

TEAMS

Game exhibitions are a lot of work. There's the normal 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, people share germs through controllers and VR headsets, people will even quit games to check their social media on gallery computers.

Unless your exhibition is just you sharing videogames from your couch, you're going to need help. Anyway, it's more fun working together.

How to find volunteers or paid helpers

1. **Put out an open call.** Share your vision, the available work, and any details about duration and money. Use visuals and lead back to a short form.
2. **Send your call directly to people you'd love to work with.** It's scary, but it's worth it.
3. **Look for help in the right places.** Consider where you might find your ideal helpers. Try videogame festivals, web art communities, relevant university departments, digital art galleries, and arcades, and ask for their help to post a poster, share a social media post, or send out a call in their newsletter.
4. **Choose your team carefully.** It's better to invest in a small group of enthusiastic helpers than to train 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:

1. After a helper reaches out, meet them quickly while energy is high.
3. Warmly welcome them, 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 2 sentence description about a game by Monday.
4. 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.
5. Cycle through a few small tasks with the new helper, escalating in 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 labour 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 understand 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 about 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 you notice that the work starts to feel arduous, communicate and immediately scale back.

Talk openly about expectations

Talk about money expectations

Until there is a major change in our economic structure, we are often dealing with volunteers and underpaid helpers in the arts. Communicate openly about money, especially if some people are paid and others are not. There is an important difference between interacting with unionized staff, contract workers, and volunteers that can't be glossed over.

Talk about community expectations

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

example, we will:

1. Only do work that matches our shared vision and goals.
2. Speak our vision clearly so helpers can see each task in the larger context.
3. Match helpers to work that most closely meets personal skills and interests.
4. Define tasks clearly, provide training, communicate expectations.
5. Support people when they ask for help (within capacity).
6. Celebrate all work.
7. Take feedback seriously and make changes when the community agrees.
8. Say no to growth when we are low on energy or time.
9. Continuously work towards a stronger, safer, and more accessible community.
10. Make space for people to grow and/or step back when needed

Talk about individual helpers expectations

Set clear expectations around what is expected from each helper. For example, we expect that each helper:

1. Is aware of the space they occupy and mindful of the way their actions shape the community and exhibition.
2. Communicates needs and desires as clearly as possible.
3. Invests in their own training.
4. Only signs on for the work they can do.
5. Ask for help when they need it.
6. Communicates right away when they can't meet commitments.
7. Communicates 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 one charismatic artist or curator is supported by hundreds of uncredited and undervalued underlings is hopefully dying out.

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