

# THE CASE OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



## Instructions for Game Play

*The Case of Rare Earth Elements* is a role-playing game that asks you to consider the positive and negative aspects of rare earth elements. Through this process you will use research and debate to explore the science, history, and controversies surrounding rare earth elements.

Rare earth elements are commonly used in a variety of everyday products and technologies. They have advanced our electronic devices, helped expand green energy, and benefited a number of scientific fields. Demand for rare earth elements has been steadily rising for decades. However, along with all of the beneficial uses and properties that rare earth elements yield, they are also closely tied to water and land pollution problems that affect millions of people. Mining and producing rare earth elements can be harmful, destructive, and incredibly expensive. During this game you will explore a variety of perspectives on rare earth elements and present arguments to your classmates about the role these elements can and should play in our lives.

## The Scenario

An international Sustainability Summit has been called to develop a Sustainability Seal regarding rare earth elements. A Stewardship Council has drafted a statement of guiding values for this seal and are convening a selection of experts in the field of rare earth elements to debate relevant issues and provide comments, suggestions, and feedback in the form of proposals for the Sustainability Seal. You will be playing either one of the Stewards or one of the invited experts, each with a strong point of view about rare earth elements and about what should and should not be included in the Sustainability Seal.

## What is a Sustainability Seal?

A Sustainability Seal is a special label that says a product has been made in ways that protect the natural environment and/or workers. Some Sustainability Seals are regulated by government, like the Dolphin Safe Tuna label and the Organic label for foods. Other Sustainability Seals are created by people working outside of government. For the purposes of this game we call those people "Stewards." The Stewards bring together a set of "stakeholders": industrial producers, representatives of consumers, activists seeking change, and other people affected by production. First, the stakeholders must agree upon a set of guiding values that define what they hope the Sustainability Seal will achieve (the focus of this game). Afterwards, stakeholders write a detailed set of



technical processes (called a “standard”) that explains how to make a particular product in a less harmful way. Producers and manufacturers who follow the guidelines can use the Sustainability Seal on their packaging and advertising, certifying that they meet ethical and sustainable standards. Since the 1980s many non-governmental labels have been created, including Fair Trade Coffee, the Rainforest Alliance, and the Forest Stewardship Council.

## How to Play

**As one of the experts attending the Summit,** it is your goal to convince the Stewards that the guidelines for a Sustainability Seal should reflect your role’s position on rare earth elements. You will be working with a group of like-minded experts, your interest group, to develop the most convincing arguments possible.

### Round 1:

First, you must learn as much as you can about your interest group’s positions so you can effectively argue for them. Then you will meet with your group to prepare answers to questions the Stewards might ask, arguments for your positions, and counterarguments to the positions the other groups will present. All of these arguments should be based on evidence from your research.

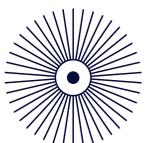
At the Summit each group will briefly present its position before responding to questions from the Stewards. Each group will have the chance to respond to each question and to the other groups, so you must be prepared to explain not only your own position but also where you disagree with the positions of other groups.

### Round 2:

After the Summit you will develop your position into a more concrete list of recommended guidelines for the final Sustainability Seal. In the Debate you will present and argue for your group’s proposal. At the conclusion of the Debate the Stewards will select one group’s proposal to adopt as part of the official Sustainability Seal. Each interest group will be ranked based on how well its goals are represented in the final Sustainability Seal. You will receive points if your proposal is selected and points based on your group’s ranking.

**If you are a Steward,** it is your job to decide which group and which proposal is most persuasive. You must research carefully, ask thoughtful questions, and pay close attention throughout the game.

*Note: In this exercise many of the assigned roles represent individuals from many nations and cultures. When assuming those personas, it is important to be aware of and to avoid stereotypes and implicit biases as they choose how to interpret the roles.*



*Encourage one another to practice empathy, remain respectful, and focus on the substance of the individual's experience and arguments.*

