**Participatory budgeting**

Welcome to the course on Participatory Budgeting.

Participatory Budgeting is a democratic process that enables citizens to have a say in how public funds are spent in their communities. This course is designed for adults and local people of rural areas or depopulated areas of Europe who are interested in learning about Participatory Budgeting and how to implement it in their local community. In this course, you will learn the basics of Participatory Budgeting, including its principles, benefits, and how to develop and implement a participatory budgeting process.

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# **What is Participatory Budgeting?**

In this section, we will introduce the concept of Participatory Budgeting, defining its meaning, and explaining how it works.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process that enables citizens to have a say in how public funds are spent in their communities. It originated in Brazil in the late 1980s and has since spread to over 1,500 municipalities worldwide. PB allows citizens to identify, prioritize, and vote on projects that will be funded by the local government. It aims to promote transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement in the decision-making process.

PB is a collaborative process that involves local government, community organizations, and residents. It creates opportunities for community members to come together to share their ideas, voice their concerns, and work collaboratively to improve their neighborhoods. By participating in PB, citizens can develop a better understanding of how the government works, and they can gain skills in leadership, negotiation, and project management.

# **History of participatory budgeting**

PB originated in Brazil in 1989, where it was implemented as a response to the growing demand for more democratic forms of governance. Since then, PB has spread to many countries worldwide and has become a popular tool for promoting citizen participation in local decision-making processes.

One of the most notable examples of PB is the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, where it was first implemented. The PB process in Porto Alegre was designed to involve citizens in the allocation of the city's budget, with the aim of addressing social inequality and promoting community development. Through this process, citizens were able to identify their needs and priorities, propose projects, and vote on how to allocate public funds for those projects.

Since its inception in Porto Alegre, PB has been adapted to fit the specific needs and contexts of different communities and cities. In some cases, PB has been used as a tool to engage marginalized communities and give them a voice in decision-making processes. In other cases, it has been used to promote environmental sustainability and address climate change.

In the United States, PB was first implemented in Chicago in 2009, where it was used to allocate $1.3 million of the city's budget for community projects. Since then, PB has been implemented in many other cities across the US, including New York, Boston, and Seattle.

To date, there have been over 3,000 PB processes worldwide, and the number continues to grow. Many organizations and networks, such as the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy and the Participatory Budgeting Project, have emerged to support the development and implementation of PB processes.

# **Different models of participatory budget**

There are several different models of PB that can be adapted to suit the needs and resources of small rural towns. Here are some examples:

Direct Democracy Model: This model involves a town meeting where all citizens are invited to discuss and vote on budget proposals. This is a simple and effective way to involve all citizens in the decision-making process, but it can be time-consuming and may not be practical for larger communities.

Representative Model: In this model, citizens elect representatives to serve on a budget committee. The committee is responsible for soliciting and evaluating budget proposals from citizens and presenting them to the town council for approval. This model can be more efficient than the direct democracy model, but it requires a high level of trust between citizens and their representatives.

Hybrid Model: This model combines elements of both the direct democracy and representative models. Citizens are invited to participate in budget meetings and vote on proposals, but they also elect representatives to serve on a budget committee. This model allows for a high level of citizen participation while also ensuring that the decision-making process is efficient and representative.

Online Model: In this model, citizens can submit budget proposals online through a dedicated website. The proposals are then evaluated by a budget committee, and the most popular proposals are presented to the town council for approval. This model is particularly useful for small rural towns with dispersed populations, as it allows citizens to participate in the process without the need for physical meetings.

Overall, there is no one-size-fits-all model for PB in small rural towns. Each community must assess its own resources, needs, and priorities to determine the best approach. However, by implementing PB, small rural towns can promote greater citizen engagement, build trust, and create a more transparent and accountable system of public spending.

# Benefits of Participatory Budgeting

1. Build a Coalition: Start by building a coalition of interested community members who can work together to organize and implement the PB process. This coalition should include a diverse group of stakeholders, such as community organizations, youth groups, senior citizens, business owners, and municipal officials.
2. Plan and Design: Once you have built a coalition, plan and design the PB process. Decide on the budget that will be allocated for the PB process, the timeline for the process, and the rules and procedures for proposal submissions, voting, and implementation. Consult with experts and other municipalities that have successfully implemented PB to get ideas and guidance.
3. Educate and Engage: Educate and engage the community about the PB process through outreach efforts such as town hall meetings, social media campaigns, and flyers. It is important to ensure that everyone in the community has a clear understanding of what PB is, how it works, and how they can participate.
4. Solicit Proposals: Solicit proposals from community members for public spending projects. Encourage proposals that will address the most pressing needs of the community and promote social, environmental, and economic sustainability. Provide support and guidance to community members in developing their proposals.
5. Vote and Decide: Once proposals are submitted, organize a community-wide vote to decide which projects should be funded. Ensure that the voting process is transparent, accessible, and inclusive of all members of the community, including those who may not have access to the internet or other technology.

Implement and Evaluate: Once the projects are decided, implement them in a timely and transparent manner. Ensure that the projects are properly monitored and evaluated to ensure that they are achieving their intended goals and benefiting the community.

# **Steps in the Participatory Budgeting Process**

There are several steps involved in the PB process:

1. Planning and preparation: This involves identifying the goals and objectives of PB, setting up a steering committee, and conducting outreach to inform the community about the process.
2. Idea collection: This involves gathering ideas from community members about how public funds should be spent. This can be done through public meetings, surveys, or other forms of community engagement.
3. Project development: This involves evaluating the ideas submitted by the community and developing them into concrete project proposals. This can be done through community workshops, feasibility studies, or other forms of community engagement.
4. Project prioritization: This involves enabling the community to vote on the projects they would like to see funded. This can be done through community meetings, online voting, or other forms of community engagement.
5. Implementation and evaluation: This involves implementing the projects that have been prioritized by the community and evaluating their impact on the community.

# **How to run a participatory budget process**

PROCESS PREPARATION

FACILITATOR

The overall planning and execution of PB can be facilitated by some professional facilitation experts. In particular, citizen engagement events could be much more effective under the guidance of professional facilitators, to develop positive and productive discussion with participants using participatory tools and techniques (canvas, presentation, group work). The goal of these meetings is to stimulate participants to address the main issues they have experienced during their stay in the city and collect them into a series of "initial ideas." The initial ideas should then be developed into specific development projects, intervention projects, and monitoring projects.

In addition, it is suggested to establish supplementary assemblies, organized and managed by citizens, that work on secondary activities and/or specific issues together with elected facilitator colleagues from the assembly.

PURPOSE

The general PB process is to collect ideas from citizens, group them, and then translate them into specific development projects, intervention projects, and monitoring projects.

The purpose must be clear internally, with the PB stakeholder group, from the beginning of the planning, and could be geographic (an area of the city, a district, a neighbourhood) and/or a specific political sector (e.g. actions to improve social welfare in the city, actions to improve alternative transportation, etc.). The purpose must also be clear (and consistent) externally when communication begins to citizens.

The PB stakeholder group must be set up and committed to defining the purpose, considering all potential pros and cons of the PB project.

DEFINING DEADLINES AND LOGISTICS

The logistics of meetings is important for the realization of the PB project. In general, participants could be divided into 10-15 different groups, assigning them specific physical meeting points depending on which of the various areas/districts of the city they come from. This last aspect was crucial to fully exploit the efficiency resulting from direct citizen interest. The Municipality of Milan also tried to address the issue of minorities and contacted various communities, with a total of 60 members - coming from 12 minority groups - who autonomously participated in the meetings. Various charities and other associations helped the Municipality to get in touch with minority members.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

As mentioned earlier, PB could establish an interaction/communication channel with citizens, composed of physical events with the support of online tools, not only to allow voting on project proposals but also to establish a communication channel with citizens to provide them with the most relevant information and, on the other hand, to be open to receive and respond to any type of question citizens may have.

For this reason, the minimum level is to set up a dedicated PB website (which could be a subsection of the Municipality website) to provide clear information and digital documents necessary to start the participatory process with at least one unique and clear dedicated email address where citizens can submit questions.

Additionally, to improve interaction with citizens, social media channels such as FB, Twitter, could be very useful also to share and work online on project proposals (e.g., Slack or Google Docs) with citizens organized in online groups.

INVITING PARTICIPANTS

The goal of PB is to involve at least 2-3% of the target population (of the city, neighborhood, district), so the invitation should be massive even if the yield is not satisfactory and only a small part of the population is willing to contribute (by dedicating time and some effort) to the constituted working group. The interaction with/among them is as follows:

Discussion, Dialogue or Deliberation

Express opinions/preferences only

Listen/watch as a spectator.

CONTEXT PREPARATION

Establish communication guidelines for everyone. Clearly state the goal of PB, write it down, and display it on the wall. It should be there for the entire duration of the process.

Communicate and keep everyone informed. No one should be excluded. Even those who do not participate should still benefit from the process, and they could become part of it at a later time or at least stay informed.

PB is usually promoted by the public authority, so try to smooth out the formal requirements of a public authority while respecting the informal needs of citizens who live their daily lives with limited time available.

Organize meetings when people can participate. Think about your target audience and try to plan the meeting by considering the different reference groups, possibly doubling up to give everyone a chance.

PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION

PHASE 1 - "Listening: public meetings for needs gathering"

The series of meetings should be scheduled by the municipality, and the participation in these public hearings should be open to the general public.

PHASE 2 - "Co-design: workshops to design interventions"

Aiming to sort out citizens' proposals, modelling and grouping them as much as possible into larger ones. The outcome of the meetings in Phase 2 are the projects to be anticipated for the voting phase (Phase 3).

PHASE 3 - Voting: choosing the projects to be implemented

The projects from Phase 2 should be made accessible to all citizens (online tools could be very useful to do so and manage communication). This phase is essentially a citizen-assisted voting process in a specific period of time and could take place either online or offline. The voting process should consider different target and age groups of the population, with the goal of engaging the most significant proportion of the target population (2-3% of the urban area population should be considered the baseline).

PHASE 4 - Results: project updates and responsibilities

The outcome of the voting process should be published online with a detailed description of all projects and the number of votes each received. Additionally, an official publication listing the winning projects and their description should be posted on the official website.

DOCUMENT AND SHARE THE RESULTS

The outcome of the voting process should be published online with a detailed description of all projects and the number of votes each received. Additionally, an official publication listing the winning projects and their description should be posted on the official website.

The sharing of results could be published with the support of a Communication Manager within the available online platform (if any) and through established and widely used social media.

The result of the vote on the participatory online platform should be described and archived, as well as all the project proposals developed to provide evidence of the work done.

Through the dedicated website, which should be maintained for several years, support communication using storytelling techniques, with short videos of the participants and some evidence (if applicable) of the impacts of the project budget through the PB process (even after some years).

Don't forget the citizens who participated and the delivered projects. Define a monitoring process even after the end of PB. If not done, it could turn out to be a disadvantage in the future. The created contents could be:

Public report

Public hearings/meetings

New media (e.g., Internet, SMS, etc.)

# **Platforms for participatory budgeting**

There are several open source platforms for participatory processes currently in use in Europe. Here are some of the main ones:

Consul: Consul is a participatory democracy platform developed by the city of Madrid, Spain. It allows citizens to propose ideas, participate in debates, and vote on proposals. It is available in multiple languages and has been used by several cities in Europe and Latin America. <https://consulproject.org/en/>

Decidim: Decidim is an open-source platform for participatory democracy developed by the city of Barcelona, Spain. It allows citizens to propose and vote on ideas, participate in debates, and create and join groups to work on specific issues. <https://decidim.org/>

Your Priorities: Your Priorities is an online platform for participatory budgeting and idea generation. It has been used by several cities in Europe and allows citizens to submit ideas, vote on proposals, and monitor the progress of projects. <https://www.yrpri.org/>

Adhocracy: Adhocracy is an open-source platform for participatory decision-making developed by the German Pirate Party. It allows users to submit proposals, discuss them, and vote on them. <https://adhocracy.plus/>

LiquidFeedback: LiquidFeedback is a participatory democracy platform developed by the German Pirate Party. It allows users to propose and vote on ideas, create and join groups to work on specific issues, and monitor the progress of projects. <https://liquidfeedback.com/en/>