

Hack-the-Climate: Manila
Philippines
Princeton University
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<http://hacktheclimate.com/>

Section I: The Project

Over the past half-decade, hackathons have emerged all across the globe as a means of bringing together young, tech savvy activists to resolve the most pressing social issues of our time. Hackathons consist of teams of computer coders, developers and entrepreneurs competing to solve a particular problem by building a website or an application within a specified time period, usually one to three days.¹ We partnered with De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde to host Hack-the-Climate: Manila, where ecological activists and computer programmers joined forces to build web and mobile applications (apps) that would help with climate change adaptation, mitigation and awareness. Hack-the-Climate: Manila's primary goal was to bring Filipino coders and ecological activists together for the longest ever climate change-themed Hackathon. The secondary goal of Hack-the-Climate: Manila was to develop applications at the event for use by environmental NGOs and green tech start-ups.

Our largest contributions came from the Philippine Telecom SMART and their subsidiaries SMART Communications, SMART News and Public Affairs, SMART Developer Network and IdeaSpace. These groups provided meals for the participants, as well as snacks, prizes and fun giveaways. The remainder of the support came in the form of donated goods and services. The week before our event, Jade Hotel and Suites hosted a press conference and served dinner to local bloggers and journalists. De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde generously provided their auditorium as a venue for the Hackathon and let us stay at the Hotel Benilde at no cost.² Chikka Philippines donated T-shirts and dinner on the first night of the Hackathon. Branco Solutions and Consulting supplied midnight meals on the first and second nights of the Hackathon as well as plastic balloons. As prizes, Microsoft Philippines donated five BizSpark accounts and five Windows Phones and Huawei contributed three LTE modems and three Android phones. Huawei also gave us an LTE Boost, lanyards and Saturday night snacks. Easy Taxi, Epson and Print Trends covered the cost of printing ID tags for the participants and organizers. Last but not least, AT&T leveraged its global media network to promote our competition internationally.³

The Hackathon took place June 6th – 8th, 2014. We spent several weeks in Manila prior to the event working on logistics with our Filipino co-organizers Diego Jose “DJ” Ramos, Elaine Cedillo, Rizzel Jill “RJ” Dy and Therence John “TJ” Resabal. Our co-organizers helped us solidify partnerships with local environmental NGOs, meet with sponsors and speakers and publicize the Hackathon to local students and information technology professionals. During the Hackathon, coders organized themselves into teams of three to five members. We allotted a period of fifty-one hours for the programmers to build, test and submit their applications to the judging panel. Over the course of the competition, the participants were able to meet fellow developers, swap ideas, write their code, play video games and come up with solutions to global warming. It was during this open forum that the ‘magic’ that hackathons are known to engender took place.

Approximately three quarters of the attendees were hackathon first-timers and for ninety-five percent it was their first environmental event. To inspire the coders and get their creative juices flowing, we invited dozens of ecological activists and tech specialists to the event to serve as presenters and group mentors. Environmental NGOs who sent representatives include Greenpeace, The Climate Reality Project, Conservation International and Fauna & Flora International. SMART, Microsoft and Huawei sent engineers to provide the “hackers” with technical assistance.

¹ In fact, the word “hackathon” is a portmanteau of the words “hack” and “marathon”, where “hack” is used in the sense of playful, exploratory or collaborative programming, not its alternate meaning as a reference to computer crime.

² Hotel Benilde is run by the college's School of Hotel, Restaurant and Institution Management.

³ Scheduling conflicts prevented us from working as closely with AT&T as we had originally planned.

Environmental and technical talks were spread throughout the conference. The NGO representatives discussed the havoc that climate change, deforestation and mining have wreaked on the Philippines and advised the coders on which kinds of apps would aid them most in their work. Noted environmentalist Gina Lopez of the ABS-CBN Lingkod Kapamilya Foundation, Inc. was our opening speaker and AG Saño, brother of celebrated Climate Change Commissioner Yeb Saño gave the keynote address. Additionally, tech presenters spoke on a variety of topics including how to transform an idea into a business, the keys to a friendly user interface and how to successfully pitch your start-up to venture capitalists. We awarded each speaker with a certificate of appreciation and an article of Princeton paraphernalia. All of the presentations were live streamed using Google+ Hangouts.

The Hackathon dramatically exceeded all of our expectations. While we had initially anticipated forty to fifty participants at Hack-the-Climate: Manila, ultimately 180 coders, 32 activists and 41 technology specialists registered and participated in the event. In total, thirty-six environmental applications were developed and presented to our judging panel on day three, including sixteen “green productivity” apps, thirteen ecological education and awareness apps and seven environmental video games.

Technical difficulties connecting electronically with our original keynote speaker Yeb Saño were our first major obstacle. Fortunately, AG Saño, a prominent environmentalist in his own right, was able to speak on his brother’s behalf. Secondly, our initial goal of seventy-two hours for the Hackathon was not culturally feasible, therefore we reduced our target from seventy-two to fifty-five hours. On the final day of the conference, De La Salle-College of St. Benilde gave us the auditorium for an additional five hours, allowing us to break the previous record by six hours.⁴

Section II: Peace and the Philippines

We took on this Davis Project for Peace because we believe that peace is not only the absence of conflict, but the presence of cooperative action to solve problems that contribute to human suffering. By bringing together over 250 students and professionals, environmentalists and coders, entrepreneurs and activists our conference saw the formation of international partnerships enabling young, talented Filipinos to participate in the global movement to solve the climate problem. We were astounded by the number of strategic partnerships and fruitful pairings forged between environmental non-profits and participants at our Hackathon, including 1st place winner “Tanaw” (an eco-tourism application) with the Wikimedia Philippine Cultural Heritage Mapping Project, People’s Choice Award Winner “Sprout” (a Tamagotchi-like conservation videogame) with Redraw the Line and our personal favorite “Environtab” (a climate-information and weather Google Chrome Extension) with Climate Central. These apps illustrate the limitless creative potential ready to be tapped in the fight against climate change and are only a small taste of what is to come at our future Hack-the-Climate events.

This project reinforced for us the reality that tackling climate change, as with any complex issue, requires more than just a single project. Before embarking on this journey, we naively assumed that Hack-the-Climate would be a one-time event, but after witnessing the passion and idealism of the “hackers” and activists, we realized their desire to help did not end with the Hackathon. Their genuine commitment to alleviating the effects of global warming inspired us to make Hack-the-Climate an annual event.⁵

Personal Statement (Jacob Scheer)

“A changing climate does not distinguish between nationalities, ethnicities or creeds; it affects us all equally. The process of developing mobile applications to address global warming with activists from all around the world showed me that international cooperation at the grassroots and diplomatic levels is the only way for humanity to solve the climate crisis.”

⁴ The previous Filipino record for longest hackathon stood at fifty-four hours.

⁵ Our next Hack-the-Climate is tentatively scheduled for September 2015 in Cebu, the Philippines’ second largest city.

Photography

