Pottsboro Area Public Library
Narrative

Project Justification

The goal of this program is to support the development of critical thinking and digital literacy skills in young people (ages 10-18) through an esports program. Esports are the competitive wing of multiplayer gaming. The 2016 Pew Institute report, Digital Readiness Gaps, reveals that rural residents fall far below their suburban and urban counterparts in their preparedness to use technology. Lower levels of digital readiness, mean that our rural young people are not on a level playing field after high school graduation. The Pew Institute report, The Future of Jobs and Job Training (2017), notes that "… thanks to digital innovation, everyone can embed learning continuously in their everyday lives…create digital learning spaces to rival classrooms as 'places' where learning happen[s]. Via simulation, gaming, digital presentations – combined with hands-on, real-world experience – learning and re-education will move out of books and into the world."

To facilitate the speed required for competitive online gaming, the internet bandwidth will increase from 18 Mbps to 500 Mbps. By developing operating hours specifically dedicated to gaming, public access to high-speed internet will increase. Additional hours are of particular importance due to the layout of our building in combination with limited hours. As we currently operate, the noise created by young people gaming frustrates patrons who need to use the computers for other purposes. Training for library staff and community partners will provide the knowledge to support users in building digital literacy skills.

In addition to developing critical thinking skills that can help students succeed in just about anything they do, esports itself is a fast-growing industry that offers many job opportunities beyond being a pro player. These include careers related to production, programming, streaming, management of esports teams, game development, graphic design, marketing, video production, and even STEM fields.

Esports appeals to students who may not have been engaged with existing extracurricular activities. There is no gender bias in gaming because, unlike professional sports, esports has no physical requirements other than fast reflexes. It serves an underserved community— the average kid on the esports team will probably play on a traditional school sports team. Gaming is often a solitary activity and students who enjoy gaming are often those who are less involved in school activities. Competitive esports provides a way for like-minded students to meet in person on a regular basis, in pursuit of common goals – providing a sense of belonging for those who might otherwise opt out of school activities.

Using the EDGE assessment, we identified our lowest scoring benchmarks. Upon review of benchmark 4.5, The library makes strategic decisions based on information about community needs and priorities, and we realized that a common frustration of our users came from problems with online gaming and the staff's lack of knowledge. With this in mind, a focus group held at the high school identified an esports program as a highly desirable activity. The focus group conversation included the potential popularity of the

program, suggestions for the format, roles that would need to be filled, and the future steps. Current library gamers were also interviewed.

Due to the small tax base of the city, our library has had to depend on alternate funding sources to support the innovative programming the library has instituted. A capacity-building grant for digital inclusion will allow us to build the foundation that the staff needs to create an impactful program.

As technology becomes an ever-increasing part of our lives, digital literacy becomes the bedrock for lifelong learning. As education, employment and empowerment become increasingly digitized, under-resourced communities like Pottsboro will be left even further behind. The rural community of Pottsboro (pop. 2160), in Grayson County, is situated 68.2 miles north of Dallas, TX. In our rural community, internet access is expensive and limited. For those who live outside the city limits of Pottsboro, the only option is satellite internet, which is expensive, slow and unreliable. For example, when it is raining, satellite internet service suffers from "rain fade" and is inaccessible. For satellite, start-up costs are about $320 with monthly ongoing fees of $69.98 for the lowest level of usage. The data caps associated with satellite internet are so restrictive that the majority of online learning is not an option. These factors make our library an important center for connectivity and digital literacy.

The number of young people found sitting on the library curb after hours accessing the library's Wi-Fi demonstrates the absence of home internet connectivity. After observing teens gathering around the library to use the Wi-Fi on a particularly cold evening, a meeting was set with student council at the high school. When asked how the library could help them, numerous teens explained that doing homework on Sunday afternoons meant finding a friend's house with internet. At that point, the library adjusted hours to be open on Sunday afternoons from 1-5pm, the only area library to provide these hours. A recent PISD early release day saw 27 students lined up at the library door waiting for the 1:00 pm opening. When the door was unlocked, students headed for the computers, or checked out tablets, and when those were taken, they pulled out their smart phones. The barriers to connectivity cause high demand for the library's internet access and hardware. Esports are growing exponentially; online gaming specifically requires high-speed access that few people in our service area have. This proposal will build on a previous IMLS Grants to States FY2017 Library Cooperation grant we were awarded called Media Mentoring for Digital Literacy.

In addition to my role as director, the staff includes a library manager paid by the city, and 3 part-time workers who are paid through a federal program for low-income adults who are 55-years-old or more.

Project Work Plan

In the first year of the project, the library will:

- Install 500Mbps internet connection.

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- Purchase 10 gaming computers.

- Set-up network according to technical details provided by North American Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF) in their Esports IT Concerns toolkit. This includes system access and internet filtration.

- Maintain CIPA compliance.

- Collaborate with Dr. Brett Boessen, esports director of Austin College (Associate Professor of Media Studies; Communication, Media & Theatre Department Chair) on the launch of the library program. He will advise on content/activity options for weekly sessions using information provided by NASEF. These activities will scaffold multimodal composition.

  Dr. Boessen will designate a point-of-contact for scheduling Austin College (AC) students who will be the program mentors.

- Collaborate with Jason Brown, Director of Technology for Pottsboro Independent School District. Mr. Brown will use students in a technology class to help design, promote and implement the program. The design and implementation of this program will be a class project based on resources provided by NASEF.

- The technology class will survey the student body to establish interests.

- Hire a Project Manager for 6 hours per week

  This position will plan, promote, implement and report on all project activities.

- The Project Manager will meet with representatives from home school groups and local schools to target students who would likely be interested and/or would benefit from participation. The Project Manager will build relationships with users to understand interests and create future sessions.

- In a series of three meetings of participants, establish the club charter, select officers, and share information about the operation of the program. The library director will work with participants to set their own appropriate boundaries.

- Hold weekly game-specific open practice and strategy times on Saturdays from 1-5pm with AC students mentoring. To accommodate multiple users, sessions will be limited to three 60-minute time slots. The mentors will scaffold digital literacy skills such as information finding and evaluation.

Contract with Josh McBride, Texoma Network Solutions, to set-up the gaming stations, hold monthly technology discussions for participants, and provide ongoing monthly systems management. Mr. McBride provides IT support for the City of Pottsboro.

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- Identify and train students who will complete the esports ecosystem around the gamers – organizers, strategists, entrepreneurs, and content creators.

- Brief weekly meetings between the project manager and the library director to update progress and issues will take place, in addition to, a monthly in-depth meeting.

- The project manager will hold brief weekly meetings with the Austin College mentors to gather input.

- The last Saturday of each month, the IMLS Promote Lifelong Learning survey will be given to program participants who are present.

- Surveys will determine if participants have home internet access and, if so, determine speed.

- Interviews will assess whether the participants were involved with other extracurricular activities previously.

- Talkback Board will gather information each Saturday. "Today I learned" question will gather post-it note responses.

- A sign-in sheet will be completed at each event to track number of participants.

- Observation will determine if more teens start using the library, peers support other's learning, and whether spectators become more actively involved.

Potential risks to the project will be limited time available from the participating AC students during school breaks and finals. Identifying local mentors who can provide coverage when college students are unavailable will be important.

In the second year of the project:

- continuation of first year activities

- develop a program for middle school students using the high school students as mentors

- weekly team gaming sessions held with participation of AC students

- implementation of tournaments

Project Outcomes

An esports program at the library will support the development of digital readiness in young people, ages 10-18, as measured by surveys to assess the promotion of lifelong learning. This program will increase public access to information, ideas, and networks through

esports by providing high-speed internet access during dedicated gaming hours that will increase our total operating hours in a safe meeting place.

A primary goal is to have participants gain mastery over digital skills. Using a Discord server (a chat app/virtual classroom for gaming), participants will connect with people all over the world who have similar interests. By using the Discord chat server, the project manager can actively moderate the group's interactions. This tool tracks individual participation in collaboration with timestamps that the project manager will audit for reporting purposes. Google docs will be used to practice effective online collaboration. To facilitate collaboration, provide timely feedback to help participants improve their work and to monitor progress, google docs will be used. Several people can collaborate at one time without saving multiple versions of a document. The DEAL class at the high school can work on the project during class as well as others working from home or at the library. The docs track contributions so that everyone can see who is doing the work.

The google drive will keep all the relevant work organized. Shared folders will be divided by ecosystem.

Using the comment feature will allow participants, mentors and the project coordinator to provide asynchronous input. It creates a brainstorming venue for participants to see what other parts of the ecosystem are working on, provide feedback and facilitate communication.

Participants will also create their own Twitch channel. Twitch is a livestreaming video platform for content, including esports sports tournaments, personal streams of individual players, and gaming-related talk shows. Tournaments will be played with other NASEF participants on Twitch.

Another skill that will develop is the ability to use online search effectively as a research tool. Because esports is a rapidly developing phenomenon, participants must be able to identify relevant and credible sources. There are a number of sites to search for knowledge such as youtube.com, Gamespot.com for game reviews, and professional team pages for tactics.

Other members in the esports ecosystem will make new video and graphic content and be able to support other users in their learning using technology. Screencasting software will capture the game being played on the monitor. Video editing is a necessary digital literacy skill for analyzing game films.

Another primary goal is to build critical thinking skills, specifically, analyzing, assessing and reconstructing their learning through the medium of online gaming. Through project-based learning, participants will learn new information seeking techniques and how to analyze the relevant sources. A video game is a perfect medium to generate multiple potential solutions to problems. Strategy sessions will unpack problems into manageable parts.

Users will practice ethical standards related to toxicity and bullying. Not only will the participants attend the NASEF-produced online workshop that addresses what toxicity looks

like, how it affects gamers across the board, and how to combat it, they will sign the NASEF Code of Conduct. Everyone involved with the program will be held to the same standards.

Users will discover new interests and deepen existing interests.

Users will collaborate and ask mentors for guidance. This encourages the formation of supportive relationships with adults.

Users will build networks of people and know about resources for pursuing their interests.

In the first year, the participation of an average of 20 participants per week is the goal. By providing high-speed internet along with gaming mentors, hardware, software, and a gathering place, rural teens will be able to take part in this massive, growing industry. Due to barriers to high-speed internet connections in local homes, this method of participating in today's society would be nearly impossible without the library's program.

In the second year, tournaments will be initiated. 6 gamers, 1 technology support person, 1 marketing person, and 1 manager will participate in weekly training sessions.

One measure of success will be for teens to start using the library in greater numbers. That is not a demographic that we currently attract outside of a few homeschool students.

The project manager will distribute the surveys on schedule and tally the results. They will also maintain the sign-in sheets for each session. The results will be tallied on a monthly basis in preparation for the quarterly reporting.

The city has expressed the desire to expand operating hours, but it has not been in our budget. Each year for the last 8 years, our funding from the city has increased. By the time this 24-month program comes to an end, we anticipate having a budget to support maintaining the additional hours.

Additionally, the school district anticipates this becoming an afterschool club which their IT Department will support.

September   October   November   December

Collaborate with
Dr. Brett Boessen...

Collaborate with Jason Brown (JB)

Hire a project manager

Order router

Install Cable One 500Mbps

Purchase 10 gaming
computers

DEAL class surveys PISD HS student
body

BB designates point of contact for program mentors
Due Sep 27

Set-up IT network

Project manager meets
with home school...

Set up gaming
stations

Schedule 3 meetings of partici-
pants – establish club charter, se...

Weekly gaming sessions & ecosystem meetings through 8-31

September

October

November

December

Start Date ∨

Today

− 60% +

Weekly gaming sessions & ecosystem meetings through 8-31-2021

Develop middle school program

Implementation of quarterly tournaments