

## *The State Budget Crisis*

### **Goals**

Increased comfort with numbers and the state budgeting process;

Understanding of how budgets are an expression of our values;

Increased confidence their own programs to defend them;

And greater understanding of the tension and pressure under legislators (empathy).

### **How to Lead**

1. Create crests in new groups. Get into three's with people they do not know. Have them draw a household crest that represents their group. 3 minutes.

TRAINER NOTE: This creates some group buy-in. Have people share their group crests with each other.

2. Read aloud the Rules. (Have written up. PREP: You have 6 minutes to review your previous years budget (don't write yet) There are 3 rounds. Each round represents one year – each lasts 6 minutes. Write down your budget on the yellow sheet. TRAINER NOTE: You do not have to count to make sure people pay what they say they are paying. If people cheat, it adds a realistic twist to the state budget process – save that for the debrief. Each person must keep a record of their group's actions

TRAINER NOTE: That's so when they debrief, every person has a record of what they did. Notice your own internal state.

3. Review Year 0's expenses. Handout the budget sheets. Six minutes to discuss and review the budget.

4. Start Year 1 and continue. Announce they have six minutes to decide how much they will pay for this round. They may need a full 6 minutes. For each year write up the following changes:  
Year 1 Year 2 Year 3

INCOME CHANGES- Wages increase by \$1,000 All other incomes stay the same

EXPENSE CHANGES- Medical costs are up \$500 due to increased prices due recession  
Electricity is more expensive by \$500 All other expenses are the same

INCOME CHANGES- Wage goes down \$2,000 (to \$23,000 this year) Your rich uncle gives \$0 this year, citing the recession

EXPENSE CHANGES- Kid's college expenses are up \$1,000 due to the recession Medical costs go up \$500 more All other expenses are the same

INCOME CHANGES- Wage goes down \$2,000 (to \$21,000 this year) Your rich uncle gives \$0 this year, citing the recession

EXPENSE CHANGES- Food costs go up \$500 Nursing home costs go up by \$500

5. End the game and debrief. REFLECT on what happened in the activity Get them in new groups of three to share: how was that activity for you? How'd it feel? Get a small sample of

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feelings and immediate reactions (not strategy – you’ll get there). You want people to be aware of their internal state, because that’s how many legislators feel, too – having access to that place creates empathy.

TRAINER NOTES: Make sure despair and hopelessness gets acknowledged – that can’t simmer in this room and doubtless one group feels completely sunk. Be light and positive, allowing people to freely express and let go of their emotions.

Get a list of what strategies they used – first in small groups, then in large groups. This is a list of what people do, for example:

How did you handle the challenges as they came?

How did you feel when you cut your mom’s nursing home?

What tensions did you have in your group?

What parts were easy to figure out?

What was more challenging?

How did you internally handle the challenge?

As appropriate, underline that people were making value-based judgments. That’s one reason groups may have different strategies. Try to move towards

GENERALIZE about more than just this game

What relationship does this have to the state budgeting process?

What are some similarities?

How did you react, and how is that like legislators’ reactions?

In short, make a list of: Lessons to draw out from this related to state budget

TRAINER NOTES: Be delighted when people show empathy and express “aha” moments. As people start to fully make the connection, some people will return to talking about the game. It’s emotional. It’s exciting. It’s despairing. Be flexible and encourage the group to think about how to use this to think about the state budget, until most people are on that same page.

Now, APPLY by handing out the simplified PA state budget numbers. Don’t give this out until people have had an adequate debrief to make meaning of it. Give people some time to walk through it – what’s similar. What’s different about budgeting for the state?

TRAINER NOTES ON MODELS: A model airplane is a simplified version of the real thing. You wouldn’t want to fly in it, but it gives you an idea of what it’s like and can even be useful for certain tests. An architect often builds a model of a building before the real thing goes up with all its complications. Of course no model is complete. This is a model of how the state budget works, to help us face reality with more clarity and perspective.

TRAINER NOTES ON STYLE OF FACILITATION: You have two distinct roles. The first half of the game your job is that of “game master” or running the exercise. Be light, upbeat and very positive. At the same time, it’s not your exercise – don’t wade into coaching or advice-giving. Give people the space for their own experience. During this time enforce time with rigor. In terms of roles, think of yourself like an upbeat accountant – you give people facts, you

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encourage people to do the “right” thing. You also look for any places people are looking at getting more revenue (I want another job, we plead with our rich uncle, etc etc). Whether in the plot or not, feel free to roll with what people come up with – it’s a game that’s great if people break out of the “cutting” mentality and also into seeking other funds!