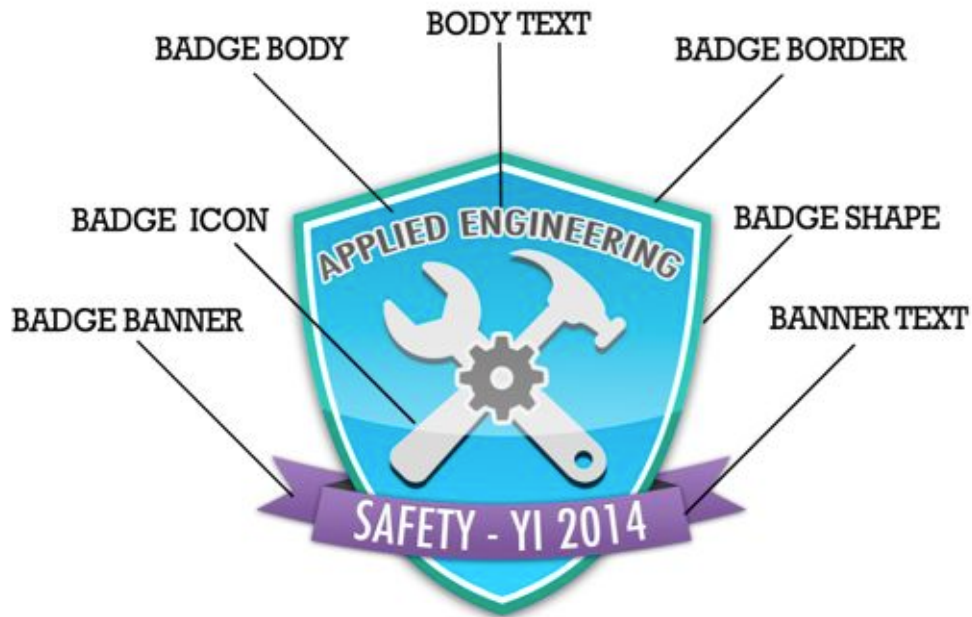




Briefing Paper: Steps in Implementing a Digital Badge System in Expanded Learning Youth Programs

By Sam Piha



Acknowledgements

The use of digital badges within youth programs, particularly those that are publicly funded and school-based, is very new. What we know about implementing the awarding of badges is also new and changing as we write this. We want to acknowledge those pioneers that have entered this area and thank them for the time they spent talking with our team about what they have learned. Below is a list of individuals we wish to thank:

Carla Casilli (Badge Alliance)
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Heather Weiss (Harvard Family Research Project)

It is important to note that each of the above people added to our knowledge. However, the recommendations cited in this paper are those from Temescal Associates and will be revised as we learn more.



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There are several steps that program leaders and staff members must go through to implementing a digital badge system. These are discussed below and a checklist is provided that cites each of the steps.

Ask “why”.

The first step is to provide an orientation to staff to ensure that everyone has a common understanding of what digital badges are and the benefits that they provide those who receive them.

Secondly, the program leaders (including the program partners – school representatives, key activity subcontractors, etc.) should meet to discuss the reasons to introduce digital badges. Is it to acknowledge learning, motivate recipients, or other reasons? Because mounting a digital badge system takes a fair amount of work, it is important that everyone knows and agrees why a digital badge system would benefit the program.

Determine which activities will be included in the first round of digital badges.

Program leaders do not need to award digital badges for every program activity or club. It is useful to start with those activities or clubs that have clear learning goals and products to demonstrate acquired skills. For instance, robotic clubs and community service clubs are very concrete in terms of their learning and demonstration. It is good to select activities and clubs, which have culminating activities that are very easy to document. Digital badges can also be awarded solely based on attendance, where there is no final product or demonstration required. A good example would be a training or outing.

Determine the specifics: Learning goals, criteria, and evidence.

It is important that the badge issuer think through the learning goals (knowledge and skills that will be acquired). The badge issuer also needs to cite the criteria that must be met in order for a participant to earn the badge, and evidence of meeting that criteria. For instance, a “course” in digital movie making might have learning goals that read: 1) Learn how to operate a digital video camera and 2) learn how to download the data and produce a short film using iMovie editing software. *Criteria* might be completion of the course and the production of a video. *Evidence* could be the actual video that was created. In the appendices, we have attached a blank rubric that programs can use to cite the learning goals, criteria, and evidence for each badge and a rubric we have filled out as a sample.

It is important to note that there may be badges that represent the completion of a series of activities with the last badge representing a “cumulative” badge. For example, a youth might take a series of courses on using a video camera, creating a soundtrack, creating a title page and credits and other text, and the use of more advanced editing software. There could be a badge entitled “Filmmaking Master” that is awarded with the completion of the entire filmmaking series of courses.

Determine how the badges will be awarded and managed.

Program leaders must decide who and how the digital badges will be awarded and managed. There are several web-based software programs that have been developed especially for this. Factors that should be considered are yearly cost, ease of use, whether recipients can “push” their badge to their digital backpack, and compliance with local, state, and federal laws. Also, program leaders should inquire whether or not they are able to brand the page using their own logo. Lastly, it is good to know whether all of the recipient names are visible to anyone who enters the site. In our work with programs, we recommend the ForAllRubrics package. In the appendix, we include a partial list of organizations that offer badging software.

Theoretically, a program could manage their badge system using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet but we have only worked with programs that have opted for a web-based software system.

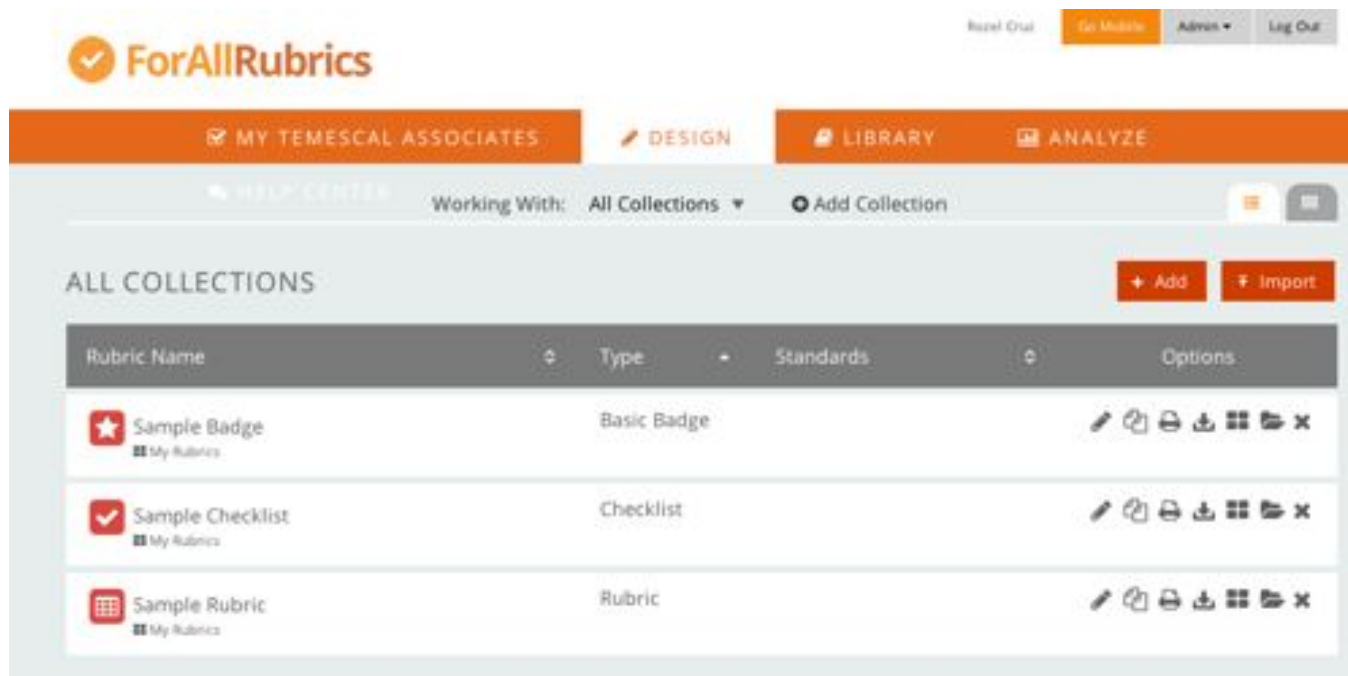


Figure 1: ForAllRubrics badge management software

Determine who will create and how the badges will be created.

The badges can be made by program staff, program youth, or an outside organization. They can be designed using online badge making software. The upside of this approach is the ease of use and low-cost. However, the images tend to be generic and they do not allow for much customization. In the appendix we offer several web-based applications that can be used to create digital badges.

Badges can also be made using graphic design software such as PhotoShop. If you have the skills and the time, badges can be made that are much more distinctive and can include the program logo to ensure that your badges are unique. Thus far, in our assistance to programs mounting a digital badge system, we have custom designed all of the badges for our clients.

Determine the badge design: Image, shape, color, etc.

In designing badges, one can choose from a number of traditional badge shapes (shield, circle, banner, square, pentagon, etc.). In addition to shape, there are a number of other elements that need to be determined. Below is a digital badge component map that we created which identifies terms for different elements of a badge.

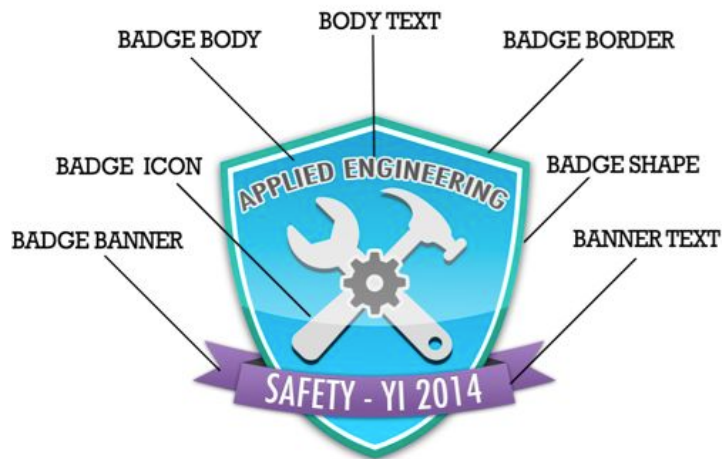


Figure 2: Digital badge component map created by Temescal Associates

Programs can choose a shape and other badge elements to represent a family of badges in a category of activities such as “digital arts”. While the shape and the colors are the same, several badges in that “family” can be differentiated with other images or text on a banner that drapes across the badge, see example below.



Figure 3: Digital badge images created by Temescal Associates

If the course is one in a series, you can place a number representing which level was completed. A checkmark can represent a “Gold” badge that represents participation in the entire series. Below are a few examples.



Figure 4: Digital badge images created by Temescal Associates

Deliver the digital badge to the recipient using a “digital backpack”.

In order for people to receive their badges, they must create a Mozilla “digital backpack”. We have created directions for creating a backpack, which can be found at: _____. Temescal Associates also provides training for creating a digital backpack.

How recipients can make use of the digital badges

Once badge recipients have “pushed” their earned digital badges into their backpack, they can share their badges with others by using social media (Facebook, etc.) or placing on their résumés or applications for higher education. They can also share the metadata baked into the badge that cites who issued the badge and what was done to earn it.

CHECKLLIST

- **Ask “why”.**
- **Determine which activities will be included in the first round of digital badges.**
- **Determine the specifics: Learning goals, criteria, and evidence.**
- **Determine how the badges will be awarded and managed.**
- **Determine who will create and how the badges will be created.**
- **Determine the badge design: Image, shape, color, etc.**
- **Deliver the digital badge to the recipient using a “digital backpack”.**
- **How recipients can make use of the digital badges.**

About the Learning in Afterschool & Summer (LIAS) Project

The Learning in Afterschool & Summer Project (LIAS) is an effort by afterschool advocates and leaders to unify the field of expanded learning programs (ELPs) and focus the movement on promoting young people's learning.

The idea of promoting young people's learning and broader development after the classroom day is not new. What is new is the vast number of children who are now able to access ELPs. We believe that afterschool programming is a unique institution that must offer more than safe havens or homework help after school. If ELPs are to achieve their true potential, they must become known as important places of learning – learning that complements, but is distinguished from, the learning that happens at school or home.

The goal of the Learning in Afterschool & Summer project is to position ELPs as places for learning. The project will draw upon an extensive and growing body of research and be informed by the national discussions on education reform and youth development. Achieving this goal will require that we assist programs in improving their practices that promote learning among young people. This includes the incorporation of specific learning principles, the intentional design of learning objectives for its clubs, and approaches in program delivery.

About Temescal Associates

Temescal Associates is a private consulting firm and will serve as the primary consultant for this project. Temescal is dedicated to building the capacity of leaders and organizations in education and youth development who are serious about improving the lives of young people. We serve our clients by offering gifted and highly experienced consultants who excel at eliciting the internal knowledge and wisdom of those they work with while introducing new knowledge and strategies that can transform the day-to-day practices that lead to improved youth outcomes.