Gilded AIge

BETTER LIVING THROUGH LAYOFFS



The future is open for business.

Race to make technology too dangerous to build responsibly.
If your AI ends the world, at least you'll have the high score!

2-4 PLAYERS / 12 ROUNDS / 80 MARKET CARDS

PRINT-AND-PLAY PROTOTYPE v0.5 / NOVEMBER 14, 2026
Estimated 75-120 minutes. Balance requires playtesting.

1. Your company, your objective

Lead a fictional AI company through twelve rounds. Buy cards, improve your deck, occupy six strategic arenas, and convert a competitive advantage into victory points (VP). Cash is the only spendable resource. There is no Influence resource, no research currency, and no adjacency or movement network.

The highest final VP total wins. Points come from quarterly control, installed scoring Assets, writing off cards, final board position, and printed card points. Companies have identical starting capabilities.

2. Components and terminology

- 80 market cards: 62 designs. The 18 designs costing $2-$4 have two copies each. All 44 premium cards costing $5-$7 are unique.
- 40 starting cards: four identical ten-card sets. Each set contains six Seed Capital and four distinct Legacy Initiatives.
- Six-arena board with round track, four player mats, 24 Presence pieces in each of four colors, one round marker, one first-player marker, and a scoring worksheet.
- Optional common card backs. You supply opaque sleeves/backing cards or adhesive/card stock, scissors, and a pencil. Replacement cubes or coins are easier to handle than paper Presence.

Your company comprises your hand, draw deck, discard pile, played cards, and installed Assets. Your **Balance Sheet** is a separate, face-up pile of permanently written-off cards. Written-off cards are no longer in your company.

The six arenas: Chip Supply, Power Grid, Workforce, Executive, Legislature, and Application layer. Application layer combines consumer AI, enterprise AI, products, distribution, and sales. On cards, Chips means Chip Supply and Power means Power Grid. Legislature represents Congress. The two government branches are Executive and Legislature.

Place pieces directly on an arena illustration, anywhere inside its border. There are no company lanes, sockets, capacity limits, or positional bonuses within an arena. Keep each company's pieces countable; stack pieces or use a numbered substitute if needed.

3. Setup

1. Choose company colors and a first player randomly. Sit in a fixed clockwise order. Give each player 24 Presence and one player mat. Unused companies and starting decks stay in the box.

2. Give each player six Seed Capital and one of each Legacy Initiative. Make an opening hand of three Seed Capital and two randomly chosen Legacy Initiatives. Shuffle the remaining five cards face down as your draw deck. Everyone therefore starts with $3 available, while still having exactly the same ten-card deck.

3. Shuffle the 20 market cards costing $2-$3 separately. Deal one of these per player into the opening market. Shuffle the remaining affordable cards together with every other market card, then fill the market to six cards. Shuffle the six market positions. Place the remaining market deck face down nearby. Leave space for a market archive. There is no separate Policy deck.

4. Place one starting Presence per player, clockwise from the first player. Then place one more per player in reverse order. Your second starting piece must be in a different arena from your first. Multiple players may occupy the same arena.

5. Set the round marker to 1. Record each player's score as 0. Keep the same first player for three rounds. After each quarter, pass the first-player marker clockwise one seat; that player starts the next three rounds.

Use all 80 market cards at every player count. The two-player experience needs playtesting; no neutral pieces or special two-player rules are required for v0.5.

4. Presence and control

You have **Presence** in an arena if at least one of your pieces is there. You **control** an arena if you have at least two pieces there and strictly more than every opponent. A tie for the lead means nobody controls it. Update control immediately after every deployment, removal, or move.

When a card requires two Presence in EACH of two named arenas, you personally need two pieces in both places. Control is unnecessary unless the card says to control both. You cannot combine counts with another player.

A 'per two Presence' effect counts only your own pieces and rounds down: one benefit for every two Presence means 1/0, 2/1, 3/1, 4/2, 5/2, and 6+/3 when capped at three. There is no arena-wide Presence cap beyond each company's reserve of 24.

The board grants no automatic cash or card-draw dividends. It gives quarterly points and qualifies you for card effects.

5. Your turn

A. Start

End temporary rules whose duration is 'until your next turn begins.' Ready your exhausted installed Assets. Set available cash to $0; no unspent cash carries between turns. Then collect any delayed income from Competition Preservation Act as its rule expires. This income is available to spend during the new turn.

B. Operate

Play cards from hand and take standard actions in any order, as often as allowed. There is no action limit. A card is played by placing it face up in your play area, then resolving its ordinary effect and eligible secondary effect. Fully resolve a card before taking another action, except for legal reactions and a same-affiliation bonus that explicitly waits for eligibility.

Gained cash adds to your available total. Spend it on purchases and actions. You may choose to stop without playing every card. Unplayed cards will be discarded at cleanup.

Standard action	Cost / restriction
Buy a face-up market card	Pay its printed cost after discounts; place it in your discard pile and immediately refill the market. Multiple purchases allowed.
Deploy one Presence	Pay $2; move one piece from your reserve to any arena.
Remove one opposing Presence	Pay $3; remove one piece from an arena where you have Presence. Return it to its owner's reserve.
Move one of your Presence	Pay $1; transfer one of your pieces to any other arena.
Write off one card from hand	Pay $3; once per turn using this standard action.
Refresh the market	Pay $1; once per turn, archive one face-up card and immediately refill its slot.

The market refresh prevents six expensive cards from trapping the early game. Archived cards are permanently out of the market and score nothing. Anyone may inspect the archive.

C. Cleanup

Resolve or decline any remaining eligible same-affiliation bonuses. Discard all played cards and cards remaining in hand, except installed Assets and source cards kept beside the board for an active temporary rule. Lose all unspent cash and unused purchase modifiers. Draw five cards. If an opponent later makes you discard, you do not refill your hand before your next turn.

When drawing from an empty draw deck, shuffle only your discard pile to form a new draw deck. Played cards remain in the play area until cleanup, preventing same-turn replay loops. If both draw and discard piles are empty, draw as many as possible. If your company has fewer than five drawable cards, you simply have a smaller hand. Never draw written-off or installed cards.

6. Card effects and combinations

There are four affiliations: Infrastructure, Policy, Talent, and Distribution. Starting cards have no affiliation. Anyone may buy or play any affiliation. Cards state their requirements directly, without intermediate labels such as Ally or Network.

- **And** means do both effects, in order. **Or** means choose one. A conditional effect happens only if its printed condition is met.
- **Another card of the same affiliation:** Play another card of the named affiliation during your current turn. Different designs or two copies of one design qualify. The second play can qualify both cards. An unresolved same-affiliation bonus may wait until later that turn; resolve it once before cleanup. Each physical card's bonus resolves at most once.
- **At least one Presence:** One piece is enough. It does not require control. Check after the card's ordinary effect. For Just One More Data Center, deploying your first piece in Power Grid therefore earns its $1.
- **Two Presence in EACH / control BOTH:** Check both named arenas immediately after the ordinary effect. The first requires two of your pieces in each place; the second requires personal control of both. Neither permits borrowing an opponent's pieces or control.
- **Per two Presence:** Count your pieces after the ordinary effect, divide by two, round down, and obey the printed cap. Determine the full bonus before carrying it out. Deployments from the bonus do not increase that same bonus.
- **For each write-off:** Count only cards written off by this play.

Presence and control requirements cannot wait for later board changes. Only the explicitly stated same-affiliation requirement can wait for another play that turn.

Premium investment requirements: A premium card always has its ordinary effect, even when you do not qualify for the bonus. Some flagships require three of your Presence in EACH of two named arenas. These thresholds apply only to that card's bonus. You may deploy or move before playing it to meet the requirement. Losing the requirement later does not undo an effect already resolved. Presence thresholds encourage mid- and late-game investment but do not impose a minimum round.

Returning Presence: This is your own piece, not an attack. Return it to reserve, update control immediately, then take the reward. It can cost you control or disable later bonuses. Cards returning a piece do not earn a standard-removal discount.

Recovering a discard: Take only from your own face-up discard pile. Never take a written-off, installed, active-rule, or already-played card. Putting it on top of your deck does not draw it. A card explicitly acquired into hand may be played immediately. Free-acquisition price limits use printed cost, before discounts. Acquisitions are not purchases.

Temporary rule review: Outside Review, Inside Track may end one temporary Government rule. Return its source to its owner's discard pile. If its owner already played it during the current turn, keep it in that owner's play area until cleanup instead, preventing same-turn replay. This review is an ordinary card ability, not a [G] attack; it cannot remove installed Assets.

Paid-action discounts: A discount on your next paid deployment or removal expires unused at cleanup and is consumed only when that paid action succeeds. Multiple next-action discounts add; minimum price is $0. Card-granted free actions do

not consume them. Competition Preservation Act instead lets each player optionally take $1 off one market purchase while its rule lasts. This is once per player for the rule's entire duration, not once per turn; the creator may use it too. A player may decline and use it on a later purchase. Track which players actually receive the $1 saving. Free acquisitions and purchases already reduced to $0 do not count. At the start of the creator's next turn, after clearing old cash, the creator gains $1 per player who used the discount. Other purchase discounts stack to a minimum price of $0. Ending the rule early also cancels its uncollected income. If the game ends before the creator has another turn, there is no payout.

Unless forced, card deployments, removals, moves, and write-offs are optional and may be taken up to the stated number. Removals require your Presence in the affected arena unless a card explicitly waives that requirement. Card-granted actions do not pay standard action costs, but must pay any surcharge from a temporary rule. Moves may affect the same piece more than once.

Perform as much of an effect as possible. Lack of reserve pieces prevents further deployments. If a draw-then-discard effect draws fewer cards, still discard if possible unless the card says otherwise. A write-off from hand cannot select the card currently being played.

Discounts add together; prices cannot fall below $0. A next-purchase modifier is consumed by your next purchase even if not fully needed. Free acquisition is not a purchase, and discounts do not change printed-cost acquisition limits. Consumer Footprint, Enterprise Multiple affects your next purchased card, not a free acquisition. Market Access Reform discounts only the first actual purchase of each player's turn during its duration; if you already bought this turn, your first purchase has passed.

If the market deck empties, leave vacant slots. Do not reshuffle the archive or purchased cards. The game still lasts twelve rounds.

7. Write-offs

Write off a card by moving it from your hand to your face-up Balance Sheet permanently. Do not discard it. Immediately score the card's printed **written-off VP**, regardless of the source of the write-off. Do not also score its kept value at game end.

Every card shows two exclusive values:

- Market cards costing $2-$3: 1 VP kept, or 2 VP written off.
- Market cards costing $4-$5: 2 VP kept, or 3 VP written off.
- Market cards costing $6-$7: 3 VP kept, or 4 VP written off.
- All starters: 0 VP kept, or 1 VP written off. The four Legacy Initiatives still do nothing when played; Seed Capital still generates $1.

Kept VP scores only at game end. Written-off VP scores once, immediately. Writing off sacrifices future use of a card in exchange for deck improvement and one extra VP. Buying, archiving, discarding, or removing Presence is not a write-off.

All starting cards have a printed cost of $0. Accelerated Depreciation Schedule therefore generates no extra cash for writing off a starting card, although writing off any starter still awards 1 VP.

The $3 standard write-off is limited to once per turn. Card-based write-offs are additional and do not use that limit. There is no hand-size minimum and no recovery from the Balance Sheet.

8. Assets and recurring points

An Asset card says 'choose: gain $2, or install.' You choose one; installing does not also gain the cash. Place an installed Asset face up on your mat. It leaves the draw/discard cycle but remains in your company. You have two Asset slots.

If both slots are full, you may write off one installed Asset without payment while installing a new one. Score its printed written-off VP immediately; it loses all future quarterly and kept VP. You cannot voluntarily write off an installed Asset at other

times unless an effect specifically allows it. Duplicate Assets are allowed, use separate slots, and each resolves separately.

An Asset played for cash is discarded normally and supplies no installed benefit. A newly installed Asset counts as a card played for same-affiliation requirements on that turn. Previously installed Assets do not count as cards played this turn.

Scoring Assets resolve only at Quarterly Earnings, not every turn. A newly installed Asset can score at that quarter's checkpoint. Preliminary Injunction provides defense rather than recurring points. Exhausted Assets still function for any benefits that do not require exhausting; exhaustion does not remove them.

9. Government cards and consent

Only clauses marked **[G]** are Government effects. The rest of that card is ordinary. Government access is checked when resolving the [G] clause, after the ordinary effect.

- **Executive control [G]:** You must personally control Executive. Legislature and consent are irrelevant.
- **Legislature control [G]:** You must personally control Legislature. Executive and consent are irrelevant.
- **Government Authorization [G]:** You must personally control both arenas, OR control one and receive consent from the player who controls the other.

If either arena is uncontrolled, Government Authorization is unavailable. Two players merely sharing Presence cannot authorize it. A player controlling neither cannot request authorization. Consent cannot be used for single-branch cards or ordinary two-arena requirements.

Announce the proposed action and any targets, then request consent if needed. Consent applies only to that card's current [G] effect. There is no automatic VP payment, shared control, continuing authorization, or claim over another player's pieces. If consent is refused, skip the [G] effect; the ordinary effect remains resolved. Consent cannot be revoked after resolution starts, and you cannot change the announced targets after obtaining it without asking again.

Players may make promises about later actions, but those promises are nonbinding. No cash, cards, Presence, or VP may be transferred as payment unless a card explicitly authorizes it. Choose a different bargain or decline if a deal is not appealing. In a two-player game, consent may rarely be advantageous; controlling both branches is still available.

Government powers are card actions. There is no board-based Enact Policy action, separate policy deck, or quarterly enactment limit. Each physical card may be played only once per turn. Bipartisan Photo Opportunity explicitly lets the controller granting consent draw one card; this is an exception printed on that card, not a general payment rule.

Temporary rules end at the beginning of their creator's next turn. Keep the source card face up beside the board as a reminder; it is out of the draw/discard cycle until expiration, then goes into its owner's discard pile before their turn starts. A final-round temporary rule expires at game end if no next turn occurs. Losing control later does not repeal an already resolved rule. Identical rules created by the same player do not stack; a newer copy refreshes the duration and the older source is discarded. Rules created by different players can coexist; their purchase discounts add together. Regulatory Certainty protects only its creator's pieces.

10. Preliminary injunctions

Preliminary Injunction installs ready. Turn it sideways or place a reminder token on it to exhaust it; ready it at the beginning of your turn. When a harmful [G] effect is announced against you, you may exhaust a ready Preliminary Injunction to prevent that effect from affecting you. Outside Counsel, Inside Connections instead allows you to discard that card from hand for the same protection. You may react even on another player's turn.

Announce actions and targets, including intended pieces for removal, before reactions. For a subpoena, announce the target player before any hand is revealed; an injunction prevents both the reveal and the discard. For a multi-player action, targets may react clockwise from the active player. Each defense protects only its user, not the entire action, so other targets still resolve it. A defended target cannot be replaced with another target during that effect.

Harm includes forced revealing/discarding/writing off your cards; removal or forced movement of your Presence; and Government rules increasing your costs or restricting your actions. An injunction does not block another player gaining cash, drawing cards, making purchases, or deploying their own Presence, even if that costs you control.

For a temporary [G] rule, you may seek an injunction when it would first harm you, rather than when it is announced. You then ignore that particular rule for its remaining duration. Record the exemption with the source card. A later fresh play is a new effect and requires new protection. The defensive surcharge from Temporary Regulatory Certainty can therefore itself be enjoined by an opponent when they first attempt a removal.

An injunction against a multi-removal Government effect prevents all removals of your pieces by that effect. It does not stop standard paid removals, non-Government card actions, or loss of control from opponents deploying pieces. Outside Review can end a temporary rule; it cannot cancel an injunction Asset or a reaction already resolved. Reaction discards are not card plays and never trigger same-affiliation bonuses.

11. Rounds, Quarterly Earnings, and victory

A round ends after every player has taken one turn clockwise from the current first player. At the end of rounds 3, 6, 9, and 12, resolve Quarterly Earnings simultaneously:

1. Each player scores 3 VP per arena they currently control.

2. Each player scores their eligible installed Assets.

3. Record both amounts in the worksheet. Advance the round marker, then after quarters 1-3 pass the first-player marker clockwise one seat. Keep the new order for the next three rounds. Temporary rules still expire at their creator's next turn, even if the new order gives an opponent an extra intervening turn.

No one takes actions or voluntarily changes control during scoring. Injunctions do not prevent opponents scoring. After round 12's Quarterly Earnings, add final scoring:

- 1 VP for each arena where you have Presence.
- 2 additional VP for each arena you control.
- The printed kept VP on ALL market cards still in your company. Count cards in hand, deck, discard, play, installed Assets, and temporary rules you own. Written-off cards and the market archive are excluded. Installed Assets earn kept VP in addition to any quarterly VP they already earned.

All written-off points were already recorded; do not score those cards again. Unremoved starters, unspent cash, and reserve pieces have no final value. The two VP values on each card are alternatives, never cumulative.

Highest total wins. Ties break by most controlled arenas, then most Presence on the board. Remaining ties share victory.

12. Worked examples

Workforce engine: You have five Presence in Workforce and play Talent Density. Gain $2, then draw two cards: floor(5 / 2) = 2. If you first deploy a sixth piece, Talent Density draws three. Talent Density is unique. Other draw cards can extend the turn, but cannot redraw already-played cards because they stay outside the discard pile.

Expansion engine: You have two pieces in Chip Supply and two in Power Grid, although an opponent controls Power with three. Fully Integrated, Locally Unpopular still qualifies for its two-in-each bonus. The Compute Must Flow does not qualify for its control-both bonus because you do not control both.

Deck improvement: Play Strategic Reorganization, gain $1, and write off Blockchain Pivot for 1 VP. Later play Founding Researcher Number 47: both Talent cards now satisfy their same-affiliation requirement. Draw one card from Strategic Reorganization and resolve Founding Researcher's draw-then-discard once. You could still pay $3 for your standard write-off that turn.

Negotiated government: You control Executive, another player controls Legislature, and a third leads in the Application layer. You play Nothing in the Statute Prohibits This, gain $2, and ask the Legislature controller to approve your announced free acquisition. If they agree, acquire that card. If they refuse, keep the $2 but skip the acquisition. Their consent does not authorize your next Government card.

Portfolio scoring: You buy Talent Density for $5. If it remains in your company at game end, score 2 VP. If you instead write it off, score 3 VP immediately and no kept VP later. Replacing an installed $5 Asset works the same way. Two controlled arenas pay 6 VP each quarter, keeping the board contest valuable alongside portfolio points.

Legal defense: You control Legislature and play Congressional Subpoena against a rival. They exhaust Preliminary Injunction before revealing their hand, preventing both reveal and discard. You still keep your ordinary $1 and card draw. A later Government attack before their next turn could get through unless they have another ready defense.

13. Printing and accessibility

Print cards at actual size on Letter paper, nine 2.5 x 3.5 inch cards per sheet. There are 14 front sheets for 120 cards. The final six positions are intentionally empty. All fronts use the same cut grid as the optional back sheet. Test duplex alignment; opaque sleeves are preferable for mixed home-printer paper.

Print the board at 11 x 17 inches, or print its two Letter portrait tiles. The tiles have a half-inch overlap. Their dashed lines indicate the same seam: trim one tile at its line, overlap the matching artwork, align the lines, and tape. The board has no grid-dependent measurements, so slight scaling is harmless there. The card dimensions should remain actual size.

Company letters A-D and affiliation names accompany colors. All gameplay information is text; no rule depends on color alone. Print all components in grayscale if desired.

14. Prototype status

This is a playable prototype supported by reproducible heuristic simulations, not a commercially validated game. See PLAYTEST.md and output/balance-report.md for evidence and limits. Edition v0.5 uses a new 62-design deck, so begin a fresh game. Earlier browser saves remain untouched under their original storage keys; the previous v0.4 offline and printable editions are archived separately. Human playtesting is still required for enjoyment, negotiation, teaching time, and player skill differences.

The race at a glance

TURN

Expire your temporary rules. Ready Assets. Play cards and spend cash in any order. Resolve eligible same-affiliation bonuses. Discard, lose cash, draw five.

CASH ACTIONS

Buy at cost. Deploy $2. Remove $3 with a foothold. Move $1. Write off $3 once per turn. Refresh one market slot $1 once per turn.

BOARD

Presence: 1+. Control: 2+ and strictly most. Read the full condition: 2+ in each, control both, or one piece. Per-two effects round down and obey caps.

GOVERNMENT

Single branch: personally control it. Authorization: control both, or control one and get consent from the other controller. Consent is for this effect only.

INJUNCTION

Prevent one harmful [G] effect on yourself. Exhaust installed Preliminary Injunction, or discard Outside Counsel from hand. No protection from ordinary paid attacks.

POINTS

Rounds 3/6/9/12: 3 VP per control plus installed scoring Assets. Write-offs: printed value immediately. Final: 1 VP per occupied arena + 2 per control + printed points.

NO LOOPS

Played cards stay out of the discard pile until cleanup. Cards and bonuses resolve once per physical card per turn. No buying from the archive.