Tech-Policy Hackathon Toolkit

Discuss, Brainstorm, Build

A guide for bridging the gap between digital rights advocates and technologists

Assembled by Internews

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Introduction

A few years ago, we began to notice that though there were a lot of technologists and advocates attending international internet freedom events and conferences, there wasn't much intermingling across these groups.

Aside from the opening and closing ceremonies, technologists stayed in sessions at the demo room or sat in on more technical panels, while policy advocates largely attended talks focused on advocacy. Despite the incredible depth and breadth of knowledge and expertise from both technical and policy specialists, (many of whom were looking at the same issues from different perspectives) there were few opportunities for technologists and advocates to collaborate and share knowledge.

> "Before the Hackathon, I was expecting to learn more about how technologists can help us [advocates] more with our work. It wasn't clear to me how we [as advocates] could use technology to measure the impact of the advocacy work that we do around bill tracking in Parliament. We had mostly seen technologists as vendors—we don't usually think about how we can actually collaborate with them."
>
> - Advocate Participant,
> South Africa Hackathon

Over the years, in speaking to partners and friends working in the internet freedom space we heard repeatedly that productive dialogues between technologists and advocates was badly needed, especially ones that resulted in ongoing collaboration and working relationships. For advocates, the need was especially significant, as many reported that it was extremely difficult to identify technologists who could help them with their policy work. Some advocates said that their experience working with technologists was most often transactional: asking for help to build a website or give basic insights, not *collaborative* like crafting a tool or program, or doing in-depth technical research that could inform their policy work.

Drawing from these and other observations and discussions in the space, we built the Tech-Policy Hackathon; a space to bring together both technologists and advocates to brainstorm and collaborate on better ways to use existing technologies, or to build new ones that could help policy advocates in their work to protect the digital rights of citizens in their countries.

> "Personally, this event helped me to build and deepen relationships with other advocates in my region. I've met most of these people in other contexts, so it's good to see them again in a different, collaborative environment. I found it especially interesting to talk to and brainstorm with the technologists. [Because of my work as an advocate] I always speak to the policy people at events. It was really great to share knowledge and discuss common experiences, and I think some great work can develop from those conversations."
>
> - Advocate Participant, Colombia Hackathon

Research was completed, the draft methodology was built, facilitators and participants identified, and two pilot hackathons were successfully held. The first pilot took place with advocates and technologists from Latin America in Bogota, Colombia in August 2017, and the second with advocates and technologists from Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa in October 2017. This toolkit is the culmination of the lessons learned and methodology that we learned from running these two Hackathons, and is meant to guide organizers and facilitators on how to successfully hold a Tech Policy Hackathon that can bring together advocates and technologists to build necessary tools and projects, while encouraging long-term collaborations.

What is a Tech Policy Hackathon?

A Tech Policy Hackathon is a 3 to 4-day facilitated event that brings together technologists and advocates working on internet freedom issues in order to foster collaboration between the groups around key policy issues. This type of Hackathon aims to provide a space for **discussion** of the issues from both policy and technical perspectives, **brainstorm** how to look at these issues from both policy and technical perspectives, and **build** small project concepts that use the newfound technical expertise to inform or enable policy campaigns (as funding permits).

> "At the Hackathon, being able to meet and brainstorm with technologists really helped me to understand the process of building technical tools—it's like building a house, which I hadn't really understood before—you need to be able to work together to understand how the tool gets built, and ask for specific things to make the process easier. Now I understand better how we can actually collaborate with technologists to help our advocacy activities. This is something I learned, and I will bring back to my organization."
>
> - Advocate Participant, South Africa Hackathon

The **ultimate goal** of the Tech Policy Hackathons, is for internet policy advocates and interested technologists to have a chance to collaborate and build proposals or design prototypes that provide technical solutions for policy advocates to support the specific internet freedom issues that they work on.

The Tech Policy Hackathon model is flexible, and allows for the organizer to expand it or shrink it to fit their goals and the needs of the target community, as well as their own parameters, including timeframe, budget, and participant availability.

At the end of the Hackathons, policy participants should:

- Know other policy advocates working on similar issues
- Know new technologists working on similar issues
- Learn more about the tools and technologies that other advocates have used in their work
- Have a better understanding of how to brainstorm and collaborate with technologists
- Have a prototype or concept for a technical tool that can inform their work

At the end of the Hackathons, tech participants should:

- Meet policy advocates and technologists working on internet freedom issues
- Learn more about relevant internet policy issues
- Learn more about other tools and technologies that advocates and technologists have used in their work
- Have a better understanding of how to brainstorm and collaborate with advocates
- Have helped build a prototype or concept for a technical tool that will inform policy work

> "I expected to be here for an hour and leave; I thought it wouldn't be very useful. I really liked how this event evolved, because it was not a hackathon like I was used to. This was the right people, brainstorming on specific topics; it was the first hackathon I have been to that was actually tangible or could be tangible in the end. Normally, in other hackathons, if you are a coder, you are just told to sit here and use this data, but this one I actually got to brainstorm and participate."
>
> - Technologist Participant, Colombia Hackathon

Who is this toolkit for?

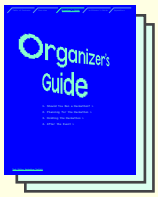
This Toolkit is a how-to guide for anyone who wants to organize a Tech Policy Hackathon from scratch. It also includes a guide for facilitators, specifically focused on how to structure and troubleshoot this kind of an event.

> "The hackathon gave me more of an understanding of the issues and legal frameworks across the continent, and more details on each organization's mission. From a collaboration perspective, I now have a better understanding of the interesting initiatives of different participants. It moves something from being an idea to what can be executable, especially when you have good partnerships in place."
>
> - Technologist Participant, South Africa Hackathon

> "I want to build the tech capacity within my organization. At the hackathon, I learned that what is most important for us right now is not necessarily to just hire a tech person, but to build a useful tool that can really help us with our advocacy work."
>
> - Advocate Participant, Colombia Hackathon

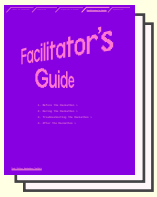
How to use this toolkit?

This toolkit is divided into two separate guides: one for the organizer, and one for the facilitator. It is possible for these roles to be held by the same person, but it will be a lot of work, so it is best if you can divide these responsibilities among two people. While the organizer and facilitator roles are distinct, we believe that in order for a hackathon to be successful they must also work in tandem. These two guides provide guidance unique to each role, but also feed off of one other to reflect this collaboration.



The **Organizer's Guide** provides guidance on how to build and organize a hackathon, from the conception. It is meant to help you decide whether or not to hold a hackathon, and subsequently provides step-by-step instruction on how to successfully plan and execute the event.

Take me to the Organizer's Guide >



The **Facilitator's Guide** provides specific guidance on the facilitator's role before and during the hackathon. It includes a section on key elements in a hackathon agenda, as well as one on how to trouble-shoot common issues that arise throughout this kind of event.

Take me to the Facilitator's Guide >

> "Before the Hackathon, I wasn't really into data privacy issues. I've done some projects on data leaks in the government, but I didn't know that other people in other countries were working on the same issues. But at the Hackathon I was introduced to a lot of resources, tools, and methodologies, etc. More importantly, I met the people who are analyzing these issues, and was able to participate and brainstorm with them. I will be collaborating with two [advocacy] organizations on two different projects to do data mapping."
>
> - Technologist Participant, Colombia Hackathon

> "At the hackathon, I learned from the technologists in the room about a series of tools that I didn't know about, which I can use and apply to my policy work."
>
> - Advocate Participant, Colombia Hackathon

> "The hackathon gave me more of an understanding of the issues and legal frameworks across the continent, and more details on each organization's mission. From a collaboration perspective, I now have a better understanding of the interesting initiatives of different participants. It moves something from being an idea to what can be executable, especially when you have good partnerships in place."
>
> - Technologist participant, South Africa Hackathon

Attribution
The Tech Policy Toolkit was funded by Internews. It was researched and written by Chinmayi SK. Internews and Chinmayi would like to thank the following people for reviewing and giving input to the toolkit: Joana Varon (Coding Rights), Moses Karanja and Lisha Sterling (Geeks Without Bounds). Internews would also like to thank the participants in the Hackathons held in Bogota, Colombia and Johannesburg, South Africa.

Organizer's Guide

1. Should You Run a Hackathon?

So, you think you might want to host a Tech-Policy Hackathon? Congratulations! First, let's walk through the things to keep in mind before deciding if you should go for it or not.

Determine your budget

First, you need to determine your budget. This will be the number one parameter that will determine how you build your Tech Policy Hackathon. It is important to understand what your budget for the event is far in advance, so you can plan accordingly. **Below are some questions to ask yourself to help you determine a budget:**

- Do I want anyone coming in from another city or country to participate in this event?
- Can I host the Hackathon at my office/friend's office, or will I have to rent a venue?
- Can I or someone I know facilitate for free?
- Can I afford to give out funding to some (or all) of the prototypes that are developed in this Hackathon?*

Develop your goal for the Hackathon

The Tech Policy Hackathon model outlined in this toolkit is a flexible one, and largely depends on the organizer's goal for the event. It's important that your goal be as specific and targeted as possible, as it will be used for reference in every step of the organizing and facilitating process. It is important to remember that not all policy, advocacy or technical issues can be solved through Tech Policy Hackathons (and it probably won't).

***A note on funding projects after the Hackathon:**
This last question, about funding projects, is important for each organizer to determine for him/herself. It is usually preferred (and a good incentive for participants to attend) if there is a funding prize for at least some of the prototypes/ concepts that are developed during the Hackathon, but this is not required. Because there is such a wide variety of ways to distribute funding, this guide does not include instructions on how to fund prototypes. This can be done based on your preference, and budget.

It is important that you be realistic about what your Tech Policy Hackathon can do. Even those that can be solved require taking into consideration the resources and capacity that is available to you (such as: time, money, and skill sets). A clear goal statement is central to a successful and productive hackathon. To determine your goal for this event, you first must think through the issue that you hope to solve by bringing advocates and technologists together. Think about what success looks like for your event.

A clear goal should include, at minimum, answers to the following questions:

- What is the problem I am seeking to address in this Hackathon?
- Why this problem is a priority?
- What are the tangible outcome(s) that I expect from this Hackathon?
- Which skills and experiences do I need to include in the Hackathon to achieve the stated outcome(s)?

The goal could be a one-line statement that includes the ethics and intended outcomes, or it could be longer, depending on how specific you want to be.

Type your response directly or print out and write in!

Example goal

This tech-policy hackathon will be a 3-day event aimed at doing the following:

- Enable policy advocates and technologists from social media companies to educate each other about the issues in preventing online bullying amongst secondary school students online.

Provide time for advocates and technologists to collaborate directly on building prototype projects that can be implemented in existing social media platforms after the Hackathon ends. Later, once you have identified a facilitator, remember to get feedback on your goal (maybe you need to refine it to make it more clear to participants), and make sure to update it with their feedback. It is very important that you and the facilitator agree on this vision for the Hackathon, as this will guide the entire Hackathon forward.

Understand Roles & Responsibilities

Understanding the different types of people you want to invite is key to holding a successful Tech Policy Hackathon. Here is a quick rundown of the people you will need to engage at this kind of event:

Coordinator [1 person]

The coordinator is responsible for the overall coordination for event, and is usually the one who wants to build a Hackathon. This person/organization is responsible for funding the event, hiring facilitators and inviting participants. The coordinator has the most stake in the vision and outcome of the event, and must work closely with everybody, especially the facilitator, to make sure the right people are involved, and the event itself has the intended outcomes.

Facilitators (lead facilitator and co-facilitators) [1 or 2 people]

Facilitators are responsible for the actual structure of the event. Facilitators are also responsible for making sure the participants know what to expect, and that every participant or organization gets something out of the event. Facilitators are identified by the Coordinator and, if the Hackathon is going to have more than 10 participants, it is suggested that a co-facilitator be engaged.

Logistics lead [1 person]

The logistics lead is responsible for taking care of the logistical requirements of the event. This person is responsible for finding a venue and ensuring it has everything that is necessary for the event. The other responsibilities are to ensure every participant and facilitator has their needs met before and during the event.

Note-taker [1 person]

During the event, a note-taker is responsible for recording the proceedings of the event. The note-taker does not get involved in facilitation or participations and is a mere observer to the event. It is suggested that this person is different from the Logistics Lead, as it is hard for one person to do both jobs.

Participants - Policy Advocates [5 – 10 people]

Policy Advocates are people working with organizations or on projects that involve policy advocacy around any number of internet freedom issues. These should be individuals who build advocacy campaigns and can understand/explain the key policy issues that they would like to work on with technologists.

Participants - Technologists [5 – 10 people]

Finding people to fill this role is one of the most important aspects of having an effective Hackathon. Ideally, candidates will be a mix of technologists who have experience working on human rights issues and internet freedom, and those who don't, but are interested in the space. It's helpful to ask advocacy participants if they can recommend technologists who they work with, or want to work with, and invite those people. That being said, because experienced technologists are often difficult to find, it is also important to look for people who are new to these issues, including those building customer-centric products, or open-source community members. You can try to look for technologists by advertising in local universities with engineering or technical schools, look for local open data or open-source community groups or Meetups, talking to thematic workspaces or incubator spaces, or asking local companies if they can send people.

Translator [1 person/dependent on # of languages]

If your event has multiple operational languages, then a translator with strong technical vocabulary should be involved. The role of the translator is neutral and is responsible for ensuring smooth communication during the event.

2. Planning for the Hackathon

Great, so you answered the above questions and have decided that you want to hold a Tech Policy Hackathon! The steps below will help guide you through the planning process. Please read through everything (including the facilitator's guide) so you know all of the steps involved before you begin planning a Hackathon.

Identify a facilitator

A facilitator is an individual that is selected to lead a hackathon based on their professional background in technology and/or policy. Their skills are expected to help shape the event itself. The facilitator is expected to use their expertise to lead and catalyze discussions and ensure active participation and a balanced sharing of knowledge and experiences. As much as possible, seek a facilitator who has an understanding of both policy and technology ecosystems. This is not to imply that the facilitator must be an expert in both — but should be well versed in basics of how policy interacts with technology. It also helps (but is not necessary) if this person already knows some of the potential participants, so that they are comfortable working together and asking questions.

Identify participants

We recommend that the participants of this event be carefully curated. If you decide to make the event open to the public, it is important that you make sure that you talk with every applicant before admitting them, so that you can share the goals of the event and understand what they want out of it. There are two necessary participant categories for this event; **advocates** and **technologists.** These two represent in the broadest sense the Internet, public policy, and human rights ecosystems. Other participants might add useful skills to the mix, but should be included once the core skills required are satisfactorily met.

Advocates

It is preferable for the advocates who participate in the event have some practical experience. Ideally the desired experience is working on diverse policy issues over time or working on the same issue in different geographies. It is also valuable if they have decision-making power in their organizations. The event brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds who may not understand some of the concepts or words taken as givens in other contexts. It is preferred advocates know how to engage and explain in simple but precise ways jargon to non-advocates.

Technologists

Technologists with prior experience working with customer centric applications would make good participants at this event. It might be hard to completely integrate those technologists who have never worked with teams. Because working on rights also means working for communities it is preferred that the technologist understand the communities involved in the hackathon. A basic understanding of technology ethics and security would also be desirable though it could also be learned during the event. Effective communication skills, are as important for technologists as they are for advocates. Technologists work in very narrow circles and may have a hard time explaining the workings of their work using everyday language. This is perhaps one of the areas the coordinator should emphasize.

Once you have a list of advocates and technologists who you would like to attend, it is a good idea to send out an invitation to everyone. This can take the form of an email that explains the vision for the hackathon, provides information about the time and location for the event, and requests a confirmation of attendance.

> "I felt like a lone wolf because there is no civic hacker culture in my country. But at the hackathon, I felt the support from other people in the region who have similar interests and are doing similar work."
>
> - Technologist Participant, LAC Hackathon

Ensure Participants Develop Problem Statements

Once the participants are confirmed, the next step is to reach out to each advocate participant to begin defining their problem statements. **Problem statements are the crux of the event, as it forms the working material for the Hackathon.** A problem statement is the issue that the participants want to focus on throughout the Hackathon, which they will each present on the first day. Working with advocates to define their problem statements should ideally start at least 4 weeks prior to the event, and is a collaborative process with the facilitator. Refer to the **Facilitator's Guide on Developing Problem Statements** for instructions on how to build these.

Find a venue

It is important to find and confirm a venue at least a month in advance. Make sure the venue can accommodate all attendees, as well as facilitators and organizers. Location should also be considered in venue selection. Below is a list of elements to keep in mind throughout the venue selection process.

Checking the venue for compatibility

Make sure your venue is capable of accommodating your event's activities.

This includes:

- Enough seats to accommodate the participants
  If possible, it is also a good idea to have a few extra chairs
- Ability to move these seats around (you may need a few different configurations for large group sessions and break-out sessions)
- Enough tables. The smaller discussion groups can accommodate 4-5 per table and the number of tables (ideally round tables) should be equal to the number of participants divided by 4
- Check for spaces to post flipcharts or whiteboards to note down instructions and discussions
- Ensure there is internet and networking infrastructure (like WiFi and power ports) to support all the participants

Keep Things Cozy, Comfortable and Well-Fueled

Since this event's success is based on having fruitful discussions, it is important that the environment is conducive to this kind of engagement.

- Ensure that there are comfortable chairs or seating arrangements in the venue (sofas and bean bags usually add to comfort)
- Ensure that there are enough snacks and water at the venue for the duration of the event. If possible, it is also advisable to have lunch catered
- Ensure that the restrooms are accessible for everyone
- If possible, have a silent space in the venue—preferably another room, where people can decompress and recharge (since discussion can drain participants' energy). If a separate room is not available for this, make sure you create an area for this in the event space

3. Holding the Hackathon

Once all of the preliminary logistics are done, it is important to feel organized and prepared for your role as the organizer throughout the event itself. Below are a few things to keep in mind during the days before your Hackathon kicks off.

Coordinate with facilitators

A few days before the event, set up a meeting with fellow facilitators and go through the methodology document. Be sure that you are all in agreement regarding the agenda and responsibilities of each facilitator for the entirety of the event. Document this distribution of responsibilities and share it with the organizing team.

Check Venue

A few days before the event, visit the venue and visualize the interactions between your participants in the space.

A few tips include:

- Ensure that the room has enough space for participants to break out into smaller groups
- Ensure that there is access to bathrooms and quiet spaces
- Do a mock exercise of activities which need movement of participants in the space
- Go through the agenda with the rest of your team
- Identify spaces in the room to display important notifications like code of conduct and the agenda

This is also a potential opportunity to identify any other needs that you forgot in the initial discussions regarding the venue.

Gather Materials

Make a list of all the materials you expect to need at the hackathon prior to the event, and make sure you have time before the first day to gather everything.

A sample list would include:

- Flip charts (or large poster boards with tape to stick to walls)
- Sharpies/permanent markers
- Sticky pads/Post-It Notes
- Pens (at least one per person)
- A big stack of blank paper

Stipends for participants

If your budget permits, it is a good idea to provide a small stipend to cover meals and transportation for all participants.

4. After the event

Giving Grants and Funding Projects

As mentioned above, if your budget permits, it is a good idea to fund to one (or all) of the prototypes/concepts that were built during the Hackathon. Again, we will not provide specific guidance on how to provide this funding, but if you have decided to give some funding, it would be a good idea to make it clear at the beginning of the Hackathon how many projects you can fund (and how much funding will be for each). If you have a competitive grant (like a prize) then you should be clear at the beginning what the criteria for the winner(s) are.

Ask for feedback

Feedback from participants helps evaluate the usefulness of any event. It helps in evaluating not only if the program was useful but also provide an understanding of what parameters need to be altered if you plan to do this program again. It also provides a metric for you to take back to your bosses or funders.

See Appendix C for a sample Feedback Questionnaire.

Facilitator's Guide

The role of the facilitator is laid out in the Organizer's Guide above. The facilitator should join the Hackathon after the organizers have developed their goal for the event.

1. Before the Hackathon

The facilitator should join the Hackathon after the organizers have developed their goal for the event, as leading up to the hackathon, the facilitator's role is largely about communication with participants, and knowing the goal is very important to make sure that it will be achieved. The facilitator can work with the organizer to decide who they would like to participate in the event, the next step is to develop problem statements, which are core to the Tech-Policy Hackathons. In fact, developing problem statements is the most crucial role the facilitator has, as they determine the outcome of the event.

Develop Problem Statements

Problem statements are a vital for the event, as they form the working material for all participants of the Hackathon. A problem statement reflects the problem or issues that the advocacy participants want to solve during the Hackathon. All advocacy participants will present their problem statement on the first day of the event. The organizer or the facilitator should work with each advocacy participant to build each problem statement **before** the event begins.

It is best to start working with advocacy participants to build their problem statements as soon as participants are identified, as, more often than not, developing them takes time to get just right.

This process can be achieved through two methods:

- **Interviews with participants**
  In the 4 weeks leading up to the event, the facilitator should schedule one-on-one interviews with the participants to discuss the work they are doing and the issue they want to work on in this event. Start with a broad discussion of the work and then refine the problem statements, which can be discussed further at the Hackathon (see below for the complete process of curating a problem statement).

- **Open call for problem statements**
  Sometimes it is possible that you may not get enough participants for the event, or enough participants with the skill sets you need. In this case, one of the ways to invite more people is by announcing an open call for the problem statements on a public website or a social media page. An open call helps engage people who might not be working with you or do not directly know you, yet their skills may be valuable at the Hackathon. This is especially true when trying to identify technical participants. This process should ideally start at the same time as your interviews with existing participants.

When building problem statements, it is better to make them as narrowly focused as possible, because they will be discussed during the Hackathon and solutions will be proposed. In order to make sure that the problem statement is indeed solvable (i.e. the participants will propose workable solutions during the event), you have to make sure the problem statement is precise.

To do this, keep in mind the following parameters:

- How much time is needed to work on the solution to this?
- What impact will solving this have? Does that relate to the vision of the Hackathon?
- What work will be needed at the Hackathon to solve this problem?
- How much support will be needed after the event to solve this problem?

You can follow the process of elimination to get the appropriate problem statements. To help with this process the following questions should be asked in both personal interviews and in the open call for problems.

You can advertise the open call for problem statements via an online form with these questions (or feel free to modify these questions as it suits you).

- What is the problem you want to address in this Hackathon?
- What background is necessary for someone to understand this problem?
- What have you/your organizations already done to solve this problem?
- What impact will solving this problem have for you, the organization you represent if any, and the wider community?
- What will happen when a solution is identified by our event?
- Would you be present at the event to work on this problem?
- What types of expertise do you want present at the Hackathon to work with you on this?

Once all of the problem statements are collected, the facilitator and the organizer should meet (remotely or in person if possible) to look over these problem statements and decide whether or not they need to be rewritten or redesigned. The facilitator's role here is to use their knowledge and experience to determine which problem statements are trying to tackle too much, and how to cut these down to make them more feasible to solve within the Hackathon timeframe. If needed, the organizer could also invite experts from policymaking and technology domains to this meeting with the facilitator, to help advise on the feasibility of these projects.

The major factors that should be considered in deciding whether a problem statement is feasible include:

- Relevancy to the general theme of technology and human rights
- Originality – is there an existing response to this problem and how is this different?
- Time frame required to develop the problem identified to outputs
- Resources available to the development of a possible solution
- Skills required to develop the solution

At this meeting, the organizer and facilitator should eliminate the problem statements that do not seem feasible, and then group the problem statements that are very similar. At this point, you are looking to group participants with the remaining problem statements that are most relevant to them. Not all of the participants will fit into problem statements that are very relevant. In that case, reach out to those participants and ask them to choose the most relevant problem statement from the final group of statements.

At the end of this process, the ratio of expected participants to problem statements should be 1:4. If there are too many problem statements at the end of the first round of eliminations, **the facilitator should do the following:**

- Abandon any problem statements that are on hold
- Schedule another meeting with the organizer and repeat the process again but with tighter restrictions in terms of needed support and feasibility

Build the Agenda

Look below at key elements of agenda, and use this as a guide to build a rough template of how you want the event to flow.

See the sample agenda in Appendix B.

2. During the Hackathon

Role of the facilitator during the event

Ensuring a safe space
Use a code of conduct for the event in order to create a safe space for participants. Read it at the start of the event and make sure that everyone in the room consents to it, and can add anything. If possible, stick it up on the wall in a visible place, so people can refer to it throughout the week.

> An example code of conduct that you can work off can be found in Appendix A.

Key Elements of Tech Policy Hackathon Agenda

Part 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Introductory Circle
To kick off the event, the facilitator should have all participants form a large circle. The facilitator then asks that each participant share their name (a name they are comfortable being addressed by), their organization/company (if applicable), where they are from, and a short description of their work.

Purpose: This activity not only helps participants know each other, it also helps the facilitator understand the skills and work of each participant. This understanding is useful in team formation. After the introductions, maintain the same formation for the next activity on the agenda: **Expectation Setting**

Time: 40 mins

Expectation Setting and Value Setting

The facilitators and the organizers pitch to the participants what they hope the event can achieve, including reading the vision statement for the event. The participants are then presented with an opportunity to share their event expectations, after which all expectations are harmonized. A note taker writes down all the expectations including what the group agrees on as common set of expectations.

Since hackathons involve intense interactions, **value setting** is extremely important for the group to function. This begins with reading aloud the organizer's set of values, which could be based on a code of conduct. The group is then given a chance to add more values or debate an existing set of values. This lasts for about ten minutes, at the end of which the group comes to a common set of values that they agree upon and abide by during the rest of the event.

Purpose: Since the event is about bringing together diverse participants. It is important to share opinions and value systems in a respectful way. The event itself expects one to have a political opinion since it is about building policies. This exercise prepares the participants to work together by showcasing their fellow participants' stand.

Time: 25 mins

Technology Views Spectrum

The first day is dedicated to participants getting to know each other. Since you will be dealing with a group that has to work intensely together over the next few days, but have widely varied skill sets and understanding of technology, it is important to set the stage where every individual's views are heard. To accomplish this, use the spectrum as a methodology.

The facilitator chooses 5 completely radical views of technology. With each statement, every person in the group is asked to choose a place on a line based on the gradient of how much they agree or disagree. The gradient starts from strongly agree and ends at strongly disagree. Once the participants have chosen their places, those on the two extremes are given a chance to defend their position and choice. The idea is that this defense could help others and themselves to evaluate their positions and change if necessary. This also helps stimulate alternate learning and understanding of technology views. Each statement by the facilitator should take about five minutes.

Purpose: Since the event is about bringing together diverse participants. It is important to share opinions and value systems in a respectful way. The event itself expects one to have a political opinion since it is about building policies. This exercise prepares the participants to work together by showcasing the fellow participant's stand.

Time: 25 mins

Building Bridges Together

This session is designed to demonstrate the importance of talking to each other while building technology. The length of session can vary. If participants already know each other, the length of this session can be shorter, but if there has been no prior contact between the people working in the hackathon then it might take a little longer.

Sample Scenario: City Transportation

The government of a city decides that it needs to update its transportation system. There are many steps that must be taken, by different key stakeholders, to make this update happen. The city forms different committees, each of which are tasked with coming up with a specific piece of the system.

The five different groups will each be responsible for a different outcome:

- A group of local legislators will draft policies around the transit system
- A committee to plan and manage the transportation system
- A software company will write a transit application for the local citizens
- A committee to identify the needs of the civil society
- A private smart automobile manufacturer will build an automobile to compete with the new system

The participants will then be divided into 5 groups and work in a specific committee.

Each team is given a flip-board to document their work, and some initial instructions that are specific to their committee.

The teams are given two choices:

- They can see all the associated data with respect to the city
- They can talk and share details about each other's work by setting up meetings

At the end of this session each team presents their work and then we enable a guided discussion of their experiences.

Purpose: The point of this Hackathon is to bring together technologists and policy advocates who usually work in silos and have them collaborate. Many of them do not know each other and have not worked together before, and it may be stressful to expect them to collaborate on complicated internet policy issues right away. By creating a mock environment with rather simple solutions, this activity allows technologists and advocates to get to know each other and to collaborate to come up with technical and policy solutions.

Time: 2-3 hours

Part 2: Problem Statement Pitches

This is the second part of the hackathon. The problem statements that were curated before the event are shared during this session. The facilitators read out the problem statements for the entire group (the facilitator can choose to not disclose the owner of the problem statement) and then each participant can choose to work on a particular problem statement. It is possible that a certain problem statement has no takers. It is the facilitator's job to ensure there is an equal distribution of skills amongst the teams and that no team is dominated by a particular skill set. The facilitators are responsible to for ensuring that there is a note taker and a facilitator in each of these teams.

Time: 45 mins

Solving Problem Statements

Once the teams are formed and the problem statements shared, groups can begin to work with their teams. This is a time for them to break down their problem statements and begin to identify solutions.

This process is done over the period of 3 or 4 work cycles (each work cycle runs for 3 hours). At the end of each work cycle, the teams report back on their work in a circle. The report back is also an opportunity for a team to seek help or information. The reporting sessions can also be used to provide any feedback to the teams by the facilitators or if mentors/experts are present at the event.

In each of these half days, the teams work with problem statements. Since these hackathons involve discussions only, it can be hard to estimate time required to put together policies. It could easily lead to a black hole of discussions. **The following methods are advised for the teams to follow to help break down and streamline ideas in each of these work cycles:**

Ideastorm

When the team encounters a broad statement such as the initial problem statement, Ideastorm can useful way of gathering opinions and solutions quickly. These are brief, intense sessions (timed for less than 15-20 mins) where everyone is required to share as many ideas in the given time. All of these ideas are documented by the note taker. The one rule is that debating of ideas is not allowed in the interest of time. That being said, at the end of this intense session, there should be a repository of information for the team to work on.

Mindmapping

This is an alternative method to the Ideastorm, as a way to help the group break out of paralysis. Start with a key idea in a circle in the center of a page or whiteboard. Connect related ideas to the central idea by drawing lines and writing down these concepts. Further details are connected to the ideas that they relate to with lines. Together, this can form shapes like a tree or a complex molecule depending on how the map develops.

Part 3: Digging Deep (Root Cause Analysis)

Sometimes the solutions are not as straightforward, in which case the team facilitators can use the '5 whys' methodology to guide discussions.

5 Whys

5 whys is an iterative interrogative technique used to explore the cause-and-effect relationships underlying a particular problem. The primary goal of the technique is to determine the root cause of a defect or problem by repeating the question "Why?" Each answer forms the basis of the next question. The "5" in the name derives from an anecdotal observation on the number of iterations needed to resolve the problem.

Example:
The vehicle will not start (the problem)

- **Why?** – The battery is dead.
- **Why?** – The alternator is not functioning.
- **Why?** – The alternator belt has broken.
- **Why?** – The alternator belt was well beyond its useful service life and not replaced.
- **Why?** – The vehicle was not maintained according to the recommended service schedule. (This is the root cause)

The team can use paper to perform this methodology with their teams.

More reading on this method can be found here: *http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/cause-analysis-tools/overview/fishbone.html*

Example of a fishbone method: *http://www.businessanalysts toolkit.com/fishbone-analysis-example/*

Part 4: Demos and Close

At the end of the last work cycle, the team will share their work. This work can be demonstrated in whatever way the team prefers. It could be in print or in the form of visual slides. Visual presentations are much more engaging than print and are highly recommended. In addition to demonstrating the work, the teams are also required to compile their work in the form of a written document.

Time: 30 min per group
(20 minutes for presentation, 10 minutes for questions/feedback)

3. Troubleshooting the Hackathon

Being a facilitator for these events is difficult and requires a lot of work. Here are some tips and tricks to help you prepare for any issues that may come up, and to help troubleshoot and problem solve when they (inevitably) do!

Facilitation Methodologies

Discussion groups with no facilitation tend to get polarized. Following certain formats for group discussion makes them more effective.

Round Robin

This should be used when facilitating a large group in a circle. Here, every member of the group talks for a specified duration of time. The discussion could either move clockwise or counter-clockwise until each participant has had a chance to talk. This is the methodology followed in the introductory session of this event.

Stacking

This methodology is used to facilitate discussions that do not require the participation of every member of the group, but ensuring that there is order and organization to those who do wish to speak. Anyone who intends to speak in the group indicates to the facilitator, and it is the job of the facilitator to acknowledge and keep track. The facilitator then calls out the names based on who indicated first and also ensures that the discussion does not go off topic. Stacking gives everyone a fair chance to participate, while avoiding participants speaking over one another or interrupting.

Parking Space

Including and respecting all voices is vital to an event. That being said, certain discussions tend to distract the group from the purpose of the event. A parking space is a great way to avoid this. It is a physical space in the form of a paper or flipchart that is used to park ideas from the group. The facilitators can use this while moderating discussions, referring back to certain ideas in a more appropriate context. The relevance of the idea to a certain discussion is intelligently determined by facilitators and communicated to the participants.

Identifying participant facilitators

Hackathons are about active participation and engagement. With that in mind, it is important not to do all of the work yourself. Choose facilitators among participants when you break into smaller groups.

Here are some factors to look for as you choose facilitators:

- People who take an initiative in making others comfortable
- People who do not polarize the discussions
- People who demonstrate leadership qualities

Training of participants to be facilitators

In our experience, we have seen that there is value in doing a small training program on Day 1 for participants. This could be scheduled as a quick end of day activity.

For this session, we recommend you do the following:

- Practice *Stacking* while conducting this session. This would provide participants with an understanding of a method they could use in smaller groups
- Conduct a mock *Ideastorm*
- Conduct a mock *5 Whys* session

Strategies for navigating group discussion

Dominant Voices

We define a dominant voice as a person who is overpowering during group discussions often with controversial viewpoints. While these people sometimes help catalyze discussion and help the group move forward, there are times when such voices can silence others or only forward the person's agenda.

In such cases they become unproductive.

- These voices could be a result of the person being more confident in expressing their opinion over the rest of the people in the group
- It could also be a result of not setting group boundaries

Dealing with dominant voices is important in order to record everyone's voice. It is also important because a sense of community is lost if someone dominates the conversations and its narrative.

Here are some techniques that you can use to deal with such voices:

- Strictly implementing *Stacking*
- Setting a time limit to how much a person can talk in a group
- Actively seeking the opinion of people who are not participating
- Periodically reminding the group that the ownership should lie with everyone in the group

Lack of Clarity

The Hackathon includes many participants from different backgrounds and skill sets. Some of the participants are able to clearly articulate and visualize their work during the period of time, while some groups struggle to make decisions on how to move forward.

There are multiple reasons why this would happen:

- Multiple solution pitches in the team
- Team members don't find value in the solution that is being built
- Lack of understanding or definition of the common goals of a team
- Explicit statement of the solution

In such situations it helps to paper-prototype the solution from the start.

Here are some questions that the team could start with:

- Who is this tool being built for?
  (The facilitator could ask the team to list out three explicit users for the tool).
- What are the user constraints?
- How does the team plan to share this tool with the potential users?

Once these questions are answered. The facilitator should help the team map this information into features/modules. It helps to explicitly state this on a paper or draw this with the team. This process helps the team move forward without spending much time deliberating.

4. After the Hackathon

This depends largely on what the organizer has determined the role of the facilitator to be (if any) when the hackathon ends. If the organizer will be giving out grants, the facilitator may be needed to follow up with the participants and ensure that the products are being built. Check with the organizer to see what, if any, your role will be when the Hackathon ends.

At the minimum, one to two days after the event, the facilitator should send out a report to all participants, partner organizations and sponsors describing the solutions and/or conceptual projects put forward during the event. This report can be created largely by combining written reports from the teams and from the note takers along with additional text, photos, graphs, or other material in support of those reports. If there are agreements with sponsors or participating organizations regarding implementation of these solutions, those agreements should also be described in the preliminary after-event report.

If there have been agreements beforehand with sponsors or participating organizations, there should be some follow-up to see that policy recommendations or coded prototypes have been carried forward. Information gleaned from this ongoing work can be added to the final after-event report.

A final after-event report should be compiled approximately 1 month after the event which combines the preliminary after-event report any information about the ways in which policies have been carried forward. If appropriate, the final after-event report should be posted to a website and a press release should be sent out to share information about the outcomes of the event.

Appendices

A. Pre-hackathon Questionnaire

Which organization are you representing?

If you are independent, indicate as such.

In which country(-ies) is your organization based?

What do you understand by this tech-policy hackathon?
As much as we have shared background information, what comes to your mind when you think of this specific tech-policy hackathon? Short answers most preferred.

Between technology and policy, where do you feel most comfortable?

All of us in this hackathon are multidisciplinary and transcend 'technical' and 'policy' backgrounds. However, we do have our specific strong suits mainly influenced by our education backgrounds or experience. Please indicate your main strong side. By technology, we mean you have demonstrable skills like scripting code, data scraping, analysis and presentation. By policy, we mean you have demonstrable skills like public policy analysis, litigation, legal drafting, advocacy planning and related areas.

What is the one thing you MUST get done during the hackathon that will improve your professional tech-policy work?

This could be 'I want to know how to analyze draft policies and laws' or 'I want to simplify a terms & condition section of a popular platform in a visual way' or 'I want to contribute code to an open-source public participation tool'

What is one thing you want to help others with that relates to tech-policy in Africa?

We all have something we can share. You could show other participants how to engage policy makers with limited resources, or how to use Git-version control platforms to contribute to open-source projects.

B. Sample Agenda

Day 1

10:30am – 11: 10am	**Introductory Circle**
11:10am – 11:20am	Break
11:20am – 12:00pm	**Expectation and Value Setting**
12:00pm – 12:30pm	**Technology Views Spectrum**
12:30pm – 1:30pm	Lunch
1:30pm – 3:30pm	**Building Together**
3:30pm – 3: 45pm	Break
3:45pm – 4:30pm	**Problem Statement Pitches**
4:30pm onwards	**Start Group Work**

Day 2

10:30am – 12:30pm	**Working Sprint**
12:30am – 1:30pm	Lunch
1:30pm – 5pm	**Working Sprint**

Day 3

10:30am – 12:30pm	**Working Sprint**
12:30am – 1:30pm	Lunch
1:30pm – 3:30pm	**Working Sprint**
3:30pm – 4:30pm	**Demos and Closing**

C. Feedback Questionnaire

Using the following form as a template. Adjust it to collect specific inputs for your program. It is also encouraged to do personal interviews of each participant during and after the event.

Was the event useful for your work?

- ☐ Yes it was useful
- ☐ It was somewhat useful
- ☐ No, it was not useful

Did the structure of the event help in working towards the solution?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Somewhat

What would you change in the structure given a chance? With 1 being poor and 5 being strong:

How would you rate the overall facilitation of the event?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

How would you rate the venue for the event?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

How would you rate the facilities at the event?

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

Was there anything in particular with regards to the event organization that you would like done differently?

Type your response directly or print out and write in!

Day 1 of the event was geared towards helping participants know each other better. Did it achieve its intended purpose?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Somewhat

Which of the following parts of day 1 proved most useful to you?

- ☐ Introductory Circle
- ☐ Spectrum
- ☐ Building Bridges
- ☐ Pitching
- ☐ Other

The activities of day 2 and 3 were aimed at helping projects work towards building a solution. Did the activities support this?

- ☐ Strongly supported the goals
- ☐ Somewhat supported
- ☐ Could have been better
- ☐ Did not support at all

Which of the following would have made day 2 and 3 experiences better?

- ☐ More breaks
- ☐ More facilitation
- ☐ More interaction exercises
- ☐ Increase in diversity of skill set
- ☐ Other

Any other comments?

Type your response directly or print out and write in!

Tech-Policy Hackathon Toolkit

Discuss, Brainstorm, Build

A guide for bridging the gap between digital rights advocates and technologists

Assembled by Internews