

## Supporting the development of youth digital civic engagement in libraries through the co-design of table-top games

**Introduction:** The University of Washington iSchool (PI: Jason Yip) requests \$371,515 from the *National Leadership Grants for Libraries* program for an implementation project grant (Goal 2: Objective 2.1). The overall need is to work with libraries to support children (ages 7 - 13) to develop an interest in digital civic participation that will prepare them more for active engagement in their adolescent and adult years. The intended impact is to co-design, promote, and nationally disseminate a narrative *Dungeons and Dragons* style tabletop roleplaying game for children around engaging in digital civic issues and the guide for librarians to co-create new modules with their youth patrons. To do this, we will develop online intergenerational co-design teams across the USA led by librarians and teens to build interest and passion around digital civic engagement. The partner organizations for this project are *The Seattle Public Library* (SPL) and [foundry10](#), both with extensive co-design experiences with youth.

**Project Justification:** Civic engagement is the “individual or collective actions in which people participate to improve the well-being of communities or society in general” [1]. Despite the proliferation of digital technologies (e.g., social media, AI), youth participation in civic engagement has been in decline [1]. Research demonstrates young people are transitioning towards new, digital mediated forms of civic engagement that are difficult to follow [1]. A need for early education exists [1], but there is a lack of meaningful activities for children to build passion and predispositions for becoming active digitally civically engaged citizens. Jenkins et al. [3] calls for support for the new “participatory culture”, that is, the need for lower barriers, informal mentorship, and social connections around civic engagement, especially coming from libraries. Our conjecture is that libraries can provide these safe spaces to create meaningful engagement for children through programmatic design [1]. Our proposal fills this critical gap by developing a play-based narrative tabletop game for children that libraries can utilize with their communities around digital civic engagement. While work has been done supporting connected learning around civic engagement from IMLS [8], less is known about the role in which co-design contributes to how children think about digital civic engagement for their future. Imaginative play can open up a number of potentials that allow children to experience difficult situations and experiment with decision making [2, 3, 4, 6]. Through our established co-design and games design process [4, 5, 9], we specifically will focus on children navigating through societal problematic issues around digital civic engagement with librarians, teens, and researchers. We are proposing to co-create a narrative *Dungeons and Dragons* style tabletop game that allows children to safely experiment and learn about digital civic engagement with librarians and older teens.

**Project Work Plan:** Our *process* for designing new play-based activities will employ teens (ages 14-17) as leaders of intergenerational co-design teams with children (ages 7 - 13), librarians, and MLIS students. [2, 6]. Our prior work in developing intergenerational co-design groups of children, teens, and librarians has proven effective for developing new digital curricula around misinformation [4], creating relational bonds between librarians and communities [2], and allowing teens to innovate in design [7]. By having **teens lead co-design groups of children as near-peer leaders**, we can better identify types of digital civic issues that children are passionate about and their transition towards adolescence. From 2017 - 2023, we have been at the forefront of online and local co-design groups at SPL and WA state rural libraries. Since COVID-19, our team has focused strictly on an online co-design implementation model, which is ready for collaboration now beyond the West Coast [5]. Our *outcomes* will be a single foundational tabletop game around the socioemotional skills in digital civic participation. Prior research [6] suggests tabletop role-playing games can be beneficial for supporting youth’s literacy, communication, and self-reflection skills. Tabletop roleplaying games have features such as different factions, fictional existential threats, and narrative uncertainty. Building on the strengths of tabletop games [6], we will build a single foundational game for digital civic engagement with three possible modules (Act 1: Public Opinion; Act 2: Uncertainty and Misinformation; Act 3: Controversies and Social Media). This

tabletop game for digital civic engagement will provide materials and frameworks so that librarians can co-create their own modules for their communities. Our design work is informed by field-leading misinformation and democracy research at the [UW Center for an Informed Public \(CIP\)](#), and [UW GAMER group](#), which has co-created an escape room for misinformation education with [CIP](#), digital card games and a VR game for supporting youth's mental health and wellbeing, and a set of play-based modules around misinformation utilizing generative AI, YouTube content creation, and Minecraft mazes. Project funding from IMLS will allow us to incorporate findings from our 2017 - 2023 co-design with our work in misinformation to develop this backbone framing and modules. Our team is made up of [Dr. Jason Yip](#) (co-design research), [Dr. Jin Ha Lee](#) (new media and digital games research), [Chris Coward](#) (civic engagement research), [Juan Rubio](#) (The Seattle Public Library), and [Dr. Sam Bindman](#) and [Dr. Jennifer Rubin](#) (foundry10).

### Year 1: Local co-designing, creation, and pilot testing

**Process:** In Fall 2024, we will co-design the initial tabletop game experience with children, teens, and librarians. In Winter and Spring 2025, the focus will be on pilot testing of the digital immersive collaborative experience on civic engagement for children and libraries. For Summer 2025, we will deploy and evaluate a larger-scale test of the collaborative experience for children and libraries to branches at the SPL, which serve a primarily BIPOC population. **Outcomes:** We will work with CIP, GAMER Group, SPL, and foundry10 to transition aspects of their prior projects building playful digital collaborative immersive experiences for children specifically. At this time, we will continue work with teen-led co-design groups online and training new teens for co-design and supporting the testing of the pilot activities.

### Year 2: Expansion of co-design and testing and large scale dissemination campaign

**Process:** We will work with new online library partners across the country beyond Seattle (e.g., rural WA areas, etc.), specifically advised by [University of Maryland](#) (urban co-design) and [Boise State University](#) (rural co-design) teams who have worked with us before. We will conduct a large-scale dissemination campaign with UW CIP, Young Adult Library Services Association, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center (Sesame Workshop), [WebJunction](#) to distribute our activities and digital collaborations across five branches in Seattle and rural libraries in WA, CA, ID, and MD networks. **Outcomes:** We will analyze the data, write up the findings, and produce the final second draft set of modular curriculum and activities for libraries for children. A final set of tabletop activities (e.g., Dungeons and Dragons for civic engagement) freely available online for librarians nationwide with guides, videos, and other support materials.

**Diversity Plan:** The project is committed to selecting half of the participating libraries and youth from communities with significant rural, historically marginalized, or lower-income populations. We will also ensure that diversity is one of our guiding principles as we create the experience (e.g., diverse representation of names, persons, cultural elements). Advisory board members will include [Dr. Tamara Clegg](#) (play-based learning), [Cindy Aden](#) (UW MLIS Chair), [Dr. Elizabeth Bonsignore](#) (urban co-design, digital games), [Dr. Jerry Fails](#) (rural co-design), and the [CIP](#). **Project Results:** The outcome of this implementation will be a single tabletop narrative game with three modules on digital civic engagement for libraries developed by librarians, teen-leaders, children, and MLIS students across the nation. We are also creating webinars, videos, and other support materials to help librarians integrate these activities into their communities and create their own future modules.

**Budget Summary:** \$371,515 which includes the UW indirect rate 55.5%, is the total anticipated costs with \$105,499 for personnel (salary + fringe benefits) and \$107,882 for student support (salary + fringe + tuition); \$16,500 for participant support and incentives; \$3,000 for supplies, \$900 for advisory board participant payments; \$18,000 in year 2 for dissemination materials and services; and \$119,734 for indirect costs.