



Guidelines for organisers of Apps challenges

Abstract

Guidelines on how to engage with stakeholders, such as potential reuse communities, public sector bodies, data holders or data publisher relevant for the challenge (government, science and culture). These also include guidelines on how to keep the conversations alive after the challenge, to help turning Apps competitions from single events to an ongoing process of the local; national and pan-European open data ecosystem.

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1. Goal of the challenge

When designing a challenge, it is important to understand your main objectives. It may be that the challenge is specifically focusing on advertising the use of an open data portal and focusing on getting more people to use the data that is published on the portal, as well as more generally getting feedback from users of the portal. Other goals may be more ambitious, such as building a community of users around an open data portal or stimulating innovation and the economy - or focusing on a specific set of data that you would like to see used. It might even be to solve a specific problem or set of problems in your local area or country? The options are numerous. Depending on the ambition of the challenge you can set up the challenge in different ways as we will discuss in the next section. Make sure you define what your goal is, as that will help you craft a much clearer message - and also help you better appeal to your target group and the relevant communities.

2. Format of your challenge

Generally we distinguish between two types of events: one-off singular challenge events which are usually one or two days consecutive days, and challenges that have a longer lifespan of about 2-3 months. When designing the challenge we encourage you to first evaluate the goals of the challenge before deciding on the right format.

Singular events

App challenges that are organised as singular events are most useful for organisers that are looking to promote the use of specific open data portals or who are more generally aiming to acquire users or get feedback from users. These events can be branded as a 'hackathon' (implies small time commitment) and often are organised as an in-person event (but can also be online) that takes one or two days. In order to facilitate developers who want to come outside of their day jobs, such events often take place during the weekend.

Another reason for organising the challenge as a one or two-days event is that there already is an existing community of users / developers and existing applications have already been developed that make use of the data. In these cases there may be a substantive developer community who is interested in coming to an event to meet the community and learn about the latest developments around the open data portal. Specific occasions that prompt the organisation may include the redesign of the open data portal, or when substantive amounts of additional data is released.

Longer term challenges

When there is not yet a community of users or developers for the data, and the desire is to build that community, a challenge that takes longer than just one or two days may be more appropriate.

Longer term challenges have a dedicated period where people are invited to participate. It often starts with a big announcement, which may include a press conference and a dedicated press release to raise awareness of the challenge. PR and marketing activities should focus on

a mix of traditional and online activities. For traditional activities, it is useful to think about who you are trying to target. Often the challenge will have an objective to not just appeal to developers, but one would hope that resulting applications are useful for all citizens. When targeting traditional media it is relevant to include that bigger picture about engagement between the data publishers and the general public. For online activities, think about the existing communities that may be interested in the challenge. These may include developer communities that are local to where the competition is organised, or startups eager to establish their name - or forums and discussion lists where data users discuss issues relating to a certain topic, ie. scientific data or government data.

Geography of the challenge

Also make sure to consider the scope of your challenge as part of defining your target group. Will your challenge be global? Supranational, like EU? National and thereby focusing only on a limited geographic or cultural area, or even regional or local? For instance a city-challenge could be the very scope you're looking for.

Language of the challenge

A key thing to consider is the language that your challenge will use, as this will likely reflect on the apps as well. Is your goal supported by using English only or maybe, in some cases, focusing only on local language(s). Or maybe even both?

3. Stakeholder engagement

Once the basic foundation is in place and that you're ready to announce your challenge, it's time to engage with the open data community.

Tell the world!

First and foremost, make sure that you promote the fact that you're launching a challenge and thereby embarking on a campaign to promote [open data](#). Make sure to start early, as building a community takes time. In addition to things like press releases, announcements on your website, and so on, you may consider:

- Contacting relevant mailing lists or social networking groups
- Directly contacting prospective users who you know may be interested in this data
- Contacting prominent organisations or individuals who work/are interested in this area - this includes government bodies, who is executing the local open data policy.

Post your material on third-party sites

Many blogs have created a large readership in specialised topic areas. It may be worthwhile contacting them and ask them to add an article about your initiative on their site. These can

be mutually beneficial. You receive more interest and they receive a free blog post in their topic area.

Establish a social media presence

While email will get you a long way and should not be discarded, it's not the most transparent or flexible type of communication, and you should consider setting up other channels for engaging with people who want to join the community around your data. One of the easiest ways of doing that is via social media, which allows you to have public conversations that let's newcomers backtrack and get up to speed even if joining conversations later.

Social media also let's you have a human face, and this is important especially (but not limited to) if you're an organization or institution moving into the open data field. A human face is often useful as it builds credibility and lowers the threshold for upcoming developers and other talents to take the leap to join your challenge even if they have only little experience.

Furthermore it should be highlighted that social media in general are informal and should be treated as such. Consider sidestepping your organizational code of conduct if any such exist - to have more impromptu, casual and engaging conversations to attract more people. In community building, people generally joins people - rather than "faceless" organizations. This goes down to even simple things like when you need to pick an avatar; use a photo of yourself or, for shared accounts, make a group photo - not your logo.

Be active on discussion lists - or even setup your own discussion list

In the open data community and adjacent developers communities, discussion lists and forums are often among the most used tools of conversation. To engage people there it is often advantageous to be an active contributor and be responsive to those writing you back. You might even want to consider setting up your own forum or discussion list - there are many free tools for that, among other [Mailman](#) or [Google Groups](#). In the beginning of running your own forum make sure to post rather frequently to ensure that those joining feel a vibrancy. Soon, they will hopefully begin to contribute. To stimulate that make sure to not use it as a channel for announcements alone; rather you should make sure to send out open-ended questions which serve to engage your audience and inspire them to give you feedback and pose questions and thoughts themselves.

As a bonus, running a forum or a discussion list also ensures that you do not need to answer the same questions again and again, as you can then link to the public archives to bring newcomers up to speed (make sure to enable public access to your discussion list archives).

Be available

If there is one thing that might potentially kill off your forum it's the unavailability of it's initiator/admin. So make sure to make time for attending to questions and conversations. Or

even better: Equip the most active community members with the agency to partially act on your behalf. This will empower them and lighten the load on your shoulders.

Making your communications more social-media friendly

It's unrealistic to expect that everyone in your target group will spend long periods of time engaging with social media. However, there are several things that you can do to make sure that your challenge announcement can be easily shared between less committed users. Digital communities tend to be very willing to share new information, yet they very rapidly consume it. Write as if your messages will be skimmed over, rather than critically examined in-depth. Also make sure to provide a unique pages for each piece of content, which will ensure that when a message is shared with others, the recipient of the referral will be taken directly to the relevant content quickly.

Understanding your audience

Like all public communication, engaging with the data community needs to be targeted - you'll be looking to engage civil society (for instance freelance developers and even students) as well as businesses (start-ups, entrepreneurs) and other stakeholders such as public sector bodies and public servants (as well as other dataholders and publishers).

In this guide we'll focus on cultural data, government data and scientific data communities and give you concrete tips for places to start. Like all stakeholder groups, the right message can be wasted if it is directed to the wrong area.

Finding your audience

Online communities have different ways of organizing - as well as with regards to which channels they use to communicate.

For data communities, however, discussion lists seems to be the medium of choice for many groupings. In this section we highlight some of the most prominent communities within the government, scientific and cultural data spaces. It is essential to bear in mind that your messages in reaching out broadly will not reach end users directly, but rather via 'info-mediaries' - many of which are to be found in the communities listed in the following.

Government data communities

Government data communities are very diverse by nature and often consists not only of data users, but also members with political interests - such as activist groups, lobbyists and government officials tasked with either releasing data or learning from the experience of others in order to do so. These will therefore have different incentives to help spreading your message.

Many forums and discussion lists exists, but some of the most notable includes the [Open Government Working Group](#) of the Open Knowledge Foundation - a list of over 900 open

government data enthusiasts and professionals - which also runs a [website](#) with relevant resources. Another community is the [EU Open Data discussion list](#), which as the name implies focuses on European government data.

Worth mention is also the recently established [Global Open Data Initiative](#), which runs a [Google Group](#) with discussions among its 200+ members. The Global Open Data Initiative aims to be a point of focus and discussion for civil society around open government data. Lastly, we encourage you to tap into twitters streams based on hashtags, for instance tags such as #opengov and #opengovernment - as well as more general ones such as #opendata.

Scientific data communities

Scientific data covers several adjacent areas including research data, educational data and even environmental and sustainability data. One of the most recognized communities is Open Knowledge Foundation's Open Science Working Group, which convenes in a [discussion list](#) and runs the [OpenScience website](#). Another recognized space is the [Open Science Federation Google+ forum](#) - and in other social media terms tapping into twitter streams around hashtags such as #openscience and #openaccess is highly recommended.

For the research end of the spectrum, you might be moving towards a more proprietary, patented space where communities are to be found in the commercial sector of companies and start-ups.

For environmental data discussions and enthusiasts, a useful resource is the Open Sustainability Working Group, also initiated by the Open Knowledge Foundation. They run a [discussion list](#) and can furthermore be interacted with via their [Twitter account](#). On Twitter, there may be trending topics that are particularly relevant when you launch and you can try to become part of those discussions by tagging your messages with the relevant tags.

Cultural data communities

Some European countries already have national initiatives that bring together cultural institutions that make open data available, and sometimes also connect them to a network of developers that are interested in cultural data and content to reuse in their projects. Examples of this are the Open Cultuur Data networks in [the Netherlands](#) and [Belgium](#) and [Avoine GLAM](#) in Finland. Another important initiative that reuses cultural data and content to specifically keep in mind is the [GLAM-WIKI project](#), that supports supports cultural organisations and other institutions who want to work with Wikimedia to produce open-access, freely-reusable content for the public. This initiative is often supported by the national Wikimedia Chapters and run by Wikimedia volunteers world-wide. [Europeana](#) can also serve as a 'channel' for data owners from the cultural heritage sector who are interested to see their metadata (and content) being reused by third parties. Through their API and hackathons this initiative promotes [the reuse of the CC-o licensed metadata](#) Europeana has collected. Lastly, the Open Knowledge Foundation's [OpenGLAM](#) network promotes free and open access to digital cultural heritage, bringing together hundreds of cultural metadata enthusiasts.

Twitter-wise, for cultural data, consider using tags such as #openglam and #publicdomain. Again a few searches to uncover contemporary topics and news within cultural data will help you discover the best hashtags.

Getting folks in a room: Unconferences, Meetups and Barcamps

Your challenge might best take place as an online activity, but face-to-face events can be a very effective way to encourage more people to engage in your challenge. Such activities may be to frame your challenge as an event (as mentioned in the early parts of these guidelines) or as events leading up to your challenge to garner interest and gauge your potential participants and even allow them to form collaborative groups.

Reasons that you may consider putting on a face-to-face event include:

- Finding out more about prospective reusers
- Finding out more about demand for different datasets
- Finding out more about how people want to reuse your data
- Enabling prospective reusers to find out more about what data are available
- Enabling prospective users to meet each other (e.g. so they can collaborate)
- Exposing your challenge to a wider audience (e.g. from blog posts or media coverage that the event may help to generate)

There are lots of different ways of running events, and different types of events, depending on what aim you want to achieve. As well as more traditional models with a predefined program, there are also various kinds of participant-driven events, where those who turn up may:

- Guide or define the agenda for the event
- Introduce themselves, talk about what they're interested in and what they're working on, on an ad hoc basis
- Give impromptu micro-short presentations on something they are working on
- Lead sessions on something they are interested in

There is plenty of documentation online about how to run these kinds of events, which you can find by searching for things like: 'unconference', 'barcamp', 'meetup', 'speedgeek', 'lightning talk', and so on. You may also find it worthwhile to contact people who have run these kinds of events in other countries, who will most likely be keen to help you out and to advise you on your event. It may be valuable to partner with another organisation (e.g. a civic society organisation, a news organisation or an educational institution) to broaden your base participants and to increase your exposure.

Should you aim for a longer, virtually focused challenge, kicking it off with a hackday to get people started before pedalling off on their own might be a good idea.

Business Lounge

If you're running a series of challenges, you should strongly consider applying to organize a Business Lounge in collaboration with Apps For Europe. Organizing a Business Lounge creates an opportunity for app makers, investors and open data experts to come together and turn open data talents from your challenges into sustainable business entrepreneurs. Apps for Europe brings an investor network to already existing competitions or hackathons across Europe. The objective? To increase the number of projects moving from an app concept or prototype phase into a business start-up.

It's a great opportunity to connect to the open data entrepreneurial community. It gives investors, business accelerators and talents to meet and build collaborations.

The Business Lounge will expose the best apps to companies, government agencies and individuals who can provide invaluable expertise, support and tutoring to help you turn ideas into a business. On top of this, the best app developers may be picked from your local Business Lounge to pitch their app to a network of European investors at [Future Everything](#) in March.

4. Sustainability - keeping the conversation going

The work with setting up your challenge shouldn't stop after it has ended. Rather, the community that will hopefully build around your challenge, once engaged, will be a valuable ongoing resource for you in the continuing your work pursuing your longer term goals and objectives. Yet it will require ongoing nursing from your side to keep the feedback loop going and ensure the continued engagement from your community. The benefits are, however, many - as you will be able to have your community work for you in a sense: Spreading the knowledge of your goals and future activities and inviting more people to engage with it - and, if given agency as mentioned earlier herein, help maintain the community with you. This can be further strengthened if you allow your users to have influence on decisions made - for instance on what data will be used for future challenges and what topics to focus on.

Make sure to collect feedback

Set up a public Google Doc/ Etherpad where anyone can input ideas, feedback and points onto during the challenge and after - this engages quieter participants in an unthreatening fashion and allows them to share their views too! Ask participants to sign up their email to you so that you have a way of contacting them.

Publicize your results and what happened

Documenting your challenge is one of the most important tasks you will have to do during and after your event, because it allows you to show the benefits of your work and helps

newcomers and those not able to participate in your community backtrack and get on board - and get participants to keep their interest in the challenge and any future activities you will seek to engage them in.

- **Make sure to collect pictures** (usually people bring phones and cameras - so announce a way for them to share with you and others - for instance through Flickr - and share them with the community (consider setting up a unifying tag that participants can use to upload their own photos to your stream)).
- **Share your slide decks** - make sure any slide decks with instructions or from face-to-face events, if any are held, are available to the public, if possible. This would go for yours as well as any invited speakers. A good tool for sharing slides is [Slideshare](#).
- **Document events and the actual challenge with blog posts** where you summarize what's going on, share important findings or topics discussed and also in the end, if possible, announce whether more similar events is likely to be organized in the future.
- **Record face-to-face events and post them on Youtube or Vimeo**, making sure to share the link to it widely (and make sure to get permission from presenters or anyone else featuring prominently in such recordings).

How to maintain your community

There are many ways to maintain a community and every community is different, so be ready to learn as you go along (or skip some steps and look up good literature on the subject). A few well-proven tips include:

Be a community member yourself - empower members to lead with you

As mentioned earlier, having a human face and being available goes a long way, and seeing yourself as a community member will often inspire other members to contribute a great lengths. You might even want to consider setting up a structure in which key members get certain responsibilities; event organizing, responding to tech support requests or act as ambassadors to name a few.

Be fair and transparent

People are likely more eager to join a community if they know more about the organizer of the community (and in this case of the challenge they'll commit time to). Make sure to run the community in a way where a certain degree of transparency allows members to know what's coming and not feel as if you are suddenly moving in new directions (ie. around technical decisions or other drastic changes) without informing the community well in advance.

Highlight successful reuse cases

A good way to inspire your community to engage further is to highlight how your challenge

has been successful in producing interesting apps or other notable fruits of the labor. You might consider setting up some kind of showcase of apps, projects and social change that builds on your challenge(s).

5. References: Examples of challenges and competitions

“Show us a better way” was the first such competition in the world. It was initiated by the UK Government’s “The Power of Information Taskforce” headed by Cabinet Office Minister Tom Watson in March 2008. This competition asked “What would you create with public information?” and was open to programmers from around the world, with a tempting £80,000 prize for the five best applications.

- **Apps for Democracy**, one of the first competitions in the United States, was launched in October 2008 by Vivek Kundra, at the time Chief Technology Officer (CTO) of the District of Columbia (DC) Government. Kundra had developed the groundbreaking DC data catalogue, <http://data.octo.dc.gov/>, which included datasets such as real-time crime feeds, school test scores, and poverty indicators. It was at the time the most comprehensive local data catalogue in the world. The challenge was to make it useful for citizens, visitors, businesses and government agencies of Washington, DC.

The creative solution was to create the Apps for Democracy contest. The strategy was to ask people to build applications using the data from the freshly launched data catalogue. It included an online submission for applications, many small prizes rather than a few large ones, and several different categories as well as a “People’s Choice” prize. The competition was open for 30 days and cost the DC government \$50,000. In return, a total of 47 iPhone, Facebook and web applications were developed with an estimated value in excess of \$2,600,000 for the local economy.

- **The Abre Datos (Open Data) Challenge 2010**. Held in Spain in April 2010, this contest invited developers to create open source applications making use of public data in just 48 hours. The competition had 29 teams of participants who developed applications that included a mobile phone programme for accessing traffic information in the Basque Country, and for accessing data on buses and bus stops in Madrid, which won the first and second prizes of €3,000 and €2,000 respectively.
- **Nettskap 2.0**. In April 2010 the Norwegian Ministry for Government Administration held “Nettskap 2.0”. Norwegian developers – companies, public agencies or individuals – were challenged to come up with web-based project ideas in the areas of service development, efficient work processes, and increased democratic participation. The use of government data was explicitly encouraged. Though the application deadline was just a month later, on May 9, the Minister Rigmor Aasrud said the response was “overwhelming”. In total 137 applications were received, no less than 90 of which built on the reuse of government data. A total amount of NOK 2.5 million was distributed

among the 17 winners; while the total amount applied for by the 137 applications was NOK 28.4 million.

- **Mashup Australia.** The Australian Government 2.0 Taskforce invited citizens to show why open access to Australian government information would be positive for the country's economy and social development. The contest ran from October 7th to November 13th 2009. The Taskforce released some datasets under an open licence and in a range of reusable formats. The 82 applications that were entered into the contest are further evidence of the new and innovative applications which can result from releasing government data on open terms.