

# Hackathon Handbook

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crazy town

# So, you want to organize a hackathon?

This handbook contains practical tips for anyone interested in organizing a hackathon.

Handbook is structured according what we find as learning points that you should consider *before*, *during* and *after* hackathon.

Handbook draws from our experience of implementing hackathons across Finland and Europe, both face-to-face, online and hybrid.



# Key points in a nutshell

## What is a hackathon?

A hackathon is an innovation event where people with various skills and backgrounds come together to collaborate and create solutions for a specific challenge or problem in a limited time period (typically 24 - 48 hours).

## Who are involved?

- Challenge-owners
- Participants
- Mentors
- Organizers and partners (can also act as challenge-owners)

## What can be the outcomes?

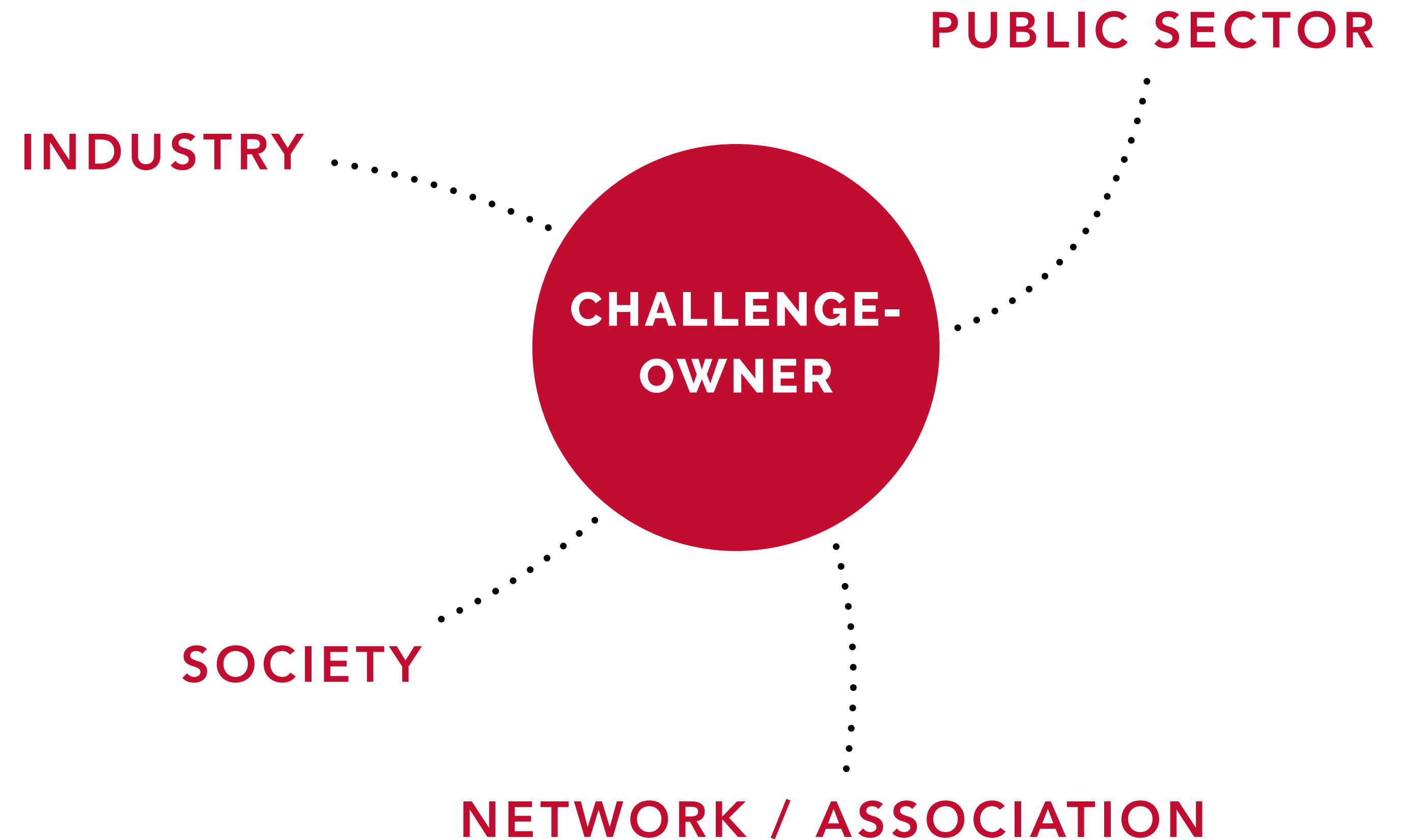
- Service
- Product
- Concept
- Insight and knowledge
- Idea-stage startup
- Initiative
- Joint-project

# Challenge-owner

A hackathon should have a real-life challenge-owner to set the direction.

Hackathons are an excellent tool for exploring new opportunities and needs in themes that challenge-owners find relevant. Ideally, the challenge-owner has interest and capacity to utilize the results of the hackathon.

Challenge-owner can be the hackathon organizer, or an external actor, such as a company, network, public sector organization.

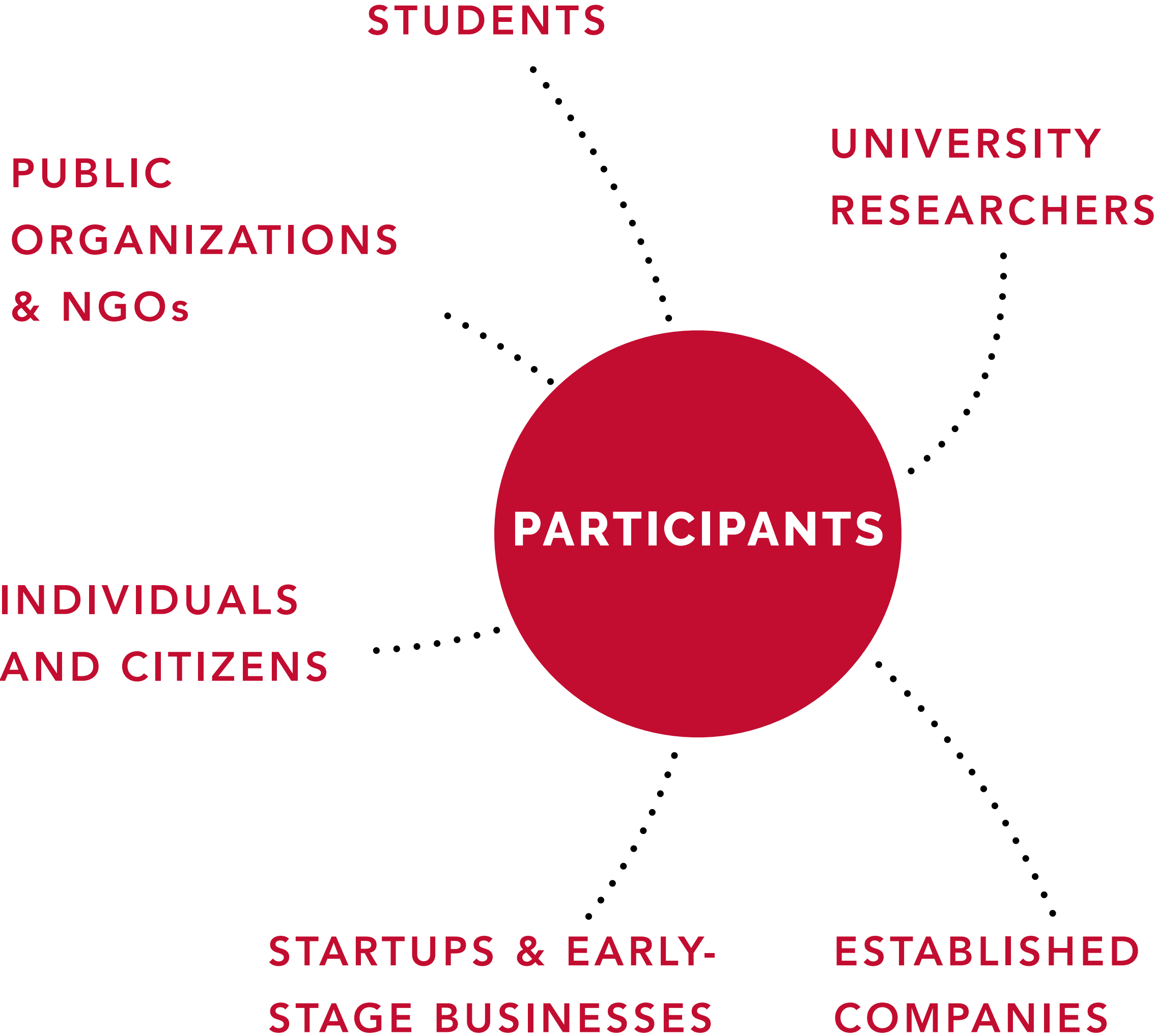


# Participants

Hackathon participants are responsible for creating the solutions during the event.

Typically, they are teams of students; university researchers and staff members; NGOs and public organizations; private individuals; existing startups, early-stage businesses, established companies, or mix of any of these.

Decision to focus on certain types of participants will directly effect on what level of support they might need, as well as what outcomes and impact you can expect from the hackathon.



# Mentors

Role of the mentors in a hackathon is to help participants to find focus, give advice and perspective; connect participants with their networks, people and resources; and be a person with whom participants can test ideas.

An organizer can involve various mentors from different backgrounds to build a pool of experts within relevant theme.

For example, as a university organizing a hackathon, you can bring your own staff members, as well as external experts, such as entrepreneurs, ecosystem players, representatives from the partners / co-organizers or challenge-owners onboard. You can also use your alumni as mentors.



*Mentors of a hackathon that Crazy Town for Albanian startup ecosystem on behalf of EU for Innovation project.*

WIRELESS:  
POLIS-1  
POLIS-2  
PASSWORD:  
poliswifi

MATERIALS

bit.ly/eu4innovation

MAKE TALENTS AND  
VISIBLE

Test your idea /  
prototype

17.00 - 17.10

17.10 - 17.20

17.20 - 17.30

17.30 - 17.40

17.40 - 17.50

17.50 - 18.00

HACKATHON

# BEFORE HACKATHON

Tag 1 to  
new social  
entrepreneurs

into  
in 36 h



# Key points to consider *before* hackathon

- Formulate a challenge that balances well between broad / specific. Remember to make sure it is meaningful and inspiring.
- Use hackathons as a catalyst for further cooperation with desired organizations and stakeholders. Have a plan and resources for how results can be used.
- Recruit strategically the right challenge-owners co-organizers, partners, participants and mentors.
- Cover key roles: hands-on organization, stakeholder communication and facilitation.



# FIND A GOOD BALANCE FOR YOUR CHALLENGE

## A BROAD CHALLENGE

e.g. What is the future of structural engineering?

VS.

## A SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

e.g. How to improve effectiveness of our process by 30%?

A challenge that is too narrowly defined tends to limit the imagination and interest of participants.

## A good hackathon challenge should be . . .

- **Relevant:** Finding solutions to the challenge addresses the strategy of the challenge-owner.
- **Actionable:** Challenge-owner has resources and possibility to implement / make use of new solutions.
- **Meaningful:** Challenge is interesting for participants from different backgrounds, as well as for the organizer.

Think of hackathon challenge as a resource magnet!



## Example: A meaningful challenge inspires and brings together talent

Hack the Crisis Albania hackathon looked for solutions to help Albania cope with covid-19 crisis to save communities, businesses and lives

Within 1,5 weeks, the event gathered over 200 participants, 30 partner organizations and over 40 mentors who contributed their time and expertise.



# Manage expectations

**It's important for organizers and challenge-owners to understand that hackathons are not a guarantee for creating fully developed solutions, but rather a way to generate innovative ideas and foster creativity.**

Hackathons should be understood as a catalyst for new beginnings that require support. Oftentimes the biggest failure of hackathons is not the event themselves, but the fact there is no effort or plan in leveraging the results further.

Have a clear plan and strategy for further development, as well as the necessary resources and support to follow through. This includes identifying potential partners, investors, or stakeholders who can help bring the ideas to fruition, as well as providing mentorship, feedback, and ongoing support to the teams.

Ultimately, the success of a hackathon should be measured not just by the quality of the ideas generated, but by the tangible impact they have on society, business, or any other relevant domain.

# HACKATHONS **INSPIRE**

EU for Innovation

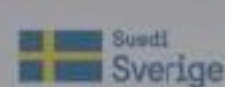


PHOTO: EU for Innovation project



# HACKATHONS SHOWCASE TALENT

PHOTO: EU for Innovation project



**HACKATHONS TEACH  
ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS  
AND DESIGN THINKING**

# Recruit partners, mentors and participants strategically

By organizing a hackathon, you can make a strong statement or announcement about a topic that you find relevant.

Therefore, think carefully:

- With whom do you want to strengthen cooperation?
- Who are enthusiastic and committed about creating impact with you?





# Cover key roles in the organizing team

**Hands-on organizer / producer:** Takes care of practical arrangements and ensures delivery

**Stakeholder communicator:** Ensures that challenge-owners, partners, co-organizers and mentors are up to date

**Facilitator:** Makes sure the event goes smoothly

Remember that different organizations can participate in the organizing team.

# DURING HACKATHON

EU for Innovation

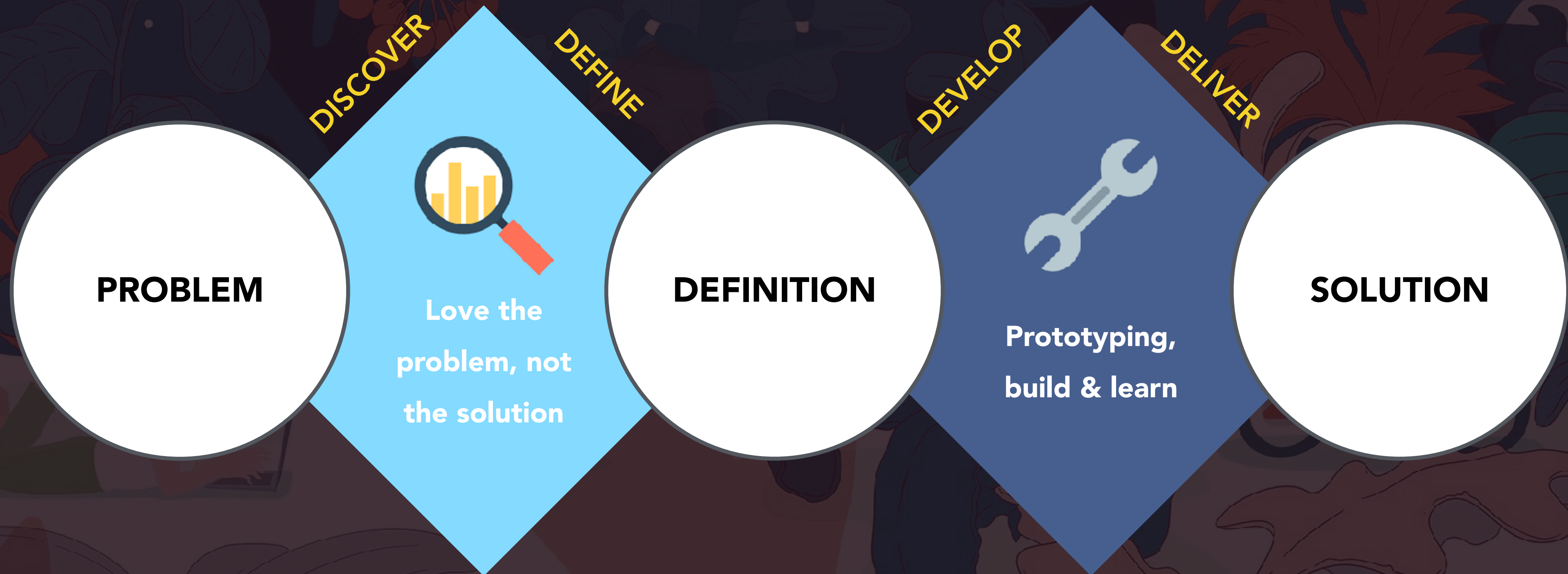


PHOTO: EU for Innovation project

## **Key points to consider *during* hackathon**

- Structure of the hackathon agenda according to “double diamond” process. 24 - 48 hours is generally a good hackathon length.
- You can also organize an online hackathon, but remember to keep tools straightforward.
- Create show around pitches and storytelling at the end. Also be clear about how the solutions will be presented and evaluated.

# Use double diamond for hackathon process



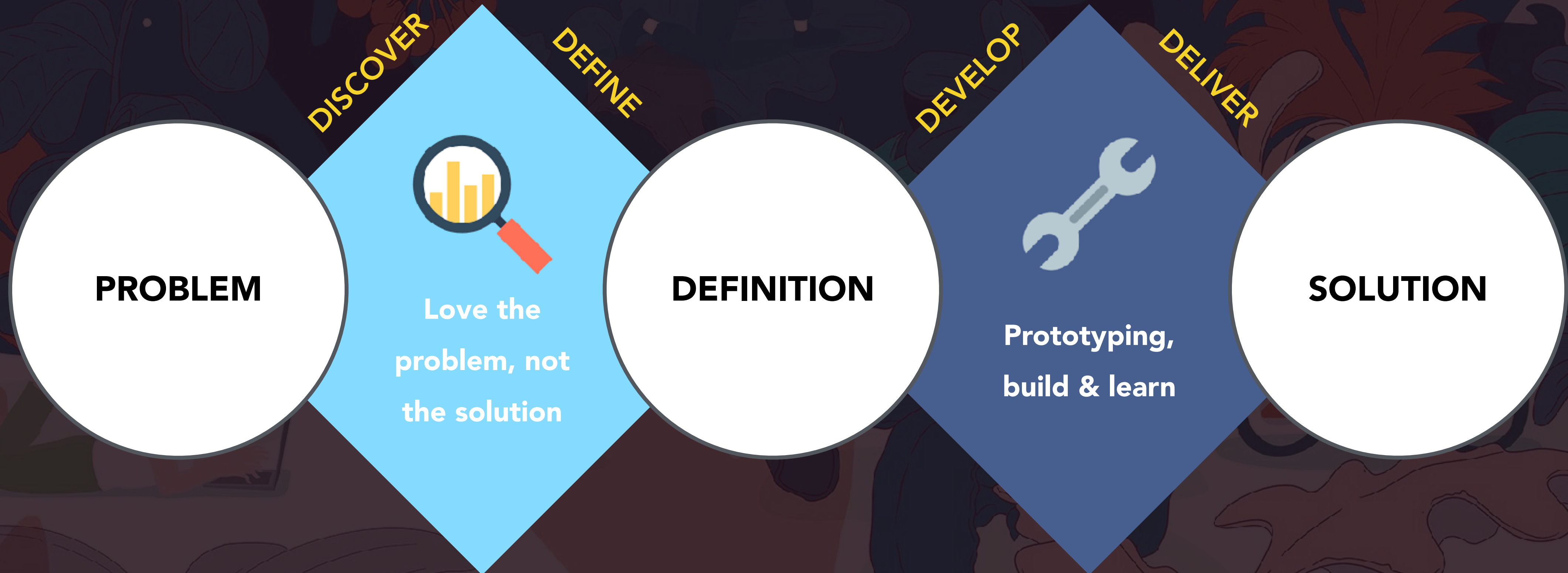
*Ideal length of a hackathon is around 24-48 hours*

# Double diamond teaches design thinking

- **PROBLEM:** Start the hackathon by focusing participants' efforts on "love the problem, not the solution". Don't let them fall in love with their idea! Help them to understand what is the real need / opportunity they are solving, whose need it is and how it impacts the user / customer.
- **DEFINITION:** After this, shift participant's attention to ideating early-stage ideas and alternative approaches to solution. They test their ideas with mentors, prioritize and finally they choose the best potential approach, and start creating a prototype.
- **SOLUTION:** You should end hackathon by allowing teams to present the demo / prototype solution with a short pitch. Give them training on how to deliver a basic pitch.

From **why** . . .  
(Problem awareness)

. . . to **how?**  
(Solution awareness)



e.g. DAY 1

DAY 2

DAY 3

# If you are running an online hackathon, keep the tools as simple as possible

The Zoom logo is displayed in a bold, blue, lowercase sans-serif font.

Zoom for live sessions



Slack for participant interaction

Optional: Mentor matchmaking, online whiteboard (Mural, Mira), etc.

We do not recommend hybrid hackathons, as you end up organizing two separate events with double the effort and increased complexity for participants.

# Make participation visible in online hackathons

#matchmaking ☆  
170 | Add a topic

Today

**Landa Grembi** 5:24 PM  
Hello everyone from Austria

**Endri Caci** 5:26 PM  
Hi everyone

**Chris** 6:30 PM  
Good evening everyone. Happy to meeting you!

**Anxhela Bruci** 6:34 PM  
Hello! Our team is looking for an app/ web/ software developer. Please send me a message if you would be interested to join or ask further questions.

**Chris** 6:35 PM  
I do not have a team yet, but would like work with web developer and designer to realise my idea. 😊

**Endri Caci** 6:40 PM  
I have not formed a team yet of found a team. I am open and aim to contribute in creating and offering new services, connecting ideas and funds together, monitored with professional experience. I want to contribute for solutions now who will become part of our life everyday life 😊 Enthusiastic, with a lot of experience in management, marketing and business development. Open for any thing.  
These days I have been offering for free marketing and management services for SME's in order to help them minimize their loss and prepare them for the coming period.

**Kris** 7:00 PM  
Hello everyone! Me and my team are working on a Mental Health Platform and are in need of an App Developer. Anyone interested?

2 replies Last reply today at 7:41 PM

#general ☆  
170 | 2 | Company-wide announcements and work-based matters

Details

Pinned by Arlind Today

**Toni Plenonen** 8:41 PM  
I also personally encourage all the teams and participants to **test, test and test** their ideas and approaches with the mentors & users/customers  
**Gather feedback as much as possible early on**  
**Fail fast, learn fast**  
And when you are building your prototype, do one or two important things really well first, keep on adding stuff after that  
Here's some bedside reading also for everyone  
<https://medium.com/the-happy-startup-school/beyond-mvp-10-steps-to-make-your-product-minimum-loveable-51800164ae0c> (edited)  
2 likes 5 reactions  
1 reply Today at 8:44 PM

**Sara Usinger** 8:50 PM  
There are still a lot of open mentor slots tomorrow morning. Use the sessions to speak to people that have a different background than you, get their feedback, insights. You still have a lot of time for more specific mentor sessions later on. As [@Toni Plenonen](#) said, get feedback right from the beginning and talk to as many people as possible.

**Pranvera** 8:52 PM  
Thank you we will

**Erion Nako** 9:48 PM  
Hope this article can help all the teams for their research: <https://www.ft.com/content/c764b98d-ae03-41bc-a2ca-8309f32d5e1c?fbclid=IwAR38vn7Z14wouJRaNwqWPsDwexNkMyGKNuXPMRG9JTM5zNq8S2I-arkn0k>

ft.com  
Coronavirus outbreaks plateau in the UK and the US, every day the last  
Today at 6:00 AM (47 KB)

#appdeveloperwanted ☆  
169 | Add a topic

Details

**Brikena Kapaj** 7:38 PM  
was added to #appdeveloperwanted by Lisian Roseni, along with 24 others.

**Lisian Roseni** 7:38 PM  
Hello everyone 😊 we have build a team with 4 members and we have this idea Opportunity to donate food through delivery APP's and restaurant deliveries. We have elaborated this and we need an extra member in the team to help us with a demo for the App. Please write me if you are interested so I can add you to our team communication group in Slack

**Marilena** 7:49 PM  
Hello, I'm interested to join the team 😊

**Rubin** 7:55 PM  
Hello everyone! we are a 5 person team with the idea of creating a sort of social-media-sales app which would directly connect an employee with a customer in order to ease the sale or better explain the product they are getting also adding the human touch we are looking for someone with developing skills in android and preferably IOS so that together we could make our idea into reality. Anybody interested hit me up.

**Nuni** 7:58 PM  
Hello everyone 😊 I have a great idea, but don't have a team...yet.  
Tech stack:  
Node.js + Vue.js + Mongo/Neo4j  
Team also needs:  
Designer  
For more, please drop me a message and let's talk.

**Arjola Breshanaj** 8:10 PM  
Hello Everyone, Lisian thank for creating this.  
WE need a developer for the WEB and the APP  
We are a team of three people. We are aiming to create a Platform for businesses in reporting their issues, challenges, problems and find the solutions, to connect together, to find Remote employees, Training etc.  
Basically a platform that would be the bridge between the interest of the businesses, Individuals and the government.

1 reply Today at 9:57 PM





**CREATE A SHOW AROUND  
PRESENTING THE SOLUTIONS**

novation

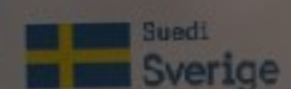


PHOTO: EU for Innovation project



**NOMANA**  
Tirana Edition

Welcome in Tirana.  
Let's make this easy:  
Find your problem and knock in the solution.

### Day One Problem

Let us help you find the best:  
Sim Card, Exchange, Taxi, place to stay

Solve it

### Week One Problem

All of the above plus, transport means,  
a work place, 24/7 services, access to  
the community, some history

Solve it

### Month One Problem

All of the above plus personal assistance,  
best wi-fi rated places, must visit ones.

Solve it

00:00

## Criteria we have used in our hackathons

**NOVELTY:** How innovative the solution is?

**ACTIONABILITY:** How realistically the solution can be implemented / piloted in practice? How sustainable the business / operational model is?

**IMPACT:** How clear benefits the solution has for the challenge?

*Remember that in addition to a short 3-5 min pitch, you can include Q&A segment as well as ask teams to include additional material that will be used in evaluation.*

A man with a beard and headphones is looking at a laptop screen. The background is a wall with colorful, abstract patterns. The text "AFTER HACKATHON" is overlaid in white, bold, uppercase letters.

**AFTER HACKATHON**

# Some *after* hackathon points to consider

- **Share and celebrate the results:** After the hackathon, share the results with the participants, sponsors, and broader community. Celebrate the achievements of the teams and highlight any innovative solutions that were created. This can help to create a sense of community and encourage future participation.
- **Offer support for top-performing teams and don't forget the importance of follow-up:** Give teams have a homebase, where to continue development after the hackathon. You can connect them with your business development services / accelerator, or link them with services offered ecosystem partners / co-organizers. Remember that if you have the right kind of partners onboard with you as mentors, partners and co-organizers, they can offer also support for teams.
- **Plan in advance with the challenge-owner how they will be involved in co-development, piloting and implementation of the solutions.** For participants, an opportunity to test and deploy their ideas with the challenge-owners can be one of the biggest benefits.
- **Be clear about who owns the intellectual property created at the hackathon.** It is a typical rule that hackathon participants usually own their ideas, but it's important to note that ideas alone cannot be protected. If a team doesn't want to continue developing their solution, the challenge-owner or organizer may have the option to do so with another partner. Make sure everyone understands this from the beginning.

**We are happy to design, organize and facilitate your hackathon or innovation event.**

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**Crazy Town Oy**

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