



# THE ALLOCATION – CASE STUDY



# SUMMARY

- ▶ The Allocation is a social resource allocation game focused on negotiation, deception, and survival under scarcity.
  - ▶ Players compete and cooperate to secure limited water resources.
  - ▶ Audience: college-age groups, social deduction & strategy players.
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# GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

- ▶ Core Concept: Resource allocation and social negotiation game.
  - ▶ Message: Power, fairness, and manipulation in scarce systems.
  - ▶ Mechanics:
    - ▶ - Hidden negotiation
    - ▶ - Central resource pool (water)
    - ▶ - Round-based distribution
  - ▶ Rules: One Allocator distributes water each round while others negotiate and react.
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- Early prototype lacked incentive to lie

- Added scoring mechanics to increase tension

- Increased minimum player count after playtests

- Balanced Allocator power to avoid predictable outcomes

- Improved pacing after small-group testing

# ITERATIVE DESIGN PROCESS

# GAME MECHANICS

- ▶ - Central Allocator distributes limited water
- ▶ - Players negotiate, bluff, and form alliances
- ▶ - Scarcity drives conflict
- ▶ - Scoring rewards survival + influence
- ▶ - Repeated rounds build escalating tension





Goal: Survive and maximize influence over allocations.



Strategies:



- Persuasion of Allocator



- Alliances and deception



Victory: Highest score

# PLAYER GOALS & WINNING



1. Reveal water supply



2. Allocator distributes resources



3. Negotiation phase



4. Resolution & reveal



5. Scoring update



6. Repeat rounds

# GAMEPLAY SEQUENCE

Several white diagonal lines of varying lengths and thicknesses, extending from the bottom right towards the top right of the slide.

- ▶ - Point Tokens
- ▶ - Water Tokens
- ▶ - Player Role Cards
- ▶ - Water Need Cards
- ▶ - Allocator Role Cards

# GAME BOARD & COMPONENTS





# RULEBOOK

## The Allocation Rules

### PLAYERS

#### 4–8 Players

### OBJECTIVE

Earn the most points by convincing the Allocator to give you enough water to survive each round.

Players may:

- Tell the truth
- Bluff or exaggerate their needs
- Make alliances
- Bribe, negotiate, guilt-trip, persuade, or manipulate the Allocator

The challenge is balancing honesty, strategy, and risk. Asking for too little may leave you without enough water. Asking for too much may make you look suspicious or wasteful.

### COMPONENTS

- Water Tokens
- Water Need Cards
- Player Role Cards
- Allocator Role Cards
- Point Tokens / Score Tracker

### GAME SETUP

Each player receives:

- 1 hidden Water Need Card
- 1 hidden Role Card

Place all Water Tokens in a pile in the middle of the table.

The first Allocator is the person who most recently drank water.

### WATER NEED CARDS

Each round, players secretly receive a Water Need amount ranging from:

#### 3–8 Water

This number represents how much water they need to score well that round.

Players keep this amount secret unless they choose to reveal or lie about it during negotiation.

### ROUND STRUCTURE

Each game lasts for 5 Rounds.

During each round, one new player becomes the Allocator.

The Allocator does NOT try to score points that round. Instead, they control the water supply and decide how water is distributed among players.

The Allocator role rotates clockwise every round.

#### 1. THE ALLOCATOR DRAWS A ROLE CARD

At the start of the round, the Allocator draws 1 Allocator Role Card.

The Allocator MUST follow the [rule](#) or behavior on that card for the entire round.

Examples:

- Favor players who flatter you
- Punish interrupting
- Reward the funniest argument
- Distrust confident players
- Cause chaos intentionally

The Allocator may not reveal the card unless they want to or otherwise specified

## 2. SET THE WATER SUPPLY

The Allocator secretly decides how much total water is available for the round.

The amount should create tension and difficult choices.

### Recommended Water Supply Formula

Take:

- The number of players receiving water
- Multiply by 4 or 5

### Example:

Players	Recommended Water Range
4 Players	16–22 Water
5 Players	20–27 Water
6 Players	24–32 Water
7 Players	28–37 Water
8 Players	32–42 Water

The Allocator may:

- Be generous
- Create scarcity
- Create abundance
- Manipulate the table strategically

The total water supply is announced to all players before negotiation begins.

## 3. NEGOTIATION PHASE (2–3 MINUTES)

All players negotiate with the Allocator at the same time.

Players may:

- Tell the truth
- Lie about their needs
- Exaggerate
- Make promises
- Form alliances
- Bribe the Allocator
- Convince others to support them
- Betray deals
- Accuse others of lying

There are no restrictions on discussion unless stated by an Allocator Role Card.

The goal is to convince the Allocator to give you enough water without appearing too greedy.

### EXAMPLE NEGOTIATION

#### Example Round

- Sarah secretly needs **7 Water**
- Jake secretly needs **3 Water**
- Mia secretly needs **5 Water**
- The Allocator announces there are **18 Water Tokens** available

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Each player secretly knows how much water they actually need.

During negotiation:

- One player claims they are desperate for water, even though they only need 3.

- Another player tries to expose them for lying.
- One player offers the Allocator a future alliance in exchange for extra water.
- Another player stays quiet to appear trustworthy.
- The Allocator listens, questions players, and follows their Allocator Prompt Card while deciding who to trust.

After discussion, the Allocator distributes the water however they choose. The Allocator decides who they trust, who seems desperate, who seems manipulative, and who deserves water based on both the discussion and their Allocator Role Card.

Players then reveal their true Water Need Cards and score points based on how close their allocation was to what they actually needed.

#### 4. THE ALLOCATION

After negotiation ends, the Allocator distributes all available Water Tokens among the players however they choose.

The Allocator may:

- Split water evenly
- Favor certain players
- Punish players
- Reward persuasion
- Create chaos
- Bluff about fairness

The Allocator does not need to explain their choices.

#### 5. RESOLUTION & SCORING

All players reveal their true Water Need Cards.

Players score points based on how efficiently they received water.

##### SCORING SYSTEM

Result	Outcome	Points
Less than needed	Failed	0 Points
Exact amount received	Perfect Allocation	4 Points
1–2 Over needed	Successful Bluff / Efficient Cushion	3 Points
3–4 Over needed	Wasteful	1 Point
5+ Over needed	Extremely Wasteful	0 Points



#### WINNING THE GAME

After 5 Rounds:

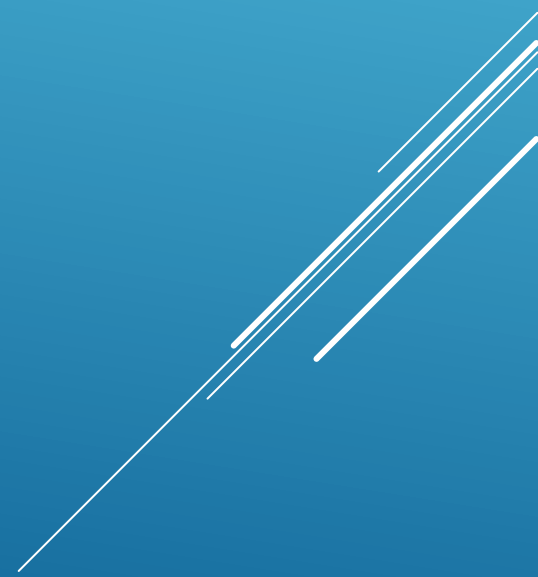
- Total all points earned
- The player with the highest score wins

In the event of a tie:

Tied players enter one final mini-round.

- The Allocator reveals an intentionally low amount of water
- Tied players have 60 seconds to negotiate
- The Allocator distributes the water
- Highest scoring tied player wins

# PLAYTESTING NOTES

- ▶ - Small groups made gameplay too fast
  - ▶ - Social deception mechanics were well received
  - ▶ - Incentive structure needed adjustment
  - ▶ - Increasing player count improved dynamics
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- ▶ - Balancing fairness vs manipulation
- ▶ - Preventing predictable Allocator behavior
- ▶ - Maintaining engagement for non-Allocator players
- ▶ - Fine-tuning scoring incentives

## CHALLENGES & DECISIONS

- ▶ Social tension is driven by incentives more than rules.
- ▶ Small mechanical changes had large behavioral impact.
- ▶ Future work: expand hidden roles and environmental consequences.

## REFLECTIONS

