

# ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE

Given that many dam decisions unfold over multiple years, it is important to take time at the beginning of the process for members of the steering committee to get to know one another. Role playing provides a forum for engaging participants in a hypothetical yet realistic decision-making scenario. By assuming roles different from their own, participants gain insight into other stakeholders' perspectives, interests, and constraints.

This role-playing scenario is intended to help members of the steering committee better understand one another's viewpoints and priorities, while also introducing them to the Dam Atlas decision-support tools.

In a typical exercise, participants are assigned stakeholder roles—such as dam owner, fisheries biologist, local historian, business owner, or resident living downstream—and are presented with a fictional but realistic dam decision case. Working in small groups, they review background materials, articulate their stakeholder's objectives, and discuss trade-offs using a simplified decision matrix. The session usually lasts two hours and concludes with a group reflection on insights gained, how perspectives shifted, and how the process might inform real-world collaboration.

## PRE-WORKSHOP PREPARATION

- Decide who is going to be the main facilitator. Depending on how many participants you will have, you will want to divide the group into tables of 5-10. If you have more than one table, you will want to select a second facilitator for each table.
- Print the scenario so you can read it out loud to the group. If you have the ability to project- you can project the scenario on the screen for others to follow along.
- Print enough character cards for everyone at each table to select one. There are four character cards on each page- after you print them, you will need to trim them down.
- Print enough objective cards for everyone to be able to choose one- so you will need to print as many as there are participants. There are 2 on each sheet so you will need to trim them down.
- Print case study sheets that seem the most relevant to your project. Try to select one from each category of alternatives.
- Print enough matrices for all the participants to have one.
- Bring enough green, yellow, and red dots for everyone to have a couple of each color.

# FACILITATOR AGENDA

## STEP 1: OVERVIEW + AGENDA (15 min)

### Main Facilitator:

- Welcome participants and explain why you are there.
- Read the scenario outloud.
- Go over the agenda for the workshop.

### Facilitators at each table:

- Hand out character cards.
- Ask everyone to read their character card and get into character.

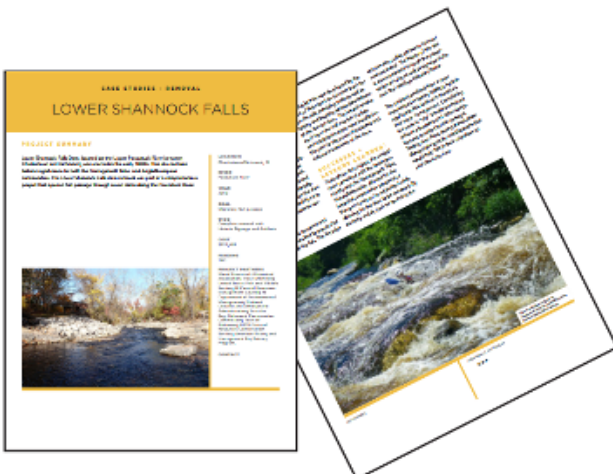
## STEP 2: GROUP INTRODUCTIONS + OBJECTIVE CARDS (20 min)



### Facilitators at each table:

- Place objective cards in piles in the center of the table. Ideally there should be enough cards for everyone to choose one of each card.
- Ask participants to pick 5 cards that represent their interests and concerns about the dam. Have participants place the card in front of themself- ranking them in order from left to right with left being highest priority and right being lowest priority. There will be blank cards as well- if participants do not feel like their interests are represented on the existing card deck, encourage them to write in on blank cards.
- Ask participants to use the cards as a way of introducing themselves and sharing with the group their interests and concerns about the Sabin Town Dam.

## STEP 3: CASE STUDIES + ALTERNATIVES (20 min)



## Main Facilitator:

Present case studies and alternatives that are being considered for the Sabin Town dam and introduce the matrix.

## STEP 4: GROUP DISCUSSION OF ALTERNATIVES (15 min)

### Facilitators at each table:

- Place the case studies in the middle of the table.
- Ask participants what aspects of the case studies seem relevant to the Sabin Town dam. Encourage participants to pick up the case study sheet when they speak about it.
- Ask the participants to consider if there are alternatives that they think should be considered that are currently not included?
- Ask participants if there are any questions about the various alternatives?

## STEP 5: EVALUATING ALTERNATIVES + RANKING MATRIX (30 min)

Test Round		Keep and Repair Dam	Build Fish Ladder	Nature Like Filtration	Reflow Channel	Remove Dam
ECONOMIC TRADE OFFS	Peak Flooding up and downstream	0% Minimal	30%-50% Partial	60%-70% Considerable	30%-50% Considerable	100% Complete
	Conservation of riparian habitat					
CULTURAL AND AESTHETIC TRADE OFFS	Recreational opportunities for riparian users					
	Viability of riparian fish					
	Impact for existing park					
SOCIOECONOMIC TRADE OFFS	Up stream costs	\$	\$\$	\$\$	\$\$\$	\$\$
	Long term costs and maintenance	\$	\$\$	\$\$	\$\$\$	0
	Liability of potential lands to other riparian users	NOT LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	LESS LIKELY	MORE LIKELY
Legend: Green = Preferred option = enthusiastic support - "this is a great solution" Yellow = Acceptable option = "Maybe it is not the best solution but it is one I could support." Red = Oppose = no support "I cannot support this solution"						

### Facilitators at each table:

- Hand out a copy of the matrix to each participant. Put a stack of green, yellow and red dots in the middle of the table
- Ask participants to review the alternatives and rank the alternatives on the matrix.
- Ask participants if there are any questions about the matrix?
- Ask participants to use stickers at the bottom of the matrix to indicate the following:  
**GREEN** = Preferred option = enthusiastic support –“this is a great solution”  
**YELLOW** = Acceptable option = “Maybe it is not the best solution but it is one I could support.”  
**RED** = Oppose = no support “I cannot support this solution”
- All participants must use one green and one yellow sticker
- Go around in the circle and ask participants to share their ranking and say the main reasons they support or the main reason they are against the different alternatives
- As people are presenting, the facilitator compiles the ranking in a master sheet indicating the number in preferred, acceptable and oppositional votes for each alternative.
- Once everyone has gone around and shared their ranking, the facilitator asks if anyone wants to change their rankings. If so- record it on the sheet.

## STEP 6: REPORT OUT + DISCUSSION (20 min)

### Main Facilitator:

- Ask each table to report out on the results of the final matrix.
- Open a full-group discussion by asking:
  - What was your experience participating in the role-playing exercise?
  - What perspectives or challenges did you notice?
  - How might this exercise help prepare you for future discussions about the dam?

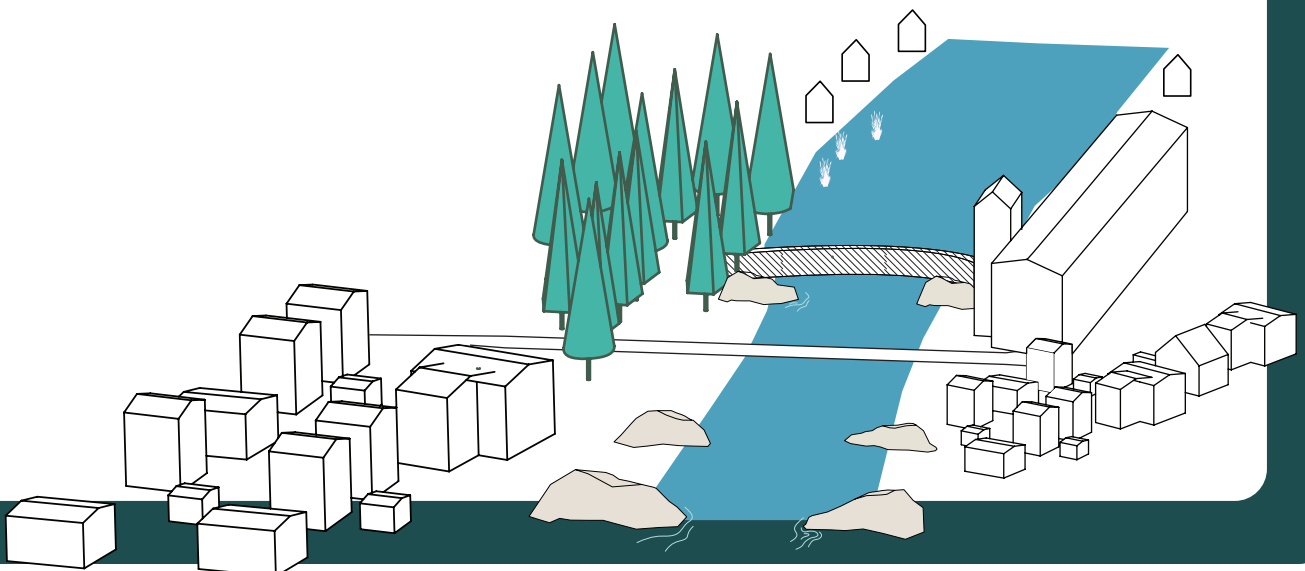
# SABIN TOWN DAM

## SCENARIO

The Sabin Town Dam is a 12' foot tall granite dam that was constructed in 1880 to power a local gristmill. Over the years, the small New England town of Sabin was established around the dam. Although the dam no longer serves a purpose, it is an important part of the town's identity and sense of place. There is a waterfall that flows over the front face of the dam that is visible from Main Street. A park surrounding the dam provides walking trails and a view of the dam. The dam creates a small impoundment that historically provided summer swimming, boating, and bird watching. However the past couple years there have been harmful algae blooms on the impoundment which has made the pond unusable for recreation and potentially dangerous to humans and wildlife.

This dam is the second dam on the river. The head-of-tide dam (the first dam on the river) was just removed, triggering the need to address fish passage at the Sabin Town Dam. There are no fish passage structures at the dam and the dam is blocking migratory fish from reaching critical spawning habitat upstream. The dam recently received a Letter of Deficiency because the structure is old and hasn't been maintained. It is a high hazard dam and if it were to fail it would pose a significant threat to downstream houses, schools and roads. In addition, during large storm events the dam holds back water and causes flooding upstream of the dam. There is a federal grant available for removal of the dam to improve fish passage, water quality and reduce flooding but it can only be used for removal. Any other modifications would most likely have to be paid for by a bond and the cost would be passed onto taxpayers.

The Town of Sabin owns the dam and the town manager and selectboard know that the issues with the dam need to be addressed. The town was recently approached by an environmental non-profit organization that will help support the application and permitting to go after the federal funds to remove the dam. They know that this will be a controversial and potentially "hot topic" in the town. Prior to moving forward with a grant application for removal, the town manager and selectboard are wanting to get a sense of the community's sentiments around the dam. They are running an "exploratory" workshop to begin the conversation to discuss the future of the dam.



BIO

## UPSTREAM PROPERTY OWNER

You live right on the impoundment and are deeply concerned about the preservation of water levels for your dock and the potential impact of alternatives on your property values. However you are also concerned because the algae problem in the lake has made it a liability. In addition, whenever there is a big rainstorm your property floods which has been happening more and more frequently. You are supporting two kids on a teacher's salary and finances are tight. You are concerned about the possibility of alternatives that will raise your taxes.

### OBJECTIVES

- Maintain property values**
- Restore recreation opportunities**
- Improve water quality**
- Reduce upstream flooding**
- Reduce cost to taxpayers**

BIO

## DOWNSTREAM PROPERTY OWNER

As a resident living downstream of the Sabin Town Dam, your primary concern is safety. With increasingly intense rain storms, you are concerned that the dam could fail any day. Every day the town stalls in dealing with the dam is a day when a large rainstorm event could happen and destroy your house- the town needs to stop dragging its feet and do something about this issue ASAP. You grew up fishing on the impoundment with your dad but haven't been able to go out fishing for the past couple years because of the algae blooms.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase safety**
- Restore recreation opportunities**

BIO

## FEDERAL AGENCY REPRESENTATIVE

You are concerned with having resilient and diverse rivers and oceans and you have the money to support your efforts. You are concerned with fish passage because anadromous (migratory) fish are incredibly important for marine life and local fisheries and you believe every dam removed gets us closer to having healthier rivers and oceans and strong local economies.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase fish populations**
- Water quality**

BIO

## TOWN MANAGER

As the town manager, you know that something has to happen to the dam due to the Letter of Deficiency and fish passage requirements. The town already has high taxes and you are concerned about the opposition to increasing taxes to pay for it. You think the federal funds for removal are a great way to take care of this problem once and for all. Every time there is a rainstorm you are concerned the dam could fail and flood downstream homes and roads. However, you are also aware of the potential impact removal could have on tourism and on the local economy.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase safety**
- Reduce upstream flooding**
- Reduce cost**
- Maintain local economy**

BIO

## WATERSHED ADVOCATE

As a member of a nonprofit that advocates for free-flowing rivers, you hope to give voice to the affected populations that can't be at the table like the wildlife and the overall health of the river. Your organization is very concerned by the water quality issues in the river and feel that restoring the river is the best option to improve water quality given that other options to reduce run off have failed. You believe that nature is beautiful and that by removing the dam you can restore habitat that will attract birds and birdwatchers and kayakers to the town.

### OBJECTIVES

**Increase fish populations**  
**Improve water quality**

BIO

## HYDROPOWER ADVOCATE

You believe that hydroelectric energy is the most important thing we can do for the environment right now. With skyrocketing greenhouse gases in the atmosphere warming the planet and causing massive environmental losses, the first thing we need to do is find an alternative energy source to address the climate crisis! You believe that all the old dam infrastructure in the region should be converted into micro hydro. This can help preserve the history of the region and help educate people about energy. However, your parents live upstream of the dam and you keep hearing them talk about the flooding. You just not sure if we can transition to clean energy before the climate crisis gets worse.

### OBJECTIVES

**Increase hydropower production**  
**Preserve history**  
**Reduce upstream flooding**

BIO

## TOWN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

As a member of the town historical society, you believe that preserving history means saving historic structures that can teach us and future generations about the region's past. Old New England dams create a sense of place and continuity and they remind us of our colonial and industrial history.

### OBJECTIVES

**Preserve history**  
**Maintain views of the waterfall**  
**Maintain water levels in the impoundment**

BIO

## PADDLING ASSOCIATION MEMBER

You love to paddle this river but this dam is very dangerous to portage and many paddlers avoid this stretch of river because it is unsafe. Just last year a paddler had to be rescued that almost went over the dam. You think the dam should be removed so that it is safer for paddlers and believe the town can build a tourist attraction around paddling.

### OBJECTIVES

**Increase safe recreation on the river**  
**Improve water quality**

**BIO****LOCAL FISHERPERSON**

Your family has been in the fishing industry for generations. You have seen the catches decrease over the years and have heard that one of the reasons is all the dams on the rivers that are blocking the herring. You're no environmentalist but you are concerned that in the coming years there will be no more fish left to fish. But you are also torn about what should happen to the Sabin Town Dam. That dam has always been part of the town and the town just wouldn't be the same without it. Why don't they consider removing some of the other old dams in the watershed first.

**OBJECTIVES**

**Increase fish populations**  
**Preserve history**  
**Maintain the view of the dam and waterfall**

**BIO****LOCAL BUSINESS OWNER**

You have a business on main street and know that in the fall many people come to town to take a photo of the waterfall and the fall foliage. You are concerned that if the dam is removed that there will no longer be the waterfall and there will be fewer tourists in the town. You think the dam makes up a unique part of the town history and don't know why all the environmentalist want to come in and tell you what to do in your town.

**OBJECTIVES**

**Maintain waterfall**  
**Preserve history**  
**Improve tourist opportunities**  
**Local economy**

**BIO****LOCAL TRIBAL MEMBER**

You are a member of the local tribe. To you, dams and the reduced migratory fish runs continue to symbolize the injustices of colonization and its impact on indigenous cultures and loss of respect between people and rivers. You believe the algae bloom is another sign of the imbalance and lack of respect that people have for nature and the more than human species that share this river.

**OBJECTIVES**

**Increase fish populations**  
**Improve water quality**  
**Restore balance between humans and river**

**BIO****LOCAL RESIDENT**

You came to the meeting because you heard there were discussions about the future of the Sabin Town dam. You go on daily walks in the park surrounding the dam. You aren't totally sure how you feel about these issues yet. You understand the need to improve the health of the river and restore fish passage but you also think the dam is an important part of the towns history. You recently heard about some really interesting dam projects in other communities that have found a way to restore fish passage and maintain the historic structure. You think the town can be creative in thinking about these issues.

**OBJECTIVES**

**Improve fish passage**  
**Preserve history**