The European Game Jam Learning Hub

JamToday Best Practice Guidelines (2nd iteration)

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2. Foreword

2.1. Aim

This guide is meant for anybody interested in knowing more about how to organise applied game jams. This JamToday Good Practice Guide 2016 includes lessons learned from JamToday stakeholders organising applied game jams in 12 different regions in Europe and additionally in Tunisia and Canada. In producing this guide we decided to focus on practical insights and examples for game jam organisers.

2.2. What's in it for me?

“[The JamToday applied game jam] raises awareness of the importance of games and game development for learning and more people, including teachers and parents get interested in it, learn deeper about the process of software development, requirements engineering, debugging, early adopting, etc” ARCC, Sofia, Bulgaria

Awareness creation, networking for participants, organisers, regional partners and the educational institutes all add value. Apart from it being a fun experience where you are challenged to approach a topic in a different manner, participants are introduced to the principles of design thinking through the game jam. As a participant, you experience what it’s like to work in a multi-disciplinary team and focus on bridging the gap between technology and creativity.

2.3. Structure of the Guide

We focus Stakeholders and the impact a game jam can have on the region. We then zoom in on the importance of Subject Matter Experts and how to include them in the process. This is followed by a case study about how one partner obtained Sponsorship. Then we look at Team Recruitment and Composition, and Coaching during the game jam. Finally tips about Transfer are provided.
3. General Introduction

3.1. JamToday

The European Game Jam Learning Hub, JamToday is a pan-European network that seeks to support the development of game-based prototypes through game jams. The JamToday network aims to build bridges between game designers and other stakeholders in order to maximise the impact of applied games. JamToday provides a replicable framework for the co-design and co-development of game-based prototypes for learning environments.

3.2. Introduction to the Toolkit for game jam organisers

“Organisers of jams where jammers with no previous experience in programming were positively impressed by the efficiency of the JamToday model, which allowed people with no programming background to develop video games from scratch.”

“We could not have conducted the game jam without this valuable information - the overview and steps in each of the 5 sections prepared us for everything to come and alerted us to aspects that we had to consider and plan for.” 125@Carlton, first time game jam organiser from Ottawa, Canada

If you are interested in organising an applied game jam, please take a look at the Toolkit. The Toolkit is reserved for members only. It is a step-by-step guide explaining how you can run a game jam following the JamToday formula and how you can implement the outcomes into learning environments with the support of the network. It consists of 5 modules (Initiation, Countdown, Launch, Evaluation and Transfer) that illustrate the different steps needed to organise, implement and transfer learning from a successful game jam (see Figure 1).

To find out more about the added value of joining the JamToday network, check out this video: https://vimeo.com/140058490.

In order for you to get even more of a grasp, we have also included a FAQ JamToday Toolkit with an overview of some of the main steps needed in the form of a visual checklist which guide you through some of the main resources available in the Toolkit (see Figure 2).

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2 http://www.jamtoday.eu/toolkit-introduction/
3.3. The Basics: Applied games and game jams

The term, applied game refers to games that are developed with aims in mind that are external to the game itself. Examples are games that have educational purposes, intended to be physically challenging or to train or develop certain skills. ‘Application’ in this sense refers to the use of skills and knowledge gained in the game and used outside of the game. ³

A game jam is a method, to not only create innovative gameplay, but also to build the ecospheres that you need to set up around them. Game jams also provide first-hand experience in design and development as they contain elements of programming, game and interaction design, narrative exploration and artistic expression. In a short period of time and with an ad-hoc team of users, designers, artists, subject matter experts and producers, it’s possible with this method to create meaningful game prototypes.

Typically game jams last 48 hours. People from different sectors are brought together to brainstorm and develop game-based solutions for tricky problems. Game jam outputs can range from analogue board games, simple video game prototypes, to advanced game prototypes. Game jams are a global phenomenon, which can stimulate innovation in creating, implementing and deploying entertainment and educational games. Prototypes are valued by juries based on their potential success within the context of use.

You can learn more about applied games the applied game jams and its added value in these videos:


3.4. Regional maturity and level of experience

In the case of the JamToday applied game jams, some regions already have many similar initiatives which makes it more difficult to entice people to take part. These partners have been organising game jams for many years in more entertainment-based contexts such as the Global Game Jam. Other regions have just introduced game jams and design thinking and people have been more hesitant due to a lack of knowledge about the topic. There is also a difference in the experience partners have in terms of working with game companies and subject matter experts.

Bear in mind that every region/location has a different ecosystem and set of challenges. The level of maturity in terms of innovation in the regions participating in organising game jams has been different. An overview of the regions and how they rate in terms of innovation is shown below⁴.

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¹ http://taskforceinnovatie.nl/media/files/seaenglish.pdf
This is why we decided to create a best practice guide as a way to highlight our experience with different sets of profiles and levels of experience. Lessons learned can be similar per region. However, there are also differences in the potential impact in a region due to its level of maturity and experience. The examples we provide in this guide have been chosen to illustrate the main lessons learned throughout the process of organising a game jam, regardless of the level of maturity or experience.
Figure 1. Overview of the JamToday's 5 Modules: From preparation to execution and transfer.
JamToday Toolkit FAQ

The resources mentioned below can be found in the ‘Index JamToday Toolkit’:

**1 INITIATION**
- Organising an (applied) game jam for the first time?  
  Resources 1-3
- Looking for a theme/inspiration?  
  Resource 4
- Want to get more people on board?  
  Resources 5-6, 9 & 10
- Ready to commit, act & communicate?  
  Resources 11 & 12

**2 COUNTDOWN**
- Found the perfect location?  
  Resource 13
- Ready to start promoting?  
  Resources 14, 17, 18 & 20
- Do you have a script with your logistical and creative vision?  
  Resources 1-3

**3 LAUNCH**
- Do you have a name tag?  
  Resource 21
- Need help with forming teams?  
  Resource 22
- Found all the participants?  
  Resource 25
- Ready to listen to teams pitch?  
  Resource 24
- Jury where are you?  
  Resources 27 & 28

**4 EVALUATE**
- Sharing is caring!  
  Resource 30
- Beautiful game prototypes: Evaluate me  
  Resource 31
- Game over or Rewind and Repeat  
  Resource 33

**5 TRANSFER**
- Help! How do I get my game to the next level?  
  Resources 34 & 35

Figure 2. FAQ JamToday Toolkit (Checklist Guide to Resources)
4. Lessons learned from the Organisers

4.1. STAKEHOLDERS

“Start early recruiting students, stakeholders and sponsors.” HKU and DGG, organisers in Utrecht, The Netherlands

Without people you have nothing. Game jams can have a substantial impact in the region if you are able to identify and combine forces. Organising an applied game jam is beneficial to many stakeholders in the region.

“We can use the insights and the knowledge of the gaming industry, especially in the jam network we can see that they have ideas, they have innovations that we, from the traditional point of view cannot think of, so we need such insight to understand that the healthcare can benefit from it.”
Jelle van der Weijden (Economic Board Utrecht & Health professional)

Stakeholder mapping is a useful way to get the ball rolling. Identify and prioritise the main actors in the region and when and how you would like to approach them. A tool to facilitate this is also provided in the Toolkit. Partners found this exercise very useful.

“Mind-mapping the stakeholders...helped a lot to identify who to win as a sponsor and who to contact in terms of collaboration”, MHMK, organiser of JamToday Game Jam in Hamburg, Germany

Applied game jams need a theme. The three themes across three years (2014-2016) the JamToday game jams are based on challenges the EU is facing. These are improving ICT skills (such as learning coding or creating games), adopting healthier lifestyles (such as healthy eating or changing antisocial behaviour), supporting learning of mathematics (such as sustaining engagement). Increasing the scope of the game jam has allowed the involvement of international partners. In collaboration and support of the Transmango project additional game jams were also organised around the theme of the future of food.

More information and guidelines per theme can be found as a member on the JamToday website: www.jamtoday.eu. Whichever theme you choose make sure that this can be linked to opportunities and needs of the local context. Every organiser/location can formulate/specify their theme the way they would like. From a theme, an assignment is specified that is given to the game jam participants at the kick-off of the event.

The scope of the assignment should be broad enough to allow for creativity and the game jam participants to design a potentially innovative applied game prototype, but specific enough to ensure that the game can be played in a specific context and caters to the needs of the region/stakeholders identified. For example you can set an age group or school type for the target audience (primary, secondary or higher education) or you may target a more specific challenge.

Organising a session with stakeholders such as schools or educational publishers to specify the needs in the region concerning the theme can be very useful to specify the assignment and increase impact of the game jam in your region.

Designing an applied game requires well-informed designers. Establishing early collaboration with relevant stakeholders, partners and experts (e.g. schools: teachers, city councils, publishers, etc.)

5 https://vimeo.com/139179927
6 http://www.transmango.eu/
is an important task for jam organisers. The quality of the game should be judged by how well it meets the questions/demands/problems of the involved stakeholder.

4.1.1. 5 tips on how to approach and identify Stakeholders

1. Use tools such as stakeholder mapping to identify the main actors in your region.
2. Use your network to reach out to relevant stakeholders and share common ground.
3. To ensure uptake, also identify potential clients and publishers.
4. Use the examples (e.g. videos, prototypes) of previous successful game jams to entice potential stakeholders
5. Identify other similar approaches and see whether you can form collaborations amongst each other.
4.1.2. SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS: What do they want and how can we integrate them in the process?

Once you identify the context of the game, the knowledge of the subject matter expert (also called domain experts) becomes important. Subject matter experts are interested in working together with you once they see the potential of new solutions that can be provided through game design.

Subject matter experts have an in-depth knowledge of the aim of the game jam and can increase the integration of real-life issues in the applied game. They help identify the learning objectives for the game, can supply metrics for assessment, and help to identify instructional strategies for the game. Subject matter experts are the missing link when it comes to making sure that the content of the game is communicated well and fully understood. It is important to ensure that the knowledge of experts can be translated into a game. For more information about working with subject matter experts and how to deal with dropouts during the game jam please refer to the Toolkit and resources available (Tips Stakeholder Involvement).

4.1.3. Examples from JamToday organisers on how to tackle knowledge gaps

**CSP Innovazione nelle ICT**, organiser of game jams in Turin, Italy organised several workshops before the game jam to familiarise potential participants with the basic concepts.

**Dutch Game Garden and HKU University of the Arts Utrecht**, organisers of the game jams in Utrecht, The Netherlands organised motivational speeches from experts in the field. In 2016 the game jam will take place in the same vocational institute (ROC Utrecht) and participants had interventions throughout the game jam by educational publishers who design math games, math teachers, and game designers.

**Glasgow Caledonian University**, organiser of game jams in Glasgow, UK, organised a special rookie game jam after the actual game jam to increase the experience level of participants for the next game jam.

At **Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland** participants were inexperienced in terms of programming, but were provided with readily available free tools sponsored by Microsoft and mentors, which allowed them to complete the working prototypes. They also were involved in a Webinar and shared tips with other new members such as making sure to log your hours diligently and creating an open and creative atmosphere as many participants are new to the field of game design.

At **DigitArt Living Lab-NET-INFO** in Tunisia they held their game jam during the Festival des Arts Numériques. They hosted an event prior to the game jam to allow participants to meet together and have coaches available during the gam jam for more support.

**Consorcio Fernando de Los Ríos**, a Living Lab based in Almeria, Spain has Scratch, Unity and other experts to facilitate the process of knowledge integration.

4.1.4. 5 tips on how to include subject matter experts

1. Use your network to identify potential subject matter experts and include them in the game jam.
2. Bridge the gap between disciplines by organising meetings between subject matter experts, game designers and organisers and create awareness about the different roles.
3. Brief the subject matter experts about their role during the game jam beforehand.
4. You can also choose to have subject matter experts available at specific times during the jam via digital means such as Skype.
5. Translate the knowledge of subject matter experts into concrete design choices for the game prototype.
4.2. SPONSORSHIP: Money - where art thou?

“You can organise a game jam with very little funds but what you need is a lot of man hours to put things together” Jaakko Porokuokka JamToday Organiser at Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland

For all organisers sponsorship remains a challenge. However bear in mind that a game jam can be organised on a shoe-string budget as long as you have committed and engaged volunteers. Combining jams with existing events is a good way to increase visibility of the jam and attract sponsorship.

4.2.1. A case study from Turin about attracting Sponsorship

CSP Turin has no existing video game degrees or courses on an academic level. After having been part of the INTERREG programme BOO Games, with an aim to boost the regional gaming industry by sharing knowledge and know-how across regions, CSP broadened their network by contacting the Polytechnic University of Turin who has an incubation programme called i3P/Treatabit housing two micro start-ups.

Treatabit previously organised hackathons and took part in their first global game jam in January 2014. This was a great success also in terms of collaboration with a group of companies called T-Union. Treatabit chose to support the two editions of Turin JamToday game jams in 2014 and 2015.

Thanks to the programme Startup Revolutionary Road, the location, surveillance during the night and part of the catering were covered. Along with a prize for the winning team: three months of incubation. A company affiliated with the T-Union group, Event horizon, offered a prize 3D graphics course.

7 http://www.jamtoday.eu/enOl-webinar-on-how-to-organise-a-game-jam/
8 Revolutionary Road is a startup programme in support of youth entrepreneurship, supported by Microsoft Youthspark and the Fondazione Cariplo.
They presented the results of the 2014 game jam during the View Conference. The conference was a good way to showcase the results. Neither organisers nor the presenters were paid for their time.

Due to the healthy lifestyle theme of the 2015 game jam, with the help of a colleague at Treatabit, CSP were able to contact M’Bon – a local hamburger chain that makes quality products and MOLE COLA, a local soft drinks brand who provided drinks during the event. There were options about having them also provide funding for the winning team to scale up their prototype. However this was unfortunately not realised.

Sponsorship remains a challenge as Revolutionary Road has come to an end and Treatabit is unable to sponsor the game jam. Sponsorship options are available via Microsoft, who is currently focusing on students from higher education. CSP will be organising coding courses with CODE CLUB Italy who offer free courses in schools. Obtaining sponsorship for these pursuits remains difficult with the remnants of the economic crisis.

4.2.2. 5 tips for attracting Sponsorship:

1. Be aware of other related festivals and projects in the area and see whether you can combine forces.

2. Be resourceful in terms of amount of budget needed. For instance security and organisational costs can be diminished if participants do not sleep at the venue.

3. Make sure to do your homework with the sponsor, find out the correct person to contact and make your pitch fully armed with all the information you can provide bearing in mind what you can offer the sponsor and what his/her needs might be.

4. Remember to look for offers of support in kind rather than just in cash, many organisations and companies find it easier to provide free services or goods than direct funding.

5. Do not give up. You can do it. It takes time and perseverance, maybe if you don’t get sponsorship this year, you may be more successful with the same sponsor next year.
4.3. TEAM RECRUITMENT & TEAM COMPOSITION: But wait, I thought we had it

How to recruit participants for the game jam and make sure that you can create a well-balanced team can be tricky for first-time organisers as well as more experienced organisers. Here are some practical tips to guide you through the process.

**4.3.1. TEAM RECRUITMENT**

“We would start on the promotion of the jam much earlier next time to attract more participants.” MHMK, game jam organiser in Hamburg, Germany

“The flyers did not really have the intended impact. Calling educational institutions and potential sponsors worked better.” JKU, game jam organiser in Linz, Austria

“For professional game companies it is important to have business potential. It takes them a whole weekend and it should be worth it.” Dutch Game Garden, game jam organiser in Utrecht, the Netherlands.

Without a group of participants no game jam can be held so it is important to make sure that recruiting participants is done in advance. Think of how you would like to organise the game jam. You can opt to provide some extra Master Classes where the basics of applied game design, game jams, and subject matter experts present provide your game jammers with information.
Organising a session beforehand with your game jam participants to provide them with more information about the content is also helpful. This can also be organised on the day of the jam itself. Make sure that the theme has then already been specified enough so that the participants are provided with enough guidelines to create the game prototype. Having mentors during the game jam is also beneficial to ensuring that both content and any technical or design problems can be tackled.

4.3.2. 5 tips about Team Recruitment

1. Use your network and reach out personally to educational institutes, game companies and experts.
2. Use a stakeholder analysis to align with the resources and opportunities that you have and link into existing events to pool resources.
3. Make sure to start recruiting on time via your network and social media channels.
4. Be aware that as with all events there can be last-minute cancellations along with last-minute interest. Be flexible in this process.
5. Provide examples of why this is a unique opportunity for participants and for those who have more experienced participants, use these as ambassadors to showcase their experiences.

4.3.3. TEAM COMPOSITION

“We received all sorts of ages and therefore it wasn’t that equal/easy to compare and judge the different prototypes and groups.” ENTI/Citilab, game jam organiser in Barcelona, Spain

“We...limited our participants to females only and since this is a male dominated field, we minimised the opportunity to recruit more participants. Conversely, this was also an important strength of the game jam...” 1125@Carleton, game jam organizer in Ottowa, Canada

“Our biggest shortcoming was the inability to attract developers. There is no shortage of them in our area, but next time we need to collaborate more closely with players in that particular field.” Laurea University of Applied Sciences, game jam organiser in Helsinki Finland

“The online participation for the development of the game prototype has provided a good option for further collaboration and a cheaper option for the organiser.” CEEI, game jam organiser from Asurias, Spain
4.3.4. Team Roles

Figure 6. Team Distribution for Applied Game Creation JamToday

4.3.5. 5 tips about Team Composition

1. Good examples of team composition are:
   • Designer, 2x coders, artist, expert/producer, audio
   • Designer/coder, 2x coder, artist, audio, producer/expert
2. Ideal team composition is around 4 or 5. Based on our experience, the ideal composition for a game jam is one where all roles are represented. Role clarity is important and so too are openness and trust.

3. Role clarity is important, as are openness and trust.

4. For less experienced teams remember that paper prototypes and PPT presentations to share design ideas is also a way to involve game jammers.

5. Make sure that there are enough mentors who can coach teams during the game jam. This is especially helpful for less experienced teams who have never been involved in a game jam before.

4.4. COACHING: I've just made something, now I need to talk about it too?

"The final presentations reflected the fact that our target audience, game developers and healthcare professionals, are not comfortable with pitching their ideas." Laurea University of Applied Sciences, game jam organiser in Helsinki, Finland

"We will help them more on the preparation of the presentation and we also think we may have someone who will prepare the presentations and present all the game to the jury member....We feel that the quality of the presentation has a big impact on the way jury members evaluate the game." CNAM, game jam organiser in Paris, France

"The time members of the jury spend while evaluating and filling the forms is still too long." Citilab, game jam organiser in Barcelona, Spain
The team has created an applied game prototype after hours of game jamming and is now asked to present their mini labour of love, frustration and hope to the judges. Presenting in front of experts can be quite daunting for the best of us. The JamToday organisers have facilitated the process by creating a template with some main points the team should be aware of when pitching. This makes sure the prototype is presented in a way that the judges recognise and can use to rate the prototype.

### 4.4.1. 5 tips for Organisers on how to help streamline the Pitch Process

1. Brief the judges about participants’ potential lack of experience in terms of pitching.
2. Provide the judges with guidelines concerning what to look for in an applied game concept if they are not game and/or subject matter experts.
3. Provide the teams with a template to ease their anxiety and to help with the pitch process.
4. Allow students to rehearse their pitch. Remind them “Breath in. Breathe out”.
5. Allow for time to play the demo during the pitch as this is ultimately what it is all about.
4.5. TRANSFER: How can we share the magic?

“Due to the opportunities during the game jam to be aware of their skills, some of [the participants] were recruited by games SMEs and entrepreneurs to work with them in their own companies.” CEEI-Asturias, game jam organiser in Asturias, Spain

One of the aims of the JamToday network is to engage teachers in the design and deployment of game-based learning prototypes thereby raising awareness about the potential of games for learning and training environments and supporting the deployment of games into learning environments. But how can you do this in a pragmatic and simple way? Sadly there are no easy shortcuts but here are some of the experiences shared by our network that you may find useful.

Research and our first-hand experience has shown that the use of games in an educational context can increase motivation and flow. However motivation needs to be sustained by methods such as feedback, reflection and active involvement in order for designed learning to take place (Jarvis & de Freitas, 2009). We also found that embedding the game in the organisation is crucial to enable transfer to occur.

As the games made during JamToday applied game jams are prototypes rather than off the shelf marketable products, our focus is not necessarily seeing whether the applied game can be used in the applied setting such as a classroom or healthcare. This is of course the next step in the process. But for now the impact can be illustrated via the lessons learned from the organisers, participants and other stakeholders.

During the JamToday Fair held in Barcelona in 2015, a question was asked as to whether the game jams also have long lasting effects for participants and other involved in the jam. Several game jam participants and organisers gave examples of how long lasting effects are visible:

For organisers:
- Increasing your network
- Highlighting your specific skills in organising events of this type

For stakeholders
- Showcasing new talent and the potential of cross-sector innovation
- Ensuring that stakeholders maintain a balanced understanding of the main issues and the implementation hurdles that need to be overcome.
- Sponsors or other stakeholders interested in hiring developers may use the game jam to see how potential employees work during a jam

For participants:
- Working together in multidisciplinary teams with people from different disciplines, sectors and educational levels.
- For beginners: being introduced to experiential learning through design thinking methods such as rapid prototyping, etc.
- Lowering the barriers to technology acquisition by increasing skills acquisition
- Learning through immersion, engagement and involvement (social interactive learning)
- Needless to say, the prototypes created are a great addition to a more varied portfolio.
- Game studios are sometimes formed or people get a job because of a good co-working experience during the jam.

9 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282849812_Game-Based_Learning_for_Knowledge_Sharing_and_Transfer_The_e-VITA_Approach_for_Intergenerational_Learning

10 Ibid
- In general students who actively participate in a jam are also visible in the games industry afterwards.
- Networks in terms of friendships and new contacts are established during a jam.

4.5.1. 5 Game design tips for transfer into educational settings

1. Have clearly indicated levels linked to specific learning goals and aim to accommodate individual learning styles.

2. Have logical, clear and simple to understand rules with a minimal introduction time and make sure to design small incremental steps to ensure engagement.

3. A strong narrative is important to keep the student engaged.

4. Take into account the multicultural nature of many classrooms.

5. Games need to work out of the box technically to fit the device available.
5. Conclusion

We hope that you now have a basic understanding of how to organise an applied game jam and the how these can be beneficial to your organisation. The JamToday network welcomes you and can provide you with more information and resources.