

Practical Guidance for hosting a hackathon

This guide has been written from the perspective of a hackathon sponsor. We have identified some key questions to consider if you would like to run a hackathon. If you plan to involve a facilitator, they may be able to assist you in answering some of these questions.



Theme

The first questions help you identify why you wish to run a hackathon and what you want to get out of it. These questions will help to shape the scope and overall theme of your event.

Why do you want to run a hackathon? Are you interested in finding a solution to a particular problem, or general innovation within the sector?

Are there specific outputs that you want to produce? Is your aim to create prototype products that could potentially be taken to market? To rethink an existing process? To test an alternative methodology or approach?

If you want to address a specific question, how can you ensure it is of interest to a wide range of people?

Facilitation

Hiring a facilitation company or delivery partner may be a time and cost saving resource to deliver your hack.

Do you have the resources in terms of time, expertise or networks to run a hackathon in-house? You'll need to provide wifi access and staff who are confident to support people using IT. If you make data available, you should have someone present who can answer questions about it.

Have you assessed options for external facilitation? There are a number of organisations, in both the private and third sector, who are trained and experienced in running hackathons and can provide invaluable assistance in developing and executing a hackathon. Input from external companies can vary from simply providing logistics such as organising the venue, catering and recruitment, to being fully integrated in the planning, hosting and delivery of the event. Organisations such as Product Forge are fully involved in the delivery of the event from inception.

“The Future Libraries hack brought together people from a range of backgrounds, with a real mix of skills. Teams asked good questions, challenged assumptions, and resented new ideas. It was inspiring to see what they could come up with given just a few days to develop their work.”

Jamie McHale, Director, Telco,
#FutureLibPF Lead Mentor



Costs of a facilitation company can range, depending on the size, length of the event, from around £1,500 for a 24-hour event and their level of input to £10,000 for a four-day format. (This fee can be split across a number of supporting organisations in order to lower costs.) Facilitation companies can vary in their focus, expertise, expense and level of involvement, so getting a variety of quotes will allow you to understand which format is the most suitable for your particular event.

If you have chosen to use a facilitator, have you had an initial conversation to ensure that both parties have clear agreement on the focus and aim of the event and each organisation's role and input expectations?

Do you have a communication agreement in place that suits both parties? The public sector may require longer timelines, more detailed plans or updates than new technology companies, so outlining expectations is an important step.

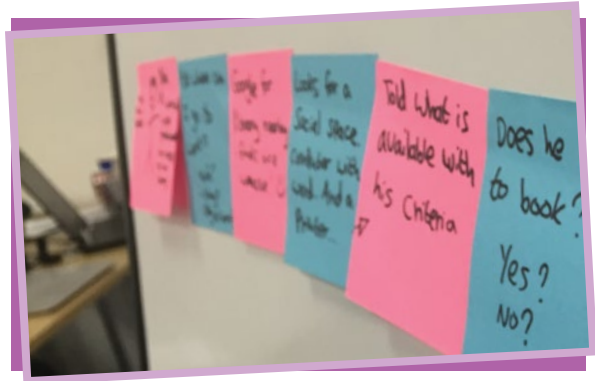
Event Delivery Logistics

Once you have decided on a theme and whether or not you will be using a facilitator, next you need to assess who to invite, when to host the hack and for how long, find a suitable location and develop a detailed agenda.

Who

Participants

- Who will be useful to recruit to attend your event? Which groups may be relevant or interested in your theme? Whilst hackathons are usually attended by students, individuals of any background can provide a variety of skills valuable to a hackathon.
- How many participants will you need to sign up to make the event viable?
- Will your event be free to attend or carry a charge? Charging a small fee reduces drop outs, but consider offering subsidised or free places to make it accessible to all groups.
- What are the best ways in which to reach your target audience? Social media, through networks, in-person promotion?
- What PR can you generate to increase sign-ups and interest in your event?



Mentors

- What type of mentors do you think would be useful for your event? Technically skilled, entrepreneurs, sector experts? Specify what level of time commitment you expect – the full event or drop-in sessions such as idea generation, specific workshop delivery or presentation reviews?

Judges

- Who can you invite to judge? This will depend on the theme and judging criteria you have set. Who will be able to ask meaningful questions or offer meaningful progression for the products? Are there judges that would attract lots of participants to attend? Who from the sector would want to be involved and see the results?

When

What date suits your participants, are there times of the year that should be avoided, for example exam times for students or bank holiday weekends?

What is the appropriate length for your hackathon? Will 24 hours be enough or would 48 or 72 be more effective? Hackathons of different lengths require slightly different considerations and longer events would need more resource investment.



Where

Will your location get the best out of the participants? Will it be a nice environment to spend a long period of time? A hackathon venue is not just about providing a space to work, it includes ensuring that you are able to develop a positive and creative environment for your participants. Does it have lots of natural light, windows that can open, break-out spaces, lots of plugs, 24-hour access and security?

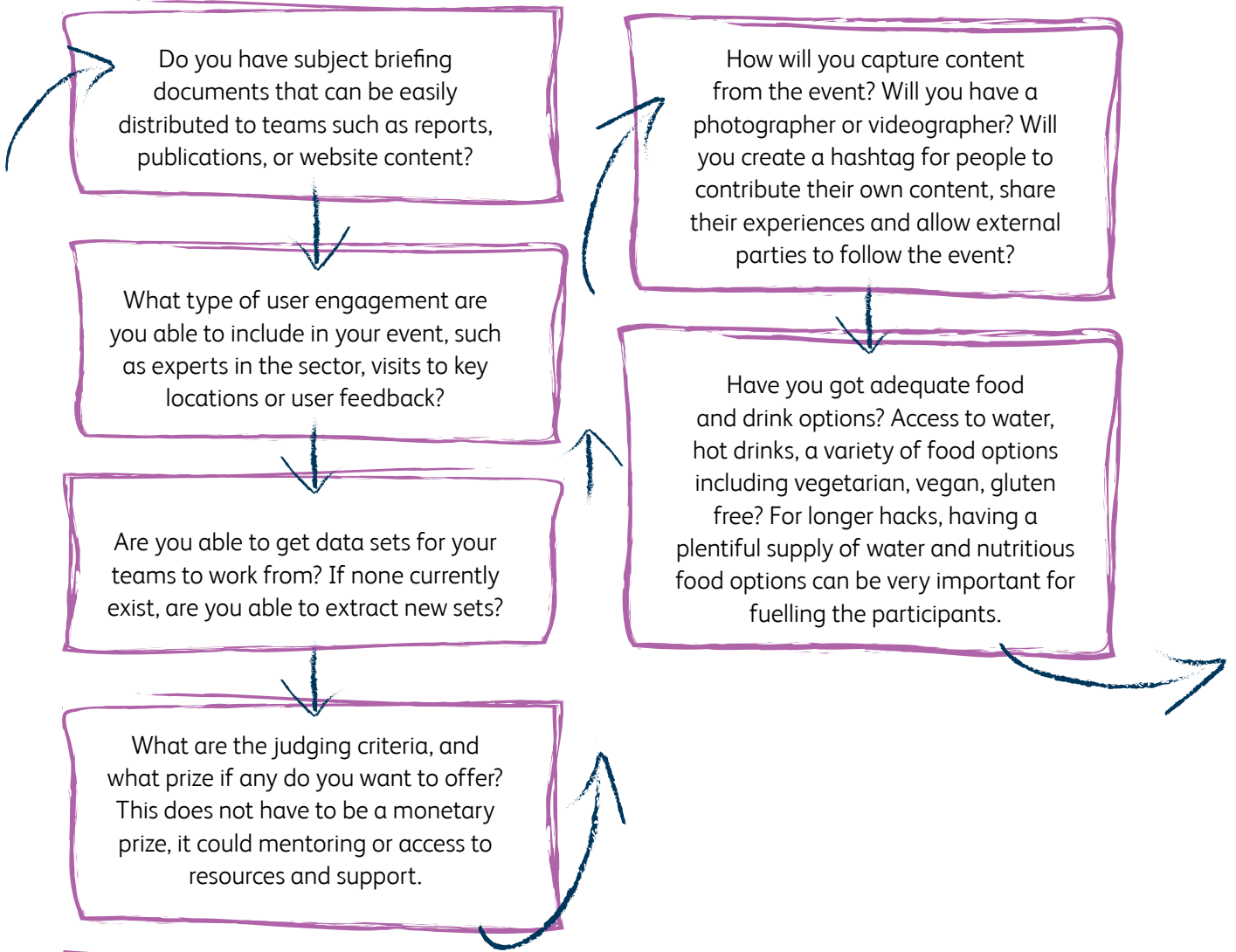
Is there a location relevant to your theme? Or a venue from which you can easily access your user groups or relevant resources?

What

The specific format of your event may be determined by the time period, but you may also wish to consider additional activities such as workshops, market research, user feedback or social activities.

Do you want a structured programme of events or would you prefer an introductory session and then allow participants to use their time as they please?

How will you introduce participants to your theme and challenge? Will you prepare an introductory presentation? If so, what is the key information that needs to be communicated?



Follow up post Hackathon

It is important to ensure you have a plan following your event to share the learnings and outputs.

What will success look like for you? Idea generation? Commercial product launch?

Do you have a post-event media plan for disseminating the outputs of the event, such as blog posts, articles, social media graphics? Can you engage participants, mentors or judges or create content about your event?

Some teams may not want to develop their product idea, but you may think it's fantastic. Have a plan for how you would approach this situation.

Do you plan to keep in contact with teams to help them develop the projects, or help them build contacts? Will you offer participants ongoing feedback and support?

**Good luck.
Get hacking!**

