08: Participatory Budgeting—How To Build Deep Community Engagement in Real Budget Decisions (201)

Trainer(s):
Josh Lerner
Participatory Budgeting Project
www.participatorybudgeting.org
The Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) is a non-profit organization that empowers people to decide together how to spend public money, primarily in the US and Canada. We create and support participatory budgeting processes that deepen democracy, build stronger communities, and make public budgets more equitable and effective.

**Technical Assistance**
We build capacity for local PB advocacy, implementation and evaluation.

**Movement Building**
We build the infrastructure and capacity necessary to scale up and improve the practice of PB across North America.

*We have worked with partners to engage 60,000 people in over 40 PB processes to decide how to spend $45,000,000 on more than 274 community projects.*
Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a different way to manage public money. It is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. PB gives ordinary people real decision-making power over real money.

**How it works**

Local communities make budget decisions through an annual cycle of meetings and voting. Most experiences follow a similar basic process: residents brainstorm spending ideas, volunteer budget delegates develop proposals based on these ideas, residents vote on proposals, and the government funds the top projects. After funding, the process starts again, and PB becomes part of the way government works.
WHERE ITS HAPPENING

The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre started the first full PB process in 1989, for its municipal budget. As many as 50,000 people have participated each year, to decide as much as 20% of the city budget.

Since then, PB has spread to over 1,500 city budgets in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. States, counties, housing authorities, schools, universities, and community organizations have also used PB for their budgets.

Toronto Community Housing

In 2001, Toronto’s public housing authority began to engage tenants in allocating $9 million of capital funding per year. Tenants identify local infrastructure priorities in building meetings, then budget delegates from each building meet to decide which priorities receive funding.

New York City

In 2011, four New York City Council Members piloted a PB process to let residents allocate part of their capital discretionary funds. 24 Council Members have since joined PBNYC, giving the community decision-making power over more than $28 million in taxpayer money.

Vallejo, California

The City of Vallejo launched the first city-wide PB process in the US. Residents are allocating $2.4 million in sales tax revenues.

OUTCOMES

- More Civic Engagement
- Broader Political Participation
- New Community Leaders and More Active Citizens
- Stronger Relationships Between Government, Organizations, and Residents
- Fairer and More Effective Spending

PARTICIPATE!

To learn more and get involved, contact the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP).

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Brooklyn, New York 11217 USA

PBP is a non-profit organization that empowers people to decide together how to spend public money, primarily in the US and Canada. We create and support participatory budgeting processes that deepen democracy, build stronger communities, and make public budgets more equitable and effective.
Training Workshop
Participatory Budgeting – How to Build Deep Community Engagement in Real Budget Decisions

November 19, 2014, 1:00p – 4:30p

Goals
1. Gain a deeper understanding of PB and how it’s being used in North America.
2. Experience firsthand how a PB process works.
3. Identify strategies and next steps for moving PB forward in your community.

Agenda
1. Introduction to Participatory Budgeting
2. Q&A
3. Gathering Ideas: Mock Neighborhood Assembly
4. Developing Proposals: Mock Delegate Process
5. Deciding the Winners: Mock Vote
6. Next Steps: Starting PB in Your Community

participatorybudgeting.org | @PBProject
YOU DECIDE
Participatory Budgeting in Port Happy

Welcome to the city of Port Happy! The Mayor, Al Calde, has recently launched a new participatory budgeting (PB) process, inviting residents to decide how to spend $1 million from the city budget.

A coastal city of 151,000 people, Port Happy has fallen on unhappy times. The once-active port is now mostly abandoned, leading to growing unemployment. Despite a solid middle-class tax base, city services and infrastructure have been neglected for years. Relations between residents have been tense, as a stream of mostly white professionals has moved into the city to take advantage of cheap housing and proximity to nearby employment centers, often displacing people of color.

Residents have grown frustrated with City Hall’s inaction and fiscal mismanagement. A coalition of community groups pressured Mayor Calde to launch a PB process, to give the community more say. You see a flyer in the street and decide to check out one of the first public meetings. Now, it's YOUR turn to decide...
Goals

1. Get to know our neighbors.
2. Learn about the City budget process, participatory budgeting, and our community.
3. Identify project ideas in our community.
4. Select budget delegates to turn these ideas into full proposals.

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Introduction to the City Budget and Participatory Budgeting
3. Breakout groups to brainstorm project ideas
4. Report-backs and Next Steps
Sign Up to be a Budget Delegate!

Budget delegates are essential to participatory budgeting. They take the ideas developed by community members at the assemblies and elsewhere, and turn them into concrete proposals to put on the final ballot. You can serve as a budget delegate if you are at least 14 years old and are a resident of this city, or a stakeholder of the city (i.e. you physically work, own a business, attend school, or are parents of children who attend school in this city).

Take advantage of this opportunity to learn about your community, government & budgeting!

Responsibilities and Benefits of Being a Budget Delegate:

- Attend 1-2 meetings per month from December to April, including a Budget Delegate Orientation in December
- Gain skills and learn about your community and city budgeting
- Get to know your neighbors and the city!
- Review community needs and ideas from across the city
- Visit locations throughout the city and research project ideas
- Choose and work on a committee that will address the city’s needs (Committees may include, but are not limited to, Transportation, Public Health, Public Safety, Education, Parks, Recreation & Environment, Art & Culture, Housing, Youth)
- Develop proposals for projects, with experts from city departments and agencies
- Educate the community about the project proposals and city needs at the Project Expos in April and during the vote in May
- Participate in outreach efforts to educate the community about PB
- Be a community leader and help shape a new type of democracy!

YES! I WANT TO BE A BUDGET DELEGATE!

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a budget delegate. Please print clearly and legibly, so we know how to get in touch with you!

NAME ____________________________ EMAIL ____________________________
HOME PHONE ( ) ______________________ CELL PHONE ( ) ______________________
HOME ADDRESS _______________________________________________________
TODAY’S DATE _______________________________________________________

Training Workshop: Introduction to Participatory Budgeting | September 25, 2014
Delegate Meetings

You recently completed the round of neighborhood assemblies. At the assemblies, you and your neighbors learned about the pot of money and brainstormed the initial ideas below. You also volunteered to be a budget delegate, to turn the initial ideas into project proposals! Now, as budget delegates, you will divide into committees to develop specific proposals based on the initial ideas.

Instructions:
• In your committee, develop 3-4 specific project proposals, using the initial ideas below as a starting point. Feel free to use locations and examples from your home city.
• For each proposal, complete the project proposal form on the next page.

Initial Ideas from Neighborhood Assemblies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Streets &amp; Transportation Committee</th>
<th>B. Parks &amp; Recreation Committee</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sidewalk repairs</td>
<td>1. Community gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sidewalk ramps at intersections</td>
<td>2. New park path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Marked bike lanes</td>
<td>3. Planters on streets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bus stop shelters and benches</td>
<td>4. Park improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lights at certain bus stops</td>
<td>5. Benches in parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Benches at every bus stop</td>
<td>6. Playground repair and new equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Street resurfacing</td>
<td>7. More park bathrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Heated bus shelters</td>
<td>8. Mobile recreation unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Traffic safety awareness program</td>
<td>10. Public yoga classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bike riding classes</td>
<td>11. Composting program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. More traffic safety officers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. Youth Committee</th>
<th>D. Health &amp; Public Safety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Skatepark</td>
<td>1. Street light improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Renovate basketball courts</td>
<td>2. New fire truck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Renovations to teen drop-in center</td>
<td>3. New sonogram machine for local clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Youth-designed murals</td>
<td>4. Healthy cooking classes for youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Bike lanes near schools</td>
<td>5. Community policing program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. After-school programs</td>
<td>6. Outdoor fitness equipment in local parks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Youth radio training program</td>
<td>7. Security cameras in high-crime areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Free summer concerts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Community Profile of Port Happy

**Population:** 151,382  
**Median income:** $66,505

### Sample Total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number*</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 14 years</td>
<td>23,799</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19 years</td>
<td>9,116</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24 years</td>
<td>9,180</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-44 years</td>
<td>39,170</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-64 years</td>
<td>45,300</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and over</td>
<td>24,277</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Race/Ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number*</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>47,591</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>17,731</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Pacific Islander</td>
<td>55,544</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other non Hispanic</td>
<td>4,363</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>5,336</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic origins</td>
<td>20,187</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Highest Level of Education (25yrs and older)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Number*</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 9th</td>
<td>5,779</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th-12th grade</td>
<td>6,372</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School grade</td>
<td>27,315</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college, no degree</td>
<td>17,291</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>7,987</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>26,357</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate or professional degree</td>
<td>15,368</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Income & Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Number*</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
<td>2,216</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000-$14,999</td>
<td>1,929</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000-$24,999</td>
<td>4,446</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$25,000-$34,999</td>
<td>4,795</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,000-$49,999</td>
<td>6,019</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,000-$74,999</td>
<td>10,031</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000-$99,999</td>
<td>7,782</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$149,999</td>
<td>10,027</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000-$199,999</td>
<td>3,765</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>3,047</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number*</th>
<th>Percentage*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>68,248</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Indo-European</td>
<td>24,380</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>15,691</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Korean</td>
<td>29,889</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,964</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Project Proposal Form

## Committee:

### Project Name:

### Location: (provide street names if applicable)

### Description: (1-2 sentences describing what the project involves)

### Estimated Cost:

### Votes:
The Participatory Budgeting Project’s mission is to empower people to decide together how to spend public money. We create and support participatory budgeting processes that deepen democracy, build stronger communities, and make public budgets more equitable and effective.

Founded in 2009, PBP is the first and only organization in the United States whose sole focus is to advance participatory budgeting. We organize trainings and conferences to educate the public, provide technical assistance to develop participatory budgeting processes, and conduct research & evaluation to help participatory budgeting grow. We have worked with local partners to launch the initial participatory budgeting processes in the US, and by the end of 2014, more than 60,000 people will have participated in our programs.

To learn more about PBP’s work, please visit www.participatorybudgeting.org

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What is Participatory Budgeting?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables taxpayers to work with government to make the budget decisions that affect their lives. PB has been used for cities, counties, states, schools, universities, housing authorities, and other agencies.

PB is usually an annual cycle involving months of meetings and voting. Hundreds of people brainstorm spending ideas for community improvements, then work with their neighbors and technical experts to create project proposals. Thousands of people then vote on the proposals they want to see in their communities. The government or institution then funds and implements winning projects. A typical PB cycle looks like this:

History of Participatory Budgeting

The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre initiated the first full-scale participatory budgeting process in 1989. Since then, as many as 50,000 people have participated each year, to decide as much as 20% of the city's budget. Participatory budgeting has spread to over 1,500 cities in Latin America, North America, Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The Chicago Alderman Joe Moore and the Participatory Budgeting Project launched the first PB process in the United States in 2009. New York City piloted PBNYC in 2011, developing the nation’s largest PB process.
IMPLEMENTING PB

City / Level of PB
Boston, MA / City
Chicago, IL / District
Lawrence, MA / Middle School
Brooklyn, NY / College
New York City, NY / District
Rochester, NY / City
San Antonio, TX / College
San Francisco, CA / City
San Juan, PR / City
St Louis, MO / District
Vallejo, CA / City

San Francisco, CA
Current Cycle: 2
Expected participation: 1500 in 3 Districts
Total allocated: $400K

Vallejo, CA
Current Cycle: 2
Participation last cycle: 3917 citywide
Total allocated: $5.8M

ORGANIZING FOR PB

Baltimore, MD
Buffalo, NY
Chattanooga, TN
Detroit, MI
Greensboro, NC
Long Beach, CA
Ithaca, NY
Jackson, MS
Merced, CA
New Haven, CT
New Orleans, LA
Oakland, CA
Phoenix, AZ
Richmond, CA
San Diego, CA
San Jose, CA
St Petersburg, FL

The Growth of PB in the US
Each dot represents one district, city, or institution implementing PB.

2009  2010  2011  2012  2013  2014 (projected)
Where is PB happening?
Since the first PB experiment in Chicago in 2009, PB has more than tripled in scale throughout the US. This map offers a snapshot of a growing PB movement.
**Case Studies**

These five cities represent different scales and models of participatory budgeting. A common thread is the collaboration between local residents, community organizations, and city government—the building blocks of PB. Each PB process represents a new way of thinking about budgeting and a new relationship between government and the people.

**Chicago: A PB pioneer**

**Government partners:** Joe Moore (Ward 49), John Arena (Ward 45), Rick Muñoz (Ward 22)

**Lead technical assistance partner:** Participatory Budgeting Project

**Lead community partner:** Great Cities Institute-University of Illinois at Chicago

Chicago was the first US city to implement participatory budgeting, in Alderman Joe Moore’s Ward in 2009. In 2012 the Participatory Budgeting Project and the Great Cities Institute partnered to expand PB to additional wards and pots of money, launching the broader PB Chicago initiative. Since then PB has been used in four additional wards, and the City’s Budget Office is hiring a new PB Manager.


**PBNYC: Scaling up**

**Government partners:** Council Members Melissa Mark-Viverito (D8), Brad Lander (D39), Jumaane Williams (D45), Steve Levin (D33), Erich Ulrich (D32), Carlos Menchaca (D38), Mark Weprin (D23), David Greenfield (D44), Donovan Richards (D31), and Ben Kallos (D5).

**Lead technical assistance partner:** Participatory Budgeting Project

**Lead community partner:** Community Voices Heard

PBNYC is the largest participatory budgeting process in the United States. The Participatory Budgeting Project and Community Voices Heard worked with four City Council members to initiate it in their districts in 2011/2012. In Cycle 1 of PBNYC, more than 7,700 people in four Council Districts participated. This doubled during Cycle 2 (2012/2013) in which almost 14,000 people in eight Council Districts created proposals and voted to fund more than 45 projects, totaling almost $10 million in public funds. Cycle 3 (2013/2014) grew to 10 Council Districts--two of which are new to PBNYC and 80% people of color--and 16,000 people. This cycle opened up more than $14 million in public funds to direct, community-level decision-making.

PBNYC is poised to grow dramatically in 2014. More than 21 City Council Members have committed to implementing PB in their districts in 2014 - nearly half of City Council. Mayor Bill de Blasio pledged during his campaign to help expand PB, and the new City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito is one of the original PB champions.

**PB Vallejo: Rebuilding trust in government**  
**Government partner:** City of Vallejo, CA  
**Lead technical assistance partner:** Participatory Budgeting Project  
**Community partners:** Better Vallejo, NAACP

In 2012 Vallejo City Council approved the first city-wide PB process in the US, as part of the city's return to fiscal stability and accountability after bankruptcy. The City of Vallejo contracted the Participatory Budgeting Project to implement the process.

The funds for PB came from a 1% sales tax approved by voters in 2011. Residents decided how to spend 30% of this revenue - over $3 million in 2013. Winning projects included streets repair, parks improvements, equipment and improvements for school libraries, small business grants, improvements to senior center, and security cameras/enhanced street lighting.

City Council approved a second cycle to allocate $2.4 million in 2014. The City also hired three full-time staff members to oversee the process, and the Participatory Budgeting Project continues to provide technical assistance.

Funder: City of Vallejo, Davenport Institute

**Boston: PB by and for youth**  
**Lead government partner:** City of Boston  
**Lead technical assistance partner:** Participatory Budgeting Project  
**Lead community partners:** Youth on Board, The City School

In 2013 The City of Boston initiated the first youth PB process in the US, for $1 million in capital funds. The City contracted the Participatory Budgeting Project to support project implementation and recruited a Steering Committee of 30 organizations. Young Bostonians designed the process through the Steering Committee, and will develop and vote on projects between March and June 2014. The pilot year of PB Boston focuses on five underserved neighborhoods.

Funder: City of Boston

**San Francisco: Beyond capital funds**  
**Lead government partners:** Supervisor David Chiu (District 3)  
**Lead technical assistance partners:** Participatory Budgeting Project, Katz & Associates  
**Lead community partners:** Coleman Advocates, Chinese Progressive Association, Chinese for Affirmative Action

Supervisor David Chiu initiated a pilot process in 2013 for $100,000 in discretionary funds, with both capital projects and programs eligible for funding. Winning projects included a public awareness campaign to educate seniors about consumer scams, one-time back rent and homelessness prevention grants for up to 25 households, employment training and job matching for youth, and 500 new Chinese language books for public libraries. The 2014 process will involve three districts, each allocating $100,000.

Funder: City of San Francisco
**PB Stories**
Participants describe the impact PB has on them personally and the impact it has on their communities.

**Mamnun Haq, PBNYC** is a community leader who immigrated from Bangladesh more than 20 years ago. He says “The Bangladeshi community is often left behind and less likely to take part in civic engagement and election processes. I thought [PB] would be a great way to get them involved as well as work as a stepping stone to future civic engagement.”

Mamnun has been a budget delegate, district committee member, and most recently a member of the Citywide Steering Committee. He believes the most important impact of PB is in reaching people who don’t usually engage: “It was heartwarming and inspiring to see members of varied immigrant communities come out and vote. Many [of whom] are not fortunate enough to be able to vote in local, state and federal elections.”

**Jenny Aguiar, PB Vallejo** is a high school student and a member of the PB Vallejo Youth Committee. She first heard about participatory budgeting when PBP gave a presentation at her school. She says “I was attracted by a sign that said “FREE PIZZA!”, but I stayed because I saw an opportunity to make a change. Before this, I had little to no experience in working with my community, but I had always been interested.”

Jenny was excited by how collaborative the process was, and how engaged her fellow delegates were in the process. Speaking about PB’s impacts, Jenny says “In some parts of the Vallejo community there was a stronger sense of unity that has emerged from PB. A lot of the youth don’t realize the power they can possess to make a better change in Vallejo by taking part in the PB process. I now know I have the ability to help not just this community, but many more, and it is in part due to getting involved in the PB process. I want to see Vallejo progress towards a better future where people can say they were proud to grow up here.”

**Owen Brugh, PB Chicago** is Chief of Staff to Alderman John Arena of Chicago’s 45th Ward, and coordinates the PB process in his ward. The Alderman implemented PB as a way of educating the community about city budgets, increasing civic engagement, and generating new ideas about how to spend the public’s infrastructure funds.

Owen says, “Usually, in an alderman’s office, people contact us to fix an isolated problem. Through this process, we discussed not just what needed to be fixed, but what we wanted our community to be.”

He describes the important impacts of PB on his community: “We were able to engage an entire area of our ward that was previously disengaged from government and cynical about elected leaders. It is wonderful to see some residents go from cynicism to self-empowerment in the course of a few months.”
Evaluating Impact

For each PB process, local researchers have used a variety of survey methods to measure impacts and identify areas for improvement. For example, PBNYC’s Research & Evaluation Team, led by the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center, tracks who participates, patterns of civic engagement of participants, shifts in knowledge and attitudes towards government, and concrete changes that occur in participating neighborhoods. Tools include:

- Surveys at neighborhood assemblies and voting sites, including exit interviews.
- Comparisons of survey information to baseline data from the census and board of elections to assess how PB participation compares to neighborhood demographics and past civic engagement.
- In-depth interviews and focus groups gather more detailed information about how and why people participate, what they learned, how they changed from the process, and how it affected relationships between city officials and community members.
- Observations are used to gather more anecdotal evidence at each stage of the process to understand the dynamics of participation.
- Tracking the implementation of projects and resources that come into participating neighborhoods to evaluate the long term impact of PB on specific communities.

Nationally, a team of researchers working with the Participatory Budgeting Project has compiled and synthesized these local research efforts, and developed standardized research instruments and plans based on the lessons learned.
PB’s Impacts
Participatory budgeting transforms people, communities, and government. It helps them learn about the needs of their larger community and work towards a greater common good. They learn to find common priorities and value perspectives and experiences of people with different life situations and in different cultural environments. PB builds the civic infrastructure necessary for deepening democracy. Major impacts include:

More Civic Engagement
Participatory budgeting has increased participation in political and community organizations, community boards, school boards, and block associations; increased community mobilization on other issues; and it may also increase voting rates in local elections.

Broader Political Participation
In each of the initial processes in the US, Steering Committees have decided that any resident at least 16 years old can vote in PB. This inclusive criteria enables historically marginalized populations such as youth, immigrants, and the formerly incarcerated to participate.

New Community Leaders and More Active Citizens
PB develops residents’ civic skills, knowledge, and attitudes. It functions as a school of democracy and citizenship, as participants go through months of deliberation and decision-making.

Stronger Relationships Between Government, Organizations, and Residents
PB connects officials with constituents, enabling them to work together and build trust. It also forges new relationships between organizations focused on different issues and communities.

Fairer and More Effective Spending
PB connects local knowledge with technical expertise, leading to more informed and responsive spending decisions. High participation by underrepresented groups helps to direct resources to communities with the greatest needs. There are fewer opportunities for corruption, waste, or costly public backlash, and more pressure to dedicate resources to public priorities.
In Chicago, the majority of active participants reported no previous involvement or low levels of previous involvement in civic activities and organizations.

In NYC, a third of active participants reported participating more in local organizations after PB.

In NYC, a higher percentage of low-income residents voted in PB (40%), compared to the full population (34%) and previous local elections (29%).

In Vallejo, targeted voting sites accounted for 83% of voters who were ineligible to vote in typical elections.

In NYC, participants report significant increases in skills such as public speaking, negotiating, building agreement, and contacting officials – and those with low incomes and less education learn the most.

In Vallejo, the majority of active participants said their view of city government improved after PB. Most residents whose project ideas did not win funding were still satisfied with the process and wanted to participate again.

In NYC, funds have been more likely to go to projects in low-income areas through PB than through other discretionary funding allocations.

In NYC, for every $5 million allocated through PB, an additional $1 million in matching funds has been raised for priority projects.