



Social Impact Games: Do They Work?

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 Knight Foundation



Why Games?

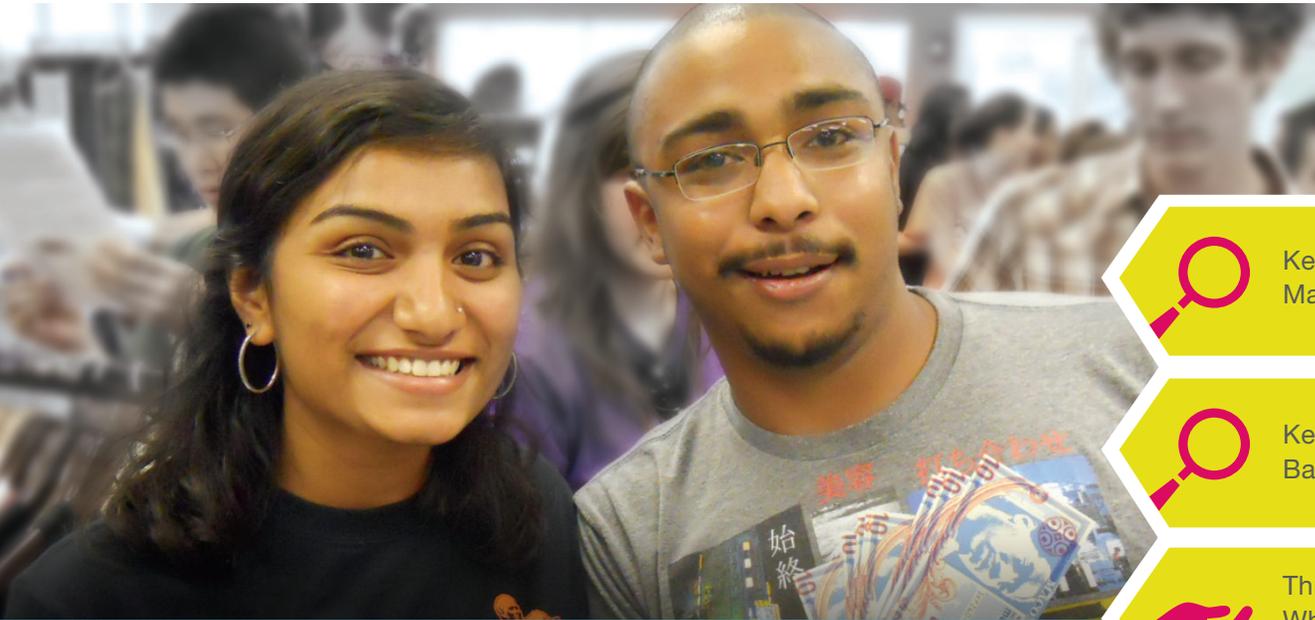
By the Numbers:

- ▶ 72% of American households play computer and video games
- ▶ 65% of gamers play games with other gamers in person
- ▶ Adult women represent a greater portion of the game-playing population than boys age 17 or younger

* Source:
Entertainment Software Association

From urban revitalization to disaster preparedness, communities across the country are tackling complex issues that require new types of partnerships and an influx of ideas. It makes sense that foundations and their community-based partners would turn to innovation in other sectors to look for ways to solve old problems. And that's where games come in.

Researchers say that playing games can bring together fundamental aspects of psychology, sociology and technology to engage people for social change. Games leverage elements of cooperation and competition for creative problem solving while sparking engagement. Games are also fun and grab hold of the public's imagination. The question is, how exactly can games lead to social impact?



Key Findings from
Macon Money



Key Findings from
Battlestorm



Things to Consider
When Funding Social
Impact Games

Funding and Incorporating Games

In 2007, Knight Foundation discovered games through the Knight News Challenge when three of the winning ideas were for news games. This led to a partnership with Games for Change to launch the Knight News Games Award. Since then, Knight has funded several other game-related efforts including civics education; design and digital literacy; and civic media innovation. In 2010, the foundation decided to try a different approach to exploring games by finding social impact games in two cities – Biloxi, MS, and Macon GA. Unlike past support for digital games, these took place in real-time with real people in the real world and they supported ongoing efforts to tackle local issues. While much has been written about how digital games have the potential to improve learning and influence behavior, less attention has been paid to the effects of real-world games – i.e., games that are played out in the physical world. With two pilot projects, Knight Foundation wanted to explore which aspects of real-world games were most effective in addressing community issues.



For past evaluations of games supported through the Knight News Challenge, please search for News Games Cluster Assessment on:

knightfoundation.org



Macon Money

A game that brings people from different backgrounds together to strengthen the social fabric of the community while catalyzing economic development.

The Larger Initiative: Macon, GA

From College Hill to downtown and beyond, Knight Foundation promotes a sense of place and belonging in Macon. Grants are designed to help bring the community together on important issues such as information and broadband access and economic development. In 2008, Knight gave Macon a \$250,000 planning grant to engage community residents in creating the College Hill Corridor Master Plan that focused on a mile and a half corridor linking Mercer University to Macon's downtown. That effort led to a new master plan for revitalization and a \$5 million grant to the Community Foundation of Central Georgia to support it, including a way to fund residents' best ideas for community transformation.

Multiple Community Partners

- ▶ College Hill Alliance – an organization which works to foster neighborhood revitalization through business recruitment and retention
- ▶ College Hill Corridor Commission
- ▶ Mercer University

Professional Game Designer

- ▶ Area/Code

Goals

- ▶ Promote interaction between members of the community who wouldn't otherwise connect
- ▶ Attract and expose area residents to local businesses in a target revitalization area
- ▶ Encourage Macon residents to visit the College Hill Corridor and historic downtown Macon and give students reasons to venture off campus
- ▶ Build on existing revitalization efforts by local partners

How to Play

- ▶ To play the game, residents of Macon got or requested half of a Macon Money bond, either at an event or online. Players then had to search through friends, online or at events for someone who had the other half. Once two players had connected to make a match, they could redeem their complete bond for Macon Money, which they could spend at participating local businesses.

Macon Money



At a Glance

- ▶ 3,500 residents participated
- ▶ over 40 businesses
- ▶ 53% of bonds that were distributed were redeemed for Macon Money bills
- ▶ 99% of the bills handed out were spent

Key Findings

Players Made New Connections

- ▶ Two of three matches by players were with people previously unknown to them and, of these, more than three quarters were with people whom they were unlikely to meet
- ▶ 46% of players matched with people from a different age group, and 59% with people with a different education level

The Game Catalyzed Economic Development

- ▶ Players visited new local businesses and continued to visit those businesses after the game
- ▶ A majority of players surveyed said the game improved their perception of Macon's target revitalization area

The Game Helped Build Social Capital

- ▶ The game contributed to place attachment and strengthened the social fabric of Macon
- ▶ 71% of players surveyed would recognize their matches and say "hi" in the future
- ▶ The more someone played the game, the more likely they were to have a positive view of Macon's future

Things That Didn't Work As Well As We Hoped

- ▶ There were fewer than expected matches across racial lines (26%), and, African Americans were underrepresented as players compared to the population of Macon
- ▶ Relatively few strong ties were created between players – only 20% of matches between players surveyed led to further personal contact (although 15% of those did become friends on Facebook, and, the game was only designed to generate limited interactions)



Battlestorm

A game that promotes the importance of hurricane preparedness through activities focused on youth as leaders

The Larger Initiative: Biloxi and the Gulf Coast

In 2010, the Knight Foundation reconfirmed its commitment to Biloxi and the gulf coast by investing in the Gulf Coast Community Foundation to help communities that continue to grow and recover from the devastation of hurricane Katrina. Additionally, the foundation has provided funding to organizations like Habitat for Humanity and created the Knight Nonprofit Center to support nonprofits in the region.

Multiple Community Partners

- ▶ American Red Cross
- ▶ Boys and Girls Clubs of the Gulf Coast
- ▶ Save the Children
- ▶ Harrison County Emergency Management Agency
- ▶ United Way of South Mississippi

Professional Game Designer

- ▶ Area/Code

Goals

- ▶ Instill good hurricane preparation habits in the next generation
- ▶ Empower youth to act safely and to take

responsibility for themselves and others during dangerous storms and their aftermath

- ▶ Influence the behavior of parents and the larger community

How to Play

- ▶ Battlestorm is a combination of dodgeball, capture-the-flag, and freeze tag. The “Town” team tries to transport balls from one side of the court to the other while the “Hurricane” team plays defense. Town teams can earn tokens as people in their community upload photos of hurricane prep kits to the game website. Teams cash these tokens in to buy extra powers like “Shelter” (which gives teams a safe zone on the court) or “Flashlight” (which removes a Hurricane player).

At a Glance

- ▶ 493 players total in 5 communities
- ▶ 10 - 14 year-old boys and girls at after-school programs run by the Boys and Girls Clubs of the Gulf Coast
- ▶ March – May, 2011
- ▶ Big event tournament attracted 100 observers, community partner booths and distributed over 300 prep kits
- ▶ Over 800 hurricane prep kits were distributed to local families



Battlestorm

Four Potential Pathways for Change

Pathway 1

Players would learn about hurricane prep from game which would also prime them for future learning

- Limited Knowledge Gain - Surveys confirmed that players learned little about hurricane characteristics or behavior
- Game did not prime kids to learn about hurricane prep more easily in the future

Exceptions

- + Linking game strategy to specific concepts connected to learning retention
- + Better questions asked about hurricane prep post-play

Pathway 2

Parents of players would become more knowledgeable and prepared

- + 25% of parents learned something new from watching the game
- + Families of players had more hurricane kit items after the game

Pathway 3

Game would leverage youth as “superconductors” of information for their families, friends and communities

Effective for families and friends

- + Youth were successful messengers and sparked conversations with friends and families about preparedness
- + Parents of players talked with their children about how to be prepared and about having a family evacuation plan
- + 33% of parents reported that they learned something new from their child who played the game

Not as effective for communities

- There was not as much community participation as partners had hoped for due to lack of outreach and game promotion
- The online element of uploading pictures of hurricane prep kits was not very successful

Pathway 4

Game would trigger conversation, catharsis, healing

- + Talking about the game allowed the families to process their experiences and talk about hurricanes in an empowered way
- + 75% of the parents of Battlestorm players believe that games like Battlestorm can help children who experience emotional or psychological problems related to hurricanes

Things to Consider When Funding Social Impact Games

1 Games work better when part of a larger effort with multiple partners

Games play a unique catalyzing role in accelerating existing efforts.

2 Games in Places Need to Have a Sense of Place

Games should incorporate a community's identity in their design, mechanics and visuals. They should tap into existing events that bring communities together and then leverage their novelty to engage local interest.

3 Professional Game Designers are key!

Incorporate stakeholders input, and have professional designers use game mechanics to modify the game to achieve specific purposes.

4 Tie Games to Their Purpose

Games need to balance fun with a higher purpose, but players need to understand the greater purpose of the game for it to catch on.

5 Meet People Where They Are

Games that include a number of possible reasons for joining or liking the game work better. Game designers should combine diverse value propositions for players with different or evolving interests. Consider including both online and offline elements in order to reach players where they are most comfortable interacting and participating.

6 Align Strategy and Knowledge Goals

Tying critical information to strategies that individuals adopt in playing a game can produce measurable learning outcomes.

7 Don't Let Implementation Be An Afterthought!

Full-time staff on the ground is critical. Evaluation staff and full-time staff can help monitor implementation to make adjustments as the game unfolds. Include robust game promotion through local partners and the media, and initially target sub-groups of players who are highly networked.

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Comprehensive evaluations of both games were conducted by:

