TWP Roleplay

Guidance on Session Zero

With the primary interests of realism, balance, and fun in mind, this Guidance has been created to frame the development of our shared world. In it you will find the basics of TWP Roleplay and Esferos, community policies, and how new a Storyteller's Mapplication™ is submitted and balanced.

In this document you will find links to all other Guidances issued by the Loremasters.

These are the constituent items of this Guidance:

Table of Guidances

Session Zero

Welcome to Esferos! We know jumping into TWP's Roleplay world can be daunting, but we're here to help. The concept for this Guidance comes from the "Session Zero" of tabletop roleplaying games. This is a game session before the campaign begins where the group lays down ground rules for the world and each other—it exists so everyone is on the same page with their expectations of the upcoming campaign.

TWP Roleplay's Session Zero is much the same. We lay out a few important ground rules and tips that all Storytellers must abide by so that everyone is on the same page. Some of these relate to OOC (out-of-character) activity, and some relate to IC (in-character) activity and storylines.

When in doubt or in need of help/guidance, ask the Loremasters or Lorekeepers.

Balance and Realism

Balance
- An overriding goal of TWP Roleplay is balance. This means everything good comes with drawbacks, and you may be rewarded if you display a sense of balance in developing your nation and in roleplay.

You cannot "win" the spreadsheet
- Your goal should not be to have the highest number on a sheet. Having a high population, a high GDP per capita, or high military spending each have their own drawbacks—it is a balance. We value creativity within the bounds we set for ourselves.

Technological realism
- Existing technologies with widespread implementation, such as cell phones or helicopters, are fair play.
- Advanced technologies with limited or experimental implementation, such as fully autonomous vehicle fleets or advanced laser weapons systems, are guided by balance: if a real-life analogue nation has access to a technology, then you may attempt to justify that access by defining the balance.
- Subject to Loremaster approval and within reason, certain areas of technology *may* be slightly (<5 yrs) ahead of RL *for established players*, though there must be a very good RP reason as to why this is.

Historical realism
- Real-life religions and languages do not exist here. You may reference them as inspiration or 'flavour' out-of-character. Using similar inspirations does not necessarily mean you are related to other nations that use a similar inspiration. Similarly, you cannot use RL religious symbols in your IC religion.
- Ancient developments should follow a timescale with reference or similarity to the real world. Writing, for example, was believed to be independently developed as early as 3200 BCE and as late as 650 BCE. Some places, however, did not rely heavily on writing until recently.
- Modern developments should also reference the real world. For example, the 'Industrial Revolution' was a process which unfolded at different scales and speeds around the world from 1760 to today.
- Your nation didn't always exist in its current form. People probably lived there for thousands of years, but much of it was in a very different form to modern life. It's unlikely that the exact same political entity that exists today existed hundreds of years ago.
- International relations don't have to be cordial, and your nation can have a friendly history with countries your nation isn't friendly with today.

The Absurdity Rule:
- Truly absurd events that are completely detached from common sense cannot be introduced into the canon of Esferos. Such absurd events are physically possible, but are not rational, likely, or reasonably explained within context. Some examples include:
  - Extraordinary coincidences or events that rely heavily on chance or luck without proper contextual setup or narrative development.
  - Unrestricted access to resources, wealth, knowledge, or connections without plausible explanation or consequence.
  - Ridiculous, pointless, farcical, or gratuitous events that do not contribute to the coherence or logical progression of the storyline.
- Storytellers are encouraged to exercise creativity and explore imaginative storylines within the bounds of reality. Avoid stacking unlikely scenarios atop extraordinary occurrences—you should always be able to answer "why is this happening?".
- The Absurdity Rule should not be seen as restrictive, but as a guiding principle that helps build a coherent and engaging roleplay world.
- Loremasters have the authority to request edits or modifications to canon events and storylines if they determine the Absurdity Rule is breached.

Miscellaneous realism
- Just as RL religions and languages don't exist on Esferos, RL places don't exist either. You may not name your nation, cities, and other things after prominent RL places like "Shanghai". Exceptions are common names like "Georgetown". If you need help coming up with names, ask in the Discord or check out a random name generator.
- There is no magic. That doesn't mean people can't *believe* something is miraculous or magical, but you cannot state as an OOC fact that it is.
  - You should make distinctions between historical, semi-legendary, and legendary events and figures.
- Where IC beliefs contradict OOC facts, it must be clear that the Storyteller recognizes the contradiction.
- The laws of physics are as we understand them in the real world. They cannot be manipulated or exploited in any extraordinary way.
- Humans are the only playable sapient species on Esferos.

The current year is not the beginning of your nation's story
- We recommend avoiding the propensity to make big events happen in the current year; you can roleplay past events or allow them to be a historical fact.
  - Just because you weren't playing your nation before does not mean it didn't exist or have relationships. Talk to neighbours and define your historical relationships with them, it's all part of the fun.

Border changes
- There are three types of border changes:
  - IC: adjustments or expansions resulting from diplomacy, succession, warfare, or other longstanding and well-developed storylines. These changes are not the outcome of one narrative, but instead involve a mature canon of stories and cooperation with neighbors. These changes do not represent a retcon of IC fact.
  - OOC Adjustments: minor adjustments to borders for mostly aesthetic reasons. These can be requested from the Cartography Board, but may require balancing and cannot result in major changes to land area. The adjusted borders replace the previous in the canon and are a retcon of IC fact.
  - OOC Expansions: meritorious or rebalancing decisions made by the Cartography Board. These are not applied for or requested. The expanded borders replace the previous in the canon and are a retcon of IC fact.
- All types of border changes require Cartography Board approval.

War is difficult, messy, and *detailed*
- There is no total victory. You should find some drawback or disadvantage to your activity—there's no fun in winning all the time.
- Just because you have a large army and have higher military spending than your opponent doesn't mean you win. Be tactful and realistic; look to real life examples.
  - Yes, North Korea is a "real life example" but their level of expenditure is an extreme outlier and comes at great cost.
- If the community requires it, we may assign War Referees as mediators to ensure the quality and mutual resolution of armed conflict.

You are not a "recently discovered tribe", and avoiding other common tropes
- There are no "undiscovered" nations on Esferos, just as there are none on Earth. Areas of the world that do not have Storytellers are not empty wastes—there are people and nations that exist there, but will not be brought into focus until a new Storyteller chooses those locations.
- Think about "undiscovered tribes" in modern day; we know they are there, they are a couple hundred people at maximum, and their technology is usually limited to sticks and stones.
- Similarly, if you are "opening up diplomatic and foreign relations after a long period of isolationism" you are not going to be up to the modern standard of life or technology. There are profound historical and practical ramifications for such a narrative.

Community and Discord Rules

Collaboration in roleplay
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Worldbuilding and RP can be daunting, but you're not alone—we're a community.
- Respect the work of others. We're all capable of creating amazing works, even if we doubt our natural talents or need a little help. Reference material, tutorials, and mentors are available to all. Do not take, steal, modify, or 'improve' another creator's content without their permission.
- Roleplay is multilateral, which means every party has to agree—you only participate in ways you agree to. If any issues arise, please let one of the moderators know.

Community conduct
- Don't be a dick. Abusive and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.
- No NSFW stuff. It's one thing to have a risqué sense of humor, but quite another to be creepy and make others uncomfortable.
  - Along with this is zero tolerance for hate imagery or masked clones or iterations of nations like Nazi Germany. The moment an RP nation becomes a clone of the Third Reich or utilizes Nazi symbolism or known hate group imagery, a ban will be immediately and irrevocably levied. Enforcement is at the moderators' discretion with no warning.
- Please respect the moderator team. Like you, we are here to relax and create a fun, exciting roleplay world. If we delete certain posts or ask you to drop a certain topic, it will be in the best interest of the community.

Continents are not "Teams"
- In the Continental Congress channels, we come together to plan histories, geography, and other things that affect our neighbors, but the goal isn't one continent-spanning intergovernmental organization. Avoid treating continents as teams.

Community Graphics Use Policy

Purpose
Artists should feel free to produce art and expressions for their communities, and it is important to us to ensure those expressions are not exploited or mishandled. The Community Graphics Use Policy sounds strict, but it is a continuation of our value of respecting the work of others. We have always and will continue to advocate for the well-meaning and considerate use of art. If you have any questions, please reach out to a Loremaster.

Community Graphical Resources
The Loremasters are stewards of Community Graphical Resources, which are gathered in the TWP RP Resource Storage folder in Google Drive by the Lorekeepers. These graphics have been collected to support their accessibility and consistency of use by Storytellers.

Graphics in this folder are free for use in the "Community Areas" of NationStates, the TWP Forums, and public TWP Discord servers.

When used on NationStates.net, it should be clear that these graphics originate from the TWP RP Community. This can be as simple as posting from your TWP RP nation account, or with attribution to TWP RP.

If a use is not explicitly allowed in this policy, contact the Loremasters for any questions or to request a reasonable exemption. The Loremasters retain the ability to curtail use of Community Graphical Resources in extreme circumstances, even if otherwise allowed by this policy.

Outside the Community Areas, these graphics should not be copied, distributed, adapted, or used to make derivative works without the creator's permission.

Community Graphical Resources shall not be used commercially in any manner.

Graphics Not Available in Resource Storage

There may be Community Graphical Resources not yet stored in the TWP RP Resource Storage folder—please contact the Loremasters or the creator for usage guidance.

Official Map of Esferos

The Official Map of Esferos ("Official Map") is published and maintained in trust by the Cartography Board for TWP's Roleplay Community and is hosted on the TWP Forums.

The Official Map is the centerpiece of the Community and therefore occupies a special place in the Community Graphics Use Policy. The following conditions for use of the Official Map and derivatives are to prevent the Community assets from disseminating beyond Community control and protection, and to respect the innumerable hours volunteered by the Community toward their creation.

The Official Map may not for any reason be copied, distributed, or adapted without the written permission of the Cartography Board. The Official Map shall not be used commercially in any manner.

Within the Community Areas, players with nations on the Official Map may use the Official Map to create and share derivatives thereof, such as a map of their country, a map of world government types, or a map of the most popular soft drinks on your continent.

Players without nations on the Official Map are considered "Outside the Community Areas" and are not welcome to create derivatives without permission from the Cartography Board except for the purpose of completing their Mapplication™.

Outside the Community Areas, individuals may not make or share derivative works from the Official Map without permission from the Cartography Board. Private personal use will receive special consideration for permission. For example, this includes players with nations on the Official Map that wish to post their derivative works to social media.

Mapplication™ Balancing

Reasoning

Every nation is composed of a set of statistics that, when combined in certain ways, may be seen as making one nation "better" than another. The Cartography Board does not agree that having higher numbers makes you a better nation in any regard. We remind everyone that you cannot "win" the map, and you most certainly cannot "win" the spreadsheet—we value creativity within the bounds we set for ourselves.

In that interest, we sought to define some boundaries to help us guide new nations in their Mapplication™ process and frame what is realistic for their nation. We developed 3 Basic Indices for the basics of your nation, and 2 Supporting Indices that can tell us more about your nation and set some boundaries.

General Rules

When formulating a Mapplication™, consider these rules:
1. Do not try to "min-max"
    a. Your Land and Population should be within two (2) tiers of each other, the further apart, the less likely to be granted (ex. 1 land and 5 pop will never be granted). Think of this as a tax base to sustain the nation and fund the control over your territory.
    b. There are very few exceptions to this rule, on Earth and on Esferos.
2. Do not try to "creep" right up to the next tier line in every index
    a. If you are near the upper range of a tier, the Cartography Board may require you reduce another index to the lower range of a tier.
3. These rules are general, and rare exceptions may be made in the case of a particularly creative concept
    a. Mirroring a real world nation will not grant you any exceptions to meet their stats. Be creative!

Basic Indices

Basic indices are the major comparative markers of a nation—the very basis of their reality. These are broad categories that don't necessarily carry any meanings from the real world over to your nation—there are plenty of exceptions to each of these categories that defy an overall definition.

Land (sq. km)	Population	GDP/capita
2,000,000 km² (exception)	50,000,000 (exception)	$60,000 (exception)
1,000,000 km²	35,000,000	$50,000
500,000 km²	15,000,000	$40,000
300,000 km²	7,500,000	$30,000
125,000 km²	3,000,000	$20,000
40,000 km²	500,000	$10,000
0 km² (exception)	0 (exception)	$0 (exception)

Note the "exception" tiers are not able to be chosen without the direct permission of the Cartography Board. A nation in any of these categories requires a nonstandard playstyle or an exceedingly difficult balancing act. If you are interested in these categories, you are more likely to be granted a low "exception" than a high.

Supporting Indices

"Supporting Indices" are metrics which can tell you something more about your nation by comparing them to real life nations in similar brackets.

Government Spending - when organizing nations on the basis of government spending as a percent of their GDP, a fairly broad trend occurs. Exceptions exist, as seen here, though we have found that nations are generally grouped by the level of social programs they maintain. If your nation provides any large-scale social services, it must be at least in the >25% tier. If your nation provides multiple large-scale social services, it must be at least in the >35% tier.

Gov Spending, % of GDP	
>55% -1E	(exception)
>35% -2	
>25% -1	
0-24.9% - 0	

For example, nations with extensive social safety nets such as universal healthcare, welfare, and free tuition group in the >35% spending category. This group includes nations like Australia (36%), Ecuador (37%), Canada (40%), South Korea (42%), the European Union (avg. 44%), and Kuwait (49%).

Nations with moderate social spending, may have a selection of a few policies afforded by the above category will tend to be within the >25% tier. This group includes Ireland (25%), Mexico (26%), Afghanistan (27%), Niger (29%), Nepal (31%), and Venezuela (34%).

Nations within the 0-25% range will not provide major social services, though may still provide limited versions of individual social programs and education through high school if they choose.

Finally, the "exception" category of >55% is generally limited to tiny island states with import-dependent economies. There are no specific benefits to this category. It requires an exception because it is inherently unbalanced.

Military - nations with high military spending as percent of GDP tend to have significant challenges or have purposefully prioritized military spending. They are not *necessarily* determinative as there are always exceptions and special cases. Your military spending cannot be more than 20% of your total government spending.

Military Spending, % GDP	
>5% GDP - 3E	(exception)
>3.5% GDP - 2	
>2% GDP - 1	
0-1.9% GDP - 0	

Countries spending over 5% include nations which are heavily embattled, or have been criticized for lack of freedom or human rights issues, such as Algeria (5.3%), Saudi Arabia (8.8%), Libya (15.5%), and Eritrea (20.9%).

You will see another characteristic grouping in the nations under 2% spending which includes small nations, nations with little incentive or political drive for military spending, and a majority of modern states. This is a diverse grouping, and most nations should fall in this category- examples include Costa Rica (0%), Ireland (0.3%), Madagascar (0.6%), Mongolia (0.8%), Mozambique (1%), Peru (1.2%), Germany (1.2%), Jamaica (1.4%), Qatar (1.5%), United Kingdom (1.8%), and China (1.9%).

The "middle" groupings of nations include a vast diversity, and are usually countries that seriously fund their armed forces but the exact grouping depends more on the GDP of the nation than their relative 'seriousness'. Countries in the 2-3.5% and 3.5-5% ranges: Latvia (2%), Cambodia (2.2%), France (2.3%), Ecuador (2.4%), India (2.4%), Cuba (2.8%), Morocco (3.1%), United States (3.2%), Namibia (3.3%), Uzbekistan (3.6%), Russia (3.9%), Pakistan (4%), Syria (4.1%), Israel (4.3%), and Armenia (4.8%).

Mapplication™ Process

The Mapplication™ system for TWP Roleplay covers all the most important basic information of your nation right from the get-go. It grants a nation their plot on the map and lays out its most basic of statistics.

After your Mapplication™ has been processed and any issues ironed out via the #mapplication channel on the TWP Roleplay Discord server, nations will be given access to their Continental Congress and will have the ability to add information to the Big Book of Numbers RP Spreadsheet.

Mapplications™ may be submitted via The Mapplication™ Thread. More in-depth instructions may also be found there.

Mapplication™ Format

Resident name:

Discord name:

Map nation name:

A couple sentences about your nation: *(original content, not NationStates stats)*

Map request as an image or plot number: *(forum embed or Imgur link)*

3-Letter Code: **2-Letter Code:**

Capital City:

Government Type:

The population of my nation is: Below average / Average / Above average

The population density of my nation is: Below average / Average / Above average

The GDP per capita of my nation is: Below average / Average / Above average

Government Spending - Which statement best describes your nation?	
	My nation provides moderate social programs, or a small selection of social programs.
	My nation has an extensive social safety net, or provides multiple programs like universal healthcare, welfare, and free tuition for its citizens
x	My nation does not provide social programs beyond bare necessities and/or high school educations.
	My nation does not prioritize social spending, but engages in some large-scale government or public spending projects.
	My nation's government spending is a vast majority of our GDP, such as having to coordinate our import-dependent economy. **(this option is subject to Cartography Board approval)**

Military Indicator - Which statement best describes your nation?	
	My nation has made a commitment to security, and maintains a moderately sized modern armed forces within our means.
x	My nation has little incentive or political drive for military spending, but maintains a small-to-moderate modern armed forces.
	My nation has prioritized military spending at the expense of other key areas and may have been criticized for lack of freedom or human rights issues.
	My nation does not prioritize military spending due to other priorities, the belief we are safe, or we don't have enough money left over to fund it.
	My nation is heavily embattled and we believe we face an existential threat. **(this option is subject to Cartography Board approval)**

Any other inspirations or concepts you want to share: