



LET'S PLAY AMERICA

Virtual Play Day Handbook

A Digital Resource In Support of Communities
**PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING THEIR
OWN VIRTUAL PLAY DAY EVENTS**

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Foreword from Let's Play America



With the sudden isolation of the entire population due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all aspects of daily life were affected. Our concern with access to play was heightened by the drastic societal change. Our attention was drawn to it quite acutely as we considered whether or not to hold our 7th Annual Adult Play Day at the beginning of June, 2020. We were certainly not the only ones to face the decision to call off a long anticipated public gathering, and with activities swiftly moving online, we grappled with the choice to shift with the winds of change or try to weather the storm by postponing all programming. We decided not to move the Adult Play Day online.

Luckily, we had a dream project on the backburner to keep us busy, one that would result in a marketable product for Let's Play America to offer our collaborators in creating opportunities for community-free play. We worked diligently on our Play Day Handbook throughout the spring and early summer, and released it as a digital resource in July of 2020. By that point it was clear that life would continue to be impacted by the pandemic for some months to come and we turned our attention to the upcoming 12th Annual Play Day on September 26, 2020. We decided to embrace the opportunity to try something new and moved the event online, our first ever virtual Play Day. We followed this online event with another one on February 14, 2021.

In this handbook we will share the process, strategies, and results we experienced when organizing, promoting, and executing Play Days online. We will share what worked, what did not, and what we will change about our process for our next online event.



Pat Rumbaugh, "The Play Lady"
Executive Director
Let's Play America

Christine Alexander
Executive Assistant
Let's Play America

A Brief History of Let's Play America & Play Days

How We Got Started

Let's Play America was originally founded as a play committee by Pat Rumbaugh in 2009, in the City of Takoma Park. After achieving their goal of making Takoma Park a certified Playful City USA by Kaboom!, the committee continued to organize free play events for city residents. In 2014, the play committee became Let's Play America and earned 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

For more on the history of Let's Play America, and shared knowledge from our 12+ year tradition of organizing free community play events, please see our original Play Day Handbook. The original handbook provides guidance on establishing a network of playmates, building a Play Committee, and key considerations for scheduling and organizing a Play Day. The Play Day Handbook is an excellent foundational resource document for anyone wishing to organize free play opportunities for their community.



DIGITAL RESOURCE: Let's Play America's original Play Day Handbook can be found [online through our website](#).

"In a society where play has become a "four-letter word"—even for children, who are now expected to be productive as preschoolers!—Pat Rumbaugh and her Let's Play America are fighting back! The Play Day Handbook offers all the details you need to bring play—in whatever form it means to you—to your schools, your community, your children, and your life. Pat knows that play is essential to life, and she's given us both permission and the playbook to embrace it!"

RAE PICA, EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSULTANT & AUTHOR



DIGITAL RESOURCE: View footage from past Play Days in Takoma Park, MD on the [Let's Play America YouTube channel](#).

Shifting to Virtual Play Days

"When the going gets tough the tough start playing – or should. Play is nature's reset button."

LENORE SKENAZY,
PRESIDENT,
LET GROW



"Overall it was a great experience, and it was great you could pull it off virtually."

TEEN VOLUNTEER,
SEPTEMBER 2020
VIRTUAL PLAY DAY

When lockdowns began in the United States in March of 2020, Let's Play America joined organizations all over the country in asking the question: how do we move forward with programming during this pandemic? It was clear to us that play was essential to managing the stress, anxiety, and isolation that people were experiencing as a result of necessary lockdown measures. We knew we needed to find a way to continue our mission of supporting communities in bringing free play to their members, now more than ever.

Accepting the transition to online programming was half the battle. Our Play Days over the past 12 years have all been in person, with hundreds of volunteers and participants involved in our three annual play events. These events featured play forms that ranged from boardgames to dance, live music to dress ups, and more. How would an online play event compare to an in-person event? Could an online play event be active? Could it be interactive? Would it even be playful?

By September, we were ready to find out. Let's Play America organized and hosted our first ever virtual Play Day on September 26, 2020. Our second virtual Play Day took place on February 14, 2021. In the spirit of our mission of increasing free play opportunities for all through partnering with organizations and communities to create their own playful events, we surveyed volunteers and participants, gathered experiences, and are sharing what we have learned so that others can create their own virtual Play Days for their communities. With this resource, we hope to spread knowledge and enthusiasm for free community play at a time it is needed the most.

As limitations on the size of group gatherings remain in place, and comfort levels with group events recovers from the shock of the pandemic, online environments will continue to be essential gathering places for communities and organizations of all kinds. Let's Play America is committed to prioritizing access to play for all in whatever way people gather. Play not only relieves us from the anxiety, stress, and sense of isolation that accompany the current divisive elements of modern public life, it can also heal these divisions as people come together to share in the common joy of creative expression, physical movement, and the undertaking of challenges in a low-stakes environment.

In this handbook, we share the process of organizing and running a virtual Play Day, including key decisions and considerations every organizer should be aware of. We welcome your feedback on this resource and are available for consultation as you embark on your own process of creating a Play Day online.

CONTACT LET'S PLAY AMERICA: info@letsplayamerica.org

“It was refreshing to put away my grown-up self for a while and give myself over to play.”

ROBIN PLOOF, PHD
PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR
ONLINE M.ED. IN EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATION,
CHAMPLAIN COLLEGE



An organizer's view of the September 2020 Virtual Play Day.

Who is This Handbook for?

Anyone who serves or is a member of a community of any kind can use this resource. Whether you are in a position of leadership or not, you can have a positive impact on your community by organizing a virtual Play Day. By planning a variety of activities to appeal to a range of interests, you can bring together members of your community in an interactive way, in the safety of an online setting.

Maybe you are a teacher, or a university administrator or faculty member. Perhaps you work at a business whose employees have been working from home, or you attend a place of worship whose activities have been restricted to Zoom and other similar platforms. Planning a Play Day at this time can be fun and rewarding. Let your imagination take you to all of the ways your community can play together online. Whether playing online trivia games, sharing jokes, riddles, and puns, participating in a Zumba class, or creating sock puppets, there are so many ways to play. Let play be the reason your community gathers online, and see the benefits for yourself. Shared joy, connection, and fun are waiting for you in a virtual Play Day!