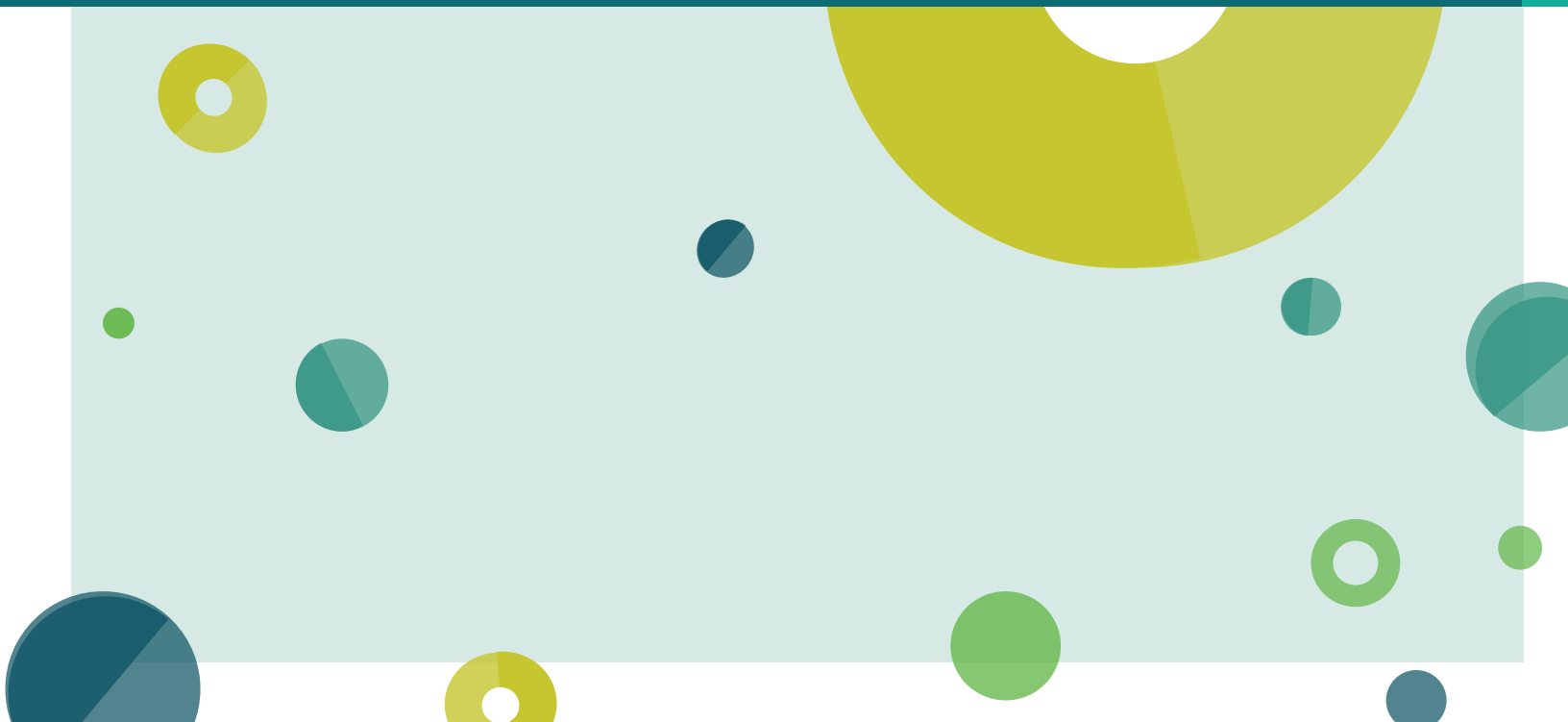




PARTICIPATORY
BUDGETING PROJECT

Participatory Budgeting Toolkit for Cities: Why Data Matters



Why Data Matters

Research and evaluation are critical to the expansion and improvement of participatory budgeting (PB). When PB first came to North America in the early 2000s, local evaluators and researchers took on the task documenting how PB unfolded locally to show what's working well and what can be improved. By examining how PB works, who takes part, and how it impacts local communities and democracy, evaluation data can be used to show why PB should be expanded and improved.

Why is it important to do evaluation?



Evaluation data can be used to:

- Help stakeholders better understand and communicate the transformative power and benefits of PB. Sharing this insight celebrates the work that goes into the process, strengthens its credibility, helps renew or maintain funding in future cycles, and can even spread PB to neighboring areas.
- Track and ensure equitable participation.
- Find out what impacts the program has on participating community members.
- Figure out what works best about the process and identify the biggest obstacles or opportunities for improvement to address in future PB cycles.
- Learn about the experiences and perspectives of budget delegates and/or steering committee members.
- Track whether you met the goals you identified for the process.
- Encourage community-building by reflecting together on shared experience(s).

Best Practices for PB Evaluation

This guide outlines several options for evaluation, but at a minimum we recommend:

- Conducting a pre-survey of PB steering committee and budget delegates at the beginning of the process and a post-survey after the vote
- Conducting a voter survey
- Holding a debrief at the end with input from all stakeholders (steering committee, city staff, and possibly budget delegates and/or other volunteers)
- Tracking aggregate data on the main results of the process (especially the voter turnout) and the design of the process (particularly the budget size) and sharing this information with PBP. For a full list of these measures, please consult PBP's [Key Metrics Toolkit](#).

Before launching your PB process, we strongly encourage you to partner with local academic researchers or nonprofit organizations to develop an evaluation plan. They may have very helpful insights and sometimes they may even be willing to help conduct research, analyze data you collect, and/or write an evaluation report.

In the past such partnerships have been mutually fruitful and resulted in extremely high-quality PB evaluations. For example, the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center (now TakeRoot Justice) was essential for performing the evaluations of PBNYC from 2012 to 2015 that found very positive outcomes and contributed to the spread of the model. The University of Illinois at Chicago's Great Cities Institute conducted important evaluations of PB Chicago and of school participatory budgeting in Chicago and Boston University researchers evaluated Boston's Youth Lead the Change PB program.



What kind of data does PBP track?

Over the past decade, Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) has both collected data directly and played a coordinating role to identify best practices and share information.

PBP's Process Tracking Database contains basic descriptive information about all the PB processes in the US and Canada. We use it to power [this interactive map](#). As the most comprehensive list of PB processes in the US and Canada, this database makes it possible to tell the story of PB's growth and expansion to new locations and to new contexts, like schools and universities.

Take a quick look at the map and make sure your process shows up. If it doesn't, please fill out this [data submission form](#) so that your story can be included.

Process tracking does not track individual-level data about who takes part, so it is of limited value for evaluating PB. That's why people who help implement PB play such a crucial role in collecting data for evaluation. PBP offers this toolkit and accompanying survey and debrief templates to help make these efforts easy and effective.

In 2017, PBP collaborated with Public Agenda and the North American PB Research Board to develop a set of measures that enable different groups of researchers to work with a common set of tools ([available here](#)). These Key Metrics track themes of how PB functions within government, how PB promotes inclusion and equity, and how PB represents a different form of civic and political life.

Kinds of PB Evaluation

When we talk about evaluating PB, we are talking about evaluating the scope of participation, the impact, and the way the process is run.

Participation Evaluation

Participation evaluation collects data about who is participating and how. This is essential because one of the central goals of PB is to establish a democratic process that is not only open to anybody in principle, but that actually succeeds in equitably eliciting the involvement of communities as a whole. We want to make sure that the process is not dominated by the usual individuals who are already privileged in engaging in civic life and want to make sure that communities that have been historically marginalized from centers of power are participating deeply as well. While this applies to participating in the voting and idea submission stages, it is particularly important in the context of budget delegates because a lot of influence over the outcomes is exercised at the stage of developing project ideas into feasible proposals listed on the ballot.

Participation evaluation typically draws on basic information about the structure and results of the process along with surveys of PB voters and budget delegates. Specific measures of participation evaluation include:

- the number of people taking part in each stage of the process;
- the age, gender, race/ethnicity, and income of participants;
- the primary language of participants;
- the number of community events and vote sites;
- whether participants are eligible to vote in traditional elections and whether they have done so in the most recent election.



These measures can be compared to demographic data about the district to gauge whether PB succeeded in equitably drawing in broad public participation. They can also be compared to voter exit polls to see if PB succeeded in engaging populations that are underrepresented in electoral processes. For example, a [key study of PBNYC](#) found that women, people of color, and low-income people participated in the PB process at higher rates than is typical for voter turnout in traditional electoral politics.

Impact Evaluation

Impact evaluation measures the effects that the PB program has on individual participants and on the community as a whole. As this requires extensive data collection and analysis, it is typically done by academic researchers rather than city staff. For instance, studies have surveyed individuals who participate in PB and found that in some contexts they are subsequently more likely to get involved in other forms of civic engagement. In countries with large-scale PB programs like Brazil, other studies have compared communities with PB to those without and have found that PB is associated with strengthening civil society, better tax compliance, and even improved public health outcomes.

Another strain of research investigates the impacts of the projects themselves developed through PB on the community. Most of these studies systematically compare investment decisions made by city government through traditional procedures to the projects developed through PB. These methods can reveal how PB is unique in terms of the general type of projects it develops (e.g., recreational, cultural, educational, health, etc.) and where they are located in the city (e.g., whether spending through PB results in more projects in historically underresourced areas).



One form of impact evaluation that is feasible to conduct on a limited scale is to survey budget delegates at the beginning and again at the end of the PB cycle and measure the magnitude of change. This strategy can determine whether the individuals who are most deeply involved with the program experience changes in their civic practices or attitudes towards democratic institutions. Please reach out to info@participatorybudgeting.org if you are interested in launching an impact evaluation of a PB process you are involved with.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluation aims to gain information that can help make the operation of the PB process better in the future. It asks questions like: What worked well? What needs improvement? How could the process be better in the future? As such, it relies on subjective perspectives of participants, administrators, and other stakeholders. Process evaluation is thus more like a large-scale brainstorming session about how to improve the

program than a science of measuring specific changes and comparisons.

Evaluation Options

Municipal PB programs will have differing evaluation needs and capacities to dedicate to it. We suggest that even smaller-scale programs will benefit greatly from the insights that can be gained by reaching out to the people most deeply involved with the process—the city staff who play leading roles running the program, the steering committee members, and the budget delegates. We then offer additional tools for programs that have more resources to dedicate to evaluation or have a greater need for detailed information about PB’s impacts (such as pilot programs that will soon be scaled up).

Minimum Evaluation Recommendations

- Conducting a pre-survey of Steering Committee members at the beginning of the process and a post-survey after the vote.
- Conduct a pre-survey of Budget Delegates at the beginning of proposal development, and a post-survey after the vote.
- Conducting a voter survey.
- Holding a celebration and debrief at the end with input at least from the Steering Committee but ideally also from city implementation staff, Budget Delegates, and other volunteers.
- Tracking aggregate data on the main results of the process (especially the voter turnout) and the design of the process (particularly the budget size) and sharing this information with PBP. For a full list of these measures, please consult PBP’s [Key Metrics Toolkit](#).



Evaluation Templates

PBP offers a suite of survey templates that can be used to evaluate municipal PB processes. We emphasize that they are templates and we encourage PB implementers to think about their own particular evaluation goals and to modify the survey tools to suit these needs. Evaluation surveys can benefit from incremental improvement each year and officials who implement PB are uniquely positioned to offer insight about what kinds of questions are most meaningful and useful.

Focus of Evaluation	Resources
Participation and Process	Idea Collection Survey
Impact, Participation and Process	Steering Committee & Budget Delegate Pre-survey Steering Committee & Budget Delegate Post-survey
Participation and Process	Voter Survey
Process	Staff and Steering Committee PB Process Debrief

Additional Evaluation Recommendations

- Customize surveys by adding additional questions or questions grounded in the goals of your PB process
- Collect pre- and post-survey data from idea collection participants
- Track more demographic data about participation (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender identity, primary language and disability)
- Keep a living document to note immediate reflections as well as ripple impacts. For example, did PB idea collection identify needs that could not specifically be

addressed through PB but that local governments could continue to work on?

Data Sharing and Management

It's worth taking a moment to think about how data will be stored and managed. We encourage city governments to systematically document information both to make it easy to reflect on what happened at the initial phases when you get to the end of the process and also so it is easy to implement recommended changes in future cycles. And considering that participatory budgeting is inherently about building transparency into decision-making processes, cities often share results of PB.

You may share your data with PBP by contacting info@participatorybudgeting.org. We use this information to improve the survey tools we recommend and to search for trends across PB processes.





We're Here to Help!

Participatory Budgeting Project is the foremost expert on participatory budgeting in North America. We are a nonprofit organization that works across the US and Canada to empower people to decide together how to spend public money.

We provide technical assistance and training to implement successful PB processes and campaigns, develop new tools and resources to make PB better, and host panels, webinars, and information exchanges to share best practices. We have supported over 76 cities and institutions to launch PB, and our work has enabled 623,068 people to decide how to invest nearly \$300,000,000 in public funds.

To learn more about PB or to request support with starting a PB process in your community, email us at info@participatorybudgeting.org



Participatory Budgeting Project encourages the dissemination of this work under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license.

Please contact Participatory Budgeting Project at info@participatorybudgeting.org if interested in reproducing this work in any part.

Published January 2021