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2418 W Bloomingdale Apt
102 Chicago, IL 60647
www.vgagallery.com



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Video Game Art Reader

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Special Edition: Game Arts Curators Kit

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VGA Reader Mission The *VGA Reader* is a peer-reviewed journal for video game audiences and video game practitioners interested in the history, theory, and criticism of video games, explored through the lens of art history and visual culture. Its primary aim is to facilitate conversation and exploration of video game art, documenting and disseminating discourse about the far-reaching influence of video games on history, society, and culture.

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About

The Game Arts Curators Kit—GACK—was conceived during the first meeting of GAIA (Game Arts International Assembly) in November 2019, in Buenos Aires, Argentina. With the collaboration of various experts in the field, we created a resource for game exhibition organization, design, and curation (Figure 1).

The document and its ongoing wiki will serve as a statement of purpose and consultation for curators, producers, and institutions involved in video game curation and event organization. This document will also serve as a guidebook and networking tool for those who want to get involved in the field of video game exhibition and event coordination.

The GACK WIKI remains live at: <https://gameartsinternational.network/gameartscuratorskit/>.

GAIA was founded in 2019 by Jim Munroe and María Luján Oulton with the intention of uniting the game arts community. The event is meant for producers, game arts curators, and community builders with the aim to foster communication, exchange knowledge, and create an international network. GAIA is currently produced by Jim Munroe, Marie Claire LeBlanc Flanagan, and María Luján Oulton.



Figure 1: The first GAIA meeting, Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 2019. Photo credit: Chaz Evans.

Goals

Chaz Evans

There are as many goals in organizing public video game events and exhibitions as in making video games. Likewise, there are a variety of purposes represented in this document; there is no singular, monolithic goal that this document aims to achieve. However, the goals shared here harmonize to provide inclusive methods and strategies for sharing video game art with diverse audiences.

Video games and related participatory media involve various practices yet often engage audiences through narrow distribution channels. The common perception is that video games are fundamentally commercial products, played domestically—often alone—and function in isolation. However, this view represents only one kind of video game and only one way that video games meet their audiences. Games are a ubiquitous and maturing form of creative media offering diverse contemporary cultural experiences and imagined futures. Many ambitious and experimental game forms don't fit into the digital download or retail distribution channels that support so-called traditional video games. Instead, these games are supported by a new global movement in video game curation.



Figure 2: Chicago New Media 1973–1992 exhibition, Gallery 400, Chicago, IL, November 1–December 15, 2018. Photo credit: Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Practitioners of this movement aim to gain recognition for games underrepresented by established cultural venues. Others use gameplay to provide visibility for cultural and social groups marginalized by these same cultural institutions. Some seek to provide audiences with methods of engaging critically with games as dynamic, interactive systems. Some practitioners celebrate video game subcultures in ways only possible by establishing independent venues. Others want to recognize, expand, and celebrate gaming skills and expertise. Practitioners coordinate events like festivals, parties, meetups, and jams. They establish organizations like galleries, collectives, and non-profits. Methods of sharing video games as critical cultural phenomena continue to evolve and expand.

The collective authorship of this document represents the collaboration of practitioners directly involved in this movement. In comparing our experiences during the Game Art International Assembly (GAIA) Symposia held in 2019 and 2021, we found that similar models supporting the development and exhibition of video games within local and regional communities have organically developed in different parts of the world. The events, organizations, and other support structures created by the individuals in this group realized their participation in an international game art network. Though it's still in a nascent stage, we recognize that

the support of such a network provides an infrastructure critical in developing and maturing creative media.

This toolkit is an attempt to document at least a portion of the collective experience of this group to share it broadly with other video game curators and organizers or those who may consider joining our international network. Though our individual missions may vary, our collective goal is to strengthen and broaden this global support network for current and future members. While one group has defined the initial goals of organizing games in public, these goals will shift and evolve after you, the reader, define your own.

Accessibility

Jenna Caravello

Accessibility traditionally refers to making accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Aside from differences in physical ability, accessibility also concerns age inclusiveness and language accommodations. Good practices in planning, curation, and design can make an event or exhibition welcoming and accessible to all.

Online access does not necessarily constitute accessibility. Gamified social platforms, streaming festivals, and open-world galleries that feel like MMOs (Massively Multiplayer Online games) sprang up to fill the social void felt keenly during the global pandemic. Virtual experiences like these have made art more accessible in some ways but less so in others. Remote, asynchronous programming may make some events and venues more approachable, but many custom applications need to include or support basic assistive technology, like text-to-speech features. (See: **Online**.)

Games designed for physical venues and gamified virtual experiences often have easily addressable accessibility challenges, many of which could be circumvented in the planning stages. Whenever possible, practice *universal design*; its main principle dictates that even in the earliest planning stages, an event is accessible to all.

This principle means that accommodations are never added later as an afterthought but are instead considered from the event's conception.

Consider implementing some of these essential assistive settings in games and interface design to make gamified virtual platforms more accessible:

TEXT

Closed Captioning is especially useful if it includes descriptive text in Plain Language. Plain Language orders information logically using common words with important details first. Game designers and virtual exhibition developers can implement customizable and resizable fonts/text colors, add text-to-speech functionality, provide real-time translation, and implement Alt-tags.¹

COLOR

How much does your game or event rely on color distinction? For people with colorblindness, a setting that alters red and green tints can be critical for accessibility. Design physical signs at events or UI and assets in games in a way that is legible to people who see color differently.

MOBILITY AND PHYSICAL INTERACTION

When planning offline events, consider how people access spaces and featured projects. According to the ADA, wheelchair ramps must have a 1:12 slope ratio and a 5×5 flat area at the top and bottom of the ramp. Wide pathways and allocated spaces to sit will also be necessary for an accessible event. It is good practice to inform your attendees of these options before the opening of your event.

Game developers can explore numerous methods for obtaining input, like voice control, eye movement, blinking, touch, and more. Some gamers experience tremors or reduced mobility, making controllers and keyboards more challenging. ("Button mashing" is not comfortable for many people.) To help with this, PC and mobile games can include modes with larger hitboxes and reprogrammable controller buttons. In AbleGamer's 2012 accessibility guide, *Includification*, Steve Spohn—author, advocate, and COO of AbleGamers Charity—wrote, "Assistive technology is great, but its

limitation is that the more buttons you program, the more complicated they are to use.”²

An accessible game doesn’t need many built-in options, and it should be playable with the fewest control options or, better yet, only a few customizable controls. For example, some people are physically unable to “button mash.” If this mechanic is the minimum requirement to play a game, an accessible version of the game could involve programming one button press to register ten presses. In addition, for people with limited mobility, games must include a setting that prevents the game from ending if motion controls are not used with the required dexterity. Otherwise, a setting that reroutes motion controls to a button-based controller is helpful.

VIRTUAL REALITY (VR), IMMERSIVE PLATFORMS, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Unfortunately, VR is generally inaccessible for many reasons. Headsets present physical and logistical problems in exhibition spaces. Some people may be uncomfortable standing for long periods or performing repetitive tasks. Others find that the added emotional pressure that others may be queued and waiting for a turn hinders meaningful play time. In her 2020 Medium article “The Oculus Go Wasn’t Designed for Black Hair,” Arwa Michelle Mboya describes her 220-participant study delving into the problematic logistics of wearing Oculus straps (a design that has since carried over to the newer Oculus Quest II) over black hair.³

Despite the ever-shrinking cost of new Oculus models, the price of a headset is still prohibitive for anyone interested in casually dropping in on your virtual exhibition in VR. Meanwhile, VR games for Rift or tethered Vive models require a processing-heavy gaming machine. In addition, VR causes vertigo and dizziness in many participants, and headsets may not accommodate all types of eyewear. Also, it may be a while before anyone feels comfortable sharing forehead sweat with a stranger.

As much as I love VR, I believe browser-based 360 videos, Augmented Reality (AR), and “3DoF” VR for cheap Cardboard-style headsets deserve support. Consider programming, making, or building virtual platforms for personal mobile devices. Browser-based collections like Radiance and with.in, or curated mobile VR applications like the 2017 New Museum x Rhizome project Artists’ VR, are on the right track in implementing technology that most people have in their pockets.

NOTES

1. Harvard Plain Language resource: <https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/use-plain-language>.
2. Able Gamers, *Includification: A Practical Guide to Game Accessibility*, 2012, <https://accessible.games/includification/>.
3. Arwa Michelle Mboya, "The Oculus Go Wasn't Designed for Black Hair," MIT Media Lab, www.media.mit.edu/articles/the-oculus-go-wasn-t-designed-for-black-hair/.

Artworks

Isabelle Arvers

Using virtual spaces and altering perception as an artistic strategy, video games as artworks allow a distanced critique of a simulated world. They tend to erase the boundaries between reality and fiction and redefine the transgressive power of the game. In the purest hacking tradition, game artworks are a *detournement*, or a diversion, of mass media to become a means of expression, political or artistic.

As we live in an “everything technological” world, artists divert technologies to critique the everyday. This antagonistic appropriation is a way of refusing to give in to the learned helplessness that characterizes a world overflowing with information and pervaded by digital images. Michael Stora, a psychoanalyst who uses games in therapy, says, “Playing time is a pleasure time, a moment where we can manipulate the image as it has manipulated us before.”¹ The idea is that interactive artworks and gameplay may help audiences identify and critique the commercial and political forces that obscure the borders between virtual and real, blur fiction and reality, and threaten individual liberties and privacy.

While hackers often act as activists, many game detournements/mods/hacks are not overtly political but rather poetic, aesthetic, or



Figure 3: Chicago New Media 1973–1992 exhibition, Gallery 400, Chicago IL, November 1–December 15, 2018. Photo credit: Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago.

contemplative. Artists and game makers provide an alternative to the game development industry by using familiar game aesthetics and gameplay mechanics to upend audience expectations regarding the technology that permeates everyday life.

TYPES OF ARTWORKS IN A GAME ART EXHIBIT

- Video games in playable or video installations, virtual reality, websites, cinema, sound-based, or networked performances.
- Films created with video games, such as *Machinima*.
- Interactive works critiquing gamification.
- Artworks questioning the notion of play space.
- Collective performances that transform the space into a playground (e.g., the city as a playground to question social, cultural, environmental, and political issues).
- Playful collective experiences *detourning* urban architecture.
- Workshops around gaming with artists, filmmakers, and musicians.
- Hacking/cracking game cartridges or consoles to create glitches or *chiptunes* music.

TYPES/GENRES OF GAMES IN ART EXHIBITS

- Radical games, political games, alternative games, games with a solid aesthetic dimension, games with original or otherwise remarkable gameplay, and games where the production conditions are specific to the exhibition (such as games produced in the framework of workshops or festivals).
- Games designed for an exhibition specifically, or a group of games that respond to one another, creating a coherent through-line within the exhibition; this could be through narrative, sub-themes, etc.
- Games that explore the power of simulation and representation, collaborative networks in games, the transformation of urban and informational space into a playground; games that explore dichotomies, such as individuals versus networks, reality and fiction, or autonomy and control.
- Games that exploit the transgressive power of gameplay and game methods.
- In some exhibitions, any type of game—whether played on a computer, through video, streamed online, presented on a tabletop, or staged as a performance—can feature explicit critical appropriation of gameplay. The exhibition may provide insights into their creation (e.g., analysis of 2D/3D software, design methods, gameplay conception sketches, or storyboards).
- Games that subvert or exploit notions of interactivity/playability (e.g., controller hacks/alterations, collaborative gaming, inventive obstacles, etc.). The idea is to transform a game into a medium that will provide a distanced reading of a subject.

SOME NOTIONS TO EXPLORE IN A GAMING EXHIBITION

- Games as structure (system, rules, complexity)
- Games as simulacra (aesthetic, immersion, simulation)
- Games as narration (scenario, writing, commitment)
- Games as exchange (interaction, networks, communities)

NOTE

1. Michael Stora, “*L’addiction aux jeux vidéo ou comment tenir le monde dans son poing fermé* [Addiction to video games or how to hold the world in one’s closed fist],” *Soins Psychiatr.* 262 (May–Jun, 2009): 22–5.

Formats

Emilie Reed

The format of video game curation can be highly varied, from one-night events, festivals, and temporary exhibitions, to permanent museum collections and archives. Determining the scope of your chosen format and any specific issues it may present is an important step in planning any activity. Generally, formats are informed by what type of work you are curating, the venue in which you are presenting it, your target audience, and the duration of the activity.

Often a project may start with a specific format in mind; for example, you may already have an event, institution, or venue booked. In other cases, you may have a limited budget or limited time. You may have a set of pre-selected video games you need to include. These factors determine best practices regarding format decisions, adjustments, or compromises.

This section lists example formats for game curation events, including issues and related questions important in deciding what format fits your activity best. Also included are summaries of past activities highlighting the main considerations and problems curators have encountered when working in various formats.

EXAMPLES OF FORMATS

- *Game Are for Everyone* nights (https://emreed.net/ANATOMY_GAFE.html) are an example of one-night events.
- The Biome Gallery (<http://biome-gallery.glitch.me/>) is an example of an online gallery space that presents special exhibitions and work by Biome Collective members.
- *Now Play This* (<https://nowplaythis.net/>) is a short-term festival held in a gallery and online.
- *The Blank Arcade* (https://emreed.net/Blank_Arcade2016.html) is a series of short-term exhibitions held in conference and gallery spaces.
- David Wolinsky's *Don't Die* (<https://nodontdie.com/>) series is an ongoing archive of interviews with people involved in gaming culture.
- The Strong Museum (<https://www.museumofplay.org/>) is a permanent museum and collection of video games, toys, and play-related artifacts.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING FORMATS

- **Budget:** How long can you sustain the activity, and what equipment costs and other expenses (publications, artist fees, programming, venue staff, etc.) can you afford?
- **Venue:** Do you already have access to a particular space for the activity? For how long? How much will it cost to rent a space that suits your needs?
- **Time:** What length of time suits your goals best (one-off, temporary, ongoing)? Are you scheduling for a period that overlaps with other similar activities in your area, or are there other challenges to participation? Who will be responsible for promoting the activity within its active period, documenting it, and maintaining that documentation? Is there a plan to pass off these responsibilities in case of a change?
- **Durability:** If there are components visitors need to touch or use, will they be durable or periodically replaced? Have you incorporated spares into your budget? Is there a budget for constructing more durable interfaces? Do you have a contingency plan for presenting broken or otherwise unusable work?
- **Safety:** What are the potential safety and accessibility risks with the venue and activity? (Low light, flashing light, noise level, stairs, uneven footing, alcohol available, motion controls or VR headsets in close quarters, etc.) Can these risks be mitigated?

throughout the activity, and are alternatives available for accessibility challenges?

- **Programming:** Are talk series, parties, tours, or other programming happening alongside your activity? How do they fit with the curatorial framing, and where do they occur? Should you limit who can come along or sell tickets to ensure the venue is not overcrowded?
- **Interpretation:** What is the curatorial framing of your activity? What are your audience's expectations and the level of familiarity that will inform the framing? How will artist information, label text, and instructions be presented in the space? Are there local or institutional regulations regarding wall text? Will you offer multiple versions of labels (see: **Accessibility**) to increase access?
- **Participants:** Do your participants need to be present for setup/servicing/facilitating/documenting the work? Will you pay for them to be present, and how? If there is no budget or ability for them to be present, how do you make this a valuable opportunity for them and ensure the installation meets their standards?
- **Documentation:** What information will you maintain about this activity, and how will it be saved (and backed up) in physical and digital formats? How public will this information be (fully public, available to researchers, etc.), and how will it be accessed? Is there any way to make this information more accessible? How do you hope people remember this activity, and what do you hope they learn from it?

EXAMPLES FROM EXPERIENCE

Co-curating the 2016 edition of *The Blank Arcade* involved working with a small new media gallery space to curate a selection of works that would be sustainable over three months with their usual team of one or two invigilators. Installation of the works we selected from an open call had to remain within our exhibition budget, which also had to cover a small publication, gallery interpretation, an opening event, and a talk series. Our budget also necessitated that these works function with our existing equipment. While the gallery space was accessible and well lit, we trained invigilators to assist or demonstrate works for visitors who would have trouble playing any of the included works. A piece with moving robotic parts proved challenging to keep working throughout the exhibition. Fortunately, the artist was local and could help troubleshoot the work when issues arose. We installed professionally printed

label texts with artist information and descriptions of how to use the games on display. The curator documented the exhibition setup and created an installation diagram before the opening. We hired a photographer to document events and recorded survey responses from visitors about their experiences. The publication featured interpretive texts for each featured game and an essay from both curators. The publication was freely available in the gallery, and digital copies were hosted on each curator's website.

Working with the production studio We Throw Switches on *Games Are for Everyone Nights V* and *VI*, I curated highly experimental and ephemeral first-person horror games. Because the event was only a few hours long, durability was not a significant concern, and visitors were encouraged to immerse themselves in the game environment. Though we funded the event through ticket sales, the facilities—and the sale of alcohol—necessitated certain audience limitations. The venue, a historical building then used for concerts and parties, presented unique curation challenges: dim lighting and uneven floors meant special care had to be taken to maintain a safe environment for visitors. We reduced and managed trip hazards, left enough of the floor clear for crowds, and offered sufficient seating to encourage engagement with longer games. We provided information on the artworks and curatorial framing by installing illuminated signs provided by We Throw Switches and texts provided by the artists and curators. These “feelies,” or props, enhanced the game environment. We documented the event by taking photographs and drawing diagrams of the space and supplemented these with visitor observation and note-taking.

Working with Now Play This, we created a zine library at their annual festival. We worked with zine distributors, online shops, and creators to gather curated publications related to the festival's themes by the exhibition date. I worked with the director to assemble functionally appropriate furniture, like bookshelves, sofas, chairs, and crafting tables for the zine area. We also installed a photocopier and craft supplies that had to be replenished throughout the activity. Clear labeling and signage separated reading and constructing zine areas. We developed a system to record lost or damaged publications. We maintained a schedule to ensure the site was always supervised during the festival to minimize lost or damaged publications and to facilitate contributions to the festival zine. We documented activities through photographs and a spreadsheet with the included zines. A zine made in the library space throughout the festival documented the festival's events program and visitor responses. The zines from the library are now part of a traveling collection that we made available for other events.

Selection

Ron M. Wilde

Unless you're presenting a comprehensive history, you will have to make choices about what goes into your exhibition. Those decisions can be tough, but understanding how and why you've chosen work will strengthen the final selection. Choosing works for exhibition is equal parts what to include and what not to; a purposeful omission can say more than an obvious inclusion.

This section will consider the following core questions:

- What is the purpose of your selection?
- Who is it for?
- What are your constraints?
- What process(es) should you use?

PURPOSE AND MEANING

A clear, concise statement for what you wish to convey will help you address questions throughout the process. Your purpose should be clear enough to keep you on track, but it should remain broad enough to allow for new interpretations and inspiration. A theme as general as "the history of games" doesn't provide

reasons to include one work over another. If you were to pick the most significant games throughout history, are you choosing based on cultural impact? Commercial success? Critical reception? Player base? Innovation?

Consider what you want an audience to learn and the feeling you want them to come away with. Some example mission statements are:

- Ludicious (Zürich): “puts the spotlight on new games with a unique voice.”
- Design / Play / Disrupt (London): “What does it take to design a videogame in the 21st century?”
- A MAZE. (Berlin): “representing the current experimental and artistic movement of thoughtful and reflected playful content in games, virtual reality, and playful media.”

Ensure you define your theme or mission internally; establish what you consider to be factual and what can be open to interpretation. The clearer you can be as a team in sharing a common vision, the easier it will be to select items to represent that vision.

AUDIENCE

Considering who you’re selecting for and presenting to is an important step. Defining an audience will help you determine your communication strategy and the knowledge level of your audience. The general public has a different understanding and expectation from an exhibition than a hardcore gamer, and again from a seasoned developer.

Try to put yourself in the shoes of who you’re curating for; consider how you can satisfy and subvert their expectations. Nothing can stop you from having multiple audiences in mind and attempting to offer something for everyone, but recognize that you may need to compromise to be inclusive (see: **Audience**).

CONSTRAINTS AND BIAS

Knowing your limitations is good to note early, but return to your limits and re-examine them often.

Before you start, make sure to write a set of guidelines that define your scope. Consider some of the following questions:

- How many titles can you include?
- What platforms can you display games on?

- Do you have the space for VR?
- Does a game need to be playable to be included?
- Can you afford custom installations?
- Do the developers need to be physically present?

None of these need to be definitive reasons for excluding titles, but be aware that you'll need to find a solution for them that helps to guide your thinking.

Consider your and your team's knowledge and biases while selecting work. Thorough research is critical, or else you can fall into the trap of presenting history from the perspective of the loudest voice in the room. Is a game really the "first gay representation in games," or is it actually "the first openly and on-screen gay representation in a AAA game that is commercially successful in the West"? Both are significant, but the distinction is important.

If in doubt, ask for opinions from agreed-upon, trusted sources outside of their jury, and give feedback on your selection to give a more accurate and well-rounded selection.

SELECTION PROCESS

Hopefully, with all of the above considered, the hardest part of the process is already behind you. Now comes the part where you actually choose what games you want in your exhibition or festival.

There are three main ways of selecting pieces to exhibit: research with individual choice, competition, and commissions. A "call for projects" sits somewhere between the latter two. An exhibition can use various techniques to complement its final selection, but the method used for a given piece should be clear in its presentation.

RESEARCH

The techniques you need for research will vary enormously based on what you're looking for and are too numerous to list here. If you're looking for immutable information such as sales and revenue, there are lists for different countries. More niche topics will be better serviced by interviewing known developers to find their influences and recommendations for places to look.

For each piece you shortlist, ask yourself, "What am I saying with this inclusion?" and "Is there something else that could say the same thing better?"

COMPETITION

More commonly used by festivals, a competition is suited to formats that focus on contemporary inclusions. A competition format requires less research from the curator but requires outreach, marketing, and prizes. Be aware of the work that a submission asks of a developer, and address what their expectations in return may be.

A competition should be as fair and transparent as possible in its process and judging. Nominees are always chosen at the discretion of the organizing team, but unclear practices will foster confusion within communities.

An example process used by the 2019 edition of Ludicious was:

1. Submission portal: Free entry via a Google form asking developers to submit media or link to a press kit and answer questions about how their game matches the competition's specific criteria. The prizes are communicated clearly.
2. Round 0: The Competition Manager removes invalid entries violating submission rules.
3. Round 1: The team watches a trailer or gameplay video from every submission, with a majority vote allowing a game to progress. Each team member is allowed a certain number of "automatic passes" they can assign to games they want to pass to the next round. There are no limits to the number of games passing this point.
4. Round 2: A selection committee of industry professionals plays 10–20 games each, rating each one against criteria set by the Competition Manager.
5. Round 3: The scores are tallied, adjusted for weighting, and a shortlist of double the number of potential nominees is created. The festival team and a smaller number of industry professionals who were not involved in Round 2 play the games together and narrow the list down to the nominees.
6. Round 4: The main jury receives the games in advance and has the opportunity to play the game at the festival and speak to the developers. They convene and choose a winner through discussion.

Be aware that over several years, a competition can become stale in its selection choices if steps are not taken to freshen up the judging criteria and committee. Be aware that the nominees in a given year will encourage those with similar games to apply and discourage those who feel they don't match the same criteria.

COMMISSIONING

If the curator thinks that a crucial topic does not yet exist in games, it is possible to commission the creation of a piece. While your exhibition will have a potentially unique work representing this vision, you must weigh the considerable cost and time implications commissions demand.

Some points to consider are:

- How will the artist be chosen, and what is the brief?
- What funding is available?
- What operational assistance is available/needed?
- How involved is the curator in the creative process?
- Are there conditions attached to the deliverables?

Themes

Clare Brennan

Storytelling is powerful. We learn, connect with others, and imagine new futures through stories. Crafting narratives allows us to explore identities beyond our own and make sense of the world from different perspectives. An exhibition theme is a narrative thread through which audiences connect meaningfully with content. A thematic narrative is an effective anchor and motivator, bringing focus and cohesion to the curatorial process and communicating clear intentions to an audience.

At the outset of any curatorial endeavor, we may ask, “What is the story that I/we would like to tell?” The answer to this question may come from many places: no right answer or specific hierarchy is involved in this process. Each curatorial project is beautifully unique. The following narrative-defining factors are proposed here for your benefit, to be considered or disregarded depending on your curatorial vision.



Figure 4: System Link: Video Game as Memoir, VGA Gallery, Chicago, IL, January 24–April 25, 2020. Photo credit: VGA Gallery.

VOICE

First, we address the central, soul-searching question: who are you, and what do you care about? You wouldn't write a book or direct a play about a subject you aren't invested in; likewise, your exhibition narrative necessarily comes from a place of personal or collective importance. How you express this narrative is your *voice*. While the narrative of a video games exhibition may explore aesthetics, mechanics, or design processes, your voice provides a nuanced address method; your voice may subtly expose critical and aesthetic reasons for alternative modes of play or unique interaction between players. Your voice may lean upon game nostalgia or wonder at fantastic hardware innovation. You may focus on characters, history, social commentary, politics, or fantasy elements. Your narrative may involve a blend of these subjects or something very specific. The point is that it is helpful to roughly define the thematic story before selecting the works that will contribute to the overall voice of the exhibition.

CONTEXT

Context includes everything from the physical space to how audiences approach collective or individual works.

These are some issues to consider:

WHERE IS THE EXHIBITION HAPPENING?

Whether you procure a traditional exhibition space—like a museum or gallery—or adapt a non-traditional exhibition setting—a bar, an empty storage unit, or an elementary school classroom—the physical environment of your event presents practical limitations and thematically impacts what you choose to show. Logistical considerations, such as physical layout, power availability, wi-fi, lighting, etc., are important in any exhibition, but the location will also profoundly impact thematic choices and narrative construction within an exhibition.

WHO IS IT FOR?

Beyond the considerations of who the audience might be (see: **Audience**), you may have to consider who else might be invested in the exhibition's narrative, personally, professionally, or even financially. These stakeholders may come with expectations or requirements, so it is essential to consider how much weight, if any, you need to place on these concerns when considering your theme. Partners may have data or evidence they need to evaluate as a core part of the agreement, so weigh this carefully when funding opportunities arise. These constraints or directives may fundamentally alter the theme of your exhibition.

WHEN IS IT HAPPENING?

Think of the space as it unfolds in time. What are the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of today? What are the technological or industrial developments within the field, and what constitutes the significant practice-led innovations from makers now? This complex landscape of time-based and time-sensitive circumstances demands thoughtful deliberation as it impacts the exhibition's story, tone, and perspective. Is the intent of your exhibition to take a particular sociocultural position or to present games as artifacts within a specific historical moment? How does this impact your overall exhibition narrative?

In addition, consider the particular situation of the exhibition. Is it part of a festival? Is there a broader program to consider? Is it a long-form exhibition, a one-night play party, or something in between? What impact do these time-based factors have on narrative construction?

VISION AND SCOPE

Write a curatorial statement early in this process that clearly states your vision for the exhibition. This may evolve as the ideas for the show develop, but this guide will help you maintain a throughline for visitors as you build the exhibition.

Through the lens of your curatorial statement, you will research and choose work that tells your narrative. As you choose these works, ask yourself: in a physical sense, how do the experiences of these works flow together? How does each piece talk to the others; does it form an agreement or create a dialogue? What kind of journey do you want visitors to experience?

Regarding scope, you may concentrate on a deep dive into one gaming aspect or sample from a selection of many. You may choose to make the path linear or non-linear. Consider the impact of these variables on the experience of your theme.

Consider the need for diverse perspectives, modes of interaction, and interpretative guides (written, audio, video, etc.). These elements can significantly enhance and enrich the show's narrative for audiences.

EXAMPLE

The Blank Arcade 2016 was a gallery installation selected from an international submissions pool. Submissions were narrowed down based on their quality and the curators' interest. Eight works were selected based on their general aesthetic and thematic cohesion, unique graphical styles, and sensory experiences. Then, an introductory text was prepared and printed to appear at the entrance of the exhibition:

Now in its third year, The Blank Arcade is an annual exhibition which highlights videogames, toys, and other artistic interventions and research exploring the blanks in mainstream perceptions of gaming and play. The selections for this year come from an impressive pool of international submissions, and include interactive sculpture and table games alongside digital games and other software works. These works subvert ideas that have become taken for granted in mainstream software development, challenging aesthetics, mechanics, and play styles we have become accustomed to. Primarily, the games in this year's exhibition address play's interaction with and effect on the player's senses, whether it be the scientifically defined five senses, our sense of space around us, or our sense of place and identity. From using textiles, sculpture and cut

paper as direct sources for technologically-engaged work, to navigating themes of personal experience, emergent play, community, humour and awkwardness, these works present a broad and ambitious scope of playful interaction. In presenting these works we hope to highlight the importance of often-overlooked approaches, and inspire broader practices in digital gaming and beyond.

Audience

Shalev Moran

The easiest way to define your intended audience is to ask: *who is this event for?* Many curators define the identity of exhibitions and events with specific audiences in mind; audience specificity provides the central mission for conferences for local game developers and events for fans of one particular game or game company. Even when audience consideration does not constitute the defining traits of a cultural event, defining the intended participants for an event is a crucial step in the planning process.

Different audiences come with different expectations and affordances. Below are some audiences specific to game curation:

PROFESSIONALS

Professionals are not only those who make games for a living; professionals may work in many game-related industries and be interested in educational workshops, skill-building events, and networking opportunities.

Professionals can be divided into *indies* (independent game developers and funders) and *entrepreneurs* seeking business opportunities. Other professionals are *industry workers*, many of whom

have vested interests in subjects such as worker rights issues in the game industry. (See: **Creators**.)

GAMERS

Gamers play games regularly and define themselves by their interest in games. Game events for gamers may be fandom-related, host competitions, screen previews for upcoming titles, and offer playable demos. This audience has a high degree of game literacy, but often in specific games and genres. Gamers may become disinterested in games other than those they like.

ART AND CULTURE AUDIENCE

The art and culture audience is not motivated by an interest in games but instead attends exhibitions or events with a broader view of culture. They may be attracted by the venue (e.g., regular museum-goers coming to see the latest exhibition) or context (e.g., geeks coming to see a medium adjacent to their geek culture; clubbers coming to the event for the party). While this audience often needs more game literacy mediation, their less stringent expectations may make them more interested in various games. Arts and culture audiences will judge included games not necessarily by “game standards” but rather by broader cultural comparisons. Weighing the options in targeting art and culture audiences may work to your advantage.

SPECIFIC IDENTITIES

An audience from a particular geographical location, ethnicity, class, gender, or cultural group may present unique curatorial challenges. This audience might be sensitive to media they perceive as hurtful or prejudiced toward particular groups. A framework that educates, secures, or empowers such identities may be essential to a successful event aimed at underprivileged or marginalized groups. You may provide spotlight showcases, include speakers from marginalized cultural groups, and identify safe space policies (see: **Diversity**).

The suggestions above are meant to be helpful and shouldn't prohibit you from telling the story you want to tell! *Trust your audience* to find interest in a story well told and an event well produced. Respect your audience, and don't pander to it.

In many cases, especially in small or professional events, the audience and participants can be from the same targeted group or even the same people. Whether audience members are also participants in the event may determine how emotionally invested your audience is in attending. Some events and exhibitions target more than one type of audience; others may evolve to find wider audiences.

Some examples:

Casual Connect is a game business event focusing on the casual and mobile games industry. Many attendees are profit-seeking business developers and game entrepreneurs, and the content is mostly business talks and presentations. However, the investment opportunities attract small game companies and independent developers. The event now accommodates this audience via an exhibition/fair of small games and a global competition with prizes and grants.

A MAZE. / Berlin is a global, professional event for expressive and artistically inclined game developers. However, many Berliners attend the event as a party/festival with a video game theme. Game developers from Europe and the world value the affordability of attendance and networking opportunities during the after-hours dance parties. Clubbers from Berlin are attracted by the dance parties first, whereas the game exhibition and networking opportunities are entirely supplementary.

Print Screen Festival is a digital arts festival for a broad, local audience. Playable games appear alongside many other types of artworks and performances. The audience has varying degrees of technological/game literacy but a generally high degree of cultural literacy; this usually leads to organizers favoring games with simple interfaces, but they have the opportunity to address more challenging curatorial themes.

Design / Play / Disrupt was a video games exhibition at the V&A Museum in London. While the texts and the exhibition structure mediated game culture for general audiences, some exclusive artifacts and behind-the-scenes interviews from well-known video game productions were enticing for more hardcore gamer crowds.

Creators

Alexander Martin (droqen)

Creators are the individual artists and teams whose work you seek to curate and display. This section presents some tips for engaging with creators and some issues you may encounter when dealing with them.

If video games are art, then their creators are artists. However, game audiences include many players who do not view games in an artistic light. This is also true of developers. You should expect to encounter creators unfamiliar with curatorial themes or from cultures where games solely serve as entertainment engines. In my experience, creators are usually open to thinking about games in a more artistic light but need a bit of hand-holding. It's up to you how much you want to engage with this issue, but if the creators are going to write an artist statement or attend the event, even a brief exchange could bolster their confidence as artists and build beneficial relationships throughout the gaming community.

CREDIT

Credit is a difficult game industry challenge: how do you credit a project touched by five people in differing amounts? Make sure

you ask how they would like to be credited. In the case of a solo creator, ask if there is anyone else they would like to credit. In the case of a team, ask if they would like to be credited by their studio, group name, or individually. (See: **Permissions.**)

WILL THE CREATORS BE PRESENT?

Consider how much information you want to include about the creators as part of your exhibit. In some cases, the creators may be present to differing degrees. They may want to be on hand for instruction and technical setup/maintenance (because things break!), but this section mainly concerns their presence as artists.

- Who made it?
- Why did they make it?
- In what context did they make it?
- Will they present their game?
- Will they field questions about their intent? Will they provide an artist's statement?

None of these are required or expected (except basic credit), but they are good questions to ask yourself: what, if any, of this is relevant to your curatorial goals? If you want to invite creators, explain how their presence will enhance the experience. It will not only give them a context in which to engage, but also strengthen their relationship with your target audience. (See: **Audience.**)

CONTACTING CREATORS

If you don't have a personal connection with the creator(s) of a work you're interested in displaying, reach out through any communication they have made publicly available.

Although you do not have to lay out every detail in your initial communication, try to make your request clear and concise: "I'm curating an event, and I would like to display game X. Are you interested / can you give me permission to do so?"

You may wish to include any of the below items that seem particularly relevant, but remember the focus should be the basic request above.

- Why are you (the curator) interested in this work or this/these creator(s)?
- What is the theme of your event?
- Will the creator(s) be paid?

- What will be expected, or not expected, of them? That is, “I/we know you’re very far away, so you do not have to be present for the event.”

MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS AND SHARING DOCUMENTATION

In the case of events where creators are not present, it is important to communicate with creators with information on what occurred. A simple follow-up email sharing documentation photos and audience responses to their work can help build a strong relationship between curators and creators.

Diversity

Mer Grazzini

All kinds of people make games. The industry is diverse regarding culture, gender, language, religion, and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, many events and exhibitions overrepresent the same privileged group: mostly men, primarily hetero-cis, mostly white and English-speaking. What can we, as curators, do to represent the gaming community and promote equity and diversity among creators?

We have many tools and strategies to help broaden the scope of the cultural material so that we may better represent the global gaming community. Here are some of them:

CURIOSITY

The first strategy in finding a more diverse pool of creators is to practice sincere curiosity. Listen to others' stories. Tap into networks that celebrate diverse experiences. You will enrich your understanding of video games as cultural material within a global, multifaceted context.

INVESTIGATION

We all know the big-budget, mainstream games. Even in the indie scene, there are wildly popular games that achieve recognition beyond the gaming community. While it's easy to construct an attractive event or exhibition about already popular games, there are many fantastic games by creators that don't get the reception they deserve. Getting to know these artists takes some skill in research and investigation. Some surface-level research may include surfing sites like itch.io and Newgrounds or following developers and gaming groups on Twitter. More investigative strategies may include scouring Discord servers, actively participating in relevant Reddit communities, or seeking out and talking to trusted devs or game curators for helpful suggestions.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Although English is a language commonly used worldwide, focusing exclusively on English-language media can effectively erect barriers to participation for many folks, both artists and audiences. Whenever possible, a part of the budget should address language barriers. Including translators when having international guests is fundamental for enjoying the art pieces or live talks. Even after events have occurred, curators can address language barriers: for example, consider using subtitles for the recorded versions of the talks, and share media on accessible platforms.

CULTURAL RESPECT

Along with searching for diverse artists, we also need to learn about their worldviews, culture, languages, and ways of referring to them. Seemingly insignificant acts promote inclusivity, like using correct pronouns or learning proper name pronunciation. Be aware that more profound research into cultural or religious protocols isn't optional—it's a necessary step in providing a respectful, safe space for your artists and audience.

ACCESSIBILITY

Though the subject is treated at length in the **Accessibility** section, it's also important to consider when approaching diversity. Creators and gamers with disabilities are also often ignored in gaming communities. Make sure the space of the exhibition is accessible. Check that work is arranged with accessibility in mind.

Task volunteers to help with guidance during the show so that artists and the audience can enjoy the event fully; this might mean that volunteers give audio/visual help where needed. During curation, consider the legibility of texts and the use of color for the visually impaired. You might have the budget to hire professional help in assessing the accessibility of your event or exhibition to check things that non-professionals might not otherwise consider. (See: **Accessibility**.)

GIVE THEM THE DESERVED SPACE

Avoid tokenism, in which a few people from an unrepresented group are included to “fill a space” or check a “diversity checkbox.” A common problem, sometimes born out of good intentions, is to focus your theme solely on underrepresentation while featuring artists from marginalized communities. For example, avoid the essentialist failings of a panel in which women developers are included only to comment upon their experiences as women in the industry. Likewise, a panel that focuses on “third world game development” and tasks developers from these communities to represent the “third world” reduces the experiences of individuals in their locality. Even though these subjects are essential conversations we need to have, invited artists need to feel included in events by recognizing their contributions and artistry rather than a reductionist view of their identity.

Partners

Angelo Careri

In the context of art curation, there are two kinds of partnerships: those that involve money (or material loan) and those that do not. The lowest level of partnership consists of a simple exchange of logos. In contrast, the highest involves large sums of money and counterparts that can profoundly influence the nature of the curation itself. Practically, partnerships involving funding will also include paperwork and contracts, whereas more informal partnerships can usually be arranged by simple oral agreement. Do not hesitate to put some basic principles in writing, as misunderstandings can happen even when little to no money is at stake. Whereas one could be tempted to seek as many partners as possible, be sure to prioritize the need for mutual benefit. The more partners you get, the more constraints you must consider. Logos are an excellent addition to your press release, but keeping your project in scope is arguably better.



Figure 5: Chicago New Media 1973–1992 exhibition, Gallery 400, Chicago, IL, November 1–December 15, 2018. Photo credit: Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago.

LIST OF POTENTIAL PARTNERS

PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Many public institutions might get involved in an art game show: museums, funding programs, universities, and government agencies. While in some contexts, public institutions can maintain a certain level of autonomy from governments and political agendas, in many cases, they do not. However, public institutions can also be a dream partner: they are well organized, effective, offer visibility, and add a certain amount of prestige. Often, public institutions provide a venue and act as the main partner of your curatorial project (See: **Venues**.)

PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS

Private foundations are theoretically non-profit and vary greatly in scope and size: they range from poorly funded charities to powerful institutions belonging to the wealthiest individuals and corporations. While they can provide a great deal of funding (see: **Funding**), remember that conflicts of interest are a real concern here. For example, if you plan to curate a show about video

games with an ecological message, check that the private foundation you have partnered with is not directly linked to an oil company. In certain countries, private foundations are a standard tool billionaires use for tax evasion, “greenwashing,” and political gain.

ART GALLERIES

An art gallery is a privately run space that offers a space for exhibiting (see: **Venues**). While many gallery partnerships occur at their venue, you may establish a partnership with an art gallery without your show taking place in this gallery. The partnership can involve material loans (like computers), expertise, catalog publishing, etc.

ASSOCIATIONS/NGOS (NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS)

If your show explores sensitive issues or targets a specific audience, you may want to partner with an NGO to help you better understand these contexts. Partnering with such an organization can be mutually beneficial if you give them an occasion to advertise their work through workshops or other forms of interaction.

MEDIA

Building a partnership with a media outlet goes beyond press coverage. It often involves advertising, exclusive access to certain content, or inviting journalists to participate in round tables or workshops. Having influential media “endorse” you in a partnership can be an effective form of recognition of your work.

PUBLISHER

A publisher may be willing to pay for the catalog documenting your show. In that case, it can be considered a form of partnership, as it will likely involve teamwork and mutual advertising. (See: **Documentation**.)

EDITORS AND STUDIOS

If you want to exhibit commercial games, you need permission and access to archives (see: **Permissions**). In some instances, creators or companies can be directly involved in curating an art show (i.e., Ubisoft in the 2019 Behind the Game exhibition at la Gaîté Lyrique, Paris).¹ Some would argue that this practice is more akin to marketing than curating. Remember that if you want to cooperate with

companies, they will be concerned about PR and may be reluctant to embrace more critical approaches to the show's content.

MANUFACTURERS

Exhibiting video games involve the use of game consoles, VR headsets, screens, and other expensive tools. When working on a tight budget, be aware that arranging a loan from the manufacturer is sometimes possible. Also, a curator may avoid such partnerships by prioritizing cheaper, more accessible, open-source tools.

UNIVERSITIES

Universities and other educational institutions can be great allies regarding content, communication, and equipment. They also can work as validation for first-time events. You can find investment from student groups, and some universities also have their own game labs or art collectives looking for places to show work. They can be good partners for organizing workshops or talks.

EMBASSIES AND INTERNATIONAL CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

These cultural institutions can be great allies when working with international developers and artists. They can cover fees for speakers, commission works, and even fund flights and accommodation. This arrangement is always accompanied by contracts and demands from the funding institution; they might ask for registered documentation once the event ends or require additional involvement from the artist/developer/speaker. Keep track of video recordings, the number of people attending, and any other info they need.

Be aware that this negotiation usually has to be done far in advance. Each embassy and cultural institution has its own rigid schedule. Also, they might reimburse you once the event is finished rather than paying upfront, so you have to make sure to be able to cover the costs in advance.

HOW TO FIND PARTNERS

Finding partners is a process that usually goes along with securing funding. It can be good to think of those two processes altogether (see: **Funding**). There are three main ways to find partners:

Email people, brands, and institutions directly. You may not receive an answer. If your project looks professional and has

partners involved, buy-in becomes easier. Be sure your request is relevant and relates to their goals.

Answer open calls. Open calls are usually related to funding, but it is also an effective way to establish partnerships.

Establish a network. Finding partnerships is a subdivision of networking. If you surround yourself with people with the same interest and build trust over time, opportunities will slowly develop. It takes time, but it is the most effective way to build solid and lasting partnerships in the long term.

NOTE

1. Programs @ Gaîté Lyrique, “Behind The Game: L’expo au cœur d’Assassin’s Creed, Exposition partenaire,” December 13, 2018–February 10, 2019, <https://gaite-lyrique.net/en/event/behind-the-game>.

Teams

Marie Claire LeBlanc Flanagan

Game exhibitions are a lot of work. There's the standard exhibition work of curation, setup, ticketing, security, communication, budgeting, promotions, and administration. But game exhibitions need extra support: people get confused about how to play, software freezes or crashes, the internet goes down, alt controllers are mysteriously broken, controllers and VR headsets may need disinfecting, and visitors may quit games to check their social media.

Unless your exhibition takes place on your couch, you will need help. It's more fun working together!

HOW TO FIND VOLUNTEERS OR PAID HELPERS

- Put out an open call. Share your vision, the available work, and details about duration and money. Use visuals and lead back to a short form.
- Send your call directly to people you'd love to work with. It's scary, but it's worth it.

- Look for help in the right places. Try video game festivals, web art communities, relevant university departments, and arcades. Ask for help to post a poster, share a social media post, or send out a call.
- Choose your team carefully. Investing in a small group of enthusiastic helpers is better than training hundreds of unreliable people. Your team will shape the experience of every visitor to your exhibition. If your curatorial team is diverse, your exhibition will reflect that diversity. If anyone on your team is abusive or toxic, that rot will eat away at your team and be reflected everywhere, including on the exhibition floor.

MAKE A PLAN FOR TRAINING NEW HELPERS

Don't let the glorious new energy fizzle away. Make a plan for how you will welcome and train new helpers. For example:

- After a helper reaches out, meet them quickly while energy is high.
- Warmly welcome them, and tell them about the community and expectations. Learn about their motivations and skills and assign them an easy task with a short deadline. For example: write a two-sentence description about a game by Monday.
- A few days later, do a punctual check-in: how are they doing? If the first task is complete, thank them and get their feedback before assigning another task.
- Cycle through a few small tasks with the new helper, escalating autonomy and difficulty. If the helper has misestimated their capacity, it's best to know quickly. If all goes well, they easily become integrated with the team.

KNOW WHY YOU NEED HELP

Why do you want helpers? Do you need specific labor and skills? Or are you interested in the excitement, diverse skills, and community growth that can come with a team? What do you need help with?

At A MAZE. Berlin, some of the many tasks we needed help with were: submissions, curation, exhibition design, exhibition construction, signage, promotion, communications, media relations, administration, logistics, computer setup, internet setup, delivery, ticketing, exhibition floor (explaining how to play, assisting people, and fixing broken games), food/drink, sanitizing controllers, security, cleaning, and tear down.

TAKE TIME TO UNDERSTAND MOTIVATIONS AND SKILLS

When you know the skills and motivations of an individual helper, it's easy to see what tasks are a good or bad fit. For example, it takes a certain type of personality to continue to be polite and enthusiastic after asking the hundredth person to keep their sticky drink off a computer.

Some of the top motivators for volunteers include community, friendship, interest in the cause, skill development, empowerment, money, opportunities for creativity, prestige, and access to resources. Ask your helpers what motivates them, and pay attention to what moves them.

BE MINDFUL OF HOW THE WORK IS BEING DONE

In every gathering or work session, make space for people to connect in a personal and delightful way. Find excuses to celebrate the work your team is doing. Invite private feedback to avoid the slow festering of unsurfaced conflict.

Invest time in making the working environment positive and supportive. This includes you! If the work starts to feel arduous, communicate and immediately scale back.

TALK OPENLY ABOUT EXPECTATIONS

Life happens. Make easy-to-access calendars, and encourage camaraderie and communication between volunteers if schedules change.

TALK ABOUT MONEY EXPECTATIONS

Until there is a significant change in our economic structure, we often deal with volunteers and underpaid helpers in the arts. Communicate openly about money, especially if some people are paid and others are not. Address the differences between interactions with unionized staff, contract workers, and volunteers.

TALK ABOUT COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Set clear expectations around what helpers can expect from you and the broader community.

Example community expectation guidelines:

- Only do work that matches our shared vision and goals.
- Speak our vision clearly so helpers can see each task in the larger context.

- Match helpers to work that most closely meets personal skills and interests.
- Define tasks clearly, provide training, and communicate expectations.
- Support people when they ask for help (within capacity).
- Celebrate all work.
- Take feedback seriously and make changes when the community agrees.
- Say no to growth when we are low on energy or time.
- Continuously work toward a stronger, safer, and more accessible community.
- Make space for people to grow and/or step back when needed.

TALK ABOUT INDIVIDUAL HELPERS' EXPECTATIONS

Set clear expectations with each helper.

For example, we expect each helper adheres to the following:

1. Helpers should be aware of their space and mindful of how their actions shape the community and exhibition.
2. Helpers communicate needs and desires as clearly as possible.
3. Each helper invests in their own training.
4. Each helper only signs on for the work they can do.
5. Helpers ask for help when they need it.
6. Helpers communicate right away when they can't meet commitments.
7. Helpers communicate when something isn't working (anonymously if needed).

WHO IS HELPING WHO?

Consider organizing your exhibition or community so that everyone is a helper. The model where hundreds of uncredited and undervalued underlings support one charismatic artist or curator is hopefully dying out.

Online

Jose Luis Pacheco Boscan

WHAT ARE *DIGITAL EVENTS*?

We live in a global society heavily influenced by technology. Rapidly evolving technologies undeniably influence how we interact with one another. New digital alternatives are constantly emerging to improve communication, problem-solving, knowledge exchange, and interactive processes. Events can be exclusively virtual or hybrid, mixing live in-person experiences with complementary online features. However, it's important to consider digital interaction is forged by and directed toward humans with social-emotional needs. Online event organizers must design a valuable experience by extending empathy to audiences, both physical and virtual.

WHEN IS IT SUITABLE TO GO ONLINE?

You may be interested in organizing an online event to expand your audience beyond regional boundaries. You may want to enhance the audience experience using a particular tool or software. You may want to emphasize the theme of your game or art industry

event, as it analyzes or critiques the internet, immersive technology, or the implementation of digital media more generally. You may feel that an online event better serves the online nature of the works or creations. You may want an environmentally effective way to bring thousands of attendees to an event from around the globe. You may have budgetary restraints; covering the logistics and general organizational demands of securing a physical venue drives costs prohibitively high. You may need to run your event online due to the impossibility of gathering physically.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT ONLINE PLATFORM?

Choosing an appropriate online platform depends on the nature of audience interaction within your event experience. There are some popular text, voice, and video chat alternatives like Discord, Zoom, YouTube, Twitch, Google Meet, and even some social networks, such as Instagram. These can also provide screen sharing, community moderation, multimedia posts, attendee registration, and live-streaming functionalities. At the same time, other platforms like Facebook, Eventbrite, Meetup, Google Forms, or Typeform can also help with the registration or ticketing processes.

Depending on the activities you plan into your event's schedule, you may use various platforms for the same event, depending on the functionality and your intended activities. For example, it's possible to have your event's opening or "kick-off" through a Twitch live stream, and the primary interaction with the audience proceeds through Discord for the rest of the activities.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN CREATING A DIGITAL EVENT

BE FLEXIBLE

Encourage self-care. Don't expect anyone to be in front of a screen 24 hours a day throughout your event. Apply best practices to work online, especially understanding that long screen time may cause eye strain, fatigue, and headaches. Event formats like game jams often delimit longer "free time" spaces in the schedule to hydrate, stretch, sleep, take a walk, eat, or simply take a bathroom break. Just like in-person events that designate set times during which games are available to play, digital events can provide set times for the audience to interact with curators, organizers, and artists online.

Consider that any planned activity can be categorized as "synchronous" if it requires your audience to be connected simultaneously at a particular moment to participate. Facilitate

“asynchronous” activities if it’s appropriate for audiences to connect whenever they can without altering the intended experience. Keeping a balanced set of sync and async activities offers wider accessibility to participants and provides flexibility so that your audience may enjoy your online event to the fullest.

MAKE USE OF MULTIFUNCTIONAL INTERACTIVE SPACES

There are a set of alternative emerging or existing platforms used creatively in online events that help emulate physical interactions within virtual worlds or internet spaces. Some feature avatar interactions within multiplayer online games; games like *Imvu*, *Animal Crossing*, and *Habbo Hotel* already have interaction capabilities. Other platforms provide total immersion through virtual reality as VR Chat, AltspaceVR, or TerraVirtua.

Examples of how these kinds of spaces function in online events are the A MAZE / 2020–2021 Berlin Festival and the CTM Festival of 2021, Andy Baio’s *Skittish*, sites included in Emilie M. Reed’s *Low Tech Webring*, Xin Xin’s *Togethernet*, Em Lazer-Walker’s *Roguelike Celebration*, Molleindustria’s *LIKELIKE: The Online Museum of Multiplayer Art*, Niall Moody’s *Biome Collective Online Gallery*, GAIA’s *Game on! El arte en juego*, *Women in Games* (womeningames.org), Argentina’s *Pase y Cierre la Puerta*, and more.

SERIOUSLY CONSIDER YOUR TECH INFRASTRUCTURE

Consider the size of your event and the technical limitations the online platforms may have. Is there a maximum user cap? What software may be needed to play the selected games? Do you need a domain or hosting service to run them? Can the server deal with the bandwidth, streaming, or download capacity if too crowded? Does it include enough accessibility options for your audience? Is it available in different languages? Does it have any regional limitations or require any specific hardware? Is the platform free? If not, include the cost in your budget, identifying the benefits of paid plans. Finally, it’s important to conduct tests of each platform before the opening day of your event.

BE PREPARED

Depending on the format, digital events can demand more coordination, monitoring, and attention from organizers, so it’s recommended to have an organizer team to share responsibility. Recruit volunteers and collaborators. Depending on your team size, you

may also want to define an attendant limit. You can also craft a risk assessment plan, an internal schedule, and a clear set of roles for your team. For example, one of the most important roles is that of “technical support,” team members that may help, manage, or guide your audience through the experience and the use of the platforms of your event.

COMMUNICATE

Keep a private communication channel with your team. Be aware of issues, and inform the team of any concerns or problems during the event as soon as they arise. Remember, interactions create complexity, which also applies to online events. Before the start of your event, inform your audience of any scheduling changes or requirements they may need to run the platforms, such as a microphone or camera.

GET CREATIVE AND HAVE FUN!

Having fun needs to be the most crucial goal of your event, and there are fewer restraints in digital spaces now than ever before. Plan fun surprises for your audiences through your schedule. The previously mentioned interactive spaces offer attractive gamified alternatives for having online icebreakers or breakout rooms, socializing, or engaging in a fun and creative way. If you receive consent from participants, you might ask for pet pics, selfies, or any other media that enhances social group dynamics. Don't underestimate any opportunity to network and have fun with your audience.

Regions

Jose Luis Pacheco Boscan

WHAT ARE REGIONS?

To facilitate meaningful, targeted experiences, game event curators must carefully consider their approach to designing for a specific audience. Designating regions in curation helps focus or widen event content appropriate to the audience. A regional scope may focus on one localized region or, in the case of online events, anywhere in the world.

Identifying and delimiting a game event's regional scope may include the following:

PURPOSE AND VALUE: THERE'S NO "WHERE" WITHOUT ASKING "WHY"

How people value experiences depends upon many factors, including cultural identity, socioeconomic status, and education. Game event curators must consider deeply subjective interpretations based on the regional audience. A well-defined purpose for your event means clearly defining the value of the experience you offer your particular audience, communicated plainly.

Of course, value is contingent on the regional context of your audience. Consider a region's locality, national and international relationships, the current sociocultural mood, and how this influences—and is influenced by—its demographics. Exhibitions that promote awareness of social justice issues or visibility and representation for certain sociocultural groups may be popular in certain regions. The same subjects may be divisive and controversial in other locations. In addition, it is important to remember that regions aren't only geographical. Regions without fixed territorial boundaries can be cultural or social. Globalization, transculturation, and migration complicate regionality, wherein a region may constitute a diaspora.

KNOW YOUR REGION: EMPATHIZE WITH YOUR AUDIENCE!

By empathizing with the audience of your particular region, an event with a particularly divisive subject—handled deftly—may still provide a valuable and enlightening experience. Event organizers who empathize with their intended audience can better ascertain how geographical, demographic, or sociocultural conditions influence audience participation. Do you need to alter the event for people living in urban environments? Are changes required for more marginalized communities or a global audience? Do you need to include elements that promote accessibility, such as signage with multiple languages, necessary for your chosen region? (See: **Accessibility, Audience, Diversity.**)

TECHNOLOGY: A WAY TO EXPAND AND CONNECT DISTANT REGIONS

Technology makes it possible to expand the impact and reach of your event. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have widened territorial boundaries and redefined regionality. Event organizers may use many useful technological tools to connect physically distant audiences meaningfully and reduce logistical overhead. Digital marketing tools and social media strategies may help event coordinators reach new audiences. However, technology can needlessly complicate planning or overextend coordinators with little regard for regional logistics (see above). Carefully evaluate whether new technological tools enrich an event experience or expand audience reach with little regard for its overall value. (See: **Online.**)

RELATIONSHIPS AND IDENTITY: ENHANCE THE REGIONAL EXPERIENCE

Another way to enrich the event experience is to invite exhibitors, strategic allies, organizers, guests, or sponsors from target regions. Find collaborators with a common purpose and welcome sociocultural exchange.

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED: ACT LOCALLY AND THINK GLOBALLY

Game arts communities allow interaction between audiences with the same purposes and interests. Though communities operate locally or on a reduced scale to regions, they can serve as nodes that generate and transfer specialized knowledge or experiences across regions and internationally.

Networks form when communities with a shared mission link to others beyond their regional boundaries. An example is the Game Arts International Network (GAIN), whose purpose is “the interconnection of Game Arts organizations, nurturing new structures in emerging regions and allowing the exchange and generation of specialized knowledge about art and games around the world.”¹ Another example is the International Game Developers Association (IGDA), which “supports and empowers game developers around the world in achieving fulfilling and sustainable careers.”² Global Game Jam is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that sets standards for game jams and provides resources to local and regional organizers through the free exchange of knowledge and experiences.³

International networks represent the shared values of global communities but also model how bidirectional and multidimensional exchange of value promotes mutual growth. This phenomenon—“acting locally and thinking globally”—is called *glocality*. For example, the Lara Game Jam, located in Barquisimeto, Lara, Venezuela, organizes local game jams, talks, workshops, and meetups to support video game development in the central-western region of Venezuela.⁴ Developers founded Lara Game Jam in 2019 due to opportunities from regional participation in the Global Game Jam.

Affiliating with a global network dedicated to your purpose may provide the resources to allow you to meet and interact with more people in your region. Like those listed above, game jam and developer networks built on mutual exchange can strengthen a shared global purpose and mobilize your local community or region to support your future events and exhibitions.

NOTES

1. Game Arts International Network (GAIN), accessed May 2021, <https://gameartsinternational.network>.
2. International Game Developers Association (IGDA), accessed May 2021, <https://igda.org/>.
3. Global Game Jam (GGJ), accessed April 2023, <https://globalgamejam.org/>.
4. Lara Game Jam, accessed April 2023, <https://instagram.com/laragamejam>.

Venues

Rene G. Cepeda and María Luján Oulton

Venues are one of the most important parts of the curation process, as you can't have an event without a space, digital or physical. This section briefly overviews what one should consider when approaching venue challenges.

SELECTING A VENUE

- Make a list of your works and determine the following:
 - How many have a large footprint? (e.g., VR games, arcade cabinets, large custom kiosks.)
 - What is the total number of devices that need power? Include projectors, consoles, monitors, charging stations, etc.
- Survey the site and note how many power outlets are available and their locations within the space.
- Remember that spaces with a lot of natural light will interfere with projectors and cause screen glare. Be prepared to find ways to reduce such interference.



Figure 6: Personal Action, Public Display: A Balcony of Video Game Art at Artists Run Chicago 2.0, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago, IL, Oct 27, 2020–Dec 31, 2020. Photo credit: VGA Gallery.

- If you have works that require ambient sound, consider the distribution of the works and the sound compatibility. Does the venue have different rooms, or is there a possibility of creating separate spaces within a room/space?
- An ideal exhibition space will have many power outlets available, giving you more flexibility in designing your layouts.
- Check the setup needs: which kind of equipment you need and what the location provides (e.g., tables, chairs, pedestals, showcases).
- If your solutions include painting, tacking, or adhering works to the walls, floors, or ceiling, check with the venue for permission well in advance.
- Are you planning on making a scenographic setup? Is that possible in the venue? Does the venue provide any kind of materials or props?
- Verify if you must share space with other exhibits/displays and consider how that could affect the curatorial script.
- Verify if the venue has technical staff prepared to help with the setup and maintenance or if you must bring your own team.
- Check security issues: do they have security guards? Have they had any previous cases of robbery or any kind of work damage?

Do you need to consider implementing security measures (e.g., locks, avoiding wireless equipment)?

- Confirm if they have a secure storage room for all the packaging, additional instruments, and work-related equipment.

Once you have this list, it is crucial to determine if your prospective location can handle the number of devices you wish to install. Remember, the space's lighting, climate control, and power restrictions may result in changing or limiting the works in your exhibition.

To include networked video games, internet access with adequate signal strength is critical. Ideally, you will have wired connections to all devices and be able to disable automatic updates. It is also wise to request that the work in your exhibition or event be granted its own dedicated network to reduce security risk.

In short, a good space for a video game exhibition should have the following:

- Enough space to house all the works you wish to display
- The electrical infrastructure to power these works
- Little to no natural light or ways to control the light's intensity
- Wired internet access (if necessary)
- The possibility of using walls, floors, and ceilings for installation
- A secure storage room

If an exhibition space meets these technical requirements, it should be an ideal location to host a video game exhibition. Other concerns—such as the space's political leanings, values, audience, and context—need consideration. However, these points vary between curators and the artists involved, so non-technical aspects of venue choice should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

ADAPTING A SPACE

You may need to adapt a space for a variety of reasons. You may need to create a black box setting for a specific work. Some works may require special furniture, temporary walls to block excess light, or an atmospheric set design.

Most space alterations require drywall and pinewood frames. The benefits of such structures are that they are lightweight, relatively cheap, easy to build, and can be reused in future exhibitions. These temporary structures can be adapted to create theater spaces and stages. They can block light leaks from windows and other light sources and hide projectors and computers. They can

be painted or decorated to provide wall text and label surfaces. In addition, proper soundproofing will allow you to isolate soundscapes so that multiple video games can be played at full volume. Finally, with some creative electrical work, they can be used to extend the electrical network to areas of the space that lack outlets and wired internet access.

Cheaper, easier alternatives may work for your space with a bit of ingenuity. For example, a simple vinyl window film can reduce glare without eliminating light sources!

GOING ONLINE

The recent global pandemic encouraged experimentation with online venues. We are still in an experimental phase and have plenty to learn. However, based on these recent experiments in online exhibition and event curation, these are some helpful recommendations:

- When going online, you shouldn't try to emulate the experience of a physical event; instead, consider what you have to gain from the online experience.
- Online exhibits put the focus on the experience over the object. All experiences are different; you, as a curator, can't have the same control as with a physical venue (e.g., you can't control the ambiance, lighting, sound, or external interference).
- Choose the software or tool based on your audience and the experience you want to create. Some tools for online events are better for smaller groups, and others can accommodate many participants. Some allow you to create whole worlds, while others provide a more fixed, controlled experience.
- Aim for a *ludic* experience. Find playful, dynamic ways of approaching the game experience. Your event may focus on simply showing the works, but creating new ways to experience games virtually, for example, field trips to online games with a specific goal (scavenger hunts), virtual performances, ludic gatherings, playgroups, or playful video calls.

(See: **Online**.)

Duration

Lauren Kolodkin

The duration of a game art exhibition must align with its overall goals within the capacity of the producers to offer the experience to the standard expected by the venue and audience. No definitive answer exists for how long an exhibition should last, but numerous factors will affect the decision.¹

Typically, an art exhibition with no interactive elements may last roughly six months, whereas standard gaming conventions last only a few days. History museums often have permanent collections on display for multiple years, while small galleries might have many shows that last a few weeks each.

When deciding the length of your exhibition, consider the following factors:

What is the goal of the event, and how much time will it take to achieve that goal?

A public convention is designed to create excitement for upcoming games, ideally driving future sales for the developers. As such, a shorter exhibition makes sense for restricting access to make the event feel more urgent.

An exhibition showcasing work around a particular theme or topic may demand a calmer environment. This may mean that the

venue must offer extended opening hours over a longer period to avoid the disruption of many people queuing to play. How long is needed between visits if the works encourage multiple interactions to examine them critically?

An irreplaceable object (such as a unique work of art or a site-specific installation) may benefit from a longer exhibition period, allowing more individuals to engage with it. However, funding, security, and maintenance considerations may limit the time that a work can be displayed safely.

Consider your audience and their expectations, as well as limiting factors such as who and what needs to be present; for example, a developer may afford a weekend to be physically present to promote their game, but not months.

What resources are required? How do they change based on the length?

On top of the base funds needed to produce an event, any exhibition with interactive objects will require ongoing investment, and producers should calculate these costs in their planning.

Objects that require touch for interaction may require repeated sanitation or general maintenance. High-priced but small items such as speakers, controllers, and handheld consoles or touch-screen interfaces may be targets for theft or vandalism and need to be secured or potentially replaced. Large numbers of visitors in short bursts may cause different types of “wear-and-tear” than many visitors over an extended period, and continuous use will necessitate replacements or repairs to equipment.

How are the works to be displayed? How does that affect the event?

Still images or screenshots, enclosed object displays, and time-based but non-interactive media may extend the time an object can be displayed safely. However, these displays may be less popular or engaging than the interactive works. Consider whether non-interactive elements still achieve the goals of the exhibition.

A short exhibition period with a few interactive works may preserve works on display but limit the exhibition’s exposure. A longer exhibition with a mix of object types may allow a larger audience to experience it, but there may be fewer opportunities for direct engagement between the curator, maker, and viewer.

NOTE

1. In the context of this article, I am using the terms exhibition, event, and program interchangeably; in the case of most venues and institutions, these terms have specific internal meanings and are not interchangeable per se.

Scheduling

Jo Summers

Here are some helpful tips for scheduling events and other time-based activities. Above all, consider the needs of both the organizers and guests.

OVERALL SCHEDULING OF THE EVENT/GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider budgets when planning schedules and event types. Don't plan so many activities that you can't afford to pay to show work or administrate effectively.
- Don't organize events too early. Allow a breakfast networking session in the morning so people have time to arrive. Consider possible transport delays, roadworks, train disruptions, etc.
- If you have many sessions, activities, or talks, consider making a physical board with Post-it notes and sharpies to plan how the sessions will take shape.
- Consider connecting all events with similar themes, and be aware that specific talks may not gel in sequence if you have multiple tracks. It may be helpful in the planning stages to make different themes represented by colored Post-it notes to visualize these topic shifts.

- Plan downtime/playtime! Some people attend events to see folks they have not seen for a while, so they won't want to attend everything. If possible, design physical space to allow for gathering and networking.

TALKS

- Don't schedule the person traveling the furthest to speak first!
- Schedule time for a tech check for all speakers so you and they feel comfortable in the space and solve any problems early. Ask speakers for slides early and test software beforehand.
- To keep everyone's attention, plan breaks. Breaks may not be necessary between short talks, but breaking the day into a morning, lunch, and afternoon session may suffice.
- Decide upfront if you want to factor in time for a Q&A session.
- Make it low pressure if people want to leave talks, especially if multiple tracks or events happen simultaneously. The ability to leave one track for another is essential when allowing for Q&A sessions, which are often interpreted as optional to attend.
- Allow appropriate buffer time so the event will stay on schedule.
- Be strict with talk timings. Warn speakers that they will not be allowed to run over, and give them five- and two-minute warnings. Appoint a dedicated timer for each session.
- Have the running order of talks clarified. These should be provided online and physically in the space.
- Provide ample reminder slides of the full schedule—this can show on monitors/projectors between talks or on sandwich boards outside of speaking venues.
- Ask your speakers to show up one hour early, at *minimum*. If possible, have a private green room for speakers to leave their things. Supply water, coffee, fruit, etc.
- Consider recording talks, but confer with the speakers first to gain permission.

LIVE GAMES

- For screening or playing live games, designate time slots. Give people stickers with their times printed on them and offer standby seats for dropouts.

EXHIBITION

- The nature of the venue may limit the flexibility of exhibition schedules—plan for capacities and time expectations far in advance.
- Be in contact with the organizers of the exhibitions preceding and following yours.
- Exhibitions should include events, especially for the opening and closing. Consider that if the exhibition is up for a long time, events can be used to reinvigorate interest in it.

ONLINE EVENTS

- Running online events can be surprisingly exhausting. Make sure to consider delegating tasks appropriately, creating shift work, and organizing ample time for rest.
- Coordinating around multiple time zones is hard! Consider what times appeal to as broad an audience as possible. Consider recording the session or using software platforms that facilitate replayability, such as Twitch. Post events online as soon as possible so that folks that missed it—even by an hour or two—can still watch within a reasonable timeframe.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER EVENTS

- Though avoiding conflict with another event is not always possible, it is always worth checking that you are not too close in date to a thematically similar event.
- However, if a similar event is happening in a nearby city or county, it could be worth reaching out to coordinate and encourage attendees to attend both events.

Communication

María Luján Oulton

A communication campaign aims to make noise, target the right people for the event, and ensure everyone remembers it. This section is intimately related to **Documentation**.

Planning the communication campaign is typically the last step on your “to-do” list. Though you may feel exhausted after determining your goals, location, audience, content, format, and narrative, your communication strategy is critical to an event’s success.

An effective communication campaign will use the appropriate tools to target diverse audiences. The size of the communications team should be proportional to the event’s magnitude. Though large events may demand that you work with individuals with public relations and social media backgrounds, more often, you may have to tackle communication strategy on your own.

A communication campaign should be guided by **What, When, Who, Why, Where, and How**.

WHAT

Define what needs to be communicated. It may sound obvious, but this is a tricky task. When planning a communication campaign,

you should think bigger than the action. If many events are happening simultaneously, how does your event stand out? What makes it unique? Is your event part of something bigger—socially, culturally, or politically? Is your event part of a long-term project? These prompts may help develop media interest.

WHEN

“When” refers not only to the specific dates of the event but to your whole campaign. You should plan three stages: **before**, **during**, and **after** the event.

- **Before:** Get audiences interested. Think ahead. Print media and television spots often have early deadlines, so you should contact any of these outlets well in advance.
- **During:** You should have a PR/press calendar for this stage with special activities for specific invitees. Schedule reminders for yourself or your team.
- **After:** Follow up on any coverage of your event. Be sure to gather and archive all of this material, as it will be helpful for future events.

WHO

Who is running the event? Who is taking part? Who is it for? Who should you be speaking to? Who will be visiting/participating? Think of related info that you could add. Coordinate interviews with the developers/artists/speakers. Engage them in the communication process.

WHY

Why is this event taking place? Why is it relevant for the community? Is it something genuinely new and unique? Why is it worthy of being covered by the press?

WHERE

Where is your event taking place? Is there any relevant info related to the location? Are there any particular links or significant history at this location? Why is this place ideal for this kind of event? Do the location/surroundings/atmosphere add value to the overall experience?

HOW

How will the event unfold? How can the audience participate, interact, and engage? How can the press relate to the different activities going on?

Consider the following:

- **Define your target audience.** Identify your event community, which will help you define appropriate methods of addressing them and critical contacts for distribution. Key questions to ask:
 - Where are they geographically? Which social media do they typically use? What are they interested in? Are you planning an event just for gamers? or will you mix different audiences (e.g., art, technology, others?) What is the age of your audience? Are you thinking of families, students, or professionals?
 - Consider the location of your event and its possible built-in audience: for example, if it's in a gallery or museum, do they have an existing audience? Is there a way to engage them with your event? Think of a message specifically for them and take advantage of the tools they already use: do they have a mailing list, a web page, a Twitter, or an IG account? (See: **Audience**.)
- **Use the appropriate communication channel.** Consider how television, printed media, the internet, or radio enhance your message. Think about the content and its best fit based on the typical consumption behavior of your audience.
- **Choose the best tools.** Consider Instagram vs. Twitter vs. Facebook. You don't have to advertise everywhere. Decide on tools or platforms based on the activity of your target audience and adjust the content to each of those tools. The "one size fits all" approach typically doesn't work, and you need to adapt your message for each tool. But also...
- **Avoid using only one social media platform (especially Facebook).** You will miss a large portion of your audience, which might create issues with the event documentation.
- **Establish a tone.** Is this a professional/formal/academic event? Is it an informal hang-out? Should you use technical language? Always remember to communicate directly with your audience.
- **Identify influencers.** This can be particularly useful for broadening your audience. Find the appropriate influencers to contact for your event.
- **Use mailing lists and community groups.** Developing a comprehensive contact list is valuable for current and future events. However, avoid spamming your contacts. Use these lists and community contacts wisely.

- **Make your competitors your allies.** Work in conjunction with related events and personalities. Check what strategies other events with similar audiences do and discuss ways you can support each other and do cross-promotion.
- **Press contact lists.** Create an updated and annotated press contact list if you can't afford to work with a specialized PR agency. Identify the right journalists, know them, and get them to know you. When they think of video games, you should be the first name on their mind.
- **Create momentum.** Start working well in advance and prepare your audience for what is coming. Generate hype and excitement!
- **Create engagement.** Make your audience feel part of the event. Interact with them meaningfully by offering activities or the possibility of getting involved. Produce frequent call-to-action messages.
- **Provide useful information.** There must be content in your communications. Provide and emphasize critical data: when is your event, where is it, and what makes it so exciting that you shouldn't miss it?
- **Work on a complete press kit** and have it ready a month before your event. It should contain a press release with all the practical information and folders with high-resolution pictures, logos, trailers, reels, or videos that could be useful for TV and the web.

Conduct

Jamie Sanchez

A Code of Conduct is required to promote safe and healthy spaces for everyone!

A well-balanced and vetted policy:

- Defines social expectations for all participants (e.g., attendees, guests, staff, hosts, vendors, sponsors, organizers, and other stakeholders)
- Forbids all forms of harassment, abuse, and hate
- Protects minority and vulnerable participants
- Empowers action against unwanted or malicious behavior
- Decreases administration overhead when unwanted behavior occurs
- Reduces risk and liability for staff and organizers
- Proactively prevents harm from occurring

DEFINING EXPECTATIONS

Games industry events can and should do better to protect participants and encourage thriving environments. While you can't account for every edge case, being proactive now is the best course of action.



Figure 7: Queer Encounters of Intimacy in Games, VGA Gallery, Chicago, IL, January 18, 2019–April 28, 2019. Photo credit: VGA Gallery.

Questions to consider:

- What behavior is allowed or desired? What kind of atmosphere are you trying to promote or create?
- What behavior is unwanted or prohibited? What do harassment, abuse, and hate look like? How will you address risky but not banned behavior?
- How might your curatorial selection, event activities, or chosen venue affect participant behavior? How can you dissuade any undesired actions?
- Will alcohol or legal substances be involved? How are those who partake expected to behave?
- How will you promote others' safety and comfort? How will illegal substances be dealt with? Does your event allow minors? How does that change the expectations of attendees and guardians? Are there local laws you must follow?
- How might you empower minority or vulnerable participants? Who will you consult for impartial feedback on your policies and incident resolution?
- How will these policies be enforced? If unwanted behavior occurs, how will it be escalated? How can a participant report

the issue? How will you receive and handle anonymous reports? Which external parties will investigate if the report involves a co-organizer, or yourself?

CODIFYING YOUR POLICIES

RESEARCH

Model your policies after other organizations with a positive track record. Defining conduct policies is a perpetual learning experience even for seasoned event organizers!

DRAFT

Here's what the structure of your document can look like.

- **Introduction:** State the document's purpose (e.g., *to create a safe environment*).
- **Participants:** Explain that these rules apply to everyone and that ignorance does not mean exemption.
- **Expectations:** Topline what is forbidden with definitions and examples. Use phrases like "not limited to" and "including" to broaden interpretation.
- **Enforcement:** Explain who is authorized to escalate matters and eject non-compliant participants.
- **Reporting:** Provide directions on reporting an incident and what is expected of the affected parties.
- **Conclusion:** Wrap with a positive, upbeat message thanking participants for their compliance.

EDIT

- Value brevity but not at the expense of transparency.
- Swap legal jargon with plain speak for improved reading comprehension.
- Eliminate jokes, sarcasm, and marketing language to show you mean business.
- Consult three unbiased external parties for feedback. Run this by your lawyer if you have one.

ADOPT

- Publish your policy and publicly announce it.
- Designate 1–3 enforcers to investigate incidents, authorize ejections, speak with local authorities, and enact positive change.

- Educate and empower your staff. They are responsible for setting the tone, discouraging unwanted behavior, and escalating incidents to the appropriate channels. Update as necessary and revisit once per year.

DISSEMINATING THE MESSAGE

- Create a Conduct Page on your website and link it in the footer.
- Mention it in every public invitation.
- Display signage at your event reminding folks they're subject to these policies. Add a QR code that will take them to your Conduct Page.
- Ensure your communications and graphic assets support the values codified in your policy.

FURTHER EDUCATION

Creating safe event spaces is a wide-reaching and ever-evolving art. Consult these resources or reach out to other organizers for a deeper perspective.

- "Conference anti-harassment," Geek Feminism Wiki, Fandom, accessed June 7, 2023, https://geekfeminism.wikia.org/wiki/Conference_anti-harassment
- "code-of-conduct-examples," Indie Web Camp, last modified April 7, 2023, <https://indieweb.org/code-of-conduct-examples>
- "Guide to writing a code of conduct," Project Include, accessed June 7, 2023, https://projectinclude.org/writing_cocs.
- "GAIA Code of Conduct," Game Arts International Network (GAIN), accessed June 7, 2023, <https://gameartsinternational.network/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/GAIACoC.pdf>

Documentation

Zuraida Buter

So, you've set up a game event! Maybe it's a small two-hour gallery event in your backyard, a four-day festival at a museum, or a six-month exhibition. People start arriving, and your event is in full swing. Before you know it, your event has ended, and you want to start working on the next one. But wait—how will you spread the word about how wonderful the previous event was? A magazine is reaching out to you asking for photos of the event. One of the creators asks for images of people enjoying their game to put on their website.

Did you take a few photos with your phone? You scour the internet to see if anyone posted pictures or videos of the event. After a day of work, you scrape together three decent photos, six blurry photos, and a confusing video.

WHY DOCUMENT?

As you can see above, documenting your projects is an integral part of your work as a curator and can serve many purposes:

- Press and marketing
- Game creator and curator portfolios

- Securing funding and sponsors
- Follow-up event material
- History and discourse

Below are some tips to help you prepare to document events. Remember that you can scale documentation up and down depending on resources, budget, and size of the event or organization. Video and photographic documentation are crucial; their quality relies on significant preparation!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What do you want documented?
- Who is it for? (e.g., yourself, sponsors, partners, media, audience, participants, creators)
- What is it for? (e.g., live documenting, archive, research, marketing, portfolio)
- How will you document? (e.g., photo, video, live stream, audio, interview, podcast)
- Where will you post / archive? (e.g., private, public, backup)

ORGANIZATION WHO?

Who will oversee documenting the project? Depending on the organization's budget, time, and size, you will have different means for documentation. Ensure one person takes pictures, even if that person is you (in the case of one-person organizations).

Good to have: Hire someone specifically for the event or have them on your team. Always brief the individuals on what and how you want it documented (e.g., ask for different angles, perspectives, etc.).

Some documentation team members to include:

- Photographers
- Videographers and video editors
- Social media managers
- Writers, editors, or interviewers

Invite the press to get a documented perspective from outside your organization and social bubble. Some organizations/press you might contact:

- Newspapers, magazines, individual game journalists
- YouTubers and streamers
- Influencers

WHEN?

There are three crucial moments for gathering and sharing documentation:

Pre-event (see **Communication**):

- Trailers / Promotional material
- Press releases
- Social media

During the event:

- Live documentation (e.g., tweeting, live-streaming, Instagram posts, Snapchat stories, etc.)
- Taking photos and videos
- Interviews: written, audio, video

After the event:

- Press releases, articles, zines
- Posting photos and videos to social media
- Updating a previous event catalog
- Portfolios

PUBLISHING AND SHARING

Where will you share documentation?

- Personal blog, website, and portfolio
- Photography websites (e.g., Flickr, Google Photos, etc.)
- Video sharing (e.g., YouTube, Vimeo)
- Social media (e.g., Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, etc.)
- The event sponsors
- Zines and magazines
- Academic journals
- Backup: Don't forget to back up your documentation in a few different formats!

WHAT

What will you document?

- People interacting with the work and other audience members (e.g., playing games, observing objects, conversing)
- Setup/layout of the event
- Location
- Vibe/ambiance

- Fun moments
- Individual projects (with and without players)
- Interview with creators, the audience, and curators

TOOLS

There are several tools you can use to document your project. Remember what you want to document, where you want to post it, who the audience is, and what tool is most suitable for that purpose. Use what you know best, or hire someone who has the expertise!

LIVE DOCUMENTATION

Live documentation means documenting the moment to give an impression of what is happening during your event and posting it immediately on social media. Tools that can be used include Instagram, Snapchat Stories, Twitter and Twitter Fleets, Twitch, and YouTube Live.

PHOTOGRAPHY / VIDEOGRAPHY

Taking event pictures or videos can be as simple as using your own mobile phone. Still, getting a professional photographer or videographer with the gear, time, focus, and expertise is highly recommended if you have the budget.

CREDITS

Don't forget to credit the creators, other curators, artists, team, designers, etc.

Examples of documentation:

- Photography: "Babycastles exhibitions," Babycastles NYC, accessed June 7, 2023, www.babycastles.com/; Zuraida Buter portfolio, accessed June 7, 2023, www.zo-ii.com/portfolio/.
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Exhibition Design

Brice Puls

EQUIPMENT PROCUREMENT

Acquiring equipment can be one of the most challenging tasks for small organizations. The availability of devices, game consoles, and computers may be extremely limiting with regard to the types of interactive work you can present. For those getting started with game exhibitions, some options are listed below.

PURCHASING

While initially the most cost prohibitive, acquiring machines for repeat use is the ideal scenario for most curatorial practices. Having a collection of mid- or low-range PCs and two or three higher-end machines for complex or graphically intensive games is a great start to having a lasting repository.

However, there are additional considerations regarding the best devices to buy. MiniPCs are great for low-end, fanless options that provide discreet installation. These are especially great for long-term interactive installations, as many have customizable BIOS

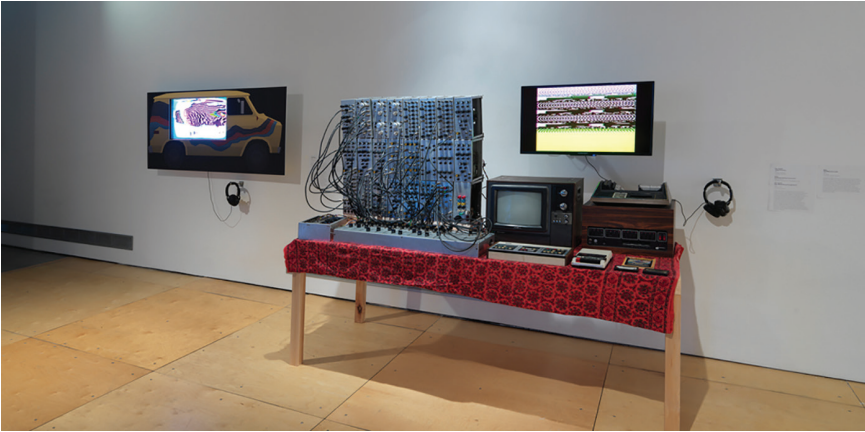


Figure 8: Chicago New Media 1973–1992 exhibition, Gallery 400, Chicago, IL, November 1–December 15, 2018. Photo credit: Gallery 400, University of Illinois at Chicago.

(basic input/output systems) that turn them on and off automatically when given power, reducing facilitation time when opening and closing an exhibition.

If an interactive art exhibition must be modular, portable, and quick to set up, the advantage of having a mid-range laptop is significant. You can use them as is and easily hide them for cable management in long-term installations. Plus, used Windows laptops and factory-refurbished models are cheap and have robust documentation regarding longevity and other usage questions.

High-end machines will always be expensive, but the best option is often a small service custom-built PC or a modified workstation tower designed for gaming or video editing. If storage and presentation within an exhibition space are an issue and a full-sized tower is unwieldy, smaller-scale “gaming” MiniPCs will have enough performance power for game exhibition but can significantly increase in price. They also require additional power and are more difficult to repair, modify, or upgrade than a traditional tower PC.

RENTAL

A variety of companies rent and ship computers and mobile devices worldwide. Renting gives you the benefit of having machines with similar operating systems and updates, making pre-installation computer setup easy. Many of these businesses cater to temporary offices or conventions, making pricing for

short-term events or longer installations available. Many of these services are cost prohibitive, especially if non-profit discounts are unavailable. However, for shows showing older games, there are computer recycling businesses and non-profits (such as FreeGeek in the United States) that offer short-term rentals of machines for a low cost or even free.

DONATION/IN-KIND PARTNERSHIP

Collaborating with sponsors or partners is a creative way to source devices. Especially for smaller organizations mounting shorter-term exhibitions, local businesses such as cybercafes, universities, or offices may be interested in providing equipment to sponsor an event. Local game studios, media production companies, or entertainment venues might have higher-end machines that would otherwise be cost prohibitive for small organizations, and donating equipment may provide mutually beneficial promotion (via signage or in-person presence). Sometimes community members or institutions are happy to donate machines when they upgrade their systems, provided you can pick them up. Putting out the word that you take donations can lead to opportunistic scores over time.

In terms of accessories, always seek the simplest version of the device needed. For example, wireless gamepad controllers, keyboards, and mice not only increase the chance of theft but also need to be charged and synced, which increases the need for facilitation. Purchasing cables online via a wholesale retailer is always a sound investment, as a repository of power, display, audio, and input cabling is easy to store and difficult to damage. Over-the-ear headphones are similarly beneficial to handle audio bleed between interactive stations and can be sourced cheaply. For displays, mid-scale TVs within the 32" range are affordable for new purchases but are often available second-hand online, via community marketplaces, or thrift stores. While projectors can be cost prohibitive, they are easily storable and can be used to create large-scale displays. Projector rental, however, can be relatively cost effective based on the region, as their smaller size makes them much easier to ship.

LAYOUT

Layout considerations vary based on the type of event, how communal the space is meant to be, and the aesthetic of the presentation.

But, overall, the absolute most important considerations for any public exhibition are addressed below:

PLAYER COUNT

Multiplayer stations can provide some of an exhibition's most interesting visual highlights but may also significantly impact space allocation. Games requiring four or more players take priority in exhibition design because of the space necessities. Three square feet per player is ideal. Multiplayer aspects can make headphones an unwieldy option, as additional cables can tangle, hinder communication between groups, and be generally unappealing to those less familiar with games and interactive art. Therefore, these games will often be auditory "hot spots" due to their need for speakers (explained below). However, putting these larger-scale games on projectors or larger displays can make them visual "twinkies" (high visibility icons and attractions that can draw people to a specific space), which can also help thematically separate areas of the exhibition.

AUDIO

Audio is the most critical consideration when planning an interactive art space. Without resources to fully control the auditory ambiance of an area (via sound-isolating speaker domes or high-end headphones), carefully consider how two curated pieces may sonically complement or conflict with each other. Games using speakers may offer multiplayer options (see "twinkies" above) or feature ambient music that complements or enhances the space around it. Overall, it is ideal to only have one game with audible speaker amplification in an enclosed area. Consider the use and energy desired in a space: high-energy spaces may need a game that has engaging music, and lower-energy spaces may require an ambient score of relaxing sound effects. Headphones should isolate games with repetitive noise or loud audio for the sake of audio bleed and the sanity of anybody facilitating the exhibition. While it can take time to ideally place games for ambient noise, the most straightforward golden rule is never to make anything overly audible that somebody working in the space could not stand hearing for more than three hours.

VISUALS

Like any art exhibition, the visual presentation of works within a space defines the exhibition's aesthetics. Consider the ideal screen space to present the work. Games that require detailed observation

should be placed on more intimate displays and in lower-traffic areas. Higher energy or visually powerful games attract crowds to designated spaces if you provide a large screen and an appropriately sized space. Plan for space around high-movement, bright, or graphically intensive work, as those pieces are more likely to draw multiple people to view it simultaneously and create traffic road-blocks in a layout. Appropriately spacing these experiences out or placing them on the same wall can prevent blockage of a main path through the area.

Also, considering what games are best played sitting down or standing up can help define a space. Games that require longer play times can often be combined into a row of tables, as more intimate screens and headphones isolate them easily. Shorter-term experiences are great for standing presentations, as the audience around a player can quickly cycle in and take their turn with the work. Visual language indicating where interactive objects can be safely returned helps attendants maintain the space and avoid damage to equipment. Hooks, shelves, and well-placed podiums can make up their cost quickly by preventing damage to objects like controllers and headphones; they also prevent trip hazards from the cords falling on the floor or extending across pathways. One helpful visual cue is indicating placement with a silhouette of the object in an eye-catching color. Markings on the floor that subtly differentiate between throughways and places to gather and interact with the displays can also help with crowding and maintaining the space.

LOGISTICAL CONCERNS

Logistical concerns include considerations like furniture, seating, and power. Be aware of the available power in all parts of the space. Interactive art equipment can be very energy intensive, and multiple stations in a single outlet may blow a fuse or switch a breaker. Always plan for a continuous pathway around your space and identify potential bottlenecks. Games that could draw crowds or have a high capacity should not be placed on opposite sides of the room, as the resulting crowd can clog a throughway. Consider quieter areas where overstimulated audience members can relax and decompress. Ensure that additional features of your space (food/drink, conversation areas, seating) don't obstruct game spaces, and areas that may draw queues (such as concessions and bathrooms) have appropriate space to expand. Creating set spaces for these objects, like adding a bussing table for empty drinks, can help prevent these objects from becoming hazards.

EQUIPMENT PREP

Equipment preparation is best done several days before installation if the exhibition space is off-site or temporary. Pre-load any machines with games and any additional software (if necessary due to an internet connection or game console), set up parental blockers, set up the machine's startup process to auto-launch the applications needed, and adjust the system BIOS to turn on when power is detected automatically. An application like Restart On Crash for PC can be convenient to ensure the game on each device is always running and will relaunch if the application fails.

Always create a few USB drives or external HDs containing every application in the show, as something will absolutely go wrong on-site, and internet access can always fail. Concealed reset buttons, in the form of a covered or removed button, key, or peripheral controller, can be an easy way to set games stuck in a particular area, frozen, or abandoned back to their starting point. An "exhibition mode" that turns off certain features and has a built-in reset timer for inactivity or other exhibition-specific behaviors is also helpful. In this case, devs may already have a build prepared if you ask; some devs will create a custom build for you that has these features, given enough advanced notice.

Specific planning for every installed piece will make it far easier to set up. Create a checklist for each piece, including what type of machine it will run on, what display it is using, what cables and input devices it needs, and what additional accessories (e.g., alternative controllers, USB hubs, USB extension cables, etc.) are necessary for it to run smoothly. Check each piece when installed so that when it is uninstalled, you will reduce the need for additional equipment inventory after the show. If traveling with your equipment, pack each piece in its own box; plastic containers or bankers' boxes are an affordable solution to ensure that each game's "station" has the equipment it needs to run. Larger objects that cannot be pre-packed into separate containers (e.g., full-size towers, TVs, projectors) should be allocated to each game and similarly checked out and checked in during the installation and de-installation process.

The two additional items always handy for equipment preparation are an installation toolbox and extra parts. Installation toolboxes should include a basic hardware kit—a hammer, pliers, screwdriver, pencils, level, sharpies, adhesive hangers, and any additional items specific to the exhibition.

Cable management can be incredibly difficult for exhibition design, so plan each layout to hide cabling and access to power.

Cable ties and colored masking tape are affordable substitutes for professional cable management enclosures. Extra parts should ideally be an additional 10% of all basic needs for the exhibition, including additional computers, cables, controllers, and audio devices. If these items are unavailable, make contingency plans for exhibiting a specific piece if you need to source other equipment in an emergency.

INSTALLATION

Installation can be broken into the following steps:

1. **Unload:** Drop-off of all equipment to an off-site location or delivered to the space day of.
2. **Placement:** Placement of all gear necessary for each game station in its respective location.
3. **Hookup:** Routing power to the location, plugging in, and turning on all equipment.
4. **Station Management:** Installing shelving, setting up furniture, and cable management of each piece.
5. **Cleanup:** Cleaning the space, decorating, and adjusting lighting/audio.

When scheduling installation, assume you will need approximately 20 minutes per game station for basic hookup and plugging in of the system. Account for additional time, including furniture setup, shelving or hardware installation, cable management, and cleanup. The combined time can indicate the number of hours needed to set up the entire space, which can be divided by the number of individuals. Always overestimate: add 5–10% to complete each task.

For shows with multiple areas, divide each zone between installers to ensure that tasks are distinct and team members are not waiting on others to finish their duties. Ensure that there are specific duties between all participants so everyone knows what areas they are responsible for. It may be better to go step-by-step rather than per-station for small-scale shows with a limited number of installers/facilitators.

Prioritize getting every game running above all else. Most troubleshooting problems will come from equipment failure or unforeseen complications with software. Having all games running will help with lighting/audio/power considerations.

Further, account for an hour or two post-installation to walk through the space, adjust how it feels, relax, and enjoy what you have accomplished!

TROUBLESHOOTING

Unless there are enough installers for this to be one individual's specific task—or in the case of a significant emergency—follow through on installing the show before addressing specific troubleshooting issues. Leaving time after overall installation to focus on troubleshooting prioritizes all additional tasks, such as sourcing extra/leftover equipment or reducing unnecessary trips to purchase or source necessary gear. Prepare for troubleshooting by collecting contact information for participating artists in a single document. Maintain your inventory in a spreadsheet, and ensure you have on-site backups of all applications and software running in the exhibition. When working with a larger installation team, ensure that everybody knows who to talk to about specific game issues so that all bugs can be accounted for and delegated among the group.

Funding

Jim Munroe

DO YOU NEED FUNDING?

Getting funding is an undertaking. Sometimes it's easier to look to the passionate people around you and see if you can all pitch in a small amount of labor to get something going. When something's volunteer-powered, it makes it easier to get funding in the future because you've proven a) you can get shit done and b) there is a community around you that cares about this stuff, too. Surrounding yourself with passionate volunteers will make your future proposals more credible and allow you to see if you actually enjoy doing the thing before spending money on it. Using volunteer power ethically and effectively is beyond the scope of this doc, but it's possible to get good at it! (See: **Teams**.)

While it would be great to get paid to pursue a passion, it took me at least two years before I had enough credibility and community integration to get paid to do it. (This raises the question of who gets paid when limited funding is available. Many organizers believe strongly in paying artists before themselves, but this can lead to burnout.)

WHAT KINDS OF FUNDING ARE AVAILABLE?

Finding funding requires a combination of research and community outreach. Regional funding differences are huge. In Canada, where I am, there's lots of funding for arts and culture initiatives; just a bit to the south, there is comparatively little public funding for such endeavors. Many regions have limited game arts entities, so consider talking to people in other arts disciplines or related industries who have received funding already. It's always easier to have money-related conversations with people with whom you've built trust, so ideally, you will have connected with them beforehand, or you can ask someone who trusts you for an introduction. Sometimes social media can show mutual connections, serving as its own introduction. (See: **Regions**.)

Project funding for which you pitch an idea for a time-limited project is much more common than operational funding, which can pay for ongoing operating costs (e.g., office rental, salaries). An organization I co-founded, Hand Eye Society, got operational funding from the Ontario Arts Council not too long ago. Still, it took almost a decade and many project funding approvals before the funder recognized the organization's artistic value.

Once you've made a list of possible funders, put them in a spreadsheet and set a reminder to look at any deadlines a month prior. Rather than dive into hundreds of pages of guidelines, I prefer to look at one at a time when I have a deadline providing some urgency.

DOES MY PROJECT LOOK SUITABLE?

After the deadline is a month out, I do another bite-sized bit of work: I read the guidelines and write questions. I flag anything involving other people (e.g., letters of interest) and things I haven't done before (e.g., devising an unfamiliar budget). Sometimes you'll discover that you need to be incorporated to qualify; if you're not, skip that one. Some funders allow for incorporation after funding, making going down that road worthwhile depending on the amount of money. Sometimes you can partner with someone who is incorporated, but that's something you don't want to rush into.

Some funders list the previous fund recipients, and you can consider contacting them for advice. They may even let you look at their successful applications if you're on good terms. However, they may view you as a competitor if you're not already friendly. Relationships and past partnerships are vital.

CONTACT THE OFFICER/GETTING FEEDBACK

If you still feel like the project is a good fit, it's time to contact the program officer or contact with a summary of your idea and any questions you have. While it may be intimidating, many granting organizations are willing to talk on the phone or via video chat. These conversations should inform you about your eligibility and competitiveness in the competition. They will rarely be super encouraging, but they usually know the jury well enough to tell you whether your project is a good fit or if you're trying to put a square peg into a round hole. Don't be discouraged: keep looking for funding programs that fit your project, and remember to circle back to funders to check in with their attitudes. Build relationships if you can.

You can ask for feedback on rejected applications, which can inform re-submits and future applications.

WHAT ARE THE FUNDER'S GOALS?

When writing an application, determine where the funder's goals align with your proposed project. An industry stimulus program might want to help existing businesses in your region maintain jobs and create new ones. An arts council might want to support the creation and exhibition of art in your region. In my region, the projects I propose to the industry funder differ from those I submit to the arts councils.

MENTALITY AND APPROACH

Writing applications is fairly dull and can be dispiriting. To deal with the power dynamic, I often start with projects I'm passionate about and look around at ways to get them supported. I do not make the success of the application the main reason why I did something. Often, I do projects I see the community needs regardless of funding, and these projects are unofficially underwritten by the ones that do get funding.

I also carefully track my time with applications because it makes it easier to plan for future applications (e.g., "I'll never try to do that again in two weeks—it took 55 hours!") and because it often feels longer than it actually takes. Applications are often boring or emotionally tiring, so remember that these hours can be reimbursed in the future if you budget for them.

EDUCATION FOR THE YOUTH

Outside of arts and industry, I have had luck finding funding for game creation programs for kids, running summer camps, and STEM skill-building workshops in underserved neighborhoods. These projects tap into community/education funding possibilities and can also be a way to create opportunities and connections with underrepresented communities.

FUNDING CHALLENGES FOR GAME ARTS

For many arts councils, you may have to explain and demonstrate the artistic value of game arts. For industry funders, you should show how non-commercial work has value to the economy. This education can take a long time but can build a network of allies and advocates!

Governance

Sagan Yee

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

The most basic definition of governance is the process by which the interests and activities of an organization are structured, sustained, and regulated, and who is held accountable. On the one hand, governance is simply a set of agreed-upon rules about how things should run. But it's also about the Big Picture questions: who are we, and who do we serve? Why is this important to us? How can we remain sustainable? What will we be doing 5, 15, and 25 years from now? And who is responsible for answering these questions? Whether your group is an incorporated non-profit, a team of festival organizers, an *ad hoc* art collective, or a bunch of friends who got together one day and decided to do something cool, all involve a form of governance.

HOW DO YOU DEVELOP A GOVERNING MODEL FOR YOUR GAME EXHIBITION, EVENT, OR ORGANIZATION?

There are no easy or right answers to the questions asked above. A good first step might be to define your project and compare your goals and needs with your current resources. Consider the following situations:

Suppose you're a group of students running a monthly game jam for local peers, and your venue is a university classroom. In that case, you might not need a high-level strategic plan other than deciding who pays for snacks every month. But say your game jam becomes extremely popular with the broader game development community, and what began as a small fun project between friends becomes a big deal. Say the school begins offering money to help you run your event, and some local game companies start offering sponsorships. Suddenly you find yourself running the city's most prominent indie game event even after the founders have all graduated and moved on to other professional projects.

Or say you are part of an informal arts collective whose members want access to government arts grants to run year-round events programming, but applicants are only eligible if they are incorporated. If you become a registered non-profit entity, the government—or whichever funding authority is responsible for distribution—gives you a set of rules they expect every business to follow. You must figure out who gets to be the president, treasurer, and secretary, how often you meet, what bylaws need to be created and observed, and other administrative concerns.

Or, say you have been running an annual games festival out of your garage with a couple of curator friends, and everyone is getting burned out because of how disorganized things have been behind the scenes. Everyone agrees the festival should continue, but it shouldn't be in someone's garage. Restructuring the organization clarifies who is responsible for making high-level decisions and acting on them. There is also some tension around what direction the festival should take: is it primarily focused on experimental, artsy games, or should more commercial games be allowed to participate?

Or, you might have noticed a serious lack of video game events in your area that serve emerging BIPOC creators, and you want to organize a monthly social meetup. One of your primary concerns might be creating a safe space for everyone.

Each of these case studies demands defining the scope and focus of the organization. The following questions may help you craft the general outline of your model of governance:

- What is the vision or goal of the project?
- Who is the project serving, and who are its stakeholders? What are their wants and desires?
- What is the scope of the project? Under what conditions could you see the project ending or becoming sustainable? Are there plans for this project to continue even after the founders have left?

- Is there money involved, either incoming or outgoing? Who is responsible for managing funds? What other relationships and organizations are related to the project (e.g., funding bodies, sponsors, venues, and similar organizations)? (See: **Funding**.)
- How can we keep this fun and engaging for everyone? How do we prevent burnout?
- How do we deal with conflict? (See: **Conduct**.)

WHAT IS THE LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE?

One of the most common ways to structure an organization in the traditional non-profit world is by differentiating between *governing* and *operational* activities. Most tasks regarding video game event planning involve concrete logistics: curating the games, renting the venue, getting sponsors, recruiting and training volunteers, getting everyone's bio and headshots, making sure there's enough bottled water on-site, etc. But for initiatives that need stable, long-term plans or those who want access to sources of funding that require legally defined structures (such as incorporation), the question of governance comes into play:

- What is the vision that drives your project?
- Who is responsible for defining its mandate? How can you ensure the organization's operational activities align with its mission statement?
- How can the organization remain sustainable?
- How will the organization respond to changes and challenges in the indie/arts video game landscape?
- Who is responsible for writing bylaws for the organization? Do you need a Conflict of Interest policy? A Code of Conduct? These may all be critical, especially when looking up granting organizations. (See: **Conduct**.)

In a traditional North American non-profit setup, two main leadership roles oversee these two types of organizational activity: the executive director and the board. Typically, the executive director handles the *operational* side of things: managing the staff, programming logistics, purchasing equipment, and other day-to-day activities that one associates with "getting stuff done." On the other hand, the board is responsible for holding the *strategy* and *vision* of the organization. The executive director "executes" the decisions of the board.

In smaller, more informal groups, the duties and responsibilities of these two roles are likely distributed among individual members.

One or more members might be responsible for determining the project's vision and carrying that directive out. Even if you aren't a fancy incorporated business entity, it might still be helpful to consider how your organization's operational and strategic sides will work together to achieve common goals.

Here are some examples of common organizational structures.

- *A working board.* In this case, the governance board and the operating staff are the same people. This is a common model for smaller non-profits, where the organizers wear multiple hats.
- *Incorporated non-profit with both a governing board of directors and operating staff.* The board of directors are, by definition, volunteers and cannot accept payment by the organization for their work. Though they make decisions about the strategic direction and vision, they are usually hands-off when deciding how that vision is executed by staff.
 - Often there is another layer of officers elected by the board who might also be board directors: the president, treasurer, and secretary.

Many orgs move from a working board to a traditional one to prevent conflict of interest. This may improve recruitment; while a working board requires a board member to lead an initiative, a traditional board requires higher-level strategy advice. This tends to attract more experienced and knowledgeable board member applicants.

HOW DO YOU ORGANIZE INTO DEPARTMENTS/COMMITTEES?

The smaller an organization is, the more individuals will likely wear several hats, managing many different activities and responsibilities. As organizations grow, differentiation between duties necessitates the establishment of departments or committees. Common committees might include:

- Governance
- Finance
- Partners and sponsorship
- Hiring
- Communications and promotion
- Programming

HOW WILL LEADERSHIP CHANGE OVER TIME?

A succession plan is often the last thing on people's minds when starting a collective, but the sooner you start thinking about it, the better prepared you will be. You all may agree that your festival or event series is meant to last as long as you can personally keep it running. You may mean for it only to happen once.

However, if you want your organization to outlive the involvement of its founders, the best time to start considering new leadership is as soon as possible! It can take years to coax someone into a leadership position and more to designate what your particular leadership position entails. Unless your organization has the funding to hire an experienced executive director, you must consider how leadership skills are cultivated and modeled. Some ways to develop leadership include:

- **Observation:** Look for leadership potential in volunteers and event regulars who seem passionate and capable and bring diverse perspectives to the organization.
- **Cultivation and Training:** Give organization members the autonomy and freedom to run things in their own way while still fulfilling the responsibilities and values of the organization.
- **Onboarding:** Have robust processes in place so that when a new person is brought into the org, they can quickly fulfill routine administrative duties while concentrating on the more creative and fun aspects of programming.

Interactivity

Saraelena Cabrera, Rene G. Cepeda, and Emilie Reed

Presenting playable video games in a game exhibition is often the desired and expected framing for a video game curator. However, interactivity has to balance with non-interactive elements, such as artifacts and interpretive texts. Physical limitations of the gallery space and the social expectations around interacting, especially in an art context, may also present unique challenges. This section offers strategies for dealing with the setup, duration, and accessibility of interactive games, which introduce elements of game literacy for visitors to encourage interaction with the work on display.

SETUP

Limited space can force curators to decide which games will be playable and which to present in their deactivated form. Some games may require large custom interfaces or specialized equipment, such as game cabins or VR igloos. In this case, it is better to prioritize unique displays over games visitors can acquire and play at home.



Figure 9: William Chyr: *Manifold Garden*, Mana Contemporary, Chicago, IL, 2015. Photo credit: VGA Gallery.

Some exhibition spaces benefit from an arcade setup. For example, the Victoria & Albert Museum's 2018 exhibition *Videogames: Design/Play/Disrupt* featured one such section in which visitors enter an arcade-like space where they can play most games. However, this space was only a fraction of the more extensive exhibition, limiting overstimulation and focusing on themes of technological advancement, social engagement, and design innovation in video games.

And while sensory overstimulation may be used by a curator as a rhetorical or conceptual tool, in most cases, it is best to avoid bombarding the audience with too many sounds or images. Prioritize communicating pertinent themes or providing the appropriate atmosphere designed by the game's creators.

Overcrowding, particularly in the case of very popular exhibitions, can also place a need to limit the number of playable games as it poses both logistic and health and safety concerns. Monitoring overcrowding is crucial in the case of VR games, where the participants may have limited visibility/mobility, and crowding may result in accidental injury to viewers and players.

DURATION

While it may be considered a technical limitation, playtime length also puts limitations on the curator at a conceptual level. While many art games lean toward exhibition-friendly formats, such as short playtime or pick-up and put-down timeframes, some games

(mainly commercial ones) may require play times of over 50 hours. In this case, think creatively about how to present gameplay. The simplest solution would be to allow players to start the game from the beginning; however, games that begin with tutorials are often repetitive and lack the excitement or atmosphere of its advanced gameplay. In other cases, the game may be more suited to be played at home at leisure; players can attain flow and control fluency and better immerse themselves in the atmosphere of an immersive narrative.

As such, not all video games benefit from interactivity in an exhibition space, and other approaches, such as screenshots or gameplay videos, may be used.

In the cases where interactivity is paramount, the following questions will help determine the most appropriate form of interactive installation:

- Will the game be available on a first-come, first-served basis, or will it be handled through a booking system?
- Is the game short enough for the player to complete the experience within a reasonable timeframe (1–5 minutes)?
- Will the player be able to play the game from the beginning, or will the game need to start at another determined point? For how long will they play?
- Are the game controls simple enough that most users can engage with the game within the determined time frame, or will there need to be some sort of training or assistance?

The exhibition theme will also help determine how many games should be playable. If an exhibition focuses on art and design at the game production stage, interactivity may not be a priority; a showcase of concept art and gameplay videos may be better suited to the exhibition. Again, the V&A's *Videogames* exhibition is an excellent example; as the exhibition centers on the technological and social design processes, the exhibition provided an interactive arena with defined boundaries that served as a discrete moment within the larger exhibition.

ACCESSIBILITY

Motion sickness, color blindness, and mobility limitations are only a few accessibility challenges to the success of interactive games in an exhibition space. For an exhibition to be successful for all, these issues demand careful consideration when interactive elements are present.

MOTION SICKNESS

Motion sickness affects VR and traditional video game players, with 67% of adults and 57% of children reporting motion sickness while playing.¹ A warning regarding motion sickness may be recommended at the entrance. Further precautions include disinfectant wipes, motion sickness bags, and a trashcan. In the case of VR, players may need to be seated to avoid potential injuries.

COLOR BLINDNESS

Color blindness solutions vary on a game-to-game basis. Some commercial and indie games have an in-game option that applies filters for the different types of color blindness. For games running on PC and Mac, the operating systems themselves have filters that may be enabled when needed; in an exhibition setting, these filters should be enabled upon request and disabled immediately after.

MOBILITY ACCESS

Most games depend on a keyboard and mouse (for PC), gamepads (consoles, VR, and PCs), and motion controls (PC, VR, and consoles). Unfortunately, the availability of accessible controllers requires a sizable budget and often requires custom solutions (see: **Exhibition Design**). Some gaming systems already offer accessibility aids: for example, the Microsoft Xbox console has its own adaptive controller, which provides solutions to various limited mobility situations. Exhibition-related media may encourage players to bring their own adaptive devices, depending on the gaming technology employed and the number and expertise of the staff.

GAME LITERACY

Game literacy can refer to the willingness of visitors to engage with interactive video games in an exhibition space. Also, game literacy may refer to visitors' familiarity with gaming system controls, genre conventions, and game mechanics.

Only some players have experience with various game systems and mechanics, and instructional material may be needed to provide the comfort players need to experience and enjoy games in a public space. Generally, driving simulations, point-and-click games, and text adventure games are simpler to control, with most first-person shooters and flight simulators being the most complicated. In addition, historical genre conventions, such as early text adventures

where specific phrases have to be typed in full to progress, may be more challenging to audiences than hypertext-based games.

One way to encourage play is through invigilators; these volunteers remain at game stations, ready to teach the controls and mechanics to those who require it. In the absence of staffed invigilators, succinct contextualizing and interpretive materials and illustrative diagrams of the controls may provide all the necessary information for effective participation. Audiovisual resources may also be provided via QR codes.

Vicarious participation is when the audience may experience a video game without playing. This may be effectively achieved by placing large secondary screens in the space, mirroring the action the player sees on a smaller device. Such a setup may be beneficial with VR games. In smaller setups, a single large screen with adequate room for viewers to communicate with the player is enough to satisfy the needs of vicarious participation. Vicarious participation can offer a bridge to those more unwilling to play games in a public space. By allowing all visitors to observe another more confident participant, hesitant visitors may still leave the exhibition with a better understanding of the game and the gameplay experience.

NOTE

1. C. H. Chang, W. W. Pan, L. Y. Tseng et al., "Postural Activity and Motion Sickness During Video Game Play in Children and Adults," *Exp. Brain Res.* 217 (2012): 299–309.

Permissions

Leland Heller

Obtaining permissions can be a morally and legally ambiguous problem. A creator might appreciate you including their game and even signal boost your event on social media, or they might feel like you are benefiting from their work without compensation. Either way, asking permission is a good idea.

So how do you obtain a creator's permission? How should you contact them? What happens if you can't reach the author? What happens when you want to exhibit a "big" (AAA) title? Who is responsible for getting the permissions? We must consider these questions when tackling this part of the curation process.

ASKING FOR PERMISSION

The best way to avoid any potential legal or ethical problems is to ask permission from the artist before exhibiting their work. Anyone on your team may initiate this process, but using someone near the top of the hierarchy (like a chief curator rather than an intern) will produce better results.

Once you have decided to include a game, contact the copyright holder (creator, publisher, or studio) for permission. Doing this

early in the process will give them the maximum response time. You can do this via email, social media, or their website, but having your correspondence through email makes it feel professional and is extremely helpful for your records.

Your initial message should include the following: an introduction of yourself and your organization (if applicable), the exhibition's purpose/theme, how/why the game will be displayed, and logistical details about the exhibition (timeline and location).

Always make sure to express your appreciation of their game!

Usually, obtaining a signed confirmation document from the creator is unnecessary, as written permission through email is typically enough.

If you do not hear back—which will often be the case for larger projects like AAA games—or if you cannot figure out how to contact the creator, it is up to you whether you want to still exhibit the game. Legally, you may still show a game without permission, but it is in a moral gray area.

COPYRIGHT LAW

Like exhibitions of more traditional artistic media, video game exhibitions are usually covered under Fair Use in the US and Fair Dealing in Canada (though your region might vary). This means that a copyrighted work can be displayed for educational purposes, which museum and gallery exhibitions fall under. So, under these circumstances, you will not fall into legal trouble for displaying a video game itself.

That said, the game must be acquired through legal means (i.e., not pirated) and displayed on actual consoles (i.e., not emulated), except in cases where this is impossible.

You *cannot* make these games available and playable online under almost any circumstances. Still, you can use images or videos of any games in promotional materials. Using game images in promotional materials falls under the same regulations that allow Twitch streamers or YouTube creators to use gameplay footage and images. However, be aware that you will likely run into the same issues these creators often do, so it is wise to avoid things like cutscenes or certain copyrighted songs the games may use.

ATTRIBUTION

From a legal and moral standpoint, you must give credit where it is due. As a curator, you must include the name, year, platform, publisher (if applicable), and studio/creator name(s) for every game

you exhibit. If you highlight a specific aspect of the game (e.g., its soundtrack), name the specific creator(s). If you can communicate with the creator, ask them how they want to be credited.

If you use an in-game screenshot or gameplay footage, credit the person who captured it. If you use an image from/of a game in promotional materials, use its title and any possible attributions.

GACK Project Coordinators

Rene G. Cepeda is a curator and researcher. He holds a PhD in interactive new media art curation and display from the University of Sunderland. Rene runs the Manual for the Curation and Display of Interactive New Media Art. He is also a lecturer at UNARTE College in Puebla, Mexico. His research interests include interaction, new media art exhibition design, and video games. <http://ragc.wordpress.com>

Chaz Evans is an artist, educator, art historian, and curator. He holds an MA in art history and an MFA in new media art from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is Director of Exhibitions and Co-Founder of VGA Gallery, as well as Assistant Professor of Media Arts at the University of South Carolina. He regularly speaks and facilitates public conversations on new media and video game art. <https://chazevans.net/>

María Luján Oulton is a curator and cultural producer. She holds an Mg in communication and cultural creation from Walter Benjamin Foundation of Buenos Aires. She is co-founder of GAIA, co-editor of *Games Studies Journal* at Universidad de Palermo, and director of *Game on! El arte en juego*. She is a lecturer at ORT, Uruguay, and UMSA, Argentina. www.luoulton.com/.

CO-AUTHORS AND CO-EDITORS

Isabelle Arvers is a French artist and curator whose research focuses on the interaction between art and video games. For the past 20 years, she has been investigating the artistic, ethical, and critical implications of digital gaming. Her work explores the creative potential of hacking video games through the practice of machinima. As a curator, she focuses on video games as a new language and as an expressive medium for artists. She curated several shows and festivals around the world, including Machinima in Mash Up (Vancouver Art Gallery, 2016), UCLA Gamelab Festival (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2015, 2017), Evolution of Gaming (Vancouver, 2014), Game Heroes (Alcazar, Marseille, 2011), Playing Real (Gamerz, 2007), Mind Control (Banana RAM Ancona, Italy, 2004), and Node Runner (Paris, 2004). In 2019, she embarked on an art and games world tour in non-western

countries to promote the notion of diversity of gender, sexuality, and geographic origin, focusing on queer, feminist, and decolonial practices. www.isabellearvers.com/

Clare Brennan is a curator and lecturer in visual arts practice at Abertay University. Her curatorial research explores this through interdisciplinary projects with artists, performers, and technologists undertaking ground-breaking and experimental work.

Zuraida Buter is a playful arts curator. She curates and documents events focused on playful culture and games. She has worked on projects such as Incubate Arcade (NL), INDIGO (NL), Screenshake (BE), and IndieCade Europe (FR). She is currently the program curator for A MAZE. / Berlin. In 2012 she co-founded Playful Arts Festival (NL), which explores and highlights the intersection of interactive performing arts, visual art, and playful design. Previously she was Executive Director of the Global Game Jam, and she has been a game lecturer at different universities. In 2020 she was awarded the Game Changer award by IndieCade. <https://zo-ii.com>.

Saraelena Cabrera is an arts educator from Mexico. She graduated with a degree in plastic arts from the University of the Americas Puebla (Mexico). She worked as Content Manager in the Educational Space of the International Baroque Museum from 2016 to 2018. Her interest in education led her to study the Master of Arts and Education: A Constructionist Approach at the University of Barcelona, carrying out professional internships at the Museu Nacional D'Art de Catalunya. She also studied management of arts and culture in museum management and cultural heritage at the International University of Catalonia. Her most recent work was in the Exhibition "Banksy: The Art of Protest" at the Barcelona Design Museum.

Jenna Caravello is a Los Angeles-based artist and assistant professor in design media arts at UCLA, working with VR, motion capture, animation, and video game platforms. Her single-channel and interactive works explore computer culture, video game logic, cartoon language, and the role of narrative in personal and digital memory.

Angelo Careri is the co-founder and chief editor of *Immersion* magazine. He is also a writer and a teacher of game studies.

Marie Claire LeBlanc Flanagan is an artist and producer. She is curious about the spaces between people and technologies, especially spaces related to expression, and connection. Marie Claire is founder of Wyrd Arts Initiatives, a nationwide non-profit dedicated to encouraging, documenting, and connecting creative expression across Canada. She served as the Editor-in-Chief of Weird Canada, a website that celebrates and documents do-it-yourself, experimental, and emerging music, books, ideas, and art; and was the founder of Drone Day, an international day for the celebration of drone music. <https://marieflanagan.com/>.

Mer Grazzini is a game designer, 2D artist, teacher, and critic from Argentina. She studied Fine Arts at the Universidad Nacional de Rosario as well as animation and music at local academies. She's made all kinds of art projects during the last decade, but lately, she's been dedicated full time to make video games with a social/educational view. She also writes design analysis and features indie games in a weekly column at PressOver News. She can be found all over the Internet as @MerGrazzini. <https://mergrazzini.itch.io/>.

Leland Heller does a little bit of everything for The MADE. They earned their BA in art history and museum studies from the University of San Francisco and have previously worked for the Children's Creativity Museum and the GLBT Historical Society. They will freely admit to being terrible at video games but loving them nonetheless.

Lauren Kolodkin works at Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery, where she supports public programs, public affairs, digital, IT, and special events teams. Lauren works on a number of special projects, including the production of SAAM Arcade, the museum's annual festival celebrating the art of video games. Lauren and her colleagues have presented internationally on video games and work collaboratively with other Smithsonian staff to continue bringing games into the United States' national museums.

Alexander Martin (droqen) is a game developer and theorist from Canada. <https://droqen.itch.io/>.

Shalev Moran is a game designer and artist. He was the Games Program Curator at Print Screen Festival between 2013 and 2018. His past roles also include Game Designer at Plarium, PortaPlay,

and Stikipixles, and lecturer at Shenkar College's Game Center. He received his BA from Tel Aviv University's Honors Program in the Humanities and Arts, and his MA in game design from the Royal Danish Academy of Design. When not making or curating games, He runs the political sci-fi project Speculative Tourism. www.shalevmoran.com/.

Jim Munroe is a "pop culture provocateur," according to the *Austin Chronicle*. His graphic novels and prose novels have been praised by Pulitzer-winner Junot Diaz and comics legend Neil Gaiman, and his lo-fi sci-fi feature films by *Wired* and the *Guardian*. His political video games have appeared at Sundance and Cannes, and he co-founded the world's first video game arts organization. He currently runs the <http://gameartsinternational.network/> from Toronto, Canada. <http://jimmunroe.net>.

Jose Luis Pacheco Boscan is an engineer, digital artist, software, hardware, and game developer from Venezuela. He is passionate about the creative and experimental integration of arts, code, and electronics into video games and interactive media. He's the founder and lead director of Lara Game Jam (<https://instagram.com/laragamejam>), a community from Lara, Venezuela, that supports the generation and growth of the local and national game development scene. <https://linkedin.com/in/jose-luis-pacheco-boscan>.

Brice Puls is an interactive artist, game developer, and exhibit designer based in Chicago. They are Director of Operations for VGA Gallery, as well as the logistics director for Bit Bash Chicago, an annual non-profit interactive arts festival seeking to expose unique and culturally important games to new audiences. Additionally, they are an independent game designer, developing work for various educational institutions, studios, and games such as Young Horses, Activision, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Field Museum, the Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, the Tony Hawk Pro Skater series, TumbleSeed, Sausage Sports Club, Manifold Garden, and Killer Queen Black.

Emilie Reed is a researcher, writer, and curator based in Glasgow. She completed her PhD in the history of interactive exhibitions and curatorial practices at Abertay University and also holds an MSc in modern and contemporary art: history, curating, and criticism from Edinburgh University. She has held a variety of roles in connection with traditional art institutions as well as new media and gaming festivals. Her work focuses on artistic, amateur, and

experimental game production, and how accessible tools and open formats enable creators in these areas. <https://emreed.net>.

Jamie Sanchez is a digital marketing consultant, WordPress developer, and graphic designer in Chicago. She frequently works on branding, event planning, and community-building projects for Chicago-based nerds and organizations. She is a co-founder of Bit Bash, Chicago's Interactive Arts Festival, and a VGA Gallery board member. She is the founder and president of AnimeChicago, a non-profit anime club catering to young professionals in their 20s and 30s who deep-dive into the academic side of the medium.

Jo Summers has over ten years of experience curating and producing community technology events, including Hackathons, Barcamps, Maker Faires, and video game parties. She is currently the executive producer for Global Game Jam and GGJ NEXT—a worldwide game jam for kids. She is a passionate advocate for showcasing weird and wonderful games to the general public, as well as supporting and promoting diversity within the creation of games.

Valentine Wanamaker is a game designer and developer, and graduate of the NYU Game Center at New York University, where he studied game design and computer science. He runs a multidisciplinary artist collective, Human Entertainment. He has also started a game design club called Slow Jam that meets every week to play-test and critique each other's work. He is an active participant in the local game development community, where he has organized and hosted game events, showcased games at Play NYC, helped run game developer conferences, and participated in game jams.

Ron M. Wilde is a freelance event manager for all things gaming related. He has worked on Ludicrous—Zürich Game Festival, HeroFest in Bern, and numerous others across Europe. His greatest gaming memory is leading a hall full of people through Rock Band Karaoke from the blinding lights of an esports stage. He can be found on Twitter as @TheNorthernNerd. www.twitter.com/TheNorthernNerd.

Sagan Yee is a classical animator and occasional art game perpetrator based in Toronto. Her work experience includes TV animation and storyboarding, videogame concept art and design, illustration, motion graphics, and even machinima. She has spoken about inclusivity, community-building, and game-making in

Toronto, Montreal, Austin, San Francisco, New York, Detroit, and Johannesburg, while continuing to oversee initiatives promoting digital media outreach and literacy. Her personal practice includes classical animation, experimental screen-based digital games, and alternative controller collaborations (one of which ended with the cops showing up). Currently, Sagan is Executive Director of the Hand Eye Society and a community member of Dames Making Games. www.saganyee.com/