Title: Narrowing the Gender Gap at Hackathons
Type: Regular Talk (25 minutes)
Language: English
Audience Level: Beginner
Abstract:

As hackathons become more prevalent, one thing has (mostly) stayed the same: the ratio of male to female hackathon participants is often lower than the ratio in the broader computer science community.

How can hackathon organizers be mindful of this issue, and encourage a diverse pool of participants? This talk will cover the basics of how to run an inclusive hackathon, as well as successful strategies organizers have used in the past. We will examine case studies of several of the largest college hackathons.

Outline:
The basic outline is in four parts:

1. **Understanding Context (4 min)** - What are the numbers? How bad is this problem? How does it affect and how is it affected by broader issues of representation in tech?
    1. *Example: Tracy Chou's project tracking women at a selection of the top tech companies and startups showed representation at ~12% on average. https://github.com/triketora/women-in-software-eng*
    2. *Example: Women completing CS degrees at university tends to range from 13% to 20% depending on the school.*
    3. We'll look at how these data compare with hackathon participant data (hint: hackathons are doing worse.)
    4. Note: Many of the same factors that keep women from participating at hackathons also keep out other marginalized groups, and we shouldn't ignore that. However, in this talk I'm going to focus on gender.
2. **Breaking Down Barriers to Entry (8 min)**
    1. Barriers*:* Self-confidence & Unfamiliarity with Hackathons
        1. Root problem: Not being in the right "networks" to gain knowledge.
        2. Subproblems:
            1. Not knowing what a hackathon is/ which hackathons exist.
            2. Not having a team or friends who are participating.
            3. Hearing about the event too late, i.e. once tickets are sold out.
        3. Solution: make sure that you are reaching out through a variety of channels. Create paths for participants to find teams.
    2. *Example: PennApps 2013s to PennApps 2014s saw a jump in female participation due to "Ladies Storm Spring Hackathons", an outside initiative on Facebook by female hackathon attendees creating a community.*
    3. *Example: HackTX saw a jump in female participation (4% to 10%) from 2012 to*

2013 due to direct outreach. (UT Austin CS is ~13-15% female.)

4. Be accessible to first-timers and participants of varied backgrounds.
    1. First-timers, beginners, designers -- there are women in all these categories, and there are women who are none of these things. Thus, do not conflate any of these labels with "women" in your messaging.
5. *Example: Girls Who Code initiatives at NYC high schools made HackTrin, a high school hackathon, have a strong female showing compared to other hackathons. (*Will get exact data before talk.)*

3. **Being Conscious of Communication (5 min)**
    1. Root problem: Participants cannot picture themselves at a hackathon.
    2. Subproblems & solutions:
        1. Visibility matters. Promotional materials, judges, mentors, and sponsors should represent a diverse selection.
        2. Language etiquette is important.
            1. *Example: http://jvns.ca/blog/2013/12/27/guys-guys-guys/*
        3. Communicate directly: have a code of conduct.
    3. *Example: MHacks realized they had a problem, raised from 5% to 13% between MHacks II and III by specifically targeting women.*
4. **Progress through Iteration (Aka, "How to Do Better in the Future") (3 min)**
    1. Involve women in your planning team: "nothing about us without us."
    2. Gather feedback from past participants *and* non-participants: be prepared to ask questions that you might not like the answer to.
        1. People have distinct identities and experiences.
        2. Collect data to understand the scope of the problem: how many women are participating? Is the gender ratio of participants consistent with the gender ratio in your community or is it better/worse? (If your university's CS department or your Meetup group is x% women, how does your hackathon compare against that?)
    3. Make the experience great → Participants come back next time.
        1. No one size fits all: what is important to your participants?
        2. Code of conduct, good mentorship, structuring your hackathon so that teams "finish" and don't feel like they've failed -- these are ways to make sure your participants enjoy themselves and want to do another hackathon in the future. While this is relevant to everyone, it is especially relevant to first-timers. (And if you've followed the above talk, hopefully you'll have a large contingent of female first-timers. (:)
5. **Questions (5 min)**

Case Studies to Cover:
I plan to use "case studies" and data from PennApps, HackTX, and MHacks. I may potentially also bring in data from HackTrin, HackNY, HackRU, HackMIT, Hack 'n' Jill, PearlHacks, and others.

Why I Am Qualified to Give This Talk:
I planned and gave a similar version of this talk at Hackcon.io in collaboration with several other college hackathon organizers. I used to organize PennApps and have close relationships with many college hackathon organizers, so I have access to relevant data. Further, closing the gender gap in tech is something I am passionate about.