UPSKILL AND RECONNECT

Guide for Organising a Hackathon for Seniors Intergenerational Digital Skills Development Model

1. Introduction

This guide has been developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Youth project **Upskill & Reconnect!**, which brings together a diverse partnership of NGOs, companies, and training experts from Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Morocco. The project is built on a simple but powerful idea: empowering young people to become digital mentors and actively contribute to solving a growing social challenge—the digital skills gap among generations born in the middle of the previous century.

Young digital mentors aged 15–19 engaged directly with seniors through local living laboratories, where they identified real-life digital needs, co-created a tailored mentorship programme, and delivered hands-on training sessions focused on everyday digital tools and services.

The **Hackathon for Seniors** represents the next innovative step in this process. Designed as an inclusive and supportive learning format, it enables seniors to apply newly acquired digital skills in practice, build confidence, and experience a genuine sense of belonging in today's digital society. At the same time, the hackathon serves as a visible milestone of progress, showcasing the impact of intergenerational digital mentorship and lifelong learning.

2. Understanding Hackathons in a Senior Context

2.1 What Is a Hackathon?

At its core, **hacking means creative problem-solving**. It does not necessarily involve technology—rather, it is about exploring ideas, experimenting with solutions, and learning by doing.

A hackathon is an event where people come together for a defined period of time to collaboratively address challenges or tasks. Participants usually work in small groups, sharing knowledge and supporting one another while developing practical solutions.

Many hackathons also include parallel workshop sessions, which allow participants to build skills, gain confidence, and better engage with the activities.

2.2 Goals of a Hackathon for Seniors

Hackathons are designed to:

> **Create opportunities for learning and skill development**

> **Strengthen the sense of community among participants**

> **Provide dedicated time and space for participants to work on meaningful, real-life challenges**

In the context of seniors, hackathons emphasize **cooperation, mutual support, confidence-building, and practical application**, rather than competition or speed.

2.3 Creating a Welcoming Environment

A welcoming and inclusive atmosphere is the single most important success factor. Many seniors (like other newcomers) experience **imposter syndrome**—the feeling that they do not belong or lack sufficient skills.

Organizers and mentors play a key role in:

- Reassuring participants that learning is expected
- Highlighting progress rather than mistakes
- Encouraging questions and peer support

When seniors feel supported and valued, they are far more likely to engage fully and enjoy the experience.

3. The Hackathon for Seniors: Concept and Format

The **Hackathon for Seniors** is a one-day, time-limited learning event where seniors demonstrate the digital skills they developed through prior mentoring workshops.

Core format:

- Teams of 2 seniors, supported by 1 young digital mentor
- Practical, real-life digital challenges (e.g. ordering food, verifying information, booking appointments, online safety)
- Mentors support verbally but do not touch devices during scoring
- A jury reviews results
- All participants receive certificates
- One top-rated participant presents at the final project conference

3.1 Tasks creation

Tasks are directly derived from:

Living Lab findings

Five local mentoring workshops that preceded the hackathon

4. Roles and Responsibilities

4.1 Roles at a Glance

Host organisation (lead)

Venue, registrations, technical setup, data protection, overall coordination

Youth workers

Floor management, mentor support, safeguarding, accessibility checks

Young digital mentors (1 per team)

Coaching during practice and challenges (no hands-on during scoring)

Roles and Responsibilities

Judging panel (3–5 members)

Youth worker, ICT/UX volunteer, senior representative, optional sponsor or authority

Support crew

Registration desk, timekeeping, helpdesk, photo/video documentation (with consent)

5. Practical Planning and Logistics

5.1 Venue and Date Planning

- Avoid summer months, public holidays, and major competing events
- Confirm allowed start/end times with the venue
- Plan at least 30 minutes before and after for setup and cleanup
- Ensure easy, accessible entry (keys, door staff if needed)
- Confirm whether food is allowed
- Check heating/air conditioning if outside business hours

Practical Planning and Logistics

5.2 Logistics Checklist

Venue & Technology

- One large room with tables for 3–4 people
- Stable Wi-Fi + backup hotspot
- Extension cords, taped cables, charging station
- Projector
- Seniors use their own mobile phones
- Printed materials in large font

Logistics Checklist

People & Materials

- Sign-in sheets and consent forms

- Lanyards or color wristbands (teams)

- Timers and visible clocks

- Scorecards and judge envelopes

- Certificates and small prizes

- First-aid kit

Risk Controls

- Offline task versions (PDF screenshots)
- Pre-recorded demo if a service goes down
- Reserve participant list or team merging

6. Food, Accessibility, and Wellbeing

Always provide vegetarian and dairy-free options

Consider vegan, gluten-free, and other dietary needs

Prefer light, nourishing food

Avoid alcohol

Balance caffeine and sweets with real meals

> 🗒 **Think "like a parent":** food should support focus and energy, not fatigue.

7. Sponsorship

For larger events, sponsorship can help cover costs such as venue, catering, materials, or prizes. Sponsors may seek:

- Visibility
- Community engagement
- Recruitment or outreach opportunities

Clear expectations and transparency ensure mutually beneficial cooperation.

8. Timeline (Suggested)

T-4 weeks — **1**

- Confirm venue and date
- Draft budget and contact sponsors
- Select 8–12 challenges
- Recruit judges and volunteers
- Publish call for seniors and mentors

2 — **T-3 weeks**

- Finalize tasks and scorecards
- Confirm dietary and accessibility needs

T-2 weeks — **3**

- Test devices and apps
- Print materials
- Brief mentors and judges

4 — **T-1 week**

- Publish agenda
- Prepare certificates
- Arrange photo/video documentation

Event day — **5**

6 — **T+1–2 days**

- Send thank-you emails
- Share photos (with consent)
- Collect feedback
- Update methodology and lessons learned

9. Event-Day Run-of-Show (2–2.5 hours)

09:00	Check-in & setup (30 min)
09:30	Welcome & briefing (15 min)
09:45	Warm-up (15 min, non-scored)
10:00	Challenge solving (40 min)
10:40	Jury deliberation & refreshments (30 min)
11:10	Awards & certificates (10 min)
11:20	Feedback & close (10 min)

10. Task Design (Challenge Bank)

Design 8–12 challenges, each lasting 10–20 minutes, aligned with Living Lab findings.

Example areas:

Services

ordering food, booking appointments

Information literacy

news verification

Online safety

passwords, phishing, privacy

Content creation and sharing

Navigation and utilities

Golden rules:

- No real personal or banking data
- Use demo accounts
- Large-print instructions
- Two difficulty tracks (Standard / Gentle)

11. Scoring Rubric (Per Task)
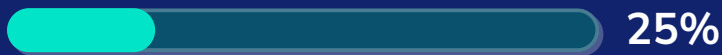
Max: 20 points per task

Safety is the primary tie-breaker.

25%

Accuracy
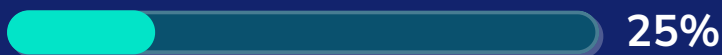
0–5 points
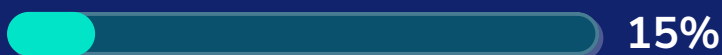
25%

Independence

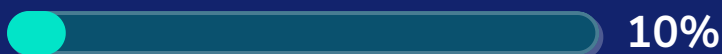0–5 points
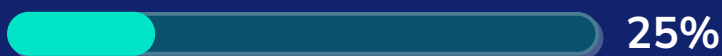
25%

Safety & judgment

0–5 points

15%

Efficiency

0–3 points

10%

Teamwork

0–2 points

12. Appendix: Sample Task Set

Task 1: Spot the Scam

You have received an email that looks important.

- Identify signs that show whether the message might be unsafe
- Point out the "red flags"
- Delete the email in a safe way

Goal: Show that you can recognize suspicious messages and protect yourself online.

Task 2: Create a Strong Password

You are setting up an account.

- Create a strong password following good security rules
- Turn on two-step verification (2FA) on a demo account

Goal: Demonstrate safe account protection.

Task 3: Order Groceries Online

You want to buy groceries without going to the store.

- Select items from a demo online shop
- Complete an order for pickup (no real payment)

Goal: Practice online shopping for everyday needs.

12. Appendix: Sample Task Set

Task 4: Book a Doctor's Appointment

You need to schedule a medical visit.

- Use a demo e-health portal
- Book an appointment with a general practitioner

Goal: Show how digital health services can save time and effort.

Task 5: Which News Can You Trust?

You are reading news online.

- Compare two news articles
- Decide which one is more reliable
- Explain your choice

Goal: Practice critical thinking and information literacy.

Task 6: Organize and Share Photos

You have many photos on your phone.

- Sort 15 photos into folders by date
- Share one folder with a family member or friend

Goal: Improve digital organization and sharing skills.

12. Appendix: Sample Task Set

Task 7: Send a Large Video

You want to send a video that is too big for email.

- Compress the video
- Send it using a demo file-sharing service

Goal: Learn how to handle large files safely.

Task 8: Buy a Public Transport Ticket

You need to travel across town.

- Use a demo transport app
- Buy an electronic ticket

Goal: Practice using digital services for mobility.

Task 9: Translate and Save a Web Page

You find a useful website in another language.

- Translate the page
- Save it as a PDF on your device

Goal: Show how to access and store information in a useful format.

12. Appendix: Sample Task Set

Task 10: Order a Taxi

You need a ride.

- Order a taxi using a demo app
- Check driver details and estimated arrival time

Goal: Build confidence in using transport apps.

Task 11: Create an Online Meeting

You want to meet family or friends online.

- Create a Zoom meeting
- Invite your mentor and team members

Goal: Demonstrate communication skills using video-calling tools.

Note for Participants

You may skip any task if needed.
There is no real payment or personal data involved.
Your mentor can **talk you through the task**, but during scoring they may not touch the device.

13. Templates and Tools

- Judge scorecards
- Mentor pledge
- Senior consent form
- Large-print rules poster

14. Final note

A Hackathon for Seniors is not about speed or competition. It is about confidence, inclusion, dignity, and empowerment—and about showing seniors that they belong in the digital world.

Project Partners and Acknowledgments

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Mensa Srbije (Serbia - Coordinator)
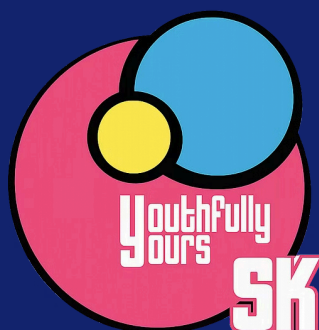
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