



game materials  
&  
directions



# Materials

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## **One @Stake role deck**

The sheets of cards are designed to be printed double-sided. Heavyweight cardstock is recommended. You'll need scissors or a paper cutter to cut up the cards in the deck.

## **One writing utensil per player**

## **One piece of scratch paper per player**

## **One printed copy of "rules handout"**

## **About 50 beans**

Beans are the game tokens that may be substituted by poker chips, coins, or other similar materials.

# Why @Stake?

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Deliberation is core to the democratic process. But the ideal deliberative process, wherein a plurality of equal stakeholding players exchange ideas in an equitable, meaningful, and rational way, is far from reality. Even with the best of intentions, open, constructive, and empathetic dialogue aimed toward the sharing of ideas and experiencing mutual understanding and agreement is difficult to achieve. With these aspirations and challenges in mind, @Stake was developed to enhance deliberation in real-world processes. @Stake relies on rapid-fire ideation, discussions facilitated through role-playing, experimentation with ideas, and collaboration among a diversity of stakeholders. In small groups of 4-5, players compete to convince their fellow players of the efficacy of solutions as told from the perspective of assigned characters. Not only do players try to get their solutions chosen by the round's decider, they also need to balance personal agendas with those of the other players' roles within the game. @Stake allows players to experiment with strategies of deliberation, practice at consideration of others' views in a playful context before entering into real-world processes. Visit the @Stake website to learn more and watch a tutorial video.

# Objective

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In @Stake, players take on the role of stakeholders with a private agenda on a public issue up for debate. Players take turns proposing solutions to issues, and arguing their points of view to the table's Decider. Putting forward an overall persuasive argument for a common good solution is key, but successfully including elements from your hidden agenda is worth bonus points. The player with the most points at the end of the game wins.

## Before the game

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All participants spend some time collectively brainstorming at least 10 issues that matter to their community. These issues should be stated as a question that needs an answer.

Issues can be anything from infrastructure, inter-agency collaboration, socio-economic challenges, or policy to more informal issues such as civic pride, youth engagement, PR campaigns, or social events -- anything, really. The most important thing is to frame the issue in terms of question that drives actionable solutions. For example:



"How can we give inner-city youth better access to job training?"



"How can we improve high-speed Internet service in underserved neighborhoods?"



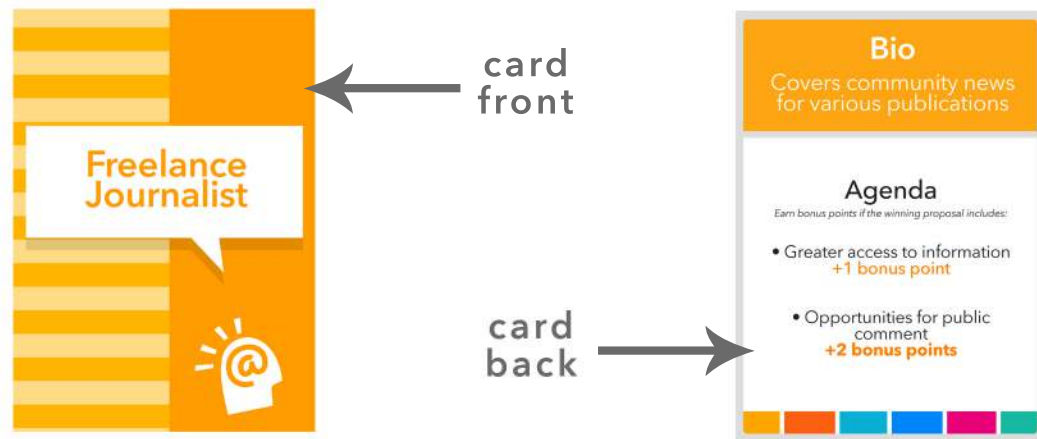
"What can be done about the state's growing drug abuse problem?"

All of the Issues should be collected and written down on cards or Post-It notes and saved for use in the game.

# Game Setup

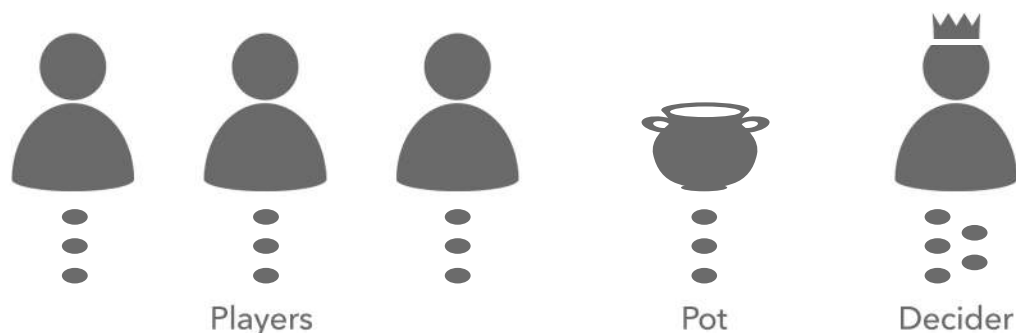
Give each player scratch paper, a pencil or pen, and 3 score tokens (such as beans (plus 2 bonus tokens to the first Decider). One player must volunteer to be the first "Decider." If no player volunteers, elect one. Everyone else is dealt a Role card at random.

The front of the card (Role Title) is public. The back of the card, which has the player's hidden agenda and bio, is private - only the player that holds the role card can read it.



Place three tokens in the center of the table as the first "pot." Players will be arguing to win the pot.

The Decider takes charge of the timer and selects the first issue for round one.



# Playing the Game

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## Step 1: Introduction

The round begins by each player introducing themselves in character, sharing the name of the role and the character bio (NOT their agenda) on the back of the card.



60  
seconds

## Step 2: Brainstorm

Next, the Decider announces the issue for the first round. The Decider then sets a timer for one minute. The other players must use that time to consider a proposal to help solve the issue. Players may make use of their note sheets to organize their thoughts.



60  
seconds

## Step 3: Pitch

After the minute is over, the Decider should ask players for their proposals. Starting with the player to the Decider's left, and moving clockwise around the table, each player has one minute to identify themselves and their stakeholder role (bio) to the group and pitch their proposal to the Decider. It's the Decider's responsibility to monitor the time. If a player wants more time to make their proposal, he or she may pay one token to the pot for an extra 30 seconds.



90  
seconds

## Step 4: Deliberate

After each player has had the opportunity to pitch their proposal, the Decider leads a follow-up discussion with the group. Players (including the Decider) may ask one another for details about each proposal, offer counter arguments, or ask for changes to the proposals. The timer is set for 90 seconds, by the end of which the Decider must arrive at a winning proposal. It is the Decider's responsibility to monitor the time using a stopwatch, egg timer, or cell phone timer. Again, players may pay an extra token to the pot to gain an extra 30 seconds to answer questions, ask questions of their opponents, or rebut opposition. It may be strategically advantageous for players to suggest improvements to one another's plans, or ask clarifying questions based on their agendas (see Scoring Agenda Bonus Points below).



## Step 5: The Decision

At the end of time for deliberation, the Decider announces a winning proposal. The Decider may take 10-15 seconds (roughly, untimed) if needed to come to a conclusion and share his or her reasoning. The player whose proposal is selected wins all the tokens in the pot, plus a number of bonus tokens based on his agenda (see Scoring Agenda Bonus Points below). All other players score points for their agendas items, if and only if the winning proposal explicitly satisfied elements of their agenda (see Scoring Agenda Bonus Points below).

# Scoring Agenda Points

The player who wins the round earns the pot, but all players may score bonus points based on their personal agendas. Starting with the winning player, players reveal their agendas to the table. For each item on the agenda that the Decider agrees was satisfied by the winning proposal, that player earns the bonus points listed on the card.





# Scoring Example

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Vladimir's proposal for the government to provide vouchers for students to commute to university is selected as the winner for the round. Vladimir wins the pot, and then reveals his agenda.

## **Vladimir's Agenda:**

Increases access to education / training +1 Point

Creates job opportunities for youth outside the city +1 Point

Make it easier to commute from country to city +2 Points

The Decider might say that his proposal satisfied the first and the third point, but not the second, and award Vladimir 3 bonus points.

## **Next, Catherine reveals her agenda.**

Includes infrastructure development +1 Point

Includes new construction +1 Point

Must be funded by the government +2 Points

The Decider rules that since Vladimir's proposal is government funded, she receives 2 bonus points, but the other two agenda items are not relevant.

Note that if Catherine had spent one of her tokens during the Q&A period to ask Vladimir to include infrastructure development in his proposal (such as public transit improvements to go along with the vouchers), she may have scored all of her agenda points.



# Ending The Game

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After each round, the player who won the pot becomes the new Decider (or passes the buck) and the steps above are repeated. (Please note, only the Decider in the first round receives bonus tokens at the start of the game.) After four rounds, the player with the most tokens wins.

## **Optional Rule: Passing the Buck**

The player whose proposal won the pot now becomes the new Decider for the next round. If for any reason that player does not wish to be the new Decider, he or she may “pass the buck” to avoid the duty. To do this, he or she passes one chip to the player on their left. That player then becomes the Decider.

The new Decider also has the option to pass the buck, but to do so, he or she must pass two tokens to the player on their left. That player must pass three tokens the left to pass the buck, then the next player must pass four, and so on until a player elects to become the Decider and claim all tokens passed in this way.

# With Larger Groups

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If you are playing @Stake with a larger group, such as in a workshop, use the following variant:

- 1) Create multiple tables of 4 players (5 if necessary).
- 2) Each table needs a full set of game components.
- 3) Games take place across the multiple tables simultaneously.
- 4) Select one moderator for the entire room to run the game for everybody. The moderator will take charge of the timer and announce the question for each round.
- 5) Play otherwise continues as described above, with the game ending once all tables have played four rounds.

# Gameplay Advice

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Remind players that they **pay a chip into the pot for an extra 30 seconds** to pitch or during the discussion portion, if they want extended time to make their case.



Remind players that they can **ask each other questions** during the discussion round, and that they should use that time to make their personal agenda points more strongly.



Urge Deciders to **make decisions quickly** once time is up.



Stress that all players **will win bonus points** if the winning proposal includes their agenda points, even if their proposal does not win.



Stress that the winner from the previous round **becomes the new Decider** for the next round.



Although some tables may finish earlier than others, make sure that **all tables start the new round(s) at the same time.**