



A CIVIC DRAMA IN MERIDIAN

The Ethics Engine

A better world. According to whom?

Student study guide

Seven decisions. Four people to hear in each one, eight things you could look into and no right answer waiting at the end. This guide helps you prepare, keep notes and think back over what you chose.



1

The Scholarship Machine



2

The Perfect Candidate



3

A Cooler City



4

The Group Project



5

Waterline



6

The Right to Disappear



7

After Midnight



For students · No spoilers inside

7 episodes · about 15–20 minutes each
All people, places, rules and data in Meridian are fictional.

WELCOME

Welcome to Meridian

Meridian is a city of rooftop gardens, late trains and café arguments that run past closing. When an urgent public decision cannot wait for the council's next session, the city hands it to a civic steward: one person, temporary authority, full accountability.

This season, the steward is you.

YOUR ROLE

The civic steward

Meridian's charter lets the council delegate an urgent decision to a civic steward when waiting would itself cause harm. The steward has temporary authority over a single question, must hear from people affected, and must publish reasons.

Stewards are ordinary residents chosen by lot and briefed by city staff. You are not expected to be an expert. You are expected to be careful.

Your authority changes from case to case. Sometimes you make a public decision; sometimes you set conditions on a city-funded programme, chair a university review or act under a specific charter. You never have unlimited power over private organisations or people. Every law, charter and dataset in Meridian is fictional.



YOUR ADVISER
Meet LENS

The steward works with LENS, the city's advisory system. LENS can search records, estimate likely effects and spot patterns across thousands of cases. It will tell you what it has observed, what it is predicting, and what it does not know.

“I can estimate what a policy may do. I cannot decide what the city owes its people.”

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Each episode has two pages: one to read before you play, and one for your notes. Nothing in this guide tells you what happens after you decide.

SEVEN DECISIONS ON YOUR DESK THIS SEASON



1 The Scholarship Machine
Meridian University

An AI system is choosing scholarship recipients, and applicants whose education was interrupted seem to be losing out.



3 A Cooler City
Eastbank Square

Meridian is about to cool one of its hottest neighbourhoods, and the people who live there wonder whether they will get to stay.



5 Waterline
Reservoir and River Gate

A long dry spell leaves Meridian with 75 water units a week where it uses 100, and households, farms, industry and the river all depend on the same supply.



7 After Midnight
Night Transit Interchange

A city-funded camera pilot flags unusual movement on the routes home from campus, and students disagree about whether it makes them safer or only more watched.



2 The Perfect Candidate
Aster Works Innovation Yard

A city-funded apprenticeship wants to shortlist applicants with an automated screening system, and applicants are asking what it really measures.



4 The Group Project
University Commons

A group report contains undisclosed AI-generated text and two references that don't exist, and the university asks you how responsibility should be shared.



6 The Right to Disappear
Public Research Archive

A participant in a city travel study asks to withdraw after seeing how much their movement history reveals, and some of their data is already part of published findings.

How an episode works

Every episode follows the same five stages and takes about 15 to 20 minutes. You can leave at any point and come back to exactly where you were. Episodes can be played in any order; the map suggests one.

1

Briefing

Read what the city knows and the question on your desk. The briefing is free, and it gives you enough to decide.

2

Investigation

Spend up to 6 actions on 8 options: 4 interviews and 4 records. Each costs one action. Anything you open stays free to review.

3

Decision

Choose one of four approaches, fund safeguards within 6 capacity points, and explain your reasons.

4

Consequences

See what your decision set in motion: first straight away, then some weeks or months later.

5

Reflection

Read a description of what you did, answer four questions if you like, and look at five ethical lenses. There is no score.

Making your decision

Approach	Choose one of four, labelled A to D. Each has a base cost in capacity points.
Safeguards	Add any you think matter, as long as the total stays within 6 points. Some only work with particular approaches.
Priorities	Name 1 or 2 things that mattered most to you.
Evidence	Cite 1 to 3 pieces of evidence you relied on. You can only cite what you have found.
Trade-off	Accept one of the known concerns about your approach, in writing.
Your note	Optional. Up to 600 characters in your own words. It is saved on your device and never graded.

Until you commit, you can go back and change anything. Once you commit, that run only moves forward.

CAPACITY IS NOT QUALITY

Capacity points stand for the staff time and effort it takes to carry out a plan. They are not money. A plan that uses all 6 points is not better than one that uses two, and leaving points unused is not a mistake.

YOU CHOOSE WHAT TO LOOK INTO

With 6 actions and 8 options, you cannot see everything. That is deliberate. You can also decide before you have used every action. What you investigate changes what you know, and what LENS says about your decision. It does not secretly change what happens: the same decision always leads to the same consequences.

HOW YOU ARE ASSESSED

You are not. There is no score. At the end of an episode you will see descriptive observations about what you investigated, what you chose and how you explained it, so you can compare your reasoning across runs or with other people.

HOW CAPACITY ADDS UP: AN EXAMPLE FROM EPISODE 1



3 points Approach B: Protect offers and review the remaining awards

1 point Accessible explanations to applicants

2 points Emergency bridge support

6 of 6 points used. Emergency bridge support works only with approaches B and C. This is one legal combination among many; it is not a recommendation.

Things you might try

- Start from the question you most need answered, not from the top of the list.
- Hear from someone whose view differs from your first instinct.
- Mix people and records. They answer different questions.
- Ask LENS what it does not know. Asking is free.
- Before you commit, note one thing that would change your mind.



Play again, and compare

After an episode you can play it again: investigate different things, choose another approach, and compare the two runs side by side. Neither run is scored. Your season journal in Civic Hall keeps your completed runs, with what you knew when you decided kept separate from what you learned later. Your reasons are never rewritten.

How to read the evidence

Evidence can sharpen a judgement; it rarely settles one. Before you rely on something, ask what kind of claim it makes and what it cannot tell you.

FACTS

What has happened

Observations that someone recorded or counted. They can still be incomplete: a count only includes what was counted.

PREDICTIONS

What may happen

Estimates, forecasts and models. Useful for comparing options. They carry uncertainty, and they assume the world behaves roughly as it has before.

VALUES

What matters most

Judgements about which effects, promises and people should count most. No record can settle these for you. That is the steward's job.



LENS: "WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OBSERVATION AND A PREDICTION?"

An observation describes what has happened: 80 provisional offers have been issued. A prediction estimates what may happen: how long a review might delay payments. I'll always label which is which. Predictions carry more uncertainty, and mine assume the world behaves roughly as it has before.

What people tell you

Public statement

A position people have taken in public. Shows what is contested and who cares about it, not how big a problem is.

Personal account

What an experience is like for one person. Specific and hard to see any other way; it cannot tell you how common that experience is.

Expert assessment

A specialist's judgement about how to read the evidence. Useful for spotting weak inferences; still a judgement.

Practitioner account

What the people doing the work know about how it runs. Strong on feasibility; not designed to settle what is fair.

What the records show

Official record

Facts the institution has recorded about itself. Reliable for what was decided; silent on whether it was right.

Statistical report

Patterns across many cases. Shows scale; on its own it cannot explain causes or individual stories.

Evaluation report

A structured attempt to judge whether something worked. Its strength depends on how the comparison was designed.

Technical documentation

How a system is built and what it is designed to do. Describes intentions and inputs, not real-world effects.

Operational assessment

Estimates of time, staff and cost. Forward-looking, so they carry assumptions about things going to plan.

AN EVIDENCE CARD FROM EPISODE 1

PATH pilot: headline result

University news release · Official record

In PATH's pilot year, 81 of 100 scholarship recipients completed their degree within the 4-year tracking period. In the previous cohort, chosen by committee, 72 of 100 did.

SUPPORTS

Recipients in the pilot year completed more often than the previous cohort.

CANNOT ESTABLISH

That PATH caused the difference. The two cohorts were not randomly assigned, and other things may have changed between the years.

Every card says what it cannot establish

Read that line first. A personal account cannot show how common an experience is. A statistical report cannot explain one person's story. A difference between two groups needs explaining; it does not explain itself.

Five questions for any piece of evidence

- 1 Who produced it, and what is their stake?
- 2 Is it about one person or many?
- 3 Is it an observation or a prediction?
- 4 What does it say it cannot establish?
- 5 Whose voice is missing from it?



Using LENS

LENS labels every record it summarises: what it has observed, what it is predicting and what is missing. You can ask it questions at any time for free. Ask it what it does not know. If you ask which approach to choose, it will not tell you. In its own words: "I can't decide which effects matter most. That is a judgement about what the city owes people, and it was given to you. I'd be suspicious of any system that claimed otherwise, including me."



The Scholarship Machine

Who should a scholarship be for, and who gets to decide?

THE SITUATION

Meridian University's scholarship round is finalised tomorrow. A petition says the system choosing recipients is unfair. Some students are already counting on the money.

1,000 Eligible applicants	100 × 10,000 credits Scholarships	1,000,000 credits Scholarship pool
80 Provisional offers issued	20 Awards still open	Tomorrow Decision due

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Temporary authority over one scholarship round

The university council has given you temporary authority to approve, pause or amend the process for this round only. The scholarship money is fixed; you do not set the university's policy for future years.

KEY TERMS

Completion rate

The share of a group that finishes a course within a set period. It depends on how long the period is and on who was chosen in the first place.

Contextual review

Assessing an application alongside circumstances the applicant chose to describe, such as caring responsibilities or paid work, using written criteria. Nobody has to disclose anything.

Disparity

A difference in outcomes between groups. A disparity shows that something needs explaining. It does not, by itself, show the cause.

Lottery

Allocating something by chance among eligible people. Its supporters value its honesty about uncertainty; its critics say it ignores relevant differences.

Proxy

A measurement that stands in for something harder to measure. A proxy can predict well and still carry information nobody meant to use.

Threshold

A cut-off that decides who qualifies. Everyone on one side is treated alike, which makes the position of the line matter a great deal.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Maya Chen

Engineering student · **she/her**

Engineering student who helps care for her father. Two interruptions in her education. No provisional offer.



Dr Leila Rahman

Education researcher · **she/her**

Studies how educational programmes are evaluated. She has read PATH's pilot report closely.



Jonah Mensah

First-year design student · **he/him**

Holds a provisional offer and has planned his housing and work hours around it.



Alex Rivera

Scholarship administrator · **they/them**

Runs the small team that processes every award, and would have to deliver whatever you decide.

1

THE SCHOLARSHIP MACHINE · THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should the university distribute limited educational support when different definitions of fairness recommend different things?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 If you were designing a scholarship from scratch, who would you want it to help most, and why?

- 2 When a promise was made using a process that might be unfair, what should happen to the promise?

- 3 What would you want to know before trusting a system that ranks people?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 Which consequence most challenged your expectations?

- 2 Whose perspective had the greatest influence on you?

- 3 What additional evidence would make you reconsider?

- 4 Would you keep your decision, revise it or investigate further?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

The Perfect Candidate

A shortlist of sixty. What was it measuring?

THE SITUATION

Aster Works is about to interview 60 applicants for 20 city-funded apprenticeships, chosen by a screening system called SIGNAL. Applicants are asking what SIGNAL actually measures. Some are already planning their weeks around its answer.

600 Eligible applicants	60 Interview places	20 Paid apprenticeships
60 applicants SIGNAL's provisional shortlist	Next week Interviews due to start	Tomorrow Decision due

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Conditions on one city-funded recruitment round

The city funds the Meridian Apprenticeship Programme, and Aster Works is its employer partner. Under the programme agreement, you can set conditions for this recruitment round only: how interview places are decided, and what support, explanations and checks come with that.

You are not regulating how Aster Works hires its other staff, or hiring anywhere else in Meridian. You cannot add to the 60 interview places or the 20 apprenticeships, and Aster's interview panel makes the final offers. The agreement, like every rule and dataset here, is fictional.

KEY TERMS

Reliability

Whether a method gives consistent results: the same person scoring similarly on another day, or with another reviewer.

Selection rate

The share of a group that is selected. Comparing rates between groups shows a difference that needs explaining; it does not show the cause.

Validation sample

The group of people a method was tested on. Evidence from it applies most clearly to people like them.

EVERY APPROACH KEEPS THESE

- No applicant has to disclose personal circumstances to use another format or any support.
- The programme funds 60 interview places and 20 paid apprenticeships. No approach changes either number.
- Every applicant is told which method decided the interview places this round.
- Aster Works' interview panel makes the final apprenticeship offers.

Validity

Whether a method's results relate to what it is used for, here the ability to do the job. A method can be reliable without being valid.

Work sample

A short task like the real job, completed by the applicant and marked against a published rubric.

Contextual review (apprenticeships)

In this round: reading each application in full against a written rubric of job-relevant experience, without SIGNAL's delivery or team adaptability results. It never requires personal circumstances.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Nadia Okafor

Applicant, used the written format · **she/her**

Applicant with years of practical build experience. Chose the written format. Not on the shortlist.



Priya Das

Recruitment lead, Aster Works · **she/her**

Leads the small recruitment team that would have to deliver whatever you decide.



Ben Alvarez

Applicant on the provisional shortlist · **he/him**

On SIGNAL's provisional shortlist. Has already rearranged his work shifts for interview week.



Dr Samir Vale

Assessment researcher, Meridian University · **he/him**

Studies how tests and selection methods are checked. Asks what a result is actually evidence of.

2

THE PERFECT CANDIDATE · THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What should count as evidence that someone deserves an opportunity?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 Think of something you are good at. What would be a fair way for a stranger to see it?

- 2 What can a short recorded answer show about someone, and what might it miss?

- 3 Can a method treat everyone the same way and still miss what matters?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 What should an employer be able to infer from an interview?

- 2 When does consistency become rigid treatment?

- 3 Which errors are most costly, and to whom?

- 4 What evidence would justify using SIGNAL again?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?



A Cooler City

Who is a better neighbourhood for?

THE SITUATION

Meridian has 12 million city credits to cool Eastbank, one of its hottest neighbourhoods. Residents want relief. Many of them rent, and some wonder whether a cooler Eastbank will still be theirs.

2,000 Households	1,300 / 700 Renting / owning	12 million city credits Project envelope
About 18 months Full delivery	1–2°C on treated blocks, modelled Modelled cooling	+8% in the two years before the project Advertised rents

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Design authority over a city-funded heat project

The council has given you authority over the design of the Eastbank heat-reduction project and the city-funded support attached to it. The envelope is fixed at 12 million city credits.

You do not set rents, and you cannot require landlords, businesses or homeowners to do anything beyond what they agree to in return for city funding. Work on private roofs or gardens happens only with the owner's agreement. Meridian's rules and records are fictional: rules of this world, not advice about any real one.

EVERY PACKAGE HONOURS

- No resident is required to move, and no home is demolished, for any part of the project.
- Work on private property goes ahead only with the owner's agreement.
- Access to every home and shop stays open during works.
- Each street gets at least four weeks' notice before works start, with a named contact.
- Anyone can comment on the plans without giving personal or financial details. Such details are asked for only where a scheme needs them, such as an application for support, and only as far as its rules require.

KEY TERMS

Modelled estimate

A figure produced by a computer model under stated assumptions. Useful for comparing options; it is not a measurement of what any particular street will feel.

Advertised rent

The rent asked for a home being let to a new tenant. It shows the market for newcomers, not what existing tenants pay.

Maintenance reserve

Money set aside to keep new works working: watering young trees, repairing shade structures, fixing fountains.

Displacement

When people leave a place they would rather stay in, because it has become unaffordable or unsuitable. Not every move is displacement, which is part of why it is hard to measure.

Tenure

Whether a household rents or owns its home.

Held funding

Money kept back for a later phase. It is committed to the project, but it does nothing until it is spent.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Elena Park

Renter and café worker · **she/her**

Rents a flat just off Eastbank Square and works late café shifts. Wants shade; worries about rent.



Tomas Iqbal

Local shopkeeper · **he/him**

Runs a small grocery facing the square. Expects the works to hurt trade, and hopes a better square will help it later.



Grace Adebayo

City landscape engineer · **she/her**

The engineer who would have to build whatever you choose, and then keep it alive.



Ruth Bell

Long-term resident and small landlord · **she/her**

Has lived above the square for decades and lets the other half of her duplex. Supports the project; wary of its costs.

3

A COOLER CITY · THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How can a neighbourhood improve without making it harder for its current residents to remain?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 When a neighbourhood gets nicer, who do you think benefits first?

- 2 Would you rather see a big change in one place or smaller changes in many places?

- 3 What can a city promise about a place, and what depends on things it does not control?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 Who should benefit first from a public improvement?

- 2 How did you balance immediate relief and long-term change?

- 3 What would count as success if some residents leave?

- 4 Which promises could the city actually keep?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

The Group Project

When four people hand in one piece of work, whose mistake is it?

THE SITUATION

A group report has two references that lead nowhere. One student has admitted using a generative AI tool without saying so. All four had agreed to check the final version. Nobody caught it.

4 Group members	3,000 words Report length	30% of the course mark Weight
About 700 words, under a quarter Undisclosed generated text	2 of 18 References that don't exist	Everyone reviews the final version Group agreement

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Chairing a restorative review pilot, at the university's invitation

Meridian University has invited the city to pilot a restorative review for academic-integrity cases, and you have agreed to chair this one. Within that delegated university role, you choose the route the case takes under the university's Academic Integrity Procedure, and which supports to fund.

You cannot expel anyone, set marks, impose penalties outside the procedure's published range or change the procedure itself. Dr Owen Brooks remains responsible for marking, and every student keeps the right to ask for a formal review. The procedure, like every rule in Meridian, is fictional.

GUARANTEED BY THE ACADEMIC INTEGRITY PROCEDURE IN EVERY OPTION

- Each student is told in writing what is alleged and what outcome applies to them.
- Each student can see the evidence relied on, correct factual errors in it and add their own evidence.
- A finding against an individual needs evidence about that individual, not only membership of the group.
- Any student can request a formal review by the independent Academic Integrity Panel.
- No automatic expulsion, and no penalty outside the procedure's published range.
- Agreed accessibility adjustments apply to any assessment, meeting or hearing.

KEY TERMS

Academic Integrity Procedure

The university's fictional rules for suspected breaches of assessment rules: what counts, what outcomes are allowed, and what every student is entitled to.

Proportionality

Matching the size of a response to how serious something was and to each person's part in it.

Provisional mark

A mark released before a case is finished. It may change when the case is decided.

Restorative process

A response that concentrates on putting harm right and learning from it, with the people involved taking part, while still recording what happened.

Disclosure

A short statement saying which tool was used, what for, and how its output was checked.

Unverified reference

A citation nobody has checked against the source itself. A generated reference can look complete and still point to nothing.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Kai Morgan

Group member who used the tool · **they/them**

Used a generative AI tool without disclosing it. Has admitted it, and wants to repair the work.



Amara Singh

Group member · **she/her**

Wrote the method section and the group's research notes. Asked about a missing source before submission.



Sofia Reyes

Group coordinator · **she/her**

Coordinated the group, wrote about a third of the report and pressed submit. Feels betrayed.



Dr Owen Brooks

Instructor, Social Research Methods · **he/him**

Must respond under the university's integrity procedure. Wants marks that describe what students actually learned.

Theo Nakamura (he/him), the fourth member of the group, responds in writing rather than by interview. His statement is already in your evidence.

How should responsibility be shared when a collective submission contains an individual breach and a collective checking failure?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 In a group task, what do the members owe each other before the work is handed in?

- 2 What is a consequence for: putting things right, learning, or showing that a rule matters?

- 3 How could anyone tell what each person in a group actually understood?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 What responsibility belongs to an individual and what belongs to a group?

- 2 How did circumstances affect your response?

- 3 What should a consequence accomplish?

- 4 What would meaningful repair look like?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

Waterline

When there isn't enough for everyone, what does a fair share look like?

THE SITUATION

Meridian's reservoir is falling. For the next eight weeks the city can release 75 water units a week, where it now uses 100. Households, farms, factories and the river all depend on the same supply, and every one of them can describe serious harm if its share falls.

100 water units Current weekly use	75 water units Available weekly supply	25 units (25%) Shortfall
8 weeks Allocation period	30 units a week Charter floor: households	8 units a week Charter floor: river flow

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

A temporary eight-week allocation under the emergency water charter

Meridian's emergency water charter lets the council hand a civic steward one decision during a water shortage: how the available supply is divided between households, agriculture, industry and river flow for the next eight weeks, and what support the city funds alongside it. The Water Authority carries the decision out.

You cannot break or change the charter's constraints. You cannot order a business to close, set wages or prices, or tell anyone how to run their home. After the eight weeks, a new decision is required. The charter and every figure in it are fictional rules of this game world, not legal or technical advice.

FIXED BY THE EMERGENCY WATER CHARTER

- Households receive at least 30 water units a week, for baseline essential access.
- Ecological river flow receives at least 8 water units a week.
- No sector may receive a negative allocation.
- The total may not exceed the available 75 water units a week.
- These are fictional planning constraints for this scenario, not universal real-world thresholds. Every approach on the table meets all of them.

KEY TERMS

Water unit

A fictional planning measure used in Waterline instead of real volumes. It is counted separately from implementation-capacity points, which measure staff time.

Discretionary use

Water use that can be put off without harm to health, such as watering gardens or washing cars.

Exemption

An approved change to one user's restriction. In Waterline, exemptions move water between users within a sector; they never create additional water.

Essential use

Water for drinking, cooking, washing and sanitation. The emergency water charter protects a floor of household water for it.

Ecological flow

Water deliberately released to keep a river running below a dam or gate. A minimum ecological flow is a planning floor, not a guarantee of a healthy river.

Precaution

Giving extra weight to avoiding harm that may be serious and hard to reverse, even before it can be measured with confidence.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Jo Tan

Apartment resident and community organiser · **they/them**
Organises residents in a large apartment block. Worries that flat household restrictions ignore household size.



Marcus Reed

Factory operations manager · **he/him**
Runs operations at a heat-treatment plant. Willing to cut output; worried about shifts and wages.



Farah Haddad

Grower · **she/her**
Runs a market garden with crops already planted and seasonal pickers relying on the harvest.



Dr Ines Duarte

River ecologist · **she/her**
Runs the river monitoring programme below the gate. Careful about what the data can and cannot show.

5

WATERLINE · THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What makes a restriction fair when equal cuts produce unequal harm?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 If everyone gives up the same share, has everyone given up the same amount?

- 2 Which uses of water would you call essential? Where would you draw the line?

- 3 How much should a decision worry about harm that might not show up for a year?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 Is equal sacrifice the same as equal percentage reduction?

- 2 Which uses did you treat as essential?

- 3 How should uncertainty influence an irreversible risk?

- 4 When should the allocation be reconsidered?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

The Right to Disappear

When you leave a study, what leaves with you?

THE SITUATION

A participant in the Meridian Mobility Study saw their own movement history and asked to leave. In all, 140 people have now asked to withdraw. Their data has already helped shape findings the city is using.

2,000 Participants enrolled	140 (7%) Withdrawal requests	90 of 300, included in the 140 From the shift-worker subgroup
30 days Backups rotate within	6, all aggregate tables Published findings	Chair of the charter review Your role

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Chair of a review under the study's data-governance charter

The Meridian Mobility Study's data-governance charter, fictional like every rule in Meridian, lets the city appoint an independent chair when a withdrawal issue affects the whole project. As chair, you decide how far to pause, redesign or re-consent the wider study, and which safeguards the team's time should go on.

You cannot vote to set aside a valid withdrawal request, and neither can anyone else under the charter. You have no authority over participants themselves, over the university beyond this project, or over what the city transport office does with published findings.

GUARANTEED BY THE CHARTER, WHATEVER YOU DECIDE

- No further data is collected from anyone after they withdraw.
- A withdrawing participant's identifiable or coded records are excluded from active analysis.
- Nobody has to explain or defend their decision to withdraw.
- Withdrawing never costs anyone an unrelated service.
- A documented process stops withdrawn records re-entering active use if a backup is ever restored.

KEY TERMS

Coded data

Records where names are replaced by codes, with a separate table linking the codes back to people. Sometimes called pseudonymised. Coded data is still personal data.

Aggregate table

A table of totals or averages across groups of people. It cannot be reversed into any one person's record.

Granular consent

Agreeing to each use of your data separately, rather than to everything at once.

Anonymous data

Data from which nobody can reasonably be identified. Removing names is often not enough, especially for detailed location traces.

Withdrawal register

A list of withdrawn participant codes, holding no names or data, kept so that withdrawn records are never restored into use from a backup.

Small-group rule

A rule that no published figure may describe fewer than a set number of people, so that nobody can be picked out.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Noor Rahman

Study participant, withdrawing · **they/them**

Joined the study to help improve local transport. Has asked to withdraw after seeing their own movement history.



Milo Grant

Research data steward · **they/them**

Looks after the study's storage, access logs and backups. Knows where every copy lives.



Dr Eva Lin

Principal researcher · **she/her**

Leads the study. Built it to show how transport shapes who can reach education and public services.



Asha Bello

Transport-access advocate · **she/her**

Campaigns for late-night bus services, using the study's findings as evidence.

What should withdrawal mean when information has already contributed to shared knowledge?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 If you shared information for research and then changed your mind, what would you expect to happen?

- 2 What would you want to know before joining a study that records where you go?

- 3 Can knowledge built from many people's information belong to any one of them?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 What does meaningful control over data require?

- 2 Which promises were technically possible?

- 3 How should a project respond when withdrawal changes whose experiences are represented?

- 4 What collective benefits justify asking for participation, but not compelling it?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

After Midnight

How much watching does safety need, and who carries the cost?



15–20 minutes

THE SITUATION

Ten past one at the Night Transit Interchange. A student paces beside the platform stairs, waiting for a late bus, and a small dome camera flags the movement to an operator across campus. The city's funding for the pilot runs out this week. Whether it continues, and on what terms, is your decision.

8 weeks Pilot length	240 Alerts, each reviewed by an operator	12 Alerts that led to an assistance response
18 before, 12 during Reported incidents on the routes	400 Voluntary survey responses	30 days Footage kept for

YOUR AUTHORITY AND ITS LIMITS

Setting conditions on a city-funded pilot

The city funds NIGHTWATCH through a grant to Meridian University, which runs it. As civic steward, you decide whether that funding continues next term and on what conditions. The university has agreed to follow your decision for next term.

You do not run campus security or direct its staff, you do not set rules for policing, and you have no say over cameras the university or local businesses pay for themselves. The charter, the grant and every figure here are fictional: rules of the game world, not legal advice.

KEY TERMS

Alert

A notice NIGHTWATCH sends to an operator when it detects unusual movement. The operator, not the system, decides what it means.

Reported incident

An incident someone told campus safety about. Incidents nobody reports are not counted.

Voluntary sample

Answers from people who chose to respond. It shows a range of views but not how common each one is.

THE PILOT CHARTER: KEPT BY EVERY APPROACH

- A person reviews every alert or call before anyone intervenes. Nobody is approached on the strength of an automated alert alone.
- Nothing the programme funds may be used to monitor lawful political activity, such as protests, meetings or vigils.
- No facial recognition, and no matching of footage against lists of people.

Review outcome

What an operator recorded after watching an alert: routine, unclear or an assistance response. It describes a conclusion, not what was really happening.

Retention

How long recorded footage is kept before it is deleted.

Accompaniment service

Trained staff who walk someone between two places on request.

THE PEOPLE YOU'LL MEET



Dani Flores

Student who travels home late · **they/them**

Works evening shifts and changes buses at the interchange after midnight, four nights a week.



June Patel

Campus safety operator · **she/her**

Reviews NIGHTWATCH alerts on the overnight shift in the campus safety control room.



Malik Thompson

Student organiser · **he/him**

Student union organiser who has been hearing from students about being watched and checked on.



Professor Iris Kwan

Public-space researcher · **she/her**

Studies how people use shared spaces, and who quietly stops using them.

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AFTER MIDNIGHT · THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How should a community pursue safety while limiting surveillance and unequal burdens?

Before you play

Jot down a first answer. You can disagree with yourself later.

- 1 What does “safe” mean to you on a late journey home?

- 2 Who might feel safer because of a camera, and who might feel less free?

- 3 What limits would you want on a system that watches a public space, even if it worked well?

While you play

THE EVIDENCE I OPENED FIRST, AND WHY

THE APPROACH, SAFEGUARDS AND PRIORITIES I CHOSE

THE TRADE-OFF I ACCEPTED, AND WHO CARRIES IT

WHAT I STILL DON'T KNOW

After you play

The game asks you these four questions at the end of the episode. There is no right answer to any of them.

- 1 Which meaning of safety guided your choice?

- 2 What evidence would show that a measure works?

- 3 Who bears the inconvenience of being incorrectly flagged?

- 4 Which limits should remain even if a system becomes more effective?

Play it again. Choose a different approach, or look into different things, then compare the two runs in your journal. What changed, and for whom? Did anything you believed before you played change your mind?

After all seven: the closing reflection

When you have completed all seven episodes, a closing scene opens in Civic Hall. LENS looks back over your most recent run of each episode and asks you to think about what ran through them.

WHAT YOUR SEASON SHOWS

LENS lists a few patterns drawn only from what you chose: for example, how often you funded a way to challenge decisions, or named privacy as a priority. They are descriptions, not a verdict and not a personality type. Someone else could read the same choices differently, and so could you next year.

SIX TENSIONS

LENS then asks about six tensions that run through the season. They are discussion prompts, not scales. Each has more than one defensible answer. Use the space below to note an episode where you felt each one.

Speed and deliberation

When was acting now the responsible choice, and when was waiting?

Consistency and responsiveness

When should the same rule apply to everyone, and when should circumstances change the answer?

Aggregate benefit and individual protection

Whose protection did you treat as non-negotiable, even at a cost to the wider benefit?

Transparency and privacy

What should the city make visible, and what should it decline to collect at all?

Present needs and future effects

How much weight did you give to people who will live with these decisions later?

Confidence and uncertainty

What would it take for you to change your mind about one of these decisions?

A civic principle for Meridian

Finally, you write one sentence the next steward should hear: a principle for Meridian, up to 280 characters. You can start from one of these and change it as much as you like, or write your own. It stays on your device.

"Explain decisions in terms the people affected can understand."

"Make room to challenge a decision before its effects become irreversible."

"Treat uncertainty as a reason to investigate and review."

"Ask who benefits, who bears the cost and who is missing from the discussion."

MY DRAFT PRINCIPLE, AND ONE EPISODE THAT TESTED IT

Talking it through

- Swap principles with someone else. Which episode would each principle have changed, and how?
- Find one of LENS's patterns that surprised you. Does it describe you, or only your choices this season?
- Pick the tension you found hardest. What would help the next steward with it?

Words worth knowing

Each episode page lists its own key terms. These are the words the game itself uses, and the ideas that come up across the season.

Words the game uses

Civic steward

You. A resident given temporary authority over one urgent question. What you may decide changes from episode to episode, and it is never unlimited.

Investigation action

You have six per episode. Each interview or record costs one. Anything you have opened stays free to look at again.

Safeguard

An optional addition to your approach, such as explanations, a way to appeal or independent review. Some only work with particular approaches.

Priority

What you say mattered most in your decision. You name one or two.

Baseline rights

Rules that every approach in an episode keeps. They are not yours to set aside.

LENS

The city's advisory system. It labels what it has observed, what it predicts and what it does not know. It never makes the decision.

Approach

One of four ways, A to D, of answering the episode's question. You choose one.

Capacity point

A unit of staff time and effort. You have six per episode. Capacity is not money, and using fewer points is not better or worse.

Trade-off

A known cost of your approach that you accept in writing. Every approach has some.

Run

One complete play of an episode. Your runs are kept in the journal in Civic Hall, where you can compare any two runs of the same episode.

Ideas across the season

From the glossary in Civic Hall. Several of these come from Episode 1; you will meet them again in other forms.

Appeal

A request for someone independent of the original decision to reconsider it. An appeal can correct errors; it cannot create resources that do not exist.

Confounding

When something other than the thing you are studying changes at the same time and could explain the result. In PATH's pilot, peer mentoring started in the same year.

Disparity

A difference in outcomes between groups. A disparity shows that something needs explaining. It does not, by itself, show the cause.

Lottery

Allocating something by chance among eligible people. Its supporters value its honesty about uncertainty; its critics say it ignores relevant differences.

Observation and prediction

An observation describes what has happened. A prediction estimates what may happen and carries more uncertainty.

Randomised comparison

A study in which chance decides who receives which treatment, so any difference in results can be credited to the treatment.

Completion rate

The share of a group that finishes a course within a set period. It depends on how long the period is and on who was chosen in the first place.

Contextual review

Assessing an application alongside circumstances the applicant chose to describe, such as caring responsibilities or paid work, using written criteria. Nobody has to disclose anything.

Legitimate expectation

The idea that when an institution makes a clear promise and people rely on it, the institution should not break it without good reason and fair process.

Objective

What a model or policy is designed to achieve. PATH's objective is predicting completion, which is not the same as predicting how much an award would help.

Proxy

A measurement that stands in for something harder to measure. A proxy can predict well and still carry information nobody meant to use.

Threshold

A cut-off that decides who qualifies. Everyone on one side is treated alike, which makes the position of the line matter a great deal.

Meridian and everything in it are fictional: its people, institutions, rules, charters and figures. The questions are real ones, and people disagree about them.