# PEGASUS

## Toward Sustainable Game Culture


**Essi Taino, Kalle Laakso, Taina Myöhänen, Usva Friman and Olli Sotamaa**


# PEGASUS: Toward sustainable game culture

**Publisher:** Tampere University / Game Research Lab, November 2025

**ISBN 978-952-03-4206-7 (printed)**
**ISBN 978-952-03-4207-4 (online)**

**Authors:** Essi Taino, Kalle Laakso, Taina Myöhänen, Usva Friman, and Olli Sotamaa

**Cover and comic art:** Tuuli Hypén

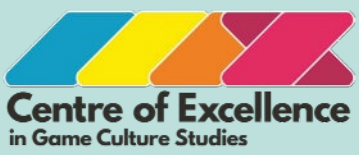
**Layout and info graphics:** Essi Taino

**Project logo:** Nova Salmivaara

PEGASUS project operated in 2024–2025, funded by the Research Council of Finland's Proof of Concept funding (decision number 359460).

**In collaboration with:**






# CONTENTS



# Introducing Project PEGASUS

## Olli Sotamaa

**Project PEGASUS, implemented in 2024-25, supported Finnish game culture actors to work towards more culturally, socially, and economically sustainable operational environment.** The project, funded by the Research Council of Finland's Proof of Concept funding, assessed the existing equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEI) challenges faced by the different games-related organizations in Finland and created new collaborative methods to address them. Project PEGASUS built on the research results and societal impact achieved within the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies on different aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially in the areas of player community and esports studies and game production studies.

In close collaboration with player and esports organizations, gaming event organizers, and game industry partners, PEGASUS brought together the key actors of Finnish game culture with capacity to initiate positive changes that can affect the lives of players and game developers alike. Main project partners were Neogames Finland, We in Games Finland, The Finnish Esports Federation (SEUL), Female Gaming Finland, and Assembly Organizing. The project's academic steering group included Aleena Chia (Goldsmiths University, United Kingdom), Aphra Kerr (Maynooth University, Ireland), Nicholas Taylor (York University, Canada), and Emma Witkowski (RMIT University, Australia).

Team PEGASUS was as follow: Professor **Olli Sotamaa** (Principal Investigator), Postdoctoral Research Fellow **Usva Friman** (Project Manager, Leading Researcher in the area of player community studies), Doctoral Researcher **Taina Myöhänen** (Leading Researcher in game industry studies), Doctoral Researcher **Essi Taino**, Doctoral Researcher **Kalle Laakso**, and Professor **Frans Mäyrä** (Senior Adviser).

**THE KEY OUTCOMES OF PROJECT PEGASUS INCLUDE:**

1. Insights regarding workshops and co-design as research tools;
2. An analysis of Finnish game cultural organizations' DEI definitions and practices;
3. An overview of Finnish game cultural organizations' DEI challenges and successes;
4. DEI Jam: a tested workshop-based co-design method for creating more culturally sustainable new models of operation;
5. Social Safety Plan: a tool for assessing safety risks and needs in game events.

In this report, we will describe these results and how they can be used in building more sustainable game culture on a practical level. This publication also includes templates for the tools so that they can be freely utilized. These results will also be explored in more detail in peer-reviewed research articles that will be published openly after the project has ended.

# Workshops and Co-Design as a Tool for Research

Taina Myöhänen

**One of the central ideas of the PEGASUS project was to bring together different Finnish game culture actors: people from player communities, decision-makers and educators from esports organizations, game event organizers, game developers, and representatives of game industry organizations.** We drew inspiration for conducting research from the principles of participatory design and co-research, in which participants are actively involved in the research process – not just as sources of information, but as producers, developers, disseminators, and users of that knowledge.

Our goal was to collect and share best practices to ensure a sustainable operational environment for the whole game culture field. At the same time, we wanted to create encounters between people working within game cultures across sectoral boundaries who might not otherwise know about each other. In this, we succeeded: workshop participants identified many communal challenges and shared best practices. The workshops led to new contacts and created opportunities for future collaborations.

Using workshops as a research method requires a great deal of practical planning, especially in terms of accommodating participants' varying resources. Initially, we planned one large workshop where all participants could meet face-to-face. However, time and resource constraints turned out to be challenging. People involved in volunteer-based associations and events were available at different times than those working in salaried positions within organizations. Participants' financial resources also varied significantly. We addressed these challenges by organizing several smaller workshops instead of one large one and by moving some workshops online. For the workshop held onsite at Tampere, we offered travel reimbursements and lunch before the session to ensure equal opportunities for participation.

As the project progressed, our understanding of the wide variety of game cultures evolved, and so did the range of stakeholders we invited to workshops. We invited, for example, representatives from a game museum, youth workers specializing in game education, and young players. Workshops tailored to different participant groups enriched our understanding of the challenges of sustainable environments and helped us better grasp the need for diverse, targeted approaches to game cultural sustainability. For example, young players expressed concrete wishes, while long-time community leaders aimed for impact through policy making and large-scale projects.

When using workshop methods as a research tool, it is essential to continuously consider who is being invited and who is missing: do the invitees represent only well-known communities and leadership figures, or are there grassroots participants, critical voices, and those affected by the activities also included? All workshops reflect their participants, so the most important task of the researcher is to exercise careful consideration in selecting participants and to ensure that the diversity of voices is represented in the research.

# Finnish Game Cultural Organizations' Public DEI Definitions and Practices

Usva Friman

**While many game cultural organizations engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) questions, they do not often define what the concept actually means – especially on the practical, operational level.** This may hinder the impact of well-intended statements and measures. In our study, we explored how Finnish game cultural organizations understand DEI in their own activities, what kind of practical tools they have for promoting DEI, and what kind of DEI documents they have publicly available.

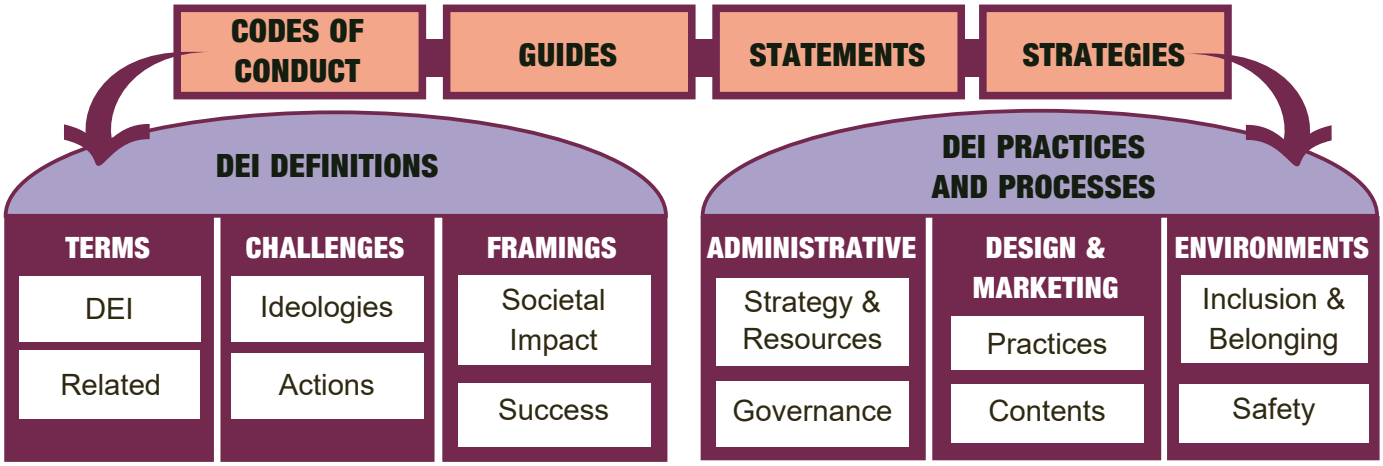
**We analyzed 18 public DEI documents from 11 Finnish game cultural organizations focusing on digital gaming. They included game companies, industry organizations, gaming event organizations, esports organizations, and public organizations with gaming-related activities.**

In our analysis, we categorized Finnish game cultural organizations' public DEI documents into four different types: codes of conduct, DEI guides, DEI statements, and DEI strategies. In these documents, the organizations defined DEI in three different ways: through DEI (and related) terms; DEI challenges, i.e. ideologies and actions preventing DEI; and DEI framings, i.e. how DEI translates to the organization's societal impact and success. They also described a variety of DEI practices and processes, focusing on three areas: administrative practices and procedures (strategy work and resources and good governance practices), inclusive design and marketing (design and marketing practices and contents), and building safe and inclusive environments (building communal inclusion and belonging and fostering safety).

Our results communicate that Finnish game cultural organizations view DEI as a pathway for their continuous success as well as for building a better game culture for everyone. DEI perspectives were even described as “cornerstones for creativity and success.” The examined organizations were actively expressing their commitment to promoting DEI both by working to prevent discrimination and harassment and by utilizing practices to build safer and more inclusive environments. However, it was not always clear if these organizations had set specific goals for their DEI work and if they were following their progress in this area.

As such, in the future, we hope to see more organizations defining what DEI means for them, setting tangible DEI goals, and following their DEI development progress.

## Types and contents of the DEI documents we analyzed:




## SELECTED EXAMPLES OF FINNISH GAME CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS' DEI DOCUMENTS:

- **The Beginner's Guide to Inclusive Gaming Activities**
  City of Helsinki / Non-toxic – non-discriminatory gaming culture project:
  https://www.hel.fi/static/liitteet/kulttuurin-ja-vapaa-ajan-toimiala/VERKKO_NonToxic_aloittelijan%20opas_EN.pdf

- **The Finnish Game Industry Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Dealing with Harassment Cases at Gaming Events**
  Neogames Finland ry, IGDA Finland ry, Finnish Game Jam ry, We in Games ry, and Suomen Pelinkehittäjät ry:
  https://neogames.fi/the-finnish-game-industry-code-of-conduct

- **Playbook for Inclusive Game Development and Marketing**
  Rovio:
  https://www.rovio.com/inclusion-playbook

- **Best Practices for Creating Diverse Characters**
  We in Games:
  https://weingames.fi/best-practices-for-creating-diverse-characters

Photo: SEUL ry | Vectorama 2019 | Pekka Nummela

# DEI Challenges and Successes in Finnish Game Culture

Essi Taino

**Digital game culture contains a wide range of environments where people interact with games, including game development, esports, game events, game education, and non-profits.** In our project, we set out to examine what DEI successes and challenges these sectors have in common and what actionable solutions are proposed for co-development.

During spring 2024, we invited professionals from key game cultural organizations to participate in co-design workshops. Eight professionals with DEI experience from the game industry, esports, game literacy education, youth work, museums, associations, and non-profits were divided between two workshops. They reflected on and discussed about the state of Finnish game culture across organizational divides and gave their views on successes, challenges and possible solutions for developing game cultural DEI in Finland.

Workshop results highlighted Finland's collaborative and open approach to developing game cultural environments across sectors. While many common challenges still exist, the situation has improved over the past decade thanks to diligent DEI work. Participants emphasized the need for a shared game culture strategy to support socially and financially sustainable co-development across sectoral divides. We hope to see this culture of open sharing and co-development further solidified through future DEI initiatives, breaking down barriers between sectors and developing a better culture equally for everyone.

## SUCCESSES

### DIVERSITY IS INCREASING.

**Diverse people** are increasingly present in game cultural environments.
**Peer groups** offer role models and increase feelings of belonging.
**People with power and influence participate** in developing DEI practices.

### WIDE-SPREAD IMPLEMENTATION OF DEI INITIATIVES IN ORGANIZATIONS.

Increasingly **organized game activities** enable collaborative DEI initiatives.
Number of employees and volunteers with **diverse backgrounds** has increased.
**Safer spaces** are created through diverse tools (e.g. equality plans).
**Individual needs** are increasingly supported (e.g. mental health, correct pronouns).
Decisions are increasingly based on **researched data** instead of assumptions.
**Education** about DEI and game literacy has increased.
**Best practices and information** are freely shared between organizations.
**Enthusiastic and open community** lowers barriers to participate.

### POSITIVE SOCIETAL CHANGE OVER TIME.

Game culture has become more widely **accepted and supported in society**.
**Events implement change** by increasing awareness and action.
**Attitudes have changed** positively: DEI challenges are talked about more openly and they are intervened with more often.

## CHALLENGES

### DIVERSITY IS STUCK ON GENDER.

**Diversity is restricted to gender**. Diversity outside of the male-female gender binary (e.g. neurodiversity, ethnicity) is often overlooked.
**Assumptions** about women's and disabled people's preferences block inclusion.
**Segregated activities**, e.g. women's esports teams, uphold stereotypes.

### STRUCTURAL ISSUES HINDER LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT.

Lack of **a shared game culture strategy** hinders sustainable DEI development.
**Inadequate financial support** channels for long-term DEI development.
**Collaboration is difficult** especially between public and private sectors.
**Physical gaming spaces are limited**, and access is heavily controlled.
Difficulties with **reaching and engaging diverse participants** in game activities.
Complications in planning the **inclusion of international and remote employees**.
**Information accessibility** simultaneously both online and offline.
**Terminology** is very specific, varies by language, and changes over time.
**Exploitative work practices** affecting entrepreneurs and employees of international companies.
**Ineffective DEI plans, metrics and actions** which disregard actual needs.
**Professionals lack skills** that support DEI work.

### SOCIETAL NORMS BLOCK DEI IMPLEMENTATION.

DEI work is often **unpaid, volunteer-based** and done by a single person.
**People with power** misuse their status to exclude and exploit others.
**Global differences** in values and practices hinder collaborative DEI development.
An "**illusion of equal society**" hides problems instead of addressing them.
Game culture's **toxicity and community pressure** affects behaviour and health.

## SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

### EDUCATION.

**Increasing game literacy education** for people of all ages and backgrounds.
**Educating professionals** about accessibility and inclusive practices.
Creating **specialized DEI content**, e.g. game accessibility reviews and guides.

### LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT.

**National game culture strategy** to support sustainable development across sectors.
Creating **minimum requirements for DEI**, e.g. accessibility options in games.
**Diversifying content** with diverse speakers, game genres, and game-adjacent activities.
Influential organizations and majority groups **openly develop and share** DEI initiatives.

### SHARING RESOURCES.

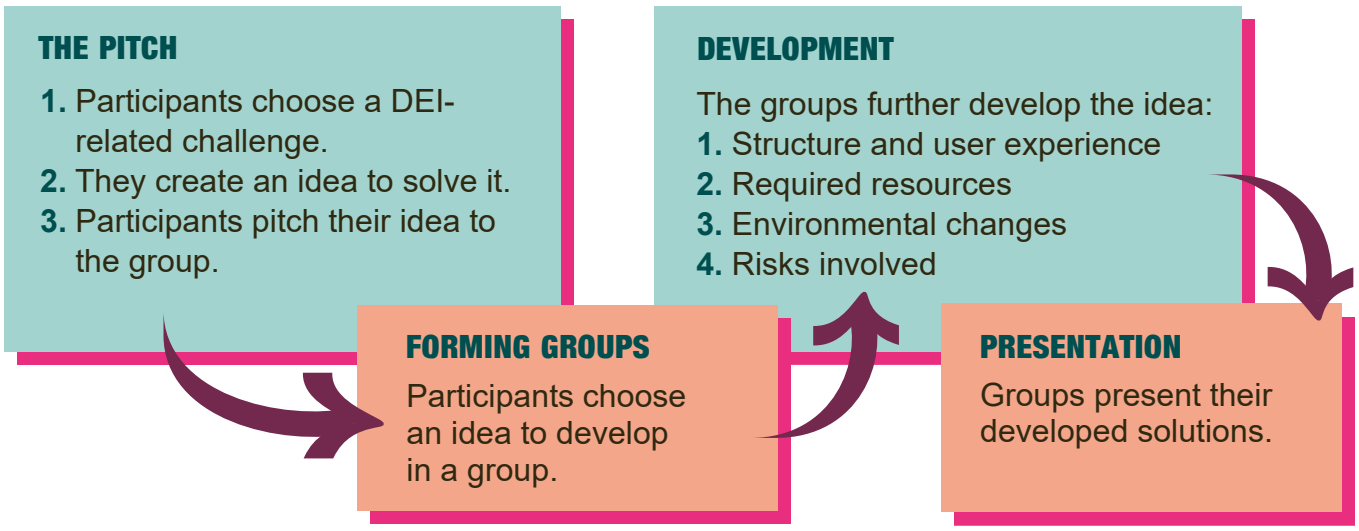
Gathering and sharing **openly available researched data** for DEI development.
Founding **public, shared gaming spaces** similarly to public libraries or sports facilities.
**Increasing and clarifying funding**, e.g. public subsidies and bonuses for DEI initiatives.
**Increasing open collaboration across sectors and organizations.**

# DEI Jam as a Tool for Developing Game Cultural Sustainability

Kalle Laakso

**During the project, we developed the DEI Jam tool for a broad range of game cultural actors.** The DEI Jam was inspired by game jams, an established format of game making. Game jams are events where a group comes up with an idea for a game and creates it in a limited timeframe. The research on game jams has indicated their usefulness as a pedagogical tool but also as a way to facilitate societal discussion and inclusion. Game jams bring people together, and they also create and share information. These are some of the benefits we sought when creating the DEI Jam.

## THE DEI JAM PROCESS




## PILOTING THE DEI JAM

The DEI Jam was tested in three different environments, and six different solutions were created. The jams were tested with participants from game cultural organizations, with game event organization volunteers, and in a game-related youth center. The solutions created dealt with game education, lack of representation, tackling toxic behavior, and food equity. The solutions differed greatly depending on the participants' backgrounds and interests.

The first jam had participants with varied backgrounds in established organizations. Their solutions were on a large scale and depended on external funding. The second jam's participants were all volunteers at a gaming event organization. They developed a solution focused on highlighting the diversity of the event's organizers to attract more diverse people as participants. The youth participating in organized gaming activities wanted to tackle problematic gaming behavior and develop ways to serve affordable food at their youth center.

All DEI Jam participants shared the goal of improving DEI in game cultures. There was noticeable interest in the jam among game cultural organizations, and the events were successful in bringing people from different backgrounds with diverse ideas together. In the jams with participants from a single organization, the solutions created were narrower and more easily applicable. On the other hand, the first jam and its great variety of participants helped to identify the sections of game culture where DEI would be most needed and what are currently considered as the most significant DEI challenges.

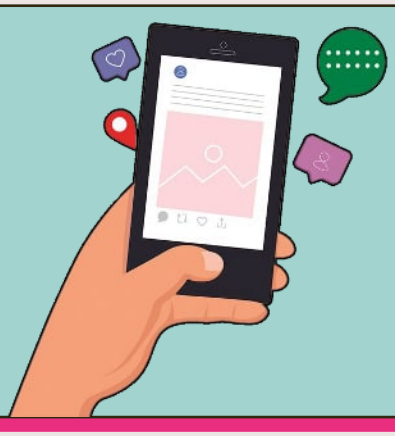
## DEI JAM ASSIGNMENTS

*The Jam assignments were created by Kalle Laakso and Essi Taino. Design Kit was used for development: https://www.designkit.org*

### OUTPUTS

**The components of the solution and what experience they create.**

**Answer these questions:**
What format is it? *A book, a lesson, a website....*
What kind of content does it have?
What kind of experience does it create for the user?



### INPUTS

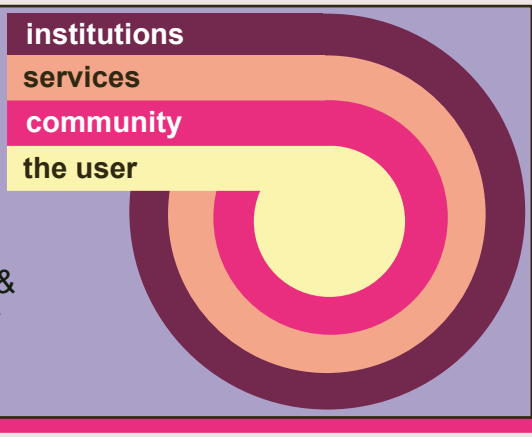
**An overview of needed resources.**

**Make a shopping list:**
**Item name**: *Employees, facilities, materials, etc.*
**Price:** *A rough estimate of their cost.*
**Store**: *Where can you obtain it?*


### OUTCOMES

**What conditions are required for the solution to have the desired impact?**

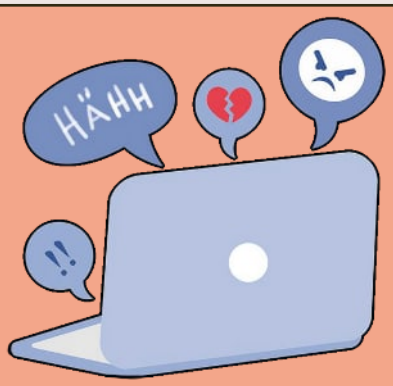
Think of the conditions on different levels of society: institutions (e.g. the government), services (private & public), community (groups of people), and the user (individual).



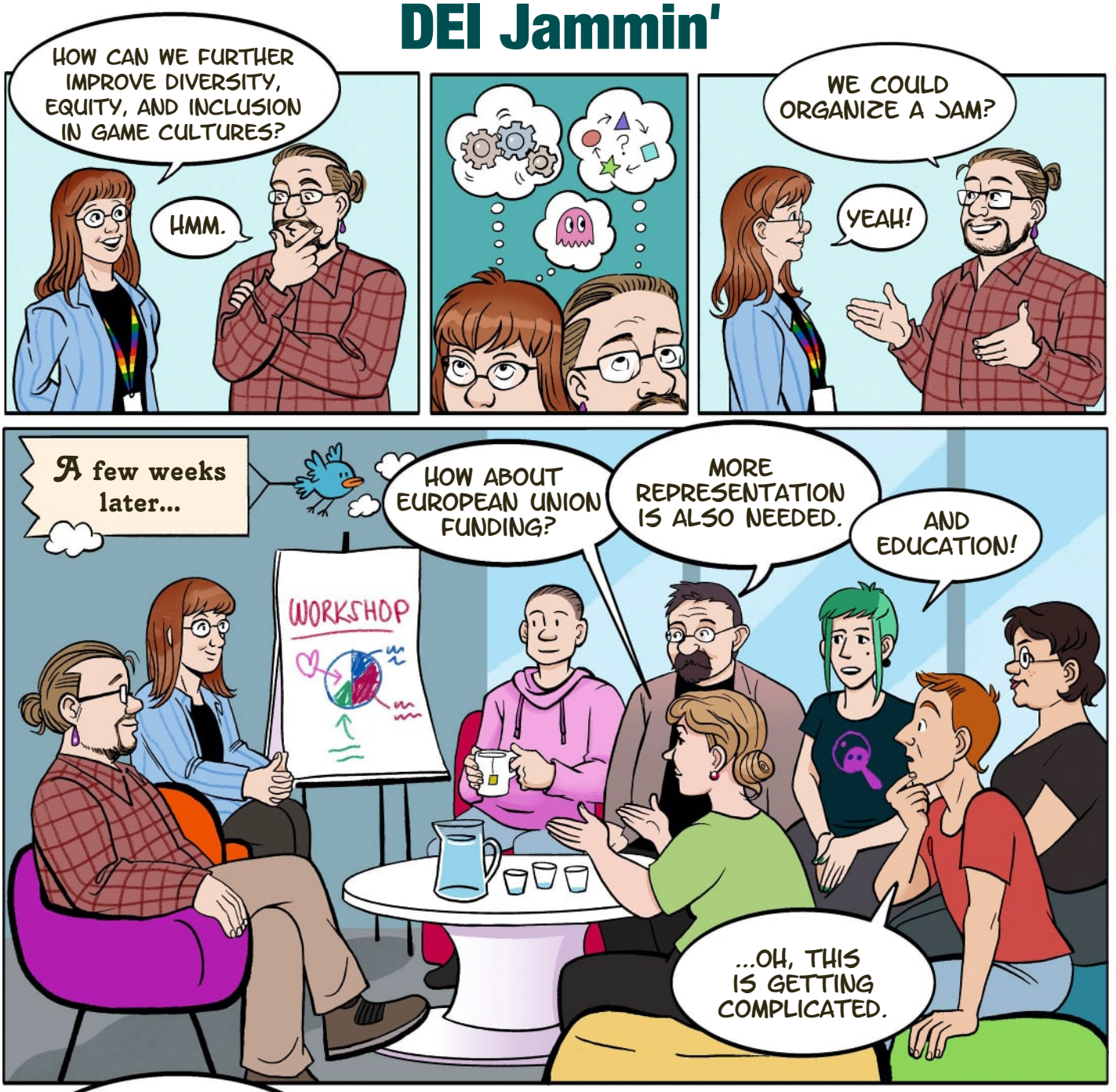

### RISKS

**Think of the solution like a hero's journey, and the risks as challenges along the way.**

What risks are there before setting off on the journey? What monsters might you encounter during implementation? Is there something that can hinder growth and lasting change?



# DEI Jammin'


HOW CAN WE FURTHER IMPROVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN GAME CULTURES?
HMM.
WE COULD ORGANIZE A JAM?
YEAH!
A few weeks later...
HOW ABOUT EUROPEAN UNION FUNDING?
MORE REPRESENTATION IS ALSO NEEDED.
AND EDUCATION!
WORKSHOP
...OH, THIS IS GETTING COMPLICATED.
WE COULD START BY SHARING MORE PHOTOS OF OUR ORGANIZERS. THERE IS SO MUCH DIVERSITY IN OUR GROUP!
YEAH!
I LIKE THIS IDEA!
YESSS!
KUBE
FLOB


"Some time later..."

DIFFERENT OPERATORS LOCATE PROBLEMS IN DIFFERENT PLACES AND THE SOLUTIONS ARE VERY DIVERSE.

THE MORE ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONS WANT TO BUILD ON TOP OF EXISTING OPERATIONS, WHILE THE YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO CHANGE HOW THINGS ARE DONE.

EVERYONE WAS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING DEI AND THE JAMS SUCCEEDED IN BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER FOR THAT PURPOSE.

THE TOXICITY IN GAME CULTURE WAS SEEN ON MANY LEVELS AND ESPECIALLY THE YOUNG PEOPLE WANTED TO DISCOURAGE RAGE-BEHAVIOUR IN GAMING SITUATIONS TO CREATE A BETTER ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL.

INCREASING REPRESENTATION AND GAME LITERACY EDUCATION IS TALKED ABOUT A LOT. THE PARTICIPANTS WANT TO BRING GAME LITERACY EDUCATION TO SCHOOLS AND INTO THE GAMES INDUSTRY. DEVELOPING DEI PRACTICES IS DEEMED IMPORTANT AND THERE IS STRONG SUPPORT FOR IT.

# Social Safety Plan

Essi Taino

**In the workshops organized by PEGASUS, various DEI plans, minimum requirements, and first aid for social safety were brought up several times.** Using these discussions as a base, we formed an outline for a Social Safety Plan. It is influenced by existing physical safety plans for workplaces required by Finnish legislation and can be integrated into them or used separately. The plan clarifies personnel roles, responsibilities, and guidelines for ensuring everyone's social safety.

Gaming activity participants use different platforms and services simultaneously (e.g. Discord, social media platforms, Steam, game's internal interface), and game activity organizers cannot realistically be responsible for all of them. However, organizers have a responsibility to develop internal processes and safeguard their participants and personnel in community spaces directly under their own control. A Social Safety Plan helps with clarifying processes and communicating this information across the organization.

## WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A SOCIAL SAFETY PLAN?

### 1: THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Even if gaming activity organizers intend to create inclusive and safer services, it is not obvious to participants without continuous and clear communication. A Code of Conduct and repercussions for breaking it should always be a part of your overall social safety design, and it should be outlined in the Social Safety Plan.

The Code communicates to everyone what behavior is allowed and what are the terms for participation. An accessible and enforced Code of Conduct prevents unwanted behavior and supports intervening in harassment. It should be visible on the website, communication platform (e.g. Discord, Slack), and any physical spaces used by the activity.

### 2: MAPPING RISKS

The safety of a community affects its well-being and longevity. Negligence or disregard for social safety can cause irreparable harm through the loss of key people, damage to public image, financial losses, or even felony charges. Risks to the gaming activity's social safety should be pre-emptively mapped and planned for. These plans should be included in the Social Safety Plan.

### 3: REPORTING AND THE CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY

Situations affecting social safety require clear and accessible reporting systems, a plan of action, and a chain of responsibility. There should be internal instructions for personnel and a separate external version for activity participants. Having clear instructions enables quick intervention, carries information to relevant people, and allows for secure handling of personal information in compliance with local privacy legislation. It also mitigates harmful gossip and the spread of wrong information.

The reporting systems, a plan of action, and the chain of responsibility are written out in the Social Safety Plan. All personnel are informed about the contents and responsibilities are discussed together.

The organizer is responsible for ensuring that the instructions are followed. Clients and participants can be informed about how to report social safety issues through e.g. social media, websites, info screens, posters, or when giving out other information in event speeches.

## COMMUNICATING VALUES THROUGH A SOCIAL SAFETY PLAN

Matters regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion in an organization may bring to light conflicting viewpoints between personnel or participants. Organizers should be prepared to discuss them together while going through the Social Safety Plan. It is important to emphasize that while everyone is allowed to have their own private opinions, they must comply with the organization's values when on duty or otherwise representing the organization. Creating a Social Safety Plan and communicating about it is a clear expression of the organization's commitment to DEI.

**The Social Safety Plan is most effective for single-time activities, such as gaming events, to better deal with situational risks and needs. If the activities are constant and long-term, such as a physical gaming space or a Discord community, we recommend making a full Equity and Equality Plan incorporating a DEI survey.**

### EXAMPLES OF RISKS TO CONSIDER:

**F**orms of radicalization and extremism in game communities.

**D**isregarding age ratings in professional gaming activities, such as showing PEGI 18 games in a location with underage people.

**P**ublic oversharing of extreme mental health crises, such as suicidal ideation or self-harm.

**T**hreatening or going through with sharing the private information of a member of the community without their consent.

**U**nwanted and inappropriate comments about physical appearance, bodies, or gender.

**A** troll raid on an online community.

**O**ther game cultural forms of harassment, discrimination, or inappropriate behavior.

# Template: Social Safety Plan

This template can be used to develop a plan for the needs of your community.

## BASIC INFORMATION

| | |
|---|---|
| Activity name: | |
| Time: | |
| Place: | |
| Organizer's name and contact information: | |
| DEI contact person's information: | |
| Safety personnel: | Include a brief overview of personnel and roles who are responsible for the overall safety of the activity. |
| Other safety-related plans: | A link or information on where to find them. |
| General description of any special needs to consider: | |

## CODE OF CONDUCT

Location of the Code of Conduct:

Date of when it was updated:

Contact person:

## POSSIBLE RISKS AND PRE-EMPTIVE MEASURES

| | |
|---|---|
| The risk | EXAMPLE: Sexual, racist or other harassment in an online community (e.g. Discord) |
| Possible causes | - A troll attack<br>- Young age of participant<br>- Weak social skills<br>- A misunderstanding<br>- An attempt to gain power and validation from others<br>- An overstimulated mental state which causes an emotional outburst<br>- Ingrained bigotry |

| | |
|---|---|
| Pre-emptive measures | - Moderators take care of the basic situations. A specialized person in charge (such as a Code of Conduct contact person) handles the unclear or difficult cases.<br>- Accepting the community's Code of Conduct upon joining the server.<br>- The Code of Conduct and repercussions for breaking it are easily located and accessible to all.<br>- Clear reporting channels.<br>- Moderators are trained to handle harassment situations.<br>- Clear instructions for moderators on the usual repercussions for bad behaviour.<br>- Moderators have peer-support chats where they can discuss difficult situations together.<br>- If needed, clear instructions and contact details for when to report situations to the authorities (police, social work, etc). In Finland, many authorities can also be consulted for free without filing a report. |
| Division of responsibilities | Name and contact detail of person responsible for developing these measures, and the names of other related personnel (moderators, Code of Conduct contact person, etc) |

| | |
|---|---|
| The risk | |
| Possible causes | |
| Pre-emptive measures | |
| Division of responsibilities | |

## HARASSMENT FIRST AID MEASURES

| | |
|---|---|
| Primary contact person: | |
| Personnel roles responsible for mitigating harassment: | General information about the roles and available personnel who handle harassment cases at different levels, e.g. executives, managers, community managers, moderators. |
| Description of the harassment case process: | General description of the process for dealing with harassment, including repercussions. |

## CHAIN OF RESPONSIBILITY AND PROCEDURES FOR HARASSMENT

| Harasser ➡ Victim | Reporting system | Procedure |
|---|---|---|
| Participant/attendee ➡ Another participant | contact person<br>AND/OR<br>link to reporting form | An overview of the procedure starting from the report to possible repercussions, and what to do after the case has been handled. |
| Personnel ➡ Participant or personnel | contact person<br>AND/OR<br>link to reporting form | |
| Management ➡ Personnel or another manager | contact person<br>AND/OR<br>link to reporting form | |

**Contacting authorities:** Procedures for situations that are severe enough to need reporting to the authorities.

**Informing participants:** Procedures for when and how to inform participants in situations where harassment becomes public, e.g. if it's publicized on social media or has happened in public, or if it happens in another setting where further informing is needed.

**Harassment case information storage and handling:** Procedures for how personal information is stored and handled internally during the process, along with when and where it is destroyed after handling. Harassment situations often contain very sensitive information and the handling of it must follow local legislation.

## PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY

| Accommodation | How many | Location |
|---|---|---|
| A quiet room | | |
| Accessible entrance | | |
| Accessible toilet | | |
| ... etc | | |
| | | |

## PERSONNEL AND PARTICIPANT ORIENTATION

**Orientation of personnel:**
A description of how personnel is informed about the contents of the Social Safety Plan.

**Informing participants:**
A description of how participants are informed about social safety (e.g. informing through the website, social media, information screens, posters).


PEGASUS