

Evaluation of the DMG Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit Project

Draft Document Review Report

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1.0 Introduction

This Document Review Technical Report was conducted as part of the evaluation of the “Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit” project (“the project”) led by Dames Making Games Toronto (DMG) and funded by the Future Skills Centre (FSC) over a two-year period. This evaluation is part of the broader Strategic Evaluation and Learning Support for FSC, for which Goss Gilroy Inc. (GGI) was engaged in order to capture project knowledge and generate learning reports for a number of FSC-funded projects.

This report contains findings obtained from program documents, aligned with the evaluation questions and indicators. Background information about the project as well as the purpose, scope and objectives are also included.

1.1 Background

DMG is a not-for-profit videogame arts organization founded in Toronto in 2012 that explicitly supports queer and marginalized people interested in developing video games. DMG offers a variety of services and supports such as “production space, education, advocacy, archiving, resource sharing and more collaborative practices”.¹ As part of these supports and services, DMG offers a variety of events such as monthly social events, weekly public workshops on different gaming related issues, regular salons and round-tables, game jams, an annual 12-week immersive workshop, four six-week-long development workshops, and formal career/practice mentorship programs.

Project Description

DMG’s goal for this project was to develop a toolkit—the DMG Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit—to provide new BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of game studios with “industry-specific technical and business skills, social impact and social finance training, and access to a community of peers and industry experts”.² The ultimate goal is to make it easier and more attainable for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals to establish their own game studios as they are often facing major barriers entering this industry. The Toolkit aims to draw on resources that DMG has already developed for its Damage Labs program— “a studio startup program that takes six independent, LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC-led games studios from concept to financing, development, and release of independent games that center and amplify marginalized voices.”³ Specifically, the goal of creating this Toolkit is to make the curriculum and resources currently used by Damage Labs publicly accessible so that more game creators can draw on them. Overall, the Toolkit will

¹ <https://dmg.to/> (accessed Jan 18th, 2023).

² Dames Making Games Project Description-Amendment.

³ DMG Application.

include “videos, interactive learning modules, solution-oriented case studies and in-depth interviews with industry experts and founders.”⁴

Project Objectives

The initial project objectives as outlined in the workplan of the project are threefold:⁵

- Create an online learning platform for DMG to host its social finance Toolkit;
- Convert the Damage Labs studio start-up content to fit an online model of learning in order to increase accessibility of the programs’ content; and
- Launch an online course which allows people to understand the idea and tools behind including social impact goals in games studios.

According to an amending agreement that was signed between DMG and FSC on March 1st, 2022, the project objectives were identified as follows:

- Increase the number of newly formed game studios founded and controlled by Canadian BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators;
- Increase the number of creators who indicate they have adequate access to learning resources to start a studio and access financing and funding;
- Increase the number of studios accessing social investment, and establish baseline data on studios accessing the Social Finance Fund;
- Increase the value of creators’ sense of connection to community of support; and
- Establish baseline data on five-year studio sustainability.

Theory of Change

A theory of change explains how an intervention is expected to produce its results.⁶

The Problem

BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of games studios face significant barriers when trying to enter the industry which are grounded in inequities and biases present in the industry. To overcome these barriers, there is not only a need to address inequities and biases in the industry, but also to provide these individuals with industry-specific technical and business skills, social impact, and social finance training, as well as access to peers and industry experts.

⁴ Dames Making Games_Project Description-Amendment.

⁵ Note: This evaluation focused on the initially set-out project objectives because these were the ones reported on in quarterly and annual reports submitted to FSC by DMG.

⁶ Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, *Theory-Based Approaches to Evaluation: Concepts and Practices*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/audit-evaluation/evaluation-government-canada/theory-based-approaches-evaluation-concepts-practices.html#toc4>

Target Groups

This project targets BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of game studios and other small, independent games studios.

Mechanisms of Change

This project posits that through the sharing of a Social Finance Resource Toolkit, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ games studio creators will have the information, skills and tools to establish their own games studios and create their own positions, namely by learning how to secure social financing. In doing so, not only would other marginalized creators also be provided a new career path option, but other games studios would then also have the tools to foster innovative approaches, thereby challenging inequalities, supporting long-term change, and contributing to equality, representation and financial independence of marginalized creators.

Outputs

The outputs are the ‘products’ of the above activities, or those primarily impacted. The primary outputs of the Toolkit are BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators and game studio founders across Canada as well as other small, independent games studios across Canada.

Immediate outcomes

The **immediate outcomes** are the changes that are expected to come from these activities and outputs, in a short period, and largely attributable to the project. The expected immediate outcomes of the Toolkit are an increase in the value of creators’ sense of connection to a community of support; an increase in BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators’ knowledge of industry-specific skills and training necessary to the establishment of a games studio (i.e., increased confidence in business and social finance literacy); increased access of BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators to peers and industry experts; and increased ability of games studios to foster innovative approaches.

Intermediate outcomes

The **intermediate outcomes** are the changes expected in the medium term to which the project is expected to contribute, at least in part. It is expected that the project will contribute to an increase in the number of creators with adequate access to learning resources, financing and funding; and an increase in the number of studios accessing social investment.

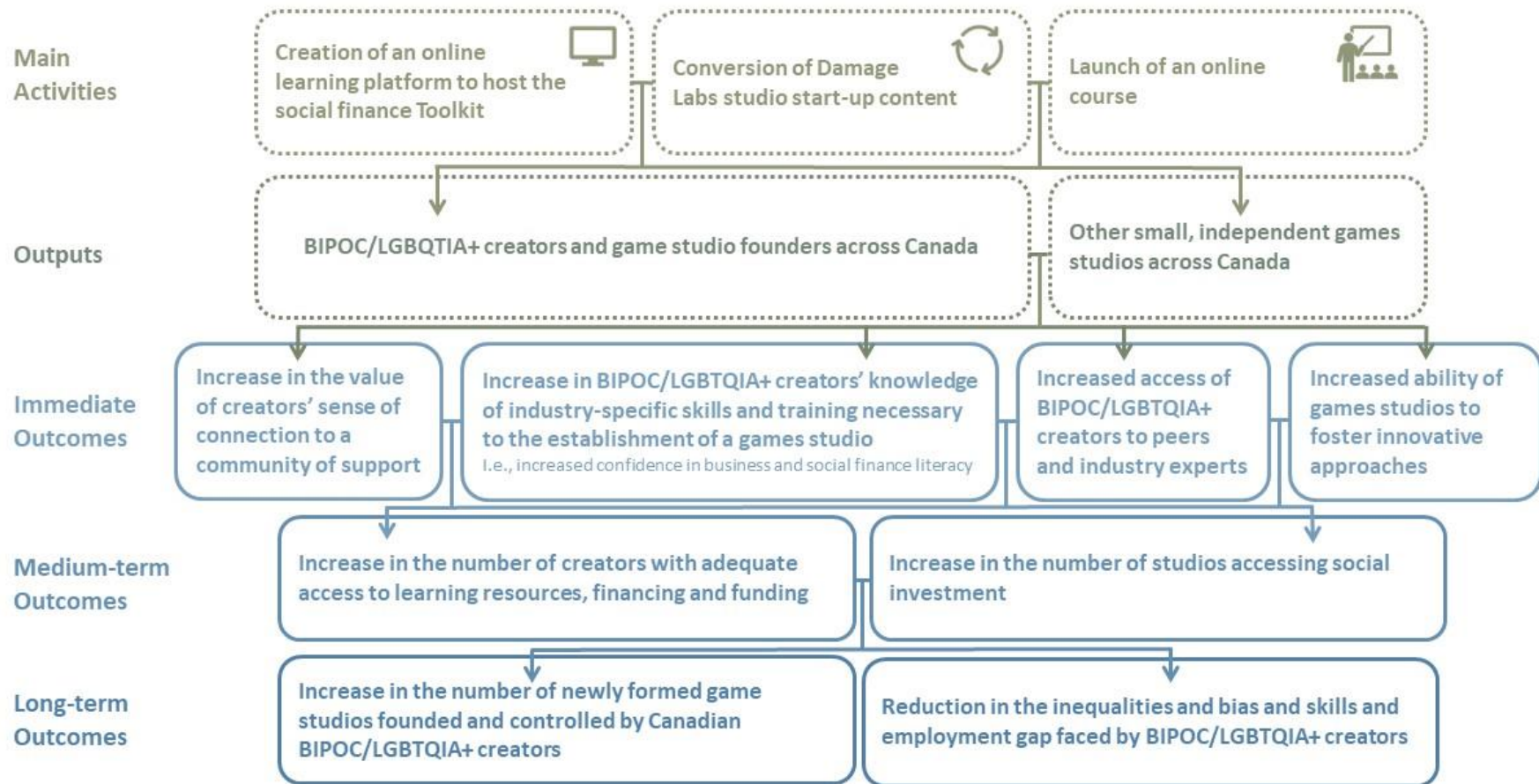
Long-term outcomes

Finally, the **long-term outcomes** are the changes that may result at a later time in the future. As a concept, medium and long-term outcomes are less directly attributable to an intervention (i.e., the project) alone, since other intervening factors play a role over time. In this case, it is expected that the project may contribute to an increase in the number of newly formed game studios founded and controlled by Canadian BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators as well as a reduction in the inequalities and biases and skills and employment gap faced by BIPOC/LGBTQIA+ creators.

Assumptions

The main assumption, that this results chain depends on, is that both BIPOC/LGBTIA+ creators and other small independent games studios will make use of the toolkit either to foster innovative approaches or access social financing—i.e., that they will be empowered to use the skills and information learned through the Toolkit.

Logic Model for DMG's Social Finance Resource Toolkit Project



1.2 Contextualization – Marginalized Individuals in the Video Game Industry

While the games studios and video games industry has become somewhat more diverse over the past few years, it is still far from providing equitable opportunities for and representation of diverse individuals (Entertainment Software Association of Canada 2021; Kane 2018). Not only is there a lack of diversity in video games but underrepresented groups such as women, people of color and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are often portrayed in stereotypical or marginalizing ways (Hern 2017; Kane 2018; Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2021). Such false representation can contribute to discrimination and harm of these groups in real life by perpetuating social biases and limiting opportunities for underrepresented groups (Hern 2017; Kane 2018).

Moreover, data demonstrates that women and other marginalized groups are underrepresented in the workforce of the video game industry (Entertainment Software Association of Canada 2021; Hern 2017). For example, in 2019-20, only 22% of game developers were women and only 12% were non-white (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2021). Additionally, marginalized groups, including women, non-binary individuals and Black, Asian and other ethnic minority individuals are underrepresented in senior roles (International Game Developers Association 2019; Ukie 2021). This underrepresentation in the workforce, further perpetuates the lack of representation of marginalized groups and characters in video games (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2021).

Reasons for this underrepresentation are linked to several factors:

- Bias in hiring and recruitment;
- Lack of support for underrepresented groups; and,
- A culture of toxicity and harassment (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2021).

Finally, marginalized individuals employed in the gaming industry are also more likely to experience discrimination and harassment in the workplace (Hern 2017; International Game Developers Association 2019; Ukie 2021). They also face barriers to advance their careers (International Game Developers Association 2019). These issues can result in high levels of stress and burnout among minority developers (International Game Developers Association 2019).

To address these issues, the video games industry needs to do more to promote diversity and inclusion in games. Important steps to address current barriers for marginalized individuals in the games industry include including hiring more diverse creators; providing more opportunities for underrepresented groups, promoting creators belonging to underrepresented groups, improving diversity and inclusion training; integrating diversity in the workplace cultures as well as creating safe and supportive workplaces that present a welcoming and inclusive environment for all individuals (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2021; Hern 2017 International Game Developers Association 2019; Kane 2018; Ukie 2021).

Some companies, especially bigger ones, have already taken some steps in this regard, e.g., by implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives (Entertainment Software Association of Canada 2021). However, further steps are needed to achieve greater representation and a more equitable access to the video games industry. Therefore, evaluating projects that aim to remove barriers for marginalized individuals in the gaming industry, such as the one undertaken by DMG, is important to better understand their impact and their potential for scalability.

1.3 Evaluation Objectives and Scope

Objectives

Considering that this project aimed to develop a new online toolkit, that is, the Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit – that is based on DMG's Damage Labs Studio Startup Program, the evaluation primarily focused on the project's relevance, reach, design and delivery as well as the effectiveness of the project.

Scope

The scope of the review includes the period from the launch of the project until the present (i.e., ending March 31, 2023). This will help capture and evaluate the different steps and processes involved in the project, as well as whether the goal of creating this Toolkit was achieved.

Evaluation Questions:

The evaluation questions relate to issues of relevance, reach, design and delivery, as well as effectiveness. An overview of the evaluation questions and indicators is presented in the evaluation matrix in Appendix A.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Methods

GGI implemented the evaluation based on a review of documents provided by FSC. The document review contributed to evidence for all evaluation questions. Specifically, it provided background information on the origin and initial design of the project. The review of documents was key in understanding how the project was intended to operate, and how it was actually implemented.

Key documents reviewed included:

- DMG’s application for Innovation Project Funding,
- DMG’s quarterly reports (Q1 2021, Q2 2021, Q3 2021, Q1 2022, Q3 2022);
- DMG’s annual reports (2021–2022 and 2022–2023);
- DMG’s Work Plan and Evidence Generation Form;
- FSC’s Reviewer Assessment Forms;
- Dames Making Games One Pager;
- DMG Project Description “Schedule A;”
- DMG PIF; and
- Dames Making Games - Project Description Amendment.

Additionally, a brief discussion was held with the Project Lead to gather evidence that was not available in the reviewed documents.

2.2 Analysis of the Data

A document review template based on the evaluation questions and indicators was developed and relevant information from all reviewed documents was entered into the template. Documents were reviewed in order, beginning with the Application for Funding and Reviewer Notes, Work Plan, Quarterly and Annual Reporting, and other documents. Once all documents were reviewed, this template was then used to extract key information to inform the answers for each evaluation question and translate findings into a concise narrative in the report. This analysis was complemented with information gained through an informal conversation with the current Project Lead at DMG, which allowed to fill in some missing information and relevant content.

2.3 Limitations

Project progress made in the fourth quarter of both the first and second financial years were not reported due to the absence of these reports among the documents provided.

3.0 Findings

3.1 Relevance

EQ1: How Does the Program Address the Needs of New BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ Founders of Game Studios?

Key Findings:

BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of games studios face significant barriers when trying to enter the industry which are grounded in inequities and biases present in the industry. To overcome these barriers, there is not only a need to address inequities and biases in the industry, but also to provide these individuals with industry-specific technical and business skills, social impact, and social finance training, as well as access to peers and industry experts. The project aimed to address this need by developing an online toolkit – the Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit – that is based on DMGs Damage Labs Studio Startup Program, an initiative that helps six independent, LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC-led games studio secure social financing and move from concept to release over a 28-week period. As such, the toolkit is meant to specifically provide marginalized creators with the information and skills they need to establish their own games studio.

The Needs of New BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ Founders of Game Studios⁷

Digital design programs offered in schools across Canada have a stronger focus on technical production skills than on business skills, contributing to a lack of holistic skills development in more mainstream education. This gap perpetuates the idea that the only career path in this field is through employment in an AAA⁸ studio. As a result, there is a notable discrepancy between the number of job seekers and jobs available and exploitation through unpaid internships.

This problem is exacerbated for BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals, who face a larger skills and employment gap as well as the inequalities and biases present in the existing games industry. This issue has also been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for women and people belonging to marginalized communities, as many individuals belonging to these communities were more likely to be underemployed or working in service-industry professions over the course of the pandemic.

⁷ DMG One-Pager

⁸ Informal classification used to classify video games produced and distributed by a mid-size or major publisher.

Therefore, BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ individuals wanting to enter the gaming industry, or more specifically wanting to establish their own game or interactive digital media studio, have needs relating to the relevant skills and employment necessary to accomplish this goal. This is mainly related to “industry-specific technical and business skills, social impact and social finance training, and access to ... peers and industry experts.”⁹

The DMG Toolkit and the Needs of New BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ Founders of Game Studios

The Toolkit was meant to be developed in parallel with the Damage Labs Studio Startup Program, an initiative that helps six independent, LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC-led games studio “secure social financing and move from concept to release” over a 28-week period.¹⁰ Over the course of the project, DMG marked the studios’ milestones, recorded issues faced, and “conducted extensive interviews regarding the process of game development.” This information gathered was then meant to be used to inform the Toolkit. Hence, the project was directly conceptualized according to the needs of marginalized creators in order to best meet their needs.

DMG sought to develop its Studio Startup Social Finance Resource Toolkit to provide new BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of game studios with necessary skills, training and access to expertise.¹¹ The Toolkit was meant to outline an effective set of guidelines and recommendations for other organizations and studios and was supposed to include instructions, access to free and open-source tools for game development, best practices for accessing and applying to social financing and other methods for generating startup revenue, social media strategies, employment standards for hiring a diverse team, guidance on project management, and more.¹² The Toolkit includes “videos, interactive learning modules, solution-oriented case studies and in-depth interviews with industry experts and founders.”¹³

According to DMG, current learning platforms enhance non-participatory models of learning and skill development and do not adjust to the governing values of the groups that use them. Hence, these existing platforms also do not address the barriers and issues identified above faced by marginalized groups. The Toolkit was meant to be designed as an innovative way in order to address this issue through DMG’s expertise as a queer-led organization in creating tools and designing programs that expand opportunities for marginalized groups, which speaks to their capability to address the needs identified and effectively impact the digital arts industry.¹⁴

⁹ DMG Application for Innovation Project Funding

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ DMG Application for Innovation Project Funding

In doing so, the Toolkit was meant to lower the barriers marginalized creators face in establishing a company that meets skills-related needs, providing them the tools to create their own positions. Marginalized creators wanting to work in the industry are provided a new career path option.

The Toolkit's incorporation of strategies for securing funding was also described by DMG as "novel to the games industry."¹⁵ By facilitating the process for marginalized creators to carve their own space in the industry, DMG would contribute to "equality, representation and clearing the path to viable careers that combine creative and financial independence."¹⁶ Moreover, by intending to make the Toolkit useful to other small, independent games studios to foster innovative approaches, the Toolkit was meant to support long-term, systemic change in gaming by challenging inequalities in representation, skills acquisition and funding models in the gaming industry that is profitable yet inaccessible for and biased against marginalized creators.

3.2 Reach

EQ2: In What Ways and to What Extent Did the Project Reach Its Intended Target Populations?

Key Findings:

DMG made use of different outreach strategies to inform target populations about the development of the Toolkit. These strategies included promotion of the Toolkit to arts groups led by queer and racially marginalized creators, using an outreach coordinator, promoting the project at other DMG activities (e.g., DMG's annual conference) and engaging previous Damage Lab participants. Outreach strategies were limited in their success, partly because of internal staff turnover and partly because the Toolkit was never launched meaning that certain targeted populations as well as intended participants were not reached.

Outreach Strategies and Progress

According to DMG, the Toolkit allows DMG's expertise and connections to be shared beyond the GTA, amplifying the positive effects of the local community.¹⁷ In order to do so, and as outlined in their initial application, DMG intended to actively promote the Toolkit to arts groups led by queer and racially marginalized creators to then be promoted to their own members. The goal was to reach 100 such groups in Canada by the end of 2021, to achieve 4000 unique visits within two

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Application for Innovation Project Funding

months of launch, and to retain communication with 600 of those users.¹⁸ However, these goals were not achieved as the Toolkit was not launched within the intended timeframe.

By the end of the first quarter (June 2021), DMG had announced the launch of the program and began recruitment of beta testers.¹⁹ DMG also began working with an outreach coordinator to develop a plan for outreach, which would involve disseminating previews of the project as well as highlighting achievements of the pilot studios on social media and newsletters. Throughout the second quarter, the coordinator created a suite of communication templates and tools as outreach strategies accompanying the Toolkit's launch. Due to staff turnover experienced at DMG and the unamicable departure of a staff member with access to the communication templates, these templates are currently not available for use. However, DMG is working on regaining access to them for future use.

At Damage Camp (DMG's yearly conference), DMG did a live streamed talk summarizing the first module in the Toolkit, comprising of learnings from Damage Labs about creating financially stable communities.²⁰ The talk was then posted online as a webinar.

In the fourth quarter of the project's second year (October–December 2022), previous program participants involved in earlier versions of the Damage Labs curriculum supported the project's outreach by speaking about their experiences to interested potential participants and community members.²¹

Participants

As outlined in the project Work Plan, DMG had the goal to acquire at least one participant from each province and territory, and aimed to have more than ten participants in the first year from five different provinces or territories.²² The project had a total number of 336 intended participants, with 16, 20, and 300 participants across the second, third, and fourth quarters of the project's first year.²³

From the project outset until Q2 of the second year, the project only gained participants in two early activities that were not directly related to the Toolkit: 53 participants were identified through DMG's yearly Damage Camp conference, in which a talk summarizing the Toolkit's first module was live streamed; and 64 participants were identified through the posting of the talk online as a webinar (total of 117) which was intended to be used as a preview for the course.²⁴

¹⁸ Application for Innovation Project Funding

¹⁹ Q1 Report 2021

²⁰ Q1 Report 2021

²¹ Q3 Report 2022

²² Work Plan

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Q1 Report 2021

A further 9 participants were enrolled in Q3 of the second year in Damage Labs' revised Social Finance curriculum delivered through distance learning.²⁵ The majority of participants were from Ontario (6), with a few also from British Columbia (1), Quebec (1) and outside Canada (1).²⁶

3.3 Design and Delivery

EQ3: To What Extent Was the Project Implemented as Planned?

Key Findings:

While DMG was successful in identifying and selecting a suitable online platform (i.e., the Teachable platform) for its Toolkit, the development of the course content and the launch of the course were not completed as intended. While the curriculum content of Damage Labs was found to be successful in promoting intended objectives, DMG experienced challenges in transforming this content into a suitable online mode. These challenges in finalizing the course content were related to staffing issues and gaps in internal skills that were not expected at project start. As a result of these challenges, the Toolkit was not launched, however, progress made towards this goal will be beneficial for finalizing the Toolkit in the future.

Creation of an Online Platform

By the end of the project's first quarter (June 2021), DMG had selected the Teachable platform to host their Social Finance Toolkit to incorporate process consultation and validation of the material content with industry partners. According to reports, the platform was also selected as it allowed the involvement of various authors in the building of the program itself. Payments and data collection are also built into the platform, making it easier for DMG to host and communicate with their students on the platform.²⁷ By March 2022, the platform for the Toolkit was completed.²⁸

Development of Content

By the end of the first quarter (June 2021), the process of converting notes from the Damage Lab pilot into content for the Teachable platform had begun.²⁹ However, efforts to develop online resources in a compelling manner were found to be more time consuming than anticipated, partly due to staffing issues which delayed timelines. Challenges were also met in converting video content from Damage Labs. Although in July 2022, DMG was still on track to complete this

²⁵ DMG Q3 Report 2022

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ DMG Q1 Report 2021

²⁸ DMG Annual Report 2021-2022

²⁹ DMG Q1 Report 2021

objective,³⁰ course content was not yet finalized by December 2022, citing challenges in redrafting deliverables within the curriculum, structuring programming units, and creating video content due to gaps in internal skills (e.g., video production/creation) as a result of staff turnover.³¹

Particularly, the current Project Lead underlined that while the content of the current Damage Labs curriculum has proven to be successful in achieving its intended outcomes and has been further refined based on feedback received during the two Damage Lab cohorts, there is a need to further refine the curriculum to adjust and transform it into a more formalized and structured program that can be delivered in an online independent model. Consequently, while currently there is a framework in place, more work is needed to complete the content development.

Recruitment of Beta Testers

DMG describes “end-users” as “the core of [their] community” and intended to rely on participants from the Damage Labs program to pilot the Toolkit.³²

By the end of the first quarter (June 2021), DMG had announced the launch of the program and began recruitment of beta testers.³³ Although the exact identities of testers were not known, DMG prioritized equity-seeking groups in this phase by prioritizing outreach in their existing community of marginalized creators. As a result, the majority of the leaders originated from those who had previously applied to the Damage Labs pilot cohort.³⁴

DMG was able to further refine the Toolkit’s content through two rounds of feedback with the completion of two Damage Labs cohorts.³⁵

Launch of the Course

As mentioned, DMG first reported delays in the launch of the Toolkit in March 2022 due to challenges met in the development of content for the Toolkit.³⁶ DMG continued to face challenges in finalizing the course content through December 2022 (Q3 of the project’s second year), citing gaps in internal skills (e.g., video production/creation) due to staff turnover, further preventing its launch.³⁷ Furthermore, DMG described the work and time required for the Toolkit in its current situation as “not wholly feasible” and progress made in the re-evaluation of the Damage Labs curriculum as valuable for “later publication.”³⁸

³⁰ DMG Q1 Report 2022

³¹ DMG Q3 Report 2022

³² DMG Application for Innovation Project Funding

³³ DMG Q1 Report 2021

³⁴ DMG Q1 Report 2021

³⁵ DMG Q3 Report 2022

³⁶ DMG Annual Report 2021-2022

³⁷ DMG Q3 Report 2022

³⁸ Ibid.

EQ4: Were Modifications Made to the Design or Delivery of the Project?

Key Findings:

Due to challenges (e.g., staffing, time constraints, skills gaps) experienced in developing the originally intended Toolkit, amendments to the original contract were made. Amendments indicated that instead of creating a full Toolkit, DMG was to create a draft version of one of the modules of the Toolkit as well as to provide a roadmap of how currently available content and material can successfully be transformed into the Toolkit in the future.

By Q3 of 2021 (the first year of the project), DMG had acquired funding for a second cohort of its Damage Labs program, which could then be used to pilot the Toolkit.³⁹

Due to the realization that the project took more time to complete than was initially intended, an amendment to the original contract was signed between DMG and FSC in March 2022. This amendment resulted in an extension of the project until February 28th, 2023.

In the first quarter of 2022 (the second year of the project), DMG chose to prioritize the conversion of Damage Labs' asynchronous social impact-related content after it was found to be more valuable and effective to prospective participants than its synchronous content related to introductory business development. To facilitate this process, DMG shortened its social impact classes to create online courses for the Toolkit lasting one month per section.⁴⁰

After this decision was made, DMG went through another leadership change, with a new Executive Director starting in November 2022. This change in leadership and associated staff turnover resulted in the loss of skills, particularly video production/creation skills which were needed to create the final content of the toolkit.⁴¹ Moreover, due to the new Project Lead having a background in education and curriculum development, it was realized that more work needed to be invested into transforming existing materials into an online course/toolkit that is suitable and useable for an online audience.

These factors, combined, resulted in an adjustment of the project to primarily focus on further reviewing and revising the curriculum as well as developing a roadmap that can be used to move the project forward in the future, i.e., to successfully transform currently available materials into the Toolkit in the future.

³⁹ Q3 Report 2021

⁴⁰ Q1 Report 2022

⁴¹ Q3 Report 2022

EQ5: How Was Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Considered in the Project’s Design and Delivery?

Key Findings:

To address the needs and experiences of BIPOC and LGBTQAI+ creators and to further equity, diversity and inclusion, the development of the Toolkit was informed by the experiences of marginalized people as well as LGBTQAI+ and BIPOC-led games studios that had gone through DMG’s Damage Labs program.

EDI was intrinsic to the rationale of the project, as its goal is to lower the barriers faced by BIPOC and LGBTQAI+ creators in establishing games companies by empowering them through the provision of relevant skills and training. Moreover, the Toolkit was intended to be “designed from the ground up to empower and reflect the vision of gender- and racially-marginalized creators.”⁴² By informing the Toolkit through the recruitment of marginalized people as beta testers and the experiences of LGBTQAI+ and BIPOC-led games studios through its Damage Labs program, the project aimed to further equity, diversity and inclusion by catering specifically to their needs and experiences.

3.4 Effectiveness

EQ6: To What Extend Did/Does the Project Meet Its Intended Outcomes?

Key Findings:

Due to challenges encountered during the project duration, DMG has not been successful in achieving its initially intended outcomes. However, DMG has successfully completed the development of a draft version of one of the modules of the Toolkit as well as a roadmap for how currently available content and material can be successfully transformed into the Toolkit in the future. In fact, DMG intends to continue this undertaking and has been successful in securing follow-up funding through another grant to continue the work of completing the Toolkit after the end of the FSC project cycle.

⁴² Application for Innovation Project Funding

Due to the challenges experienced with this project, such as internal staff turnover, and leadership changes at DMG which resulted in shifts in workload and workflow; gaps of skill sets needed to complete the project that underestimated the time and resources needed to complete the project; and finally, challenges associated with initially missing knowledge on curriculum development, none of the initially intended project outcomes were achieved. It is, therefore, not possible to report on the impact that the Toolkit had as it was never finalized. However, where possible, some observations of impacts are noted below, based on the two cohorts of DMG’s Damage Labs.

Ensuring Accessibility of Content to Priority Demographics Across Canada

As of December 2022, the Toolkit was not yet launched due to a number of time- and capacity-related challenges. As a result, this outcome has not yet been met.⁴³ However, according to the current Project Lead, DMG has been successful in collecting feedback on curriculum content from the participants of its two cohorts of its Damage Lab. This feedback has been used to make changes to the existing content to ensure it is more relevant to and considers the needs of its intended target population.

Project Reach Across Canada

As of December 2022, the Toolkit was not yet launched due to a number of time- and capacity-related challenges. As a result, this outcome has not yet been met.⁴⁴ However, DMG has been successful in including participants from five different provinces of Canada for its two Damage Lab cohorts.⁴⁵

Increase in Participants’ Confidence in Business and Social Finance Tool Literacy

As of December 2022, the Toolkit was not yet launched due to a number of time- and capacity-related challenges. As a result, this outcome has not yet been met.⁴⁶ However, the current Project Lead indicated that the curriculum used for the Damage Labs cohorts has generally proven to be successful and has helped to promote participants skills and confidence with regard to business and social finance tools, with many of the participants having incorporated a studio. Therefore, according to the current Project Lead, the curriculum is “effective and it is wanted, it just needs to be transformed into a suitable form to be presented as an online course”.

Note

Finally, it is worth mentioning that while none of the initially intended outcomes of the project were reached, DMG has been successful in achieving the amended outputs of the project (as outlined in section EQ4), i.e., DMG did successfully put a draft version of one of the modules of the

⁴³ DMG Q3 Report 2022

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid

Toolkit together and provided a roadmap for how the content and materials currently available can be successfully transformed into a Toolkit in the future.

3.5 Learning Reflections

- The development of online resources in a compelling manner is time consuming;⁴⁷ therefore, it is important to be realistic with project timelines, ⁴⁸ particularly when the project is reliant on the creation and approval of content by other instructors.⁴⁹
 - Feedback adjustments and final content creation were also found to be very time consuming, particularly due to variation in project team members' knowledge of video production/creation and staff turnover.⁵⁰ Therefore, it is necessary in the planning phase to account for all steps of the process, recognizing curriculum development, online education and the conversion of interactive programming as their own respective skillsets and recognizing the additional burden this presents to internal workloads—particularly in small teams, who may wish to consider seeking outside support and knowledge to fill gaps.⁵¹
 - It may also be beneficial to contract out certain tasks to account for skill and knowledge gaps that may exist within one's own team to ensure timelines are met.⁵²
- Different audiences are more responsive to different content mediums—for instance, for this project, in-person cohorts were largely made up of participants with no knowledge of business, whereas existing studios were more interested in asynchronous online learning.⁵³ Therefore, this also determined the type of content that was selected for each medium (i.e., 101 business development content was less relevant for online learning).⁵⁴

⁴⁷ Q1 Report 2021

⁴⁸ Q2 Report 2021

⁴⁹ Q3 Report 2022

⁵⁰ Q3 Report 2022

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Annual Report 2022-23

⁵³ Q1 Report 2022

⁵⁴ Ibid.

4.0 Conclusions

The project appears to be highly relevant and addresses the needs of BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ people by lowering the barriers to founding a games studio by providing them with the required skills, training and networking opportunities to establish their own studio. The Toolkit, once completed, is innovative, offering a value-adjusted, participatory model of learning and skills development on this subject that is not present in other learning platforms, and includes training on topics such as social financing, which is also not common. It also caters specifically to their needs and experiences, with the Toolkit content directly informed by BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ participants of the DMG's parallel Damage Labs program. As a result, the Toolkit would not only address the immediate skills-related barriers of creators, but in making the Toolkit useful to other game studios as well, would also contribute to redressing the inequalities in the game industry on a more systemic level.

Unfortunately, despite this positive finding, the project has not progressed as intended. As of July 2022, the project appeared to reach its intended target population to a very limited extent. It appears that outreach work was intended to mostly take place with the Toolkit's launch (hence, an outreach coordinator was hired and some strategies were lined up), but the Toolkit has not been implemented. Moreover, although the online learning platform hosting the Toolkit was created, the project continued to meet a number of time- and capacity-related challenges throughout 2022. As a result, the conversion of Damage Labs content has not been completed, nor has the Toolkit been launched.

As a result of the above-named challenges, the project has not yet met its intended outcomes relating to accessibility of content, project reach, and increase in participants' confidence in business and social finance tool literacy. However, the development of a draft module of the Toolkit as well as a roadmap for how to transfer currently available material and content seems promising in supporting the completion of the Toolkit in the future.

Moreover, given that the current Project Lead has a strong background in education and curriculum development, they are quite confident that the initially intended project objectives can be achieved in the future. This would include the creation of an online toolkit that successfully converts the Damage Labs curriculum content into an online model of learning; increasing accessibility of the programs' content; and launching an online course that allows people the ability to understand the idea and tools behind including social impact goals in games studios.

In fact, the current Project Lead highlighted that DMG is intending to continue this project to reach these goals. To this end, the current Project Lead has already secured follow-up funding through an education development/community development grant which will allow them to completely redevelop the Damage Labs program and facilitate its online platform.

Appendix A – Evaluation Matrix

Evaluation Questions	Indicators
Relevance	
<p>1. How does the program address the needs of new BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of game studios?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of the needs of new BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ founders of game studios • Evidence that the format and activities of the project support these needs
Reach	
<p>2. In what ways and to what extent is the project reaching intended target populations?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to reach target population • Intended number of participants • Number of participants involved during the piloting phase • Number of people/organizations that have been informed about the launch of the course
Design and Delivery	
<p>3. To what extent was the project implemented as intended?</p> <p>3.1 To what extent was an online learning platform created that DMG can use to host its social finance toolkit?</p> <p>3.2 To what extent was the Damage Labs studio startup content converted to fit an online model of learning to increase accessibility of the programs content?</p> <p>3.3 To what extent was an online course launched which allows people to understand the idea and tools behind including social impact goals in a games studio?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that an online platform has been selected which gives DMG the flexibility to create robust content with only a small amount of web development • Evidence that the project developed content for the selected platform • Evidence that the project recruited beta testers • Evidence that the beta version of the online course was launched • Evidence that the project refined content based off beta feedback • Evidence that the project launched the alpha version of the online course

Evaluation Questions	Indicators
4. Were modifications made to the design or delivery of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that the design or delivery of the project changed over time
5. How was equity, diversity and inclusion considered in the project's design and delivery?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of the inclusion of EDI in the project
Effectiveness	
<p>6. To what extent did/does the project meet its intended outcomes?</p> <p>6.1 How effective has the project been in ensuring that the content is accessible to priority demographics across Canada?</p> <p>6.2 How effective has the project been in reaching participants across Canada?</p> <p>6.3 How effective has the project been in increasing participants' confidence in business and social finance tool literacy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence that more than 50% of those who start the course complete it Evidence that there is at least 1 participant from each province and territory Evidence that there are more than 10 participants in the first year from 5 different provinces or territories Evidence that there is a 25% increase of users' confidence in their skills from beginning (i.e., before taking the course) to end (i.e., after completing the course).