

HACKATHONS ON RAILS

A GUIDE TO RUNNING
YOUR FIRST HACKATHON



Stone Soup Guide to running your first Hackathon

Running your first hackathon is a daunting prospect. From the outset there are so many open questions: coordinating the venue, establishing a theme, courting sponsors, handling participant onboarding, recruiting judges & mentors... Will anyone even register or show up? What if no good projects emerge? What if the judges are jerks? What if the food doesn't arrive?

Deep breath... This mini eBook is a tested guide and workbook you can follow from start to finish to plan and execute your dream hackathon. I've been a part of 30+ hackathons over the years having been at the [very first Startup Weekend in San Francisco](#) back in 2007 and having run numerous events since as founder of Charity Makeover, Problematic, OpenStartup, Nocode Lisboa and the Stone Soup Protocol. I've made every conceivable mistake, revised my process and distilled it all into this document to enable you to bypass all the trial & error of hosting dozens of sub-par events. Regardless of whether you choose to run your event via the [Stone Soup platform](#) or on your own, you'll find this guide to be an indispensable copilot in helping you to run effective events.

Hackathons can improve the world one immersive experience at a time. And when done properly they can be a blast to organize expanding your professional and social circles in short order. I wish you a productive and enjoyable hackathon that creates the impact you envision. Now let's get started with planning your first one!

- Sean

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1: Introduction to Hackathons

Hackathons have grown from niche programming events into powerful engines of innovation and collaboration across industries. Whether you're hosting one for software developers, designers, or even entrepreneurs, hackathons offer a unique experience where participants can rapidly prototype solutions, connect with peers, and push the boundaries of creativity.

What Is a Hackathon?

A hackathon is an event where individuals or teams come together to solve specific problems within a set timeframe—often 24 to 48 hours. While they began in the tech world, hackathons have expanded into education, healthcare, and even community activism. The intense, time-bound environment fosters quick thinking and innovation, encouraging participants to develop minimum viable products (MVPs) or prototypes that address real-world challenges.

Types of Hackathons

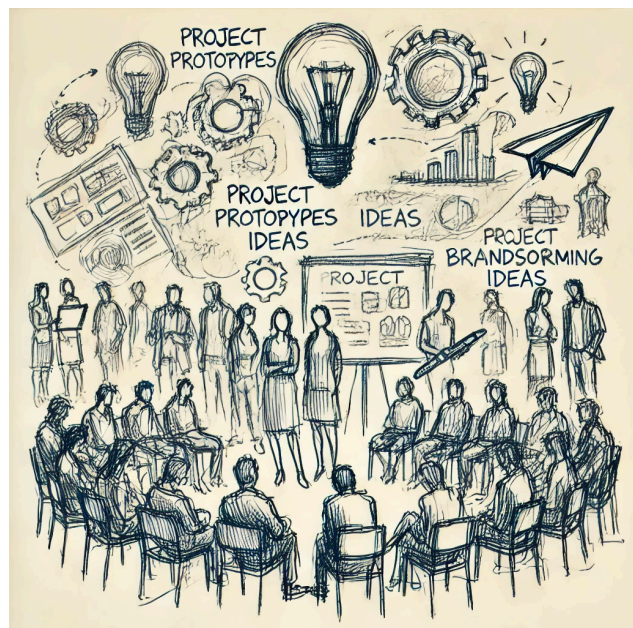
- **Open Hackathons:** Open to anyone with a passion for problem-solving, regardless of skill level or background. They foster diversity and community engagement.

Example: [OpenStartup Community](#).

- **Corporate Hackathons:** Companies host these to spur internal innovation or engage external developers for fresh perspectives on existing problems.

- **Non-Profit & Social Good Hackathons:** These events focus on solving societal issues such as poverty, healthcare, or education. Example: [Problematic](#).

- **Educational Hackathons:** Geared toward learning and skill development, these hackathons help students experience fast-paced, real-world challenges.



Why Host a Hackathon?

There are several reasons why organizations host hackathons:

1. **Innovation:** Hackathons encourage fresh, unconventional ideas and rapid experimentation, free from the usual constraints.
2. **Community Building:** Hackathons bring diverse groups together, fostering collaboration