The Roseville Public Library:  
The Value of Video Games

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Overview

Mission and Goals

In order to meet the growing and changing needs of the Roseville city community, the Roseville Public Library is building a video game collection. This document will outline the policy for the video game collection, indicating how it will be created, maintained and supported by staff. As technology has become more accessible to individuals, the relationship between people and the technologies they utilize has shifted. No longer purely functional, people use computers for entertainment, social networking and personal information retrieval. The Roseville Public Library seeks to reflect the many motivations for technology use among its patrons, in all of its various forms.

The goal of the Roseville Public Library video game collection is two-fold. The collection is intended to 1) provide materials to patrons who consider video games to be an integral part of their world and 2) increase valuable skills in the city’s youth that video games, video game literature and participation with the library will foster. According to Trevor Oakley (2008), “it takes only a modest financial commitment to launch a circulating collection of video games and the return on investment is huge—teen patronage increases and the library is recognized as a total media and information destination and truly relevant to teens’ needs.” By working to attract children and teenagers to the library, they will become more familiar and comfortable with libraries and the services offered. Adding a video game collection will ultimately increase patronage, literacy and community participation.
**Description of Service Community**

The city of Roseville is located just 16 miles outside of the capital city of Sacramento, California. It is the home to several technology companies, including Hewlett Packard and NEC Technologies. Located in northern California, the city enjoys a warm and dry climate and four seasons. The area was settled as a result of pioneers who traveled west during the Gold Rush era. The community has 3 libraries in its system: The Downtown Library, the Martha Riley Community Library and the Maidu Library. Due to the warm weather that is enjoyed throughout the year, the city has an extensive parks and recreation program that works closely with the library to bring programming to children, families and other residents. Families can choose a number of primary schools to send their children to and 6 high schools. (City of Roseville California, About Roseville, 2010)

**Demographic Information**

The total population of Roseville is 115,452, living in 44,014 households. Those residents 19 years of age and younger, also known as NextGens (Abram & Luther, 2004), make up 25.5% of the total population. Adults between the ages of 20 and 64 account for 61.5% of the population. 92.9% of the population over 25 years of age have gone on to receive their high school diplomas or higher. (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010)

**Parameters and Limitations**

In beginning the collection, there are certain parameters that will be followed in order to use the budget most effectively. These parameters can be revisited once the collection has been established. Initially, the collection will represent games available on the three major consoles (Xbox 360, Playstation and Nintendo Wii) and computers. If the
collection proves to capture the interest of the user community and a need to expand the collection presents itself, then games for other gaming devices can be added. The collection of games will also be supplemented with textual materials for further reference and research.

The collection will be limited to games that fall into certain categories of the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). The ratings that are most in line with the nature of the collection are Early Childhood (eC), Everyone (E), Everyone 10+ (E10+) and Teen (T). The main focus of the collection is on children and families, so adding games to the catalog that are intended for more mature audiences is not necessary. When looking at the demographic data for the community, a large percentage of the population is made up of families. Considering that the average age of gamers is currently around 33 (Oakley, 2008) and many families have parents in this age group, it makes sense to create a selection that can be enjoyed by entire families. This will encourage interaction and community involvement among users, giving them an alternative to reading that is still active, unlike the passive activity of watching television programs.

The only other limitation that will be in place is in regard to the circulation of certain pieces of the collection. While all games and textual materials will be available to check out, the consoles themselves will be for on-site use only. Since such a high percentage of households own gaming consoles, it is not necessary for the library to loan these expensive items.

**Patron Needs**

Technology has had an undeniable impact on the learning behaviors of NextGens. By engaging in video games, Sanford (2008) contests that children and young adults are
able to enhance certain skills and interact positively with computers and other video gamers. The Roseville Public Library recognizes the importance of these skills and through adding video games to the circulating collection the needs of the younger generation are more adequately met.

Beyond the educational and informational needs that will be met by this collection, it is also intended to provide entertainment. Games are first and foremost a source of enjoyment for players. The skills that are enforced through game play are an added bonus. The library is also hoping that by bringing children and teens into the library, they will be more likely to checkout books as well. As Oakley (2008) explains, “circulation of teen fiction and nonfiction at the library increased about four percent annually, but the year we launched the circulating game collection, there was a 20 percent increase in the number of books borrowed by teens.”

**Details of the Subject Area and Formats Collected:**

*Primary and Secondary Users*

The primary users of the collection will be children and teenagers. As discussed by Abram and Luther in their article “Born With the Chip,” NextGens are an important generation that librarians need to connect with in order to better serve their needs as information seekers. Adding a video game collection is a way of drawing them into the library and, in turn, learning how to better serve them. In this article, Abram and Luther (2004) state, “NextGens grew up playing video, PC, PDA, and interactive games that allowed them to learn and develop skills based on their experience.” Offering games that have been sited as beneficial towards the development of various types of literacy and other skills will be both educational and entertaining to the NextGen group.
From the city’s census data, we know that the population is generally young and we can infer that the majority of them are familiar with video games. The average gamer, according to the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), has been playing for 12 years. For many of the adult gamers in Roseville, this means that video games have been apart of their lives since they were young adults or even children. For the children of these individuals, videogames have been present throughout the majority (or entirety) of their lives. According to the statistics presented by the YALSA, as of 2006, 87% of teenagers had a video game console in their home. It is important for the library to provide access to materials that represent the world that these young people have grown up in.

The collection will then focus on the parents of NextGens, who make up our secondary user group. We want to make sure that we provide games that entire families can enjoy. Beyond that, materials will be available to educate those adults who are interested in learning about the importance of video games and other new technologies. The library will also keep information on hand concerning the games in the collection, why they were chosen and what value they have to users.

Another group that the collection will serve consists of those interested in a video game related career. With the entertainment software industry growing to meet demand and public interest, over 500 institutions of higher education have begun to offer courses and programs to train individuals for these careers (Mastel and Huston, 2009). It is the responsibility of the Roseville Public Library to provide access to relevant materials to the children and adults who have more serious interests in these fields - especially
considering the proximity that the city of Roseville has to the major technology centers of California.

Formats in the Collection

The Roseville Public Library video game collection will begin with a selection of the most popular games recommended by libraries that have already established such programs. By referring to articles such as “Top Fifty Gaming Core Collection Titles,” compiled by Kelly Czarnecki and “Circulating Video Games” by Trevor Oakley, we can find out which games have worked at other libraries and why. Once we choose the games, we will invest in the systems that they are played on. There are many things that owning the systems will allow the library to do. For instance, we will be able to host competitions and hold game nights. We will also be giving opportunities to children who may not have a video game system in their home. Patrons would have to sign up for time on a system, so as not to cause conflict, but it should provide an extra valuable service to the program.

Other formats that we would want to include in the collection are textual. By maintaining a current selection of books and magazines about games and the gaming industry we can provide important information to patrons who have a more substantial interest in the topic. Having a supplemental collection of textual materials will also be helpful to the staff. It will allow them to stay current on gaming trends and generally understand the collection better. It will also be an aid for maintaining and updating the collection. Through subscribing to publications like Electronic Gaming Monthly and PC Gamer, staff can keep track of new technologies, upcoming releases and products that become obsolete.
Who Makes Selections?

The project will be overseen by Roseville’s senior children’s librarian. On the staff, she is the most familiar with video game technologies and has the most interaction with the primary user group. During the first year of the collection’s development, she will convene once a month with the Roseville Teen Library Counsel. They will all work together to create proposals for items that should be included in the collection and a timeline for the collection’s progression. After each meeting, any decisions and minutes will be sent to the library director for final approval. In this way, the library is including those who the collection will impact the most while still maintaining some control over what is added. After the program has been in place for a year, the Teen Library Counsel and children’s librarian would determine a more limited schedule for meetings and decide on how many games the library should aim to add each year.

Selection Criteria and Aids

As stated earlier, the library will only select games that fall into certain categories as assigned by the ESRB. This will give scope and boundaries to the collection and help us in maintaining it over time. We also want to focus our efforts on obtaining console and computer games that promote learning and collaboration while simultaneously meeting the interests of our patrons. Another interesting aspect of video games is discussed by Kathy Sandford and Leanna Madill (2007) in their article “Understanding the Power of New Literacies Through Video Game Play and Design.” They explain, “Video games are one of the new literacies that offer powerful literacy learning, especially in operational and cultural literacy dimensions.” Reading articles like this will
help us to find games that enhance how children and teenagers learn from and understand circumstances that they are placed in.

Finding appropriate games and materials that fit into our criteria will be aided by a number of tools. To begin, we will seek out literature and policy documents from libraries with similar programs. By looking at how both public and academic libraries have set up their own new media collections, we will be able to enhance our own. We will also refer to publications like *School Library Journal*, *PC Gamer* and *Electronic Gaming Monthly* to find reviews of games and gaming products that are being released. Another set tool we will rely on for information regarding video games and libraries is the LibGaming listserv at http://groups.google.com/group/LibGaming and its corresponding blog called “Game On: Games in Libraries” at http://libgaming.blogspot.com.

**Miscellaneous**

**Gifts**

In order to make sure that we are offering the most relevant and current materials to patrons, having a strict policy on gifts is important. Accepting items that a patron wants to donate may be very enticing considering how much some of the products cost. However, the Roseville Library will need to be more selective when considering which items to accept and add to the collection. In order to achieve this goal, the council of teen patrons and the children’s librarian will work together to construct a wish list of items that they intend on purchasing. If someone would like to donate a game, book or console that is on that list, it will be accepted. Items beyond that list will be politely declined.
Deselection and Discards

As the collection grows and technologies advance, it is going to be necessary to remove some items. With the textual content, the reference staff will have to monitor books to see when the subject matter becomes outdated. If a technology is no longer relevant to how the video game industry works, the book that discusses it should either be transferred to the wider nonfiction section or removed from the library all together.
When video games are returned by a user, the librarians will inspect the game disk or cartridge to make sure it has not been damaged. If it is no longer usable, it will be discarded from the collection.

Evaluation Policy

Having an evaluation policy will be critical to the success and longevity of the video game collection. It is likely that there will be some resistance to the collection once it is first introduced. In order to illustrate its value, the library must be able to show that the program will benefit the user group it is targeting and the larger Roseville community.

In order to evaluate the collection, a number of systems will be put into place to judge how successful it is among patrons. This can be accomplished by creating surveys for users to fill out and monitoring participation in events associated with the collection. The library can also keep track of circulation statistics to see how many times a specific game is taken out.

Complaints and Censorship

When a complaint is made regarding the collection, the issue will be reviewed by those associated with the maintenance of the collection. In order to field these issues as
they arise, information on each game and why it is included in the collection will be available to patrons. While the collection will likely receive complaints about the games that are included, it is also possible that complaints will also be made regarding games that are not included. By making information available about the scope of the collection and why certain materials have not been included, the library avoids accusations of censorship.

**Conclusion**

The inception and maintenance of a video game collection at the Roseville Public Library will offer tools and technologies to a generation that has grown up expecting these systems to surround them at all times. As a public institution, in order to stay relevant, we must continue to update our facilities with current materials for each successive generation. By drawing the youngest generation into the library, we have a greater chance of forming valuable bonds with them that will be mutually beneficial. We can create life-long learners who will appreciate the value of libraries in our world.
References


