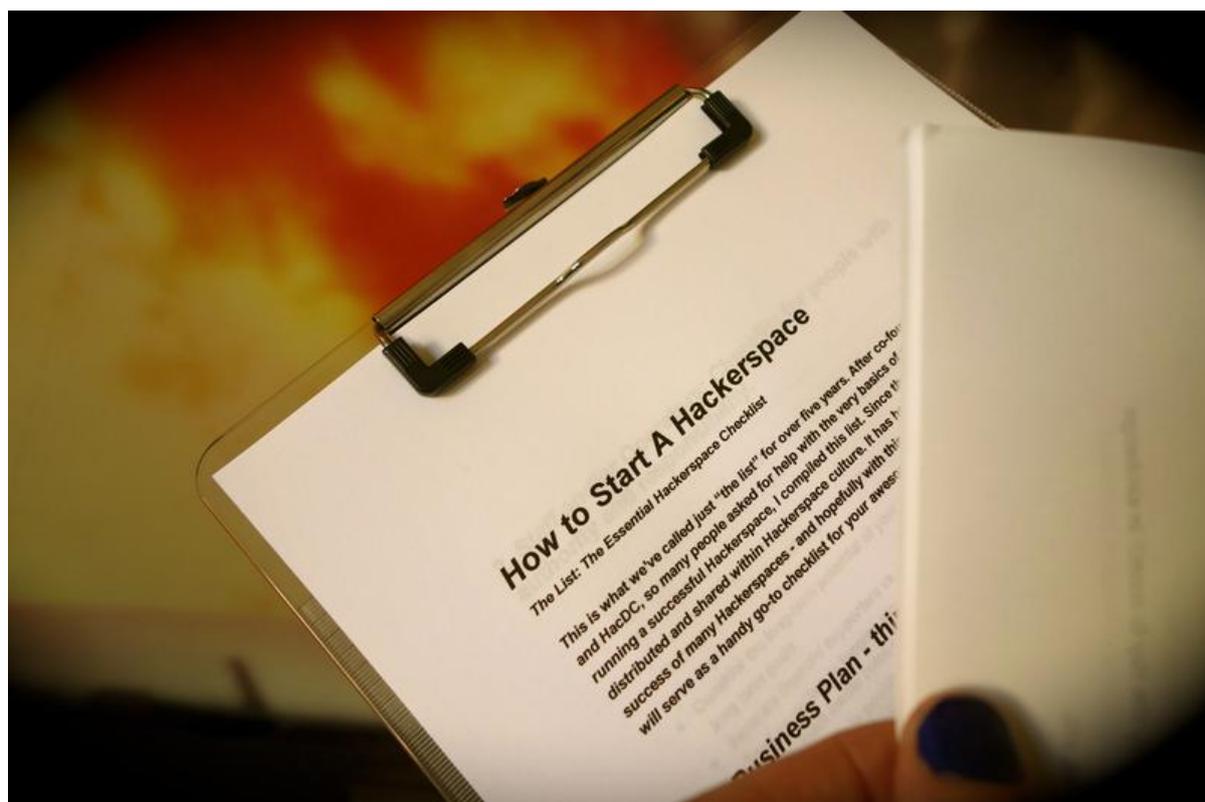




How To Start A Hackerspace: The List

Created by ericm



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The List

How to Start A Hackerspace

The List: The Essential Hackerspace Checklist

This document is "The List" - it is the direct result of the overwhelming interest in starting Hackerspaces that hit my inbox after co-founding PSONe and HacDC. When so many people asked for help with the very basics of starting and running a successful Hackerspace, I compiled this list to make it as easy as possible for potential Hackerspace founders to hit the ground running (and not forget anything important). Since then, "the list" has been distributed and shared within Hackerspace culture. It has helped with structuring the success of many Hackerspaces - and hopefully with this update and public release, it will serve as a handy go-to checklist for your awesome Hackerspace-to-be.

Feel free to share this widely, print it out for your clipboard, read it on your tablet, and share it with anyone you think could use this checklist to kickstart their Hackerspace aspirations. For even more elaboration on starting a Hackerspace, I highly recommend that you also read the [How To Start A Hackerspace \(\)](#) tutorial, which you'll see me refer to throughout The List.

1. Business Plan - things you have to do, plus a little CYA.

- Legal framework: secure a lawyer and an accountant.
- Assets and financials; budget, income, expenses, projections: See [How to Start A Hackerspace: Money and Resources \(\)](#). (Adafruit.com)
- Break down income sources and potentials, including sponsorships, donations, merchandise, products etc.: See [How to Start A Hackerspace: Product Sales \(\)](#). (Adafruit.com)
- Outline membership plan (# of members + \$ per month = revenue generated See [How to Start A Hackerspace: Membership Dues \(\)](#). (Adafruit.com)
- Create a compelling and simple Mission Statement: See [Pumping Station: One's Mission Statement \(\)](#) for a great example. (Pumpingstationone.org)
- Present your offering uniquely – why should members choose your space over another?
- The value proposition of your Hackerspace; its place in market niche
- Want to be a nonprofit? Define your reasons for going non-profit.
- Write up your business plan.

- Notarize and finalize.
- Present your plan to potential investors, banks, clients, members, etc.

2. Staff and/or Operators: Checklist for people with authority and responsibility.

- Identify who you'll need to run the Hackerspace.
- Figure out who is available to you and who wants Hackerspace duties and responsibilities.
- Assess suitability for various roles.
- Think and decide what you can offer the leaders of your team for taking on important responsibilities.
- Consider the long-term potential of your team leads, and the Hackerspace's long term goals.
- Separate financial supporters vs. non-financial supporters (such as donors). See [How To Start A Hackerspace: Donations \(\)](#) (Adafruit.com)
- Define team leader roles clearly.
- Place people in positions of administration, trainers, house staff, merchandisers, teachers, lecturers, office administrative, member admin, etc.

3. Acquire Non-Profit Status (Optional, and not to be taken lightly)

- Secure the services of a nonprofit attorney.
- Check your state requirements: depending on location the guidelines will be different. Check online or with your local municipality.
- Get the necessary paperwork and go to your legal counsel for preparation and filing.
- Obtain proper permits/licenses - again, this depends on your location.
- Get insurance. You can find out what kind you'll need from your attorney and/or your local requirements (expand your insurance later to cover equipment and possessions you put in your Hackerspace). [Making a Makerspace: Getting Insurance \(\)](#) (Makezine.com)
- Submit your filings according to your local requirements.
- Follow up with whoever is handling your case.
- Your 501c3 filing will take time and possibly a refiling.

4. Bylaws

- Look at guidelines in other Hackerspaces that have been successful; a great example is the [PS:One bylaws](#) ()(Pumpingstationone.org)
- Modify the Bylaws to suit your Hackerspace.
- Have your Hackerspace's Board sign off on them, make sure everyone is in agreement.

5. Budget - See also: [How To Start A Hackerspace: Money and Resources](#) () (Adafruit.com)

- Operating costs.
- Lease for space.
- Permits and license fees/legal fees.
- Equipment supplies/building materials.
- Cost of setting up and maintaining web presence.
- Advertising and marketing (if desired).
- Salaries for staff (or co-op income and patronage for workers).
- Auxiliary costs (utilities, basic supplies, insurance etc.) [Making a Makerspace: Getting Insurance](#) () (Makezine.com)

6. Monies - See also: [How To Start A Hackerspace: Money and Resources](#) () (Adafruit.com)

- Decide your membership model.
- Decide your membership tier structure (monthly, yearly, lifetime..?)
- Sponsorships - can be cash from individuals, companies, or hardware sponsorship.
- Donations - donation jar, individual/company donations.
- Investors. Remember, these are long-term relationships and investors typically expect returns, Board votes or shares.
- Merchandise income - you can always sell schwag, kits and art.
- Outline any other potential income sources you are willing or able to commit to (online advertising revenue, events and fundraisers, etc.)

7. Location - See also: [How To Start A Hackerspace: A Home For Your Hackerspace \(\) \(Adafruit.com\)](#)

- What do you require, and what do you want? Consider space size, location, proximity to transportation, neighborhood affiliations, member safety, etc.)
- How much can you reasonably afford?
- Explore lease-to-buy options.
- Assess the buildout potential of spaces you look at.
- Find out the zoning, permits and operating rules and requirements of the space (depends on location; check your local government's website) – is it going to work?
- Is it accessible?
- Can it accommodate technology, wiring, upgrades, loud noises, lots of people in and out, strange activity, etc?

8. Layout - See also: [How To Start A Hackerspace: Get Your Space Ready \(\) \(Adafruit.com\)](#)

- Size - measure it out.
- Break down the space into front and back; public or private areas.
- Determine fixed (such as a darkroom or chemicals area) or mutable areas
- Coordinate your layout plans and map with your DIY members - assess everyone's needs.
- Consider what materials to use, efficient space layout to optimize productive hacking; never forget about safety and develop a safety education program.
- Think about growth while you're at it. Hypothesize a future buildout – sketch out a rendering of the space to that effect.
- Determine your Hackerspace's overall motif and themes.

9. Infrastructure Buildout - See also: [How To Start A Hackerspace: Get Your Space Ready \(\) \(Adafruit.com\)](#)

- How will you break out your work zones?
- Will there be dedicated member storage?
- Space to space linking: Will you dedicate a wall to teleconferencing?
- Are your building permits in order? What building permits do you need?

- Do you have enough funds to hire contractors or will it be mixed with the member volunteers?
- If you do pull from the membership, are they licensed to do architectural or electrical work?
- Are all the tools you want compatible in the current space, and do you need any non-standard arrangements made for heavy tools?

10. Equipment - See also: [How To Start a Hackerspace: Get Your Space Ready \(\) \(Adafruit.com\)](#)

- Assess the basics for starting up: make a list.
- Look around at your in-house tools and materials.
- Consider portable, moveable, off-site equipment and materials.
- What is needed to facilitate the areas in your Hackerspace that are being built? What can you reasonably provide, what will your members need to provide for themselves?
- Scavenge. (Responsibly!) You'll be surprised at how handy milk crates are in a Hackerspace.
- Possible co-op of tools, lending library, signup time slots, or other tool/equipment sharing system?
- Also consider the possibility of building new equipment and things like heavy duty work tables onsite.

11. Web Presence

- What kind of web presence is it? None? Social only (Twitter, Facebook)? A full-featured website, membership page only, an email list, group or singular blog, a forum...?
- Membership page: See [How to Start A Hackerspace: Membership Dues \(\)\(Adafruit.com\)](#)
- Maintenance: assign responsible people who love to do it.
- Merchandise - sell on your site for income?
- Online lectures and materials - sell on your site for income?
- Links to affiliates - things like Amazon Associates can bring in "passive income" but consider member ethics, your Bylaws and Mission Statement when choosing affiliates.

- Advertising: again, consider your people before signing ad agreements, because advertisers are public reputation associations.

12. Marketing or Advertising

- Identify markets or the niche your Hackerspace fits into.
- Show marketability: create a solid “who we are” and what you offer (what can be done in your Hackerspace) on your website, pick your logo and Hackerspace colors for consistency.
- Who are your members? Can they offer anything toward getting the word out with activities like stickering, flyering, Tweeting, photo sharing, wearing your schwag?
- Merchandise (schwag) can be in-house or affiliate-related.
- Expand your tentacles – network online and off.
- Would your Board and members be okay with paid advertising on other websites?

13. Members and Membership - See also [How To Start A Hackerspace: Membership Dues \(\) \(Adafruit.com\)](#)

- Get people to join - Get the word out.
- Get members involved; invite participation.
- Volunteers - Consider offering membership by the day to month in exchange for Hackerspace work.
- Recruit at conventions, gatherings, parties, etc.
- Show your accessibility with a place for feedback, forum input.

14. Affiliates and Associates

- This can be found among friends and current members.
- Look outside your immediate network.
- You can also network with others within like-minded organizations.
- Approach alternative educational institutions for support.
- Connect online with other Hackerspaces.
- A co-op model is always an option.
- Consider joint endeavors, group exercises and inter-system challenges.

- Reach out to MIT via Polycom to the FABLAB network.
- Put yourself on the [Hackerspaces map \(\)](#). (Hackerspaces.org)

15. Classrooms and Workshops

- What do you want to offer? Is it going to be relevant to your stakeholders?
- Disciplines; pull from the experts amongst your membership.
- Teachers or lecturers; see who's coming to town, or travels and offers classes.
- Materials: you'll need places to have a class, meetup, or talk.
- Fees - how much do you charge, pay the teacher, etc. [How to Start a Hackerspace: Classes and Workshops \(\)](#) (Adafruit.com)
- Consider online availability or streaming video/live feed for your events.
- Certification and Accreditation: Is it important to offer this to your stakeholders?
- Continue the educational cycle within your Hackerspace (learn, teach, learn, teach etc).

16. Franchise or Model Branching

- Is growing beyond one location effective for your goals?
- Viability - can you replicate your Hackerspace and sustain it?
- Desirability. Does your model appeal to different markets?
- Location(s); think about where you'd like to have another Hackerspace in your member network.
- You can also consider venue-type expansions (i.e. a club, workshop, warehouse, tech/science labs, etc.)

After reading The List you'll probably have more questions than when you started - and that is a good thing. This document is here to give you a checklist to make sure you don't forget anything and consider everything you'll need when building your Hackerspace.

If you have any questions or feedback don't hesitate to contact me - and hack on!

Sincerely,

-Eric Michaud

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