

**Play for Change:
Educational Game Design for Grassroots Organizing**

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Introduction: Civic Engagement in a Participatory Culture

Introduction

On July 4, 1897, Wisconsin State Representative Robert M. La Follette (aka “Fighting Bob”) stood on a wagon amidst the chaos of a county fair to announce his bid for the governor’s seat. In his speech, “The Danger Threatening Representative Government,” he stated:

So multifarious have become corporate affairs, so many concessions and privileges have been accorded them by legislation—so many more are sought by further legislation—that their specially retained representatives are either elected to office, directly in their interests, or maintained in a perpetual lobby to serve them. Hence it is that the corporation does not limit its operations to the legitimate conduct of its business.¹

La Follette’s fight against the corrupting influence of corporate interests rings as true today as it did in 1897. While La Follette decried the irresponsible actions of Gilded Age robber barons, today’s activists fight disinformation campaigns and a revolving door policy for lobbyists, all funded by a thinly-veiled cadre of modern robber barons. Few people epitomize this elite group of neoliberal oligarchs better than oil moguls Charles and David Koch.

Between 1997 and 2008, the Koch brothers gave “more than \$17 million...to groups involved in the campaign against unions, including the Competitive Enterprise Institute, which promotes legislation targeting private-sector unions.”² The influence of the Koch brothers and their allies has been particularly strong in the state of Wisconsin, where they have invested millions in campaigns supporting Republican governor Scott Walker. After taking office in

¹ LaFollette, “The Danger Threatening Representative Government.”

² Overby, “Billionaire Brothers In Spotlight In Wis. Union Battle.”

January of 2010, Walker returned their favor by approving \$137 million in corporate tax breaks.³ A year later he became a hero of the neoliberal elite by successfully passing the “Budget Repair Bill,” a bill that drastically limited the collective bargaining rights, compensation, and benefits of public employees. In response, over 100,000 protestors—including many already-underpaid teachers—occupied the state capitol building and capitol square for 16 days, live streaming their actions, activating remote supporters across social media platforms, and demanding protection of labor rights and resistance to “the politics of austerity.”⁴

Although the protestors succeeded in demanding a recall election in 2012, they faced an uphill battle. Walker’s campaign raised \$30 million, largely from the Koch brothers and other out-of-state donors; his competitor Tom Barrett’s campaign raised only \$4 million from primarily in-state donors.⁵ The Republican Governor’s Association and Americans for Prosperity spent a combined \$19 million on Walker’s campaign, potentially in coordination to a degree that violated federal tax law.⁶ Despite this massive disparity in funding, 46% of Wisconsinites voted for Barrett. In the end, however, Walker and his corporate backers won by a margin of 171,105 votes.⁷

The ability to flood campaigns with private and corporate funding in this way was bolstered by the 2010 Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. This landmark 5-4 decision ruled that the First Amendment’s free speech clause protects corporate expenditures on political communication. This decision, along with the Budget Repair

³ Collins, “Theorizing Wisconsin’s 2011 Protests: Community-Based Unionism Confronts Accumulation by Dispossession,” 10.

⁴ Collins, 1.

⁵ “Wisconsin Voters Keep Walker after Recall Election.”

⁶ “Leaked Audio Suggests Koch’s AFP Violated Law During Walker Recall.”

⁷ “2012 Recall Election for Governor, Lt. Governor and State Senator.”

Bill, evolved into a rallying cry for progressives throughout Wisconsin. In February 2011, the decentralized hacktivist group⁸ Anonymous launched a denial of service attack on a Koch brothers' subsidiary in Green Bay, WI,⁹ stating: "It has come to our attention that the brothers, David and Charles Koch - the billionaire owners of Koch Industries - have long attempted to usurp American Democracy. Their actions to undermine the legitimate political process in Wisconsin are the final straw. Starting today we fight back."¹⁰

Wisconsin United to Amend

In the midst of this struggle, two self-described "white-haired" Wisconsinites decided to dedicate their retirement years to fighting the influence of corporate money in politics. In 2010 George Penn founded Wisconsin United to Amend (WIUTA), a social movement organization (SMO) based in Madison, WI. WIUTA is "dedicated to restoring our representative democracy, by minimizing the corruptive influence that money has on our political process."¹¹ The organization's goal is "to overturn Citizens United and related Supreme Court decisions so we may reclaim the liberties and privileges guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution for real people."¹² Jim Crist, a retired IT specialist, joined WIUTA soon after it was founded and primarily manages the organization's digital strategy. George, a retired nuclear engineer, focuses his time on training, public presentations, and offline recruitment.

George had initially become involved with the California-based group Move to Amend in 2009, and began working in his home state of Wisconsin not long after. WIUTA's first

⁸ Coleman, "What It's Like to Participate in Anonymous' Actions."

⁹ "St. Louis Man Sentenced in Federal Court for Cyber-Attack on Koch Industries Subsidiary."

¹⁰ Smith, "'Anonymous' Takes down Americans for Prosperity Website."

¹¹ "Uniting Citizens Against Citizens United."

¹² "Uniting Citizens Against Citizens United."

municipal resolutions calling to amend the Constitution were passed on April 4, 2011, only 14 months after the *Citizens United* decision. WIUTA is not alone in the fight against corruption, but it was the first to focus on the issue in the state of Wisconsin. Other groups making progress on anti-corruption initiatives at the national level include Represent.Us, Common Cause, No Labels, Issue One, and Our Revolution. WIUTA's key partners within the state include Blue Jean Nation, Free Speech for People, the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, the Wisconsin Farmer's Union, the Wisconsin Grassroots Network, and Wolf-PAC Wisconsin.

Like the leaders of many small SMOs, Jim and George use Facebook, Google Groups, an open-source constituent relationship management system called CiviCRM, and a variety of other online tools to connect with supporters. Although valuable for increasing issue visibility, they've struggled to convert engagement with these digital platforms into real-world activism and frequently reference "clicktivism" - the idea that the "feel-good" action of a button click or finger swipe can reduce engagement with real-world institutional change - as a problem for the organization. Many modern SMOs face this challenge. As Sasha Costanza-Chock writes in their book on organizing in the immigrants rights movement, "Organizers often feel pressure to stay up to date with emerging social media tools, practices, and norms. They frequently end up participating in new media spaces even when the value of doing so seems vague."¹³ This is true for WIUTA where, despite efforts to engage a younger and more diverse group of supporters through social media, meetings are often attended by the same 10-20 people, most of whom are of retirement age.

¹³ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 123.

A key theme of discussion at the 2019 Unrig Summit, a gathering of SMOs working on anti-corruption initiatives throughout the country, echoed this challenge. Attendees spoke about the need to leverage social media, engage more young people, and increase collaboration throughout the movement, but, when it came to discussing tools and approaches that could address these needs, few knew where to start. It seems that limited attention has been given to understanding and incorporating the existing practices of youth activists or to the approaches that have successfully addressed these needs in analogous spaces.

Creative and Networked Activism in Wisconsin's 2011 Protests

As has been documented by Henry Jenkin's team at the University of Southern California, many activists today—particularly youth activists—are adopting a form of political participation that looks more like fandom than activism. University of Wisconsin media scholar Jonathan Gray describes his experience at the spring 2011 protests in Wisconsin as follows:

As I joined one of these protests and filed into the Capitol, whose rotunda and other public areas had been peacefully occupied, a young man stood by the entrance holding an iPad above his head. The screen played a looped sequence from *The Empire Strikes Back* in which a Rebel Alliance snowspeeder attaches a cable to a huge lumbering AT-AT (All Terrain Armored Transport) Imperial Walker on the snow planet of Hoth. The speeder then winds the cable around the walker until the doglike machine is crippled, unable to walk, and collapses. The man in the Capitol chanted, 'The Rebels brought down Walkers. So can we!' As hundreds of protesters filed past him, many chuckled, applauded him, shook his hand, and/or joined in his chant before joining the protesters demanding that state representatives locked behind closed doors listen to them.¹⁴

Both Gray and Madison local Sarah Braasch describe how protestors appropriated popular narratives to facilitate dialogue in a way that also added a humorous note to an otherwise tense situation. The depiction of the Star Wars AT-AT as "Imperial Walker" became particularly

¹⁴ Gray, "Of Snowspeeders and Imperial Walkers: Fannish Play at the Wisconsin Protests."

prevalent. On her blog, Braasch shares the story of a bystander’s interaction with two people in an Imperial Walker costume: "“Oh, can you stop for a second, so that I can get a picture of you?” the bystander asked, “to which one of the gentlemen responded, in an imperial manner, ‘The Imperial Walker Never Stops!!!’”¹⁵



Figure 1: Imperial Walker costume, image taken by Sarah Braasch¹⁶



Figure 2: Imperial Walker poster created and freely distributed by MRTNN, a local graphic designer.¹⁷

Beyond their use of popular culture, Wisconsin protesters also utilized a variety of innovative tactics that leveraged emerging forms of internet and communications technologies (ICTs). Most notably, the protesters were some of the first to utilize continuous live streaming to

¹⁵ Braasch, “The Imperial Walker Never Stops!!!”

¹⁶ Braasch.

¹⁷ mrtnn, “Stop Imperial Walker | Mrtnn’s Blog.”

share activity taking place at the Capitol more broadly.¹⁸ Movement participants also made extensive use of Twitter, Facebook, and blogging to document and coordinate protest activity.

The actions of activists during the 2011 Capitol protests in Wisconsin demonstrated an emerging form of ICT-supported grassroots organizing that enabled ad-hoc, participatory action in a way that would be seen globally in the Spanish Indignados movement and the Occupy Wall Street movement, which also both began in 2011. Outside of mass protests such as these, however, many SMOs like WIUTA struggle to foster these forms of creative, bottom-up, “participatory” engagement. This is, in part, because many SMOs approach social media and digital organizing technologies as tools to facilitate top-down, “institutional” forms of engagement, such as voting and donating, rather than leveraging the unique capacities of networked technologies for learning, community building, and interest-driven participation.

This thesis will explore the day-to-day practices of SMOs—and the digital tools that support those practices—with a focus on the anti-corruption movement in the state of Wisconsin and, specifically, civic engagement practices in the central Wisconsin city of Appleton. Some of my research questions related to this line of inquiry include: How are emerging civic technologies and practices understood and implemented outside large urban centers? What tools and practices are nonprofits and SMOs currently using to engage their supporters? What tools and practices are youth activists using to engage with causes they care about? And, finally, to what degree are youth activists also engaging with traditional institutions and how do they learn about those opportunities?

¹⁸ Costanza-Chock, “Mic Check! Media Cultures and the Occupy Movement,” 382.

Welcome to Appleton

Appleton, Wisconsin sits at the heart of a region in central Wisconsin called the “Fox Cities,” which encompasses over twenty municipalities along the shores of the Fox River and Lake Winnebago. At 72,000 people, Appleton is the largest of these cities. It boasts a private college, several technical schools, an art museum, a prosperous paper industry, and a thriving downtown that comes to life in the summer with farmers markets and concerts. The Fox Cities, including Appleton, are also predominantly (though decreasingly) white, Christian, conservative communities. The most common foreign languages spoken in Appleton are Spanish (3,489 speakers) and Hmong (3,009 speakers).¹⁹

My family has lived in the Fox Cities for over 150 years, primarily working as farmers and factory workers. I grew up on the remnants of our family’s Depression-era farm in Neenah, a city located just a few miles south of Appleton, and was raised on stories of the area’s history. Many of these stories included themes of extraordinary poverty, harsh living conditions, and racial and gender-based violence. It is still not easy to be anything other than a straight, cisgender, white Christian in this community where, despite its northern location, some residents proudly display the Confederate flag and shout racial slurs from their cars.²⁰ Despite the efforts of local organizations, businesses, and city government to identify and push back against racism and other forms of violence against minorities, city staff shared with me that these behaviors increased over the course of the Trump campaign and his ensuing presidency.

In addition to my personal connection to these communities, my choice to study the civic engagement practices within small suburban and rural cities responds to the fact that the majority

¹⁹ “Appleton, WI.”

²⁰ Harkness, Third Interview with Karen Harkness, Director of Community and Economic Development, City of Appleton.

of scholarship on civic engagement focuses on large urban centers like Boston, Chicago and San Francisco.²¹ Appleton is significantly smaller and more conservative than many of the major cities where civic innovation research takes place, yet it offers an impressive array of civic innovation initiatives for its relatively small size.

For example, in June 2015 Appleton ran a civic hackathon (despite the fact that the use of the term “hackathon” made city IT staff uncomfortable).²² The event was designed to help local residents and technologists develop solutions to local challenges, such as accessing information about snow plow schedules during winter storms.²³ That same year, local residents established a coworking space downtown. The city also participates in a community art program called 100 Art and has a robust placemaking organization called Appleton Downtown, Inc. that organizes farmers markets, concerts, and one of the area’s largest music festivals, the Mile of Music.

Elsewhere in Central Wisconsin, the concepts of civic technology and civic innovation are largely a novelty. For example, the 2,200-person city of Wautoma, which is the largest city in nearby Waushara County, inconsistently maintains a difficult-to-navigate website that, as of July 2018, didn’t include the time or date of the city’s next common council meeting. Other municipalities don’t have a website at all. In many small communities there seems to be an assumption that everyone knows each other. A trip to the Waushara County Fair with my aunt and cousin in the summer of 2018 felt more like a block party; we couldn’t walk more than a few feet without stopping to say hi to a neighbor. Particularly in small communities, word of mouth

²¹ However, see Goldfarb, 2018 for an excellent report on rural and small-town civic engagement; Goldfarb, “All the People, All the Places: A Landscape of Opportunity for Rural and Small-Town Civic Engagement.”

²² Harkness, First Interview with Karen Harkness, Director of of Community and Economic Development, City of Appleton.

²³ Collar, “Appleton to Host Its First ‘Hackathon.’”

can be an effective tool, but, as will be discussed more later, it can also be extremely exclusionary.

City staff in Appleton have played a crucial role in working to make local government more accessible to residents. In 2017 Appleton Communications Coordinator Chad Doran established Appycademy, a 10-week class that gives residents “an inside look at different services the city provides.”²⁴ Appycademy participants “tour city facilities, meet staff members” and are generally given the opportunity to learn about the intricacies of city government. On the digital side, the city has optimized its website and, inspired by tools like SeeClickFix, included an issue reporting feature for residents, which they built in-house. The city’s largest improvements to its public communication infrastructure have taken place in the realm of social media, particularly Facebook, but there are limits to what can be accomplished with these platforms. As Appleton’s Director of Community and Economic Development Karen Harkness explains:

We have a Communications Coordinator at the police department, we have the Communications Coordinator for City Hall, we have a Communications person at the library, and we did have a communications person at Valley Transit [now, that position has been outsourced]...their job is to do that communication to the community. And they do that through press releases, Twitter, Facebook, radio shows, and the newspaper...But finding that right medium to engage the populace is difficult because we all get our news from someplace different.”²⁵

Chad echoes Karen’s concerns about the limitations of the city’s outreach strategy. “We recognize there’s no one size fits all. There is no such solution,”²⁶ he explains. When Chad’s role was created a few years ago, the city didn’t even have a Facebook page, so he’s been able to

²⁴ “City of Appleton Appycademy.”

²⁵ Harkness, First Interview with Karen Harkness, Director of of Community and Economic Development, City of Appleton.

²⁶ Doran, Interview with Chad Doran, Communications Director, City of Appleton.

craft the city's digital strategy from the ground up with a focus on accessibility. So far, he's built a relationship with a Spanish-language local newspaper and shared that his next step is to "create a secondary social media page for all of our channels in Spanish and in Hmong, because those are our two growing non-English-speaking populations."

Beyond keeping pace with emerging communication technologies and attempting to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse community, city staff must also toe the line between the "civic" and the "political." Most of the public servants I interviewed work in communities that are managed through a combination of city staff and elected representatives. Staff are organized into departments tasked with various managerial activities and rarely share their personal political affiliations at work. With over thirty years of experience in local government, Karen Harkness doesn't remain apolitical in her role, but she is a minority. "Most of the directors won't come out on a political issue," she explains, "because they feel that it would negatively impact their ability to sell whatever program they need to sell to the elected officials or to the community." The prevailing sentiment held by city staff throughout central Wisconsin is that local government cannot be too politicized. In their opinions, the role of local government is to ensure that the water is clean, the potholes are filled, and that the community's infrastructure is generally functioning in service of its residents. As the Village Manager of 17,000-person Fox Crossing put it, "If I don't hear from people, I know I'm doing my job well."²⁷ Although this may be a useful indicator for residents with a robust understanding of civic processes, such an approach can also contribute to the marginalization of less-connected members of the community.

²⁷ Sturgell, Interview with Jeff Sturgell, Village Manager, Village of Fox Crossing, WI.

If issues like climate change and immigrant rights are understood as “political” or partisan in any way, Jeff’s “nuts and bolts” approach to managing his village makes sense. I can understand how local government’s capacity to operate effectively could be diminished if it is perceived as promoting the policies of one party over another, particularly if progressive policies contradict the views of the community’s elected Aldermen and county board members, who are predominantly conservative. Policy at the city level can be influenced by local residents, but this must be accomplished by shifting the makeup of local elected boards, rather than by pressuring city staff. As Chad explains, “The council members create policy for the city that the staff implements and follows. We’ll occasionally hear from people who hate the way something works, and we’ll say, ‘reach out to your council member, that’s where you start change. They’re the ones who direct policy.’”²⁸ In Wisconsin, however, the vast majority of organizing work is based in the metro areas of Madison and Milwaukee. This is the reason I specifically set out to understand the civic engagement practices of activists and SMOs in small central Wisconsin cities like Appleton.

My methods included a mix of ethnographic and design-based research. I conducted semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and public design interventions primarily in the Wisconsin counties of Waushara, Winnebago and Outagamie with a focus on the cities of Appleton (72,000 residents), Menasha (17,000 residents), and Wautoma (2,000 residents). I also spoke with people from the Village of Fox Crossing, the cities of Stevens Point, Madison, and Milwaukee, and the Oneida Nation. Although I initially intended to emphasize the experiences of rural residents, I ended up spending a majority of my time working with second and third class

²⁸ Doran, Interview with Chad Doran, Communications Director, City of Appleton.

cities with populations greater than 10,000 people. My research at MIT included collaboration and design work with students in the following classes: CMS.842 Playful and Social Interaction Design Explorations (Spring 2018 and Spring 2019), CMS.861 Networked Social Movements (Fall 2018), and CMS.815 Games for Social Change (Spring 2019). These methods are detailed further in Chapter 3.

Defining “Civic Engagement”

Before continuing, it’s worth clarifying what is meant by the broad and buzzwordy term “civic engagement” in the context of this thesis. My use of this term is based on the commonly cited definition from Thomas Ehrlich:

Civic Engagement: "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."²⁹

I like that this definition does not distinguish between political and non-political engagement, as this is a poorly defined boundary. Following Peter Dahlgren and Henry Jenkins, I see the civic as “a precondition for the political, in the sense that it situates us within the realm of the public.”³⁰ I do, however, find it useful to distinguish between “institutional” and “participatory” forms of civic engagement. In their work with the Youth Participatory Politics Research Network, Cathy Cohen and Joseph Kahne distinguish between forms of institutional civic engagement—such as voter registration, party membership, voting in elections, and referendums—and noninstitutional civic engagement—such as joining online forums, creating

²⁹ Ehrlich, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, vi.

³⁰ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 58.

status updates, and updating a profile picture to promote a cause. In contrast to “institutional politics,” Cohen and Kahne define “participatory politics” as follows:

Participatory Politics: “interactive, peer-based acts through which individuals and groups seek to exert both voice and influence on issues of public concern.”³¹

“Participatory politics is never meant to displace a focus on institutional politics,” they explain. “We might think of it as a supplemental domain where young people can take part in a dialogue about the issues that matter, think about strategies of mobilization, and do some of that mobilizing collectively online.”³² Following Cohen and Kahne, I will refer to two subcategories of civic engagement throughout this thesis as “institutional” and “participatory.”

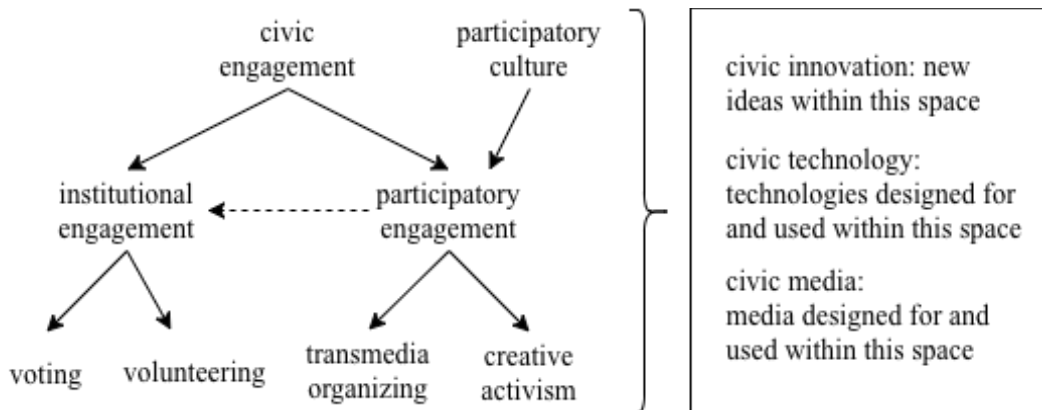


Figure 3: Diagram of terms with example subcategories.

Furthermore, when it comes to the technologies that support these forms of civic engagement, I will use the term “civic technology,” although many alternative terms are used to describe work in this field, including “community technology,” “hacktivism,” and “community driven design.”³³ In fact, the #MoreThanCode report identified 252 different terms that

³¹ Cohen and Kahne, “New Media and Youth Political Action.”

³² Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 4298.

³³ Costanza-Chock et al., “dataT4SJ Terms.”

practitioners use to describe their civic technology work.³⁴ Following the Knight Foundation, I will define “civic technology” as follows:

Civic Technology: “Technology used to inform, engage and connect residents with government and one another to advance civic outcomes.”³⁵ In other words, technology to support civic engagement.

Subcategories of civic technology include:

Civic Media: “any use of any medium which fosters or enhances civic engagement.”³⁶ Civic media can be understood as a large subcategory of civic technology.

GovTech: “Technology designed with government as the intended customer or user...Whereas GovTech is defined by the intended user (that is, government), civic tech is defined by the intended outcome. Thus, civic tech and GovTech are neither mutually exclusive nor perfectly overlapping.”³⁷

Political Technology: Technology designed to support political campaigns, organizers and grassroots organizations. Higher Ground Labs defines eight categories of political technology: Messaging & Media, Research, Data Analytics & Modeling, Voter Engagement, Volunteer & Activist Mobilization, Fundraising, Organization Infrastructure, and Movement-Wide Technology.³⁸

Finally, in their work to map the landscape of civic technology, The Knight Foundation has defined five useful “Community Action Innovation Clusters” to describe the different activities that civic technologies can support.³⁹ These include:

Civic Crowdfunding: Technologies that “support local projects and organizations that generate a public benefit through peer-to-peer lending and crowdfunding.”

Community Organizing: Technologies to “manage social campaigns and initiatives.”

Information Crowdsourcing: Technologies to “collect data from a large number of individuals to inform and address civic issues.”

³⁴ Costanza-Chock et al., “#MoreThanCode: Practitioners Reimagine the Landscape of Technology for Justice and Equity,” 124.

³⁵ “Scaling Civic Tech.”

³⁶ Gordon and Mihailidis, *Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice*, 2., citing Jenkins, 2007

³⁷ “Scaling Civic Tech.”

³⁸ Lai, “2018 Progressive Political Technology Landscape Report,” i.

³⁹ Knight Foundation, “13 Community Action Innovation Clusters.”

Neighborhood Forums: Technologies that “power local groups of people to connect, share information and collaborate.”

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Sharing: Technologies that ”promote resident-driven sharing of goods and services.”

These terms will be referenced throughout this thesis with as much specificity as possible, while acknowledging that the categories are also imperfect and often overlap.

Decline in Civic Engagement

Perhaps the problem is not that people don't want to get involved in politics, but rather that they don't want to take part in a professionalized politics so interested in efficiency that there is no space for them, or they don't want to spend time in a political world so cramped that there's no freedom to explore and discover, to know or master. People don't get involved in politics because the process, both figuratively and literally, does not involve them.⁴⁰

- Stephen Duncombe, 2007

It is no stretch to say that political conversation is taboo in many parts of America today.

There are many reasons for this. Over the past forty years the country has experienced an alarming decline in metrics of both civic health and trust in government⁴¹ to the point that, in 2016, America was for the first time downgraded from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy.”⁴² That same year, the election of Donald Trump spurred a new wave of civic engagement,⁴³ but in the wake of disruptive media technologies, declining resources for local journalism, and atrophied civics curriculum in public schools, many people lack access to

⁴⁰ Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, 72.

⁴¹ Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart.*; Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital.”

⁴² “Democracy Index 2016.”

⁴³ Liu, “How Trump Is Reviving American Democracy.”

training and opportunities that would enable them to effectively advocate within local government or social movement organizations.

This “strange disappearance of civic America” was first popularized by Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam.⁴⁴ Beginning in 1995—and later with his book *Bowling Alone*—Putnam makes the case that “something has happened in America in the last two or three decades to diminish civic engagement and social connectedness.”⁴⁵ Using bowling leagues as a proxy, he argues that declining participation in civic associations impedes the development of social capital, which is necessary for healthy civic participation. Putnam defines social capital as, “features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.”⁴⁶ This idea is inclusive of both *bonding* social capital—“networks that link us to people like ourselves”—and *bridging* social capital—“networks that link us to people unlike ourselves.”⁴⁷ Putnam’s work on social capital focuses on the impact of generational shifts on civic participation, including declining union membership, declining voter participation, increasing mobility, cultural and demographic transformations, women’s increasing participation in the workforce, and the changing role of mass media in politics.⁴⁸ Many of these trends continue today. This introduction will outline the landscape of civic engagement today and describe seven trends that are negatively impacting public participation in civics: 1) decline in face-to-face engagement, 2) decline in civic literacy, 3) decline in local news, 4) increase in polarization and political avoidance, 5) growing mistrust

⁴⁴ Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.”

⁴⁵ Putnam, “Bowling Alone: The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.”

⁴⁶ Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America,” 1.

⁴⁷ Putnam, “Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance,” 86.

⁴⁸ Putnam, “Bowling Alone: The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.”

in institutions, 6) lack of local organizing and representation by political minorities, and 7) lack of play and personalization in institutionalized forms of engagement.

Decline of Face-to-Face Interaction

In her work on the history of “unitary democracies,” which are democratic systems that focus on consensus building rather than adversarial approaches to politics, Harvard political scientist Jane Mansbridge suggests that there are “four central features of friendship” that “recur in unitary democracies throughout history.”⁴⁹ These are “equal status or respect, consensus, common interest, and face-to-face contact.” Unfortunately, face-to-face participation has become deprioritized by many SMOs and civic institutions today.

Starting with his original 1995 essay on social capital, Putnam identifies a curious countertrend to his thesis: although social capital is in decline, membership in new national organizations like the Sierra Club and the National Organization for Women has grown significantly since the 1970s. He suggests that “perhaps the traditional forms of civic organization whose decay we have been tracing have been replaced by vibrant new organizations.”⁵⁰ In other words, it is possible that modern organizations are simply more appealing to people than legacy organizations. He goes on to argue that many new organizations fall into an emerging category of “tertiary associations,” which function differently than their predecessors. For most members of these new organizations, “the only act of membership consists in writing a check for dues or perhaps occasionally reading a newsletter.”⁵¹ Social

⁴⁹ Mansbridge, *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, 10.

⁵⁰ Putnam, “Bowling Alone: The Strange Disappearance of Civic America,” 70.

⁵¹ Putnam, 71.

movement scholar Sidney Tarrow calls these members “checkbook supporters.”⁵² This form of association lacks activities that build social capital, including face-to-face discourse,⁵³ developing trust through reciprocity, and building shared identities. As Mark Warren puts it, “We lack not advocacy groups, but organizations in which people themselves actively participate in democracy.”⁵⁴

But not all scholars agree that civic participation is in decline. Many see emerging forms of civic and political technologies as producing “a change in the form of participation, more than an overall decline...people are still participating, just in different ways.”⁵⁵ Chapter 1 of this thesis will outline the shifting forms of civic participation that exist in today’s highly networked movements. I will argue that, in many cases, the “tertiary organizations” described by Putnam in 1995 continue to prioritize a limited form of “checkbook support.” Although more organizations today rely on digital fundraising tools than mail-based subscriptions, emerging technologies have not significantly changed the practices of many civic organizations. Organizations that rely on checkbook support without creating opportunities for sociality—either face-to-face or digitally mediated—miss opportunities to build social capital.

Civic Literacy in American Education

One self-reinforcing feedback loop that contributes to the decline of social capital is the reduction of opportunities for hands-on civic learning and mentorship from more experienced community members. This becomes particularly problematic when few states in America

⁵² Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 135.

⁵³ McCarthy, “Persistence and Change among Nationally Federated Social Movements,” 135.

⁵⁴ *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, 4.

⁵⁵ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 8.

emphasize civics in their required curriculum. An assessment by American Promise found that “only nine states and the District of Columbia require one year of U.S. government or civics,” that “thirty-one states only require a half-year,” and ten states have no civics requirements at all.⁵⁶ Furthermore, an assessment of high school education standards in 32 states and Washington D.C found that “no states have experiential learning or local problem-solving components in their civics requirements.”⁵⁷ In other words, most students are introduced to the facts of government without ever being required to put that knowledge into practice. To use Putnam’s example of a bowling league, this is like asking a person to read a book about bowling and then throw a strike on their first visit to a bowling alley. Traditional civic associations create opportunities for both practice and mentorship. Civics education in American classrooms does not. Given this context, it is not surprising that a 2016 survey by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that “26 percent of people can name the three branches of government (executive, legislative and judicial), a statistically significant decline since 2011, when 38 percent could name all three.”⁵⁸

As Rebecca Burgess from the American Enterprise Institute Program on American Citizenship explains, “a large part of the civics problem, is that as soon you start to talk about what is a good citizen, or what does citizenship mean, you start to rub up against values.”⁵⁹ In their two-year analysis of ten educational civics programs in the U.S., Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne identified three different visions of citizenship: 1) the “personally responsible citizen” who volunteers and pays taxes, 2) the “participatory citizen” who is a knowledgeable

⁵⁶ “The State of Civics Education.”

⁵⁷ “The State of Civics Education.”

⁵⁸ “Americans’ Knowledge of the Branches of Government Is Declining | The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.”

⁵⁹ Shaw, “Civic Illiteracy in America.”

and active organizer in the community, and 3) the “justice-oriented citizen” who seeks to understand and address the root causes of issues.⁶⁰ Generation Citizen is one organization that is working to bring a justice-oriented approach to civics in schools across the country. They’ve developed an “action civics” curriculum called The Advocacy Hourglass in which “students begin by thinking about broad issues in their community, narrow their topics to one local issue, and then specify a root cause that contributes to the problem. They then identify a main goal for their project, think more broadly to identify the targets of their campaign, and then choose tactics that they will utilize to get there.” These skills form the core of civic literacy.

Although evidence from researchers who study youth participatory politics suggests that young people are increasingly engaging with politics in creative, participatory, and connected ways, these forms of engagement are often only loosely connected to specific demands or campaign goals. Without robust civics training in schools or the mentorship of experienced organizers who possess a comprehensive understanding of democratic and institutional processes and local context, activist media may fail to address the root causes of issues. This is because strong civic literacy skills are essential to the success of civic media projects. At their worst, poorly designed civic media projects have the potential to detrimentally impact a movement or misrepresent its core constituency. Furthermore, the support structures that enable young people to view media creation as a tool for change can be lacking, particularly outside of large urban centers. Overall, there need to be more structures that connect participatory and justice-oriented civics education with the practices of creative, media savvy participatory engagement, and they need to reach far more students than they do today.

⁶⁰ Westheimer and Kahne, “What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy,” 240.

The lack of practice-based learning in civics curriculum, combined with low engagement in the civic associations where youth might otherwise learn civic skills from mentors in the community, contributes to the overall decline in civic engagement and civic literacy. Intentionally building supports for peer mentorship and collaborative, intergenerational learning into civic technologies could help address this challenge. Chapter 2 will discuss the crucial role of community in learning and how civic technologies might borrow from the field of game design to advance the civic literacy skills of their participants.

Decline in Local Journalism

Even if a person is able to develop a high degree of civic literacy, their ability to participate effectively in local decisions may still be limited by a lack of information and the increasing prevalence of false information. A 2018 study of local news at the University of North Carolina found that, “in the past decade and a half, nearly one in five newspapers has disappeared, and countless others have become shells – or “ghosts” – of themselves.”⁶¹ In the context of this decline, local information has become difficult to discover, vet and compare. The report summarizes the severity of this problem as follows:

The stakes are high, not just for the communities that have lost newspapers — or are living with the threat of losing a local newspaper – but also for the entire country. Our sense of community and our trust in democracy at all levels suffer when journalism is lost or diminished. In an age of fake news and divisive politics, the fate of communities across the country – and of grassroots democracy itself – is linked to the vitality of local journalism.⁶²

The information vacuum that is left at the local level is often filled by informal news sources with varying levels of journalistic integrity. On the the brighter end of this spectrum,

⁶¹ Abernathy, “The Expanding News Desert,” 5.

⁶² Abernathy, 6.

local elected representatives and city staff have begun to absorb critical public communication roles. In Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 31-year-old Assemblywoman Katrina Shankland's Facebook page has become a key source of progressive political news for her constituents. In nearby Appleton, Communications Coordinator Chad Doran uses Facebook to share updates with residents. His popular "What's Your Question Wednesday" post gives community members a weekly opportunity to publicly ask questions about the city. Doran carefully researches and answers every question, every week.⁶³

But there are limits to these approaches. Constituents who wish to follow the activities of their local representatives face a range of technical savvy and response rates. Shankland responds to constituents quickly using a suite of digital tools, but other representatives rarely maintain their own social channels or respond to queries issued through those platforms. For city staff like Doran, outdated mandates often require announcements to be published in print newspapers, limiting the resources he can spend on a more diverse range of tools. Furthermore, the position of a city Communications Coordinator is too expensive for most small cities to support and was initially controversial even in Appleton. Appleton's Director of Community Development Karen Harkness explains that each administrative appointment must be weighed against other critical city needs, such as firefighters and teachers.⁶⁴

In the wake of this decline in local news, a plethora of tools has emerged to help citizens track and take action on issues at the national level. ProCon.org is an inspiring example of one of these tools. Founded in 2004, ProCon aggregates perspectives from across the political spectrum on dozens of national issues. During presidential elections they release a "Presidential Election

⁶³ Doran, Interview with Chad Doran, Communications Director, City of Appleton.

⁶⁴ Harkness, First Interview with Karen Harkness, Director of of Community and Economic Development, City of Appleton.

Candidate Quiz” to help voters identify alignment with candidates based on their public stances on issues, rather than simply rhetoric. Like most nonprofits, however, the organization has a limited capacity. In her session at the 2018 Frontiers of Democracy conference, ProCon’s Tracey DeFrancesco expressed regret that her organization (and others like it) lack the capacity to research and develop resources for local elections. An analysis of several political and civic technologies designed to support the information infrastructure that backs successful civic engagement is introduced in Chapter 1.

Polarization and Political Avoidance

In *The Big Sort*, journalist Bill Bishop documents increasing place-based polarization in America, explaining that, “as Americans have moved over the past three decades, they have clustered communities of sameness, among people with similar ways of life, beliefs, and, in the end, politics.”⁶⁵ Citing the work of University of Pennsylvania political scientist Diana Mutz, he explains that, “in a comparison of citizens from twelve countries, Americans are the least likely to discuss politics with someone holding a different view.”⁶⁶ In fact, Mutz found that only 23 percent of Americans report having these conversations at all.

Unfortunately, many community representatives (usually structured as elected boards) are similarly unwilling to take stances that could be perceived as “political” in nature. As an Appleton Post Crescent reporter explained in a September 2017 article, “Aldermen may dip their toes into some partisan politics this week—something not often seen under the nonpartisan local government structure in Appleton—as they debate whether to create a climate change board and

⁶⁵ Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 5.

⁶⁶ Bishop, 286.

follow the Paris agreement on climate change.” This unwillingness to engage with politics is a problem that is likely exacerbated by single-party domination of most local boards, discussed below.

Mistrust in Government

Living among these factors has led to an unprecedented decline in trust of government, as well as most other institutions.⁶⁷ Lerner argues that “citizens are losing their ability to shape—through democratic means—the decisions that affect their lives.”⁶⁸ In *The Big Sort*, Bishop describes how this has changed over time:

Plummeting levels of trust changed what's possible for politicians to say and for government do. The incredible national ambitions of the early 1960s were built on consensus cemented by overwhelming trust in government. As trust declined, the reach of the federal government shortened, and its potential was reined in. Americans found it hard to reach a consensus - on anything.⁶⁹

Today, trust in government is at a historic low, down from 80% in 1964 to 22% in 2010⁷⁰ and 17% in 2019.⁷¹ A 2018 study by Pew found that 61% of people believe “‘significant changes’ are needed in the fundamental ‘design and structure’ of American government to make it work in current times.”⁷² The majority of Americans also believe that “if they contacted their member of the U.S. House of Representatives with a problem it is either not very likely (40%) or not likely at all (21%) they would get help addressing it.”⁷³ This lack of trust is exacerbated in states like Wisconsin where there is a divide between the beliefs and lifestyles of urban

⁶⁷ “The Public, the Political System and American Democracy,” 16.

⁶⁸ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 10.

⁶⁹ Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 97.

⁷⁰ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 9.

⁷¹ “Public Trust in Government: 1958-2019.”

⁷² “The Public, the Political System and American Democracy,” 6.

⁷³ “The Public, the Political System and American Democracy,” 67.

progressives and rural conservatives. In her study of communities throughout the state of Wisconsin, sociologist Kathy Cramer identifies this as a “politics of resentment”:

A politics of resentment arises from the way social identities, the emotion of resentment, and economic insecurity interact. In a politics of resentment, resentment toward fellow citizens is front and center. People [in rural Wisconsin] understand their circumstances as the fault of guilty and less deserving social groups, not as the product of broad, social, economic, and political forces.⁷⁴

Cramer’s research found that rural communities were particularly mistrustful of and resentful toward government based on the perception that they do not receive their “fair share” of decision making power or public resources.⁷⁵ This perspective on fairness is common in Wisconsin, but it is less starkly divided between rural and urban residents than Cramer’s book suggests. Her analysis broadens the concept of “rural” to include anywhere outside of the state’s metro areas of Madison and Milwaukee. This can be misleading, as it collapses larger cities into the same “rural” bucket as tiny, 500-person villages. In fact, Kramer’s study included 16 groups from municipalities with over 30,000 residents.⁷⁶ It is in these small cities and suburbs that the politics of resentment exists in step with urban life. Cramer’s description of the resentful mindset of many Wisconsinites is apt, but it does not stop at the edge of the state’s rural hamlets.

Political Minorities and Local Organizing

Similarly, progressive ideologies do not stop at the edges of Madison’s and Milwaukee’s metro boundaries. Many conservative districts in Wisconsin are 30-40% progressive.⁷⁷ When it comes to organizing for progressive causes in conservative districts, however, many people feel

⁷⁴ Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*, 9.

⁷⁵ Cramer, 23.

⁷⁶ Cramer, 230.

⁷⁷ “2016 Fall General Election Results.”

too outnumbered to make a difference. In *The Big Sort*, Bishop explains that "as political majorities grow within communities, minorities retreat from public life. Majorities have their beliefs reinforced by seeing and hearing their inclinations locally repeated and enhanced.

Self-reinforcing majorities grow larger, while isolated and dispirited minorities shrink."⁷⁸

Although ICTs like Facebook can enable users to identify and connect with like-minded people, they rarely facilitate offline action in places where people perceive themselves to be a political minority. During our interview, Clint Harness, the leader of the Neenah chapter of Our Wisconsin Revolution, scrolled through a facebook feed on his phone, explaining, "people love to talk, but they're not going out and talking to people in real life."⁷⁹

This is true for many people who live in conservative regions in Wisconsin and is also reflected in campaign strategies. Judy Harris is a retired teacher and League of Women Voters member who lives in a 400-person village a few miles from Wautoma. She shared the following story about participating in her first presidential campaign after moving to the area fifteen years ago:

I tried to find out who the chair of the Waushara County Democrats [was]. It took me about two hours online and I ended up with a name [but] nobody answered the phone. There wasn't a message. It wasn't anything. So I finally decided to just asked somebody and they did tell me the name of the person. So I contacted him and I said, "I want some yard signs. I will put up some yard signs. I'm new here. I'm a Democrat." He said, "Ha! We don't have yard signs." I said, "What do you mean, you don't have yard signs?" and he said, "Well, we're not Dane County, we're not Milwaukee. We don't have enough voters here. We have to pay so much money to get yard signs. We can't afford it."⁸⁰

In the end, the only way Judy was able to get yard signs supporting her presidential candidate was to ask her Minnesota-based brother to load his station wagon with them and drive

⁷⁸ Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 77.

⁷⁹ Harness, Interview with Clint Harness, Our Wisconsin Revolution Chapter Founder.

⁸⁰ Harris, Interview with Judy Harris, Member of the League of Women Voters, Ripon Area.

the signs to her and her friends in central Wisconsin. Now, after nearly two decades of organizing in the area, Judy explains that one of her key challenges continues to be “getting the state [Democratic] party to send people here to help us develop a county party that would be active.”

Judy’s dedication to local advocacy is a unique exception in central Wisconsin.

Because the small number of active progressives who live in conservative districts often feel too outnumbered to make a difference locally, they frequently direct their attention to state and federal campaigns. This trend is evident in the organizing work being done in central Wisconsin around the issue of climate change. University of Wisconsin media scholar Sharon Dunwoody, who is also a member of the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change, explains that ignoring the organizing power of local institutions, even in small and conservative communities, is a missed opportunity. By targeting the members of neighborhood organizations, she explains that campaigns can leverage the community’s existing infrastructures of social ties to create social-normative pressure.⁸¹ She adds that, although potentially useful for the dissemination of information, one-way media like newspapers and most websites “are not good channels for encouraging people to act.” Interactivity is key, and, as Putnam also suggests, the sociality of civic institutions can be a crucial ingredient for supporting civic action.

The dearth of support for local campaigns also contributes to unbalanced representation at the municipal and county levels in central Wisconsin, where very few progressives or people of color are elected to office. Fortunately, it doesn’t take a massive number of votes to shake up

⁸¹ Dunwoody, Interview with Sharon Dunwoody, Professor Emerita and Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Member.

local elections. Aaron Wojciechowski was elected as the first queer person of color on the Winnebago County Board with only 700 votes.⁸² He was also only 18 years old at the time.

Finally, it is important to note that political allegiances have shifted dramatically in recent years. Based on his work with Yochai Benkler on political news networks, Ethan Zuckerman describes the 2016 presidential election not as a triumph of the right over the left, but of the far-right over the center-right.⁸³ This shift has left many conservatives feeling like they lack representation in American politics today. A 2018 Pew study found that "nearly a quarter of the public now holds an unfavorable view of both major parties (24%)."⁸⁴ Morris Fiorina describes the situation as follows:

Americans are closely divided, but we are not deeply divided, and we are closely divided because many of us are ambivalent and uncertain, and consequently reluctant to make firm commitments to parties, politicians, or policies. We divide evenly in elections or sit them out entirely because we instinctively seek the center while the parties and candidates hang out on the extremes.⁸⁵

A more diverse representation of political ideologies at the local level could improve the ability of communities to address local problems and more effectively serve minority populations. The role technology plays in organizing at the municipal and county levels is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Civic Engagement in a Participatory Culture

⁸² Wojciechowski, Interview with Aaron Wojciechowski, Winnebago County Board Supervisor and UW-Oshkosh Student.

⁸³ Faris et al., "Partisanship, Propaganda, and Disinformation: Online Media and the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election."

⁸⁴ "The Public, the Political System and American Democracy," 53.

⁸⁵ Citing Morris Fiorina, Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 25.

Finally, shifting forms of participation in today's networked world demand an expansion of the pathways that enable people to engage with traditional civic institutions. The digital natives of Generations Y and Z have different expectations than their predecessors that evolved within, and have been heavily influenced by, what Henry Jenkins calls "participatory culture."

Participatory cultures of fandom 'transform the experience of media consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community' (Jenkins 1992: 46). The outcome is an autonomous, 'self-sufficient fan culture' (Jenkins 1992: 47) that can exist outside the frames of reference determined by media texts and actively seeks - and often succeeds - to exist as a counterweight to decisions made in the determination (i.e. institutional production) of media texts.⁸⁶

As Cohen and Kahne describe in their work on "participatory politics,"⁸⁷ today's youth activists, armed with smartphones, social media savvy, and a proliferation of affordable tools for creativity, are redefining what it means to engage with politics. Fifteen years after publishing his first work on social capital, Putnam revisited his ideas in an article titled "Still Bowling Alone? The Post-9/11 Split." Focusing on youth who were in college, high school, or middle school at the time of the September 11th, 2001 attacks, Putnam argues that "the 10 years since 9/11 have brought an unmistakable expansion of youth interest in politics and public affairs."⁸⁸ He further suggests that "technological innovators may yet master the elusive social alchemy that will enable online behavior to produce real and enduring civic effects. If such effects do come about, they will benefit young and adult Americans alike—and fortify the civic impact of our new 9/11 Generation."⁸⁹

What remains to be determined is the degree to which emerging forms of participatory politics can be strategically integrated with traditional forms of institutional organizing to

⁸⁶ Laughey, *Key Themes in Media Theory*, 178.

⁸⁷ Cohen and Kahne, "Participatory Politics. New Media and Youth Political Action."

⁸⁸ Sander and Putnam, "Democracy's Past and Future: Still Bowling Alone? - The Post-9/11 Split," 11.

⁸⁹ Sander and Putnam, 15.

achieve lasting change. In a biting critique of digital organizing, which he calls “slacktivism,” Malcolm Gladwell argues that “fifty years after one of the most extraordinary episodes of social upheaval in American history, we seem to have forgotten what activism is...activism that challenges the status quo—that attacks deeply rooted problems—is not for the faint of heart.”⁹⁰ Gladwell is right that many examples of participatory politics, particularly those that spread through social media, lack connection to more strategic campaigns orchestrated by institutions. However, his analysis is overly simplistic. In Chapters 1 and 2 argue that successful organizing today must incorporate the gamut of emerging and traditional forms of participation in a way that individually scaffolds learning and engagement for movement supporters.

Research Questions

In light of the rapidly shifting nature of political engagement described above, this thesis explores how principles of educational game design can facilitate engagement and learning in networked social movements. First, Chapter 1 investigates the existing state of participatory and institutional organizing practices with an emphasis on small social movement organizations in the state of Wisconsin. Chapter 2 explores the emerging space of civic technology through the lens of educational game design. Using the framework introduced by leading educational game scholars in *Resonant Games*, this chapter discusses the potential applications of “game design thinking” to promote civic engagement. This is broken into four sections: 1) Play and Learning,

⁹⁰ *Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.*

2) Identity and Personalization, 3) Collaboration and Community, and 4) Strategy and Context. Finally, Chapter 3 outlines my application of game design thinking and the *Resonant Games* framework to develop a game to promote grassroots organizing in the city of Appleton, WI.

My primary research question is: How might nonprofits and social movement organizations (SMOs) leverage the principles of game-based learning and game design thinking to increase civic engagement and civic literacy? Secondary research questions include: How are emerging civic technologies and practices understood and implemented outside large urban centers? What tools and practices are nonprofits and SMOs currently using to engage their supporters? What tools and practices are youth activists using to engage with causes they care about? To what degree are these youth activists also engaging with traditional institutions and how do they learn about those opportunities? And, finally, how might nonprofits and SMOs leverage the place-based affordances of location-based games to facilitate and coordinate action at the local level?

Chapter 1: Participatory and Institutional Civic Engagement in Networked Movements

Shifting Forms of Engagement in Networked Movements

Social movement scholar Sasha Costanza-Chock writes, “if communication is at the heart of social mobilization, and if holding power largely depends on the control of communication and information, it follows that the transformation of communication in a given society deeply affects the structure and dynamics of social movements.”⁹¹ In a country where the average teenager carries more computing power in their pocket than the entire team of scientists who sent the first people to the moon, we can expect a significant transformation in the ways people engage with civics. According to a 2018 report by Pew, “around half of Americans have engaged in some form of political or social-minded activity on social media in the past year.”⁹² An early assessment of the role of internet and communication technologies (ICTs) in social movements suggested they “have the potential to alter the flow of political information, to reduce the cost of conventional forms of participation, and to create new low-cost forms of participation, ultimately contributing to an upsurge in participation,”⁹³ but there have also been drawbacks to digital organizing.

This chapter explores the shifting nature of civic engagement in a networked world and how social movement organizations (SMOs) are adapting to today’s rapidly changing media ecology. An analysis of literature related to networked social movements reveals new trends in

⁹¹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 72.

⁹² Anderson et al., “Activism in the Social Media Age.”

⁹³ Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs,” 205.

both *how* people engage with movements and *what* that engagement looks like. The “how” of engagement can be broken into three categories: (1) online networks help activists discover opportunities to take action, (2) online networks can influence public opinion, (3) online networks enable SMOs to benefit from their connections to related movements. The “what” of engagement describes emerging forms of participatory action that are (1) remixed and remixable, (2) personalized, (3) modular, and (4) seek to achieve a more diverse set of cultural, as well as political goals. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the features offered by existing civic technologies to support both SMOs and activists in achieving their goals in a networked society.

Discovery, Influence, and Recruitment in Networked Movements

Discovering ways to take action

First, social media has become an important way for activists to learn about opportunities to take action both online and offline. According to research by Mansell and Hwa, “social media play an important role in facilitating the mobilisation for, and coordination of, direct actions offline.”⁹⁴ However, social media use for activism is not evenly distributed across demographics or parties. Pew found that “Democrats are more than twice as likely as Republicans to say they have used social media in the past year to look up information about rallies or protests happening in their area.”⁹⁵ Social media use is also influenced by age, income, local ICT infrastructure and a variety of other factors. Ultimately, the benefits of social media for organizing depend on the habits and practices of a campaign’s target audience. For organizations like WIUTA, whose

⁹⁴ Mansell and Hwa, “Social Media and Activism,” 5.

⁹⁵ Anderson et al., “Activism in the Social Media Age”; Smith, “Civic Engagement in the Digital Age.”

success depends on action at the municipal and county levels, platforms like Facebook can enable supporters to identify opportunities for local action. More often, however, these platforms are better equipped to promote action at the state and federal level, leaving an information gap at the local level.

Influencing public opinion through participatory framing

In today's volatile media landscape, the idea that "clicktivism" is a problem has become instantiated in the public mind. As was mentioned above, writer Malcolm Gladwell argued in 2010 that "activism that challenges the status quo—that attacks deeply rooted problems—is not for the faint of heart" and that, "weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism."⁹⁶ According to Pew, many Americans today would agree with Gladwell. They found that 71% of people today "believe that social media make people think they are making a difference when they really aren't, with 28% saying this describes social media very well."

However, recent research suggests that the simple act of "liking" or "retweeting" something can have very real benefits for movements. By analyzing Twitter activity related to the Occupy movement, Bennett, Segerberg, and Yang found that "peripheral networks can play a significant role in defining and responding to social events."⁹⁷ They explain that "actors and networks on the periphery of technology-supported crowds (e.g., engaged online supporters, critical commentators, bots, trolls) may greatly effect the scale and impact of protests and protest communication visibility."⁹⁸ In other words, social media can significantly amplify movement

⁹⁶ *Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.*

⁹⁷ Bennett, Segerberg, and Yang, "The Strength of Peripheral Networks: Negotiating Attention and Meaning in Complex Media Ecologies," 660.

⁹⁸ Bennett, Segerberg, and Yang, 663.

messages. One of the specific ways social media propagates movement messages is by facilitating connections to mainstream media. In the immigrant rights movement, activists found that "Twitter produces higher response rates and faster response times from reporters than traditional press releases."⁹⁹ In Bennet's analysis, these reporters (like celebrities and other individuals with large social media following) are likely also able to play an influential role based on their position in the periphery of movement networks.

Furthermore, Manswell and Hwa explain that "social media enable activists and protest movements to 'self-mediate' and to distribute movement goals or frames more easily."¹⁰⁰ This process of self-mediation—the increased ability for movement actors to use social media to contribute to and comment on movement framing by sharing their own stories—is also described as transmedia organizing. This is "a process whereby activists develop a narrative of social transformation across multiple media platforms, involve their movement's base in participatory media practices, amplify movement voices by way of the mass media, and provide concrete opportunities for action."¹⁰¹

The ways transmedia organizing influences framing within a movement might also be understood as a process of "participatory framing." This process is negotiated by supporters who "'vote' on the issues they want to see and, through content selection and its propagation in networks, frame political messages in social media networks."¹⁰² Organizations are increasingly responding to this mode of engagement. A recent survey of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ

⁹⁹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ Mansell and Hwa, "Social Media and Activism," 5.

¹⁰¹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 59.

¹⁰² Aruguete and Calvo, "Time to #Protest: Selective Exposure, Cascading Activation, and Framing in Social Media," 482.

organizations found that “six out of ten ask their community members to create media, and nearly four out of five share their community members’ stories as part of their organizing, advocacy, or outreach work.”¹⁰³ However, the same survey found that limited resources and training can make these initiatives difficult to pursue. Issues related to safety, privacy and surveillance may also limit participation in transmedia organizing projects.

Recruitment through connected movements

Social movement theory suggests that “the most common pathways to movement participation are through family, friends, community, and direct lived experience.”¹⁰⁴ This is still the case for many people, although those invitations may increasingly come in a digitally mediated form. Referencing Melucci, Mansell and Hwa explain that “networks and the ties between actors within a social movement can be understood as being constitutive of collective identities that are ‘constructed and negotiated by repeated activation of the relationships that link individuals (or groups).’”¹⁰⁵ The vast online networks that exist on social media create a multiplicity of opportunities for this activation and negotiation.

In their 2012 paper “The Logic of Connective Action,” Bennett and Segerberg suggest that modern large-scale networks create a “logic of connective action” that functions differently than the more traditional “logic of collective action.”¹⁰⁶ While the logic of *collective* action emphasizes uniform framing and the function of SMOs as dominant organizing bodies, the logic

¹⁰³ Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Out for Change: Transformative Media Organizing Project (2015), “Toward Transformative Media Organizing: LGBTQ and Two-Spirit Media Work in the United States.”

¹⁰⁴ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 142.

¹⁰⁵ Mansell and Hwa, “Social Media and Activism,” 6.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett and Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” 743.

of *connective* action suggests that digital media are also strong organizing structures that, in many cases, enable increased flexibility and personalization for movement actors.¹⁰⁷ This desire for personalization again speaks to the role of participatory framing in movements. Bennett and Segerberg summarize this transformation as follow:

"When people who seek more personalized paths to concerted action, are familiar with practices of social networking in everyday life, and when they have access to technologies from mobile phones to computers, they are already familiar with a different logic of organization: the logic of connective action. The logic of connective action foregrounds a different set of dynamics from the ones just outlined. At the core of this logic is the recognition of digital media as organizing agents.¹⁰⁸

More broadly, the logic of connective action demands that traditional SMOs recognize activists' need to see the connections between related movements, enabling supporters to discover actions based on the issues they care about, rather than the organizations they follow. Bennett and Segerberg explain that, "in place of content that is distributed and relationships that are brokered by hierarchical organizations, social networking involves co-production and co-distribution, revealing a different economic and psychological logic: co-production and sharing based on personalized expression."¹⁰⁹ Their assessment suggests that digital strategies that emphasize connections between the goals of related SMOs are beneficial to all parties involved. Connective strategies expose more potential supporters to individual SMOs while also supporting a more comprehensive understanding of the variety of goals and actions that exist within a movement. This enables activists to make their own decisions about which actions merit investment. It seems that the following statement made by Klandermans and Oegema in 1987 remains true thirty years later: "The formation of recruitment networks involves both extending

¹⁰⁷ Bennett and Segerberg, 748.

¹⁰⁸ Bennett and Segerberg, 752.

¹⁰⁹ Bennett and Segerberg, 752.

the reaches of the organization, particularly at the local level, and forming coalitions with other organizations.”¹¹⁰ Social media can extend the reach of an individual SMO’s recruitment network.

Finally, in his 1980 work on differential recruitment, Snow et al. found that "the question of ‘why’ people join social movements cannot be adequately understood apart from an examination of the process of ‘how’ individuals come to align themselves with a particular movement. Indeed, it is our contention that the ‘whys’ or ‘reasons’ for joining arise out of the recruitment process itself."¹¹¹ In an era of social media, engaging in the participatory framing of a movement may also be a powerful recruitment strategy for organizers. To summarize, the range of calls to action made by SMOs (particularly participatory forms of action), in combination with the degree to which those calls to action are connected to a larger network of movement actors, will directly impact who participates in a movement.

Participatory Engagement in Networked Movements

Beyond the operational components of discovery, influence, and recruitment, networked movements also leverage the participatory affordances of networked action in a way that particularly caters to the practices of youth activists. In their work on participatory culture, Jenkins et. al. explain that, throughout history, “young people have refreshed and renewed the public’s symbolic power as they fight for social justice; they often push back against inherited

¹¹⁰ Klandermans and Oegema, “Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements,” 520.

¹¹¹ Snow, Zurcher, and Ekland-Olson, “Social Networks and Social Movements: A Microstructural Approach to Differential Recruitment,” 799.

forms and search for new mechanisms for asserting their voice.”¹¹² From feminist riot grrrl zines in the 1990s to today’s Twitch streams for charity, these mechanisms often appropriate DIY media and cultural symbols to draw attention to marginalized voices. Constanza-Chock quips that “organizers bring the battle to the arena of ideas by any media necessary.”¹¹³ These media-based forms of participatory engagement go by many names, including creative activism, ethical spectacle, transmedia organizing, activism, and tactical media. Garcia and Lovink’s description of “tactical media” provides a useful description for this category of engagement:

Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by, or excluded from, the wider culture. Tactical Media do not just report events; as they are never impartial, they always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media.¹¹⁴

Although they go by many names, various forms of participatory engagement tend to have four things in common. They (1) enable personalization of action, (2) remix popular culture, (3) diversify action, and (4) modularize action.

Personalization of Action

The first - and potentially most important - component of participatory engagement is that it enables choice and personal expression through the personalization of action. This idea builds on what Bennett and Segerberg call “connective action,” which is “the self-motivated (though not necessarily self-centered) sharing of already internalized or personalized ideas,

¹¹² Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 176.

¹¹³ Constanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Garcia and Lovink, “The ABC of Tactical Media,” 1.

plans, images, and resources with networks of others.”¹¹⁵ People who are familiar with connective action may be more inclined to engage in activities that promote “personalized action formations” than in institutional forms of engagement. “In personalized action formations, the nominal issues may resemble older movement or party concerns in terms of topics (environment, rights, women’s equality, and trade fairness) but the ideas and mechanisms for organizing action become more personalized than in cases where action is organized on the basis of social group identity, membership, or ideology.”¹¹⁶ Sandra Rodriguez adds that this may be particularly true for Millennials, who “would prefer to create new means of action for a cause than joining an organized group.”¹¹⁷

Unlike institutional forms of engagement, which deliver narrow messages from the top-down, Peter Levine explains that “Individuals need not change their identities to participate in connective politics but can rather choose an array of issues, slogans, and network partners that address their existing personas. Personalization is another way to describe the disaggregation of choice that has been a trend of the last century.”¹¹⁸ This personalization of action is something that is frequently practiced in the field of transmedia organizing, where “organizers often invite movement participants to contribute simple media elements such as photographs, texts, or short video clips, which they later aggregate, remix, combine, and circulate more broadly.”¹¹⁹ The ability to contribute to movement messaging in a way that spans many mediums and platforms enables supporters to choose how they will take part based on their personal interests, skills and

¹¹⁵ Bennett and Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” 752.

¹¹⁶ Bennett and Segerberg, 744.

¹¹⁷ Rodriguez, “Spreading the Word: Information and Citizen Engagement Among a Web 2.0 Driven Generation.”

¹¹⁸ Democracy in the Digital Age (Levine, in Civic Media)

¹¹⁹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 185.

resources. When this happens, "participation becomes self-motivating as personally expressive content is shared with, and recognized by, others who, in turn, repeat these networked sharing activities."¹²⁰ In addition to contributing media and stories, supporters may also express support for a movement through a variety of commercial mechanism. For example, "the organization of individual action in terms of meanings assigned to lifestyle elements (brands, leisure pursuits, friend networks) results in personalization of such things as climate change (in relation to personal carbon footprints), labor standards (in relation to fashion choices), or consumption of food (associated with fair trade practices or the slow living)."¹²¹

Citing Dahlgren, Jenkins suggests that practitioners should "consider 'the subjective predispositions behind participation,'" by understanding four types of motivation:

Interest (which [Dahlgren] defines as "the perceived potential for satisfaction deriving from everything from basic curiosity, to a drive for knowledge, as well as the seeking of pleasure"); Efficacy ("a confidence in one's ability and a sense that participation is something amenable, within reach, that can be successfully enacted. At bottom it has to do with a sense of empowerment."); Meaningfulness ("the rewards are perceived in rather private, normative, cognitive and/or affective terms"); [and] Duty ("a sense of obligation, loyalty or solidarity, some kind of social value that resides beyond the self").

¹²²

Organizing strategies must reflect all four types of motivation, but the motivation of interest is frequently the least attended to among this list. The personalization of action enables participants to express their individual interests and beliefs as part of the way they take action.

¹²⁰ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," 752.

¹²¹ Bennett and Segerberg, "Collective Action Dilemmas with Individual Mobilization through Digital Networks," 3.

¹²² Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 4827.

Remixing Popular Culture

Beyond the logistical considerations of how people engage, an important component of personalizing action has to do with claiming, remixing, and sharing symbols and stories that carry personal meaning. Duncombe suggests that "We are observing a shift in the language of social change from realist to utopian or fantastical modes, from traditional forms of political education to a style of politics that borrows heavily from entertainment."¹²³ In his study of The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), an organization that engages youth with politics through the fictional world of Harry Potter, Jenkins argues that "popular culture provides models for what movements might look like—as in, for example, the ways that the HPA calls itself ‘Dumbledore’s Army for the real world.’” He continues by explaining that “realist modes often depict problems as overwhelming, conditions as irreversible, thus offering a profoundly disempowering mindset for thinking about politics.”¹²⁴

Referencing Gray’s work in Wisconsin, Jenkins explains that “Star Wars–themed signs, which depicted the governor as an ‘Imperial Walker,’ evoked shared cultural experiences and their playful tone dispelled some anxieties that had arisen around the mainstream media’s, often hostile, depiction of the protests.”¹²⁵ The way that images of the “Imperial Walker” costume were able to spread through both social and mainstream media demonstrates Costanza-Chock’s argument that "social movements are becoming transmedia hubs, where new visions of society are encoded into digital texts by movement participants, then shared, aggregated, remixed, and circulated ever more widely across platforms.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Jenkins et al., 4676.

¹²⁴ Jenkins et al., 4687.

¹²⁵ Jenkins et al., 4653.

¹²⁶ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 174.

Interestingly, Jenkins and his team also found that strong themes of pop culture and fandom do not appear to dissuade participation from outsiders. "While Harry Potter Alliance, Imagine Better, and the Nerdfighters do build on the infrastructure and shared cultural knowledge of fandom, we also found participants who had joined because of their political commitments and who were not particularly fans of the media content being discussed."¹²⁷ It seems that, even for outsiders, "popular culture facilitates shared affective investments that bond members together, providing a vision of change that is empowering, meaningful, and pleasurable as they conduct the often hard and discouraging work of political activism."¹²⁸

Diversification of Calls to Action

As mentioned above, participatory forms of engagement offer a wide range of opportunities to take part. Costanza-Chock explains that "social movement media practices don't take place on digital platforms alone; they are made up of myriad 'small media' (to use Annabelle Sreberny's term) that circulate online and off. Graffiti, flyers, and posters; newspapers and broadsheets; community screenings and public projections; pirate radio stations and street theater."¹²⁹ Participatory engagement is platform and medium agnostic.

Unfortunately, as Duncombe bluntly puts it, modern SMOs "don't want your participation; they want your money to pay for someone else to participate for you."¹³⁰ Many SMOs, campaign managers, and nonprofits are guilty of an overreliance on donation requests as a call to action. In my analysis of the 36 emails sent from four political organizations in

¹²⁷ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 366.

¹²⁸ Jenkins et al., 4644.

¹²⁹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 185.

¹³⁰ Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, 66.

Wisconsin¹³¹ between November 1st and November 30th, 2018, I found that 55 percent included only one call to action: a donation request. Only 2% of the emails asked supporters to write a letter to the editor or share a message on social media. This is ineffective in an environment where many young people think that “institutionalized politics offers a narrow set of genres: checking a box on a ballot or signing a petition frustrates those who have grown up within a more participatory culture.”¹³² At the most basic level, diversifying calls to action with more creative, arts-based, and playful forms of engagement could significantly improve participation rates, particular among young supporters.

The diversity of participatory forms of engagement is also important for civic health. Peter Levine explains that, "according to a theory of affected interests, a democracy is not a group of people who constitute a fixed polity that has a right to decide on everything that comes before it...Rather, each person has a potentially unique set of interests and a right to be consulted on all the decisions that affect those interests."¹³³ Increased diversity in the repertoire of contention enables people to voice their opinions on more of the issues that concern them. It can also foster increased inclusivity in movements.

In addition to an expansion of tactics, many participatory forms of engagement also argue for an expansion of targets. Jenkins explains that "many of today’s grassroots organizations believe that the most effective way to put pressure on the government is through the exercise of expressive and discursive power—through education and cultural change—rather than necessarily through the ballot box."¹³⁴ For young people in particular, there is an increasing

¹³¹ Wisconsin Democrats, Wisconsin United to Amend, Wisconsin Common Cause, and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign

¹³² Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 4749.

¹³³ Democracy in the Digital Age (Levine, in *Civic Media*), 38

¹³⁴ Jenkins et al., 211.

“desire to disassociate one’s self from institutional politics, but not from the idea of social change.”¹³⁵ Participatory forms of engagement diversify the ways in which people can become involved, enabling a wider range of cultural and political approaches. In turn, Cohen and Kahne found that participatory engagement often also reinforces more traditional, institutional forms of engagement.¹³⁶

Modularization of Action

Finally, many forms of participatory engagement are modular in nature, which means they can be easily replicated and repurposed. Tarrow claims that “there has been a ‘modularization’ of the practice and organization of contentious politics: People across the globe have been rapidly imitating practices and forms of organization that originate elsewhere. Diffusion by personal contacts and the press have been joined by radio and TV and, more recently, by the cell phone and the Internet.”¹³⁷

However, the idea of modular forms of contention is not new. An early example of a modular technology for contention was the barricade, which, by the mid-19th century, had become commonplace in Paris. Tarrow explains that the barricade was popular because “it could be mounted in a variety of sites, on behalf of a variety of goals, and against a variety of targets. Once its strategic advantages were known, the barricade could unify people with different aims and could be diffused to a variety of types of confrontation with authorities.”¹³⁸ But it took over

¹³⁵ Jenkins et al., 4993.

¹³⁶ Cohen and Kahne, “New Media and Youth Political Action.”

¹³⁷ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 263.

¹³⁸ Tarrow, 38.

fifty years for barricades to become a common tool in France. What is new today, of course, is that near-ubiquitous internet connectivity enables ideas to spread more quickly than ever before.

In their work on connective action, Bennett and Segerberg argue that "the two elements of 'personalized communication' that we identify as particularly important in large-scale connective action formations are: (1) Political content in the form of easily personalized ideas...[and] (2) Various personal communication technologies that enable sharing these themes."¹³⁹ One way that transmedia organizers support the personalization of ideas is "by providing clear opportunities for supporters to produce and circulate their own movement media...They also provide downloadable stencil templates, make instructional videos, and post them to YouTube and Vimeo."¹⁴⁰ Many youth-oriented SMOs are increasingly offering quick, simple, and modular ways to share messages.

In summary, organizers that support participatory engagement often:

Map ways in which individual participation can add up to something larger. They direct attention to specific issues and propose ways that people can work together to bring about change. They train members to produce their own media and tell their own stories. They offer networks through which this media can circulate and reach an engaged and appreciative audience. Above all, they create a context where 'talking politics' is a normal, ongoing part of the group's social interactions.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," 744.

¹⁴⁰ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 185.

¹⁴¹ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 1075.

Institutional Civic Media Practices in Networked Movements

Despite the rapid expansion of opportunities for civic participation presented by emerging forms of participatory engagement, many SMOs have struggled to incorporate participatory calls to action into their organizing strategies.

Top-Down Messaging and the Digital Marketing Funnel

The first challenge in this space is that the field of digital organizing today draws heavily from mainstream digital marketing. This means that asks are frequently structured using a “marketing funnel” approach designed to get a small fraction of the people who see a message to take a specific action. This approach can be effective for selling products, but it ignores and sometimes even discourages participatory, bottom up engagement. Costanza-Chock notes that “better-resourced nonprofit organizations often approach social media strategy from the perspective of building a brand, fundraising, and constituent relationship management.”¹⁴² Similarly, in his early work on ICT use in social movements, Garrett suggests that “technology-enabled additions to the repertoire of contention also potentially limit activists. By formalizing the role of participants, automated tools supporting online action offer a constrained set of actions, thereby excluding important opportunities for collective action.”¹⁴³ Jenkins found that this was particularly problematic for youth, for whom “institutionalized politics” is seen as offering a narrow set of calls to action.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 169.

¹⁴³ Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs,” 210.

¹⁴⁴ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 4763.

Reflecting the trend toward professionalization and “checkbox supporters” discussed in the introduction, Lerner claims that:

Large civic organizations are increasingly managing rather than enabling democracy. Affluent professionals run most of them, with little meaningful member involvement. Meanwhile, rises in donations, petition-signing, and letter-sending—while important acts of participation—generally involve minimal effort. In these cases, people are participating more but engaging less. They are turning what were once social processes into individualized tasks with little human interaction.¹⁴⁵

This professionalization not only ostracizes potential supporters by limiting the ways they can contribute, but it can also lead to the failure of a movement to adequately reflect the voices and needs of its base. As Costanza-Chock explains, “many professionalized nonprofits have failed to grasp the new media ecology. They continue to develop social media strategies that replicate top-down communication processes, don’t take advantage of the possibilities of transmedia organizing, and in many cases lack community accountability.”¹⁴⁶ They suggest that “the accountable transmedia organizer sets up a space and then facilitates conversation, but does not impose one model or idea from the top down.”¹⁴⁷

Franchising and the Limits of Local Support

Part of the reason it is so difficult for many organizations to leave the “top-down” approach to engaging supporters is that it has also delivered successes. In the 1990s the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) campaign made extraordinary progress by organizing and

¹⁴⁵ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 8.

¹⁴⁶ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 174.

¹⁴⁷ Costanza-Chock, 9.

delivering content to a network of local chapters throughout California and then the country.¹⁴⁸

Tarrow describes this trend toward “franchising” as follows:

In part in response to the problems of gaining broad support without bureaucratic membership organizations, many movements have “franchised” local organizations, which remain independent but use the name of the national organization and receive their publicity in return for financial contributions and cooperation in joint campaigns (McCarthy and Wolfson 1993: 4–6; McCarthy 2005)...Franchises allow a small national umbrella organization to coordinate the activities of a broad base without expending scarce resources on maintaining the formal connective structures of a large mass organization.”¹⁴⁹

Although franchising can reduce overhead costs, it also suffers from a “top-down” approach to organizing that may discourage genuine participation. Franchising can also be a time-consuming and costly option for organizations to pursue. In Wisconsin, for example, Our Wisconsin Revolution (OWR) is an SMO that spun out from the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign in 2016 and immediately began recruiting new chapters. Clint Harness saw a post on Facebook for an OWR meeting in Appleton and, after attending with his wife, eagerly began working with another member to establish a local chapter in Neenah. As a new organization itself, OWR had limited resources or guidance to offer Clint and his partner. Clint recalls that “[we were] just trying to figure it all out. The two of us have never done this before, so we were like, ‘where do we start?’ We got some information from our state organization but there wasn’t a lot going on at the state level.”¹⁵⁰ A year after joining OWR, Clint says, “I find myself slipping away from the organization... I’ve been recently in touch with the democrats in Outagamie County and they already have an organization set up and a structure [that] has been in place for a

¹⁴⁸ Crutchfield, *How Change Happens: Why Some Social Movements Succeed While Others Don’t*.

¹⁴⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 136.

¹⁵⁰ Harness, Interview with Clint Harness, Our Wisconsin Revolution Chapter Founder.

while. And I'm like, 'Why are we doing this [OWR chapter] again?'"¹⁵¹ This is a common problem among SMOs large and small.

In his research on Online Volunteering, an early volunteer matchmaking platform launched in 1999, Benjamin Stokes found that "preexisting managerial deficiencies seemed aggravated online, especially around basic communication and feedback. Volunteers reported being upset with a troublingly common occurrence: organizations appeared to forget about them, as if they were simply a project buried on a busy desk."¹⁵² Since the early days of Online Volunteering, constituent relationship management (CRM) software like CivicCRM and Nationbuilder have come a long way in addressing this problem, but many people still fall through the cracks. This is, in part, because these tools are not built to support participatory, bottom-up organizing.

Limited Digital Marketing Resources and Media Expertise

In contrast to the problem of over-professionalization in larger nonprofits, many smaller, particularly volunteer-run organizations struggle to keep up with shifting media trends and technologies. The staff and volunteers in these organizations often "feel pressure to stay up to date with emerging social media tools, practices, and norms. They frequently end up participating in new media spaces even when the value of doing so seems vague."¹⁵³ A survey of 231 LGBTQ and Two-Spirit organizations across the country found that half have "a media budget that is less than \$1,000 per year." As one survey respondent said, "many organizations

¹⁵¹ Harness.

¹⁵² Stokes, "Restructuring Civic Engagement: Meaningful Choice and Game Design Thinking," 8.

¹⁵³ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 123.

are not able to think expansively about media work while just trying to exist.”¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, some organization reported that, even as they gained traction online, they began to “struggle to find resources to reach offline audiences and to effectively link their online and offline media strategies.”¹⁵⁵

This problem extends to many nonprofits as well as SMOs. CAP Services is a nonprofit based in central Wisconsin that “has been on the front-line of the war on poverty since 1966.”¹⁵⁶ In our interview, CAP Executive Director Mary Patoka and her team shared that, with limited resources, they often struggle to coordinate volunteers for traditional programmatic support and outreach, let alone media and digital marketing support.¹⁵⁷ Communications Director Matthew Brown says he spends most of his time on print and newspaper outreach, but wishes he could do more video work. Interestingly, although CAP engages minimally with social media outreach, some CAP programs have adopted tools like Facebook Messenger as core tools for communicating with clients.

For SMOs in particular, failing to leverage the connections between different forms of media is a missed opportunity. Costanza-Chock argues that “few grassroots movement groups think systematically about how to use online media to drive broadcast media coverage, or vice versa.”¹⁵⁸ They suggest that “the combination of participatory media, which allows grassroots voices to be heard in their own words, and broadcast media, which can amplify those voices to much larger audiences, may be the most effective form of media organizing. However, many

¹⁵⁴ Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Out for Change: Transformative Media Organizing Project (2015), “Toward Transformative Media Organizing: LGBTQ and Two-Spirit Media Work in the United States,” 9.

¹⁵⁵ Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Out for Change: Transformative Media Organizing Project (2015), 37.

¹⁵⁶ “CAP Services Homepage.”

¹⁵⁷ Patoka and al., Interview with Mary Patoka and CAP Services Team.

¹⁵⁸ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 177.

groups, if they devote resources to a communications strategy at all, still focus on traditional PR approaches.”¹⁵⁹

Finally, it is always important to ask who’s participating in these organizations and how labor is compensated. In some cases, paying staff can lead to professionalization and distancing from the movement base. In other cases, compensating labor fairly may be the only way for a low-income worker to participate in a movement. Costanza-Chock suggests that “the chief barrier to an effective praxis of critical digital media literacy is lack of resources to hire dedicated, paid staff. Most interviewees believed that dedicated staff would be able to transform underutilized computer labs into hubs of training, formal and informal skill sharing, media-making, and transmedia organizing.”¹⁶⁰

Existing Limitations of Civic Technologies to Support Networked Movements

Finally, to understand the current state of technologies that exist to help SMOs recruit, train, and mobilize their supporters, I compared the feature sets of nine tools frequently used by SMOs and ten tools designed to directly support activists in becoming more engaged.

Tools for Organizations

For the first analysis, I selected nine technologies commonly used by social movement organizations based on their approximate frequency of appearance in web searches and industry publications, as well as recommendations from organizers. These nine tools primarily fall into the category of “constituent relationship management” (CRM) technologies. CRMs enable

¹⁵⁹ Costanza-Chock, 81.

¹⁶⁰ Costanza-Chock, 123.

organizations to track and interact with not only customers but also volunteers, donors, legislators, and other supporters.

Reviewing the websites and promotional materials of these nine tools revealed a set of 25 features. The five most common features across all nine tools were 1) event management, 2) reports, 3) contact management, 4) emails, and 5) donations and fundraising management. Other common features used by three or more tools were 1) customization features, 2) groups, 3) campaign management, and 4) forms. The remaining fourteen feature categories were used by only one or two of the tools. Of the nine tools that were reviewed, CiviCRM included the most features (15), followed by The Action Network (11), ActionKit (9) and Mobilize (9). The full results of the analysis can be viewed in the Appendix.

It should be noted that this tally is based on the features highlighted in promotional materials for each tool, not extensive use of the tools themselves. This means there are likely inaccuracies in the dataset in cases where a feature is included in a tool, but was not recorded because that feature was not mentioned in marketing materials. However, as the purpose of this analysis is to broadly identify common features in tools used by SMOs, this margin of error is acceptable.

As expected, the analysis reflects an overall preference for institutional forms of organizational engagement and volunteer management, including events, contact lists, emails, and reports that reflect these particular types of activity within the network. In many cases, the tools are equipped with advanced features such as automated marketing funnels, dynamic profiles, user targeting, and advanced list segmentation. Six tools include the ability to email supporters from within the tool itself. That said, the calls to action supported by these tools offer

a very narrow repertoire of contention. Beyond more common asks for supporters to make donations, call their representatives, and attend events, only a few tools also ask supporters to write letters to the editor or share personal stories.

This analysis also revealed a few surprises. First, the tools reflect a significant preference for email communication (8 of 9 tools) over other forms private chat, which was less-frequently available than expected (2 of 9 tools). Second, only one tool highlighted its ability to support multiple languages, which is deeply problematic for any organization seeking to reach the general American public, and particularly challenging for movements that predominantly serve non-English speakers. Third, the ability to integrate with Wordpress, Drupal, Joomla and other open-source tools was far less common than the ability to integrate with private social networking sites like Facebook (although this was also rare).

As discussed above, today's activists, particularly youth activists, access the internet using a wide variety of tools and platforms, many of which are not supported by the tools analyzed. A 2018 Pew report found that only 51% of teens in the U.S. now use Facebook, while far more use Snapchat, Instagram and Youtube.¹⁶¹ Only four years before that, in 2014, another Pew report had found that "71% of teens reported being Facebook users. No other platform was used by a clear majority of teens at the time."¹⁶² Clearly, usage patterns change quickly and vary between people of different age groups. Unfortunately, the tools that serve social movement organizations are comparatively slow in adapting to these changing usage patterns, and therefore adequately serve only a fraction of potential supporters.

¹⁶¹ Anderson and Jiang, "Teens, Social Media & Technology 2018."

¹⁶² Lenhart, "Teen, Social Media and Technology Overview 2015."

Although CRM tools are crucial for organizational success—SMOs must be able to track their supporters and donors—existing tools often fail to engage activists beyond a narrow set of actions that are predominantly delivered using email and Facebook. In a diverse digital ecosystem, CRM tools should integrate with a wider variety of popular platforms and promote participatory forms of engagement that extend beyond traditional calls to action.

Tools for Activists

My second analysis focused on the tools used by the existing supporters of SMOs to engage with the issues and organizations they care about. For this analysis, ten technologies designed to support activist activities were selected based on their approximate frequency of appearance in web searches and searching in the iTunes App Store, as well as recommendations from activists. These ten tools are primarily apps, although some, such as Facebook, also include web platforms. DoSomething.org is the only tool that does not also have an app. (It appears there was once a DoSomething.org app but it is no longer supported.)

For each tool, a user journey map was created by capturing screenshots of every key screen in the app. These journey maps were then analyzed to identify 44 features in 5 categories. The first category, “Actions,” includes 18 features that enable users to take actions related to the issue they care about. These actions include things like calling reps, taking quizzes, and tracking bills. The 7 “Login and Integration” features identified describe the login and registration experience and the tool’s integration options with social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. The 9 “Community” features identified include chat, internal member directories, and the ability to invite others to the tool. “Personalization” covers 5 features that enable users to filter their

experience based on things like personal interests and location. Finally, the 5 “Gamification” features reflect the inclusion of game features like statistics, points, ranks and leaderboards. Of these five categories, Login and Integration features were the most common across all ten apps. In total, the apps had an usage rate of 41% across all the features in this category. The usage rate for other categories were 28% for Community features, 24% for Action features, 22% for Personalization features, and 18% for Gamification features. The full results of the analysis can be viewed in the Appendix.

To begin, it must be noted that there are very few active users on any of these platforms, particularly those that focus on single issues or single organizations. Even the SDGs in Action app from the United Nations appeared to have limited regular engagement. This is likely caused in part by the prevalence of static and outdated content. More broad-based apps such as Countable, Brigade, Indivisible, and ActOn serve more as platforms for a variety of organizations and causes and have more dynamic content. Countable was the most active and well-maintained of all tools assessed.

However, higher usage rates and dynamic content does not correlate with more features. Although the Brigade and ActOn apps were the two tools with the most features in the analysis - 22 each - Countable only included 17 of the 44 features, Facebook Town Hall included 11, and the Indivisible app included 9. Information on the overall number of users for each of these platforms is not publicly available, but it is likely that DoSomething.org (which advertises that it is used by people “in every zip code in America”) is the most frequently used. DoSomething.org only includes 8 features, and, notably, none of these fall into the Community category. This

imbalance in features is not surprising, since each app has its own distinct use cases. Official descriptions of each app and my assessment of their use cases is covered in the Appendix.

There are four notable conclusions from this analysis. First, the repertoire of contention offered to activists via these apps is only slightly more expansive than the actions recommended by traditional social movements. A few innovative features do exist. One example is Brigade's set of ideology quizzes, which allow users to compare their stances and beliefs to other users on the platform. Countable also includes features which enable users to take a stance on issues and legislation and provide evidence and justification to support those positions. However, only two apps allow users to submit their own actions to the platform and, in the Brigade case, this is positioned as more of a feedback feature through a one-direction Google form. Additionally, only half of the tools analyzed point users to actions that can be taken beyond the confines of the tool itself.

Second, none of these tools appear to pay particularly close attention to privacy or data security. For activists engaging with issues online, the ability to customize privacy settings should be a top priority and users should be educated about the implications of the information they make public. For example, all but one the the ten tools assessed allow users to register and login with Facebook. It should be made clear to users that connecting their Facebook accounts with an activism app may expose them to certain privacy and surveillance risks. A particularly worrisome example of inattention to privacy concerns was seen in the Y-Combinator-backed OutVote app. This app scrapes the user's address book to match contacts with public voting records and attempts to predict who those contacts will vote for in the future. This is intended to enable users to identify which of their contacts are least likely to vote and contact them, however

it does so without permission of any of the contacts who are being entered into the OutVote database. Furthermore, the app's voting record matching and prediction algorithms for political affiliation were both found to be inaccurate in many cases.

Third, none of these tools provide information to users on representatives or legislation below the state level. Although both Facebook and the Indivisible app aggregate lists of issue organizations that exist at the local level (with limited reliability in both cases), neither track actual votes or proposals at the municipal or county level. I believe the creation and maintenance of a dataset at the hyperlocal level may be one of the most important untapped opportunities within the field of digital tools for organizing.

Fourth and finally, the most frequently used apps generally have limited direct ties to specific SMOs. They may aggregate information posted elsewhere by SMOs (as in the case of the Indivisible app) but only DoSomething.org appears to regularly collaborate with existing organizations. They accomplish this through carefully managed partnerships, but this approach can be resource-intensive and one-directional. Additionally, no tools other than DoSomething.org appear to provide activity reports to potential partner SMOs that could help them understand the potential value the tool might bring to their organizing efforts.

To summarize, digital tools designed to connect activists to the issues they care about are most successful when they function as platforms that serve multiple issues and organizations. Despite some innovative features and the growing functionality of tools like Brigade, Countable, and Facebook Town Hall, most tools in this space still only support a relatively limited subset of actions related to either increasing awareness about generalized issues such as "water" or "health," achieving specific political outcomes, or broadcasting one-directional information

about events and issues. As was also found in my assessment of tools used by organizations, there is potential to increase engagement with issues through digital tools by offering users a larger and more inclusive repertoire of contention to draw from.

Three Limitations of Existing Tools

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed limitations in the connective infrastructure that supports digital organizing work today. Specifically, there is a gap between the tools used by SMOs and the tools used by activists. On one side of this gap are SMOs that primarily rely on email and social media to make a narrow set of asks (vote, donate, share, etc). On the other side are increasingly networked groups of supporters with expectations for real-time information, personalization, entertainment, and opportunities for creative expression. For them, platforms like Instagram and Snapchat are a key source of information, but these tools are not built for organizing, and also pose risks to privacy. There are three specific challenges that exist within this ecosystem:

1. There is a lack of transparency and access to information about movement goals, candidates, and political opportunities at the municipal and county levels.
2. There is a lack of collaboration between social movement organizations, even within the same issue areas.
3. There is a lack of creativity, personalization, and diversity in the calls to action made by many social movement and political organizations.

Chapter 2 will explore how principles from the field of educational game design could inform the design of civic technologies in ways that can address these three challenges.

Chapter 2: Game Design Thinking for Civic Engagement

Civic Tech and Games for Change

By August of 2016 over 34 million people in America had downloaded *Pokemon Go*. That's nearly 1 in 10 Americans, but still only a fraction of the total number of people who play games in this country. A 2015 Pew study found that 49% of Americans play video games,¹⁶³ and a 2018 study by the firm Electronic Entertainment Design and Research found that this has since increased to nearly 70%, with a majority of gameplay taking place on mobile devices.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, the body of gamers as a whole represents a relatively representative cross-section of America that includes people of all genders, ages, races and religions. Yet civic engagement continues to lag.

Dichotomies like these prompt game designer Jane McGonigal to ask, "What if we started to live our real lives like gamers, lead our real businesses and communities like game designers, and think about solving real-world problems like computer and video game theorists?"¹⁶⁵ She is not alone in asking this question. Josh Lerner, the Executive Director of The Participatory Budgeting Project, researches how games can transform democratic engagement. In *Making Democracy Fun*, he explains that, "For most people, democratic participation is relatively unappealing. It is boring, painful, and pointless. It is boring because it offers little of interest. It is painful because it often involves nasty conflicts and bitter defeats. It is pointless

¹⁶³ Duggan, "Gaming and Gamers," 2.

¹⁶⁴ Crecente, "Nearly 70% of Americans Play Video Games, Mostly on Smartphones (Study)."

¹⁶⁵ McGonigal, *Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World*. NEED PAGE NUMBER

because it rarely provides any intrinsic pleasure or concrete outcomes."¹⁶⁶ Games, Lerner argues, create experiences that can make otherwise-boring civic engagement enjoyable. Similarly, Stephen Duncombe argues that “we need to rethink progressive politics in terms of the quality of our gameplay. Perhaps one of the reasons progressive are not winning much these days is that lately our game isn't much fun to play.”¹⁶⁷

McGonigal and Lerner fall within a growing community of game researchers and practitioners with an interest in “games for change” (G4C), or “serious games.” In their framework for purposeful game design, Mitgutsch and Alvarado define serious games as games that “intend to fulfill a purpose beyond the self-contained aim of the game itself. Serious games engage with the intention to ‘convey ideas, values, and sometimes at persuading the players’ [15].”¹⁶⁸ Mary Flanagan explains that:

Most in the community understand serious games to be those primarily within the domain of education or military applications. Such games might focus on training for service, disaster relief, hazardous occupations, crime, the redesign of public spaces such as transit systems and parks, or the creation of frameworks for team building....On the other hand, games for change or social impact games are understood as those that address social concerns more broadly. These might include poverty, racism, ism, bias and discrimination, war and peace.¹⁶⁹

This chapter builds on scholarship within the games for change and educational game design communities to explore how the affordances of games and the elements of the game design process itself can be utilized to advance the field of civic technology design, particularly for organizers and SMOs.

¹⁶⁶ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, 65.

¹⁶⁸ Mitgutsch and Alvarado, “Purposeful by Design?: A Serious Game Design Assessment Framework.”

¹⁶⁹ Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 2674.

Political Games

Before continuing, we must distinguish between the many potential uses of games for political and civic engagement. Lerner makes a helpful differentiation between “political games” and “games as political action,” arguing that “games as political action have the most potential to encourage democratic participation, by engaging people directly in political decision-making.”

¹⁷⁰ Today, many games for change are educational or performative in nature; they do not directly connect players with real-world action. At best, a player may be directed to sign an online petition at the end of a gaming experience. The handful of SMOs that use serious games typically do so in a way that reflects their use of documentaries, books and other non-interactive media. In other words, many political games emphasize information delivery, not engagement.

Lerner explains that:

The tenuous connection to politics and community groups is perhaps the greatest limitation of social issues games. The games are generally designed by independent developers or design companies with little political experience, only sometimes in partnership with politically or socially engaged organizations. Most of the games are isolated projects, not embedded in longer term campaigns or political processes. When they are connected to a campaign, they tend to have hazy goals, such as raising awareness. They rarely help translate this awareness into action: for example, by actively connecting players with community organizations, political parties, government agencies, or other vehicles for action. Nor have many social issue games tried to intervene in political decision-making processes, such as by helping players write letters to elected officials or attend protests.¹⁷¹

Although political games that focus on educational outcomes can create value for players, my primary interest is in how games can be used to model complex systems in a way that structures and simplifies pathways to engage in real-world action. The process of developing

¹⁷⁰ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 48.

¹⁷¹ Lerner, 36.

experiences that support this type of direct engagement can be supported through what I will call game design thinking (GDT).

Game Design Thinking

One of the first to introduce the idea of game design thinking is Benjamin Stokes, a leading researcher in the games for change community. Stokes suggests that "the discipline of game design has oriented to the delicate balance of engagement that makes or breaks a game: if it is too difficult, players quit in frustration; too easy, and players quit because it is boring. My question is whether such game design thinking has implications for civic engagement. I propose the answer is a resounding yes."¹⁷² Josh Lerner echoes this idea. He argues that organizations and governments "should design democracy to be more like a game, by drawing on game mechanics that engage the senses, establish legitimate rules, generate collaborative competition, link participation to measurable outcomes, and create experiences designed for participants."¹⁷³

Emersons Engagement Lab director Eric Gordon has also talked about game design thinking, suggesting that "the goal of game-design thinking is to translate social problems that have become normalized, or invisible, into distinct fields, so that the limitations that define our play within it can be made visible."¹⁷⁴ Gordon's interest, however, is more focused on using game structures to facilitate participatory design workshops. My approach to game design thinking is more aligned with what Gordon calls "engagement games." These are experiences that "use game mechanics to bring play and serious real-world processes together, so that real

¹⁷² Stokes, "Restructuring Civic Engagement: Meaningful Choice and Game Design Thinking," 3.

¹⁷³ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 8.

¹⁷⁴ Gordon, "20 Playable Problems: Game-Design Thinking for Civic Problem-Solving," 390.

action occurs while playing the game."¹⁷⁵ Stokes explains that “this is quite different from the recent hype to ‘gamify’ civic action with points and scout-like reward badges. Instead, I propose to ask how game-like thinking can shift civic design and strategy, especially around meaningful choice.”¹⁷⁶ Building from Stokes, Flanagan, and Gordon, this thesis will define game design thinking as follows:

Game Design Thinking: an approach to the design of civic technology that uses the structure of a game to model complex social problems in a way that makes them easier for community members to understand and engage with.

For this reason, I will look most closely at two game forms that emphasize place-based interaction in existing spaces across online and offline worlds: alternate reality games (ARGs) and location-based mobile games (LBMGs). Unlike board games, console games, or online games, ARGs and LBMGs have the capacity to facilitate situated engagement in real-world spaces. This chapter will pay particular attention to how the unique affordances of ARGs and LGMGs might be incorporated into civic and political technologies to more effectively onboard new supporters into existing social movements.

Games for Learning: The Resonant Games Framework

If game design thinking provides the rationale for applying the principles of game design to civic technology, educational game design can provide the roadmap. The organizing framework for this chapter comes from *Resonant Games*, a book by leading educational game design scholars at the MIT Education Arcade that offers four guiding principles and 22 mechanics that drive learning in games. The four principles are (1) honor the whole learner, (2)

¹⁷⁵ Gordon, Walter, and Suarez, “Engagement Game Guidebook,” 7.

¹⁷⁶ Stokes, “Restructuring Civic Engagement: Meaningful Choice and Game Design Thinking,” 1.

honor the sociality of learning and play, (3) honor a deep connection between the content and the game, and (4) honor the learning context.¹⁷⁷

The resonant games framework is helpful because it reflects the systems-based approach of game design thinking. When it comes to designing learning games, the authors explain, "If you are asking , ‘How do I make [this topic] fun?’ then you need to reconsider your approach. Resonant design is not about inserting content into games. It is about deeply connecting the game and the learning."¹⁷⁸ The same is true for the design of authentically engaging civic technologies. This chapter explores how each of the four resonant design principles can be applied to the design of civic technologies to facilitate civic learning and engagement.

Play & Learning

Resonant Games Principle: Honor the deep connection between the content and the game. Resonant design takes the connection between learners and knowledge, skills, and practices very seriously. All games, in their way, are learning games.¹⁷⁹

The first principle I’ll discuss can help civic designers create space for authentic play that connects to learning and engagement objectives. This principle builds on a long history of scholarship exploring the role of games in learning pioneered by researchers like James Paul Gee and Katie Salen. Research on the broader role of play in learning indicates that the relationship predates humans by millenia. In his study of the role of play in brain development, Stuart Brown explains that “play lets animals learn about their environment and the rules of engagement with friend and foe. Playful interaction allows a penalty-free rehearsal of the normal give-and-take

¹⁷⁷ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 311.

¹⁷⁸ Klopfer et al., 342.

¹⁷⁹ Klopfer et al., 319–320.

necessary in social groups.”¹⁸⁰ Raph Koster similar describes “having fun” as “a key evolutionary advantage.” He argues that, “without the little chemical twist in our brains that makes us enjoy learning new things, we might be more like the sharks and ants of the world.”¹⁸¹

When it comes to the design of civic technology, Erhardt Graeff argues that designers “should learn from the field of civic education. If we want to enhance citizen empowerment, we need to think about how we are designing for civic learning and addressing real civic empowerment gaps (Levinson 2012) and participation gaps (Jenkins et al. 2006).”¹⁸² I will take Graeff’s argument a step further to suggest that civic technologists should not only take content and process from civic education, but should also learn from the broader field of technology-facilitated learning, specifically learning games. This section will describe the deep connections between play, games and learning in social movements.

Learning in Social Movement

Citing over three decades of literature, adult education researchers Hall and Clover claim that “the study of social movement learning recognizes that whatever else social movements are or do; they are exceedingly rich learning environments.”¹⁸³ From the very first moment of awareness, mobilizing around an issue is a learning process. That learning can be informal, such as gaining knowledge about an issue or developing specialized skills through practice, or formal, such as adult education initiatives within trade unions.¹⁸⁴ From “one-on-one” relational organizing to orchestrating a guerilla projection on the side of a building, every organizing tactic

¹⁸⁰ Brown and Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, 32.

¹⁸¹ Koster, 96

¹⁸² Graeff, “The Need for Empowerment-Based Design in Civic Technology,” 9.

¹⁸³ Hall and Clover, “Social Movement Learning,” 1.

¹⁸⁴ Hall and Clover, 2.

must be learned. At the same time, the ability to navigate the democratic and capitalist mechanisms that shape American life must also be learned. Given the central role of learning in organizing, it makes sense that tools designed to facilitate organizing should pay particular attention to learning theory. One of the central tenets of educational game design is that play is an extraordinary enabler of learning.

As described in the participatory engagement section of Chapter 1, there is nothing new about the idea that playfulness can exist in step with activism and learning. Mary Flanagan's *Critical Play* documents decades of artistic and playful activism from WWI-era social critiques in Dada art¹⁸⁵ to subversive play in *The Sims*.¹⁸⁶ Lerner argues that "experiences of activist play have had four main impacts on democratic participation;" these are (1) increase participation through "positive and easy entry points," (2) amplify the impact of participation, (3) make participation more democratic and collaborative, and (4) teach the "skills and attitudes necessary for democratic participation."¹⁸⁷ The Center for Artistic Activism at NYU has documented more than 1,000 projects that leverage art and play for activism on their Actipedia wiki.¹⁸⁸ What's unique about these examples is that they aren't scripted; each affords and often requires a large degree of freedom and self-direction. The authors of *Resonant Games* explain that, "to help students develop competencies and develop their own passionate questions about the world, it is essential to figure out what is already fun about the matter at hand."¹⁸⁹ The playful, creative organizing tactics highlighted in resources like Actipedia and *Beautiful Trouble* describe the

¹⁸⁵ Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 452.

¹⁸⁶ Flanagan, 681.

¹⁸⁷ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 41.

¹⁸⁸ "Actipedia."

¹⁸⁹ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 340.

many ways in which organizing work can be fun in and of itself. Following this Resonant Games principle, the goal of an organizing game could simply be to connect players with these already-fun activities.

In *Resonant Games* Scot Osterweil outlines what he calls the “four freedoms of play.”

These are (1) freedom to explore, (2) freedom to fail, (3) freedom of identity, and (4) freedom of effort.¹⁹⁰ Osterweil describes each of these as follows:

Freedom to explore: Play allows for players to fool around, to investigate, to run their minds over the surfaces of a new problem or idea, to be surprised by some new idea or experience.

Freedom to fail: Play is an excellent opportunity to discover one’s capacities as well as the possibilities of materials, systems, and other learning objects without fear of reprisal and with minimal impact on one’s sense of competence. James Paul Gee refers to this as a “psychosocial moratorium.”

Freedom of identity: The capacity to investigate your own identity by trying on other identities and learning what it feels like to perform different types of actions and to ask all sorts of questions.

Freedom of effort: Play is healthily anchored in a freedom to exert oneself maximally, but also to maintain a lusory attitude (Salen & Zimmerman, 2003) while hanging back, observing, and/or reflecting.

Each of these four freedoms must exist in any civic technology that is designed to support learning. In many ways, these freedoms distinguish between authentic games and gamification.

Citing Deterding, Lobna Hassan defines gamification as “the use of elements taken from video games in the design of non-gaming platforms, in order to increase user engagement and to enhance the user experience.”¹⁹¹ Gamification focuses on points, badges, and leaderboards (PBL) but typically lacks opportunities for genuine play. At the most basic level, it is understood as a

¹⁹⁰ Klopfer et al., 578.

¹⁹¹ Hassan, “Governments Should Play Games: Towards a Framework for the Gamification of Civic Engagement Platforms,” 252.

way to make an activity that is boring or tedious more interesting. Games are different. Although they may include PBL, they also facilitate and structure space for play.

This need to create space for play aligns with Eric Gordon's call for "meaningful inefficiencies." He argues that "democracy needs to allow for unpredictable, chaotic, novel civic action," that can facilitate "the birth of a new political current, as small as a word or as large as a declaration."¹⁹² He continues, "when playfulness is recognized and accommodated within civic systems, the result is a meaningful inefficiency, where the good user is propelled toward action, not just work and labor."¹⁹³ Play is the mechanism of that action.¹⁹⁴ Civic and social movement technologies often seek to optimize efficiency, but play isn't efficient. Neither are games. As Bernard Suits said, "playing a game is a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."¹⁹⁵ What games do, however, that other forms of play do not do, is structure engagement.

Scaffolding, Feedback and the Zone of Proximal Development

The godfather of the study of learning in videogames, James Paul Gee, explains that "there is a good deal of guidance in games: guidance from the game design itself, from the NPCs [non-player characters] and the environment, from information given 'just in time' and 'on demand,' from other players in and out of the game, and from the resources of communities of practice built up around the game."¹⁹⁶ The need to structure the guidance provided throughout a gaming experience enables the designers of learning games to intentionally scaffold learning. According to Klopfer and the *Resonant Games* team, "Games with deepening complexity

¹⁹² Gordon and Mihailidis, *Civic Media: Technology, Design, Practice*, 253.

¹⁹³ Gordon and Mihailidis, 256.

¹⁹⁴ Gordon and Mihailidis, 255.

¹⁹⁵ Suits and Hurka, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia*.

¹⁹⁶ Gee, "Learning and Games," 26.

introduce concepts that are challenging and that may not lend themselves to quick or easy explanations . They enable players to build mastery through repeated exposure to these concepts while gradually introducing new dimensions to be wrestled with.”¹⁹⁷

The goal of structuring the pursuit of mastery in this way is to keep player-learners in the “zone of proximal development” (ZPD). Originally introduced by Vygotskian, ZPD is a “concept which refers to the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, the ZPD ensures that learners are always at the edge of their comfort zones; it is the basis for scaffolding engagement within games.

The concept of ZPD is often affiliated with the idea of “flow.” Csikszentmihalyi argues that, “within the broad range of ordered experience, optimal experience may be further defined in terms of two dimensions: what there is to do and what one is capable of doing.”¹⁹⁹ Klopfer, however, argues that the idea of flow is less useful for the design of learning games than the concept of ZPD. He explains that “there is evidence that games whose mechanics specifically drive toward flow and optimal experience are usually designed for individual experience and can in fact impede learning, while playing with others is more effective for learning and reflection.”²⁰⁰ ZPD, on the other hand, “is the space where learners can do things with help , and it is the space where the most effective learning happens. Good games keep players in that space, where

¹⁹⁷ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 1008.

¹⁹⁸ Obikwelu, Read, and Sim, “The Scaffolding Mechanism in Serious Games,” 1.

¹⁹⁹ Csikszentmihalyi, “Toward a Psychology of Optimal Experience,” 211.

²⁰⁰ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 561.

they are engaged and learning.”²⁰¹ Media scholar Ethan Zuckerman explains that "cultivating an activist movement becomes the process of leading people up the ladder of engagement from affiliate to opinion leader to donors, to movement organizers.”²⁰² The ability to structure this ladder of engagement is the key element that separates play in games from other forms of play, and it is essential for maximizing the learning potential of playful experiences. As Dickey explains, "The theoretical assumption underlying interactive learning environments is that learners construct understandings by interacting with information, tools, and materials as well as by collaborating with other learners. Yet, these environments must also help scaffold the learning process.”²⁰³

The onboarding processes of many social movements, particularly in digital spaces, frequently fail to effectively scaffold learning and engagement over time. For example, the “Act Now” page of Represent.Us, a national SMO with a generally robust digital strategy, scaffolds engagement for potential supporters in only two steps. The first step asks visitors to the page to show their support by sharing a message on social media. The second step asks visitors to search for and join a local chapter and, if there is no local chapter, to start one. As Clint Harness described in Chapter 1, starting a new chapter of an organization can be a thankless and exhausting undertaking; it is a massive leap to ask a new supporter to take. Represent.Us could drive increased engagement by designing an onboarding process that scaffolds learning and engagement in a way that more effectively keeps potential supporters in the zone of proximal development.

²⁰¹ Klopfer et al., 3746.

²⁰² Zuckerman, “Effective Civics,” 66.

²⁰³ Dickey, “Game Design and Learning: A Conjectural Analysis of How Massively Multiple Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) Foster Intrinsic Motivation,” 254.

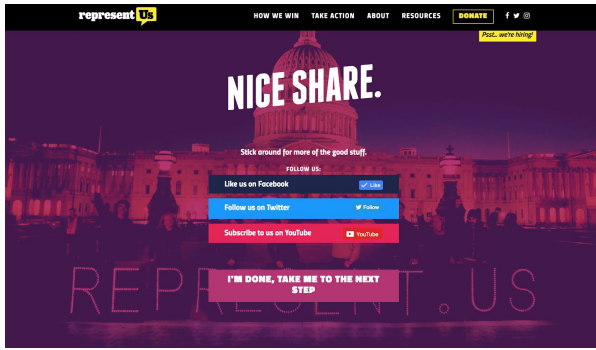


Figure 4: Screenshot from the Represent.U.S onboarding page, August 19, 2018



Figure 5: Screenshot from the Represent.U.S onboarding page with invitation to start a new chapter in Wisconsin, August 19, 2018

Finally, the ability to iterate based on feedback is a central component of learning within the ZPD. In part, this means designing spaces where it is possible—and safe—to experiment and fail. As mentioned previously, however, civic technologies designed to maximize efficiency rarely create space for failure. Stokes explains why feedback is necessary: "Compared to traditional civic strategies for online ‘retention,’ iteration shifts our attention to the feedback loops we provide participants. Such loops are how participants learn to improve their strategies, and optimize their civic skills—and this learning process is itself engaging.”²⁰⁴ For this reason, frequent opportunities to receive feedback—from both the game system and other players—must also be built into the scaffolding of learning games. When civic technologies scaffold learning and engagement in a way that facilitates authentic play and experimentation, provides frequent feedback, and keeps participants in the zone of proximal development, they are able to optimize for civic learning.

²⁰⁴ Stokes, “Restructuring Civic Engagement: Meaningful Choice and Game Design Thinking,” 12.

Identity & Expression

Resonant Games Principle: Honor the whole learner. Resonant design is incompatible with views of learning and of intelligence that see those seeking to learn as empty vessels awaiting “fill-ups” on knowledge. Learners must be seen as full human beings with a range of passions, likes, and dislikes. They have homes, social lives, and interests outside a given opportunity to learn. They have good days and bad days and physical bodies. We believe that we as game makers must hook students using all the things that hook us (and probably hook you too): telling them a good story; trying to understand them well enough to present them with puzzles, challenges, or other provocations that speak to them; and meeting them where they are.²⁰⁵

Based on the *Resonant Games* principle of “honoring the whole learner,” diverse forms of participatory engagement can expand people’s definition of democratic participation and create new opportunities for self-expression and identity exploration by building on supporters’ existing interests. Social movement scholarship has made significant inquiry into how everyday people become activists through the study of “pathways to participation.” There are many factors that influence this process, including personal ties to other activists, awareness of opportunities to take action, knowledge of the “repertoires of contention” that can be utilized to make one’s voice heard, and, of course, the availability of time and resources to take part. Klandermans and Oegema explain that “at the individual level, becoming a participant in a social movement can be conceived as a process with four different steps: becoming part of the mobilization potential, becoming target of mobilization attempts, becoming motivated to participate, and overcoming barriers to participate.”²⁰⁶ In other words, they describe a top-down, institutionally-oriented process that views activists primarily as targets for mobilization. However, as Bennett and

²⁰⁵ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 307.

²⁰⁶ Klandermans and Oegema, “Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements,” 519.

Segerberg explain, today's networked activists are transitioning from a "logic of collective action" to a "logic of connective action" that deprioritizes hierarchical management:

The logic of collective action that typifies the modern social order of hierarchical institutions and membership groups stresses the organizational dilemma of getting individuals to overcome resistance to joining actions where personal participation costs may outweigh marginal gains, particularly when people can ride on the efforts of others for free, and reap the benefits if those others win the day. In short, conventional collective action typically requires people to make more difficult choices and adopt more self-changing social identities than DNA [digitally networked action] based on personal action frames organized around social technologies.²⁰⁷

The "logic of connective action," means that "taking public action or contributing to a common good becomes an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation achieved by sharing ideas and actions in trusted relationships."²⁰⁸ This analysis reflects the shift from institutional to participatory forms of engagement identified by Cohen and Kahne in their study of youth political action,²⁰⁹ as well as shifts in learning theory.

Institutional forms of engagement that attend to collective action challenges in an attempt to drive narrow sets of action mirror an outdated approach to education that suggests that learners are "empty vessels" that can be filled with knowledge. The learning theory of constructivism seeks to counter this narrative by centering the existing interests and knowledge of learners. Emerging from the work of John Dewey and Jean Piaget (among others), education researchers Duffy and Cunningham argue that "constructivism has come to serve as an umbrella term for a wide diversity of views" that center on two unifying points: "(1) learning is an active process of constructing rather than acquiring knowledge, and (2) instruction is a process of

²⁰⁷ Bennett and Segerberg, "The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics," 748.

²⁰⁸ Bennett and Segerberg, 752.

²⁰⁹ Cohen and Kahne, "New Media and Youth Political Action."

supporting that construction rather than communicating knowledge."²¹⁰ This constructivist approach to learning is better suited to supporting participatory engagement than top-down institutional engagement.

Identity Exploration & Personal Expression

Particularly for young people, media production, circulation, and consumption²¹¹ are becoming increasingly prevalent pathways to participation that build on the existing skills and interests of potential supporters. Costanza-Chock argues that, "among other pathways to participation, I find that making media often builds social movement identity; in many cases, media-making projects have a long-term impact on activist's lives."²¹² "Many of the most powerful examples of media campaigns that work well," they continue, "involve everyday people taking part in media making, in a wide range of formats—from printmaking to posting on Instagram, from writing poetry to editing digital video"²¹³ However, Jenkins addresses the fact that, despite a flourishing participatory culture among American youth, there must be mechanisms that "help young people move from being socially and culturally active to being politically and civically engaged."²¹⁴ In other words, media making can be a core component of engagement, but only when there are structures that enable participants to see this form of engagement as a possibility. This section argues that civic games can be a mechanism for this

²¹⁰ Duffy and Cunningham, "Constructivism: Implications for the Design and Delivery of Instruction," 2.

²¹¹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 151.

²¹² Costanza-Chock, 16.

²¹³ Costanza-Chock, Schweidler, and Out for Change: Transformative Media Organizing Project (2015), "Toward Transformative Media Organizing: LGBTQ and Two-Spirit Media Work in the United States," 28.

²¹⁴ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 941.

transition by providing personalized experiences that connect identity exploration and personal expression to civic engagement.

The role of games and play in the process of identity formation has been a topic of game studies for many years. As early as 1995, Sherry Turkle explored how Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs) “revealed that virtual environments allow users to experiment in a safe, non-threatening environment and to expand, explore, and reflect on different aspects of themselves.”²¹⁵ Klopfer explains that “trying on and exploring a new identity in a game space provides an opportunity for players to incorporate new aspects into their real-world identity.”²¹⁶ For social movement organizers, this identity-play can offer a opportunities for potential supporters to “try on” different hats in the activist space and explore their affiliations to different causes.

As Bennett and Segerberg explain in “The Logic of Connective Action,” the personalization of action is an important component of participatory engagement.²¹⁷ Expressing one’s views through visual cues and symbols is a tradition that long predates the internet. Citing Tilly, Freelon explains that “the ‘wearing or bearing of common symbols [and] direct affirmation of a common program or identity’ (p. 261) [are] signifiers of unity...For movements that use social media extensively, few common symbols are as emblematic as their best-known hashtags.”²¹⁸ Costanza-Chock explains that “when people are invited to contribute to a broader narrative, it strengthens their identification with the movement, and over the long run increases

²¹⁵ Dickey, “Game Design and Learning: A Conjectural Analysis of How Massively Multiple Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) Foster Intrinsic Motivation,” 258., citing Turkle (1995)

²¹⁶ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 938.

²¹⁷ Bennett and Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” 744.

²¹⁸ Freelon, McIlwain, and Clark, “Quantifying the Power and Consequences of Social Media Protest,” 994.

the likelihood of successful outcomes.”²¹⁹ To summarize, an important component of identity exploration is the ability to not only experiment privately, but to also share those expressions of new identities and receive feedback from peers. Games can serve as a tool to structure the connection of personalized forms of expression to civic and social issues in a way that creates new pathways to participation through identity exploration.

Collaboration & Community

Resonant Game Design Principle 2:

Honor the sociality of learning and play...Resonant design is predicated on the idea that learning is both an individual and a social experience. Self-taught learners who never connect their knowledge to that of others may have reliable abilities to produce meaning, but those meanings may lack validity. Resonant games are designed so that they bring many players into conversation with each other and with the game, drawing people into the world together through provocation instead of by broadcasting a single message.²²⁰

As was discussed in the Introduction, the decline of civic engagement in America is related to a decline of civic institutions that facilitate the development of social capital.

Grassroots organizing in social movements, particularly at the local level, can be a powerful catalyst in reversing this trend. Sociologist and community organizer Mark Warren explains:

Community building is rapidly emerging as a vital force for revitalizing democracy at the ground level. It represents a serious effort to reverse what scholars have recently identified as the decline of social capital...What unites these diverse phenomena is a focus on patient relationship building at the local level, with efforts directed towards concrete improvements to the communities where families live and work.²²¹

²¹⁹ Costanza-Chock, *Out of the Shadows, Into the Streets!: Transmedia Organizing and the Immigrant Rights Movement*, 47.

²²⁰ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 319.

²²¹ Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, 9.

I argue that games can be optimally structured to facilitate community building and cross-movement collaboration, which, when applied to social movements, can result in the recruitment of new supporters from adjacent and complementary causes.

The growth and support of community is an essential part of organizing at the local level.

According to Putnam:

Places with dense associated networks tend to have frequent public meetings on local issues, places that have high electoral turnout tend to have high levels of social trust, places with lots of local clubs tend to support many nonprofit organizations...[even when controlling for] racial composition, affluence, economic inequality, adult educational levels, poverty rates, educational spending, teachers salaries, class size, family structure, religious affiliation, the size of the private school sector, and so on.²²²

He explains that social networks have three powerful effects: (1) they create norms of “generalized reciprocity,” (2) they “transmit information and propagate reputations,” and (3) they “encourage altruism and empathy.”²²³ Diani builds on this with the argument that “by facilitating communication and strengthening trust and solidarity, social capital increases actors’ control over their own lives. There is no reason why this general principle should not apply to social movements.”²²⁴

A challenge to Diani’s statement is that a large amount of organizing work today takes place online, although few digital organizing tools or social media platforms are designed to facilitate the development of social capital. Tarrow explains that “although diffusion through the Internet may have greater ‘reach’ than direct diffusion or diffusion through traditional media, it lacks the interpersonal ties needed to create trust between initiators and adopters; thus coordinated contention that spreads through the Internet may be less easily sustained than

²²² Putnam, “Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance,” 68–72.

²²³ Putnam, 59.

²²⁴ Diani, “Social Movements and Social Capital: A Network Perspective on Movement Outcomes,” 142.

contention that diffuses through these more traditional forms.”²²⁵ However, not all digital platforms lack the capacity to support the development of authentic social capital.

Many online communities, particularly online communities that exist within and around games, enable members to build strong relationships that support and reinforce reciprocal trust, peer learning, and the development of reputations over time. Referencing his work on participatory culture, Jenkins stresses that these communities “are characterized by ‘relatively low’ barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong social support for creating and sharing and for the development of ‘voice,’ informal practices providing mentorship and training for would-be participants, and contributors’ sense that what they share matters.”²²⁶ In game communities, Gee explains that:

Widely popular games like *World of Warcraft* and *GuildWars* have made a game out of social planning and organization itself. For example, in *World of Warcraft*, small groups organize into larger groups to go on challenging raids in dungeons. Each large group is composed of five-person cross-functional teams, and each of these teams has to function well as a team while also integrating quickly and smoothly with other teams in the group to produce a well-choreographed raid.²²⁷

Mechanisms like team play that enable the development of long-term relationships contribute to the development of social capital, regardless of whether the experience occurs online or offline. In 1999, sociologist Ray Oldenburg proposed the term “third place” to describe “a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gathering of individuals beyond the realms of home and work.”²²⁸ In their research on

²²⁵ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 19.

²²⁶ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 826.

²²⁷ Gee, “Learning and Games,” 33.

²²⁸ Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*, 16.

collaboration in “massively multiplayer online games” (MMOs), game scholars Steinkuehler and Williams argue that MMOs serve as a new form of “third place”:

By providing spaces for social interaction and relationships beyond the workplace and home, MMOs have the capacity to function as one form of a new “third place” for informal sociability much like the pubs, coffee shops, and other hangouts of old. Moreover, participation in such virtual “third places” appears particularly well suited to the formation of bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000), social relationships that, while not providing deep emotional support per se, typically function to expose the individual to a diversity of worldviews.²²⁹

An additional benefit to this type of engagement that the social capital argument leaves out is its ability to facilitate social learning. The *Resonant Games* framework emphasizes the sociality of learning, arguing that “almost all learning is highly social, because knowledge may be said to be social—symbols, ideas, and knowledge are all given meaning and weight by the context in which they are operating. Further, learning in a group context can provide greater resources for learning than any given learner may have on his or her own.”²³⁰ In her early work on learning in MMOs, Steinkuehler pays particular attention to the roles of social practice and apprenticeship in the game *Lineage*. She observes that “gamers who have already mastered the social and material practices requisite to game play enculturate, through scaffolded and supported interactions, newer gamers who lack such knowledge and skill.”²³¹

When it comes to peer learning in social movements, Bennett and Segerberg explain that “personal action frames do not spread automatically. People must show each other how they can appropriate, shape, and share themes.”²³² Tarrow similarly claims that “the learned conventions

²²⁹ Steinkuehler and Williams, “Where Everybody Knows Your (Screen) Name: Online Games as ‘Third Places,’” 866.

²³⁰ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 1443.

²³¹ Steinkuehler, “Learning in Massively Multiplayer Online Games,” 5.

²³² Bennett and Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics,” 746.

of contention are part of a society's public culture.”²³³ In his work on youth activism, Jenkins found that:

Many “traditional” civic organizations enable youth to participate based on an apprenticeship model, where they learn through subordinating themselves to a powerful adult mentor. By contrast, our case study groups adopt a more participatory model, in which young people are taking control of and shaping their own modes of engagement. In this model, learning takes place not only vertically, from expert to newcomer, but also horizontally, from peer to peer.²³⁴

This model of peer learning is more reflective of learning in games like *World of Warcraft* than learning in traditional SMOs and civic institutions.

Finally, Graeff reminds us that collective action, by definition, is a group activity. “For those who design civic technology,” he explains, “the implicit theory of change is that user engagement will scale due to lowered barriers to participation and network effects, and aggregate engagement online might convert into impact. Creating space for individual actions is not equivalent to creating space for collective action.”²³⁵ This is true at both the individual scale and the organizations scale. Social movement scholars Carroll and Ratner argue that “at the individual level, an activist in one SMO who joins another SMO becomes tied through common membership to activists in the second SMO; at the level of the SMO, the same activist creates a direct tie between the first and second SMO and a potential basis for communication and coordinated action.”²³⁶ A survey of 231 Two-Spirit and LGBTQ organizations found that “partnerships are an important way to leverage existing resources, build visibility, broaden reach,

²³³ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 29.

²³⁴ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 952.

²³⁵ Graeff, “The Need for Empowerment-Based Design in Civic Technology,” 5.

²³⁶ Carroll and Ratner, “Master Framing and Cross-Movement Networking in Contemporary Social Movements,” 604.

amplify work that addresses shared problems, mutually build capacity over time, and increase impact.²³⁷

Unfortunately, many civic technologies today are built to serve a singular cause or purpose. Furthermore, "few nonprofits open their databases to third parties...This barrier is significant, and deserves attention at the level of sectoral strategy."²³⁸ These limitations result in the siloing of issues and causes in a way that leads to wasteful duplication of tasks, training, services, and technologies despite the fact that:

Counterhegemonic politics requires that activism go beyond the horizons of individual social movements in order to grasp the interconnectedness of resistance struggles. The localism implicit in identity politics, while conducive to the pragmatic pursuit of immediate objectives in some contexts, can obscure this realization by fixating on narrow agendas and can truncate the transformative framing processes that nurture counterhegemony.²³⁹

Tarrow suggests that new forms of "hybrid organizations" are learning to tap into these interconnected networks to activate what Diani calls "protest communities," which are "sets of activists sharing a bedrock willingness to engage in sustained participation in protest activities (Diani 2009)."²⁴⁰ Because "the formation of recruitment networks involves both extending the reaches of the organization, particularly at the local level, and forming coalitions with other organizations,"²⁴¹ it is essential that technologies designed to support collective action be able to serve multiple organizations that, together, form a broader protest community that can be activated for the benefit of each issue at times of need.

²³⁷ Out for Change, 39

²³⁸ Stokes, "Restructuring Civic Engagement: Meaningful Choice and Game Design Thinking," 11.

²³⁹ Carroll and Ratner, "Master Framing and Cross-Movement Networking in Contemporary Social Movements," 620.

²⁴⁰ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 139.

²⁴¹ Klandermans and Oegema, "Potentials, Networks, Motivations, and Barriers: Steps Towards Participation in Social Movements," 520.

To summarize, the inclusion of features that enable organizers to build communities that facilitate the growth of social capital, support peer learning, and collaborate with affiliated causes must be central to any civic technology that seeks to organize for change. As Timms argues, "The challenge ahead, for any organization trying to create movements at scale, is not simply to master social media, but to learn to shape and support social communities. This will require not just new toolkits, but new mindsets."²⁴² I suggest that educational games provide an excellent model to inform the development of these new toolkits and mindsets.

Strategy & Context

Resonant Design Principle 4:

Honor the learning context...Resonant design is dedicated to finding the patterns necessary for fitting designed experiences into people's lives...²⁴³

Of the four Resonant Design principles, Klopfer and his team argue that the "most important is the idea that resonant games situate the activities and knowledge in contexts that are meaningful to the learner as well as significant in the larger societal context."²⁴⁴ Games can help organizers facilitate habitual, place-based engagement with social movements at the grassroots level.

First, it is worth revisiting the finding from Chapter 1 that very few civic technologies are able to support engagement at the local level. This is extremely significant to the larger context of grassroots organizing when we consider the claim that "most social problems need to be resolved through changes in policies and structures at the national level. But the national power

²⁴² Timms, "Creating Social Change with Social Media."

²⁴³ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 319.

²⁴⁴ Klopfer et al., 504.

of social movements comes from the strength of its local groups."²⁴⁵ The Tea Party movement is a powerful example of the impact local organizing can have on national discourse. According to Indivisible, "Only 1 in 5 self-identified Tea Partiers contributed money or attended events. On any given day in 2009 or 2010, only 20 local events — meetings, trainings, town halls, etc. — were scheduled nationwide. In short, a relatively small number of groups were having a big impact on the national debate."²⁴⁶ Many issues can also be directly influenced, at least in part, through advocacy at the municipal, county, and institutional levels, all of which control significant shares of local resources and decision-making power.²⁴⁷ Coordinating meaningful grassroots action at scale is a key challenge facing many organizers today. Crowdsourcing games and location-based mobile games (LBMG) are particularly well-suited to addressing this logistical challenge.

In his well-known book on the topic, Jeff Howe define crowdsourcing as “the process by which the power of the many can be leveraged to accomplish feats that were once the province of a specialized few.”²⁴⁸ He explains that crowdsourcing offers “a rubric for a wide range of activities. Its adaptability is what makes it pervasive and powerful. But this very flexibility makes the task of defining and categorizing crowdsourcing a challenge.”²⁴⁹ Crowdsourcing activities include collaborative creation, data collection, crowdfunding and much more. A

²⁴⁵ Moyer, “The Movement Action Plan: A Strategic Framework Describing The Eight Stages of Successful Social Movements,” 3.

²⁴⁶ Indivisible Guide

²⁴⁷ Harness, Interview with Clint Harness, Our Wisconsin Revolution Chapter Founder.

²⁴⁸ Howe, *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business*.

²⁴⁹ Howe, 18.

common feature of crowdsourcing is its ability to leverage collective intelligence, which is "the capacity of large groups to solve complicated or complex problems."²⁵⁰

Karen Schrier's work on "knowledge games" explores how games can provide useful structures for the facilitation of crowdsourcing activities. For her, knowledge games are "games that seek to invent, create, and synthesize new understandings of the world, solve real-world problems big and small, and help us reconsider, reframe, and reflect on humanity and our universe."²⁵¹ Schrier suggests that, in addition to solving problems, games can be designed to facilitate the collection of local data and opportunities for engagement at the local level. To illustrate this, she describes the 2008 University of Washington game *Foldit*, in which "players fold 3-D representations of proteins to help us better understand possible protein structures."²⁵² By participating in games like *Foldit*, she explains, "amateurs are able to make meaningful contributions to science by simulating the activities of actual scientists, using the realistic tools, problems, approaches, and epistemic frames that they would normally use—and through a game."²⁵³

As described in Chapter 1, most existing civic technologies are unable to support local action and data at scale. Games like *Foldit* make it possible to imagine a crowdsourcing game or system that could enable large numbers of users to collectively maintain up-to-date data on the stances of the more than 513,000 elected officials in 85,000 government units throughout the United States.²⁵⁴ In her work on Free and Open Source Software (FOSS), Andrea Calderaro

²⁵⁰ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 1457.

²⁵¹ Schrier, *Knowledge Games: How Playing Games Can Solve Problems, Create Insight, and Make Change*, 6.

²⁵² Schrier, 32.

²⁵³ Schrier, 34.

²⁵⁴ "1992 Census of Governments."; this is the most recent census of governments.

suggests that projects oriented toward principles of transparency and social benefit may be particularly well-suited to the type of people who engage in FOSS communities.²⁵⁵ Even at the local level, however, crowdsourcing could be used to collect a database of local events where organizing efforts could take place, source mission-aligned art and media, and crowdfund movement activity.

One of the most powerful contextual tools for grassroots organizers, however, could be derived from the field of location-based mobile games (LBMG). Over the years, location-based games have been given many names, including “‘Urban Games,’ ‘Locative Art/Games,’ ‘Massive Games,’ ‘Flashmob Art,’ ‘Ubiquitous Games,’ ‘Hybrid Games’ ‘Alternate Reality Games,’ and ‘Pervasive Games.’”²⁵⁶ In short, the unifying feature of all LBMGs is that they use real, physical environments as spaces for play by geolocating game content, and often players themselves, in real world maps. In the “hybrid reality” of an LBMG:

Users are required to move through physical space as they tag, collect, trade, and battle for digital artefacts and player achievements, accessing a microworld through their smartphone via the digital overlay of game objects and virtual locations across the actual environment. Through this augmented layering of the digital onto place, banal and familiar surroundings are transformed to become significant game loci.²⁵⁷

LBMGs are a natural outcome of the societal reorientation around mobile connectivity. In his early work on location-based play, Gordon introduces the idea of “net localities,” which “implies a ubiquity of networked information – a cultural approach to the web of information as intimately aligned with the perceptual realities of everyday life. We don’t enter the web anymore; it is all around us.”²⁵⁸ When it comes to situating “activities and knowledge in contexts

²⁵⁵ Calderaro, “New Political Struggles in the Network Society: The Case of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) Movement.”

²⁵⁶ Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 2172.

²⁵⁷ Hjorth and Richardson, “Pokémon GO: Mobile Media Play, Place-Making, and the Digital Wayfarer,” 4.

²⁵⁸ Gordon, *Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, 9.

that are meaningful to the learner,”²⁵⁹ the affordances of place-based play that uses the city as a game board could be transformative for grassroots organizing. In their research on the LBMG *Pokémon GO*, Hjorth and Richardson explain that:

Mobile media create new modes of engagement that entangle attention and distraction in ways that can be understood as ‘ambient.’” (Hjorth & Richardson, 2014). The notion of ‘ambient play’ seeks to contextualise mobile games within the rhythms of everyday life. Mobile location-based and augmented reality games such as *Pokémon GO* are manifestly ambient, as they become embedded in our daily routines, pedestrian movement, and interaction with the familiar strangers populating our neighbourhoods and urban spaces.
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Christian Licoppe and Yoriko Inada found that players of the the LBMG *Mogi*, a Tokyo-based precursor to *Pokémon GO*, “would frequently change their common patterns of movement through the city to play the game.”²⁶¹ Similarly "Horton (2012) documents how his young research participants integrated Pokémon play into the structure of their mundane spatial practices and daily space-time routines, effectively remaking their homes, local shops, and neighbourhoods as intertwined with the Pokémon universe.”²⁶² This “ambient play” can provide external triggers for action and habit formation in nearly any context, including grassroots organizing. Furthermore, Gordon suggests that "by looking at familiar spaces with the eyes of a tourist, and by finding new information and people in those spaces, people can become much more aware of the locations they inhabit."²⁶³ “As people become location aware,” he continues, “they can also become aware of the political impact of locations.”²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 504.

²⁶⁰ Hjorth and Richardson, “Pokémon GO: Mobile Media Play, Place-Making, and the Digital Wayfarer,” 5.

²⁶¹ Gordon, *Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, 77.

²⁶² Hjorth and Richardson, “Pokémon GO: Mobile Media Play, Place-Making, and the Digital Wayfarer,” 6.

²⁶³ Gordon, *Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, 79.

²⁶⁴ Gordon, 106.

In addition to the potential habit-forming and reframing benefits of LBMGs, the game format is also ideal for the support of situated learning. Gordon explains that "by taking advantage of the users' mobility and making use of location-aware interfaces, learning activities can be situated in actual, relevant contexts (de Souza e Silva & Delacruz, 2006; Klopfer, 2008)."

²⁶⁵ The exploration and collecting mechanics of many LBMG can be particularly beneficial for learning. In *Resonant Games*, Klopfer argues that "games prepare players for future learning when they promote conceptual understanding through exploration, rather than mere acquisition of factual knowledge. The former equips the player to ask interpretive questions when confronted with new challenges, while the latter can often prove to be ephemeral."²⁶⁶

Gordon suggests that "the systems that best take advantage of physical spaces coming online are ones that treat physical locations as yet another organizing structure of social life and attempt to fit them into accepted platforms for online interaction."²⁶⁷ Given the central role of local information and action in grassroots organizing, LBMGs can help organizers use geolocation to structure the delivery of content and calls to action to supporters. Stokes adds to this notion with the following question: "If public space is a hybrid of physical and digital, what are the hybrid tactics for civic engagement? Many places can no longer be understood by the physical experience alone. Navigating space and discovering place is happening in new ways. But do these new ways dampen the visibility of our cultural assets in favor of utilitarian goals?"

²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Gordon, 80.

²⁶⁶ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 1106.

²⁶⁷ Gordon, *Net Locality: Why Location Matters in a Networked World*, 115.

²⁶⁸ Stokes, Dols, and Hill, "Cities Remix a Playful Platform: Experiments to Embed Pokémon GO, from Open Street Festivals to Neighborhood Libraries," 4.

I argue that, if LBMGs designed for civic engagement also honor the previous three *Resonant Games* principles, particularly the need to create space for play and “meaningful efficiencies,” they can support powerfully meaningful and impactful civic learning and engagement experiences.

Striking A Balance Between Participatory and Institutional Forms of Engagement

My suggestion that games can provide useful frameworks for structuring learning and engagement in social movements speaks to the need for *both* participatory and institutional forms of engagement. In their work on participatory politics, Cohen and Kahne found that these two categories often reinforce each other. They explain that “youth who engage in participatory politics are far more likely than others to engage in institutional politics, as well,”²⁶⁹ and that “participatory politics provide a substantial opportunity to reinvigorate both youth politics and political life in general.”²⁷⁰ Unfortunately, as my tool analysis shows, most civic technologies today are heavily weighted toward institutional forms of engagement. To expand access and inclusivity, particularly among young people, these tools must adopt features that also promote participatory, bottom-up activity. At the same time, however, those same tools must also build from the wealth of experience and knowledge that exists within traditional movement organizations. This is not an easy balance to strike.

Tarrow suggests that networked movements “thrive because they need no special organized efforts to maintain them over time and across space. But their weakness is that autonomy at the base sometimes excludes strong connective ties between center and periphery,

²⁶⁹ Cohen and Kahne, “Participatory Politics. New Media and Youth Political Action,” 13.

²⁷⁰ Cohen and Kahne, x.

making it difficult for leaders to implement coherent strategies or control their membership.”²⁷¹

He warns that “sustaining a movement is the result of a delicate balance between throttling the power in movement by providing too much organization and leaving followers to spin off into the tyranny of decentralization.”²⁷² But just because a process is decentralized, doesn’t mean it’s also disorganized and ineffective. The field of game design shows that participatory engagement, crowdsourcing, and a variety of other bottom-up practices can be structured into technical systems that are both playful and engaging. My definition of game design thinking argues that civic technologies can use the structure of games to model complex social problems in a way that makes them easier for community members to understand and engage with. The following chapter will detail this process in the context of designing a civic engagement and literacy game for the city of Appleton, Wisconsin.

²⁷¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 132.

²⁷² Tarrow, 266.

Chapter 3: Participatory Futurism and Game Design Thinking for Civic Engagement in Central Wisconsin

Participatory Futurism

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias.²⁷³

- Oscar Wilde, 1891

On December 14, 1966, media mogul Walt Disney lay dying of lung cancer in a Burbank hospital. Even in his final days, he could be found sharing ideas with his brother Roy for a new project called EPCOT - the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow.²⁷⁴ Inspired by the work of the 19th century urban planner Ebenezer Howard, Disney's dream was to create "an experimental prototype community that is always in the state of becoming. It will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future, where people actually live a life they can't find anywhere else today in the world." Disney died the next day, but his brother and company would attempt to bring his final dream to life.

Ten years after Disney's death the company's president E. Cardon Walker described the project as follows: "Epcot Center is designed to respond to the needs of people by providing an international forum where creative men and women of science, industry, government, and arts can develop, demonstrate, and communicate prototype concepts, and new systems and

²⁷³ Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*.

²⁷⁴ (Miller, 1982, p. 70)

technologies, and their application in creating better ways of life."²⁷⁵ Epcot finally opened in October of 1982 as the newest theme park in the Orlando, Florida Walt Disney World Resort. That same month, Annetta Miller wrote an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* entitled “Epcot Center: Disney’s Dream Come True.” Although touted as “the country’s biggest private construction project”²⁷⁶ at the time, like many dreams for the future, Epcot’s reality pales in comparison to Disney’s original vision. Even the detailed seven-point plan Walker shared in 1976 was drastically scaled back before the park’s opening.

Despite these shortcomings, the Epcot experiment punctuates several powerful intersections between media, spectacle, futurism and civic planning. It also highlights the roles of race, class and privilege in futurist thought. Disney, a wealthy white man and infamous anti-semiter, bears much in common with his 20th century futurist peers. The most famous futurists of the 20th century—including people such as Alvin Toffler, Buckminster Fuller, Aldous Huxley, and H.G. Wells—were typically white American or European men who advocated for their own, singular visions of what the future should be.

In recent years, the voices of futurism have become more diverse. For example, Alondra Nelson explains that her goal as an Afrofuturist scholar is to “explore futurist themes in black cultural production and the ways in which technological innovation is changing the face of black art and culture.”²⁷⁷ Afrofuturism has transformed the modern understanding of futurism, but more progress is necessary to continue expanding participation in futurist thought.

The concept of “participatory futurism” introduced here explores ways that the traditionally singular visions and singular perspectives of futurism might be transformed into

²⁷⁵ (*Epcot Center Dreamers + Doers Speech, Cardon Walker, 1976-01-13, 1976*)

²⁷⁶ (*Walt Disney World EPCOT Center, Newsweek Special Advertising Supplement, 1982-11-22, 1982, p.2*)

²⁷⁷ Alondra Nelson, “About Afrofuturism.”

participatory practices that facilitate the collective imagination and articulation of a desired future state. As Bishop describes in *The Big Sort*, this is not something Americans are used to doing:

For most people these days, the question of politics certainly isn't this one: how do people with vastly different beliefs and backgrounds learn to live together? In the first four national elections of this century, the questions have been how best to isolate voters with sophisticated target marketing - a strategy endorsed and financially supported by both the Republican establishment and Democratic bloggers - and how to demonize the other side in order to gain, at best, a teetering advantage in the House of Representatives, Senate, or White House.²⁷⁸

Harvard political scientist Jane Mansbridge describes this challenge in her work on the differences between “unitary” and “adversarial” democracies. She explains that “the central assumption of unitary democracy is that, while its members may initially have conflicting preferences about a given issue, goodwill, mutual understanding, and rational discussion can lead to the emergence of a common enlightened preference that is good for everyone.”²⁷⁹ Frequently criticized as utopian and idealistic, a the idea of unitary democracy in today’s notoriously adversarial America feels impossible, but could reframing the context of participation make a difference?

This thesis began with the idea that fostering political engagement within the frame of “creating a better future” might enable a more genuine and productive exchange of ideas between people who would otherwise consider each other ideological enemies. As Duncombe has said, “Without dreams we will never be able to imagine the new world we want to build.”²⁸⁰ Caustic rhetoric can win campaigns, but its negativity and divisiveness has a cost. Addressing the country’s long-term decline in civic engagement will require significantly more opportunities to

²⁷⁸ Bishop, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 281.

²⁷⁹ *Beyond Adversary Democracy*, 35

²⁸⁰ Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, 25.

meaningfully engage with others in ways that foster mutual trust and conversation across ideological differences. Thinking about the more-distant future offers an opportunity to temporarily set aside political identities and think with others about what's possible in a larger frame of reference.

As Jenkins has claimed in relation to his work on the USC Civic Imagination project, "too often, our focus on contemporary problems makes it impossible to see beyond immediate constraints and develop a clearer sense of what might be achieved."²⁸¹ He describes this project in relation to Duncombe's work on "ethical spectacle" as follows:

Our concept of the civic imagination is closely related to the set of practices Duncombe (2007) has identified as 'ethical spectacle.' "These ethical spectacles work best, he tells us, when they emerge from participants' collective imaginations, when they are flexible enough to adapt to changing situations, when they are transparent enough that spectators understand them as constructed, and when they have utopian dimensions—because they allow us to think beyond the range of current possibilities."²⁸²

In many regards, this capacity to think beyond the present is a basic tenet of democratic participation, but it's something very few Americans engage in regularly. A study led by Jane McGonigal at the Institute for the Future found that "the majority of Americans rarely or never think 30 years into the future, and many rarely even think five years out." Citing a series of other studies, the report goes on to argue that "people who don't think about the future vote less often, save less for retirement, make poor health decisions, procrastinate more, have a harder time resisting temptation, are more likely to drop out of school or be arrested, care less about long-term challenges like climate change, [and] show less resilience in the face of tough obstacles"²⁸³

²⁸¹ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 668.

²⁸² Jenkins et al., 743.

²⁸³ ("IFTF: Survey Finds Majority of Americans Don't Think about the Future," n.d., p. 4)

Popular culture sometimes aims to facilitate this type of future-oriented thinking. Referencing Richard Dyer, Jenkins explains that “entertainment often offers us not a vision for what actual political alternatives might look like but rather a taste of what utopia might feel like, with its values expressed through our sense of empowerment, intensity, and plentitude in contrast to our real-world constraints.”²⁸⁴ In *Critical Play*, Flanagan suggests that games might be particularly well suited for supporting this form of engagement. “If we look to the fundamental reasons for why we play,” she explains “the connection between artistic methods, activism, and game design becomes clear. There is something about designing play, especially the process of conceptualizing and making games, that requires an attention to possibility.”²⁸⁵

Given the lack of opportunities for bottom-up, participatory engagement offered by many SMOs and the extreme political apathy of many people in central Wisconsin (described in the Introduction), the final goal of my research was to design a “participatory futurism” intervention that could be run in the 72,000 person city of Appleton, Wisconsin. The result of this work is a 5-week location-based game called *Forward*. The remainder of this thesis will tell the story of this game’s development and describe its final form.

Methods

Primary research for this thesis and the *Forward* game consisted of a mix of ethnographic and design-based research. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and public design interventions primarily took place in the Wisconsin counties of Waushara, Winnebago and Outagamie with a focus on the cities of Appleton (72,000 residents), Menasha (17,000 residents),

²⁸⁴ Jenkins et al., 4680.

²⁸⁵ Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 2769.

and Wautoma (2,000 residents). I also spoke with people from the Village of Fox Crossing, the cities of Stevens Point, Madison, and Milwaukee, and the Oneida Nation. Although I initially intended to emphasize the experiences of rural residents, I ended up spending a majority of my time working with second and third class cities with populations greater than 10,000 people. Research completed at MIT included collaboration and playtesting with students in the following classes: CMS.842 Playful and Social Interaction Design Explorations (Spring 2018 and Spring 2019), CMS.861 Networked Social Movements (Fall 2018), and CMS.815 Games for Social Change (Spring 2019).

Interviews and Focus Groups

I began my primary research in the summer of 2018 in central Wisconsin. Between July 12th and August 22nd, I conducted 15 interviews with 18 people there, including local civic leaders, social workers, and city staff. My largest interview was with six staff members from the nonprofit CAP Services in Stevens Point. I conducted repeated interviews with only one person, Karen Harkness from the city of Appleton; we met four times over the course of the summer. A table of these interviews is available in the Appendix. The primary research question these interviews explored was: How are emerging civic innovation tools and practices understood and implemented outside large urban centers? As is discussed in chapter 1, the findings of these conversations helped narrow my focus to social movement organizations and activists.

My next step was to investigate the tools and processes used by SMOs to recruit, manage, and mobilize volunteers and compare them with the tools and processes used by youth activists in central Wisconsin to engage with civics. I returned to Wisconsin to conduct more research in

collaboration with a small SMO called Wisconsin United to Amend (WIUTA) from December 28, 2018 to February 1, 2019. WIUTA has over 8,000 members who come from across the political spectrum to fight the corrupting influence of big money in politics in the state of Wisconsin. The group has limited resources and is primarily maintained through the work of its volunteer leaders, Georg Penn and Jim Crist. Like many organizations, they struggle with the process of recruiting volunteers and motivating people to take leadership positions within the organization. They find youth recruitment to be a particularly difficult challenge for their movement. Our shared goal was to explore this challenge through user research and to identify alternative approaches to engagement that the organization may pursue in the future. This work included, (1) conducting a digital engagement survey comparing the online habits of WIUTA members and high school students; (2) facilitating four co-design workshops (a fifth was canceled due to weather) with teens, civic organizations, and community members to reimagine the ways activists learn about and engage with issues they care about; and (3) 18 informal calls and meetings with community members, leaders of related movements, and technologists to understand how WIUTA's challenges relate to those faced by other organizations.

Playtests and Installations

Between April 2018 and April 2019 I developed 14 iterations of *Forward* (a table of these tests can be viewed in the Appendix). Most of these iterations were tested at least once.

Audience

Based on this primary research and needs identified in Chapter 1, the three target audiences of the game include civically engaged youth, youth artists and gamers, and passively engaged adults.

The primary audience for this game, “civically engaged youth,” consists of young people who are already actively engaged with voluntary, planning or advocacy activities within the community. In the context of this game, I define “youth” as anyone under the age of 30, but will particularly target people between the ages of 13-23. Subcategories of this audience include youth activists, youth who are part of volunteer organizations, and participants in socially-aware high school and college clubs. What I’ve witnessed with this audience is that, although they are engaged in some contexts, they rarely have a broader awareness of related formal organizations working in the community or other issues that are intrinsically connected. The goal of the game for them is to expand their awareness of organizations and issues that relate to the things they already care about.

Forward’s secondary audience includes digitally-savvy youth artists, makers, and gamers. Many young people are already using digital media and social networks to express political ideas, but they often do so in ways that are disconnected from formal SMOs and nonprofits. This limits their exposure to the greater systemic knowledge for effecting change that formal organizations possess. This category also targets people who already play location-based games like *Pokemon Go* and *Ingress*. The goal for this audience is to help them build connections between their creative and gaming interests and civic activities.

The final audience for this project includes adults who are passive supporters of nonprofits or political parties, or occasional participants in local civic processes. This audience includes occasional town hall attendees or followers of nonprofits and social movement organizations. Generally, this category targets people who are interested in particular issues but are less active than they could be. For example, Wisconsin United to Amend has over 8,000 subscribers to their email list but fewer than 100 active volunteers across the state at any given time. The goal for this audience is to increase awareness of organizations and issues that relate to the things they already care about and offer more relevant and consistent calls to action.

Forward Playtests

Prototyping for *Forward* began with a focus on the idea of participatory futurism. The initial goal of the project was to create a playful experience that encourages participants to think creatively about the distant future in a frame that ignores the traditional liberal/conservative binary. My hypothesis was that asking people to imagine what their community could be like in 100 or 1000 years would enable them to imagine a world beyond group-based ideologies.

The development of a game to test this idea began in spring 2018 in CMS.842: Playful and Social Interactions Design Exploration with The Community Futures Board Game. This was a tabletop board game designed to enable community members to playfully co-create future-oriented visions for their town. The driving question for the project was: How might we use games and place-based experiences to help community members co-create future-oriented narratives in a way that bridges partisan divides and fosters the inclusion of new voices? In other words, the project aimed to understand how Americans think about the future, in aggregate, and

explore how a data-based project on citizen opinions about the future of their country might be able to influence public dialogue, popular culture, and legislative action. Broader questions that inspired this project were: (1) How and why do so many people in central Wisconsin not feel heard by government? (2) What do people envision as their ideal dream for America and how can we gather data on this? (3) How can we engage citizens in crafting bipartisan, aspirational visions for the future?

Inspiration for the Community Futures Game mechanics came from collaborative future-crafting experiences like The Institute for the Future's *Foresight Engine* and The Situation Lab's *The Thing From the Future*. These games invite participants to playfully imagine alternative futures based on a variety of prompts. The Community Futures Game attempted to increase access to these types of experiences by creating a low-tech future-crafting game that can be played in small groups or installed in public spaces like libraries, museums and malls.

Survey String Board

Four prototypes of the Community Futures Game were tested over the course of the semester. The first experiment tested was the "Survey String Board." The interface for this 1-person experience was a wooden board with twenty multiple-choice questions printed on it; each response to these questions was marked with a nail. To answer the question, the user needed to wrap a thread around the nail corresponding to her response (see Figure 6). The goal of this prototype was to understand if and how a tangible interface could motivate users to share data on demographics and belief systems with the project. One playtester shared that the act of wrapping the string around the nail caused him to more carefully consider his answer. This insight suggests

Community Futures Board Game, v2

The second version of the Community Futures Game added color-coding to the question and idea cards and a game board to add spatial order to the experience. The system of prompts for the idea cards was simplified to three randomized factors: (1) How far into the future will this idea happen? (2) In what context/where would this idea be found? (3) What type of thing are you imagining? The point systems was also redesigned to make gameplay more interesting. In this version, points earned by completing cards could be used to purchase various specialty items, including wildcards and “thumbs up” stickers that could be used to advance the ideas of others. The goal of the game was to capture as many “squares” on the game board as possible for your team by having the most “thumbed up” idea on a square.

Players unexpectedly enjoyed the performative aspect of sharing when playing idea cards—which was not included in the instructions—and appeared to genuinely enjoy the game. They recommended making greater use of the game board in the gameplay and rethinking the color-scheme of the cards and board. Players also enjoyed “thumbs-upping” each other’s ideas, but the idea of teams was largely forgotten by the game’s end and, again, the question cards felt out of place in the experience.

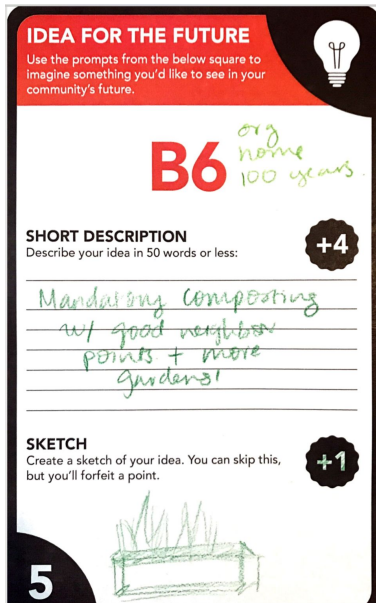


Figure 8: A sample completed Idea Card from Prototype 2. The prompt for this card was to “Imagine and organization you’d like to see 100 years in your community’s future that is related to the home.” The answer supplied was “Mandatory composting with good neighbor points and more gardens!”



Figure 9: First iteration of the Community Futures Game board in Prototype 2, mid-game.

Community Futures Board Game, v3

The final design of the Community Futures Game tested during CMS.842 included a variable board with a 4x4 grid of idea card prompts. The prompts used were the same as the previous prototype and players could still “thumbs up” ideas, but the question cards were eliminated and, rather than trying to take over the whole board, the goal was updated to be the first team to capture a straight line of four idea squares across the board. This “connect four” approach was enjoyable for players, particularly with the addition of a new specialty card: Switchcards. When purchased by players using the “thumbs-up” stickers (earned by playing idea cards), Switchcards enabled a player to swap two object prompts or two topic prompts on the board, clearing all ideas from those two spaces. Additionally, the colors of the topic cards were

updated to two colors, each representing a team. In the previous version, ownership of a card was based on the color of ink used by the player, which was confusing.



Figure 10: Topic Switchcard and prompt tiles

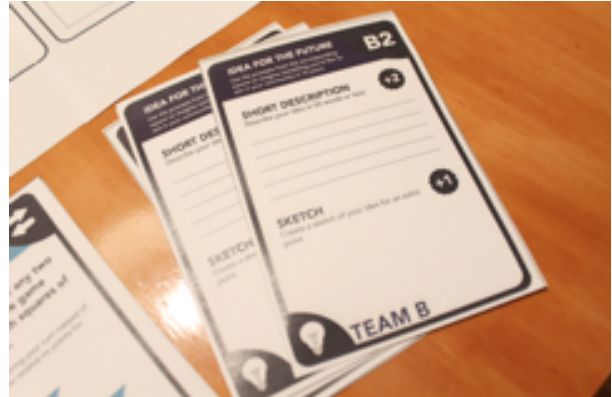


Figure 11: Blank topic cards for the “Dark Purple” team.

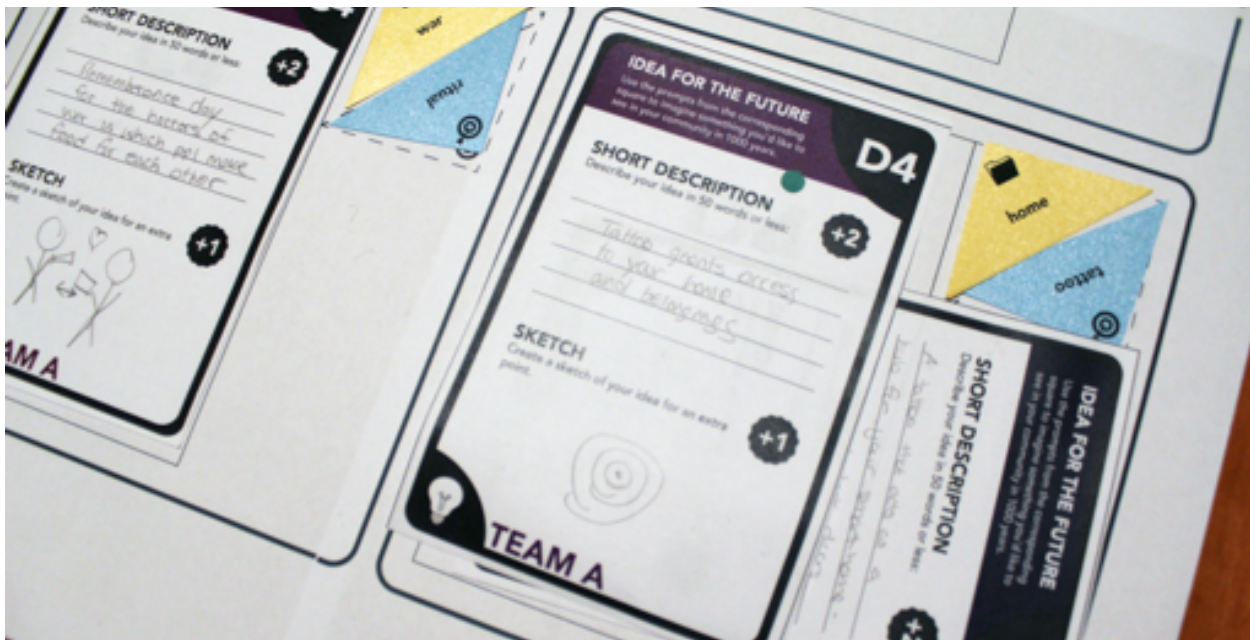


Figure 12: Completed idea cards on the final game board. For this square, the time prompt was “1000 years in the future,” the topic prompt was “home,” and the object prompt was “tattoo.” The idea is for a “tattoo that grants access to your home and belongings.”

Since my goal was always to create a game that could be run publicly in central Wisconsin, my next step was to begin testing concepts in spaces where my potential target audiences would be able to engage with them. Between July 19th and August 25th I exhibited

three experimental installations at four central Wisconsin libraries for a total of 35 days. Based on the findings of the Community Futures Board game, these installation sought to engage the public in conversations about connectedness to government, the economy, and the American Dream in small-town Wisconsin, while also testing different mechanisms of place-based engagement. Questions focused on three broad topics: 1) How and why do so many people in central Wisconsin not feel heard by government? 2) What do people envision as their ideal dream for America and how can we gather data on this? 3) How can we engage citizens in crafting bipartisan, aspirational visions for the future? The installations were more successful in testing game mechanics and user experience than they were in answering these questions; there were not enough responses collected to make any qualitative or quantitative claims from user submissions. That said, it was helpful to prove that users were willing to engage with survey-style content; if used within a larger-scale game, such an approach could produce interesting data for the community.

Community Futures Game Installation, v1

The first of these public experiments was the Community Futures Game Installation, v1 (CFG11), which was exhibited for 11 days at the Appleton Public Library. CFG11 was the largest installation tested and offered a variety of ways to interact including a string board for public Q&A, a post-it wall, and an interactive game that invited players to use the prompts on the game board—which would periodically change—to imagine things they would like to see in the community’s future. These were shared by filling out “Idea Cards.” If players could collaborate to get a row of Idea Cards on the board from the same time period (represented by color), those

cards were removed from the board as a “Completed Future” and the contributors received points. In total, 30 Idea Cards were submitted by the game’s conclusion.

The 8-panel installation included (1) title panel, (2) sticky panel, (3) game instructions A, (4) game instructions B, (5) leaderboard panel, (6) about panel, (7) completed futures panel, and (8) string board panel. The title panel was designed to draw attention to the game and introduce the spirit of play. With quotes from famous Americans (and a few others) throughout history, it focused on the idea that the United States was founded on the promise of constant innovation and improvement. To the right, the sticky note panel invited participants to share their own favorite quotes about the future. The first panel of the game itself provided step-by-step instructions for completing an Idea Card—the core element of the Community Futures Game. This included blank idea cards from four “timeframes”—1, 10, 100, and 1000 years into the future—as well as object stickers, topic stickers, and an Idea Box for ideas without a place on the game board. The second panel of the game included the game board and instructions for how to win. The leaderboard panel included a leaderboard that was manually updated at the end of each round of the game and instructions for registering to play the game. The about panel provided background information on the project and its funders. It also included a second set of instructions for registering to play the game and the full text of the subject consent form registered with the MIT Internal Review Board. The consent form was placed on this panel because it is the second-most-visible panel from the front of the exhibit. When players succeed in connecting five ideas from the same timeframe on the game board, a “Completed Future” was created and added to the completed futures panel. Finally, the string board panel consisted of 20 questions which

could be answered by tying a string around a nail representing the participant's response, one by one. The colors of the string - red, blue and yellow - represented the player's political ideology.



Figure 13: CFGII game instruction panels.

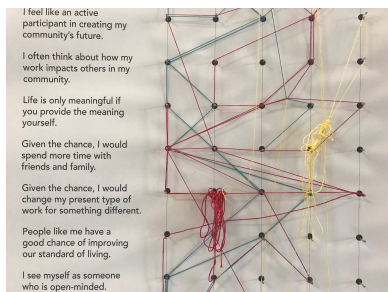


Figure 14: CFGII string survey.



Figure 15: CFGII, view from library entry.

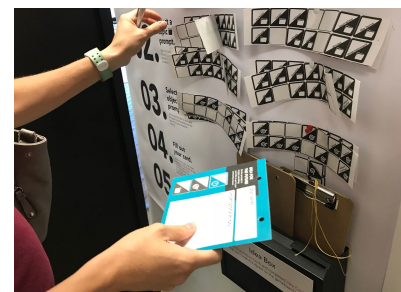


Figure 16: CFGII player filling out an Idea Card.

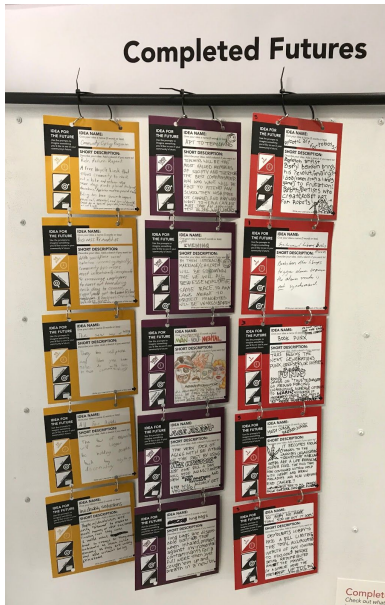


Figure 17: CFGI1 Completed Futures panel with three “futures” created by participants.

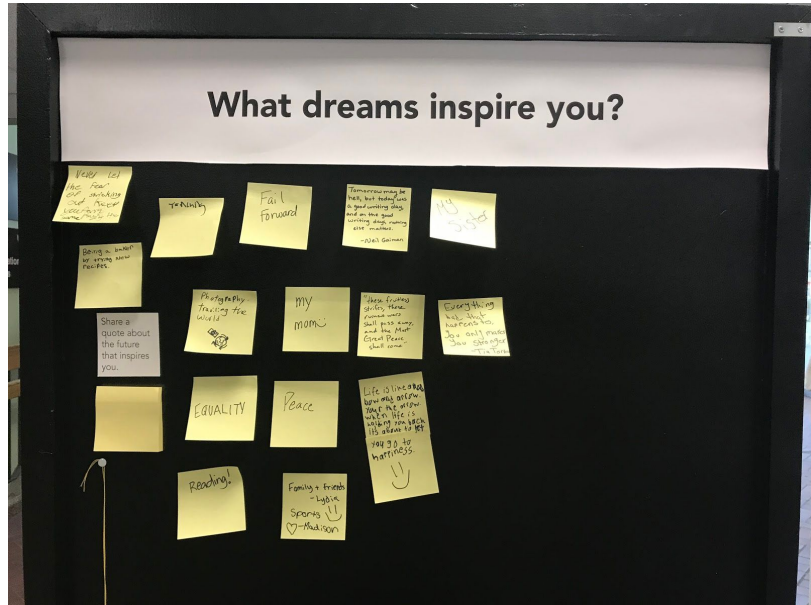


Figure 18: CFGI1 post-it panel. Most responses were off-topic.

Engagement with this installation was generally dominated by a few super-users, who submitted a large majority of contributions. Generally, the design appeared to require too much time or was too complicated for a passerby to complete. Within those super-users, however, I observed a great deal of creativity. People unexpectedly told stories in a way that inspired a more story-focused design for the second version of the game, described below. These stories included unique characters and settings, if not fully developed plots. People also submitted colorful art that indicated they’d completed their cards at home with their own markers and then returned later to submit their ideas.



Figure 19: Examples of Completed Cards from each of the four time periods offered in CFGI1

Community Questions Game

The next two installations were based on a different concept designed to facilitate cross-partisan dialogue called the Community Questions Game. The first of these ran for 4 days

at the Appleton Public Library and produced 5 submissions and the second ran for 10 days at the Menasha Public Library and produced 41 submissions. This prototype asked participants to pose questions for people who they perceived to be ideologically different and answer questions in return. Responses could take the form of a statement, drawing, fact, or follow-up question. The project description was: “In an increasingly complex, diverse and sometimes divided world, the Community Questions Game provides a safe public space to discover answers and engage in conversations with people who are different from you.” Although the installations generated engagement, few participants followed the instructions correctly and, despite its civic orientation, a surprising number of responses focused on religion.

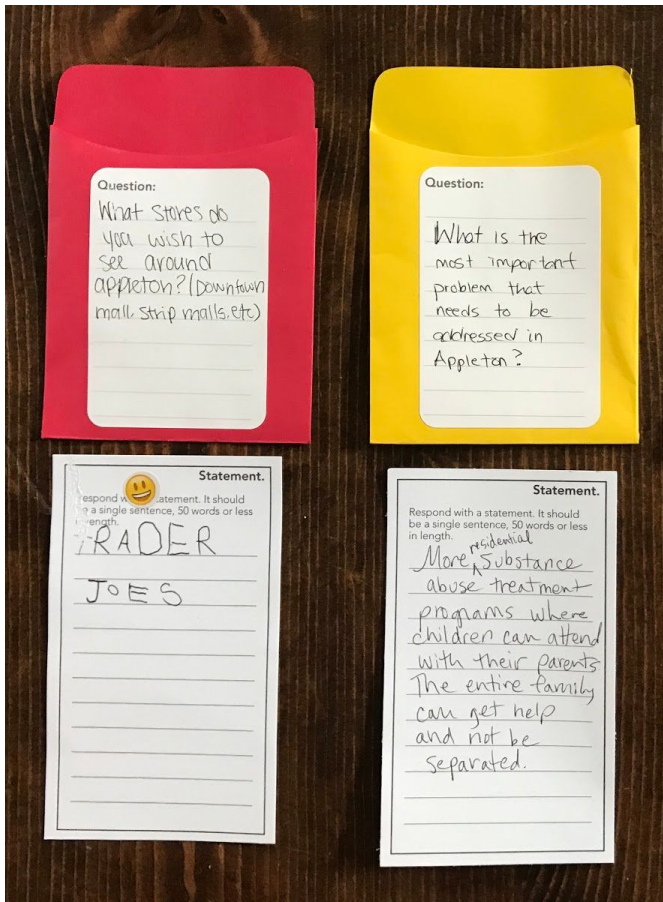


Figure 20: Completed cards from the Community Questions Game



Figure 21: Community Questions Game installation at the Appleton Public Library

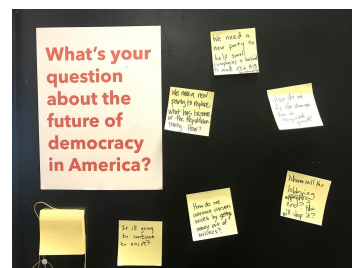


Figure 22: Post-it responses to a prompt from Cesar McDowell's Community Question Campaign; reverse panel of CQG



Figure 23: Blank Response cards in the Community Questions Game.

Community Futures Game Installation, v2

The fourth installation was a revised version of the Appleton Community Futures Game Installation that was installed for 10 days at the Wautoma Public Library. Instead of instructing participants to create “completed futures,” this version of the game asked players to collaboratively tell a story about the local community in the year 2126. “Setting Cards” (blue) could be filled out and added along the top of the game board, “Character Cards” (purple) along the left, and “Story Cards” (yellow) could be added where the other cards intersect to tell a story about a particular character in a particular setting. Unfortunately, only 9 submissions were added to the board over the course of the installation. Wautoma is a small city with a population of only 2,200, which may have contributed to limited engagement with the prototype. Testing in a larger city may have provided more comprehensive results for assessing the mechanics of the experience.

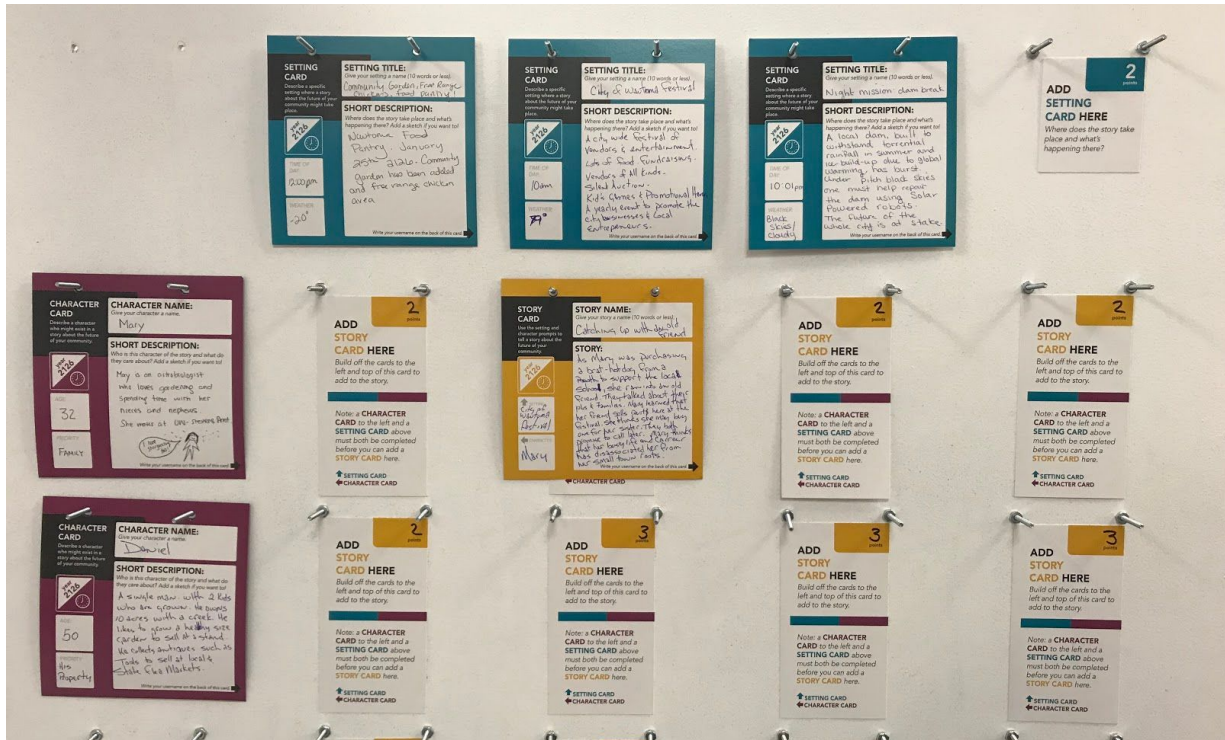


Figure 24: Partially completed game including two completed character cards (purple), three completed setting cards (blue), and one completed story card (yellow).

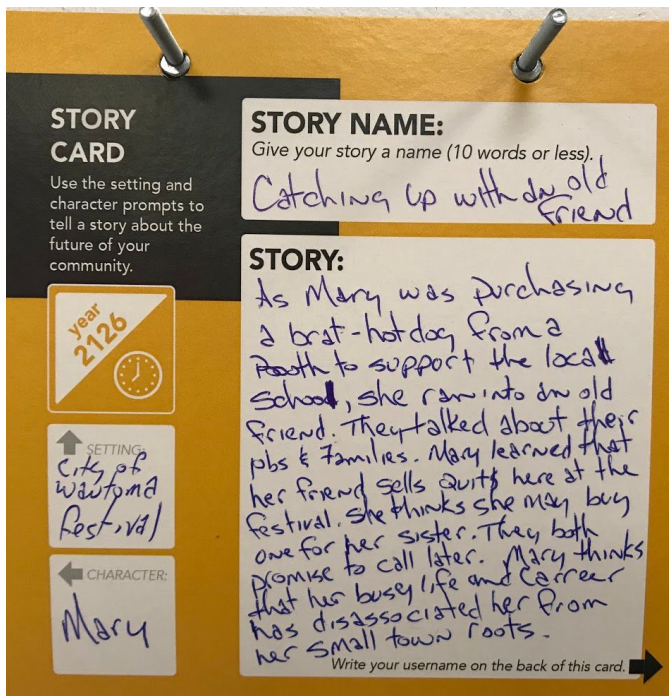


Figure 25: A story card about a woman named Mary attending the City of Wautoma Festival in the year 2126.

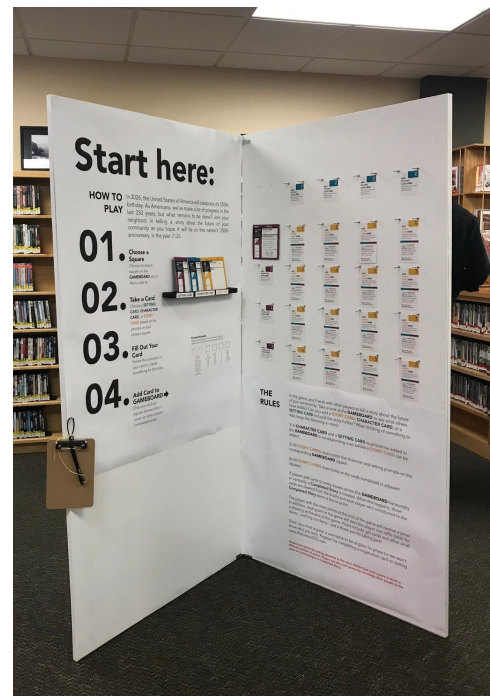


Figure 26: Instruction panels of CFGI2 at the Wautoma Public Library.

Beginning in fall 2018, the project turned toward exploring how the place-based affordances of location-based games might foster civic engagement at the local level. In collaboration with Wisconsin United to Amend, the project also began more intentionally applying the concept of game design thinking to the complex system of grassroots organizing. ArtHero was the first prototype in this line of inquiry.

ArtHero

After two months of analysis of the features of location-based games - particularly *Pokemon Go* and *Ingress* - ArtHero emerged as a project in the Hacking Arts hackathon at MIT. A team of eight people, including students from Wellesley College, Emerson College, MIT, as well as local community members, contributed to mockups, story development, playtesting, and documentation of the prototype.

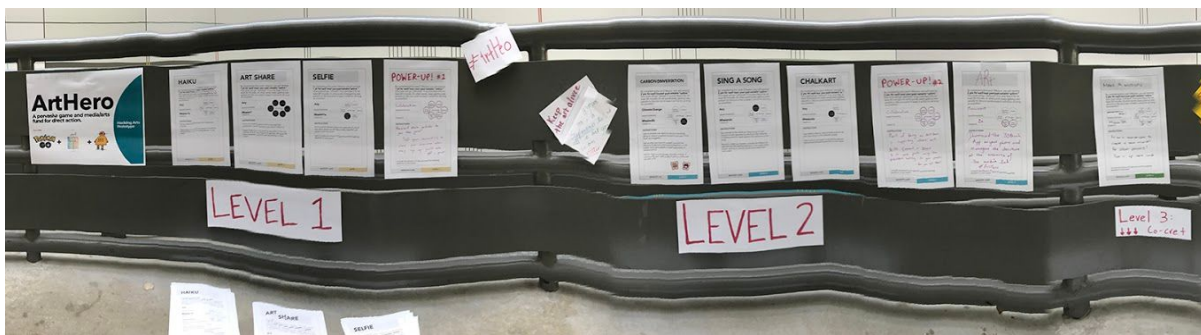


Figure 27: Image of ArtHero Missions during the public playtest at the Hacking Arts Festival.

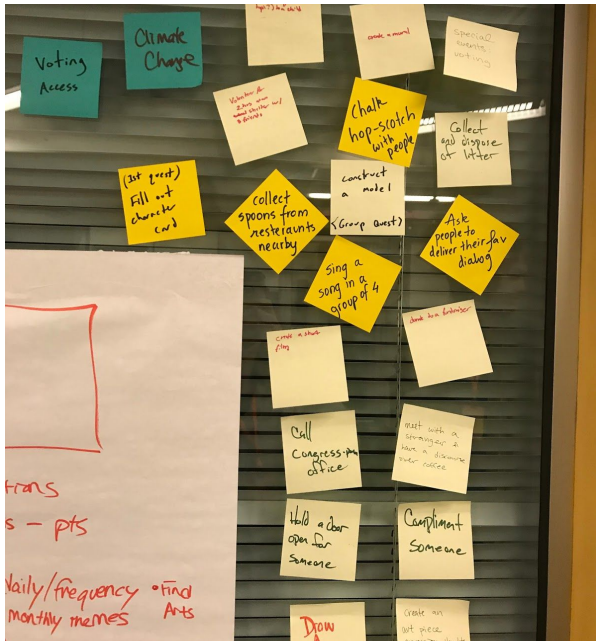


Figure 28: Post-it brainstorm of potential creative activism activities that could be incorporated into on-campus Missions.

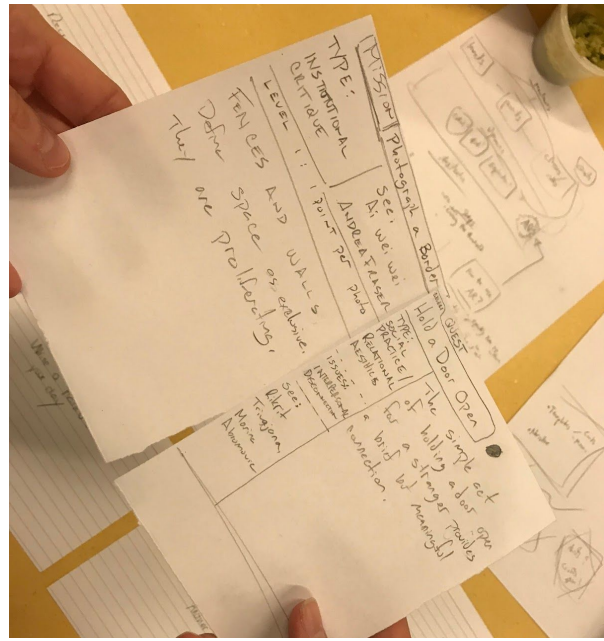


Figure 29: Mockups of ArtHero Mission screens.

On the second and final day of this event, an event called the Hacking Arts Festival ran alongside the hackathon. Our team spent the evening developing a paper prototype to test the game idea and was able to setup a table at this festival the next morning to test it with users. This experience began with creating a “character badge” with a custom avatar. This was designed to foster a sense of playfulness and identification within the game. To complete their character badges, players were asked to create a username, decorate a baby animal graphic as their superhero avatar, share the issues they care about and type of art they create, and, finally, select between “team peanut butter” and “team jelly.” People playing the game then clipped their new “badges” to their conference name tag so they could identify other players in the game. This stage of character creation was, by far, the most popular component of this prototype and created the most powerful takeaways.



Figure 30: Materials for the creation of character badges.



Figure 31: Completed character badge

Players were then instructed to take a “Mission Card” containing instructions for completing a playful action that combines the players artistic and media-based interests with a cause they care about. Cards also included instructions for documenting completion of the Mission by posting a picture to social media using predetermined hashtags.

HAIKU

By completing this Level 1 Mission, you will receive **1 pt for each hour your post remains "active."** Your post will go "dormant" if no one likes it for at least 60 minutes. (In other words, keep getting new people to like your post to keep it active for as long as possible!)

Any
issues/movements

Mission1b
mission id

INSTRUCTIONS

Write a haiku about something that's inspired you recently.

Take a photo or screenshot and tweet it. Include the Mission ID (above) and the hashtag #arthero in the tweet.

MISSION CARD
LEVEL 1

CARBON CONVERSATION

By completing this Level 2 Mission, you will receive **2 pts for each hour your post remains "active."** Your post will go "dormant" if no one likes it for at least 60 minutes. (In other words, keep getting new people to like your post to keep it active for as long as possible!)

Climate Change
issues/movements

Mission2b
mission id

INSTRUCTIONS

Talk to another player about a way you are struggling to reduce your carbon footprint and see if they have any suggestions.

Tell us what you learned in a tweet. Include the Mission ID (above) and the hashtag #arthero in the tweet. Each person needs to tweet separately to receive points.

NOTE: This is a peanut butter and jelly mission. If you're a PB, pair up with a Jelly. If you're a Jelly, pair up with a PB.

MISSION CARD
LEVEL 2

Figure 32: ArtHero Mission instructions.

@hackart4 ArtHero

2h

RT @ [redacted]: #arthero Mission1b: write a haiku for something that's inspired you recently, for me that's meeting so many amazing people and...

@ [redacted]

2h

.@hackart4 #ArtHero Giles springs into action! Support privacy and tech with him by sharing tech art and more. ArtH... twitter.com/web/status/1...

Figure 33: Screenshots of social media reports related to Missions.

Of the few dozen people who visited the ArtHero table during the festival, approximately ten created avatar profiles to play the game. Several of those participants also completed

Missions. No one completed the game’s chalk-art Mission, which was the highest-level Mission included in this version of the game. The components of the current version of *Forward* that were most influenced by this prototype were the story and profile design, which both echo Arthero’s playful, “cute-animal” aesthetic.

Social Movement Game



Figure 34: Game components during playtest of SMG.

Based on the need for structures that can more effectively support bottom-up, participatory forms of engagement in grassroots organizing, the next version of a game explored mechanics designed to enable players to complete creative Missions, and also be rewarded for

collecting components to create and share their own Missions. These Missions were plotted on a game board that set the boundaries of a specific place where the game would theoretically be played—in this case, the MIT campus. This version of the game was played with five students and one faculty member in CMS.861, Networked Social Movements. The input of these players was helpful both because they were among the game’s target demographic, and also because they’d all been studying the role of networked technologies in social movements over the course of the semester, which gave them advanced familiarity with the system I was designing for.

The game defined three components that could be combined into Missions: Actions, Issues, and Opportunities. Issues included facts and information about a social issue, Actions included information about specific actions that could be taken to address the issue, and Opportunities included information about events where Actions might be particularly impactful. Combined, they created a Mission with specific instructions others could follow to address an issue in a particular way. Issues and Opportunities were always related to a particular challenge category, such as climate change or gun control, and needed to match within the Mission card. Custom cards were also included in the deck for each category to enable players to create their own Issues, Opportunities and Actions to the game. When these custom cards were used by other players in Missions, the creator received bonus points.



Figure 35: Game cards from SMG

Players of this version of the game shared that they enjoyed creating custom issues and appreciated the variety of techniques offered by the Action cards, but they wished there was a wider range of cards overall. The way the points were balanced in the game was identified as a weakness, because the system didn't create enough incentive for players to complete Missions

created by others. Players also felt like there were missed opportunities for more collaboration within the game and wished there was a larger story beyond simply earning points. Finally, there was confusion about the difference between Opportunities and Tactics, which prompted experimentation over the next several iterations of the game.

Forward, v1

Building from the findings of the Community Futures Game Installations, the next prototype, which was the first to be called “Forward,” sought to explore collaborative storytelling methods in the context of a participatory futurism game. This design was heavily influenced by the Center for Story-based Strategy’s framework. In their book *Re:Imagining Change*, they explain that “every issue already has a web of existing stories and cultural assumptions that frame public understanding. Story-based strategy provides a process to understand the current narrative around an issue and identify opportunities to change it through strategic intervention.”²⁸⁶ The book’s clear breakdown of the components of story-based strategy made it possible to use them to replace and revise components of the previous two games that players found confusing. These components include (1) the four “narrative cornerstones” of goals, targets, audiences, and constituencies,²⁸⁷ (2) the “five elements of story—Conflict, Characters, Imagery, Foreshadowing, and Assumptions,”²⁸⁸ and (3) six “narrative arcs,” such as “frame the conflict with values,” and “name the villain.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁶ Canning, Reinsborough, and Smucker, *Re:Imagining Change: How to Use Story-Based Strategy to Win Campaigns, Build Movements, and Change the World*, 19.

²⁸⁷ Canning, Reinsborough, and Smucker, 53.

²⁸⁸ Canning, Reinsborough, and Smucker, 59.

²⁸⁹ Canning, Reinsborough, and Smucker, 139.

In Forward, v1, the “Action” cards from the previous test became “Tactics,” but were otherwise largely unchanged. The “Issue Cards” became “Goal Cards,” which, instead of focusing on facts, each highlighted a specific social goal or campaign. Finally, “Opportunity Cards” were removed altogether and replaced with “Story Cards,” which were structured to help players identify elements of a story related to a given Goal Card. This time, when completing Missions, players were instructed to begin with a “start” card in each category. They could then add sub-elements based on the Story-based Strategy framework to build out their Missions and the Missions of other players. These sub-elements are depicted in Figure 38. Like in the previous game, they could “complete” a Mission by filling out a “completed Mission” card.

Figure 36: SMG Mission Card

Figure 37: Fv1 Mission Card



Figure 38: “Start” cards and sub-element cards included in the Fv1 deck. Content based on the framework from the Center for Story-based Strategy.

This iteration of the game was tested at youth-focused workshop hosted at Neenah High School with five teenagers between the ages of 13 and 16. The session began by asking the participants and facilitators to talk about issues they care about and think about the ways they learn about opportunities to create change related to those issues. The teens had very few ideas in

this regard and were generally unfamiliar with the activities and goals of local nonprofits.

George from Wisconsin United to Amend then gave a presentation on the types of outreach they do as an organization and the challenges they face in engaging youth with their cause. After a short brainstorm about this, the teens playtested the game.

Play was slow to start but everyone caught on by the second round. At the end, the group had a lively feedback session about potential improvements to the game experience. Although the players generally seemed to understand the game, it was not fun, the large paper cards were cumbersome and messy, and the story structure was too complex. Players liked the idea of completing creative Missions in public, but, overall, the story-based strategy framework was simply too intensive for teenagers with limited knowledge of the local nonprofit and organizing ecosystem. Overall, the game did not successfully facilitate a collaborative storytelling experience. That said, Forward, v1 could be a very generative activity for experienced organizers to run when planning participatory campaigns and outreach strategies.

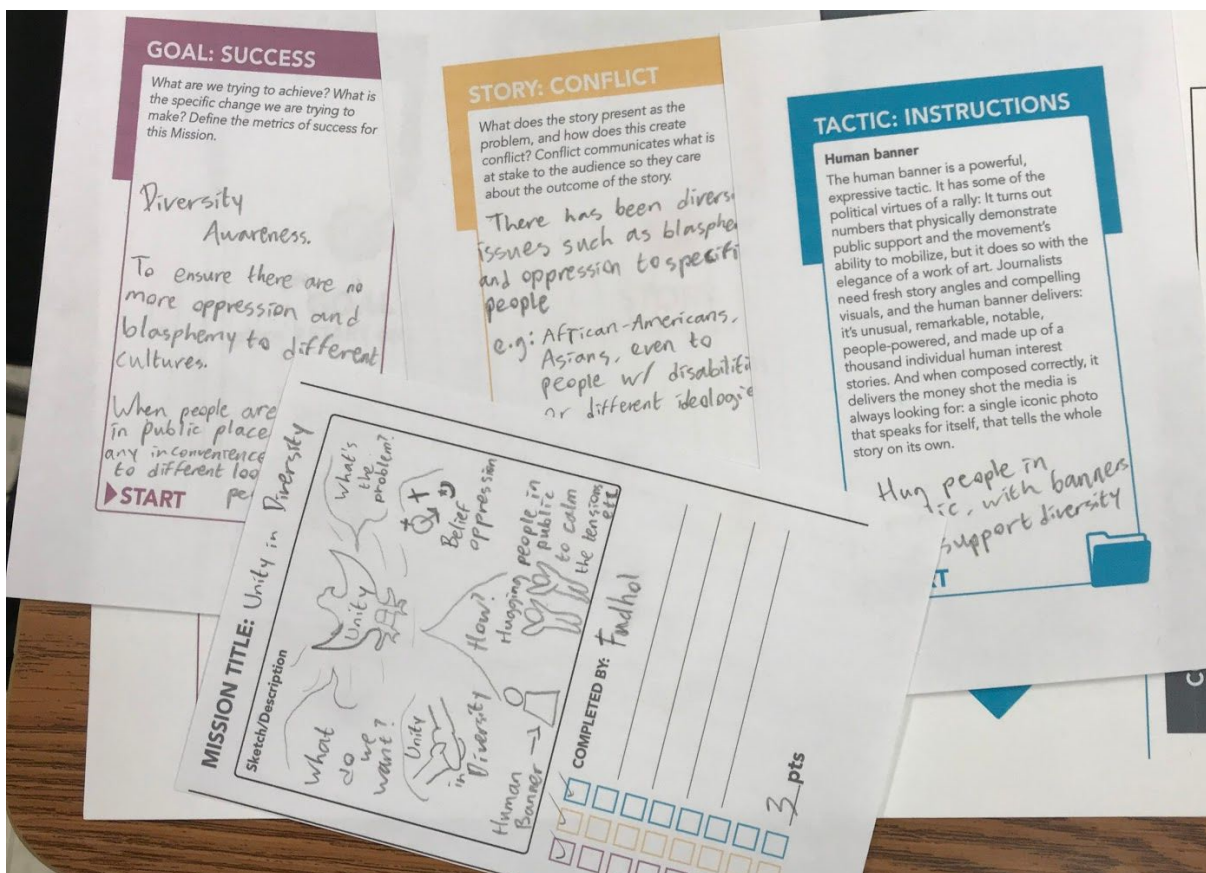


Figure 39: A completed Forward v1 Mission card proposing a human banner to raise awareness about diversity and inclusion.

Forward, v2

The next iteration of *Forward* made significant improvements to the card structure in the game based on feedback from the previous two tests. Because the target audience for the experience extends beyond seasoned organizers, it also dropped much of the Story-based Strategy storytelling components of Fv1 to focus on the mechanics of Mission completion. Mission creation functioned similarly to the previous two prototypes. The “meaningful inefficiency” added to this version of the game required players to read about Missions other players had completed in order to collect tokens related to four “issue categories:” blue for

“strong democracy,” red for “quality education,” yellow for “healthy people,” and green for “healthy environment.” Once a player had enough tokens in a given category, they could be used to complete Missions in that category by filling out a “Story Template,” which they were instructed to complete as though they were sharing what they did on Instagram or Facebook.

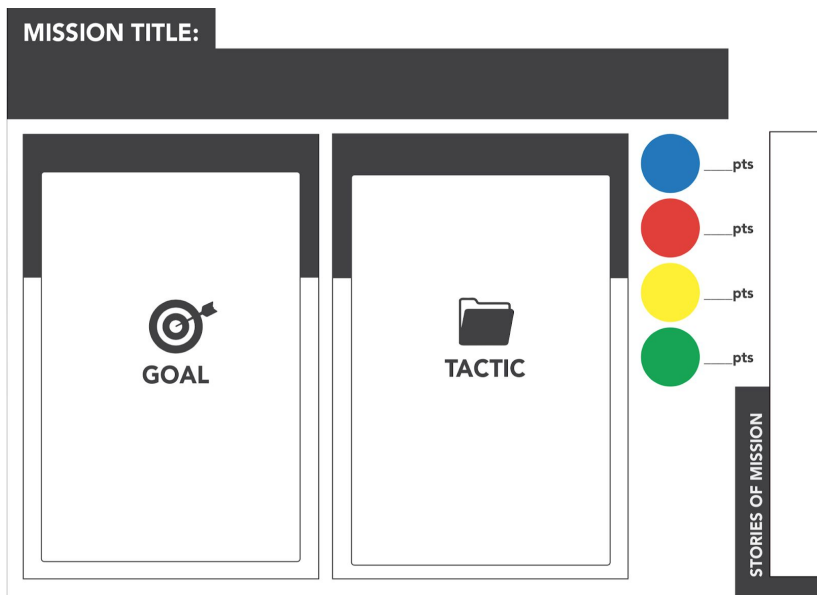


Figure 40: A Mission template from Fv2

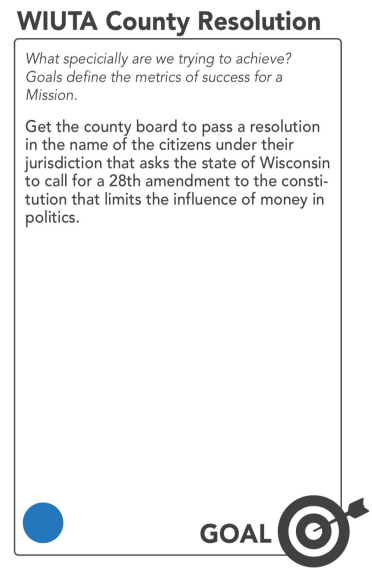


Figure 41: A Goal card from Fv2

In this playtest, six adults ages 30-60—who all live in the Fox Cities—played four rounds of the game. As in previous playtests, players were confused about the rules in the first round but understood by the second round. Carefully scaffolding the introduction of both rules and story will be crucial for the final game’s success. In this version, some of the Goal and Tactic cards were pre-populated with content before the playtest but most of them were blank, which meant players needed to add their own ideas. Like in the SMG playtest, players really enjoyed this. That said, providing better instructions and more examples would have been helpful. Feedback and observation suggested that players enjoyed using the “issue tokens” as a form of in-game currency, but felt like the system also restricted their ability to choose which issues to work on.

When discussing whether they would play a real version of this game, players thought prizes would make it more likely that they would actually complete Missions in the real world. Referencing her ability to compete with friends in the Fitbit app, one player was particularly excited about the potential for team play and competition with friends within the game. Finally, this was the first test where the players really began to get invested in the game and have fun; they wanted to keep playing when our playtest time ran out.

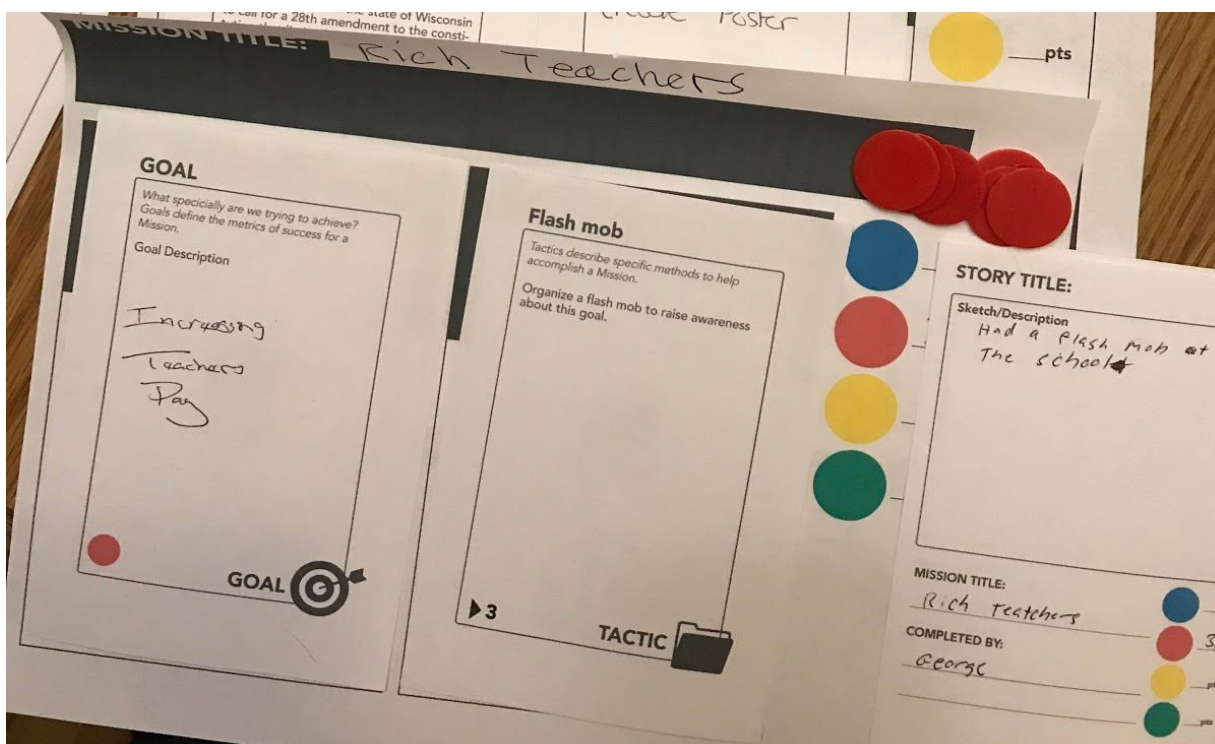


Figure 42: A “Rich Teachers” Mission in Fv2 suggesting a flash mob at the school to raise awareness about low teacher pay.

Forward, v3

The next version of the game significantly revised the design of the paper prototype to save table space (which was a logistical challenge in all three preceding games) and clarify instructions. It introduced player pieces to indicate the location of players in the game, a

scorecard to have players track their scores rather than use tokens, and included more example content in the card deck. This version also introduced a new mechanic to bring the concept of participatory futurism back into the experience. The goal of this game was to “work with other players to craft a vision for your community on Wisconsin’s 250th birthday, 79 years from now in the year 2098.” This could be done by creating and upvoting “positive Visions” about the future.

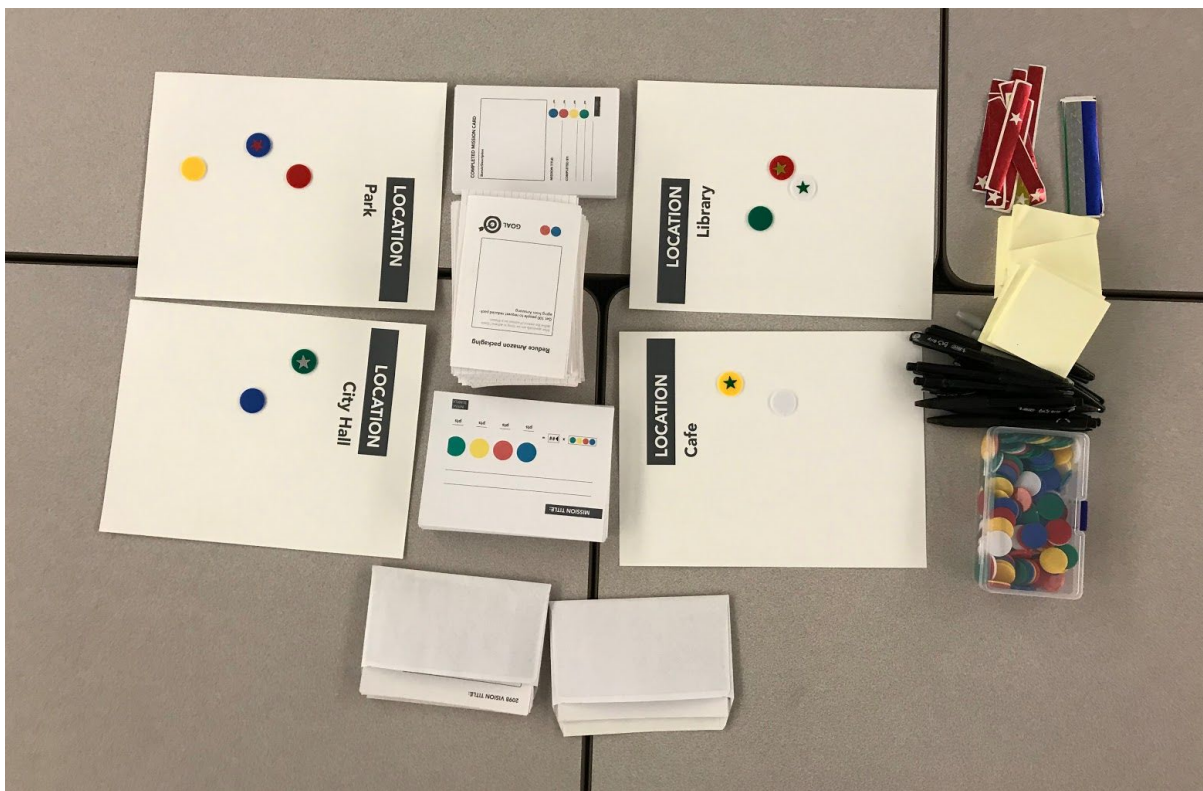


Figure 43: Game setup from Fv3

Forward, v3 was scheduled to be playtested as part of a community codesign workshop in Stevens Point, WI that ended up landing on one of the coldest days Wisconsin has seen in years. Unfortunately, only one person was able to attend, which meant a full playtest was not possible, but we walked through the entire game together and he shared useful input regarding partnership

development for the game. He thought that some nonprofits may be hesitant to take part due to worries that participation in the game could be viewed as advocacy and jeopardize their nonprofit status. To address this, he recommended framing the game as a tool to promote the work organizations are already doing. Instead of asking them to submit Tactics and Goals, for example, ask them what events they're already planning and work with them to create Missions in support of those events. He also thought the game would be of particular interest to Kiwanis, Rotary, ELK and other more formal service organizations in the community.

Forward, v4

Forward v4 had much in common with Forward v3 (which was never fully tested) plus design improvements related to readability and a small revision to the participatory futurism mechanic. Instead of simply creating and upvoting “positive Visions,” this version of the game framed thinking about the future in terms of a future edition of the local newspaper. Gameplay periodically revealed “negative News Stories” from the future that the players had to overcome by creating and sharing “positive News Stories.”

HEADLINE:

NEWS STORY TEMPLATE

Likes

SCORE CARD

NAME: _____

Write down the number of points you earn in each turn. For every 10 points you earn in a category, you will receive 1 VISION TEMPLATE or 10 LIKE STICKERS.

Education & Opportunity

Health & Well-Being

Justice & Democracy

Healthy Environment

	1			
1	2			
	3			
	1			
2	2			
	3			
	1			
3	2			
	3			
	1			
4	2			
	3			
	1			
5	2			
	3			
	1			
6	2			
	3			
		pts	pts	pts

Figure 44: A Headline template from Fv4

Last Remaining Coral Reef Dies Due to Coral Bleaching

Comments

NEGATIVE NEWS STORY

10

Figure 45: A Dark Headline from Fv4

Figure 46: Scorecard from Fv4

This version of the game was played with 15 students in CMS.615 Games for Social Change at MIT. Not only were these student among the game’s target demographic, but they also had advanced familiarity with the field of games for change, which enabled them to give specific technical feedback on the game’s mechanics and goals. First, players felt that the point-to-action ratio in the game was loose, and that large, difficult Missions were over incentivized. This may actually mean the scoring is on-point for a final, live game, in which players would actually have to complete those Missions, rather than simply fill out a card. Players also suggested that it

would be useful to have a rating scale to vet the effectiveness of Tactics and Missions and that these ratings should generate point bonuses.

Finally, players indicated that introducing the News Story mechanic at the same time as the Mission mechanic was confusing, and that more scaffolding would improve the experience. The addition of a second complicated mechanic also made scoring challenging for this paper prototype. When negative News Stories were uncovered by players, they mostly caused confusion, and, ultimately, there wasn't enough time allotted for the playtest to allow the players to overcome any of the negative News Stories. In feedback, players indicated that they were confused about the end goal of the game and that the "News Story" component "felt vestigial."

Forward, v5

The last prototype documented here was a test focused more specifically on the News Story mechanic of the game and a new Mayor mechanic designed to incentivize movement on the game board (which was lagging in previous versions). To do this, this version combined the Mission Creation and Completion mechanics into one action and eliminated the ability to add custom Tactics. Instead, only four Tactics were included, which were distributed across four "locations" on the MIT campus gameboard. This meant that only certain types of Missions could be completed in certain places. For example, at the "Hayden Library" location, players could post memes or hang flyers but could not do chalk art or organize a flash mob. To complete a Mission, players only needed to play a Goal Card and an allowable Tactic Card at their current location in the game. After doing this, they received points toward becoming the "Mayor" of that

location and received tokens that could be spent creating and upvoting News Stories. Holding the Mayorship of a location also gave players bonus tokens at the end of each round.



Figure 47: Gameplay with Mayor placeholders from Fv5

Coming full circle, Forward, v5 was tested with 5 students in CMS.842, the course where the Community Futures Board Game originated the previous year. In this version of the game, players were able to dedicate significantly more attention to combating the negative News Stories than in Fv4 and they did so with an unexpected degree of collaboration. Based on

in-game feedback, a new rule was added partway through the game allowing players to trade cards with each other so they could more effectively collect the Goals and Tactics necessary to complete Missions. This was particularly helpful because the sample deck created for the game was relatively limited and repetitive. The players indicated that they enjoyed the Mayor mechanic as well as writing and voting on the headlines, but the voting system was ultimately designed for larger numbers of players and was difficult to test with only five people. This was the first playtest in which players walked away feeling like they had “won” the game.

Summarizing Themes

In summary, there are five core findings from these experiments that the final version of the game will have to consider. First, effectively scaffolding the game’s instructions and story will have to be done very carefully, as these were key points of confusion in all playtests. However, the delivery of this information in the digital version of *Forward* can occur in smaller bites over a longer period of time than is possible in paper-based playtests. The final game’s approach is influenced by *Pokemon Go*’s in-game tutorial and training, which models excellent scaffolding of content that is delivered over many levels of gameplay. Second, players expressed a desire for team play and collaborative play in nearly every playtest. Third, the balancing of points was imperfect and many playtesters felt that there was not enough incentive to complete the Missions of others (in some cases), or create their own Missions (in other cases). Fourth, many players expressed appreciation for the ability to add custom Tactics and Goals to the game. And fifth, players did not feel compelled by the game’s story (when a story was given at all). The

game's ultimate story was primarily developed after the final playtest documented here and was vetted with students in CMS.615 and local stakeholders.

Finally, it is worth noting that many questions and challenges that came up during playtesting were related to the limitations of paper prototyping. Many issues players encountered would not exist in a digital game, such as approximating the passage of time with turns, rolling dice for randomization, collecting a hand of cards, and requiring players to track their own scores with elaborate scorecards. Despite these distractions, each playtest constituted a major step forward for the game's development. Takeaways from each playtest are summarized in the Appendix.

Forward Workshops

In addition to the above playtests, I held three workshops in January 2019 to solicit community feedback on the project.

First Story Workshop

The first story workshop I held was designed to facilitate a conversation about potential concepts and characters for the *Forward* storyline. Initially, this was envisioned as a project that would highlight Wisconsin state history, so the first workshop used story cards from the Fv1 deck to help participants brainstorm historical figures that would be important to include in the game. Hosted by the media specialist of the Oneida Nation history department in Hobart, WI, five people attended this workshop, including four Oneida tribe members. After introductions, the workshop opened with a discussion of the challenges inherent to any attempt to represent the

many histories and cultures that would need to be included in a game about “Wisconsin history” with the wry conclusion that it should be done “very delicately.”

Next, we moved into a story design activity in which participants used story cards adapted from the Fv1 deck to brainstorm people, locations, and historical events relevant to Oneida history that could be included in the game. The group came up with several ideas and enjoyed the storytelling components of the activity (by the end, several of the attendees were talking about organizing a storytelling event about Oneida women’s history). That said, participants also had some difficulty thinking of historical figures on the spot; it was suggested that I should create forms that could be shared more widely to include more people in the brainstorming process. The workshop concluded with a discussion about what the overarching story within the game might be and came up with the guiding concept of “utopias.”

Strategy Workshop

The next workshop, billed as a “strategy” session, was held at the Madison Public Library. Six people attended, including staff and volunteer leadership from several local organizations as well as interested community members. I had initially hoped to use adapted versions of the Fv1 Story-based strategy cards to discuss potential Campaigns, Targets, and stories with the group, but most of the workshop ended up being dedicated to explaining the concept of the game and related discussion. This provided particularly useful feedback on the framing of the story.

At the time of this workshop, I was testing two very different approaches to the game’s story: a playful iteration of the ArtHero avatar “creature” concept versus a more serious repurposing of the concept of “patriotism.” The attendees strongly disliked the latter concept,

expressing a desire for something more light-hearted. They suggested a framing focused on “courageous people.” One person suggested, “Home of the Brave” as a title or central frame. Another liked the idea of exploring “visions of change,” which was interesting considering its potential connections to the Community Futures Game concept. The group also pushed back against the idea of basing the story on Wisconsin history, suggesting that it would be too focused on white, male stories and that many players would find history boring or alienating. As one attendee said, “people don’t give a damn about history.” Another suggested that she “would be more attracted to something future-based.” Several people did, however, like the idea of tying in history that is specifically related to the movements within the game.

After discussing the story, the group transitioned into a conversation about the tools they use to engage with local organizing. This included discussion of the limitations of the Facebook search tool, which many regarded as a primary—but not particularly comprehensive—tool for discovering local advocacy opportunities. One man said “you have to be in the network to get involved in the network.” Regarding collaboration, another attendee said organizations have a “fierce sense of competition with each other” and that “groups only send out information about their own events.” The attendees noted the League of Women Voters as an exception to this norm. Finally, there was significant agreement that organizations need to expand their calls to action. Many attendees were frustrated with the frequency of donation requests in their inboxes and the lack of attention to other modes of contribution. One man said he’d recently received six donation request emails in a single day from a single organization. Although the workshop did not lead to any concrete content for a game, the conversation was illuminating and significantly impacted the game’s story.

Second Story Workshop

The second story workshop was organized much like the first. I invited over forty local historical societies and groups, but almost none of them were interested in participating. In the end, the workshop was attended by three people—George and Richard, who are both from WIUTA, and Seth, a member of Wisconsin Friends of John Muir, a central Wisconsin environmental organization based at the childhood home of the famous conservationist. Despite this low attendance, the conversation was rich. Seth was particularly energized by the idea of creating an alternate reality game and shared several character suggestions for environmentalists and archeologists from Wisconsin history that might be included as characters. This led to a discussion about the challenge of including the stories of women and people of color in the context of a historical tradition that so rarely documented their contributions.

Next, the workshop transitioned into an open-ended brainstorm about possibilities for alternative overarching narratives. Richard dove into the details and constraints of a science fiction story that would enable messages and items to be transferred through time. As the conversations continued, the group began to feel overwhelmed by the story. We discussed whether an alternative reality game with a science fiction narrative would detract from authentic engagement with the game's core issues. Ultimately, the workshop encouraged me to reconsider building a full, character-rich alternate reality game and to instead develop a simpler story. Conversations in all three workshops also contributed to the decision to shift away from a narrative based on Wisconsin history.

Forward: The Game

President Kennedy said, “The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need men [and women] who can dream of things that never were.” *Forward* is a game that invites players to do exactly this. It is what I call a participatory futurism game: an experience that requires players to look beyond today’s polarized controversies toward a better future for everyone. This is done with the help of... time-traveling laser-cats! In this location-based mobile game, players must collaborate to defeat a mad inventor from the year 2076 who is intent on creating a Dark Future for humanity. In order to do so, they must first complete Missions that address the challenges that exist in the community today.

The Story

The following story is revealed to players throughout the game’s tutorial:

Dear people of the past:

We, your descendants in the year 2076, have sent this message via our time-traveling laser-cat to ask for your help.

Many years ago, an inventor by the name of Sir Ronald G. Pumpnickel III patented a way to genetically modify cats so that they could travel through time and space using interdimensional Portals. (For a long time this was useless, because the cats couldn’t take anything with them or speak, but they were cute and made the headlines for a while.)



Figure 48: *Forward* game art

But then Ronald had a breakthrough! He invented a mysterious device called The Orb of Possibility (aka "The OoPs"). OoPs have the power to capture a wish for the future and, when charged by the laser-stare of a catnip-fueled, time-traveling cat, cause that wish to become a reality within 50 years. They are special because they can cross dimensions of time and space with the cats, which meant they could be sent to the past to influence the present. OoPs can also carry small messages (like this one).

At first, life with The OoPs was good. It was a momentous day when the great laser-cat Ralph traveled back to 2012 to deploy the "Happiness for All" Orb that brought peace to our time. But things have been changing recently. You see, Sir Pumpnickel has gone mad and has begun sending Orbs carrying Dark Futures filled with negative wishes back to your time and deploying them. With the help of your catnip-fueled laser-cat, you must combat the Dark Future he is making for us all by creating and charging OoPs containing Positive Futures. You can earn Catnips to fuel your laser-cat by completing Acts of Truth and Bravery we will call "Missions." Missions exist in three categories: Research, Advocacy, and Creativity.

More laser cats will be arriving in your time in the weeks to come. You and your friends must each adopt one and train it to look for OoPs at portals located around your community. When you find an empty OoPs, use it to create and charge a Bright Future; these help us fight the mad inventor's Dark Futures. You can also train your laser-cat to directly defuse Dark Futures.

Your actions over the next five weeks can reverse the damage created by Sir Pumpernickel and return us to our once idyllic lives. (You just might end up better off for it too!) People of the past, you hold the fate of us all in your hands. Your first Mission awaits!

Game Overview

Forward is a location-based mobile game that lasts five weeks, although it could be extended beyond that timeframe. To begin, players can “check in” at Portals around their community to discover and complete Missions. Missions are opportunities to playfully learn about and influence current issues in the community. By completing Missions, players earn Impact Points in the four categories of the game and Catnips to fuel their laser-cats. Players are also rewarded for completing Missions in other ways, including earning Badges, getting access to resources, tools and trainings, and winning “Bounties” from the community such as issue-related swag and gift certificates from local businesses.

Missions emphasize creative and personalized ways to engage with local civics and are the core of the gameplay. Each Mission includes a Campaign (a short-term goal) and a Tactic (instructions for taking action on an issue). Inspirations for Missions are depicted in Figures 49-52. Advanced players can also create their own custom Missions and earn bonus points when other players complete those Missions. In each week of the game, a minimum of 5 Missions are released to enable players to improve their Impact Stats in the four Issue areas in the game and to earn Catnips. Catnips can be used to charge or create Bright Futures, and to defuse Dark Futures sent by the mad inventor.

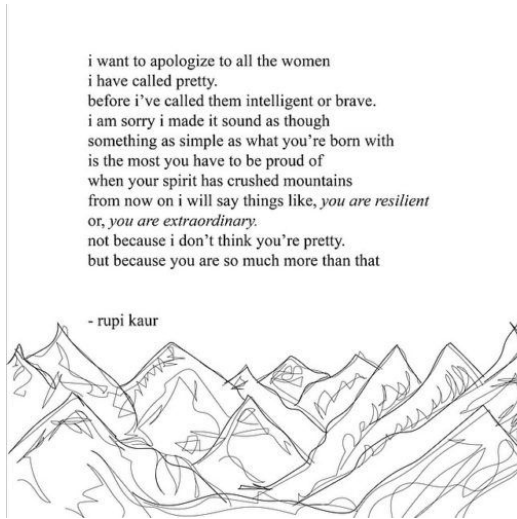


Figure 49: Example of Instagrammed poetry, by Rupri Kaur



Figure 50: Chalk art, by Kelsey Nichole

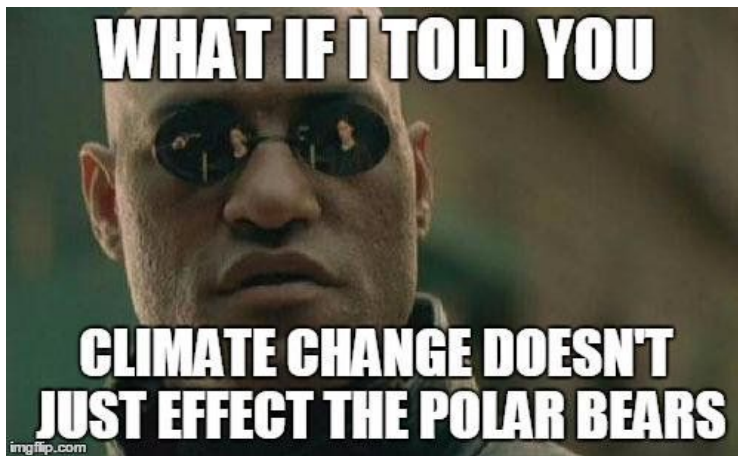


Figure 51: Climate change meme



Figure 52: Stickers, flyers, and merchandise.

The central components of gameplay are summarized in the following table.

Table 1: Central Components of *Forward* gameplay

Player Activity	Description of Activity, as presented to the player
Adopt a Laser-Cat	Your first action in <i>Forward</i> is to choose and name a kitten from the laser-cat shelter. This kitten will grow to become your trusty companion in fighting Dark Futures. These super-kittens have been arriving through Portals in droves and they need homes!

<p>Train your Laser-Cat and keep it happy</p>	<p>Visit Portals around the community to find Catnips to keep your cat happy and develop its superpowers. Initially, you'll use Catnips to train your cat to defuse Dark Futures and charge and deploy Bright Futures. Like all cats, laser-cats are fickle creatures. If left too long without Catnips, your cat will become sad and may become a Dark Cat. Dark Cats run away at night to help the mad inventor by charging and deploying Dark Futures. If your cat goes Dark for more than five nights, it will run away for good and your game stats and rank will return to zero. (Basically, don't run out of Catnips!)</p>
<p>Defuse Dark Futures</p>	<p>OoPs containing Dark Futures from the mad inventor may pop up in any Portal at any time. These are bad. The goal of the game is to eliminate as many Dark Futures as possible while deploying Bright Futures in their place. Once a Dark Future is discovered, it is automatically shared with the whole player community. Players can visit the Portal where the Dark Future was found to join other players in "defusing" it. This requires extra Catnips to energize your cat. Your cat can only defuse an OoPs once a day, so you may need to get your friends involved to defeat it!</p>
<p>Create and Deploy Bright Futures</p>	<p>Players can also use Catnips to create their own OoPs containing Bright Futures to combat the inventor's Dark Futures. Each Bright Future combats a specific Dark Future. Once a Bright Future has been fully charged, it can be deployed by its creator. Deploying a Bright Future will damage or destroy the Dark Future it is combating and will also earn bonus points, badges, and recognition for the Bright Future's creator and their team.</p>
<p>Charge Bright Futures</p>	<p>Players can use the Catnips they earn through Portal check-ins and other activities to have their cats "charge" both their own Bright Futures and Bright Futures created by others. This deployed in time to damage or destroy its opposing Dark Future, all players who helped charge the Bright Futures will receive rewards.</p>
<p>Earn VIC status</p>	<p>Players can check-in to Portals once a day. Whoever checks in the most earns "VIC" (very important cat) status at that Portal for their laser-cat. This earns you a special badge, allows you to set a theme song for the location that all players can access, and, of course, gives your laser-cat the right to nap at the top of the cat tree (this also earns bonus Catnips).</p>
<p>Complete Missions</p>	<p>Missions are specific activities you can complete to advance more quickly in the game, earn special badges, and compete for real-world prizes. Missions include different types of actions that can be taken to raise awareness about initiatives local organizations are working</p>

	<p>on to improve the community. (For example, you might create a meme about a campaign to increase teacher pay and digitally tag it at the high school. Or you might do chalk art on the sidewalk to support a new climate change policy.) When you complete these activities, you'll earn Catnips as well as Impact Points, which track individual impact in the community. When other players "like" a your completed Mission, you'll receive bonus Catnips and Impact Points.</p>
Create or join a team	<p>A lot of Missions can be completed by yourself, but some require teamwork. Create a team with up to ten friends to complete team Missions, compete for special team prizes, and participate in inter-team challenges and dares.</p>
Build Stats	<p>Every Mission in the game includes a Campaign and a Tactic. Mission statistics are tracked based on the difficulty of its Tactic and the category of its Campaign. The four Campaign issue categories are: (1) Education & Opportunity, (2) Health & Wellbeing, (3) Democracy & Justice, and (4) Environment & Climate</p>
Level Up in Three Tactical Categories	<p>As you complete Missions using different Tactics, you will level-up in the three tactical categories: Research, Advocacy, and Creativity. Each level offers new Tactics, unlocks more advanced Missions, and, once you've become a master, allows you to add your own Tactics and Campaigns to the game..</p>
Create Missions	<p>As you level up, you'll be able to begin creating your own Missions. Player-created Missions earn bonus Impact Points for both you and the people who complete them.</p>
Win Bounties	<p>Local business and organizations can add prizes, called "bounties," to Missions they'd like to support. These do things like give a free cup of coffee to the "VIC" of a Portal at a local cafe or provide a \$25 giftcard for the player who has the most likes on their Completed Mission. There are also weekly prizes and grand prizes awarded for categories including "most creative team" and "most impactful player."</p>
Earn Badges	<p>Badges enable personalization, recognition and reputation building within the game. They mark advancements in Levels, and a variety of other activities within the game and may unlock special privileges when earned.</p>

Aesthetic

Throughout a year of testing, players most favorably responded to a playful design that uses bright, vector-based artwork and inclusive, future-oriented framing. Multiple story design workshops with community members explored potential ways to frame the *Forward* story. These initially focused on the idea of highlighting Wisconsin's progressive history in the narrative, but many people thought doing so would be too boring. A promo video testing a more serious design that used archival media and the strong anti-corruption rhetoric of Robert La Follette was not favorably received (see Figure 53). The story ultimately created for *Forward* reflects a more playful and fun aesthetic that references popular internet culture and has received positive feedback from target audiences.

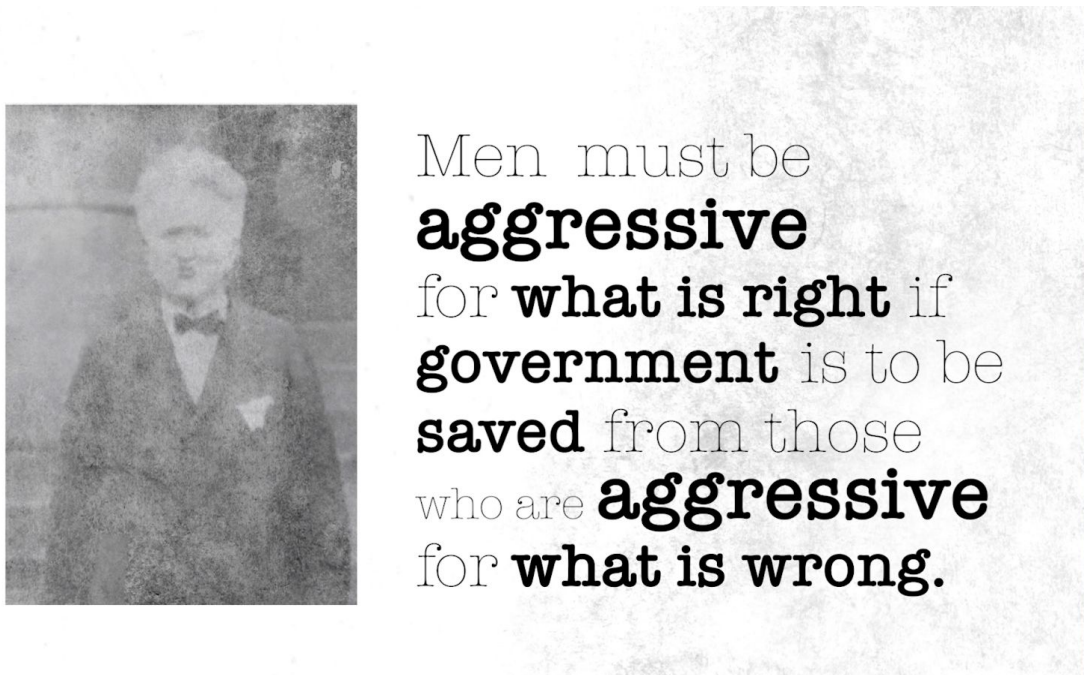


Figure 53: Screenshot from archival-based promo video.

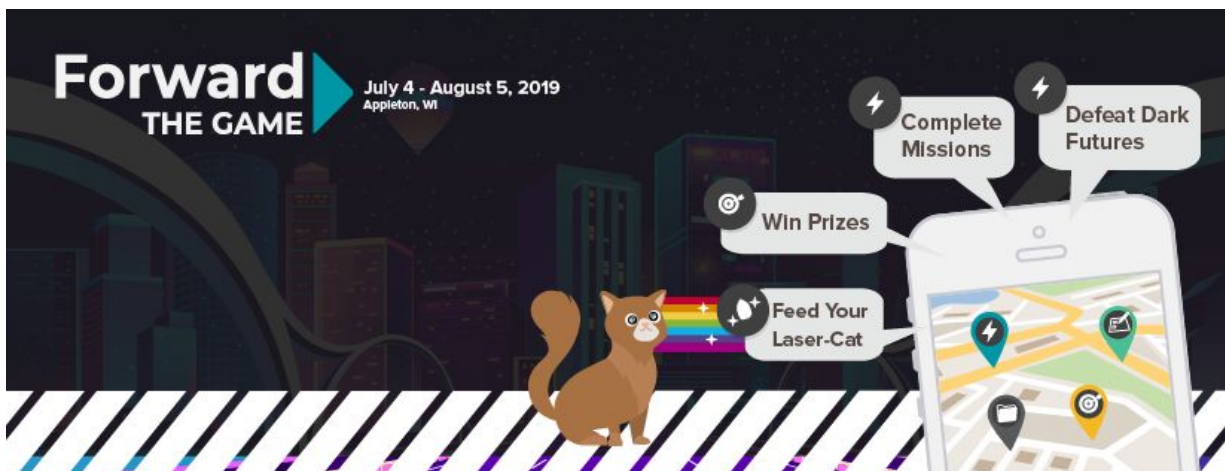


Figure 54: Promotional art for the 2019 summer game pilot.

Defining Learning and Engagement Goals

Game designer Raph Koster suggests that games are best at teaching us “things that we can absorb into the unconscious as opposed to things designed to be tackled by the conscious, logical mind.”²⁹⁰ In other words, they’re better equipped to shift perspectives through experience than to support rote memorization. In the case of *Forward*, the game’s core goal is to encourage players to playfully experiment with and adopt the behaviors and identities of an active citizen. Assessment is based in part on the Active Citizen Continuum from the nonprofit youth service organization Break Away. This continuum, illustrated in Figure 54, suggests a transition that moves participants from community members, to volunteers, to conscientious citizens, to active citizens, at which point “community becomes a priority in values and life choices.”²⁹¹ Other learning objectives include: 1) demonstrate proficiency with new tactics for taking action, 2) name local organizations and campaigns, 3) identify and verify facts related to local issues, 4)

²⁹⁰ Koster, 76

²⁹¹ “Alternative Break Definitions.”

demonstrate understanding of local government processes, 5) recall the names of local representatives, 6) contact a local representative for the first time, and 7) practice expressing positive ideas about the future.



Figure 55: The Active Citizen Continuum, © 2014 Break Away

Learning in the game is measured through in-game surveys and quizzes that are delivered as “mini-Missions,” as well as through analysis of player creations and Mission completion. The assessments delivered as quizzes include survey questions adapted from Generation Citizen, Tufts University’s Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement initiative (CIRCLE), and multiple Pew Research Center surveys. Engagement with the game itself is measured by tracking player activity on the platform. In aggregate, this informs future designs of the game with data on frequency of play, peak times of play, locations of play, popular content and Missions, unpopular content and Mission, and the devices used by players to access the game.

Recap Highlights Based on *Resonant Games* Framework

This section recaps how the mechanics of *Forward* are designed to reflect the recommendations of the *Resonant Games* framework in a way that supports the defined learning and engagement goals. A table summarizing this section is also available in the Appendix.

Play & Learning

First, *Forward* draws from the *Resonant Games* suggestion to “figure out what is already fun about the matter at hand”²⁹² by building on a long history of creative activism. *Forward* Missions promote creative activities such as media-making and public performance to help players apply their existing interests to civic participation. In turn, this expands players’ understandings of civic engagement to include a larger repertoire of action, which, in the game, are represented as Tactics. Mission design is guided by Stephen Duncombe’s guidelines for ethical spectacle in that they aim to be: participatory, open, transparent, realistic, and utopian.²⁹³

Forward also supports Osterweil’s four freedoms of play.²⁹⁴ Players have the freedom to explore by viewing the submissions of other players and checking in to locations throughout the community to unlock hidden content, including story elements, Missions, and geotagged art. Players have the freedom to fail through low-stakes activities that also provide ongoing feedback from other players and the game system. Opportunities for failure include: (1) incorrectly answering trivia questions, (2) losing Mayorship of a location, and (3) adding unpopular Missions, Futures, or Reports. Feedback in this third category is based on the number of completions or upvotes each item receives. Freedom of identity is supported through an onboarding screen that asks the player to identify their interests and in-game rewards that allow players to decorate their avatars (which was found to be a popular feature in playtesting). Players also have the ability to explore their identification with three different categories of engagement:

²⁹² Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 340.

²⁹³ Duncombe, *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*.

²⁹⁴ Klopfer et al., *Resonant Games: Design Principles for Learning Games That Connect Hearts, Minds, and the Everyday*, 578.

advocacy, creativity, and research. Finally, freedom of effort is supported through the casual nature of location-based games, the ability to select the category and difficulty of Mission engagement, and the opportunity to spend time exploring user contributions to the game's story.

Scaffolding in *Forward* is based on time spent in the game and the number of Missions completed. Players follow the guidance of three non-player character (NPC) "trainers" to level up in three categories of engagement: advocacy, creativity, and research. Each new level reveals new Tactics the player can use to complete Missions and unlocks any current Missions in the game requiring those Tactics. After the player has reached the maximum level in a category, they receive special privileges and are incentivized to continue learning by discovering and inventing new Tactics and then adding them to the game. Unlike Tactics, Campaigns are always visible through the game's search form, but they are also periodically featured at locations to increase their visibility for players, one or two at a time.

Finally, the game positions play as a mechanism for civic action by oriented points, badges, leaderboards, access to information, and community interaction around the following activities: (1) completing Missions, (2) liking the completed Missions of other players, (3) tactical mastery, and (4) engaging in conversations about the future. The first "meaningful inefficiency" within the game is that players must overcome the community's collective fears about the future (called "Dark Futures") by creating short, positive headlines about life the year 2076 (called "Bright Futures"). This activity encourages players to think about the future with a positive lens and then share that vision publicly. Other players may upvote or provide alternatives to each proposed Bright Future to help overcome Dark Futures, but players must earn their ability to participate. This is done by earning points in four ways: (1) checking into

locations, (2) upvoting the Mission Reports of other players, (3) completing Missions and receiving upvotes from other players, and (4) creating Missions and receiving points for upvotes on all submissions from other players. The second “meaningful inefficiency” in the game is created by the Mayor mechanic, which awards special privileges to the most active player in each location of the game.

Identity & Expression

Forward draws from the *Resonant Games* suggestion to “honor the whole learner” by designing gameplay to help players connect their existing interests - particularly their creative interests - to the needs of local organizations. In this way, personal expression becomes a mechanism of in-game achievement by enabling players to choose how they will participate. This ability to choose how to contribute also fosters to a sense of ownership and belonging.

The ability to “try on” different identities within the game is supported through the three “skill tracks” in the game: Research, Advocacy, and Creativity. These tracks enable players to choose the type of engagement that fits their needs, but also encourages them to step outside those boundaries by experimenting with Tactics from other categories. By leveling up in, for example, the Creativity category, a player may begin to think of themselves as a more creative and outgoing person, even if that type of play was not what initially drew them to the game.

Next, both the game’s story and its Missions reference popular culture - particularly internet and meme culture - in a way that encourages the repurposing and remixing of media. This is particularly true of Creative Missions, which specifically support art and media-based forms of participation and expression, some of which expressly draw from popular culture.

Along these same lines, the game also incentivizes sharing Positive Futures, Missions, and Reports across any social network capable of displaying a link. This promotes spreadability across a range of platforms.

Collaboration & Community

Forward draws from the *Resonant Games* suggestion to “honor the deep sociality of learning” by building teamplay, collaboration, and community support features into the game. First, the game supports reputation building through reciprocity and altruism by rewarding acts of generosity and mentorship with badges and bonus points. In general, the rank and badge system of the game also serves as a visualization of a player’s in-game reputation.

Second, the game seeks to be affirming with low barriers to entry. Affirmation comes in the form of frequent automated point rewards and badges, as well as through community feedback, which only allows upvoting. The game also promotes positive and supportive community expectations and standards from the very first onboarding screen. Even in digital spaces, strong community standards can curb negative and trolling behaviors, although manual moderation will also be required to enforce the game’s rules and behavioral expectations.

Next, the game promotes peer learning and training by enabling players to offer and engage in special “training Missions” to learn from each other. Beyond this, advanced players can also create new Tactics, Campaigns, and Missions, which each require a certain level of expertise to create and share.

Finally, the game promotes collaboration and playful competition among friends. Collaboration primarily comes in the form of large-scale Missions that require multiple people to

complete and Team Missions, which specifically require players to be members of a team. Players can also collaborate by gifting points to other players. Because players are limited in the number of upvotes they can give to a Bright Future each day, this enables players to strategically share Catnips with players who have not yet voted. Competition is facilitated through a “challenge” system that enables players to dare their friends to complete Missions and reward them with bonus Catnips if they are successful.

Strategy & Context

Finally, *Forward* draws from the *Resonant Games* suggestion to “honor the learning context” by drawing from successful location-based games and crowdsourcing games to promote habits of connection to the local community. This begins by leveraging the ambient nature of location-based gaming to reward players when they check in to locations in the game. In turn, this location-based approach to play is able to situate information and opportunities to engage with the game in the places where they will be most relevant to the player. For example, when a player checks into a “library” location, they may see specific events or Missions taking place at the library in the near future or learn about community issues and decision that involve the library.

The game also makes use of crowdsourcing by enabling players to create and share their own Missions, Tactics, and Campaigns. This is a basic component of the participatory, bottom-up goal of the game. A secondary way in which crowdsourcing is used in the game is through research tactics, which occasionally require players to update databases when they

discover new information about local issues. At scale, this could address crucial local data gaps in the ecosystem of political information.

Participatory Futurism

Finally, both *Forward's* story and its Dark/Bright Futures mechanic invite players to think about the future as a space of possibility. This addresses the lack of future-oriented thinking identified by McGonigal's research at the Institute for the Future and, hopefully, facilitates a more inclusive and open-minded approach to gameplay.

Conclusion

It is possible to imagine thousands of tiny, inconspicuous, everyday decisions whose common denominator is precisely the spirit and ethos of a politics that is aware of the global threat to the human race, and which does not support general consumer resignation but rather seeks to awaken a deeper interest in the state of the world and rally the will to confront the threats hanging over it.²⁹⁵

- Vaclav Havel

From our country's ongoing reliance on fossil fuels to its staggering decline in metrics of civic health and engagement, there are many things to say "no" to in America today. What we're not good at is saying "yes." According to political scientists Donald Kinder and Nathan Kalmoe, Americans may have more in common with each other than our vitriolic Facebook feeds would suggest. Building from Philip Converse's early work on belief systems, they argue that ideological differences stem more from "the attachments and antagonisms of group life"²⁹⁶ than true ideological alignment. In other words, people back particular ideologies because doing so is acceptable in the context of their social spheres.

Kalmoe and Kinder's ideas are echoed by Kathy Cramer's work on group-based biases in rural Wisconsin. In fact, Cramer's 2016 book *The Politics of Resentment* played a crucial role in inspiring me to return to my hometown in central Wisconsin for my thesis research in Comparative Media Studies. In my case, I'm seeking the exceptions to her popular (and often accurate) portrayal of the disenchanting rural Wisconsinite to understand how my expertise in media and game design can support the handful of activists working to engage their neighbors in

²⁹⁵ Havel, "Address by Vaclav Havel."

²⁹⁶ Kinder and Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public*.

addressing both local and global challenges that impact these communities. That said, games also have their limits.

A common criticism of the field of serious games is that there is a fundamental tension created when “play” and “fun” and juxtaposed with content that references very real suffering. Another criticism is that a society that needs to be tricked into participation through spectacle and games is deeply broken. Zuckerman asks, “if we need simple narratives so people can amplify and spread them, are we forced to engage only with the simplest of problems? Or to propose only the simplest of solutions?”²⁹⁷ Similarly, Neil Postman’s famous 1985 critique of television culture argues that “what afflicted the people in [Huxley’s dystopian novel] *Brave New World* was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and why they had stopped thinking.”²⁹⁸ At their worst, serious games can disconnect, misrepresent, alienate and belittle. Their design demands careful attention to questions of representation, ownership, governance, labor, and attribution.

When it comes to games that are specifically designed to promote democratic engagement, questions of access and privilege gain particular importance. In *Making Democracy Fun*, Lerner admits that, “in the end, games could also lead to unfair outcomes. Even when their internal rules are fair and transparent, games privilege certain players over others. If budget decisions are delegated to a game, for example, will players with greater skills and resources take home more of the loot? Will less privileged communities leave as losers?”²⁹⁹ Putnam thinks so. He reminds us that “social and political participation depends on resources, as well as opportunities and motivations. Thus, participation-based initiatives may magnify existing social

²⁹⁷ Jenkins et al., *By Any Media Necessary: The New Youth Activism*, 1225.

²⁹⁸ Postman, 2642

²⁹⁹ Lerner, *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics*, 2.

disparities."³⁰⁰ Although no technology will ever serve every user, The Design Justice Network has laid out ten guiding principles that all designers should follow to “center people who are normally marginalized by design.”³⁰¹ Flanagan summarizes the difficulty and potential of designing within this space as follows:

The challenge, then, is to find ways to make interesting, complex play environments using the intricacies of critical thinking and to encourage designers to offer many possibilities in games, for a wide range of players, with a wide range of interests and social roles. We can manifest a different future. It is not enough to simply call for change and then hope for the best; we need interventions at the level of popular culture.³⁰²

I argue that we need some of those interventions to come in the form of games, not necessarily because they are fun but because they contain crucial elements that are missing from the civic technologies that support engagement today. For too many Americans, the experiences that enable civic learning, identity exploration, personal expression, and meaningful forms of civic association are out of reach. It is not surprising that many people in central Wisconsin, like others throughout the United States, have retreated into a state of armored passivity. This must change, and games can be part of the solution. In a 1924 speech called “The Perils of Passive Citizenship,” Wisconsin’s “Fighting Bob” La Follette said the following:

America is not made, but is in the making...Mere passive citizenship is not enough. Men [and women, and all people] must be aggressive for what is right if government is to be saved from those who are aggressive for what is wrong.³⁰³

Forward offers a first step toward testing the ways in which the field of educational game design can be integrated into the design of technologies to support participatory forms of bottom-up civic engagement. In a country facing debilitating wealth inequality, systemic race

³⁰⁰ Putnam, “Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance,” 86.

³⁰¹ “Design Justice Network Principles — Design Justice.”

³⁰² Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, 2875.

³⁰³ La Follette, “The Perils of Passive Citizenship.”

and gender-based oppression, flagrant government corruption, and the existential threat of climate change, it's time for all people, including those who live in more insulated and privileged places like Appleton, to remember that America is still "in the making." We all need to aggressively fight for a better future for humanity.

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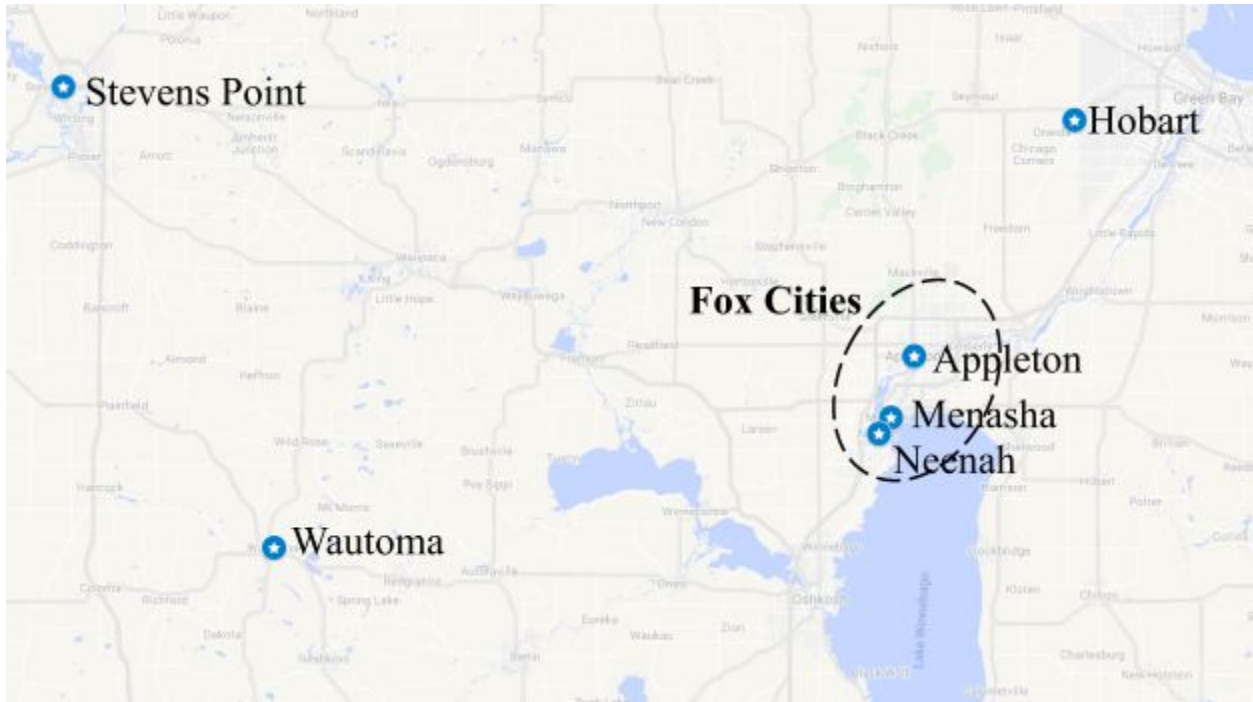
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Appendix

Map of Central Wisconsin



Interviews

Between July 12th and August 22nd, I conducted 15 interviews with 18 people. My largest interview was with six staff from the nonprofit CAP Services in Stevens Point. I conducted repeated interviews with only one person, Karen Harkness from the city of Appleton; we met four times over the course of the summer. Interviewees included:

Name	Title
Karen Harkness	Director of Community and Economic Development, City of Appleton
Clint Harness	Advocate and Neenah Chapter Co-Founder, Our Wisconsin Revolution

Sharon Dunwoody	Professor Emerita and Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Member, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication
Katrina Shankland	State Representative, 71st Assembly District, Wisconsin State Assembly
Amanda Stuck	State Representative, 57th Assembly District, Wisconsin State Assembly
Jan Novak	Prevention Coordinator Waushara County Dept. of Human Services
Judy Harris	Member, League of Women Voters, Ripon Area
Aaron Wojciechowski	County Board Supervisor, Winnebago County
Jeffrey Sturgell	Village Manager, Village of Fox Crossing, Wisconsin
Jennifer Falck	Director, Legislative Reference Office, and tribe member, Oneida Nation
Anthony Kuchma	Environmental Project Manager, Oneida Nation
Mary Patoka	President & CEO, CAP Services, Inc.
Nicole Harrison	VP Human Development, CAP Services, Inc.
Matthew Brown	Communications Director, CAP Services, Inc.
Anonymous	CAP Services, Inc.
Anonymous	CAP Services, Inc.
Anonymous	CAP Services, Inc.
Chad Doran	Communications Coordinator, City of Appleton

Prototypes

Between April 2018 and April 2019 I developed 14 iterations of *Forward*. Most of these were tested at least once.

Prototype	Test Context	Takeaways
String Voting Activity	Cape Cod, MA 4 friends and family	The tangible nature of the string-board survey inspired increased reflection about question prompts.
Community Futures Board Game, Version 1	Cape Cod, MA 4 friends and family	The Idea Card structure was too complicated and the win state of completing more cards than the opposing team was too simplistic; question cards regarding belief systems also felt out of place in the experience.
Community Futures Board Game, Version 2	Cambridge, MA 6 members of CMS Cohort	The addition of a game board added necessary structure to the experience; question cards again felt out of place; players unexpectedly enjoyed the performative aspect of sharing their Idea Cards.
Community Futures Board Game, Version 3	n/a; insufficient testing Final project for CMS.842	The “connect four” approach to the game’s win state added additional structure that players found useful and fun; the improved color scheme reduced the complexity of the game.
Community Futures Installation, Version 1 (CFG11)	Appleton, WI Public library installation with 30 players over 11 days	The futures game was dominated by a few super-users who put an unexpected amount of time into their cards; overall, the installation inspired limited engagement; the string-survey did not work in an unsupervised public setting.
Community Questions Game Installation (CQG)	Appleton, WI Public library installation with 5 interaction over 4 days Menasha, WI Public library installation with 41 interactions over 10 days	Participants struggled to follow the prompts on the cards in the context of an unsupervised installation; a surprisingly large number of responses focused on religious ideas
Community Futures	Wautoma, WI Public library installation	Players were able to follow the game’s rules to collaboratively tell a story, but the installation

Installation, Version 2 (CFG12)	with 9 interactions over 10 days	did not engage many people.
ArtHero, Version 1	Cambridge, MA 4 players through public demo at the Hacking Arts Festival; insufficient testing	Creating and decorating a character avatar was extremely enjoyable for users; there was limited engagement with the core mechanics of the game.
ArtHero, Version 2	Cambridge, MA 7 students in CMS.861 Networked Social Movements	Players enjoyed creating custom issues and appreciated the variety of techniques offered by the Action cards, but they wished there was a wider range of cards overall; the point system was imbalanced and over-incentivized completing one's own Missions; players desired more opportunities for collaboration.
Forward, Version 1	Neenah, WI 5 students at Neenah High School between ages 12-17.	The story-based strategy approach was able to effectively facilitate gameplay, but required too much content knowledge and organizing experience for the youth playtesters.
Forward, Version 2	Neenah, WI 6 friends and family who live in Neenah between ages 30-60.	Players enjoyed using Issue Tokens as in-game currency but felt the system limited their freedom of choice; players desired more opportunities for collaboration and suggested that prizes would help motivate real-world engagement.
Forward, Version 3	Stevens Point, WI 1 community member reviewed game but couldn't play	Insufficient testing.
Forward, Version 4	Cambridge, MA CMS. 15 students in CMS.615	The point system was imbalanced and over-incentivized completing high-value Missions; players desired more scaffolding in the game's introduction and a rating system to vote on the effectiveness of Tactics and Missions; there was limited engagement with the News Story mechanic, which "felt vestigial."
Forward, Version 5	Cambridge, MA 5 students in CMS.842	Players desired more opportunities to collaborate by trading cards; the Mayor mechanic was well-received.

Installation Prototype Engagements

Between July 19th and August 25th I exhibited three experimental civic engagement installations at four libraries for a total of 35 days.

Installation	Venue & Total Population Served	Total Days Open to Public	Total Interactions	Interactions per day	Interactions per day per 1,000 ppl served
Community Futures Game, Version 1	Appleton Public Library serves 72,000 people	11	30	2.73	0.038
Community Questions Game	Appleton Public Library serves 72,000 people	4	5	1.25	0.017
Community Questions Game	Menasha Public Library serves 17,000 people	10	41	4.1	0.241
Community Futures Game, Version 2	Wautoma Public Library serves 2,200 people	10	9	0.9	0.409

Workshops

Topic	Context	Takeaways
Youth Digital Engagement Workshop	12/28/2018, Neenah, WI 5 students at Neenah High School between ages 12-17.	See takeaways from Fv1 playtest
Story Workshop	1/4/2019, Hobart, WI 4	Story shifted toward the concept of “utopias;” participants agreed that a Wisconsin history narrative would face

		challenges with representing diverse histories
Strategy Workshop	1/7/2019, Madison, WI 6 community members and local organizers	Shifted toward a story focused on “visions of change;” participants agreed that a Wisconsin history narrative will be boring and face challenges with representing diverse histories
Story Workshop	1/10/2019 3 community members	Shifted toward a simpler narrative structure with fewer characters and assets; participants agreed that a Wisconsin history narrative would face challenges with representing diverse histories

Civic Technology Feature Comparison

	Name	CiviCRM	The Action Network	Action Kit	Mobilize	Nation builder	Crowdsout	Salsa	Amplify	Facebook	Percent of tools that use this feature
72	TOTAL FEATURES	15	11	9	9	7	6	6	3	6	32.00%
8	Events	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	88.89%
8	Reports	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Dashboard	Dashboard	Dashboard	88.89%
7	Contact Management	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y			77.78%
6	Email	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y				66.67%
6	Donations/Fundraisers	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y		Y	66.67%
5	Customization	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y				55.56%
5	Groups		Y		Y	Add-on			Y	Y	55.56%
4	Advocacy campaigns	Y	Y	Y			Y				44.44%
3	Forms		Y		Y			Y			33.33%

2	Member directory for users			Y					Followe r list	22.22%
2	Member fundraising	Y					Y			22.22%
2	Community Resources/ Wiki	Wiki		Y						22.22%
2	Private Chat			Y					Y	22.22%
1	Points							Y		11.11%
1	Project Coordination			Y						11.11%
1	Petitions		Y							11.11%
1	File Storage		Y							11.11%
1	Peer-to-peer fundraising	Y								11.11%
1	Case Management	Y								11.11%
1	Security			Y						11.11%
1	Accounting Integration	Y								11.11%
1	Supports Multiple Languages			Y						11.11%
1	Wordpress compatible	Y								11.11%
1	Drupal compatible	Y								11.11%
1	Joomla compatible	Y								11.11%

Tool	Description from Tool	Use Case	Last updated, as of 11/26/18
Brigade App	Use Brigade to tell your elected officials what you want them do, work with other like-minded users on the issues you care about and track over time how they are doing their job!	Focused on state-level representatives; brigades seem good for organizing groups of people who already know each other	Unknown
Countable App	Countable makes learning about what your government is up to easy and fun. Learn about issues you care about, influence Congress with one-tap voting, and rally your friends around specific legislation.	Great tool for tracking state-level representatives and bills	Latest post 7hrs ago
Facebook Town Hall	N/A	Best for tracking and communicating with representatives; not designed to facilitate organizing in groups	Unknown
Indivisible App	The Indivisible App helps you be more engaged as an activist in the Indivisible movement, and it provides tools for group organizers to connect with activists.	Best for finding local actions and tracking votes of state-level reps; scrapes and aggregates meeting and action data but not everything is supported by humans	Town Hall function does not appear to be used
OutVote App	Outvote makes it easy to remind your friends to vote. In a world filled with dark money, bots, and fake news, that's what friends are for.	Elections focused; only one (now outdated) action, regarding the Mueller protests	11/8/18, 18 days ago
imPACT App	Unknown	Tool to self-track organizing activity	11/2/18, 24 days ago
ActOn App	ActOn is a free platform for nonprofit and for-profit social enterprises to leverage the power of mobile, social networking and data analytics to deepen relationships with supporters.	Issue-focused; little attention to politics	Unknown

SDGs in Action App	Learn about the 17 SDGs, get news on your favourite goals, find out what you can do how you can take action to help achieve them, create your own events actions and invite others to join you in sustainable actions and events.	Issue-focused; little attention to politics	Not frequently updated
DoSomething.org	DoSomething.org is mobilizing young people in every US area code and in 131 countries! Sign up for a volunteer, social change, or civic action campaign to make real-world impact on a cause you care about	Provides youth interested in socially progressive volunteering with a predetermined set of actions.	Actions updated monthly
Stumble & Rise App	Get perspectives and trending social justice stories. Save and bookmark your favorites, share with friends on social media to keep the conversation going.	Social network for progressives with media, actions and events	Fewer than 100 users; unknown

	Name	Brigade App	Countable App	Facebook Town Hall	Indivisible App	Out Vote App	imPACT App	Act On App	SDGs in Action App	DoSomething.org	Stumble & Rise App	Percent of this category's features used across all 10 tools
		22	17	11	9	6	2	22	19	8	7	
29	Login/Integration	3	3	3	3	2	1	4	6	3	1	41.43%
6	Tour/Intro	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y			60.00%
4	Can explore without registering				Y			Y	Y	Y		40.00%
9	Register/login with email	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	90.00%
7	Register/login with Facebook	Y	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y	Y		70.00%
1	Register/login with Google								Y			10.00%
1	Register/login with Twitter								Y			10.00%
1	Register/login with phone					Y						10.00%
9	Gamification	2	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	18.00%
4	Individual Statistics	Y					Y	Y	Y			40.00%
2	Ranks							Y	Y			20.00%
1	Points		Y									10.00%
1	Badges							Y				10.00%
1	Leaderboards	Y										10.00%

1													
2	Personalization	1	2	1	1	0	0	4	2	1	0		22.00%
4	Follow reps	Y	Y	Y	Y								40.00%
4	Follow issues		Y					Y	Y	Y			40.00%
1	Follow organizations							Y					10.00%
2	Follow locations							Y	Y				20.00%
1	Swipe rt/lt on actions							Y					10.00%
4													
8	Actions	10	8	4	5	1	0	7	6	4	3		24.44%
4	Get rep contact information	Y	Y	Y	Y								40.00%
4	Track your rep's actions/bills	Y	Y	Y	Y								40.00%
3	Constituent verification (for reps)	Y	Y	Y									30.00%
2	Message reps		Y	Y									20.00%
3	Call reps		Y					Y		Y			30.00%
2	Create actions	Y							Y				20.00%
5	Discover actions (beyond the tool)	Y			Y			Y	Y	Y			50.00%
4	Share actions	Y						Y	Y	Y			40.00%
2	Like/heart actions							Y	Y				20.00%
5	Read news	Y	Y					Y	Y		Y		50.00%
3	Learning/resources				Y				Y		Y		30.00%
2	Share memes created by tool		Y								Y		20.00%
2	Sign petitions	Y						Y					20.00%
2	Take a stance on issues	Y	Y										20.00%
1	Text contacts (ask them to take action)					Y							10.00%
2	Quizzes	Y								Y			20.00%
1	See a map of actions				Y								10.00%
1	Purchase/marketplace							Y					10.00%
2													
5	Community	6	3	3	0	3	0	4	3	0	3		27.78%
5	Invite contacts via Facebook	Y		Y		Y		Y	Y				50.00%

1	Invite contacts via Google								Y			10.00%
3	Invite contacts via phone contacts	Y	Y			Y						30.00%
2	Invite contacts via Twitter							Y	Y			20.00%
5	Group chat	Y	Y	Y				Y			Y	50.00%
4	Private chat	Y		Y				Y			Y	40.00%
2	Compare your views with others	Y	Y									20.00%
2	Predict voting behavior of your contacts	?				Y						20.00%
1	Member directory										Y	10.00%

Forward Pilot: Game Components

Map | a map of the local area with Portals marked where players can interact with the game

Portal | Geolocated places where players can interact with the game; for example: public library, city hall, parks, etc. Portals also include tags that suggest how they may be useful for completing Missions.

Mission | Missions are public opportunities to engage with or learn about issues and help achieve related Campaigns. Missions include the following details:

- Timeframe; Missions can be completed in a 1-hour to 7-day timeframe
- 1 Campaign
 - The Mission's Issue is based on the Campaign it's working to achieve.
- 1+ Tactic
 - Total people required, based on Tactic(s)
 - Total resources required, based on Tactic(s)
 - Total difficulty, based on Tactic(s)
 - Total impact, based on Tactic(s)

Tactic | Tactics are templates for civic engagement with step-by-step instructions, resource, skill and time requirements, and other details.

Campaigns | Campaigns are clearly defined strategic goals for making progress on issues. They include information related to the scope of the Campaign (institutions, municipal, county, etc), the type of campaign, its difficulty to achieve and potential impact for the community.

Report | Reports provide evidence of completed Missions through photos, videos and short, written stories.

Impact Points and Catnips | Points received by completing Missions. Points can be earned in each of the five issues categories of the game; some Missions may generate Impact Points for multiple issue categories. The number and category of points received for each Mission is based on the difficulty of the Tactic(s) used in the Mission and the issue(s) addressed by the Campaign the Mission addresses.

Forward Progression & Points

Catnips	Impact Points	Requirement
+1-25	+1-25	Complete a Mission; Mission value is determined by the Gamemaster based on the Tactic's difficulty. The category of Impact Points rewarded is based on the Campaign's related issue category. If two players complete a Mission together, and they both submit reports of their completed Mission, then both will receive full points.
+10		Add a new Mission
+20		Add a new Tactic or Campaign
+1		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Mission that includes a Tactic created by the player is completed.
+1		A Mission that includes a Campaign created by the player is completed.
+1-5		<p>A Mission created by the player is completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1pt for Missions valued 1-5 • 2pts for Missions valued 6-10 • 3pts for Missions valued 11-15 • 4pts for Missions valued 16-20 • 5pts for Missions valued 21-25
+1-3		Check in at a Portal
-1		Charge a Future
-10		Add a Future

Action	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Adopt Cat					
Collect and Complete Missions	x				
View, Charge, and Defuse OoPs	x				
<i>Complete first Mission</i>	→ Lvl. 2				
Create Bright Futures		x			
Create new Missions		x			
<i>Add first Mission or Complete 5 Missions</i>		→ Lvl. 3			
Add Tactics and Campaigns			x		
<i>Complete 10 Missions</i>			→ Lvl. 4		
<i>Complete 20 Missions in category</i>				→ Lvl. 5	

Badge	Requirement
VIC	Earned when the player has earned more points than any other player at a Portal
10xMission	Earned when a Mission created by the player has been completed ten times.
Bright Future Deployed	Earned if a Bright Future is successfully transmitted to the future by your laser-cat.

Forward: Resonant Design Recap

Recommendation	Implementation
<i>Play & Learning</i>	
Find what’s already fun	Promotes creative activism based on Duncombe’s guidelines for ethical spectacle.
Honor the four freedoms of play	Promotes the exploration of locations to discover story, Missions, geotagged art, and more; Promotes freedom for failure and feedback through peer responses; Promotes identity exploration through skill-building and avatar creation; Supports a diverse array of Missions require different skills, interests, and levels of engagement.
Scaffold for the Zone of Proximal Development	Supports scaffolding through the gradual, ordered discovery of game content, including guidance from non-player characters (NPCs) that help players level up in three Tactical categories: advocacy, creativity, and research.
Create Feedback Loops	Provides peer feedback on Futures, Missions, and Submissions (completed Missions).
Make play a mechanism of achieving the desired engagement goal	Uses engagement with Dark and Bright Futures to promote future-oriented thinking and foster a sense of playful competition.
<i>Identity & Expression</i>	
Make personal expression a mechanism of achieving the desired engagement goal	Uses personal expression through Missions to raise awareness about local causes and organizations and promote civic learning.
Contribution creates ownership	Enables players to create their own Missions; the “VIC” of a Portal can also set a theme song, which may generate additional attachment to a location.
Leverage participatory culture	Supports the completion of Creative Missions, which specifically support art and media-based forms of participation and expression, some of which expressly draw from popular culture.

Support spreadability	Incentivizes sharing Futures, Missions, and Submissions across any social network capable of displaying a link; doing so may increase their chances of success in the game.
<i>Community & Collaboration</i>	
Support reputation, reciprocity, and altruism	Reflects engagement with the community and acts of generosity through badges, ranks, and rewards.
Be affirming, with low barriers to entry	Promotes positive and supportive community expectations and standards from the first onboarding screen on.
Promote peer learning and training	Enables players to engage in special “training missions” to learn from each other; players can also create new Tactics and Campaigns.
Promote collaboration	Players who are members of teams are rewarded with bonus points and specialized team Missions.
<i>Strategy & Context</i>	
Crowdsource	Supports the completion of Research Missions, which crowdsource information about local Issues, Campaigns, elected officials, and local opportunities for action.
Promote habits of connection	Leverages the ambient nature of location-based gaming to reward players when they check in to locations in the game.
Situate learning and engagement	Provides new information about local Campaigns, Issues, and Missions - some of which is location-specific - each time a player checks in to a Portal.