IGDA CLIMATE SIG

2021 PLANNING SESSIONS RECAP

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Image Credit: Craig Seagreen (2019)

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[Working Session Slides]

Session 1 Video, Transcript - Coming Soon!

Session 2 Video, Transcript - Coming Soon!

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THE TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE (TL;DR)

The IGDA Climate SIG completed 2 working sessions to synthesize community feedback articulating visions for a climate positive and resilient future for the industry; blockers to progress; and potential solutions. As next steps, we are:

- **Scheduling monthly community chats** the first and second week of every month (2 time zones)
- **Gathering feedback on next steps** (please feel free to comment directly in this doc!)
- **Identifying interested contributors and leads/co-leads** for each SIG workstream in 2021+

WHAT IS THE IGDA CLIMATE SIG?

The International Game Developers Association **Climate Special Interest Group (SIG)** serves **to unlock grassroots climate action, enable climate councils on every major game company,** and **amplify the UN Environment's message** about youth advocacy, the power of video games, the climate crisis, and what games can do.

CORE PILLARS

- **Raise awareness.** Build industry knowledge of and community engagement around the impact of video games on the environment.
- **Promote efficiency.** Develop and advocate for power-saving software design patterns for video games and entertainment.
- **Enable great content.** Develop and advocate for creative design guidelines and best practices that support climate-positive elements in games.
- **Unlock behavioral transference.** Support player and developer understanding of how gameplay experiences can translate into real world outcomes.

CONTEXT

To define focus for 2021, the Climate SIG, in partnership with Game Devs for the Future, gathered feedback and guidance from **17 game developers, game writers, game**

financiers, games and media researchers, climate scientists, teachers, higher ed professors, marketers, and video game enthusiasts via online survey. These wonderful humans provided their vision for a climate positive and resilient future for the industry; the challenges blocking progress towards that future; and potential solutions that may enable us to get there. 2 working sessions, conducted in different time zones, were facilitated to synthesize said feedback and define a path forward.

"I believe in our ability as game designers to empower people, by reducing the sense of helplessness that they have about climate issues.

All games teach - By using games to summarize complex data, meeting players where they are about acting effectively, and presenting hopeful mechanics-based visions of the sustainable future that can be interacted with, we can help people worldwide to pursue cultural and systemic changes.

We also can and should use games to return nature to its place in our culture, because if people cannot interact with something, they cannot perceive it as important."

- *Jackson, Game Designer and Programmer*

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR A CLIMATE RESILIENT FUTURE IN GAMES?

When prompted for their hopes regarding the video game industry's future, members of the community surfaced the following key themes:

DEVELOPERS LEAD THE WAY. Climate change is not a problem too big to tackle. Developers are leaders inspiring players to save the world *in real life*! Games are used as immersive tools revealing clear paths players can take to engage in climate action together.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Burnout. Lack of interest in the climate crisis because it is "too big of a problem".
- Developers can be unaware of the power they have to create behavioral change.
- High cultural barrier to entry for developers new to climate action. It's hard to know where to get started.
- Absence of management training and funding for climate action in game studios.
- Lack of accessible resources and methods that can be used to connect game design to regenerative projects that can build action and resilience.

PLAYERS ARE SAVING THE WORLD. Through amazing content that merges interesting mechanics with climate positive messaging, players build a deep connection to their environment and actively want to protect it.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Burnout. Lack of interest in the climate crisis because

it is “too big of a problem”.
- Popular culture expects “fun” to only exist through escapism from reality.
- Consumers are incentivized to favor extended play at high intensity, rather than focused time well spent.

“[There exists] blind faith in technology, fueling climate complacency. Still widespread beliefs among both devs and gamers that art & entertainment should stay away from real-world issues, or indeed act as a tool for people to actively ignore them. Long-standing culture of escalating fidelity at larger and larger ecological and social cost (and rapidly diminishing creative gain).”

- *Hugo, Game Designer*

GAMEPLAY RULES, NOT GRAPHICS. The console wars are a thing of the past. The industry promotes and celebrates great experiences that are accessible, compelling, and have lower energy usage.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Popular culture is driven to value and glorify the computational arms race.
- Dependence on and/or bias towards physical consoles and box copies.
- Limited funding and/or marketing resources towards indie content.

TRANSPARENT SUPPLY CHAINS. Hardware manufacturers actively conduct life cycle analyses (LCA) and minimize waste. There is verified, accessible documentation on how materials are sourced and used. Hardware and software are radically energy efficient.

“AAA games are quickly becoming a large fraction of world emissions. Greenwashing is the biggest barrier. [We] need real commitments, not offsets.”

- *Dargan, Climate Scientist*

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Belief that climate work is “financially unsustainable” and “against business objectives”.
- Sustainability is not the default mode of operations.
- Absence of clear metrics and proven impact.
- Lack of industry standard in the video game industry regarding carbon impact calculations.
- Lack of incentives for energy efficiency.
- Absence of global unified carbon price.

“My company is actually pretty committed in this area. I think the barriers for the largest orgs include a lack of pressure politically and from the public to change their processes. I think think they’re more likely to adopt pro environment policies when

PLAYERS HAVE MORE OPTIONS FOR HOW THEY WANT TO MAINTAIN THEIR DEVICES. Right-to-repair laws are opened up to give consumers more autonomy in how they want to repair and/or modify their devices. Devices are delivered with easy-to-use manuals and non-proprietary parts - increasing product lifespans.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

not doing so threatens their standing in the market, frankly. Smaller companies probably just aren't aware of what they can be doing to make a difference."

- *Cat, Games Writer*

- Popular culture is geared to incentivize and profit from the rapid consumption of new hardware.
- Consumers are not incentivized to learn and value the practice of repair and/or modification.

GAME DESIGN AND SOFTWARE PATTERNS THAT WORK. There is an industry-wide climate standard in creative game and platform design - promoting climate science and action in ways that are compelling, actionable, and profitable.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Popular belief that art and entertainment should be separate from real world issues.
- Business decisions often ignore opportunities for behavioral change (ex. Auto opt-in to power saving features, as opposed to manual opt-in).
- Absence of peer support in the video game industry. Climate action can currently feel isolating because there aren't communities willing to take a systematic approach to working together.

"The two biggest challenges my studio has faced so far are offsetting the carbon emissions from our air travel (prior to the pandemic) and reliably sourcing electrical and gas energy produced by renewable sources."

- *CJ, Studio Head*

DEVELOPERS HAVE MORE WORK FLEXIBILITY. A shift towards game studio culture that is more personally sustainable - with more flexibility around work schedules, less travel, and decreased dependence on in-person trade shows. This, we hope, has potential to free up time and resources for more focused work at a lower carbon cost.

WHAT IS BLOCKING PROGRESS?

- Work and conference cultures are built around the idea of physical spaces, rather than digital spaces.
- Fear of retaliation or absence of psychological safety may prevent employees from advocating for change.

VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY LEADS THE REST OF TECH. As our industry heads toward a more climate active and resilient future, there is a measurable ripple effect across the entire tech sector.

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE AND/OR GETTING INVOLVED?

We're starting up regular community calls the second week of each month!

Send a note to climate-sig@igda.org and/or join our community Discord channel: https://discord.gg/RJ6pTx, where most of our workstream conversations are happening. We'd love to have your voice help our industry move forward!

HOW DO WE GET STARTED IN 2021?

To pave a path forward that would enable us as a community to overcome the challenges identified, we conducted an initial brainstorm of potential solutions and grouped them into key themes. Both working sessions were prompted to think about quick wins, as well as long-term strategic initiatives. These helped us identify **potential work streams** based on intended outcome(s).

The discussions regarding potential solutions were also conducted with the idea that developers, publishers, and players can exist anywhere along the continuum between lack of awareness to full engagement.

Below are the resulting 2021 workstreams, ready for feedback (from you!).

#1. DEVELOPER RESOURCES. To enable developer awareness, we first need to start documenting the current landscape. Examples of potential resources include:

- A 101 guide, contextualizing the impacts of climate change on the video game industry
- A single source of truth database listing the work that's already happening: published games and game design patterns, seed funding; and vetted scientists and organizations who can inform/collaborate
- A database of raw industry data on energy usage

CLIMATE COUNCIL TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP. To enable developer agency, we can start with building advocacy skills - mentorship, c-suite support, community organization. A potential next step is to concretely define the existing paths to advocacy, with the intention to build clear cases with business, public policy, and social justice lenses that are easy to use and adopt.

INDUSTRY BENCHMARKING. To build a path towards concrete industry standards and metrics, we can start by aggregating best practices. Examples of potential outputs include the convening of sustainability leaders and practitioners to share best practices, which could then be shared with game developers.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT. As the above workstreams kick off, we need to cultivate an encouraging space that can enable ongoing peer support, additional brainstorming, and excitement. Strong validation for the Climate SIG and communities like Game Devs for the Future!