Roguelike Celebration 2020 Transparency Report

On October 3-4, we hosted [a fully virtual Roguelike Celebration](#): a conference-style gathering for fans and developers of roguelike games and procedural generation.

This was an all-volunteer not-for-profit event. Ticket prices went to funding the event, and we have some leftover funds to use for next year. Inspired by transparency reports from other conferences, we wrote this report to explain how we accomplished this event, including what we spent money on and what kinds of effort went into the event.

We hope this encourages others to create virtual special-interest events!

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Timeline

On March 2, 2020, several of the 2019 organizers began discussing plans for 2020, and they invited people who had shown interest in helping with organization for 2020. Over the next few months of emails, as the pandemic progressed, we agreed to the following:

- Roguelike Celebration 2020 would be a fully virtual event, held the first weekend in October keeping with past conferences (and staying clear of both Canadian Thanksgiving and other events).
- Instead of fully relying on pre-existing tools like Zoom and Discord, we would roll our own custom social space, with resources Em would bring in through her work at Microsoft. (See the ["Custom social space development"](#) section for details.)
- For the first time, we would give speakers honoraria for talks.

We met weekly from April through October through videocall.

On May 10, we sent out a notification email to the Roguelike Celebration mailing list announcing that the event would be an online event and soliciting talk submissions. We also proactively solicited submissions from people we thought could speak on relevant and interesting topics. We closed the submission period on July 17, and we received around 70 proposals. We accepted 17 full-length talks, 17 short talks, and 2 game presentations.

To promote the event and test our custom social space, we held a mini-event on August 30. We had 157 registered attendees, and anecdotally around 50 concurrent users in our social space for the duration of the event. (See the ["Preview meetup"](#) section for details.)

The main conference was held on Saturday, October 3rd, and Sunday, October 4th, in the custom social space. We had 744 registered attendees (both free and paid), and anecdotally between 200 and 400 concurrent attendees in the social space at any given time during the conference.

Financials

Our Eventbrite ticket pricing structure looked like this, in this order, and got the following number of people:

Tier	Price	Tickets sold
Pay for yourself!	$30	271
Pay What You Can ticket	Donation	123
Pay for yourself and someone else!	$60	100
For those who can't afford to attend otherwise	Free	325
Speaker tickets	Free	31
Proposal tickets	Free	17

"Proposal tickets" were free tickets offered to everyone who submitted to our Call for Proposals for talks and other presentations.

At the end of the event, our full accounting looked like this:

Item	Category	Dollars
Tickets on Eventbrite	Income	$16,316.33
T-shirt sales	Income	$2,602.17
Honoraria for speakers	Expense	-$3,140.00
Software	Expense	-$187.60
Hardware/equipment	Expense	-$269.25
CART (live captioning) services	Expense	-$4,160.00
Shirt design payment	Expense	-$300.00
T-shirt costs	Expense	-$3,011.15
Video stream overlay design payment	Expense	-$300.00
Noisebridge fiscal sponsorship	Expense	-$815.82
Total for 2020		$6,734.68

We'll use the surplus - see the ["Looking ahead in 2021"](#) section.

Speaker selection

As mentioned above, we ran a public call for proposals as well as directly reaching out to select speakers to either ask them to speak or to apply to speak. This included reaching out to potential speakers from groups often under-represented in speaker lists at game conferences, including people of color, women, nonbinary people, and trans people. We explicitly were open to presentations and activities that weren't "talks".

We did not run a [blind](#) speaker selection process. The organizers selecting talks could see each speaker's full name, bio, and talk subject without redaction.

While a blind process is often used to make sure subconscious biases don't negatively influence speaker diversity, our speaker pool typically includes a disproportionate number of first-time speakers who are not accustomed to preparing formal conference talk proposals. Talks from people like this have historically been some of the most-loved talks at previous Roguelike Celebration events, and we value providing a space for these new voices. We wanted to make sure our speaker selection process did not exclude people in that situation, which meant factoring in more context about each speaker.

This was paired with offering optional speaker coaching provided by volunteers. While we asked about interest in coaching on the CFP form, we did not consciously consider willingness to receive speaker coaching in our selection criteria.

We received around 70 proposals, and we accepted 17 full-length talks, 17 short talks, and 2 game presentations. Speakers whose talks were rejected were still offered free tickets.

In the proposal form, we asked "Do you identify as a member of a marginalized or underrepresented group?" (with the supplemental

description of "This will not affect selection criteria, and is just so that we can track our own diversity efforts internally.") Results:

- Among proposals submitted: 30% said "Yes" and 70% said "No" (and one left this answer blank).
- Among proposals accepted: 50% said "Yes" and 50% said "No".

After we had otherwise completed the speaker selection process, we separately reached out to [The Game Band](#) to ask if someone on their team wanted to speak about Blaseball. Blaseball did not exist at the time our CFP closed, and we thought they would be a uniquely good fit for our audience. They agreed to give a talk.

We offered a $150 honorarium for full-length talks and a $50 honorarium for short talks. We also added $5 to each of these at the end to cover shipping for speaker shirts. A few speakers declined honoraria. Our honoraria payments totaled to $3,140.00.

Software

Custom social space development

We built our own custom event platform and social space rather than use something out-of-the-box. This is an open-source project (licensed under the MIT license) hosted on GitHub at https://github.com/lazerwalker/azure-mud. We had 10 contributors, about half of whom were not core organizers.

Project management took place in the open over GitHub Issues, with Em prioritizing and organizing tasks to be done.

Our technology stack relied on Microsoft Azure serverless services, due to Em's work and giving Em more ability to work on the platform as part of her day job.

We did not track development time, but it's reasonable to assume that development took hundreds of hours of unpaid volunteer time.

Production cloud services were all hosted in Em's personal Azure account. All costs fit within the monthly credits she was provided for free as a Microsoft employee, and were not billed to Roguelike Celebration. Other volunteers may have incurred costs for personal development environments, but none were expensed.

We deployed a number of live hotfixes to the social space during the event itself, primarily meant to fix issues preventing people from using the space as well as a small number of high-priority quality-of-life issues. These issues arose largely out of not being able to test with as many simultaneous users as would ultimately be in the space. If we reuse our social platform in future years, minimizing the number of deployments during the event itself will be a priority.

Pre-existing tools

Beyond social space development, we also leveraged a number of pre-existing tools. We streamed to both Twitch and YouTube, using [StreamYard](#) to manage the overlays. We used the paid version of StreamYard, which gave us a number of advantages, especially longer periods of recording our stream for future upload.

While we were able to disable chat on YouTube, on Twitch we could only limit chat (i.e. people who had been following our channel for 3 months could post emoji every 30 seconds), so we did occasionally need to moderate chat.

We also used [StreamText](#) for live captions. Because StreamYard did not give us a way to embed closed caption data directly in our livestream, we directly linked attendees to our StreamText page and embedded it within the social space underneath the video feed.

We used Zoom to provide attendee videochat at the event for unconferencing, using 6 different Zoom Pro accounts over the course of the conference.

We spent $187.60 on these software services.

Hardware

We offered speakers who didn't have quality recording equipment reimbursement for purchasing it, as well as sharing recommendations for microphones and webcams that had worked for others. Four speakers submitted invoices for this purpose and were reimbursed.

One organizer also submitted an invoice to be reimbursed for hardware - specifically for capturing recordings from StreamYard for future YouTube upload and an Ethernet cable for improved network connection.

These expenses totaled to $269.25.

Live captioning

For accessibility for attendees, we hired [White Coat Captioning](#) to provide CART (live captioning) for all talks. We used their services last year as well.

We paid $4,160.00 for their work this year, for 21 hours total: 4 hours for the preview event, 8 hours on Saturday, 9 hours on Sunday.

Preview meetup: August 30

We held a free preview meetup on August 30. The purpose was twofold: to serve as a test of the social space, and to serve as promotion for the event.

We had six speakers give 5-minute preview versions of their talks, one live presentation of a crowd-participation game, and unstructured social time to chat and explore the space. As at the actual event, talks were livestreamed to both Twitch and YouTube and featured live captions.

We had 157 registered attendees on Eventbrite. We did not keep detailed metrics for the event itself, but anecdotally we had around 50 concurrent viewers in the "theater" at any given time.

Art assets

Swag: Shirts

In previous years we commissioned multiple types of swag (t-shirts, socks, tote bags, etc) and distributed them in person to attendees. As a virtual event, we needed to keep it a lot simpler, using on-demand printing and shipping.

We commissioned a t-shirt design for $300 from Tyriq Plummer, who was also a 2017 and 2020 speaker.

We learned from !!Con organizers that they used Printful and Shopify for their virtual conference shirts and were satisfied with their experience. We looked into this and decided to use the same method.

Printful met our needs because they had print-on-demand shirts, international shipping, a print method that could deliver adequate quality, and both straight-cut and fitted-cut shirts in a variety of colors and sizes (including extended sizing).

We chose a t-shirt price that was as close to at-cost as we could estimate, since we didn't need to make money on the shirts, but didn't want to lose much money on them either. We gave a code for a free shirt to each speaker and organizer. Overall, 102 people ordered 148 shirts for $2,602.17 total (paying for their own shipping).

Printful doesn't have a shop interface, so we used Shopify to create the shop website.

Our costs for Printful + Shopify (shirts, printing, and service fees) were $3,011.15 total. This means we spent $408.98 on service fees and shirts for speakers and organizers.

Stream overlays

We commissioned designs for our video stream overlays for $300 from Christen Alqueza, who was recommended to us by a past swag artist.

She created overlays with our branding to put over slides and Q&A sections, as well as screens for when we needed to pause the live stream for breaks and technical issues.

Code of Conduct

For previous in-person events hosted at Eventbrite (2016) and GitHub (2017-2019) offices, we had to use their standard, generic company Codes of Conduct. We asked attendees to report any issues to in-person organizers.

That wasn't going to work for a virtual event, and we wanted to do it better this time, so we revised our Code of Conduct and added specific reporting instructions. We listed an additional type of unacceptable behavior reflecting our reality as an event in fall 2020: "Support for fascist, neo-nazi, white supremacist, white nationalist, or conspiracy theory groups/movements." We included a summary of the CoC within our event space, with a reporting tool any attendee could use.

We developed a report-handling process and trained ourselves on it before the event. We designated an organizer as the primary CoC responder, responsible for watching for issues during the event and handling reports. This is the main reason why we closed the space overnight from Saturday to Sunday - we had to sleep and could not monitor it overnight.

We had received one proactive report from a community member before the conference, who was concerned that a specific person might show up in the social space. The reporter shared information about the person so that we could verify the concern and watch out for this. We monitored for this and did not see the person during the event.

We did not receive any reports from attendees during the event, and we did not see attendee behavior that crossed the line to needing more than a reminder.

Fiscal sponsorship

As a volunteer project that is not a formal nonprofit organization on our own, we rely on an established nonprofit to receive our income and disburse our payments. This relationship is called [fiscal sponsorship](#).

[Noisebridge](#) serves as our fiscal sponsor, and we pay them 5% of our income as a fee for this service. This year, that fee was $815.82.

Looking ahead in 2021

We previously had a surplus of $5,238.45 from our 2019 event. Combined with our $6,734.68 surplus from 2020, we have a total of $11,863.78 available for 2021.

This is more surplus than we expected, especially because we didn't have sponsors this time (few companies had budget for that in 2020). We learned that a virtual event has fewer expenses — for example, no catering costs or travel reimbursements for speakers — while being more accessible for more attendees interested in purchasing tickets.

This will give us flexibility when we plan our 2021 event budget, and it enables us to discuss paying professionals for projects that would make Roguelike Celebration better, such as improved captioning for our video archive and accessibility improvements for our virtual event space.

Questions? Want to help?

If you have any questions or want to help with 2021, email us at contact@roguelike.club!