

Organizer Strategy and Event Planning Guide

Overall configuration

We configured our hackathon to have a balanced mix of facilitated training sessions, designated team working time, and targeted consulting to help crystallize ideas and strategies. This cadence aims to provide a supportive environment for participants to learn new tools and skills while creating new and exciting prototypes that can catalyze innovation within your organization.

In this guide, you will find the following:

- Organizer Strategy and Event Planning Guide
- Pre-Event Outreach, Overview, and Participant Solicitation
- Facilitator Preparation
- Facilitation Guide: Virtual Prep Session (Pre-Hackathon)
- Facilitation Guide: Detailed Agenda for In-person Hackathon Event
- Participant Packet
- Sample judging sheet
- 5 Why's Worksheet
- Sample challenge statements

Institutions, organizations, and individuals are welcome to utilize all included documents in support of hosting their own hackathons. All documents have been anonymized with items that should be personalized to your institution included in brackets in all caps.

Hackathon Overview (2.5 Days):

Day 1: Inspiration, Problem Framing & Idea Generation

Objective: Set the stage, align teams on their challenge, and begin ideation.

- **Opening Keynote** – Inspiration & activation
- **AI & the Future of Work Discussion** – Large group discussion on AI's role in solving complex challenges
- **Challenge Deep Dive & Root Cause Analysis** – Teams break down their challenge statements to uncover underlying issues
- **5 Whys or Crazy 8s Rapid Ideation** – Structured brainstorming session to generate potential solutions
- **Team Debrief & Next Steps** – Reflect on ideas, identify promising directions for refinement on Day 2

Day 2: Solution Refinement & Prototyping

Objective: Refine ideas into actionable solutions and begin preparing final presentations.

- **Refining Solutions** – Teams develop and pressure-test their top ideas
- **Prototype Development** – Create a tangible representation of the solution (e.g., concept sketches, storyboards, workflows)
- **Feedback & Iteration** – Peer and facilitator feedback rounds to refine solutions
- **Presentation Prep** – Teams craft compelling narratives for their final presentations

Day 3: Final Presentations & Judging (Half-day)

Objective: Showcase solutions and gather feedback from the judging panel.

- **Final Presentation Round** – Teams pitch their solutions to the group and judging panel
- **Judging & Feedback** – Panel provides insights and selects standout solutions
- **Closing Reflections & Next Steps** – Group discussion on key takeaways and potential follow-ups

Mindsets & Expectations to Reinforce Throughout the Event

These principles should thread through all facilitation moments — opening remarks, transitions, team prompts, and consultant check-ins. They help create the conditions for bold, human-centered innovation.

- **Humility & Growth:** Early ideas will be messy — that's not just okay, it's expected. Focus on innovation and creativity, not perfection. Encourage teams to think in drafts, iterations, and "what ifs."
- **Blue-Sky Thinking:** This is a sandbox — experiment boldly. Aim high, think big, and resist the urge to second-guess yourself. Some of the best solutions start from a "wild" seed.
- **Curiosity is your Credential:** Every person brings a unique perspective shaped by their experience — that's the superpower of diverse teams. You don't need to be an "expert" to add value. Approach everything — data, ideas, each other — with genuine curiosity.
- **Human-Centeredness:** Stay anchored in the real needs, challenges, and dreams of learners and users. Solutions should be grounded in empathy, equity, and a deep understanding of who is impacted. AI is a tool, not a single source of truth — human judgment, ethics, and creativity remain essential.
- **Collaboration First:** Diverse teams will create stronger, more sustainable solutions. Build on each other's ideas with a "Yes, and..." mindset. Listen actively, challenge kindly, and assume best intentions — we are all here because we care about students, believe in innovation, and want to push what's possible forward together.

Event Planning Guide

Phase 1: Planning and Setup (Pre-Event)

Key Area	Action Items & Insights from Innovation Sprint
Define Goals & Vision	<p>Establish clear, ambitious goals.</p> <p>Sample goals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Innovation (sparking tech-driven solutions) ● Skill-building (upskilling employees in new AI tools), ● Visibility (strengthening the organization's position as a leader in its field) ● Impact (surfacing high-potential ideas)
Logistics & Schedule	<p>Dates & duration: Plan for a 2.5-day event (e.g., Day 1 morning to Day 3 afternoon).</p> <p>Location: Use a central main campus/venue (e.g., Venue X).</p> <p>Sample schedule overview:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Day 1: Facilitated work, opening session, keynotes ● Day 2: Dedicated team work time, consultant check-ins ● Day 3: Final pitches and awards
Budget & Resources	<p>Create a detailed budget, including direct costs (branded items, catering, spot bonuses for winning teams) and travel/lodging (participant and staff hotel blocks). Plan for SWAG like gear bags and notebooks.</p>
Participant Sourcing	<p>Application process: Use an open call supplemented by targeted outreach and leadership nominations.</p> <p>Timeline: Allow a few weeks for applications, selection, and team formation before the event.</p>
Team Formation & Structure	<p>Size: Aim for interdisciplinary teams (e.g., 9 teams of 8 participants each).</p> <p>Roles: Have each team self-select a team captain (as the central hub for communications and logistics) during a virtual prep session.</p>

Phase 2: Pre-Event Preparation & Content

Key Area	Action Items & Insights from Innovation Sprint
Challenge Statements	<p>Design broad, systemic challenges that are grounded in real-world issues (e.g., customer journey, internal processes, product development).</p> <p>The goal is to serve as a launchpad for fresh thinking, rather than prescribing a solution.</p>
Virtual Prep Sessions	<p>Host 1-2 mandatory virtual sessions leading up to the in-person event (e.g., a month prior). Use this time for an event overview, team introductions, team captain selection, and technology level setting.</p>
Communication Plan and Resources	<p>Establish standards: send all communications from a dedicated event email, use BCC, and confirm in-person vs. virtual details. Send a post-event email to celebrate winners.</p> <p>Post all resources, including attendee guides, logistics guidance, AI tools, background materials, and courses, in a centralized location that is easily accessible.</p>
Facilitation & Mentors	<p>Draft a detailed Facilitation Guide for all 3 days. Assign staff (Facilitators, Consultants) to groups.</p> <p>This hackathon model leverages two types of support personnel: facilitators and consultants.</p> <p>Facilitators serve as the hands-on guides for the entire hackathon experience. Facilitators lead almost all sessions, provide logistical support, and manage the overall event experience.</p> <p>Consultants are individuals with areas of strong subject matter expertise relevant to the hackathon topic or event. These individuals may provide brief sessions on their area of expertise and should circulate among the teams to serve as thought partners on solution formation, presentations, and other relevant matters.</p>
Core Deliverables	<p>Standardize the three core team deliverables, typically due by the end of Day 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototype (low-fidelity, tangible expression) • Business Case (concise explanation of why the solution matters) • Pitch Deck (short, compelling presentation). Templates should be provided.