



# Launching Students Well: Lessons from defunct incubators

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**EXECUTION**  
**LABS**



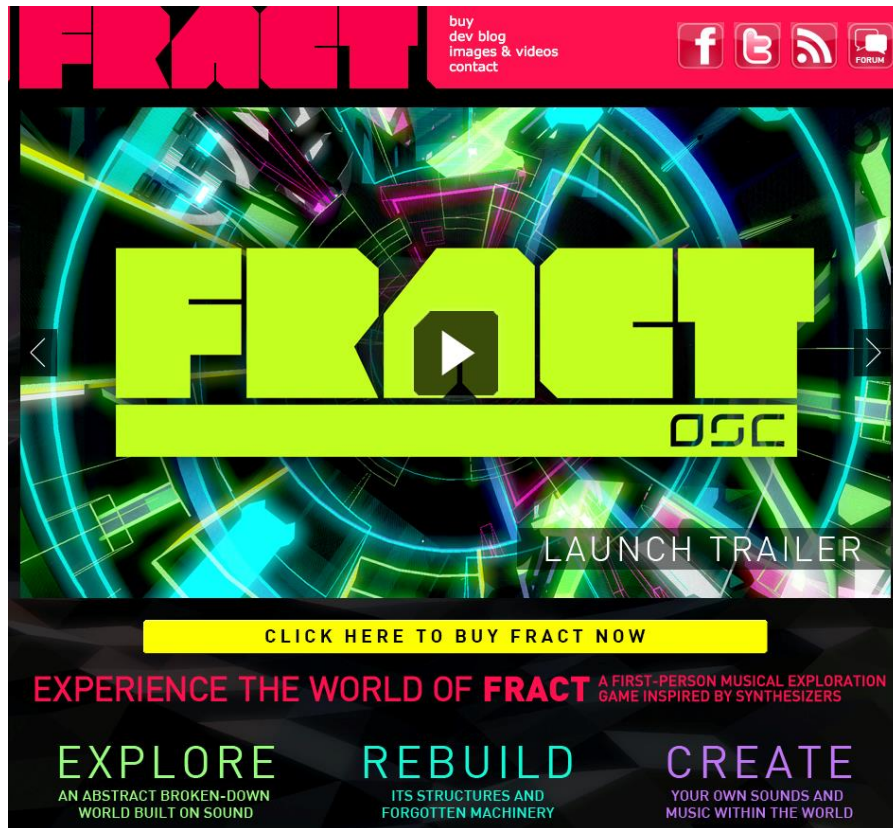
critical hit



Technoculture, Art and Games  
Research Center

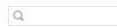
# Fract

- Developed in 2011  
Incubator pilot
- IGF winner
- Indie Fund-supported





EXPLORE HOW IT WORKS START YOUR CAMPAIGN



## Mouffe - Game in a Tent, Quilt Controller

Montreal, Quebec, Canada Gaming

Story Updates 4 Comments 2 Funders 81 Gallery 11

248

339

3

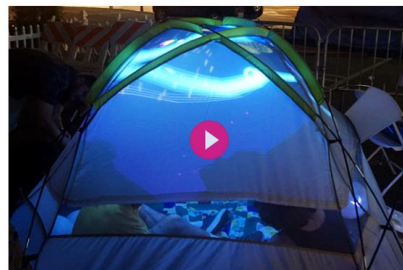
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Help buy Mouffe a projector, bring Mouffe to your festival!



Kim Hoang  
Email Verified  
417 Facebook Friends



Gaming  
Montreal, Quebec  
Canada  
4 Team Members

Contact See More Details

\$2,838 CAD

raised by 81 people in 1 month

129% funded

0 time left

\$2,200 CAD goal  
Flexible Funding

**CAMPAIGN CLOSED**  
This campaign ended on February 19, 2015

SELECT A PERK

\$100 CAD

Featured

**Fly your Mouf-Flag!**

A custom quilted pennant with your name emblazoned on it will be affixed to the outside of the Mouffe Tent. A piece of you travels with Mouffe wherever it goes! Additionally you get all the other lower tier perks: the patch, the zine (digital and paper), the postcard, the name on the website.



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**"It might be the best co-op game  
ever made."** GIZMODO

**"If you're not already friends  
with whoever you play this game with,  
you probably will be."** WIRED

**"The feel good game of this year's exhibit."**  
VentureBeat

**"...about as unique a gaming experience  
as you can get."**  
DORK SHELF

**"The coolest game of ALT.CTRL.GDC"**  
jeuxvideo.com



## KO-OP Mode

- 2013
- Can find them with their next game, GNOG, at IGF pavillion

2012

## Quebec Gov't selects TAG Research Centre for \$450,000 Grant to Develop Montreal Games Industry Hub

The mission of the Montreal Games Incubator is to **augment the training and education of the next generation of video game designers, and entrepreneurs** as they seek to develop a variety of careers in the video game sector of the digital economy. The Incubator program aims to provide an intensive team project focused environment situated **between traditional educational setting and commercial industry**. It will provide a unique practice based learning experience **supported by community networks, expert faculty and industry mentors**.

2016

## New York State Selects NYU Game Center for \$450,000 Grant to Develop New York Games Industry Hub

February 1, 2016

211

The NYU Game Center, a department of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts housed at NYU's Brooklyn campus, has been selected by Empire State Development (ESD) to receive a grant of \$450,000 over three years to establish a Digital Gaming Hub in New York City. The NYU Game Center was one of three institutions of higher learning selected, along with Rochester Institute of Technology and Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

ESD's goal for the Digital Gaming Hubs is to encourage collaborative activities in gaming that bring together industry, higher education, non-profit organizations, and individuals to foster creation of new games and companies. Hubs will ideally provide resources and mentoring to encourage students and entrepreneurs, including hosting events and providing incubator space and services.

"The NYU Game Center is proud to have been selected as one of the State's Digital Gaming Hubs and we're very grateful to Senator Golden, as well as all the individuals and organizations who supported us in winning this grant," said Frank Lantz, chair of the NYU Game Center. "A core part of our mission has always been to create community and support local game developers, through a longstanding program of professional, public, and community events. We look forward to expanding our game incubator, creating more public programming, and energizing the games industry in New York City by connecting talented developers and industry partners through the Hub."

"New York University's new Digital Gaming Hub will encourage students and businesses to create new innovative technologies," said Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner Howard Zensky. "This funding will also help entrepreneurs and start-ups develop new products and spur economic growth throughout the region."

Since its establishment in 2008, the Game Center has consistently offered free and public events to a growing community of gaming enthusiasts, including the Lecture Series, No Quarter, and the 2016Global Game Jam. These events will serve as the cornerstone of the new Hub, which thanks to ESD support, will also encompass new initiatives, such as expanding the successful NYU Game Center incubator to include developers outside NYU. The Center will also be soliciting suggestions from local game makers, students, and gaming enthusiasts in the community over the coming months regarding what they'd like to see the Hub develop. For more information on submitting ideas, contact [gamecenter@nyu.edu](mailto:gamecenter@nyu.edu).

# Funding rhetoric and promises

- Changing needs of industry
  - educational programs = surplus of entry-level grads who lack experience to get industry jobs
- Creating Employment/careers
  - Need training to help students launch own start-up studios
  - Need introduction into professional networks
- Economic growth of games industry in your region and increased ownership of IP/profits
- Will make university incubator “sustainable” via industry partnerships and /or IP profits in a few short years



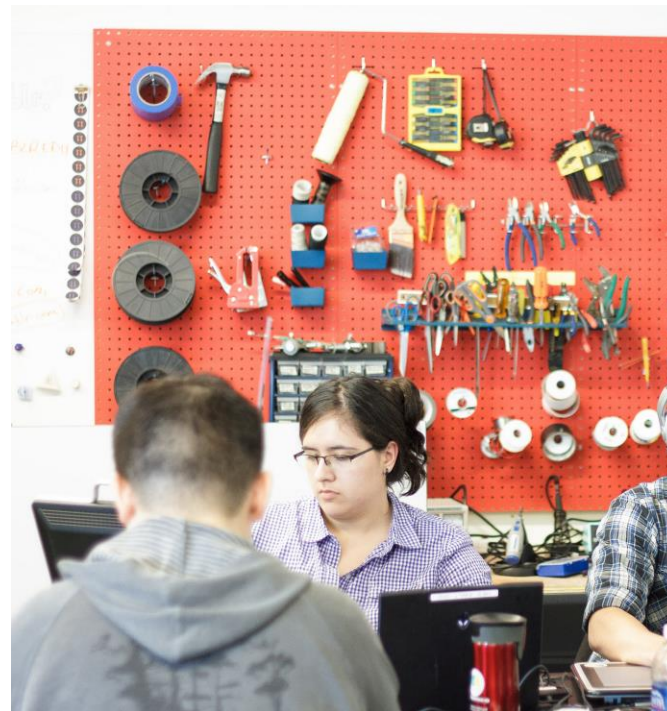


So where does \$450 k go?

....\$150,000 disappears immediately when you are staffing an incubator and providing stipends so your participants can focus on game-making not housing.

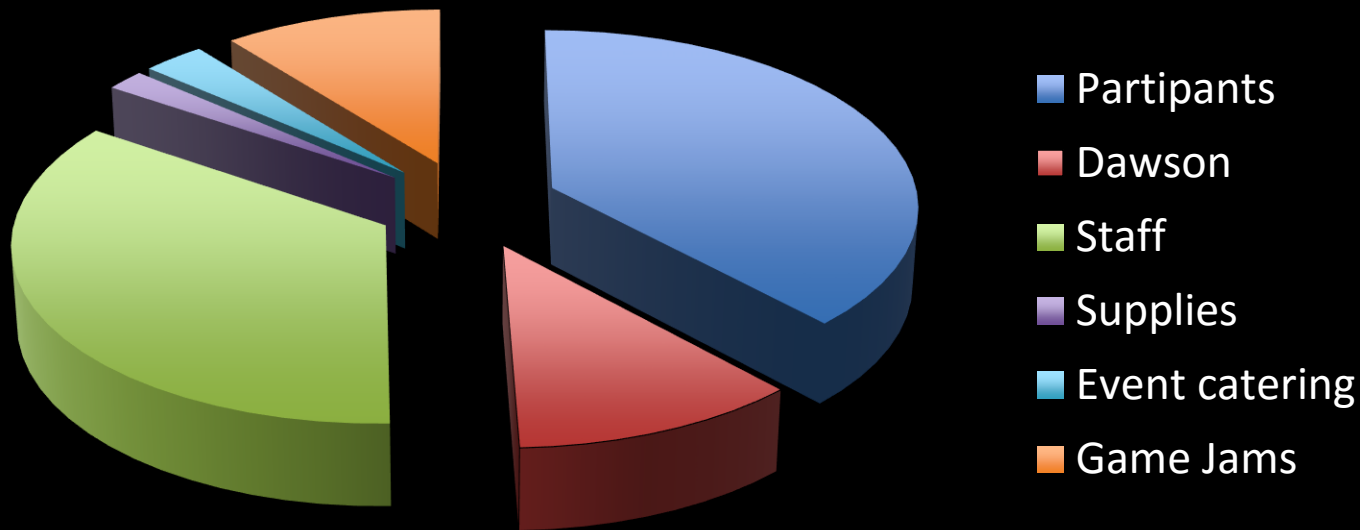
# Where \$150K went in 2014

- 16 participants, funded at \$3000 for 10 weeks.
- 8 funded PT employees
- 5 game jams, including food
- Year Round evening workshops for skills training
- 2 catered showcase events, for 100+ guests (hosted by Google and Concordia)
- 6 public talks by industry and academics (international)
- Funding to cover registration and some travel costs for teams to showcase games at events like IndieCade and GDC.
- Swag. Of course.





## 2014 Budget: \$125,000



# 2014: 11 grad student staff for 16 participants

six month, part time positions

- Admin\* (HR, budget, day-to-day, space and staffing)
- Communications\* (Press kits, event planning, assist admin, game jam host)
- Game Producer

10 week contracts

- Social Media (3 hrs/week)
- Blogger (5 hrs/week)
- Photographer (30 hours)
- Web Design ( 30 hours)
- Videographer ( 30 hours)

Funded from other Academic Research Projects or Volunteer

- Ethnographic Researcher
- Co-ordinator (Me)
- Student Volunteer donated time on a drop-in basis
- 40 industry mentors donated time

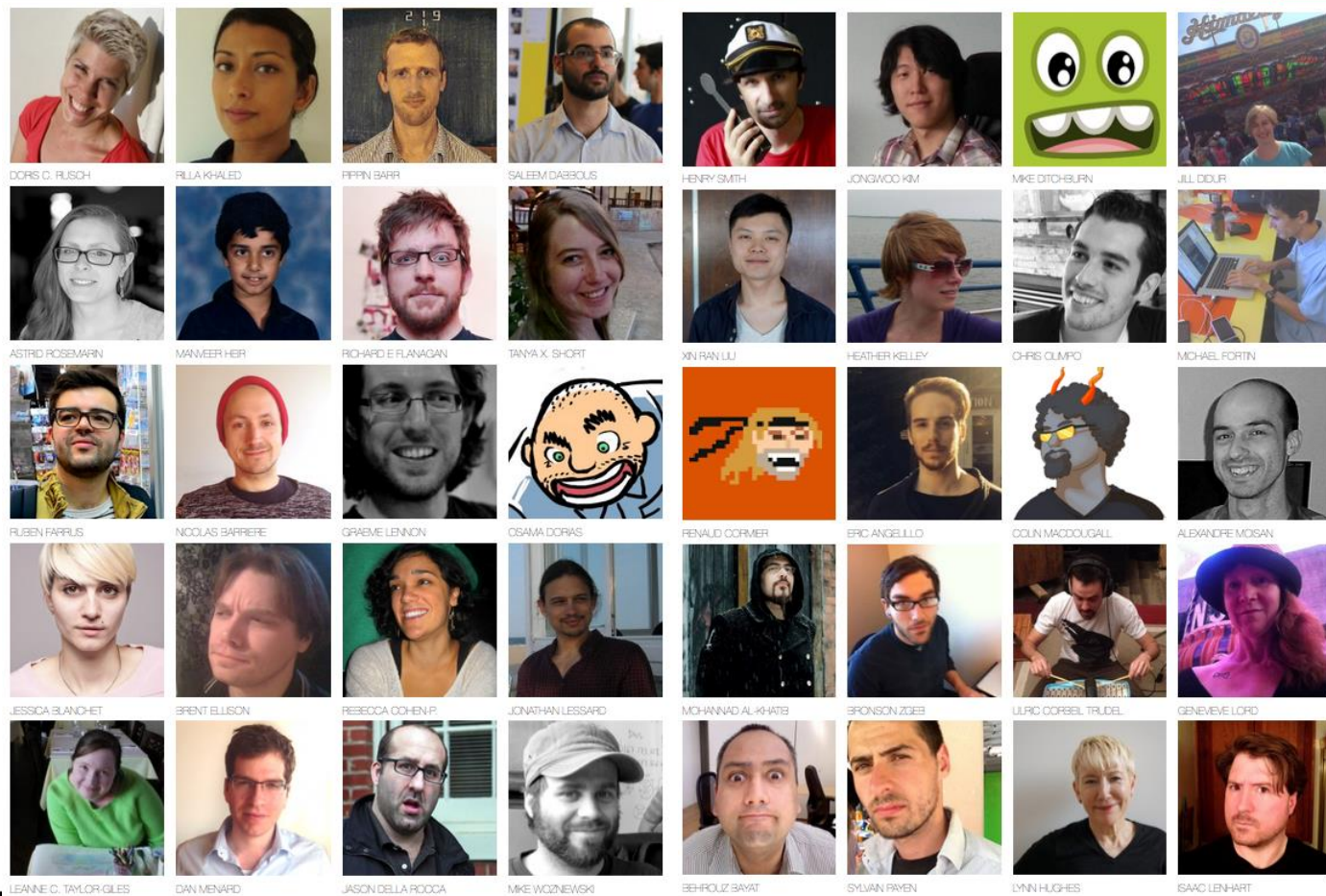
\*just graduated non-student, so massive taxes

1. Taking a stance on unpaid labour in the game industry can endanger the economic sustainability of your incubator.



Launching students well meant for Critical  
Hit a focus on building people, not games.





## 2014 industry mentors

- AAA, aca & indie
- Summer speaker series
- Matched mentors
- Pro play-testers



Game-making activities by 2013 participants, one year later

Pixelles  
Participant  
follow-up:  
1 year  
later

2. Launching students well and landing careers in the new games industry requires a focus on social connectivity and soft skills.





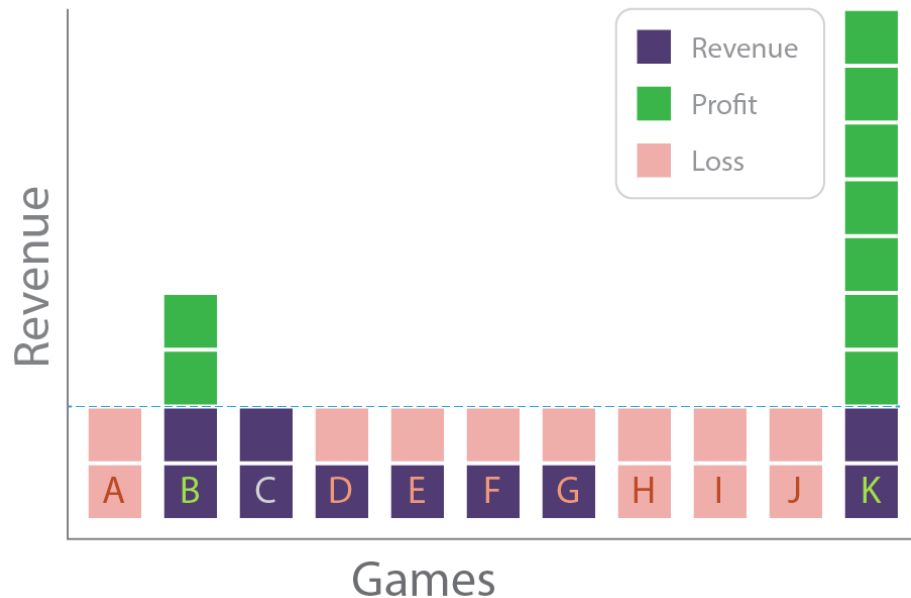
The economically self-sustaining  
post-secondary games incubator  
is a pipe dream...



# Minimum sustainable success for studios

The unpredictability of successful small - scale development at Spry Fox

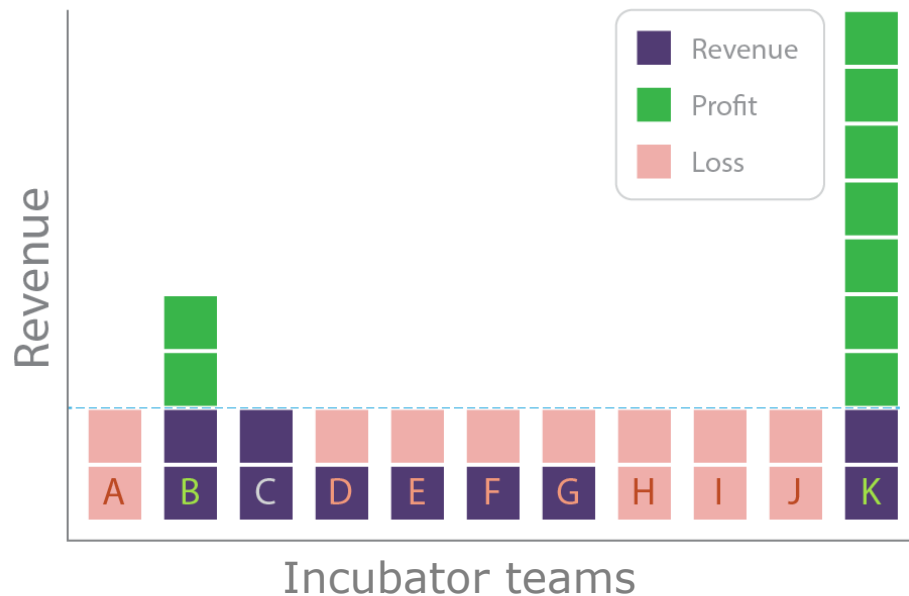
- 31 projects started as prototypes.
- 20 smaller prototypes that also didn't pan out. Some took months, others took days.
- 11 released projects
- 4 that didn't make money (both brutal and moderate failures).
- 4 break even projects
- 3 outright successes.



(shamelessly stolen from Dan Cook [www.lostgarden.com](http://www.lostgarden.com))

# Minimum sustainable success for incubators

The unpredictability of studio development in game incubators mirrors that of game studios, but on a much longer time scale, as “success” equates to developing a stable of games. Not launching 1.



...Incubator successes are long-tail events.

On a 3 year cycle, private companies and universities alike will fail.

University incubators, unlike privately invested ones, can be structured to survive long-tail outcomes.

3: Your post-secondary incubator can survive only if it has a base budget that annually renews, biding the long tail.





For us, launching students well meant connecting them to human networks, choosing which values overrode the grant language, and focusing instead on biding time for long term successes.

Thanks!  
@jen\_whitson

