

# Community-Led Recovery



## ARPA Funds in Oregon

Congress passed the American Rescue Plan (ARPA) to support our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using community-led decision making to distribute ARPA funds will help ensure investments match real community needs. \$350 billion will be passed down to states, local governments, and tribal governments. Your community can participate and have a say in where this funding goes.

The American Rescue Plan Act is a historic opportunity to not only build back our communities and economy after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic, but also has the potential to address the deeply embedded inequities in access and voice in our democracy.

Practices like participatory budgeting (see diagram below) can increase equity, access, and accountability in spending decisions, transforming and deepening democracy as we

build back better. That is why the Democracy Beyond Elections coalition presented 11 awardees across the country, including Youth Voice, Youth Vote PB (YV<sup>2</sup> PB), money to invest in developing, expanding and creating long term participatory processes to help equitably distribute not just ARPA funds but future funds as well!

Participatory democracy extends beyond community surveys, advisory committees and public forums by placing real decision-making power in communities. Participatory democracy includes many tools for community-led decision making, including participatory policy-making, deliberative assemblies and referendums, and participatory budgeting. For the purpose of ARPA, awardees like YV<sup>2</sup> PB focused on participatory budgeting as a central best practice for meaningfully engaging communities in budgetary decisions.



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**Youth are uniquely impacted by COVID-19 and are vastly underrepresented in government decisions made on their behalf.** That's why five collaborating non-profit organizations (Participatory Budgeting Oregon, Unite Oregon, Rosewood Initiative, Play Grow Learn, and East County Rising Community Projects), the Seeding Justice Foundation, and three State Legislators launched Youth Voice Youth Vote PB (YV<sup>2</sup> PB) in 2022.

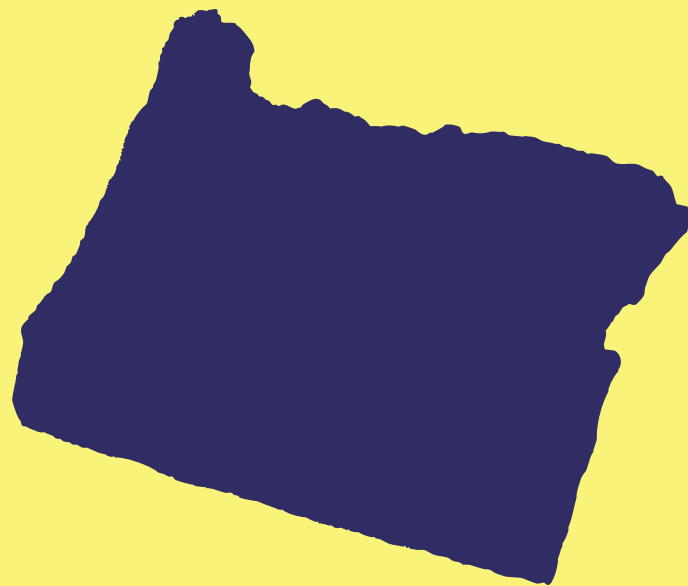
Oregon's first participatory budgeting process, YV<sup>2</sup> PB invites youth ages 13-25 who live, play, pray or go to school within the boundary (currently, or within the last two years) to design and vote on \$500,000 in COVID-19 relief and recovery projects in State Senate Districts 24 and 25 and House District 50, the project area covers parts of East Portland, Gresham,

Fairview, Wood Village, Troutdale and North Clackamas.

The first cycle of PB in 2022 and 2023 will allocate American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars committed by State Legislators Kayse Jama, Chris Gorsek, and Ricki Ruiz. A second cycle could allocate ARPA funds from the City of Gresham and general dollars from other State and local jurisdictions in 2023 and 2024. Over the course of two PB cycles, YV<sup>2</sup> PB aims to engage at least 5,000 people in exercising their power to benefit their communities and spearhead PB in Oregon. In the process, YV<sup>2</sup> PB promises to expand civic leadership and organizing skills while enhancing and rebuilding community, relationships, and mental health outcomes.

### **YV<sup>2</sup> PB PROCESS TIMELINE:**

**The first PB cycle started in 2022 and will aim to engage at least 2,000 youth across these phases:** process implementation, project development, outreach, and voting to decide how to spend roughly \$500,000 in ARPA funds in early 2023. If Participatory Budgeting Oregon is successful in securing additional ARPA funds or general public dollars, a second PB cycle will run in 2023 to 2024. We are also fundraising private dollars to further support youth-led design and implementation with extensive community outreach and engagement to ensure robust and equitable participation.



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### OREGON'S FIRST PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROCESS

By sharing real power over real money, participatory budgeting (PB) taps the expertise of those most impacted by systemic inequities by providing a mechanism to directly engage those most underrepresented in government in decision making. By exercising their power through the PB process, participants expand the civic leadership and organizing skills that power social movements while building trust and transparency around the use of public funds. PB has spread rapidly around the globe since starting in Brazil in 1989 and across the US after launching in Chicago in 2009.

But PB has yet to come to Oregon—until now. With the strategic investment of ARPA funds by State Legislators, organizational commitments, and both individual and grant donations to kickstart this effort, YV<sup>2</sup> PB made history as Oregon's first PB process.

YV<sup>2</sup> PB has centered youth and youth decision-making from the beginning. Across the YV<sup>2</sup> team, there are 22 youth leaders ages 12 - 25 designing and executing this PB process - from process rules, communications, outreach, and advocacy for a second cycle, youth are in the driver seat.

YV<sup>2</sup> staff convened a team of five **Youth Consultants** from the outset of the project to

set the initial criteria for community outreach and project goals. Their main responsibility was to design the Steering Committee application and to score and select committee members from a pool of 54 applicants.



**YOUTH CONSULTANTS**

From left to right: Kaylee Sales, Azaria Coakley, Lisbeth Marquez-Delgado, Danny Cage and Jessica Monje Perez

YV<sup>2</sup> staff convened a team of five Youth Consultants from the outset of the project and formed the YV<sup>2</sup> Steering Committee. The Youth Consultants met for several months and set the initial criteria for community outreach and project goals. Their main responsibility was to design the Steering Committee application and to score and select committee members from a pool of 54 applicants.

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The **Steering Committee** is made up of 12 youth aged 14-25 who live throughout the project area. Their job has been to research the needs of youth and to learn from community experts and leaders. They used their lived experience and knowledge to design the rules for YV<sup>2</sup> and produced our process [Rulebook](#).

In preparation for the public facing kick-off of YV<sup>2</sup>, we launched our Advocacy & Communications Cohort. This group, which includes four of our original Youth Consultants who wanted to continue being involved in YV<sup>2</sup>, have been shaping the direction of the communications strategy & plan and are on the ground doing outreach in schools, community events, and youth spaces to drive participants to idea collection events. They are also collaborating with staff to advocate for funding for a second cycle of YV<sup>2</sup>.

## PROCESS UPDATE

YV<sup>2</sup> is in the Idea Collection phase. Our first event was on October 22, 2022 at Parkrose High School. Former Steering Committee members are serving in process facilitator roles for the remainder of the first cycle. Process Facilitators are currently, with staff support, executing the idea collection phase. They are leading the idea collection events and engaging in conversations with youth on the impacts of COVID on them and their communities, what they like and need in their communities, and



**STEERING COMMITTEE**

From left to right: Karol Wai, Yaqueilin Garcia, Kimberly Cortes-Martinez, Lillianne Pham, Samantha Leyva Gonzalez, Aquene Briggs, Elexis Moyer, Diego Garcia, Jack Petty, Kofi Franklin, Xochitl Carresco Garcia and Natan Hagdu.

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what COVID recovery looks like to them to help youth from the project area brainstorm ideas for potential projects.

We are investing in our youth and creating a group of youth leaders who are PB practitioners, ages 13 - 25 and demonstrating our commitment to them by supporting them, mentoring, and providing compensation for all of their involvement in the process.



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Amanda Hudson, Director of Education & Programs

Amanda Hudson (she/her) is a co-founder, and leads educational programming, PB project design and implementation at PB Oregon. Amanda came to PB through her research as a Ph.D. Candidate in Urban Studies at Portland State University.

“I discovered participatory budgeting through my academic work and it sounded super cool. I often joke and say, I’m a bad academic because I actually wanted to do the things I was researching, instead of just reading about them. I know budgeting isn’t the sexiest topic, or one that gets people excited, but I was excited to see that this is a real process with real impacts. PB is more than superficial conversations where government officials are theoretically trying to make things more

“participatory.” Because when they don’t define how they want the community to engage, they end up with tokenistic participation. So many public involvement professionals are focused on getting the community to show up, but all they end up doing is counting folks, not actually listening or sharing power. That isn’t real participation. So with my background in popular education, I became focused on what does deep democracy actually look like? And that is where PB comes in. It is a process where you can see the transformative power of what happens when the average community member is given access to systemic power and meaningful



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decision making. I believe once you treat people with a certain level of dignity and respect and acknowledge their power, the power they already have, people will not go back to just being treated like passive folks on the sidelines. I like the idea of like, nah, get in there and then you won’t let them take your power away.”

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# Portland Tribune

### [My View: It's time to let public participate in budgeting](#)

By Danny Cage 07/26/2022

Portland needs to join the growing list of cities that rely on the 'participatory budgeting' process.

What if communities directly facing these challenges could directly shape the solutions? That is the premise of participatory budgeting (PB), a form of participatory democracy many cities and communities are embracing as a solution to growing inequity, division and injustice.

But what is PB and how does it work? PB starts when elected officials decide to share power by letting ordinary residents decide how to spend a portion of the public budget. After that the process usually consists of five basic steps:

A paid steering committee representative of the community established basic scope and parameters in a process rule book.

People brainstorm ideas.

Community budget delegates and government staff refine ideas into projects vetted for legality, feasibility and sometimes equity and impact.

Projects go back to the community for a binding vote or decision.

Governments implement the winning projects with available funds and the process starts again.

Major cities like Seattle and San Francisco and even smaller ones like Tacoma have launched a PB processes. For example, Seattle is currently expanding its PB program to allocate \$28 million to community safety projects. What about Portland?

A series of false starts and reversals by the Portland City Council has made launching PB in



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Portland an unfulfilled campaign promise since 2017.

During this year's budget process, the council had over \$100 million in additional federal funds at their disposal but could not see the wisdom in delegating even a small fraction of their decision-making power to the community through PB.

Sharing power is hard for most elected officials, even when budgets are not tight. But austerity may be all the more reason to launch PB. Vallejo, California, made PB part of a successful strategy to emerge out of municipal bankruptcy in 2013. In Portland the City Council has not fully grasped that PB is not a competing investment for existing budget priorities, but a better way to invest in those priorities, one that taps the expertise of the community and makes government more trustworthy.

In a hopeful sign, the Portland Charter Commission seems to recognize this. In response to public testimony, PB is on the list of charter reforms for Phase II of the Commission's work beginning in July. There is precedent in Boston, where voters adopted a PB mandate in their city charter last November.

Portland could do the same. Momentum is growing. After tiring of waiting, five community organizations teamed last year to launch a youth-based PB process called Youth Voice Youth Vote PB within two state Senate districts east of I-205. By this time next year the hundreds of youths in East Portland, Gresham and beyond will vote on how to spend a half million in American Rescue Plan Act funds committed by state legislators Kayse Jama, Chris Gorsek and Ricki Ruiz for COVID recovery projects.

Elected leaders would be wise to get behind or in front of the push to expand participatory budgeting in Oregon. Communities are becoming impatient and are ready to exercise their power to drive solutions that work for them. Why not let them?

*Danny Cage lives in Northeast Portland.*





**YOUTH VOICE**  
**YOUTH VOTE**  
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING



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*- Amanda Hudson,  
Education & Program Director*

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PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

To follow YV<sup>2</sup> PB process updates check out [youthpb.org](http://youthpb.org) and follow us on social media

Twitter: @youthpb

Instagram: @youthpb

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