Startup Weekend EDU Seattle

The Seattle Public Library

Young Adult

|

Adults

Startup Weekend EDU Seattle

Nov 18, 2016

$5,000+

$$$
Byline

Jay Lyman, Librarian, The Seattle Public Library

Startup Weekend EDU Seattle is a weekend-long entrepreneurship competition that brings individuals together around ideas to improve education. Attendees are invited to pitch ideas to improve education, then work in teams to develop the ideas and explore their viability. The weekend culminates in a public event where ideas are judged and prizes awarded.

Advanced Planning

Startup Weekend EDU Seattle allows people with technical, education, design and business backgrounds to come together as a community. The event provides a fun and relatively safe way to explore entrepreneurship and to learn from coaches and other participants. It is an opportunity to network with like-minded people and create real products or services in an effort to improve education.

We start planning around July for the November event, creating a team of volunteers that work alongside staff. The volunteers recruit volunteer coaches and judges and help with logistics.

Though this program isn't something that libraries typically do, Startup Weekends take place nearly every weekend in communities around the world. In the Startup Weekend model, participants generally pay around $100 (to cover the cost of food and such), but our program is free; the Library Foundation and a local business incubator called Galvanize have picked up the tab.

Since participation is free, we try to extend the opportunity to individuals who may not have had the opportunity to participate in this type of event before. Before opening up tickets to the general public, volunteers reach out to organizations to market the opportunity to their groups.

Marketing

We started our targeted marketing one month before opening up the tickets more widely. Tickets were available on the library website during the targeted outreach, but we also reached out to specific contacts in local communities of color and the education community, among others. Last year we were successful in our recruitment of people with different backgrounds and skill-sets with help from our local Startup Advocate David Harris, who has connections at an African American coworking space called Blackdot, and also organizers of a program called Hack the CD.

We also reached out to an organizer who had previously run Startup Weekend Latino ; we talked to contacts at Seattle Public Schools; we worked with an EdTech Meetup group to organize a pre-event to build interest in the education community (which was really successful); and we reached out to specific teachers that we know. This year's event is off to a great start as well.

After pursuing those avenues, we opened up the registration using the more regular Startup Weekend promotional channels. People that attend Startup Weekends regularly know where to look for them, and we wanted to give those that may not have had a chance to attend a shot at these first.

When people register they self-identify as educator, designer, developer, business person or student. We don't turn anyone away, but as we need a range of skill-sets in each area, it helps us know where we might need to focus more attention. Last year we had a good mix of skill-sets, but we wanted to bump up the number of educators this year.

Budgeting

Most of the budget for this event goes to food for the attendees. People are in the building all weekend, and we provide healthy food to power their inspiration. Typically we have box lunches, breakfast supplies from Costco and a buffet dinner (pizza, Indian food, Thai food). We also have coffee and tea. In-kind gifts (snacks and such) are sought by volunteers, which helps bring down the cost. The volunteers also solicit sponsorships.

We purchase supplies such as giant Post-it notes, pens and badges. We also buy branded T-shirts for attendees (an optional component) and we pay for the flight for our volunteer facilitator (the MC for the weekend).

Day-of-event Activity

The 2015 event went from Nov. 20 to 22, and the 2016 event will be from Nov. 18 to 20.

The logistics for this event are varied and detailed. The program takes place in multiple rooms across different parts of the library. We utilize the auditorium for our pitches and presentations as there is an audience aspect for those. A team of between five and eight library staff support it throughout the weekend.

On Sunday, the public is invited to watch the teams present their ideas to a panel of experts, who declare a winner. The winning teams are awarded prizes that help them continue after the weekend, but any team might move forward if they choose to. This is a schedule for the event, which can also be found on the event's website:

- **Friday, 6:30 - 11 p.m.:** Friday night we kick off with dinner and an icebreaker. Everyone then has an opportunity to pitch their idea to improve education. Some people pitch more than one idea, and others don't pitch at all, which is fine. We all vote on which ideas we like best. Afterwards a rather chaotic process of team formation further refines the list of maybe 50 ideas down to the 10 or so that will move forward. People advocate for their idea (or an idea that they like), and they talk with each other about the skills they bring to a given team. A lot of negotiation takes place as people develop their teams and choose who they want to work with for the weekend. Some ideas don't form teams around them, but we try to get everyone matched up with a team. Once a team determines that it has the people needed to start, they go find their workspace and start working.
- **Saturday, 9 a.m. - 11 p.m.:** Everyone returns and picks up where they left off. We bring in expert coaches to imbue the teams with expertise. Librarians help with market research. Teens and teachers come to give feedback on what the teams are building. A lot of the work happens on Saturday: the teams go out and talk to people in the community to get feedback and ultimately work to try to validate that their idea and plan is viable. The team members work together to develop a solution to the problem, start to develop the tools or processes and show the viability of the business surrounding it.
- **Sunday, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.**: The teams finish what they are building or researching Sunday morning, then change gears to presentation mode. They create demos and five-minute presentations for the afternoon program. We bring in coaches to help them refine their presentations and slides.
- **Sunday, 3 - 6 p.m.:** We hold a final, public event where the teams unveil what they have been working on. Each team gets five minutes. After all have presented, the judges deliberate and come back to give each team feedback

and award the winners: first, second and third place, and often a "people's choice" award. Teams can choose to continue after the event is over, and the winners get prizes that help them continue, such as time at a coworking space or coaching with a local expert, etc.

Of course, there are always unexpected challenges. One example was during the first year when we didn't know the HVAC systems turned off automatically after a certain point in the evening.

Program Execution

Last year 86 people participated on the teams. The total audience at the final public event as 158, but that number inclued the 86 participants. The winner, Team Floop, proposed a tool that improves the feedback loop for teachers and their students. The app facilitates teacher's feedback to students on their homework assignments. It helps the students get the feedback faster, which has been shown to increase their retention and learning from the assignment. Excitement is building for our 2016 event as well. We did an evaluation survey of attendees, which showed a positive outcome. We also had a very diverse set of participants with people of different ages, educational levels and backgrounds coming to the event.

Feedback was positive. We surveyed the participants and asked the following questions to help us understand the outcomes:

- Q1: Do you feel more knowledgeable about what it takes to establish a business ?
- Q2: Do you feel more confident about establishing a new business?
- Q3: Do you intend to apply what you just learned?
- Q4: Are you more aware of applicable resources and services provided by the library?
- Q5: What did you like most about the program?
- Q6: What could the library do to better assist you in starting a new business?

Advice

A lot of considerations go into making an event like this successful, such as:

- The logistics of running a weekend-long event that runs before and after the library closes.
- The logistics of funding the event.
- Making sure all the stakeholders are on board with offering this as a free model — both the volunteer organizers and the parent company (now TechStars) that owns the event template. TechStarts provides support, but volunteers who have run these kinds of events really take responsibility for making the event happen alongside library staff.
- Recruiting the right mix of skill sets and people willing to spend their weekend participating in the event.

For the event to work, it relies on a team of savvy Startup Weekend volunteers and a lot of interest from the education, technical, design and business communities. I would definitely reach out to those of us at The Seattle Public Library who helped organize this before trying it locally. We can be contacted via Ask a Librarian at www.spl.org/ask/.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images

Image









Image







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Library Olympics

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Sep 17, 2015
Adults (21 and up)+ | $$$
Image



Entrepreneur Fair

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Mar 25, 2016
Children (9 and under)+ | □□
Image



Homeschool Resource Fair

Audiences:

Children (9 and under)
Adults (21 and up)