INFORMING CHANGE

Awarding Innovation

An Assessment of the Digital Media and Learning Competition

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Prepared for
John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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Preface

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT INFORMING CHANGE

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Introduction

Increasing availability and accessibility of digital media have changed the ways in which young people learn, socialize, play, and engage in civic life. Seeking to understand how learning environments and institutions should transform to respond to these changes, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (the Foundation) launched the Digital Media and Learning (DML) Initiative in 2005. This report highlights the successes and challenges of one component of the DML Initiative: the DML Competition (the Competition).

OVERVIEW OF THE DML COMPETITION

The DML Initiative and its innovative DML Competition aim to create learning opportunities for youth that are relevant to them and that prepare them for future success. The goal of the first phase of grantmaking within the DML Initiative was to understand and disseminate information about the ways in which learning for young people is changing as a result of digital media. Grants were awarded to fund research on how young people learn today and to fund innovation labs designed to experiment with new learning environments for the digital age. This pioneering work established the Foundation as the leader in the emerging landscape of digital media and learning.

Through these initial investments, the Foundation identified that digital literacy is a critical component of learning for young people. Many young people are deeply engaged in learning through digital media; they pursue their interests through online communities and develop key skills through these interactions. Many other young people need opportunities to build those skills, and the first phase of the DML Initiative focused on understanding the learning environments that could do so.

The current second phase of the DML Initiative builds on the first phase and aims to influence and impact learning environments for young people through new tools and approaches, particularly those that incorporate digital media and connected learning (see box). During this phase of grantmaking, the Foundation has continued to support research to advance the connected learning approach, including two interdisciplinary research networks and a Digital Media and Learning research hub at the University of California, Irvine. The Foundation is also supporting a number of demonstration sites to test and scale the concepts of connected learning, including the YOUmedia Learning Labs, the Hive Learning Networks, Quest to Learn, and the Games Learning and Assessment Lab (GlassLab).

THE CONNECTED LEARNING APPROACH

Through the work of Foundation and its DML Initiative grantees emerged connected learning, a model of learning comprised of a variety of principles that can be applied to any learning environment, digital and beyond. The connected learning framework states that (a) learning is fundamentally a social endeavor, and learning environments and experiences must be designed with that in mind; (b) learning is most powerful when it is connected to one's interests; and (c) learning is retained when it is connected to real world experiences in the form of academic achievement, employment, or community impact.

As a critical source of innovation and new ideas related to digital media and learning, the DML Competition is also a key component of this second phase of the DML Initiative. In support of connected learning, the Competition identifies innovators and invests in prototypes of games, mobile phone applications, virtual worlds, social networks, digital badge platforms, and more.

DML Competition Program Goals

In the vanguard of a new approach for learning, the DML Competition serves multiple purposes. Foundation staff, HASTAC staff, and the DML community consider the program to have three primary goals:

To find new people to bring into the DML community. To move the goal of connected learning forward, the DML community and concepts need to move into a broader sphere and be relevant to leaders and thinkers in other fields. The Competition has done this, for example, by bringing interested gamers into the education space and out-of-school time program providers into the technology sphere.

To promote particular ideas and issues within and beyond the DML community. Hundreds of people enter the Competition, and more simply hear about the Competition from their peers or the media. As a result, the Competition creates momentum and buzz around individual topics. The topics are increasingly leveraged as a way to create a conversation around a key piece of the Foundation's strategy, involving practitioners, media, innovators, and scholars in the field.

HASTAC

While funded by the Foundation, the DML Competition is implemented by HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Alliance and Collaboratory). HASTAC is an international network of more than 14,000 members from the arts, social sciences, education, and digital technology working together to transform the future of learning. It was co-founded by David Theo Goldberg from the University of California Humanities Research Institute and Cathy Davidson from Duke University. They co-lead the DML Competition through a grant from the Foundation to the University of California, Irvine.

"The Competition has a ton of potential to really further particular approaches to learning, and [to focus] funding and public attention around connected learning specifically."

– Field Leader[1]

To uncover and fund new DML ideas and solutions for youth. The Competition is also intended to spark creativity and innovation in the DML landscape, and to provide seed money for new ideas to be implemented and tested. By assumption, if the aim to find and bring new people into the community is successful, then new ideas will follow. New solutions, however, may also come from existing members of the DML community who may not yet have implemented their idea.

"The purpose is to create real-world exemplars of the ideas in connected learning. The Competition recognizes theory is powerful, but people really need to understand and be able to point to specific examples of theory in practice. The goal of the DML Competition is to identify tangible, visible, successful exemplars."

– Field Leader

[1] DML Competition judges and other key leaders in the DML landscape interviewed for this evaluation are referred to as "field leaders" throughout this report.

DML Competition Program History

Throughout the lifespan of the Competition, awards have been granted to individuals, universities, for-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations within and outside the United States. The first four competition cycles awarded over $10 million to 85 projects in over 20 countries, and another $1.75 million is being awarded in the fifth competition cycle (Exhibit 1).

Exhibit 1
Competition Overview

Competition	Theme	Competition & Award Period Timeline	# of Applications	# of Awarded Projects	Total Award Amount
DML 1	Innovation & Knowledge-Networking	August 2007–June 2009	1,010	**17** • 7 Innovation • 10 Knowledge-Networking	$2,000,000
DML 2	Participatory Learning	September 2008–November 2010	691	**19** • 5 Young Innovators • 14 Innovation in Participatory Learning	$1,997,000
DML 3	Reimagining Learning	January 2010–June 2012	817	**19** • 10 21st Century Learning Lab Designer • 9 Game Changers	$1,876,500
DML 4	Badges for Lifelong Learning	September 2011–May 2014	398	**30** • 23 Project • 3 Platform • 4 Research	$4,368,500
DML 5	Project:Connect Hackathon, Voto Latino Innovators Challenge, & The Trust Challenge	In Progress			$1,748,000

The first years of the Competition were designed to test and build on hypotheses emerging from the early pieces of the DML Initiative. The first competition cycle, DML 1, launched in 2007 and received over 1,000 applications, far exceeding the expectations of the Competition implementers. There were two categories of awards: (1) Innovation awards ranging from $100,000 to $250,000, and (2) Knowledge-Networking awards ranging from $30,000 to $75,000. The Innovation awards focused on builders of new digital environments. The Knowledge-Networking awards funded proven communicators who were dedicated to digital learning through blogs, social networking, and other online communities and communication avenues. The strong response to this first competition cycle confirmed the observations and hypotheses of the Competition implementers that many educators, innovators and scholars were ready to be brought together to build the DML landscape.

DML 2 built off the first competition cycle's success with its launch in 2008. There were also two categories of awards: (1) Innovation in Participatory Learning awards, and (2) Young Innovators awards. The Innovation in Participatory Learning awards, ranging from $30,000 to $250,000, supported dynamic projects that enabled or

enhanced participatory learning[2] through the creation of new digital tools or the use of digital media in a new way. The Young Innovators awards, ranging from $5,000 to $30,000, focused on targeting visionaries between the ages of 18 and 25 to help them bring their ideas from the "garage" stage to implementation.

DML 3 introduced corporate partners Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA), Electronic Arts (EA), Entertainment Software Association (ESA), and Information Technology Industry Council (ITI). The Competition implementers also partnered with the White House in response to President Obama's Educate to Innovate initiative and aligned with National Lab Day (now known as National Lab Network), an organization committed to promoting hands-on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) experiences. Three types of awards were offered for this competition cycle: (1) 21st Century Learning Lab Designer awards, (2) Game Changers awards, and (3) Kids' Game Changers awards. The 21st Century Learning Lab Designer awards, ranging from $30,000 to $200,000, focused on projects that built learning labs or learning experiences for the 21st century environment to help young people learn through exploration, interaction, and sharing. The Game Changers awards funded projects ranging from $5,000 to $50,000 to develop new educational levels and adventures for the LittleBigPlanet and Spore Galactic Adventures video games. Similarly, the kids' version of Game Changers funded projects for youth under the age of 18 to develop new levels for LittleBigPlanet (which also awarded a PSP-3000 video game system to five kids), or to create a new adventure in Spore Galactic Adventures (which awarded 12 kids with a trip to the EA headquarters).

DML 4 was the largest to date in terms of the award amount granted and the number of awardees, and was supported in part by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The fourth competition cycle focused on a new online accreditation tool called digital badges.[3] The Competition funded efforts to build platforms for hosting badges, to create the content for badges that target various audiences, and to conduct research on badges. The awards ranged from $10,000 to $200,000.

The fifth competition cycle, is currently in progress and is broken into three sub-competitions. In 2013 and in partnership with Facebook, Mozilla, and the Family Online Safety Institute, Competition implementers organized a one-day hackathon which culminated in $48,000 in awards for social tools for good, social tools that enable control of information, and social tools that enable literacy. The 2014 Voto Latino Innovators Challenge is designed to galvanize the participation of young Latinos in connected learning concepts, awarding Millennials who use technology to create solutions to problems affecting the Latino community. The 2014 Trust Challenge will fund projects that uncover new approaches and knowledge related to issues of data and privacy online, which are key policy barriers to spreading connected learning.

[2] For the Competition, the Foundation defined participatory learning as "a form of learning connected to individual interests and passions, inherently social in nature, and occurring during hands-on, creative activities." It is based on the notion that "young people often learn best through sharing and involvement." This concept was a precursor to the connected learning framework that was later adopted.

[3] For the Competition, digital badges were defined as "a validated indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality, or interest that can be earned … Badges can support learning, validate education, help build reputation, and confirm the acquisition of knowledge. They can signal traditional academic attainment or the acquisition of skills such as collaboration, teamwork, leadership, and other 21st century skills."

OVERVIEW OF AWARDED PROJECTS & AWARDEES

The following is a brief overview of the awarded projects and their leaders (i.e., the awardees).[4]

Awardees

Age (n=77)

- 40 was the average age of principal investigators at the time of the competition
- 18% were under 30 years old
- 39% were between 30–39 years old
- 19% were between 40–49 years old
- 17% were between 50–59 years old
- 6% were 60 years or older

Affiliation During the Competition (n=78)

- 45% were affiliated with a nonprofit or community-based organization
- 39% were affiliated with a higher education academic institution
- 17% were affiliated with a for-profit business or corporation
- 9% were affiliated with a K–12 academic institution
- 5% applied as individuals or part of an informal group of individuals
- 3% were affiliated with a government or public agency
- 4% had some other type of affiliation

Awarded Projects

Original Project Goals (n=80)

- 55% aimed to use new technologies to enable new modes of participatory learning
- 53% aimed to develop a new game, program, or environment/space for learning
- 33% aimed to create new tools for tracking knowledge or skill attainment
- 33% aimed to adapt an existing program, game, or social networking environment into a new educational context for youth
- 20% aimed to communicate and circulate best practices and ideas in digital media and learning
- 19% aimed to conduct research to better understand informal and interest-driven learning
- 6% aimed to pursue other goals

Targeted Audiences (n=78)

- 54% targeted youth in high school (grades 9–12)
- 41% targeted youth in middle school (grades 6–8)
- 35% targeted educators
- 26% targeted out-of-school youth
- 26% targeted college students
- 19% targeted schools
- 19% targeted young adults
- 17% targeted communities
- 14% targeted youth in elementary school (grades K–5)
- 8% targeted parents
- 24% targeted other audiences, such as adult learners and employers

Current Status (n=72)

- 71% of awarded projects are still active in some form
- 29% of awarded projects are no longer active

[4] Data are based on the 95% of awardees who participated in this evaluation's survey.

OVERVIEW OF THIS EVALUATION

Informing Change's evaluation of the DML Competition focuses on five areas of inquiry, each with several key questions:[5]

1) Purpose of the DML Competition and context of the DML landscape
2) Recruitment, application, and selection processes
3) Supports provided to awardees
4) Outcomes for awardees, awarded projects, and the DML Competition overall
5) Learning processes

Several data sources contributed to our understanding of these areas, including a review of Foundation, HASTAC, and grantee materials; site visits and other observations; 39 key stakeholders interviews with Foundation and HASTAC staff, Competition judges, field leaders, and awardees; a survey of 80 awardees;[6] and a survey of 78 award finalists.[7] Data were analyzed both in the aggregate and by competition cycle to account for differences between competition implementation. For some analyses, awardees and finalists were combined to understand the overall perspective on the recruitment, application, and selection processes; in these cases, we refer to the combined awardees and finalists as "applicants." Note, however, that not all applicants were included in data collection.

Evaluation Limitations

Informing Change used a combination of data collection methods to ensure that the information comes from multiple sources. When reviewing the evaluation findings, it is important to note some limitations:

- All interview and survey data used in this evaluation are self-reported, which may present some bias; however, this report bases findings only on commonly mentioned responses from multiple respondents.
- Being a retrospective evaluation, survey and interview respondents were asked to recall their experiences at two points in time—when involved in the Competition and since the Competition. For the earliest awardees, this includes going back as far as 2008.
- Informing Change worked with MacArthur and HASTAC staff to select key field leader informants for their knowledge and familiarity with the DML Competition and connected learning. While we are confident that the evaluation findings represent a wide range of perspectives, the findings likely do not reflect all experiences and beliefs in the DML community.
- Our team drew conclusions on secondary data provided by the Foundation and HASTAC, including awardees' grant reports and HASTAC's grant reports to the Foundation. Since the grant reports did not have a standard template to follow that prompted for both challenges and successes, they generally highlighted more of the positive than the negative experiences during the Competition. We probed further on challenges through primary data collection (i.e., surveys and interviews).

We believe these evaluation findings are credible and representative of the overall experiences of awardees, and reflect the larger themes identified across data collection sources.

[5] This evaluation did not include the DML 3 Competition Kids' Game Changers awardees or the DML 4 Competition awardees who were funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Also, one awarded project from the DML 2 Competition was not included in the evaluation since it did not complete the award requirements.

[6] This represents 95% of the 84 awardees from the first four competition cycles.

[7] Finalists are applicants who advanced to at least the second round of the selection process but were not chosen for an award. This represents 44% of the 178 finalists from the first four competition cycles.

OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

This report reflects key findings and themes from the various data sources obtained, along with recommendations for future improvements to the Competition. It includes three overarching chapters and their sub-sections, and an appendix on data collection methods:

- **Competition Processes:** Describes the implementation of the Competition, including what worked well and what was challenging. It covers the decision-making process around using a competition format; the implementation of the Competition; the recruitment, application, and selection processes; and the non-monetary supports provided to awardees.
- **Impact of the Competition:** Highlights the ways in which individuals, awarded projects, the DML landscape, and the Foundation have been impacted by the Competition. It includes key successes and achievements, as well as challenges encountered.
- **Recommendations for the Future:** Offers recommendations and concluding perspective on the DML Competition.
- **Appendix:** Includes additional information on data collection methods.

Competition Processes

Grantmaking Through Competitions

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A COMPETITION MODEL

When the DML Competition was launched in 2007, the Foundation was an early leader among philanthropic organizations using a competition as a grantmaking mechanism. Because the DML Initiative was focused on innovation and experimentation, the Foundation identified a competition as the best mechanism for testing a variety of new ideas, and learning from those experiences. Unlike "by invitation only" grantmaking programs, the DML Competition welcomes any and all good ideas related to the topic for each competition cycle, and is open across experience levels of principal investigators. Informants listed a host of benefits of grantmaking competitions, and several say they could not imagine the DML Competition being structured in any other way.

Competitions can provide more opportunity than traditional grantmaking models in terms of applicants and goals.

A competition, with its potential winners and losers, creates excitement and publicity that helps to cast a wider net of applicants beyond academic institutions and established nonprofit organizations that often dominate a traditional grantmaking program. One implementer notes, "In some ways, the Competition takes theory out of the ivory tower and research space, and puts it into practice in the public space to generate excitement in conversation and debate." A competition structure can be more equitable and accessible than other grantmaking programs. The absence of a long list of qualifications or requirements for applicants can be seen as risky for a grantmaking program, but also allows the funder to focus more on good ideas as opposed to big names.

The competition model also allows for ideas to be loosely connected to a theme, but not bound to specific intended outcomes. One Foundation informant describes, "We didn't set out and say we were going to achieve X, Y, and Z outcomes; here is how we're going to go about it; here's our theory of change; here's our rationale. It doesn't have any of those components to it, which is one of the reasons why a competition, as a mechanism or a tool, was seen as sort of an obvious fit and such an appropriate way to go about this." Internally, competitions are seen as a plus for the Foundation because they are a way to distribute multiple small grants without incurring excessive administrative costs.

Competitions can create opportunities for partnerships and collaborations beyond the philanthropic sector.

The competition approach to grantmaking brings public attention to the organizations involved in a way that traditional grantmaking generally does not, allowing both the DML Competition and its partners to benefit from the relationship. The DML Competition particularly benefited from partnerships with the federal government and for-profit industry. These parties may not have seen the advantages to their involvement in a traditional grantmaking program addressing similar topics.

While some see the rest of the DML Initiative's work as confined to a small group of key players, the Competition serves as a public piece of the work, bringing in outsiders. In that way, the DML Competition serves as a nice complement to the rest of the DML Initiative, including the DML conference, research hub, innovation labs, and other work.

Competitions can mobilize the targeted community on an issue.

A large competition backed by a respected philanthropic organization shows that the competition's theme is a topic worthy of attention. Competitions require a great deal of advertising to encourage applicants, and ongoing publicity to benefit the awardees. Additional media coverage helps spur conversation and debate within the field, and can bring new awareness and energy to that year's topics. Furthermore, if a competition fully discloses its list of applicants, proposed projects, and awardees, it can publicize what is being done in the space and inspire more ideas and projects.

> ***"If you're trying to create a movement, you either have one powerful central force, or you place a thousand bets and then try to find a set of people [for whom] the Competition really tickles their fancy and releases their own creativity to try to do something meaningful."***
>
> – Field Leader

Competitions can create a cohort of grantees motivated to learn from one another.

Traditional grantmaking cohorts are often pulled together by the funder to advance a specific agenda. Ideally, a competition creates a natural cohort of awardees who can learn from each other but are involved to further their own goals and objectives. Informants see philanthropic competitions—the DML Competition in particular—as having a strong learning tone. Because funded projects are not necessarily those that have been proven to work, the program encourages experimentation and learning from failures.

> ***"There's a space to learn, so people get to see how these projects are developed, and the actual challenges and successes that happen as they're being unrolled. That's really key to the Competition running in a different way than other grant mechanisms."***
>
> – Foundation/HASTAC staff

POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF A COMPETITION MODEL

Despite the many potential benefits in philanthropic competitions, informants note a number of drawbacks. Most of the issues are applicable to all competitions of this nature, and not just the DML Competition. Overall, evaluation informants believe the benefits outweigh the drawbacks. While competitions sometimes give less room for the grantmaker to include its perspective in the work, the Foundation mitigates this issue by implementing more explicit strategies in other components of the DML Initiative.

Generally, there are more "losers" than "winners" in a competition.

Competitions can create expectations that cannot be filled. Applicants may devote a large amount of time to develop their proposal, establish partners, and estimate costs. However, in the first three competition cycles, only 2–3% of applicants received awards; in the DML 4 Competition cycle, 9% were successful in securing funding for their project. A competition not only creates more losers than winners, but it might also unintentionally publicize the failures of those who are not awarded, as opposed to a closed grantmaking competition that keeps the list of unsuccessful applicants private.

There is less accountability for awardees in a competition.

Not only is there risk in investing in an untested idea, but there is little accountability that can be placed on awardees who do not follow through on the proposed work. With a traditional grant, grantees have the incentive to abide by their grant terms because they want to maintain a positive relationship with the funder in order to receive future funding. With the Competition, most awardees will not be a continuing grantee. The funder, therefore, has fewer tools to influence awardee compliance.

Competitions do not guarantee a more diverse or higher-quality applicant pool.

While a competition allows for more equity and access, the applicant pool does not always lead to diverse, high quality projects. The DML Competition receives a substantial number of applications from established organizations and scholars, many of which end up receiving awards. Applicants who are familiar with the grant application process and who are already players in the DML landscape have an advantage. They know what the Competition's judges may be looking for and what might constitute an attractive project. The competition structure also attracts many applicants who do not have appropriate or feasible proposals. Yet, judges must still spend time to review and score these applications.

THE DML COMPETITION PROGRAM'S INTERNAL STRUCTURE

As the DML Competition requires significant time and resources for recruiting applicants and making selections, the Foundation funded HASTAC to administer and manage it. The extent to which the DML Competition can achieve its three primary goals rests heavily on HASTAC's implementation of the Competition. They are charged with bringing life to the Foundation's vision for each competition cycle, as well as identifying best practices and lessons learned to improve future competitions.

HASTAC's flexibility helps the DML Competition improve each year.

Since the inception of the DML Competition, the Foundation has worked closely with its partner HASTAC to implement each competition cycle from start to finish. Foundation staff see the relationship with HASTAC as a close partnership. One Foundation informant notes, "We are funding an intermediary, but we weren't buying their services. We were partnering with them. We didn't just make a grant, and sit back and say, 'Okay, you guys go figure it out.' We fund the resources but, collectively, we are figuring it out together."

Both organizations in this partnership describe the union as collaborative, fluid, and flexible. Foundation staff note that the design of each competition cycle is structured to fit the theme and target audience of that round, and HASTAC effectively adjusts its implementation each time to suit that structure. Given the nature of the work, implementers need to make quick decisions and change direction as necessary, and HASTAC staff have the capacity and skill to do so.

The internal structure of the program faces challenges of implementer coordination and capacity.

The DML Competition is a unique and groundbreaking grantmaking endeavor. Unsurprisingly, then, it has its share of internal challenges. The geographic location of the program's implementers is one challenge. While the content of the Competition is digital, many of the program's decisions are best made in-person due to its complexity and comprehensiveness. However, with HASTAC as a bi-coastal organization and the Foundation located in a third state, both HASTAC and Foundation staff express frustration that face-to-face time is too difficult to come by. One informant reflects, "There are challenges that come with multi-institution collaborations, particularly when brands are on the line. And that can mean last-minute changes and increased back and forth

during development, and it means that we have to work quickly and on the fly. That being said, that's the cost of working in the space and what's required to generate the most relevant competition. It's kind of the nature of the Competition."

Another factor that plays into this challenge is the number of key decision makers involved in competition implementation. Opinions and preferences differ not only between HASTAC and the Foundation, but within each organization as well, further complicating implementation, and potentially causing gears to shift.

Finally, the capacity of both organizations also adds challenges to implementation. The DML Competition is one of several projects for HASTAC, as well as for the Foundation's DML Initiative. These multiple commitments impede timeline and decision-making, and this problem only continues to grow as each competition cycle becomes more ambitious and complex.

Documenting the decisions, processes, and outcomes of the DML Competition was not prioritized at the outset, resulting in less evidence for informed decision making.

A drawback of the quick decision-making and pivoting nature of the program's implementation is the lack of time allowed for documentation and systematization of processes and outcomes. Until this evaluation began, awardee applications and reports were not easily accessible or organized, and little was documented on how the Competition was carried out. This information is important not only for accountability but, more crucially, for informed decision-making on improvements to future competition cycles. This documentation would also allow implementers to show the importance of the DML Competition in a tangible rather than conceptual way. They would be able to more knowledgeably discuss the successes and key stories that came out of the work, including who the awardees are, and what the awardees have accomplished and learned.

The high survey response rates from both awardees and finalists reflect their willingness to share their experiences in and beyond the Competition. As one finalist shares, "Kudos to you for doing a follow-up survey. It renews my faith that [the DML Competition] is a reflective and positive institution." This type of follow up with awardees and finalists provides a critical source of information on the Competition's longer-term outcomes and the ways that it can be improved in the future.

Recruitment, Application, & Selection Processes

The Foundation and HASTAC understand that the quality and reputation of the Competition are dependent on the quality of the awardees. To award grants to high-quality applicants, the Competition must attract and select from a large pool of applicants. Therefore, much attention and resources have been focused on recruiting a diverse and talented applicant pool, and rigorously selecting applicants with the highest potential for success. The processes for recruiting, applying, and selecting awardees have evolved with each competition cycle to reflect the changing themes and lessons learned from previous years.

RECRUITMENT PROCESS

To reach a high-quality potential applicant pool that is diverse in terms of institutional affiliation, type of project, and team structure, HASTAC staff have developed several recruitment techniques over the years, including a combination of traditional (e.g., press releases), digital (e.g., online advertisements), personal (e.g., direct outreach from staff), and mass (e.g., listservs) outreach. The HASTAC team spends time surveying the landscape and identifying the key network nodes to reach the new audience for each competition cycle.

With changing competition themes, the applicant pool also changes, and the HASTAC implementation team must revisit the approach for recruiting applicants each time a competition cycle launches. They must learn about the environment and networks related to each new theme, and identify effective ways to reach into them. Foundation and HASTAC staff identify this skill as one of HASTAC's implementation strengths.

Individualized and mass outreach approaches complement each other well for recruiting applicants.

Many awardees and finalists report hearing about the Competition from a colleague or friend (i.e, an individualized outreach approach), or reading about it on the Foundation or HASTAC websites (i.e., a mass outreach approach). Hearing about it from a colleague or friend can spark potential applicant interest, possibly even motivating them to read about the Competition on the websites. The websites offer the details of the Competition that applicants need for developing their submissions. Awardees and finalists from the third and fourth competition cycles report hearing about the Competition through a wider variety of outlets (Exhibits 2 and 3, next page), reflecting the increasing diversity in HASTAC's outreach methods.

> ***"We found that the best way to recruit applicants is really the old-fashioned way of building networks, and working continuously and repeatedly to reach out to people, to groups, figuring out what key words will help us target certain interdisciplinary areas where innovators are working."***
>
> – Foundation/HASTAC staff

Exhibit 2

How DML 1 & DML 2 Applicants[8] First Learned About the DML Competition Program

(n=58)

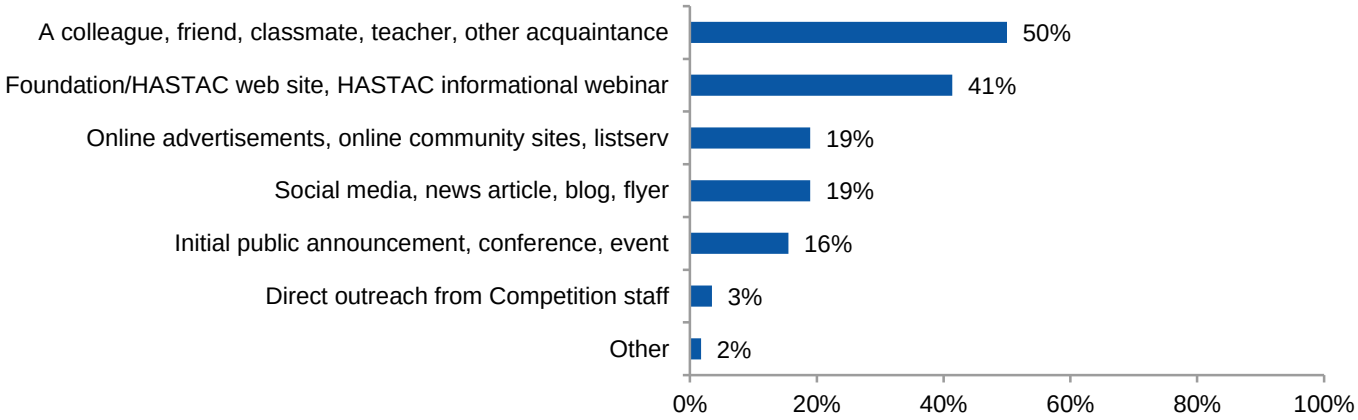
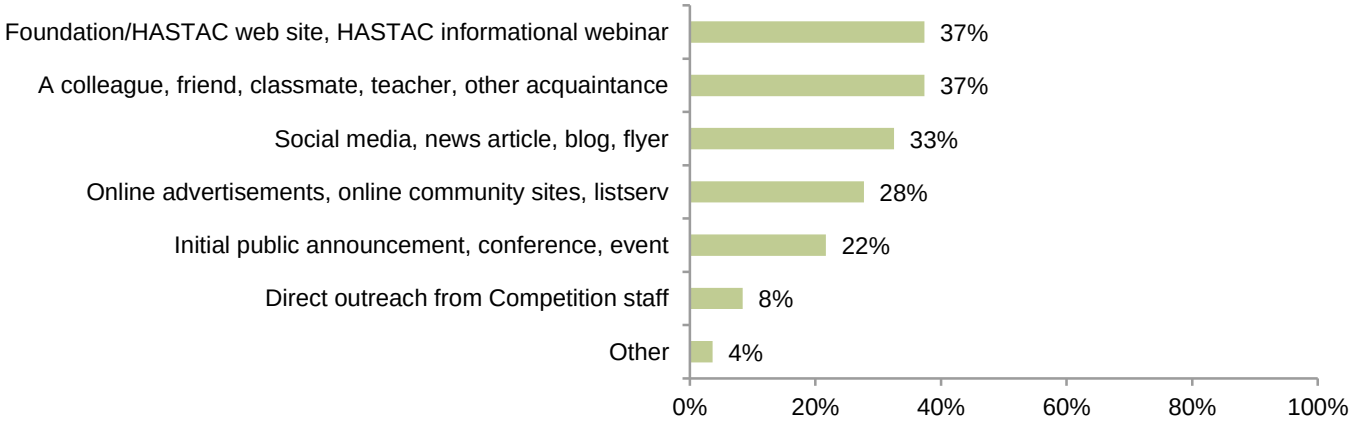


Exhibit 3

How DML 3 & DML 4 Applicants First Learned About the DML Competition Program

(n=83)



In addition to expanding outreach methods, the Competition implementation team spends ample resources during each competition cycle to understand the best way to describe and market the Competition to appeal to their current targeted audience. These efforts have resonated with applicants, who report that they can identify the relevance of their work to the Competition. For example, one applicant notes, "We liked the idea and spirit of the Competition, and we felt we had a good idea for a platform that would meet the Competition's interest areas." The recruitment and outreach approaches also appealed to applicants because they could see that the program was willing to take risks on new ideas rather than the approach of many other traditional grantmaking opportunities to fund already proven projects. One applicant describes: "The goals that year were a good fit for my project and welcomed applications for 'start-up' project[s] from small-scale organizations."

[8] Applicants refer to only the awardees and finalists who completed the survey. It does not include applicants who did not get past the first round of the selection process.

Partnerships increase the Competition's visibility and outreach, but can also increase the complexity of the program.

The DML Competition engages in partnerships for marketing and recruitment as well as for implementation. A HASTAC staff member describes that the reason for developing partnerships is that "it helps increase the relevance of the Competition, it opens [the Competition] up to new audiences, [and] it provides a great level of visibility in many cases." Some awardees from the DML 3 Competition cycle in particular mention that the possibility of working with LittleBigPlanet was a key reason why they chose to apply.

Reflections from informants indicate that it is difficult to find a partner that can meet the needs of the multiple stakeholders involved in each Competition cycle (e.g., the Foundation, HASTAC, awardees). A partnership that is perceived as beneficial by one group may present difficulties or limitations to another group. For example, the partnership with Sony and EA was appealing to awardees and achieved the initial publicity boost that was hoped for. However, HASTAC staff note that the partnership did not sustain a larger conversation around gaming and learning that they were hoping to create. The Mozilla Foundation partnership also had a mixed reception. Both HASTAC and Foundation staff lauded the partnerships. Some awardees, however, felt that the Mozilla team was understaffed and not communicating updates in the process as often as awardees would have hoped. Since the awardees were building their badges around the Mozilla platform, they believed these limitations (mostly in communication) made it more difficult for them to implement their projects.

PAST DML COMPETITION IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS

- The White House
- National Lab Day
- Sony, EA, ESA, and ITI
- Mozilla Foundation
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Facebook

The Competition's international reach has expanded in each cycle of competition.

Since DML 2, the Competition has been open to international applicants to help increase the diversity of awardees. This expansion presented new tasks to the Competition staff in terms of translating the Competition's purpose and goals into other languages and cultures, and distributing funds internationally. The HASTAC team addressed these challenges by hiring consultants with expertise in international outreach to help them build networks. They remained persistent in following up with potential leads. Despite obstacles, Competition staff and judges see the wider outreach as a key success for the Competition because they have been able to engage a diverse, global audience. Competition judges also expressed appreciation for the efforts to include international applicants.

APPLICATION & SELECTION PROCESSES

Similar to the recruitment process, the Competition implementation team revisits and modifies the application and selection processes for each new competition cycle with the hope of discovering more competitive and diverse ideas (Exhibit 4). These changes include increasing the rigor of the application forms, increasing the number and types of rounds for both application and selection, and balancing the role of public feedback and voting with expert judging.

Exhibit 4

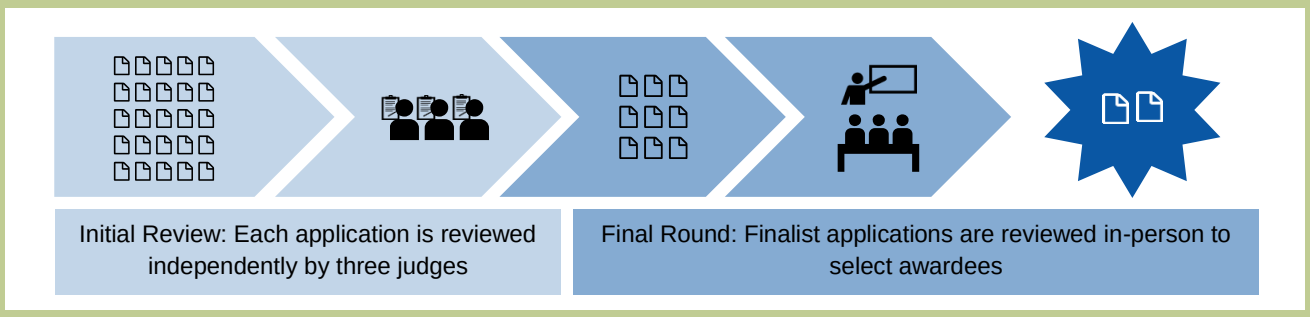
Summary of Application & Selection Processes by Competition Cycle

	DML 1	DML 2	DML 3	DML 4
Overview	A single application form included a summary of proposed work, an assessment plan, staff, timeline, description of what mentoring would be helpful, and budget information.	A more rigorous application compared to DML 1 that included a description of the project; how participatory learning will be integrated; the new learning environment being proposed; timeline and budget; anticipated outcomes; anticipated problems or hurdles; the social impact of the project; who and/or what benefits from the project; and staff and their roles.	A multi-staged application process, where applicants submitted their "preliminary application" that included a brief project description and abstract that were made available for public commenting. Following public comments, applicants revised their applications and submitted for initial judging. Finalists submitted a 3-minute video about their proposed project for the final round of judging.	A multi-stage application process that included receiving and selecting applications based on projects and programs that would use badges (Stage 1); receiving and selecting applications based on the technology to create the badges (Stage 2); and matching finalists from the first two phases into 90 teams to "pitch" their projects to finalist judges (Stage 3).
Initial Judging	35 initial judges, with each application reviewed by 2 judges to select the finalist pool	60 initial judges, with each application reviewed by 3 judges to select the finalist pool	51 initial judges, with each initial application reviewed by 3 judges to select the finalist pool	17 initial judges for Stage 1; and 9 initial judges for Stage 2 to select the finalist pool for the next stage
Final Judging	10 finalist judges select the awardees	11 finalist judges select the awardees	12 finalist judges select the awardees	21 finalist judges grouped into 3-person panels select the awardees
Public Involvement	No public commenting or voting	Public commenting on applications available through ScratchPad	Public voting for People's Choice Award winners (2 winners each for 21st Century Learning Labs and Game Changers) from 1,208 votes	Public commenting on the Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications; judges considered the comments when selecting finalists

JUDGING PROCESS

For the initial review, judges score each application from 1 to 5, using plus and minus signs to indicate stronger and weaker applications within each level. The judging rubric is fairly loose, and includes descriptions of the goals for each type of award and an overview of the selection criteria. Their reviews are completed independently and submitted electronically. The Competition implementers strive to recruit enough judges to read about 30 applications each (although it has been as high as 50 applications). They use a diverse group of readers for each application. The judges are selected by HASTAC staff based on that competition cycle's theme and the judges' content expertise.

The finalist round enlists judges who are prominent journalists, CEOs, leaders in the DML landscape, and/or Foundation staff. These judges are selected by both HASTAC and Foundation staff. These finalist reviews are completed in-person, usually over a span of two days. In the DML 4 Competition cycle, the finalist round included an in-person "pitch" by the finalists to a three-person judging panel. These judges also provide suggestions and insights on how to improve the Competition following the selection process.



Public involvement (e.g., commenting, voting) has received both positive and critical responses from Competition staff and applicants.

Finding the right way to incorporate the broader public into the Competition is a particularly difficult task and is an issue that the HASTAC team has been addressing since they introduced public commentary in the DML 2 Competition cycle through Scratchpad, an online forum that allowed the public to ask questions and for applicants to find collaborators and solicit feedback. The Competition implementers hoped it would encourage potential applicants to share ideas with one another and to build partnerships. However, the type of open collaboration staff had hoped for in the public commenting was lacking. The HASTAC team suspects that this is because of "concerns over intellectual property and a wariness to put ideas out in the public sphere in a simultaneously competitive setting."

DML 3 included both public commenting and voting through a public website that was integrated into the application process, and was intended to reflect the participatory learning principles that underlie the Competition. HASTAC reported receiving 552 public comments and 1,208 public votes across the preliminary applications, which were all publicly posted for review. Applicants had the opportunity to use the public feedback to revise their proposal for review by the judges. HASTAC staff found DML 3's public commenting of higher quality overall; for example, one awarded project resulted from a collaboration created

> ***"Figuring out how to involve the public in meaningful ways that foster larger conversations, and to have that interaction be meaningful and well informed is an ongoing challenge that nobody has figured out. It's exciting that we're in that space."***
>
> – Foundation/ HASTAC staff

from the public commenting. Public voting was used to select four "People's Choice Awards" winners and brought additional attention and focus to the Competition. There were concerns, however, by Competition implementers, awardees, and finalists over ballot box stuffing and reducing the process to a popularity contest. Public *voting* was dropped in DML 4, although public *commenting* on the Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications remained.

Overall, public involvement has been viewed as a benefit because it increases the transparency of the Competition and creates buzz around ideas, but it has remained an area that has required continued adjustment in each competition cycle to find the right balance of public input and expert judging.

The various techniques used for the application and selection process have improved the quality of the applicant pool over time.

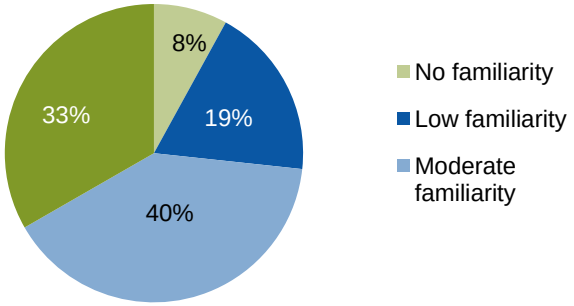
Like most open competitions, the DML Competition attracts a large number of applications that do not fit the focus or standards of the Competition. Judging rubrics for the initial rounds note that judges may encounter "applications that clearly do not warrant consideration for the award" and advise judges to "assess it quickly and move on" in those cases. HASTAC and Foundation staff believe that there have been improvements in the quality of the applicant pool over time. Even though lower quality applications are still submitted, there are still hundreds of very competitive applicants vying for the few awards. DML community members increasingly understand what the Competition is looking for, and Competition staff have used different approaches to the application process to push applicants to bring different skill sets and more creativity into their proposals, such as video submissions and "napkin sketches" of their project ideas with room for development from public commenting.

The DML Competition has had success in awarding individuals with low familiarity with the connected learning framework (i.e., those who are likely new to the DML landscape).

Connected learning was not termed until the DML 4 Competition cycle, but the concepts it encompasses (described in the evaluation's awardee survey as a framework for thinking about learning across key domains in a young person's life—peer culture, interests, and academics) have been central throughout each competition cycle. In fact, 73% of awardees report they were moderately or highly familiar with the concepts behind the connected learning framework before applying for the Competition (Exhibit 5).

One goal of the DML Competition is to bring new people into the DML community, presumably people with little or no prior familiarity with the connected learning framework. Twenty-seven percent of awardees report they had little or no familiarity with the connected learning framework prior to participating in the Competition. The Competition by nature attracts many applicants who are already active in this space, but more than a quarter of awards went to those who were likely new to the DML landscape.

Exhibit 5
Awardee Familiarity with Connected Learning Concepts Before Competition
(n=77)

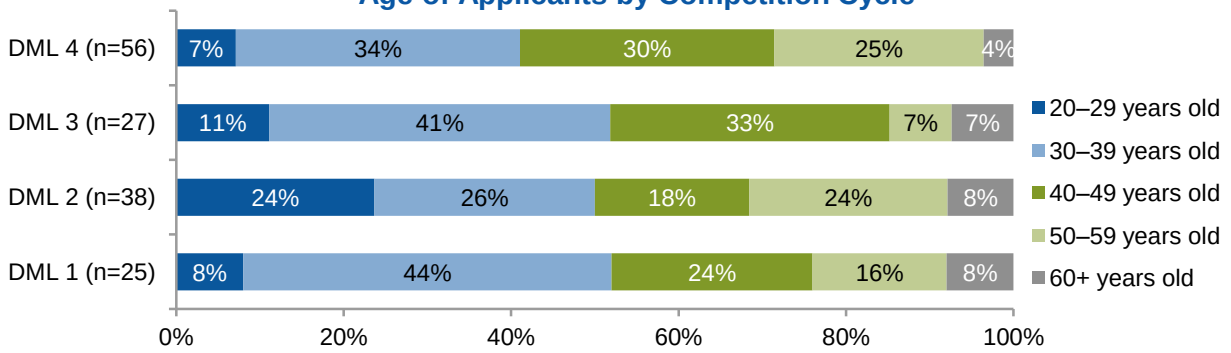


The Competition has yet to achieve a diverse applicant pool in terms of age and affiliation.

Ideally, the Competition implementers hope for applicants of all ages, and in particular hope to provide younger applicants with their first opportunities for funding. After the first competition cycle, Foundation staff, HASTAC staff, and judges reflected that few awardees were under the age of 30. The average age of DML 1 applicants was 42 years old and only 8% were younger than 30 years old. The Competition implementers hoped that the focus on young adults in DML 2's Young Innovators award would help to increase the number of applicants under 30 years old, which it did, but later competitions have not seen much improvement on including more young adult applicants (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6

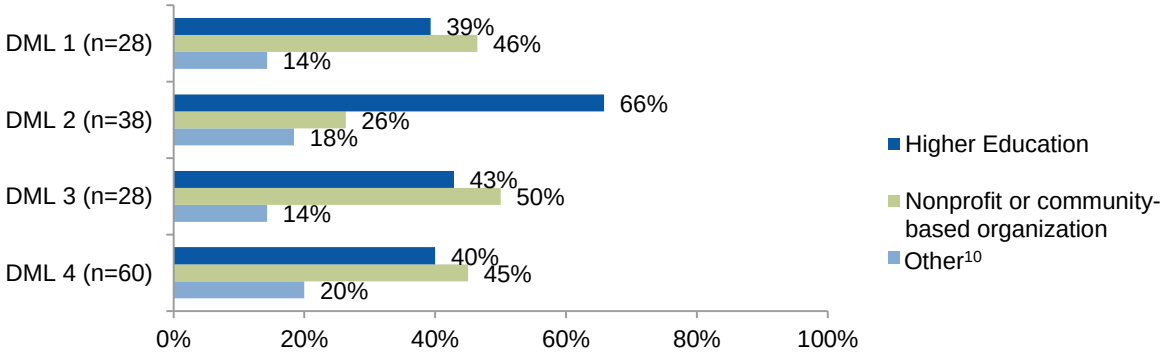
Age of Applicants by Competition Cycle



Competition implementers also hope to attract applicants from a variety of institutional affiliations, striking a balance between representatives from higher education institutions and other affiliations. Across the competition cycles, a large share, between 39% and 66%, of applicants are affiliated with a higher education institution (Exhibit 7). The other common affiliation of applicants is nonprofit or community-based organization, accounting for 26% to 50% of applicants.[9] Competition staff work to attract high quality applicants from outside the higher education realm, but they continue to face this challenge in each competition cycle. Applicants from higher education tend to have more experience with proposal writing, and thus they tend to present their ideas more clearly than applicants from other affiliations, such as K–12 education, government agencies, or individuals without an affiliation.

Exhibit 7

Institutional Affiliations of Applicants by Competition Cycle



[9] Some applicants selected both higher education and nonprofit or community-based organization as their affiliation, and thus are counted twice in the graphic and percentages.

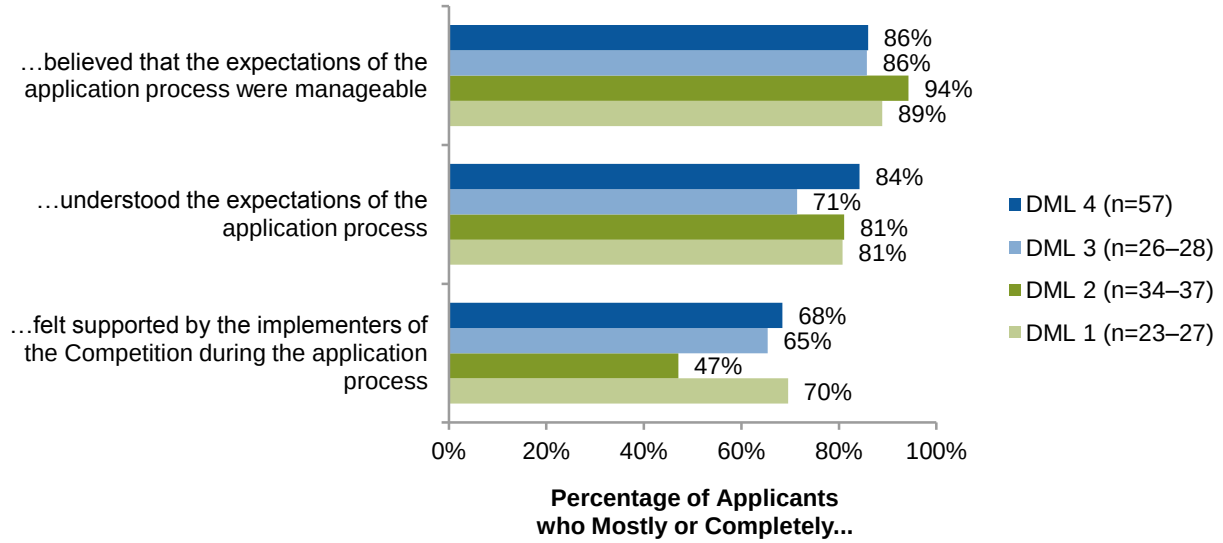
[10] Includes K–12 academic institution, early childhood education provider/organization, for-profit business or corporation, government or public agency, individual or informal group of individuals, other.

Awardees and finalists provide high ratings of the application process (i.e., preparing and submitting their application); they understood what was expected of them and how the process worked.

Throughout the changes in the recruitment and application processes for each cycle, awardees and finalists across the competition cycles rate their experiences very positively (Exhibit 8). They believe the process was manageable, they understood the expectations, and they felt supported by Competition staff while completing their applications. Awardees say that if they had any questions about the application process, they were able to contact and resolve them with Competition staff.

Exhibit 8

Applicants' Ratings of Application Process by Competition Cycle

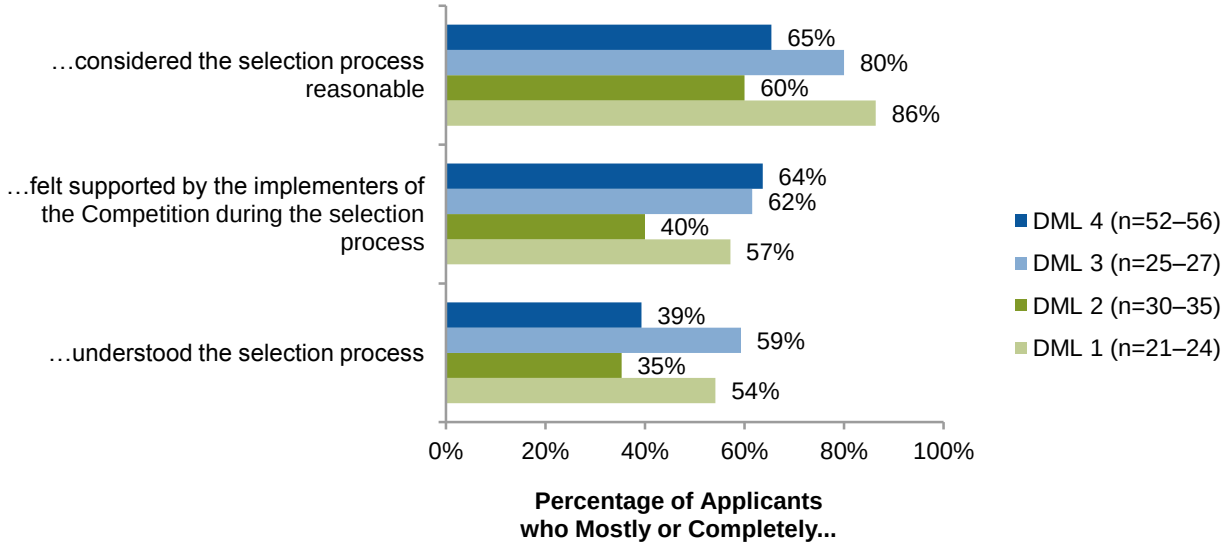


The selection process (i.e., understanding the criteria for choosing awardees and informing applicants on their status), on the other hand, received lower ratings; awardees and finalists note that there were gaps in organization and communication.

Awardees and finalists rate their experiences with the selection process lower than the application process (Exhibit 9, next page). Fewer understood how or why awardees were chosen, suggesting that the criteria were unclear or not transparent. Across competition cycles, finalists also mention that they would have preferred to receive feedback on their project; some did not realize they were finalists until they were contacted for this evaluation.

Exhibit 9

Applicants' Ratings of Selection Process by Competition Cycle



> ***"It was an exciting process to be a part of, although it was relatively disorganized. In particular, the decision-making processes for awarding grants were not at all transparent. Nevertheless, I learned a lot from the process and am glad that our organization progressed as far as it did in the Competition."***
>
> – Finalist

The judges and other field leaders also identify some challenges in the communication and organization of the Competition, particularly of the ambitious DML 4 Competition cycle. Similar to comments made by awardees and finalists, they note that the awardee partnerships were challenging to arrange during the application and selection processes—not all matches that look good on paper work out as well in real-life. In practice, complications arose during the implementation process, which is not uncommon in assigned partnerships. They also mention that the Competition implementation team seemed overextended and did not always have sufficient capacity in terms of processes and communication.

> ***"I got the sense [that the problems were with] just sorting through the volume of applications—knowing which ones were worth reviewing in more depth and getting the feedback of the judges."***
>
> – Field Leader

Supports Provided During the Competition

HASTAC provided a range of non-monetary supports to awardees to complement the award funding, with the goal of helping awardees' projects succeed and helping them connect with the DML community. HASTAC utilized a combination of in-person and electronic supports, and individualized and group supports. They modified the supports available for each competition cycle based on lessons learned from earlier cycles and the perceived needs of the new competition cycle. DML 4, in particular, included a wave of new and increased supports to help awardees conceptualize their projects and develop their badge systems.

"Badges [were] so nascent that we just realized that we really needed to provide a project roadmap, and we really needed to mentor these projects from beginning to end, in a different, more time-intensive way."

– Foundation/HASTAC staff

EXAMPLES OF COMMONLY PROVIDED SUPPORTS FOR DML AWARDEES

- **Webinars** – Webinars were offered two to three times during the early competition cycles, but the number of webinars jumped to 20 for the DML 4 Competition cycle. The webinars are used for dual purposes—to share information across awardees to build common knowledge and language, and to provide awardees with a forum for sharing with and learning from each other. Example webinar topics included project sustainability, media strategies, a Twitter tutorial, assessment strategies, and grantee workshops where awardees shared their work.
- **Winners' Showcase** – These in-person showcases occurred at the end of each award period to allow the awardees to display their work to leaders in the DML landscape through presentations and forums as well as to network with others. Some showcases occurred at the DML conference and also overlapped with the announcement of the winners of the next competition cycle (the Winners' Launch Events), allowing new awardees to interact with current awardees.
- **Winners' Hub** – This is an online discussion forum for awardees. Each project has a profile, and awardees can post entries and respond to others' entries. In DML 4, this forum was also open to those who did not win the Competition to encourage collaboration across the badges field.
- **SWOT Analysis** – This was used in the DML 4 Competition cycle to assess project strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). These analyses complemented a needs assessment survey administered to all awardees.
- **In-person Workshops** – DML 4 included two in-person workshops that allowed awardees to practice presenting to each other and expert judges. There were also Q & A panels and attendee-led content.
- **Badges Project Roadmap** – The DML 4 Competition implementers developed a weekly timeline with goals to help awardees implement and plan their work to meet their objectives by the end of the award period.
- **Deep Dive Sessions** – These individualized project conference calls occurred two to three months following the announcement of the DML 4 awardees and included HASTAC and Mozilla staff to discuss the status of each project and what supported was needed. Similarly, DML 1 included bimonthly check-in calls between projects and HASTAC to discuss project budget, timeline, and use of technology.

USEFULNESS OF SUPPORTS

Overall, awardees found the support they received from the HASTAC team very beneficial to their work.

> ***"Our team really enjoyed being part of the vibrant badge community. The support we received from [HASTAC] was stellar. The webinars were interesting, and the events [were] fruitful and well designed. Thank you for organizing such a much-needed, fascinating, and rewarding experience."***
>
> – Awardee

Most awardees speak positively of Competition staff, finding them to be very helpful and available. Many awardees commented in the surveys and interviews about the close relationship they have with HASTAC staff, particularly with Sheryl Grant who worked most closely with them to build connections to other awardees and leaders in the DML landscape: "A lot of work that Sheryl Grant did [connected me] with different people who were interested in hearing more about our work … Some of those conversations were with other winners, but others were just with other people who were interested in exploring badging within higher education. I really think those conversations were an opportunity for me to continuously articulate the way we were working in the design principles of our project and some of the practices we were engaging in." Very few awardees report having had challenges with the Competition staff (14%), or had negative experiences participating in events and activities hosted by HASTAC (7%). In these few cases, the negative experiences usually stemmed from the lack of comprehensive one-on-one support.

The in-person Winners' Showcases are most helpful for awardees' work.

Awardees found the Winners' Showcases very useful to their work. The benefits this and other in-person supports provided included opportunities to build connections with other awardees and leaders in the DML community, leading to new partnerships and collaborations. These opportunities also provided them with a channel to share their work with others in the field. HASTAC staff also believe that face-to-face supports are the most useful ways to interact with and support the awardees. In-person interactions also helped future virtual interactions' productivity because awardees were already comfortable with each other. However, this support is costly for staff to organize and host and for awardees to attend. Some members of the Competition implementation team are concerned that this is an area that would need to be cut back if resources for the Competition become tighter in future cycles.

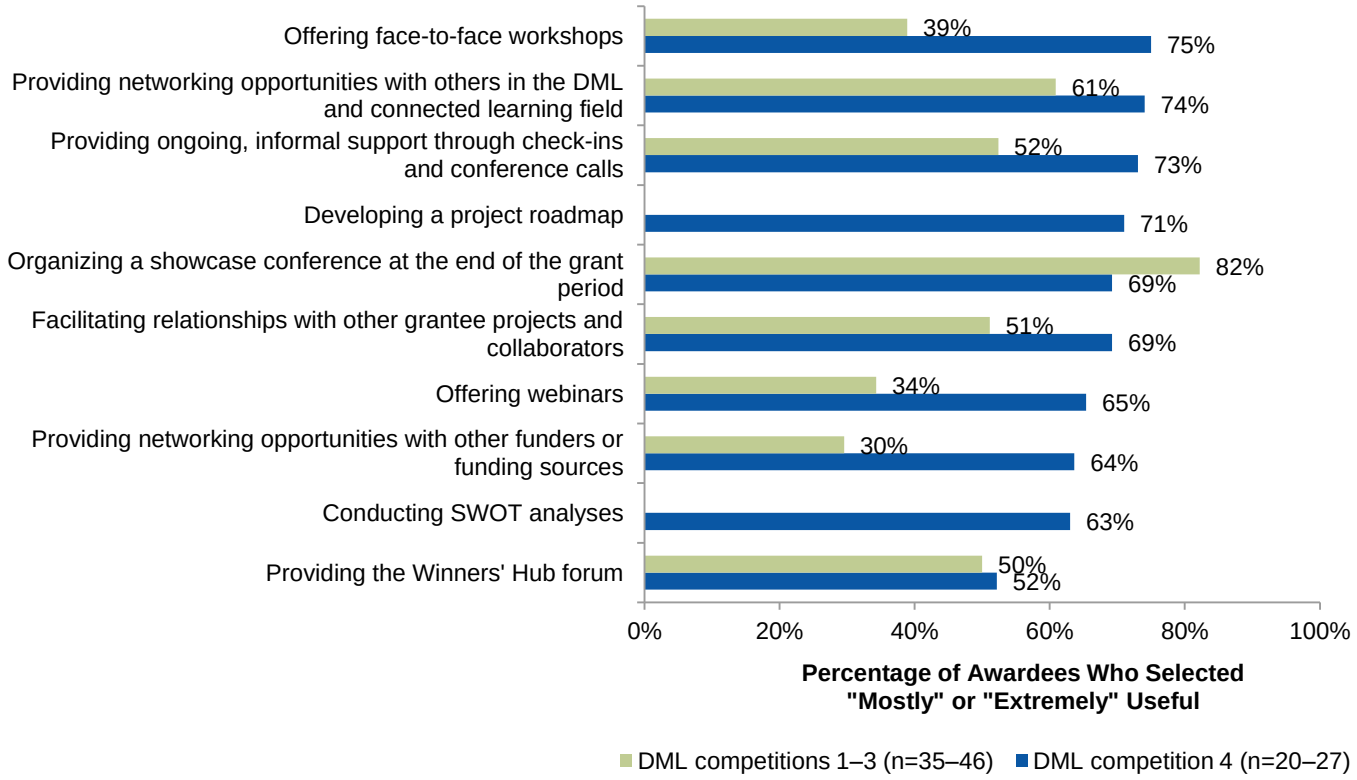
> ***"I thought [the conferences] were very useful because they allowed face-to-face discussions … I think some great ideas were exchanged in those interim conferences."***
>
> – Awardee

DML 4 Competition awardees found supports more useful than did awardees from other competition cycles.

Awardees from the first three competition cycles mentioned a desire for project planning and management support. HASTAC increased the level of support provided to the DML 4 Competition awardees, resulting in higher ratings by DML 4 awardees of nearly every support (Exhibit 10). In addition, DML 4 Competition awardees who used the newly added SWOT analysis and project roadmap rated them highly—63% found the SWOT analyses mostly or extremely useful and 71% thought the same for the project roadmap.

Exhibit 10

Awardees' Ratings on the Usefulness of Non-Monetary Supports



The Winners' Hub has not been a highly valued resource.

While most awardees used the Winners' Hub at some point during the award period (between 69% and 93% depending on the competition cycle), several awardees stated that the resource felt inauthentic and forced. More posts on the site were from the HASTAC team than from the awardees themselves. The Competition implementers also note the challenges in getting awardees to fully engage in the process, especially since awardees are busy with their project work and personal lives and many use other already existing social networking sites to connect with their peers. Those awardees who found the forum useful spoke about the benefits of learning about other projects and sharing with each other.

Impact of the Competition

Impact on Individuals

A primary goal of the Competition is to find new people to bring into the DML community. The DML Competition has spurred a new group of leaders who have led and contributed to these projects. The awardees, as well as some finalists, acknowledge the impact the Competition has had on their own professional lives; how they think about digital media and learning; and their future roles in the DML community.

IMPACT ON HOW AWARDEES AND FINALISTS THINK ABOUT DML

Participation in the DML Competition has left lasting impressions on awardees, in how they think about digital media and learning and its relationship to their work.

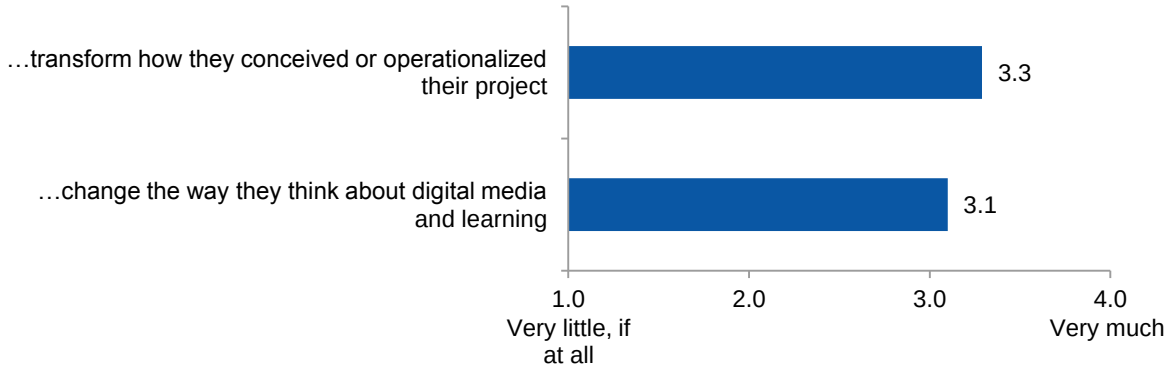
Overall, 76% of awardees report they were "very satisfied" with the Competition. In their surveys and interviews, the majority of awardees express appreciation for being involved in the Competition. As one awardee phrases it: "It was a great honor, a wonderful experience, and I'm very happy to have been a part of it."

Some of the awardees' highest average ratings were around the impact the Competition had on their thinking of both their own work and the larger DML landscape (Exhibit 11). As one awardee describes, the Competition forced her team to "focus more on the quality of our programming" and to "really think about the impact digital badges and technology could have in our programs and on our students." Another awardee explains that the showcase at the end of the Competition changed the way he thinks about digital media and learning. The showcase gave him the opportunity to see what others were doing and how others were integrating their work with digital media and learning. It was an "eye-opening experience to [see] all these different approaches that really took their own paths and were very different from what [we] had done."

Exhibit 11

Average Awardee Rating on the Extent to Which Participating in the Competition Helped Them to...

(n=78)



Almost all (91%) of awardees say that their participation in the Competition inspired new ideas related to digital media and learning. The four primary ways awardees were inspired were:

1) **Awardees developed a new understanding or way of thinking about digital media and learning (33%):** "It inspired us to think big about how to make things small and portable, which was crucial to our mission of enabling music making and learning to happen anywhere, anytime."
2) **Awardees applied their learnings to future projects (29%):** "The program is still running, and has inspired numerous others to undertake similar modes of participatory learning using digital technology. A new project I am working on is inspired by what we learned."
3) **Awardees learned how to network and developed new connections (25%):** "We were introduced to a community of innovators and doers, motivated to contribute high-quality educational experiences. We were able to use some of what we learned through our process and be inspired and ignited by others in the cohort and DML community."
4) **Awardees applied their learnings to their awarded projects (13%):** "We built strategies for reaching key stakeholders to provide teens with additional career and college opportunities."

More broadly, the DML Competition impacted the way educators and other practitioners think about their work with youth.

Awardees report that participating in the Competition changed the way in which they conceptualize learning for young people. For example, one awardee mentions that DML 4 reinforced a focus on high-quality experiences for young people: "I think at first when we jumped at digital badges, we forgot about learning, and we were talking about the symbol and recognition. I think now we know that in order for young people to learn, it needs to be based on a high-quality program first, which in turn can be recognized by digital badges. [The DML Competition] has forced adults to slow down and really focus on quality."

Similarly, another awardee states that the Competition validated the impact of out-of-school time programs. "I can't specifically say what percentage of people who have won the Competition are still treating kids in large numbers. But I certainly feel like [the DML Competition] had a major impact in recognition of the value of learning that young people do in community spaces and among peers. I think there's now a framework that people who are serving kids can pin their work to and say, 'We're not just an after-school program where kids can hang out and play video games. We are part of this connected learning effort where young people are developing literacies and confidences and mastery of learning through media and technology.'"

EXAMPLES OF PROJECTS DIRECTLY IMPACTING YOUTH

During each award period, some projects succeeded in directly impacting youth, particularly small groups of youth in after-school programs, summer programs, or classrooms. The following examples show the breadth of Competition-funded projects' impact on youth.

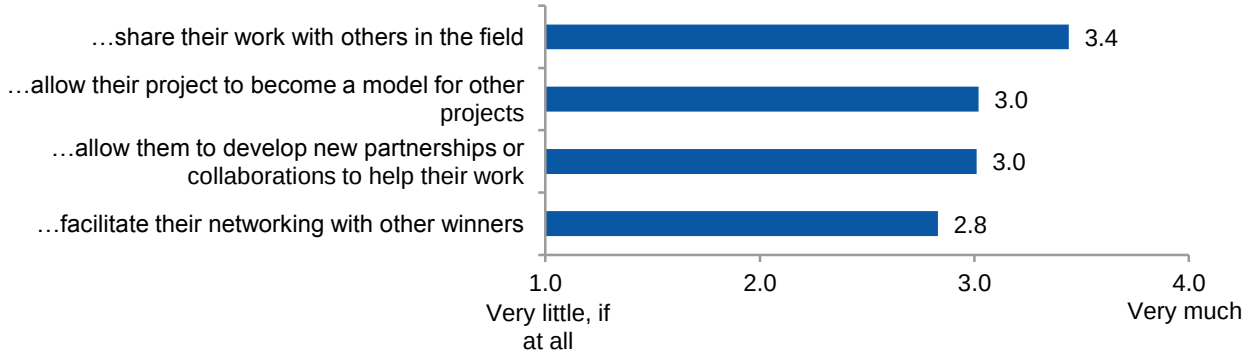
- **Mission: Evolution** was a DML 3 Competition project that created an after-school program for students to design a video game about evolution theories and facts that they learned in their science class. A group of 10th graders participated in the after-school program project. Not only were the students motivated by the work, but they became members of the DML community, and—most importantly—the project inspired their career aspirations. The project's principal investigator notes, "Some of the students became interested in different career opportunities [in the DML landscape]. I ended up writing recommendations for some of them for programs they wanted to go into. It was very motivating for my participants." After its pilot year, the after-school program was no longer in operation, but some of its components were incorporated into the awardee's regular science curricula.
- DML 1 Competition project **HyperCities** is a learning platform that uses Google Maps and Google Earth to overlay cities with geo-temporal information (e.g., family genealogies, architectural, and urban history) that provides youth with the opportunity to interact with digital media in a new way and to gain a deeper understanding of their familial history. At the University of California, Los Angeles, students collaborated with local high school youth to create tours of their neighborhoods using HyperCities. Even though the learning platform is no longer being developed, the interviewee states that "HyperCities, as a project, lives on, probably more so in terms of the ideas, concepts, and social aspects … than the technologies themselves."
- DML 2 Competition project, **DevInfo GameWorks: Changing the World One Game at a Time**, was a software gaming engine that gave users access to United Nations development data and game templates to create, share, and play games on and offline. The initial prototype, DevFacToe, was based on Tic-Tac-Toe and incorporated facts that users had to match up with corresponding countries on the spaces on the board to get four in a row and win the game. The website was successfully pilot-tested in classrooms across three countries and attracted visitors from over 96 countries. The website is still live, but the software is no longer being developed due to funding. The DevInfo GameWorks team noted, "We were able to take what we learned from the project and the connections that we made, and we've been able to develop those into longer lasting relationships and really focus on the development of communities of educational innovators. That's [our] primary focus now; less developing software and more on how can we sustain the kinds of relationships that we started to make during the Competition."
- The **Mobile Action Lab** was a DML 3 Competition awarded project for Youth Radio that gives marginalized youth the opportunity to develop and share mobile apps that address the needs in youth's communities. The project surpassed its goals, engaging more youth and creating more apps than originally planned. Mobile Action Lab "trained significant numbers of young people in entirely new areas of expertise, created powerful networks of colleagues for young people within our organization, and built capacity for what [is now called] the Innovation Lab that will scale the model, in partnership with MIT Media Lab and Mozilla." The Mobile Action Lab continues to grow and has become an integral program at Youth Radio.
- DML 4 Competition project, **Pathways for Lifelong Learning**, is a badge system created by the Providence After School Alliance in Rhode Island that tracks student learning in after-school programs, from middle school through high school. Its purpose was to create "a seamless system of learning pathways that usher youth through middle school, high school, and onward to college, career, and life." The awardee is still working on the project and continues to impact youth in Rhode Island. The badges "have provided a way for high school students to get public validation for activities and skills that would not otherwise be included in their transcripts."

IMPACT ON AWARDEES' AND FINALISTS' NETWORKS

Awardees report that they developed strong connections with other awardees during the Competition that helped them to achieve their project goals.

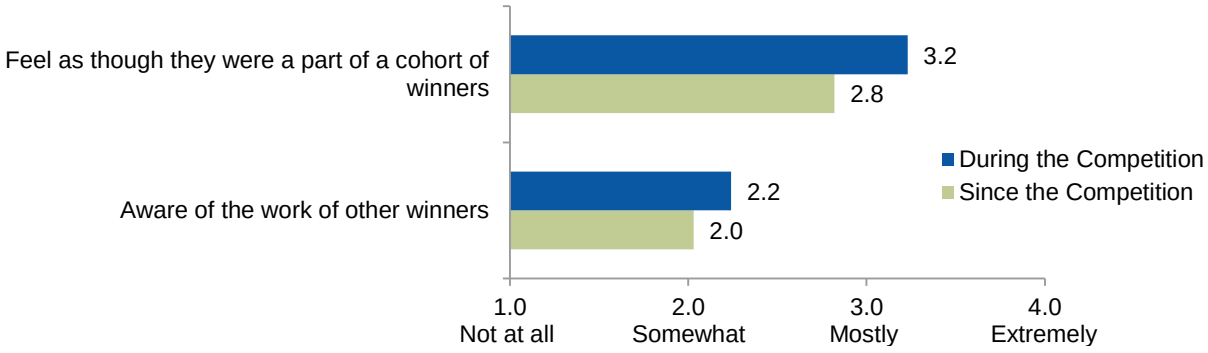
HASTAC focuses on creating a cohort of awardees in each competition cycle who can learn from and with one another. Awardees give positive ratings of the Competition's impact on their networks, partnerships, and collaborations (Exhibit 12). Awardees found these relationships with other winners very beneficial in developing their projects during the Competition, turning to each other for support and guidance along the way.

Exhibit 12
Average Awardee Rating on the Extent to Which Participating in the Competition Helped Them to...
(n=65–78)



These connections weaken somewhat for awardees following the award period (Exhibit 13). During their interviews, awardees expressed that they would like to stay in touch and more involved with their peers, but often cannot find the available time. However, those who have been able to maintain connections say they continue to share their work and learnings through informal conversations with peers, conference presentations, and blogs. DML 4 Competition awardees have stronger connections with their awardee cohort than awardees from earlier cycles. This is not surprising since DML 4 occurred more recently and in many ways, the awarded projects share more similarities than projects from other cycles.

Exhibit 13
Average Awardee Opinions on their Cohort During & Since the Competition
(n=72–77)



IMPACT ON AWARDEES' AND FINALISTS' PROFESSIONAL WORK

For most awardees, and many finalists, their participation in the Competition has had a positive impact on their professional work by developing their skills and opening the door to new opportunities.

When asked about the impact of the Competition on their professional lives, 93% of awardees and 48% of finalists report multiple benefits. They have developed technical skills in areas such as grant management, public speaking, IRB processes, game and badge design, and proposal writing. Furthermore, they have expanded their understanding of concepts such as digital badges and connected learning. They have received recognition for their accomplishments and a new credibility behind their work and name, and some have experienced career development and advancement. They also now have a larger network of contacts that they can draw upon. While these benefits have impact on the professional lives of individuals, they also expand the overall DML landscape by developing new future leaders and innovators.

> ***"The hands-on experience of navigating the 'build,' the challenges of running the platform, and ultimately the acceptance that it wasn't the right solution were significant learning experiences for me. It helped lay the foundations for how I have led subsequent evolutions of our program's digital spaces with far greater success, experience, and achieved outcomes."***
>
> – Awardee

Finalists believe applying for the Competition impacted them and their work to some extent.

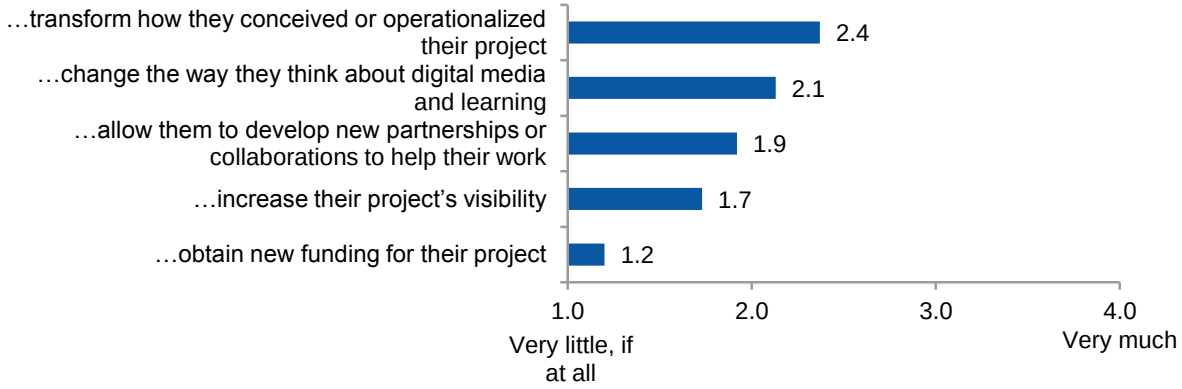
Finalists report a mixture of beliefs on the extent to which applying for the Competition has impacted their work (Exhibit 14, next page). Foundation and HASTAC staff attempt to create an application process that allows applicants to engage with each other and the public to improve their ideas and concepts. Engagement with peers and the public appears to have occurred to a limited degree; some finalists believe that simply applying for the Competition transformed their thinking about digital media and learning as well as their own work. Very few finalists believe that the application process increased their visibility and helped them obtain new funding. One reason may be that, as stated earlier in the report, some finalists did not know of their status as finalists and therefore were unable to leverage that recognition to help their work.

> ***"The most that the DML application and submission process did for us was to help us better clarify our goals. The well-articulated questions of the proposal helped us to think through our plan for implementing the project, and thus, in a way, ensured that we would be successful in realizing it, regardless of receiving DML funding. And that is, essentially, what happened. [Our project] has had amazing success, and will continue to evolve to meet the educational needs of today's students."***
>
> – Finalist

Exhibit 14

Average Finalist Rating on the Extent to Which Applying to the Competition Helped Them to...

(n=70–71)



Some (41%) finalists have made progress with their proposed projects despite not receiving a DML Competition award.

Even without the DML Competition award, 41% of finalists report that they were able to go forward with their projects, albeit on a smaller scale than they had proposed. This figure differed between the finalists from the first three competition cycles (46%) and the DML 4 Competition cycle (33%), likely reflecting the more time earlier finalists have had to pursue their work.

For those who moved forward with their work, 50% of the finalists had to modify or cut back on their proposed plans while 21% stayed similar to what they had originally proposed for the DML Competition. Most reported that their project's funding came from a mixture of sources, of which philanthropic, other (e.g., university funding, their own organization's budget), and public funding contributed the most (Exhibit 15).

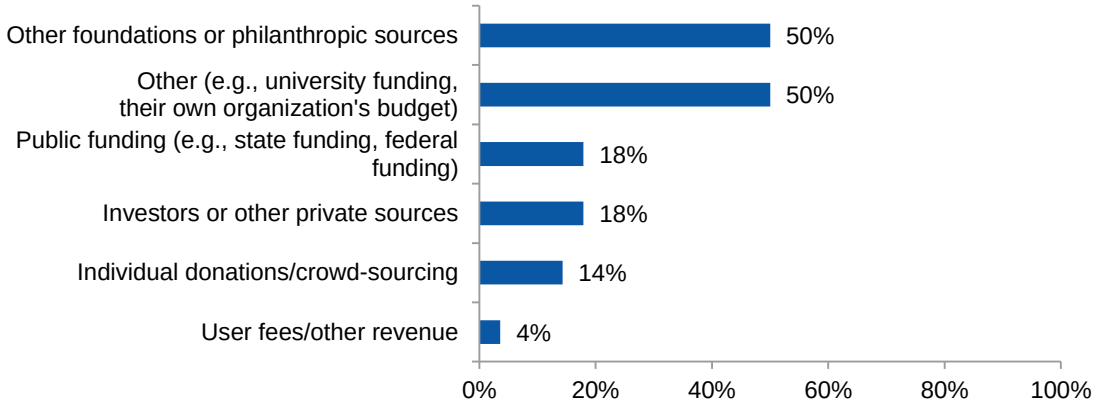
"The concept remained stagnant without DML funding until we undertook a smaller, regional approach using funds from a Canadian donor."

– Finalist

Exhibit 15

Funding Sources for Finalists who Moved Forward with Their Project Despite Not Receiving an Award

(n=28)



Impact on Projects

Another key goal of the Competition is to uncover and fund new DML ideas and solutions. The Competition addresses this goal by funding innovative prototypes of projects that test and improve the relationship between learning and digital media. This section describes the achievements of these projects, the current status of projects, and some common challenges faced along this new, unpaved path.

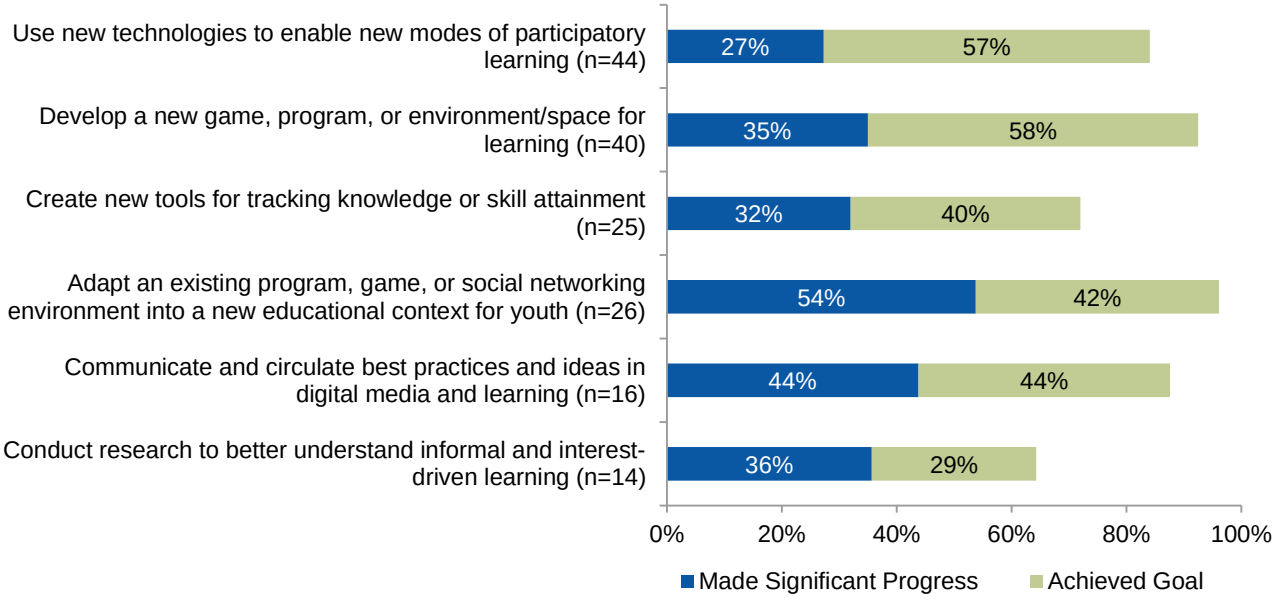
PROJECT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Most awardees believe they made significant progress on their original project goals during the Competition.

Awardees pursued a variety of project goals during the award period, and most report great success in achieving their original goals (Exhibit 16). When asked about why they were successful during their award period, many awardees credit the actual monetary award. The Competition provided several additional supports—a network, learning resources, and recognition—that helped awardees to succeed, but the award amount was the key element. The money funded projects' staffing and consultant needs, travel expenses for Competition events that fostered sharing and networking equipment and technology, and technical assistance for the projects.

Exhibit 16

Awardees' Responses on Progress Made Toward their Goals During the Award Period



The awardees who achieved success credit their ability to set expectations on what could actually be accomplished. For example, most awardees who report they accomplished their goals say that they focused on creating a prototype or beta version of their project: "From the very beginning, we said that we understood the scope of this … having done some very large projects in the past. So we immediately identified that the output of this was going to be a prototype." Awardees who were not as successful recognize that they tried to achieve too much in the limited timeframe of the award period (e.g., development of prototype, identification of audience, and implementation).

> ***"We definitely ended up having to cut some things and everything always takes a lot longer than expected … Especially if you haven't done projects like this before, it's always more expensive and takes more time than you expect."***
>
> — Awardee

When their original goals did not suffice, some awardees took the initiative to modify project goals. About one-quarter (22%) of awardees report they added or changed their goals over the course of their grant period, and that they made significant progress on about half (57%) these new goals as well.

Awardees highlight a range of successes for their projects, reflecting the intentional design of the DML Competition to promote learning and broadly define success.

Recognizing the newness of the DML landscape and experimental nature of the awarded projects, the DML Competition avoids narrowly defining project success. This has been exemplified in awardees' personal stories about the biggest successes of their projects. To awardees, success has ranged from creating a tool that they originally set as a goal, gaining credibility in their industry or field, collaborating with others, or reaching their intended audience. Other successes have been personal ones, such as transforming how they think about digital media and learning, and recognition of their own skills and expertise.

Awardees greatly appreciate the space the program makes for iterating and learning, and they encourage implementers to continue to take risks on great, unproven ideas, as few large funders do so. One notes, "I appreciated that there was a lot of recognition that what people take on in these competitions is experimental and people are doing it for their first time. So I would [tell the Competition staff] to keep room for people to depart to some extent from what they had envisioned. I think that the Competition already does a really good job of that."

Please describe your project's biggest success…

"The vision was to create a new mobile learning platform for young adults. Funding from the Competition allowed us to design and refine our concept, find partners, and develop new mobile-to-mobile technologies. It allowed us to take a mere vision to a real-world pilot, although the end result was significantly different from what we originally imagined!"

"The DML funded project allowed us to pilot, experiment, and learn some incredibly valuable lessons around technology, online communities, and understanding our value add."

"The project significantly influenced the way we, and our larger institution, understands how virtual badges can succeed in helping us achieve our educational missions. We will definitely be continuing to use and expand on this tool, and our participation in the program taught us a lot, and gave us access to a community of practitioners that we will continue to depend on."

"The young women who participated from low income backgrounds all reported they felt empowered as a result of their participation."

"The project became sustainable, and is still in existence long after the grant period expired. The grant allowed us to put it on a solid footing."

"A big success was helping to engage higher education in a larger conversation about innovative models for teaching and learning, and assessments that could keep pace with those innovations. Our position as the pilot project for badging in higher education is very much due to our membership in the cohort of Competition grantees. The connections to other universities, the opportunities to speak about the project in person and in the media, all of this was supported or facilitated by the Competition and the network of individuals behind it."

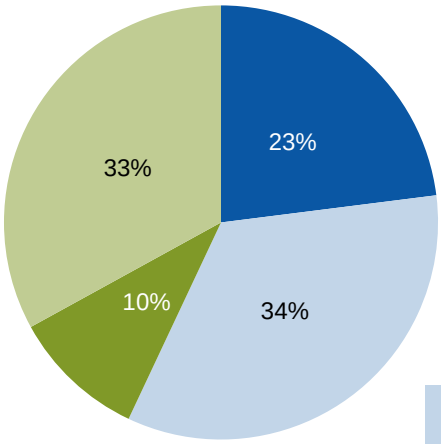
THE PROJECTS TODAY & IN THE FUTURE

This section discusses the current status of awarded projects and their potential for the future. Importantly, expectations around the program goal of funding new DML ideas and solutions differ between Competition implementers, on the one hand, and awardees and key leaders in the DML landscape, on the other hand. While the implementers generally see the Competition as a space for experimentation and prototyping, field leaders and awardees want more DML awards to result in viable solutions for learning that continue to be used in field.

Most awardees carry on part of their project work after the Competition ends.

Currently, 93% of DML 4 awardees and 57% of DML 1–3 awardees continue to work on some part of the project for which they won the DML Competition award. The current status of awarded projects varies widely, but 77% of awardees report that their project still exists in some form (Exhibit 17).[11]

Exhibit 17
Awardee Project Current Status
(n=73)



Has grown into a larger project

"The project has continued and expanded consistently since the grant period ended. We are still very much on the same trajectory that we started on but have evolved in response to emerging technologies, especially mobile and tablet devices and opportunities for electronic publishing."

No longer in existence

"Due to work commitments and other projects, my project is on 'indefinite hiatus,' though I'm hopeful that one day I might have the time and opportunity to revisit it."

Still ongoing but possibly reduced form

"The project is still ongoing, and we are in the early stages of truly building a 'true pathway.' We are excited for what's next, but we realize that we need more resources and time to create our vision."

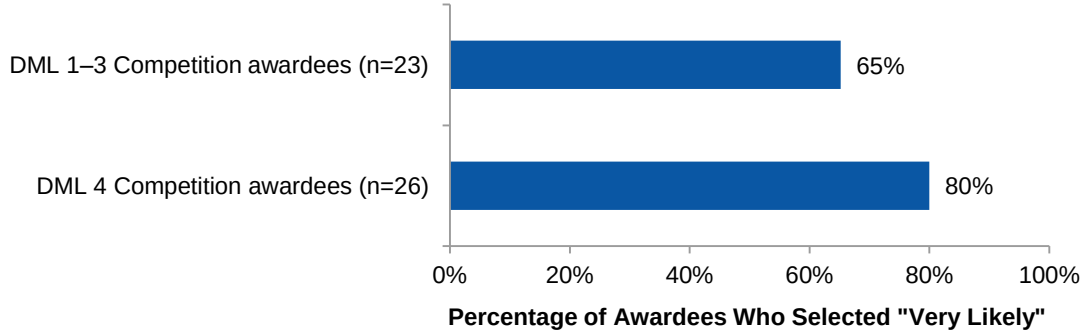
Exists but not actively worked on

"It is still functioning. We don't have resources to run the program without outside funding or being paid, which limits the extent to which we can facilitate the program. It is used for free by tens of thousands of people however, though it hasn't been updated in three years. It has inspired a new project as well that I'm working on; and many people have copied the format, [and] contacted me about how to implement something similar."

[11] Similarly, 73% of the winning projects from the 2007–2009 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's News Challenge (perhaps the grantmaking competition most comparable to the DML Competition) still existed in some form two to three years following that competition. Data from
Arabella Advisors (2012). *Experiments in Media Innovation: A Look at the 2009 Knight News Challenge Winners*. Prepared for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.
LFA Group: Learning for Action (2011). *An Interim Review of the Knight News Challenge*. Prepared for the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The DML Competition awardees who are still working on their projects are confident that their work will continue for the next three to five years (Exhibit 18).

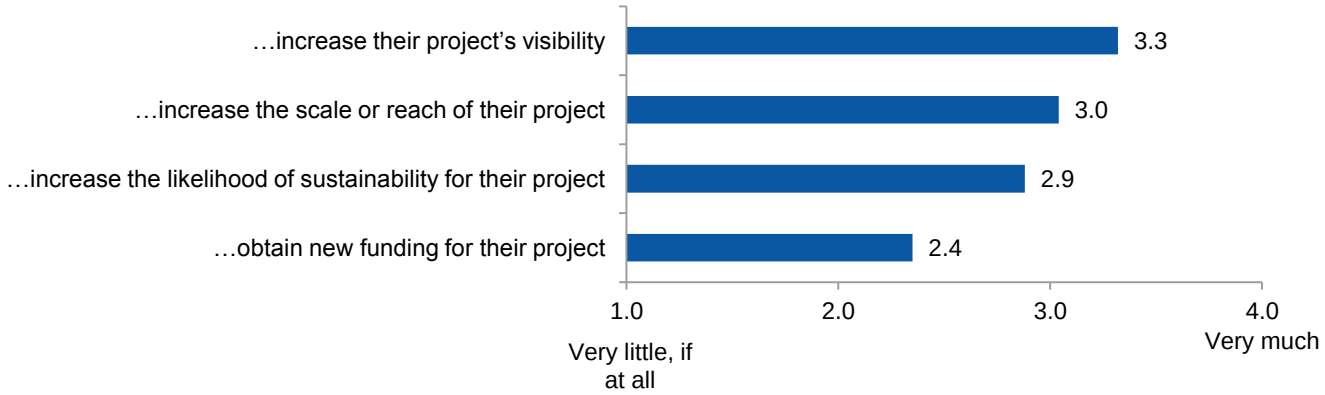
Exhibit 18
Awardees' Responses on the Likelihood that their Project will Continue for the Next 3–5 Years



Awardees report that the Competition impacted factors related to their projects' long-term potential.

Of the factors that contribute to projects' long term potential, awardees rated the Competition's impact the highest for project visibility and lowest for securing new project funding (Exhibit 19). Many awardees agree and appreciate the role the Competition played in increasing the visibility, scale, and reach of their work: "In an indirect way … having the support of [the Foundation] raised the profile of what we were doing, and made it easier to get support and buy-in from other partners." Fewer awardees feel that the Competition helped to obtain new funding. As discussed later in this report, this is an area that awardees feel the Competition implementers could provide them with additional support during and after the Competition.

Exhibit 19
Average Awardee Rating on the Extent to Which Participating in the Competition Helped Them to...
(n=75–76)



ADVICE FROM PAST AWARDEES FOR FUTURE AWARDEES

Reflecting on their experiences in the Competition, awardees share a variety of advice for future awardees on how to carry out their projects successfully:

On Implementation

- Pilot projects always take more time than anticipated. Be generous with your estimated budget and the time you will need to accomplish your goals because costs and effort will be higher than you think.
- Try to establish a small team putting in a lot of time rather than a large team with each member putting in a little time. You will accomplish more that way and the team will have more ownership.
- Be realistic about what can be accomplished with one round of funding. One awardee says, “Even if you can come up with a project that you think is a pretty good candidate for what would get support, make sure that you really want to do that work and that you can do it quickly enough that you’ll have deliverables by the end of one year.”
- Consider how success will be defined and measured, and how that success can be communicated publicly.
- Iterate early and often. Do not assume that all the components of your prototype will be up and running before it is tested. Implement in stages and pieces.

On Working With Others

- Attend the DML conference, and make the most out of it. Meet new people, bounce ideas off experts and peers, and reflect on what you learned from the conference, and how those learnings can be implemented into your project.
- Take the time to network with other awardees and learn collaboratively as much as possible. Communicate virtually and in-person, whenever possible. One awardee states, “It is absolutely essential to surround yourself with others so you don’t feel like you’re totally on your own, you can get feedback, and you can get encouragement and give encouragement. And more generally, just try to learn as much as you can and share your learning as much as you can.”

On Communications & Marketing

- Have a clear mission so that others understand what you are trying to accomplish and how they could get involved.
- Use the credibility and name of the Foundation, and the prestige of winning a DML award, to leverage more funding and secure higher-quality partners and volunteers for your project.
- Consider your potential audience and support base early in the development phase. One awardee notes, “Think about marketing; think about your audience. Do not just build something great and hope people come, but engage the audience and very early get their buy-in, support, and criticism so they can be part of the process. So at the end of the year, hopefully, you’ve not only completed something that’s admirable, but you also have a lot of buzz and people curious about it, and there’s the opportunity to leverage that successful year into future funding and development.”

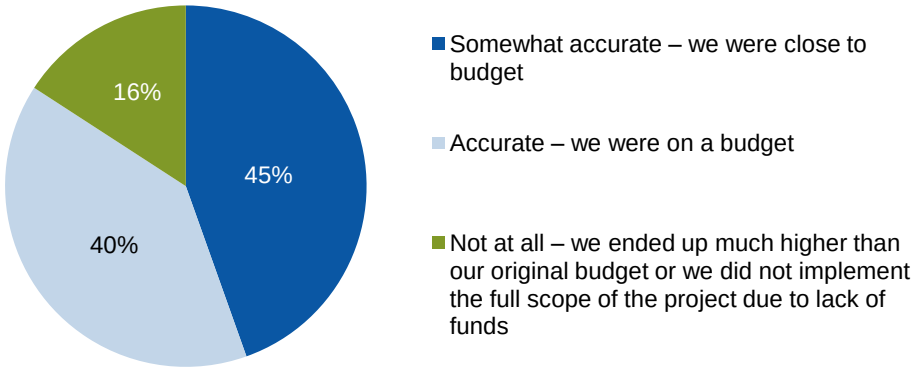
CHALLENGES AWARDEES ENCOUNTERED DURING PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

As innovators in the emerging DML, awardees unsurprisingly encountered challenges developing and implementing their projects. Of the 72 awardees who reported on project challenges, only 4% reported they did not encounter any during the grant period. For some projects, the challenges were internal (e.g., staying within budget), while others had difficulty working with partners or collaborators. Many awardees commented that they found the HASTAC team helpful when addressing these hurdles.

The most common challenges appear to be related to project management (i.e., timeline, goals, and budget).

Across competition cycles, many awardees identified challenges with implementing the project within the original timeline (54%); according to the original concept and objectives (44%); and within the allotted budget (38%). Furthermore, 60% of awardees report they were not accurate or only somewhat accurate with their estimated budgets (Exhibit 20). In their interviews, awardees explain that one reason for these challenges was that they were engaging in new and untested work, and, thus, underestimated how long it would take and how much it would cost. In addition, some awardees noted that they had not anticipated needing to apply their award amounts to their travel to attend the DML conference.

Exhibit 20
Awardees' Responses on the Accuracy of Their Project Cost Estimates
(n=76)

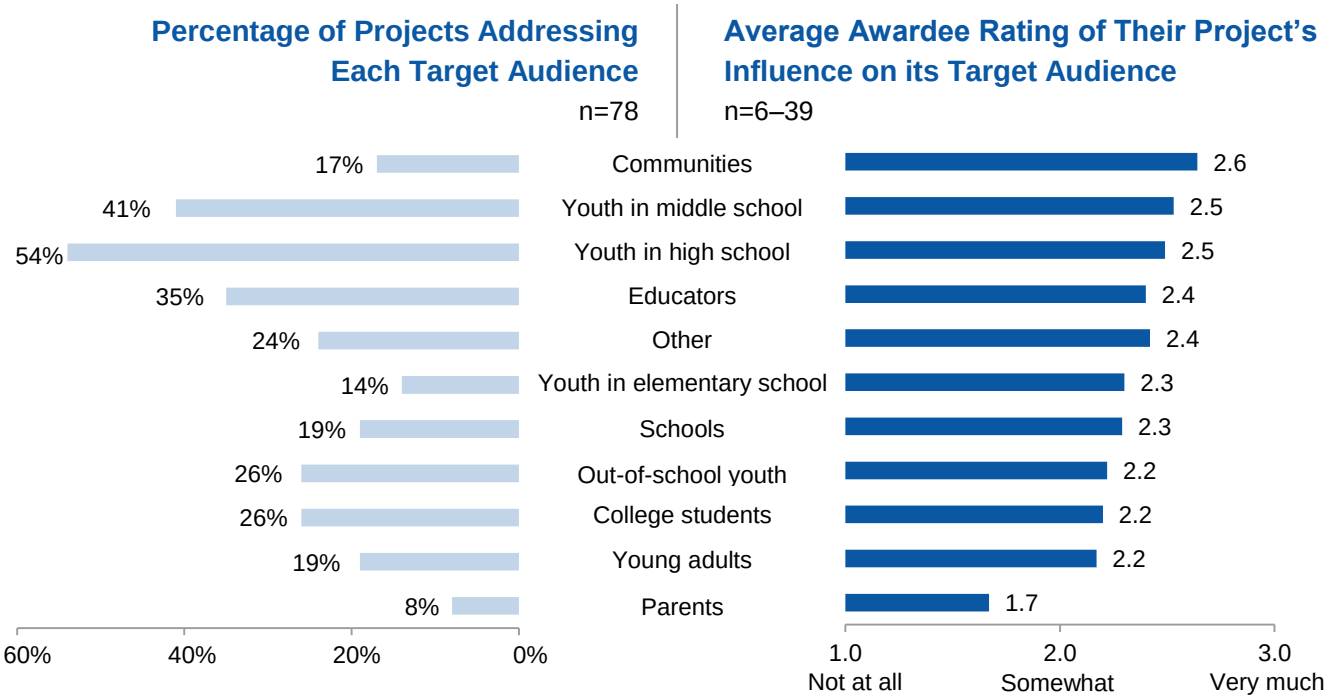


Awardees report that influencing their target audiences was a key challenge.

The DML Competition focused on prototyping new tools and environments that could improve learning for youth, and less so on implementing them with their target audiences. Therefore, while many awardees state that they were able to accomplish their goals around developing and creating, overall awardees felt only somewhat successful in influencing their target audience (Exhibit 21, next page). Forty percent of awardees identify reaching the target audience as one of the crucial challenges they faced.

Awardees in earlier competition cycles describe the challenges as outsiders of getting their new, innovative tools into the school system to directly reach their intended audiences. For others in the Competition, the audience challenge was a result of a lack of time management and planning for the project. Some DML 4 Competition awardees developed their badge tools, but did not spend as much time identifying the audiences who would earn (e.g., students) and accept (e.g., colleges, employers) the tool. Consequently, they are continuing to work on reaching their audiences post-award.

Exhibit 21



Collaborating with project partners was another challenge for DML 4 Competition awardees in particular.

Forty percent of the DML 4 Competition awardees reported they experienced challenges working with their project partners; this is compared to only 17% of awardees from the first three competition cycles. The higher percentage for DML 4 reflects the difficulties many awardees had working with the partners assigned to them to implement badge systems. Awardees reflected on the importance of spending ample time to select the right project team collaborators, as they can lead to future collaborations as well. For example, one awardee describes how his DML Competition team has turned into a long-term partnership: "[The Competition] allowed me to create a team and that team has stayed with me for the past four years. We turned into a startup."

Often awardees are unsure of ways to continue and expand their work after the award period.

Following the Competition, awardees, even those who achieved success during the award period with their prototypes, found that maintaining and expanding their work was much harder than anticipated because:

- **Awardees are not sure of the necessary steps to scale their prototype.** Awardees often do not have the knowledge or experience to grow their projects or plan for the long term.
- **Project team members move on to their other interest areas.** Team members often split their time between different projects. Once the award period ends, teams often move on to other work for which they already have funding, impacting project continuity.
- **There are few other funders for DML projects.** The Foundation is the leading funder of DML projects. To continue receiving philanthropic funding, awardees state they need to position their projects to other fields such as education or workforce development.

Persistence and organizational support are key factors for awardee and project success in overcoming the challenges they face creating new tools and products.

Competition implementation staff recognize the challenges awardees encounter, particularly with how to continue and expand their work after the Competition. They believe that the awardees who are most likely to achieve longer-term success tend to be affiliated with larger, more stable organizations (e.g., universities, for-profit organizations, nonprofit organizations) that can provide the strong supportive backbone to help fund the work going forward. For awardees that do not have this type of affiliation, Competition staff highlight that recurring characteristics of successful awardees are persistence and flexibility—the ability to find ways to move the work forward despite obstacles.

Influence on the DML Landscape & MacArthur Foundation

The goals of the DML Competition are aimed at contributing to the overall DML landscape by bringing in new people, ideas, and tools. This section describes key findings and insights into the extent to which the program is building the DML landscape, as well as the Foundation.

The DML Competition has helped to identify and shape the DML landscape.

As noted earlier, the implementation of the first DML Competition successfully showed that there were people eager to join a community of DML thinkers and practitioners. One awardee explains that the DML landscape was growing as the Competition emerged, and while the field may have still grown in the absence of the Competition, the Competition accelerated that growth and created more visibility. Another says, "The DML [Competition] enables people who are neither looking to create a large business nor looking to engage in the politics of education reform to experiment with different forms of using digital media and learning." Informants point to emerging networks around gaming for education and digital badging as clear examples of the Competition's influence.

> ***"When this initiative started, there were a lot of people who were unsure about technology's relationship to learning, and how we think about young people's social, economic, and educational mobility. I think the Foundation and the DML work has really become one of the visible and important advocates for why this is an important issue. I think DML, in general, has been a major contributor to fostering a more innovative conversation, and dynamic conversation around the role of technology, the future of learning, and what it means for young people and society."***
>
> – Field Leader

Furthermore, the DML Competition spurs national conversation around "hot topics" in the DML landscape, creating excitement in the blogosphere and social media. DML leaders and those new to DML both believe that the Competition effectively focuses the DML community on certain topics and concerns. This influence is augmented by other key pieces of the DML Initiative (e.g., DML conference, digital badges field building, Hive projects). Awardees who consider themselves part of the DML community believe that the Competition is one of the biggest influencers on how digital media can change and improve learning.

> ***"What you have … is a major foundation, a household recognizable name, basically saying we want to support innovation and learning in all kinds of ways, and I think it's very admirable that [the Foundation] supports it."***
>
> – Awardee

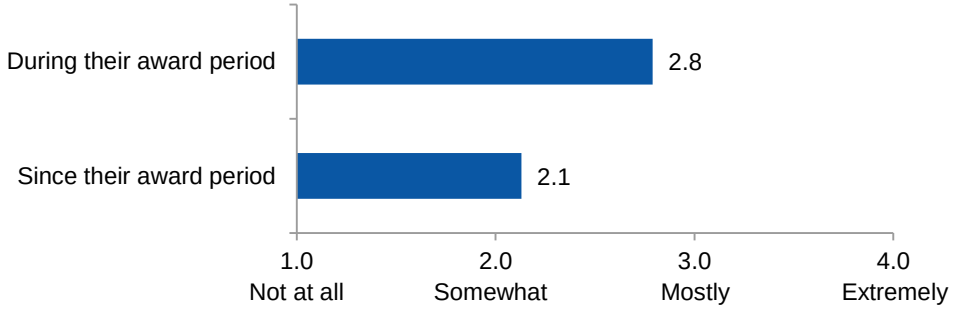
Not all individuals introduced to the DML landscape through the Competition remained a part of the DML community.

While a large share of informants believe that the Competition has built and influenced the DML landscape, a similar share think these emerging topics are still only on the radar of a small group of people. For example, as discussed earlier, over 70% of awardees were already familiar with connected learning prior to the Competition, suggesting that they already had some connection to the DML landscape. In addition, many awardees feel less connected to the DML landscape following their award period (Exhibit 22). Several awardees note that they could not speak to the Competition's influence on the DML landscape or learning for youth because they have not kept up with the field since their award period. Some of these awardees express an interest in wanting to stay connected, but feel like they do not have the time or mechanism for connecting to the DML landscape now that they are no longer grantees.

Exhibit 22

Average Awardee Opinions on the Extent to Which They Felt Connected or Networked with Others in the DML Community

(n=71–78)



Competition implementers and others in the field also have differences in opinion. While HASTAC and Foundation staff largely believe that a sizeable share of awardees are connecting and staying involved with the DML community, others are not as positive. Field leaders, in particular, question whether Competition implementers are doing enough to keep awardees involved in the DML community. They more often see the same types of people at DML events, and see few new leaders in the DML landscape emerging from the pool of Competition awardees.

The contrasting perspectives between field leaders and Competition implementers, and the decline in awardees' connection to the community, could reflect differences in how stakeholders define the DML landscape and staying involved. While some stakeholders hold the view that staying involved mean sustaining their original projects, others believe it means continuing to work, collaborate, and innovate in the DML landscape. The DML landscape does not have clear boundaries and bleeds into many interdisciplinary areas. Awardees could be actively involved in the DML landscape through their work in education but not necessarily consider themselves as members of the community.

The Foundation leverages the Competition to promote key parts of its DML Initiative as well as overall strategy.

The DML Competition has allowed the Foundation to advocate for concepts and tools that they feel best improve education and learning for youth. For example, the program has funded, and thus advanced, youth-centered learning. One informant impacted by the program notes, "It seems so obvious to me right now that it seems ridiculous to say it, but when I started [working in the DML landscape] in 2008, I thought I was designing

"Each time we've done a competition, I think that we have successfully been able to push out a new concept and help push a little bit [of] a broader conversation about learning from our DML perspective."

– Foundation/HASTAC staff

for kids, I thought I was creating for kids, and I thought I had kids first. But it wasn't really until I got deeply involved in DML that I [realized] I superficially put the kids first. I'm not really, truly doing user-centered design. And it was a big awakening."

The DML Competition has furthered the Foundation's position as a leader in non-traditional grantmaking approaches.

The Foundation has benefited from the DML Competition within the philanthropic space. The Competition has given the Foundation additional in-depth experience with grantmaking that is not driven by established outcomes, and has increased the Foundation's capacity and expertise in using competitions to implement strategy. It has put the Foundation on the map as a leader in connected learning, as well as has helped to publicize to the rest of DML Initiative. In addition, the Competition gave the Foundation opportunities to develop key allies and relationships from the federal government to the technology industry.

Recommendations for the Future

As described throughout this report, the DML Competition has funded a large number of innovative DML projects and has inspired new ways of thinking for many awardees. As the Competition continues and grows, we offer the following recommendations for the Foundation based on our analysis of the DML Competition's successes and challenges to date. These recommendations also incorporate the feedback provided by multiple awardees, finalists, and field leaders.

Communicate more directly and often with Competition applicants and awardees.

Informants wanted more information and direct communication with the Competition implementers throughout the selection and award periods. Applicants who received awards, as well as those who did not, wanted more information about the selection criteria, and the strengths and challenges judges identified when reviewing their proposals. This information would help improve projects, whether or not they receive awards. More frequent status updates and explanations of choices would lead to a more transparent application and selection process.

Awardees also suggest more communication between awardees and Competition implementers toward the end of the award period to plan for the future of their projects. For example, a short guide that outlines next steps to take for projects after the award period would be very useful to awardees who are first-time foundation grantees.

Open communication and constructive feedback have the potential of bringing more people into the DML community and leading to higher-quality models of connected learning. Competition implementers could add finalists to their outreach lists to share information about upcoming events and opportunities in the DML community. Proactively including finalists who had good ideas but missed out on an award could help them remain part of the DML landscape after the Competition.

Document and publicize the DML Competition's successes.

Data collection for this evaluation revealed that many people are unclear on what happens to DML awardees and their projects after the Competition. This lack of knowledge leads many to assume that little success has come out of awarded projects. Results from this evaluation show that this is not the case. The Competition implementers should communicate more clearly that the Competition's success does not stem from the number of sustained projects, but from the promise of innovative prototypes. Similarly, the Competition implementers should actively identify and publicize the program's impact and outcomes moving forward. Better communication of the purpose, learnings, and accomplishments of DML Competition awardees to the DML community will increase the perceived value of the Competition. Furthermore, new awardees would more easily learn from the lessons of past awardees if successes, as well as challenges, are shared.

Publicizing success requires a follow-up process with awardees to collect information on their outcomes. One option is to consider a post-award reporting survey that incorporates the most useful information that was collected for this evaluation. Several awardees note that a small amount of required documentation may be helpful to them as well.

Competition implementers periodically post a "Where Are They Now?" update on past awardees on the HASTAC website. These updates could be included as part of new competition cycle launches and award announcements. The Competition implementers should also consider creating and disseminating short briefs of lessons learned or achievements for a handful of key awardees for each competition cycle. These briefs would allow others to learn from the experiences of particular awardees. Even though competition topics and audiences change from year to year, highlights of success will bring credibility to the Competition.

Foster a stronger community of practice among awardees.

Competition implementers should continue to provide opportunities for cohort learning. Awardees who reached out to their peers benefited from the interactions, and many others express regret for not doing so. The online Winners' Hub aims to create a community of practice, but many awardees have not found it helpful. Indeed, it is very difficult to create a new community platform in any setting because community members tend to gravitate toward platforms they already use, such as Facebook or LinkedIn. Resources may be better spent developing a community page on an existing platform. In addition, Competition implementers should explore awardees' suggestions of monthly voluntary Google Hangouts to discuss challenges and successes around a particular piece of implementation, as well as open forum conference calls during which awardees can discuss ideas with their awardee peers. Competition implementers could also organize informal in-person gatherings at related conferences or events that multiple awardees are likely to attend. Furthermore, awardees would benefit from being paired with another awardee with a similarly structured project to facilitate peer learning throughout the award period.

Match awardees with mentors to support the implementation of their projects.

The addition of a formal mentorship component is the most frequent request by past awardees. Mentorship would be especially valuable given that many awardees are engaging in DML work for the first time. Currently, Sheryl Grant, Director of Social Networking at HASTAC, provides mentorship support on a case-by-case basis, but this practice is not ideal or comprehensive for a group of awardees because it relies on one person who has many other responsibilities. Furthermore, the various projects require vastly different expertise (e.g., financial planning, technical assistance, marketing); one or a few people cannot feasibly provide the necessary array of support.

DML 1 Competition applications included a question on applicants' mentoring needs. These needs could be further explored during the "deep dive" sessions and SWOT analyses conducted with awardees if these supports continue in future competition cycles. Mentors could be recruited from awardee alumni pools, Competition judges, and other field experts, and matched to awardees based on their project content and guidance needs. Matching awardees with previously successful awardees also fosters cross-cohort learning and keeps alumni involved in the DML community.

Support the project management capacity of awardees.

Developing realistic scopes, establishing and maintaining timelines, and managing team members and partners were common challenges among awardees. Competition implementers should consider offering project management supports in addition to the DML 4 project roadmap that many awardees found very useful. Competition implementers should also incorporate project management capacity as a component of the application and the selection criteria.

On the topic of partnership management, awardees from DML 4 Competition cycle have a few suggestions if the assigned partnership model were to continue. To facilitate better relationships, they suggest that the Competition implementers investigate more thoroughly the knowledge, products, and skills purported in each partner's application to ensure that each party has the capacity to follow through on their piece of the work. Furthermore, implementers should facilitate a process to address what will become of the project and its intellectual property once the funding period ends.

Develop deeper connections between the Competition and other components of the DML Initiative.

Other components of the DML Initiative should be leveraged to keep past awardees and finalists involved in the DML landscape, foster cross-cohort learning, and pique the interest of potential new applicants. For example, the DML conference is a well-suited venue to advance many of the DML Competition's needs. The Foundation could

consider hosting a networking reception for Competition alumni at each annual conference. This cross-fertilization of ideas, as well as interaction with people across competition cycles, would benefit the individuals but also the DML landscape more broadly. Small details, such as including a tag on conference name badges that identify awardee alumni would bring more visibility to the Competition at the conference, especially during years that do not have a Competition launch. While it would be a costly endeavor, it may well be worth making DML conference attendance mandatory for awardees and subsidizing travel costs to accommodate attendance. Conference attendance and face-to-face interactions would help create a stronger connection to the DML community, making it more likely that they will stay involved.

The more recent developments in the DML Initiative, including Cities of Learning and GlassLab, can also be linked to the Competition. These efforts can serve as venues for awardees to continue to develop and implement their projects. This could be a win for both parties—awardees could be able to sustain their successful project, and the Foundation could bring a new successful project into the DML Initiative's umbrella.

Continue to build philanthropic and private sector support for the DML landscape and connected learning.

Funding projects that pioneer the DML landscape has one major drawback: after the DML award period, awardees whose projects have potential for continuation have difficulty finding other funders that are interested in their work. Awardees hoped for a pathway for more funding for successful projects, in particular, from the Foundation. However, because long-term funding from the Foundation is not a possibility for most projects, awardees would like support from Competition implementers to identify potential other resources for their projects once the award period is over.

The Foundation and HASTAC have done an impressive job of building the DML landscape. The Foundation has also begun to serve as a thought leader and field builder for DML in the philanthropic community, and should continue work in that vein. Field experts noted that the DML landscape can only move forward if additional funders and private sector players become and remain involved; DML will not progress if it is seen as the Foundation's "darling." If the Competition builds additional philanthropic and private sector interest in DML, it can better support awardees' post-competition work and more broadly build sustainability mechanisms for the connected learning movement. Because Competition topics change with each cycle, more funders in the community would mean more continuity for projects addressing past competition topics.

Address capacity issues with the Competition's implementation.

Implementing any of our recommendations to improve the Competition will require more time and resources, especially on the part of HASTAC staff. On top of this, each competition cycle grows more ambitious. DML 5 addresses multiple topics, essentially incorporating three competitions in one cycle. It is therefore critical to rethink the structure of Competition implementation to add internal capacity. The Foundation should consider bringing in additional individuals or organizations to support and assist HASTAC in the implementation of each competition cycle and to provide support to awardees during the award period. HASTAC already uses partners to support the content of the Competition (e.g., Sony, EA, Voto Latino), and conduct outreach to potential applicants. In the future, Foundation and HASTAC staff should consider partnering with others on other parts of implementation, including the mentorship component, building a community of practice, and documenting the Competition's successes.

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The DML Competition has introduced connected learning to a variety of audiences, and produced some important examples of the framework in action and its potential impact. If any of these recommendations were implemented, the DML Competition would be better positioned to deepen its impact and more powerfully advance connected learning.

Appendix A: Additional Information on Evaluation Data Collection

This appendix provides a closer look into the informants interviewed for the evaluation. The document lists the names and affiliations of informants we spoke with as part of this evaluation project. This appendix also includes survey response numbers by informant category and competition cycle.

INTERVIEW INFORMANTS

Foundation Staff & Competition Implementers

- Connie Yowell, Director of Education, MacArthur Foundation
- Julia Stasch, Interim President, MacArthur Foundation
- Chantell Johnson, Director of Evaluation, MacArthur Foundation
- David Goldberg, Co-Founder, HASTAC
- Cathy Davidson, Co-Founder, HASTAC
- Sheryl Grant, Director of Social Networking, HASTAC
- Mandy Dailey, Director of Administration, HASTAC

Field Leaders & Judges

- Nichole Pinkard, Founder, Digital Youth Network
- Diana Rhoten, Board Member, Institute of Play
- John Seely Brown, Former MacArthur Foundation Trustee
- Mark Surman, Executive Director, Mozilla Foundation
- Carina Wong, Deputy Director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- Louis Gomez, Professor, University of California at Los Angeles, DML 1 Competition Judge
- Craig Watkins, Professor, University of Texas at Austin, DML 2 Competition Judge
- Sam Dyson, Director, Hive Chicago Learning Network, DML 3 Competition Judge
- Mimi Ito, Professor, University of California at Irvine, DML 4 Competition Judge

Awardees

DML 1

- Antero Garcia and Greg Niemeyer, Black Cloud: Environmental Studies Gaming
- Benjamin Robison, Fractor: Act on Facts
- Howard Rheingold, Social Media Virtual Classroom
- Jerry Smith, Self-Advocacy Online
- Katherine Kinzer, YouthActionNet Marketplace
- Leba Haber Rubinoff, Mobile Movement
- Todd Presner, HyperCities

DML 2

- Anthony Pecorella, Cellcraft: Exploring the Cell Through Computer Games
- Daniel Poynter, Digital Democracy Contest
- Derek Lomas, Playpower: Radically Affordable Computer-Aided Learning
- Jared Lamenzo, WildLab
- Jeff Kupperman, DevInfo GameWorks: Changing the World One Game at a Time

DML 3

- Ann McDonald, NO2NOx: Better Routes to Better Lives
- Elisabeth Soep, Mobile Action Lab: Programming Apps for Collaborative Community Change
- Jennifer Biedler, Mission:Evolution
- Joshua Hughes, Discovery Pier: A Whole New Spin on Science and Engineering
- Mark Matthews, LittleBigChemistryLab

DML 4

- Alex Molina, Pathways for Lifelong Learning
- Gregory Daigle, EarthWorks
- Joanna Normoyle, The SA&FS Learner Driven Badges Project
- Marc Lesser, MOUSE Wins! Badge-based Achievement System for National Youth Technology Leadership
- Richard Mills, Exploring the motivational effects of badges – who do badges appeal to and why?
- Richard Wyles, Moodle as Issuer, Mahara as Displayer
- Rick Bates, Intel and Society for Science and the Public Badges

SURVEY RESPONSES

Competition Cycle	Awardees	Finalists
DML 1	17	13
DML 2	17	22
DML 3	16	12
DML 4	30	29
Competition not identified	0	2
Total	80	78
Final Response Rate	95%	44%

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