

## **Sun Ridge Arizona Solar Commission Simulation**

### **Scenario Overview:**

The community of Sun Ridge, Arizona—a rural, economically diverse area—is facing a crossroads. With extreme heat waves and rising utility costs, local leaders are exploring a large-scale solar energy project that could provide clean, low-cost power to the community. However, while a solar farm seems like a step forward, it comes with significant political, environmental, and logistical hurdles.

Sun Ridge sits in an ecologically sensitive desert area. Concerns include water use for cleaning panels, impacts on native species and tribal lands, and debates over land rights. Meanwhile, economic inequality persists: many low-income residents can't currently afford home solar installations or electric vehicle transitions.

The newly elected State Energy Commissioner has convened a Solar Development Commission to decide how to proceed with public investment. Should the community move forward with a partnership that would get the project up and running on an expedited timeline? Or should the plan shift to one that includes local tribes and tribal land? How should jobs, land use, and power distribution be handled to ensure equity and sustainability?

### **The Decision at Hand:**

The Commissioner has called this five-party commission to decide the path forward for a \$30 million fund and establish a roadmap for building a large-scale solar farm outside Sun Ridge. It was tentatively decided to move forward with the project in partnership with a local real estate developer, Mesa Real Estate, to site the project on land they already own. Concerns were raised about how this project was decided and the lack of community input has been criticized in the local media and by many in the community.

The real estate developer, Mesa Real Estate, has been excluded from this commission due to the concerns about how their role in the project was decided and their potential outsized influence in the community. The Commissioner will act as facilitator but is also a voting stakeholder. The group must come to a consensus or strong majority agreement by the end of the simulation to secure funding from the state legislature.

Options include:

- 1. Real Estate Developer Solar Farm Partnership**
- 2. Tribal-Led Solar Development Zone**

3. **Environmental Mitigation and Land Study**
4. **Local Job Training and Transition Program**
5. **Energy Credit Subsidies for Low-Income Residents**

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### **Stakeholder Teams:**

Each team receives private goals and concerns. Stakeholders may include:

- **State Energy Commissioner** (Facilitator and key swing vote)
- **Tribal Land Representative**
- **Renewable Energy Company Executive**
- **Environmental Advocacy Group Director**
- **Local Business and Resident Coalition Leader**

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### **Proposed Initiatives:**

1. **Real Estate Developer Solar Farm Partnership (\$18M–\$24M)**  
Partner with a local real estate developer, Mesa Real Estate, to develop a 150 MW solar farm. Offers clean power to 30,000 homes, but needs major environmental review. Water-intensive cleaning may be restricted.
2. **Tribal-Led Solar Development Zone (\$15M–\$20M)**  
A regional solar initiative led by tribal nations. Empowers local communities and respects sovereign land. Could create lasting local jobs and infrastructure. Legal and political hurdles exist. Water-intensive cleaning may be less restricted as laws on tribal lands are technically less restrictive.
3. **Environmental Study & Mitigation Fund (\$4M–\$8M)**  
Addresses habitat preservation for desert tortoises and other endangered species. Studies stormwater runoff, glare impact, and long-term soil degradation. Required for permitting process.

**4. Job Training and Energy Sector Transition Program (\$4M–\$6M)**

Creates solar technician and maintenance training in partnership with state colleges. Priority given to local residents and coal industry workers transitioning from shuttered plants.

**5. Low-Income Energy Subsidy Program (\$2M–\$4M)**

Offers monthly credits to low-income households for solar-sourced electricity. Addresses energy equity but limited in scope without widespread infrastructure.

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### **Simulation Logistics:**

- Five parties must negotiate how to allocate the \$30 million budget to get this project over the finish line in a way that satisfies all the major community stakeholders who need to sign off on the project.
- Any three-party agreement is binding if it includes the Commissioner.
- Unanimous agreement is preferable.
- Stakeholders may propose hybrid solutions or packages.

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### **Debrief Questions:**

1. What were the biggest challenges to consensus?
2. How did economic vs. environmental values show up in negotiation?
3. Were stakeholders able to identify win-win compromises?
4. What role did justice, sovereignty, and equity play in your strategy?
5. Which solutions seemed most scalable or politically feasible?

## ROLE B - Tribal Land Representative – Confidential Instructions

You are an elected official representing a sovereign tribal nation whose lands border the proposed development area. Your community has faced historical exploitation by energy companies and state agencies. This time, you want full respect—and real power.

Any proposed project will have an impact on tribal lands as some of the infrastructure will need to come across tribal lands and the project will be visible for many residents who live on the edge of tribal lands. You are not opposed to solar development—in fact, you've advocated for green infrastructure—but you **will not accept a deal** that leaves your community with symbolic gestures and no real control.

You and the community you represent are very much tied to this land and region. You are skeptical of some outside groups that try to come in and impose their priorities on locals, whether it is the tribal community you represent or the rest of the local population that has lived in the area for decades.

### Your Priorities:

1. **Tribal-Led Solar Zone** – This is the only scenario where your people lead and benefit directly. You are willing to lead the project or partner with a developer, but your tribe must own or co-own it.
2. **Job Training Program** – A necessary piece. Youth unemployment on the reservation is high. Training must include tribal colleges and local job guarantees.
3. **Environmental Mitigation** – Vital to preserve ancestral ecosystems. Without this, elders in your community will push you to withdraw.
4. **Real Estate Developer Partnership** – Acceptable only if the real estate developer agrees to share profits or offer long-term lease income to the tribe.
5. **Subsidies** – Symbolic only. You may trade support for these in exchange for wins elsewhere.

### You Must:

- Protect tribal sovereignty and land.
- Secure either ownership or control in any solar project.

- Avoid another exploitative agreement. If pushed, you can publicly withdraw and create a PR crisis.

**Confidential Tip:** You're willing to walk away and publicly shame the project if sovereignty isn't respected. You have powerful allies in the media and legal system. Use that leverage carefully. You can also provide land for just 80 percent of the cost of what the land would be provided for if the real estate developer project were to go forward.