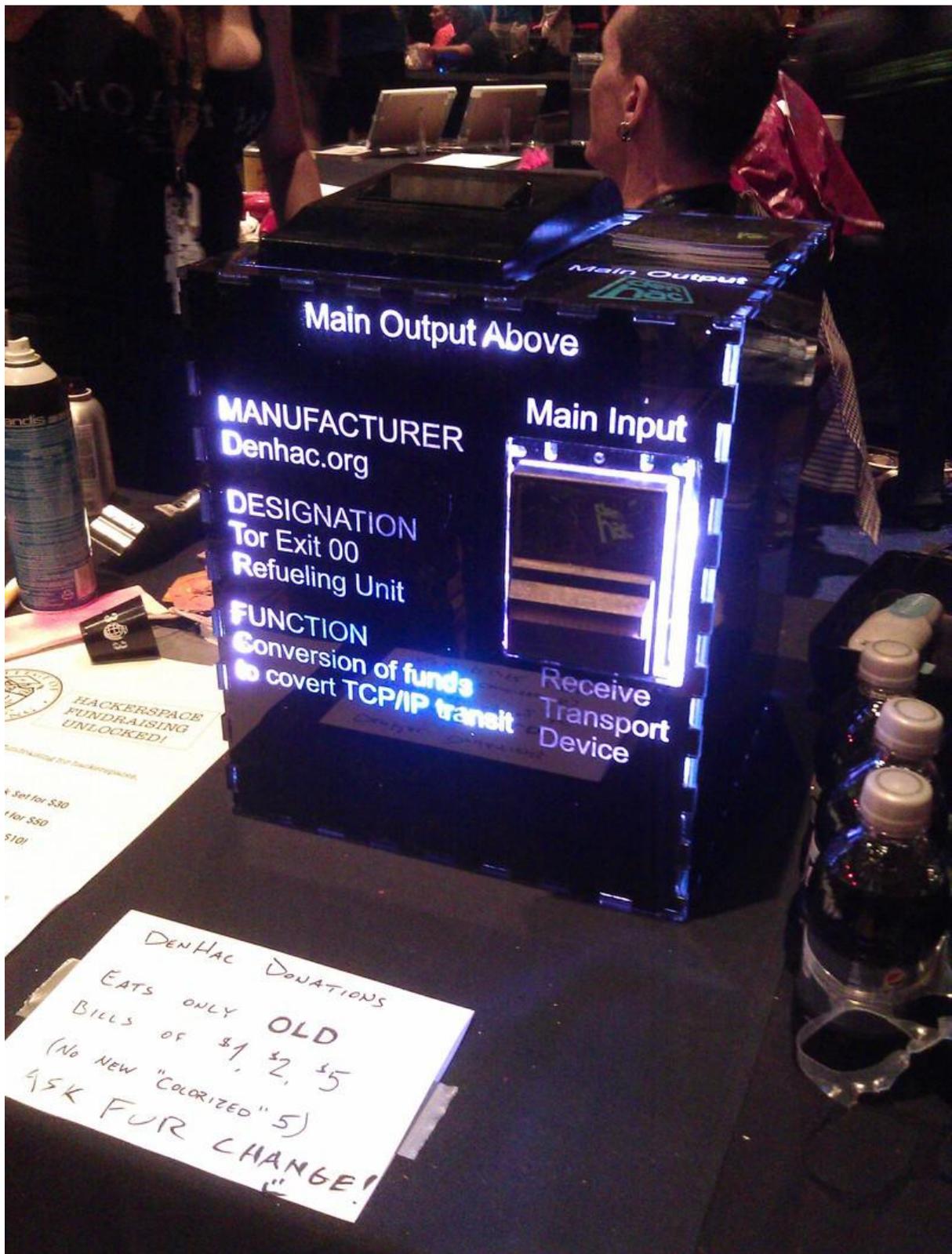




How To Start A Hackerspace: Money and Resources

Created by ericm



<https://learn.adafruit.com/how-to-start-a-hackerspace-money>

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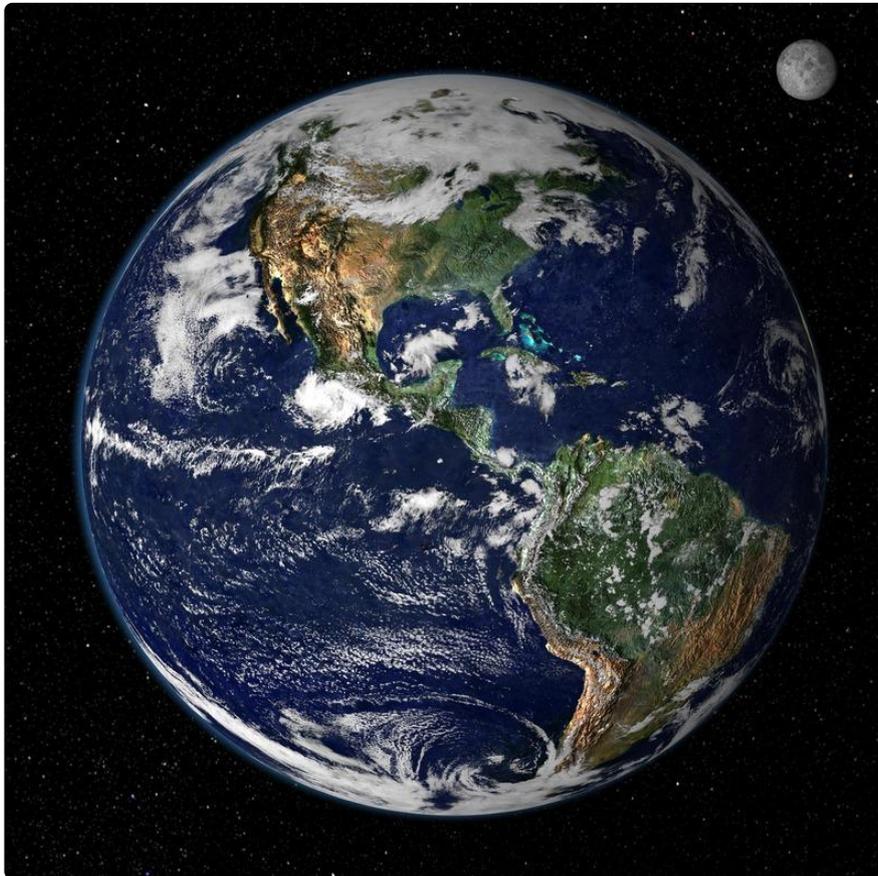
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Overview

If you have a [Hackerspace \(\)](#), then you have expenses. As I mentioned in [Part 5 of How to Start a Hackerspace \(“Money and Resources”\) \(\)](#) money is going to be the fuel for your Hackerspace’s fire.

There are lots of cool, creative ways to meet the financial needs of your Hackerspace and its community. A Hackerspace lends itself perfectly to bringing in money for resources and growing your community for the future at the same time.

Hackerspaces can bring in funds in various ways and this guide will help you if your just getting started or if your looking for new ways to bolster your resources:



Membership Dues

Most Hackerspaces find that relying on dues exclusively isn’t enough to cover bills and expenses. But dues are an essential component of your income streams and can help set membership levels. You can customize membership and dues as you like and according to what makes sense for you and your hackers. Make sure to take a look at

how much other Hackerspaces charge members, and what the different levels mean so you can get concrete ideas for starting your membership dues structure.

At PS: One we started out with a membership-based funding system. Its focus was on being covered by membership with zero corporate funds, and we did not charge for workshops. We focused on outreach to keep membership high. However, we later realized that this couldn't be our sole source of funding – it wasn't enough. We had two primary tiers; one was “full member” (\$70/month, unlimited access -24/7- a locker, and access to tools, voting abilities). The other tier was “starving hacker” (\$40/month w/ same level of access, but no voting abilities). There was also a “donate” option, which was not for access and a “friend” of status, with no access but the individual could make a donation for \$13.37.

In another example, ATX Hackerspace in Austin, Texas has several tiers and is organized as a co-op, as follows:

- \$100 purchases a “Voting Share” and ownership into the co-op
- \$75 is a “pay-as-you-go” monthly membership fee (applies to Patrons and Owners)
- \$25 discount for using auto-pay (applies to Patrons and Owners) [[is this a membership level or does it add-on to the other levels?]]
- \$20 further discount for Student/Reduced Rate members -- requires auto-pay [[is this an add-on discount to other levels?]]
- Another \$20 discount is available on top of that for students, and “Hackers in Need.” For this level at ATX, students must show proof of full-time enrollment in an accredited institution, and “Hackers in Need” can privately petition the Directors for the reduced rate.

These are only two examples of the many ways you can structure your Hackerspace with membership dues. Your Hackerspace can fund through recurring payments with [PayPal \(\)](#), [WePay \(\)](#), [Cash \(\)](#), [Check \(\)](#), [wire transfer \(\)](#), or as many ways as you want to. Members who wish to remain anonymous will appreciate a cash option.

Product Sales

Another way to supplement your funding is by selling goods made by members or other associated hackers. Goods for sale might be things like artwork, kits, or finished

products. Some Hackerspaces have online stores like [Null Space Labs \(\)](#); [Dallas Makerspace \(\)](#) has a vending machine, and other Hackerspaces host events where goods are for sale.

Hackerspaces can sell a variety of goods things - not just stuff from members. You can also buy things in bulk or at a discount to resell for your space: Adafruit Industries has a [Hackerspace program \(\)](#) where you buy at a reseller discounted price, and then sell the items at full price or discounted to your membership.

Another option is selling your Hackerspace's own fun schwag: gear, stickers and t-shirts with your logo, manifesto, or call to arms. If you don't want to keep stock sitting on a shelf in your space, use online print-on-demand stores like [Zazzle \(\)](#) or [Cafe Press \(\)](#). Just remember to calculate in enough margin, or it may not be worth the effort.



Kits for sale at [Cairo Hackerspace](#) () in Egypt. - Photo by Mitch Altman

Events

Your Hackerspace might be so cool that people will want to pay you to use or access the space. Just make sure they don't destroy it! If you decide to generate income by renting space or time, have a contract detailing who the responsible parties are and what they're responsible for. Make sure your contract or written agreement has concrete cleanup terms, ways that your space can and can't be used, what will be available and not available for use, and anything else that may come up after a rental.

This way if there's a discrepancy or issue that comes up later, both parties can review the contract to see what was agreed to. Have everything in writing in email or otherwise. A paper trail makes it easier to resolve disputes and gives you a template for doing space rentals (and events) in the future. For sample contracts you can use as a template, and make your changes accordingly.

Don't forget to check in with your membership about the dates, or refer to your calendar system.



Five Minutes of Fame at [Noisebridge \(\)](#) - Photo by Rubin Starset

Donations

People make donations to Hackerspaces in different forms. Money, equipment, raw materials, labor, professional services, and food are all great ways to take the weight out of your expenses and not have your Hackerspace spending as much money as it would have without the contribution. Donation jars, cool money-taking robots, PayPal or WePay on your website, and Square are all fine ways of taking "walk-in" donations.

Make sure it's really a donation if it's tools or equipment - some people will dump old or broken stuff on you just to get rid of it, and then you need to call a recycling or trash pickup to get your "donation" out of your Hackerspace.

Some Hackerspaces accept large donations from individuals or companies in exchange for agreed-upon terms or product placement. This can be enormously helpful. But if you agree to do this, just make sure that the terms are in line with the values of your Hackerspace and its members, and that it won't impact the reputation of your Hackerspace in a way you don't intend.



Potential pile of donations. - Photo by reway2007

Grants

Another form of revenue for projects is applying for grants from places such as science foundations, universities, companies, individuals, or even government agencies. In the grantmaking world, there are people who have projects they want to see done whose goals and ideas might align with yours. There are many places to look review this grant organisation list at [Science Magazine \(\)](#) for a great start. Some might be simple search engine query away. Keep in mind that grantwriting can be a lot of work in many cases, and there are professionals that specialize in grant writing.

Hackerspace Rental

Your Hackerspace might be so cool that people will want to pay you to use or access the space. Just make sure they don't destroy it!

If you decide to generate income by renting space or time, have a contract detailing who the responsible parties are and what they're responsible for. Make sure your contract or written agreement has concrete cleanup terms, ways that your space can and can't be used, what will be available and not available for use, and anything else that may come up after a rental. This way if there's a discrepancy or issue that comes up later, both parties can review the contract to see what was agreed to. Have everything in writing in email or otherwise. A paper trail makes it easier to resolve

disputes and gives you a template for doing space rentals (and events) in the future. For sample contracts you can use as a template, and make your changes accordingly.

Don't forget to check in with your membership about the dates, or refer to your calendar system.

Classes/Workshops

Classes and workshops can be conducted in your Hackerspace (or outside of it) by members of your Hackerspace or by teachers and educators from outside your community. Not everyone charges for classes; sometimes they charge for the tools and materials needed, or sometimes Hackerspaces will charge for a seat in the class when a student brings their own tools and materials.

Take a look at how other Hackerspaces charge for different classes and workshops before you proceed. You can charge in advance (many Hackerspaces use [Eventbrite \(\)](#), which includes payment processing) and at the door at the time of the event. Prices are usually set higher at the door right at event time, incentivizing students to sign up in advance for a cheaper deal on your class.

High quality teachers enhance the chances of drawing new people into your Hackerspace who may become members. Typically, teachers and Hackerspaces split the profits from the classes, with terms and contract agreed upon in advance.

Calendaring all of your financial plans - and event plans, and space rental plans - is not just a good idea, it's necessary. You'll need a calendar system that all members can access, such as a client or web interface.

Many Hackerspaces use [GCal \(\)](#), especially because it is very versatile and can be adjusted for both private and public viewing, reminders can be sent via text or email, and has a lot of other tie-ins with many services lots of people use.



Happy students in the [College of Lockpicking \(\)](#) workshop at [Crash Space \(\)](#).

Conclusions and Further Considerations

In upcoming posts and edits to this guide I'll be going further into other Hackerspace financial needs and considerations, like payment processing, budgeting, and more. Feel free to contact me with any suggestions, and do jump into the comments to ask me questions, or share Hackerspace income generating ideas or stories.

One thing to consider is that you should diversify your income so that if membership drops, sponsorship stops, or kits don't sell well your not evicted from your amazing Hackerspace. This means that what may work this month for income may not work next month and you'll have to find new ways to keep your Hackerspace and community alive.

Keep On Hacking!

-Eric Michaud
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