ARTICLE

Enhancing Discoverability

Transitioning a Board Game Collection from a LibGuide to a CollectionBuilder Site

Hanwen Dong, Perri Moreno, Tyler Rodrigues, and Julia Stone

ABSTRACT

As board game collections continue to grow in popularity at academic institutions, the University of Idaho Library wanted to establish an accessible and easy-to-use discovery tool for its physical game collection. At the collections' origins, a LibGuide was created by librarians for this purpose, but as the collection records continued to grow into the triple digits, something more adaptable and customizable was necessary. In the summer of 2023, a team of librarians came together to build a custom site to house the game collection's information using CollectionBuilder, an open-source framework for digital collections and exhibits websites that are driven by metadata and powered by modern static web technology. Creating this site came with unique challenges and considerations specific to the University of Idaho Library's needs in displaying their board games. CollectionBuilder's ability to support iterative and agile development, ample instructional documentation, and seemingly endless customizations makes it a suitable solution for a growing and changing collection discovery tool.

INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries have long been much more than a warehouse of dusty tomes and article databases. As early as 1945, board games were incorporated into library services and collections that included special collections, curricula support, and community building.[1] Among the libraries that maintain board game collections, the number of games in each collection can range from less than a dozen to more than a thousand.[2] Studies reported that a curated board game collection with institutional support can benefit the campus community in various ways, such as enhancing students' social, information literacy, problem-solving, and other skills;[3] increasing students' engagement with other students, faculty, and the library;[4] and providing opportunities for gamification and pedagogical and curricula integration.[5] In an effort to stimulate students' creativity and connection, the University of Idaho Library started a board games collection in January of 2019.

Each year, the University of Idaho Library's board game collection grows by more than 15 new games. In addition to the games being added into the library catalog, prior to the spring of 2023, information about each game was included in a LibGuide in an effort to share information relevant to helping patrons select the best game to suit their interests in a digital format. As the collection grew into triple-digit numbers, it soon became apparent that a LibGuide would be an ineffective and cumbersome way to share information about the collection. Having about 110 board games in the current collection to date, the Library needed something more fluid and easier to maintain.

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Accordingly, a team of several librarians decided to transition the digital board game collection information to a CollectionBuilder website due to the tool's functionality. CollectionBuilder is an open-source framework for creating digital collection and exhibit websites driven by metadata and powered by static web technology. Starting in the spring of 2023, an interdepartmental team was assembled to begin this transition and investigate how other institutions physically and digitally handle their board game collections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discovery Systems

Two common discovery systems for board games are physical shelves and library catalogs. First, given the uniqueness of board game collections compared to other types of traditional library materials, patrons can easily discover board games by browsing physical shelves, especially if the shelves are dedicated to storing and displaying board games. Since patrons may not always be searching for a particular game to play or the existence of the collection, it is important to place the collection in a visible space where they can easily access and browse.[6]

The online public access catalog, or library catalog, is another common discovery system besides physical shelves. Similar to searching for any library materials, patrons can search the library catalog using keywords and filters to narrow their search results to find specific titles. Taking a look at the University of North Texas as an example, patrons can use the library catalog to search for titles and filter games by author or contributor, title or series, genre, and more.[7] But standard bibliographic records may not be sufficient for describing games. For board games, it is recommended to include game-specific metadata fields such as player count, recommended age, and playing time in the cataloging records.[8]

However, a 2017 survey revealed that among the 94 libraries that maintained a tabletop game collection, 51% did not create any bibliographic records.[9] Various challenges contribute to a lack of records for board games. These challenges include library technical services staff's unfamiliarity with board games, understaffing, difficulty with creating original records due to games' complexity, and a lack of (access to) bibliographical records from other institutions and instructions from the Library of Congress.[10] While it is beneficial for patrons to be able to search for board games using library catalogs, technical barriers prevent many libraries from creating bibliographic records for board games effectively. For instance, not only is creating custom records complicated and laborious, but most standard bibliographic interfaces are not well-designed to use the custom records.

Building a Digital Collection

Given the limitations of library catalogs in which board-game-specific facets (e.g., recommended age, playing time, and number of players) can be difficult or time-consuming to implement, building a digital collection or digital library is an alternative solution to enhance the discoverability of game collections. The digital collections that libraries build can vary by local practices. For example, Landman Library at Arcadia University has its games listed on the website with individual titles linking out to BoardGameGeek.com, a popular site that covers information related to board games.[11] Princeton University Library uses Springshare's LibCal, where patrons can browse the availability of board games in the collection and add individual titles to their cart for checkout.[12] New York University's Game Center Open Library maintains its game collection of over 600 titles on a spreadsheet—searchable using the web browser's search function—that contains metadata information including title, genre, developer, publisher, release date, number of players, and description.[13]

In general, building a digital collection may require careful consideration for planning, resources, and implementation. First, having a rationale for creating a new digital collection is necessary. For example, if the existing collection is not meeting users' needs, creating or migrating to a new digital collection would enhance the usability of the existing collection.[14] Any tools or systems involved may require capital investment and dedicated staffing time, so the pros and cons of using commercial versus in-house technology should be evaluated. In addition, the process of building a digital collection can take a collaborative approach—from establishing workflows, creating metadata, prototyping, and changing the prototype site based on internal or external feedback.[15] Lastly, when determining future product development features and capabilities, the team should consider the users' needs and the long-term sustainability of the collection in terms of ongoing maintenance.

BACKGROUND

The original board game LibGuide, which the University of Idaho created to house the digital collection, was adapted from the LibGuide created by Florida State College at Jacksonville.[16] On the LibGuide, each game had its own page where it contained an image of the game, a description, player count, appropriate length of play, a link to the catalog listing, information about the theme and mechanics, a link to the rules, and a how-to-play video. The guide also contained a link to send a game recommendation, advertised the library-sponsored board game events, information about modern board games, campus and local community groups related to board games, and library materials about board games.

Due to its relation to the highly popular board game collection in addition to its hosting information about board game events, the Board Game LibGuide saw high usage. A usage statistics report generated via Springshare LibGuides demonstrates that the Board Game LibGuide experienced a total of 22,762 views over the course of the guide's existence, starting in December 2018 through December 2023 (see Figure 1). These view statistics placed the Board Games LibGuide as the second most viewed LibGuide at the University of Idaho, outpacing guides in publication far longer. Circulation statistics show that between 2019 and 2023, games were checked out an average of 434 times each year and renewed 50 times.

As more games were added to the collection each year, the LibGuide's structure had to be rearranged to accommodate them. In the LibGuide, games were arranged alphabetically in groups, beginning with two groups and increasing gradually to four as the number of games increased. With each addition of a game, groups had to be rearranged; as the groups grew, the drop-down menu would extend past the visible screen size on some devices (see Figure 2). After adding the new games purchased during 2022–2023, the team members decided that the LibGuide was no longer manageable with the large number of games listed and began discussing alternative methods for sharing the collection, such as CollectionBuilder.

Several aspects of CollectionBuilder seemed more suitable than LibGuides for sharing the board game collection. The search function in CollectionBuilder site allows users to search all aspects of the record to find a game that matches their needs. Additionally, CollectionBuilder allows for more customization options, such as modifying the layout of the home page and item pages. CollectionBuilder's built-in features like adaptable browse cards and word clouds are also beneficial for discoverability. Unlike LibGuides, CollectionBuilder allows for many interactive browsing options, such as concurrent tagging systems, which make the collection filterable by customized criteria.

Figure 1. The graph displays the number of pageviews that the Board Games LibGuide received each year from 2018 through 2023 according to the usage statistics provided by Springshare. The guide started to be advertised to patrons in spring 2019 and promotion ceased after it was unpublished in fall 2023.

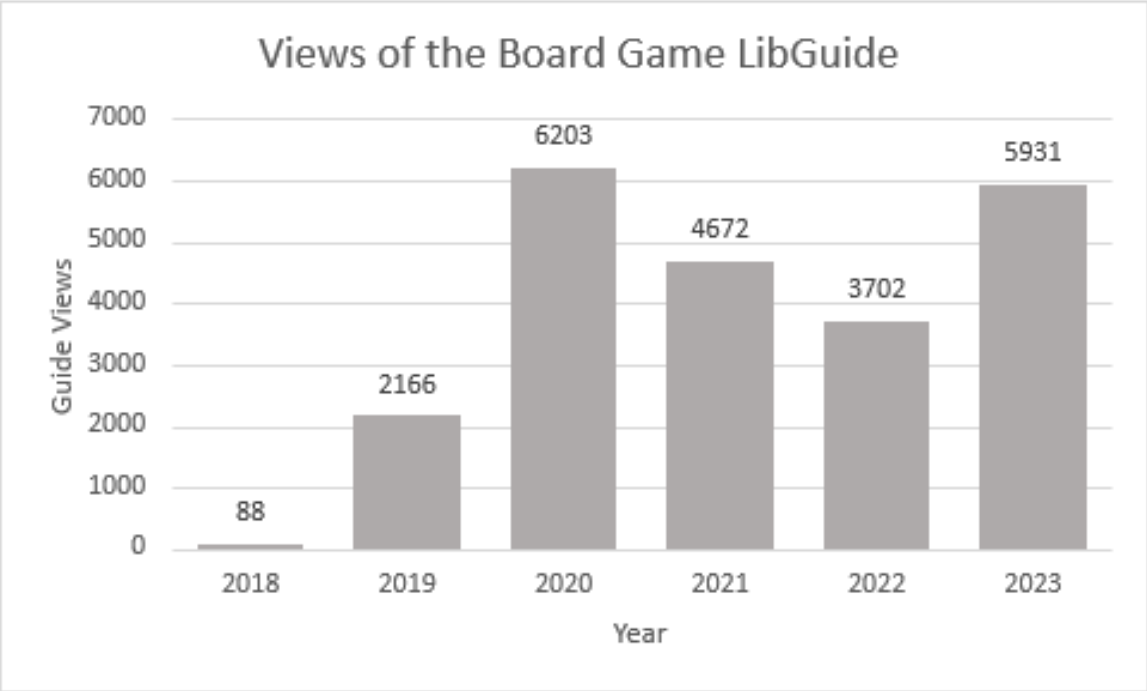
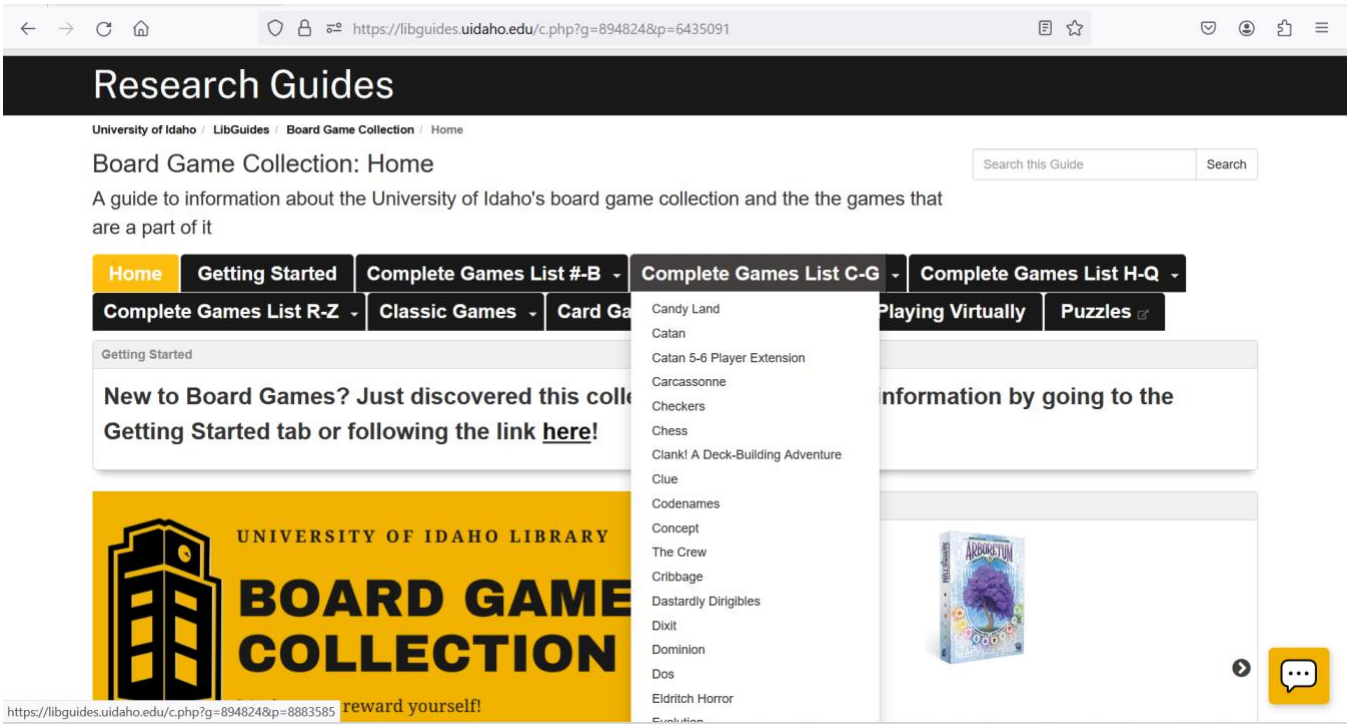


Figure 2. A screenshot of the Board Games Collection LibGuide. It shows a dropdown menu that extends below the edge of the computer screen.



Maintaining the online collection also would be easier to do using CollectionBuilder. Librarians would no longer have to rearrange the structure of dropdown menus to accommodate a growing collection of games since the process of adding a new game simply involves updating a Google Sheet of metadata. As the University of Idaho Library already utilizes other customized versions of the CollectionBuilder template to create its digital collection websites, the process for creating the board game digital collection site was straightforward and agile. CollectionBuilder supports agile and iterative development, which enables the project team to prototype ideas rapidly, get feedback, and keep iterating and improving the site in small steps.

CASE STUDY

Project Planning

Project Team

The project team consisted of the University of Idaho Library's instructional technology librarian, digital scholarship librarian, digital infrastructure librarian, reference and instruction librarian, and the newly hired student engagement librarian. In terms of roles and responsibilities, the instructional technology librarian and reference and instruction librarian took the lead on metadata creation and project planning. The digital infrastructure librarian built the site and provided technical support alongside the digital scholarship librarian, while the student engagement librarian assisted with planning for the continued maintenance and promotion of the collection.

Collaboration and Meetings

The team members collaborated with one another via email, Zoom meetings, and a shared OneDrive folder with meeting notes and agendas. Collaborative documents allowed the team to keep track of action items, goals, and ideas for customizing the digital collection site. It was important for all members of the project team to have input on the overall look and functionality of the site; therefore, before building the site prototype, the team met to discuss the desired layout and features, and which board game images to use for the collection.

Building the Site

Metadata

The metadata used to build the CollectionBuilder site came from the Board Games Collection LibGuide. The digital infrastructure librarian used OpenRefine to web scrape the content from the LibGuide and parse it into structured spreadsheet data. This important step transitioned our data from unstructured data (i.e., arbitrary web pages in LibGuides) to structured data (i.e., a spreadsheet with standardized metadata fields), which will enhance the project's sustainability, consistency, and usability as the board game collection continues to grow.

Next, the structured spreadsheet data was transferred to a collaborative Google Sheet. Google Sheets was selected as the metadata platform because Microsoft Excel cannot correctly export a CSV for use with CollectionBuilder as it has issues with scrambling UTF-8 encoding. Another benefit of working on the metadata in Google Sheets is that it offers the team access to a useful, built-in version control function. Google Sheets automatically tracks changes made to the spreadsheet and allows users to revert to previous versions if needed.

Using CollectionBuilder also allowed the team to customize the metadata fields to fit the needs of the board game collection. Because the LibGuide structure was designed around book materials, the reference and instruction librarian adjusted field names in the Google Sheet to better describe the collection. This included changing the "author" field to "designer" and adding fields that did

not exist in the LibGuide, such as awards, recommended player count, recommended player age, and play time. Additional technical metadata fields, such as fields for small and thumbnail images, were added to enable the CollectionBuilder site to build and function properly.

With the goal of making the CollectionBuilder site an interactive way for patrons to interface with the board games, the fields for awards, play time, and player count were each given additional fields by the reference and instruction librarian to allow for further breakdown of the categories. An additional field was added for awards: one containing the award title and the year it was awarded, the other the name of the award without the year. The award field with the title and the year is included on the item record webpage, while the award name without the year is included on a word cloud page to give the users the ability to filter the collection by winners of specific awards.

A field for recommended player count was added to supplement the player count range. For the playing time metadata field, four true/false columns were created to designate the range of the game's play time: games that take less than a half hour, a half hour to an hour, one to two hours, and more than two hours to play. Having this metadata available sets the groundwork for the team to create a sorting feature for users to find games with specific play time ranges. To ensure consistency and enhance usability of the metadata, the reference and instruction librarian cleaned and standardized the metadata using OpenRefine.

Site Prototype

The digital infrastructure librarian built the site prototype for the board game collection by creating a new repository in the University of Idaho Library's GitHub organization. Building digital collection sites within the library's GitHub organization account allows for many collaborators to make changes via their individual GitHub accounts. Every time a collaborator commits a change to the repository, such as adding files or editing code, GitHub tracks these changes using the version control system, Git. This allows everyone on the project team to easily view the history of changes made to the site.

To build the prototype site, the Google Sheet of metadata was downloaded as a CSV file and added to the repository. For the initial draft of the site, the team decided they would use the same board game images used in the LibGuide to save time. The metadata included external links to the board game images pulled from the LibGuide, so no image files needed to be added to the repository. Additionally, site configuration files and layout templates for the item pages and homepage were edited to reflect the customizations and features discussed at the site prototype planning meeting.

The board game site prototype featured separate word cloud pages for theme, mechanics, and awards. The About page included text providing context about the collection based on written content from the original board game collection LibGuide. Each item page included a description underneath the image of the game and metadata about the game on the right side. An Awards and Resources section was included at the bottom section of each item page with a list of the awards the game has won, separated by semicolons. In that same bottom section, supplemental videos on how to play the game were embedded, as well as buttons linking to the catalog record, more information about the game, and the rules.

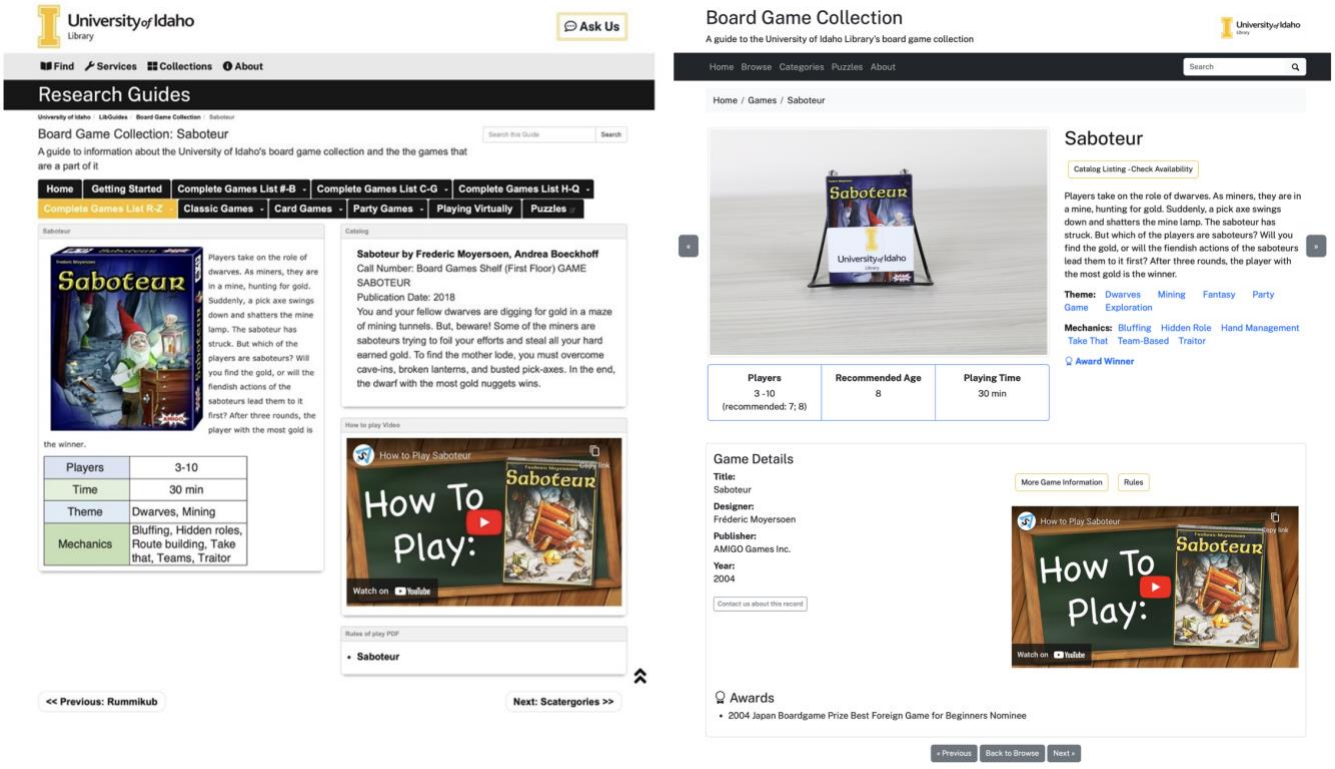
Customizations

Intended to be a starting point for brainstorming additional customizations and features to add, the site prototype helped the project team pinpoint areas for improvement. When discussing the site prototype, the team noted that the lists of awards were too prominently featured on the item

pages and needed to be moved to avoid overwhelming the user with text. In addition, there was inconsistency in the board game images featured in the collection: some images were low quality and small, while others were high quality and large. To address issues concerning game awards, the team changed the awards list to be a bulleted list for easier readability and moved it to the bottom of the item page to help streamline the content. In addition, text reading "Award Winner" alongside a ribbon icon will display for all games that have a value of "true" in the award_winner metadata field. When a user clicks on the "Award Winner" hyperlink at the top of the item page, the page automatically scrolls to the awards list at the bottom of the item page.

The team also worked to make the board game images more consistent. The instructional technology librarian coordinated with the digital labs manager to have student workers take high resolution photos of the board games in the collection. After the photos were taken, the digital infrastructure librarian generated small and thumbnail image derivatives of these board game photos and then uploaded the files to the library's server. These new images were then linked to from the metadata spreadsheet to enable them to appear on the site. Additionally, a quality control form was sent to the library's digital collections team to gather more feedback on the board game collection site from other library staff. This workflow enabled the team to collect valuable feedback on the site to make effective modifications and adjustments, such as moving the theme, mechanics, and awards word clouds to one page called "Categories" and moving the catalog listing button higher on the item pages for better visibility. More colors were added to make the browsing buttons on the home page and the "Categories" word cloud page stand out more. See Figure 3 for a comparison of the old and new designs.

Figure 3. On the left is a screenshot of an item page from the Board Game LibGuide. On the right is a screenshot of the same game's item page on the Board Game CollectionBuilder site.



Lessons Learned and Addressing Challenges

Images and Copyright

The project team faced some challenges as they migrated the board game collection from a LibGuide to a CollectionBuilder site. One of the main challenges involved abiding by copyright standards and keeping the style of the images consistent throughout the digital collection. To ensure the project followed copyright guidelines, the team decided it was best to take photographs of each game in the collection despite the additional labor and time this would require for maintaining the collection. The instructional technology librarian created a best practices document for taking photographs of the games collection so student workers and other staff members would also be able to contribute to this work, while keeping the images consistent and cohesive in the collection. For example, the document provided both good and bad examples of images; bad images may include off-centered game placement, part of the game box out of the image frame, or a dark image.

File Naming and Missing Metadata

The process of metadata cleanup and refinement was another difficulty the team learned to navigate. Image file names for the collection needed to abide by the correct file naming conventions for the web to avoid issues with the site. Specifically, filenames needed to be all lowercase unique strings with no spaces or special characters, except for underscores. The digital infrastructure librarian ran a script to remove spaces in existing filenames, which helped to speed up the file cleanup process. Additionally, some metadata was missing or was unable to be transferred from the LibGuide. It was time consuming and challenging for the team to fill in missing metadata for new fields due to the large size of the collection. Information for fields that were missing data was collected from the game boxes, rulebooks, and boardgamegeek.com.

Final Site

The final site is still a work in progress, but it has many advantages when compared to the previous board game collection LibGuide. Instead of needing to click on a game title from a dropdown listing (e.g., “Complete games list R–Z”) to view a game’s details, users now have an interactive browse page featuring all the games in the collection to scroll through. The browse card buttons on this page allow users to sort and browse games by theme and game mechanics. Users can also use the word cloud pages to browse games by theme, game mechanics, and awards.

Building upon this enhancement in item discoverability, the search box on the CollectionBuilder site is more powerful and flexible than the search function in LibGuides, allowing search functionality across relevant metadata fields in item records. The digital scholarship librarian configured the search function in the board game collection site to search across multiple fields, including title, description, mechanics, theme, awards, year, designer, and publisher.

The flexibility and modularity of the CollectionBuilder framework facilitates the creation of new customizations and allows for the implementation and modification of new and existing features beyond what LibGuides can offer for a digital collection site. As the University of Idaho Library’s collection of games grows and new needs develop, the new CollectionBuilder digital collection site can evolve accordingly through iteratively adding new metadata fields, pages, and browsing options.

DISCUSSION

Ongoing Edits and Challenges

In the short time between starting the migration to CollectionBuilder and launching the site, around eight months, several problems were identified. Link rot for videos explaining game instructions were discovered and will need to be updated. This also led to the necessity for establishing an audit or maintenance schedule for the site—a way to ensure information remains accurate and the state of the physical item matches its digital representation. Personnel changes highlighted the necessity for creating a data dictionary for the site's metadata. This will ensure that data is harvested uniformly, and clear communication of style and content are maintained.

Engagement and Outreach

The board game collection continues to see steady use across campus departments and student populations, both internal and external to the library. The new CollectionBuilder site will aid in the collection's discoverability and ease of use for students trying to find and check out games. The new site also serves as a helpful tool to find holes in the collection by play mechanic, length of play, or number of players, allowing for more accurate collection development and purchase decision making. Additionally, future features will continue to streamline the game browsing experience allowing the collection wider use.

Future Considerations

As with all ongoing projects, there are areas the team would like to continue to grow and develop. One feature that they would like to add to this CollectionBuilder instance is an advanced multifaceted search with options to filter by a combination of mechanics, themes, playing time, number of players, etc. There still is some information and data to be migrated and incorporated from the old LibGuide to the new site as well, such as how to play games virtually and getting started resources. Additionally, the team would like to add a metadata field to include the artist information for game artwork. One of the benefits of the CollectionBuilder framework is its adaptability and ease of maintenance. When new ideas arise, they are easy to implement and roll out.

CONCLUSION

The board game collection continues to be a focal point for University of Idaho students. It serves as a cornerstone in the Library's student engagement initiatives, striving to find new and innovative ways to meet students' needs. As of now, the plan is for the collection to maintain its current growth rate, highlighting the necessity of a flexible collection discovery tool like CollectionBuilder. CollectionBuilder is meant to serve as open-source minimal infrastructure platform that anyone can implement and modify for their own use. The board game digital collection team hopes to have highlighted the adaptability of CollectionBuilder through this case study and motivate other librarians to be empowered to use this tool for their own digital collections.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO LIBRARY'S DIGITAL BOARD GAME COLLECTION RESOURCES

The following resources were used to create the University of Idaho's Digital Board Game Collection.

Board Game Collection Code Repository: https://github.com/uidaholib/games_source.

- The Board Game Collection code repository was created using the CollectionBuilder-CSV template. CollectionBuilder code is licensed under MIT. This license does not include external dependencies included in the assets/lib directory, which are covered by their individual licenses.

Board Game Digital Collection site: https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/games/

Board Game Metadata Template (Google Sheets): https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UAfYrc0uSnYtZGPBRdbGxSmhnzsMDUx3ophVLw3HvmA/edit?usp=sharingThe University of Idaho Board Game Digital Collection site and the Board Game Metadata Template are licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY SA 4.0).

APPENDIX B: COLLECTIONBUILDER RESOURCES

The following resources are intended to help new users learn about CollectionBuilder and how to use it for their projects.

Documentation and Project Examples
CollectionBuilder project site: https://collectionbuilder.github.io/

- Project site for CollectionBuilder, featuring information about templates, tutorials, and community initiatives, as well as the CB Blog.

CollectionBuilder documentation: https://collectionbuilder.github.io/cb-docs/

- Robust documentation on all aspects of CollectionBuilder, including metadata templates and guidelines, object guidelines, customization tips, and site configuration options.

CollectionBuilder Examples site: https://collectionbuilder.github.io/cb-examples/

- Built with CollectionBuilder, this collection of CollectionBuilder projects features sites created by a variety of individuals, organizations, and institutions, demonstrating the range of possibilities and use cases for CollectionBuilder.

Walkthroughs
CollectionBuilder-GH Walkthrough:
https://collectionbuilder.github.io/cb-docs/docs/walkthroughs/gh-walkthrough/

- A step-by-step guide to setting up a repository on the GitHub web interface using some provided example metadata.

CollectionBuilder-SHEETS Walkthrough:
https://collectionbuilder.github.io/cb-docs/docs/walkthroughs/sheets-walkthrough /

- A two-part guide for building digital collections directly from a Google Sheet. The first part provides steps for using the SHEETS template's built-in development mode to prototype, test, and share a draft of your digital collection site. The second part outlines how to publish an ongoing collaborative site and/or a permanent collection site via GitHub Pages.

CollectionBuilder-CSV Walkthrough:
https://collectionbuilder.github.io/cb-docs/docs/walkthroughs/csv-walkthrough/

- A step-by-step guide for creating an example digital collection using preexisting demo metadata, the CollectionBuilder-CSV Template, Visual Studio Code, and GitHub Actions. It is recommended to install free, open-source software on your computer when using the CollectionBuilder-CSV template.

ENDNOTES

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