

San Jose State University

**SJSU ScholarWorks**

---

Faculty and Staff Publications

Library

---

1-1-2017

## Arranging the Pieces: A Survey of Library Practices Related to a Tabletop Game Collection

Teresa Slobuski

*San Jose State University, sut477@psu.edu*

Diane Robson

*University of North Texas*

PJ Bentley

*Washington County Cooperative Library Services*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/lib\\_pub](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/lib_pub)



Part of the [Collection Development and Management Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Teresa Slobuski, Diane Robson, and PJ Bentley. "Arranging the Pieces: A Survey of Library Practices Related to a Tabletop Game Collection" *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice* (2017): 2-17. <https://doi.org/10.18438/B84C96>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Library at SJSU ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty and Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of SJSU ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@sjsu.edu](mailto:scholarworks@sjsu.edu).



*Research Article*

**Arranging the Pieces: A Survey of Library Practices Related to a Tabletop Game Collection**

Teresa Slobuski  
Research Services Coordinator  
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library  
San Jose State University  
San Jose, California, United States of America  
Email: [teresa.slobuski@sjsu.edu](mailto:teresa.slobuski@sjsu.edu)

Diane Robson  
Associate Librarian  
Media Library  
University of North Texas  
Denton, Texas, United States of America  
Email: [diane.robson@unt.edu](mailto:diane.robson@unt.edu)

PJ Bentley  
Public Services Librarian  
West Slope Community Library  
Washington County Cooperative Library Services  
Portland, Oregon, United States of America  
Email: [paulb@wccls.org](mailto:paulb@wccls.org)

**Received:** 18 May 2016

**Accepted:** 13 Nov. 2016

© 2017 Slobuski, Robson, and Bentley. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons-Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike License 4.0 International (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly attributed, not used for commercial purposes, and, if transformed, the resulting work is redistributed under the same or similar license to this one.

---

**Abstract**

**Objective** – The purpose of this study is to explore collection development, cataloguing, processing, and circulation practices for tabletop game collections in libraries. This study used the term “tabletop games” to refer to the array of game styles that are played in real-world, social settings, such as board games, dice and card games, collectible card games, and role-playing games.

**Methods** – An online survey regarding tabletop games in libraries was developed with input from academic, public, and school librarians. Participants were recruited utilizing a snowball sampling technique involving electronic outlets and discussion lists used by librarians in school, public, and academic libraries.

**Results** – One hundred nineteen libraries answered the survey. The results show that tabletop games have a presence in libraries, but practices vary in regard to collection development, cataloguing, processing, and circulation.

**Conclusion** – Results indicate that libraries are somewhat fragmented in their procedures for tabletop collections. Libraries can benefit from better understanding how others acquire, process, and use these collections. Although they are different to other library collections, tabletop games do not suffer from extensive loss and bibliographic records are becoming more available. Best practices and guidance are still needed to fully integrate games into libraries and to help librarians feel comfortable piloting their own tabletop collections.

---

## Introduction

Libraries have supported games and play for over a century. The early 20th century saw the emergence of toy libraries that were established to support families in need by lending toys, board games, and other realia that support play (Moore, 1995). Since the 1970's, digital games have become the most visible and dominant medium of play in our culture and in libraries (Nicholson, 2009). Although video game sales remain prevalent, tabletop games have entered a new golden age, beginning with the emergence of designer games in the mid-1990s. Since 2012, purchases of board games have risen annually by more than 25% as online retailers have made them available to the mass market (Duffy, 2014). Recent estimates placed total industry sales above \$880 million in 2014 (ICv2, 2015). This growth has been further accelerated by the advent of crowdfunding as a means to finance and pre-order new games (Roeder, 2015).

As the hobby gains in popularity, librarians are reevaluating tabletop games as a viable collection for their patrons' needs. For many librarians, it is not a matter of *whether* to include tabletop games in a library's collection but a matter of *how*. Even though the establishment of

toy- and game-lending collections predates the establishment of libraries' video game collections, research about tabletop game collections lags behind the research on video game collections. Librarians interested in collecting video games can find a plethora of information on incorporating video games into their programs and collections. However, a librarian interested in building a tabletop game collection will find relatively few resources to guide them.

Despite well-established benefits of gaming and booming growth in the tabletop industry, only a small number of libraries circulate tabletop games. In a 2007 survey of 313 libraries, 44% circulated games with 27.9% of those libraries circulating board/card games (Nicholson, 2009); that equates to 12% of libraries overall circulating board/card games. Since this question has not been surveyed since 2009, it is difficult to gauge the current proportion of libraries that circulate games. This is not meant to imply that libraries are not incorporating tabletop games into their services in other ways. Many libraries provide games in their children's areas, host chess and go clubs, and run gaming programs (Nicholson, 2009). However, the practice of developing, processing, cataloguing,

and circulating a tabletop game collection is relatively rare.

Tabletop games, much like other types of realia, can be daunting to libraries because of presumed cost, durability, and complexity. Because few resources address those concerns, it is not surprising that few libraries have developed tabletop game collections despite the growth of the hobby. This study was conducted to gather information from the libraries that do have games collections in order to determine their procedures and practices. The authors address some of the perceived challenges and issues regarding tabletop game collections and offer ways to improve access and management of this type of special collection through the creation of standards and best practices.

## Literature Review

### *Games in Libraries*

Modern libraries include tabletop games in their services in different ways. To gain a better sense of the history of games in libraries, it is helpful to expand the scope to include other play media. In his 2013 article, "Playing in the past: A history of games, toys, and puzzles in North American libraries", Nicholson makes clear how libraries have historically supported play through their programs, services, and collections.

Hosting clubs and offering programs seem to be the earliest means by which libraries supported play. Nicholson (2013) notes the earliest mention of games in libraries is a chess club at the Mechanics' Institute Library in 1850's San Francisco. The relationship between gaming communities and the library has evolved so that game clubs and gaming programs have become standard among many libraries' offerings. Nicholson's survey of libraries (2009) found that 43% offered gaming programs, most of which included tabletop games. In 2007, the American Library Association began collaborating with game companies to provide free

tabletop and digital games to libraries that participate in International Games Day. In 2010, around 1,800 libraries participated and in 2015, 2,157 libraries participated. The coordinators of the program surveyed participating libraries; among those who responded, 57% had offered gaming programs in the last year *in addition* to their International Games Day event (*International Games Day @ your library*, 2016). These numbers show that while there is not much formal documentation about libraries and tabletop gaming, many libraries are enthusiastically participating in the trend.

Libraries have also supported play by building lending collections. Toy libraries emerged during the Great Depression in North America and were the first to lend games in addition to toys and puzzles. Moore's *A history of toy lending libraries in the United States since 1935* (1995) documents these types of collections. Her research starts at the first Toy Lending Library in a garage in 1930's Los Angeles. The library ensured that families that could no longer afford toys, puzzles, or games could still access them. In 1970, the American Library Association's Children's Services Division began reviewing toys for use in libraries (Moore, 1995). Today two associations, the USA Toy Library Association (USATLA) and the International Toy Library Association (ITLA), exist to support libraries and librarians that manage toy collections.

Despite this long history there is still reluctance to fully integrate games into the library. As Bierbaum notes in her 1985 survey of realia in libraries, new media is often decried as the destroyer of libraries as we know them. (Bierbaum, 1985). In order to cater to their users' interests, libraries incorporate new media, technology, and realia into their collections regardless of this outcry, but if their emerging collections are not as fully integrated as standard collections, they will be only partially accessible to the users they are intended to serve.

### *Collection Development*

The need for collection management guidance is ongoing as both digital and analog games evolve. Law (1976) stresses the need for librarians to become well-versed in game collection management. Law's concerns hold true today, including keeping up with game resources and literature to evaluate games for purchase, improving searching and finding in catalogues, the physical care of circulating games, and loss prevention (Law, 1976). Bastiansen and Wharton (2015) note additional challenges for toy libraries, such as adequate staffing, collection visibility, and maintenance of materials.

Current scholarly publications that directly address the topic of tabletop game collections are practically non-existent. A few publications, such as Nicholson's (2010) book, *Everyone plays at the library: Creating great gaming experiences for all ages*, provide advice for starter collections or outline characteristics of good games for libraries. A few articles focus on role-playing game collections. "Dungeons and downloads: Collecting tabletop fantasy role-playing games in the age of downloadable PDFs" and "Dragons in the stacks: An introduction to role-playing games and their value to libraries" give overviews of major role-playing games. (Sich, 2012; Snow, 2008). However, no substantial writings were found that explore board game collection development.

Determining what to buy is not the only issue that libraries face as they consider this type of collection. Chadwell (2009) discusses the issues that managers face. Many librarians and administrators see game formats as disruptive because new procedures and policies are often needed to handle games. However, these concerns are shortsighted because libraries are becoming more efficient in other areas, such as automatically delivered bibliographic records, shelf-ready item processing, and automated materials handling. This should allow libraries time to handle new formats as needed, but again

this survey shows that librarians treat this type of format differently to other standard formats.

### *Cataloguing*

Special collections are considered hidden if not in the library catalogue. In the white paper "*Hidden collections, scholarly barriers: Creating access to unprocessed special collections materials in North America's research libraries*" the contributors state why all collections should be catalogued if possible: uncatalogued collections are at greater risk of being lost or stolen, are inaccessible to the community, and access is staff dependent. (Jones, 2003) In her 1985 study, Bierbaum surveyed 218 public libraries about three-dimensional realia collections of which toys and games were the most popular category. Of these libraries, 163 collected toys and games but many were not cataloguing these items. This survey noted a lack of guidance in cataloguing non-print materials as a possible cause for the lack of catalogue records.

Thirty years later there is still little in-depth information beyond the basic realia cataloguing rules set forth in the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Second Edition (AACR2) and Resource Description and Access (RDA). Olson (2001) uses a tabletop game as an example and does state the need to include information about the number of players, recommended age, and purpose of the game. In a slideshow presentation for the Association for Library Collections and Technical Services (ALCTS), McGrath (2012) includes helpful hints for tabletop game cataloguing. However, Moore (2014) reflects different practices for game cataloguing. Piascik (2002) briefly reviews the cataloguing and circulation of special materials but notes that sixty-nine percent of their materials lacked records in the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). The original cataloguing needed in such cases requires advanced knowledge if the catalogue records are to be complete and useful.

At this time, professional organizations have not provided best practices for cataloguing tabletop games or for assigning subject or genre headings to these materials. Librarians continue to need more guidance in these areas if they are to provide satisfactory access to tabletop games.

### ***Game Preservation and Processing***

More publications address the preservation of video games than of tabletop games. This imbalance exists because of the real danger of losing digital games to media format obsolescence. Lowood et al. (2009) detail many of the issues surrounding video game preservation. There are no readily available publications for analog game preservation or processing. Circulating collections require additional steps not necessary for personal use collections. Piascik (2002) gives a few tips for processing games, including advice to use bags for pieces and to make creative use of conventional library materials. Most of the information on tabletop game preservation is not library-specific and exists only on gaming blogs and in forum posts.

Although articles about games and their value are readily available there is not enough current, in-depth research about tabletop games in libraries. Tabletop game collections will remain niche experiments in libraries until literature that provides guidance for collection development, cataloguing, processing, lending, and preservation finds its way into professional and scholarly publications.

### **Aims**

The lack of resources and baseline data specific to tabletop collections in libraries contributes to misconceptions about practices and can hinder librarians who are considering establishing game collections. The researchers designed a survey to gather information about current practices for these materials with the belief that the results would provide practical information on how tabletop game collections are

implemented and maintained both for librarians who are exploring the possibility and those who are looking to improve their existing collections. The specific goals of the study were to understand the norms and related issues regarding tabletop game collections. The study focused on the following research questions:

- Are libraries cataloguing their tabletop game collections so they are discoverable?
- Are libraries circulating their tabletop game collections outside of their buildings?
- What barriers are libraries facing in fully integrating tabletop games into the library?

### **Methods**

An online survey was developed to gather information from libraries with game collections. Input was gathered from several academic, public, and school librarians to craft the questions. The survey was created using Qualtrics research software and was tested by members of the American Library Association's Games and Gaming Round Table. The responses were collected in June and July of 2015. Participants were recruited utilizing a snowball sampling technique involving electronic outlets and discussion lists used by librarians. The request to participate included an explanation of the purposes of the research and a link to the survey.

### **Results**

#### ***Demographics***

The results included responses from 119 participants with 66% of the participants from public libraries, 28% from academic libraries, 3% from special libraries, and 3% from other (3 curriculum resource centers and 1 school library). The respondents were from urban (21%), suburban (26%), and rural (31%) areas, with 17% indicating mixed and a few libraries

Table 1  
Overview of Practices Based on Library Type

		Which of the following best describes your library?				Total
		Public	Academic	Special	Other	
Do you create catalogue records for tabletop games for your OPAC?	Yes	15	8	2	4	29
	No	42	6	0	0	48
	Sometimes	10	6	1	0	17
Total Respondents		67	20	3	4	94
Do you create item records with barcodes for your tabletop games?	Yes	17	13	2	4	36
	No	33	3	0	0	36
	Sometimes	5	1	1	0	7
Total Respondents		55	17	3	4	79
Do you circulate your tabletop games?	Yes	17	11	3	3	34
	No	38	6	0	0	44
	Total	55	17	3	3	78
Do you offer programming around your tabletop games?	Yes	41	11	1	2	55
	No	13	6	2	2	23
Total Respondents		54	17	3	4	78

reporting other. Total library budgets ranged from \$50,000 to \$5 million plus, with the majority from libraries with \$1 million to \$4.9 million budgets. Of the 119 respondents 81% have a tabletop game collection and 19% do not.

### *Collection Development*

Collection development and curation of tabletop game collections is unique to each library and its patrons' needs. The survey included several questions about these practices. Surveyed libraries' collections range from very broad and informal ones that include mostly donations to well-curated collections that support institutional goals.

Unlike other media, most games are unavailable through library vendors. Nevertheless, games are being added to collections. There were 77 libraries that acquire games through both purchasing games (84%) and accepting

donations (66%). Of the 65 libraries that purchase games, most (74%) use online vendors such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble, 57% purchase from physical game stores, 32% purchase from physical chain stores, 18% purchase from online game vendors such as Cool Stuff Inc., Funagain, and Miniature Market, 11% purchase from library vendors, and 5% purchase from "other," including thrift stores, garage sales, and eBay.

The budget for purchasing tabletop games ranged from \$0 (all donations) to over \$500. Out of 76 libraries, 46% have a budget of up to \$249, 30% have \$0, 12% have \$250 - \$500, and 12% have over \$500 to purchase games. Libraries with lower budgets tended to favour general vendors, both online and physical. Selection criteria range from purchasing popular, family friendly, or award-winning games to solely purchasing games that support coursework and classroom instruction.

Table 2  
Vendor Usage by Game Budget

		What is your budget for purchasing tabletop games?				Total
		\$0	\$1 - \$249	\$250 - \$499	\$500+	
What type of vendor do you use to purchase your games?	Online general vendors (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc.)	9	26	7	6	48
	Online game vendors (Cool Stuff Inc., Funagain, Miniature Market, etc.)	0	5	3	4	12
	Online library vendors (Ingram, Brodart, etc.)	0	3	1	3	7
	Physical chain stores (Barnes & Noble, Books-a-million, Target, etc.)	5	12	0	2	19
	Physical local stores (Game shops, comic books stores, etc.)	8	17	5	5	35
	Other (please specify)	2	0	1	1	4
Total Respondents <sup>a</sup>		11	34	9	9	63

<sup>a</sup> Respondents could choose more than one vendor type.

Although book donations to libraries are often castaways, donated games are not always from the back of someone's closet. Many game companies understand that more gaming is good for their business. There were 50 libraries that provided insight into game donations. Of those 50, 45 accept donations from patrons, 25 receive games by participating in International Games Day, 19 accept donations from publishers, 17 from local businesses, and 8 from "other", including staff and local thrift stores. Donation criteria range from accepting only complete games in good condition to anything that is offered. Some libraries accept any type of game regardless of age range or content, but others only accept games that are appropriate for the library's collection needs.

### Cataloguing

Despite the fact that cataloguing is a cornerstone for discovery in libraries, survey results reveal that cataloguing practices of tabletop game collections are inconsistent. There were 94 libraries that answered the question "Do you create bibliographic catalogue records for tabletop games?" Of those 94, 31% do, 51% do not, and 18% answered "sometimes." There were 39 libraries that responded to a question regarding what types of tabletop games have catalogue records. Board games are most frequently catalogued with 79% of those libraries reporting these kinds of records. Libraries also catalogue card sets (54%), roleplaying guides (54%), and "other" (13%) games. "Other" games include puzzles, totes with multiple games, and games tied to



Table 3  
Catalogue Records for Different Tabletop Game Types

		Do you create catalogue records for tabletop games for your OPAC?		
		Yes	Sometimes	Total
What types of tabletop games get catalogue records?	Board games	23	8	31
	Card Sets	16	5	21
	RPG guides	10	11	21
	Other	3	2	5
Total Respondents <sup>a</sup>		24	15	39

<sup>a</sup> Respondents could choose multiple types of games.

curriculum goals. Libraries that “sometimes” create catalogue records were most likely to create them for Roleplaying (RPG) guides with 73% of the libraries that sometimes catalogue tabletop collections having this practice. These results do not show an increase in game cataloging when compared to the findings of Bierbaum’s survey of public libraries (Bierbaum, 1985).

Standards in cataloguing also vary. Of libraries surveyed, 22 libraries use OCLC to catalogue their games. These libraries were asked to approximate the percentage of games they have catalogued which already had OCLC records. There were 11 libraries that responded with 4 answering less than 25%; 5 answering 25% to 49%; and 2 answering 50% to 74%. No libraries reported that over 75% of games they catalogued already had records in OCLC.

Both subject headings and classification numbers are essential for access to collections. However, out of 36 libraries, only 22% find Library of Congress subject headings sufficient to aid in finding tabletop games in the OPAC. Out of 39 libraries, 22 (56%) create local subject or genre headings using other resources,

including Board Game Geek ([www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com)), Father Geek ([www.fathergeek.com](http://www.fathergeek.com)), game descriptions, and reviews. Librarians are also creating subject terms that include curricular area, grades, awards, and mechanisms. Standard call numbers are not as widespread for these collections. Of 37 answering libraries, 16% use Library of Congress (LC), 32% use Dewey, 46% use local call numbers, and 5% use no call number “none”.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many libraries still have reservations regarding cataloguing and processing tabletop games. One respondent stated, “Keeping all the pieces is not easy and we have become more wary of entering new items into the catalog.” Besides material concerns, the unusual nature of these items causes some to be hesitant or doubtful of their cataloguing ability. One respondent’s comments could ring true for any size library when first starting to provide access to these materials: “I am in a one person library and I am in no way good at original cataloging which has held me back from cataloging a lot of our board games. Best practices for original of board games would

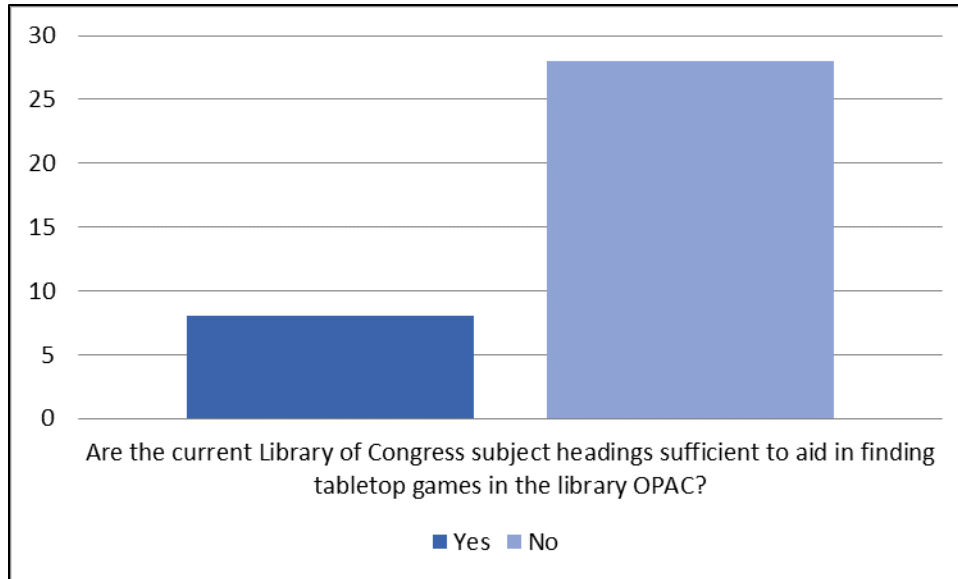


Figure 1  
Subject heading sufficiency.

be great.” However, as seen in the above results, libraries are still attempting to provide access to their tabletop games. One library stated that they “add a color-coded sticker and letters to indicate the primary audience(s) for each game,” to aid browsing the collection. Another notes that, “It’s important to mark and indicate every item in game (I like to put in individual baggies), to ensure that materials are not missing when loaned & returned.” The complexity of most games could be daunting for a cataloguer unaccustomed to cataloguing realia since there are no best practices to follow.

As more libraries collect and catalogue games, the availability and quality of records in OCLC should increase. The survey did not include perception questions for the 51% of libraries that indicated they are not currently cataloguing their tabletop games. However, we can infer by responses to other questions that the in-house usage and small size of many of these collections negate the perceived need for bibliographic records. The lack of sufficient subject and genre headings and classification is also a barrier for

finding and using games. The combination of perceived complexity of cataloguing with a dearth of standards means that these collections are more hidden than others in the library.

### *Processing*

While cataloguing provides intellectual access to collections, processing is key to providing physical access. Questions specific to processing tabletop games were included in the survey to address topics such as item records, barcoding, and physical processing of games.

As with cataloguing, processing procedures remain inconsistent for tabletop collections. Of 79 respondents, there is an even split of 46% of libraries that create item records with barcodes for their tabletop collection and 46% that do not, while 9% only barcode sometimes<sup>1</sup>. Even the process of barcoding is quite variable when compared to traditional collections with 38 respondents putting barcodes on the game box, 5 putting them on the game’s instructions, 5 putting barcodes on each of the bags or

<sup>1</sup> Percentage totals 101% due to rounding error.

pieces/cards within the game, and 10 placing them on other parts of the game. Also, barcoding is sometimes limited to game types, with one respondent noting that “RPG guides” are the only items that get barcodes, which may mean only those would receive item records.

From the answers to this survey, few games are processed to increase longevity and reduce wear-and-tear. However, of the 79 libraries that answered questions regarding processing, 22% reinforce the game’s box; 54% separate games pieces into bags; but only 6% put plastic or archival sleeves on cards to protect them from damage. For some libraries, how their collection

is used negates the need for extensive processing. One respondent stated, “In our library the games have been considered just to be used within the building - they are cheap and easily replaced. Not much money or effort is put into ‘preserving’ them.”

However, some libraries with games for in-house use only do carry out extra processing. One library noted that they “put a security strip in the board game boxes so that the board game collection can only be used in the library.” Another library “keep[s] the reinforced game boxes in a very visible area and [has] all of the guts behind the desk. We don’t check them out

Table 4  
Barcoding and Processing<sup>a</sup>

		Do you create item records with barcodes for your tabletop games?			Total
		Yes	No	Sometimes	
What parts of the game get their own item records/barcodes: (choose all that apply)	box	30	2	5	38
	instructions	4	1	0	5
	bags of each type of pieces/cards	3	0	2	5
	others (please specify)	6	3	1	10
Total Respondents		35	5	7	47
Do you leave your games in their original containers?	Yes	34	32	7	73
	No	2	3	0	5
Total Respondents		36	35	7	78
Do you separate game pieces into bags?	Yes	21	19	3	43
	No	15	16	4	35
Total Respondents		36	35	7	78
Do you sleeve your individual cards with plastic sleeves?	Yes	3	1	1	5
	No	33	34	6	73
Total Respondents		36	35	7	78

<sup>a</sup> Respondents could select multiple parts to have item records or barcodes. Respondents also could answer regarding parts, containers, bagging pieces, or sleeving cards even if they had previously stated “No” or “Sometimes” in regards to creating item records.

Table 5  
Circulation Practices for Tabletop Collections

		Count of Responses
<b>What is the loan period for tabletop games in your collection?</b>	<b>Less than 1 day</b>	6
	<b>1-3 days</b>	4
	<b>4-7 days</b>	5
	<b>7-14 days</b>	10
	<b>14+ days</b>	12
Total Respondents <sup>a</sup>		34
<b>Can patrons place a hold on a tabletop game?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	23
	<b>No</b>	10
Total Respondents		33
<b>Can patrons renew a tabletop game?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	26
	<b>No</b>	8
Total Respondents		34

<sup>a</sup> Respondents could select multiple options to indicate that some tabletop games have different loan periods than others.

or have them cataloged. We feel that this strikes a nice balance for our patrons to know that we have these games and that they are there to be played with, but also keep good track of the pieces, etc.” Furthermore, some libraries are even more conscientious about their processing, especially those that provide out-of-library checkouts. One survey participant wrote, “I put library stickers and a library name stamp on everything.” Another library provided a unique way to manage the many parts of some tabletop games without individual barcodes: “We weigh the various types of components of each game with a digital scale and attach this information to the game. That way, we can tell if all items have been returned when they’re checked in.” While unusual, weighing could allow for clearer check-in procedures for circulation staff. As with cataloguing, the processing of tabletop games remains an area without clear library standards. This lack of standards leads to an unwarranted

fear, not seen with print materials, concerning damage and loss for this format (see below).

### *Circulation*

Cataloguing and processing a collection prepares it for potential circulation. Librarians on social media and blogs have discussed how to circulate tabletop games without undue hardship on staff, and the researchers hope this survey offers some insight for libraries considering circulating their games.

Much like cataloguing and processing, there are no best practices for circulating a tabletop collection. Of 78 responding libraries, 44% report that they circulate tabletop games. However, if in-library, in-school, and out-of-library borrowing are considered together, it is clear that more libraries are circulating games. Out of 77 answers, 65% of libraries report that they allow in-house library use only, 1% in-school

only, and 34% lend outside of the library or off the premises. From the difference in the results from these two questions, it is clear that some libraries consider in-library/school use as circulation, while others do not. Perhaps this is due to the lack of catalogue records for items that are indeed available for use in the building. Of the 44% of libraries that indicated that they do circulate this collection, 82% let all of the library's patrons check out games, 9% have age restrictions, and 3% have other restrictions such as checking out to faculty/staff members only. The loan period varies from less than 1 day to 14 plus days, with the majority (35%) being 14+ days. Seventy percent of these circulating libraries allow holds to be placed on games, and 76% allow renewals.

As noted above in the cataloguing section, 51% of the respondents do not catalogue their collections, so actual visibility is important for finding their collections. Of the 80 libraries that answered questions regarding tabletop collection storage, 25% store collections behind the counter but visible to patrons; 36% stored them behind the counter but not visible to patrons (closed stacks); and 39% store theirs in public areas (open stacks). Of the 31 libraries with open stacks for their games, 23% are in the Teen's Area, 19% are in the Children's Area, 19% are with media items, and 65% are in "other," which includes displays near front desks or entry points, community resource areas, lounge areas, curriculum collection areas, and in toy and game libraries.

Loss prevention is one of the leading concerns that can cause a library to not circulate tabletop games. Questions were included to help gauge procedures related to loss prevention. Regular inventorying is one common method to prevent loss. As with cataloguing and processing, inventory procedures are varied with 48% of 80 respondents counting pieces at each return while 28% never count their pieces. More rarely, 18% count pieces yearly, 6% monthly, and 1% weekly. It is unclear if any of the 28% of libraries that do not inventory use alternative methods to

ensure games are complete, such as the weighing system mentioned earlier.

Although 73% of responding libraries conduct inventories, only 34% purchase new pieces when they are lost, and most (77%) do not charge patrons replacement fees. One library that charges a replacement fee noted, "None charged over last year at 5 branches. Replacements have been minor." Another mentioned that they would charge but that the situation has yet to come up at their library. The types of pieces replaced include instruction booklets, game pieces, tokens, and cards. Libraries that do replace pieces have many ways to manage the replacement process. One respondent wrote, "I sometimes buy duplicate copies of games at thrift stores and garage sales, so that I can use them for replacement parts as needed." Several noted that many games can be played even when some pieces are lost, so replacing the pieces is not always necessary. "We would make replacement judgments based on the specific game. We would try to work with users to get pieces back, but would charge if significant pieces were missing." Another noted that they were able to get the publisher to send them a replacement piece.

Overwhelmingly, it seems the fear of lost pieces should not be a deterrent against circulating tabletop collections, considering comments such as: "The largest concern with circulating board game were missing or broken pieces [sic]. As of nearly a year of circulating 50+ games, we have had only one missing piece. It was gladly replaced by the publisher"; "We have not had any instances of lost pieces or damaged games, so we haven't developed too many policies yet to handle these issues"; and "Lost pieces was the biggest fear, and it was for naught. Although some pieces do go missing, it does not happen at a high rate. And many games are completely functional even if some components get lost." These comments should assuage the fears that libraries that are new to collecting or circulating games may have.

Table 6  
Tabletop Programming by Library Type

		Which of the following best describes your library?				Total
		Public	Academic	Other	Special	
Do you offer programming around your tabletop games?	Yes	41	11	2	1	55
	No	13	6	2	2	23
Total Respondents		54	17	4	3	78
Which programs do you provide which involve tabletop games?	Family board gaming events	28	1	0	0	29
	Game jams	2	1	1	0	4
	Board game design events	5	2	1	0	8
	Adult gaming events	17	9	1	0	27
	Teen gaming events	28	2	1	0	31
	Other tabletop gaming events	9	4	1	1	15
Total Respondents <sup>a</sup>		41	11	2	1	55

<sup>a</sup> Respondents could choose multiple programs they offer.

### *Programming and Events*

Programming and events continue to grow in all types of libraries. In nearly all libraries with tabletop collections, programming is a key element to the collection. Although the majority of the survey did not consist of questions regarding programming, write-in responses such as, “We don’t circulate games to patrons, just to staff for program use” occurred throughout the cataloguing, processing, and circulation sections.

When asked about offering programming around tabletop games, 78 libraries answered

with the majority (71%) confirming they do offer programming with their collection. These programs include teen gaming events (56%), family board game events (53%); adult gaming events (49%), board game design events (15%), game jams (7%), and other events (27%) including game days, tournaments, lectures, and club meetings.

Many of these libraries elicit help from outside agencies for gaming events. This help comes from staff and faculty (49%), teen/student clubs (29%), local board game meetups (24%), game retailers (13%), and professional agencies (4%). Connections to volunteers, community game

stores, and local gamers bring visibility to programs and help ease the pressure on staff. Although not a focus for this research, it is clear that tabletop collections provide an outlet for libraries to connect to patrons as well as to other community stakeholders.

### Conclusion

This research provides an extensive first look at tabletop game collections in libraries. The results show that libraries are fragmented in their procedures for creating, employing, and maintaining these collections, which is not surprising since each library must develop their practices locally or at best through informal communications with other libraries. However, this research also reveals commonalities among many libraries. For those who catalogue tabletop games, they benefit from having bibliographic records available from OCLC while at the same time they find that subject and genre headings remain inadequate. For those who circulate games, most find that the fear of lost pieces was misplaced and that circulation can be accomplished by using procedures that make sense for their location. Overall, many comments show that while different from mainstream library formats, tabletop games can find a place in a library's collection.

Understanding the surveyed libraries' current practices should encourage other libraries to pilot their own tabletop game collections or increase access to their existing collections.

However, comments and the variety of responses to the survey questions reveal that libraries and researchers have much work to do in this area. The demand for tabletop games in the wider marketplace is increasing. Libraries should be meeting the cultural, recreational, and educational needs of their users by meeting this demand, but they are falling behind. Many tabletop games go out of print. Libraries should be collecting tabletop games in order to preserve them for study and future use, but in this area they also fall behind. Most libraries are not collecting or offering the format in any

significant way while those that do must create local practices. For this reason, researchers and professional organizations should be developing resources and best practices that empower libraries to successfully meet the needs of their users. At the same time, as revealed by the survey results, libraries do not need to wait for codified standards in order to launch tabletop game collections that are discoverable, well-preserved, and available to borrow. Current attempts can be imperfect while still providing significant access.

There should be no insurmountable barriers to incorporating this format into a library. Most of the problems are based on misconceptions instead of reality. We should not let another 30 years pass before we start to fully integrate tabletop games into the library. Standards would help ease unwarranted fears, but a shift in attitude about this type of collection also needs to take place. Libraries have supported games and play for over a century, and now librarians and researchers have the opportunity to strengthen this tradition for another century by establishing standards and best practices for tabletop game collections.

### References

- Bastiansen, C., & Wharton, J. (2015). Getting ready for play! Toy collections in public libraries. *Children and Libraries: The Journal of The Association for Library Service to Children*, 13(4). 13-16,29. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5860/cal13n4.13>
- Bierbaum, E. G. (1985). The third dimension. *Public Library Quarterly*, 6(3). 33-50. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J118v06n03\\_05](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J118v06n03_05)
- Chadwell, F. A. (2009). What's next for collection management and managers? User-centered collection management. *Collection Management*, 34(2), 69-78. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01462670902731081>

- Duffy, O. (2014, November 25). Board games' golden age: Sociable, brilliant and driven by the internet. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/nov/25/board-games-internet-playstation-xbox>
- ICv2. (2015). Hobby games market climbs to \$880 million. *ICv2: The Business of Geek Culture*, 88(Fall), Retrieved from <http://icv2.com/articles/markets/view/32102/hobby-games-market-climbs-880-million>
- International Games Day @ your library*. (2016, January 12). Retrieved from <http://igd.ala.org/2016/01/12/igd-2015-final-roundup/>
- Jones, B. M. (Ed.). (2003). *Hidden collections, scholarly barriers: Creating access to unprocessed special collections materials in North America's research libraries* [White paper]. Retrieved from <http://www.arl.org/storage/documents/publications/hidden-colls-white-paper-jun03.pdf>
- Law, G. (1976, Oct.). *The librarianship of games*. The 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of North American Simulation and Gaming Association. Raleigh, NC, USA.
- Lowood, H. (Ed.), Monnens, D., Vowell, Z., Ruggill, J. E., McAllister, K. S., & Armstrong, A. (2009). Before it's too late: A digital game preservation white paper. *American Journal of Play*, 2(2). Retrieved from <http://www.journalofplay.org/issues/2/2/special-feature/its-too-late-digital-game-preservation-white-paper>
- McGrath, K. (2012). *Cataloging three-dimensional objects and kits with RDA* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from [http://downloads.alcts.ala.org/ce/03282012\\_RDA\\_3D\\_Kits\\_Slides.pdf](http://downloads.alcts.ala.org/ce/03282012_RDA_3D_Kits_Slides.pdf)
- Moore, J. E. (1995). *A history of toy lending libraries in the United States since 1935*. [Master's Research Paper]. Retrieved from ERIC database (ED 390 414).
- Moore, J.R. (2014). *Cataloging 3D Objects & 2D Graphics Using RDA and MARC21* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://olac2014.weebly.com/uploads/2/5/1/9/25198051/olacmoug2014-moore-3d2d.pdf>
- Nicholson, S. (2009). Go back to start: Gathering baseline data about gaming in libraries. *Library Review*, 58(3), 203-214. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/00242530910942054>
- Nicholson, S. (2010). *Everyone plays at the library: Creating great gaming experiences for all ages*. Medford, NJ: Information Today.
- Nicholson, S. (2013). Playing in the past: A history of games, toys, and puzzles in North American libraries. *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, 83(4), 341-361. <http://doi.org/10.1086/671913>
- Olson, N. B. (2001). Cataloging three-dimensional artefacts and realia. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 31(3-4), 139-150. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v31n03\\_01](http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J104v31n03_01)
- Piasek, J. M. (2002). Cataloging and processing of special format science curriculum materials. *OCLC Systems and Services*, 18(3), 153-156. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/10650750210439377>



Roeder, O. (2015). Crowdfunding is driving a \$196 million board game renaissance. In *Fivethirtyeight*. Retrieved from <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/crowdfunding-is-driving-a-196-million-board-game-renaissance/>

Sich, D. (2012). Dungeons and downloads: Collecting tabletop fantasy role-playing games in the age of downloadable PDFs. *Collection Building*, 31(2), 60-65.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01604951211229854>

Snow, C. (2008). Dragons in the stacks: An introduction to role-playing games and their value to libraries. *Collection Building*, 27(2), 63-70.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01604950810870218>