

Teaching Unit 12: Hackathon – Designing a Civic Engagement Toolkit

Teacher's Instructions

Activity: Hackathon – Designing a Civic Engagement Toolkit

1. Facilitator Instructions

Overview

Students participate in a 1.5-hour hackathon sprint where they co-design a Civic Engagement Toolkit. The toolkit should enable grassroots/community initiatives to negotiate effectively with municipalities, while protecting their autonomy and ensuring inclusivity.

Timeline (1 1/2h total)

1. Briefing & Inspiration – 10 min
2. Problem Framing – 10 min
3. Idea Sprint – 20 min
4. Prototyping – 30 min
5. Presentations – 15 min
6. Reflection & Debrief – 5 min

Materials

- Case description (e.g., community initiative seeking recognition of urban commons)
- Team role cards (timekeeper, scribe, designer, presenter)
- Flipcharts, markers, sticky notes or digital boards (Miro, Canva)
- Timer + projector for common check-ins
- Access to AI tool (ChatGPT) for inspiration & policy-checking

Ground Rules

- Teams co-create, not compete (all toolkits are valid).
- Strict time-boxing; move fast, don't overthink.
- All voices in the team must contribute.
- AI can be consulted as advisor, not decision-maker.

Outputs

- 1-page Toolkit Prototype (poster, Canva slide, storyboard)
- 2-minute oral pitch per team
- Reflection notes on empowerment & risks

2. Hackathon Procedure

Stage 1 – Briefing & Inspiration (10 min)

- Facilitator introduces the challenge: *“Design a Civic Engagement Toolkit that empowers communities to engage municipalities while sustaining autonomy.”*
- Short case inspiration: Ghent Commons Transition Plan, Bologna Regulation on Urban Commons.

AI Role: Generate 2–3 examples of community engagement tools from real cities.

Digital Tools: Mentimeter (poll: “What’s the biggest barrier for communities?”), Padlet (keywords wall)

Stage 2 – Problem Framing (10 min)

- Teams identify one local/community challenge to address (e.g., green commons, affordable housing, mobility).
- Map barriers and opportunities.

AI Role: Ask selected LLMs: “What barriers do grassroots initiatives face in negotiating with municipalities?”

Digital Tools: Miro/Jamboard (sticky clustering), Maptionnaire (if spatial claims are relevant).

Stage 3 – Idea Sprint (20 min)

- Teams brainstorm toolkit formats:
 - Digital (apps, online platforms)
 - Narrative (storytelling campaigns)
 - Spatial (participatory mapping)
 - Policy (negotiation guidelines, templates)

AI Role: Prompt LLMs: “Suggest 3 low-cost civic engagement tools for community initiatives.”

Digital Tools: MURAL/Miro boards for brainstorming, Canva Whiteboard for sketches.

Stage 4 – Prototyping (30 min)

- Teams create a visual prototype: poster, storyboard, or slide.
- Required elements:
 - Toolkit name
 - Purpose & target users
 - Steps/methods included
 - How it strengthens civic autonomy
 - How it interacts with municipal actors

AI Role: Use LLMs as a policy checker: “Does our toolkit risk tokenism? How to safeguard autonomy?” “Which SDGs or NEB principles could it align with?”

Digital Tools: Canva/Pitch.com (final slide), Google Docs (shared drafting).

Stage 5 – Presentations (15 min)

- Each team pitches in 2 minutes.
- Audience/facilitator gives feedback using Kahoot/Poll Everywhere (Inclusivity / Feasibility / Creativity).

AI Role: Optional: Ask LLMs to “rewrite” pitch in accessible language for a municipal council.

Stage 6 – Reflection & Debrief (5 min)

- Mentimeter word cloud: “One word for today’s toolkit lesson.”

- Group reflection on risks of co-optation, blind spots.

AI Role: Ask: “Which community voices might still be missing from our toolkits?”

3. Toolkit Prototype Template (for students)

Name of Toolkit:

Purpose:

Target Users:

Steps/Methods:

How it Empowers Communities:

How it Engages Municipalities:

Risks & Safeguards:

4. Reflection Prompts

1. How does your toolkit preserve community autonomy?
2. What risks of tokenism or co-optation exist?
3. How might municipalities resist this toolkit?
4. How could communities scale it in real life?

Digital Tools Matrix (Hackathon TU16)			
Stage (Time)	Goal	Suggested Digital Tools	Purpose / How to Use
Setup (before class – 5 min)	Assign roles & prep	Miro/Canva templates	Ensure clarity on roles & task
1. Briefing (10 min)	Introduce challenge	Mentimeter, Padlet, AI (examples)	Poll expectations, share cases
2. Problem Framing (10 min)	Identify community issue	Miro, Jamboard, Maptionnaire, AI (barriers)	Cluster problems visually
3. Idea Sprint (20 min)	Brainstorm toolkits	MURAL, Canva Whiteboard, AI (suggestions)	Generate & sort ideas
4. Prototyping (30 min)	Develop toolkit	Canva, Google Docs, AI (policy checker)	Create prototype, refine with AI
5. Presentations (15 min)	Pitch toolkits	Canva, Pitch.com, Kahoot/Slido	Present & peer-evaluate
6. Reflection (5min)	Capture lessons	Mentimeter word cloud, Google Forms, AI (critical friend)	Record insights, identify gaps

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Students' Instructions

What This Session Is About

In this session you will take part in a fast-paced hackathon focused on community-led urbanism. You will work as civic actors designing a Civic Engagement Toolkit that helps communities engage with municipalities in a strategic, inclusive, and realistic way.

The goal is **not to design a perfect solution**, but to create a tool that could realistically be used by a community group in the near future.

Your Role as a Participant

- Work as a civic actor, not as a municipal authority.
- Collaborate actively within your team.
- Design tools, not protests or abstract visions.
- Balance empowerment with realism.
- Be aware of power, exclusion, and the risk of co-optation.

Session Structure (90 minutes)

Stage 1 – Briefing & Inspiration (10 min)

You are introduced to the challenge and real-world precedents.

Stage 2 – Problem Framing (10 min)

Your team defines a specific civic challenge and identifies barriers and power dynamics.

Stage 3 – Idea Sprint (20 min)

You generate and select ideas for a Civic Engagement Toolkit.

Stage 4 – Prototyping (30 min)

You develop a clear, visual prototype of your chosen toolkit.

Stage 5 – Presentations (15 min)

Each team presents its toolkit in a short pitch.

Stage 6 – Reflection & Debrief (5 min)

You reflect on what was learned about civic power and institutional engagement.

What You Are Expected to Produce

- A 1-page Civic Engagement Toolkit prototype (poster, slide, or storyboard)
- A short team pitch (2 minutes)
- Participation in discussion and reflection

Rules of Engagement

- Keep your ideas simple and actionable.
- Avoid tools that require large budgets or institutional control.
- Ensure all voices in your team are heard.
- Use AI tools as advisors, not as decision-makers.
- Respect time limits.

Reflection Questions (After the Session)

1. What civic problem did your toolkit address, and why?
2. How does your toolkit empower communities while engaging institutions?
3. What risks or limitations does your toolkit have?
4. Which voices might still be missing?
5. What would make a municipality take this toolkit seriously?

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