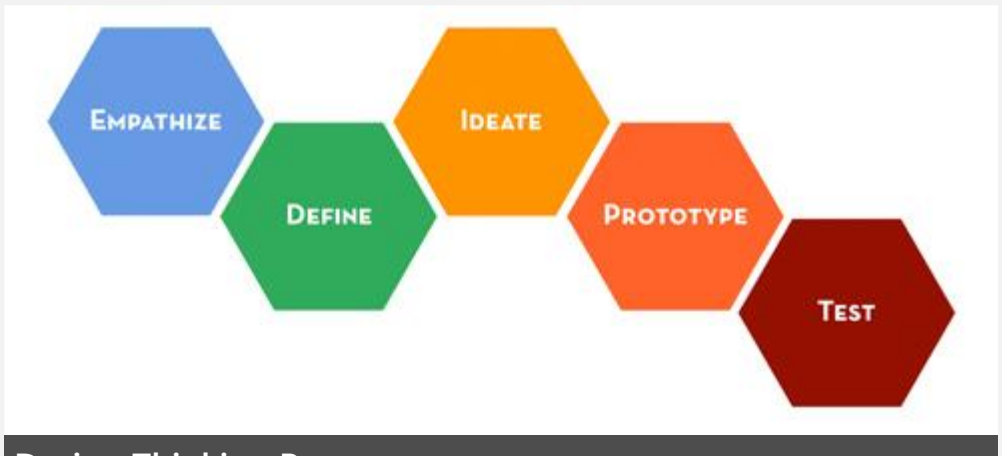
Tumbleweed Express: A Tale of 54 Game Jams

Matthew Louis Mauriello
Project Manager (@mattm401)

IGDA DC Chapter Meeting
June 28th, 2016 (@IGDA_DC)

Introduction

Matthew Louis Mauriello
PhD Student, Comp Sci. (HCI)

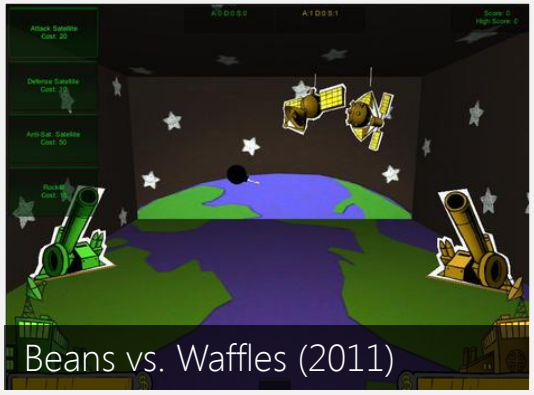


Design Thinking Process
Image by Stanford d.School

igda

Aspiring Indie Dev. (2003)

Deceptive Driving (2010)



Beans vs. Waffles (2011)

Introduction: Our Story

This is a story about how a bunch of strangers got together and made a game about a train by working ~(once a month) over 4.5 years.

...it's also a story about how I learned what it means to be an amateur.

Rochester
Syracuse
Saratoga Springs
Buffalo
Albany
Ithaca
Scranton
New Haven
Newport
State College
New York
Long Island
Allentown
Hershey
Harrisburg
Lancaster
Philadelphia
York
Atlantic City
Baltimore
Washington
B
Ocean City
Charlottesville
Richmond

As indie game developers you may have been involved in a number of projects that implode or become inactive; for many reasons, this is a common experience within our community.

This certainly happened to me right before my transition from IGDA Albany to IGDA DC.

igdaDC

GLOBAL GAME JAM™
www.globalgamejam.org
INNOVATION, EXPERIMENTATION, COLLABORATION

After Global Game Jam 2010, IGDA DC heard from many of its members that they did not know how to fully participate in a large game jam.

To address this issue, the chapter decided to organize a few small game jams leading up to the next Global Game Jam.

This was my first project with the chapter, which lead to a short tablet game being published on the App Store.

Rochester
Syracuse
Saratoga Springs
Buffalo
Albany
Ithaca
Scranton
Newport
New Haven
State College
New York
Long Island
Allentown
Hershey
Harrisburg
Lancaster
Philadelphia
York
Baltimore
Washington
B
Charlottesville
Richmond
Deceptive Driving (2010)
Beans vs. Waffles (2011)

Introduction: Genesis

Based on the positive reception of this first game jam, we decided to hold a second.

What happened next was the genesis of the project Tumbleweed Express and the founding of The Dirigiballers, LLC.

IGDA DC: November Gam Jam - Message (HTML)

File | Message | Insert | Options | Format Text | Review

Paste | Cut | Copy | Format Painter | Clipboard | Basic Text | Address Book | Check Names | Names | Attach File | Attach Item | Signature | Include | Follow Up | High Importance | Low Importance | Tags | Zoom | Zoom

Send

From mattm401@umd.edu

To... 'Sam Levine'

Cc...

Bcc...

Subject: IGDA DC: November Gam Jam

Hey Sam,

I think I could host the next game jam at my place...

Cheers,

~Matthew Louis Mauriello, MS
Department of Computer Science
University of Maryland
A.V. Williams Building, 4122
College Park, MD 20742
--
http://www.cs.umd.edu/~mattm/
Twitter @mattm401

Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams

TIMELINE

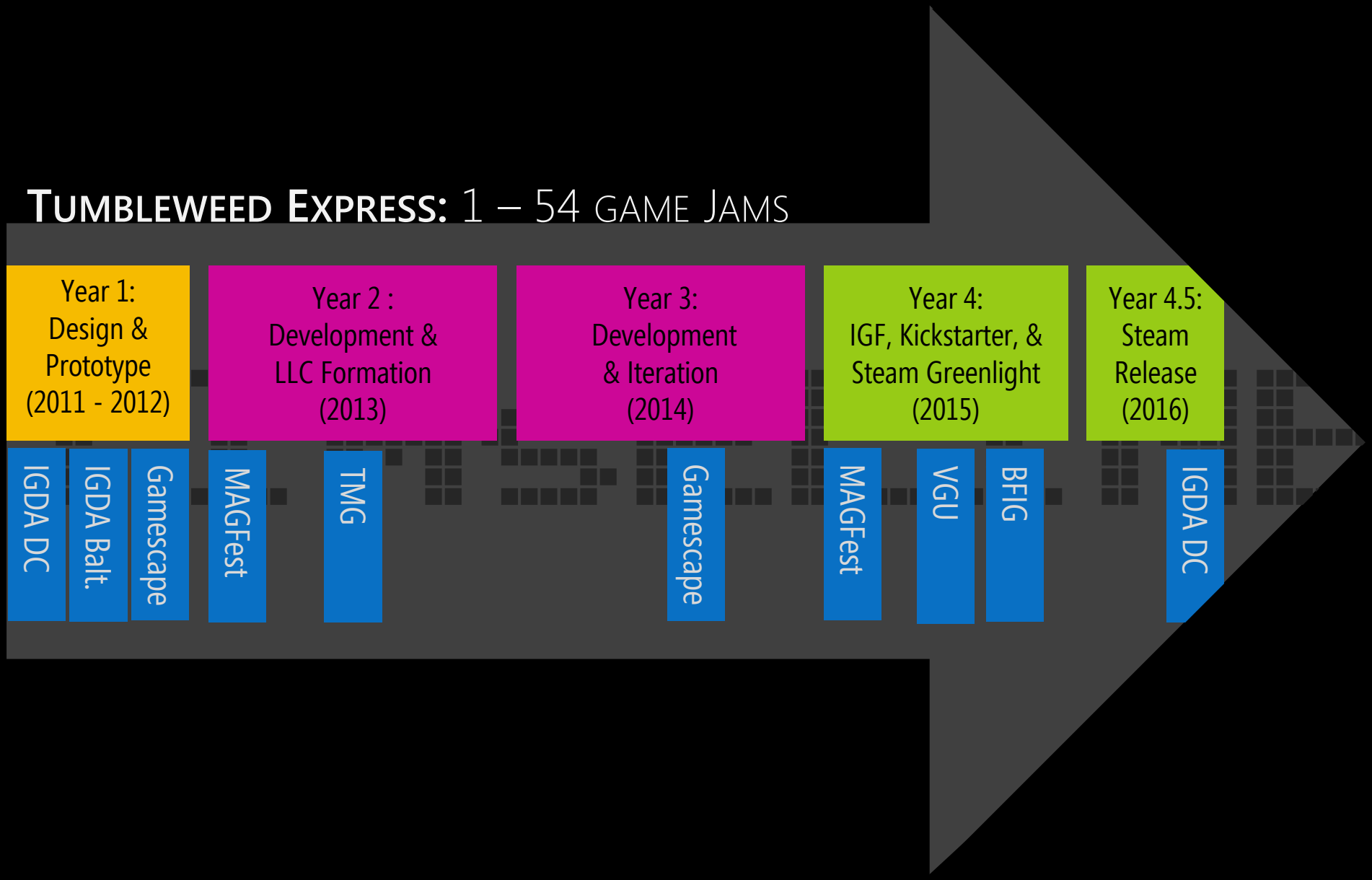
Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams

Year 1:
Design &
Prototype
(2011 - 2012)

IGDA DC

Introduction
(Version 0.0)

Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



Introduction
(Version 1.0)

Development Team

Project Management Team
Matthew Mauriello (Lead)
Ben Heard
Jacob Clayman

Design Team
Jacob Clayman (Lead)
Andy Varshine
Ben Heard
David To
David Weiss
Duy Le
Greg Morningstar
Keelan Downton
Matthew Mauriello

Art Team
Andy Varshine (Lead)
Duy Le
Greg Morningstar
Jacob Clayman
Jon Heard

Programming Team
Matthew Mauriello (Lead)
Ben Heard
David To
Jacob Clayman
Jon Heard
Keelan Downton

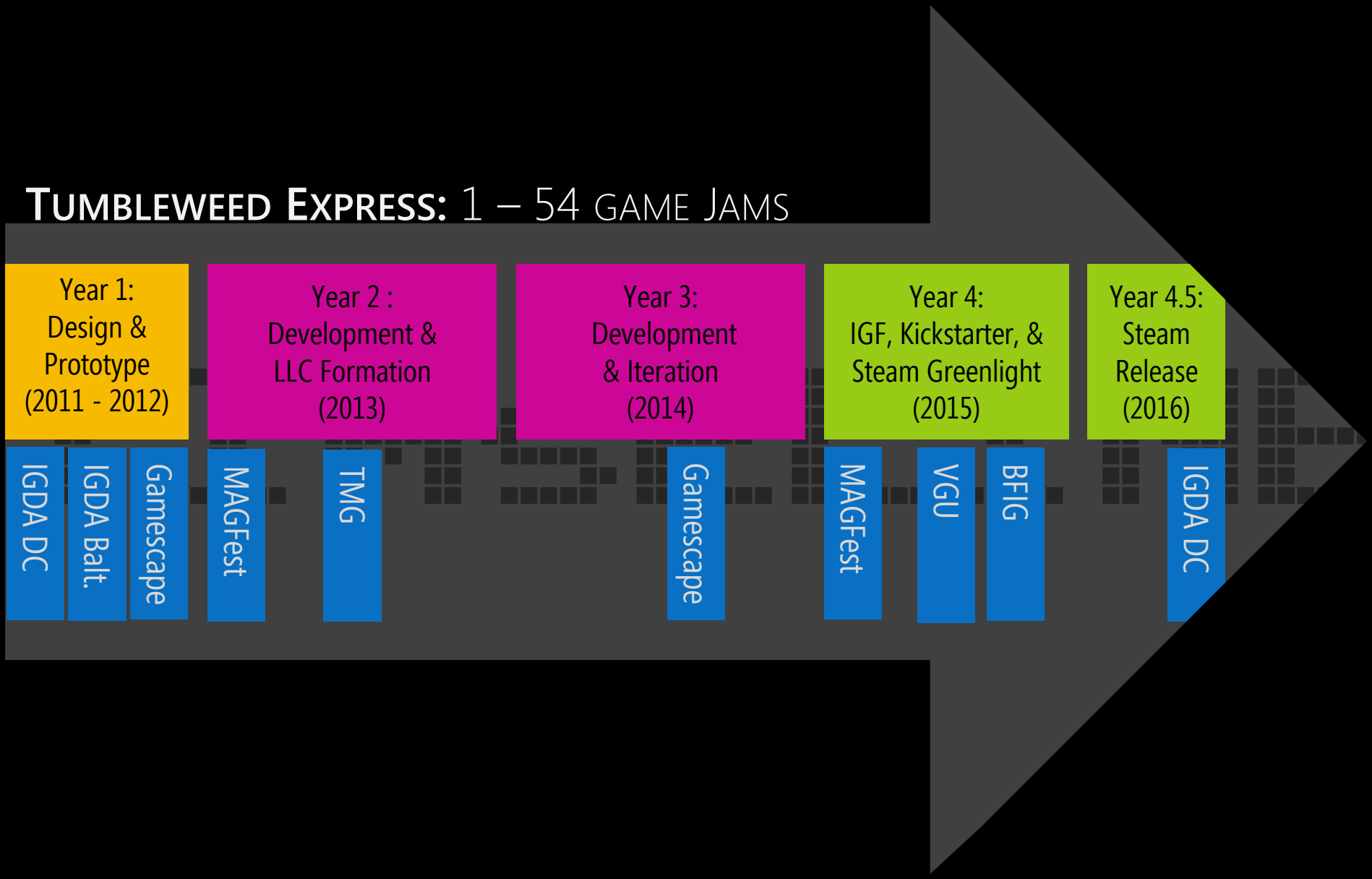
Audio Team
Sam Miller (Sound Lead)
Stephan Nettekoven (Music Lead)
Jacob Clayman

Voice Actors
Anistasiya Rul as Xenia
Arnoud Moes as Drillcar Jim
Greg Morningstar as The Narrator
Jacob Clayman as Sneaky Pete
Kilian Berthold as Dirigibaus

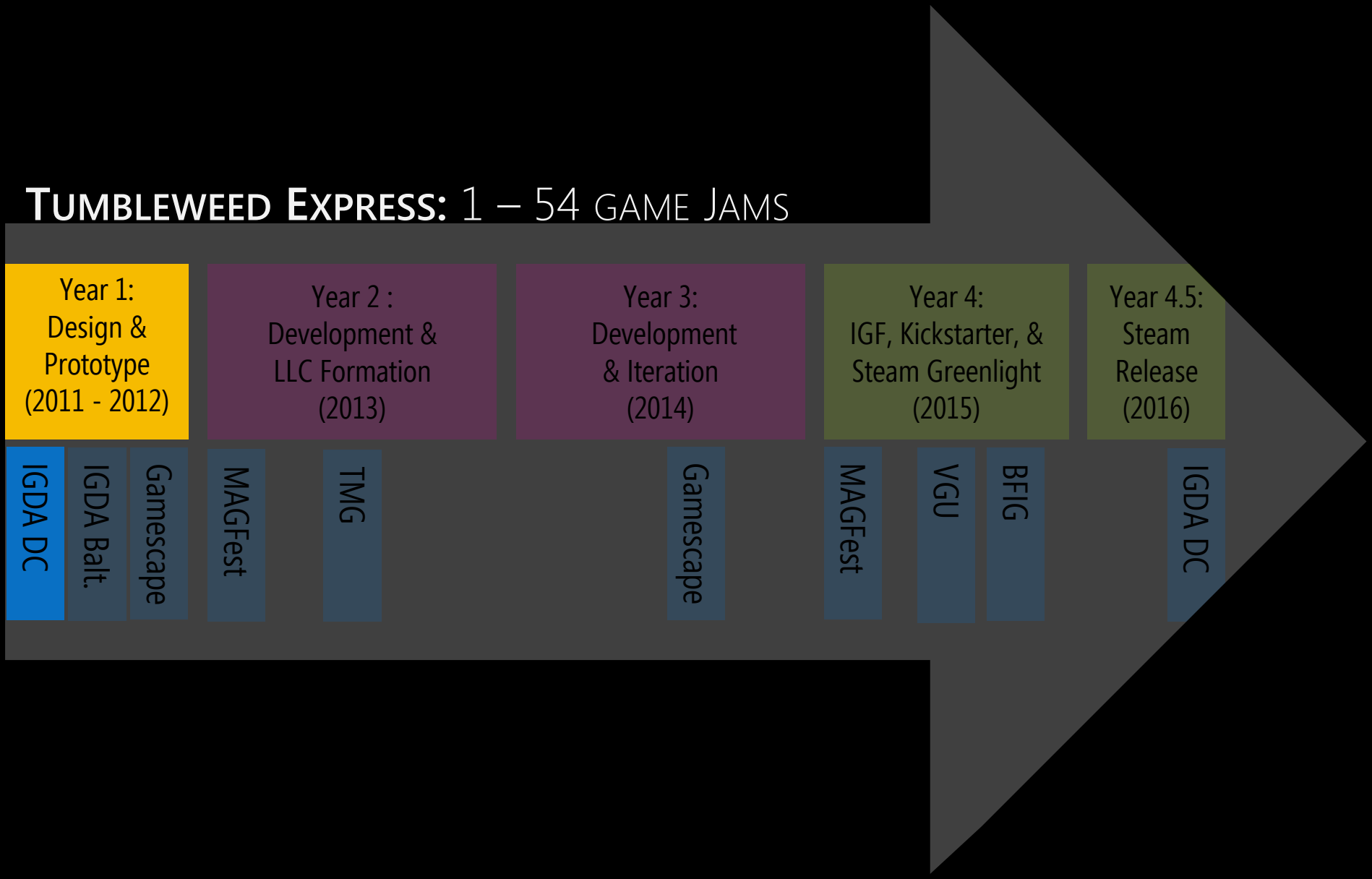
Contributors
Arnoud Moes
Bo Banducci
Brenna McNally
Christopher Bruser
Christopher Hayes
Dan Hertzka
Mason Booker
Mike Willis
Sam Levine

Special Thanks
Friends, Family, and Fans
IGDA Baltimore
IGDA DC
IGDA PA
MAGFest Indie Videogame Showcase
Baltimore Gamer
David Rumsey Map Collection

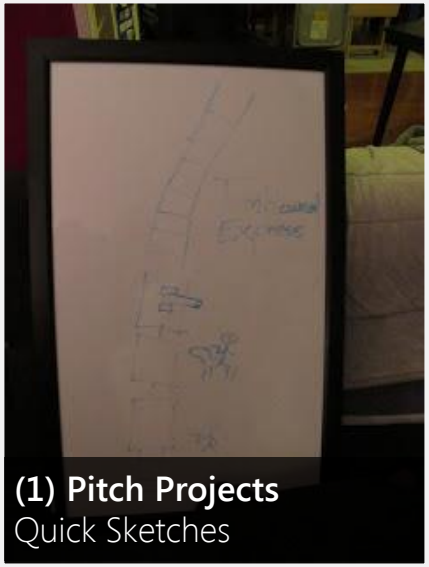
Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



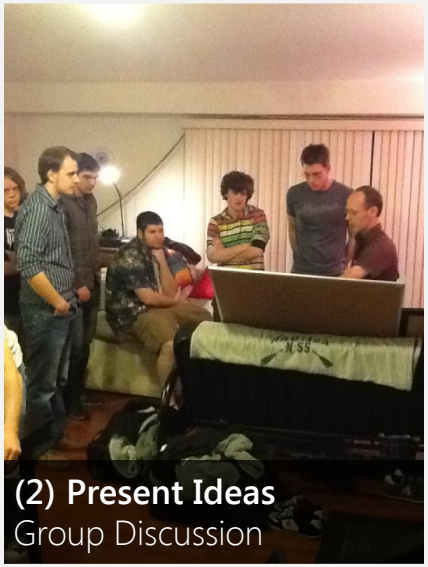
Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



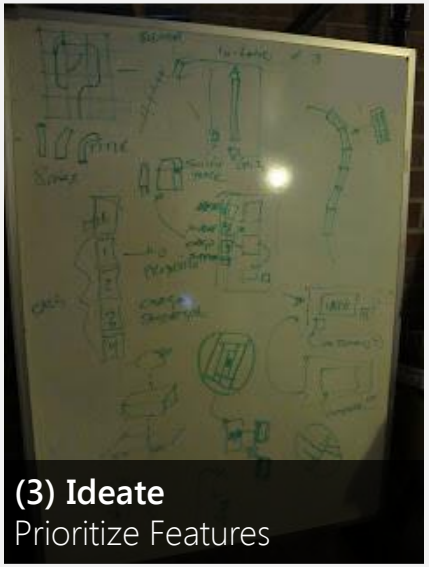
Year 1: Game Jam 1
(Version 0.0)



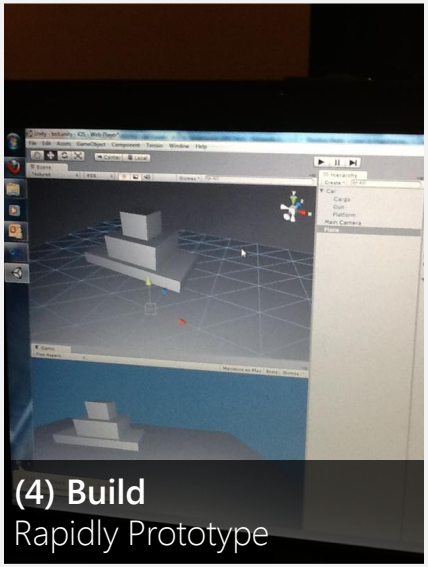
(1) Pitch Projects
Quick Sketches



(2) Present Ideas
Group Discussion

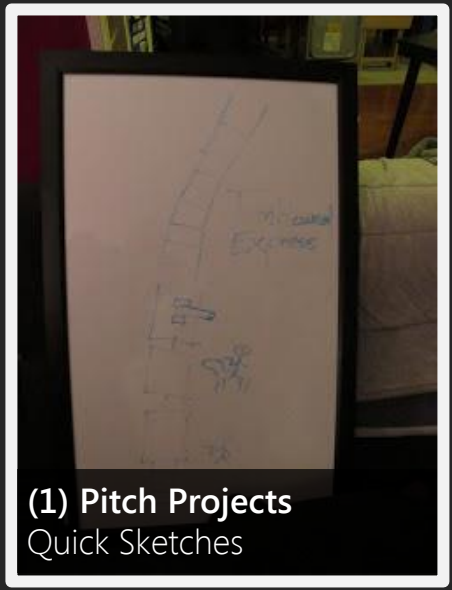


(3) Ideate
Prioritize Features

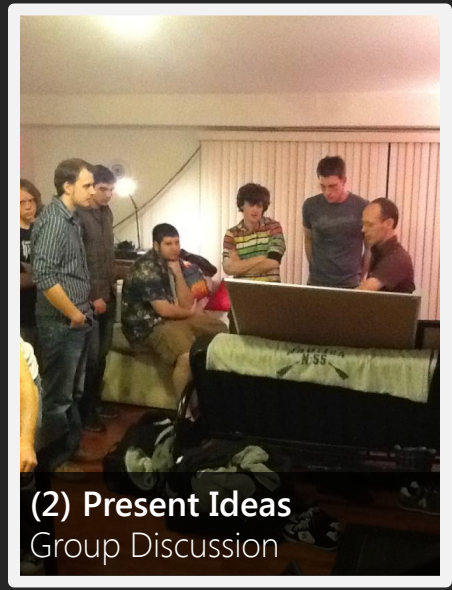


(4) Build
Rapidly Prototype

Year 1: Game Jam 1
(Version 0.0)



(1) Pitch Projects
Quick Sketches



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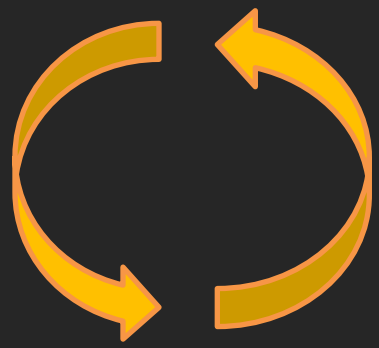
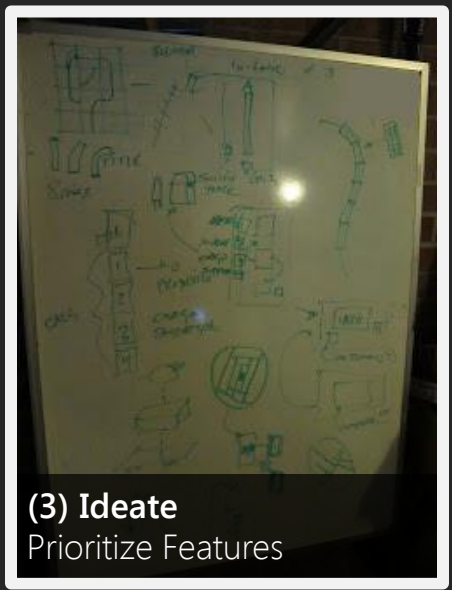
Group Discussion





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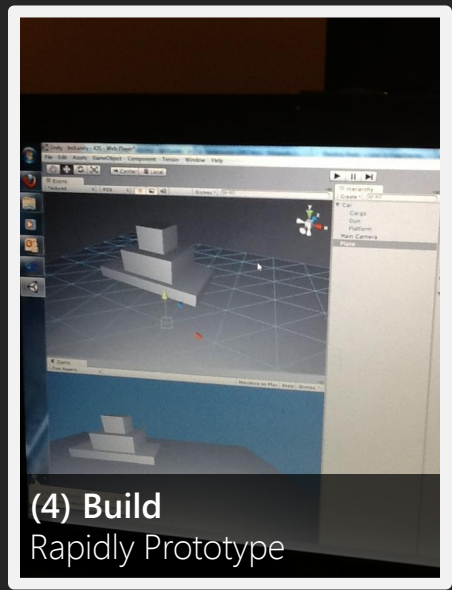
Prioritize Features



(4) Build
Rapidly Prototype

Year 1: Game Jam 1

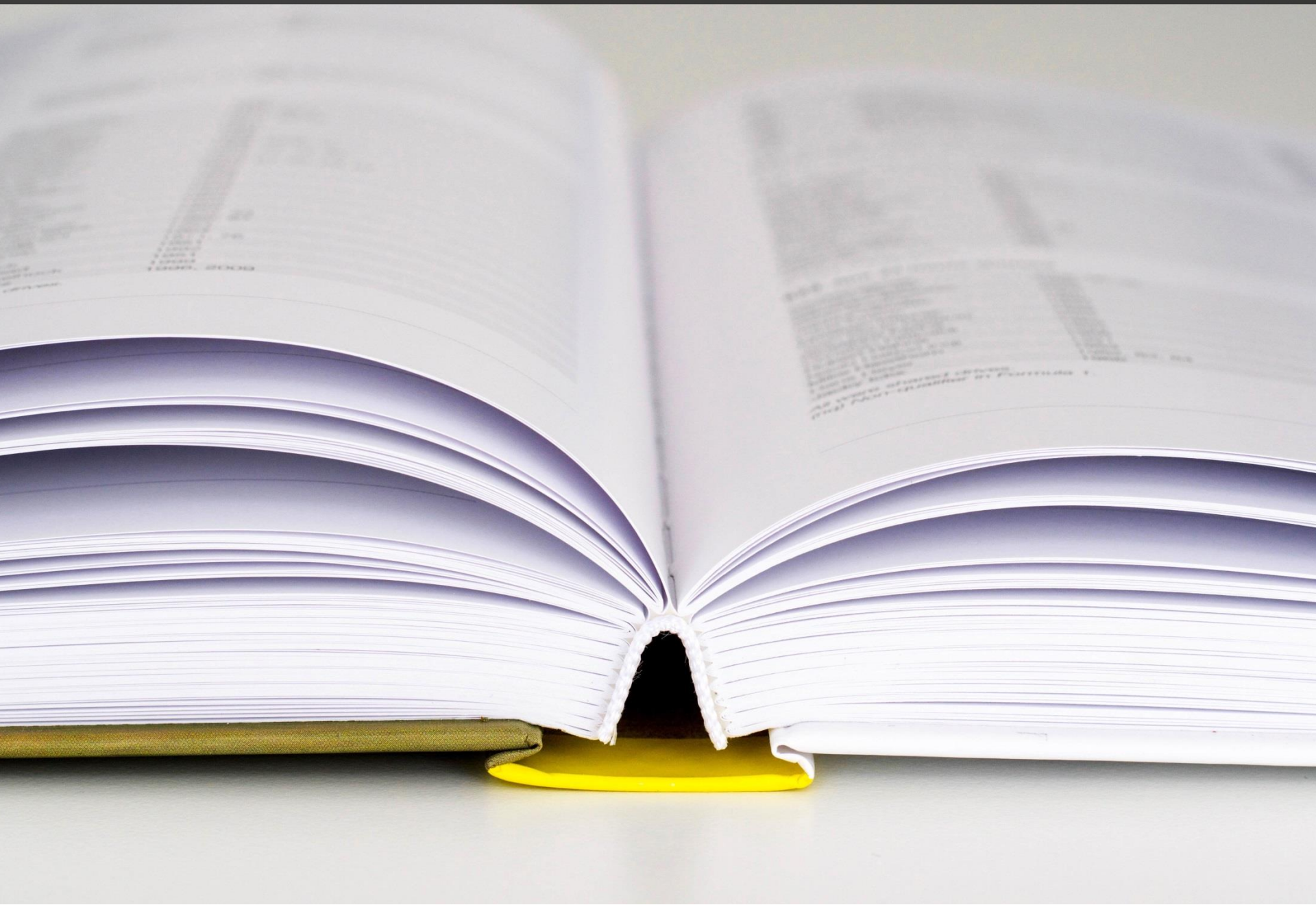
(Version 0.0)

Goals: Expected Project Outcomes

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
3. Complete the project with support for Windows, Mac, and Linux.
4. Release the game on Steam.

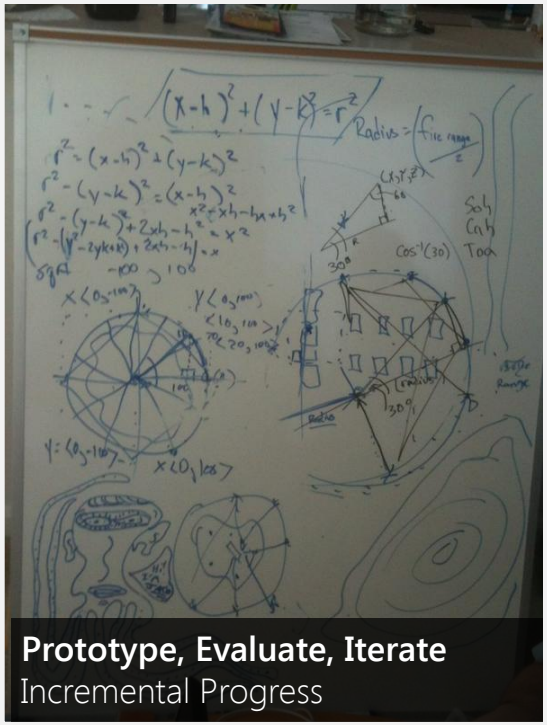
Year 1: Create Game Design Document

(Version 0.1)



Year 1: Game Jam 8
(Version 0.2)

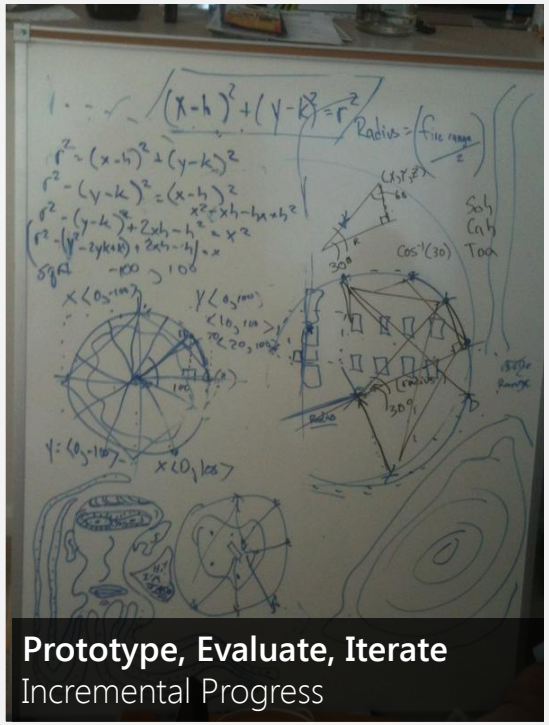
Continue Game Jams
One Weekend A Month



Prototype, Evaluate, Iterate
Incremental Progress

Year 1: Game Jam 8
(Version 0.2)

Continue Game Jams
One Weekend A Month



Prototype, Evaluate, Iterate
Incremental Progress

Year 1: Game Jam 8

(Version 0.3)

Year 1: MAGFest Submission

(Version 0.3)

Year 1: MAGFest Response

(Version 0.3)

"Hi & good day to you!

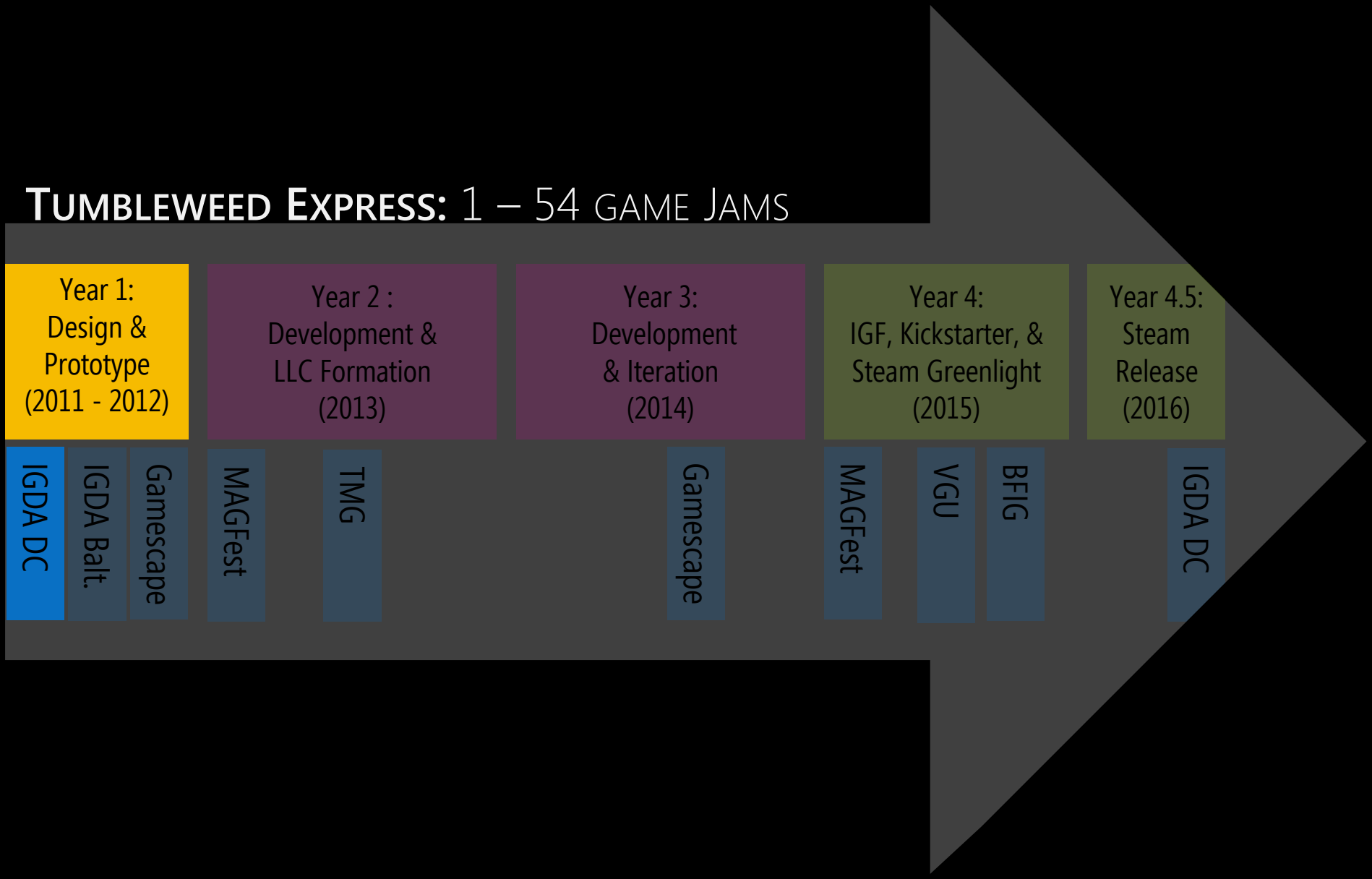
I'm proud to announce that you have been selected to be a part of the new Indie Game Showcase for Magfest 11!

If there are any questions prior to the start of Magfest 11, please don't hesitate to email me directly. Thank you for your time and congratulations!!!

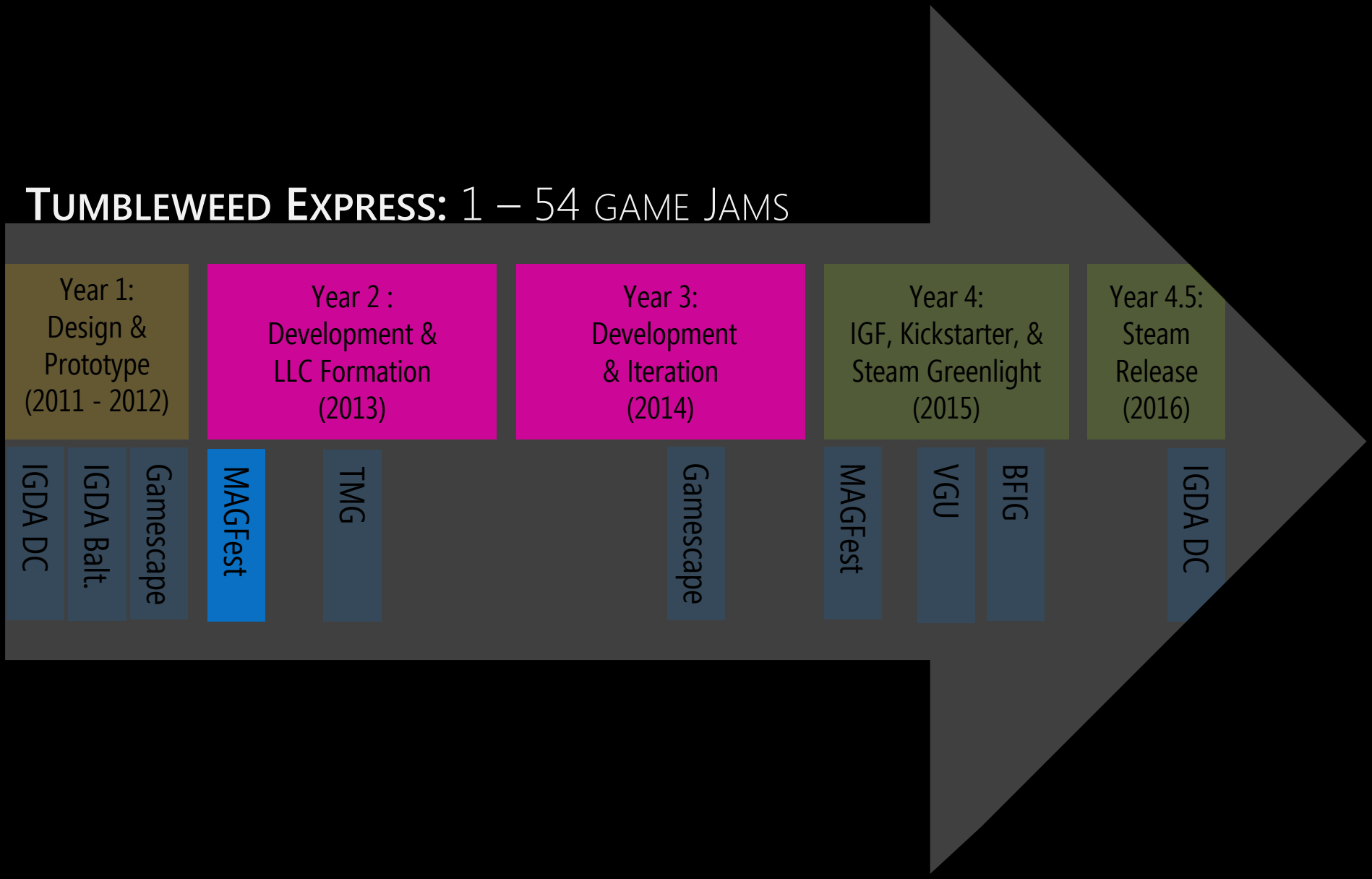
Cheers,
Gabriel G.

Indie Game Showcase."

Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



Years 2 – 3: 1st of Many Crunches

To start, the team prepared for MAGFest 11.

Team members worked constantly over the winter holiday period to complete the first full demo of Tumbleweed Express.

(This was the 1st of many crunches that preceded our deadlines.)

Year 2 - 3: Game Jam 13

(Version 0.4)

Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49_QUd93U20

Reflections: Things Learned

Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.

Year 2 - 3: MAGFest 11
(Version 0.4)

Year 2 - 3: Collecting Feedback

(Version 0.4)

Year 2 - 3: Building Interest

(Version 0.4)

Year 2 - 3: Marketing

(Version 0.4)

"Are you guys on Twitter?"

Year 2 - 3: Marketing

(Version 0.4)

"Are you guys on Twitter?"

No. Oops!

Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.

Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.

Years 2 -3: After Magfest

1. LLC Creation & Work Agreements
2. Process MAGFEST Feedback
3. Update Game Design Document
4. Join Social Media
5. Migrate to BitButcket & Utilize Ticketing
6. Roster Changes & Hiring Developers

Year 2 - 3: MAGFest Most Requested

(Version 0.4)

Attendees of MAGFest played 196 games of Tumbleweed Express and generated 259 unique tickets that included: feedback, feature requests, bugs, and user experience issues. After cataloging these issues, the top items included:

Add Radar; could be a purchasable option (14 Requests)
Boss needs indicators for where to shoot and colliders (8)
Destructible spawners (8)
Mouse sensitivity needs to be adjustable (7)
Iterate on design of battle menu; it's confusing (6)
Weapon switching is slow and cumbersome (5)
Put on Steam with achievements (4)
Drillcars are very aggressive (4)
Track switching and destination control (4)
...

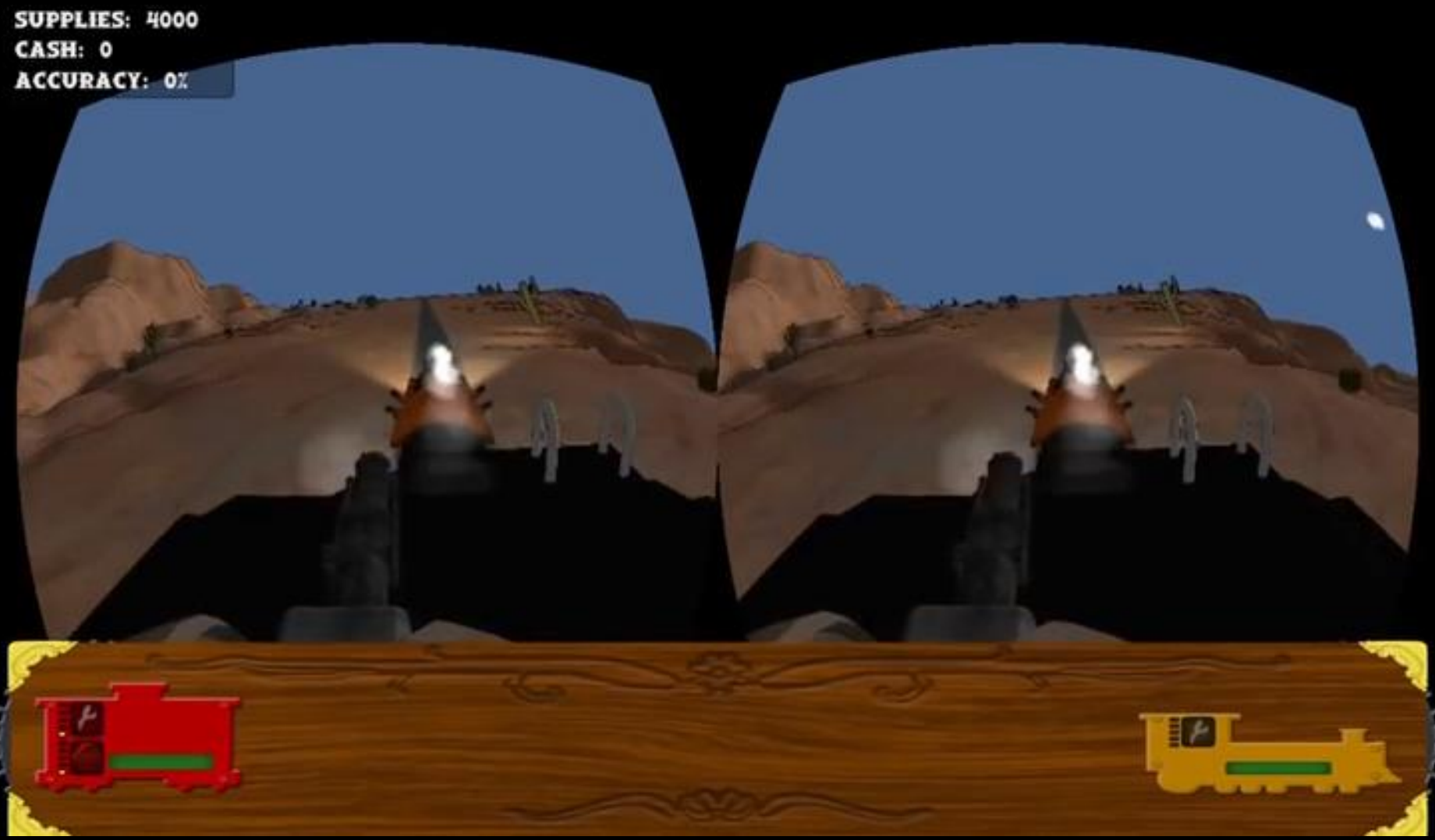
Year 2 - 3: Then and Now
(Version 0.5 – 0.7)

Customization: 2012

Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HFBr2-WyYbI

Year 2 - 3: Experiment

(Version 0.5x)



Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vmDlYWgopA

Goals: Expected Project Outcomes

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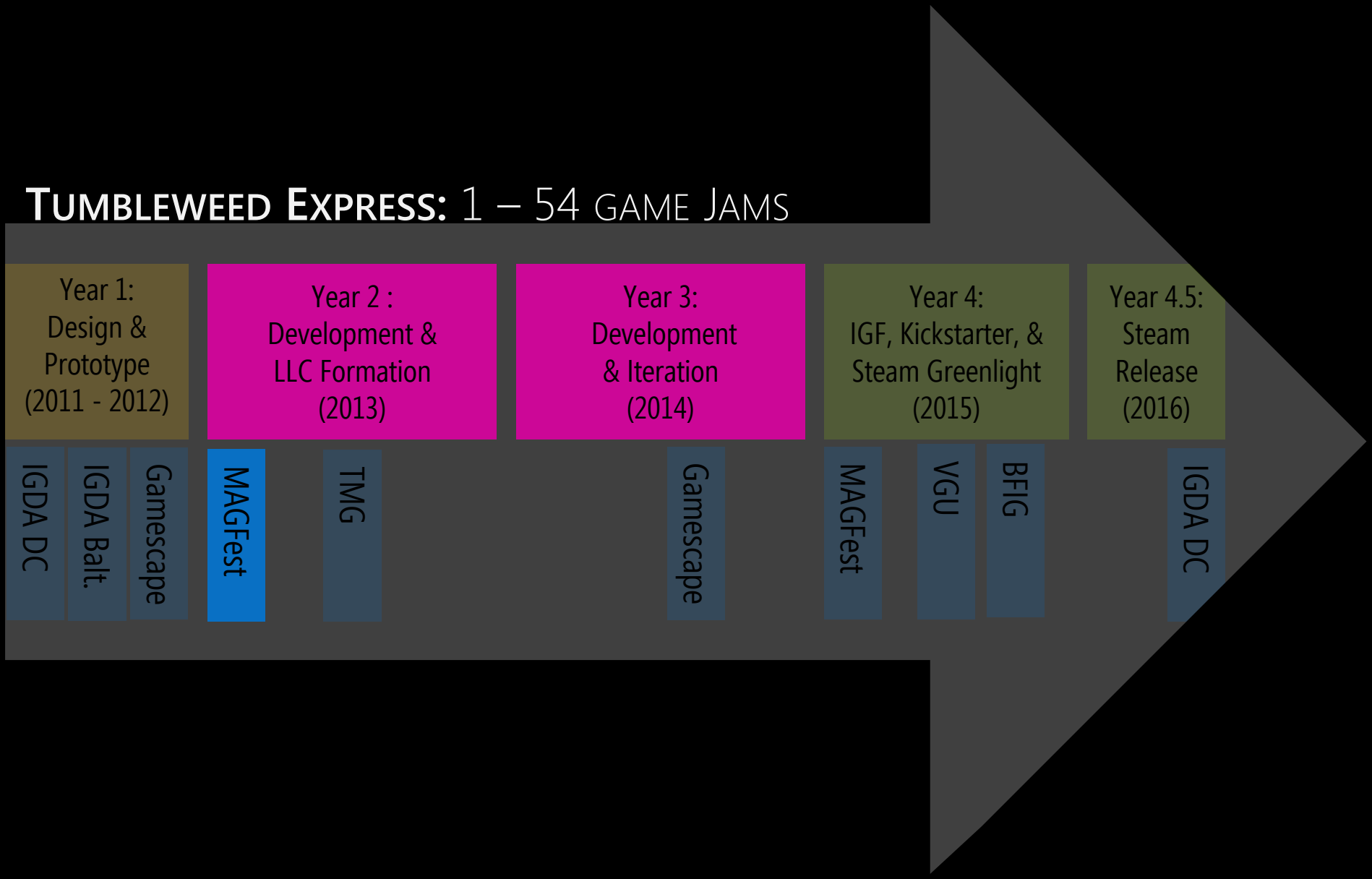
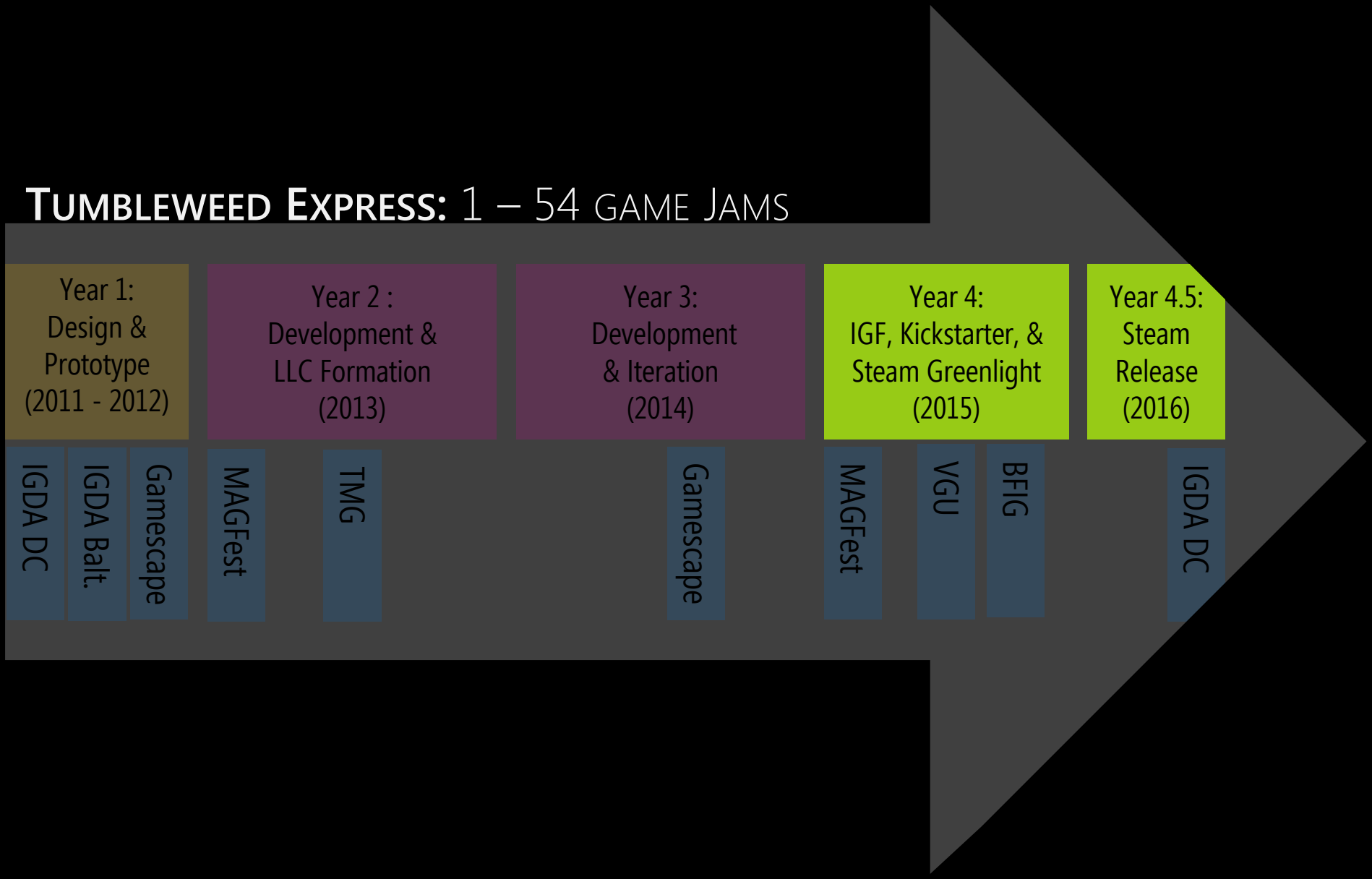
Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams

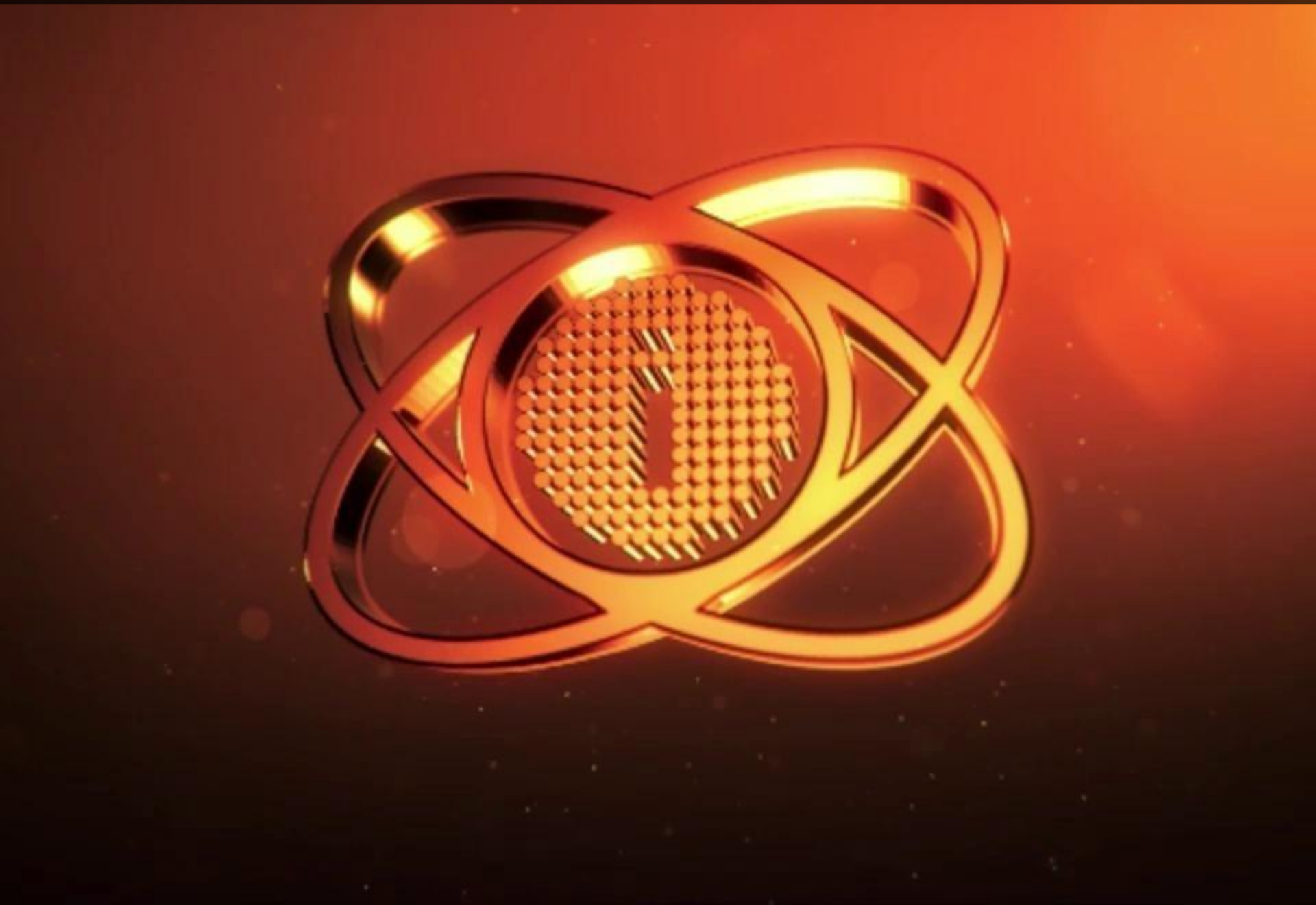


Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams



Year 4 – 4.5: Submit to IGF

(Though unsuccessful, it was good for productivity to have this as goal)



Year 4 – 4.5: Setup Steam Greenlight

(Helped us move towards release and expand the community)

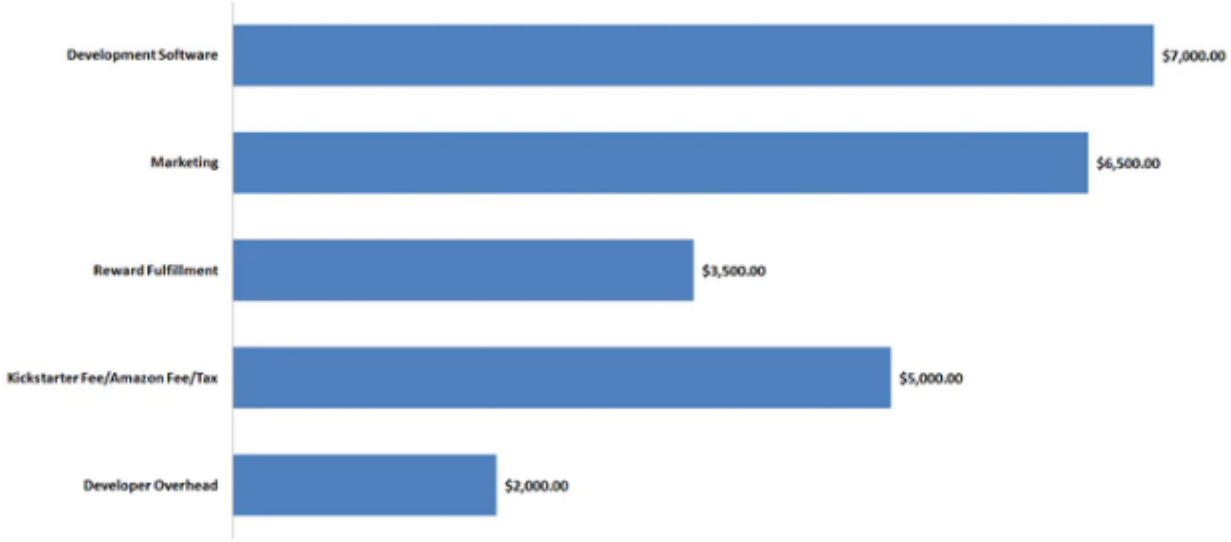
Year 4 – 4.5: Run a Kickstarter

(Attempted to acquire funding and increase momentum)

Why KICKSTARTER?

The Dirigiballers have chosen Kickstarter as a funding platform because we view it as the most efficient and intuitive tool to engage with our audience; additionally, we think it fits in best with our unique development style and we hope to meet people who are passionate about the project through this venue. We also hope that you will enjoy the list of backer rewards that we have planned as they were very fun to come up with!

The lion's share of the funding we receive will go directly towards the final production and release of Tumbleweed Express, which includes: commercial licenses for the development tools we use, some hardware needed for testing, help with attending conventions, and the marketing that will help increase exposure enabling the project's success! Below is the total rundown of the development aspects that your donations will be funding.



Stretch Goals

$30,000
In-Game Developer Commentary

$35,000
LOCKED

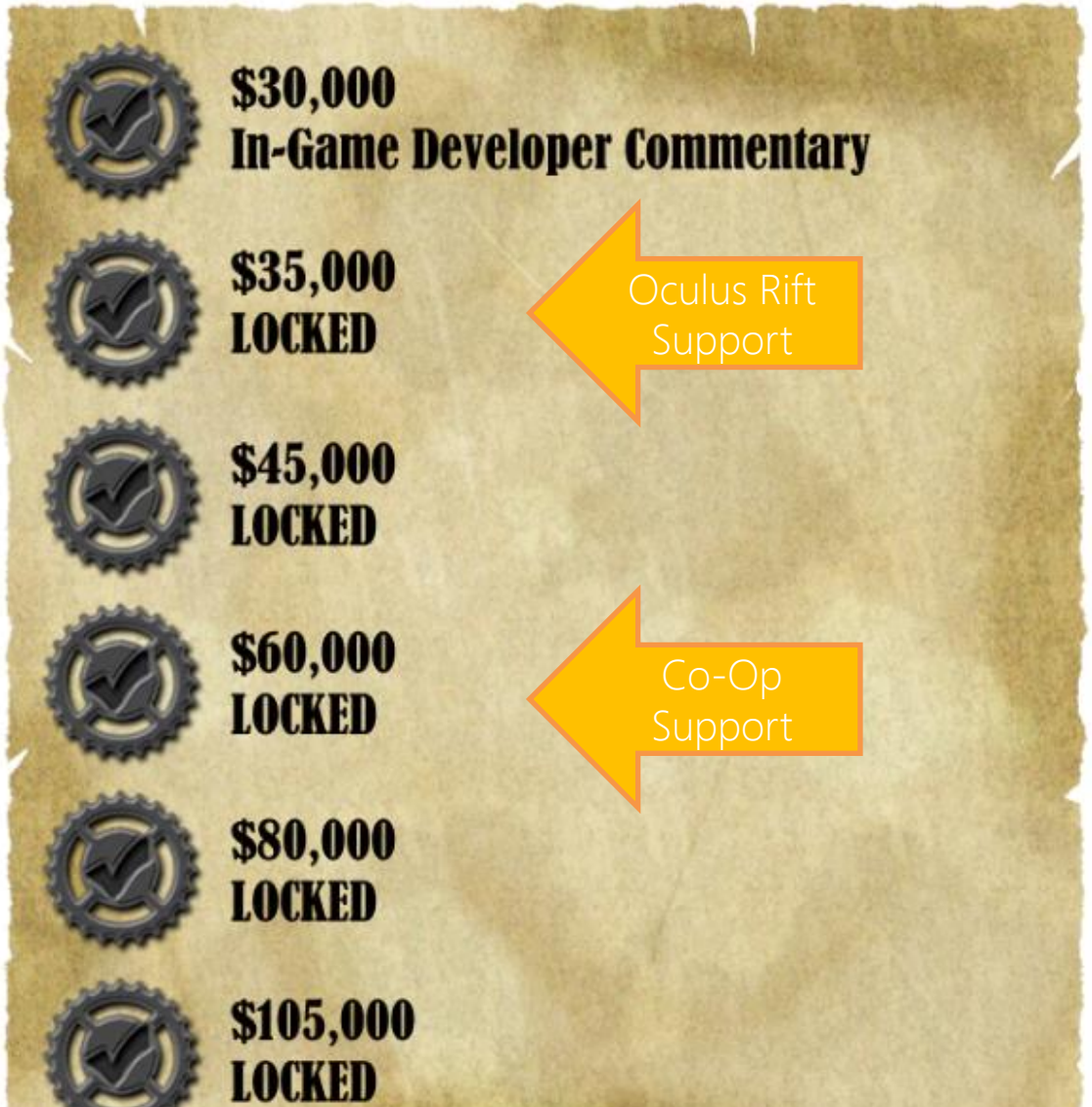
$45,000
LOCKED

$60,000
LOCKED

$80,000
LOCKED

$105,000
LOCKED

Stretch Goals



Tumbleweed Express: The Steampunk Railshooter

by The Dirigiballers, LLC

79
backers

$5,452
pledged of $24,000 goal

0
seconds to go

Funding Unsuccessful

This project's funding goal was not reached on October 2, 2014.

College Park, MD Video Games

Trains with guns on them in the Wild West! Shoot, upgrade, customize, and mount up to defeat brutal outlaws and ruthless businessmen!

Share: Tweet | Share | Embed | Pin | Post

Samuel Batista, Dan Silber, and 2 more people you follow are backers.

The Dirigiballers, LLC

First created | 29 backed

dirigiballers.com

See full bio Contact me

Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.

Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.

Tumbleweed Express Development Blog

Welcome! This blog has been created to chart the development of Tumbleweed Express, a "Travel Defense" game in which the player controls a steam-powered train that travels along the countryside utilizing mounted weaponry to fend off attacking enemies in a "Western Steampunk" setting. This project originated at the 2011 Fall Game Jam that was hosted by the DC Chapter of the International Game Developers Association.

Saturday, October 4, 2014

Post Mortem: How to (not) get funded on Kickstarter in 30 days

On Thursday, October 2nd at 2:00p.m. EST the Tumbleweed Express Kickstarter campaign ended unsuccessfully having reached ~22% of its funding goal. Firstly, I want to express my sincerest gratitude towards everyone who supported us during our campaign. The help we received from total strangers was powerful and surprising and the support we received from friends and family was heartwarming and encouraging. We met lots of new people, formed friendships and connections, and strengthened our ties with the communities that we came from. However, due to the all-or-nothing nature of Kickstarter we unfortunately will receive none of the amount that was raised.

Mostly I felt relieved at the end of it, as the negative emotions of frustration and disappointment had already run their course leading up to the final hours of the campaign. Despite the technical failure of the campaign however I do want to stress that this past month was the most successful, intense, and positive marketing push that our project has had in the three years we've been working on it. That said, I want to evaluate the campaign and give my impressions on what happened using the following categories:

What I Know We Did Right: Actions we took that tangibly benefit our campaign
What I Think We Did Right: Actions we took that, while imaginably positive, did not appear to tangibly benefit our campaign
What I Know We Did Wrong: Actions we took that tangibly hurt our campaign
What I Think We Did Wrong: Actions we took that, while imaginably negative, did not

Official Tumbleweed Express Pages

www.dirigiballers.com
www.facebook.com/TumbleweedExpress

Twitter Feed

Tweets by @Dirigiballers

Dirigiballers Retweeted

Matthew Louis
@mattm401

Tomorrow night I am doing a short talk on Tumbleweed Express followed by a panel with some of the team, join us! twitter.com/Dirigiballers/...

27 Jun

Dirigiballers
@Dirigiballers

Come to our #indiedev talk tomorrow

Embed View on Twitter

Year 4 – 4.5: Scoping Back

Having an unsuccessful Kickstarter was still valuable because the project's audience expanded and the team better understood what fans wanted. However, it was time to return to the game design document and scope back (e.g., by removing experimental features like VR and Co-Op).

Year 4 – 4.5: Pressing On

Thanks to the project's expanding community and the team's continual updating of the project, social media, Steam Greenlight, etc…

Your title, "Tumbleweed Express," has been Greenlit!

To continue, you will need to complete the necessary digital paperwork to sign up as a new Steamworks Partner.

Before you get started, you may want to check out this page of frequently asked questions:

At the end of that process, you'll have an appID and account in the Steamworks Developer Program with access to the necessary SDK, documentation, and configuration website to prepare your application for launch.

To continue, please return to your item's page in Steam Greenlight (and make sure you're logged in with the account that submitted the item), where you'll see a big button to continue this process.

This series of web forms is a new process that we are testing out. If you have any questions or encounter any issues while completing the forms, please contact us at

Sincerely, The Steam Business Team

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Reflections: Things Learned

1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.

Reflections: Things Learned

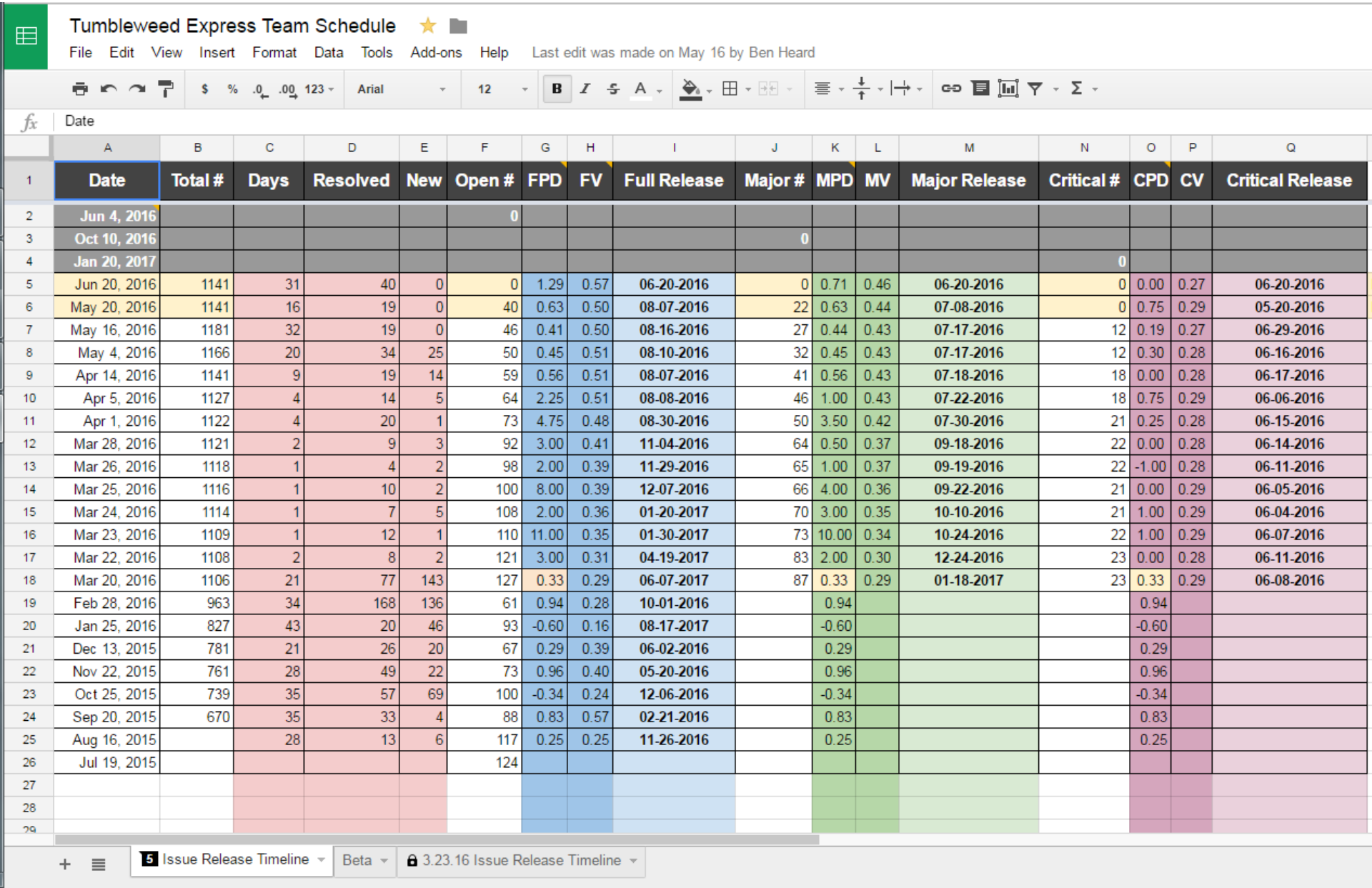
1. External deadlines are great for productivity.
2. It is never too early to start marketing.
3. Developing a project takes more than having the code, art, and audio.
4. Persistence is important.

Year 4 – 4.5: Remote Jams Begin

(Version 1.0)

Year 4 – 4.5: Data Driven Timelines

(Version 1.0)



Tumbleweed Express Team Schedule

File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was made on May 16 by Ben Heard

Arial 12

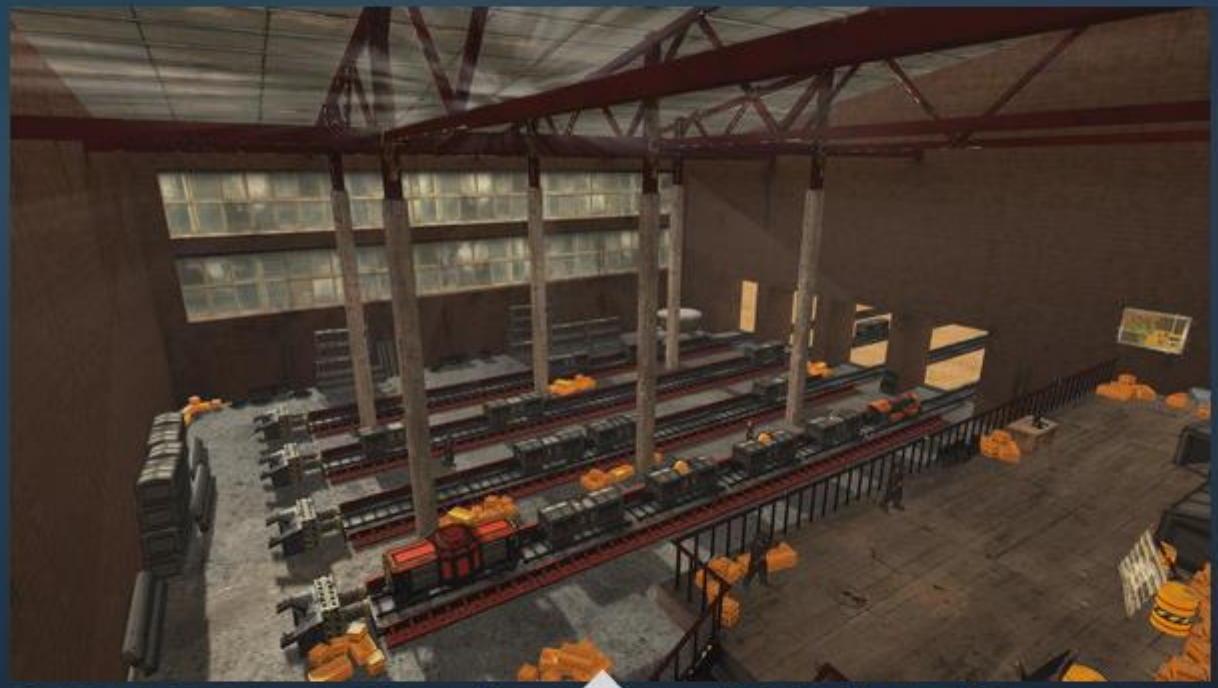
fx Date

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
1	Date	Total #	Days	Resolved	New	Open #	FPD	FV	Full Release	Major #	MPD	MV	Major Release	Critical #	CPD	CV	Critical Release
2	Jun 4, 2016					0											
3	Oct 10, 2016									0							
4	Jan 20, 2017													0			
5	Jun 20, 2016	1141	31	40	0	0	1.29	0.57	06-20-2016	0	0.71	0.46	06-20-2016	0	0.00	0.27	06-20-2016
6	May 20, 2016	1141	16	19	0	40	0.63	0.50	08-07-2016	22	0.63	0.44	07-08-2016	0	0.75	0.29	05-20-2016
7	May 16, 2016	1181	32	19	0	46	0.41	0.50	08-16-2016	27	0.44	0.43	07-17-2016	12	0.19	0.27	06-29-2016
8	May 4, 2016	1166	20	34	25	50	0.45	0.51	08-10-2016	32	0.45	0.43	07-17-2016	12	0.30	0.28	06-16-2016
9	Apr 14, 2016	1141	9	19	14	59	0.56	0.51	08-07-2016	41	0.56	0.43	07-18-2016	18	0.00	0.28	06-17-2016
10	Apr 5, 2016	1127	4	14	5	64	2.25	0.51	08-08-2016	46	1.00	0.43	07-22-2016	18	0.75	0.29	06-06-2016
11	Apr 1, 2016	1122	4	20	1	73	4.75	0.48	08-30-2016	50	3.50	0.42	07-30-2016	21	0.25	0.28	06-15-2016
12	Mar 28, 2016	1121	2	9	3	92	3.00	0.41	11-04-2016	64	0.50	0.37	09-18-2016	22	0.00	0.28	06-14-2016
13	Mar 26, 2016	1118	1	4	2	98	2.00	0.39	11-29-2016	65	1.00	0.37	09-19-2016	22	-1.00	0.28	06-11-2016
14	Mar 25, 2016	1116	1	10	2	100	8.00	0.39	12-07-2016	66	4.00	0.36	09-22-2016	21	0.00	0.29	06-05-2016
15	Mar 24, 2016	1114	1	7	5	108	2.00	0.36	01-20-2017	70	3.00	0.35	10-10-2016	21	1.00	0.29	06-04-2016
16	Mar 23, 2016	1109	1	12	1	110	11.00	0.35	01-30-2017	73	10.00	0.34	10-24-2016	22	1.00	0.29	06-07-2016
17	Mar 22, 2016	1108	2	8	2	121	3.00	0.31	04-19-2017	83	2.00	0.30	12-24-2016	23	0.00	0.28	06-11-2016
18	Mar 20, 2016	1106	21	77	143	127	0.33	0.29	06-07-2017	87	0.33	0.29	01-18-2017	23	0.33	0.29	06-08-2016
19	Feb 28, 2016	963	34	168	136	61	0.94	0.28	10-01-2016		0.94				0.94		
20	Jan 25, 2016	827	43	20	46	93	-0.60	0.16	08-17-2017		-0.60				-0.60		
21	Dec 13, 2015	781	21	26	20	67	0.29	0.39	06-02-2016		0.29				0.29		
22	Nov 22, 2015	761	28	49	22	73	0.96	0.40	05-20-2016		0.96				0.96		
23	Oct 25, 2015	739	35	57	69	100	-0.34	0.24	12-06-2016		-0.34				-0.34		
24	Sep 20, 2015	670	35	33	4	88	0.83	0.57	02-21-2016		0.83				0.83		
25	Aug 16, 2015		28	13	6	117	0.25	0.25	11-26-2016		0.25				0.25		
26	Jul 19, 2015					124											
27																	
28																	
29																	

5 Issue Release Timeline | Beta | 3.23.16 Issue Release Timeline

Tumbleweed Express

Community Hub



Trains with guns on them in the Wild West! Shoot, upgrade, customize, and mount up to defeat brutal outlaws and ruthless businessmen! Tumbleweed Express is a tower, or travel, defense game set in the American West.

User reviews:
OVERALL: Very Positive (57 reviews)

Release Date: May 31, 2016

Popular user-defined tags for this product:

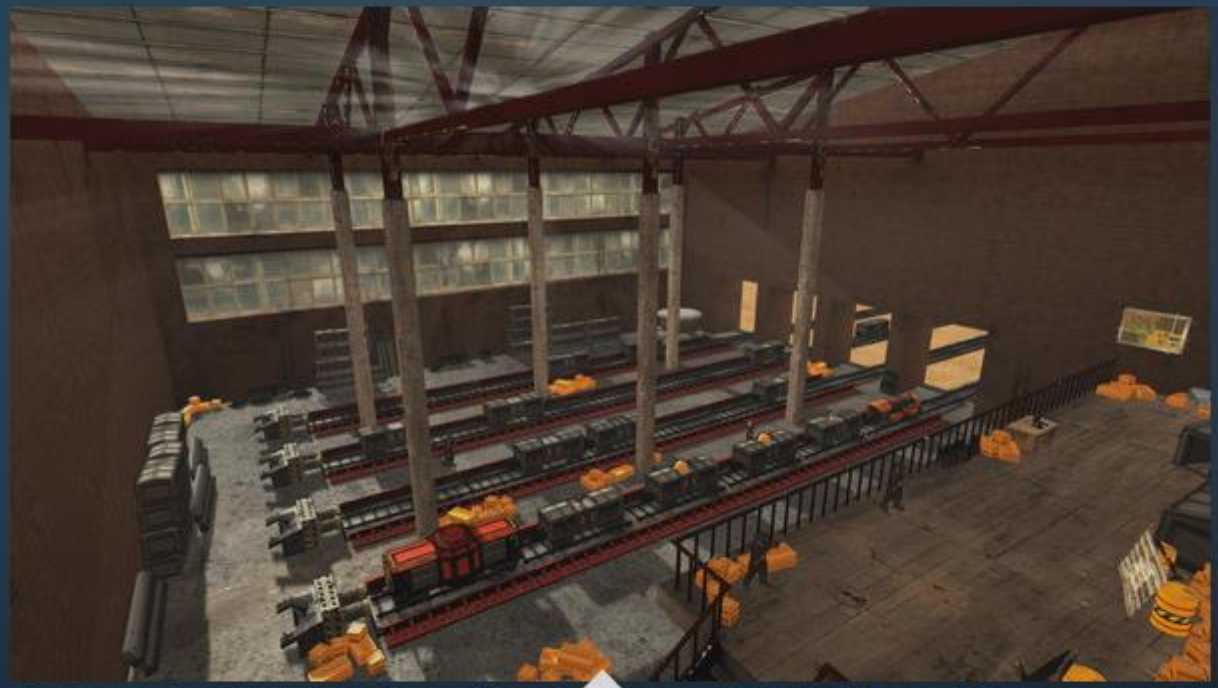
Indie | Action | Adventure | Singleplayer | Trains

Tags you've applied to this product:

+ Add your own tags

Tumbleweed Express

Community Hub



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+ Add your own tags

Goals: Expected Project Outcomes

1. Make a fun, 3D game about a train in approximately 3 years time.
2. Submit a build to the Independent Games Festival (IGF).
3. Complete the project with support for Windows, Mac, and Linux.
4. Release the game on Steam.

Release Dinner: May 31st, 2016

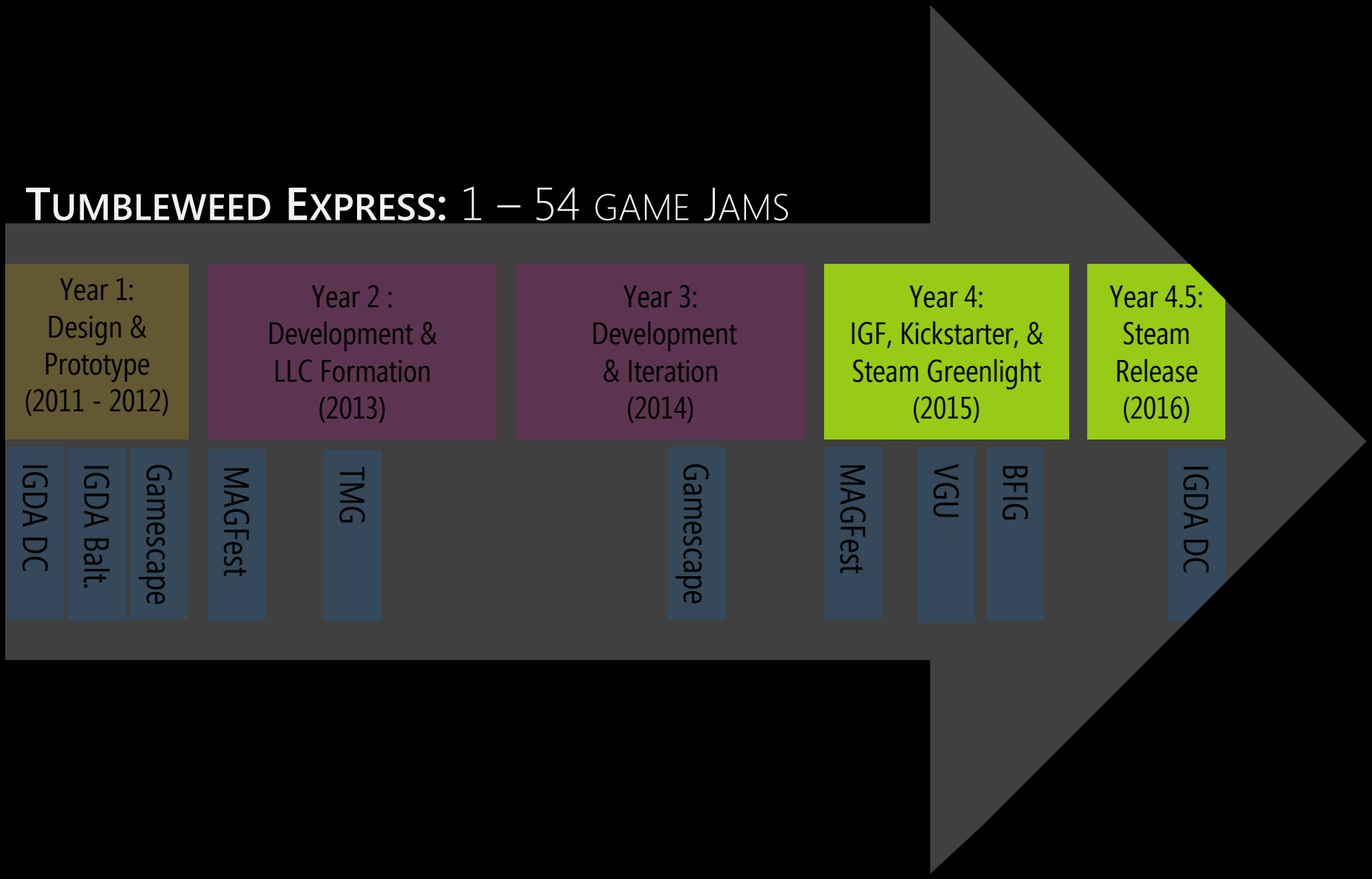
(Team and Friends)

Conclusion: What I Learned

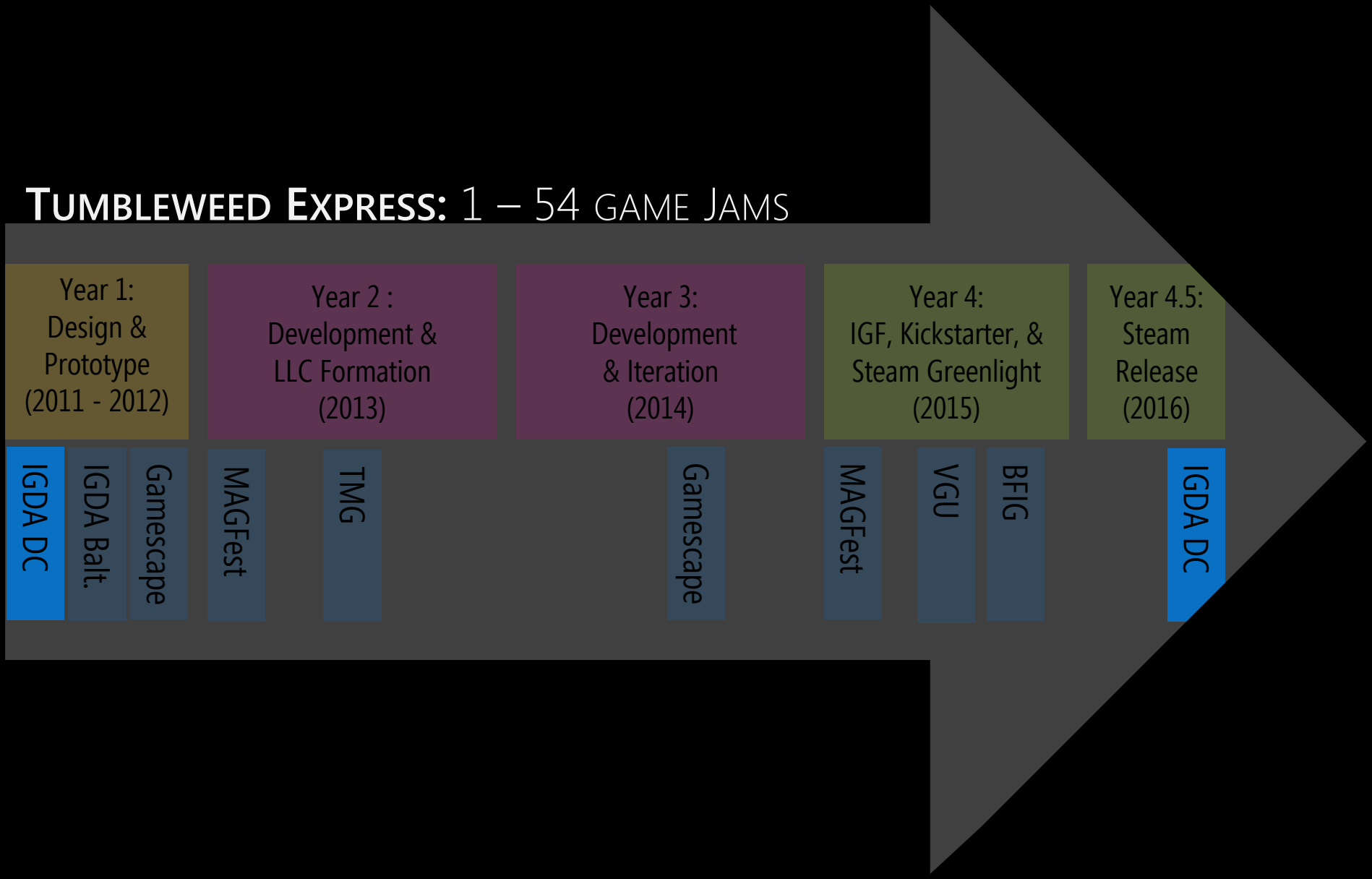
Am·a·tuer (noun): The English word amateur came from a French word which in turn came from a Latin word that meant "lover."

In English, amateurs are so called because they do something for the love of doing it and not for pay. (Merriam-Webster)

Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams

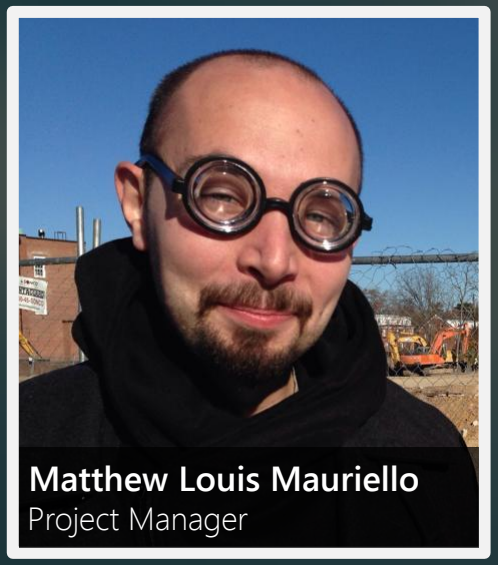


Tumbleweed Express: 1 – 54 game Jams

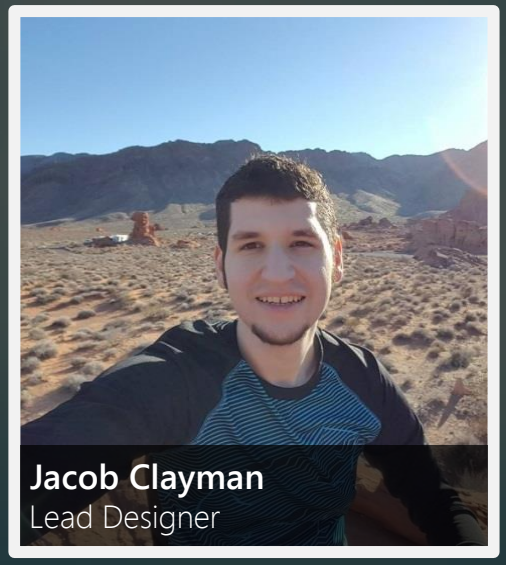


Year 4.5: IGDA DC Panel Discussion

(Version 1.0)

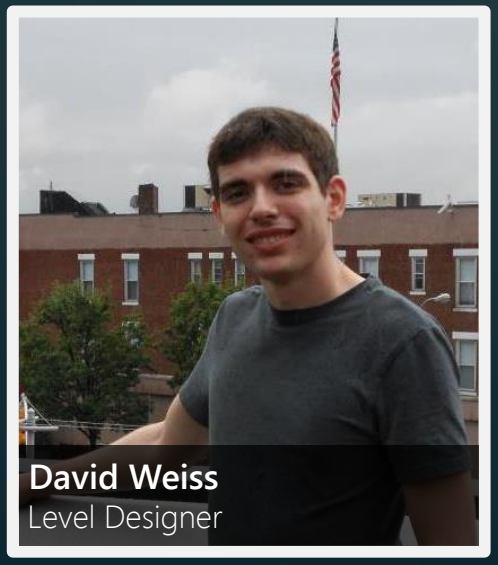


Matthew Louis Mauriello
Project Manager



Jacob Clayman
Lead Designer

David To
Programmer



David Weiss
Level Designer

Thanks for Listening!
Questions?

Tumbleweed Express: A Tale of 54 Game Jams

Matthew Louis Mauriello
Project Manager (@mattm401)

IGDA DC Chapter Meeting
June 28th, 2016 (@IGDA_DC)