

Empowering & Innovating Games-based Library Services: National Best Practices for Gaming Collections & Programming

The [Wisconsin State Library Agency](#), [Washington State Library](#), [Game to Grow](#), [Field Day Lab](#) (a research lab housed within the [Wisconsin Center for Education Research](#) [WCER] at the University of Wisconsin-Madison), [Heart of the Deernicorn](#), and [WiLS](#) (a non-profit membership organization serving more than 600 libraries and cultural organizations in Wisconsin and beyond), with the support/advisement of the [Chief Officers of State Library Agencies](#) (COSLA) and the American Library Association's [Games & Gaming Roundtable](#) (ALA GameRT), propose *Empowering & Innovating Games-based Library Services: National Best Practices for Gaming Collections & Programming*, a National Leadership project in support of Goal 2: Build the capacity of libraries and archives to improve community well-being and strengthen civic engagement, and Objective 2.1: Develop or enhance replicable programming, models, and tools that engage communities and individuals of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This three year (August 2024-November 2027), \$249,500 implementation project will utilize the proficiency and collaboration of numerous nationwide subject matter experts and networks (WI and WA State Library Agencies, Game to Grow, Field Day Lab, WiLS, ALA GameRT, COSLA, regional library consortia, local libraries, etc.) among multiple related sectors of study (library innovation, games-based research, games & learning, gaming in library services, diversity in gaming, community needs/outreach, etc.) to implement and study research-, programmatic-, and practitioner-based methodologies related to games-based library services. Ultimately, the project will result in the development of both a comprehensive research report of quantitative/empirical data and literature related to past and present games-based library services, and a newly-generated, scalable, replicable 'Digital Toolkit' to be offered on respective State Library partners' websites, and thoroughly maintained by WA state.

The research report will encompass a panoptic view of both the historicity of games-based library services (while dissecting and building upon prior IMLS grant work done in this space) as well as their current usage in the national library environment; the Toolkit will offer library agencies and individual libraries a diverse suite of replicable/scalable/accessible games-based service implementation techniques, resources, and practices, while outlining how such services can beneficially transform future-facing library services and simultaneously invite a more inclusionary audience into library spaces (more info below: "Project Results"). Both the Toolkit and the associated research report will be effectively promoted and disseminated throughout the national library landscape (predominantly via ALA GameRT and COSLA; more info on dissemination below; "Project Work Plan [Phase #3]").

PROJECT JUSTIFICATION

This project is being proposed as a timely and actionable response to three demonstrable concepts/needs which have the potential to significantly influence library programming and collection development trends in order to better meet the contemporary interests of library stakeholders, while more aptly positioning library institutions as enterprising, innovative 'community hubs'-- concretely sustaining libraries' relevancy long into the future. The concepts are as follows:

- Library trends suggest that library spaces will serve a more diverse, robust, and expanded user-base if they more deliberately embrace targeted technology, media, and innovation trends as 'core' service offerings while simultaneously re-envisioning their spaces (both physically and philosophically) as all-ages educational/social/collaborative 'community hubs'-- in place of pure information-provision outlets ([Meier, 2022](#); [Smith, 2020](#)).
- Modern gaming (in numerous formats and combinations: video games, board games, tabletop role-playing games, collectable/competitive card games, virtual reality, youth Esports, etc.) continues to rise in popularity at a staggering rate ([Cherry, 2023](#); [Macbeath, 2023](#); [Morikawa, 2023](#)), and shows no signs of slowing down; in 2021, well-known games publisher Wizards of the Coast (based in Washington state) boasted that their legacy tabletop-roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons* (created in Wisconsin) had achieved more than 50 million players to date, and 33% year-over-year increases globally, while the overall board game industry was expected to grow 7% to 11% between 2022-2027 ([Corliss, 2021](#); [Peiser, 2022](#)). The video game industry in particular has become the highest-grossing entertainment industry in the world by a wide margin ([Divers, 2023](#)), with an estimated 212.6 million Americans playing video games at least one hour a week, which equates to 65% of the country ([ESA](#),

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[2023](#)). These realities highlight fertile library collection development and programming possibilities which libraries need to consider. Rising interest in modern gaming corresponds directly with the psychological, social, & learning benefits specifically and intrinsically embedded in gaming as an interactive, choice-based medium vs. non-interactive mediums ([Baker, 2014](#); [Schrader, 2018](#); [Von Ehren, 2020](#)). This causal link indicates that a desire for games will at least remain steadfast (but will more than likely continue to grow) hereafter; current and future library users *will* be gamers.

- In consideration of these first two concepts, research suggests gaming in libraries (both programmatic and collection-based) is overwhelmingly positively received, offers new service and participation opportunities to potentially untapped user-bases, and manifests new pathways for physical/philosophical evolutions of library institutions ([ALA GameRT](#); [Stratilatovas, 2019](#)). Regrettably, both education of games-based library services in professional library training degrees and broad implementation of gaming as a foundational library service have yet to be fully understood and embraced by the national library community ([Burkhardt, 2013](#); [Elkins & Hollister, 2020](#)). Additionally, modern and holistic research about the ‘current state of gaming in libraries’ and where/how to improve games-based library services has yet to effectively be collected, curated, and disseminated ([Hill, 2016](#); [Templeton, 2021](#)). This determinedly contributes to a dearth of appropriate games-based services training and adoption nationwide.

It's evident that more focused work in this project area is critically required for the field of librarianship to ensure our institutions' long-term relevancy, as generations of passionate gamers continue to make up larger demographics of library users. 2024 research suggests that as many as 53% of Gen Z and Millennial library users identify as ‘gamers’ ([Berens & Noorda, 2024](#)). Libraries serve as unique neutral ground where individuals from diverse backgrounds can converge, creating an inclusive environment transcending social and cultural barriers. Multiple professional sectors, fields of scholarship, and authoritative bodies are already exploring the junction of games and targeted populations with extraordinary momentum – highlighting intersections with BIPOC people ([Black Voices in Gaming](#); [Natividad, 2021](#); [Stonemaier Games, 2021](#)), neurodivergent people and people with disabilities ([AbleGamers, 2022](#); [Russell, 2023](#); [Stabley, 2023](#)), urban populations ([Puttkamer, 2023](#)), rural populations ([Profenna, 2023](#)), justice-facing populations and the staff who serve them ([Blumer, 2005](#); [FullyLoaded Electronics](#)), LGBTQ+ populations ([Lundberg Toreffson, 2022](#); [Small, 2024](#)). This project presents an opportunity for the national field of librarianship to reflect upon and evolve our games-based work in a similarly innovative way.

Subsequently, this project well aligns with the IMLS Goal and Objective of “strengthening community engagement” and “promoting inclusive engagement across diverse audiences” ([IMLS Goal 2 and Objective 2.1](#)), as it will directly result in the development and nationwide dissemination of a new and relevant “Digital Toolkit” (more info below; “Project Results”), with its content directly informed by previous scholarship and tested in a diversity of libraries; at project end, the Toolkit will provide state libraries, library consortia, individual libraries, and other organizations serving libraries with replicable, scalable, “shelf-ready” program ideas, collection development models, advocacy methodologies, easily implementable resources, and theory-supported best practices for integrating games-based programs and collections in their own regions and spaces. Additionally, project work and explorative research will intentionally focus on investigating the intersection of games and inclusive library services, employing the guidance and expertise of professionals belonging to (and serving) targeted populations. Their input will buttress the toolkit with equity-informed practices to allow libraries to better reach currently untapped and historically marginalized groups. Furthermore, libraries applying the toolkit content and research will be positioned to continuously engage with these populations for cyclical service improvements; new audiences will bring with them new needs, recommendations, criticisms, and feedback, which will support an enhanced outreach and service revision model.

This program naturally builds on current work already underway in Washington, which is described in more detail in the work plan below. The Washington State Library has hosted two years of live gaming among librarians at the last two state’s annual library association conferences, is currently conducting a grant program to support tabletop role-playing games in public, tribal, and community college libraries across the state using LSTA funds, and is administering a state-funded proviso in the 2023-25 budget to support game-based therapeutic rehabilitation at the library at the state’s juvenile detention center.

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Functionally, this project will significantly and more thoughtfully expand upon prior work done in the ‘games and libraries’ space. Some examples of past (or related) IMLS-funded projects include Syracuse University’s “Alternate Reality Toolkit” proposal (2012; [LG-07-12-0555-12](#)), their “[Innovation Destination](#)” website (2015; [LG-80-15-0214-15](#)), and their web-based game development project (2022; [LG-252363-OLS-22](#)). Other examples would be American University’s “Hive Mechanic” neighborhood-based coding games (2021; [LG-250108-OLS-21](#)), and, perhaps most in-line with our proposal, their 2018 “National Forum on Games-based Education in Libraries” ([RE-98-18-0114-18](#)).

These projects, though valuable in their own right, are definitively focused on *different* (more narrowly-scoped) games-based areas of work than our project is proposing (more info below; “Project Results”) – and/or have not resulted in presently available resources useful to the national library landscape. The Alternate Reality Game ‘Toolkit’ (which our team has not been able to locate) aimed to focus specifically on [ARG’s](#) instead of broad multi-format games; the Innovation Destination website is evidently more makerspace/STEAM-focused rather than games-centered; and SU’s web-based ‘game development project’ and AU’s “Hive Mechanic” concentrate on the development of actual games themselves rather than on holistic best practices for games-based service integration in libraries. AU’s “National Forum” purported to offer an online resource guide, but it is not currently locatable. It is also important to highlight that the above project partners are predominantly Universities, as opposed to library practitioner-supporting agencies like WA State Library and the WI Library Services Team; our agencies’ sweeping work with differently resourced multitype libraries will allow us to embed directly informed library experience into our Toolkit with acute intentionality.

Additionally, the above projects have not resulted in holistic and comprehensive scholarship (both historical and contemporary) about games-based library services (especially with an intentional focus on inclusive services) like ours aims to (more info below; “Phase #1; Wisconsin Track”). The robust research we will be doing will be the first of its kind, which we anticipate becoming a bedrock of study for future games-based library projects to easily build upon.

Our project will serve as a groundbreaking and necessary response to the critical needs/concepts described throughout this narrative -- answering both the “why” and “how” of implementing games-based services. Library institutions continually strive to identify new ways of remaining innovative and culturally significant in the eyes of their userbase. Given the ever-evolving popularity of games and gaming, more deliberate and informed integration of games-based library services offers leaders in the field extraordinary opportunities to strengthen interest-rich relationships with patrons while reaching untapped demographics. Games not only offer a fun and interactive experience but also help foster local community bonds ([Stokes, 2020](#)), develop new spaces for community participation ([Steinkuehler and Williams, 2006](#)), and enhance empathy ([Gagnon et. al, 2023](#)). Furthermore, research into gaming across a wide spectrum of learning, literacy, and mental health sciences have concluded there to be extraordinarily efficient and deeply impactful learning and social/emotional benefits relative to the medium (Gee, [2007](#) & [2013](#); [Farber, 2021](#)).

The Toolkit will create actionable pathways for libraries looking to reinvent themselves and reshape their physical spaces/programs. As libraries still seek to rebound their usage numbers after pandemic drop-offs, this grant will provide an onramp for those looking to truly innovate within their communities – elevating the library profession as a whole, and keenly serving the next generation of library users. Games-based library services will (as mentioned before by fellow [games-in-libraries proponent](#) and WA Secretary of State, Steve Hobbs) “lift up libraries!”

In the end, this project passionately aims to demonstrate that **embracing gaming in libraries = embracing innovation in libraries**, directly resulting in tangible benefits for both library staff and users.

PROJECT WORK PLAN

The three-year project, beginning on August 1st, 2024, has three primary phases:

Phase #1 (August 2024-August 2025): The two state library agencies will concurrently employ two tracks; Washington will complete and analyze initial piloting of games-based programming, while Wisconsin will conduct comprehensive research and a literature review with Field Day Lab. This Phase will also include extensive national surveying coordinated

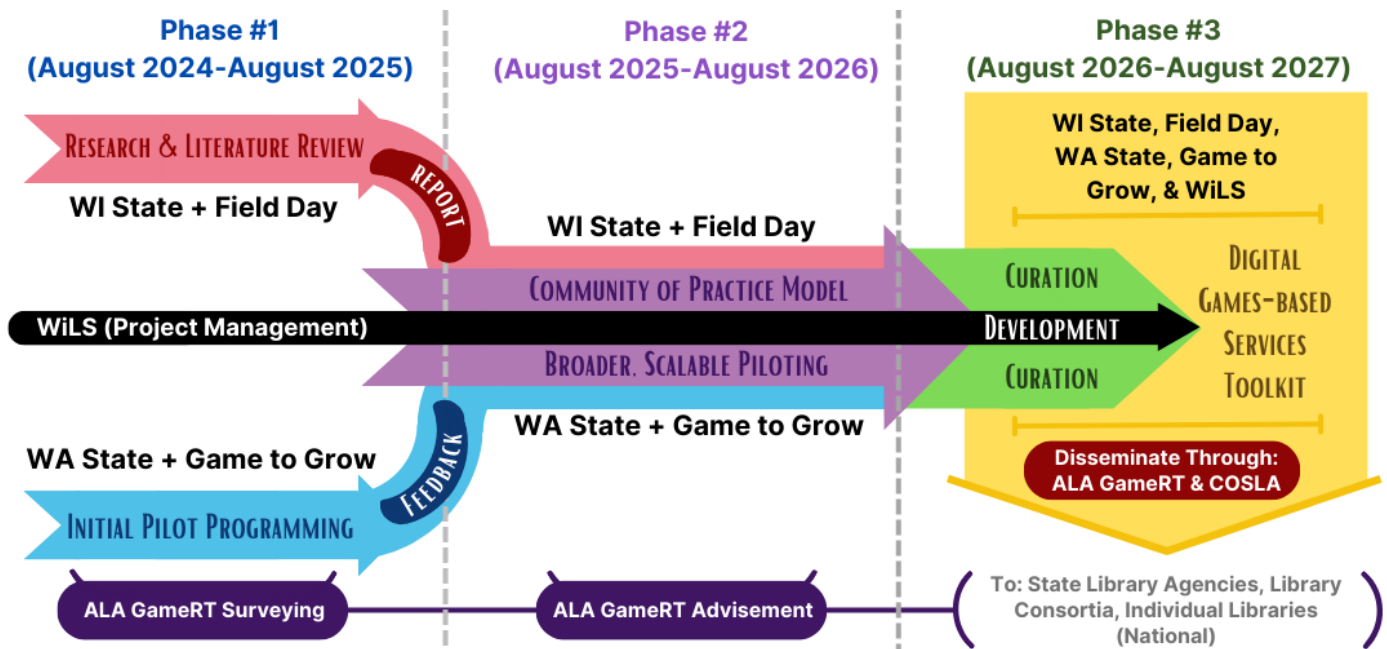
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through (and with the support of) ALA GameRT to develop a sweeping snapshot of “the state of the field” when it comes to games-based services. The ALA GameRT will also help platform the ongoing project through all project phases via numerous promotional pathways (more info below; “Wisconsin track”).

Phase #2 (August 2025-August 2026): Washington and Game to Grow will expand and scale the pilot programs throughout broader multi-type libraries, while Wisconsin and Field Day Lab will establish a more intimate ‘Community of Practice’ (CoP) model, using Field Day’s successful and established [Fellowship](#) template. ALA GameRT’s vast network of diverse games-activated librarians will be advising all partners during this phase (making game/program/collection materials recommendations, broadcasting further opportunities for participation, etc.), while WiLS will regularly convene partners to facilitate resource-sharing, collaborative troubleshooting, and joint project analysis. WA’s blossoming work of scaling games-based service piloting and WI’s CoP work in developing service integration best practices will be transitive between project partners during Phase #2, resulting in a rigorous positive feedback loop for all ongoing work.

Phase #3 (August 2026-August 2027): Primary partners will curate and develop the digital “Games-based Services Toolkit”. ALA GameRT, COSLA, and all state library partners (including consortia, individual sites, and state Associations) will assist with dissemination of the Toolkit and its included research report (detailed information below; “Phase #3”); Washington will guarantee the sustainability of all online tools and resources – providing a central location for a newly-inspired national Community of Practice to revolve around (Wisconsin will also host on its website).

To visualize the project workflow, we’ve included a timeline illustration with associated personnel and project milestones:



For additional clarity, more detailed phase workplans are described in the following section:

Phase #1 – Initial Pilot Programming / Research + Literature Review & Report:

- **Wisconsin Track; Research + Literature Review & Report:** WI State Library Agency will surface and reflect upon work/literature already done in the games-and-libraries space, collect and study modern research related to gaming in library programs and collections, and develop a contemporary, cutting-edge report to support work done in Phases #2 and #3. Field Day Lab and DPI LST will be the research leads, while WiLS will help organize the team and project manage (meeting setting, agenda building, communications, document organization, etc.).

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The surfacing and analysis of literature (as well as data collection/surveying on a national level) will be facilitated with significant assistance from advisory organizations ALA GameRT and COSLA. In particular, the ALA GameRT has agreed to help platform the project, support the project, and facilitate data collection/surveying in several ways (throughout all three phases), including:

- Making members of their board available to meet on a rotating basis to offer feedback and suggestions and spread word about the project as needed.
- Hosting sessions at the ALA Annual Conferences in 2025, 2026, and 2027 (ALA GameRT leads programming at each Annual Conference), where we can offer informational presentations about the project – including current activities, the progress/status of the project, future goals, opportunities for attendees to get involved, etc. They can also help moderate Q&A time for attendees to ask questions.
- Offering us multiple online pathways wherein we can survey their network, post updates, highlight calls for participation, share announcements, etc., including:
 - The GameRT Discord server: <https://discord.gg/3CDhdRx>
 - The GameRT Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/gamertala>
 - The GameRT Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/LeagueOfLibrarianGamers/>
 - The GameRT Blog: <https://games.ala.org/>
 - The GameRT forum on ALA Connect (accessible only by GameRT members): <https://connect.ala.org/gamert/home>
 - Hosting us for a live Twitch stream as part of their [Round Table Round Table](#) series. They would dedicate an episode specifically for this project: <https://www.twitch.tv/ALAGameRT>

Utilizing GameRT’s reach alongside both COSLA and individual partners’ networks will allow project leaders to capture robust data and communicate widely about ongoing work. All Phase #1 research and literature collected will be analyzed, curated, and synthesized into a final report (led by Field Day Lab/WiLS), which will include initial recommended best practices for implementing games in library spaces. Outlined theories, methodologies, data, and other associated information harnessed in the report will in turn be utilized to support broader statewide pilot testing in Washington State and a games-and-libraries-based Community of Practice model in Wisconsin in Phase #2. Ultimately, the Phase #1 research report will include content about:

- Historical and contemporary practices of games-based library services (including library practitioner areas of focus like programming, collection development, and community collaborations), including identification of knowledge, capacity, and resource barriers related to the integration of games-based library services, in addition to potential solutions that might ameliorate such issues,
 - i.e., what types of library collections and programs have been/are/will be offered in the games-based library services sphere? How do we develop materials collections and programs around different formats of gaming? What is successful? What is *not*? Why?,
- An examination of nationwide communities’ desire for games-based library services; a “needs assessment” for this type of work, conceptualized from a local to national spectrum,
- A deep exploration of issues and opportunities related to equity, diversity, and access as they relate to gaming in library services (for both library staff and users; demographics of focus will include rural libraries, prison libraries, BIPOC librarians/users, neurodivergent users and patrons with disabilities, etc.),
- Demonstrable research supporting the meaningful social-emotional, mental health, and deep learning benefits that games-based library services offer (innately tied to games’ uniquely interactive and choice-

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based anatomy; [Bauld, 2023](#)), including how gaming might benefit senior populations (e.g., gaming as a means of helping to prevent degradation due to Alzheimer's/dementia; [ChenMed, 2023](#)).

- **Washington State Track; Pilot Testing at Multitype Libraries:** The Washington State Library (WSL) will administer the second year of a state-funded program for therapeutic gaming in at least one juvenile detention center in Washington during the first phase. In addition, WSL will be assessing its state-wide tabletop role-playing game grant program, which will have concluded just as this grant is starting. Also, working with the [Tabletop Game Alliance](#), WSL will have access to additional research resources as necessary to complement Wisconsin's investigations.
 - In 2023 the state of Washington appropriated \$83,000 in FY 2024 and \$67,000 in FY 2025 for the Washington State Library to administer a [two-year program](#) “to support businesses and nonprofits engaged in therapeutic rehabilitation within juvenile secure residential facilities,” to “provide outreach and therapeutic education among incarcerated youth is crucial for successful community reentry.” The Washington State Library currently funds through a combination of state and federal sources the salaries, benefits, and collections for libraries within the state’s prisons, mental institutions, and one, soon to be two, juvenile detention facilities. WSL has identified a qualified vendor to administer a therapeutic gaming program at the library at the Echo Glen Children’s Center in Snoqualmie, WA. The second year of this program will coincide with the first year of this grant and will provide hands-on, practical experience in using game-based therapy in a library setting. One of this program's outputs is expected to be a manual for conducting therapeutic with incarcerated individuals.
 - Using LSTA funds from the IMLS, the Washington State Library is currently administering a [two-pronged grant program](#) for libraries across the state to provide tabletop role-playing experience to their patrons. All public, tribal, and community college libraries can apply for a mini grant of up to \$400 for games, game equipment, books, and more to support starting or expanding game-playing in their libraries. In addition, three competitive “innovation” grants of up to \$2,000 apiece will be awarded to libraries for more extensive or comprehensive projects. The outcomes of this grant program will be recorded just as this grant will begin, providing a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data from libraries of all kinds. Another expected outcome of this grant program is working with Heart of the Deernicorn on simple enhancements to existing games to make them more accessible, such as game instructions available in audio, other languages, or braille, as well as adding tactile elements to the games.
 - And finally, the Washington State Library hosted its second annual WLA After Dark session at the state’s library association conference in late February 2024. After the overwhelming demand in the first year, there were six concurrent games with various levels of experience, a character creation station and expert help for all participants. Besides promotion for the tabletop role-playing grant program, Washington State Library intends to establish a tabletop role-playing interest group with the state library association, and the members of this interest group will provide a critical channel of practitioners across the state to support the work of this grant.

Phase #2 – Broader Pilot Testing, Community of Practice Workshopping, & Identification of Best Practices: During the second Phase of the project, the distinct ‘tracks’ of Phase #1 will converge -- folding the research results of WI’s work into the multitype library pilot testing feedback that WA acquired. Using the collective information, partners in both states will maintain ongoing collaboration and activate new project-related partnerships with library sites for broader pilot testing and workshopping throughout WA and WI, respectively. WiLS will unite the ongoing work done via recurring meetings, so the states can build on and utilize each other's work, troubleshooting emergent challenges together.

WI will work with Field Day Lab to develop and manage an intimate yearlong ‘Community of Practice’ model of games-based library service testing, with ~15 librarians representing diverse staff members, community demographics, and resource availability, meeting both in-person and virtually as a cohort. CoP members will receive subaward funds to test

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games-based programming and collection development practices in their libraries, collaboratively troubleshoot challenges, document emergent best practices, and offer each other mutual counsel toward games-based services success. WI is aptly positioned to facilitate a successful recruitment and CoP model while collecting ongoing data, feedback, and implementation best practices, in no small part due to the following existent games-based library initiatives:

- The [Wisconsin Games + Learning + Libraries](#) digital cohort (located on the [WISELearn](#) online discussion & [OER](#) sharing platform). This burgeoning group and its associated email distribution list already boasts more than 100 members representing school, public, academic, and special librarians from diverse communities and regions throughout the entire state. The group serves as a central resource sharing, resource curation, and networking hub for WI librarians (and other educators) that are interested in the beneficial learning principals, collection practices, and programmatic opportunities related to games of all types.
- Two ongoing games-and-librarians-based research/practitioner Communities of Practice (“[Fellowships](#)”) currently being facilitated by Field Day Lab and WI:
 - [PolarVR: Utilizing Public Library Systems to Engage Rural and Latinx Communities in Polar Research](#) – A National Science Foundation (NSF) supported project bringing together “rural librarians, bilingual science communicators, polar scientists and a technical team” working together to create a series of “five bilingual virtual reality (VR) experiences, engaging users as polar explorers of exotic and extreme environments to enhance STEM understanding and appreciation.” The project, which has been running since July of 2022 (and will run through 2026), employs a new cohort of librarians each year, paralleling the annual development of new VR experiences. The project aims to “create a new channel for disseminating polar science, working first with underserved rural Latinx communities in Wisconsin to create a new network between rural communities and university researchers.” For librarians’ communities’ benefit, involving them in the co-design process will “produce new ways for rural libraries to engage their local communities and their growing Latinx populations with polar science experiences”.
 - [Astrophysics Game Design Fellowship](#): In February of 2023, Chris Baker joined Field Day Lab to help lead the “kickoff” event for an ongoing Astrophysics Game Design Fellowship. The partnership convened public librarians, school librarians, science teachers, and particle astrophysicists throughout Wisconsin to begin envisioning and developing a new desktop educational game based on current research happening at the [Wisconsin IceCube Particle Astrophysics Center](#), one of the largest NSF funded science endeavors to date. The Fellowship will help librarians learn more about games and game-based learning, while bringing the cutting-edge scientific research being done at the University of Wisconsin to life in supporting the development of a new science game and associated activities.
- The annual Wisconsin [Play Make Learn Conference](#) is “a place for collaboration and discovery in the design, research and practice of playful learning, games for learning and positive social impact, making and makerspaces, STEAM education, and arts in education”, creating “an inspirational space for preK-12 educators, designers, developers, innovators, librarians, museum professionals, makers, and researchers to tinker together, share knowledge, and celebrate one another’s work”. The conference keeps growing, continuing to see audience demographics expand -- both in the fields they represent and how far they travel; attendees and presenters have participated from across the United States and five other countries, including Canada, Germany, Taiwan, the Kingdom of Bahrain, and India. Play Make Learn is an ideal conference to stoke excitement and share ongoing updates about the project with a directly interested audience. Chris Baker is a member of the Play Make Learn Conference Planning committee.

WA will expand their Phase #1 multitype library pilot testing to acquire a broader swathe of library partners of different sizes (regional consortia and individual sites) to similarly test best practices as outlined via Phase #1’s research and programming feedback. WA hopes to expand its therapeutic gaming project to include the Green Hill School in Chehalis, WA, which is a medium/maximum security fenced facility that provides older males (up to 25 years old) sentenced to Juvenile Rehabilitation treatment with education and vocational training. Washington State Library is currently working

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with the WA Department of Children, Youth, and Families to provide library services to Green Hill School. In addition, WA expects to expand on the phase #1 aspects of accessibility aspects of tabletop role-playing games with the Washington Talking Book and Braille Library and other interested library partners across the state.

Phase #3 – Project Evaluation, Documentation/Resource Curation into Digital Toolkit, & Toolkit Dissemination:

During the final phase, WA State & WI project leaders will work directly with WiLS and Game to Grow (with Field Day Lab and ALA GameRT offering back-end feedback) in order to holistically analyze the research report & results collected in Phase #1 as we; as the robust work and broader evaluation done in Phase #2. This reflective curation will result in the development of a replicable, scalable, and digital “Games-based Library Services Toolkit” which will include supplemental research reporting and documentation. These outputs will be housed on WA State’s & WI’s respective websites and disseminated nationally through ALA GameRT’s & COSLA’s far-reaching networks to maximize national impact and change.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Lead project personnel includes: Sara Jones, Washington State Librarian and PI for the project, Co-PI Sara White (WA Youth Services Consultant), Co-PI Mike Buschman (WA Library Development Manager), Co-PI Ben Miller (WI Library Services Team Director), Co-PI Chris Baker (WI Public Library Consultant), and Co-PI David Gagnon (Director/Founder of [Field Day Lab](#), Scientist at WCER).

Project collaborators will include Adam Davis (Co-founder of Game to Grow), Jim Mathews (Education Director at Field Day Lab, Scientist at WCER), and non-profit library support organization [WiLS](#). Project advisors will include the ALA GameRT, COSLA, Heart of the Deernicorn, WA & WI regional library consortia, and individual multitype library sites.

DIVERSITY PLAN

First and foremost, Project Leads will design the participatory aspects of each phase within a crucial lens of “Nothing about us, without us” regarding our efforts to lift up and better serve targeted populations. Community of Practice- & pilot-based “Calls for participation” and research methodology will include language *specifically seeking* to integrate library workers belonging to and serving diverse populations. Demographics-of-focus for participants, games-adjacent research, and best practices development will include BIPOC, neurodivergent people and people with disabilities, urban populations, rural populations, justice-facing populations, LGBTQ+ populations, and more.

Interested librarians belonging to these groups will be given participation priority, as outlined in a recruitment plan that will be developed within Phase #1 (directly informed by acquired research). By utilizing the skills, experiences, and backgrounds of diverse project participants, partners will be able to engage in active dialogue with relevant community members and local organizations. Furthermore, libraries will gain valuable insights into the cultural, educational, and entertainment preferences of their patrons.

This approach ensures that the gaming activities offered are not only inclusive but also culturally relevant and appealing to a wide range of ages, identities, and backgrounds. Examples of such activities may include libraries hosting game nights, workshops, and tournaments that reflect local demographic/community interests, and purchasing games-based collection materials which specifically include themes and representative characters that will resonate with diverse audiences. In addition, we expect that by providing game-based events and services, libraries will discover ever richer understandings of the breadth of diversity in their communities.

The project will prioritize highlighting diverse games for diverse gamers ([Bednar, 2022](#); [Court, 2020](#)). The Toolkit will prioritize diversity and equity, ensuring that every library can offer gaming experiences that resonate with their unique communities. The toolkit will include:

1. A diverse game selection guide to offer libraries leadership on curating a diverse collection of games. It will:
 - Highlight games that celebrate various cultures, identities, and perspectives,

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- Recommend games spanning different genres (e.g., adventure, strategy, role-playing) to cater to diverse audiences., while showcasing games developed by underrepresented groups,
 - Consider age groups, accessibility needs, and sensitivities when selecting games ([Verizon on Accessibility in Gaming](#)).
2. Inclusive gaming event templates for multiformat programs, game nights, tournaments, and workshops, including:
 - Theme nights tied to cultural celebrations (e.g., Hispanic Heritage Month, LGBTQ+ Pride, etc.).
 - Accessibility-focused events: Including guidelines for sensory-friendly gaming sessions and adaptive controller workshops.
 - Multilingual materials: templates and guidance for promoting events in multiple languages.
 - Literature supporting the benefits of games-based services for targeted populations (e.g., gaming as a means of helping to prevent degradation due to Alzheimer's/dementia; [Ning, et al., 2020](#))
 3. Community engagement strategies to equip libraries with tools to effectively engage their communities; provide strategies for reaching marginalized communities, such as justice-facing individuals ([Blondeau, 2019](#); [Dowling, 2014](#)).
 4. Evaluation and assessment tools to help libraries measure the impact of their gaming programs.
 - Templates and key performance indicators for collecting feedback from patrons about their gaming experience.
 - Examples of libraries that successfully implemented inclusive gaming initiatives.
 - Techniques for highlighting innovative games-based service measures taken to improve community outreach and reach broader, more diverse populations.

PROJECT RESULTS

This project will result in two key outputs. One output will be a first-of-its-kind holistic analysis of both historical and contemporary practices of games-based library services, including a comprehensive collection of relevant research literature, evaluation of past and present quantitative/qualitative data related to games-based library service, nationwide surveying for in-practice recommendations, etc. Simply put, we believe our research outputs will become *core* groundwork for study surrounding library programming and collection development practices.

Another more directly functional output of the project will be an easily accessible and cohesive “Digital Toolkit” which will offer replicable gaming programs and games-based collection development recommendations rooted in accessibility and equity, all supported by modern research highlighting the intrinsic social-emotional learning (SEL) & learning science benefits of interactive media. The Toolkit will be designed for use by library entities of various sizes: state library agencies, regional library consortia, individual library sites, etc. Library staff of wide-ranging skill/experience in games-based service space will be able to utilize it, from novices to experts. Content-wise, the toolkit and associated research will specifically:

- Offer library organizations a well-documented buffet of games-based library service options to implement in their spaces, including recommendations, successful models, policy/procedure templates, tips, tricks, barriers to avoid, and more. These outlined best practices for games-based library services will more specifically include:
 - Guidelines for budgeting scalable games-based library programs (drop-in programming; recurring programming; partner programming; readymade “programs in a box”, etc.) related to gaming (tabletop gaming, board gaming, collectable/competitive card gaming, video gaming, etc.). Guidelines will also include information about programming for different games-interested demographics (youth, teens, adults, seniors), alongside wraparound suggestions for programming (how to set up and promote the programs; offering snacks and other activities; recommendations for multiplayer games, etc.)

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- Funding gaming collections (video, board, TTRPG, etc.), with recommendations of what to purchase (best boardgames for circulation, TTRPG books to purchase, what popular video games across different console offerings are best to prioritize, etc.), best practices for adding games to libraries' ILS's (assigning borrowing rules; replacement costs & fines/fees; language to include in new procedures and policies; how to label/tag games; how to maintain collections (where to purchase replacement components without having to purchase a whole new game), etc.
- Outline proven methodologies highlighting the social/emotional and deep learning benefits of gaming, which will help libraries advocate for integration of games-based library services and encourage pathways for research-informed collaboration with local community group and school gaming programs,
- Spotlight pathways for overcoming challenges and barriers related to games-based library services, including technology, education, and resource gaps, while making recommendations for existent games-based library networks to connect with that can offer future professional development and continuing education opportunities,
- Thoughtfully explore equity and accessibility as the topics relate to gaming and the implementation of games-based services for diverse audiences – especially when led by library staff belonging to targeted diversity groups ([Bay, n.d.](#); [GamesHub, 2022](#); [International Game Developers Association, n.d.](#)). Both the programming and collection development portions will include informed-by-practice recommendations for considering and reaching inclusionary audiences, as outlined in the diversity plan.
- Center nationwide libraries, library agencies, and library organizations around new, emergent theories of games-in-libraries research, resulting in a robust community of practice and potential “mentorship model” that will allow for strong, ongoing games-based service recommendations (and revisions) looking to the future.
- A community needs “assessment process” or “checklist”, and a sustainability model for the ongoing evolution of scalable games-based library practices (including information about websites/agencies/organizations that share regular updates about gaming trends, innovation, etc.), encouraging libraries to autonomously remain informed about emergent games-based practices that might be newly integrated into their programs & collection.

The toolkit will be hosted on both the WA State Library and WI DPI LST websites and will be widely promoted/disseminated to the national library community through COSLA, the ALA GameRT, [Tabletop Game Alliance](#), and other relevant external networks. The Toolkit will be available after the period of performance, and the ongoing offering of the toolkit will fall under the states' retention policies, which will include technical support to sustain the same level of access over the duration of the retention period (10 years in the case of Washington). In addition, after the performance period, the toolkit will be updated with connections to similar future projects, events, and efforts around games-based library services.

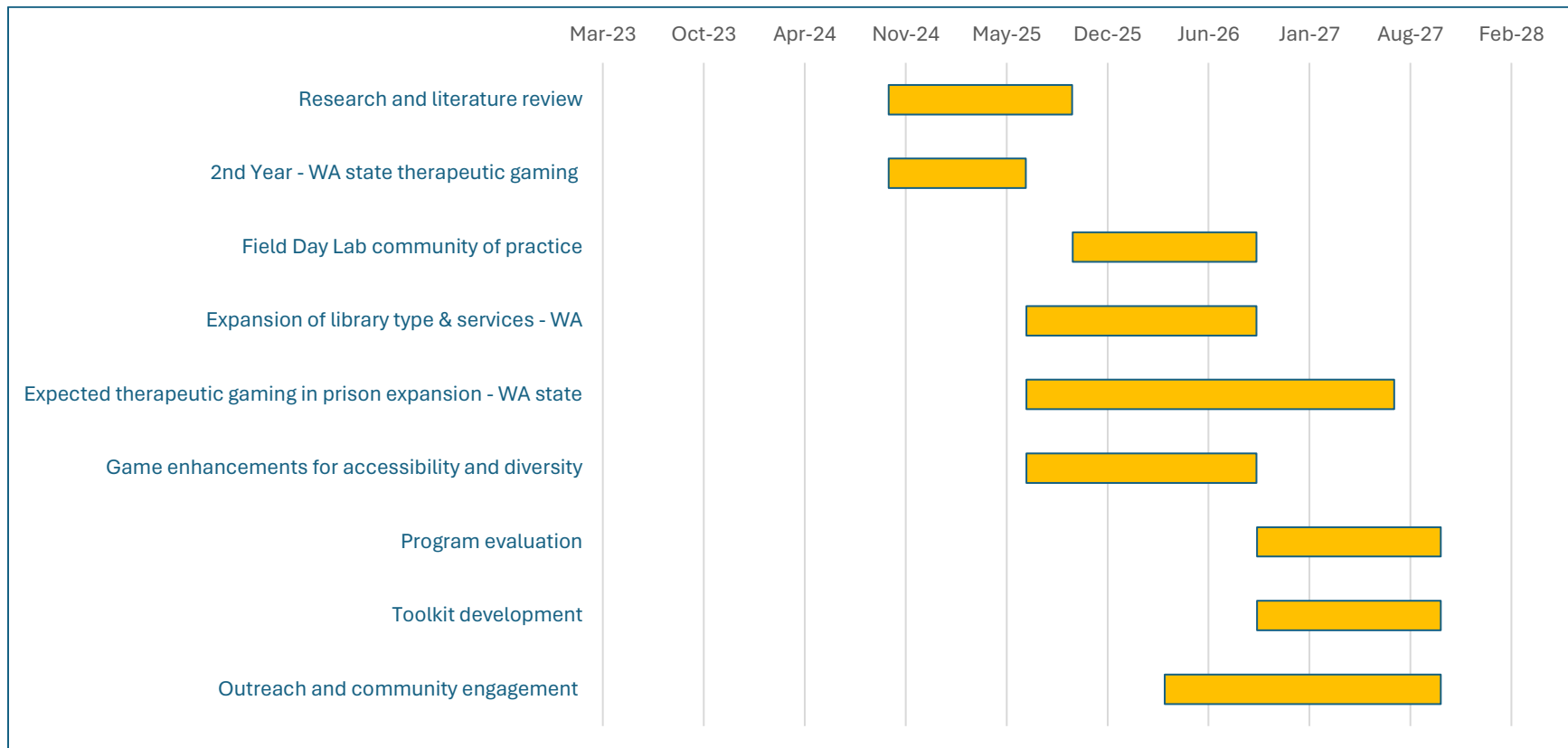
TARGET GROUPS & BENEFICIARIES: As the “Digital Games-based Library Services Toolkit” will be intentionally designed to be easily replicable and scalable for different needs, the target groups for project outcomes are State Library Agencies, statewide Library Associations, regional library consortia, and individual library sites. The core beneficiaries of the Toolkit (and supporting research report) will be collection development- and programming-focused library staff, and library patrons of all ages.

BUDGET SUMMARY

- **Year One Total: \$51,500**– Research and literature review, project management
 - **Year Two Total: \$119,000** – Expanding game resources, project management, marketing, etc.
 - **Year Three Total: \$79,000** – Community engagement, advanced gaming equipment and technology integration, toolkit development, evaluation, and deployment, project management
- ★ **Grant Total: \$249,500**

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Schedule of Completion



Digital Products Plan

The project aims to create a comprehensive "Digital Toolkit" to enhance library services through games. This toolkit is designed to be a versatile resource for libraries of all sizes, offering an array of gaming programs and game-based collection development practices grounded in accessibility and equity. Supported by modern research, it will highlight the benefits of interactive media for social-emotional learning and learning science. With contributions from both subject matter experts and practitioners, the toolkit will be scalable and easy to replicate, catering to library staff with varying levels of expertise in games-based services.

The toolkit will not only showcase proven methodologies demonstrating the educational benefits of gaming but also offer solutions for overcoming challenges related to implementing games-based library services. It will emphasize the importance of equity and accessibility in gaming, provide a framework for community needs assessment and sustainability, and encourage libraries to stay informed on emerging gaming trends. Once completed, the digital toolkit will be available on the WA State Library and WI DPI LST websites, promoted nationally via COSLA, the ALA GameRT, and other networks, aiming to centralize library efforts in integrating gaming into their services effectively.

Type

The toolkit will be a web-based, content-rich resource providing a detailed collection of games-based library service options. It will include guidelines for budgeting scalable programs, recommendations for building gaming collections, and strategies for inclusion and accessibility. These resources are intended to help libraries implement successful gaming programs and collections that cater to diverse demographics and interests. The toolkit will also feature best practices for program promotion, maintenance of game collections, and the integration of games into library systems, all organized in an accessible, user-friendly format.

Availability

The digital toolkit will be readily accessible online, hosted on the websites of the WA State Library and WI DPI LST. Its wide dissemination strategy includes promotion through the national library community, leveraging platforms and networks such as COSLA and the ALA GameRT. This strategic availability ensures that library staff across different regions and institutions can easily access the toolkit. By situating the toolkit within these established library networks and digital platforms, the project ensures a broad reach, allowing libraries of all sizes and types to implement its resources and strategies effectively.

Access

The toolkit will be released into the public domain with a Creative Commons CC0 designation, making it freely available (no cost) to the public with no copyright or attribution restrictions. In addition, the toolkit will be crafted to cater to library staff with varying degrees of experience in games-based services, from novices to seasoned experts. This approach ensures that regardless of a library staff member's previous experience with gaming or digital services, they can efficiently utilize the toolkit to develop and enhance games-based library programs. And finally, the toolkit will follow the W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) international standard to be accessible to people with disabilities. This will include providing text alternatives for non-text content, captions, friendly to assistive technology, easily readable and navigable, and much more.

Sustainability

The toolkit will be hosted on both the WA State Library and WI DPI LST websites. The expectation for the toolkit will be available during and after the period of performance, and the curation of the toolkit will fall under the states' retention policies, including technical support to sustain the same level of access over the duration of the retention period (10 years in the case of Washington). In addition, after the period of performance it is expected that toolkit will be continue to be updated with connections to similar future projects, events, and efforts around games-based library services.