

# FOOD DATA HACK



Carl DiSalvo

Thomas Lodato

Amanda Meng



**[www.publicdesign.gatech.edu](http://www.publicdesign.gatech.edu)**

The first Atlanta Food Data Hack took place March 9th, 2013. It brought together designers and developers, farmers and food producers, advocates and entrepreneurs, government officials and concerned citizens to conceptualize and prototype new uses of information and communication technology in support of local food issues and food systems.

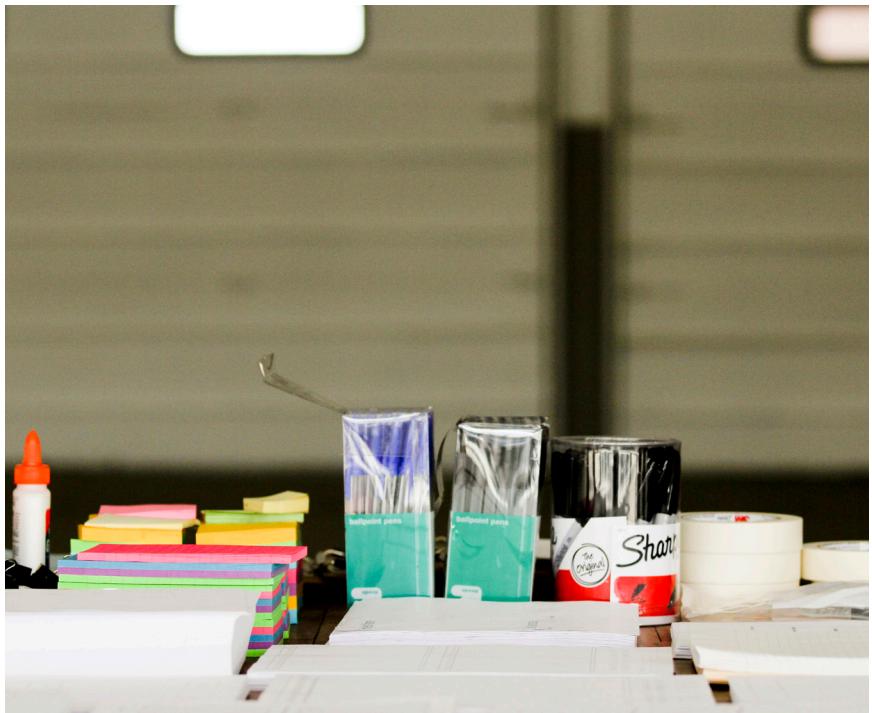
As a research site, the Atlanta Food Data Hack provided an opportunity to explore issue-oriented hackathons as collective and collaborative making events. Unlike our participation and observation of other hackathons, this event (and the subsequent series of events) takes a research-through-design approach. A research-through-design approach complements our field observations of hackathons with insight into the making of these gatherings as events. The philosophical concept of the *event* shifts from focusing on the objects and outcomes to processes and becomings (Fraser 2006). In design, as Alex Wilkie explains, events focus attention on both present and distal objects and people (Wilkie *forthcoming*). Combined with the concept of infrastructuring in design (Björgvinsson et al. 2007), the research-through-design of an event explores the ways scaffolds are created before design-time and used at design-time to foster attachments to issues (Marres 2007) and reconfigurations of socio-technical systems (Suchman 2007).

While the preceding scholarship frames the larger study, this photobook focuses on an internal view of the units of a hacakthon. In trying to understand issue-oriented hackathons, we began by cataloguing their composition.

-Carl DiSalvo, Thomas Lodato, & Amanda Meng

# *OBJECTS*





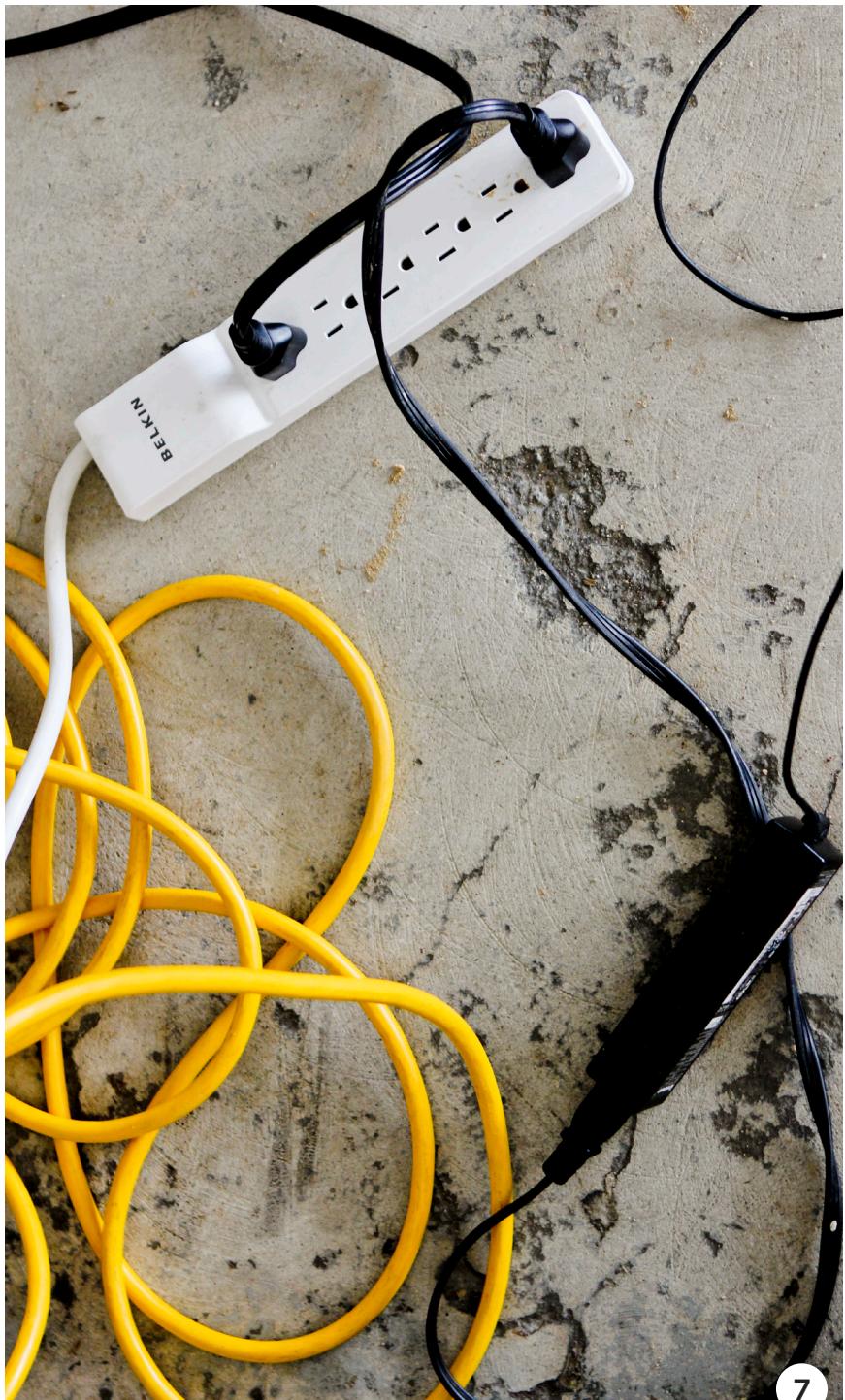
Material resources often shape the character of events. They provide a practical as much as aesthetic resource for making. Our materials oriented participants towards ideation and design.

Hackathons are long events. Food provides a way for attendees to break up their lengthy work sessions.





Access to power in the form of extension cords, power strips, outlets, and adapters are necessary infrastructural considerations.







Hackathon organizers often provide data to attendees. This data comes in many forms, ranging from digital repositories to printed materials. For the initial Food Data Hack we provided maps, digital spreadsheets, KML files, and PDFs containing a range of data related to local food systems and land use.

In addition to the provided materials, attendees often bring a variety of materials with them. Above we see business cards and pamphlets brought by attendees.



Every  
Last  
Morsel



Important to the design of an issue-oriented hackathon is reinforcing themes at various scales. We used food provisioning as an opportunity to reinforce the issues that motivated this hackathon by purchasing from local, independent businesses.

# *GROUPINGS*





The majority of a hackathon is structured around formal topical discussions and working groups. These planned encounters encapsulate the meaningful exchanges at hackathons. Informal discussions also allow people to stumble upon other interests and begin to shape the character of the event.







Committed experts and stakeholders provide a valuable resource to frame topical discussions and generate attachments amongst attendees. We invited representatives from two Atlanta-based organizations—Jon West of the Atlanta Community Food Bank (across top) and Julie Self of the Atlanta Local Food Initiative (across bottom)—to speak about food systems and land use.

Being inclusive and accountable to organizations within Atlanta was an important consideration when planning our event. Prior to the event, we sat down with these and other stakeholders to identify a theme for the hackathon. We wanted to make sure to include and be accountable to organizations within Atlanta also working on food systems. The relationship between land use and food systems came from that discussion.















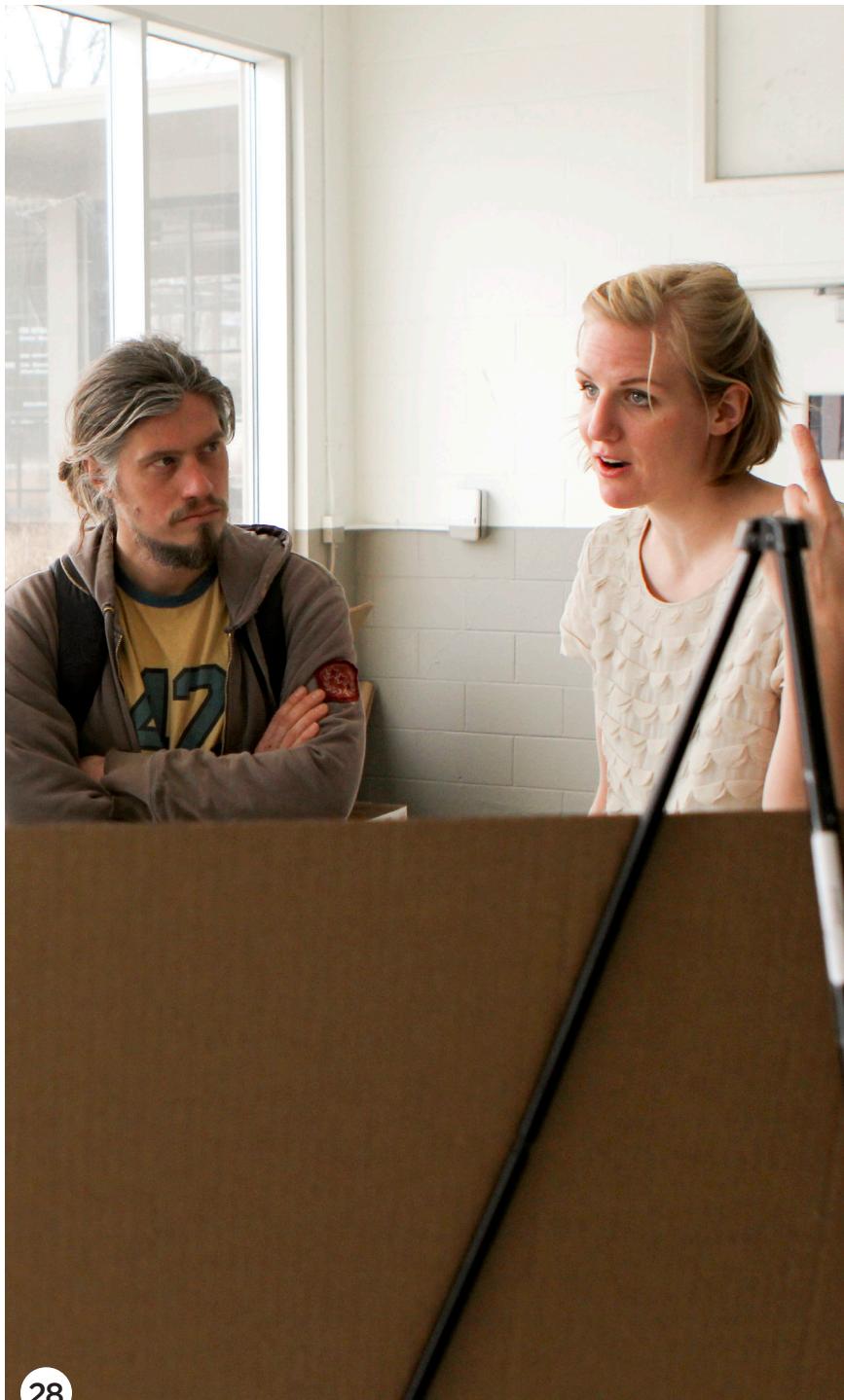






While groups may form around a particular topic, members do not necessarily agree on the definition of the topic or how to address it. Much of the discussion throughout the day is around articulating the differences in how to understand and address a topic.

More than talking, attendees spend significant time listening to the ideas of others.





Groups often generate intermediate artifacts—such as wireframes, flowcharts, and lists—as ways to demonstrate thinking. The artifacts provide a way to structure discussions across groups and with stakeholders.

# *EXPRESSIONS*

Part  
community garden  
new visitor  
interested citizens  
become involved  
TLW





Notes and note-taking have many forms. Some attendees take notes individually and then use them in group discussions by transcribing snippets on stickie notes. These transcribed notes help groups make sense of a topic. Groups order, discard, or otherwise manipulate these notes as ways of focusing on or bracketing problems. This is done by placing the notes in physical relationships, such as next to or on top one another.

Sometimes groups begin by organizing their ideas collectively, and so opt to create a shared representation. These representations require an attendee to listen and transcribe ideas for the whole group.

legislation

regulations  
enforcement  
penalties,  
reparations

availability of  
facilities  
~~decide in packaging~~

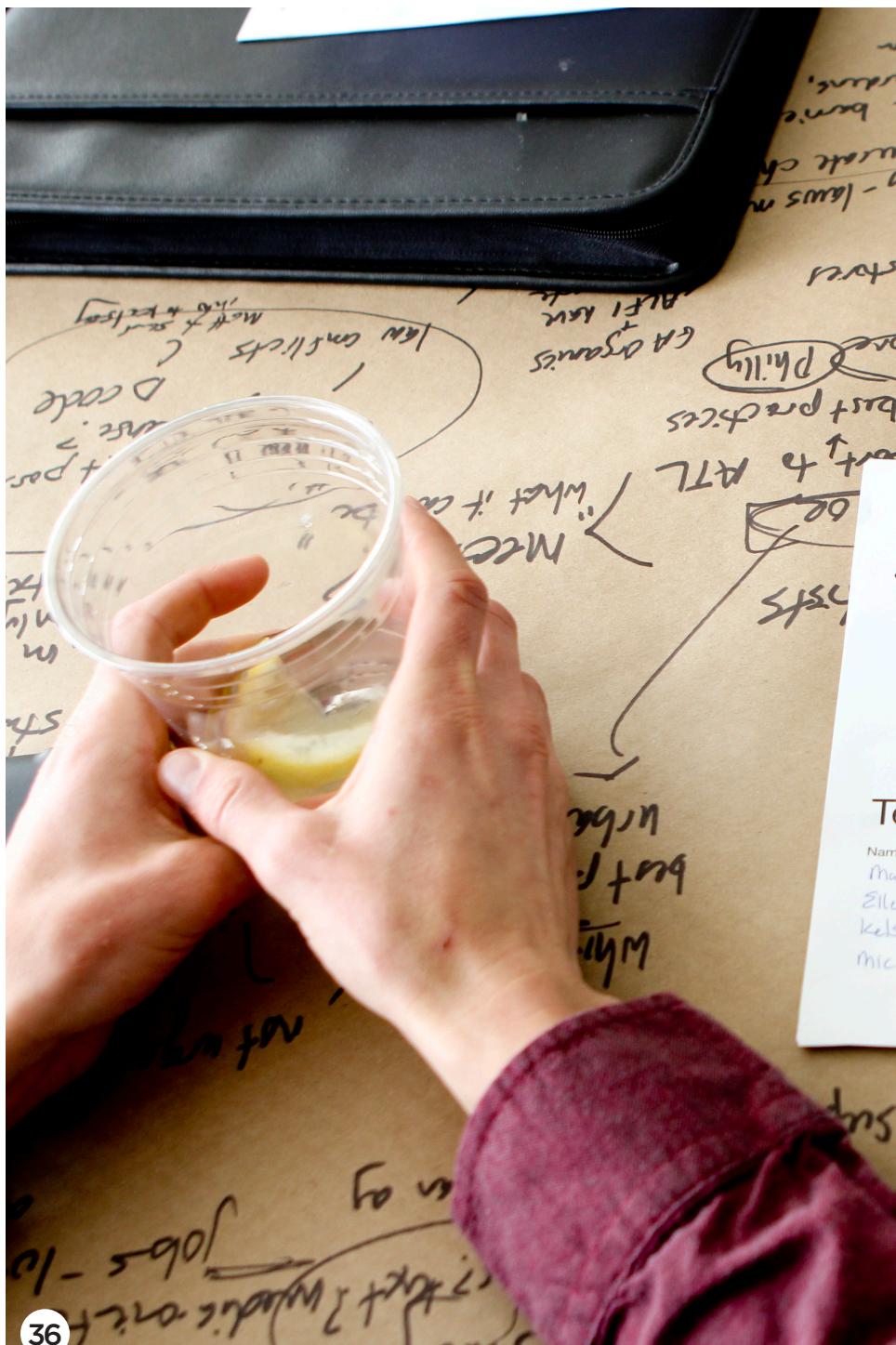
processing

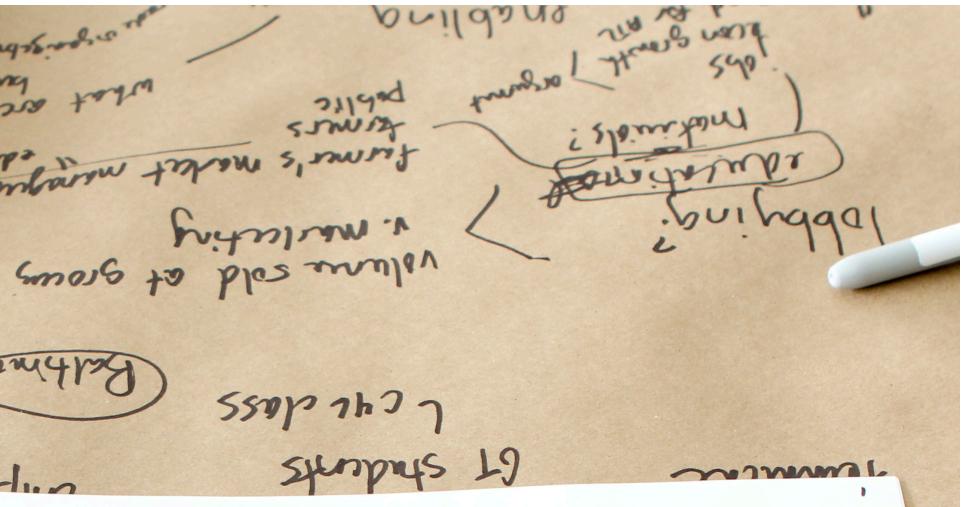
Fair Valley Main has  
facility

Occupational Tax  
- State law vs. city law -  
- State law -  
- Standard tax certificate  
- Occupational Tax certificate  
any business in the city  
any corps



Charts and flow diagrams demonstrate how groups collect and represent their topic areas.





Project Name

## Enabling Commercial Urban Agriculture:

- 1) Telling The Economic Development Story
- 2) Hacking the City Code
- 3) Farmers Selling to APS and/or Kroger  
Team Members (ie, increase channels)

Email

matt@podponics.com  
 czegura@gmail.com  
 lbaack@atlantaga.gov  
 mic.brownm@intel.com

Issue-oriented hackathons are composed of many parts. We intend this photobook to be a complement to our scholarly work on hackathons by providing a partial list of things to attend to when observing or organizing such an event. The goal here is to illustrate what objects, people, practices, and processes come to be called an issue-oriented hackathon.

**The objects** of a hackathon co-constitute the palette of activities. One must be aware of how electricity, markers, data, stickie notes, information, pieces of paper, and food relate. These objects reenforce the commitments of an issue-oriented hackathon while providing needed infrastructure and resources to attendees.

**The groupings** of a hackathon provide a way for ideas to be cultivated and shared. One must be aware of formal and informal groupings, and practices like talking, listening, and debating when considering what to encourage people to do.

**The expressions** of a hackathon forge attachments amongst various proximal and distal units, such as people, land assets, seeds, and knowledge sets. Expressions of ideas provide traces of interactions amongst various actors. Expressions argue for certain conditions in the world and can take a multiplicity of forms, from working code to paper prototypes to a list of written guidelines.

Across these three vectors—objects, groupings, and expressions—we begin to attend to what an issue-oriented hackathon is.

## References

- Björgvinsson, E., Ehn, P., & Hillgren, P. (2010). Participatory design and “democratizing innovation”. *Participatory Design Conference* (pp. 41-50).
- Fraser, M. (2006). Event. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(2-3), 129-132.
- Le Dantec, C., & DiSalvo, C. (2013). Infrastructuring and the Formation of Publics in Participatory Design. *Social Studies of Science*, 43(2), 241-264.
- Marres, N. (2007). The Issues Deserve More Credit: Pragmatist Contributions to the Study of Public Involvement in Controversy. *Social Studies of Science*, 37(5), 759-780.
- Suchman, L. A. (2007). *Human-Machine Reconfigurations: Plans and Situated Actions*. Cambridge University Press.
- Wilkie, A. (*forthcoming*). Prototyping as Event.

## Researchers

Carl DiSalvo  
carl.disalvo@lmc.gatech.edu

Thomas James Lodato  
thomas.lodato@gatech.edu

Amanda Meng  
a.meng@gatech.edu

[www.publicdesign.gatech.edu](http://www.publicdesign.gatech.edu)

## Photography

Kevin Dowling  
kevin@kevindowling.net

## Acknowledgements

Julie Self and the Atlanta Local Food Initiative

Jon West and the Atlanta Community Food Bank

Kristin Wilson, Stephanie Hodges, and the City of Atlanta's Office of Innovation Delivery

Anna Marissa Fetz and Jamestown Properties



