

DRAFT

# Hack-in-a-Box



Mayor's Office of  
Tech + Innovation



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# Hackathon Planning Timeline



# What is a Hackathon?

Hackathons are events where computer programmers, graphic designers, and business savvy individuals gather to collaborate on software projects. Beginning in 1999<sup>1</sup>, hackathons have gained widespread traction and popularity and now are a staple of tech-culture worldwide.

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## When to plan a Hackathon:

Universities, venture capitalists, government agencies and corporate businesses, have embraced hackathons because they offer an innovative way to:

- Strengthen teamwork
- Raise productivity
- Scout talent
- Foster the creation of new ideas
- Engage the community
- Develop prototypes and Minimum Viable Products (MVPs)

[1] OpenBSD Hackathons





# Event Design

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# Concept Visualizing

Before you can start organizing your event, it is important to lay a framework for what kind of hackathon you want to hold.

Who will be your core audience? Students? Government workers? Business people?

What is the purpose of the event? What are you trying to accomplish?

What social challenge do you want to center your hackathon around? Is there any particular theme you would like to address?

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## Run-of-Show

Once you have a general idea for what your event will be, decide how you would like it to be structured. After you finalize your schedule, publicize, along with other information about the event.

How long will your event be? When will it start and when will it end?

Will you have speakers or workshops?

When will each event of the day begin? Demos? Awards ceremony?

# Challenge Scoping

Choosing a civic challenge as a theme is a great way to center your hackathon around an issue that is relevant and engaging to the community.

**If you're in the government,** it could be beneficial to center your hackathon around an issue your agency is currently focusing on. Try looking for a challenge theme that corresponds with your agency's strategic plan, or what it seeks to accomplish in the next 6-12 months.

**If you're in the private sector,** find ideas for challenging and creative themes by looking into what New York City is currently focusing on. Look through resources such as news articles, pertinent Twitter handles and websites such as [nyc.gov/onenyc](https://nyc.gov/onenyc) for New York City's strategic plan. Additionally, you can reach out to an NYC employee by finding their contact information at [greenbook.nyc](https://greenbook.nyc)





# Programming

# Venue

## Things to Consider:

WiFi: the servers should be able to provide Internet for numerous devices. Information to sign in to the WiFi should be easily available via signs or cards

Bathrooms: should be gender-neutral

Capacity: audience should be able to fit into the venue. Be mindful of fire codes

Location: venue should be accessible from public transportation and not too far from your core audience

Accessibility: venue should be navigable by people with physical handicaps

## Equipment:

- Power Cords

- HDMI/thunderbolt cables

- Projectors

- Microphones

# RSVP Management

In order to have everything running smoothly the day of, have attendees register for the event beforehand, either by using Google Forms, EventBrite or some other online tool.

*To charge or not to charge?* Decide whether or not you want to charge a ticket price for attendants. Charging a minimum fee creates a sense of commitment and makes people less likely to not show up on the day of. You can also waive the fee for participants who sign up to volunteer before or after the event.

*Dealing with no-shows...* The best way to deal with no-shows is to prevent them from happening by creating excitement around the event, charging ticket fees and opening up registration early. However, no-shows are inevitable. Minimize the damage by not putting a cap on registration.

# Marketing

In order to ensure a good turnout, you should start publicizing the event at least two months prior. Make sure event details (e.g. date, time, location, prizes) are easily available online.

## *Tech-Platforms*

Devpost

Hackernest

Github

TechCrunch

- Get the word out to a large number of people by using platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Reddit.
- Additionally, using tech centric platforms can help you reach a specific audience.
- Establishing an official event hashtag can generate buzz around your hackathon.
- Get the press involved! For maximum exposure contact the media at least a month in advance with a press release.

# Food

Make sure you provide something in the way of sustenance, even if it's just coffee and snacks.

Some important things to keep in mind:

- Don't serve alcohol if there will be attendees younger than 21
- Be mindful of dietary restrictions. Have vegetarian/gluten-free options



# Email Outreach

It takes a village to organize a hackathon. Emails are usually the best way to get in contact with everyone, from sponsors to mentors. Make sure you contact all potential collaborators well in advance.

Keep your initial communication short and to-the-point.

## Email Sample

Subject: Opportunity to Support our Hackathon

Hello <first name>,

I am <name>, writing from <organization>. <Organization> is planning a hackathon on <date> and we thought <name of potential sponsor> would be a perfect sponsor because of <reason>. If you think you might be interested, we can set up a meeting to discuss further. My number is <number>.

Hoping to hear from you soon!

Best,  
<name>

# Participants

# Sponsors

After coming up with the basic details about your event, it's time to secure sponsorships. Securing sponsors is essential to receiving the funding and credibility you need to organize a successful hackathon.

## Sponsors can help:

- Secure a venue
- Supply food
- Offer prizes
- Provide mentors
- Market your event
- Give swag

## Find sponsors by contacting:

- Tech companies
- Local businesses
- Government agencies
- Venture Capitalists

Sponsorships are a two-way relationship. Be mindful of what your sponsor may be looking to get out of the arrangement. This can range from having their logo displayed on event material, to having contestants use their APIs. The perks that you offer can vary based on the type of sponsor.

Generally, there are three levels of sponsorship:

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***Premium Sponsorship:*** A premium sponsorship is the most expensive and helps the hackathon the most, hence this sponsor gets the most perks from the sponsorship.

2

***Regular Sponsorship:*** A regular sponsorship is somewhere between the maximum and minimum amount and gets a solid amount of benefits.

3

***Friend-of-the-Hackathon:*** A friend of the hackathon gives a minimum amount. This can be local food vendors or t-shirt companies.



## Mentors

In order to ensure maximum productivity, it can be helpful to provide onsite mentors who can act as a resource. Participants can ask them questions, and they can provide feedback and advice.

Mentors can be provided by sponsors and can be people in the tech field, people with data analytics skills, or people with insight on the challenge. Be sure to brief all mentors before the event.

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## Challenge Owners

Challenge owners are directly related to the challenge question and have a vested interest in any solutions. Their role is to serve as an expert on the theme, to explain the challenge, as well as to answer any questions participants may have. Challenge owners may also be called upon to explain the data provided.

Challenge owners should have some say in the judging rubric and can also brief judges on what to look for in a winning demo.

# Organizers

In order to organize a successful event, it is pertinent to put together a team of motivated individuals who can take care of all tasks, both major and minor. You should have one lead organizer. Delegate specific tasks to certain organizers; have someone in charge of directing volunteers, someone to take pictures, etc. Be sure to brief all organizers and volunteers before the event.

## Pre-Event:

Organizers must be able to stay on top of every detail, as well as be able to keep track of all the technical aspects of planning the event.

Tasks include: booking the venue, contacting sponsors, maintaining web presence, etc.

## Event-Day:

On the day of the actual event, organizers must be present and active in order to ensure everything goes smoothly.

Tasks include: serving food, check-in/check-out, promoting hashtag, etc.

# Judges

Before you can crown the winners and hand out the prizes, you need to create a judging panel of around 3-5 well-rounded judges. The purpose of having judges is to pick the most promising and innovative ideas that are presented. Different agencies and different challenges can call for a variety of judging criteria. Ultimately, it is up to the organizers to decide what they are looking for most in a demo. Make sure to brief your judges beforehand on what you are looking for.

Some common judging criteria include:

**Technical Sophistication:**

How well is the idea presented? Did the participants display a high-level of technical acumen?

**Innovation:** How well have the participants responded to the challenge question? How creative was their solution.

**Accuracy:** Does the demo work? Is it relevant to the challenge at hand?

**Potential:** Do you see a future for the app? Does it fill any voids in the marketplace? Does it have potential to grow?

Judges should be business or tech professionals or experts in the theme who have first-hand experiences in the field. Your judges are probably busy people so make sure you contact them at least a month in advance.

**External Judges** are from outside the organization.

May be able to offer a fresher, less biased opinion.

Judges from different, yet relevant fields may be able to bring a different perspective to the judging.

**Internal Judges** are judges from within the organization.

They may be more familiar with data, as well as with the company/agency's objectives.

May be more willing to participate, and easier to schedule.