

# A GAME OF POWERFUL COMMUNITY TRADE-OFFS

## Facilitator Guide

“We are one community ecosystem. Government, organizations, and businesses are departments within that system—and our success is interdependent.”

### PURPOSE OF THE GAME

This game is a decision simulator, not a trivia exercise. It helps participants experience how community issues are interconnected and how upstream decisions create cascading impacts across housing, education, health, workforce, economic vitality, and more.

The goal is **alignment**, not consensus. By the end of the game, participants should:

- See community challenges as part of a single system.
- Identify which issues are upstream vs. downstream.
- Understand that every investment creates a tradeoff.
- Leave with shared ownership of the priorities identified (ideally) – or a clear understanding of the disconnectedness in alignment.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Community game board (with major community or service elements).
- Game cards (stats, observations, and perceptions).
- Tables of 3-4 participants from a cross-section of government, organizations, business, or departments.

### HOW BUILD THE GAME CARDS

- Create 10-12 cards in each category, with a random sampling representing real conditions in your community or service area.
  - Stat card possible sources: Census/ACS data, school district data, employer or workforce data, hospital or public health data, housing studies
  - Perception and observation card possible sources: perception studies, surveys, Heart & Soul feedback, lived experiences

## HOW TO PLAY (20-30 MINUTES)

### Step 1: Choose a Card

At each table, participants select one card a time.

### Step 2: Identify Downstream Impacts

Downstream refers to the symptoms, consequences, and responses after a problem has already occurred.

As a group, discuss:

- Which elements does this effect?
- Where do we see the symptoms showing up?

### Step 3: Identify the Upstream Leverage Point

Upstream refers to the conditions, systems, and root causes that create outcomes.

Ask:

- What is the most upstream cause driving this condition?
- If we addressed *that*, what downstream issues might improve?

### Step 4: Place the Card

Place the card on the board where it is rooted, not where the pain shows up. Reminder to participants: *Stats are abstract, but they represent real people... neighbors, children, businesses.*

### Step 5: Card Placement

Determine the top two elements with the most cards placed.

## FACILITATOR PROMPTS TO USE DURING PLAY

### Optional 'Wild Cards'

Facilitator may choose to distribute one or two to each team to spark deeper thinking.

- What is the long-term outcome of the individuals impacted?
- If this trend continues for 10 years, what changes?
- Who pays for this and how?
- What system absorbs the cost when this goes unaddressed?
- Is this a cause or a symptom?
- What happens if we don't intervene here?
- What other element moves if this one improves?

## DEBRIEF (20-30 MINUTES)

### Group Reflection Questions:

- What surprised you?
- Where did alignment naturally emerge?
- Do you think differently about community resource trade-offs?
- Where do we usually try to address the issue?
- How would you change how we do business as a community knowing what you know now?
- If you owned the community, where would you resource?
- If the overarching issue was addressed, how would that change future resourcing to other issues?

### Reflection & Carry Forward

#### Individual Reflection

- One insight that stuck.
- One assumption challenged.
- One action I'll take.
- One partnership opportunity.
- What decisions will I make differently now?
- How will I share this and/or engage others?

#### What Comes Next

This game is not the outcome, it is the alignment mechanism.

The priorities identified should feed directly into:

- Collaborative alignment
- Strategic targets
- Dashboards
- Capital stacking strategies
- Accountability structures
- A stronger community