

Enlightened Self-Interest

Enlightened Self-Interest is a game about non-profit boards. When you play the game with people involved in university/community partnerships, at least one member of the board should be a university representative, but the game can certainly be played with any mix of member characters. It can also be played for longer and shorter times or with more or less advanced rules (see below). Purposes of the game include:

- to model the complex dynamics of non-profit boards for people considering board membership, cooperating with a non-profit, or currently serving on a board.
- to give players experience with rhetorical challenges in situations where argument and problem solving can really matter.
- to dramatize the way that well-meaning people of different backgrounds can easily misunderstand one another, mistake hesitance or deliberation for recalcitrance, and grow frustrated with the slow pace of collective decision making.
- to encourage play within serious situations.

Start with the most basic rules of the game, but experiment with variations suggested here or developed in the course of further play.

Basic Rules

1. Before you begin play, decide in the group these fundamental characteristics of the non-profit organization you represent. The fundamentals need not be described in more than a few words and numbers—they can be elaborated in the course of play.
 - a. Demographics of the community served
 - b. Geographical location for the organization
 - c. Current operating budget
 - d. Number of employees
 - e. Service or function of the organization
2. One player must volunteer to be the Executive Director (ED). All other players must choose a card from the Board pile. Take a few minutes for the players to fill out brief notes expanding the biography or back story of their characters. Feel free to make the roles known to all, but the biographies are best shared as play unfolds. As noted above, if some or all of the players are associated with a university or college, the group may choose to designate one or more university members of the board.
3. Choose a card from the Situation pile. The ED is the only player who may change, alter, or add to the details of the situation but may be convinced to do

so by members of the board. No additional funding can be sought once the budget has been set in the initial phase of the game (see **Advanced Rules** for variations), except in cases where a financial crisis has emerged.

4. Play begins with the reading of the Situation. The game ends when a plan for resolution has been voted on and passed by the board. If the ED does not agree to implement the plan, the board may vote to terminate the ED and choose one of their own members as an interim, or they may decide to go back for further deliberations.
5. Once play has ended, debrief with the group about the results. You may want to answer questions such as:
 - a. What divisions or underlying tensions developed in the discussion and along what lines do the conflicts form?
 - b. How do people without particular expertise in a situation nonetheless contribute to the resolution of the problem?
 - c. In what way is money a limiting factor and in what way is funding not the major issue?
 - d. How does the vision or mission of the organization shape its actions under stressful conditions?
 - e. What do board members need to know to be more effective in their jobs.
 - f. How can rhetorical training contribute to the efficacy of a board?

Advanced Rules and Variations

Playing with a board and dice. Once the fundamentals of the organization have been established, the group may decide to draw a board to play on. Rules may vary according to the specific goals of players in the game. Players may, for example, draw a board that represents a neighborhood, city, or rural site. Each area of the board might be associated with numbers of people that the organization serves, and the game involves a goal of accumulating a certain number of enrolled people. On the other hand, the game board might represent various external factors or funders with which the board and organization interact. In this case the goal might be to increase the budget of the organization by proposing a grant once the game marker is moved to the appropriate funder's space. Roll of the dice would determine whether or not the grant is accepted (determine the funder's percentage of acceptances and then vary the yes/no results, e.g. a highly selective funder might give out a large grant, but only doubles totaling over 6 will win the grant).

Write your own situations. The Situations pile in this edition is purposely limited. Frequent players and facilitating teachers should come up with their own challenges to *Enlightened Self Interest*.

Add new board characters. You may want to invent more eccentric, problematic, or visionary board members to enliven your game.

Decide on alternate winning endpoints. The basic game puts an emphasis on resolution as the endpoint, and above we mention organization size or budget expansion as possible metrics for success. The board should decide on its own game endpoint at the outset.

Bernard or Bernardine. A corporate lawyer who has long wanted to give back to the community, B has never before worked closely with a non-profit.

Charles or Charlene. Recently named the director of a local Boys and Girls Club, C has a passion for helping others but not much experience with management.

Robin. A social activist and performance poet, R comes from a wealthy family and graduated from college four years ago. R is beginning to think about how to translate grassroots work into more established projects.

Michelle or Michael. A long time resident of the neighborhood in which the organization is located, M has seen the non-profit grow and wants to keep the focus on neighborhood needs.

Dixon or Delores. A leader in the local community of an ethnic minority, D has formed an organization to protect the group's interests in the region.

Jamie. A former librarian with a passion for serving individuals, J spent twenty-five years at a public library that closed for lack of funds and forced J into retirement five years ago.

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Sean. A young associate professor who just earned tenure at a nearby college, S has a specialty related to the mission of the organization and thinks college students could benefit from more work in the community.

Kim. A local businessperson with a stake in keeping crime low and the reputation of the neighborhood high, K wonders about the value of government support for education at any level but believes that police protection is crucial.

Sylvester or Sylvia. An administrator in the local college residence halls, S has a strong interest in the mission of this organization and long experience working with people across a variety of ages.

Kyle or Kaylie. A middle-aged accountant, K was asked by the boss to represent their firm for pro-bono work because K has a reputation among colleagues for being kind-hearted.

Able. A skilled political communications officer, A is currently overseeing public relations for a state senator in this community. The senator both wants to have a hand in the success of the organization and a clearer sense of voter sentiment on issues of the day.

Chris. A pastor at the local church, C feels that spiritual as well as material needs must be met in the community. Social justice is important to C, but services must not violate religious freedoms.

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Our organization has been approached by another, larger organization with a similar mission to merge some or all functions. Our budget is precarious but not immediately threatened. Still, organization apparently offers more financial stability. Their headquarters is in a different part of the county, but they would ask the ED to stay on as manager of this site.

A large foundation has offered to work with us on a multi-year funding arrangement that would considerably ease the financial concerns of the organization, but they want us to develop a better way to track the success of our services.

Someone broke into the office and took the laptop the ED uses to write grants and keep track of the organization's business. The organization has a backup on server, but not all files were saved. Indications were that the robbers were either regular patrons of the organization or were given information by regulars. Some personal information about the board was contained on this laptop.

A sector of the population we serve has recently sent an angry letter complaining that they have been excluded from the decision-making process and don't feel they are adequately served by the organization.

This week the main waste pipe of the building broke. Waste accumulated in the basement, and we had to shut down operation. The organization has a small emergency fund, but these repairs will wipe out all reserves and make it impossible to hold the annual fund-raising event that contributes significantly to the operating budget for the next year.

A group of women asked the ED if they could contribute more directly to the success of the organization. They do not want charity, they said. They want to help the organization grow, even if they are not paid for their time. Many of these women could certainly use paid work, but they say money is not their primary motivation.

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