Terraforming Mars: Sponsorships

A fan module by Samthere (Bear)

Ever since the World Government launched the Martian terraforming project, people have looked up to the sky and dreamed of what comes next. While some corporations strive to carve out the bulk of the Terraforming Committee's subsidies, the initiative presents opportunities for all sorts of new ideas. Entrepreneurs, idealists and opportunists, individuals and organisations alike; they have something to put on the stage, and the red planet is holding auditions!

These hopefuls offer various sponsorships for anyone willing to help achieve their goals. Those who do so will gain access to unique benefits and rewards.

Sponsorships is a fan-created module for Terraforming Mars that modifies the Milestones system present in the base game. Instead of simply competing for points, being the first to achieve sponsorship goals offers a choice of varied rewards that play into different strategies and help keep up the pace of the game, while also being less punishing for players who get beaten to the top spot.

Contents

1 Sponsorships board:

17 sponsor-chips (reward tokens):

Setup

After selecting the board (and any variant Milestone claim conditions), place the Sponsorships board so that it covers the top of the Milestones section. Select six sponsor-chips arbitrarily and place them face up along the Sponsorships board. This happens before players are dealt any cards (such as corporations, projects or preludes). When playing with this module, the Milestones are referred to as sponsorships.

Playing

As an action, you may claim an available sponsorship if you meet the requirement. To do so, pay 5M€, place one of your player markers on the chosen sponsorship, and choose a reward. You can't claim a sponsorship you've already claimed, but you *can* claim one that another player already has.

If you're the first player to claim a particular sponsorship, you may take one of the available sponsor-chip reward tokens **or** the default reward (1TR or 10M€). Otherwise, if another player has already made the first claim for that sponsorship, you simply claim the default reward (1TR or 10M€).

In this way, it's possible for every player to claim every sponsorship. Up to 5 of the 6 sponsor-chip reward tokens can be claimed.

Rewards listed on a gold background on a sponsor-chip are gained immediately when you claim it. Rewards on a blue background have an ongoing effect or an action. If the sponsorship has no ongoing effects after gaining the immediate benefits, turn it face-down and keep it with your events. If it has a blue section, keep it face-up in your tableau, unless stated otherwise. For specific details of each different sponsor-chip, see the following section.

Ablative Disarmament

Raise the temperature 1 step and gain 4 heat.

You've earned the contract to help execute a disarmament program for participating Earth nations, by shipping weapons to Mars for explosive decommission. How convenient!

AI Project Manager

Add 1 resource to each of your cards with at least 1 resource on it.

A bespoke AI is trained to oversee your project lifecycle, helping to streamline complex logistical tasks, and enabling your experts to focus on their strengths.

Celebrity Endorsement

3VP.

Your sponsor has connections to a beloved celebrity, who's at the centre of a viral social media campaign in support of your efforts!

Communal Planting Programme

Place a greenery tile and increase oxygen level 1 step.

In your name, huge numbers of Martian residents seed and raise vegetation on the planet's surface.

Contracting Network

Gain 2M€ for each different tag you have (excluding this).

Effect: When you perform an action, the wildcard counts as any tag of your choice until your next action. (This continues during production and the end of the game.)

Your sponsor initiates you into a network of experts and professionals, allowing you to outsource your subject experts and access specialist advice to help fill gaps.

Dyson Swarm Initiative

Increase your energy production and your heat production 1 step each.

Counts as playing a power tag.

With the aid of your sponsor, you successfully design and launch a proof-of-concept Dyson swarm, jumpstarting a mega-scale project to deploy energy collectors in orbit around the Sun.

Experimental UHP Tomography

Place 1 ocean tile and gain 1 plant.

You help your sponsor obtain licenses for practical testing of cutting-edge, extremely deep subsurface scanning technology. They help you locate new liquid water sources, ripe for pumping.

Interplanetary Racing Cup

Gain 4 titanium. Reveal cards from the deck until you reveal a space card. Put that card into your hand and discard the rest.

It may seem frivolous, but pushing the state of the art for the sake of a space race leads to technological innovations in all sorts of fields!

Iterative Improvements

Effect: When you play a card, you pay 2 M€ less for it.

Repetition is the mother of learning. Your sponsor's expertise in project analysis and process improvements helps you to further refine what you're already good at.

Longevity Enhancements
Add 6 microbes or 3 animals to any card.
Your sponsor shares breakthrough improvements in helping living things thrive in the developing Martian ecosphere, which you're quick to implement.

Many-Worlds' Fair
Look at the top 5 cards from the deck. Take 3 of them into hand and discard the other 2.
You and your sponsor pioneer an interplanetary exhibition, promoting and sharing new ideas from all fields! Your role in facilitating the event puts you in close contact with many of the exhibitors.

Native Prospectors
Increase your steel production 1 step. Gain 4 steel.
With people now being born and living their entire lives on the red planet, it's clear that some Martian natives have insights into their home world unmatched by their alien contemporaries, and your sponsor can get them to work with you.

Prefabricated City
Place a city tile on any non-ocean area. You may place it next to another city.
Together with your sponsor, you develop a prototype for rapid deployment of prefabricated, modular infrastructure.

Recycled Irrigation Bots
Increase your plant production 2 steps.
Your sponsor provides access to a variety of deprecated agricultural machinery, which you're able to refurbish to help automate surface farming.

Seat on the Panel
Fund an award for free, even if 3 awards are already funded. (Place this token on the award.)
Effect: Add 1 to your total when scoring the chosen award.
Your sponsor is highly respected and influential in their field, sitting on the panel of judges for a prestigious industry award. Nobody would call it foul play, but the judges are often more aware of your achievements than the other candidates'.

Specialist Recruitment
Increase any production 1 step. Increase your M€ production 1 step.
You're looking to hire experts in very specific areas. You need the best people, with very particular skills, and your sponsor knows how to find them.

Startup Business Incubator
Action: Spend any resource to draw a card. (Once per generation.)
You create an environment for budding innovators to find funding, tools and each other. When big ideas grow into big successes, you're already working with them.

Aims of the Module

The idea for this module came about after playing multiple games in which the milestones mechanic left some players not having fun. I've thought a lot about what makes Terraforming Mars so much fun for a lot of players, even if they're not winning, and broadly I feel that it's the sense that you've still been able to do your thing and tell your story. Milestones don't quite fit within that, but since they're so disproportionately valuable, you're heavily punished if you don't feel like paying attention to them, or even worse if you do go for them but miss due to chance, misjudgement, or just turn order. It can be extremely punishing, and while I don't necessarily think it's unbalanced, it's become noticeable to me that they often make the game less for players who aren't quite as competitive.

Another problem I have with milestones is that they're by far the single most valuable part of the game. Awards sit right next to them, generally costing more and carrying the risk that another player can take the benefit. At best, an award is *only* as good as a milestone, and generally they're quite a bit worse. I think milestones, being safer once you get them, should be less valuable than awards. Finally, if you do need to disrupt your strategy to claim a milestone, you *only* get points. It takes resources out of the game, and thus delays the end of the game.

Sponsorships aims to provide an experience that eases all of these issues, and was very much designed for a more relaxed "have fun seeing things happen" environment. The simple solution to the first issue was allowing players to still get *something* out of their efforts, even if they don't get there first and claim the big reward. The second issue is helped by simply making them less valuable, so you actually have a meaningful decision between rushing for the targets and playing towards your strategy and so that awards share the spotlight. The final issue is one of making the rewards more interesting. Giving back fungible resources helps you lever your success into playing more of the game, so I decided that would be the general route rather than just points.

I still wanted to reward someone for prioritising a goal, without punishing players quite so harshly if they lose that race. I decided that the baseline reward of 3VP for 5M€ (which is still incredibly good, but not quite so game-warping) was a good guideline to design effects around. This works out to be sort of similar to 1.5 TR (depending on when you get it) or 15M€, so there's a lot of space to try different things. The default reward is 1.5VP/1TR/10M€ which is about half as good, considering the cost to claim.

Not all tokens are strictly equal. For example, 3 animals takes some work to be as good as 3VP, and will rarely be better than it. But there are 6 tokens for 5 awards and the same ones won't come up every time, so rushing to get the one you want is still rewarded while allowing a little wiggle room. Figuring out when some are better or worse (or how to make them better), or whether you need them right away, is part of the fun for me. Personally I often don't include the 3VP award since it's less interesting, but it provides a good comparison and can be quite appealing to grab when the others don't line up with your strategy.

Contact

I've only playtested this locally, so any feedback or adjustments are appreciated! Let me know if certain tiles seem weak or strong, if you have any tweaks that help it play better, or if you have interesting ideas for new token effects! This first pass is mostly core effects with a few extras.

Email: the.samthere@gmail.com   Steam: Bear (https://steam.bears.cool)
Discord: bearsam   BGG: Samthere