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Prepared:	TechChariot	2024/06/08				
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1. **Overview**

This standard defines a comprehensive procurement method for maps used in an Age of Empires II Competition. Materials selected through this process are expected to provide a fair and predictable outcome for map suppliers.

2. **No Campaigning**

Unless otherwise stated in subsequent sections of this document, advocating for/against maps is forbidden. Creators who violate this rule will be regarded as disruptive to the processes of this specification and disqualified.

3. **Review Authority**

If the competition has a "Map Procurement Focal" or equivalent, then that person will either inspect maps personally or appoint team-members to help, depending on the number of maps and the capabilities of inspectors. If no such role is specified, then the tournament host is responsible for map quality.

4. **Evaluation Phases**

Maps submitted for use in the competition shall be filtered according to the four phases outlined in order through the following sections:

4.A. Component Screening

4.A.1. Purpose

This phase ensures that the map fulfills its intended role assigned by the parent competition. (E. G. confirming that a "Petra" map actually looks like "Petra" for a "desert-themed" competition, OR confirming that a "SUPER Arena" map gives players starting fortified walls, as intended by its parent tournament, etc.)

4.A.2. Required Skills

Any impartial reviewer with access to the map and its component specification is capable of performing this evaluation. No knowledge of competitive or skilled game-play is required.

4.A.3. Time-frame

If a creator misinterprets the direction of the map from the tournament representative's intentions, then it would be easy to waste a large amount of time and effort achieving features and details that are not needed. Therefore, this review should occur first and early-on, and should be more of a "guidance" phase, to maximize efficiency.

4.A.4. Applicability

This phase is only performed on maps with associated component specifications to define their outline and/or general direction. It is notably skipped if all maps for a competition are sourced through contest, where more freedom is allowed.

4.B. General Screening

4.B.1. Purpose

This phase ensures that the map meets all general requirements of its parent competition. This could be anything from excluding certain types of units, stipulating maximum map filesize or storage location, or even declaring that each map in the tournament should have a photon-man scout, etc. In effect, if all maps in the tournament should have some common feature --or lack of feature-- then it is covered by this section.

4.B.2. Required Skills

Any impartial reviewer with access to the map and its general specifications is capable of performing this evaluation. No knowledge of competitive or skilled game-play is required.

4.B.3. Time-frame

This review checks to make sure that creators have addressed the challenge of map design without introducing solutions that also entail a known detriment to competitive Age of Empires II. It should be performed after details of the design are solidified (thus after Component Screening), but before technical screening.

4.B.4. Applicability

This phase is performed on maps with associated general specifications, including contest submissions. Most tournaments have at least a basic "do" and "do not" list, which counts as a general specification.

4.C. Technical Screening

4.C.1. Purpose

This phase ensures that the map is "Competitive", meeting obligations to players and viewers for entertainment value.

4.C.2. Required Skills

Review in this phase demands specialized knowledge of competitive Age of Empires II game-play, allowing recognition of strategic options and potential exploits on proposed maps (or lack thereof). This complex analysis should be performed by highly skilled players using a pre-defined worksheet and/or method to ensure consistency and transparency across diverse maps and reviewers.

4.C.3. Time-frame

This phase is the final challenge of prospective competition maps because:
- Those capable of performing it are rare and coveted for participation in other competitions. Therefore, iteration on this phase should be minimized/eliminated by first ensuring compliance with all other requirements, which could be checked by anyone. For example if a competition does not allow maps larger than 2 MB, then asking a pro-player to perform a "Competitivity" evaluation on a 10 MB map would be a waste of time because it could not be included, even if the pro-player

evaluated favorably.
- This evaluation is focused on the philosophy of a map, and the big picture for how all of the small details go together to produce a variety of strategic choices. Presenting an unfinished or flawed map might distract the skilled player from the limited scope of their review, biasing the process/result.
- During development, a map may be revised many times, but even the smallest of changes can have a large impact on whether or not it is competitive. Performing this evaluation last decreases the risk of a map changing after the receiving the "Competitivity" stamp of approval.
- Skilled players are more likely to be influential; many stream and have social-media followings, or are friends with those who do. This phase is performed last because map contest submissions are a reflection of their parent competition – only finished maps should be exhibited for best possible optics.

4.C.4. Applicability

This phase should be performed on maps intended for play in a locked, two-team/player configuration. Competitions outside of this configuration ("Diplomacy", "Free-for-All", etc.), may not include a Competitivity analysis for the following reasons:
- The complexity of diplomatic choices (as in who to attack/ally, etc.) may compensate for a lack of strategic military options.
- The unfairness of diplomatic situations (E. G. getting 2v1ed) is generally large when compared with civilization unfairness inherent to the map (E. G. Mongols on "BOAR_NOTHING").

4.D. Artistic Evaluation

4.D.1. Purpose

The other development phases described in this specification are *exclusionary*: Maps are inspected against the requirements of their parent competition, and any that fail to comply are rejected. The remaining maps would be acceptable for use in the parent competition, but there may be too many to include all. The Artistic Evaluation is a means of selecting the best maps from those that remain, making this phase an *inclusionary* "Map Contest".

4.D.2. Required Skills

Any impartial reviewer with access to the map or screenshots is capable of performing this evaluation. No knowledge of competitive or skilled game-play is required.

4.D.3. Required Body

This phase involves selecting maps based on subjective properties. It is therefore recommended to account for the opinions of the largest body possible.

4.D.4. Time-frame

This phase goes last. Only maps that satisfy the requirements of their parent competition should be platformed through mass media.

4.D.5. Categories

The parent competition may exclude some of the below categories, or include others not listed. The following are ordered in recommended weight/importance:

- **Thematic Appropriateness** – If a theme is specified for the event, then this category is a reflection of how well the map represents it. If no theme is specified, then this category is a scoring for how well the map fits its own nomenclature.
- **Originality** – How much the map explores uncharted territory, introducing new configurations and concepts not seen in other random maps.
- **Fun Factor** – How much fun the map looks like it would be to play!
- **Visual Appeal/Readability** – How "good" the map looks. Tasteful application of terrain layering, blending, and eye-candy objects makes this map look like it could be somewhere in the real world, or similar fantasy world. The beautification choices do not come at the expense of map readability; there isn't *so* much stuff going on that players would have difficulty seeing resources or units/buildings. NOTE: Readability is *not* a philosophical question of which strategies are best for the map.

4.D.6. Campaigning

Positive campaigning is encouraged to sway public opinion during this phase, and also build excitement for the event. The following are published for each map that survives to this phase:

- Original name
- Description written by creator
- Screenshots of important locations
- Identity of the creator

5. **Inspection**

This section explains how maps should be evaluated during each phase of section 4 (Evaluation Phases). except the Artistic Evaluation.

5.A. Compliance Matrix

The Compliance Matrix is a table or spreadsheet that lists each map requirement in its rows as a sort of checklist, and the columns are used to indicate the status of that requirement, usually at a particular point in time. In this way the development of a map may be tracked.

5.B. Dispositions

The status of the map at the time of its evaluation may be broken down into seven categories:

5.B.1. Complaint

Map currently meets the requirement in its entirety.

5.B.2. Compliance Expected

Map is expected to become compliant with the requirement within the allowed time.

5.B.3. Exception Granted

Map does not comply with the requirement, but its creator made a compelling argument for accepting the non-conformity that the tournament representative agreed to.

5.B.4. Exception Requested

Map does not comply with the requirement, but its creator made an argument for accepting the non-conformity.

5.B.5. Exception Rejected

Map does not comply with the requirement. Its creator made an argument for accepting the non-conformity that the tournament representative could not allow.

5.B.6. Non-Compliant

Map does not comply with the requirement. The requirement has either not yet been addressed OR the creator did not request exception.

5.B.7. Not-Applicable

The map creator made a compelling argument that the requirement does not apply to the map, which was accepted by the tournament representative.

5.C. Review Obligation

Upon submission, each map creator includes a copy of the Compliance Matrix reporting the status (see § 5.B) of each requirement. All categories are available minus "Exception Granted" and "Exception Rejected". A tournament representative will then review each checklist item with all disposition categories available minus "Exception Requested".

6. **Progression**

A map is authorized to move forward in the procurement process if all checklist items of the compliance matrix are dispositioned by the tournament representative in any combination of: "Complaint", "Compliance Expected", "Exception Granted", or "Not-Applicable". The presence of even a single "Exception Rejected" or "Non-Compliant" requirement is cause for the map to be declined for further processing.

7. **Anonymity**

During phases 4.A (Component Screening), 4.B (General Screening), 4.C (Technical Screening), reviewers should protect or keep secret details of map development, including: the name of creator(s), number of maps under development by specific creators or their submission status, disposition (accepted/rejected), or any associated details. The map procurement process should encourage creators to take risks to try new things, sparing potential humiliation from failing to meet basic competition requirements, in a public manner.

Note that some tournaments with component specifications may publish a list of creators associated with each map if the process has a long-lead time with multiple inspections and reworks (as required), in effect structured to guarantee their use.

8. **Submission Method**

In keeping with the anonymity recommendations of §7, maps should be submitted through private message to the "Map Procurement Focal".

9. **Conclusion**

This standard describes best practices for sourcing maps to use in an Age of Empires II competition. The phases of its process are ordered in a way that optimizes the resources of a custom-map community, while mitigating risk of damage/embarrassment to the competition or map creator. It is a highly recommended component to any map procurement specification.

Revision	Description	Change Document	Date (YYYY-MM-DD)
X1	Advanced release for community review/feedback.	N/A	2024/06/08
X2	Incorporated feedback from Zetnus	N/A	2024/06/08