

CHAPTER 3

Production and Logistics for Transformative Role-playing Games

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3.1 Introduction

When running analog role-playing games, you are also, in effect, becoming event planners. For a transformative game to work its magic, your players need to trust the design, the setting, and the situation. Issues of *logistics* can be jarring at best, and catastrophic at worst, e.g., problems with transportation, accommodation, set-up, and technical failures. To avoid these issues, we recommend carefully planning and tracking your production and logistics work when possible. This chapter is intended as a support for these processes.

In this chapter, we will consider the wide range of considerations that go into producing a transformative role-playing game at scale. While many of the topics here may pertain more to long-form larps rather than other types of game, we recommend reading carefully anyway and deciding what is directly relevant to your projects. Furthermore, while we focus primarily on in-person events, you can find some considerations around working with technology later in the chapter.

We have structured this chapter to follow a traditional project lifecycle. It begins with the tasks necessary to start working on running your game, then moves onto the design tasks and other activities that need to happen before your game. We will then consider those tasks that might happen once you arrive onsite. Finally, we will discuss tasks that happen after the game is done. While this organization is chronological, note that some activities run throughout the entire project. For example, you will create a budget during the initiation phase, but you will not close the budget until the last invoice has been paid, which is likely to happen after the game is packed away.

In these next sections, we will cover the **Initiation** stage: when you are starting the planning for your project.

3.2 Organizational teams

a) Organizational structure, leadership, and management

Leadership is a role or a quality that involves influencing people to enthusiastically and willingly follow a vision or a direction. *Management* is a set of processes and methodologies that enable those people to work efficiently and effectively. In hierarchical terms, leaders are in charge of deciding what needs to be done, while managers are in charge of delivering it. In many game projects, the leaders are also managers, but the skillsets are different.

While some teams are run like a corporation (Harviainen 2013), not all are hierarchical; some prefer a consensus-driven approach to decision making, or a democratic (committee-based) structure. Martine Svanevik (2009) argues that it is possible to collectively create larps “with a flat power structure, where the traditional role of organizer is non-existent.” Harviainen (2013, 119) mentions that while such structures can be beneficial, “because the larp lacks a definitive authority, it also lacks a directive source who is able to settle disputes, define undeniable in-game truths, and so forth.” Authority can be important, so be transparent with how your team will function so everyone understands their responsibilities. In this section, we will assume a distinction between leadership and levels of management that you can choose to dismantle for your own project.

An overlap also exists between the organising team and the design team in as much as the people who come up with the idea for the game are also the same people who produce and run the game. However, this is not always the case. If you consider most tabletop RPGs or even larps like *Gothic* (2024; Brind et al. 2024), *Just a Little Lovin’* (2011–; Groth, Grasmø, and Edland eds. 2021), or *On the Styx* (2019–2022), they can be organized by people who are not the original designers because a larpscript exists (Stark, Nilsen, and Lindahl 2013). Many shorter scripts and even some long ones are available on the archive Alexandria.dk.

The core skills of a leader or a leadership team are to be able to enthuse others and provide a coherent vision for the game: What is the game about? What are the themes and intentions of the piece? It does not necessarily mean being “in charge,” nor does it mean that you have all of the answers; deferring to the expertise and experience of others is in itself a leadership quality. Ultimately, however, the leaders are accountable for the success of the game. We recommend a form of soft leadership, with more frequent delegation than in other fields. There are many reasons for this. First of all, implementation is a collective effort and rarely will an organizer, however committed, be able to have a comprehensive view of all aspects of the larp, so you have to trust what other working groups are doing. Secondly, but no less importantly, larp teams are often made up of volunteers who do not receive a salary. It is therefore necessary for the environment to be more relaxed and flexible than the working world in which these

people usually operate. Friendly treatment, recognition of their work, and a healthy environment are the best rewards for a team of volunteers, who will thus be more motivated to return or create new events.

For more tips on managing projects, see Bailly (2022).

b) Other Implementation team roles

In many teams, one person will end up taking on more than one of these responsibilities. Ideally, everyone should be aware of the main themes of the game and the design philosophy. Remember to devote time and effort to effective communication between the various groups, so that everyone functions as part of the same project and can act in a way that ensures their work is consistent with the type of experience you want to provide to participants. Also, note that the roles listed here may be filled by one or more persons depending on the size, type of event, and the resources available. In general, it is more effective to assign fewer persons to supervisory roles and more persons to the actual production of materials, but this is not a general rule. Each team is formed according to the inclinations, objectives, political agenda, and social group that make up the team.

i) Project Roles

Depending on the scope, your project may need several roles filled by team members. Examples include:

- **Project manager:** Responsible for tracking and reporting on the project and helping to keep it on time, and on budget.
- **Producer:** Responsible for maintaining an overview of all aspects related to production and delegating tasks.
- **Accountant:** Handles and tracks the financial transactions.
- **Physical logistics specialist:** Makes sure that everything that needs to get to and from the location arrives/departs on time; is correctly and safely set up; and packed away.
- **Scenographer:** Responsible for designing the physical atmosphere, such as lighting, sound, set pieces, and props.
- **Communication specialist:** Looks after the dissemination of information to potential and actual players and crew.
- **Safety specialist:** Is responsible for implementing structures to support the physical and emotional safety of all participants.
- **Accessibility specialist:** Specialises in all aspects of accessibility before and during an event.
- **Cultural consultant / sensitivity reader:** Reads and advises on matters pertaining to culture and identity to ensure fair, inclusive, and appropriate content.
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion specialist:** Works to ensure that the event is inclusive and welcoming to all people whenever possible.

- **Education specialist:** Where the transformative game has educational content, advises and consults on education best practice and process.
- **Therapeutic specialist:** Advises and consults on therapeutic content, best practice, and process.
- **Workshop designer:** Designs and writes scripts for workshops that deliver concise content in a timely fashion and across different levels of experience.
- **Documentation lead:** Is responsible for photographs, videos, and other documentation of the game.
- **Worldbuilder:** Is accountable for the creation, documentation, and description of the Storyworld for the game.
- **Narrative designer:** Is in charge of the plot and narrative development.
- **Character writer:** Is accountable for the creation of characters and relations for the game and/or the process by which characters are created.
- **Sound designer:** Creates the soundscape for the larp by writing or commissioning new pieces, compiling existing tracks, and/or recruiting DJs or other performers.
- **Graphic designer:** Designs the website, logos, fliers, and any other visual materials needed for the game.

ii) Run-time Roles

- **Game runner(s):** Are responsible for the actual running of the event.
- **Non-player characters (NPCs) and support characters:** Play the non-player characters.
- **Onsite crew:** These are the amazing people who will perform the job of what in cinema is called the “runner”: performing all those tasks that do not fall within the roles listed so far. In many cases, they may be people who have taken part in previous runs as players and who return with the advantage of already knowing the event. Including onsite crew members broadens the base of people involved in an event, expanding the community and acting as a gateway to start organising larps.
- **Facilitators:** The facilitator’s role in runtime is to ensure the game and workshops begin with clear framing, flow through responsive play, and land in reflection that participants can use.
- **Safety team:** Are responsible for the emotional and physical safety at the event. We recommend choosing safety team members that are particularly empathetic and strong communicators, ideally with some experience handling crisis situations.
- **Medics:** Are responsible for handling medical emergencies, e.g., first aid, dispensing medication, or calling the ambulance if needed. You can sometimes deputize members of the players base as additional medics, but make sure you have at least one person with this skillset on your team.

- **Mental health professional or paraprofessional:** For emotionally intense games, a licensed professional able to handle states of overwhelm or acute crisis, as well as less pressing support for the players.
- **Educator:** Akin to the education specialist. Delivers the educational content.
- **Documentarian:** Document the game in some way for future use, e.g., a photographer, researcher, or journalist. We recommend making your participants aware of and introducing these individuals to the group before play. If you have ways to opt-out of documentation, make those clear to players ahead of time.

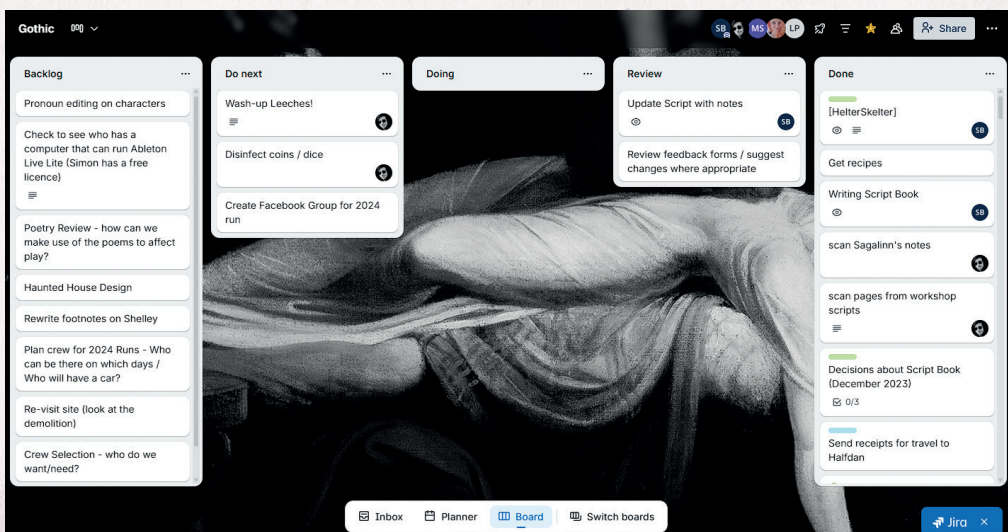
While some roles can be filled by multiple people, we recommend making project roles clear so that everyone understands their respective responsibilities to avoid the infinite hours model of organizing in which everyone is responsible for all tasks (Petterson 2021, 218).

3.3 Project management

Project management is a process of supervising the work of a team so that everything that needs to get done is done, on time, and within the constraints of the project, which are often financial. The project manager is not necessarily “in charge” nor accountable for the creative quality of the work; their focus is on keeping the event on track and managing the details. If at any point they think the project is not going to be ready on time, they need to communicate this.

In larp production, the project manager is often -- but not always -- the producer. However, for larger projects and teams, this is not always the case. There are a number of project management methodologies and online tools to support these methods, although a brief survey of larp makers in May 2025 suggested that most people were simply using a shared document – like Google Docs/Sheets – to track what needed to be done and by when, with a small group of people suggesting tools like Miro, Jira, Trello, and Coda (see Figure 1 for an example from *Gothic* (2023).

Fig 1: Trello board for project management of *Gothic*, courtesy of Avalon Larp Studio.



At its most basic, project management involves having a list of what needs to be done and by when, what is in progress, and what is completed or blocked. It can also include detailed estimations, timelines, and dependencies, but the approach depends on the scale of the game, number of participants, and experience of project managers.

Project management also overlaps with some elements of run-time facilitation. In long-form larps, often events need to take place at a specific time, or workshops need to run to a tight schedule so that the game can start at the allotted hour. Project management skills are useful for planning and implementing the runtime as well as the overall design.

Table 1: Production spreadsheet from Act 3 of *Midwinter* (Svanevik et al. 2020), showing key planned events, courtesy of Avalon Larp Studio.

Saturday		
Time	What	Person responsible
10:00	Workshop - structure of the day, warm-up exercise	MS
10:45	Act 3 - Crisis	-
11:00	Workshift 1 - provide toy materials	HJ + crew
11:45	Prep coffee for social time	SB
12:00	Social time (coffee)	-
12:40	Pick up lunch	Reindeer Guard
13:00	Family time (and lunch)	-
14:00	Tidy up from lunch	All
14:00	Workshift 2 - provide toy materials	HJ + crew
14:45	Prep tea for social time	SB
15:00	Family time (and tea)	-
15:45	Tidy up from tea	SB
16:00	Social time	-
16:50	Christmas Tree	-
16:55	Act 4 - Climax	-
17:00	Workshift 3- provide toy materials	HJ
18:00	Social Time	-
19:00	Workshift 4 - provide toy materials?	HJ
19:40	Pick up dinner	Reindeer Guard
20:00	Family Time (Dinner)	-
20:30	Prep Christmas Tree decorating	MS / SB
21:00	Decorating the Christmas Tree	MS / SB
21:15	Act 5 - Denouement	-
21:50	Meeting at The Christmas Tree	-
22:00	Larp Ends	-
22:30	Everyone off site	-

In the next sections, we will share several considerations you should make **Before the Game** when implementing your project.

3.4 Setting

In the early stages of implementation, it helps to think about the setting of the game as this will inform many aspects of the project, particularly around location and aesthetics. In this section we will consider the genre of the game and the process of worldbuilding.

a) Genre

Genre is an important consideration as players tend to bring assumptions based upon previous associations and experiences. These assumptions can work in your favor, for example, using fairytale creatures that are familiar to children in a larp intervention. However, they can also bring with them challenges, such as stereotypes or misaligned interpretations of the genre. For example, the term “fantasy” can refer to games that range from silly, to epic, to gritty, to a highly political thriller; a player assuming the tone of the game is more like *Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1991) will likely have difficulties calibrating with a player imagining the game is like *Game of Thrones* (1996). When working with genre, giving pop cultural examples as touchstones ahead of the game can be helpful, although do not assume your players are familiar with these references. What you might consider common knowledge within your subculture may be completely unfamiliar to some players.

Thus, even with such touchstones, you should be transparent with players about what kind of tone and which themes you are most interested in playing. A light-hearted *Star Trek* episode focusing on everyday life aboard the ship is far different from a Borg episode featuring torture of a beloved cast member, so simply using *Star Trek* as a reference may not be enough to set the proper tone. Without such guidelines, in applied situations, you run the risk of derailing the playstyle away from the specific transformative goals you are aiming to incentivize. Also consider which themes are most appropriate for certain populations’ contexts. For more information, see Chapter 2 of this textbook.

While these reminders are important during the design phase, they can especially emerge in implementation. As role-playing games are spontaneous, co-creative, and improvisational, emergent play is inherent to the experience (Bowman 2018; Torner 2018). You may need to course correct the game as an organizer or bring in a run-time facilitator who can narratively direct the players in the preferred direction. Failing to do so may cause at least a lack of narrative cohesion or uneven play experiences and at worst, safety concerns due to reactions to sensitive emergent content.

b) Worldbuilding

The structure of a worldbuilding team depends on the scale of the larp you are running and the complexity of the world you want to build. For a campaign fantasy larp, you may need to do a lot of writing; producing an entire setting from scratch may need a large team to support that work: writers, editors, and proofreaders. Some projects introduce the idea of team leaders who are responsible for sections of the worldbuilding. *College of Wizardry* (2014-) did this for their Student Handbook (Skjønsgjell et al. 2015), which was a five hundred page diegetic guide to the new storyworld. Seventy-two contributors worked to define the world and its history in a way that still allowed a collaborative “Yes, and...” approach to play. However, five hundred pages contains a lot of information and it might not help a transformative game if you expect your players to assimilate all of that information before the game. Be clear with your participants what information is essential and what is meant for mainly aesthetic purposes. As with everything else, intensive worldbuilding is a design choice. The larp *Conscience* was set in a near future world with realistic androids and artificial intelligence. The world document was 650 words long and it detailed the playable aspects of the world and society and important “historical” events that were relevant to the character’s backstories. It also provided a framework for players to generate their own stories. For a smaller game, or one that is closer to the world we live in, a much smaller team or even an individual can describe the information that players need to play the game.

i) Historical Setting

This approach is also useful for a game with a historical setting. For a tabletop adventure set in 1986, it might be enough to reference the Cold War, the AIDS crisis, and a general lack of mobile phones.

ii) Existing IP

If permitted, you may also want to set your game within an existing setting, for example a tabletop game using the *World of Darkness* storyworld, which has a rich history and a society that is well documented and understood by many. However we urge caution when it comes to using someone else’s intellectual property (IP) without permission. Even if your intentions are good, this is an area where we suggest that seeking forgiveness after the fact could be expensive and stressful. Major media corporations often have a lot more resources for legal battles than gamerunners do.

iii) Shared worldbuilding

Another option that works well for smaller games is to do worldbuilding collectively in a workshop. Let the players decide where and when the larp takes place, calibrate the culture (Nielsen 2014; Nielsen and Bulterund Strand 2019), create some news headlines for things that have happened there recently, and establish any antagonists.

3.5 Other essential aspects of the game design

Which aspects of the game design are essential to enact? As discussed in Chapter 2, map the game design to your transformational goals and to use this as a basis for prioritising their relative importance. You should not be in a position where everything is crucial; the more moving parts there are to a design, the greater the chance of a part of the impact not landing for the players. Consider the the following:

a) Relations

Is transformation achieved directly through the relations between the characters? For example, is some form of redemption or reconciliation key to your design? Do players need to help each other reach their transformative goals through play? If so, make this necessity transparent in your design.

b) Plots

Is transformation achieved through catharsis or the resolution of some plot or problem? Is there one central storyline, or several stories? Is the narrative linear, or rather a web of narrative threads? When it comes to a transformative game, sometimes the plot is not meant to be a “narrative” discovery, but rather a context that serves the main focus of the larp and its goals.

Sometimes the organizers prepare the storyline, but also players can create their own or transform, or even overturn, the main plot through emergent play (Bowman 2018; Torner 2018) or hacking the game to suit their own preferences (Svanevik and Brind 2020). A common example is when oppressive systems in larps are overruled by spontaneous democratic organizing based on the sensibilities of the players, not the characters, e.g., the *larp democracy* phenomenon (Fatland 2006; Hugaas 2019). Consider if your game will fall apart with emergent play and if so, communicate with your players what can and cannot be changed.

c) Outcome

Does everything come together at the end of the game? Is the final scene meant to be the point at which your goals are met?

In a transformative larp, the outcome is not so much about “victory” or not even “fun,” but what participants take home with them in terms of experience, reflection, personal, or social growth. The experience aims to be formative, able to give participants new perspectives or tools about negotiation, conflict management, emotional awareness and so on. Some aspects can be also cathartic on a more intimate level.

d) Contrary elements

Of those aspects that are critical according to your transformative goals, why and how are they critical? You should be able to articulate and explain this to yourself and others. There may be ideas, scenes, or concepts that feel important – and they probably are – but sometimes this feeling is subjective and the things you are focusing on are less important to the overall design and outcomes.

If not, do these elements run counter to your transformative goals? If so, how will you mitigate this? This is another fundamental aspect of design that needs to be decided early in the implementation. Spending time understanding what is not key to the experience and what actually may run counter to it is a key artifact of the piece, particularly for a long form or larger game. Consider making a risk assessment not only for safety (Sinking Ship Creations 2020; Losilla 2024), but also for the larp content itself, listing all of the things that might go wrong, how likely that is to happen, what the impact would be, and how it could be mitigated.

e) Transparency

How transparent is the game in terms of these critical points, i.e., how much agency do players think they have?

Some non-transparent games enjoy miscommunicating the level of agency players have; they talk about the illusion of agency or promise one thing but deliver another (Torner 2013). In a sphere that prioritizes honesty we are unsure of the value of doing this in a transformational game unless the goals are explicitly connected to detecting deception or problem solving in ambiguous situations. It is better to set expectations and manage the limits of agency, e.g., “Your characters will have significant agency in this game. However, we reserve the right to course correct or use a *deus ex machina* intervention if the piece strays too far from its intended path.”

f) Structure

How might the degree of structure affect certain populations? For example, while many neurodiverse players prefer structure, this is not universally true. Whichever way you design, structure will need to be clearly signposted and – where necessary – facilitated. If your design expects players to turn up for a ritual at 10pm, you may need a process for reminding them shortly beforehand. In locations with many possible play spaces, finding players to remind them may be untenable, so have another plan.

Even if plot-related scenes are optional, keep in mind that some players experience *fear or missing out* (FOMO) or feelings of rejection when they miss key group scenes or important plot points. You cannot always mitigate these reactions, but having a clear structure with a robust system for reminders can help. Keep in mind FOMO can also happen in tabletop RPGs, even when every player is technically witnessing the same events. Facilitators should try to distribute plots or special scenes amongst the players equally whenever possible to avoid perceptions of favoritism. We will discuss facilitation in more depth in Chapter 4.

3.6 Interaction design

In this section we will discuss the processes of interaction design. As this is an important aspect of role-playing – the ways that characters interact with one another, with organizers, or with NPCs. We suggest thinking about this early; however, we acknowledge that during the iteration process, sometimes ideas you will have early in the process will be discarded in favour of new ones. In the following sections, we will consider some of the implementation choices related to interaction.

a) Interacting with each other

How will players interface with the others during the game? For a tabletop game, the interactions between players, antagonists, and NPCs are sometimes directly curated by the facilitator or the game system. In a larp, however, the design should aim to create opportunities and invitations for interaction between characters. These opportunities are seeded in a number of different places: primarily the characters and their relationships, but also the planned activities, spatial, and social design of the game.

b) Player agency

To what degree can player choices impact the game during runtime, i.e., what is their degree of agency? This design question should be answered very early in the implementation process. Some games are very open-ended. There is no set story ending, and no expectation of success. In a fantasy game where the player characters can be defeated, you are creating a situation where character death is possible or even probable. In other games, even when these tragic outcomes are possible, players have a degree of control around when they will happen and/or the opportunity to opt-out of them, e.g., in consent-based games (Brown 2016; Bowman 2017). Still other games have a fixed ending that cannot be changed, some others have multiple choice options. The tension between authorial control and players' desire for agency can be designed away by making clear ahead of time the extent to which their characters have freedom to make change within the fiction.

Again, consider how the degree of player agency relates to your transformative goals. If you are aiming to help them improve their feelings of perceived competence or self-efficacy (Bandura 1982; Ryan and Deci 2017), a high degree of agency will be important. If your goals focus on raising awareness and empathy about social issues related to oppression, then removing agency (Bjørkelo and Jørgensen 2018) and/or having a fixed ending is a better option (Aarebrot and Nielsen 2012).

c) Group size

As discussed in Chapter 2, the size of the group matters, especially in terms of how much your design relies on runtime facilitation. Is a specific ratio of organizers to participants necessary for your transformative goals and the tasks you have assigned?

Can one teacher run a larp for 35 students, or do you need four additional facilitators to work with the students in smaller groups? Is there an expectation of supervision or emotional care? How large a safety team do you think you will need, based on the intensity of the planned activities?

When working with experienced role-players, you may be able to expect they will be able to play optimally based on *herd competence* (Lundqvist 2015) and sufficient instruction in the preparatory game materials, such as character relations or goals on the character sheet. However, you cannot assume new players will know how to engage without sufficient scaffolding and modeling from a guide. Furthermore, even experienced players struggle to engage sometimes, so having more organizers present is helpful.

d) Factions

Do the characters have specific factions or core groups with whom they will mainly play?

As we discussed in Chapter 4 of *TRGD* the Three Affiliations Model (Raaum et al. 2000, 2017; Fatland 2010b) allows for characters to have three core groups with whom they can interact. Constructing these affiliations in a way that gives a strong alibi for interaction and designs opportunities for characters to talk is important. If you have a group of characters working together in the kitchen, it might be more efficient for each of them to have their own work station and do separate jobs, but you have better interaction if they are all peeling potatoes together. Similarly, a religious commune where the initiates remain silent seems appropriate, but encouraging them to talk to one another – even just in whispers – tells your players that it is okay to interact. This is one of the places where narrative design and interaction design may clash. Privilege playability over fidelity to authenticity (Nielsen and Andresen 2013).

e) Calibration

Calibration and negotiation belong to all aspects of interaction design and are perhaps the most important thing to workshop and to make time for. Calibration and negotiation can be taught. Using exercises like the No Game can help inexperienced players learn to say no. In the No Game, you take turns in asking another player for something and they say “no” or “no thank you.” The purpose of this exercise is to normalise saying no, and to get used to being told no. *The Three Minute Game* (School of Consent 2015), developed by Harry Faddis and popularized by Betty Martin (2015), is also a useful way to build trust and teach the basics of calibration and negotiation. For example, Avalon Larp Studio adapted *The Three Minute Game* for the larp *Gothic* to help to build trust between players for physical interaction, e.g., of a romantic or sexual nature. Players alternate between asking/answering the questions: “How would you like me to touch you for two minutes?” and “How would you like to touch me for two minutes?” with an opportunity for negotiation and calibration.

Getting players to feel safe and brave enough to talk freely and honestly with one another takes time and effort. Be gentle with them and give them space. For small ensemble groups, calibration can occur within the whole group between all players, one at a time. If you know the players involved, starting with the more experienced ones first can help to set the level of honesty for the rest of the group. Ideally, this calibration comes at the end of a set of workshops that have already built trust and comfort between the group of players.

Always bear in mind that calibration becomes more complicated and time-consuming as the number of players increases. Large-scale larps have to manage many relationships and find space and time for calibration to be carried out before the event, on location. Due to the large numbers involved and other player responsibilities, it will always be difficult to try to carry out these activities online before the event. Many organizers therefore carry out these activities a few hours before the larp so that all participants are present and focused. It is always complicated to supervise a negotiation between two or more players, due to its intimate nature. For this reason, it is always best to train staff as well as possible beforehand.

f) Character relations calibration

How will players plan, workshop, and/or calibrate character relations before, during, and even after the game? In many cases, characters may have known one another for long periods of time – even years or more – and you need to allow your players a chance to talk about this dynamic: how well or poorly their characters get along and what the norms of behaviour are in each of their groups. Making time in workshops for relations discussions is probably the most efficient method of calibration; however, it has been successfully done over online meetings, phone calls, and instant messages. You can prepare self-guided questions on worksheets to facilitate the discussion.

Lines workshops are also useful here, in which players arrange themselves in a line in the room according to their perceived status. In particular, status lines allow players to identify where they think their character belongs within a group in terms of importance, wealth, intelligence, belonging, etc. For example, in *The Deadline* (Bowman et al. 2022, 2024), players enact members of an interdisciplinary research group experiencing conflicts around revisions on a grant application. In this scenario, perceived status is quite important to dynamics between the characters, so the designers included a line workshop. Players move along an imaginary line in the room with one side representing “strongly agree” and the other “strongly disagree” to the following questions:

- Do you believe your perceived status in the group is high?
- How enthusiastic were you about this project when it kicked off?
- How enthusiastic are you about this project right now?

The facilitator can then ask questions the player answers as their character, e.g., “For example, “Dr. Jones, I see that you feel you have a high status in this group. What is it that makes you feel that?” (Bowman et al. 2024). Players can also briefly chat with the participant next to them about why they think that place in the line. Such information is important not only to help the player get into character, but also to establish relationship dynamics quickly in the group.

g) Character collaboration

Are characters expected to collaborate? Or are the relationships more neutral or open to interpretation?

In some groups or factions, it is clear that the characters are supposed to be working together, but in others there is more room for interpretation. For example, in a school setting, just being in the same class as another character does not necessarily mean you are friends. You could be rivals, frenemies, actively dislike one another, or be ex-partners -- bitter and destructive or looking for reconciliation. Guide your players depending on the group with the sorts of questions and options they have for in-game collaboration. We can replace the whole sentence with something like ‘there is a tendency for players to create relationships that are “comfortable” rather than “dramatic,” i.e., *anodyne* relationships, particularly when players are tired from extensive workshopping. While such relations might be fine for some goals, they may not be ideal, for example, if your goals center upon conflict management (Cahn and Abigail 2014), resolution, or transformation (Lederach 2014).

h) Adversarial relations

Related to this point, are adversarial relationships built into the game with other players and/or NPCs?

Adversity and drama are at the heart of many role-playing stories and are often highly engaging, but they are not always required, nor always constructive. Drama is a subjective need. Some players derive energy from conflict; others shrink from it and find that even third-party conflict adversely affects their play and, by extension, transformative process. Note that conflict is not always visible, as in the case of heightened drama, but instead might remain under the surface. Similarly, adversarial relations do not always involve a direct conflict.

You may wish to move conflict from *character vs. character* (CvC, sometimes called PvP), to *character vs. environment* (CvE, sometimes called PvE), so that it only exists between players and NPCs or other external pressures in the game world. This practice allows conflict to be scheduled and to happen in controlled spaces. For example, at *The Quota* (Brind et al. 2018; Brind 2020) about refugees seeking asylum, homophobic interactions were very much an opt-in activity, and they took place in 1:1 interview rooms between PCs and NPCs. For participants who did not want to engage with the theme, they were not going to see or overhear it.

If adversarial, again, do these relationships contribute to your transformative goals? Conflict for conflict's sake probably does not contribute directly, but facing adversity and overcoming or reconciling it might. Ask yourself if there is an alternative to adversarial relationships and to what extent they are necessary to the game you want to make.

For more information about conflict, see Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of *TRGD*.

i) Group interactions

How and when will players interact in a group? Examples include eating, rituals, speeches, and parties. For each of the groups, plan and roughly schedule the times and spaces for interaction. Decide where and when these groups should be together and confirm there is enough space for interaction. Is the location crowded and noisy? A meal time may seem to be a good time and space for people to talk, but if they are spending half of the time queuing for food, and the rest of it in a space where it is too loud to hear properly then it may not work as planned. On the other hand, mealtime interactions can be designed as well, such as in the practice of *dinner warfare*, in which the organizers use arranged seating as a way to increase drama, encouraging players to intensify conflicts during food scenes (Wind 2024).

Also consider issues related to navigating the site. If you have a group of characters who are secretly meeting in the woods to rehearse a play, consider how long it takes to get to the woods and how easy it will be to find the location. Is rehearsing the play the most important activity? Or is the play simply a pretext for interaction, which can just as easily happen while walking there?

Are group interactions highly structured, loosely structured, or up to the players to navigate? You may be comfortable just letting the players sort the structure out for themselves. A loose structure allows groups and subgroups to form and is usually more comfortable and relaxed for players, as they do not feel they need to be checking the time and working out where they need to be next. However, as mentioned previously, lack of structure risks some players being left out or isolated.

j) Physicality

Are characters expected to physically interact with each other, e.g., combat, intimacy, sexuality, physical restraint?

Whilst most of what we think about when designing for interaction in embodied games is conversation, other forms of interaction may be important to your vision. If you have a combat system -- physical or otherwise -- or rules for intimate, sexual, or other physical contact, these need to be designed, communicated, and a clear baseline demonstrated ideally during workshops. As many of these types of interaction intersect with the safety rules for the game, it is essential that everyone has the same understanding of how they work or do not work.

What are the guidelines or rules around physicality? Putting the rules for physical interactions into your pre-game materials is a useful baseline, but you cannot safely assume that everyone has read or assimilated this information. They still need to be written, and ideally published before you invite players into the space, but you will need to review them with everyone in the room during workshops. Players should understand the type of game they are signing up to play and have enough information to make an informed decision about what actions they are and are not comfortable with (Koljonen 2016). Therefore, making this design choice early is important.

How will you workshop physicality? Practicing these techniques seems particularly important where they are thematically relevant to the game, but actually they should be workshopped in any game where there is a possibility they might be used. Even a player who does not want to play on physical interactions should understand how they can be used in the game and will ideally have tried them in the controlled environment of a workshop. This practice can be used as a refresher for any *escalation* or *de-escalation mechanics* you may have introduced (see Chapter 5 of *TRGD*). Get people to try out simple scenes with multiple partners.

3.7 Character writing

In this section, we will consider the process of writing characters for games. The following processes are generic for larp or tabletop games and apply equally to player and NPCs.

In some cases players will create their own characters either before the game or during workshops. We will consider these in a separate section later in this chapter.

a) Pre-written Characters

If your game features characters that are written for the players or requires NPCs, then you will need to allow enough time to ensure character writing is done well before the game. Whilst an experienced game runner can create NPCs on the fly – particularly in a tabletop setting – it is better to have these ideas fleshed out before the game when possible.

Out of a survey of character creation processes in 2024–2025, perhaps the most frequently repeated recommendation is to design the characters before writing them (Brind, 2025, 417). This generally means sketching out only a few sentences for each character—covering their basic function, purpose, and relationships—rather than producing detailed biographies at the outset. This light-touch approach prevents duplication of character concepts and helps maintain balance across networks of relationships. For instance, Not Only Larp used this technique when designing *I'Inconscience* (2025).

If your game needs more than a handful of characters, you may need to recruit and manage writers. If you are creating at scale, a management structure should be in place to ensure that characters are written on time and to the appropriate

standard. Designing and writing characters for a large-scale game is a collaborative and structured process, and several best practices emerge from the experience of writing teams. While some designers continue to write entirely alone—even for large productions—most recommend a ratio of 5-10 characters per writer. One effective strategy for scaling is to divide a large larp into smaller, semi-autonomous sections, each supported by its own team of writers. A cast of 160 characters, for example, can be reframed as 4 groups of 40, allowing the design task to function as a series of more manageable projects.

Several methodologies for group-based design exist. A popular approach is to design the *group first*, beginning with its shared identity before developing individual members. A single group concept can yield multiple characters that share coherence while retaining variety. Many teams recommend collective brainstorming sessions: spending a day generating mind maps; drafting factions, plots, and relationships; and sketching personalities and themes. These connections can be formalised through whiteboards with relationship lines or similar visualisations. For the 2019 version of *Odysseus*, writers used a “dating site” model where a writer could signal that a particular character required a specific kind of connection.

Before prose writing begins, teams stress the importance of equipping writers with a clear framework. This framework often takes the form of a *writer’s guide*, which provides information about the game’s overall design, storyworld, premise, and mood, as well as the game’s central themes. Such guides also specify the expected length of character sheets, the number of relationships required, and the milestones and deadlines of the writing and editing process. Example characters and templates further ensure stylistic consistency. For more information on this topic, see Brind (2025).

Finally, some designers have been experimenting with generating larp content through the use of generative artificial intelligence (gen AI) (see e.g., Torrebejano Osorio 2023). While such a practice can quicken the writing process, the materials are often drawn illegally from the labor of human writers who did not give their consent for its adaptation (Suominen 2025, 33-34) and/or replace the labor of experienced RPG artists whose work has enriched their communities for years (Ihalainen and Gyldenstrøm 2026). Furthermore, such characters often lack the depth and thoughtfulness present in characters written by experienced humans, and may feature stereotypes, biases, or other problematic content. The widespread use of AI also causes enormously negative impacts to the environment. Finally, as role-playing games are at their core a co-creative medium, by not allowing humans to write the characters, you are depriving them from getting the credit, experience, fulfillment, and sometimes even financial compensation associated with being part of a writing team. Therefore, we strongly recommend reconsidering this approach if you have the network, resources, and time to create human-written characters. The same recommendations apply if you plan to include artwork in your character sheets or other game documents.

b) Writer's Guide

Here are some recommendations for sections that should be included in a Writer's Guide:

- **Thank you and introduction:** Writing projects often involve tight deadlines and creative emotions. Having a welcoming tone and saying thank you become even more important in these spaces than in everyday life. When you are working with a volunteer team, particularly if they are working for free or for little money, genuine gratitude is fundamental. Similarly, always credit your writers prominently in the finalized materials.
- **Sample characters:** Some writers find it much easier to produce high quality characters or content if they have an example to look at. Sharing a few high quality sample characters written for the game world sets a benchmark for length, style and content.
- **Deadlines for Initial Design:** Make clear what the deadlines and end date is for the initial design process. Include milestones for sketching out the characters, their relationships, and their plots.
- **Deadlines for Writing:** After the initial design phase is when the more extensive writing starts. What are the due dates for writing and when do the characters need to be finished? Set dates and expectations.
- **Schedule for meetings:** If you plan to have catch-up meetings or calls with the writing team, try to make it clear when, at what time, and how often.
- **Types of characters (groups):** If there are different types of characters, groups, or factions, here is where you give these details. For example, at a magic school, there may be teachers, juniors, sophomores, and seniors, each with a slightly different function and experience.
- **Link to the world document:** If there are any specific worldbuilding materials that the writers should be aware of before they start their work, link to it from the writer's guide.
- **Any backstory or plots not in the world document:** Similarly, include any additional plots or backstories that should be woven into the characters. If writers are empowered to create their own plots, create a shared document for this purpose so they can add details that enable other writers to hook in to their ideas.
- **Overview of the character sheets:** Include details for the required sections and how long they should be. To compliment the example characters, explain what each section of the sheet is for and give an approximate word count for each section.
- **Writing process (step-by-step):** Explain how you will design, write, and edit characters. Give an explanation for how to create relationships between characters, particularly those written by other writers.
- **Important notes:** Rules and guidelines notwithstanding, reiterate things that really need to be done or information that must be included.

While these instructions may seem extensive, clear expectations can help address potential misalignment or misunderstanding later in the process.

c) Player-created characters and characters created in workshops

For the larp, *Lumen* (2025), we asked players to co-create their characters in workshops just before the game. For this transformative leisure larp, we wanted participants to play *close to home*, meaning characters quite similar to themselves and/or based upon aspects of their own lives. This practice meant we wanted them to be responsible for the creation and deciding which elements they felt safe enough to include.

This workshop makes use of a set of archetypes (Pearson 2015) -- derived from Jung (1976) -- that we used as the foundation for character creation. There are twelve archetype families, and each of these have a number of alternative approaches to the archetype from which players can choose. With reference to their chosen transformational journey, we ask players to select two archetypes: 1) one that represents where they are now, i.e., their starting point as a person, and 2) the one that represents where they want to be. We follow this process up with a series of questions, discussions, and exercises that encourage the rapid co-creation of *close to home* characters.

Keep in mind some players need more *alibi* (Montola 2010; Deterding 2018) than others, meaning they need more fictional points of reference for their character. One practice used in the larp *Epiphany* (Bowman, Murdock, and Roycroft 2017; Bowman 2023) is to invite players to choose three close to home and three far from home characteristics to help provide additional alibi if needed.

i) Co-creative relation design with players

Most -- but not all -- role-playing games involve interaction with others. In character co-creation sessions, we can also help players design and refine relationships between these characters. These can be done in person during a workshop, via a questionnaire, or on social media.

ii) Character co-creation forms

These are forms where you ask players to write a little about their character and the sorts of relationships they would find useful in the game. You can guide them with potential types of relationships, but should not force types of relationships on them. For example if you had a question that simply asked, "What sort of negative relation would suit your character?" This is forcing an answer that may not be appropriate. It would be better to ask, "Would your character benefit from a less supportive or challenging relationship? If so, what sort of relationship did you have in mind?" With these forms, you then mix and match needs and requests and see if you can join up different characters in interesting and creative ways. When player character

relations are not available, you can consider writing NPC characters to fill the gaps. However, if the goal is for players to interact mainly with each other, avoid having NPCs play too active of a role in the game itself.

iii) Character relation requests

Some larps advise players to get in touch with each other before the event. Using social media, players can ask the group for different types of relations, using the platform to connect to other players and co-create relations directly. The aim is to create relationships that will then develop in the game, increase the sense of community, and discuss any boundaries and safety issues. The most recent trend is to set up a Discord server dedicated to the event. If you include this possibility, we recommend specifying whether these pre-game activities are mandatory or optional.

The downside of this approach is that some participants have less time to spend on this sort of activity and some players may be unsuccessful in their attempt to find others to form relations with them. It may be more easy for some players to establish relations than others; while larp communities tend to be more inclusive than more general populations, many larp players experience marginalization related to gender (Saitta and Svegaard 2019), sexuality (Paisley 2015; Stenros and Sihvonon 2019), age (Petersen 2024), weight (Kessock 2019), race/ethnicity (Kemper 2019) or other aspects of appearance (Kessock 2016; van der Heij 2019). Relying on players to create their own relations without a structured process will likely lead to feelings of exclusion. Make sure that even those who did not have time before the game can find a way to catch up, perhaps in the workshops before the start of the larp.

iv) Relation building, defining, and calibration workshops

If there is sufficient time in your workshop schedule, you can organize multiple rounds of conversation between small groups and individuals to clarify relations. Examples questions include:

- How do your two characters know one another?
- What sort of relationship dynamic works for both of you as players?
- What do each of you – as players – need from the other?
- What types of play would you prefer each other avoid?

For example, if players are expected to play out a rivalry, maybe the players agree to play the dynamic with less animosity and more like frenemies. Similarly, if players are cast in a dysfunctional romantic relationship, they can decide aspects about this dynamic they would like to emphasize, e.g., occasional affectionate squeezes on the shoulder as a form of familiarity and reassurance. They can also detail aspects they might want to avoid, such as screaming matches.

d) Editing characters

Editorial practices in character writing processes also vary. Some teams appoint a separate editor or coordinator to check consistency, while others adopt a model in which all writers collectively review and cross-check one another's work, as in *Gothic* (2023–2024). In some cases, lead writers reserve the right to make changes across all character sheets.

What unites these practices is the principle that no individual writer “owns” a character: characters are communal artifacts within a collaborative design process. While this practice enhances efficiency, it also raises questions about authorship and copyright. To manage such collective labor, teams emphasise the importance of regular meetings, co-writing sessions, and feedback exchanges. The COVID-19 lockdowns accelerated collective familiarity with online collaboration, making such distributed processes more viable.

During the writing phase itself, teams employ different structures. Some follow a waterfall model in which writers are assigned specific characters, then pass their work through successive rounds of editing and release. Others adopt a more dialogic approach, maintaining an active conversation between character writers, plot writers, and even players in the case of co-created characters. This integration is particularly productive, ensuring that characters remain meaningfully embedded within plots, and that plots emerge organically from character relationships. Although this chapter cannot fully address the dynamics between character-driven and plot-driven traditions, merging recommendations from both enriches the design.

Technical tools also play a role. Some teams employ boilerplate text to maintain consistency across multiple sheets. For instance, scripts can automate mail merges, allowing spreadsheets to populate standardised content into each character document—a method reportedly used in *1942* (Raaum et al. 2000, 2017; Fatland 2010b).

Finally, proofreading is repeatedly identified as indispensable. Proofreaders attend not only to language and sensitivity, but also to continuity and consistency. Effective proofreading entails cross-checking relationships, verifying interconnections, and identifying subtle failure modes that may otherwise go unnoticed. When carried out rigorously, this process safeguards both the internal coherence of the fiction and the fairness of the player experience.

For character creation we suggest looking at the failure modes checklist (Brind 2025, 443–477) to identify those characters that may have structural weaknesses after the design process.

e) Cultural consultation/sensitivity reading

When you are designing a larp that pertains to or makes use of a culture that is not your own we recommend finding a way to include people who do come from that culture (Kessock 2014a; Kangas 2017; Mendez Hodes 2020), e.g., a cultural consultant

or other members of the writing staff. Similarly, if writing about a background different from your own, especially one that is marginalized, we recommend including individuals who have that lived experience (Kemper 2018; Leonard, Janjetovic, and Usman 2021), e.g., a sensitivity reader or other organizers on your team. Importantly, you should not expect people to work for free in this space. In order of priority:

1. Include people from the culture you are using and/or from marginalized identities in your creative team.
2. Pay for sensitivity readers and cultural consultants to review your work.
3. If for some reason you are unable to follow these guidelines, you might consider whether it is essential to the game to make use of experiences outside of your own background.

3.8 Educational content

In terms of educational content, your team may require adding a specialist on a specific topic. That educator may inform your game design and implementation before run-time, but may also present educational material, e.g., in workshops or contextualization sessions after the *larp*. If your main team does not have teaching specialties, you may need to include someone experienced in didactics, especially if you are pitching your game to stakeholders as being an educational intervention. While the skillsets of gamerunners and educators sometimes overlap, people with experience in didactics often understand the needs of target groups in important ways or have specific techniques for classroom management that are useful to deploy in games as well.

For more information on educational role-playing design, see Chapter 2 of *TRGD*. To learn more about implementation and facilitation of educational games, see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of this book respectively.

3.9 Safety and support

You should always carefully consider safety when designing for transformative impacts, as we have discussed before. Your safety team should ideally be separate from other roles, especially logistics; the skillset and bandwidth required for holding space for others emotionally may not be available to team members busy with other logistical tasks (Berthold 2024).

Some guiding questions and recommendations:

1. **Safety team members:** How many safety team members will be available? When will they be available? What times are off-hours? We recommend having at least one available during waking hours. Make sure to show the players the safety team members during the workshop and ideally have a sash or badge to indicate their role.

2. **Contacting the safety team:** Where will players find safety team members? Will players have access to their phone number or a way to instant message them? Is there a walkie talkie in the safety room they can use to alert the team? Are the safety team members embedded in the game as NPCs?
3. **Locating the safety room:** Where is the safety room? Have players been shown its location pre-game? Is it far away from the main action? Is it quiet enough? Ideally, your safety room is only used for that purpose and not as a social or organizing space.

Similarly, integrating a mental health professional or paraprofessional is necessary for therapeutic work and highly recommended for all transformative games when possible. This individual can be embedded, having an in-game and off-game support role, but should be able to step off-game to help at any time. We also recommend having trained individuals present for emotionally sensitive scenes or as debrief facilitators (see Chapter 4).

However, having an on-call mental health professional, whether by phone or on location, can be expensive and potentially cost-prohibitive. If you are connected to an institution like a university, you may have access to such resources when running games on campus. At minimum, we recommend having all safety team members trained in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) if possible.

We will discuss safety implementation in more detail in Chapter 5.

a) Expectations of support

When it comes to the degree of player support at your event, the most important thing to manage is expectations. By this we mean that the actual level of support should be on par with what players are led to expect from what you communicated to them. We understand that you might want to support players as much as possible, even beyond what you objectively might be able to do. In our experience, it is much better to lower your level of support than to be unable to support them in a time of need.

Player support should be addressed as early as possible in your design process. Critically consider what support you are able to provide, and what support other parts of your design can accommodate from the beginning. There are different ways to go about this, and the following short list of questions are meant to provide a low level starting point for you to be able to consider player support throughout your design process.

- What can players expect in terms of support throughout the process?
- Does support start before after the actual play time?
- If so, when does it start? At sign up? At casting?
- Does support extend to after the actual play time?
- If so, when does it end? 1 month? 2 months?

- Do you have a dedicated support team? How do you communicate this to players?
- How will players be instructed to support one another before, during, and after play?
- Are the support structures part of the diegetic experience or not?
- How do you communicate the expected level of player support?
- Can people opt-out of supporting other players? We do not recommend this practice as a general rule in transformative play, but in crisis situations, it is most appropriate to alert the safety team.
- What safety mechanics and/or techniques will you include?
- How will facilitators support players before, during, and after play?
- Are there parts of the design that provide specific challenges to player support? If so, how can they be mitigated?
- If relevant, which additional responsible parties can support learning and emotional well-being, i.e., teachers, counselors, etc.?

For a deeper dive into considerations around player safety and support, see Chapter 5 of this book and chapter 5 of *TRGD*.

3.10 Location logistics

In this section, we discuss the tasks associated with finding the right location for your game, as well as what you will need to have in place in order to run the game in that space.

a) Identifying, finding, and securing the right location

One of the first considerations in the process of moving from a design into implementation is understanding what kind of location your intervention needs. When designing for a leisure transformational game, you will likely need to borrow a space, use your own space, or rent a location. Examples include convention spaces, living rooms, or more thematic locations such as castles. Educational games may take place in established cultural spaces like museums, classrooms, community centers, or summer camps. Therapeutic games may need an additional location to the smaller, more intimate counselor's room, such as a group therapy room, or even a forest (Bartenstein 2022).

If you want to create a liberated atmosphere for players to explore, a party larp may be a viable option (Pettersson 2025). To have a more luxurious experience in a realistic setting, you may choose to run a blockbuster larp, e.g., in a fancy castle. Alternatively, you might want to run an urban larp that takes place in multiple locations around a city (Pettersson 2025). Each of these settings require unique considerations (Pettersson

2025). You may also need separate spaces for workshops, game play, and debrief depending on the design and location, so plan each phase accordingly.

In contrast with more static forms of role-playing, such as tabletop, some larps rely much more on the physical attributes of a location. Finding the objectively right location for a larp is a significant challenge. Like tabletop players, you should ask yourself the question: how do you want to approach the scenario, and what works best for your players? These questions are offset by other factors: the costs associated with the location, its proximity to transport hubs, the accessibility of the site, and whether it has accommodation. Even when you find the objectively perfect location – the one that has everything you want, for a price you can afford – there is always a risk that this may fall through. Some high-profile international larps have found and then lost venues that would be considered perfect, e.g., *Conscience* (2018) at Fort Bravo in Spain, and *Inside Hamlet* (2015, 2017, 2018) at Elsinore Castle in Denmark. Losses such as these are hard to mitigate, but something as an organizer you should be aware of and prepared for.

If necessary, you can improvise with limited tools at hand and rely on the “theater of the mind.” For example, long-form black box larps with relatively bare locations do exist. However, many role-players prefer a more evocative set dressing, e.g., supported by detailed elements such as props, miniature figurines, or historic buildings. More detail often equals more costs involved.

Keep in mind that a location can potentially heavily impact and inform the behavior of players. For example, playing a servant in a large castle in Poland might mean a considerable amount of walking and trying to find specific spaces in addition to whatever physical labor tasks are required, e.g., in *Fairweather Manor* (2015; Jones, Koulu, and Torner 2016). While such feats may help inform players about physical disparities between the classes in the past, they make exploring the interpersonal dimensions of such relations more difficult and time constrained.

See the larp location as your tabletop: will you opt for a “blank” canvas space with limited set dressing or does more detail benefit the larp?

i) Location wishlist

To help with your location search, start with a wishlist. What are you looking for in a location? Use this opportunity to record everything you want without any constraints. For example for the larp *B Movie* (Wonderlarp and Avalon Larp Studio, upcoming), the wishlist looked like this:

B-Movie Location Wish List

B Movie is a larp set in Hollywood in the 1950s. Whilst we can do many things with scenography, the best locations will require less work to remove 21st century stuff. There are two narrative layers to the larp: The Storyworld - 1950s Hollywood, and the B-World - which is where the movie takes place. The nature of this will depend on the location. For example if we had a castle, the movie would more likely be horror, if we had caves, more likely sci-fi etc.

Must Have

- Electricity
- Running Water
- Affordable accommodation for around 25-30 players and 10-15 crew (35-45 in total)
- Transport links to an international airport (or within 4-5 hours coach journey)
- A few Indoor spaces that can be used as sound stages, studio offices, off-game/safety rooms
- Exclusive Use

Should Have

- Catering
- Many Indoor spaces that can be used as sound stages, studio offices
- Outdoor space including woodland
- Parking
- Playable accommodation spaces so that players don't need to go off-game to sleep etc.

Could Have

- Secret underground tunnels (or a dark basement we can use)
- Rooms that can be made to look like secret laboratories, alien spaceships
- A bar /nightclub (unless we run our own)
- A dinner with a jukebox

Would be nice to have

- Spa
- Internet access
- A Movie Studio / Backlot with a 1950s style motel and dinner right next door
- A crypt
- Caves
- A castle that looks like it might belong to a dangerous scientist
- A 1950s town

When making your wishlist for venues, consider the following questions:

- What activities does your game include and what affordances does the location have to support them?
- Are there spaces you need for specific scenes, rituals, and other types of experiences?
- How many spaces do you need to run your game?
- What off-game spaces do you need? Examples include:
 - Off-game / Break space
 - Organizer room
 - NPC bunker
 - Safety room
- Are there spaces big enough for the whole group?
- Does each smaller faction or group have their own space?
- Is there a black box or meta room where players can create specific scenes together?
- Will players play indoors, outdoors, or both?

You should also evaluate how the atmosphere might contribute to your transformational goals. For example, if the goal is to help people feel empowered and the setting is a magic school, a cool castle will likely provide more ambiance and alibi to *pretend to believe* (Pohjola 2004) they have such powers.

You should also assess: Does anything about the atmosphere contradict your transformative goals? If so, how will you mitigate this issue? For example, the larp is taking place in an office building where people are working normal jobs out in the hallways, perhaps players might feel less magical, more mundane, or inhibited from, for example, raising their voice to cast a spell, which may work against the setting.

On the other hand, you could focus on the contrast between the magical and the mundane in such a location, for example if wizards have to cast spells more secretly. In other words, you do not need a magical-looking castle to play a compelling game. Environments with a 360 degree illusion of realism are not necessarily more immersive (Koljonen 2007). Ultimately, you should find ways to work with both the strengths and constraints of your location.

b) Price

One of the most critical questions to ask is: what is required financially and legally to secure the location you want for your game? Is it affordable? The perfect historical location that charges €1200 per hour to corporate clients is probably not an affordable venue for a 12-player game that runs for two days. As we discuss in Chapter 2, if you do find the ideal location, keep in mind you may have to work with a liaison or authorities to get access to a specific space. Museums, for example, often have specific rules and oversight.

Also, consider any aspects related to physical safety that may be costly, such as making a space more accessible by renting a go-cart and ramps to assist players with limited mobility. Choosing a site that is both accessible for your target group and affordable is likely a better plan.

Finally, always consider the physical safety of your participants and perform a risk assessment for running games in those spaces (Sinking Ship Creations 2020; Losilla 2024); the risks associated with a known, controlled space like a classroom are quite different from an adventure in the woods.

c) Sensitivity around sites

Some sites are distinct places with historical, social, or spiritual significance. It may not be appropriate to run a game there even though the location seems thematically appropriate. If you are unsure about running a game at such a site, this section will offer you some tips and things to consider. The keyword is *communication*; particularly with those who have ownership of the site or have strong historical ties to the place.

When in doubt, consider the following three points:

1. Research the site's history and consider potential risks. Consult with on-site experts and local communities;
2. Avoid using real tragedies and/or marginalized histories tied to the site;
3. When possible, use symbolic or fictional alternatives in your storytelling that respect the theme and setting, without appropriating the place itself.

• Example 1:

You want to run a larp about dark magic in a church.

Possible approach: Do research on the site. Is the church still serving a religious purpose or not? If yes, contact the caretakers of the building and seek permission. Consider whether the tone of your game respects the site's ongoing religious function. Will such a ritual potentially offend players, interrupting their transformative purposes?

• Example 2:

You want to run a post-apocalyptic larp at a decommissioned factory.

Possible approach: Verify with local authorities if the building's construction is still safe to enter and adheres to current-day structural integrity standards. Ask yourself if the building is accessible and suitable for a larp that spans over several days?

d) Locating a site

How can you find the right site? There are several ways to search for a location, and they are quite different from one another. We do not believe that one is better than another. You can therefore use whichever you prefer and which best suits your degree

of commitment and aesthetic style. Furthermore, these methods are not exclusive; they can easily be combined.

Here are some examples:

- **Going around randomly by car** may seem strange, but it can work, especially if you explore the area near where you live. It also adds a sense of fun and discovery to the whole experience and can be done easily several times, so you can better organize the details and note any issues with the venue. The downsides are that it is time-consuming, costly, and there is no guarantee that your exploration will be successful.
- **Use the internet:** This is the quickest and cheapest way. Many organizers rely on this method. In this case, after choosing a suitable location, you will still need to make one or more visits to the site to see how much of the space can actually be used and in what way. In this case, we recommend keeping a list of possible locations for future use.
- **Ask others:** You can ask other organizers, friends and anyone else who might be informed for advice and, ideally, addresses of gaming spaces. Another useful source is the larp community. If you ask them on relevant social media channels, they will likely be happy to help you.

e) Location scouting

Location scouting is the process of visiting one or more potential sites where you might want to run your game. These should be places that seem affordable; offer most -- or ideally all -- of the facilities on your wishlist; and be places where you have a good vibe from speaking to the owner or their representatives. Location scouting is your opportunity to get a sense of the space, ask questions, and to inform the location owners about the importance and value of what these games can do, ideally generating shared enthusiasm for your project.

Sometimes, your scouting adventure will be the first time that the owners have come across the idea of transformative play, role-playing games, or sometimes even the idea of adults playing. You have an opportunity to build bridges. Additionally, a friendly, professional, and enthusiastic attitude can sometimes lead to significant discounts on venue rental costs.

We recommend spending some time in a proposed location. Stay long enough to understand what the venue is like during daylight and in the darker hours, getting a sense of what is possible. For outside spaces, campsites, and woodland areas, pay particular attention to ambient sounds. A near perfect location that is only a few kilometres from a motor racing circuit or airport, for example may not be as perfect as you first thought. Similarly, the idyllic campsite you found may suddenly become less private if a public walking trail runs alongside it.

f) Evaluation criteria

Some locations may be cheap or convenient to acquire, but lack ambiance or have disadvantaged attractions. RPGs are run in a variety of different settings, each with their own affordances and drawbacks.

i) Privacy

One of the most important criteria is privacy. Here are examples of spaces that range from private to public:

- **Closed locations:** Exclusive, open only to the players of this game, conference, or festival. In many cases, closed locations are best for role-playing to avoid situations where onlookers interrupt with questions or otherwise distract from play.
- **Semi-open locations:** Some locations are mostly private for the play space, but open to the public in other areas, e.g., film sets, camp buildings next to public parks with walking trails, and some museum spaces. Players also may feel judged if onlookers are present. Consider especially if you are asking players to perform actions in public spaces that might alarm onlookers, such as violence, heated altercations, or consider bigoted reactions to overt displays of sexuality from passers-by.
- **Public locations:** Some locations are fully public, such as events at public monuments or squares or any number of other places. *Pervasive games* are played out in public and sometimes incentivize in-character interactions with people who are unaware a game is being played. While such play may seem harmless, ethical considerations arise, especially when playing with sensitive themes. People may feel manipulated or betrayed, or unexpected behaviors might happen. However, if your public behaviors are relatively harmless or normative, the play may not be obvious to onlookers. Consider the potential interactions with members of the public as a part of any risk assessment and consider how to mitigate these risks.
- **Game events:** In-between locations that are game-friendly, but not exactly private are game events, such as festivals, conferences, game jams, and conventions. Such spaces are great for meeting like-minded role-players, and are often spaces that feel safe for attendees in terms of dressing in costume or acting unusually. However, they do not afford the same level of privacy as a closed location. Pervasive gaming within a game event setting is usually considered less ethically concerning, although transparency is always recommended.

Remember that privacy can often help your players feel less inhibited surrendering into the experience. Regular interruptions by non-larpers can have the opposite effect, especially if they stop and stare or ask questions, even if politely. In some cases, your activities might be occurring too close to a neighbor or even echo in the surrounding

countryside, which could lead to noise complaints. In such situations, we recommend getting permission from local public servants and authorities, letting them know what sorts of activities might occur there, and reassuring them you are only playing. For louder activities, whenever possible, choose locations that are remote enough not to disturb anyone and secure the entire location for your group.

ii) Additional criteria

As we will cover in more depth in the next section on Site Logistics, to ensure that you can design, deliver, and manage any location-specific logistics, at the bare minimum the site needs to be able to support the Four Ss:

- Sustenance
- Sleeping
- Sanitation
- Survivability

Can you ensure your participants and crew can eat and drink safely? Do they have somewhere safe and warm to sleep? Does your location have sanitary places to attend to their basic biological needs? Have you ensured that the environment offers no immediate risks to health and well-being? Any site visit needs to take these implicit questions into consideration before moving forward.

g) Deposits and contracts

When you have found the perfect site, you need to book it for the dates of your game. In some cases, this process will require nothing more than an agreement. However, many locations will want a deposit to secure the dates, or ask that you sign a contract to make a booking. The contract is one of the biggest risks of making larger long-form games as you may be asked to make a payment before you have any funds from potential players.

Look carefully at any contract and see if there is a break clause; if you have to cancel, how much money will you still need to pay? How confident are you that the game will get sufficient funding to run?

The advantage of contracts and deposits is that you have a binding agreement with the location. They are less likely to offer the location to someone else, doublebook it, or forget the agreement if it is in writing. You also have legal recourse if such situations occur.

The other financial concern at this point is event insurance. You cannot usually get insurance without a contract in place. We recommend sorting out insurance after you have received the funding, but before you spend any money beyond the site deposit. Insurance offers some protection if a participant is injured on site or damages happen to the location itself.

h) Site Logistics

Depending on the location and your game you may need to spend some time designing the logistics of the event. Whilst a small tabletop RPG or larp could be played in a cafe or in someone's house, when you make a game at scale, you will need to look at planning and providing for the needs of your players.

Logistical challenges are present in every space. Games that require very little costuming, props, or special locations are more portable and easier to run in a mixture of spaces, e.g., classrooms full of desks, the activity rooms in a prison, a hotel conference room. Games with more elaborate scenography and location-based modules add challenges such as transportation, and accessibility (Dalstål 2013).

In the following sections, we return to the Four Ss and will consider each one in turn.

i) Sustenance

Is there drinking water? This seems such an obvious question, but it is not safe to assume that every location has safe water to drink. If not, you need to consider whether the location is suitable, whether you can provide sufficient drinking water for everyone, or whether it is reasonable to expect participants to bring their own. Similarly, if they cannot drink the water, they also may not be able to bathe in it or brush their teeth with it. In emergencies, you may need to purchase baby wipes and hand sanitizer for each person.

How and when will participants eat? Players, staff, volunteers, and organizers need access to food. For an event running in a city centre location and with suitable breaks it might be possible to let them find food for themselves, but this needs to be planned and communicated ahead of time. You may also need to build in extra time in case the restaurants are slow.

Consider meal times as a part of your schedule for your game. Understand when people need to eat and how long they need to eat those meals. If you have players from different countries, consider their different timezones. For example, pushing back a dinner time for a larp running in the UK to 9pm would make for a late meal, but for players coming in from Finland, the two hour time difference would make it closer to 11pm for them.

Participants need to have a place to eat; sufficient plates, cups, bowls, and cutlery, unless you asked players to bring their own; and somewhere to wash-up. For example *The Last Song* (Justesen et al. 2022) was a Viking-era larp where players brought their own bowls, plates, knives, spoons, but the organizers provided 21st century sinks and hot water to wash-up afterwards.

Try, if possible, to ensure organizers and staff eat at the same time as players. If you do not, then your meal times may be interrupted by game-related issues.

ii) Food prep

Who is responsible for providing and preparing food? Catering for a large number of people is a skill. You need to ensure that your catering team is able to deliver food on schedule. They also need to be able to understand diets, allergies, and intolerances, preparing and labeling food safely. Accidentally using an ingredient containing gluten for a dish served to someone with coeliac could result in hospitalisation. Caterers should make sure the labels for food are written in the language spoken by everyone at the game. Depending on the country, you might not be allowed to use volunteers in the kitchen unless they have specific food preparation certificates or training.

Feeding large numbers of people in a timely manner is also a skill. As an example, imagine you have two hundred players queuing for food and one person serving that food. Assuming that each person takes about twenty seconds to be given their food, select condiments, and grab silverware, it will take over ninety minutes for the person at the back of the queue to get their food. This means that you need to leave at least two hours for each meal. Consider assigning shifts to participants in such situations to avoid long wait times.

Your location might not have a kitchen or any space where food can be prepared. In a Viking-age larp, participants might be able to prepare a delicious stew over an open fire. For *Midwinter* (Svanevik et al. 2020), which took place in a factory space without a kitchen, the organizers made a deal with a local hotel to provide diegetically authentic, but also hot and delicious, meals, which were delivered to the venue twice each day.

You also need to ensure that everyone has access to drinking water. If the site does not have this you need to clearly signal it to everyone, to ensure that they bring their own and/or to provide it yourself. *The Quota* (Brind et al. 2018; Brind 2020) took place in a disused prison in a location where the main water was not safe to drink. The organizers found a supplier that could provide 500 litres of water, which was delivered on a truck on the day of the event. Depending on the location, you may also want to think about providing hot drinks.

Sometimes you might not be able to provide food. It could be that the location does not have a kitchen, or you do not have the staff, or sometimes simply that the dietary needs of some or all of your players are too complicated. Asking people to bring their own food is an acceptable choice but you need to communicate it clearly, particularly if there are no shops nearby, places to get food away from the location, or cool storage for refrigerated items.

If you opt not to provide food and drink, ensure that you have taken care of your own needs and those of your volunteers. If there is a kitchen space, make it clear whether players are allowed to use it. Similarly if there are no cooking facilities, ensure people know. Consider also that some players may forget to bring food or be unaware that they are responsible for their own sustenance.

For more on food, see also diegetic food design later in this chapter.

iii) Sleeping

Where will players sleep? Some games run for longer than one day, or take place in locations where participants need to travel to get to and from the game. If so, one of the logistical questions centres around where the players -- and indeed the organizers and volunteer crew -- will sleep. The location could be a campsite with places to pitch tents or sleeping cabins, or it could be a hostel or hotel with private rooms. In some cases, there may be accommodation nearby and participants are invited to make their own arrangements for sleeping, but if not, this remains a consideration. In some games, sleep deprivation is a part of the design and participants are invited to find sleep where they can. This would seem an unusual choice for a transformative game, unless skills in survivalism are core to the learning.

Are there enough beds? Everyone needs somewhere to sleep. Whilst some longer larps have organized sleeping in shifts, in most cases people will prefer to have their own sleeping space, to share spaces with people that they know, or to have sleeping spaces for specific genders or combinations of gender.

Is sleeping off-game or in-game? This is an important choice to make. You may choose to allow players to designate whether their rooms are in-game or off-game, or to make it clear to everyone if and how and when an area is a playable space.

Can players expect to have uninterrupted sleep? Designing the hours of silence where sleep is encouraged, but some games make use of all 24 hours of play time with events happening late at night or early in the morning. Consider the benefits of this versus the effects of lack of sleep. A tired player may look after their own needs, may not be able to commit fully to the play experience, or may be more prone to get sick. Games that privilege players who are able to deal with less sleep are not terribly inclusive of members of disabled and neurodiverse communities.

How will you adapt to sleeping needs, if at all? Whilst some people can sleep anywhere, others have accessibility requirements around access to electricity – for example to power a CPAP machine, silence, or darkness to enable them to sleep at all. Others require privacy. This means that simply counting the number of beds is not enough to ensure that you can accommodate everyone. Assume some players may need a private room.

Will you provide bed linens and blankets or are players expected to bring them? Some locations, such as hotels, provide these items as a matter of course; others do not. If you ask players to bring their own, some will forget. Bed sizes are not necessarily standard, so you will need to check and confirm the size well in advance of the event to share with players. Sleeping bags can be more helpful in these situations.

Does the sleeping location have air conditioning or heating? Can players control the temperature in their space? This is particularly significant when temperatures at your location are very hot or very cold. As a local, you may be used to a temperature that an international participant is not so readily able to handle. Sleeping at 25°C

(77°F) without air conditioning may be relatively comfortable for someone from Southern Europe, but could be considerably harder for someone from Northern Europe; conversely sleeping in an unheated cabin at 5°C (41°F) may not be pleasant for someone unused to colder conditions.

iv) Sanitation

Whilst perhaps the least glamorous part of event design, thinking about the most basic needs of the human body is important. At scale, it can be an expensive challenge to make sure that everyone has an appropriate space for sanitary needs. Some guiding questions:

- Do players have access to bathrooms? If so, do they have running water?
- Do they have hot water? If so, for how long?
- Is there electricity and/or lighting in the bathroom?
- Who is responsible for cleaning and restocking the bathrooms?
- What happens if there is a sanitation blockage?
- Do players have individual or shared washing facilities? Showers or bathtubs?
- How will you ensure all genders have access to bathrooms? Are bathrooms divided by gender? If so, can you relabel them to be inclusive of all genders?
- For how long and often can players take showers? Are there water restrictions?
- Do players need to bring their own towels, soap, toilet paper, and other toiletries or do you/the location provide these?
- Can your game design handle people needing to wait in line to use the bathroom? If so for how long?

It is possible that not every site you visit will have functional bathrooms. Even when there are bathrooms on site you need to consider how many participants there are, and how long they will be onsite. Whilst we do not recommend allowing alcohol during transformative games, if present, alcohol tends to increase the number of toilets needed at a given time.

If you find yourself in a position of needing to rent portable toilets, you will need to include them in your budget. If you rent toilets, you should also think carefully about:

1. **The location(s):** Toilets need to be in accessible, yet ideally discreet areas. If possible, they should be well-lit and signposted.
2. **Their maintenance:** You will need to arrange for regular cleaning of toilet facilities throughout the event to maintain hygiene and comfort. This practice also reduces the chances of something getting broken, blocked up, or overflowing. Bins may need to be emptied and returned.

3. **Accessibility:** Consider any access needs your participants may have. We recommend renting a mixture of standard and accessible toilets.
4. **Storage:** Consider amenities such as hand sanitizing stations and mirrors. Have somewhere close by and dry to store cleaning materials and supplies like toilet paper and hand soap.

v) Survivability

Will players face extreme weather during the event? This question can be difficult to answer because of the variations in what we might think of as extremes of weather even before the effects of climate change. Review previous years' weather for the site location and monitor the forecasts in the weeks running up to the event, particularly if running your game outdoors and/or camping.

Advise your players to bring multiple layers just in case, especially if they are planning to wear clothing that might overheat them or leave their skin exposed to the elements. You may wish to advise them to bring heating blankets, sunscreen, lip balm, or other items to help them in difficult weather conditions.

1) Rain

For games that take place outside, rain can be a significant factor. Even with proper wet weather clothing, people will often shelter inside tents, buildings, or under trees rather than playing outside. This may cut down on the interactions that involve moving beyond one's local circle. If no common places for players to congregate are available, then this tendency is even more likely; for example, at a camping event with tents, groups of players are more likely to stay and role-play inside their own group shelter. In extreme cases, players may pack-up and go home.

If you are fortunate and planned for only some events to take place outdoors, you should have a contingency event that can be run instead. On the whole, rain is hard to mitigate, and it can lead to something even more insidious.

Beyond rain is its effect on the ground, including mud, lack of drainage, and impeded access. Depending on the climate and the drainage of the site, it does not take a lot of rain before the soil can get churned up, leading to mud. Mud is difficult to walk in and sometimes dangerous underfoot. In addition, the high likelihood of tracking mud into indoor parts of the venue can lead to subsequent cleaning challenges. Areas that get a lot of footfall can become almost unpassable on foot, or for emergency vehicles. On sites with very poor drainage, tent pegs can float out of the ground, causing the collapse of tents.

Cars driving in and out of parking in fields can lead to vehicles getting stuck and needing to be towed out. This is a problem of scale. Tens of players might generate a bit of mud, but hundreds or thousands can lead to a site quickly becoming unusable. If you are running an event at scale in a season and climate where this amount of mud is possible, you may need to budget for things like woodchips, artificial walkways, or professional expertise and equipment to rescue stuck vehicles.

2) Sun

Whereas mud and rain can be unpleasant and uncomfortable, extremes of sun can be dangerous or even life threatening. As much as you may remind participants to wear sunscreen and stay hydrated, some will not. If there is little or no shelter from the sun this can lead to sunburn, heat exhaustion, or worse. People wearing heavy costumes or armour are also more susceptible to the effects of hot weather.

On the matter of shelter, remember that shade does not necessarily equate to protection from UV, particularly in tents that may give the illusion of being in the shade whilst simultaneously offering no respite from the sun's rays. For staff working in tents, consider providing them with fans.

In France in 2023, the afternoon temperature during a 4-days high fantasy larp in August peaked at 44°C (111°F). Here the organizers paused the game from 12:00 to 17:00 each day and ensured a constant supply of water and showers to help people stay cool.

Preparation and education are important here. Role-playing games have been played outside in high temperatures, such as larps have been run successfully in the Sahara Desert (*Sahara Expedition*, Chaos League, 2020-2025). Consider shelter, water, hats, lip balm, and sunscreen.

Very dry weather increases the risk of fires. You need to ensure that you understand fire regulations, that these have been effectively communicated to your players, and that you have a process in place to deal with emergencies. A camp site needs fire breaks between tents. If you have a rule of no fires for cooking then someone needs to monitor that the rule is not being broken.

3) Wind

Even if the temperatures seem mild, wind can increase the intensity of weather in the following ways:

- **Windchill:** Air can feel colder when exposed to the wind, as the air in motion accelerates the rate of heat transfer from the body to the surrounding atmosphere. When the temperature is low, being out in the wind makes it feel colder.
- **Breeze:** Conversely when the weather is hot, a breeze can make it feel colder, increasing the possibility of sunburn, dehydration, and heatstroke.
- **Extreme wind:** Temporary structures, particularly tents, are susceptible to strong winds. If you are using a site with tents, ensure that you check and tighten the guy ropes. In the case of extreme winds, it may not be safe to run an event at all.

4) Snow and ice

Larps have been run in the snow and in the cold. If people have the correct clothing and equipment, then snow can be a beautiful backdrop for powerful scenes. However, risks should be taken into account: that people will fall on ice; that toilets, water pipes, or gas canisters will freeze; or that someone will not have suitable clothing. For international games, you cannot assume that all your players understand how to dress for the cold or even have a shared agreement of what constitutes cold conditions.

As with extremes of heat, preparation and education are important. Larps have been successfully run in the snow in January in European countries. Even in the UK, a weekend game with camping dealt with low temperatures of -12°C (10.4°F). Consider shelter, water, hats, gloves, thermal layers, and wool.

Will you provide shelter from the weather? In what ways? Are there heated spaces sufficient for all participants?

5) Nature

If you are running an event outside you also need to be aware of the local flora and fauna.

Are there likely to be insects, if so how dangerous are they? Are there poisonous snakes? Bears? Ticks? Midges? Hornets? Particularly for international events, you should not assume that players coming in from other countries understand how to deal with local wildlife.

Are any of the local plants toxic? Is there poison ivy? Giant hogweed? Poisonous mushrooms? Not every participant will necessarily be aware of these, what they look like, or what to do if they come into contact with something dangerous.

i) Site specific design

This section is possibly most relevant for larps. Whether you are inside one or more buildings or outside in nature, you should design and plan the locations and movement of your players, sometimes called *spatial* or *environmental design* (Ebbehøj, Hertel, and Trier-Knudsen 2019). Sometimes, you may want them to travel from place to place. Setting the camps of opposing factions apart from one another makes the journey between them significant or dangerous *diegetically*, i.e., within the fiction. Conversely, if you want a sense of community, having the place where people live and work physically close to one another means they are likely to remain inside that zone.

We recommend having a hub for social interaction. Placing this towards the physical centre of your site often makes sense. At *The Quota* (Brind et al. 2018; Brind 2020), this space was the Recreation Room, which contained a table, chairs, and a limited amount of scenography and props. Examples included some children's colouring books without coloured pens; a set of pamphlets and fliers collected from tourist information centres in Wales; a handful of books; and some board games. These choices told a story about the detention centre, its budget, and its intentions.

The board games were the Cardiff edition of *Monopoly* and a Welsh version of *Scrabble*. The *Scrabble* set was missing the board. This was not a deliberate decision, although arguably the inclusion of Welsh tiles would have made the game almost unplayable for most participants.

There was also a spatial element to this design choice. The original design specification had located this space on the ground floor of the building to ensure wheelchair access. When this ceased to be a requirement – the day that the game started – the room was relocated to a larger space on the upstairs floor. Functionally, this space was also the location for the hot drink making facilities: a large water boiler; some institutional tea and instant coffee; packets of sugar and milk; and plastic cups.

Having a map of the location is useful for design and planning. If you are using buildings, a floorplan enables hypothetical design to take place. If you need different activities to happen in different locations, for example, working out where they will take place on the plan will give you an idea of the viability of your activity design (see Figure 2).

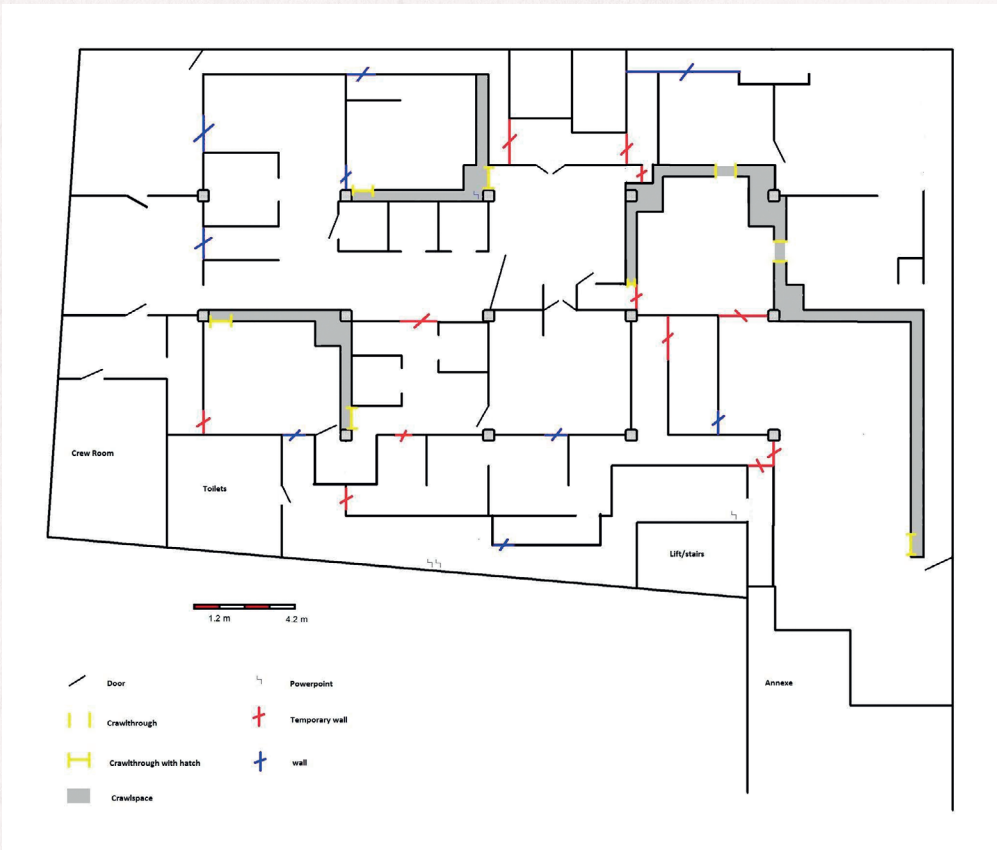


Figure 2. Spatial design plan for *Midwinter* (Svanevik et al. 2020) showing walls, doors, power locations etc.

j) Movement

You also need to give consideration to the differences between players and their characters in how they want and need to move. This aspect of design covers everything from ensuring a wheelchair user has access to a bathroom, to the places where people will queue for food or sit to eat. You also need to consider whether you are going to workshop the way that characters might move. For example, does your game feature dancing? How and where will you teach and practice the steps?

k) Combat locations and safety

Some games involve physical interactions in the form of combat e.g., a larp with foam boffer or replica weapons. In these cases, you need to consider which locations are safe enough for characters to fight. Specific to logistics and spatial design you can consider the lighting, ground, and terrain. A location that seems relatively safe to use for this sort of play during the day may become extremely dangerous at night due to lack of light. If you combine low light with nearby water or steep slopes, a path by a lake could become an extremely high risk location after sunset.

If you are using a camp site or another location with tents, consider some sort of rope or barrier to keep participants away from tent pegs; tripping can be very dangerous. The same is true for indoor locations with furniture, woodland, or even flat grassy fields that may have hidden rabbit holes or other trip hazards.

If you are using dark locations, ruins, airsoft sites, or caves, consider rough ground, rocks, and exposed brickwork. The style of physical interaction between players of airsoft and people fighting with melee weapons is different, e.g., their propensity to fall. Consider also *pinch points*; a dozen people defending a doorway can make for interesting play, but fallen characters blocking that doorway can lead to accidental injuries.

If your game uses simulated or replica firearms, ensure that the local laws of the country permit them and that you understand the rules for transporting and storing prop guns. Avoid situations in which you have unplanned interactions from law enforcement because of a misunderstanding with a passerby.

At every point of the process ask yourself the questions:

- What could go wrong here?
- Can we mitigate it?

Simulated larp combat is never risk-free. Whether boffer, larp, blunt, or simulated, weapons are never completely “safe,” nor are *slow fighting* or *lightest touch* combat systems. As an organizer, if you decide to include combat in your game, considering these risks as a part of your implementation is important. Whilst you must rely on your participants to adhere to the safety rules, mitigating the risks and defining those rules is your responsibility.

We consider additional considerations related to physical safety in Chapter 5.

l) Communication technology logistics

If you are operating across a large site you need to consider communications. You may be able to use existing mobile phone networks or even wifi to communicate, or you may want to use two-way radios or walkie talkies. In both cases you will need to be aware of places where there are no comms, and of the necessity to keep batteries charged. If you are using radios, ensure people are trained how to use them and that they keep their ear-pieces in and their radios on.

Some buildings are unfriendly to communications. Thick stone walls, or metal interior structures can block mobile and radio communications. You can plan for this by identifying these dead spots and agreeing upon protocols for crew members who will spend a lot of time there. For example, when an NPC is in the library, and we know there are no radio communications available there, we ask them to step out onto the balcony every twenty minutes and secretly check their messages. This practice will not help if something comes up that requires that person urgently, but otherwise we have a degree of confidence that they will receive a notification shortly.

m) Sound design

Sound design is a professional skill which requires training and experience. The questions and advice we offer in this short section are no substitute for having that experience and knowledge. We recommend reading “The Fundamentals of Sound Design for Larp” by Tolvanen and Melakoski (2019) for more information.

You will need to source music and any sounds that you use. Whilst there are freely available sound effects online, you may want to avoid using copyrighted music without a specific license, particularly if your game has a commercial aspect to it. If you are asking players to attend, then you might want to consider investigating some of the copyright free music libraries. Getting a licence to use some short pieces of thematically appropriate music remains relatively inexpensive.

How will you include music, atmospheric sound, or other noises? Playing sounds -- including music, sound effects, and ambient backgrounds -- requires amplification and speakers. Whilst a bluetooth speaker might work in a single room, it does not fill a whole building. Larger rooms and spaces require bigger speakers and more amplification. A single soundscape across multiple rooms and floors requires cables and multiple outputs. You will need to consider whether your budget stretches to hiring or renting such equipment and whether you have the expertise to set it up properly and safely.

Check your sound and your sound levels before the game starts. Ensure there is no distortion, that the sound is not too loud, and that any cables are securely taped down or laid in a way that does not constitute a trip hazard. Keep in mind that the sound in an empty room will be very different in a room full of people and something that seemed loud enough may be barely audible. Bring spare cables, adapters, and plugs.

If you are playing sounds from a computer that is plugged into the main speakers, consider packing a ground loop isolator; this is a device that can reduce or remove the low humming sounds that sometimes come out of laptops. Ideally you will have tested your sound and system before you get to the site.

Sound can be used in different ways to support a transformational game:

- **As transitional scenes:** For example you can play a piece of music to signify the start and end of the game. Sound is both a clear indicator to the players that the experience has started/finished, but also has an emotional impact akin to being in a film.
- **During run-time ambiently:** An ambient soundscape can add a lot to the experience of the play, from suitable effects to support a tabletop game, to the sound of a thunderstorm raging outside of a haunted house.
- **In specific scenes:** Being able to trigger sound effects or musical cues at the exact right moment can be very powerful. Imagine a crash of thunder at the exact moment the knight errant asks for a sign from the heavens? In order to do this though you will need to have a method of playing the sound at the right time and a way of seeing and hearing what is going on in play.

Can you adapt your sound design to accommodate players with sound sensitivities or disabilities? Some participants may struggle with volume or certain ambient frequencies due to neurodiversity or a disability. Let your players know they can come to you if the soundscape is too loud or if they have sensory issues. If you are able, obtain suitable hardware or software that enables you to remove or reduce specific frequencies. Tools like Ableton Live are useful here.

Is sound critical to your design or for communicating your game content? Sometimes sounds are just a nice-to-have feature. Consider the cost of the equipment and any technical challenges against the value that sound and music bring to your game. For an academic discussion on sound in larp, see Lambe and Nunes (2026).

n) Lighting and lighting design

If your playing space has little or no natural light, or if it can be made darker with blinds or curtains or careful preparation, then we recommend considering lighting as a part of your design. Again, lighting design is a professional skill, but there are some things that can be done relatively easily and cheaply.

Things to consider are that some lights, particularly older theatrical lights, give off a lot of heat and so need to be positioned in places where they are not going to burn players or start a fire. Fortunately, modern LED lighting is much cooler. If you opt for battery powered lighting such as candles or lanterns, ensure that you have a way of charging them and that someone is assigned to do this job every day.

How will you include atmospheric lights, strobe, or other forms of light? Do you have sufficient money in your budget to rent or purchase lighting? Do you have a method of transporting it? Professional quality lighting tends to come in flight cases, so you may need to think about renting a van or trailer. Is there enough power and/or enough power sockets? Do you have a way of rigging lights? Do you have a way of controlling the lights? Do you have time to set them all up? Much like with sound, many lights require cables for power and/or for control.

Many lighting effects work better with a haze or smoke, but using smoke or haze machines will set off smoke detectors, and may even set off a fire alarm or notify the fire brigade.

Can you adapt your lights to accommodate players with sound sensitivities or disabilities? Low light situations can particularly affect players with a visual impairment. Strobe lights can trigger epileptic fits in some people. Lasers can damage people's eyes and are particularly dangerous to younger children. We recommend you do not rely on any of these. If you are going to run a game that features low lights or dark areas, you should signpost this clearly to potential players.

Is light critical to your design or communicating game content? As with a sound rig, lighting can be expensive; sometimes it brings less to the event than you might have hoped.

For more information about lighting in black box larp, see Rasmus Teilmann (2018a, 2018b).

o) Scenography

Scenography is the combination of technology and physical objects / material stagecraft in order to create and produce a sense of place as a part of a performance. We use it to describe a mixture of location design, set design, props, and special effects.

With the rise in popularity of *immersive events*, it is easy to understand the value of detailed scenography to help set the scene for a transformative game, e.g., through spectacle (Pettersson 2025). From making the play area of a tabletop game seem to be a part of its storyworld, to creating a fully functional representation of a starship, scenography can give your players a physical sensation of being in a place. However, scenography is not an essential part of the implementation; many games -- even larger ones -- work in a black box space (Pettersson 2025), or in another location with minimal or no scenography.

Will you include scenography? Or is the space neutral or bare? As a designer you may have a vision for a space. This vision may well have affected your choice of location already, but for some games, the play is going to happen mainly inside the imagination of the players. Sometimes scenography does make a strong difference. The larp *Gothic* was run in a 19th century manor house in Denmark, complete with dark corridors and a

spooky attic, but the playtest was run in an open meeting hall with daylight coming in through the windows, and chairs and tables set out to represent rooms and furniture.

The decision around whether you include scenography will be informed by its importance to the vision, and your budget of both time and money. As a part of this decision, you need to consider transport and storage. For example, your vision for the game might absolutely require a vintage dentist's chair, but it is going to cost €1000 and weigh 200kg. How are you going to get it to and from the site? Where are you going to put it after the game?

How long do you have the location for? Is there time to rig complex scenography before the game starts? Is there time to take it down? The larp *Do Androids Dream?* (Sandqvist et al. 2017) in Gothenburg rented a warehouse space and had time to build a complex set out of scaffolding, rig lighting, and even make it rain indoors. This could not have been done without time for building and decommissioning.

The atmosphere of a game can be affected by the physical space. At one end of the scale, playing an intensely transformational game in a school building may adversely affect the players because children's pictures on the walls could break their immersion, or bring up challenging memories. At the other end, playing a larp about refugees in an actual disused prison with barbed wire fences and sleeping in prison cells may be too oppressive for some participants and may cause unintended trauma.

If you include scenography, should players interact with it? Some scenography is representational and there to provide the sense of a space, e.g., putting a medical-style screen into a room with a desk and chairs, along with a small tray on wheels with medical equipment on it. Add a chart, a stethoscope, and a box of latex-free gloves, a white coat, and a sign on the door that says "Doctor's Office" and you have used scenography to represent a space. If your game requires working technology -- such as a hackable computer network, actual CCTV, a kitchen that allows the preparation of food, or responsive terminals on the bridge of a starship -- then the scenography also needs to be functional. Remember that anything that you put into the play area becomes a part of the game. If you place a strange obelisk with runes on it in the middle of the woods, expect your players to find it and interact with it; looking for meaning or function.

We recommend asking yourself: is important scenography accessible to all players? Might anything in the scenography present difficulties for people with limited mobility or other disabilities? If so, can you mitigate this risk in some way, e.g., offering different ways to engage or other activities? Putting important scenography in places where not all players can see or interact with it is problematic. If you build the hut of the Seer in the middle of the woods at the end of a muddy track, your players with limited mobility may not be able to get there to see it. If your magical plant that grows in the darkness can only be reached by crawling through a darkened maze, then someone with a visual restriction will not be able to find it. These are design choices. We will cover accessibility in more depth later in this chapter.

For more information about how scenography relates to plots and facilitation, see Chapter 4 of this book.

i) Scenography as narrative design

Scenography contributes to the narrative but can also be a part of the story itself. A painting on the wall of a house, a strange sundial, or the mosaic pattern on a basement floor might inspire the narrative design of the game in unexpected ways. Every surface is designable, but sometimes you can fold layers of design in interesting ways. The downside of designing for site-specific scenography is that the game becomes less transportable, but the upside exposes the hidden magic of these sorts of games and can be a part of the joy of design.

For an example of scenography that also functions as narrative design, at *Midwinter* (Svanevik et al. 2020), new labels were created for the hot drinks to replace the packaging on the commercial brands (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Milk Carton label for *Midwinter* (Svanevik et al. 2020).

For more on this topic, see the section on Props in this chapter.

3.11 Tech design

You may choose to integrate advanced technology in your larp. While a thorough examination is beyond the scope of this book, our Erasmus+ EDGE Tech Toolkit (Suominen 2025) explores current and future technologies that can be used in transformative games. The Toolkit includes considerations for such technologies as:

- 3D modeling
- 3D scanning: Laser scanning and photogrammetry
- 3D character development (virtual clones)
- 3D printing for costumes, equipment, and props
- Mobile and computer applications
- NFC / RFID technology
- Audio technology
- Communication technology

- Extended reality
- GPS / Real-time location tracking
- Microcontrollers for tech enhancement
- Game engines
- AI and machine learning

You can access the link to the Tech Toolkit [here](#).

For some examples of uses of technology in larp implementation, see Dalstål (2014),

3.12 Sensory design

a) Food / taste

As Göthberg and Sandquist (2017, 240) note, taste and smell have the power to trigger memories and emotional responses. Whilst we discuss food under sustenance above, it can also be used as a tool to support your game. Examples range from diegetically-appropriate snacks on a gaming table for a RPG, to serving Christmas Dinner for every meal (*Midwinter*, Svanevik et al. 2020), to more complex food and meal choices.

For example, for the larp *The Quota* (Brind et al. 2018; Brind 2020), food was diegetic. Participants were fed in-game from a kitchen within the prison complex; they ate with plastic cutlery at tables in the dining room of their cell block. Whilst the larp catered for a number of dietary requirements, including vegan, gluten intolerant, and specific food allergies, the meals were designed to sustain life, but were heavy on the carbohydrates -- in order to make participants feel slightly sluggish and tired -- and deliberately cheap. On the Friday night of the event, participants had been in the jail for just over 24 hours. They had eaten their evening meal: a vegetable stew which was nourishing, but deliberately underseasoned.

Shortly after 8pm, the security guards at the jail received their meal: a large order of take-away fish and chips. The security guards were played by members of the event crew (NPCs). They were instructed to eat the fish and chips inside the detention centre, in full view of the inmates. The smell of the deep-fried food permeating the building led to many of the inmates going outside, even though it was cold and dark, to avoid having to watch and smell the food being eaten. Most of the people playing the guards either gave away their food to inmates or — if they were playing guards without compassion — left food so that it could be taken (Brind 2020, 14-15).

As described earlier, another example is *dinner warfare*, a design technique intended to make shared eating scenes more dramatically interesting (Wind 2024). In dinner warfare, the organizers use seating charts to place characters next to each other or far

away for maximum drama. Food during these scenes can be buffet style, but can leave more time for role-playing if delivered by servers.

For an example of an approach to food design, see also Elleby and Bønnelycke (2023, 208-241), who discuss their approach and also provide menus. If your food is diegetic, it needs to be tested through cooking and tasting in advance. Recipes need to be available that anyone can follow, in case members of your primary catering team are unavailable.

Finally, we note that some designers have made scarcity of food a part of their design, e.g., telling players not to bring their own food or snacks, and then making the players go hungry. If you plan to make in-game food difficult or impossible to find, we strongly recommend you provide an off-game alternative. Hungry people are not good larpers nor are they safe larpers. Lack of suitable food can also lead to health concerns, for example for diabetics.

With food design in a larp, one must also consider the cultural implications. Are you including food that some, but not all participants can eat? Will political, religious, or ethical beliefs be taken into account? How do the organizers intend to manage any leftovers from meals and how will they try to avoid waste? In the case of events with many participants, one must also try to limit the impact on the ecosystem. For example, several international larps are moving towards more sustainable and cruelty-free foods.

b) Smell

It is said that, in Western Europe, if you wish to sell property, the smell of baked bread and Freshly brewed coffee evokes a positive reaction in most buyers, including those who do not drink coffee. There is no doubt that smells can be used in immersive settings; indeed during the 1980s, Disney Imagineering used them extensively in their work.

Various scents are available that can be used to enhance the role-play experience with various delivery methods, such as smoke machines, oils, scent blocks, aerosols, diffusers, and sprays. They range from quite pleasant scents that evoke a memory of winter holidays, to deeply unpleasant odours designed to provoke fear of disgust. You could offer players the earthy tones of a damp cave or the smoggy street of a 19th century city.

However, some scents cause allergic reactions or respiratory issues, and some scent products are irritants. Ehrich et al. (2023) offer a guide to how to carry out your own risk assessment for use of scents in games.

c) Touch

Some games are quite tactile by design, particularly those that are wordless or played blindfolded, such as several larps designed by Nina Runa Essendrop (2018). Some of these experiences have used objects with specific textures that blindfolded players discover in play; others rely on participants finding one another in the play space and maintaining some sort of contact throughout the game. Larps in particular may have elements of touch because of the embodied nature of the form. Consider how best to signpost the degree and type of touches to your players, workshoping if required. If possible, consider alternative options for engagement based on players' willingness to touch or be touched, and any sensory issues or restrictions from neurodiverse players.

If touching objects is a part of the game design, also think about how best to sanitise them and whether they are culturally or religiously appropriate for all potential players.

3.13 Communication

How will organizers communicate with players and vice versa throughout the process? At this time of writing in August 2025, Facebook and Discord remain the prevalent social media platforms for organising and discussing role-playing games. Bluesky is also gaining traction. None of these platforms are ideal, and we recognise that the face of social media does change. Online communities grow, fragment, evolve, and die, from the mailing lists of the '80s, to the newsgroups of the '90s, from LiveJournal to Facebook. We do not know what comes next, but there is a need for spaces where role-players can communicate. In this section, we will talk in general terms about how to use online spaces to communicate with and to build transformative communities.

a) Recruitment

How will you promote this game and recruit players? In this section, we will discuss ways of promoting a game and recruiting potential players from a general adult population. Note that running games for minors is likely a separate process. See chapters 2 for more information.

i) Website

Websites are less useful for promotion than they used to be, but they stand as important repositories of information and a destination for potential players.

Here is the information that we think people look for on a website. Some of it would come under the category of marketing copy -- words and images designed to persuade players to sign up for your game. Much of it under the category of information: things they need to know in order to make a decision about whether this is a game they want to play, should play, and are able to play (Koljonen 2020):

- **Home page:** The classic landing page for a website with a logo and a small amount of marketing copy. This page has more of a marketing function than anything else. Depending on the amount of information you have, you can actually put most of what follows onto a single page. This practice is often better for Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), but can make it harder to find information, particularly when you have a lot of detail. When you open for sign-up, this is where you have the link to the sign-up page or ticket purchase site.
- **Experience:** This section helps players to understand the nature of the game that you are advertising. It contains information designed to help them decide whether they *want* to play the game.
- **Need-to-know:** A summary of the most important aspects of the game.
- **Is this game for me?:** A simple list of the themes of the game and the expectations the organizers have of the players. If your game deals with difficult themes or has an element of physicality it is worth highlighting these here. Some potential players will read this information and decide that the game is not for them. This is okay. For a larp, this section should also answer the question, “What will I be doing with my body?” so that players understand the physical requirements and experience of the piece.
- **Characters:** In this section, give an overview of the characters or types of characters that are available to play.
- **The story:** This section could feature the backstory of the larp or an overview of the expected trajectory of the story during the game
- **Playstyle:** What are the rules of engagement for participants in this game? How physical/emotional will it be? Is it collaborative or competitive? (One may assume the former for transformative games, but you should be clear to help potential players make an informed decision about whether to sign up).
- **Historical and cultural setting:** If relevant, give an overview of the setting of the game. Do not assume cultural or historical understanding for international players.
- **Metatechniques:** Give an overview of any safety techniques and metatechniques. This section signals to experienced players that you have an understanding of the form, and offers new players a glimpse of how these situations can be handled.
- **Practical:** The set of information that enables a potential player to decide whether they *can* play the game. This remains distinct from a desire to play it.
- **Accessibility:** Add any considerations related to accessibility, including topics covered in the section on accessibility design in this chapter and Chapter 5 of *TRGD*.

- **Key information:** Any additional information they should know.
- **Dates / location:** When and where will the game be held? If you are advertising internationally, make sure you have sufficient information to enable players from other countries to identify the location. If you are opening / closing sign-up on specific dates, list them here too.
- **Cost:** If you are charging for people to play, how much is it? On what schedule must the payments be made? Are there discounted/subsidized places for underprivileged participants? Can you offer any spots for players to attend for free if they volunteer to help with organizing before or during runtime?
- **Food:** If there will be food included, give some details here, including the dietary restrictions for which you can cater. Is the food vegan? Should players bring their own? Is there a refrigerator available for storage? Are tea and coffee available?
- **Number of players:** Makes it easier for participants to understand the size of the game.
- **Accommodation:** If players will be staying on site, what sort of accommodation is available? Is it camping? A hotel? Dormitories? Shared beds?
- **Schedule:** If available, the schedule gives potential players more detail about start and end times, how long they will be playing for, and how long they will be sleeping for. It is particularly important for players travelling a long distance to understand when workshops will start and when debriefs will finish so that they can plan their journey.
- **Further reading:** At this point, we hope that our potential players are very keen to sign up to the game. This section is where we give them the details.
- **Sign-up and casting:** What is the process for signing up? When will tickets be available? Is it first come first served? Is there a lottery? How will casting be managed? Is there an application? Will you include a flagging process (see Chapters 2 and 5)?
- **Location and travel:** Whilst we have already given a location for the game, here we give a specific address and some advice for how to get there. If the location is remote, will you be providing a transport option like a coach from a major town or airport?
- **Costume:** What level of costuming is expected? If you can provide a mood board or a costume guide here that is useful, but these can come later in the process. What costume should the players bring and what costuming items will be provided, if any? Is there a cost to order these items?
- **Packing list:** What should the players bring?

For a tabletop game, comfortable clothes of their own choosing, unless you are suggesting costumes. For a black box larp, comfortable dark-coloured or black clothing. For a Nordic or American freeform game, usually no specific costume is required. For a larp, it depends on the setting, duration, location, and season. If costuming is required, we recommend specifying that it is a larp and not a 100% accurate historical re-enactment. This reassurance will ease the pressure on players and allow for a greater number of participants.

For a tabletop game, players might want to bring their own pens, paper, dice, drinks, and snacks. For a larp, we recommend letting players know they can bring their own props and specify if there are things that you need them to bring or if there are things they should not bring. Players tend to be enthusiastic and it is better to manage their expectations than to rely on common sense. Furthermore, we recommend specifying in the guide and preparatory materials what is mandatory to bring and what is recommended but not necessary.

Some example text from *The Last Song* (Justesen et al. 2022) follows:

Feel free to bring small props, coins, beads, etc. to trade. It is important to bring a wooden bowl, in game eating implements, and a cup or tankard. Please do not bring glass bottles or real weapons to the site.

- **Aesthetic:** What aesthetic is required for the genre? If you are going for a high immersion game you may need to spell out the specifics of what you are requesting. It may be obvious to you that modern drink cans and plastic bottles have no place in your 18th century tale of courtly intrigue, but spelling it out gives players a chance to think things through and hopefully come more prepared.

Is your experience intended to be historically accurate down to the year, approximately set in an “era,” *coolthentic*,³ or does it not matter? Tell your players and make it very clear which one you expect. Sometimes, friction can arise between players who have hand-sewn an outfit and those who have put a belt around an oversized shirt. You can resolve this in advance with clarity of aesthetic design.

- **Crafting:** Do players need to do crafting before or during the game? Many players, particularly larpers, enjoy crafting props, writing material, and making costumes. This is a time consuming process. If you are expecting participants to craft, then you need to signpost the expectations early.
- **Policies:** There are a number of things that you need to think about and publish so that players can make an informed decision about whether to sign up. What happens if you have to cancel the game? What if they need to pull out of the larp? A suggested list of policies include:

³ A portmanteau word borrowed from the UK Larp tradition which values a costume that looks good and right over and above it being hand sewn from hand-dyed fabric.

- Cancellation, refund, and insurance policy
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion policy
 - Safety policy
 - Covid-19 policy
 - Privacy policy
 - Photography / video policy
- **About:** This section gives a bit of information about who the organizers are, provides methods for getting in touch with them, and credits people involved in or contributing to the design and implementation of the game.
 - **The team:** Who are the people designing and implementing the game? What is their experience? What other games have they made?
 - **Credits:** A lot of games are made by volunteers or by non-profit organizations. Some techniques that are used come from other places. Crediting people for their work, acknowledging people for their ideas, and listing everyone who helped out on a game is best practice.
 - **Contact:** A contact form, email address, postal address, and/or links to social media are useful here.

ii) Social media

Furthering the point we made about the changing face of social media, whatever platforms or methods are being used by players, you will need to create and curate a presence on them. This practice helps you build a following in that space for marketing and advertising purposes. This involves effort before you want to start promoting your event. Remember that each social media channel has specific demographics associated with it.

Social media platforms are designed for advertising and the users are the product. If you want to make use of the platform as intended, you will need to create a very targeted advertising campaign and be prepared to pay for clicks. We hope for some replacement in the future that will allow communities to be created for the sake of building communities rather than for generating revenue.

iii) Promotion through journalism

If your event is newsworthy, you may be able to generate interest, copy, or screen time by creating a mailing list of relevant journalists and sending them press releases about your events. Having a friendly journalist helps here. Whilst we have little evidence of people choosing to come to games because of newspaper articles, it generates a wider discussion about opportunities for transformation through play, e.g., this article on *The Quota* (Brind et al. 2018; Brind 2020) in *The Guardian* (Reith-Banks 2018).

iv) Mailing lists

Before Facebook, before the Web, even before newsgroups, there were mailing lists: a place where an individual could sign up for a regular newsletter about a specific subject. (Indeed, before moving online you could do this with stamps and letters).

A return to this form has occurred in recent years with many more organizations and event organizers curating a monthly or occasional email to a group of folks who have opted in to receive information.

v) Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is still a very popular way of generating capital for games projects and has

been used for larps as well as tabletop RPGs, American freeform games, and board games. Many resources already exist offering advice on how to run successful crowdsourcing campaigns.

vi) Player contact

How will players contact you before, during, and after the game session(s)? How often will you be available for contact? Think about how you will make yourself available for questions and player support. Email is ubiquitous, but many younger players also expect Discord, Telegram, or other social media platforms. There is an overhead associated with monitoring all of these. If you have personal socials you may want to make it clear that you do not answer questions pertaining to your game through those. You may also wish to state estimated response times and limits to where and when you can be contacted.

vii) Player's Handbook

Pulling together all of the relevant information from the website, plus details of characters and more about the game into a designed package in the form of a Player's Handbook makes it easier for players to download and keep everything they might need in one place. A PDF is readable on a phone and a screen and allows for interesting layout choices.

If your budget stretches to it, a printed copy of the Player's Handbook is a useful resource and a beautiful memento of a game.

b) Contacting the players

How often will you contact your players? Tell your players how often you expect to contact them and when to expect an update. Whilst some material may go to social media, important information about payments, casting, and character sheets should also go directly to players. We suggest 3-4 letters to players sent via email with a notification on Discord/social media to say they have been sent. The number of emails that end up in spam folders or undelivered is significant.

c) Player contact with one another

Will you have an online space for players to interact? This is an important and difficult decision. Many players enjoy the idea of online role-play both as a means of building their characters and relationships and as a space to continue the story between games. Others use the space to talk about the off-game elements of the event. However, having an online space privileges those who have time to interact within it and risks creating a two-tier experience: one for players who have interacted a lot online, and another for those who are coming into the space cold.

Who will moderate this space? What are its rules? We recommend designing and curating your online spaces. Unless you have a small number of players who are personally known to you, players may join from many cultures and walks of life. The way they may deal with one another and expect to be dealt with may vary wildly and (potentially) destructively. Some people write in a way that seems abrupt or even rude, but that is not their intent. (There are also people whose intention is to be disruptive or difficult). Consider laying out the rules for engagement clearly and up front, then ask people to read and agree to these rules.

You may need the ability to moderate, or even prioritise active moderation. This means that a person or a team of people read and monitor the online space who are ready to step in, stop conversations, delete messages, or even remove people from the space. This is a challenging task. Moderators often have to deal with angry people who can be rude and aggressive, expecting an immediate response. Having a back channel for moderators and organizers to communicate in real time can help here. Sometimes decisions need to be made by people with a management / overall responsibility.

Are players expected to interact beforehand? Or is this optional? If you need players to interact in an online space prior to the game you should make this expectation very clear up front. The investment of time can be significant and not every participant has an equal amount of free time. A single parent working two jobs may struggle to spend time every day keeping up with online conversations, particularly on platforms such as Discord, and making it mandatory might not be tenable for them. Again, making online interaction optional may also end up generating a two-tier experience where players who did have the time to interact know more about the game, have already formed relationships, etc.

Are players allowed to pre-plan relations, scenes, and other activities? If so, will other players be at a disadvantage if they are not able to participate? Consider this carefully. This choice is particularly risky when you allow players to create their own relationships or to pre-plan scenes in the game. At the same time, having players invested in the game in advance increases engagement, intensity, and reduces the propensity to drop out.

3.14 Casting

Casting refers to the process by which organizers assign specific characters, roles, or functions to players, or a process by which players select and negotiate for specific roles between them. The latter approach can work well with small groups who have a degree of trust and maturity, but it also risks privileging assertive / aggressive / direct players when it comes to allocating roles.

Conceptually, some characters seem more attractive than others. Playing the dashing captain home from the war, or the Commander of the starship seems immediately more interesting than the scullery maid, or the person who works in the docking bay. With good character design, this should not be the case, but we must accept that – given a free choice – some roles would have more sign-ups than others. In this example, the high status roles are also likely to have in-game functions that require the player to be able to perform.

Casting, therefore, is an art form that requires judgement, thought, and even-handedness lest we are seen to always give the best roles to the same people or to our friends. We suggest a blind casting that is based on what players ask for during sign up. Supplementary questions about the sort of experience they are looking for on a form can help the decision making process. If you opt for a transparent process, casting against type can often generate super interesting play. If you are not sure, check with the player:

We are considering you for the role of the commander. This will involve making rapid decisions under pressure and direct conflict with members of the council. If you were cast into this place would you be excited by / comfortable with it?

a) Flagging / addressing playstyle incompatibilities

One of the biggest challenges of playing with people you have not interacted with before is understanding and addressing differences in playstyle. Some people are incompatible with one another, such as an emotionally-driven internal immersionist paired with a loud, play-to-win player with a tendency to drop character and make off-game jokes. As facilitators and GMs, we need to be very aware of these potential friction points and work to mitigate them.

These issues are best identified and addressed early. Talking about play preferences and agreeing a baseline of interaction can be a useful workshop session either in person, or facilitated online.

We discuss flagging in more detail in Chapters 2 and 5.

b) Redundancy and robustness

How do you deal with people dropping out? If the organizer joins in, will they still be effective? Your game will have dropouts. People get sick, real life gets in the way, or sometimes folks just forget. If you are lucky, you will get a few days or weeks' notice of someone's intention not to attend, but this is not always the case.

Sometimes you may find your game has seats at the table, or roles unfilled. This can be designed around to a certain extent by building redundancy into the characters, but occasionally, gaps will significantly impact the game as a whole, e.g., “*We have no commander for the starship!*” or the experience of one character and their player, e.g., “*I am sorry, Romeo, but Juliet can’t make it!*” Having a short list of understudies who live nearby can help.

In some cases you may need to have a member of the organizer crew step in and play. Consider how this practice affects the overall running of the game. Taking someone off the kitchen crew and getting them to play will certainly save the play experience, but will make getting the food to table on time significantly harder. In this case it is better to have someone in the runtime crew already prepared for this possible task. Or even consider offering the spot to players for free, hoping someone will take it.

3.15 Documentation

Documentation is the term used to describe records of a game taken before, during, and after. Your design notes, drafts of characters, copies of social media campaigns all count as documentation. Any field notes you take during the game, and any feedback or data collected afterwards also fall into this category. The most common use of the term, however, refers to photographs (and to a lesser extent video) taken during the game, mainly by an out-of-game photographer provided by the organizers.

As much of this documentation has personal information in it that pertains directly to individuals who can be identified, you need to be aware of any local laws that govern the storage and handling of personal data. In Europe, this law is currently GDPR. It is beyond the remit of this book to offer guidance here as we are not lawyers or legal advisers.

How will you obtain consent for processing personal information? In any sign-up form where you ask a player or potential player for their personal information include an opt-in statement that gives you their consent to store that information. Link also to your privacy policy.

How will you obtain consent for documentation? We recommend having a specific documentation consent policy, which could be an actual consent / release form, or you can go for tacit consent by making it a part of your policies / terms and conditions.

If players will be getting copies of these images for their own use, what are the limits?

If you tell people they can use pictures of themselves on their own social media, they should not be using photos of co-players for other purposes. How will you ensure the privacy of someone who opts out of their photos being used when they appear in the background of someone else’s portrait? The suggested solution to this appears in the policy below: there is a period where images are available only to players and you ask that they not be shared. At the end of that week, any player who opts out of images has their photos removed. After that period, players may use the images in a personal capacity.

In what contexts or publication venues will documentation be used? Be specific. Particularly with images, people want to know what you are going to do with the photos/video. Their willingness to let you use it for academic purposes or to put on your own social media will tend to be different from if you intend to sell the images or use them for marketing purposes. Be honest about your intentions and make sure that players understand before they sign up what any images might be used for.

a) Sample photo policy

Here is an example template Photo Policy that you can share with your players:

There will be some photography/videography during the course of <event>. This will be restricted to a session of “portrait painting” during <time> // The photographers/camera crew will be there “in-character” // The photographers will not be there in-character, but will try to photograph the action without being seen.

If you do not wish to be photographed, please inform the photographers // By signing up to the larp, you agree to be photographed during the game.

After the game is completed, the images will be made available to participants only. You will have a week to request that any photograph with you in it is deleted, or cropped/edited to remove you. We ask that you do not share any photos until this week is up, and everyone has had a chance to review and confirm they consent for their images to be used. After the week is done, please ask permission of co-players before tagging images of them.

If you don’t ask for your photo to be taken down, we will assume you are okay with us using any media for marketing or publishing purposes. Some media may be used in an academic context. You have the right to withdraw assent at any time; this means that even though you were okay with a photograph immediately after the event, if you change your mind about it in the future, you can ask to have it deleted. We will remove it from our own servers and archives, and will not use it in any further marketing or publishing.

3.16 Aesthetics Implementation

a) Costumes

Will you provide costumes? Providing costumes is a tricky undertaking as you need to be able to provide for all shapes and sizes. Unless you have access to a significant store of clothing, it is often better to let players sort out their own costuming. However, there are some things like cloaks, sashes, tabards, or robes that can fit many differently-shaped humans. These need to be planned, purchased, cut, and assembled. Think about whether the players will need clothing layers if you provide costumes. This will depend

a lot on the season and location. For a multi-day outdoor larp in the winter, yes. For a one evening tabletop game in an air conditioned venue, maybe. Additional advice on costuming can be found at Grove (2020) and Grove and Örtberg (2025).

b) Props

The design, manufacture, transportation, and storage of props are a part of scenography implementation. In this section we will talk about the type of props that are specific to the game that either you will provide or you will ask the players to bring.

What props will you provide? If there are props that are core to the design of the game then you should provide them, or at the very least have them available for players to borrow. In the black box larp *Faerie* (Justesen 2023), there are some magical items that are important to the story, for example a light that always shows the character the way to their heart's desire; the organizer provides a LED candlestick in a holder to the players at the start of the larp.

For a large game, you might want to consider name badges for your players and their characters, possibly with indicators of their group or faction. For a larp that involves scientific experimentation or medicine, you may wish to provide a set of laboratory or medical equipment.

You should similarly have props available to your volunteers and NPCs. For larps, you will always need bags, baskets, and boxes for people to move objects around.

How will the props you provide connect with your transformative goals? Think about why you are including each prop. Does it map to a particular part of your design, e.g., perhaps an item to be given away or destroyed as a part of a redemptive ritual? Or a letter to be opened when the character is ready? Not every prop has to have a transformational purpose, but if you introduce one with this intention, we recommend applying the Darklord Test (Brind 2019, 119) to identify where it might go wrong and be used to overpower others.

If your props run counter to your goals, how will you address this? There is no single answer to this question; it depends on the goals in question or the prop. For example, the scented candle that you selected to bring everyone together does not work as expected. Having selected a comforting smell and tested it with friends and family, in the gaming environment, people react differently. Rather than coming together, instead some people leave the room, which has a potential impact on an important upcoming scene.

As soon as you identify the problem, you need to take action. The first is to extinguish and remove the candle; ideally to air out the room a little, whilst also taking care not to make it too cold. If you are able to replace it with another smell, or neutralise it in some way then you can. Ideally you need to do this without interrupting play, but sometimes it is better to break the immersion to course correct than to stay hands-off. In every instance, you need to know there is an issue, plan how you are going to resolve the immediate issue, and then look at amelioration.

Sometimes the issue could be down to someone misunderstanding or misusing a prop. We suggest gentle intervention here, particularly in a transformative setting. Words like “blame” and “fault” are less useful while a game is in place. Focus on the fix.

c) Other tools

For a tabletop game, have spare dice, pens, pencils, papers, and the ability to print and reprint character sheets. Players will forget things, which can slow down the game. For larps, you may want to use laminated cards, ribbons, or stickers to provide meta information about props.

3.17 Guiding player preparation

Many players think they need to arrive on site with minimal preparation and will be able to play easily. Players often have busy lives and do not have the big picture view of the implementation design like you do. Therefore, you should clearly communicate with players what is needed for preparation ahead of time.

a) Logistics-related preparation

What do players need to bring with them in terms of bedding, toiletries, etc.? Depending on your location and the agreement you have with them, players may need to bring some essentials with them. A hotel may provide towels and bedding, but some other locations may require players to bring sheets, pillow cases, or towels. You need to tell them what they need to bring, including the size of the bedding. You also need to be prepared for a percentage of them to forget anyway. In most cases, it is worth sending out an “essentials packing list” to players and crew to try to reduce the instances of things forgotten. For a larger or longer game, it is worth having a selection of toiletries available for people to use.

b) Game-related preparation

What do players need to do to prepare before the game? Here are some recommendations for instructions you may wish to provide for them.

i) Reading the character sheets

If the game uses pre-written character sheets, then players need to read and digest these before the game. If there is any pre-game work, such as talking to close relations, you should remind them about this well before the game. If the game uses characters generated by the players, again it is worth checking in with them and asking to see/review the characters in advance of the game so they can be revised if required. For a tabletop game, you need to decide if the characters are created in advance or during Session 0.

ii) Read the setting information

It helps if players have a broad understanding of the storyworld and setting, particularly for a long-form larp. Reading up on the storyworld, asking questions, and potentially getting involved in pre-play are all a part of the assimilation of setting information.

iii) Read and learn the rules

Some players read the rules of the game in advance. Others do not. For a tabletop game, this issue might be less of a problem, but for a large larp, it can waste a lot of time during workshops. Consider distributing a set of “rules you must know” in advance of the game, not just as written material, but also as audio.

iv) Acquire and pack key props

Remind players to prepare and pack any key props that they need to bring, e.g., latex weapons to a boffer larp, or wands to a magic school.

v) Prepare and pack costumes and luggage

Remind players to test wear and pack costumes just before the larp. Let players know where they can leave their out-of-game luggage, whether the location will be secure or not, and whether it will be accessible during the game. If you are providing costuming, make sure they know if the sizes are standardized or if you are custom-making them to order (Jelínková 2026).

c) Transformation-related preparation

If your players need to practice specific skills or use content during a game, you should send materials ahead of time whenever possible. Even if you plan to hold workshops covering the materials, assume players will need more time in order to prepare. Should they consider ahead of time what transformative goals they want to achieve with the game? Should they journal on the topic? Should they read an academic article or familiarize themselves with historical information? Make clear these expectations and you will help reduce cognitive load for your players.

Importantly, even if you ask players to prepare beforehand, some will either miss the information, not have time for preparations, or forget key items or tasks. You should consider backup plans for these sorts of situations. Are some preparations optional rather than necessary? If so, we recommend signposting this fact in your communication. If players have not considered transformative goals, will you provide a list to choose from? We cannot mitigate all risks, so consider what factors you can address and what factors will have to be a gamble.

3.18 Workshop Design

The purpose of the workshops are to introduce your participants to the intentions of the game in terms of desired impacts, themes, and structure. At this scale you also need to let them know about the logistics of the game site; the safety structures; where they will eat and sleep, etc. This is also your opportunity to explain the game world and their characters, and possibly for strangers in the real world to build the relations between their characters. You may also have key skills or activities you want them to use in play and introduce exercises to teach and practice these skills. After the game, we recommend at least one de-roling activity and a debrief. All of these workshops, exercises, activities, and briefings need to be carefully designed. We discuss the key elements of workshop design in Chapters 2 and 4 of *TRGD* and workshop implementation in this book in Chapters 2 and 4.

a) Scripts

We recommend having printed scripts for your workshops that explain exactly what the facilitator needs to say along with the details of the workshop or briefing. These scripts should include anything that they need to bring to the workshop, and any tasks they need to complete. This is because you do not always know who will be running the session. You might intend that you are the person running it, and start from the assumption that you do not need detailed notes; however, if you are sick, for example, and have lost your voice, someone else needs to be able to step in.

b) Practice

Unless it is a playtest, ideally, facilitators will not be running a workshop for the first time. At the very least, having a readthrough of the script to make sure they understand it is a good idea.

c) Time

As a part of the practice session, you can also get a better idea of the time it takes to run a workshop or complete a briefing session. Designing a series of workshops, with breaks, in the time available between players arriving on site and the start of the larp is a complex art. Understanding what can be done in 45 minutes takes some time and practice to get right.

3.19 Budgets

Now that we have examined all the details of logistics and production, we will consider the overall budget. Some games can be expensive to make, and operating at scale comes with a financial risk which you can mitigate by understanding what an event is likely to cost to produce. If you understand these risks, and you have planned for the unexpected, you can then work out how much funding you need to be able to run the event. This funding will come either from participants, their legal guardians, or other authorities.

Start by looking at the known costs and some estimated costs you can put into a spreadsheet. In the example in Table 2, we are planning the budget for an event for 25 players and a volunteer crew of 10. The numbers in the unit cost column are a mixture of quoted prices where we know what something is going to cost, or estimated prices, where we set ourselves a budget for spending. We also recommend adding a contingency or “safety margin” of 10-15% to cover the unexpected.

Table 2: Sample larp budget from Avalon Larp Studio.

	Unit Cost	Units	Total
Venue (Including VAT)	€2,000.00	1	€2,000.00
Food per player	€50.00	25	€1,250.00
Scenography, props, costume, FX	€500.00	1	€500.00
Food for crew	€100.00	10	€1,000.00
Insurance (quoted)	€250.00	1	€250.00
Heating & power (included in rent)	€0.00	0	€0.00
Stationery, printing, office materials	€50.00	1	€50.00
Travel	€100.00	1	€100.00
First aid kit	€15.00	1	€15.00
Van hire	€100.00	1	€100.00
Sound system hire	€75.00	1	€75.00
Subtotal of Costs			€5,340.00
Safety margin (15%)			€801.00
Total Cost			€6,141.00

To run this event without losing money, the organizers would need to secure funding of around €6,100.

With twenty-five people taking part, this would mean a cost per participant of around €250. In order to reduce the costs, one could reduce the food budget, such as not allowing quite so generous an amount for food for the volunteer crew; reduce the scenography budget; etc. Playing with these numbers enables you to develop a sensible working budget, increase the number of players, or reduce a ticket price so that you can understand the maximum amount of funds available. It is better to do this with a spreadsheet before you have spent any money.

Even for a game where your only costs are the rental of a room and hot drinks, it is useful to understand in advance how much it will cost to organize; particularly as a volunteer, you should not be paying out of pocket.

If you are operating internationally, ensure that you understand the rules around tax. In the example above, we show VAT, which is a goods and sales tax. It is slightly different from a sales tax in the USA and it is applied differently depending on which country you are operating in and – in some cases – dependent upon the country where the event is taking place. You also need to consider currency fluctuations if you are charging for tickets in one currency but paying for locations and suppliers in another.

Once you have set a budget, you need to keep to it. In the example above, if your scenography budget is €500 then you need to stay within that constraint. The temptation to move money from one area to another is always there, but it is good practice not to do this unless you are absolutely certain that the other expense is covered.

Keep in mind that the more expensive your event, the less accessible it may become for your target population. While

Next, we will transition to talking about what happens **During the Game** when implementing.

3.20 Onsite logistics

In this section we will discuss the process of arrival and set up of a site prior to running an event.

a) Preparations

What preparations do you and any other facilitators need to make before play can begin? As soon as you arrive on site, check all the spaces you have planned to use. Confirm everything is as it should be. Anything out of order becomes a task that goes on the production plan. Take pictures or videos of how things were set up when you arrived as a reference for how they are supposed to look when you leave. Check electricity, water, toilets and internet connection as a preliminary task. Fix these as a first step if something is not working. It is also good practice to immediately establish an *operational base*: a room or other space available to the runtime crew that can serve as a meeting point for printing materials and sorting information. If the event venue is outdoors or in a location without internet connectivity, it is good practice to download all materials to your local computer or print them out beforehand.

i) Hosting and managing volunteers

Make sure to take time to welcome your volunteers and introduce them to one another. Provide two spaces for volunteers: one where they can go for tasks and a separate space to relax and take a break. Being a good host is one of the most important duties of organizers. Being greeted by someone who cares and wants you to have a great experience is genuinely the best way to start an event (Petterson 2024). It is therefore useful to make a clear division in the responsibilities of the organizer team: who is being a calm host, and who is dealing with problems?

ii) Materials

There are things that event runners regularly find that they need, such as printouts, pens, dice, tape, scissors, badges, and other implements. Depending on the scale of the game you may find that you need copies of handouts or a working printer on site. You will probably need paper and pens and other stationery. Masking tape, Sharpies, bluetack, and duct tape are generally useful. We suggest a basic set of stationery; scissors and/or craft knives; more pens than you think you will need, a good stapler, and if you are bringing printers, then spare ink or toner cartridges.

Prepare organizer and player badges ahead of time as much as possible.

iii) Power

If you are going to have an organizer office space, take some time to think about power supplies. Extension cords and four-way plugs are useful, but you need to make sure they are not a trip hazard. International adapter plugs, fans, and lights may also come in handy. In addition, bring boxes for the various items and materials. If you are running events regularly, you may end up with boxes or crates of useful things to bring. Keep a list of these supplies both for budgeting purposes (see below) and so that you know when to buy more.

iv) Cleanup

How will cleanup occur? Will you clean, players, cleaning staff, or a mixture? Planning the clean up at the end of an event makes the task easier and quicker, particularly if everyone understands the area they are responsible for and what “done” looks like. Depending on the location and your agreement with the location, cleanup can mean anything from checking for dropped litter, down to a complete clean of the location top-to-bottom. Ensure you have sufficient cleaning materials, brooms, mops, and trash bags. Set up places for recycling or sorting recycling depending on your country.

We suggest including the “ten minute tidy” which involves asking your participants before the game to give ten minutes of their time at the end of it to help with some of the cleaning and tidying tasks. Consider a hundred players, each contributing ten minutes to the clean-up process. That gives you over sixteen hours of cleaning effort. If you are going to ask this, make sure to sign-post it in advance and make sure to have someone skilled available to manage it, who can assign tasks, etc.

You can use the video that you took when you arrived on site to ensure that every room and part of the location is exactly as it was when you arrived.

v) Set build

If you have work to do to get anything built or constructed, put someone in charge of that part of the process. Ideally you will already know how long it is going to take and will have plenty of time.

vi) Tech setup

The same is true for any sound and lights that need to be rigged. Whilst the Tech and Set teams often need to work in the same spaces, it is better to have different people assigned to each task.

vii) Soundcheck

Once the set is done, and the tech set-up complete, if you are using sound and lights as a part of your production, test them. Do this on location, with the real sound effects, music, or soundscape. Ensure that everything works, that the sound is clear and crisp, and neither too loud nor too quiet in all key locations. Whilst you may want to do this before players arrive, in practice, it is usually one of the last parts of the set-up because it takes time to get everything ready.

b) Runtime: The clock is running

In this section we will consider what activities need to happen from the moment when your timeline says ‘we start now’ until the end of the larp and debriefs. You should have a plan that will tell you when something is due to start and when it is due to finish. It is very easy to go over time, particularly if you have someone who is inexperienced at running workshops, or if you have participants who are prone to running late. All you can do is your very best to keep to time.

i) Running workshops

Workshops are a fundamental part of your pre-game and you cannot afford to cut them. However, if they run over time you risk reducing time for costuming and/or play of the game. Encourage participants and facilitators to be on time and ensure that everyone has a clock, watch, or a phone that tells the current time. See Chapters 2 and 4 for more information on facilitating workshops.

ii) Starting the game

If you are able to start the game within 15 minutes of the allotted hour then you are off to a good start. Ideally, you start exactly on time. If it runs much over the 15 minutes, you may need to look at your proposed timeline and consider if something needs to be moved or trimmed.

iii) Game-running

The process of actually running the game depends on many factors. If you have a timeline for when events need to happen, try to make sure that they are ready to go, and that they start on time. If they are starting to slip, make micro-adjustments, cut things if you have to, and make sure everyone knows about the changes. Trust your design! Hold regular meetings with your volunteers. Make sure they are okay! Talk about any tasks that need doing, or changes that need to be made. Say thank you. Say it a lot.

iv) Downtime

If there is a downtime, act break, or sleeping break, make sure that everyone takes the break as a break -- including you.

There are some tasks that need to be done on a daily basis. Any battery-powered devices should be recharged overnight. Any washing-up that needs to be done should be done. Make sure any trash is removed and recycled/thrown away.

v) Ending the game

The game usually has an agreed end time. If everything is resolved prior to that time, it is okay to end the game early, but keep in mind some players will be pacing their personal storylines according to the previous schedule and be frustrated.

vi) Handling surprises and mistakes

How do you respond *when* it goes wrong? No plot survives first contact with the players and it is equally rare for a long-form game to run without a problem. Small things might not work, or sometimes a player will have an issue that needs to be resolved. Your job is always to facilitate transformative play in a safe way, to look after your volunteers, your participants, and yourself.

Take a breath. Ideally, discuss the issue and any possible solutions with co-organizers or trusted volunteers, or with players if you must. During runtime, prioritise solutions over trying to understand what went wrong or who was to blame. A review of the causes of a problem comes later.

If the issue relates to safety, please see Chapter 5.

c) Aftermath

When the game is done there are still some key tasks that need to be completed before your work is done.

i) Tidying

Make an initial tidy up of the play area to remove anything that needs to be washed or thrown away. Collect your props in one place and player objects in another. This can be done as a part of a “ten minute tidy” where you ask everyone to contribute ten minutes of their time right at the end of the game. If you have sufficient participants, it is possible to get many hours of work done very quickly.

ii) Debriefing

This needs to be on your timeline because it will require one or more spaces, and members of the team to facilitate the debrief.

iii) Takedown / pack up

Everything that was set up now needs to be taken down and packed away. If there are props or costumes that need to be cleaned, these should be kept separate. Technical gear goes back into flight cases, particularly if it was rented. You should try to put everything back exactly as it was when you arrived. The pictures or videos you took upon arrival are useful here so you can ensure that it looks like you have never been to the site.

iv) Cleaning

Even if cleaning was explicitly included in your rental agreement, it is best practice to leave a location looking clean: washing-up done, floors swept, beds stripped, etc. Leave energy for this task.

v) Handing back the location

When everything is out of the location and you have had a final look around to ensure every room looks good, only then is it time to pack-up, hand back the keys, and head home.

In this final section, we will discuss recommendations for implementation **After the Game**, an important topic too often overlooked, since we tend to focus on the details of run-time itself.

3.21 Post-game emotional safety

In this section, we will discuss important considerations related to the mental well-being of you and your participants. While we sometimes put other logistical concerns at the forefront, when ending a game, lack of proper attention to emotional safety can lead to feelings of alienation, dysregulation, or burnout.

a) Self-care

Look after yourself. Plan some downtime after running an event, particularly if it has been a voluntary undertaking. Event organizers and particularly game runners often find themselves working far harder than they would expect of anyone else. Make sure you are leaving yourself time to rest and recover. Unwinding after the game with sleep, hydration, and perhaps comfort foods is important.

You may experience a post-event drop (Bowman and Torner 2014; Nilsen 2015), sometimes called depression. After an intense event, players and organizers alike may feel deflated, self-conscious, sad, exhausted, or any number of other emotions perceived as negative. Another way to think about drop is that if the game experience and community surrounding it lead to feelings of *expansion*, then drop refers to feelings of *contraction* afterward (Hugaas and Bowman 2019). Organizers in particular are prone to drop, as they may push themselves to extremes during implementation spending energy and/or physical exertion. Organizers commonly have trouble sleeping before and during the game.

Drops are not uncommon, but you should still take them seriously. You have delivered something which is hopefully powerful, beautiful, and important, but you may also feel disconnected from it, particularly if you did not directly participate. These feelings are legitimate. When you have rested, it is useful to have a debrief with your co-organizers or friends.

Make no important decisions the week after running an event. Be kind to yourself and allow others to be kind to you.

b) Week of stories

We are all humans. Organizers are often exhausted after an event, and receiving feedback, particularly negative feedback, immediately after the event has finished can be difficult and destructive, even when that feedback is intended to be constructive. The Week of Stories is a request from organizers to players to hold off on public analysis, critique, or criticism of the larp for a period: usually seven days. This approach creates a space for players to reflect on their experiences without these memories being affected by the judgement of others, gives the organizers time to rest and recover, and encourages a focus on sharing and documenting what actually took place at the larp, i.e., the Story. Phrases like the following would be allowed during a Week of Stories:

“I loved that scene where your character ...”

“I found it incredibly powerful when ...”

On the other hand, phrases like these ones would come after the Week of Stories

“I think the organizers should have ...”

“The workshop did not work for me because ...”

For more on emotional safety, read Chapter 5 of *TRGD* and Chapter 5 of this textbook.

3.22 Feedback

When your event is complete, we recommend asking both players and collaborators for feedback, including crew, volunteers etc. Feedback in this context is information about reactions to your game, which is used as a basis for improvement. In this section, we will discuss various methods of requesting feedback and what to do with the data.

a) Surveys

A survey is a quick way of getting specific, usually anonymized feedback about your event (Montero 2021; Waern 2019). Using tools like Google Forms you can put together a set of questions and ask your players to score or answer. Unless your game has hundreds of players, you may not get particularly large sample sizes, but it is still possible to infer some useful information as long as you do not expect statistical significance.

Surveys tend to be structured, questions are typically closed-ended, and answer choices are fixed. With that in mind, we suggest you include a limited number of short-answer open-ended questions to help clarify why people responded the way they did to a closed-ended question.

b) Informal talks after the larp

Although emotions may cloud the player's judgement immediately after the event, this does not mean that they are not a valid element of evaluation. Emotional feedback and personal data works best when delivered by face-to-face interaction. Do not forget that some of the ideas and impressions that are very vivid immediately after an event may disappear days later when filling out a survey. Emotional and immediate feedback is useful when contextualised.

c) Open-answer questions

Alternatively, you could simply put out a set of open-answer questions where participants can tell you what they think about a broad range of topics. It is useful to guide your participants with questions like, "What did you enjoy most about the experience? Were there any aspects of the game that did not work for you?" Avoid general requests such as, "Give feedback here." Be aware of the tendency to receive negative feedback more often than positive feedback using this method, particularly if the form is anonymous. In addition, because sample sizes are likely to be even smaller than with a survey, and because the questions are less structured, the results will be more subjective.

d) Discord / Facebook

Participants often post on social media about their experiences. Sometimes they will create their own threads to communicate with their co-players, to discuss cool scenes or moments and to continue sharing the experience.

Occasionally they will raise issues, or want to talk about things that did not work so well for them. They may forget that the organizers / designers are reading, they may tag you in their posts, or they may not. If these posts are public, you can read them. If written immediately after the event, they will give you a snapshot of the participant experience. If they come later then they will likely be more integrated and reflective. Either way, remember that this sort of feedback is subjective or intersubjective. (See also the Week of Stories from before).

e) Emails

Encourage participants to email you their thoughts, copies of feedback, or reviews they give elsewhere. Sometimes you will not see things people have posted on social media, or possibly they are locked down to Friends Only status.

Sometimes emails will require an immediate and considered response, e.g., if something went wrong during the game. If you do offer email as a means of communication, then make sure you are monitoring that email.

f) Responding to and evaluating feedback

You do not have to respond to all of the feedback you get, although an acknowledgement / thanks is always welcome. However, some feedback invites or even needs a response. We suggest the following: if you receive a complaint or feedback that requires a response, try to avoid an emotional / immediate reply. Drafting a response and sharing it with co-organizers for comment is a good idea. This is particularly important if you are replying to something on social media.

Where possible, ensure you have rested before replying; if you can wait until after the Week of Stories that would be better.

The same is true when it comes to the evaluation of feedback. This is best done with some distance between you and the game. Constructive criticism is extremely valuable as a way of improving your design, processes, and the games you make, but it is easy to misconstrue it as destructive without that distance.

3.23 Summary

This chapter discussed myriad considerations when scaling up your game, especially when running larps, tabletop, or freeform games in special locations. Having a knowledge of the range of considerations can help you decide how far up you feel comfortable scaling and evaluate any limitations you may have. In the next chapter, we will discuss facilitation strategies in more depth.

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