

# How to organise a hackathon

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These are the collected tips and experiences on how to organise a hackathon, either together with RIPE NCC, or in your own company.

*The intended audience is, at this moment: APNIC staff, Mozilla Foundation, TU Delft / Quantum Internet, ENOG, SANOG and other NOG organisers, and smaller other NGOs who want to learn how to organise a hackathon.*

Vesna has been organising hackathons for RIPE NCC since 2014: <http://labs.ripe.net/hackathons>

Previous RIPE NCC hackathons have been very successful, each involving:

- 20-45 participants
- The production and publication (on GitHub) of lots of FLOSS software tools
- Many presentations, at RIPE meetings, and articles published on RIPE Labs
- Between one and three sponsors for each event

## Versions

(v0.1) (April 2017) Created the first version of this document

(v0.2) (July 2017) (added few more details, considering code-sprint & "hackathon version 6")

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## Introduction

Hackathons (hacking marathons) are events where a group of people works together on a pre-defined set of problems, intensively - for a long time period (24 hours; two days; one week). Mostly "hacking" means coding, programming, software development - but there can be other creative activities involved.

There are two different kinds of hackathons:

- competitive, corporate-run, NDA-SW producing
- cooperative / collaborative, non-for-profit, "free and open source" (FLOSS) producing

I personally prefer the collaborative type.

Most common goals are to:

- Bring together (network) operators, researchers, designers, students, developers
  - in more "exotic" case: journalists, analysts, activists, lawyers, doctors, other experts..
- Develop common tools
  - useful for *\$the\_groups\_above*
  - given back to the community (we insist on FLOSS licensing, & GitHub repository sharing)
- Make use of data provided by the *\$organising\_committee* or contributors
- Encourage cooperation and re-combination of creativity with various groups
- Get feedback on the usage of (your) tools
- Promote your tools & services
- Have fun!

# General Event Organisation

In general terms, the hackathon is just like any other event (conference or a training): you need to have a DATE, LOCATION (country, city), VENUE, CATERING, BUDGET, PARTICIPANTS, communications plan, PR effort, project planning, documentation, others organisations (sponsors / supporting organisations / local hosts), T-shirts, goodies.... not in any particular order.

Time-wise, the most important thing to realise is that it takes **tree to six months in total:** between the start of planning, and the event itself.

## Hackathon-specific requirements:

- Topic (goals)
- Specific projects / challenges
- Data Sets
- Existing tools to be worked on / modified
- People:
  - Jury
  - Facilitators
  - Topic experts
  - Participants: coders, researchers, operators, students, hackers, designers, artists ...

## Our experiences with choosing a date & location

- we had 3 hackathons (1st & 5th & 6th) as stand-alone events
- we had 3 hackathons the weekend before / next to another large conference (RIPE Meeting)

Advantages of having it next to the other conference :

- there are people coming to the event that will already "be there", so they can combine the trip & save time & money
- results were presented immediately after, creating lots of awareness, publicity, buzz
- possibly cheaper venue, negotiated as part of the conference

Disadvantages of having it next to the other conference :

- two events back-to-back are TOO LONG for both organisers & participants
- people who are not invited just "walk in", thus disrupting the work (and eating our lunch 😊 )
- some people / organisations do not walk to work during the weekend

Other considerations

- choose a country & city which is accessible
  - not too expensive (travel, hotels..)
  - easy to get a visa for
  - bonus: has a vibrant local community
  - bonus: have a helpful & enthusiastic local host or supporting organisation
- date
  - **MUST BE 3 to 6 MONTHS in advance!**
  - choose a right season
  - choose a date NOT clashing with other global / relevant conferences
  - NOT during / close to local public holiday
  - make sure the JURORS are able to join on that date!

## Our experiences with choosing a jury:

Jury Involvement: what we expect jury to help with:

- - be involved in the process - keep us fair & transparent
- - promote the event, get the most diverse & skilled participants
- - give advice, specially on topics & "categories"
- suggest potential sponsoring organisations
- - join 3 conference calls
- - vote for choosing participants, twice
- - be there during the hackathon (and help as facilitator)
- - give feedback about final projects presentations, choosing "winners" per category & announce them

It is good to have 3 - 5 jury members:

- - one "Working Group" co-chair from the WG relevant to the topic
- - one person from the organising company (Executive Board or staff)
- - one other strong & independent & prominent representative of the (topical) community
- possibly - one person from each sponsoring company
  - IF they are a large sponsor, and committed from the start!!
  - alternatively, sponsors might **not** get a place on the jury, because I want to have small jury but many sponsors...
- I prefer to have jurors from neutral organisations - not those who are competing with each other in business
- prefer to have jurors who are NOT hands-on, because those people are better as participants; rather, jurors should rather be those with people skills, managerial, business, leadership, facilitation...

# Budgeting

Amount of money needed will depend on how many people, do you want to cover their travel, do you have to pay for the venue..

In our experience, the total event budget is between Euro 10.000 and 25.000

At previous events we have spent 13k, 10k, 18k, 25k, and xx K

This is spent on:

- Renting the venue
- Providing food & drinks
- Paying the travel funding
- Some very good coffee
- Closing party (and transport to it, by bus, if needed)
- T-shirts
- Prizes (Philosophically, I prefer to NOT have monetary prizes, but to give stroop-wafels ;-)

Example 1 : Size of the event ~30 people

- 10 of the supported participants
- 10 from open registration
- 3 jurors
- 5 ripe ncc staff

====

28 people

Example 2 : Size of the event ~40 people

- 3 supported participants
- 28 from open registration
- 3 jurors
- 6 ripe ncc staff

- 2 NO-SHOWS

====

40-42 people

## Sponsors

We had sponsors for most of our hackathons, who payed between 1.000 and 30.000 (that was split between two events).

Previous sponsors: Comcast, Facebook, Akamai, ISOC, Euro-IX, DENIC, Afiliias and Farsight Security.

- There is a lot of administration involved with getting sponsors: signing contract, issuing invoices...
  - the contract needs to be checked by the legal team / department
  - invoicing is done by finance department
- They need to provide info about their organisation, and a logo, for web & for the print / T-shirt
- They can send a jury member, and maybe 2 participants
- They may want to use this event for self-promotion, but this should be strictly controlled, and IMO minimised!
- The sponsors should NOT influence the content of the event!!

Sample pitch text:

*(as) Sponsor (you) will get:*

- \* *Your logo published on the hackathon web pages*
- \* *Your logo printed on the T-shirt*
- \* *A mention in our announcements during the event*
- \* *And of course that warm, fuzzy feeling of supporting the community effort!*

*Depending on the level of sponsorship, you may also get to bring one extra participant from your organisation, or maybe even get a place on the jury.*

## Prizes & Give-aways

The idea of this "hackathon" is to be \*cooperative\*, not competitive, so I prefer people to NOT fight each other in order to become a "winning team", but to work together to make the best possible tools.

Therefore, I would suggest that we have multiple prizes, and then use our judgement to choose who is the most suitable for which prize - without "ranking" them as 1st-2nd-3rd...

Here are some suggested prizes:

- speaking slot at connect-wg (20 minutes)
- (\*) depends on availability of team-members on Wednesday!
- paid trip for one person to the Euro-IX workshop (5. November, Krakow)
- (\*) depends on availability of team-members on that weekend

(alternatively, paid trip to RIPE74, Budapest)

- box of 6 packs of stroop-waffles

- 4 vintage RIPE Atlas v2-probes , courtesy of Robert

- potential - RACI speaking slot, 15 minutes

- only for "academics" - students, researchers

- depends on availability of team-members on Tuesday evening

- maybe -- something to think about -- Brendan from facebook offered - fancy headphones, but maybe he will give them away as the prize for the winner of the (optional) quiz (that's fine with me, what do the others think?)

Anything else, symbolic?

Like: 10.000 RIPE Atlas credits?? Google-storage-voucher?

Plus, RIPE NCC will be giving away:

- RIPE Atlas t-shirts

- RIPE Atlas probes

- stickers ;-)

- stroop-wafels, as "fuel"

## Applications procedure

There are multiple ways to do this

- open, unstructured, spontaneous: (like IETF hackathon) - provide space & time & coffee & food, let people code
- preselected, structured, tightly controlled (somehow we always go for this option 😊 )

If we want to preselect participants, we need to

- announce the event : topic, date, city
- announce the deadline for applications
  - at least give 4 weeks to apply (can be longer)
  - at least 4 weeks BEFORE the event itself
  - alternatives: have two rounds; leave some extra spaces open for latecomers..
- if there is a travel funding , the deadlines much be MUCH LONGER
  - consider the visa applications, stricter checking, emailing back & forth..
- have engaged jury
- have a APPLICATION FORM
  - long story:
    - you need to collect applicant data, share it with jury, get contact details...
    - you need to be able to allow jury to rate the participants (I use Survey Monkey)
- you have to have "draft replies" for every situation
  - thank you for your application you will hear from us on the DATE...
  - you have been accepted
  - you have been accepted with funding
  - you have been placed on the waiting list
  - you have NOT been accepted (in a nice way..)
- announce the participants & publish the list
- get them to agree on all kind of conditions (ask the legal department)

## Requirements for the partipants

\* Prior application is required, for everyone

\* The application contains info about skills set and affiliation

\* A maximum of two people from the same organisation

\* No team/group applications, only individuals

\* The jury will choose participants

- paid for the travel expenses for CERTAIN participants (10 x 500 = 5000 Euros)
  - criteria:students, researchers, and applicants from least-developed countries

## Communication

### Communications Plan

- timeline
- where to publish - who to target
- internal checklists
- who will be in charge of setting up the channels (see below)
- someone to write & check all the "draft replies"
- warn legal department about contracts, agreements from participants..
- where to publicise results after the event



## Announcements

- event web page
- community mailing lists
- RIPE Labs
- Social Media
- Personal contacts of jurors & organisers

## Internal communication - between participants themselves

- mailing list
- EtherPad
- IRC
- (optional) Facebook group

## Logistics

### Venue

- room size: enough for XX number of participants
- set-up: islands ; what is needed is:
  - both presentations-to-whole-group AND
  - possibility to work in smaller groups
- informal-looking is better, if possible
- has to enable catering / food / drinks
- *Examples: conference hotel **OR** RIPE NCC office **OR** local hackerspace **OR** university rooms*

### Refreshments

- lunch HAS TO BE PROVIDED by the venue
  - or the extra catering arrangements need to be made
- drinks & snacks HAVE TO BE PROVIDED / arranged
- COFFEE!!! good coffee is very important!!! ***find a barista!!***

### *Hotel / lodging*

- Normally, RIPE NCC does **NOT** organise the sleeping arrangements of participants for them, nor do we pay for it. The hotel will be payed by their employers, and participants are expected to arrange accommodation themselves. For that reason, it's good if the venue is more-less centrally located, with various hotels available nearby.

### *Travel*

- Normally, RIPE NCC does NOT organise the travel for participants, nor do we pay for it.

## Other activities

### Dinners

- going out is nice, it breaks the monotony
- staying in is useful, less time is wasted (bring pizza in)
- this is one of the larger expense items!!

### Party

- closing event / party is nice to have
- visit to the local brewery is a nice extra
- sometimes you need to organise a BUS (or boat, or taxies...) to bring people there

### Visit to the local **hackerspace**

- this is a de-fact tradition 😊[Six Years of Hackerspaces Tours During RIPE Meetingshttps://labs.ripe.net/Members/becha/six-years-of-hackerspaces-tours-during-ripe-meetings](https://labs.ripe.net/Members/becha/six-years-of-hackerspaces-tours-during-ripe-meetings)
- new tradition in the making - visiting a local botanical gadder 😊

## Give-aways

### T-shirts

- If there is a budget, create an event t-shirt
- hi-res logos are required by the sponsors
- a designer contracted by RIPE NCC has to be contacted in time
- after the design is agreed, PRINTING of t-shirts needs to be arranged
- asking participants for the size takes about 2 weeks & a survey-monkey survey set-up & data collection

### Presents/gifts for the jury & local host

- stroopwafels are always a good one 😊
- a give-away from the RIPE NCC

# Daily TIME Schedule

Schedule DAY1:  
09:00 Welcome  
09:30 Presentations by RIPE NCC: Logistics,thanks to sponsors, timeline (Organiser)  
09:40 Round of introductions (All)  
    \* Round of personal introductions (1 minute per person)  
    \* Projects, Data Sources etc  
    \* Ideas suggestion (2 minutes per person/team/idea)  
10:30 Brainstorm & teams-forming  
\* RE-ARRANGE THE TABLES!!  

- 11:00 - 13:00 WORK on projects (2 hours)

  
13:00 LUNCH break  
14:00 - 19:00 WORK (5 hours)  
19:00 dinner  
21:00 - midnight: OPTIONAL - continue working! (3 hours, OPTIONAL)

Schedule Day2:  
9:00 arrive & start working  
09:00 - 11:00 WORK (2 hours)  
11:00 (15 minutes) all: Presenting progress  
11:15 - 13:15 WORK (2 hours)  
13:15 LUNCH break  
14:00 - 17:00 WORK (3 hours)  
17:00 wrap-up: presenting final results & planning follow-up steps  
    \* 5 minutes per team!!  
17:45 - JURY gathers in a smoke-filled room & comes up with feedback & a "winner" of stroopwafels!  
18:00 - closing ceremony  
18:30 - LEAVE FOR DINNER  
19:00 dinner

## Follow-up

After the hackathon:

- collect feedback, photos, materials, SW
- update GitHub collection
- publish RIPE Labs article
- pay-up the travel funding to supported participants
- pay all the invoices
- send a "thank-you" email to the list of participants; close the list; merge it with "all-hackathons" list
- (optional) prepare & deliver "report form the hackathon" at the RIPE (or other) meeting
- have a "recap" meeting with organisers, staff, jury, supporting organisations
- optional - organise a follow-up CODE SPRINT
- start organising the next hackathon 😊

## Useful Links

Previous RIPE NCC hackathons: documentation, photos, articles, links to codes & videos <http://labs.ripe.net/hackathons>

- RIPE Labs:
  - [Save the Date: RIPE NCC Hackathon Version 6](#)
  - [Follow Up to IXP Tools Hackathon: Code Sprint](#)
  - <https://labs.ripe.net/Members/becha/results-dns-measurements-hackathon>
  - [DNS Measurements Hackathon 2017](#)
  - [IXP Tools Hackathon Results](#)
  - [Announcing the IXP Tools Hackathon](#)
  - [RIPE Atlas Interface Hackathon Results](#)
  - [RIPE Atlas Interface Hackathon](#)
  - [RIPE Atlas Tools Hackathon Results](#)
  - [Join the RIPE Atlas Tools Hackathon](#)
  - [RIPE Atlas DataViz Hackathon Results](#)
  - [Coming Soon: RIPE Atlas Hackathon 2015](#)

Presentations at RIPE (etc) meetings

- SEE6
- RIPE74
- RIPE73
- RIPE72 (add links)

Actual hackathon pages:

- <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/dns-measurements/#!the-event> & <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/dns-measurements/#!attendee-information>
- <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/ixp-tools/#!attendee-information> & <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/ixp-tools/#!the-event>
- <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/Interface/#!the-event>
- <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/tools-2015/>
- <https://atlas.ripe.net/hackathon/2015/>

GitHub code repository - hackathon results / products: <https://github.com/RIPE-Atlas-Community/ripe-atlas-community-contrib/blob/master/README.md>

Instructions for the "programme committee" for organising "regional meetings": <https://www.ripe.net/participate/meetings/regional-meetings/see/see-5/guidelines-for-new-pc-members>

## Other resources

- <http://gwob.org/why-i-love-hackathons/>