

PROJECTSET



A REFERENCE GUIDE ON VIRTUAL HACKATHONS



What is a hackathon?

A hackathon is an event in which a large number of people engage over a short period of time to collaboratively develop innovative solutions for complex problems, products, and services. The word hackathon is an amalgamation of two words:

- "hack", which reflects a collective and experimental approach to solving problems;
- "marathon", which reflects a, continuous, intense and arduous effort to achieve a target outcome in a given time.

Hackathons have been a popular approach to solve problems in the technology field, but the concept is being increasingly adapted to develop innovative solutions in other fields.



Why are hackathons useful?

A hackathon offers value to a diverse set of stakeholders such as students, educators, professionals, though leaders, innovators, researchers, etc. These include:

- **Robust IP/ Idea development:** a hackathon typically offers a stimulating environment for rapid ideation where participants often reinforce and build on each other's contributions;
- **Speedy testing of ideas and concepts:** a hackathon offers a quick and inexpensive way to stress-test innovative ideas and concepts. The diverse – and often complementary – perspectives and experiences of participants allow rigorous examination of proposals from multiple angles.
- **Effective community engagement:** a hackathon typically focuses on a clear theme or topic and, consequently, brings together individuals to engage and deliberate on their common or shared purpose.
- **Reliable talent development:** a hackathon offers professionals to develop specific skills (often under mentorship from relevant experts) and employers the opportunity to identify promising talent.

What are the advantages of a virtual hackathon?

Virtual hackathons offer several advantages over a physical (on-premise) hackathon, including:

- **Diversity and inclusivity**, notably in terms of participants, given that interested individuals can join in from any part of the world without having to spend time and money on the commute.
- **Flexibility** given that participants can attend to other important matters without significantly impacting the quality of their work or engagement. Unlike physical hackathons, a virtual hackathon does not require full-time commitment and is typically involves a discrete set of live interactions interspersed with time windows for asynchronous work.
- **Economy** given that a virtual hackathon involves significantly lower costs and, consequently, lower sponsorship fees that makes it particularly viable for many start-ups and SMEs.

However, a key drawback of virtual hackathon is the relatively lower interaction opportunities among participants. This can be partially addressed through dedicated networking slots.



What are the key stages of a virtual hackathon?

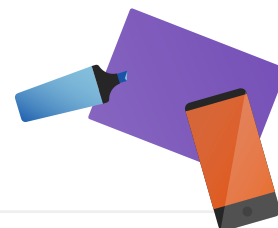
A hackathon involves a number of parallel activities; it helps to organise these into the following four distinct phases each with a clear set of activities and deliverables:

1. The **Design** phase involves finalisation of key details including objectives, target stakeholders and timeline
2. The **Preparation** phase builds the key infrastructure and tools (e.g. webpage, etc.) necessary to prospect target stakeholders and sign them up
3. The **Execution** phase involves the organisation of the entire event, including associated tutorials, keynotes, cultural and networking sessions
4. The **Wrap-up** phase involves announcement of results, managing communications and closure of all key outstanding activities (e.g. distribution of prizes, etc.).

The key activities and deliverables associated with these phases are summarised below.

	Design	Prepare	Execute	Wrap up
Key Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define hackathon strategy • Develop operating plan • Set up program team • Define target stakeholder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set-up site and collaterals • Launch sign-up campaign • Support on-boarding • Test-run platform and tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage session flows and schedules • Manage user support • Track user engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce results • Award prizes • Analyse feedback • Support post-event comms and off-boarding
Key Deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program team and roles • Target list of sponsors, judges and mentors • Stakeholder value proposition • Implementation (incl. marketing & comms) plan • Hackathon themes & problem statements • Budget and financing • Prizes/ giveaways • Hackathon FAQs/ T&Cs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmed list of sponsors, participants, judges and mentors • Briefing material for judges, sponsors and mentors • Sponsorships Agreements² • Onboarding webinars for participants, judges and mentors • Event program, content, timelines and roles • Platform ready to go-live! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assignment of mentors • Program agenda run • Support team on stand-by • Media updates • Ad-hoc interventions¹ • Conformation of participants' submissions • Evaluation and results • Participants' feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing collaterals incl. press release, social media posts and stakeholder quotes/ feedback

Note: 1) Contingency plans

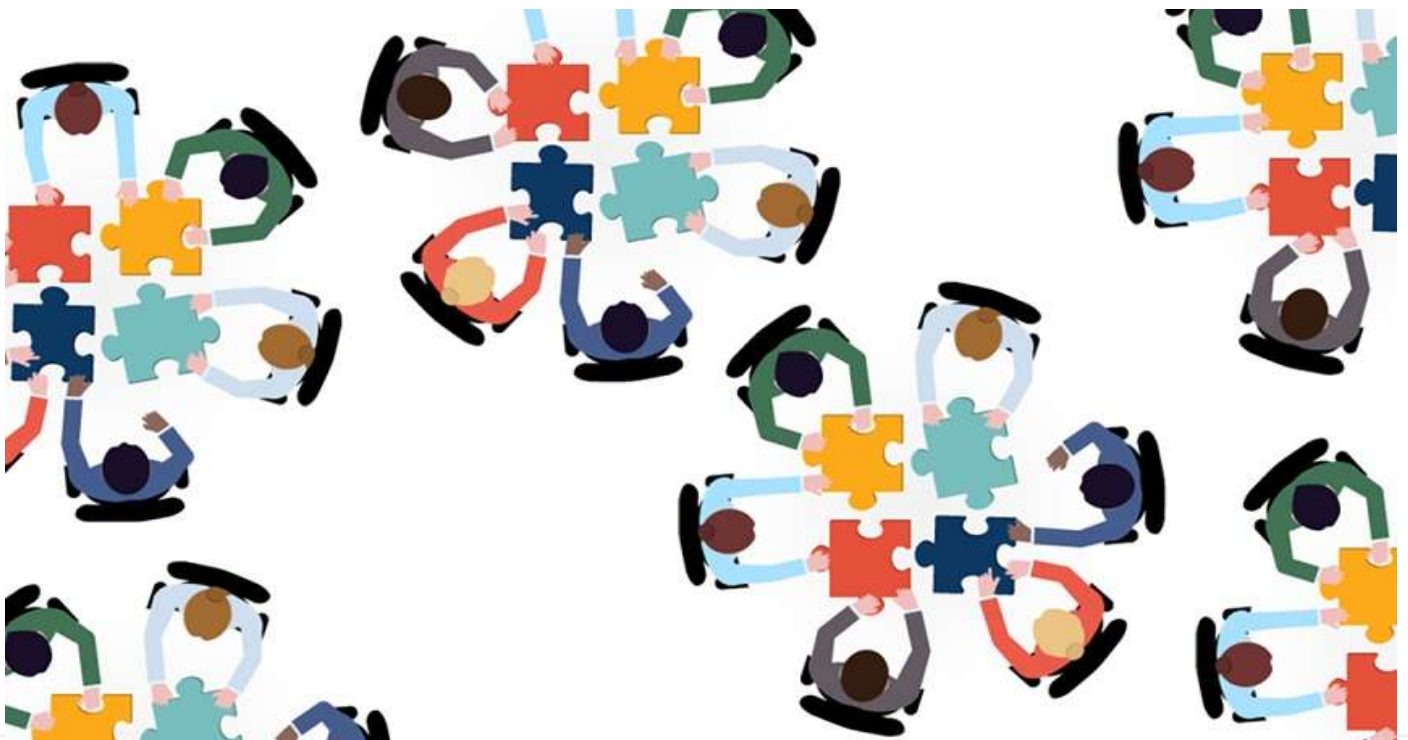




What are the best practices to ensure a successful virtual hackathon?

There are several key design and operational factors that impact the overall experience and success of a virtual hackathon. Some of these are:

- **Information and tools to familiarise participants:** A virtual hackathon increases the likelihood of strangers – who have not met before or have much information about each other – ending up as team mates. It is therefore important to build in tools and processes that helps build a threshold level of familiarity among participants as well as allows them some flexibility in joining teams.
- **Structured program agenda:** A virtual hackathon works best with a clear set of time slots for a) live interactions across teams; b) live, synchronous work within teams and c) asynchronous work at individual level. It is also important to ensure a balanced mix of mandated vs. optional sessions (e.g. skill clinics) as well as content-heavy vs. light entertainment sessions that follows a logic flow, for maximum engagement and impact. This is in sharp contrast to the typical non-stop 14-16 hour programs in physical hackathons.
- **Clear structured onboarding of participants:** Collective ideation in a virtual set-up requires special skills, disciplined process and purpose-built tools. It, therefore, works best when participants are briefed to follow a common set of principles and guidelines (e.g. how to share ideas, how to give feedback, etc.) that are simple, clear and transparent to all. This is particularly critical when teams comprise people from diverse cultures and backgrounds who have not met before.
- **Active mentoring:** Periodic steering of each team by a dedicated mentor significantly enhances the engagement, experience and impact of participants. Mentor inputs tend to revolve around process issues (e.g. effective work-plan, task allocation) as well as a “outside-in” view on proposed solutions; accordingly, mentors do not need to have deep subject matter expertise on the hackathon topic.
- **Clear feedback for all teams:** It is valued by most teams and can be efficiently organised in virtual hackathons, notably as the evaluation criteria are clearly defined upfront. In hackathons with a large number of teams, a *two-stage process* or a *shared allocation of evaluation responsibilities* allows meaningful feedback to all participants.



How much does it cost to host a virtual hackathon?

The cost of a virtual hackathon depends on key parameters such as target number of participants, timeline, agenda, etc.; there is no typical budget for such events. However, anyone can host a basic virtual hackathon with a budget of just \$2,000.

What are the advantages of the ProjectSet virtual hackathon platform?

- 1. Fast:** You can set up a virtual hackathon event in less than 15 minutes!
- 2. End-to-end:** Drive registration, team formation, onboarding, collaboration and evaluation on the same platform
- 3. Flexible:** Run multi-stage hackathon on the same platform
- 4. Automation:** Let the platform handle all time-consuming tasks such as email to participants, etc.
- 5. Integrated:** Enable participants to seamlessly showcase their outputs and testimonials in their digital portfolio.



To sum up.....

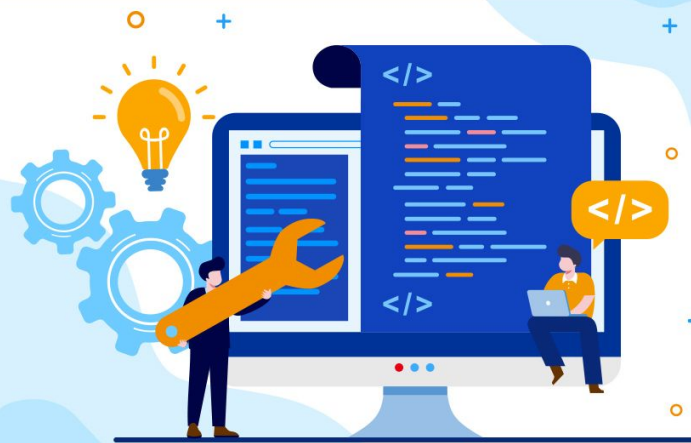
Set your virtual hackathon up for success:

- Follow a clear, structured process
- Target clearly defined stakeholders and participants
- Build a balanced program agenda with clear flow
- Onboard all stakeholders
- Engage active mentors
- Offer feedback to all



Get started today with a **FREE** offer to host your virtual hackathon:

- Set up your virtual hackathon in minutes
- Attract participants from any location and empower them with the right tools to collaborate virtually
- Enable speakers, mentors and judges to engage virtually from any location
- And so much more.....



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VIRTUAL HACKATHONS
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