

The Archive of Small Promises

120-minute plan | 4 players | No combat

Promises have become little objects in a civic archive. Its shelves are full, and a librarian cannot return the promise she made to her sister.

Content notice: Commitment, family disappointment and consent; nobody must share a real promise.

What is really happening

Archivist Rhea classified unresolved promises as permanent deposits. That prevents owners from revising them, so the objects accumulate. A consent-based renewal card releases a deposit; sealing new intake stops the overload but leaves old promises unresolved.

Prepare and play

Use your own rules or play without dice. State the goal, choose an approach, explain a reasonable cost and let the players decide. Plausible careful actions succeed; uncertain actions can succeed with delay, spent supplies or a favour owed. Evidence is always available through its described action. Each player creates an ordinary person with a useful skill, a reason to help, and an item. No character sheet, monster statistics or proprietary rulebook is needed.

Take 10 minutes to introduce characters, read the premise and discuss the content notice. Anyone may say "pause", pass on a description, or ask to move an uncomfortable moment offstage. Agree on no combat and on treating consequences as delay or repair, not permanent harm. Give one player the route map and another the time sheet.

Time plan

120-MINUTE PLAN

0-10: Opening agreement

10-20: Arrival

20-35: Records and tools

35-50: An independent trail

50-55: Break

55-75: The immediate problem

75-95: The final choice

95-110: Home and aftermath

110-120: Closing and epilogues

Follow both investigations; take the break before the immediate problem.

At 75 minutes, settle the immediate problem using a safe approach without another roll. At 95 minutes,

finish the final method and begin the return.

With 10 minutes left, first secure the immediate goal: Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments. Mark the immediate goal safe only once the people or resource are secured. Then, if no final method was used: Pause intake and preserve the model until her sister can reply. Mark the fallback method and read the cost ending. Give each character an epilogue; do not bypass the safety step.

4 PLAYERS

Create a renewal process that respects owners who are absent.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Give Rhea a choice about her own promise.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Arrival - 10 minutes

Place: Archive lobby

Read aloud

A jar containing a tiny ladder trembles on the lobby desk. Noel says it is a promise to help paint a ceiling.

Run this scene

The archive's rule, not broken promises alone, causes the overload. Pause the service as a fallback. Begin with the concrete request in the premise. Ask each character why they care and give them one ordinary useful item. Read both public observations without requiring a roll. Explain that the marked routes are safe to investigate, and offer a choice of the records or the visible trail. Let the group appoint a map reader; do not use hidden travel rolls to block the first lead.

Choices

1. Visit Card desk
2. Follow the trail to Delivery steps

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Promise vault. A missing method can be found again at Renewal shelf; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Noel: Recover a promise without making it binding forever Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Timeline record: Every overflowing shelf is stamped PERMANENT; no owner has a renewal card. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The archive's rule, not broken promises alone, causes the overload.

Fallback instruction: Closing new intake stops the shelves growing while old deposits stay safe. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Pause the service as a fallback.

Records and tools - 15 minutes

Place: Card desk

Read aloud

Imi lays out cards marked KEEP, CHANGE and RELEASE. The old catalogue has only one box: PERMANENT.

Run this scene

Consent-based revision clears deposits. The archivist is in the vault. Put the method card and destination note on the table. Ask what the two objects suggest, then answer direct practical questions from their wording. The maker can trade tools for help carrying or recording them, but refusal never removes these public documents. The trail remains another route. A check, if your rules use one, changes the time or tidiness of the work rather than whether this evidence exists.

Choices

1. Proceed to Promise vault
2. Compare evidence at Delivery steps

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Promise vault. A missing method can be found again at Renewal shelf; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Imi: Create a record for a promise that can change Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Method diagram: A willing owner may mark KEEP, CHANGE or RELEASE and sign a renewal card. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Consent-based revision clears deposits.

Destination note: Rhea's duty card places her in the promise vault. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: The archivist is in the vault.

An independent trail - 15 minutes

Place: Delivery steps

Read aloud

Gus's delivery basket is full of keys, pebbles and folded paper stars. Nobody has signed the old receipts.

Run this scene

A physical trail reaches her. A witness supplies the destination. Describe the physical trail before asking for a decision. The witness tells what they actually observed and admits what they did not see. If the group refuses conversation, the physical route supplies the destination. Let a character compare the timeline and another trace the map. For a divided group, take one short turn per side, then reunite at the meeting; do not add another travel encounter.

Choices

1. Proceed to Promise vault
2. Compare evidence at Card desk

If the group gets stuck

If conversation or a test fails, give the public card anyway. A clear sign points to Promise vault. A missing method can be found again at Renewal shelf; no character skill is required.

People and evidence

Gus: Deliver overdue tokens to willing owners Guides the party if they share a plan. If refused, points to the visible trail. Voice: Cautious, distinguish observation from assumption.

Physical trail: A trail of garden leaves falls from the model toward the vault. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: A physical trail reaches her.

Witness statement: Gus saw Rhea carry her garden model into the vault. Give it: Ask any direct question, or read the witness's signed statement if conversation is refused. GM inference: A witness supplies the destination.

The immediate problem - 20 minutes

Place: Promise vault

Read aloud

Rhea stands among shelves of objects that lean toward the door. She holds a small model of a shared garden.

Run this scene

Archivist Rhea classified unresolved promises as permanent deposits. That prevents owners from revising them, so the objects accumulate. A consent-based renewal card releases a deposit; sealing new intake stops the overload but leaves old promises unresolved. State the immediate stakes and offer both listed approaches. Before resolving action, ask who observes, who acts and who helps. Make any cost visible before a player accepts it. Avoid demanding a special ability or spell. When a plan fails, use the slower listed route and mark its time cost; people remain recoverable. Once the goal is safe, mark the immediate goal safe and continue. A refusal by the keeper cannot hide the marked safety instructions.

Choices

1. Invite present owners to choose cards; move absent owners' tokens to a dated waiting shelf.
2. Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments.

If the group gets stuck

Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments. Explain a five-minute delay before they accept it; mark the immediate goal safe when the people or resource are secured.

People and evidence

Rhea: Ask her sister to revise a promise she cannot fulfil Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Safety marks: No one may sign for another owner. A missing owner's token goes to WAITING, not RELEASE. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Resolve the archive without overriding absent people.

Encounter and party adaptation

Create a renewal process that respects owners who are absent.

A delay leaves less time for the final repair or decision. Explain costs before resolving an action.

Invite present owners to choose cards; move absent owners' tokens to a dated waiting shelf.

Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments.

Two pairs take observation and action tasks. Resolve them in two short alternating turns.

Mark the immediate goal safe after either safe approach; a setback costs time, not access to the next scene.

The final choice - 20 minutes

Place: Renewal shelf

Read aloud

The renewal shelf is empty except for three card slots. It seems built for a choice the archive stopped offering.

Run this scene

Consent-based revision clears deposits. Resolve the archive without overriding absent people. Reveal the method and fallback together. Ask the group which tradeoff it accepts and give every character a small contribution. Mark the complete method for the first choice or the fallback method for the second. A risky improvisation should inherit one of these outcomes after its cost is explained, rather than create a third unprepared lock. Keep the immediate goal safe. Return by the known marked route; no new location needs to be invented.

Choices

1. Let Rhea request a revised garden promise and adopt renewal cards for the archive.
2. Pause intake and preserve the model until her sister can reply.

If the group gets stuck

Pause intake and preserve the model until her sister can reply. Mark the fallback method, keep the immediate goal safe and read the cost ending. Do not repeat a failed test.

People and evidence

Imi: Create a record for a promise that can change Lends supplies if a character helps carry or catalogue them. Public instructions remain available. Voice: Quick, exact words; point at tools while speaking.

Rhea: Ask her sister to revise a promise she cannot fulfil Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Method diagram: A willing owner may mark KEEP, CHANGE or RELEASE and sign a renewal card. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Consent-based revision clears deposits.

Fallback instruction: Closing new intake stops the shelves growing while old deposits stay safe. Give it: Inspect the visible labelled object. Give its full text automatically; a check affects time or extra colour only. GM inference: Pause the service as a fallback.

Encounter and party adaptation

Give Rhea a choice about her own promise.

The complete method preserves the planned service; the fallback preserves the immediate goal at a visible cost.

Let Rhea request a revised garden promise and adopt renewal cards for the archive.

Pause intake and preserve the model until her sister can reply.

Work in two pairs, one following the method and the other preparing a fallback or record.

Mark the complete method for the first approach or the fallback method for the second. Both allow return and an ending.

Home and aftermath - 15 minutes

Place: Archive lobby

Read aloud

A ladder dissolves into a warm draft. Its owner keeps the decision, rather than an object that makes the decision for them.

Run this scene

Choose a complete resolution or a resolution with a cost, then ask the group what happens next. Read the ending matching the selected outcome. Invite each character to add one ordinary detail to the aftermath, then ask the keeper for a concrete next action. Record who accepted the cost and which clues went unused. Spend the last few minutes on one enjoyable moment and one thing to change next time. Characters need not solve every optional inference to earn a resolved ending.

Choices

1. Describe who follows up tomorrow
2. Ask who helped whom and what it cost

If the group gets stuck

If no method was chosen, first confirm the immediate goal is safe, use the final fallback method and then read the cost ending. Record the unresolved work and give every character an epilogue.

People and evidence

Noel: Recover a promise without making it binding forever Offers directions and ordinary transport for news of the outcome. Voice: Patient, concrete sentences; ask one practical question.

Rhea: Ask her sister to revise a promise she cannot fulfil Explains both solutions when the party agrees to protect the immediate goal; the marked instructions are available regardless. Voice: Calm under pressure; admit the decision and its cost.

Endings

Complete resolution

The shelf clears one decision at a time. Rhea writes a smaller garden plan and sends it as a request, with room for an answer.

First secure the immediate goal at Promise vault. Use final method A at Renewal shelf before choosing this ending.

Resolution with a cost

New intake closes. The tokens rest safely behind glass while invitations go out for patient, individual conversations.

First secure the immediate goal at Promise vault. Use final method B at Renewal shelf before choosing this ending.

Let Rhea request a revised garden promise and adopt renewal cards for the archive remains for a later visit.

Handout answers

h-order: The archive's rule, not broken promises alone, causes the overload.

h-fallback: Pause the service as a fallback.

h-method: Consent-based revision clears deposits.

h-note: The archivist is in the vault.

h-trail: A physical trail reaches her.

h-witness: A witness supplies the destination.

h-safe: Resolve the archive without overriding absent people.

Clue reasoning

The archive's rule, not broken promises alone, causes the overload.: c-order

Proceed to Promise vault: c-note OR c-trail OR c-witness

Resolve the archive without overriding absent people.: c-safe / marked safety fallback

Give Rhea a choice about her own promise.: c-method OR c-fallback

Map descriptions

GM route atlas: Start at Archive lobby. Card desk and Delivery steps are independent investigation routes; both connect to Promise vault, which leads to Renewal shelf. All marked connections are bidirectional. Return uses the known route to Archive lobby.

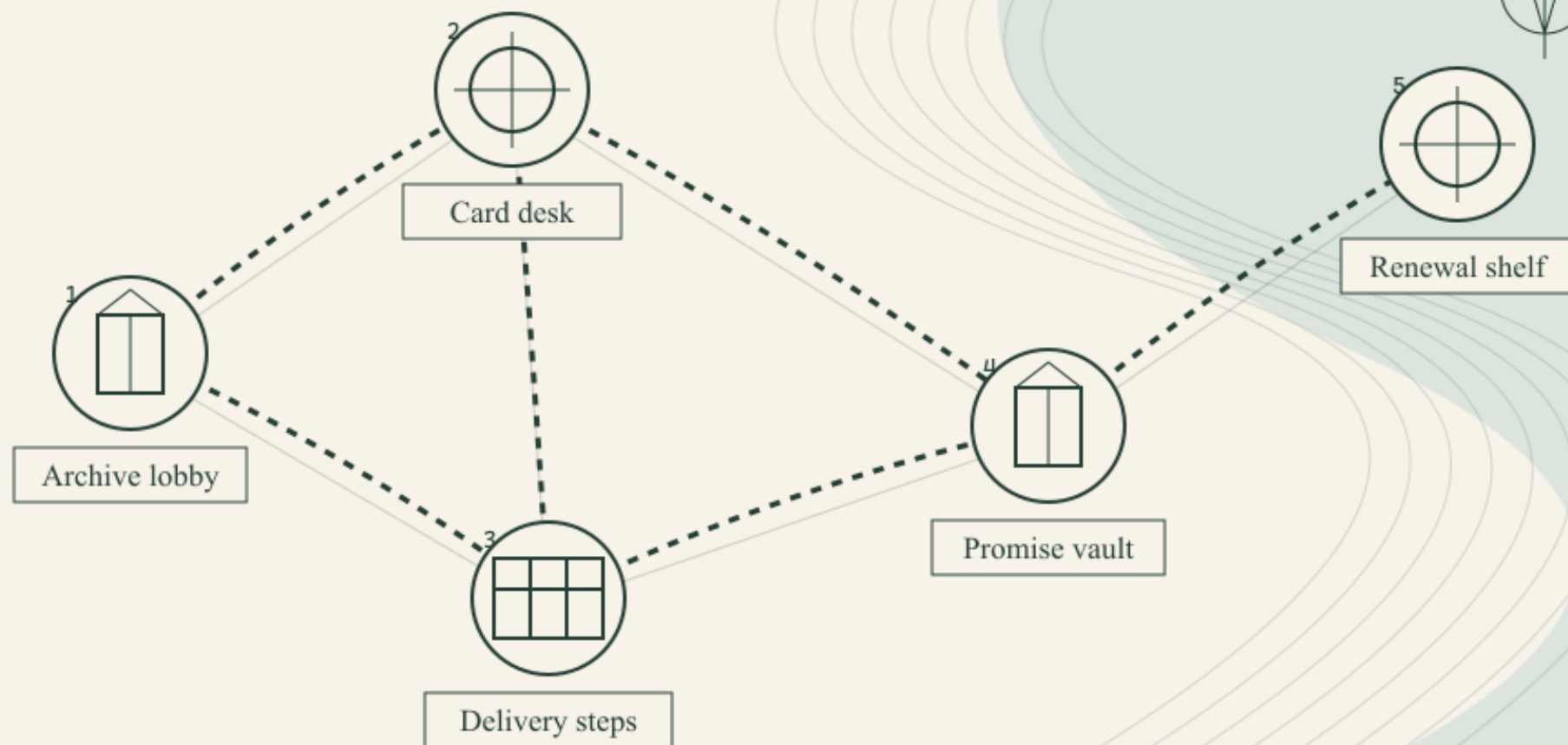
Promise vault - approach plan: At Promise vault, the marked entrance reaches the immediate problem.

Approach A: Invite present owners to choose cards; move absent owners' tokens to a dated waiting shelf.

Approach B: Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments. Both reach the onward route. Layout is schematic, with no combat grid or movement scale.

Player route map: Public route map: Archive lobby connects to Card desk and Delivery steps; either reaches Promise vault, then Renewal shelf. Routes work in both directions. Retrace the route to return. No hidden information is marked.

GM route atlas

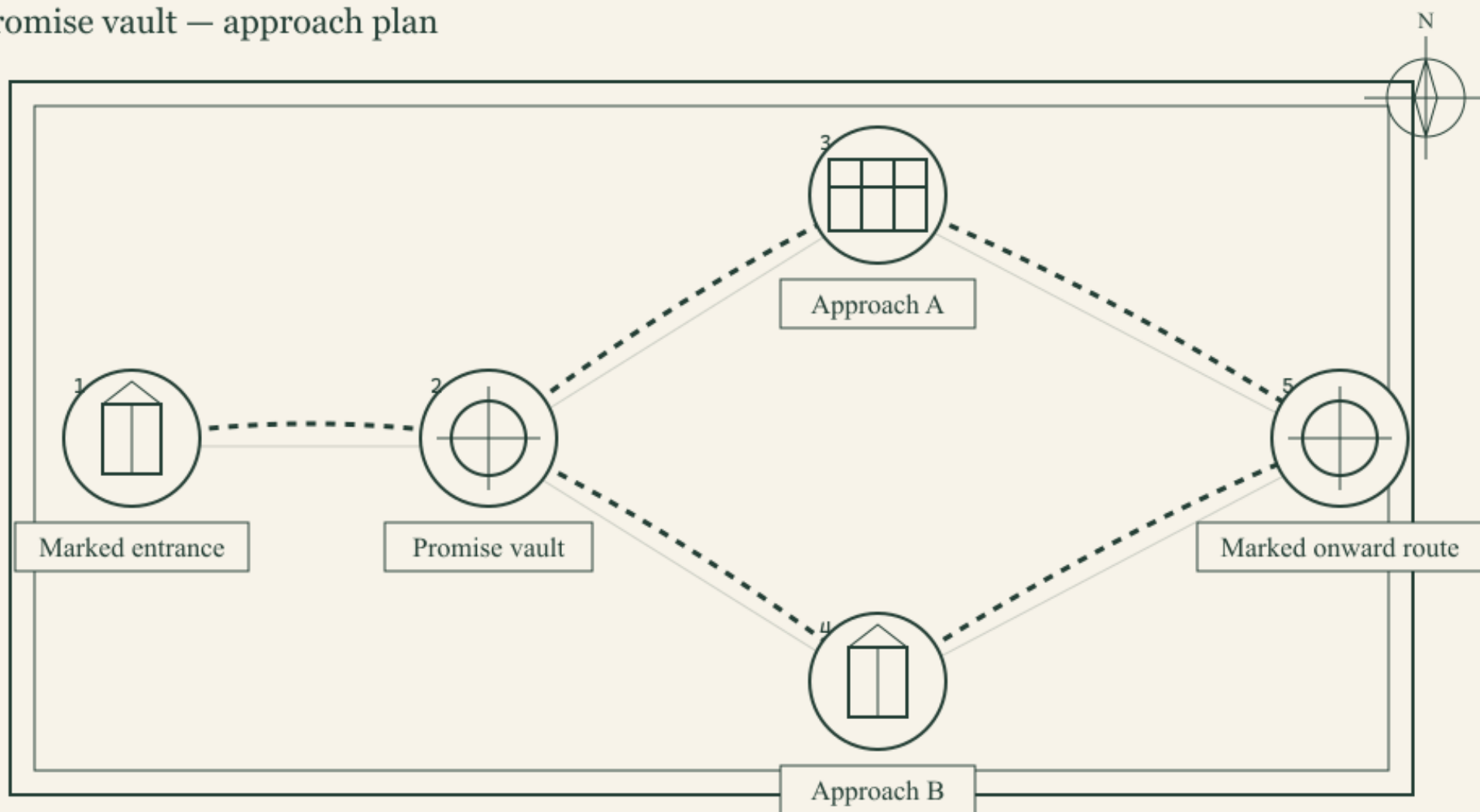


C-SAFE / immediate problem

C-METHOD or C-FALLBACK

GM ATLAS · CONNECTIONS ARE BIDIRECTIONAL · NOT TO SCALE · 1.0.0

Promise vault — approach plan



Invite present owners to choose cards; move absent owners' tokens to a dated waiting shelf.

Close intake and schedule private renewal appointments.

GM ATLAS · CONNECTIONS ARE BIDIRECTIONAL · NOT TO SCALE · 1.0.0