

Introduction

Whistlestop is a game of campaign strategy. Each player represents a candidate or political party that is trying to gain the upper hand in an election. The basic game play is simple- each player draws a tile in turn, lays it next to an existing tile, and then places a token if desired.

The tokens represent campaign volunteers, people who want to help your side win the election. You have a limited supply of volunteers, though you may be able to earn a few more during the game. Volunteers can work for you in stationary campaign offices or on roving whistlestop tours. Campaign offices provide you with a stronger influence, but whistlestops give you more flexibility.

Starting The Game

Each player should have ten volunteer tokens. One should be placed on the scoring pad in the zero (“0”) position. Four more should be set aside as a reserve supply. This leaves each player with five volunteers to start the game.

The tiles should be laid face down and randomized. Each player should select a tile and once all the players are ready, each player reveals his selected tile. The player whose tile has the highest point value goes first, with play continuing clockwise around the table. If two or more players have tiles of the same value, award temporary extra points for any special symbols- (1 for media, 2 for money, 3 for votes). If those players’ tiles are still tied, have them select new tiles. Once the starting player is chosen, reshuffle all of the tiles.

The player who is last in the order of play then selects a new tile at random and places it in the center of the table. This is the starting tile off of which the first player must build.

Taking a Turn

The player selects a tile at random and places it next to one of the existing tiles. Any side of the new tile that touches an existing tile must match, so highways must abut highways, city blocks must touch city blocks, and so on. It is okay to place rural and suburban tile sections together, but only if there is no legal way to abut sections of the same color. If the new tile simply cannot match any of the existing tiles, the player select a new tile and then shuffles the previously drawn one back into the pool.

Urban Precinct = Grey Blocks
Suburban Precinct = Green Zone
Rural Precinct = Tan Zone
Highway = Black Line

Once the player places a new tile, he may choose to place a volunteer on the tile, provided that no other volunteer is already placed on that precinct or highway. Volunteers placed inside a precinct form a campaign office. Volunteers placed on a highway set up a whistlestop tour. Many tiles will offer multiple placement options. Note that separate precincts or highways could later be joined together. In these cases, all of the volunteers remain until the precinct(s) involved are completed and any contests are resolved.

Once a player places his volunteer, or declares that he intends not to, he checks to see if he has “sewn up” or completed any precincts with the tile he placed. If so, the controlling player(s) receive the appropriate number of votes as an advantage over his opponents and moves or removes volunteers as appropriate. At the end of his turn, the player may also choose to remove any volunteer tokens from any completed highways or precincts on the board- though he can leave them if desired. If he leaves the token he retains the option remove it on a later turn, though it cannot be replaced once removed.

Play then moves clockwise to the next player in turn.

Precincts

Precincts are contiguous areas of similar constituency- urban, suburban, or rural. Highways and city limits form the boundaries of precincts. A precinct stretches indefinitely until it hits a boundary. Highways end at city limits and three- or four-way intersections. When a precinct is completed or fully closed off by the placement of a tile, players should check to see who has the most influence over the precinct. A campaign office in the precinct counts for two points of influence. A whistlestop on an adjacent highway counts for one point of influence, but only if that player declares that he is contesting the precinct. If no player has more influence than any other, all of the volunteers involved in contesting the precinct are removed.

If, however, one (or more) player has more influence over the precinct than anyone else, he keeps one volunteer in the precinct as a campaign office. This office can be removed on a later turn, but it may be important to leave it until the end of the game. A token representing a controlling office should be turned upside down to indicate that the precinct is “sewn up” and has been scored. All of the other volunteers that contested the precinct are removed from the board and returned to their players. The player(s) who “sewed up” the precinct receive an advantage for each tile in the precinct- 1 vote for each rural tile, 2 votes for each suburban tile, 3 votes for each urban tile.

In addition, some tiles show special symbols that represent boons to a player when the precinct containing the symbol is completed:

The 🗳️ or “media” symbol gives the player who laid the completing tile an additional volunteer from his reserve, to a maximum of nine tokens. No player can receive more than one additional follower per turn.

The 💰 or “money” symbol allows the player who laid the completing tile to take an additional turn immediately following this one. No player can take gain more than one additional turn per turn, nor take more than three turns in a row.

The 🗳️ or “votes” symbol doubles the advantage granted by that tile when the precinct is “sewn up” in a player's control. Thus, a rural tile is worth 2, a suburban tile is worth 4, and an urban tile is worth 6. Only the tiles that actually contain the votes symbol double in value.

The rural township (grid in a circle) symbol increases the base value of the tile to 2 votes and any special symbol it contains applies to all of the adjacent precincts.

Election Day

Once the last tile has been placed and that player completes his turn, the game moves into “Election Day”. On Election Day, all of the uncompleted and uncontrolled precincts are scored. “Sewn up” precincts controlled by upside-down campaign offices are not scored again, but they drive much of the action on Election Day.

On Election Day, check each unscored precinct to see who has the most influence over it. Whistlestops on adjacent highways and campaign offices in adjacent “sewn up” precincts count for one point of influence. Do not remove whistlestops on election day- they can contest multiple precincts. Campaign offices in uncompleted precincts count for two points of influence. The player(s) with the most influence over the precinct gain an advantage of 1 vote for each rural or suburban tile, or 2 votes for each urban tile. The votes symbol still doubles the votes for a tile, based on these values. The money and media symbols are meaningless on Election Day. If no player(s) have more influence over the precinct than the others, no advantage of votes is awarded.

Victory

At the end of election day, the player with the highest vote advantage wins. If two or more players both have the highest total, they must either come to a power-sharing agreement or win a run-off election (play the game again).