screen so hackers can see you painting if they'd like to.

Do a countdown for the video and have everyone follow along together.

At the end, have hackers take turns sharing their screens to showcase their work or consider posting them in a public channel of some sort!