

GO ON, THROW A PARTY!

// OUR EVENT HOSTING GUIDE

CODE *for*
AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

Code for America relies on the idea that people across the country are willing and eager to get involved and use their skills to make a difference. Our fellowship program is only one way to make that happen. We want to spark a national movement of civic hackers coming together to build and implement innovative applications that change the way government works. Wherever you are and whatever your background, you can help. You can bring together your friends and other people in your city for meetup or hackathon. A local event can not only spark a conversation about CfA—and the opportunities in our fellowship—but also generate more interest in the idea of recoding government for the 21st century. We've put together some tips and advice to help you organize an event and be successful.

STEP 1: CREATE YOUR EVENT!

First, make sure you've signed up to host an event with CfA. Once registered, you'll have access to an event page, which can be your online hub for the event—you should share it with your guests when you invite them (step 3). [Click here to create your event.](#) Of course, you should also use whatever event platforms are popular in your area—Eventbrite, Meetup, etc. Go wherever people are; the key is getting people at the event.

STEP 2: BUILD YOUR LIST!

This event is about you mobilizing your social network, so invite friends, family, colleagues, or even that new hire at the other end of the office you've been looking for an excuse to talk to. Don't just focus on your political or technology friends—reach out to everyone to come—and emphasize the casual, fun atmosphere of your event.

The longer the list, the better! Most hosts will invite 50 people, expecting a turnout of about 10. Every person who shows up is one more towards our goal of recruiting thousands people into our geek army. Think of everyone you'd like to invite and then contact them through the event website via facebook, twitter, email, etc.

STEP 3: INVITE!

To maximize turnout, we recommend a three step process: spread the word, follow-up, and reminders.

SPREAD THE WORD

To spread the word, your event page has an invitation tool, but if you have the time, personalize an email, including the link to the sign in page, and send it individually to each of your guests. Be sure to leverage your social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc). The personal touch is crucial for engaging your social network. To further raise awareness, you can customize and hand out the CfA fellowship flyers (downloadable on the [resources page](#)) in your workplace, local university/college, hangout, or community center.

FOLLOW-UP

After your initial contact (via email, Facebook, etc), follow up. This step is crucial—and a good opportunity to catch up with friends too. You can encourage them to come and answer any questions.

We've seen that the best way to guarantee turnout for your event is by calling through your list of invitees after your initial contacts.

There are many ways to get people excited and committed. Remember, these are your friends; you know how to talk to them.

REMINDERS

After the follow-up, there remains one last step: reminders. Although it may appear redundant, we have always found that calling those key guests who RSVP'd on the day of the event goes a long way to ensuring turnout. Keep track of who you have contacted and who you have yet.

Remember: turnout, turnout, turnout! Even after you develop and follow up on your list, you can still invite people you run into while doing errands or at work. And ask each person who says yes to bring friends!

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STEP 4: PREPARE!

You've got some options when it comes to the format of the event. You can make it a working session by hosting a hackathon over, say, a weekend, or you can put together a meetup or barcamp during the week at happy hour. You know your community best, so decide what makes sense to get people excited and in attendance. Some tips we've collected for either style are below.

// HACKATHON

We believe in bringing together smart and passionate people, and motivating them to take on hard problems with hard deadlines; that's our fellowship — 20 fellows, spending the year tackling some interesting civic challenges. Weekend hackathons, however, can achieve the same thing by lighting a fire under that model: dozens of people in just a few days. To host a successful hackathon, we recommend three key ingredients: good developers, good data and good ideas.

Good Developers: It's been rightly pointed out that the cost benefit analysis for apps competition often don't attract top notch developers: good dev shops would be spending too much time with too little pay out. It just doesn't add up. That's why the Donors Choose app contest is stressing non-monetary benefits, namely a photo-opp with the one-and-only Stephen Colbert. Follow that model by seeing what you can get out of local leaders or businesses. Of course, offering some money as seed funding for new business around the apps works too!

Good Data: Getting together good developers without providing good data is like ordering a extra dry virgin martini. The glass isn't just half empty; it's empty. There is rightfully a big push in the civic space for better data, because it's the lifeblood of innovative apps. Be sure to have some APIs on hand like [Open311](#), the [FCC API](#) or [PHLAPI](#). Check out [Civic Commons' inventory](#) for a comprehensive list.

Good Ideas: There's a phrase that is probably overused but probably with good reason: no one has a monopoly on good ideas. Even if you pack smart people in a room together with the tools they need, that doesn't guarantee success—especially under a rapidly ticking clock. Fortunately you can turn to the crowd for backup. Get everyone you know to submit their own ideas that the participants can hack together at the event. You can use the ideation platform we've already set up—with some good and scalable ideas already: <http://codeforamerica.org/ideas>

// MEETUP/BARCAMP

Meetups don't have to adhere to one format. Most include networking over cocktails and often feature a panel discussion or guest speak and Q and A session from the audience. If it's your first event, you may want to try something more informal. Here are a few tips:

Make it free: Free removes 80% of the barriers people have to attending, and it aligns with our mission of providing access to everyone.

Provide food: Whether it's donating homemade cupcakes, asking for potluck offerings, or simply meeting at a restaurant or coffee shop, making food options available is always a draw for visitors.

Find a flexible venue: A coffee shop with room for 2 or 10 will ensure everyone has a comfortable place to sit, just in case your RSVP list changes. Or most local bars will let you reserve some tables/space and may even throw in a drink discount.

Give them something to talk about: You can make a list of questions to discuss and write one each on the back of index cards. Or have your guests do that as they arrive. Worst case, if the conversation gets sticky, play a round-robin game of [buzzword bingo](#).

STEP 5: PARTY!

Have fun, and enjoy the event. It's a great opportunity for you to share your thoughts and hear from others. Really the goal is to make new connections and generate interest. Slick ads and videos are one thing, but the kind of peer to peer communication facilitated by this event is the most powerful means of spreading ideas and information among the movement. For talking points or flyers, check out the issue cards on the [resources page](#). These can help spark discussion or provide useful take-home materials. With your event, you will have helped us redefine public service and recode government in your own city. Thank you and congratulations!