

1. What community partnerships have been helpful to you in introducing and supporting PB?
  - Housing authority, neighborhood associations, schools, churches and business groups were all really helpful. Individual nonprofits mostly were not, though that might be unique to Cambridge.
  - Community partners have been especially important in finding out where it makes sense to hold voting events, reaching out to diverse communities that might not have computer access.
  - Big themes in ideas submitted thus far have been sustainability and helping people in need.
2. What obstacles have you faced?
  - Our first year, we did it when the city budgeting cycle was also occurring, which was really tough on our staff. We currently have 1.5 FTEs working on it, as well as an intern.
  - We've been able to build outreach through an online voting system, as well as the fact that it's not required to be a US citizen to vote (or provide ID, you just sign an oath certifying that you live in Cambridge and your age).
  - I would also recommend not calling it participatory budgeting, because it's too complicated to say, not catchy, and difficult for ESL individuals in particular. Other orgs have used names like "Youth for Change" in Boston, etc.
3. How have you interested your schools and youth in your project?
  - We visit youth centers and schools during the idea collection process, and then hold voting events 6 months later. Cambridge's voting age is 12, which also helps.
  - Having a school-related project funded also drew a lot of interest. We're currently working on reaching out to individual teachers instead of through the administration, and reaching out to college students (Harvard, MIT).
4. How has PB changed your view of city budgeting, and how did you get involved?
  - I've learned a lot about how the city works through PB because it's engaged me in figuring out, which is how I got involved because I wanted to do budgeting as a way of understanding the city. PB really has nothing to do with budgeting, and more to do with community engagement and outreach. A lot of other cities do it through their mayor's office; for us, because we're run by a city manager, budget office makes more sense. It's made the budget office more public-facing.
5. Outside of the money allocated to PB, have city departments been influenced by PB ideas or included them in their budget?
  - Some departments have taken ideas from PB and instituted them in their own budget: for example, replacing a flag, setting up accessibility entrances, enhancing parks. It has also helped the city think creatively long-term in our capital plan.
6. Have there been certain community groups/leaders skeptical of PB? If so, how do you respond to their concerns and apprehensions?
  - We haven't faced a lot of skepticism. The toughest crowds tend to be at universities, with students questioning the legality of it, especially GOP-heavy crowds. Some residents have also questioned letting 12-year olds vote. Some people have also been cynical about the amount of money available vs. the amount of money overall in the budget. In general, the response is stressing the good PB has done — overall, we've had a really positive reception.
7. What is the most effective way to approach community groups about PB? What materials have been valuable?

- We've found it's really helpful to stress wanting to get people involved in both voting and submitting ideas. We tend to frame it as "what issues or problems do you see here? What projects would fit the criteria?"
- Our best idea collection events have been going into group meetings and holding brainstorming events. We go to ESL groups, parent groups at libraries, schools, for example, where there is already a captive audience. It's also important to tailor it to specific group — for example, bike advocacy groups want to hear about bike-related projects, etc. Very few people showed up to PB-specific events when we held them our first year.

8. What does your process look like?

- We hold about 30 idea collection events over 2 months (many ideas are also submitted online), from June 1-July 31st. From mid-August to end of October, volunteer budget delegates meet weekly to work through ideas submitted. A shortlist is submitted by budget delegates at the end of October. City staff (about 1 or 2 people from each department) then have two weeks to look at ideas and create cost estimates, after which the city manager vets them. In mid-November, budget delegates come back and set final projects for the ballot/make text more catchy. At the end of November, budget delegates and outreach staff come back to make posters that are used throughout the week to advertise. During the week before the vote, at the start of December, about 30 vote events are held. About 20-25 percent people voted in person last year (paper ballots are available in more languages than the online way).

9. How did you introduce PB to Cambridge residents when you initiated the project?

- We built up an email list (from nonprofits, neighborhood associations, etc) to reach out to people, advertised in local newspaper, created door-hangers before the vote, placed blurbs in issue newsletters (for seniors, disability commissions) placed blurbs in city mailings, hosted segments on local community tv and utilized city social media.

10. Did you encounter any resistance among city staff when implementing PB?

- Within city staff, there was some resistance re: increasing workload and concern about community involvement being negative, because many departments that were more public-facing mostly encountered constituents when they had complaints. We had "department speed-dating": set up reps from different departments to meet delegates and answer questions, which helped a lot because it wasn't super negative. We now have two events: one at the start for bigger picture questions, and one a month later for more specific questions, which has worked really well.