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Library Gaming Experiences on a Tight Budget

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One of the commonly expressed barriers to gaming in libraries is a lack of money. If the library spends money on a gaming program, then there are fewer resources available for other library activities. Given that gaming in libraries can be controversial as well as expensive to start up, some librarians are hesitant to explore a new gaming service.

There are, however, some game experiences than can be done with few resources. These programs are not "free," as the reality is that these programs have a cost. Gaming programs in the library require facilities, and then these facilities can not be used for other activities. These programs also cost staff time; even if the games themselves are run by volunteers, staff members are still engaged with planning, marketing, and assessing the program. Space and staff aside, there are a number of gaming programs that the library can run for little additional cost.

The first category of inexpensive library gaming programs is "Bring a game" events. In these events, attendees are invited to bring their own games. As many libraries have projectors in their meeting spaces, helping attendees hook up their video game consoles to the projector and sound system can allow them to share their home gaming experiences with others. Even older gaming consoles can be fun to play with a projected image. This concept also works well for board games; attendees bring games from home and teach others how to play. By changing the tone of the event to "Bring a game from your childhood," it can become an intergenerational experience as seniors are invited to bring marbles, jacks, or pick-up sticks and teach them to new generations.

Related to these events are collectable card game or collectable miniatures events, such as *Pokemon*, *Magic: The Gathering*, or *HeroClix*. In these games, players purchase sealed containers of cards or figures, build decks of cards or armies from what they get, and then battle with each other. These games also have a strong community element as players trade with others to strengthen their armies. The Nintendo DS *Pokemon* games are similar in this trading aspect. The library can run a program inviting people to bring their own cards or figures and then trade and play with each other. If the library wants to support new players, there are inexpensive starter sets available for most of these games.

Another inexpensive game experience is using games where the rules are in the public domain. Chess, checkers, and backgammon can be played with an inexpensive boxed combination set. Decks of cards can be used for a variety of

games for many different generations. Lesser-known games like *One Thousand Blank White Cards* (<http://www.elsewhere.org/discordian/bwcards.html>) and the social game *Werewolf* (<http://www.eblong.com/zarf/werewolf.html>) are also enjoyable games that can develop into ongoing gaming programs.

Taking the social games a step further, libraries can run roleplaying games set in the world of one of the books already on the shelves. Commercially-available roleplaying games present worlds, characters, and scenarios for exploration; however, thousands of books already in libraries have rich worlds, ready for adventure. This is a program that can be added on to a book club event, where everyone has read the same book. Attendees are split into small groups, and each person in a group takes on the role of a different character from the book. The librarian presents a new situation, and each group has to figure out how the characters would work through that situation.

There are many other models of inexpensive gaming programs, such as large-group icebreaker games, game creation events, and puzzle-based treasure hunts. The primary cost for these games is creativity and time, but it is much easier to justify these costs in a library budget than the purchase of an Xbox and ten game titles! In addition, as in many of these game experiences attendees are helping to create the fun, they are more engaged and develop different types of skills than simply playing the games others have created.