



# IMAGINE, INNOVATE, LIBERATE:

How to Run Your Own  
“Hackathon” or Innovation Event



*“Make the Breast Pump Not Suck” Hackathon, Photo by Ken Richardson*



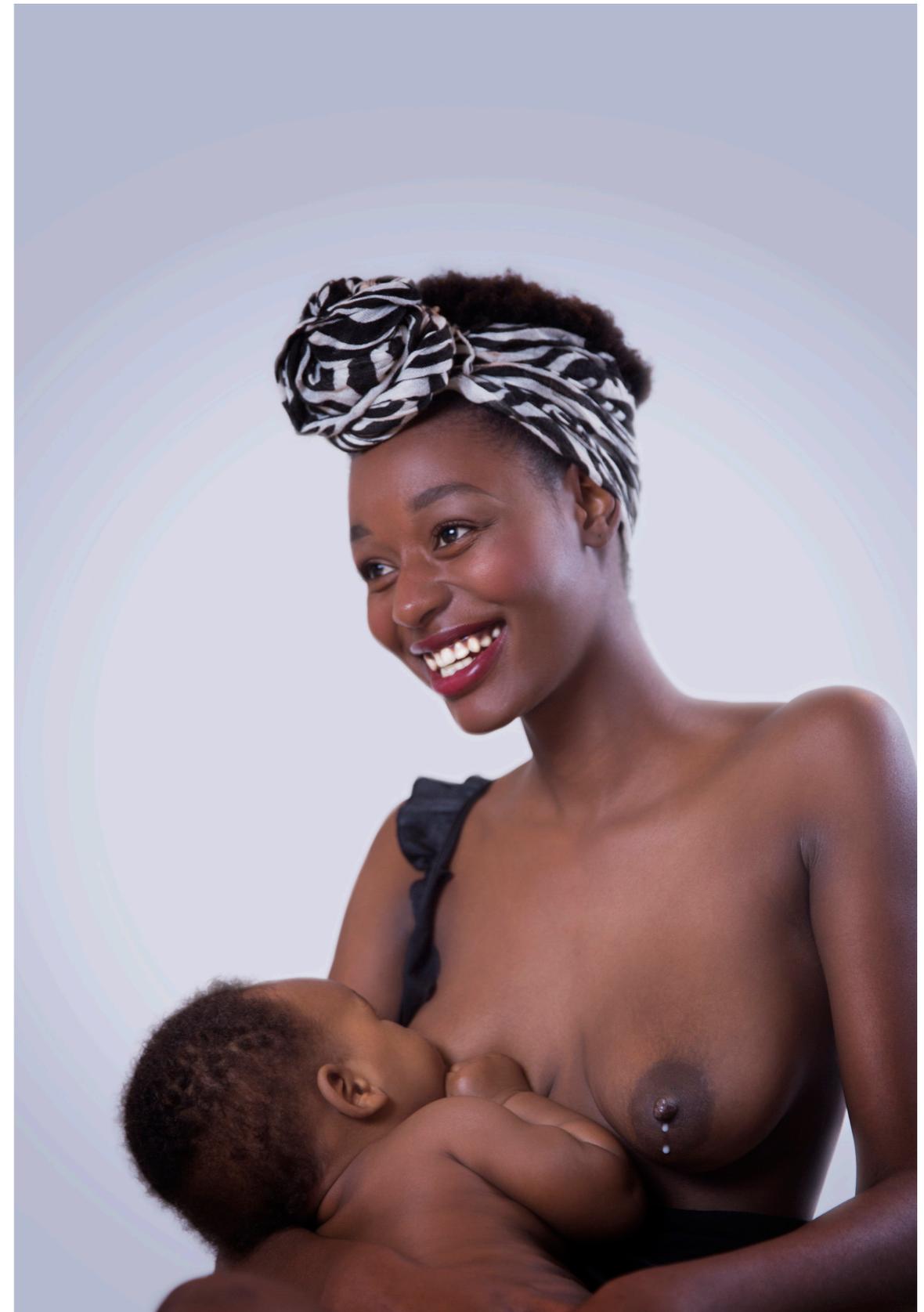
# INTRODUCTION

From babywearing fashion shows, to product fairs, to “breastfeed & paint” gatherings, the Black Breastfeeding Week community has hosted many creative events to gather people together and showcase the importance of breastfeeding in the Black community.

This year, we are offering a framework for a new kind of event that will bring innovation and creativity to the black breastfeeding experience: the “hackathon.” We will be hosting our own hackathon in Detroit on August 24th & 25th, and we invite you to host your own in your own neighborhood!

## **Why We Need YOU to Innovate for Breastfeeding**

The voices of black families have been traditionally overlooked in innovation spaces and that’s why we need YOU to bring your fire, passion, and brilliant ideas to revolutionize Black breastfeeding in the United States. Since 2013, lactation supporters and activists have used Black Breastfeeding Week to offer unique ways to highlight breastfeeding in Black communities with unique events, celebrations and conversations. With racial disparities in



*Photo by Vanessa Simmons, [www.normalizebreastfeeding.org/](http://www.normalizebreastfeeding.org/)*



lactation promotion, support and family leave deeply affecting Black babies and families, it will take community-powered attention and innovation to dream, plan and create solutions to close the “human milk gap” and eradicate preventable infant losses and adult breast cancers. Let’s build a world that doesn’t just create equitable public health outcomes, but celebrates everything the Black families and communities have to offer. We are more than statistics – we are resilient, joyful, and proud. Bring that spirit to your hacking!

As one of the only developed nations with no paid family leave, the US has significant gaps in policies needed to make breastfeeding accessible, and this particularly impacts Black women and other women of color. Meanwhile, Black women, regardless of income or education levels, disproportionately give birth to babies who are born too small, too sick, or too soon. That means Black babies need breastmilk the most because of its unmatched health benefits. Data demonstrates that we can save billions of dollars on healthcare costs, decrease the likelihood of numerous healthcare issues for mothers and babies, and ultimately save lives by increasing breastfeeding rates. Why the inequity in breastfeeding rates?:

- ❧ Lack of lactation consultants and medical professionals of color who provide culturally relevant and consistent support.

- ❧ Mainstream media misrepresentation. There is significantly less media that portrays women of color breastfeeding which perpetuates a false stereotype that black women do not breastfeed.
- ❧ A complicated history with breastfeeding, given how women of color were historically forced to be wet nurses for their masters during slavery which disrupted the natural maternal bond and feeding relationship.
- ❧ And so much more....

### What is a “Hackathon”?

A “Hackathon,” an idea that comes from tech communities, is an event where people gather over one to two days to focus on a design challenge and prototype, or create, new solutions to solve a specific problem. Although hackathons can be large-scale events however, this toolkit will demonstrate how you can create a hackathon at a variety of scales – with a group of friends in your living room, all the way up to dozens of people at an event space.

In this toolkit, we will outline a process that will help you create your own “hackathon” to dream up new ideas to improve the black breastfeeding experience. This toolkit was produced in partnership with the organizers of the 2018 “Make the Breast Pump Not Suck Hackathon,” which brought together people from all walks of life to improve



*Innovation can include creative, sometimes even simple updates to local environments, events, resources, and media.*

not just technologies for breastfeeding like the breast pump, but also programs, policies, and services.

### What is “Community Innovation”?

Anyone can innovate by making choices to “change existing situations into preferred ones.” Innovation extends beyond apps, devices, and websites. Innovation can include creative, sometimes even simple updates to local environments, events, resources, and media.

We believe that we, as a community, are the experts on our own lives and should be at the forefront of innovations that help make our lives better. A hackathon, large or small, gives designers (that’s you!) the opportunity to “hack” or

re-design new solutions to problems you face every day. That may mean hacking a thing, like a breast pump or pumping room set-up, or hacking a problem, like equitable access to lactation support or paid family leave.

Community innovation allows us to draw on and amplify all the strengths of our community, not simply focus on the problems.

Think about the settings and resources with breastfeeding in your community. What are some common challenges that people face? What are some desires you’ve heard expressed? How might places, people, and processes be re-designed to make it easier for breastfeeding and infant feeding?



 **Promotion:** List out your promotional strategy which can include: social media blasts, email lists, and good ol' fashioned word of mouth. Consider asking local businesses to donate food, prizes, and marketing support.

## Place

 This depends on your desired event size. Anywhere from 5-7 people in a living-room to a larger event in a local church, recreation center, school or beyond works well.

 You'll want spaces for writing and collaborating.

## Process

 1 month before the hackathon: Focus on nailing down your logistics of the what, where, when, and why. Hype! Get folks excited to participate and seek commitments.

 2 weeks before the hackathon: Put into place any additional materials you might need. This can include prizes, donations for supplies, guest mentors, etc. Continue to publicize on social media and beyond.

 1 week before the hackathon: Remind people about the event, review the materials and flow of the day, and prepare any design-prompts that might be helpful.

Design prompts can include issues and opportunities in your community for hacking inspiration.

 Day before the hackathon: Get good sleep and eat well to prepare for the exciting day ahead. Send your participants logistical tips on things like parking and transportation, what they need to bring, etc.

**Pro-tip:** The Detroit Black Breastfeeding Week Hackathon will be hosted at the co-working space, [WeWork](#). You can submit an inquiry to host at WeWork as well via this [link](#). The submissions go to the local event leads in each city and then they reach out to connect further.

## Materials

Sample Materials List in **Resources** section



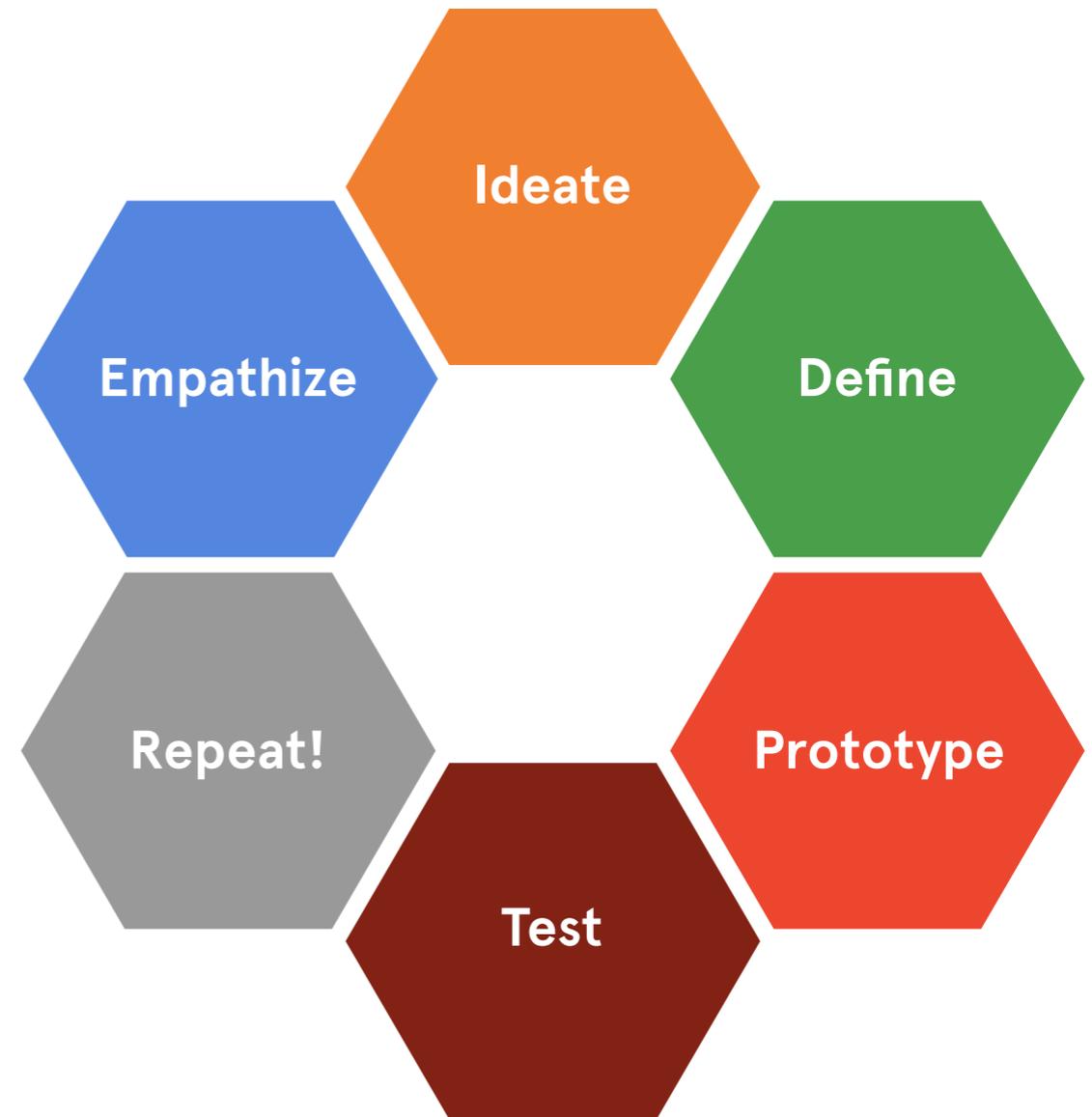
# DURING THE HACKATHON: AGENDA & DESIGN PROCESS

## Sample Agendas

-  Sample One-Day Agenda in **Resources** section
-  Sample Two-Day Agenda in **Resources** section

## Design Process

There are many different ways to design and create solutions. The model at right, from the Stanford Design School, is just one example. You should feel free to take components of it, and add or remove pieces to make it work for you. The Design process below is a cycle, with 5 different



*Image by the Stanford d.School*



unique phases: **Empathize, Ideate, Define, Prototype, and Test.**

## Empathize

Empathy is at the core of design. It helps us understand each other, and ultimately build solutions that meet our collective needs. There are many ways to build empathy with others, and one simple way to begin is by listening to each others' stories. Consider building in time at the beginning of your event to ask each other the following questions: "What brings you to the event today? Do you have a particular birth or breastfeeding story you'd like to share with the group?"

## Ideate

Ideation is a structured brainstorming process, and one that we can do in collaboration with each other. If you can get post-it notes for this step, it will really help. Begin with a prompting question, like "what pain points do you or members of your community face related to the birth and breastfeeding experience?" or "what is working in our communities to support birth and breastfeeding?" Write only one idea per post-it note on the wall to keep things organized. When you put your ideas on the wall, you can sort them into categories by moving the individual post-it notes around. At the end of this process, you should be

able to identify similar and different ideas across the room to help you move on to the next phase.

## Define

Defining what you will be working on will help you narrow things down for the next phase. Narrow down your problem by creating a "How Might We...?" statement (e.g. "how might we support black mothers as they begin breastfeeding?"). After you have defined the areas you are working on, you can split into teams to tackle them. Depending on how many people you have at your event, you might have one team or many. On your team, you may want to brainstorm again to address your "How Might We" statement.

## Prototype

Now comes the hands-on, making part – creating a prototype for your solution. A prototype is a representation of your idea that can take many forms. For example, if your solution involves a physical item, you might make a representation of it out of cardboard or other materials. If you're creating a website or an app, you might draw out screens of the app in detail. Not every solution needs to involve technology, but you can still make a prototype (e.g. a short skit or role-play to convey an idea that doesn't involve technology). Prototypes are an important way to communicate your idea to others.



## Test

Testing is the final step (before you could start the process over again). This is a great opportunity to get feedback from people on your prototype. Ask another team or friends outside of your event to interact with your prototype and tell you what they think. Try to keep the conversation open-ended and learn what you can to improve your idea and prototype.

## Wrapping Up

People pitched ideas, envisioned better futures, and rolled up their sleeves with collaboration- now what? There are several pathways to concluding your event, before thanking everyone for coming:

🌿 Have each team or person share their final idea with the group.

- Judge the projects and award prizes.

🌿 Prizes can include: gift cards to local businesses, mentorship hours from local entrepreneurs, exposure on local media channels and blogs.

- Vote on the best projects and select winners.
- You can count the number of votes for each project and rank winners by first, second, and

third place. Or, you can give winning projects superlative titles such as Most Creative, Most Impactful, Most Collaborative, etc.

🌿 Debrief as a community about which project(s) to continue working on collectively.

### Questions to consider as you review projects:

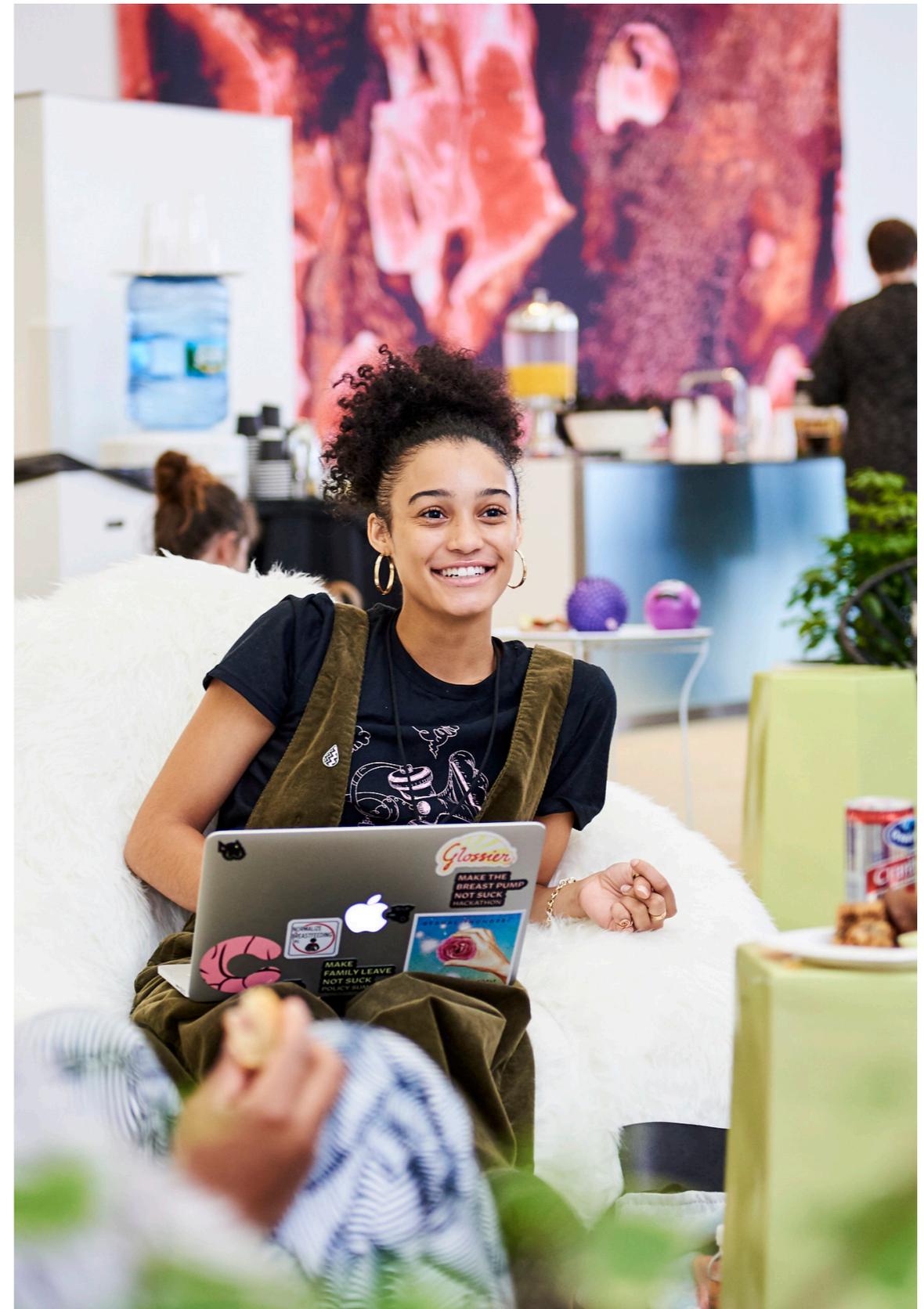
- 🌿 Is it clear how success is defined by this project?
- 🌿 Does this project center the people who are most impacted by this issue or opportunity?
- 🌿 Did the project team demonstrate a willingness to incorporate community feedback?
- 🌿 Is this project feasible to implement?
- 🌿 Does this project have potential for sustainability? Scalability?

Note: the questions above may differ in their applicability, depending on your community values. For instance, you might choose to prioritize fun and creativity over practicality – so your project questions would differ accordingly.

# AFTER THE HACKATHON: WHAT'S NEXT?

After the hackathon, there are many ways to keep the momentum going, including grant writing, pursuing sponsorship from companies, looking into small business resources, sharing your story, and finding partnerships. Here are some resources that might help:

-  [Grant-writing](#)
-  [Small business resources](#)
-  Sharing your story
  - [Writing op-eds](#)
  - [Social media](#)



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# RESOURCES

## Sample Materials List

To run an effective hackathon, it is important to have a variety of materials on hand that participants can use to prototype their ideas. Some useful materials include:

-  Paper products: white paper, cardboard, construction paper, poster board, post-its. A printer can be useful!
-  Adhesives like glue, tape, hot glue guns.
-  Cutting tools like scissors and cutting knives
-  Markers and pens
-  Fabrics, stuffing, and soft materials. A sewing machine can be very helpful!
-  3D prototyping tools: modeling clay, pipe-cleaners, styrofoam, wire, etc.
-  Electronics prototyping tools (for example, [Arduino kits](#))

**Pro-tip:** In advance of the hackathon, collect recycled materials you might otherwise throw away! These can be great for prototyping.

You can also look for community resources for recycled materials in your area (for example, [Art & Scraps](#) in the Detroit area offers recycled materials at a low cost to organizations, schools, and individuals). Grocery stores can also be a great resource for cardboard.



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## Sample One-Day Agenda

8:30 - 9:30am: Breakfast & Welcome

9:30 - 10:30am: Framing and Goal-Setting for the Day

10:30 - Noon: Idea Share and Team Formation

Noon - 1pm: Lunch

12:45 - 1:15pm: Team Brainstorming

1:15 - 3pm: Hacking!

3 - 4pm: Teams prepare to share projects

4 - 5pm: Share projects with full group

5 - 5:30pm: Wrapping up (conversations, judging, or voting)

5:30 - 6pm: Closing Circle and Reflections

## Sample Two-Day Agenda

### Day One

8:30 - 9:30am: Breakfast & Welcome

9:30 - 11am: Framing and Goal-Setting for the Day

11 - 12:30pm: Idea Share and Team Formation

12:30 - 1:30pm: Lunch

1:30 - 2:30pm: Team Brainstorming

2:30 - 5pm: Hacking!

5 - 5:30pm: Closing Circle and Reflections

### Day Two

8:30 - 9:30am: Breakfast & Welcome

9:30 - Noon: Hacking!

Noon - 1pm: Lunch

1 - 3pm: Hacking!

3 - 4pm: Teams prepare to share projects

4 - 5pm: Share projects with full group

5 - 5:30pm: Wrapping up (conversations, judging, or voting)

5:30 - 6pm: Closing Circle and Reflections



# HACKATHON SUCCESS STORIES

## The Renée

The Reneé, founded by Whitney Robinson, is a series of “design jam sessions” held across the country where women of color who have experienced pregnancy and/or trying to conceive can come together, share their stories, and come up with solutions to solve problems they have faced in a space that is “joyful and inviting.” Whitney has hosted three design jam sessions so far (with plans to host more sessions across the United States and internationally), and all of the data she collects from the sessions will inform a tech resource she hopes to build for pregnant women and those who will become pregnant one day. For each Reneé, Whitney invites 5-7 women from all walks of life, and builds in plenty of time for people to speak about their experiences. After attendees share their stories, the group identifies common ground between the experiences and



*Whitney Robinson, Founder of the Reneé*



shared “pain points” before any solutions are identified. “This movement is centered around storytelling and diverse experiences,” Whitney says, “Everyone needs to feel comfortable being able to speak.”

**Advice for Organizers from Whitney includes:**

-  Consider those in the room as the experts. Our experiences can influence outcomes – try to get beyond that as best as possible to ensure truly innovative results.
-  Ensure that the environment where the hackathon is held is also inviting. One way to do this is through smell. First impressions set the stage: a nice scent can set the mood.
-  Follow-up! People like to know that they have value beyond the session.

**2018 “Make the Breast Pump Not Suck” Hackathon**

The 2018 “Make the Breast Pump Not Suck” Hackathon was successful in generating impact through press and media, novel and meaningful collaborations, community growth, policy advocacy, and personal empowerment. Through implementing a storytelling strategy, the team centered the



*“Make the Breast Pump Not Suck” Hackathon. Photo by Ken Richardson*



people impacted the most in press articles and successfully emphasized equity and systems-change for improving postpartum healthcare. Exciting collaborations formed with dozens of new relationships built across geographic, demographic, and expertise differences. As participants returned home, they catalyzed community change by growing their projects with grants, trainings, and spin-off ideas. Most importantly, many participants have shared how the event has been personally transforming for how they view themselves, their ability to enact social change, and their vision for an equitable breastfeeding future.

**Advice for Organizers from the “Make the Breast Pump Not Suck” team includes:**

 Push for narrative change: mainstream media often perpetuates unhealthy stereotypes and about birth and breastfeeding and pushes the blame on individuals. Uplift people’s stories that demonstrate the resiliency and creativity to breastfeed and pump and demonstrate the systemic barriers that get in the way.

 Cultivate joy and play: healing, resting, and having fun is ESSENTIAL to collaborating on social change projects. Little details – such as goodie bags, art pieces, and chill spaces go a long way in supporting down-time and socializing.

 Uplift low-tech and no-tech innovations: There is a beauty in simplicity. Innovation does not have to be technologically advanced. It can look like improving existing resources and amplifying what already works for other people.

