#WirVsVirus Hackathon

# WIR VS VIRUS
DER HACKATHON DER BUNDESREGIERUNG

Handbook

Lessons learned from organizing the world’s largest hackathon

Last update: 30 June 2020
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1 Genesis and timeline

The idea for the #WirVsVirus Hackathon came about when we witnessed the large amount of people coming up with solutions for challenges posed through Covid-19. The Corona crisis is affecting each and every citizen. Hence, we wanted to create a digital space where all those eager to help can meet, sync and work together. Estonia served as a first-mover in the Covid-19 hackathon sphere and we are grateful to have gotten their input on this matter. Read more about their Covid-19 hackathon here.

Sunday (15.3.2020)
On Sunday, we wrote a short concept which was sent to the Federal Chancelleries Office seeking for patronage. It included the following points:
- the benefit of a Covid-19 hackathon
- Organisations involved and their roles
- reasoning for the government to support our activity

Monday (16.3.20)
On Monday evening, we had our kick-off call with about seven or eight people. Topics included:
- outlining tasks (i.e. rough “work packages”) and next steps
- distribution of these tasks and assigning roles

Tuesday (17.3.20)
We reworked the concept and added more details, including a detailed schedule and main contributors to the hackathon, and resubmitted it to the government. Besides, we focused on:
- Hackathon name
- Logo development
- Website creation
- setup of social media presence (e.g. Twitter handle)
Later that day, we received confirmation that the Hackathon idea was presented to the cabinet and that the whole German government would act as patron.

Wednesday (18.3.20)
Since the government had approved the hackathon, we were able to publicly announce the event. On Wednesday afternoon, we opened the online registration for challenges and for participants, as well as for mentors and company support. Important factors during the announcement and registration included:
- announcement was retweeted within an hour by several networks as well as the government, creating quite a bit of traffic and visibility
- FAQ were put on the website
- registration options were placed directly on the website
Thursday (19.3.20)
On Thursday, the registrations had gone far above what we anticipated. We discussed closing the registration phase early, the first time when we hit 5,000 participants. However, we decided to keep the registration open as we expected our processes to be scalable: As long as enough mentors signed up to support the participants, we would be able to manage the group, no matter how big. What we did not allow for was the large-scale traffic crashing eventually all our chosen platforms at one point or another.

Eventually, we closed the submission of challenges on Thursday evening, with close to 2,000 challenge submissions. On top of that we also received about 200 challenges from Federal Ministries. We decided to cluster and curate the challenges to make it easier for participants to pick and choose their topics and teams. Read more about [challenge clustering here](#).

Friday (20.3.20)
In total, by Friday, close to 43,000 people had signed up. In the morning, at 11:00 am, the mentors joined a webinar via Google Hangout to learn about their supporting role during the hackathon. At 3pm, we published the curated challenges and informed the participants of the next steps. On Friday evening, we first onboarded mentors, then participants and company representatives to [Slack](#). We answered questions about the registration process mainly on Twitter and during a live video call we streamed on [Youtube at 6:30pm](#).

Saturday (21.3.20)
Finally, on Saturday morning, everyone was onboarded:
- 26,000 active hackathon participants
- 2,500 supporting mentors

We kicked off with a morning check-in live stream via [Youtube at 10:00 am](#), sharing the most important information for the day. The day closed with a [check-out live stream at 5:00pm](#), providing a briefing for the next day.

Throughout the day, members of the organization team and mentors moderated various slack channels. Read more about [Slack moderation here](#).

Sunday (22.3.20)
Sunday morning, the submission process was announced in another [check-in video stream](#) on Youtube: Each team had to film and submit a two minute video via Devpost and YouTube. Though the official deadline was 6pm, we extended the deadline till midnight due to technical issues: YouTube Europe’s servers were not equipped for the large amount of submissions. Regardless, we had a [closing ceremony live on Youtube at 6:30pm](#) with a thank you note from the German Chancellery, pictures from the weekend and live music. By midnight, 1,500 teams had submitted their ideas on DevPost.
Monday - Friday (23. - 27.03.2020)
With the support of more than 700 mentors, experts and members of federal ministries, out of the 1,500 submissions the top 197 ideas were shortlisted based on a “ten eye principle”. Criteria included:
- Social value added
- Innovation
- Feasibility and scalability
- Idea stage (progress)
- Understandability

Out of those 197, an expert jury of 48 members from various sectors and professions selected the best 20 ideas from five different thematic areas based on the same criteria listed above. Those areas were
- Health
- Nutrition and supply
- Administration, information and data
- Economy & Labour
- Welfare and education

The top 20 winners were announced during a Youtube live stream on Friday, 27.03.2020.

Since then we spent our time designing, fundraising and implementing a follow-up support program to enable the continuation of solution development.

2 Stakeholders
List all stakeholders you want to address and their needs.
- The registration process must be easily accessible via one platform, e.g. your website (registration processes for each stakeholder will likely differ as each group requires different information)
- What information do they require? When and where do they find it? Single point of truth is key
- Assign one lead responsible for each stakeholder group
- Answer as many questions as possible through a FAQ. Have someone in place who is constantly updating public FAQ on the website. Ideally, plan beforehand what information can be published when and where.
- Our key stakeholder groups included: ourselves (the organization team), participants, mentors & moderators, companies, government and of course press.

Diversity among all stakeholder groups is essential - lack therefore on our part was a severe critique reaching us at the end of the hackathon and after. We would have needed a broader diversity concept including race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, personality, socioeconomic status. Consequently, it would also have been necessary to set up a dedicated outreach-concept to explicitly address marginalised groups and encourage them for participation.
2.1 The organization team

In a nutshell
The hackathon was organized by seven different initiatives: Code for Germany, Initiative D21, Impact Hub Berlin, ProjectTogether, Prototype Fund, Social Entrepreneurship Netzwerk Deutschland, and tech4Germany. Our team grew from Monday, 16.03.2020, 6pm, seven people to Friday, 20.03.2020, 6pm 100 people. Everyone in our team was extremely solution oriented and proactive. Delegation is key. Make sure to align on: who takes which decision / who has the authority to make a final approval / who is responsible for what / who executes tasks, who coordinates? Who is the final source of truth in case of confusion?

We allocated the following main roles:

- Hackathon project manager
- Head of communications
- Head of tech infrastructure & owner of all data
- Head of challenge submissions
- Head of participants
- Head of mentors
- Head of company support
- Head of scientific enquiries

Roles we should have established in hindsight:
- Person connecting press with participants
- Person solely responsible for internal communications like emails to participants

Key points
- When we built up our organization team from the seven initiatives we emphasized an interdisciplinary approach. That way we made sure to have a variety of skills available during the whole process.
- We trusted that everyone in our organization team would take ownership of their assigned role(s) and task(s). That trust translated into a broad self-reliance of everyone involved.
- With our tight time frame decisions had to be made quickly. It was very beneficial to have a core team for quick decision making and regular check-ins and shared communication channels.

Key learnings
- A variety of expertise within the team is extremely valuable. Make sure not to forget the tech expertise within your team. In hindsight, it would have been valuable to have a person on our team that regularly participates in hackathons (possibly someone who helped organize the Estonian hackathon) / other online formats, such as online gaming.
- Fostering diversity is as important within the organizing team as it is in other stakeholder groups: We encourage you to think outside your immediate personal and professional networks and make a conscious effort to include other communities and actors that will help you to integrate different perspectives and
experiences in all processes. This will not only enable you to broaden your reach, but also improve the overall hackathon - after all, diverse and interdisciplinary teams do create better results.

- If possible, try to **plan ahead**: how much men and women power you will need to bring your hackathon to life? What skills will you need? Will there be peaks or time slots that are hard to cover?
- **Being smart with time**: Record onboardings of the process that can be sent to everyone joining in later, so that the process owner is only needed for follow-up questions.
- **Clear chain of command**: Engage a core team, with each core member being responsible for one area and a sub-team.
- **Honesty & decision-making**: Within the core team, be honest and open. This speeds up decision making and cuts through the bullshit*.
- **Create one single source of truth**: Refer to one and only one document that is always up to date and has a timestamp with the latest changes.
- **Transparency**: Keep the decision-making circle small, but create transparency on progress, decisions and interdependencies between teams through one common collaboration area.

2.2 Participants

__In a nutshell:__
With close to 43,000 participant sign-ups, transparent, timely and coherent information is key. In terms of timeline, we started organising five days before the event, and the numbers totally overwhelmed us. In an ideal world, you need to have a coherent, sophisticated onboarding process for participants. Especially with a digital-only event you need to be sure that your participants know how to use the tools you offer. People need time to sign up, make a profile, and do these kind of technical things before the event really starts. They also need enough time to familiarize themselves with the challenges offered and the people willing to join forces with them.

__Key points__
- **Registration** was via Typeform and we tried to make the registration process as easy as possible.
- We then sent an information email with instructions on how to find challenges in an Airtable and how to register on Slack to all signed-up participants.
- Once registered on slack, participants were able to join various channels, depending on the challenge they wanted to tackle.
- Once participants had found their challenge and team in the respective channel, they registered on DevPost and created their project page in the #WirVsVirus Hackathon space. We had a naming system for project channels that also translated onto DevPost.
- We also encouraged participants to inform themselves about the existing ideas to prevent doubling of solutions and provided a list with some ideas we found beforehand. No need to reinvent the wheel!
- As a final submission, teams had to create their DevPost page and upload a two minute video on YouTube (and place that link on their Devpost page).
- We discovered early on that we needed to create a FAQ that was available for participants and would continue to grow throughout the hackathon. We decided that this had to be our one single source of truth for everything. This was a really hard lesson for us. Parallel documents with differing information are hard to handle. Even more so if the number of participants is overwhelming by itself. Having one single source of truth for everything your stakeholder groups would need to know, like the internal agenda times, communication schedule, internal communication, external hackathon timeline, etc. makes your life so much easier. We had lots of people participate who had never used Slack, never used DevPost, never even used video calls. We had FAQs published for all these things and could always share a link. Have a look at our FAQ here (German only unfortunately).
- We created a code of conduct to establish clear expectations for participants. Have a look at our Code of Conduct here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key learnings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Create a marketplace / matching platform to connect offers and needs from participants, mentors and companies. Devpost is not equipped to meet the needs of 20,000+ people.</td>
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<td>- Allow sufficient time for tech onboarding. Expect tech to slow down (or crash) and have a plan in place on how to react if this happens.</td>
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<td>- Offer a pre-hackathon tech-onboarding for non-digital native participants. Record this onboarding to share it with everyone who onboards late.</td>
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<td>- With more time to prepare, it would have been handy to organize central webinars for relevant topics e.g. data security and make them available to all teams via YouTube.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Create a FAQ that is available for participants and continues to grow throughout the hackathon. This is your one single source of truth for everything. Always indicate what was the last date of changes. This means, do not start adding different documents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Be very transparent towards your participants regarding the process and any challenges that might have come up - both internally and externally. This builds trust within your community and also encourages participants to take responsibility for challenges that arise and help each other (instead of expecting us/the organisers to fix it). Have a Code of Conduct in place and communicate this code in your community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Delegate to participants and listen: Delegate everything you can to the participants themselves. If the majority of people votes against what you are saying, just drop it. You do not have time to discuss.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- If you do press related work afterwards, its handy having core information about participants at hand as journalists are interested in participants from a specific area, age group, background.</td>
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2.3 Mentors & moderators

In a nutshell
Mentors were key to the success of this hackathon. They supported teams with specific skills in tech, business or project management. They helped teams find each other and stay on track throughout the weekend. Finally, they played a key role in selecting the winning projects once the hackathon had ended.

Key points
- **Registration** was via Typeform and the information was fed into Google Doc to make the information machine readable.
- When registering, mentors also submitted their expertise & skills (such as tech, health, education, etc). However, we were not able to use that information since we did not have a scalable process in place to match mentors and participants. Creating a **scalable and decentralized matching process** is key.
- We engaged some of the *mentors as Slack moderators*: On Friday & Saturday, these moderators helped participants to find their teams. Pairs of moderators were assigned to different Slack channels, where they were in charge of hosting the participants online. In hindsight, the process would have been more transparent if moderators and mentors would have been separate roles and not merged into one.
- On top of engaging mentors as moderators, we also had moderators from the organization team to facilitate some of the slack channels. **Read more about Slack organisation here.**
- Mentors created profiles on **DevPost** to be recognisable to participants / teams. Participants and mentors were also able to connect via Slack.

Key learnings
- **Onboard the mentors** prior to the hackathon and **empower them** to take control of their assigned responsibilities.
- **Build for scale**: **Record the onboarding session** and make it available to other mentors who were not able to join the session (crucial for us as more than 400 mentors wanted to join our call, but Google Hangouts had a capacity limit at 250).
- **Build decentralized processes** that enable participants and mentors to meet and match.
- **Separate the role** of Slack moderator and team mentor. Both are very time intensive and require different skills and information prior and during the hackathon.
- If the ratio of moderators/mentors-participants is correct, you can upscale the number of participants to infinity (if your tech platforms allow for it).

2.4 Company support & other resources

In a nutshell
Company support included an overview of pro bono and/or in-kind help offered by companies and other initiatives. Beforehand, consider the following:
- What do you want from companies or initiatives?
- How and why do you want to include them?
- What kind of information do they need to stick to their respective role?
- Who is their main contact if questions arise?
- What legal considerations are necessary if companies want to offer financial or in-kind donations?

Several companies were eager to support! Thus, we set up a Typeform to organize their offers. These offers were then reviewed and clustered by a team into three categories:
- relevance during the hackathon
- relevance after the hackathon
- people that should rather be a mentor or expert

Key points
- **Registration** was via Typeform. We used predominantly **predefined categories** and reduced the number of open questions. This enabled the identification and categorization of offers.
- We set up a Google spreadsheet with different categories of support. This sheet was pinned to the general company support Slack channel. It **organized the offers** and made them available to all participants.
- **Clear communication**: Companies that offered a service relevant for the hackathon itself received an email on Friday with information on how to proceed.
- We also informed companies of the **Code of Conduct**. It is important to create a safe space for participants. Thus, we asked participants to report any suspicious behaviour eg. a company trying to sell its services/products.
- We set up a **general company support channel** that was moderated during the day.
- **Coherent naming of channels**: We asked the staff of the companies to create a channel following the system 2_company_support_CompanyName and to name themselves 2_company_support_YourName so that they could be recognized as administrator of their channel.

### Key learnings
- Create a marketplace / database / matching platform for teams/participants to search and access the needed support.
- **Be precise.** When setting up your Typeform, make sure you ask all relevant questions. We had to do ours twice, causing more work on our side and the company’s side when having to fill out the form again. Of course, we sent a lovely thank you message :)
- People are responsible. During the hackathon, we had very few problems with people using the company support only as self-advertisement.

2.5 Government

In a nutshell
We decided to involve the government as the Covid-19 crisis requires all actors - public, private and civil society - to join forces in creating effective solutions. We believe this can be a blueprint for how governments could address pressing challenges bottom up and collaboratively with civil society. Several ministries submitted challenges prior to the hackathon, thus proving the legitimacy and overall urgency of challenges for the hackathon. In our specific case and timeframe, government involvement was possible due to already established working relations with the relevant actors and strong top-level support for the idea from the start.

**Key points**
We discussed and considered the pros and cons of involving the local government.
Benefits might include:
- increased legitimacy of your hackathon due to institutional backing
- broader reach and public awareness (diversity of participants)
- trust building amongst participants that they are “coding for good”
- easier access to key decision makers in the follow-up process

Challenges might include:
- bureaucratic necessities might slow down overall timeline
- increased expectations, especially regarding the hackathon outcome, from civil society and public opinion
- increased stakeholder management

Key learnings
- Involving the government drastically increased visibility and public awareness for the hackathon. If you want to reach a broad audience, this is very useful.
- Reach and implementation power of the government is a motivational factor for participants to join the hackathon.
- Be aware that there might be an increased pressure if you involve government to have good and valid outcomes.
- Visibility that comes with government involvement also means that there is a closer observation of your proceedings from press and the public eye.

3.6 Press and Communications

In a nutshell:
We had an enormous outreach, growing our Twitter from 0 to 16K in 4 days. Twitter functioned as our main line of communication to the wider public (participants were informed via mail and Slack, journalists via press releases and conferences). We had a lot of press interest and it was critical to assign one lead person for communication, both internally and externally. For us, there were two main challenges: keeping everyone up to date but also finding a language that fits both public servants and potential participants.

Key points:
- Twitter was our main line of communication and due to time and human resource constraints we decided to work with Twitter only.
- Our enormous growth was due to the fact that we were seven organisations with well established and digitally savvy communities. In total, we already accounted for a follower base of around 30K and got more than 1000 retweets for our initial post.
- We sent out a joint press release with the German government which was also shared by the federal press office. We gave close to 15 interviews per day. We established a press section on the website, and a form in which interested journalists could fill in their email address. Thus, we quickly generated a press mailing list.
- We asked press to use a specific subject line to be able to identify press requests from the gazillion of other mails flooding our inbox (e.g. PRE_Hackathon:..)
- We had one single person as well as a phone number available for the whole process.
- It was more than beneficial in our tight time frame that the person responsible for press requests and communication was also a member of the core team and had therefore all the information.
- We decided to invite press contacts to a virtual press conference, and only those who participated in that press conference, about 40 people, were then invited to Slack. The press conference served the purpose to inform the press on our process and status. We also had a Code of Conduct for press:
  - Press members had to be transparent about who they are by using a prefix in their Slack name (PRE_Name Surname).
  - Press had only limited access to channels and a dedicated press only channel.
  - Press was not allowed to contact participants by themselves. Anyone not following these guidelines was deleted from Slack, no exceptions.
  - Screenshots of Slack were only allowed to be published with explicit press team permission.
  - We also informed the participants about the press on Slack and the Code of Conduct for press.
- Create a #press_search channel in which members of the organization team can post requests from journalists.
- Direct communications via Twitter: We were not afraid of admitting that something went not as planned and asking participants for patience if we were facing challenges. We made sure that they knew that we were taking care of whatever challenge we were facing and would answer their questions as soon and best as possible. This built trust and a strong online community.
- As a multi-organisation team we prepared a comms sheet with everyone’s website, Twitter handle, name of company representatives + Twitter handles.

Key learnings
- Outreach will be a lot easier when you have already established communities and a broad network.
- Be open and transparent about challenges to establish trust and reliability even in uncertain circumstances.
- Be clear and strict about rules and Code of Conduct.
- Should you invite journalists to Slack? Discuss this question beforehand within your team to better manage expectations. Have a Code of Conduct for journalists.
- Be ready to have your data at hand (number of participants, challenges submitted, etc.)
- Let people use one hashtag to spread the word about the hackathon + provide project logo (for us, #WirVsVirus, #WirVsVirusHack and #WirVsVirusHackathon continued to be mixed up).
- Journalists will have specific requests about participants of a certain background, age group, area of living. Therefore it is recommendable to ask these things during registration process (we didn’t, which caused a lot of extra work).
- Having one person responsible for connecting press to certain teams and/or participants would have been beneficial as well.
3 Processes & tech

Overall, make sure to think big: Scaling down is easier than scaling up. We expected 10,000 participants and ended up with 43,000. Within two days, we had to scale all processes to meet the needs of a significantly larger audience. The hiccups in that scaling process led to us losing some participants during the onboarding process.

3.1 Tech Tools

Work closely with responsible contacts of your chosen tools (e.g. from Slack or Youtube) to make them aware of the very, very high number of users that can be expected in a very short period of time and make them listen! For example: there might be 1,000 video uploads in the same 30 minutes. Are you really prepared for that?

We used the following tools for our Hackathon:
- **Airtable**: Listing curated and clustered challenges
- **CloudFlare**: Website development and design
- **DevPost**: Team registration
- **Guaana**: Challenge submission
- **Slack**: two spaces - one for the hackathon itself and one for the organization team
- **YouTube**: Livestream & announcements (incl. professional live stream support
- **Typeform**: Registration of participants/challenge owners, mentors and companies
- **Twitter**: Social media communication
- **Google Hangout** and **Zoom**: Video conference tools for team check-ins

3.2 Finding and selecting challenges

In a nutshell

Within two days, we received over 2000 challenges. Challenges were submitted by the general public as well as federal ministries. We did not set specific thematic criteria as we wanted challenges to be very broad. Challenge owners needed to submit their challenge in an application form on a platform called **Guaana** and were asked to fill out the following sections:
- Title
- Problem Description
- Target Group
- Challenge Definition (How can we...)
- Existing Solutions or Ideas to their challenge

Federal ministries received a word document to lower barriers for submission.

**Key points**
- We started with a team of 35 people, but eventually 50 people supported in reading and categorizing and filtering the best challenges during a night and half a day.
- We implemented a grading system from **one** (hardly given) to **five** (completely fulfilled) and graded challenges in the following aspects:
  - **Impact** (the number of people affected by the challenge, challenge addresses an existing problem)
  - **Feasibility** (working on the challenge is doable during a hackathon (e.g. no political demands like implementing an unconditional basic income)
  - **Quality** (challenge is formulated in a clear and understandable way)
  - **Overall** (overall rating of the challenge allowing for the criteria above)
- Submissions that received an overall “four” or “five” grade were clustered into thematic groups of challenges.
- Eventually, we had 809 challenges (grade four or higher) that were clustered into 48 topics. Challenges and topics were all listed on [Airtable](https://airtable.com) for the participants to choose from.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Define challenge areas beforehand.</strong> Letting people submit challenges and sorting them into different areas ourselves was a lot of work. Next time we would define them before and have the submitters pick which area their challenge fits in.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Make sure challenge areas are mutually exclusive.</strong> Had we had more time, it would have been great to specify challenge areas more closely to make sure to cover all relevant areas while being mutually exclusive. We ended up having some areas with &gt;50 challenges, and some with &lt;5.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Establish rules for the challenges.</strong> Many challenges we received weren’t fit to be worked on in a hackathon (like political demands). By establishing clear rules and guidelines beforehand you can filter out a lot of unnecessary challenges. Low submission barriers leads to a greater need of human resources to actually filter challenges and make them presentable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Establish a system to reduce Duplications.</strong> Many challenges we received were incredibly similar and it took a long time to consolidate them. Strategies like publishing all submissions that were handed in in real-time, so that people could have checked if their challenge already exists before submitting it double would have worked if the number of challenges in one category was still feasible to read through for challenge owners.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use a tool that allows you to export challenges.</strong> Unfortunately, we learned too late that Guaana, the tool we used to collect challenges doesn’t have a function to export all submissions. Editing them in the tool itself wasn’t very user friendly. We ended up having to manually copy and paste the challenges into an excel sheet. Next time we would definitely look at different tools.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adapt submission process for your stakeholder groups.</strong> If you want federal ministries to be challenge owners pay attention to the options available for them to submit challenges and adjust the submission process accordingly.</td>
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### 3.3 Organising Slack

**In a nutshell**
We used slack as a communication platform for the hackathon. We had a **channel structure** on slack that allowed us to group all the people who signed up according to the challenge they were interested in. That made things a lot **easier for them to find a group** of people that would want to work on a specific challenge throughout the weekend. **Mentors helped guide participants** into the right Slack channels and groups, helped them discuss ideas and find a team until Saturday morning.

Signing up all participants at once did not work as Slack limits registrations. We had to do it manually. That caused a lot of stress on our side and some irritations with the participants. By early Saturday, we finally had everyone equipped with a link to sign up on slack.

We had **two slack workspaces**: one for the hackathon and one for the organization team. Having two workspaces was key, as it allowed us to pre-set the workspace for the whole hackathon.

When participants joined Slack, they had previously selected their challenges on Airtable and knew which channels to look for, beyond the few global channels that they were automatically linked with (a general channel & a channel for open questions). That meant that participants, especially in the onboarding phase, had a **really clear idea of what they had to do** when and how. The first channel they had to join was the channel with the identification number of their challenge.

**Key Points**

- We created **sub-channels for each challenge** so that participants could spread out evenly across Slack and single channels did not break down. Specifically, we created five sub-channels for each of the 48 thematic challenge clusters by adding `_a`, `_b`, `_c`, `_d` and `_e` to the channel name.
- We also created a **centralized Slack structure** to organize teams and topics. We set up different channels within these areas:
  #0. General questions & organisation groups (mentors, sponsors, organization team)
  #1. Challenges
  #2. Company Support
  #3. Know-How Mentoring
  #4. Press
  #5. Follow-up support program

- We reserved one **“General/Announcements” channel** to administrators to Slack. It’s important to have one single source of truth channel.
- We also set up a **mentors-only channel** to gather all relevant information in one place and enable peer exchanges.
- We asked everyone to be clear regarding their various stakeholder status and indicate their roles in their **Slack registration name**. This makes it very easy to find answers and to share information with the right people.
  - MENT_Name of Mentors (mentors)
  - ORG_Name for person_NameofOrganisation (organization team)
- **Final thoughts on Slack:** The Slack Workspace we set up was meant to last for a Hackathon and not beyond that, creating a big path-dependency on our side once the Hackathon was over: **how to build a sustainable community** out of a space with 26,000 registered & 1200+ channels (to only count the public channels)? Initially, we did not plan to keep Slack open after the Hackathon. Setting up a new structure that simplifies onboarding processes for new Workspace members took us around two weeks.

**Key learnings**

- **Stay flexible.** We created ad-hoc channels when realising that a new topic needed to be treated separately. For example, many questions came up regarding DevPost. Thus, we set up a seperate channel to avoid flooding of the “general questions” channel.

- **Decentralize the channel creation.** Mentors were empowered to create the topical channels - the structure was communicated early and the mentors had to follow a specific pattern.

- **Automatically add your participants to the most relevant channels** - you can adjust the parameters on your Slack Account.

- **Set the Slack Workspace up in a way that is meant to last** and host the community for a while, if you want to build a sustainable community structure. A few key elements should be mapped out, like having an automatized onboarding process for all new members or allowing collaboration tools API on Slack (Google Drive, Trello,...). There is at least two weeks of wrap up needed after the hackathon.

**3.4 Online moderation**

**In a nutshell**

Approx. 26,000 people were active on Slack during that weekend. We had 1,250 channels on Slack of which only four were managed and moderated by the organization team. All other channels were **moderated by mentors** who became pro bono moderators. Out of the 2,500 mentors, approx. 500 signed up to also be moderators. They had a **direct line** to us, the “mentors and moderators” channel, where they could acquire information. As a result, we only had to handle and moderate 500 moderators and mentors, and not all participants on slack (plus the four channels moderated by us). That helped us to drastically reduce the audience from 26,000 to 500.

**Key points**

- We decided that only administrators were allowed to post in the “announcements” channel, making it our **one source of truth.**
- **We established a posting routine** in the “announcement channel” to manage expectations better. One announcement to kick off the day, one to close the day.
- **We provided regular updates** regarding next steps & key moments, such as a YouTube live stream to announce the submission deadline.
- **We set up FAQs and onboarding documents for the organization team** to quickly integrate new team members and dispatch the knowledge fast & efficiently. Have a look at our document [here](#).
- **We found that sharing responsibility & dispatching workload** helped keeping everything manageable. Mentors were responsible for all “1_NAME” channels, organization team was in charge of five different “feedback channels” that started with a “0” focusing on DevPost, mentors, open questions, “asking support” and “offering support”.
- We also created a **rotation schedule** and assigned shifts of 2hrs to the organization team. It helped to include people in different time zones to also enable night-time support. When that was not possible, we publicly announced the times in which the channels would not be moderated.
- We used the “check” **emoji** to indicate which questions had already been answered by other moderators to avoid double work.
- In the private channel for the organization/moderator team, each moderator was asked to **check-in & check-out to monitor who was actively working**.
- We also **assigned a lead Slack moderator** each day to take care of deleting accounts, observing the Code of Conduct, and dispatching the tasks if needed.

### Key learnings

- **Keep an open and honest policy** regarding challenges that your organization team is facing. This will foster community and create a bond with participants. We all make mistakes and it’s ok.
- **Clarity in communication & moderation.** Establish posting routines, be reliable and only have one source of truth.
- **Empower your mentors** to take responsibility for their assigned Slack channel and questions from participants that might come up. Make sure they know that you trust them. Each mentor was responsible for opening an allocated Slack Channel, enabling a very fast set up and very decentralized way of forming the teams. Mentors should be onboarded on Slack one day before the participants. Read more about mentors [here](#).
- **Distribute the load on several shoulders** in your organization team, make sure there is a document that has all FAQs and establish a shift routine to be sure moderation is ensured at all times (or communicate the times without moderation to your participants).
- It is **difficult to integrate participants that arrive late** into existing teams. Create a special channel to onboard them.
- Not everything can be planned ahead. Here are some things that can go wrong:
  - Slack Chatbot hacked by participants
  - Fun channel misused with irrelevant or inappropriate information
  - Make sure to **deactivate the @channel function** to avoid notification overload
3.5 Jury and selection criteria

In a nutshell
Both your jury and selection criteria have a strong impact on the quality of the hackathon outcome, especially if they are communicated broadly and transparently from the start. Participants will keep them in mind when working on their projects. They will determine what the public sees and thinks about the hackathon. Thus the jury and the selection criteria should reflect your values and the goal you want to achieve. You should be able to explain how and why you chose the criteria and the jury.

Our selection criteria were public interest, innovation, feasibility, progress and perceivability. We chose those criteria because they combined what were our key values for the hackathon: interdisciplinarity, creativity and solidarity. We also wanted these criteria to match with the participants we wanted to attract: people who are impact-driven and who want to develop innovative ideas into effective projects.

Our selection process had several steps to narrow down the huge amount of projects submitted to us. We committed over 700 mentors, civic-tech experts and Ministry employees to review all 1,500 projects submitted to DevPost. Every project was reviewed by five different people to ensure that the assessment was not based on a single opinion. The reviewing was a first quality check with the criteria mentioned above already in mind. It was also checked if the projects were valid and technically sound as well as reconcilable with prevailing legal considerations, e.g. data protection laws. In this reviewing process the most promising 197 projects were pre-selected and given to an expert jury from five different sectors (see also Genesis and timeline). The jury consisted of 48 high-level people who had a huge variety of expertise and experience in their field of activity. The jury scored the projects in their assigned sector on the criteria mentioned above and that way picked their top five projects. For example, an expert in the field of health had about 40 projects from that sector to score. That way, the 20 projects with the most top votings were chosen as the winning projects and announced publicly on Youtube.

We originally planned to include a Youtube voting step in our selection process because we wanted the general public to have an influence on the project selection. But the community very early on reflected to us that a Youtube voting is a bad way to determine what is a good project. It’s often a mere ‘popularity contest’ and doesn’t represent a fair selection based on the criteria mentioned above. We nevertheless uploaded all projects to Youtube to create more visibility for projects. However, Youtube likes did not impact the selection of projects.

Key points
- We chose five simple selection criteria that worked for both, to select the right challenges that were handed in for the hackathon, as well as to decide which were the best projects that came out of the hackathon.
- We decided to have a **two-step selection process** with two distinct juries. The first jury created a shortlist of the projects they found most promising. The second jury selected the best projects of the shortlist.
- We **listened to our community**, learned from them and ditched the public voting, which we planned as the first step of the selection process.
- Our jury wasn't as diverse as it should have been and we can only recommend anyone taking the time to **thoroughly think through the composition of your jury**.
- We did **not include prize money** for top selected teams because we thought it does not fit our overall goal, which was to empower civil society during the crisis and show solidarity. However, either way is fine, but have a line of argumentation prepared for whatever case you are going for.

### Key learnings

- **Selection criterias reflect your values.** Think about what you want to be the impact of your hackathon, and then choose your selection criteria accordingly.
- Design a **selection process** that is as low-threshold as possible yet as thorough as necessary. This is important because being a jury member is time-consuming and often voluntary work, thus the process should be lean and efficient. Yet participants want to know that the selection process was sound and balanced, too, ensuring them that they had a fair chance.
- **Listen to your community and the participants.** Even on delicate issues such as criteria and selection it is crucial to stay flexible and open to feedback. The more open you are, the faster you learn and the easier it is to adjust the process, making its outcome better for everyone.
- **You need a diverse jury.** Make sure your jury is as good a representation of society as possible in terms of diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, educational and academic background...). Different people have different lived experience and therefore contribute different value to different solutions. You want all the values and perspectives represented especially when you are dealing with societal challenges.
- **Give feedback, if you can.** Giving feedback is a huge service for your participants that will be highly valued. However, if it is not possible to give feedback in a way that it is actually helpful, restrain from it all together. Rudimentary feedback often leads to misunderstandings and frustration.
- **Think about those who do not win.** The selection process needs to be designed for them, too. Only a small percentage of the participants will be winners, but you want all of them to be part of your community even after the hackathon.

4. What’s next - Thoughts on sustainability

Organizing a hackathon is a great way to bring various stakeholders together and generate ideas and solutions in a short amount of time. It is not, however, a great way for fixing structures or for creating sustainability.
Therefore it is very important to think ahead and plan a follow up program for all the potential that was unlocked and all the great ideas and solutions that came out of the hackathon. Your will have very limited impact if ideas and team spirit slowly die afterwards, because they are not receiving the support they need and deserve.

In our case, we have set up a support program with four main elements:

1. **Solution Enabler**: Needs-based support of 130 solutions through expertise, resources and partnerships
2. **Solution Builder**: Intensive program to bring 10 solutions into independent application and scaling within a few weeks
3. **Community Management**: Continued moderation and support of all solutions and 40,000 Slack participants
4. **Matching Funds**: A crowdfunding matching fund for the broad financial support of emerging solutions.

These programs were design to support our overall goal of the hackathon: demonstrate solidarity and empower civil society to come up with innovative ideas how to tackle the Corona crisis. For this unique case, our first and foremost goal was not the sustainability of every project, but its feasibility and effectiveness. Many solutions might be critically important right now, but not in three weeks from now. Especially the Solution Builder focuses on developing prototypes into effective solutions as fast as possible. For the Solution Enabler, not just projects form the hackathon but every project that works on solving the Corona crisis could apply. The same goes for the community that was created during the hackathon and that is now open for everyone to join. You can learn more about the elements of our support program on our website.

Last but not least, you should think about the bigger message behind your hackathon that is worth communicating. Hackathons are not only great for bringing together diverse teams and coming up with creative projects, they also demonstrate the power of community. Civil society, civil servants, businesses and scientists can use this format to work together in a free and innovative way, unlocking huge potential. Collecting the lessons we can learn from this experience, sharing them openly and transferring them to different contexts is another way how you can have a sustainable impact with your hackathon.

For further updates about #WirVsVirus please follow us on Twitter @WirVsVirus.

Best of luck and lots of fun with organizing your own local hackathon! ♥
Your #WirVsVirus Hackathon organization team