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# Games and Play SIG: Engaging Underrepresented Communities

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**Abstract**

The Games-and-Play community has thrived at ACM SIGCHI with a consistent increase in games- and play-related submissions across research papers, workshops, posters, demos, and competitions. The community has attracted a significant number of academic researchers, students, and practitioners to CHI conferences in recent years. CHI 2018 is being held in Montréal, a major game development hub. Montréal is not only a home for major game studios but also more than 100 smaller game studios. In line with the “Engage With CHI” spirit of CHI 2018, this SIG aims to engage the Games and Play community in a discussion about the directions that we can take to advance towards demographics that will benefit from HCI games research but are currently underrepresented: small, independent developers, non-profit organizations, and academics that create mobile games, games for health, games for change, and/or educational games.

**Author Keywords**

Video Games; Entertainment; HCI; Games; Play; Gamification; CHI PLAY; Playful Experience.

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H.5.0. General; K.8.0. General: Games

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## Organizers

This SIG is organized by Lenart Nacke, Pejman Mirza-Babaei, Katta Spiel, Zachary O. Toups and Katherine Isbister, who have all been very active in CHI games community in the past. Nacke and Isbister have served as Games and Play sub-committee chairs. All of them have multiple CHI publications and organized workshops, courses and SIGs for CHI in the past.

## Reaching our Audience

A goal of this SIG is to discuss and identify directions to engage with game development communities to promote HCI research on games. We want to increase the representation small developers at CHI. We will ask all CHI 2018 game-related workshop organizers and session chairs to communicate this SIG to their participants and plan to be active within the ACM SIGCHI's CHIPLAY community and online. We will also use our local industry connections to promote CHI2018 (and game related events such as this SIG) to developers in Montréal.

## Introduction

Games and play technologies have been a driving force for research since emotionally engaging experiences became a prominent area of user research at CHI [1,2,3,4]. Despite the immediate importance of design to deliver engaging experiences in games, HCI practices and methods are not mature throughout the industry and associated academic and non-profit domains [5,6,8]. This inexperience impacts small developers. By small developers, we mean independent ("indie") developers, non-profit organizations, and other development units that have an interest in game development or gamification and are underrepresented in the CHI community.

Small developers often lack resources, knowledge, and experience to include HCI research in their processes, yet would benefit greatly from it. Further, such groups are unable to communicate the results of research work to stakeholders involved in game development (e.g., programmers, designers, producers, marketers) [5,6,9]. This miscommunication often leads to a lack of collaboration between academic researchers and game developers, which would otherwise be mutually productive. Moreover, this means research outcomes are often not effectively disseminated to the communities who could use and benefit from them the most.

Within the scope of this year's conference, and in line with the "Engage With CHI" spirit of CHI 2018, we propose to build a SIG meeting targeting the "long tail" in game development (i.e., small developers). Our goal is to bring the CHI games and play community together [4] to discuss how to better understand, investigate, promote, and provide the value of HCI research in games for these small companies and initiatives. We

are interested in finding out how they can benefit from existing HCI strategies, tools, and techniques, or how our approaches and policies need to be modified, adapted, or re-thought to meet the requirements to engage with these underrepresented communities. It is necessary to discuss expectations, resource costs, training needs, value-to-cost ratios, as well as policies and strategies to reach and engage beyond usual CHI audiences. The outcome of this SIG meeting will be a collection of best practice recommendations, guidelines, tools, and individual success stories on how these collaborations may work.

The games community includes researchers and practitioners focusing on player-centered design and evaluation of games and entertainment applications. Topics that are consistently of interest in this SIG are:

- player-oriented game development including analysis, design, games user research and evaluation of desktop, mobile, mixed reality, tabletop, serious, exertion, and affective games;
- development of interactive TV formats, DVDs, and related media;
- interactive applications for media consumption and usage on the web, in the car, and with mobile platforms; and
- other entertainment-focused applications.

Although this list of topics is not comprehensive, it demonstrates an impressive portfolio of research on interactive entertainment technologies that can (and should) have higher impact on efforts within the game development communities.

## Goals and Action Items

- Bring the community together to share their work.
- Identify directions for research and standards for collaboration with game developers.
- To discuss ways the CHI conference can welcome indies and non-profits to participate.
- Identify the key challenges that prevent small developers from taking advantage of the CHI community.
- Publish whitepapers that identify open problems in engaging with indie developers.
- Make games and entertainment content from CHI more prominent to game development communities.
- Discuss and document the community efforts beyond standard publications by extending existing work in games research and development.

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Through this broad range of HCI expertise, this SIG offers small developers and researchers a platform to inform each other and plan collaborations.

## Issues to cover during the SIG

The aim of this SIG is to provide a forum for the members of this important sub-field of CHI to plan ways to serve the community best at upcoming CHI conferences. This year, the SIG is focuses on small developers, so our primary issues are to:

*Understand the challenges small developers face.* By identifying common pitfalls, developers' constraints, and other challenges in taking up HCI research in their development practices.

*Identify lightweight HCI practices that can be easily incorporated by small developers.* We expect that a core outcome will work toward actionable practice for small developers.

*Welcome small developers to the community.* While conference attendance can be expensive and challenging for small developers, we will identify ways to develop mutually beneficial relationships.

As in years past, the SIG will also continue to address the following, bearing in mind our focus on small developers and time constraints at the SIG:

*Identify current trends in games and interaction research* to determine the makeup of the CHI community, note changes, and ensure research remains timely.

*Scope games research at CHI* to determine the breadth of the community. Can and should it include other areas? How can we identify those areas and tie them to SIGCHI's other communities?

*Expand beyond CHI.* While there is a strong games academic community, we would like to strengthen the field in general with better scientific outlets for publishing games research.

*Educate new researchers* about the publishing standards, common methodologies, and, of course, the reviewing process that is ever changing, but always focused on keeping its quality.

*Integrate other research communities.* SIGCHI is not the only organization with a games community. There are other interesting venues that would improve their quality and ours by collaborating with us. Outlets like ICA (International Communication Association) game studies and Digital Games Research Association (DIGRA) have always been important for games research and will remain publishing venues that we could consider working with. We need to discuss possible integrations or scholarship support for researchers working within the Game Developers Conference (GDC) or other professional venues. A strong part of the success of the games research at CHI has been tie-ins to the games industry and relevance of the work for them.

*Collaborate with industry.* In the past, we have successfully integrated industry speakers in both CHI and CHI PLAY gaming talks and panels. What is a good strategy to continue to involve these practitioners and developers? Also, is there a way to drive research within CHI that directly benefits small developers?

### Process/Schedule/Agenda

We will inform the games community members about the SIG goals beforehand to enable participation of the attendees in the organization of the SIG. As this SIG is central to the success of games-and-entertainment-related activities and connecting with small developers in 2018 and beyond, the agenda is planned as follows:

Intro and Recap (10 minutes) of what was done this year in preparation for the SIG meeting, and more generally by the subcommittee, and how we interfaced with the main conference planning.

We will use the remainder of the session to gather ideas for how to move forward with the community beyond 2018 (using game-like support people feel comfortable with). The following topics will be discussed:

(1) Identification of items the community should focus on in 2019 (Next step action items, including the proposed focus on small developer community members); (2) Identification of volunteers willing to lead community actions in 2019 and beyond (3) Summary of action items for next year(s). (4) Wrap-up with results and action items. We want to conclude the meeting with a plan of how to move forward with the community in the next years based on the input of everyone attending the SIG. We will provide an opportunity for everyone to get involved in SIG communications.

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