Hack the Hood’s Innovation Initiative

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hack the Hood, an Oakland based non-profit organization, developed the “Seeing Yourself in Tech” (SYIT) initiative as an approach to attracting, enrolling, and training local youth in the community with the goal of “priming the pump” to jumpstart a pipeline of talent to go on to promising careers in technology. While many organizations have focused on the issues and opportunities related to the underrepresentation of minorities in tech careers, many efforts have focused on the “where”, “what” and “how” of making an impact and have, perhaps prematurely, focused on acceleration and scaling of offerings. Using these more traditional approaches would be unlikely to yield any truly new insights or approaches or anything beyond typical and well-understood needs, ideas and projects. The issues related to tech employment representation by race, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation are well understood, and the impacts of practices like “Code Switching” become common in the national conversation. Hack the Hood, because it is deeply embedded in the Oakland community and works with hundreds of local youth each week, saw a need to better understand and communicate the “why” of careers in tech, real or perceived barriers to entry for young people of color, and take a human-centered approach to designing a solution.

Using interviews, immersions and multiple focus groups, the Hack the Hood core team gathered perspectives and inputs from the target population and synthesized those into key insights that informed end products. While the team quickly set about to create a series of videos, the team didn’t start with a predetermined message in mind. Operating in sprints, the team iterated based on real-time feedback to achieve a final deliverable that has a much tighter fit with the intended audience than would have been otherwise possible. The messages in the final video speak to the latent needs and desires shared by Hack the Hood’s prospective and current students and alumni, painting “tech” in a broader light than just coding, championing local success stories, and showing a vision where young people can create and own their own ca-
reers instead of looking for their next job. In exploring the story of tech and entrepre-
neurship in Oakland, the team uncovered the diversity of Oakland tech, showcasing
local creators innovating with 3D printing of jewelry, storytellers using photography
and videography and people from the community thriving as tech employees in some
of the nation’s most famous companies. Using a human-centered design approach
produced deeper and more nuanced beliefs and emotional experiences than would
have been possible with a focus on process or policy, producing a story that is not just
authentic, but authentically Oakland.
CONTENTS

Executive Summary ....................... 2
Background and Goals ................. 5
Project Team and Approach .......... 8
  Team .................................. 8
  Training ............................. 8
  HCD Sessions ....................... 9
Inputs and Insights .................... 11
  Initial Design Session .......... 11
  Design Inspiration Activities .... 13
  Video Rough Cut Design Session .. 16
Results and Recommendations .... 19
  Human Centered Design .......... 19
  Video .............................. 20
  Recommendations .................. 22
Conclusion ............................ 25
BACKGROUND AND GOALS

The growth of the American technology sector over the past 25 years has been nothing short of astonishing, with the top five companies in tech (Apple, Amazon, Alphabet, Microsoft and Facebook) as of the time of this writing combining for a market capitalization of nearly $3.5 trillion. In the United States, the tech sector employs over 4.5 million workers¹ and consistently makes up over 5% of US GDP². In addition to jobs formally in the technology sector, it is important to recognize the broader impact of digital transformation on all industry sectors and the inevitable increase in the technology jobs this will create across enterprises. Not surprisingly, technology careers are among the most popular among college graduates² and there is a perennial “skills gap” resulting in hundreds of thousands unfilled openings across the sector each year.³

The popularity of careers in technology appears to be holding strong, with a recent study by BW Research Partnership for the American Hotel & Lodging Educational Foundation showing that among members of Gen Z and young millennials, 75% are interested in careers in technology, 10% higher interest than any other industry and averaging 25% higher interest than hospitality and 35% more than construction. Respondents rated technology the highest among industries for offering the best salary, but also rated it among the lowest having good diversity in the workplace (51%). This study showed that the lack of diversity is not due to lack of interest among people of different racial backgrounds, as interest in the technology sector was significantly higher for African Americans (80%), Asians (80%) and Latino (79%) than any other industry and higher overall than White respondents (74%).

Despite the interest in technology among minority job applicants in the U.S., the lack

⁵ https://www.ahla.com/sites/default/files/AHLA%
of their representation in the tech sector is a major economic problem for an industry that struggles to find qualified talent. While the diversity problem in technology is widely accepted among industry insiders, specific statistics are nonetheless useful in understanding the magnitude and specifics of the issue. For example, according to the US Equal Opportunity Commission, the tech sector employs African American and Hispanic/Latino employees at a rate that is half of the rest of the private sector. As people advance in their careers, the problem becomes even more pronounced with Whites making up 83% of technology executives (as compared to 68% of all employees). In addition to race and ethnicity, tech has a gender problem as well. Only 20% of technology executives are women. Clearly, solutions to the lack of diversity in tech are urgently needed and Hack the Hood is at the forefront of the challenge.

Being embedded in these underrepresented communities provides Hack the Hood and its team members with a unique perspective on the issues with tech careers and gives them an ability to see opportunities that might be missed without examining implicit biases. Much of the industry has attacked tech careers obstacles from the supply side, focusing on the so called “skills gap” that quantifies the lack of talent available in the U.S. workforce to fill high-skilled job openings. To be clear, this is an important problem that has profound impacts on immigration policy in government, curriculum development at universities and hiring strategies in industry. What is unclear, however, is how short-term, supply-side policies and strategies will create real and lasting change for communities of color in the tech industry. Taking a different approach, Hack the Hood recognized the need to focus on the demand side of the tech careers equation, realizing that perhaps the biggest, or at least initial, barriers to entry into tech careers is that people in the community can't envision a pathway for themselves where they end up in rewarding and sustainable careers in technology. Put more succinctly, far too young people of color see themselves in tech, and too few organizations are engaged in directly changing that narrative.

Hack the Hood also recognized that the mission of the SYIT initiative had to be more than just about the practice of code switching or the larger issue of underrepresenta-
tion in tech among these demographics. For Hack the Hood’s constituents, “who you are” goes beyond race, ethnicity, gender or sexuality and is in large part about “where you’re from”. With this in mind, the team set out to tell a video narrative that spoke to the known, sector-wide issues and opportunities but anchored in the culture of Oakland and reflecting the unique, nuanced and nuanced, and authentic experiences of hackthehood participants and alumni.

This insight led the team to develop a project aimed at raising awareness and belief within the community, with the goal of answering the core question to drive real change:

*How might we help you, our youth in Oakland, see yourself in tech careers and then provide the support you need to achieve your vision?*

This report describes how Hack the Hood aimed to answer this question, the process, and products the team created and the reaction among its intended audience.
PROJECT TEAM AND APPROACH

TEAM
With a goal of producing a set of “Seeing Yourself in Tech” (SYIT) video assets with a hyper focus on the local Oakland community, a core tenet of the team-building approach was to engage as many Hack the Hood stakeholders – employees, students, alumni and partners – in the process as possible. When expertise was needed from outside the Hack the Hood, priority was given to engaging with existing partners and local organizations who understand the organization’s mission, brand and operating model. The table below lists team members, roles and organizations.

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<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>ROLE</th>
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TRAINING
Because Hack the Hood was committed to running a human centered design (HCD) process, the first order of business was to make sure the core team and key project participants were fully exposed to and trained in the mindsets, methods and tools
of design thinking. After identifying a leading expert facilitator in HCD, the team convened for a full-day, immersive training workshop with the goals of building a shared design language and conceptual framework, providing skills training in HCD and user centricity essential to the video creation process and generating critical outputs (personas and profiles, archetypes, interview templates, etc.) to guide downstream activities. The training was completed in April 2018, setting the stage for a series of co-creation sessions in Summer/Fall 2018 to engage Hack the Hood alumni in the effort.

**HCD SESSIONS**

Putting this training into practice, the team created a process to capture customer input from Hack the Hood alumni at three distinct phases of the project, which should be read below in chronological order:

1. **Exploration:** *Research and Insights Design Thinking Session* – May 2018
   Using a design-thinking workshop group format, the core team convened a group of 12 Hack the Hood current students and alumni for a group discussion designed to capture key themes and insights. While typical design sessions focus on a specific product or experience, this event was purposefully designed to be an open, expansive and informal discussion on the broad topic of careers in technology. As Seth Godin once said, “Focus groups, run poorly, are really good at telling you exactly what you want to hear”. The team was very careful to avoid this trap. Outputs from this stage included raw observations and verbatims, themes, and insights that were consolidated into learnings documented in the next section.

2. **Concept Creation and Development:** *Design Inspiration Feedback* – July 2018
   With themes and insights in hand, the video producer used both in-person and virtual techniques to gather inspiration to guide the design and messaging of the first draft of the SYIT video. First, the production lead presented a wide variety of videos that spanned the spectrum of formal to “uncomfortably zany” and asked Hack the Hood alumni to provide their opinions and perspectives on each. Next, the alumni provided their own examples from YouTube and oth-
er online sites of the types of videos that inspired them. Using the combined input, the team was able to develop an approach for the SYIT video. Outputs included overall visual, format and messaging direction that they incorporated into a first “rough cut” of a long-form video to share with the team.

3. **Iteration: Video “MVP” Feedback Design Session – August 2018**

Taking a page from Lean Startup, the team convened a final design session to gather reactions and suggestions from Hack the Hood alumni about the “minimum viable product” (MVP) of the SYIT videos. Before diving into the more time consuming and expensive tasks in the video editing process, gathering feedback served as a critical mechanism to make thematic, messaging and design change decisions early in the process and left time to shoot additional footage if needed. Outputs included critical messaging points and themes, design direction and additional content suggestions.

After the final session, the video production team incorporated the feedback into final edits for a long-form asset as well as vignettes intended for social channels.
INPUTS AND INSIGHTS

As the team executed its HCD approach, they were able to capture valuable input and insights from Hack the Hood participants at each stage. A summary of key learnings from each stage/session is included below.

INITIAL DESIGN SESSION

KEY INSIGHTS

Using a facilitated but informal discussion approach resulted in the sharing of a wide variety of perspectives, experiences, and learnings from Hack the Hood alumni. They were particularly focused on the emotional aspects of the Hack the Hood journey and probed to gather deeper perspectives wherever possible. Following the core team’s readout and review after the session, they synthesized the findings into the core key insights below:

• **From Consumer to Creator:** It was clear in the discussion that the introduction to technology through Hack the Hood transformed the perspectives of students and made them feel empowered to create a new future – products, experiences, and services – for people in their community. Technology is as much about power and potential as it is devices and code.

• **The Power of Platforms:** Technology (and the alumni group’s fluency with it) is seen as a powerful platform – for their careers, for their communities and for their ideas.

• **Passion > Profit:** While participants understand and are appreciative of the potential careers in Tech has to provide a pathway to a better, more stable economic situation and life for them individually, each alumnus was more motivated by a moral imperative to use their new skills and capabilities to change their world. The typical “tech persona” that is pervasive in places like Silicon Valley and New York City not only doesn’t resonate with them, it is palpably offensive to many of the students.
• **Live a Better Life, HERE:** Many people around the world choose Tech as a career pathway because of the doors it opens around the globe to better opportunities and richer lives. For Hack the Hood alumni, **they want to stay in their community and live better lives.** They are not interested in moving to Silicon Valley, San Francisco, or another far-flung location.

• **Applied Tech is Tech Too:** Focusing on the application of technology up front seems to be a key to getting youth interested in joining Hack the Hood. One alumnus plans to apply his Hack the Hood education to storytelling via video production and documentaries, while others are focused on gamifying everyday life via AR and VR. Clearly, **it’s not about writing code, but how that code can make your ideas a reality.**

• **Invest in Me:** Many of the alumni discussed their frustrations (and the team observed some justified latent bitterness) **with the lack of industry/commercial investment in their community.** For instance, one participant remarked about how the types of BART advertisements changed the farther East the train is based. Nearly every alumnus had a story about a mentor who invested in them or remarked how moved they were (and how much commitment it engendered on their end) by the willingness of Hack the Hood volunteers to sit with them to teach and co-create for hours on end.

• **They are Pioneers:** Because the students are typically the first in their families and communities to approach a career in tech, **they feel the weight of expectations on them in a way that most in tech do not.** Many of them feel that despite the struggles and obstacles they face, they have to persevere for the next generation.

• **More Awareness All Around:** In addition to marketing programs like Hack the Hood to these disconnected communities, it is critical to **tell the story of the alumni and help them recruit potential tech students where they are.** The alumni said it was difficult for them to share their experiences because some of their peers are not interested and they can’t show those that are anything tangible.
• **Find Local “Heroes”:** The alumni discussed an experience at NextDoor where they met the CEO who “is from Hayward” and how inspirational it was to see someone local make it so big and have a global company. They clearly would not have had the same emotional reaction to someone from downtown San Francisco.

**DESIGN INSPIRATION ACTIVITIES**

With the initial set of insights serving as the foundation for the key messages the videos would need to convey, the team gathered input from Hack the Hood students and alumni to inform the design and branding of the final product.

**AESTHETIC RESEARCH**

The video producer created a document to guide research on aesthetics, particularly related to the “CODE:SWITCH” theme, playing on both the technical definition of “code” as well as its use in denoting how people of color have to switch their language and contexts based on the environment they’re in. With these concepts in mind, the team developed the title “CTRL+Shift” for the project.

• **First Impressions - INTRO:** With an emphasis on capturing attention and keeping a viewer engaged, options were suggested ranging from funny moments with the video’s “hero”, animations and cutouts of talking heads, and prominent quotes or takeaways.

• **Formats:** The team introduced the concept of two versions including an extended version for the web and a “sizzle” version for social channels like Instagram and Facebook.

• **Animations:** Presented various options for bumper animations across color styles, fonts, and visual effects to get feedback.

• **Calls to Action:** Tested several CTA quotes including “let’s talk tech”, “the hood talks tech”, “visit our website”, “check out our program”, “sign up for 2019”, and “get a mentor” to gauge effectiveness and urgency.
• **Storytelling Elements:** Gauged the popularity and reaction to several approaches, including “throwback” pictures (showing a hero’s photo from childhood, etc.), split screens, freeze frames, popup studio backdrops and engaging lower-third text and graphics.

• **Style Boards:** Served up several options of rough and finished graphics and story/ style boards to get impressions from the audience.

**YOUTUBE INSPIRATION**

The video producer provided Hack the Hood creators with several links to YouTube videos with wildly varying styles to gather feedback on what resonates and engages, bores or turns off this audience, including:

• **The Product Review:** A simple/basic review video of a high-end, exclusive smartphone prototype, designed to get feedback from the Hack the Hood creators about how this style of video captures and retains their attention.

• **Cool Tech:** A walk through of a video showcasing AR/VR technology laid on top of the Super Mario video game. In addition to the focus on emerging technology, it was designed to showcase the “hero” who created the technology on his own volition.

• **“Zany” Videos:** A variety of videos were included that ran the gamut of zaniness, from monotonous talking animated characters to music videos.

**CODE:SWITCH PERSONAS**

The team identified five distinct interview personas to help guide and inspire the creation of the videos and to help classify the Hack the Hood participants, including:

• **The Phoenix:** Someone that used tech to rise above an undesirable status quo, they are known to be driven problem solvers who can multi task, who give people the benefit of the doubt and could be an education dropout, may have a history of homelessness, abuse or addiction, and will use tech to build an audience/clientele doing it their own way even if society doesn’t deem it the ideal model of “success”.

• **The Self Driven Dreamer:** One who is determined to get what they’ve always dreamed of, this person is a resource catalyst, influencer and builder who always had an idea of what they wanted to do but wanted their own career path, is manifesting a childhood dream(s) and uses tech as a tool for building communities.

• **The Intersectional Techie:** A person who has an idea and adds technology to the mix, this activist and artist makes things fit to them instead of fitting in, uses tech to build communities and is a true integrator of career paths through technology.

• **The Dormant Skill:** The classic case of making something you do for fun make you dough, this adaptable late bloomer views time as a social construct, switches careers often, thinks of money as an afterthought and treats life like a game of “leveling up”.

• **The Passion to Profit:** An energetic entrepreneur who is driven and resourceful, this person knows that failure shouldn’t stand in the way of eventual success, always wanted to be his or her own boss to pursue great ideas like that tech startup or app in the works.

In addition, the team was on the lookout for backgrounds such as:

- People of Color
- Queer/Trans/Non-Binary
- Immigrant/DACA
- Young Providers
- ESL
- Gender queer
- Early 20s
- Mid 30s
- Late 50s
VIDEO ROUGH CUT DESIGN SESSION

After incorporating the design inspiration into the project and completing a rough cut of videos, a group of Hack the Hood creators and alumni gathered to provide feedback on the content and design, including:

MESSAGE

• "Tech" isn’t just coding
  Numerous participants discussed how the video had opened their eyes to the breadth of careers in technology. Citing examples of careers in video production and a subject in the video using 3D printing to enable her jewelry and fashion business, Hack the Hood alumni discussed how the examples helped move beyond the perception of coding languages and app development into a much broader creative context. The video featured a Microsoft executive and a jewelry maker.

• In Context, In Action
  The team liked to see the application of technology live and in Oakland, citing the “ring maker” who used 3D printing to create unique jewelry faster and in a more custom way than could be possible without technology.

• The “Necessary Evil” of Code Switching
  All participants related to the video’s stories of code switching and lamented that it was something they would need to learn to do to be successful.

• Discuss the Career and Journey, not the Job
  The group had a productive discussion about the difference between a career and a job, with the former being something that spans years or decades and is owned by them, as opposed to a job that can come and go and is owned by the employer, not you. A career is something that you are going to love doing for the rest of your life and job is something you do to get by and you can get fired or hired at will.
• **Big, Established Companies Feel Less Accessible**
  The audience noted that newer, smaller companies and startups seemed more open to authenticity and there would be less need to code switch.

**MESSENGER**

• **Genuine, Informal**
  Authenticity is the most important quality the “heroes” need to display.

• **All Energy**
  The woman from Microsoft in the video had a contagious energy that inspired. More, more, more energy.

• **Be You**
  Messengers that stressed not needing to change who you are, dress a certain way, or code switch were incredibly inspiring to the Hack the Hood alumni.

• **More Youth in Video**
  The audience felt it was impactful to see established people in their roles, but that showing youth on their journey would make the path feel more accessible.

**DESIGN**

• **Disorienting Shooting Technique**
  The audience universally complained about the first version’s zooming in and out and “reality TV” feel, but also the “produced” feel of nervous interviewees being shot against a green screen while sitting down in a studio. Loud background audio was also disorienting.

• **Shorten, and Hook the Audience in the Opening**
  Viewers noted that they only spend 30 seconds to decide before moving to the next movie and the first versions they would have skipped.
• **More and Better Background/B-Roll**
  Action shots and locations within the city drew great attention and kudos, and the audience recommended abandoning studio and green screen shots for more in-context and action shots to make the videos more engaging.

• **Authentically Oakland!**
  The audience became excited when seeing familiar, local spots in Oakland, saying it made the messaging more impactful and that the success stories seemed more real and accessible. They suggested more and varied panoramic city shots, more areas of Oakland, and more locals telling stories about where they’re from at a street level.
HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

Anchoring the SYIT initiative in a Human Centered Design approach produced a better product than could have been achieved with more traditional, linear and “waterfall” approaches. Hack the Hood began the process in an advantageous position as a community-centric and student-centered organization. While Hack the Hood’s employees had never received formal training in HCD until this project began, their mission, structure and day-to-day operations are all rooted in building empathy for their prospective and current students and alumni, co-creating solutions, and iterating and pivoting with each incoming class to achieve the maximum impact for the community.

There are well over 100 proprietary “design thinking” and HCD processes in use across the world today so assessing the adherence of this project to any one process would be a difficult exercise. Moreover, while each of these have strengths and weaknesses, all of them depend upon a handful of fundamental stages, mindsets and methods that the SYIT project put into action to great effect, specifically:

- **Empathy**
  Through interviews and design sessions, the team gathered personal and powerful perspectives, stories and experiences from the Hack the Hood students and alumni who represent the intended audience from the community. These observations and inputs served as the foundation for all subsequent work on the project.

- **Insights**
  Synthesizing the raw input and research into insights was a foundational element for the project. The insights from the first design session led to the identification of opportunity areas for the video to address.
• **Ideas**
  The team listened to and incorporated the ideas surfaced in design and feedback sessions by Hack the Hood collaborators and also brainstormed and developed creative concepts as a core team. Many of these ideas are pervasive throughout the final video.

• **Prototyping**
  All HCD processes encourage moving quickly towards making ideas real by getting a first version (e.g. “minimum viable product”) in the hands of potential customers as soon as you are ready. The team did just this, hosting a design session to show “rough cut” long form videos to Hack the Hood students and alumni to gather specific feedback on the design, content, and subjects of the video.

• **Testing and Iterating**
  Based on feedback, the team pivoted and created additional versions with incremental changes, gradually iterating to get a final product.

By following a HCD methodology, the final product produced should resonate with our intended audience because the team involved these key stakeholders as co-creators in every step of the process.

**VIDEO**
At a special viewing party at Hack the Hood on November 9, 2018, the final version of the video was released to stakeholders. An official version of the video can be accessed here (include YouTube link when ready). As noted in the previous section, the final video was heavily influenced by the insights from initial group design sessions as well as the direct feedback on the design, content and format surfaced during feedback sessions. While the length of the full video (22 minutes) may make it unlikely to keep all audiences engaged for the entire story, the creation of “shorts” (under 1 minute) from the master video will allow for more digestible segments to reach youth in the Oakland community.
Remembering the goal of SYIT to address the demand side of the diversity in tech issue and help raise awareness and belief among young people in color in the Oakland community, predicting the potential (pre-launch) impact of the video can be informed by quotes from Hack the Hood alumni who attended the event and saw the video, below:

“Seeing young women of color makes me feel it is worth going into the tech field with confidence”

“You can’t be what you can’t see”

“It’s important because I don’t usually see Mexicans in any tech companies”

“Having people of color in the tech industry provides other youth of color with role models that look like them. We can also show that minorities are 100% capable of gold high positions in this world”

“I want to see more people like me”

“It keeps me motivated...I have an ‘if they can do it I can do it!’ mindset. It always gets the job done! It inspires me, keeps me wanting to learn and explore new things, and it relieves me to see that there are people that come from where I come from doing what I want to do. It lets me know it’s not impossible!”

“Having representation of my culture expands knowledge and we learn from one another how to be better people. Showing what my culture is in the tech industry helps to not have stereotypes and allows us to show the REAL us”
"To know that you can be yourself and still achieve your goals without being 'cookie cutter' gives me relief"

"this made me incredibly proud of the people of color who worked for a position in the tech industry, inspiring me to strive for the same"

Because a consistent barrier to pursuing tech careers the team uncovered among Hack the Hood stakeholders was “code switching” (needing to change contexts, language or demeanor based on whom you are speaking with), the team settled on “CTRL-Shift” as a unique expression of what many see as a necessary evil and made it the core theme of the video. In addition to providing perspectives on the CTRL-Shift dynamic, the video delivers a powerful message of diversity. Throughout the production, we are invited into a conversation with people from a variety of races, genders, sexual orientations, and ages and from different economic and family backgrounds. Even the definition of “tech” is challenged, with the addition of entrepreneurs who 3D print jewelry or who self-identify as a “mixed media artist” to the accepted roles of software engineers and coders. Many of the popular design elements like provocative lower-third graphics, close-up and zoom effects, rough cut quality and outtakes and local Oakland b-roll were all worked into the final cut. Moreover, the authenticity of every interviewee anchors the narrative and helps to build belief, create community and engender confidence that careers in tech are not only within the grasp of youth in the community but are desirable pursuits as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the final video produced by Hack the Hood was a resounding success, many insights, ideas and opportunities arose during the course of the project as the team conducted so many of the HCD activities with Hack the Hood alumni and stakeholders. Indeed, the SYIT initiative and video should be looked at as a vital step forward, but clearly a first step in a longer journey. With this in mind, the Hack the Hood team
should consider the following additional enhancements to continue progress and maximize the long-term impact of the initiative:

• **Make More**
  Because technology advances at such a breakneck speed, it will be critical to continue producing content like SYIT – more people, more roles, more experiences – to keep the subject matter fresh, relevant and contemporary.

• **Reformat it**
  While video is powerful and getting as many people as possible to watch the content is a critical success factor, more static content can be repurposed and shared across additional channels (Facebook, Instagram, etc.). Turning key “heroes”, stories and quotes into other digital (memes/images) and print (posters/mailers) formats can extend the reach of the SYIT efforts.

• **Make it a Graduation Pre-Requisite**
  Each of the students that come through Hack the Hood are their own incredible success story. Make them tell it! Each student should produce his or her own short video version of their story. As a blueprint, see the video (insert link here) of an Hack the Hood alumnus and instructor who shared how he got involved with Hack the Hood, where it has taken him, and why he is passionate about technology and its potential to transform lives in Oakland.

• **Solve a Local Problem**
  During our initial focus group, an idea emerged that instead of doing one-off “random” term projects, Hack the Hood students should be required to work on a project that solves a local problem in Oakland. By focusing on local problems to solve, the technology that is produced can be showcased to people in the local community and used as an awareness, branding and recruiting tool for Hack the Hood.

• **Turn Graduates into Promoters and Recruiters**
  All brands have the goal of not just securing and retaining customers but turning them into promoters to help recruit new customers via word of mouth and
trust. Hack the Hood has the opportunity to adopt the same model, tapping into alumni to help spread the word, build belief and recruit new students from the community. This can create a virtuous cycle yielding more stories, more awareness, more belief, and more successes.
CONCLUSION

The SYIT initiative designed and executed by Hack the Hood was a unique, innovative and very successful approach to examining the issue of lack of diversity in technology fields and how this is uniquely expressed in Oakland, identifying an unaddressed aspect of the problem that disproportionately affects members of its local community and designing a solution to have the maximum impact possible. Adopting a human-centered design approach to solving the problem resulted in a more targeted and insightful initiative and end product, and leveraging professionals from the local community made for a more inclusive and effective solution.

More needs to be done, but there is now a foundation in place to build upon. The human-centered approach to this process did more than just provide a blueprint for the team to follow and to guide project activities. It laid bare that when trying to drive change in this community it is imperative that the people who make up the community – the staff, students, alumni and stakeholders of Hack the Hood as well as all the people they represent – have to be at the center of everything that is conceived, created and communicated. Indeed, it is the only way that lasting change will take hold.
ABOUT HACK THE HOOD

Hack the Hood is an award-winning non-profit that introduces low-income youth of color to careers in tech by hiring and training them to build websites for real small businesses in their own communities. During 6-week “Bootcamps,” young people gain valuable hands-on experience, build a portfolio, and learn about opportunities in the tech industry, as well as building critical technical, leadership, entrepreneurship, and life skills with mentorship from staff and tech professionals working in the field.

Hack the Hood is a diverse community of people who are passionate about making sure technology is used as a force for good, not a vehicle for increased income disparity and displacement. We want to support youth of color to harness their creativity and hone their talents, while also contributing to the vitality of their communities.
ABOUT EARI

The Economic Advancement Research Institute (EARI) is a nonprofit research organization focused on issues and challenges related to economic mobility, sustainability and vitality—all critical to restoring America’s competitiveness. Addressing these challenges requires the ability of regional economies to thrive. Connecting regional assets to create a competitive economic environment has to be driven by empirical research and data that informs and transforms systemic policies that are too focused on short-term political ideology. EARI’s approach to nuanced research and policy provides actionable recommendations to overcome short-term political ideology and support a successful regional framework.

EARI delivers policy reform recommendations, new frameworks, and actionable guidance through applied economic research and evaluation that identifies pathways between talent development and workforce needs, and empowers regions to move towards full employment with expanded opportunities for job seekers, entrepreneurs and the business community.