LSTA Project Evaluation: Tigard Public Library
Project name: Bridging the Gap: Gaming for All Ages through the Public Library
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Summary of Evaluation

Tigard Public Library's "Bridging the Gap: Gaming for All Ages through the Public Library" is a project focused on responding to three concurrent issues. Attendance at the library's teen events had decreased; a 2009 patron survey revealed that seniors were under-served; and the city continued to lack a recreation department or other public alternative to "fulfill the community's appetite for information about popular culture and social trends and their desire for satisfying recreational experiences" (as stated in the Tigard Public Library Strategic Plan).

"Bridging the Gap" has been successful in addressing these issues. The project is attracting new users to the library, increasing the attendance of programs, and provides a space where recreation and information can co-exist for both teens and seniors. The project has raised expectations about what the library can provide and helped generate excitement about new programs.

The project was delivered using a diverse set of programs that incorporated gaming mediums such as console, PC, board, and reality formats. The project was marketed as "Minds at Play" and targeted a wide range of demographics. The results have been extremely favorable. The program attracted significant numbers of new users to the library and allowed patrons of all ages to become better acquainted with a wide variety of gaming technology. These patrons have expressed a strong interest in future programming.

The staff and volunteers involved with the programming are to be congratulated. They have delivered a quality set of programs to the Tigard Community despite the fact that some had minimal previous experience with gaming technology. There are some changes that could be made to improve efficiency but the real challenge for the Library will be to find a way to continue this gaming series and help feed the expanding technological appetite of the Tigard Community.

Project objectives

The main objectives of the project were to:

- Administer 18 game-related programs,
- Have participants report a high level of satisfaction,
- Increase overall program attendance,

- Attract new patrons to the library,
- Increase participant's level of confidence with video game mechanics and,
- Generate interest in future programs.

Project Organization and Marketing

During the project year, 38 programs were organized and led by staff members and volunteers. A committee made up of Sarah Jesudason, Charles Dunham, Lisa Elliott, and Ann-Marie Anderson met quarterly to review the project's progress and direction. Along with the Library's normal quarterly program flyer, "Minds at Play" developed three original marketing flyers that detailed the Spring, Summer and Fall/Winter programs. E-mail, Facebook, school visits, and various press releases were also used to encourage attendance.

Two "Gaming Open House" events kicked off the "Minds at Play" series. These programs encouraged patrons of all ages to stop by the Library's Community Room and experiment with various gaming systems. These events attracted over 140 attendees and provided a great introduction to the types of programming for families, adults, and teens that the series would provide. The games were chosen based on age appropriateness and out of the following game categories: strategy, narrative, action, knowledge, party, and active.

Family programs

Family programs consisted of events that were designed for all age groups. They featured various video game consoles and board games, with some using board games exclusively. These programs featured a wide range of party, action, and knowledge games that were appropriate for all ages.

Adult Programs

Adult programs focused on the baby-boomer and senior demographic. These programs featured the Nintendo Wii and specifically the game Wii Sports. An Adult Murder Mystery game was also popular.

Teen and Adult Programs

Teen and adult programs incorporated age appropriate video and board games that incorporated social, strategic, narrative, knowledge-based, and action themes. All types of board games, role playing games, console games and PC games were used.

Teen Programs

Teen programs incorporated a wide range of video game consoles and board games along with snacks, crafts and other activities. They were designed to provide this age group with a casual space to congregate and socialize while playing their favorite games. Some had themed titles such as: Teen Mystery Night, Duct Tape Mystery Prom Night, and Teen Survivor: Library Edition.

Resources:
An extensive amount of new equipment was necessary to carry out the “Minds at Play” series. The following items were purchased for the programs:

- Mobile digital projector
- Mobile digital projector screen
- Various board and card games
- PC games for 16 computers
- Headphones with microphones
- Nintendo Wii Console with accessories and games
- Playstation 2 Console with accessories and games
- Xbox 360 console with accessories and games
- Xbox Kinect with games

Project Results
The project met or exceeded all of its objectives. At each of the 38 individual programs, staff handed out evaluation forms and received extremely favorable results. Despite a slight drop in numbers during the summer months, attendance was strong throughout the program. The largest turnouts were for National Gaming Day and the Gaming Open House events.

Through site visits and interviews with the review committee, the following conclusions can be made:

- The “Minds at Play” gaming series successfully attracted new patrons to the library,
- Program participants developed a new level of confidence with the mechanics of video games and,
- The community expressed a strong interest in future gaming-themed programs.

In addition, staff is anticipating an increased demand for a circulating collection of video games at the Tigard Public Library.

Project Impact
The “Bridging the Gap: Gaming for All Ages through the Public Library” reached out to all age groups through its wide variety of programs. It helped introduce new users to the Tigard Public Library and helped existing users recognize the library as a modern community information and recreation center.

Over the long-term, the success of this program is expected to increase the demand for gaming and other tech-related programs at the library. How the Tigard Public Library chooses to follow through and foster future programs will determine the long-term

impact. The Tigard community appears to be primed and ready for more.

Suggestions for Improvement

Attracting additional staff

Getting other library staff to run the programs was more difficult than expected; largely due to their lack of experience with the gaming technology. Yet, an enthusiastic staff is key to keeping the program fresh and innovative. The library could solicit volunteers who have strong gaming backgrounds to work side-by-side with staff and help them gain confidence with the technologies.

Attracting participants

In order to maintain or even increase participation, the library could:

- Provide a predictable long term schedule for programs. As an example, teens could expect that on the third Thursday of every month there would be a teen gaming night from 7-9PM. (It should be noted that some programs in the “Minds at Play” series were on a consistent schedule, but it was short term.)
- Incorporate some mature rated titles. These programs could be restricted to adults or to those under 18 who have a signed waiver from their parents.
- Start playing games online though XBox Live. The Tigard Public Library could connect with other libraries and casually game or hold tournaments.

Using library resources to their full potential

The Tigard Public Library’s computer lab is perfectly set up to hold various game tournaments as well as promote the creation of video game montages (recording gameplay sections and editing them into a video). Programs like these would attract new users, make full use of existing resources, and be potentially groundbreaking within the larger library community.

Conclusion

The “Bridging the Gap” project committee not only showed great forethought, creativity, and expertise in the planning and execution of this program, they also positioned the Tigard Public Library to become a leading innovator for gaming in libraries. As a gamer and a librarian, I was honored to be asked to review the program and came away from the experience an enthusiastic supporter.