



TOOL | PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory budgeting involves citizens with decision making about budget issues. This tool can be used on both small-scale levels such as service and community, or on large-scale levels such as city, provincial, or national.

OVERVIEW

Participatory Budgeting programs are innovative policymaking processes. Citizens are directly involved in making policy decisions. Forums are held throughout the year so that citizens have the opportunity to allocate resources, prioritize broad social policies, and monitor public spending.

A BETTER EDUCATED COMMUNITY

Participatory budgeting exposes the community to both the complexity and competitiveness of the budgeting process. It is therefore educational as well as empowering.



BETTER PRIORITIZED SPENDING

The central objective of participatory budgeting is to ensure a better match between community expectations of public services and the actual expenditure on, and delivery of, those services.



MORE COMMUNITY BUY-IN

Exposure to the difficult process of making choices between projects and services with equal merit may help the community to buy-in to either lower service levels or, in some cases, higher taxes.



Source: Three Arguments for Participatory Budgeting (<http://budgetallocator.com/>)

Participatory Budgeting works best when there are already high levels of community activism. The power attributed to citizens in the decision process can vary, from providing decision-makers with richer information about citizen preferences to processes that assign parts of the budget to direct citizen control.

STRENGTHS

- Involves decisions about spending and devolving real power
- Has the ability to be a very public process and can therefore convey legitimacy beyond the immediate participants
- Participants can acquire a deeper understanding of the work of the organizing body

WEAKNESSES

- If managed poorly, can create unrealistic expectations amongst participants
- Isn't as successful where central targets and restricted budgets limit the amount of power that can be given to citizens
- When meetings are open to all, there is the risk of certain groups dominating the process

BASIC STEPS

Participatory Budgeting often involves several basic steps:

1. Spending priorities and the selection of budget delegates are identified by community members
2. With support from experts, budget delegates create spending proposals
3. Community members vote on which proposals should be funded
4. The organizing body (i.e. the city, the organization, etc.) implements the top proposals

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PLATFORMS

- Budget Allocator - <http://budgetallocator.com/>
- Participare - <https://participare.io/>
- Change Tomorrow - <http://changetomorrow.io/>
- Citizen Budget - <http://www.citizenbudget.com/>
- Budget Simulator - <http://www.budgetsimulator.com/info>

CASE STUDIES

TORONTO COMMUNITY HOUSING

For 15 years, the Participatory Budgeting (PB) process has given Toronto Community Housing residents the opportunity to decide how to spend capital funds to improve their communities.

<https://www.torontohousing.ca/pb>

HALIFAX TAX

Halifax Tax was established to support Halifax Regional Municipality's "Shape your Budget" community engagement program.

<http://budgetallocator.com/2014/09/26/halifax-tax-participatory-budget-to-simulate-400m-of-municipal-spending/>

PORT MACQUARIE-HASTINGS COUNCIL

A thoughtful online and offline participatory budgeting strategy helped Port Macquarie-Hastings Council rekindle its community's trust.

<http://budgetallocator.com/2014/09/29/participatory-budgeting-strategy-adds-port-macquarie-hastings-council/>