



Building a Hacker Haven:

The Long Game of Growing a Local Hacker Community

Why are we giving this talk?

- To inspire and motivate you to go home and start your own DEF CON group, maybe a nonprofit, maybe an eventual hackerspace/makerspace, and contribute to the community.
- Came back from DEF CON 26 all inspired and motivated to crush the next year. Jeff Moss inspired us at closing ceremonies to come home and start a DEF CON group.





Who We Are

- Allie Zagrodnik – Senior Information Security Analyst – GRC @ Sentry Insurance
- Ryan Zagrodnik – Security Consultant @ Red Siege
- Madison, WI
- Community builders
- Proud pet parents and Packer fans, GO PACK GO!



Join a Local Hackerspace - [Sector67](#)



Why is community involvement important?

- **We need community now more than ever.**
- Isolation and loneliness are becoming the norm.
- More people are living behind screens, and opportunities to learn from one another are disappearing.
- The hacker community has always grown through collaboration, mentorship, and shared curiosity.
- When we build local communities, we give people a place to learn, experiment, ask questions, and grow together.
- And maybe, just maybe, we keep a few people from learning the hard way.



How do I start a DEF CON group?

Old DEF CON Groups Page (<https://forum.defcon.org/node/231250>)

New DEF CON Groups Page (<https://defcon-groups.org/index.html>)

↓

Email the Group Admin

↓

Wait for acceptance

↓

Welcome to the Community! (Welcome DC715! <https://dc715.org/>)



Does it cost money to start a DEF CON group?

- No. But yes, it cost us money.
 - meetup.com
 - Other local group's chats/events
 - Meeting space
 - Equipment for meetups



What if your local DEF CON Group has gone quiet?

- **Communities can be revived! And every community deserves another chance.**
- Connect with the current organizer, if possible.
- Work with the DEF CON Groups team to determine the next steps.
- Inactive groups can often be revived with new leadership.
- Don't let an existing group discourage you, multiple groups can successfully coexist.

Are there rules to running a local group?

- Respect privacy and protect member anonymity.
- Enforce the DEF CON Code of Conduct.
- Keep the community non-political and non-commercial.
- Use accessible meeting spaces whenever possible.
- Clearly identify your group as a local DEF CON chapter.
- Focus on education, collaboration, and community.
- You cannot charge members to attend

Your job isn't just to organize meetings, it's to build a community people want to come back to.

How to raise money

- **Don't be afraid to ask.** Your community wants to support something they believe in.
- **Build early momentum.** Before launching a crowdfunding campaign, line up a core group of committed donors. People are much more likely to contribute to a campaign that's already gaining traction.
- **Choose the right fundraising platform.** We had a much better experience with **Givebutter** than **Classy**.
- **Take advantage of nonprofit tools.** Services like PayPal offer discounted nonprofit donation options.



Support DC608 – Madison's Hacker & InfoSec Community

Help us keep DC608 alive and thriving!



Organized by **DC608 Madison Inc**

Verified

\$184

15% of \$1,200 goal

7 Supporters

DC608 is a nonprofit hacker and information security community based in Madison, WI. We host free monthly meetups to bring together security professionals, students, and enthusiasts to learn, collaborate, and share knowledge.

Why We're Raising Funds

We believe in full transparency. Every dollar donated goes directly back into keeping DC608 running—100% of donations support the community. No one on our board is paid; all work is done by volunteers.

Our Annual Costs:

- Venue Rental: \$55/month (\$660/year)
- Website & Branding: \$144/year
- Domain Renewal: \$15/year
- Meetup.com Hosting: \$180 every 6 months (\$360/year)

Total Annual Cost: ~\$1,179

Donate



\$25 Some nerd made a \$25 donation

24 days ago

Go to WISCON!

Love Comment Share

\$25 Papascruff made a \$25 donation

4 months ago

Love Comment Share

\$13 Cyb3rCh3rry made a \$13 donation

4 months ago

Love Comment Share

\$25 ab made a \$25 donation

5 months ago

Love Comment Share

DC608 loved this

\$50 CPU made a \$50 donation

5 months ago

Building a Board That Lasts

- Recruit people who believe in the mission, not just people who are available.
- Shared values matter more than technical skills.
- Know your state's nonprofit board requirements before incorporating.
- Build governance into your bylaws before you need it.
- Protect the long-term vision of the community you created.
- Hold regular board meetings and document decisions consistently.



How to start a 501(c)(3) nonprofit

- You don't have to be a lawyer.
- Use trusted guides and templates (Nolo guide from local library)
- AI can help explain unfamiliar legal language.
- [File the appropriate IRS Form 1023](#) (or 1023-EZ if eligible).
- Ask for help when you need it.

What we did:

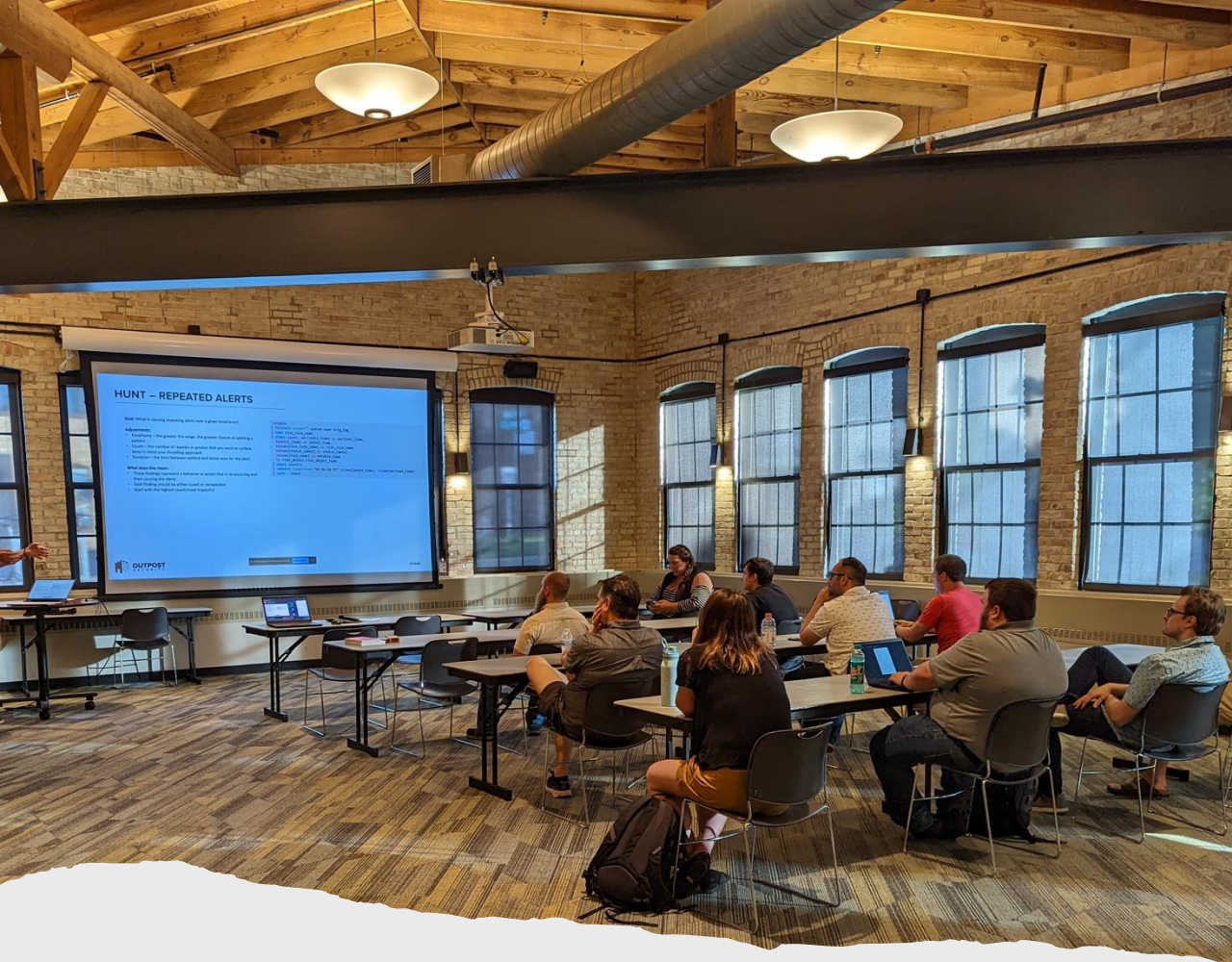
- Used the Nolo guide as our roadmap.
- Leveraged AI to answer questions along the way.
- Filed the paperwork ourselves.
- Saved thousands of dollars.



What bare minimums do I need?

- A way for people to find you (website or social media)
- A place to communicate (Discord or Slack)
- A Code of Conduct
- A place to meet
- Something to learn or do together
- A consistent meeting schedule





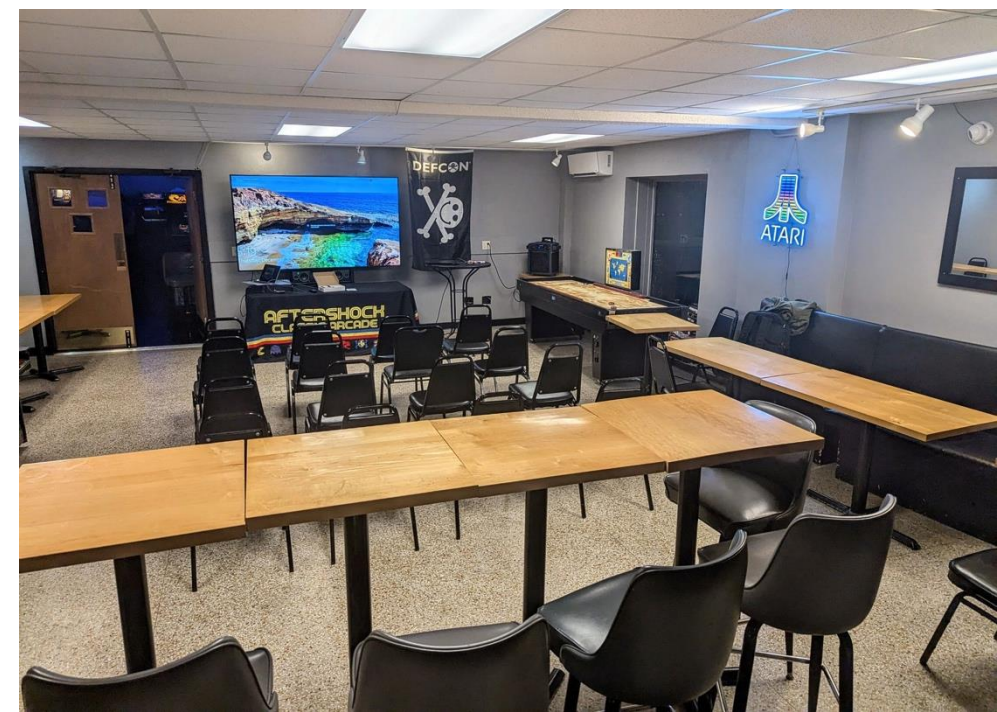
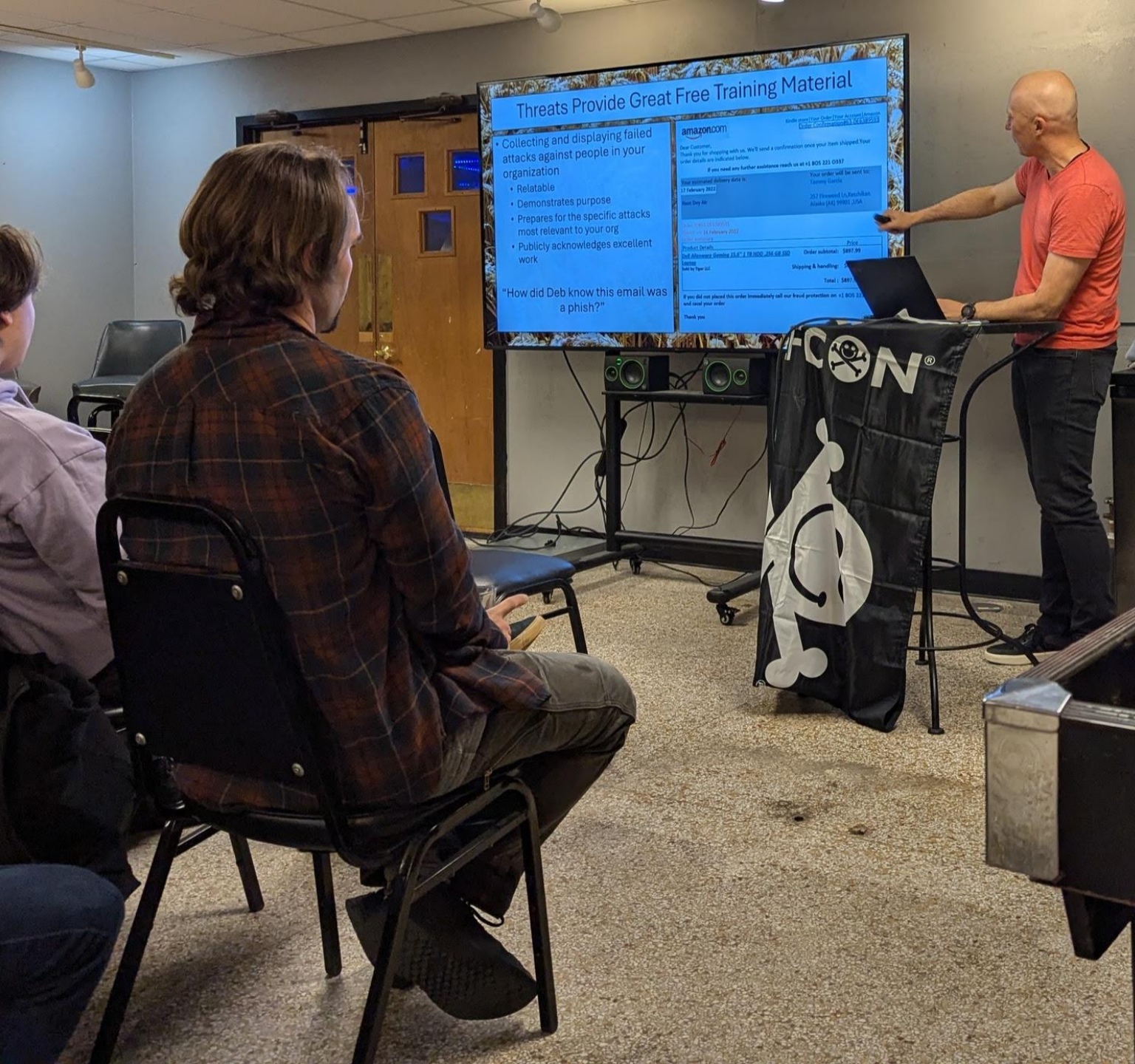
Finding Your Space Takes Time
Attempt 1 – Goodman Community Center



Attempt 2 – Party Room
at Aftershock Classic
Arcade



Attempt 3 – Aftershock's New Party Space



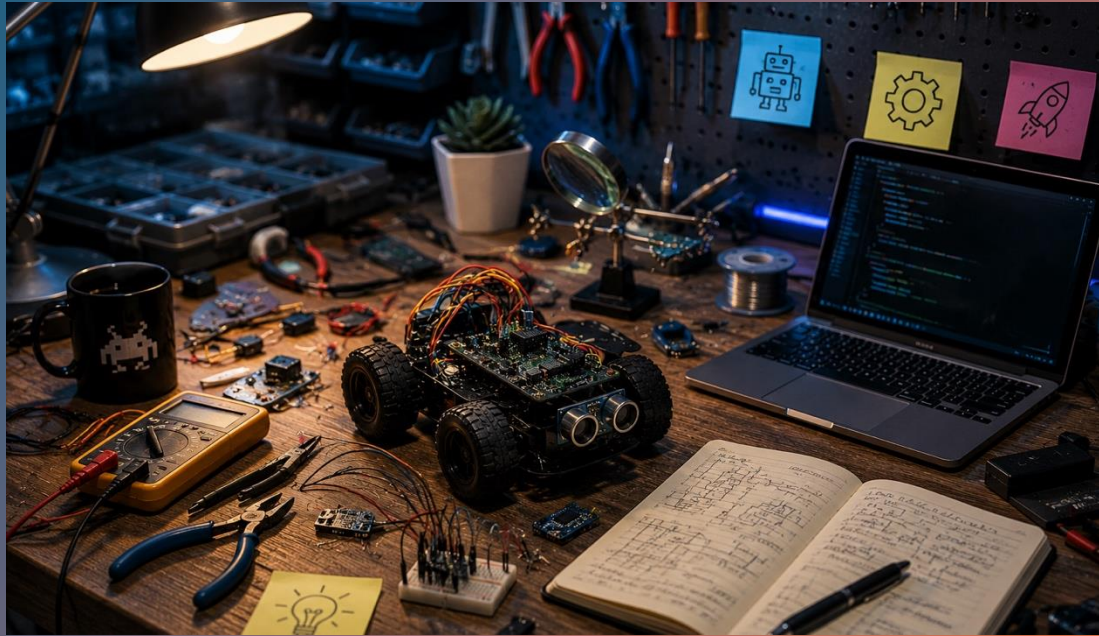
How to secure speakers

- Be ready to give a talk yourself.
- Don't be afraid to cold-message people.
- Use Meetup to email your members and ask for volunteers.
- Lean on your personal and professional network.
- Invite virtual speakers if travel isn't an option.

Remember: your speakers don't have to be famous; they just have to be willing to share something interesting.

- Goal is to create opportunities for people to learn and present
- As your group grows, the recognizable names will begin to follow naturally





No Speaker? No Problem!

- Host a lock picking night.
- Organize a hardware tinkering session.
- Meet up at a local brewery or coffee shop.
- Solve a Hack The Box challenge together.
- Host a cybersecurity-themed game night.
- Work through a blue team lab as a group.



People come back because of the community, not because every month has a keynote speaker.

Every Community Has Shenanigans

- Expect weird things to happen.
- Have moderators ready.
- Follow your Code of Conduct consistently.
- Listen before reacting.
- Automate what you can.
- Don't give everyone screen sharing permissions. Ever.



When the Code of Conduct Violation Becomes Real

- A board shares responsibility for difficult decisions. If you don't have a board, lean on those you are building the community with
- Choose your words carefully, assume every message could become public.
- Have conversations in person when it's safe and appropriate.
- Apply your Code of Conduct consistently, not selectively.
- Difficult conversations are part of protecting your community.

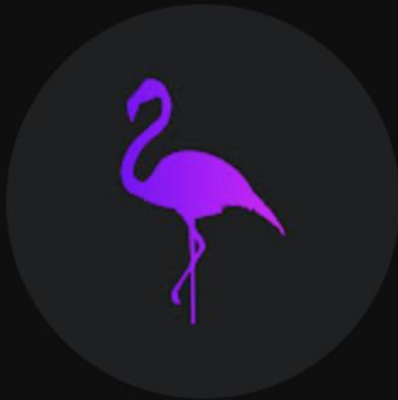
**Your job isn't to make everyone happy.
Your job is to make your community feel
safe, welcome, and treated fairly.**



Shorts

Subscriptions

You



DC608

@DC608Madison • 174 subscribers • 28 videos

DC608's monthly meetup presentations. ...more

 Subscribed 

Home

Videos

Live



Latest

Popular

Oldest



Garmin, 2020

Steps

23 views • 8 months ago



HACKING 101

1:09:59

239 views • 1 year ago

This Community Has a Few Stories...

- The warnings started rolling in and people came with receipts
- Double booked and blissfully unaware
- Arcades are very *Mr. Robot*... until you're trying to give a presentation.
- Know Their Name *and* Their Handle
- Livestreams: Now featuring Trolls



Your Community Matters

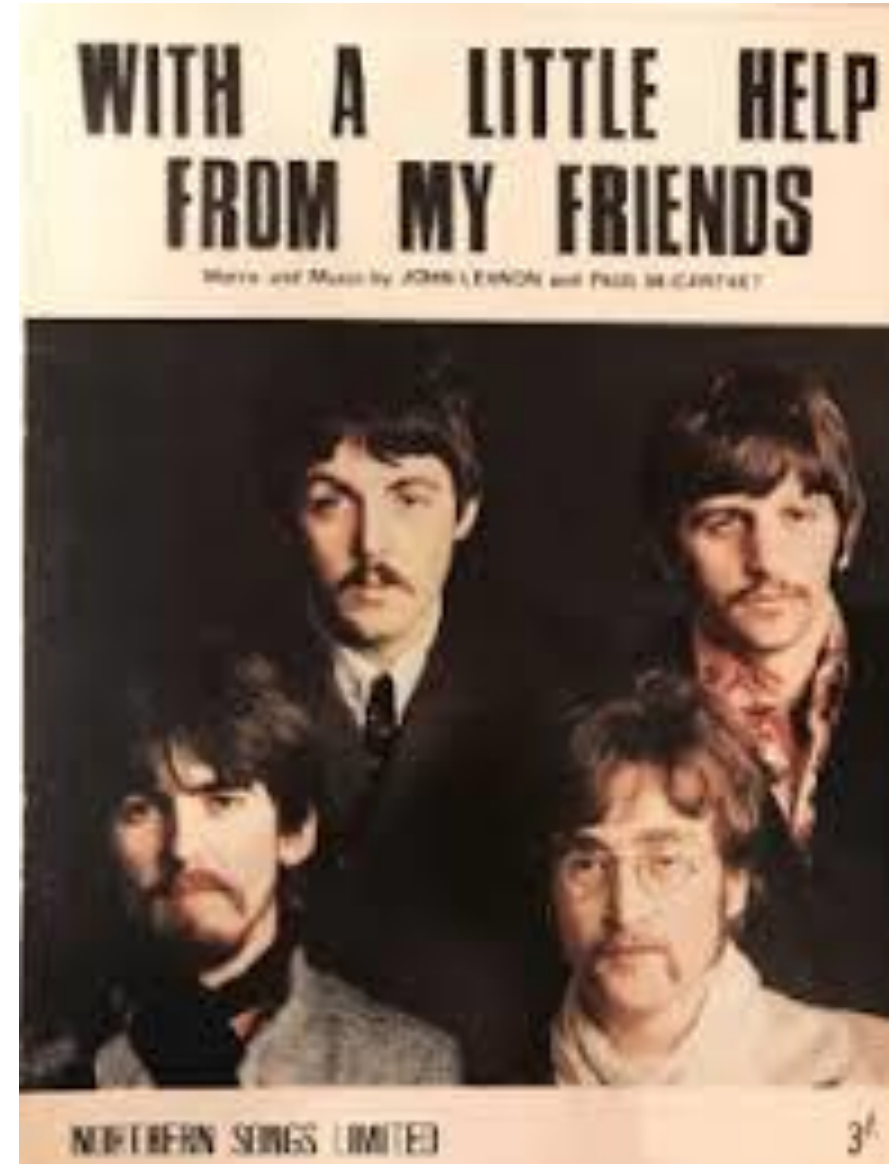
- Someone is looking for a place where they belong.
- Someone is waiting for permission to get involved.
- Someone will find lifelong friends because your meetup exists.
- Community isn't just about cybersecurity, it's about people.
- We need each other now more than ever.
- Community makes us better hackers and better people.
- We're more digitally connected than ever, yet many people have never felt more alone.
- One meetup can change someone's career, confidence, or life.
- Build the community you wish existed.



Wisconsin Information Security Conference (WISCON)

Success Requires a Little Help From Your Friends (Old & New)

- Chris Meyer – Sector67 (Waterppk)
- Trent Miller (AzureAD)
- Will McCardell (Aleph)
- Brayden Houston (8bit)
- Chris Hanson (Icarus)
- Echo
- Danny Hetzel (DannyDanHammer)
- Brad Wagner (Karmavore)
- Joe Hopper (brkr19)
- Steve Schindler (CPUvirus)
- Rebecca Jo Jones



Thank you!

- [linkedin.com/in/allisonzagrodnik/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/allisonzagrodnik/) —→ Socialenglady
- [linkedin.com/in/ryanzagrodnik/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ryanzagrodnik/) —→ TheL0singEdge

Find Us Online

www.startadefcongroup.com

www.dc608.org

www.wiscon.io

