

Budget Hold'em for Districts Facilitator's Guide



Budget Hold'em for Districts is a game that has evolved out of Education Resource Strategies' (ERS) experience over the past decade working with urban districts across the country on strategic resource allocation. It is designed to help school districts reshape their budgeting process into a long-term visioning exercise around how to best serve their students.

Through this interactive exercise, players create a “hand” of investment and savings options that reach student achievement goals while meeting a specific budget target. Card options extend beyond typical operational efficiencies for how to organize and invest resources. There are no right or wrong answers. What matters is what is right for your district.

Instructions and Time Required

Below are directions for a one-hour version of the game using the mini-deck of 25 cards. This format provides insight into high-level priorities and would be great to use with a diverse group of stakeholders with limited time. Longer versions of *Budget Hold'em for Districts* include the full deck of 60 cards, which can incorporate greater discussion around priorities. The full version has been used to guide budgeting processes in districts across the country.

Playing <i>Budget Hold'em for Districts</i>	
5 min.	<p>Introduce the Game</p> <p>The goal is to create a “hand” of investment and savings options that meets the district’s budget target, while maximizing the way resources are used to improve student performance.</p>
5 min.	<p>Identify District Priorities</p> <p>Share 3-5 instructional priorities for teams to invest in and/or protect from budget cuts.</p>
5 min.	<p>Small Group: Assign Roles and Review Rules</p> <p>Divide players into teams of no more than five to six. Have teams assign roles of task master, who keeps the team on time, and spokesperson, who summarizes team choices for the larger group.</p>
20 min.	<p>Small Group: Review the Cards</p> <p>The groups will now quickly review the District X context and the cards. We suggest reviewing the cards by category (i.e., review all class size cards together, then all the special education cards) then determine whether each card falls into the “yes,” “no,” or “maybe” pile.</p>

20 min.	<p>Small Group: Finalize your Hand</p> <p>The groups will now tally up the cards in the “yes” pile and revise their hand. What % in “new investments” did they identify? Are there ones that are higher priority? What % in savings did they identify? Are there more challenging savings opportunities in the “no” pile that they want to consider, to balance the budget? It’s important to select investments before considering savings. They’ve identified opportunities to invest, they must now find savings to meet the target budget reduction.</p>
10 min.	<p>Full Group: Debrief and Discuss</p> <p>Reconvene to give groups the opportunity to discuss their experience and share some of the difficult trade-offs they made, and why.</p> <p>Potential Discussion Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the biggest insights and/or surprises in your choices • Were you able to make some transformative changes, or did you feel compelled to add back items cut in recent years? If the latter, what impact will this have on student performance over the long run? • What particular card options and restructuring priorities appear to have the most leverage? • What options were most controversial? Why? • Which options might be worth pursuing in your district?
Total Time: 1 hour	

Feedback Welcome

We want to know what you think of Hold'em! Let us know if it was useful for your district, or if you have suggestions for improvement: contact@erstrategies.org. Learn about our district work: erstrategies.org.