



SUNSHINE IN THE CITY: FISCAL TRANSPARENCY & COMMUNITY TRUST

SUMMER 2023 MEETING
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Engaging the community in the process of financial decision making and increasing transparency around how the city spends money can help build community trust, increase buy-in, and even boost your city's fiscal health. The historic influx of federal dollars to cities in recent years - along with a host of new tools and applications to help you engage, share, and report results - offers a great opportunity to cities looking to advance this work. This session will highlight best practices, benefits and challenges of increasing fiscal transparency and fiscal engagement.



RESOURCES

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“A Guide to Online Financial Transparency,” Mark Mack, Government Finance Officers Association, Dec. 2019.

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“Public Engagement and Transparency Is Key to States and Localities Using Federal Aid to Advance Racial Equity,” Iris Hinh, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Jul. 5, 2022.

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“Rethinking Public Engagement,” Martin Carcasson, Shayne Kavanagh and Valerie Lemmie, Government Finance Officers Association, 2023.

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GFOA'S FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE

Recognizing the crucial need for government financial transparency, GFOA has undertaken a major project to make that goal feasible for state and local governments. We have worked to define what transparency means in every area of government finance, in a report that's now available at gfoa.org/transparency. We also surveyed more than 400 municipal government organizations about their use of online platforms for financial transparency, resulting in two reports: a collection of case studies that highlight ways in which governments are incorporating financial transparency; and a summary of the survey data.

All three reports are available at gfoa.org/transparency.

Online transparency is an evolving practice that can be understood in different ways. Many states and larger local governments have adopted open data initiatives, posting large datasets online for use by other governments, non-profit organizations, private-sector firms, the press, and the public. Others focus on overall government transparency, posting documents such as budgets, audits, or contracts, granting online access to meetings, making it easier to provide comments and interact with government officials.

Fiscal transparency is particularly important because financial resources affect all other aspects of government administration. Financial transparency is not one or more individual actions but a framework that encompasses the information a government shares, the actions it takes, and the culture it adopts. Its key components are:

- Sharing data that tell a story.
- Sharing data proactively.
- Being honest and fair in the way data are shared.
- Taking a neutral stance rather than advocating any position or agenda.
- Fostering trust and financial sustainability.
- Providing current, timely data.

- Curating data.
- Making sure data are contextually accurate.
- Promoting accountability.
- Fostering a culture of openness.

THE PATH TO TRANSPARENCY

The most common catalyst for financial transparency is probably a general desire to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in government administration, and to build trust. Most governments want to show the public that government is both good and the best approach to managing shared resources. Many governments look to online financial transparency as a way to educate the public about what government does and how it arrives at the decisions it makes. Other motivations include the desire to improve public service and accountability, and to maintain or improve professional ethics. Governments that concentrate on financial transparency report improved legitimacy and support, and general improvements in their organization's reputation. General public sentiment is another strong catalyst for increased financial transparency — after studying what people wanted, a number of governments found that online financial transparency was the best way to achieve it.

The point of transparency is to make financial data — including revenues, expenses, budgets, debt, and investments, as well as strategic initiatives that may have financial implications — available in a manner that is both timely and relevant to users, helping them understand the government's allocation of finance resources. Governments share financial data in a

way that provides context and financial data that allow users to define the information they would like to discover and then interact with that information in different ways. In this way, the financial data are used to tell a story — stakeholders aren't left to sort through an enormous pile of undifferentiated data on their own.

Online financial transparency can also be understood as the actions that help governments share fiscal information such as revenues and expenses in ways that allow both

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finance professionals and average citizens to use them, improving overall confidence and trust in government.¹ Financial data that are shared online can also be supported offline via traditional budget hearings, citizen engagement meetings, town halls, and other in-person interactions. The finance department doesn't always have all the data needed (e.g., KPIs for the number of roads paved), so if information is stuck in silos, this will need to be addressed.

The best way to look at online financial transparency is through the lens of the audience. Governments need to think about what an interested resident or other stakeholder would want — and need — to know in order to understand the organization's financial condition, revenues, costs, budget, and future plans, in both the short term and long term, and let this understanding guide the effort. If the government doesn't have this knowledge, it should seek feedback from the target audiences (e.g., citizens, rating agencies, media outlets).

Many states and larger local governments have adopted open data initiatives that post large datasets online for use by other governments, non-profit organizations, private-sector firms, the press, and the public. Others focus on making existing documents and information available, including budgets, audits, and contracts. Still others have developed online portals that provide a public-oriented view, including information about government programs, their costs, and the services and benefits they provide, all in an easy-to-understand format that often includes interactive charts and graphs.

The data elements included in an online financial transparency platform and the design of the platform both have significant impacts on the user's experience. They have a direct effect on whether the platform informs, educates, and/or engages the users.

Communities often have existing channels of engagement with citizens, brokers, and other stakeholders, and engaging these partners is typically the best way to learn what potential external users want to learn from the government's transparency website. Partners can also be a great resource

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for complementary data that may be needed to provide context. In large governments, these partnerships may take the form of other government entities.

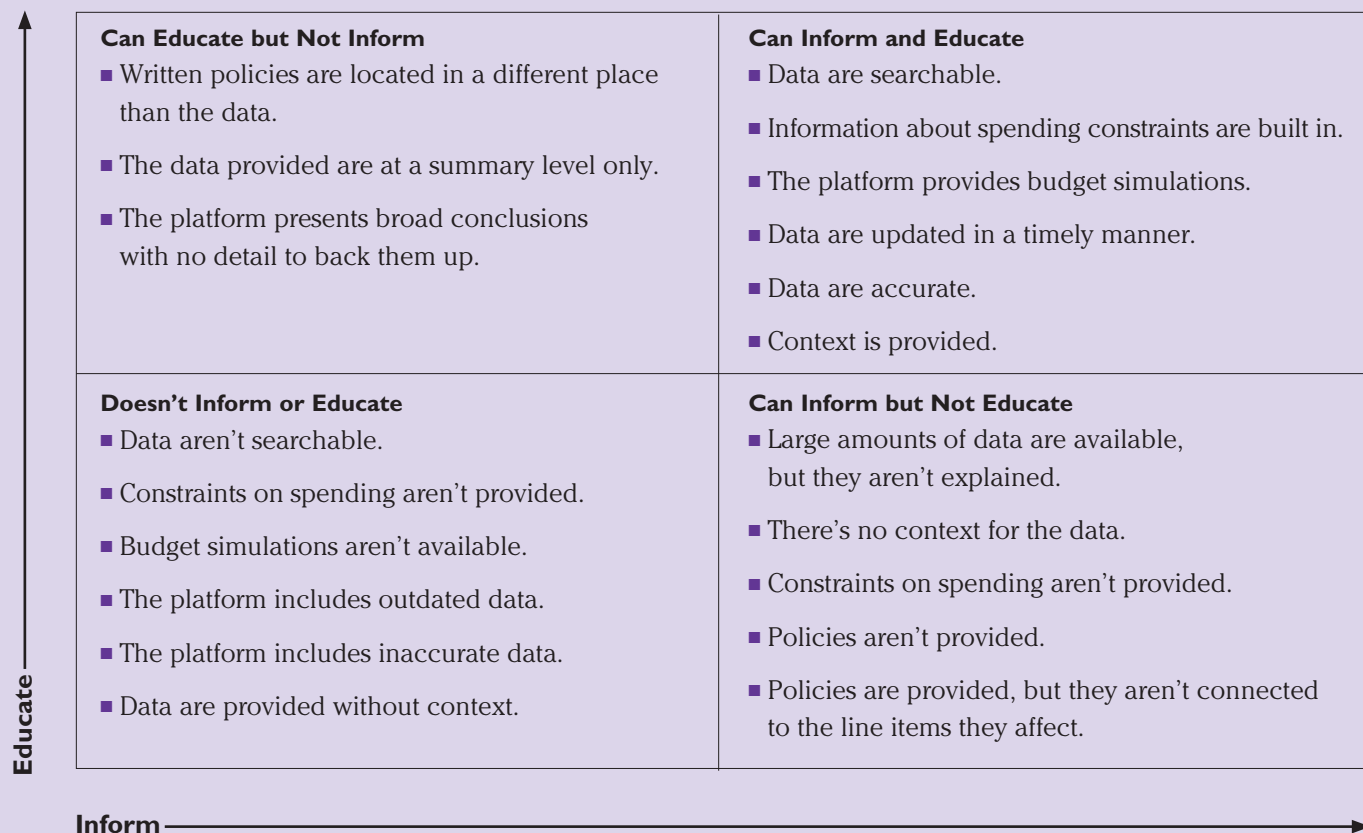
Users within the organization are also an important part of this effort. Governments should work to cultivate a culture of openness within the organization. This may require addressing the fears of some staff members of sharing their data throughout the organization and online. Even a brief, standard explanation about online financial transparency — an “elevator speech” — can help reduce this initial fear.

TRANSPARENCY AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Governments often think of transparency as being separate from citizen engagement — this is reflected in the fact that there are many norms and standards for financial reporting, disclosure, and fiscal openness, but none for ways in which stakeholders might engage with this information. Public reporting requirements such as comprehensive annual financial reports (CAFRs), audit requirements, and debt disclosures are well-established components of a government's responsibilities. In a GFOA survey of more than 400 municipal governments, 100 percent of respondents said they share their financial information with the public, and many of these entities probably don't even think of this as financial transparency; instead, it's probably considered a purchasing- or capital planning-related activity. And that's true, but at its core, reporting is about financial transparency. The difference between CAFRS, etc., and the latest budget transparency platform is simply the channel of communication.

Long-term, two-way communication that propagates citizen engagement is a critical aspect of sustainability. The systems governments establish to help exchange information with the public allow government to educate citizens, media, rating agencies, and other stakeholders, while also allowing them to provide direct feedback to government in ways other than voting. Two-way communication also provides much more specific feedback than election results because users can directly identify their areas of concern or interest. When both

Exhibit I: The Connection between a Government's Online Financial Transparency Platform and Its Value to Users



long-term and two-way communication are in place, trust and confidence in a government and its financial stewardship improve exponentially.

Many users of transparency platforms report frustration about the lack of context for data, which makes the information difficult to use and can even give the wrong impression. Users usually want to know why a government has done specific things (e.g., spent at least 5 percent of its budget on road construction each year). Transparency platforms are increasingly able to provide that kind of context and meaning. Governments can curate, or specifically tailor, data to the interest and needs of users,

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improving the ability of transparency platforms to educate stakeholders. This can be accomplished by listening to the users of the governments' platforms and refining offerings (e.g., data sets, capital projects plans) to reflect users' preferences.

For users who aren't accustomed to interpreting finance information, some data can appear to conflict with other data (e.g., cash versus the accrual basis of accounting). Clarity must be provided to avoid such misunderstandings. Governments should also explain complex topics such as the way pensions and other postemployment benefits obligations affect the current year's expenditures.

Tips for Making Data Easy to Understand

To engage citizens, governments need to make their data easy to understand. This includes making sure the information:

- **Is Easily Digestible.** Users should be able to understand and make use of the data, regardless of their understanding of government finance.
- **Can Be Translated.** Data should be translatable to be of use when users are trying to answer a specific question.
- **Includes Meaningful Analysis.** This requires the government to understand what kind of information users want.
- **Is Connected to Services.** Users may not always understand accounts, funds, and funding structures, but they do typically understand major services and services provided by the government. As much as possible, data should be tied back to major service categories. For example, data could be tied to a major CAFR program category such as public safety, economic development, or conservation.
- **Explains Policies in the Right Places.** If the government faces policy constraints, rules, earmarks, or mandates that limit the ways in which it can use funds, this information should be presented in a way that ties the constraint to the money. For example, if 20 percent of all general fund spending is earmarked for public safety, the government might embed a notice explaining the policy along with a hyperlink within the section of the platform that addresses public safety. This is clearer than a notice on the home page under a “policies” header.
- **Includes Actual and Projected Data.** Projections are educated guesses, but they can provide context about the government’s assumptions — what it expects will happen — and should therefore be included where possible.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

Online financial transparency is complicated, so it makes sense that governments sometimes want to start out by simply informing users via some limited set of financial data —

posting the current year’s operating budget, for example. But while the public will find this information useful, it’s merely a data dump if the platform doesn’t also provide budgets for the past 3 to 5 years, or if the additional information is housed in a different place on the website. Without context, it is difficult to evaluate the merits of the current year’s budget, and time-based analysis is not the only consideration. Data comparing the budget to actual spending throughout the year (at least quarterly) for the current year and prior budgets will give users a better understanding of the government’s resource allocation strategy in both approach and execution.

There are two primary components of online financial transparency platforms: the platform’s ability to inform users and to educate them. Nearly all local governments do some version of informing their citizens online, but few provide the depth of information (i.e., detailed data) or context needed to truly educate users. Most fell somewhere between static, high-level generic information and dynamic, drillable, searchable, up-to-date data with context embedded. Exhibit 1 illustrates this spectrum.

Many users of transparency platforms report frustration about the lack of context for data, which makes the information difficult to use and can even give the wrong impression.

SURVEY RESULTS

GFOA surveyed more than 400 municipal government organizations about their use of online platforms for financial transparency. The information provided below highlights some key takeaways.

- While approximately 75 percent of governments share their debt-related information on the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board’s Electronic Municipal Market Access (EMMA) system, only 50 percent post debt-related info to their own organization’s website. This speaks to the importance of data placement. Having to go to multiple places for data is often a barrier, and it can even make users think the organization has something to hide.

Tips for Improving Financial Transparency

The following recommendations are based on GFOA's transparency research.

- Online financial transparency platforms should be interactive, making use of simulations, surveys, and other feedback mechanisms that can enable two-way communication between users and the government.
- Governments should encourage stakeholders to participate because this feedback helps ensure that taxpayer money is allocated in ways that align with the community's needs and wishes. This can be accomplished by integrating online transparency with in-person interviews, public meetings, and other offline channels.
- Context is essential, but to promote ongoing engagement, it has to be presented in a way that's easily understood — users need additional information about the data to help provide meaning. For example, seeing the average salary of a fire chief in users' state may help them contextualize the salary of their city's fire chief.
- Details help tell the story. While summary-level data is ideal for most users, the details behind those summary-level conclusions will often be what provides

the context. To be effective, platforms should connect summary-level financial data (i.e. total capital budget for the year) to detailed data (i.e. capital budget for parks in neighborhoods where the median income is less than \$30,000 annually). This will provide some users a quick path to high-level information while giving others access to more granular, supporting detail.

- When building simulations and feedback mechanisms, governments should control the options that are available to users in a way that provides feedback the organization can use (e.g., if 20 percent of the operating budget must be spent on road construction, that should be built into all possible budgets within the simulation).
- Financial transparency websites should be designed as simply as possible. This can increase usage and users' understanding of the data.
- Financial transparency websites should be flexible. Given internal and external changes (e.g., social, economic, political, demographic), a flexible format allows a government to adapt information like data sets or rules in a budget simulation to the specific needs of the community.

Additionally, most non-finance professionals are not even aware of EMMA or how to access and use the website.

- Nearly 45 percent of respondents do not post salary-related information on their websites. Since 70 percent of all local government costs are related to personnel, these data are important to an understanding of government spending. Also, of governments that do share salary-related data, fewer than 10 percent provide any contextual information.
- Only 20 percent of respondents reported having enough flexibility, accuracy, and timely data on their online financial transparency sites to make the platform useful

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for internal staff and elected officials; it's easier to send an internal request form data (i.e., calling the finance office).

The full listing of survey questions and responses are available at gfoa.org/transparency, along with our report detailing financial transparency and a collection of case studies. ■

Note

1. Shayne Kavanagh, "Transparency: A Means to Improving Citizen Trust in Government," GFOA, 2017.

MARK MACK is a manager in GFOA's Research and Consulting Center.

Public Engagement and Transparency Is Key to States and Localities Using Federal Aid to Advance Racial Equity

JULY 5, 2022, 1:42 PM | BY IRIS HINH

As states and localities continue to decide how to use the remainder of \$350 billion in flexible federal recovery funds (FRF) from the American Rescue Plan, they should actively engage communities — especially those hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic — and increase transparency about their spending processes and choices. Public engagement and transparency are critical to ensuring that the funds are spent in ways that meet communities' priorities, address the greatest harms of the pandemic, and build an inclusive, equitable recovery. Many states and localities have been collaborating with community organizations, gathering information on residents' priorities, and regularly communicating updates to the public. States and localities that have yet to begin this process should consider these models.

States and the District of Columbia received \$195 billion in flexible funds from the Rescue Plan. Local governments received \$130.2 billion (\$65.1 billion to counties, \$45.6 billion to larger cities, and \$19.5 billion to smaller cities — the largest amount of one-time federal aid ever provided to local governments). States and localities have until the end of 2024 to obligate these funds and until the end of 2026 to spend them. Federal rules provide considerable flexibility to use these funds to replace lost revenue, address the pandemic's economic and health impacts, provide premium pay to essential workers, and create broadband and water/sewer infrastructure. Most states and localities have already used some of these funds^[1] but also have a significant portion left.

Public engagement and transparency in FRF spending decisions are also key to addressing long-standing racial inequities. Historically, people of color had limited to no power in policymaking, which allowed white lawmakers to extend and cement racial disparities in power and wealth^[2]. Thus, states and localities must be intentional about *how* they allocate their remaining FRF. Direct community feedback strengthens states' and localities' ability to better meet people's needs, especially those who have been systemically excluded and whose daily lives are shaped by these fiscal policies.

States and localities should offer multiple avenues for civic engagement to center community priorities for FRF. In particular, they should remove or account for obstacles to engaging in public engagement processes, including caretaking responsibilities, language barriers, and limited technology and broadband access.

Some states, but more so cities and counties, have strengthened civic engagement and transparency through a range of tools, including local advisory boards, community outreach campaigns, and online spending dashboards:

- Establishing new processes to improve collaboration between policymakers and community leaders and residents, such as advisory committees drawn from a broad cross-section of the public, and to diversify community input in spending decisions.

- **Chester County, Pennsylvania**, created a committee^[3] of volunteer county employees and community residents, representing a range of ages, gender identities, socioeconomic statuses, and geographical areas.
- **Cook County, Illinois**, partnered with the Civic Consulting Alliance, a diverse group of community-based organizations, and councils in underrepresented communities to shape engagement strategies^[4] in FRF spending.
- **St. Louis, Missouri**, consulted with a Stimulus Advisory Board^[5] of 25 community stakeholders from social service agencies, disability advocates, refugee and immigrant advocates, racial equity organizations, and local organizations.
- Offering various outreach mediums creates opportunities for individuals and families to learn about FRF and to share their priorities.
 - **Denver, Colorado**, led a community outreach campaign called RISE Together Denver^[6], which sent 25,000 mailers to traditionally underserved neighborhoods, set up pop-up events, put up flyers at local libraries, and launched e-blasts through county offices and social media campaigns. Residents engaged through calling into telephone town halls and online participation.
 - **Durham, North Carolina**, partnered with North Carolina Central University, Durham County, Neighborhood Improvement Services, and the Equity & Inclusion Department to discuss outstanding needs, share common goals, and generate ideas for FRF spending^[7]. Residents reviewed the spending priorities and provided feedback on how to increase transparency moving forward.
 - **Fresno County, California**, conducted an online community outreach survey in late 2021, which was offered in over 40 languages^[8] with physical copies at local libraries.
- Using newsletters, press releases, and online updates on FRF spending creates transparency around how allocations can meet community needs. And for residents who want to engage in advocacy, these tools can also inform spending of the remaining funds.
 - **Delaware's** governor has made FRF newsletters and allocations available online^[9].
 - **Honolulu, Hawai'i**, solicited feedback on funding priorities through a community engagement survey in early 2022 and created a dashboard^[10] of approved funding by category.
 - **Missouri's** governor launched a website^[11] in 2022 with information on how nonprofit organizations and residents can apply for grant programs funded by FRF, in addition to the state's spending decisions.
- Establishing processes to promote FRF spending in communities hit hardest, and to prioritize people most impacted by the pandemic and long-standing inequities when allocating FRF.
 - **King County, Washington**, developed a shared vision with over 600 county employees and 100 local organizations to create an Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan^[12].
 - **Los Angeles County, California**, created an equity dashboard^[13] that was developed with the county's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiative team to make FRF data available to everyone.
 - **Massachusetts** formed a Federal Funds Equity & Accountability Panel^[14] to track allocations using metrics such as economic and demographic equity. The state is also in the process of setting up a data dashboard and community survey.

These approaches reflect the extent to which states and localities have prioritized the experiences and perspectives of their communities. However, as they spend the remainder of the federal aid, states and localities will have many additional opportunities to target their FRF spending decisions toward advancing racial equity and meeting community needs — and they should seize them.

The budget is the most important policy document that a local government produces.* As such, it has been recognized for decades that local governments should do better at engaging citizens in the budget process. The standard avenue for citizen engagement in the budget process is often limited to a public hearing or two, which typically happens after important decisions have been made and often amount to little more than a chance for citizens to air their grievances at a microphone.

In this paper, we will contend that new forces have emerged that suggest local governments need to consider public engagement in a new light. Before we examine these forces and their implications, we must recognize that public engagement is the most difficult part of planning and budgeting. To take on a difficult problem, we first should define the problem before attempting to solve it. In that spirit, in this paper we will first re-examine the reasons for public engagement. Knowing *why* we do public engagement sets us up to understand *how* to do public engagement.

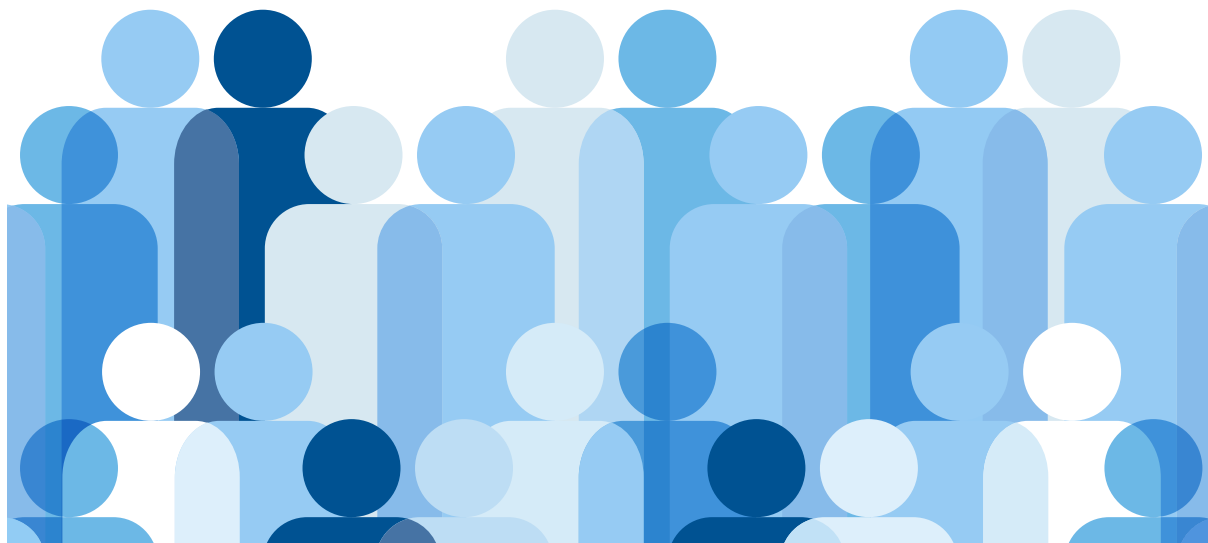
In this paper, we will also “think like a chef and not a cook.” A cook follows a prescribed recipe but runs into problems when the recipe does not fit the situation. A chef, however, has deeper understanding and knowledge and can adapt to the situation. For that reason, the second part of this paper will set forth principles to help local governments design public engagement in a way that satisfies the purposes of public engagement.

ABOUT THE WORD “CITIZEN”

By “citizen,” we mean people who share a civic identity. This is the “self” in self-government. It also means participation in the creation and receipt of public goods. This is the “government” in self-government. You can read more about the meaning of “citizen” and its significance in the resources at the bottom of this page.†

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT DEFINED¹

The activities by which people’s concerns, needs, interests, and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues. It usually includes a combination of providing access to relevant information, gathering input, discussing and connecting, identifying and providing choices, and deliberation on major decisions.



* Because the budget outlines resources for a community’s policy priorities.

† Please consult kettering.org/blogs/work-citizen or, for more detail, the book *Ecology of Democracy* by Dr. David Matthews, available at kettering.org.

Rethinking the Purpose of Public Engagement

A good place to start rethinking public engagement is to consider why public engagement is important. If we know the reasons local governments need public input, we can design public engagement accordingly. Traditional reasons for public engagement in planning and budgeting include building trust in the decision-making process, defining community priorities, improving the quality of outcomes, improving relationships between the public and public officials, and building stronger support for the resulting decisions. While these reasons are still valid, we contend they are incomplete. In following pages, we examine four reasons public engagement is important today, distinct from decades past, and the conditions that give rise to the reasons.²

(Re)Establish legitimacy of local government as an institution. In most decades after World War II, the legitimacy of government was taken for granted. Today, the legitimacy of government is in question,* but legitimacy is needed for government to function. Many people today, especially the young, feel they need to disrupt institutions to be heard.

In this paper we will first re-examine the reasons for public engagement. Knowing *why* we do public engagement sets us up to understand *how* to do public engagement.

An important contributor to this loss of legitimacy is a loss of public trust in governing institutions. Many people do not believe public officials will act on behalf of the entire community and that the voices of low income, black, indigenous, and people of color will continue to be unheard and marginalized. For an increasing number of families, the American dream seems unattainable, with income disparities the highest in our recent history.³ People look to government for solutions that are not forthcoming. People also look to government to be a partner with them in recognizing and addressing shared community problems, and to be seen as a co-producer of public goods with government

rather than a passive bystander, customer, or client. Since 2020, we have seen numerous public protests demanding more responsive government on topics as diverse as racial justice, COVID restrictions, reproductive rights, and school curriculums. These protests have become a movement and demand an affirmative response from local government—one that puts citizens at the center of public problem-solving—if our democracy is to work as it should.

The loss of public trust is accompanied by increased divisiveness or polarization, making it difficult for people to bridge the divides that separate them. Yet when provided the opportunity to name the issues they are concerned about, frame the context of the issue, deliberate, and act together to address the issues, most people are willing to work through tensions and trade-offs to find common ground and solutions they can live with. Engaging citizens, in democratic and complementary ways, helps them build relationships of trust with other citizens and public officials; gain confidence in our governing institutions through shared work and responsibility; and become owners of the solutions or co-producers of public goods with government.

Another contributor to government's loss of legitimacy is the "information tsunami" in which society now finds itself: an exponentially increasing and extreme volume of available information.⁴ Before, citizens had limited information about government, and that information was intermediated by government itself or perhaps one or two media outlets (e.g., the local paper). Today, citizens

*According to Pew Research Center, from 1964 to 2017, American's trust in government dropped from 77% to 18%. Around that time, American's belief that the federal government serves their interest went from 64% to 21%. Though these statistics are focused on the federal government, we should acknowledge that: A) local government typically fares better than the federal (and state) government in these polls, but also B) their respective scores are often correlated, which means declining federal scores do not bode well for local government.



As citizens have access to more sources of information, the authoritativeness of any sole source goes down and citizens can cherry-pick sources that feed them their preferred narratives.

have more information sources, like Facebook, NextDoor, and Twitter. To make matters worse, the incentives faced by these platforms encourage sensationalism, provoking outrage, and presenting users with information that confirms their preexisting beliefs.⁵ This is especially true of social media, which is the most important source of information for many people.⁶

As citizens have access to more sources of information,⁷ the authoritativeness of any sole source goes down and citizens can cherry-pick sources that feed them their preferred narratives. This creates a negative feedback loop. Sources that provide simple narratives catering to current biases get more attention, thus incentivizing them to do more. Sources that try to provide quality information are at a disadvantage because they can't compete as well for the public's attention. Thus, citizens become less certain that they can believe what government officials (or experts in general) say and government's legitimacy comes into question.

This is not the only way the information tsunami brings legitimacy into question. The missteps of local government are laid bare as never before. Some missteps may be exaggerated (or fabricated) and others are real, but either way it creates a gap between the perceived performance of government and government's claims of competence. The problem is not that the people who make up the institutions of local government are corrupt or incompetent, but the issues local government must deal with often are complex, and institutions' ability to deal with them are finite. This leads to our next purpose for public engagement:

Align public expectations with what government can realistically accomplish. It has become a truism among public managers that the public expects more from the government than they are willing to pay for. Though there is scant research on the public's expectations versus reality. Survey results from [Polco](#) suggest that public managers' observations may be accurate. A majority (around 75%) of residents across American cities report that the quality of services from their local government is "good" or "excellent." Yet the same respondents also rate the value of services for the taxes paid to the local government poorly—a "49" on a 0 to 100 scale, where 100 is "excellent" and 0 is "poor."* This may imply that although day-to-day services are satisfactory, citizens are looking for more from their government than they are getting.⁸

* Polco's 100-point scale is designed to mimic a traditional letter-grading scale where 90 to 100 would be very good, 80 to 89 good, etc.

Part of the problem is that the rhetoric of democratic politics has become misaligned with what local governments can achieve. Failure occurs when the public's expectations and government's claims of what it can accomplish diverge from reality. Elections often incentivize attacks on current office holders (blaming them for problems) or big promises of how new candidates will solve problems (which rarely come to pass)—both of which tend to undermine faith in government. This divergence between public expectations of government and government's capabilities is a potential problem for all local governments, even if it is a matter of the public expecting flawless street conditions in exchange for minimal taxes.

Many times, the issue the public is concerned about is more complex than street conditions. In the Polco survey, respondents were most critical of housing and economic opportunities. Complex problems like this do not have tidy technical solutions and are impossible to solve to everyone's satisfaction.⁹ Compromises, trade-offs, and continuous management of the issue are the only resolution. For example, a shortage of affordable housing requires greater density of housing to address. However, the success of NIMBYism* shows that there is no shortage of people who prefer lower density, at least in their neighborhood. Thus, if government is expected to “solve” issues like affordable housing, then government will be put in a position of almost certain failure. The result of failure is to further sap local government's legitimacy.

As an illustration of expectations versus reality in local government planning and budgeting, let's consider the “equity” movement in budgeting. GFOA has written extensively about the **importance of considering equity in budgeting** as one of the elements of fairness in budgeting.¹⁰ However, the rhetoric around equity in budgeting sometimes goes beyond what government can do. For example, the stated aims of budgeting in equity sometimes imply that equal outcomes for members of the public should be a goal.** One can question whether local government has the ability (or the writ) to achieve this goal, especially when a citizen's own agency has an important impact on the extent to which they achieve the outcome in question, and where government intervention may be seen as overreach into private affairs.

Get Feedback From a Fractured Public. In the heyday of the traditional budget, the 1960s, society was far more conformist than it is today. Society has been becoming steadily more individualistic since then.¹¹ Add to that the information tsunami that encourages further and faster fragmenting of the public into groups that cohere (usually temporarily) around some issue of shared interest.

This means there is no single “public” that government can get feedback from. The “public” that engages in local issues (the people who attend city council meetings, participate online, and email council members and staff) is comprised of self-selected individuals who have an interest in that issue. These people are not representative of most citizens. Many citizens may not feel they have a stake in the issue at hand or may be content with the status quo. Others may not have access to the decision-making process. Government cannot make decisions based on the voices of those who show up and who are not representative of the interests of the larger community. So, what is the purpose of public engagement?

First is to hear from people with a stake in the issue at hand. These people may be represented by an interest group. However, in other cases, they may not. Low-income people or members of marginalized communities may not have the resources to organize, the time to attend public meetings, or feel welcome. Hearing from people with a stake helps government understand those with the most to lose

* NIMBY stands for “Not in My Backyard.”

** For example, in a 2020 campaign video, Kamala Harris said, “equitable treatment means we all end up in the same place” along with a cartoon illustrating her point. Though she was not referring to local government budgeting, it is a well-publicized example of a view of equity that sometimes shows up in local government budgeting. We can also observe the popular equity cartoon that shows people looking over the fence at a baseball game, where equity is defined as everyone seeing over the fence (the desired outcome). You can see more research about how people of differing political beliefs tend to define fairness and equity at gfoa.org/fairness.

(or gain) from the outcome of a decision. Minimizing losses and figuring out how to make as many people as possible better off is essential to maximizing the total benefit for the community. This may help defuse potential conflict among those for whom the stakes are highest.¹² In many cases, the people with the most to lose are historically marginalized populations. This is because these groups, by definition, do not have resources at their disposal or access to the policymaking process. Even a loss that is not so large in most people's estimation could hurt a marginalized group because it is *relatively large* compared to the resources they have.

A second purpose is to bolster government's legitimacy in the eyes of the public that is most impacted by the issue. Legitimacy is the government's ability to justify its decisions with diverse stakeholders. Legitimacy is important to engage the public in co-creating solutions that government authority can help enact. Conventional public engagement, like the public hearing, often delegitimizes government

Hearing from people with a stake helps government understand those with the most to lose (or gain) from the outcome of a decision.

because people do not feel heard, do not understand how decisions are made, and get the impression that government officials are not interested in public opinion. We will see later in this paper that public engagement can be used to find common ground and heal some of the fracturing the public has experienced.

Finally, public engagement cuts across different perspectives on democracy. Public engagement may support "direct democracy," or giving the public the power to make decisions. In this case, the representativeness

of the participants would be critical. However, public engagement is often one part of a broader planning/budgeting process that helps inform the decision-making of elected officials. This supports a "representative" form of democracy. Some elected officials see themselves as delegates (voting in a way that represents their constituents' preferences) and others more as trustees (voting what they think is best). Public engagement can inform both types of electeds by providing a clearer sense of constituents' preferences (while helping refine those preferences) or by helping the elected think through the issue and make wiser decisions. Even in a process that supports representative democracy, it would be ideal if the participants are a cross-section of the entire community. In any event, high-quality public engagement will provide better information than the common alternatives, like traditional public hearings, closed-door meetings with interest groups, social media trends, etc.

Provide an alternative to the politics of cynicism. A public fractured into temporary and shifting interest groups cannot provide sustained, coherent solutions to the issues that people are concerned about, especially when issues are complex, where no perfect or permanent solution is possible. On top of this is the questioned legitimacy of government—the institution that might have the authority to provide or at least coordinate a solution. So if the public can't provide a solution, and the delegitimized government can't either, then opposition to the status quo provides a message that a group can cohere around. This "politics of cynicism" lacks unifying ideas, programs, or plans for a solution. In fact, when one is proposed from within the opposition group, the group tends to lose cohesion because the members of the group must confront the complexities required to solve the problem that originally brought the group together.

High-quality public engagement must provide an alternative to the politics of cynicism, channeling citizen interest into constructive dialogue and a search for solutions.



PRINCIPLE 1

Quality Over Quantity: More Public Engagement is Not Always Better

Though there are cases where the public is not engaged in budgeting often enough, this principle cautions us against swinging the pendulum to the other extreme of over-engagement. There are reasons to be just as cautious about over-engagement as under-engagement. For one, low-quality public engagement can do more harm than good. In fact, one study suggested that attending a typical public meeting was associated with a lower sense of efficacy and belonging to the community!¹⁴ High-quality public engagement will cost time and money, so if a high volume of public engagement will come at the expense of quality, then it might be better to have low volume but higher quality.¹⁵ Also, the public is already overwhelmed with information, so the goal should not be to add to the information tsunami but rather to cut through it. That will require a sharp design, which our other principles will speak to.

High-quality public engagement will cost time and money, so if a high volume of public engagement will come at the expense of quality, then it might be better to have low volume but higher quality.

But before designing public engagement, a local government needs to find the issues where public engagement has the best chance to be effective. Here are some features of issues that may be ripe for productive public engagement:

- There is time and space in the decision-making process for the public's input to influence the government's direction. If the issue has already been "decided," engagement will be less effective and may frustrate participants. For example, the traditional budget hearing takes place at the end of the budget process after most (if not all) important decisions have been made. Public engagement could happen before the budget process, to learn what issues the public feels are most important. The budget can then direct resources to address those issues.
- Issues are primarily defined by tensions between positive values, such as freedom, safety, and equality. People on all sides of the issue want the best for the community even if their definitions of what is "best" are different.
- All major stakeholders realize that the status quo of the issue under discussion is not sustainable. This could be, for example, the budget itself, where there are big and persistent deficits, or there could be some community concern (public health, safety, etc.).
- The commitment and action of multiple groups is necessary to make progress on the issue.
- There is a "middle ground" on the issue, and people could be brought over to it. In contrast, highly polarized issues that have devolved in stark win-lose terms will have less potential.
- Different stakeholders may misunderstand how others perceive the issue but are open to having a good-faith conversation with people on the "other side."
- Resources exist to support the decisions that come out of public engagement.

These criteria have critical implications for engaging the public in planning and budgeting.

First, picking the right issue is the **indispensable** starting point for productive public engagement.

Second, the “right issue” may not be the entire budget! Local governments have limited resources for public engagement, so rather than trying to engage the public on the entire budget, it may be better to pick a specific topic that is of interest to the community. For example, one of the authors of this paper was an assistant city manager for a small town, where trees were an important part of community’s character. Hence, the public was engaged in a conversation about how to assess the stock of trees in the community. This led to funding in the next budget for a special project to inventory the trees in the community and their health. The budget in the year after that created funding for ongoing assistance from an arborist to maintain trees in public rights of way. Of course, local governments can engage the public in conversation about the wider budget, but it is not required for productive public engagement.

Third is to know the goal of engaging the public. The goal can range from informing the public of a decision that has already been made to empowering the public to make the decision themselves.¹⁶ Most public engagement in public finance will be in the middle of these two, where the public’s involvement is used to help make the decision but is not the final word.* Knowing the goal is important for a couple of reasons. It sets expectations for all stakeholders, including elected officials, staff, and citizens. It also informs the design of the engagement. For instance, if the goal is to inform, then the design should avoid giving participants the impression that they are decision-makers. If the goal is to engage citizens in the decision-making, the design must allow them to participate effectively but also make clear to citizens what role their participation plays in getting to the final decision. Many design principles in this paper speak to how to engage citizens in decision-making.

The fourth implication is if the issues at hand are not a good fit with engagement, or if you do not have the institutional capacity for public engagement, you might be better off *not* doing public engagement. You need the institutional capacity to see successful public engagement through. We will turn our attention to that next.

QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

- ➔ What issues could most benefit from public engagement in your community?
- ➔ How do you know that these issues are the ones that could most benefit? Has the public given you clues on what those issues might be?
- ➔ How broad should the topic of public engagement be? Should you focus on a narrow issue of particular interest to the community, or do you want to engage the public in a larger discussion about the budget?
- ➔ Should you do public engagement at all? If the issue is not a good fit for public engagement or you do not have the time/resources to do it well, you may be better off not doing it.

* There could be examples at the end of the spectrum as well. The “Participatory Budgeting Project” is an example of an engagement strategy where the public is expected to make the final decision.



PRINCIPLE 2

Build or Bolster the Institutions to Support Public Engagement

High-quality democratic decisions depend on high-quality democratic institutions. Further, lasting democratic legitimacy does not come from charismatic leaders; it comes from institutions. Thus, local government must invest in institutions that can support high-quality public engagement, which requires more resources but is likely to arrive at better, more widely supported decisions. This will be more efficient overall, considering that quick but poor decisions can be costly over time.

That said, building the institutional capacity for better public engagement in the budget office may be difficult for many local governments. Public engagement requires specialized skills that might not match the skills and interests of existing staff, and the resources may not exist to create a permanent, new capacity in the budget office.

Local government must invest in institutions that can support high-quality public engagement, which requires more resources but is likely to arrive at better, more widely supported decisions.

So how might this capacity be created? The budget office could work more closely with other elements within local government that do have capacity for public engagement. Some public information or communication departments are growing beyond the traditional public relations role to support high-quality public engagement. For example, in the City of Mississauga and the City of Burlington, both in Ontario, the public information office plays a lead role in public engagement around the budget. Other municipalities, such as Larimer County and the City of Longmont in northern Colorado, have developed internal facilitation teams. Employees across multiple departments dedicate time outside their normal duties to build their skills through dedicated trainings. When a department needs help, they can call on that internal group for assistance.

An institution does not have to rely on its employees. Examples of outside resources include universities, community foundations, philanthropic groups, other local governments, and civic organizations. For example, a contract with a local consultant or university could provide as-needed support for public engagement. Relying on outside consultants can be costly, but the cost of no engagement or low-quality engagement can be even more significant overall. An alternative could be using citizen leadership academies, which have traditionally prepared citizens to work on boards and committees. Those academies could train citizens to volunteer as facilitators.

Let's move to the next principle, which starts to answer a natural next question: What can local government do with this institutional capacity for high-quality public engagement?

QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

- How will you institutionalize the capacity for high-quality public engagement? Will it be found inside your organization, or will you partner with an outside provider? If it will be inside your organization, will it be in the budget department or in another department, like public information, or decentralized among many departments? Will public engagement be sponsored by a ranking elected official or by an appointed official?

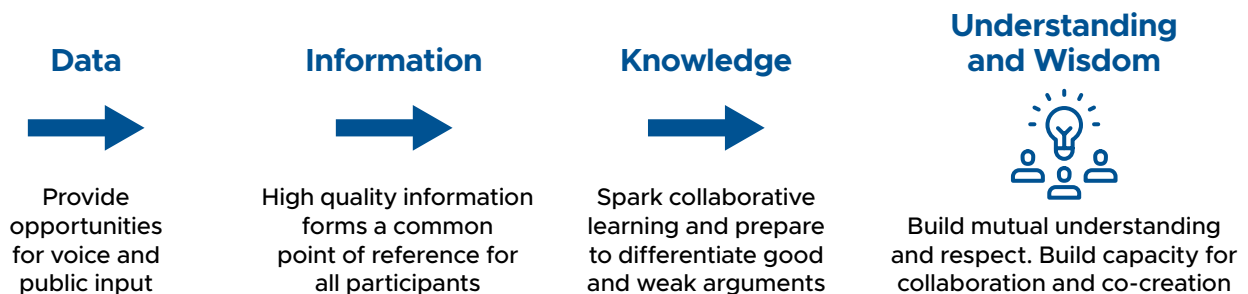


PRINCIPLE 3

Think of Public Engagement as the Improved Capacity for Sense-Making

The “information tsunami” we described earlier challenges our ability to make sense of the world around us. Public engagement supports government in transforming the noise that occurs about local issues into a more useful form. Conventional engagement—such as surveys that lack rigor,¹⁷ one-at-a-time-at-the-microphone, emails to elected officials, and social media posts—serve to collect individual opinions and preferences. But such data is limited in terms of perspective, questionable in terms of accuracy, and lacking in terms of recognizing inherent tensions and trade-offs. Too often, people are talking past each other, focusing on different aspects of the issue or different underlying values. As a result, simple “magic bullet” solutions or blame game dominates, and processes are unable to tap into the best of human nature: our creativity in addressing complex challenges. Quality engagement must first process and filter raw public data into quality information that allows the public to engage with it productively and deliberatively. Formats like “**issue guides**” walk the reader through the nuances of an issue and the choices the community is faced with (without leading them to a conclusion). The goal is to avoid the shortcuts and spark our best thinking. This art of framing for deliberation, rather than framing for persuasion,¹⁸ is a skill local governments must develop capacity to support quality public engagement. Think of the institution of public engagement as a “weather station” that provides feedback on the prevailing winds of public opinion, as opposed to the thumb-in-air of relying on public hearings, social media, etc. In the end, communities need processes that can turn raw data and opinion into quality information and questions, then, through authentic engagement and discussion, into usable knowledge and mutual understanding, which can lead to wisdom, high-quality decisions, and collaborative action. This is the essence of public engagement as sense-making, as shown in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1 | PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AS SENSE-MAKING



Sense-making is not only good for government. Public engagement as sense-making helps the public make sense of what local government does and can do. It can help the public better understand local government’s capabilities and limits. It can help create a shared sense of reality between the public and public officials. This happens by bringing them into the decision-making process and face-to-face with the complexities and hard trade-offs at hand.

So, what are the methods governments can use for sense-making? Many conventional engagement processes—such as surveys, citizen comment, and open houses—are focused on gathering opinion and “input.” That raw data is necessary, but it’s only the beginning. “Deliberative engagement” methods are critical for moving raw data down the line toward wisdom.¹⁹ Such processes focus on interaction and rely on key components, such as high-quality background information, that help participants engage issues with more nuance, small group discussion, clear ground rules for conversation, diverse participants, capable facilitators and, perhaps, trusted third parties* who can help bridge trust between citizens and government.

As research on social psychology demonstrates, humans are not wired to interact with opposing views on difficult issues, so building capacity in these components is critical to transform our polarization-ready brains, at least temporarily, into ones willing to deliberate.²⁰ The information coming out of deliberative forums is different than that coming out of a survey or one-at-a-time-at-the-microphone. It is data that shows how people engage each other, how they work through tough issues, and which trade-offs they are willing or unwilling to accept. Most important, quality deliberative processes can often spark human creativity since participants cannot rely on simple solutions or the blame game and thus often develop new ways to address their shared problems.

This is not to imply that local government should be a windsock and go with whatever the prevailing winds are or to imply that citizens should accept local government as is and give up hope that it can address difficult problems. High-quality public engagement also works to refine public opinion by helping citizens understand the complexities at work and how those might be addressed. The deliberative process works to bring together public opinion with expert knowledge, tapping into the best of each while working to avoid either of them dominating too much. We take this up more in our next section.

Quality deliberative processes can often spark human creativity since participants cannot rely on simple solutions or the blame game and thus often develop new ways to address their shared problems.

QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What issues in your community might be in most need of higher quality sense-making?
- In the progression from data to information to knowledge to wisdom, where might you need the most work?

* Who this trusted third party is will depend on the community but could be a minister/clergy member, school principal, etc.



PRINCIPLE 4

Help the Public Engage With Complexity

Many of the community challenges that inspire the passion of citizens are complex problems. Complex problems are distinct from problems that are merely complicated. A jet engine is complicated. It is not easy to understand a jet engine; but once you do understand it, you can make changes and get predictable results, like fixing a broken engine. A system like the economy is complex. There are many moving parts, with unpredictable results arising from the interactions of those parts. You cannot “fix” complex problems. Rather, when it comes to the complex problems local government and the public engage with, it is best to recognize the possible trade-offs, the competing values underlying those trade-offs, and then negotiate the resulting tensions.²¹ Examples of complex problems local governments contend with include public safety, drug use, education, public health, and more.

Complex problems pose a challenge to public engagement. Because they defy easy answers, they contribute to the politics of cynicism. In the absence of a clear solution, those interested in the problem cohere around being against the status quo and look for people to blame for the status quo (often public officials). This can lead public officials to perceive the public as unreasonable and, hence, impossible to productively engage with. Though the public is not inherently unreasonable, they can adopt unreasonable views in the context of a complex problem.

There is a lot that local government can do to help the public engage with complexity, recognize the nuances of problems, and get past us (the public) versus them (public officials). One strategy is to engage the public in defining the problem. People often want to jump to solutions, but that often results in solutions that treat symptoms and ignore root causes. The GFOA paper “[Defining the Problem: The Missing Piece to Local Government Planning](#)” describes a method called “Turn the Curve planning” that can be used to engage stakeholders in defining the problem.²²

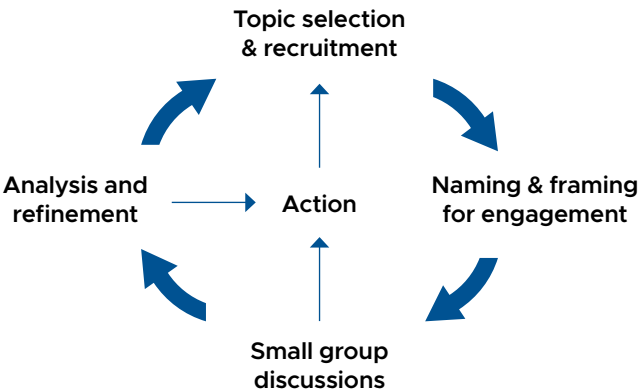
Another technique, with broader application than Turn the Curve planning, is “deliberative community forums.” These forums discover what people think about an issue after they have engaged with multiple, alternative viewpoints. The forums provide the resources citizens need to develop an opinion informed by relevant facts, expert information, and an understanding of how issues and policies affect others in their community.²³ The steps of a deliberative community forum include:

- 1. Choose the issue the forum will address and recruit a diverse group of participants.** Participants should include people who are impacted by the issue and changes that may occur in the community as a result of addressing the issue as well as those who may be part of the changes. Efforts should be made to engage those who may not normally engage or be included, which can require added resources or special planning. Engaging a group of people with diverse perspectives helps make sense of the issue by describing it fully and putting it in context.²⁴ Strategies to help engage a diverse group include holding the public engagement event near to where people live and in a space they are comfortable with, and providing childcare services, travel assistance, or translation services when necessary.
- 2. Efforts should focus on gathering a clear sense of the issue from the public and content experts, often resulting in a discussion guide or backgrounder that can be used for others to engage with and refine.** The diverse views and perspectives held by the public can be gathered from conventional sources such as surveys, citizen comments, and communications to elected officials or staff. Those perspectives are filtered and combined with subject matter expertise to create substantive materials for the public to engage with around the issue that is the subject of the forum. These materials could include a background set of facts but should not be limited to that. The materials need to frame

values and trade-offs in play and lay out key questions for participants to engage. These discussion guides or backgrounders provide a baseline of information. They also lay out the tough choices and trade-offs inherent to the issue. They make it clear that there is no magic bullet to solve the issue, setting the public up well for the robust conversation that is warranted. These materials are designed to help overcome the human tendency toward simple solutions and the avoidance of tensions.

- 3. Participants engage in small group discussions facilitated by trained moderators and guided by the material produced in step 2.** Small groups work together to not only identify what actions they prefer or would reject (and what trade-offs they are willing or unwilling to accept) but also to improve the background document. The background document becomes a shared project that is improved through each engagement. Participants highlight what they liked, what they want to push back on, and what is missing. Organizers work to refine the document between events.
- 4. Insights gathered from the public discussions can be filtered back through subject matter experts in a variety of ways to check for misinformation and explore new possibilities.** One way is to have experts on hand and have them engage participants' questions during the event. This could include government staff but could also involve outside experts. Another way is to engage experts afterward to respond to what was learned from the public process. Over time, a cycle of engaging experts and the public, either together or later, continues. That interaction is used to improve the background document and sharpen the decision-making at the public or council level.²⁵ It is critical that expert views do not dominate the event. This includes explicitly (experts talking too much) but also includes implicitly (creating a presence that might inhibit conversation). For example, too many staff members who are set apart from the participants by uniforms or other markings of their expert status, or seating experts on a raised platform can impede conversation.
- 5. Deliberative processes are designed to lead to action, but such action may take many forms.** The actions coming out of a deliberative process may involve official decisions by a decision-making body, but they also may require actions by individuals or groups in the community. New organizations may form, or existing organizations may adapt how they approach the issue. Ideally, collaborations form across public, private, and nonprofit sectors to address the issue. Such actions, however, should not be the conclusion of a deliberative process. Actions may change the dynamics of an issue, hopefully improving how tensions are negotiated and the community's values are honored, but rarely are problems solved in the sense that the problem is no longer an issue. The conversation is ongoing, interrupted by new actions and ideas that change its dynamics. Exhibit 2 represents this process as the cycle of deliberative practice.

EXHIBIT 2 | THE CYCLE OF DELIBERATIVE PRACTICE



The City of Pittsburgh used deliberative community forums to engage citizens in planning for the capital budget. The forum took place after the mayor had announced the priorities for his administration but before the city departments made funding requests. The goal of the forum was to help refine the city's priorities and provide departments with more citizen perspectives that could help them develop their funding requests. You can read more about the process used by Pittsburgh in [A Handbook for Deliberative Community Forums](#). The exit survey for the forum showed that most participants agreed that the forum achieved the points listed below. Notice the connection with the new purposes and principles for public engagement that we described earlier:

- Gave participants an understanding of the issues involved when developing the city's capital budget (*align public expectations with what government can realistically accomplish*)
- Caused participants to consider points of view that they had not previously considered (*engage with complexity*)
- Made participants feel as though their voice had been heard by the city (*establish legitimacy as an institution*)
- Made participants more likely to engage in making their neighborhood stronger (*see our Principle 6, revitalize "responsibilities" that go along with "rights"*)

Using techniques like Turn the Curve planning or deliberative community forums build the institutional capacity to deal with complex problems on an ongoing basis. However, these benefits come at the cost of time and effort for organizers and participants. Thus, we must remind ourselves of Principle 1: Local governments must pick opportunities to use these methods judiciously yet also use them often enough to retain institutional capacity. Like athletic ability, this institutional capacity is "use or lose it." It is not "in case of emergency, break glass."

Finally, a point about how **not** to engage with complexity: Avoid the temptation to oversimplify complex situations. Oversimplification usually involves fitting complex problems into categories.²⁶ The most potentially damaging is making a binary choice out of a complex problem, like might be the case in a referendum. This forces people to pick a side and discourages investigating the nuances of complex problems. Similarly, highlighting or emphasizing people's group membership risks, inviting an "us versus them" mentality. This is because it activates a person's identity as a member of a group that has a position or stake in the issue. Instead, try to activate a shared identity of being part of a larger group that is jointly seeking solutions to a shared problem. As an example, research suggests that when public safety executives (e.g., a fire or police chief) come to a budgeting meeting in their uniform, their identity as a police officer or a firefighter is activated. This makes them more likely to push for decisions that benefit their department. Conversely, if they come dressed in civilian clothing, like everyone else, it activates their identity as a member of the broader local government, which encourages decisions that benefit that group.²⁷

QUESTIONS AND CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What are the complex issues in your community that inspire public passion?
- Can you engage the public with Turn the Curve or deliberative community forums?
- What outside organizations could help you convene such an event and add to the credibility of the proceedings?

Avoiding Common Pitfalls In Community Engagement

Equitable budgetary decision-making should aspire to include diverse city residents in the process. Once you have defined your goals and selected the community engagement approach, watch out! The right style of engagement will depend on the nature of the decision: Your city might release a for common pitfalls that can turn a well-intentioned strategy into one that fails to produce the needed survey to gather data in order to determine budget priorities, or you might decide to partner with a results, or worse, harms your city’s relationship with the community. For each of the three community engagement approaches below, check the potential pitfalls and consider the tactics suggested in order to be more inclusive, gather better data, build trust, and make superior decisions. Learn more about community engagement [here](#).

Goal	Pitfall	Solution	Example
Gather Data to Build a Clear Mandate	Your engagement generates useless or irrelevant data	Preview your engagement activities and questions with engagement specialists at the city, community members or groups, and the teams that will analyze the data.	Using Community Engagement to Build a Clear Mandate Miami-Dade County Launches Thrive 305 Survey and Workshops Process to Inform County Budget In Miami-Dade County, for example, Mayor Daniella Levine Cava wanted to spark civic engagement and align her administration’s agenda with constituents’ priorities after taking office late last year. Her staff launched a countywide survey that could quickly reach a broad range of residents. In February 2021, more than 25,000 people completed the survey. One clear theme that emerged from the results was a concern about public safety. Specifically, many respondents expressed a desire to increase their sense of safety by improving lighting and maintenance in parks and other public spaces. With clear data to point to, Mayor Cava proposed increased funding in this area in her administration’s first budget. To help turn survey results into a community-driven policy framework, Mayor Cava’s team also held a series of workshop events with county leadership and staff, nonprofits, community leaders and policy experts. (Adapted from 2021 Medium post)
Use surveys, focus groups, interviews, meetings, and other tactics to identify problems, set priorities, and grasp public sentiment.	Your engagement does not achieve sufficient or representative turnout	Use online and accessible in-person forums. Partner with community organizations to increase turnout. Spur participation with non-monetary and monetary incentives.	
	Your engagement feels extractive or condescending to participants	Tell people how you will use their input. Do not oversimplify core concepts for your audience.	
	You leave marginalized communities feeling unheard or excluded	Eliminate barriers related to language, technology, physical ability, work schedules and childcare responsibilities.	
	Your engagement activities feel performative or pointless to participants	Make sure engagement is necessary for your specific goals and will support decisions.	

Avoiding Common Pitfalls In Community Engagement

Goal	Pitfall	Solution	Example
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Effective Program Design

Organize boards and commissions to formalize community influence over specific strategies and investments.

Your advisory board fails to make an impact despite its long-term efforts

Multiplying task forces and commissions lack focus or duplicate each others' efforts

An influential commission does not represent the community it intends to serve

Identify and remove the silos between the board, city departments, and relevant non-city community organizations that prevent big-picture thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Carefully define the term limits, scope, timeline, and ultimate goals of each group operating under city oversight; revisit these terms on a periodic basis. Communicate this information transparently to the public to keep task forces accountable.

Give community members and community organizations a role in nominating and evaluating potential commission members. Formalize pipelines and inclusive onboarding processes for new members of under-represented origins. Consider compensating participants for their time to broaden access to those otherwise unable to afford participation, transportation, or associated costs.

Using Community Engagement to Design Programs Effectively

[The City of Minneapolis Partners with Community Intermediary to Run Twin Cities Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute](#)

To increase the accessibility of boards and commissions positions for City of Minneapolis residents of color, the City's Neighborhood and Community Relations department partnered with Nexus Community Partners—a community-building intermediary—to build a pipeline and facilitate onboarding for diverse participants. The program identifies, trains, and supports onboarding of residents of color into publicly appointed boards and commissions.

[City of Santa Monica Streamlines Boards and Commissions to Increase Efficacy and Reduce Overlap](#)

The City of Santa Monica is streamlining its boards, commissions, and task forces to increase their efficacy, diversity, and alignment with City departmental efforts. Relying on the recommendations of a community-based working group, the City recently decided to improve onboarding of new members, consolidate board budgets under associated departmental budgets, require annual workplans and progress reporting from boards, subject all advisory bodies to review every five years, improve community awareness of boards and commissions to broaden participation among more diverse community members, and share training resources on meeting management, appropriate participation, implicit bias, and parliamentary procedure. Further recommendations will advise in the future on reducing duplication of effort among the city's existing boards.

Avoiding Common Pitfalls In Community Engagement

Goal	Pitfall	Solution	Example
Collaborate to Support Implementation Collaborate and ally with institutions and community organizations to strengthen city efforts and build local capacity.	City investments duplicate or fail to connect with community organization programs and supports	Map the functions, relationships, and populations served by a given “system” —for example: business development, workforce development. Strategize with known institutions and community organizations to streamline efforts and plug in gaps.	Using Community Engagement to Support Implementation City Plants LA Urban Forest Project The City of LA relies on a public-private partnership between the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the non-profit organization City Plants, and seven other community-based organizations that work in concert with residents and businesses to coordinate tree planting and care throughout Los Angeles.
	Certain community organizations supporting a system are unreliable or lack credibility	Learn from community partners about “weak links” in a system, figure out what those organizations need, and determine whether public resources can fill the gaps.	
	Community organizations and networks are skeptical of city support or intentions	Be transparent about city plans, acknowledge the lived experience of participants, and respectfully leverage the expertise of local community organizations.	

ABOUT THE CBER PROGRAM

Launched by Bloomberg Philanthropies in 2020, the **WWC City Budgeting for Equity & Recovery** program is designed to provide critical support to mayors & city financial leaders as they navigate these challenging fiscal times.

HR&A Advisors, Inc. is an industry-leading consulting firm with over 40 years of experience. HR&A works with public and private sector clients to provide services in real estate, economic development, and program design & implementation to build communities that work for everyone. While the firm incorporates an equity lens into all of its work, HR&A Advisors has chosen to call out the importance of these values by naming Inclusive Cities as one of its primary practice areas. HR&A helps create more equitable, resilient, and dynamic communities.

A New Era: The Act 47 Exit

2022 ushered in a new era of opportunity in Scranton, as the city formally exited Act 47, a Pennsylvania statute enabling the state's Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to help municipalities avoid financial distress and ensure the health, safety and welfare of their residents. Scranton was officially designated a distressed community, subject to Act 47 on January 10, 1992, following a vote from city council. This determination was considered appropriate after years of recurring deficits, questionable financial management practices, and unfavorable political, economic and demographic trends.

In a ceremony held at Lackawanna College on January 25, 2022, Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) Secretary Dennis Davin signed a determination letter articulating findings that termination of the city's distressed status was appropriate under Section 255.1 of Act 47. The decision was made after a thorough review of the city's audits, financial data, and the record from a public hearing held in November 2021. Sec. Davin was joined by Mayor Paige Cagnetti, City Council President Kyle Donahue, Pennsylvania Economy League Senior Research Fellow Gerald Cross, and other local leaders. Scranton is one of only 16 municipalities to successfully exit Act 47, a testament to the city's leadership and the deliberate actions taken in recent years to improve Scranton's economic outlook.

In many ways, this successful exit from Act 47 is ushering in a new era for Scranton, signaling that the city is in control of its future, open for business, and ready for investment.

Mayor Cagnetti expressed gratitude to the advisors, staff, and elected officials who made the exit possible over the course of three decades. She commented:



As Mayor, I can sleep at night knowing we have cash on hand to meet an emergency, a luxury some of my predecessors did not enjoy. We cannot thank them enough for making tough calls to get us where we are today.

While we are eager to shed the "distressed" label, this doesn't mean we've arrived at our destination. We have a tremendous amount of work ahead to create a financially stable future.

In the first two years of our administration, standing on the other side of difficult decisions made by officials before us, we achieved annual budget surpluses despite economic headwinds from the pandemic; we have been able to decrease the amount we borrow to fund ourselves at the beginning of each year; we have been able to continue to decrease our debt obligations; our credit rating is stable; the case is evident for our credit outlook to improve.

We have implemented new internal controls, improved processes, increased transparency, set up an internal whistleblower hotline, passed investment and fund balance policies, and taken the bold step of implementing a Payroll Preparation Tax.

The fiscal challenges are steep for all cities of our size and economic profile – but we are confident that the bumpy road of the past thirty years is behind us and we are working hard to move forward.

We're pushing to secure our long-term financial health by making tough but necessary decisions on prospective healthcare benefits and retirement structures.

We're advocating for legislative changes to give us more local determination of how we govern.

We're looking around every corner for revenue solutions to try to lower taxes over time.

Running a city means difficult decisions are always around the bend – but Scranton and its residents have proven time and again that we are resilient.

Complementary Plans

Connecting planning processes to achieve a shared vision

When it comes to securing a vibrant future for Scranton, it is important to acknowledge the work and achievements that have already led to significant progress across the city. Throughout the strategic economic development planning process leading up to this report, an assessment of ongoing and prior planning initiatives was conducted to determine areas of past success to leverage and identify new opportunities to pursue. Recognizing that economy, environment, and equity are overlapping elements of strategic development, this plan runs in tandem with the [Scranton Recreation Needs Assessment & Master Plan](#) and [Scranton and Wilkes-Barre Bicycle and Pedestrian Study](#), as well as the upcoming [City Equity Plan](#), Walkability Study, and Downtown Scranton Master Plan. While the focus of each plan differs, Scranton's changing demographics, existing challenges, and emerging opportunities inspired the need for these initiatives. They share similar goals, and together, will build a stronger community so that Scranton may reach its full potential. Strong communications and marketing is critical to the success of all three plans and the city's growth overall. The city will also be contracting a marketing specialist to develop a brand that will raise the profile of Scranton and promote community and economic development.

Scranton Recreation Needs Assessment & Master Plan ("Parks Study")

Released in October 2021, the Scranton Recreation Needs Assessment & Master Plan serves as a comprehensive needs assessment and resource guide to evaluate the current state of neighborhood parks, exploring possible funding and design solutions.

An initial park user survey identified primary uses of the parks system, maintenance conditions, and ongoing programming or events. In addition to gauging resident's interactions with park space, the survey also asked residents about their specific experiences of, and needs for, their local parks. The study breaks out each specific green space by zip codes across the city. The study inventories and assesses the condition of all the existing green and open spaces in the city.



Source: Scranton Recreation Needs Assessment & Master Plan



City Equity Plan

The City Equity Plan is still ongoing at the time of this plan's release. The plan will address resilience and how equity is a driver of economic measures. A response to the changing demographics of Scranton, the plan will consider how to promote inclusion and belonging in the city. During this process, the City of Scranton is partnering with the Scranton Area Community Foundation to convene community partners and service providers to create an Equity Commission, conduct a community equity analysis, and advance initiatives that improve equity outcomes for all community members.



Downtown Scranton Master Plan

The Downtown Scranton Master Plan will offer a roadmap of investment to enhance life and promote economic vitality in the city's downtown. The plan has identified five focus areas for investment, including gateways and strategic corridors, eds and meds, the riverfront as a destination, heritage, and the use of incentives as a catalyst for growth. This will continue the important work laid out in the 2016-2020 *Our Transformative Period Community Revitalization Plan* for Scranton's Central Business District.



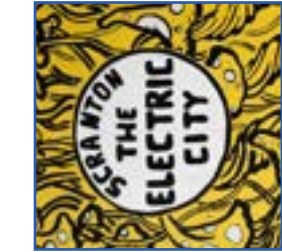
Bicycle and Pedestrian Study

The Scranton and Wilkes-Barre Bicycle and Pedestrian Study was published in December 2020 and provided an action plan for Downtown Scranton. It has since been incorporated into the pending Downtown Scranton Master Plan. The proposed downtown Scranton bicycle and pedestrian improvements are designed to create a network for active transportation that enables enhanced connectivity for all ages and abilities. The plan includes a well rounded and phased approach to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, ordinances, public education, and more.



Walkability Study

After overcoming delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic and with the introduction of ARPA funding, Scranton will now be able to execute on the Walkability Study by Speck & Associates. This will include assessment of and potential updates to the existing street network, number and width of lanes, design of turn lanes, intersection signals, bicycle facilities, on- and off-street parking including prices, multi-modal transport connections, traffic signage. The overall goal of the study and updates will be to ensure the safety, mobility, and success of downtown Scranton.



Marketing Strategy

The City of Scranton will also be contracting a marketing specialist to develop a brand that will create strong public perception and raise the profile of Scranton as a desirable location to do business, work, and live. This marketing strategy will celebrate community, collaboration, and the future of work, inspiring investment and assisting with talent attraction and retention. The plan will offer fresh, innovative, and interactive approaches to engage business decision-makers, site selectors, tourism partners, influencers, and media. It will help prospective residents to understand the assets and affordability of Scranton relative to high-priced coastal cities and highlight the advantages of geographic proximity to major metropolitan areas such as New York and Philadelphia.

Communicating for Impact

Communication strategies are an important component of the success of any economic development plan. Marketing, messaging, and communication about the plan's contents, key initiatives, and long term impact are critical to ensure awareness and ongoing investment in a local economy. This ongoing communication, when supported with well-crafted branding, can prove the difference in whether or not a community is able to effectively compete with its peers.

For Scranton, the opportunity is clear. Scranton's quality of life, affordability, storied history, and industry mix are the building blocks of a strong, competitive brand. Yet from current Scranton residents, we heard mixed perceptions. Many residents and local business owners expressed sentiments of disconnection, skepticism, or disappointment regarding the city's progress. Additionally, concerns about support for diversity, equity, inclusion, and fairness all loomed large in many residents' minds.

The opportunity now lies with the City of Scranton and its stakeholders across the community to communicate with residents, business owners, visitors, and industry leaders about this plan, and the present power and future potential of Scranton.

Immediate Priorities

Attracting Industry

Marketing and communications efforts are a critical component of the work of business attraction, retention, and expansion. While geography, workforce, and site availability continue to be important factors in the work of economic development, reputation, quality of place, and a city's brand are increasingly determining where talent, industry, and tourism flow. Increasingly, cities are partnering with their local destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and economic development organizations (EDOs) to integrate efforts that attract interest, investment, and engagement in their community.

For Scranton, there is opportunity to foster greater collaboration amongst local stakeholders, galvanizing efforts around a core set of messages and priorities to drive industry growth and further investment.

The Scranton Brand

A city's brand is the perception of place held by residents, business owners, visitors, and industry. In many ways, a city's brand sets the foundation for the work of economic development, naturally attracting businesses, talent, and prospective residents who are drawn to the values and opportunities the brand represents. Additionally, this brand provides a blueprint to frame decisions around city planning, infrastructure investments, and public policy creation. When done correctly, a well crafted brand can infuse a city with new life, driving a sense of energy, invigoration, and cultural activity.

A brand is not just about a logo or a tagline, it's about a community's characteristics, its competitive advantages, and its core identity. As a major city, Scranton has an existing brand that communicates its key attributes; however, this brand has not been intentionally cultivated or harnessed for impact. Investment is needed to clearly communicate Scranton's values, attributes, and assets to residents, visitors, and those considering a career or business opportunity within the city.



Competing for Talent

Millennials and Generation Z, born between 1981 and 2012,³⁹ currently comprise 38% of the workforce.⁴⁰ By 2030, roughly 75% of the workforce will be dominated by this group. For the majority of this demographic, their associations with Scranton include its status as the backdrop for the television show, *The Office*, and hometown of current President Joe Biden. While these associations are positive, they do not speak to the ample career opportunities available within the city. Additionally, with the rise of remote work and a more globally connected economy, competition for talent is no longer isolated to the surrounding region. Scranton's employers will be competing on a national and international basis for talent to sustain local industry. This competition for talent will extend beyond millennials and Generation Z, covering the full spectrum of workers from ages 25 to 64.

To address this reality, dedicated efforts to effectively highlight Scranton's career pathways, quality of life, diversity, and overall affordability are needed to ensure a competitive future workforce. These efforts should take the form of:

- Social media campaigns
- Videos
- Advertising
- Dedicated web presence

These efforts could be owned or incubated by local economic development organizations, as seen in Minneapolis - Saint Paul with [MAKE IT. MSP](#), a strategic initiative of the GREATER MSP Partnership, and in New Orleans with [504ward](#), incubated by the New Orleans Business Alliance.

39. Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

40. CNBC: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/03/05/how-millennials-and-gen-z-are-resaping-the-future-of-the-workforce.html>

Instilling Confidence in Scranton

As the City of Scranton advances the strategies included within this plan, it is critically important that the progress and impact of these efforts are transparently shared with the community. This continued communication earns the confidence of residents and business owners, while serving to attract the investments of industry and philanthropy. Public-facing dashboards, regularly issued reports, digital assets, and resident engagement opportunities will prove critical tools in this work.

To kickstart the advancement of these priorities, the City of Scranton recently issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for a vendor to support delivery of marketing and communications services, covering initiatives included within this plan as well as others on the horizon.



Continuing to Enhance Scranton

Scranton is at a critical moment of opportunity. As the city's demographics shift, industries grow, and new leaders assume critical positions, the stage is set for a renaissance. The city is one of only 16 municipalities to successfully exit Act 47, a testament to the city's deliberate actions taken in recent years to improve Scranton's economic outlook. With this momentum, it is time to usher in a new era of confidence as the community shifts from a mindset of scarcity to opportunity.

In January 2022, the George W. Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative named Scranton-Wilkes-Barre-Hazleton, PA in its list of "cities of opportunity" based on living standards and net domestic migration rates, as well as upward mobility as measured by the non-profit organization Opportunity Insights.⁴¹ Not only does this designation signify the great potential of Scranton, it emphasizes the importance of working regionally to build a stronger, more resilient economy.

This Strategic Economic Development Plan is a living document and tool for galvanizing community engagement and investment. The City of Scranton is committed to the strategies within this report, which range from initiatives with near-term impacts to long-term transformational change. Amplifying this plan are other efforts and economic-development related initiatives, as well as strategies being explored as separate planning initiatives.

41. The Evolving Geography Of Opportunity: Leading Cities of the Past, Present, and Future: https://gwbcenter.imgix.net/Publications/Reports/gwbi_Evolving_Geography_of_Opp_2.1.pdf

In addition to the Recreation, Equity, and Downtown plans, the city is also assessing and developing the following economic development measures:

- Creating a centralized community event resource
- Launching a neighborhood research & resource guide
- Supporting localized job centers
- Developing an Open Street program
- Enhancing the Lackawanna Transit Center and preparing for the expansion of rail
- Land use, community asset, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial ecosystem mapping
- Developing social enterprise opportunities
- Continuing to support improvements to the education system

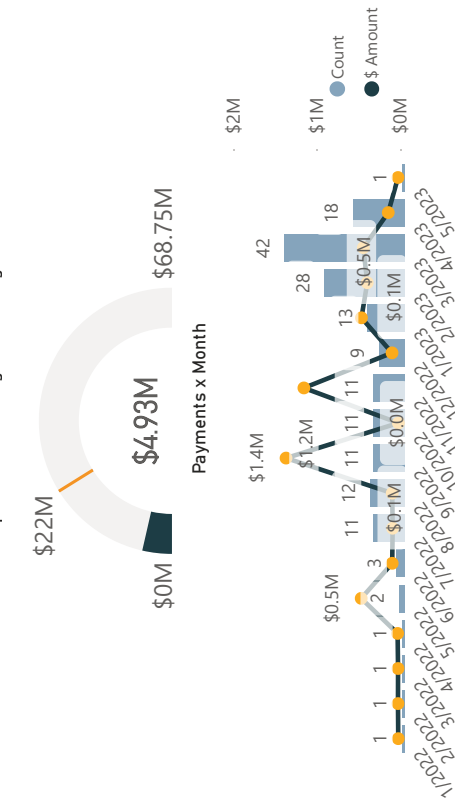
Scranton, its residents, business owners, and community members are energized and have demonstrated their willingness to learn, reflect, and act. The city will honor its rich history, while acknowledging that the Scranton of today requires a new definition. It is a transforming community that will continue to grow stronger by fostering a welcoming environment for all residents and visitors, and by investing in the opportunities of tomorrow. The work of the City of Scranton, its partners, and community members does not end with the publication of this report. This strategic plan will serve as a catalyst for action so that Scranton, and its residents, can reach their fullest potential as a city where all can thrive.



Photo: DiscoverNEPA

Search

Rese



7.16%

22.20%

\$63.82M

Category	Sub Category	Expenditure Date	\$ Amount	% Total Spend
Revenue Loss	City Street Paving	9/9/2022	\$1,200,000	1.75%
Negative Economic Impacts	SACF Non-Profit Grant	11/9/2022	\$999,047.28	1.45%
Infrastructure	DPW Vac Truck	5/22/2022	\$449,930	0.65%
Negative Economic Impacts	Park Study Improvements	3/9/2023	\$170,102.02	0.25%
Negative Economic Impacts	Small Business Startup/Expansion	1/25/2023	\$169,404	0.25%
Infrastructure	Stormwater Camera	1/20/2023	\$147,800	0.21%
Negative Economic Impacts	SACF Small Business Grant	2/2/2023	\$135,000	0.20%
Infrastructure	Meadowbrook culvert repair	6/14/2022	\$88,200	0.13%
Infrastructure	Meadowbrook culvert repair	9/22/2022	\$77,060	0.11%
Negative Economic Impacts	Small Business Startup/Expansion Grants	3/23/2023	\$70,953.8	0.10%
Total			\$4,925,318.59	7.16%

Communications and Outreach Plan

1. Purpose of the Communication & Community Outreach Plan

This Communication and Outreach Plan (CPOP) describes communications, public outreach, and community engagement during the first cycle of the Participatory Budgeting Initiative.

It is the vision and intent of Budget and Management Services and the Participatory Budgeting Steering Committee (SC), through this CPOP, to create a proactive and responsive communications and community outreach approach that builds trust and credibility for the initiative by engaging with a variety of stakeholders and residents to participate in the PB process. Building trust and credibility will require a thoughtful, inclusive, and authentic public outreach program that engages with the community's numerous and diverse stakeholders and residents early and consistently throughout the 2-year cycle.

1.1 Guiding Values

Communication efforts will be aligned with the Steering Committee's public participation goals, which the CPOP will follow as guiding principles.

- **Inclusion**
- **Correcting Harm**
- **Empowerment**
- **Community Building**
- **Transparency**

1.2 Refined Principles

To further distill these values, the CPOP focuses on the following three refined principles:

- **Equity** is working to correct past harm and committing resources to places of greater need. Equity is not the same as fairness. In order to implement equity, there will need to be an assessment of need and representation.
- **Trust** is the belief in the reliability, truth, and ability to communicate open and honestly about interests and needs both internally and externally.
- **Transparency** is a practice that involves timely and effective communication that is adapted to a wide and diverse audience and accurate sharing of intentional information in an accessible way that promotes accountability.
- **Community Benefit** improves access to services or activities that improve well-being, and/or increases the impact and reach of existing programs and services.

Communications and Outreach Plan

2. Goals

- Projects that serve the most marginalized communities
- Build greater equity
- Engage more diverse populations
- Increase overall engagement

Communications and Outreach Plan

3. Communication Team Roles & Responsibilities

This section describes the Communication & Outreach Team's processes to manage, respond to, and monitor all communication, media relations, public involvement, and community outreach on the initiative.

Table 3-1 provides an organization chart for staff dedicated to communication during the PB process.

Table 3-1: Communication & Outreach Team Organization Chart

COMM TEAM	Position	Role
Communications & Outreach Manager	Budget Engagement Manager	The Communications & Outreach Manager is responsible for overseeing the communication strategy, staffing, materials development, and the quality control (QC) process. The Communications & Outreach Manager collaborates with the Communications Lead to ensure the communication strategy aligns with the guiding values and refined principles set by the SC.
Communications and Outreach Lead	Budget Engagement Coordinator	The Communications and Outreach Lead provides strategy and support for the initiative's Internal Communications, Public Outreach, and Community Engagement staff along with the City of Durham public affairs team. The Communications Lead manages the production of materials within the team and reports to the Communications & Outreach Manager. The Communications Lead participates in weekly coordination meeting and coordinates regularly with the City of Durham Public Affairs Staff.
Communications and Outreach Support	Community Outreach Worker(s)	The Communications & Outreach Support staff assist the Communications & Outreach Lead.
Graphics Support	(New I-team person and Corporate Budget Analyst)	The Graphics Support staff is comprised of graphic artists supporting the production of communications materials under the direction of the Communications Lead.
Initiative Director	Budget and Management Services Director	The Initiative Manager is responsible for overall Team integration, and oversight. The Initiative Director coordinates with the Communications Manager and Communications Lead on the production and approval of communications materials.

Communications and Outreach Plan

Strategies for Communication & Outreach Plan

The Communication & Outreach Team will employ strategies to enhance the outreach and engagement program and process so all members of the community have an opportunity to participate in the initiative.

Outreach will be inclusive of all populations, including underserved populations, such as LEP, minority and low-income, and any others who may be identified as the initiative progresses. The Communication & Outreach Team will attempt to engage and involve these populations by identifying neighborhoods and communities within the City of Durham and Durham Public Schools and determining the most effective means for outreach to them to provide information and encourage their involvement.

The communication tools and techniques highlighted in this CPOP will comply with federal, state, and local requirements as listed below.

- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** – Accessibility will be a priority for both physically accessible meeting locations and virtually accessible information available online.
- **Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** – The City of Durham, as an agency, complies with the rules and regulations of Title VI, including that “no person shall on the ground of race, color, and national origin be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal funds.”
- **Limited English Proficiency** – When a need is anticipated or a request is received for translation or interpretation services, public information, engagement materials, and meeting notices in the appropriate language(s) will be made available and/or interpretation services will be provided. Budget & Management Services will proactively provide dual-language materials and interpretation services when possible.
- **Underserved Populations** – The Communication & Outreach Team will share information with and encourage participation from minority and low-income populations, particularly those that are not currently engaged in local government processes. The Communications & Outreach Team will also consider opportunities for engaging with other potentially underserved populations, such as members of refugee and undocumented alien populations.

Communications and Outreach Plan

Communication Methods and Tools

The Communication & Outreach Team will create and use a variety of informational tools and materials to assist with communications and public engagement efforts related to the initiative and the various components of the PB process. Tools will be developed for in-person and online use. The tools listed in this section will be developed for the widest possible audience to enable their use for a variety of focuses (e.g., public outreach, community engagement, government affairs, etc.). Recognizing that this CPOP is dynamic, other tools and materials not described below may be developed if circumstances suggest they would enhance outreach effectiveness.

3.1 Community Engagement

Community engagement and outreach methods focus on the coordination of strategic education and awareness building with residents, community groups and schools in Durham who may have an interest in the initiative but who aren't yet involved in the public processes associated with it, either because they lack knowledge about the initiative or don't know how to become involved in the public processes associated with the initiative.

Community engagement also includes strategic education of groups or individuals who support, promote, or engage in the initiative or express interest in doing so. This can take place through any of the following measures: dissemination of information to other groups or individuals; engagement with mass media, social media or other mass-communication methods and interactive participation through in-person outreach. The Communications & Outreach Lead will be responsible for executing the tools in this section with support and direction from other members of the Communication & Outreach Team.

3.1.1 Community Engagement Tools

Community engagement tools encompass the foundational tools needed for communication. These tools reach the widest audience and will be used across all stakeholder groups.

- **Website:** Participatory Budgeting Staff has established a website which serves as an online information center for stakeholders by providing an overview of the initiative, process timeline, upcoming events, news, and a contact form for stakeholders to reach the Participatory Budgeting Staff. The Communication & Outreach Lead will provide regular content updates.
- **Collateral (fact sheets, brochures, presentations, etc.):** Factual and up-to-date materials will be handed out at community events, public meetings, City of Durham partner or employee meetings, and other informative events. The Communications & Outreach Lead will be responsible for coordinating the creation of these materials and keeping them up-to-date.
- **Social Media:** Social media will be used to enhance communications as a platform for two-way communication and timely updates on a daily and weekly basis. The Communications & Outreach Lead, with support from the Outreach workers, will maintain Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts to facilitate strategic advertising of online idea collection, events, voting, and other opportunities for community engagement. The social media strategy developed for the initiative is outlined in Appendix B.

Communications and Outreach Plan

- **Quarterly Advertising Campaign:** As a direct effort to engage uninvolved residents and stakeholders, quarterly advertising will be a cornerstone of producing high turnout and high engagement during idea collection and voting. The Office of Public Affairs will assist and provide input on the quarterly advertising campaign with concern to strategies, mediums, and outlets utilized to engage uninvolved residents and stakeholders.
- **Quarterly Blog:** A quarterly blog will be written on topics of interest such as industry news, PB updates, or milestones. This will serve both internal and external audience as easily digestible updates and news for the project and will help increase project transparency and awareness. The Communications and Outreach Lead will research and write the blogs with the support and direction of the Communications and Outreach Manager and Communication Team.
- **Speakers Bureau and Toolkit:** As needed, the Communications and Outreach Lead will develop presentations to update community organizations, City of Durham partners, and unengaged stakeholders. Such presentations will be in response to presentation requests, proactive outreach or subsequent to major initiative milestones. A speaking circuit will be established to assist with message dissemination and communicating opportunities for involved during the PB process. Speakers, including City of Durham Staff, Steering Committee members, and volunteers will be identified and made available for presentations. Associated PowerPoint presentations, handouts, and presentation materials will be developed.
- **Annual Report:** An annual report focused specifically on PB Durham will be created to provide an annual recap of progress.
- **Monthly E-Blasts:** E-blasts will be used to provide overall updates and promote public engagement efforts and opportunities for participation.
 - **Email management:** A subscriber list will be developed through an online sign-up form on both DurhamCommunityEngagement.org and DurhamNC.gov and through the collection of email addresses at public events. Current recipients of other Neighborhood Improvement Services (NIS) electronic updates will also be given the opportunity to opt into or out of e-blasts pertaining to PB. Emails will be administered either through the Nationbuilder database or Microsoft Outlook and will be made available on the website.
 - **Email Strategy:** Overall email strategy may include creating list segments based on location, affiliation, or other information as deemed appropriate. Email lists may also be used to administer surveys, collect input, or advertisement.
- **Pop-up Meetings:** Pop-up meetings will be used at existing community events and in high-traffic public spaces to have conversations with community members about PB Durham, gather input, answer questions, distribute information, and carry out promotional giveaways. The Communications Team will develop a pop-up meeting planning document and research to identify potential events and high-traffic locations. Planning for these events will be primarily on a monthly basis, with weekly review and confirmation of upcoming events.
- **Special Events:** Milestones will be celebrated using special events such as idea collection kickoff,

Communications and Outreach Plan

and project groundbreakings that will incorporate elected officials, news media, and the local community.

3.2 Internal Communication

Internal communication and outreach methods will focus on educating and informing internal City of Durham employees and nonprofit partners of general and specific progress. Employees are the first line of customer service, and they need to be well informed to correctly represent PB Durham.

Communication directed internally will mirror the flow and timing of public information on a monthly and quarterly basis to ensure that City of Durham employees, partners, and consultants are informed before the public and are prepared for public conversations. The Communication and Outreach Manager will coordinate internal communications.

3.2.1 Internal Communication Tools

- **Monthly Round-up Email:** Internal email updates will be distributed to all impacted City of Durham departments. This tool will be the most frequent tool used for internal updates. If some employees do not have access to email (e.g., mechanics, operators) the email will be distributed in printed format.
- **Facility Brownbag/Roadshow:** As community organizations, partners, and others request more information on PB Durham staff will provide presentations and informational materials. The Communication and Outreach Manager will provide in-person updates at least twice per year.
- **Call Center:** Durham One Call may receive inquiries and comments from the general public. As a component of internal communications, the Communication and Outreach Manager will provide talking points to call center support staff.

3.3 Government & Elected Officials Relationship Management

The Communication and Outreach Manager is responsible for outreach to the local government stakeholder groups, local elected officials, key director and manager level staff, and any inter-governmental organizations connected with these individuals.

3.4 Public Outreach

Public outreach provides an opportunity to build trust and credibility for the initiative by engaging with a variety of stakeholders and residents to provide information and foster engagement. Through the tools listed below, the Communication and Outreach Lead is responsible for creating opportunities to engage with diverse stakeholder groups and residents early and consistently to ensure support for PB Durham.

A variety of meeting types and presentations are planned and detailed below. Additional meetings may be requested through an online meeting request form.

3.4.1 Public Outreach Tools

- **Community Meetings:** Community meetings will be held to share information and bolster public participation during all phases of the first PB Durham implementation cycle.

Communications and Outreach Plan

- Outreach: Invitation methods may include newspaper display advertisements, postcards, flyers, social media and social media advertising, electronic methods (emails, website postings, use of third party email networks, etc.), targeted media relations, and outreach to community leaders and organizations.
- Materials: Public meeting plans outlining logistics, informational materials (exhibits, maps, handouts, etc.), meeting management tools (sign-in sheets, directional signs, etc.), input opportunities, and outreach/notification methods will be developed. Summaries will be prepared to document each meeting. Public meeting materials will be made available on the website.
- Locations: Meetings will be held in accessible community spaces located in close proximity to the transit stops.
- Format: An engaging open house format will be utilized to create informal yet informative events. Staff will be available to talk one-on-one with attendees. Public-friendly maps and infographics will be created. Public input tools may include surveys, comment forms, and interactive exercises. Formal presentations are not envisioned, and attendees would be able to come and go at their convenience.
- **Neighborhood-Based Public Meetings:** Additional meetings or facilitated workshops may be required to bolster participation from specific populations that are located within a designated area of the City. Outreach, materials, location and format will be determined based on the composition of the neighborhood and the stakeholders.
- **Online Participation:** Virtual idea collection and voting allow visitors to participate from the comfort of their own homes, which can greatly increase engagement and participation.
- **Stakeholder Meetings:** Stakeholder meetings will mirror the public meetings on a smaller scale. Stakeholder groups can request a presentation.
 - Format: Stakeholder meetings will generally include a PowerPoint presentation and a short Q&A session.
- **Informational Brownbag for Employers:** Informational brown bag lunch sessions for major employers (public and private) will be offered to share information and gather ideas.
 - Materials: PowerPoints, handouts, and promotional materials previously created for stakeholder meetings will be used in public brownbag sessions.
 - Location: Sessions will occur in the stakeholder/employer facility.
 - Format: Informational brownbags will generally include a PowerPoint presentation and a short Q&A session.
- **In-Person Meetings/Office Hours:** An in-person meeting may be more appropriate for certain interactions rather than a full presentation or public meeting. In these situations, office hours will be held at City Hall and City Hall East to accommodate detailed conversations with stakeholders.

Communications and Outreach Plan

- **School Outreach:** Youth participation is the top priority for all members of the Steering Committee. During the PB Durham cycle staff will reach out to all middle and high schools in the Durham Public School system to share information and facilitate engagement in the process. The Communications and Outreach Team will conduct outreach to schools and establish long-term relationships during the process.

3.5 Traditional Media and Public Relations

Traditional media relations will be used to promote the widespread dissemination of PB Durham information, including key milestones, upcoming public meetings, and input opportunities by engaging reporters and soliciting media coverage. The Office of Public Affairs will be responsible for day-to-day media management including the release of media kits, press releases, and media alerts.

3.5.1 Media Communication Tools

The Communication Team will deploy the following tools to facilitate media communication:

- **Interviews:** The Communication and Outreach Manager and Communication and Outreach Lead will conduct proactive outreach and communication with established media contacts to increase reporter awareness of PB Durham, potentially resulting in favorable coverage. This includes pitching news stories to the media, arranging meetings with reporters and editorial boards to provide more in-depth information about the history and goals, and addressing specific questions about PB Durham. Media coverage opportunities will be further enhanced by tailoring communication to particular publications.
- **Media Tracking:** Media coverage of the initiative will be captured and incorporated into the outreach metrics and reporting. Ongoing evaluation will review the accuracy of information and the tone and reach of media coverage to determine if follow-up with reporters is needed.

Communications and Outreach Plan

4. Data, Metrics, and Reporting

The Communications and Outreach Team will use metrics and reporting to measure the success of its communication and public involvement program. These results will be reviewed on a monthly basis to determine if the team needs to revisit the tools and tactics in this document.

4.1 Data Collection & Reporting

The Communications and Outreach Team will track the progress, traction, and outcomes of public involvement activities throughout the program to allow for adjustments or adaptations to messaging to better reach and accommodate stakeholders. Indicators will include metrics to track qualitative and quantitative changes in the audience's level of interaction, overall tone of communications, and behavioral change/activity. A report including web analytics, social media analytics, and comment and outreach tracking will be emailed to the Communication and Outreach Manager on a bimonthly basis. The Communication and Outreach Manager will review the results and share them with the rest of the team. After the team reviews them, the results from this analysis will allow the Communication Team to adjust strategies as needed to achieve the specific goals of the communication efforts, such as reaching specific audiences or capturing specific input. A full list of the tracking tools and metric goals are provided in Table 8-1.

Table 8-1: Analytics and Metrics Goals

Tracking Tool	Metrics	Goals
Website Analytics	▪ Daily page views and visitors ▪ Average visit duration ▪ Average pages per visit ▪ Web traffic sources, including social, direct, referral, and organic search ▪ New or returning visitors ▪ Visits by sources, including desktop, mobile, and tablet ▪ Top pages visited along with corresponding page views and average time on page	▪ Increased web traffic ▪ Continual increase in unique visitors ▪ Increased average visit duration ▪ Increase mobile device visits utilizing social media strategy
Social Media Analytics	▪ Total organic impressions, engagements and link clicks ▪ Audience growth data, including total followers/fans and follower/fans growth ▪ Engagement count, including replies, retweets, and likes ▪ Engagements and impressions per tweet/post and follower ▪ Reactions, comments and shares	▪ Increased followers on all social media platforms ▪ Increased number of engagements per post per platform ▪ Positive tone of engagements

Communications and Outreach Plan

Tracking Tool	Metrics	Goals
E-Blast Analytics*	- Opens - Opens – Client Type Analysis - Clicks - Forwards - Hard and soft bounces - Opt outs - Click through performance	- Increase number of recipients - Increase number of opens - Decrease number of opt outs
Public Meeting Metrics	- Attendance - Tone of comments and questions - Comments received	- Increased attendance of new stakeholders - Continued participation of existing stakeholders - Comments that assist in the decision making process
Online Participation Analytics	- Total page views - Average visit duration - Average time spent on each segment - Web traffic sources, including social, direct, referral, and organic search - New or returning users - Visits by sources, including desktop, mobile, and tablet - Download or click analytics	- Increased web traffic - Continual increase in unique visitors - Increased average visit duration

**Emails will be sent through Neighborhood Improvement Services email management system, Nationbuilder, to aid in tracking.*

Communications and Outreach Plan

Appendix B: Social Media Strategy

B.1 Goals and Objectives

B.1.1 Goal: Project Awareness and Engagement

- Sustain a social media presence for the entire 2-year cycle
- Monitor and enhance engagement of the project's social media presence
- Grow social media network

B.1 Channels

The Communications and Outreach Lead will take advantage of the @PBDurhamNC existing follower base by acquiring administrative rights, rebranding, and posting through its Twitter, Facebook, and newly created Instagram account.

Channel	URL	Average Post Frequency
Twitter	https://twitter.com/pbdurhamnc	3-4 posts/week
Facebook	www.facebook.com/pbdurhamnc	3-4 posts/week
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/pbdurhamnc	3-4 posts/week

B.1 Content Creation and Approval

- The Communications and Outreach Lead will work with the Communications and Outreach team to identify topics and timelines to create a social media content calendar.
 - All content will be approved by the Communications and Outreach Lead.

B.1.1 Visual Content

- Video
 - Developed: Videos may include clips of PB activity or spliced video content from a longer PB video.
 - Live: Live video broadcasts help connect with followers and the community in a new way, making the initiative more real, more relatable, and more accessible. Public meetings may be streamed live on Twitter and Facebook via their built-in video streaming services Periscope and Facebook Live. Other public events may also be streamed live, as applicable.
- GIFs
 - GIFs are easy to create and are effective and engaging to an audience. PB-specific GIFs will be created at important milestones or when appropriate. Twitter GIFs will also be used to supplement a post.
- Graphics
 - Graphics for recurring posts will be developed to support content. Graphics supporting special events such as public meetings will be developed to promote the meeting. Other

Communications and Outreach Plan

graphics to support social media will be developed, as needed.

B.1 Engagement

Social media posts will engage with established social media accounts in the region that may relate to Participatory Budgeting, the City of Durham, or community engagement in general.

B.1vPaid Advertising

Paid advertising may be used to promote the initiative and to advertise public meetings. The purpose of an advertisement on social media is to increase followers, increase website traffic, promote public meetings, and promote other major initiative milestones.

B.1 Performance Indicators/Analytics

B.1.1 Frequency

Reports will be generated once a month through Sprout Social and sent to the Communications and Outreach Manager.

B.1.1 Metrics

- General:
 - Total followers
 - Follower growth
 - New followers
 - Profile visits
 - Tweets sent
 - Impressions
 - Engagements
 - Retweets
 - Clicks
 - Likes
- Demographics:
 - Gender
 - Age
 - Location of fans
- Video Metrics:
 - Views
 - Completion Rate
- Paid Advertising Metrics:
 - Results
 - Impressions
 - Budget
 - Amount spent

Durham participatory budgeting enters third year with \$2.4 million for residents to spend



Photo by [Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons](#) | The Chronicle



By [Michael Ramos](#)

November 29, 2022 | 9:24pm CST

In the program's third year, the city of Durham is setting aside \$2.4 million for residents to spend as they please.

The initiative, known as participatory budgeting (PB), is a way for residents ages 13 and older to have direct influence on deciding how a portion of the public budget should be spent. The goal of the participatory budget, according to its [website](#), is to increase "engagement in diverse populations while educating the public about local government processes."

The participatory budget process is currently in its first phase which focuses on brainstorming ideas.

Durham residents, including Duke students, can use an online mapping [tool](#) to submit ideas until Dec. 10 about where they would like to see part of the budget used and why. Proposed projects must benefit the public, be a one-time cost, and be capital projects. The tool also allows residents to see other ideas that have been proposed.

Following the first phase, residents are recruited to serve as budget delegates who work with the PB Durham Steering Committee and city staff to come up with concrete proposals. Residents then get to [vote](#) on how to divide the \$2.4 million among the proposals.

Winning projects in PB Durham's first cycle in 2018-19 [included](#) an LGBTQ Youth Center, bus shelters and technology for Durham Public Schools. The second cycle in 2019-20 [provided](#) grants of up to \$50,000 to various nonprofits.

The funding was previously divided through the city-wide ward system, but this year's mapping tool hopes to promote equitable distribution by reaching communities that need funding the most.

Andrew Holland, assistant director for the budget and management services department of Durham, describes PB as having the ability “to go into those underserved and marginalized communities in Durham to ensure that those individuals can participate in this process.”

Holland hopes students can engage with the Durham community by volunteering their time to help reach out to community members, such as informing Durham residents about PB through pop-up events. During the proposal development stage, students can [volunteer](#) as budget delegates to turn submitted ideas into actual proposals.

When voting opens up to Durham residents, Holland hopes students can go into communities to spread the word of what is available on the PB ballot. An “assembly day” will take place before the voting begins, giving budget delegates the opportunity to go into different communities to meet residents and clarify any questions over proposals.

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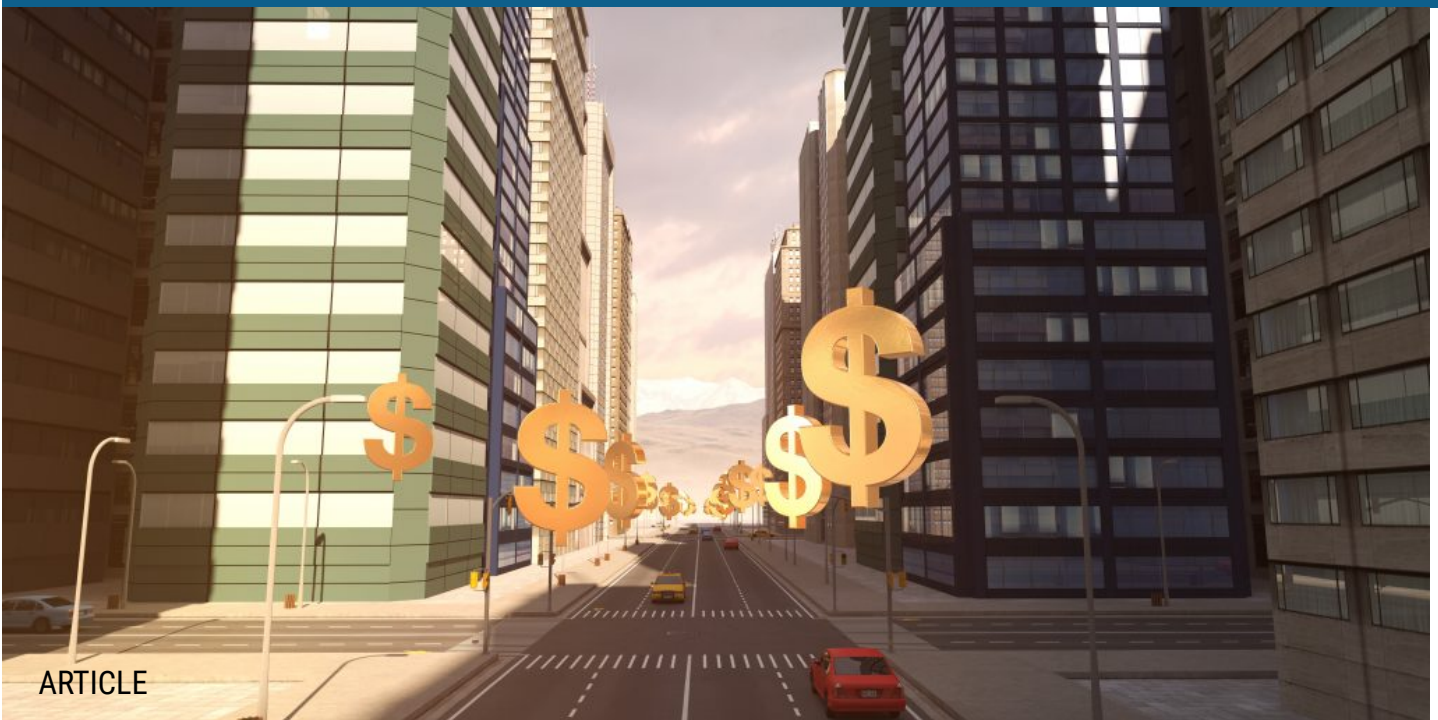
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Michael Ramos | STAFF REPORTER

Michael Ramos is a Trinity first-year and a staff reporter of The Chronicle's 118th volume.

ECONOMY (<https://www.americancityandcounty.com/type/economy/>)



By the people, for the people

Participatory budgeting engages citizens by letting them allocate city funds towards self-proposed projects

Written by Jason Axelrod (<https://www.americancityandcounty.com/author/jasonaxelrod/>) 4th October 2019

Imagine this: your local government's elected officials and its department heads are determining the annual government budget. It's business as usual. As funds are allocated, a large sum relative to your local government – say, between tens of thousands of dollars and \$2 million – is firmly earmarked for the community to decide, through a defined process, how to use.

Constituents, from pre-teens to senior citizens, will brainstorm and propose projects like installing LED streetlights or renovating a park for the public money to fund. Community volunteers will assess the proposals and eliminate unrealistic ones. Over a multiple week period, your jurisdiction's constituents will then vote on the vetted projects they believe are most worthy of the public funds. After the vote, the government will immediately enact the winning projects into policy and work to make them a reality.

This scenario isn't unprecedented — it illustrates a democratic process called participatory budgeting (PB) in action. PB's core goal is to let community members decide how to spend part of a public budget, according to the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), a nonprofit organization that creates and supports PB processes mostly in the U.S. and Canada.

In doing so, PB ensures that governments respond directly to the needs and priorities of their constituents and spend public funds on items that the people actually want, explains Michael Menser, an assistant professor of philosophy and environmental studies at Brooklyn College and a PBP co-founder.

"Participatory budgeting is a way to really empower residents in their communities and to really engage traditionally marginalized residents as well, and to give people real decision-making power," says Hollie Russon Gilman, a fellow at Columbia University and public policy think tank New America who authored a 2016 book about participatory budgeting.

First implemented in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989, PBP estimates that the process has since been practiced in 3,000 cities around the world. It can be implemented using the budgets of cities as well as with those of counties, districts, schools or individual agencies.

However, even with its successful track record, turning a large sum of public funds over to the people won't necessarily be embraced across the board immediately. "The initial pushback you'll get is, why would we turn over money to the people? It's the elected [officials' jobs] to spend this money. Sometimes, we get that," Menser says.

"Our response is always that, well, isn't it better to have a relationship with the folks who elected you and actually work with them to do policy, rather than try to be separated from them and hope for the best or just do it in a top-down way," he adds.

Most cities in the U.S. carry out PB in the same general five-phase process, Menser says. PBP defines the steps as, design the process, brainstorm ideas, develop proposals, vote and fund winning projects.

Two cities on opposite ends of the U.S. that implemented PB in their communities — Seattle in 2015 and Durham, N.C. in 2018 — found multiple benefits in doing so.

"With participatory budgeting, PB, it really humanizes the budget process," Durham Budget Engagement Manager Andrew Holland says. "With our process, that's what we witnessed. A lot of our residents were energized... they really felt as though they had a voice in the process."

Designing the process

Durham adopted participatory budgeting in May 2018 with a budget of \$2.4 million, Holland says. The Durham City council appointed a 15-member steering committee for PB in the city and hired a team including Holland to oversee the process. The city also hired a consultant from Our City, Our Voice in designing a PB process to fit Durham.

Seattle first launched PB in 2015 just for its youth programming, according to the city's website. However, the city opened PB up to all Seattle residents in 2017 for them to decide specifically how to spend part of the city's budget on small-scale street and park improvements. Seattle residents are able to vote until Sept. 30 on how to spend \$2 million of Seattle's 2019 budget.

Seattle took a different approach than Durham in designing its PB process. The city contracted with PBP in 2015 to set up its PB process. However, officials also went to community groups and paid community members to function as consultants that participated in open discussions and ultimately helped city staff develop Seattle's PB format. This "took the city out of the driver's seat," explains Seattle Department of Neighborhoods Director Andrés Mantilla.

The relationships Seattle forged during this process would later help it during the voting phase, as these community groups legitimized PB to community members who voted on projects, Mantilla says.

Brainstorming ideas

Like city staff did when designing the PB process, Seattle's modus operandi when outreaching PB in general has been for the city to go to people about PB rather than have them come to the government.

Seattle has used pop-ups at different events and its community liaison program to outreach PB, says Shaquan Smith, Seattle's participatory budgeting coordinator. However, libraries heavily distribute information throughout branches in Seattle, too.

When ideas are collected in Seattle around January and February, residents can submit their ideas at pop-up events, at libraries or through Seattle's online PB platform, Smith says. A particular focus this year has been given to gathering more input from communities of color and for bringing more focus to equitable areas. However, outreach is a challenge in a city of almost 800,000, Mantilla says.

Durham's PB team compiled a list of community stakeholders and nonprofit organizations, and enlisted them to help get the word out about PB and its benefits, according to Holland. The team also went to various community meetings, festivals, local schools and religious institutions to educate people about PB.

However, Holland cites education as a major challenge. "At times, it took a while to get folks in the mind frame or the mindset of, 'hey, you have a chance to decide how to spend \$2.4 million.'"

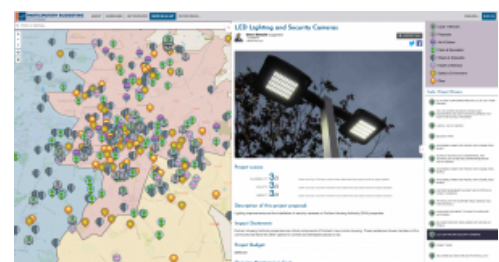
A major focus of Durham's PB campaign was targeting the poor, marginalized and underserved communities, according to Holland. The city used a third-party vendor and various data sets to target outreach strategies to these underserved communities to ensure that they had a voice in the process. Even undocumented immigrants could participate, and Holland says that a good amount of minorities both submitted project ideas and voted.

During this phase of Durham's 2018 PB cycle, over 500 project ideas were generated. Not all were feasible, so they had to be vetted for the PB vote.

To accomplish this, Durham officials turned again to the community.

Developing proposals

"With participatory budgeting, we want to ensure that residents are constantly part of the process. So, that's why we wanted to allow the residents to volunteer to work with city staff to vet those ideas," Holland explains.



Ultimately, around 100 resident volunteers served as “budget delegates” in Durham who spent a few hours each week vetting projects based on equity, impact and feasibility. City staff worked with the delegates to help them determine feasibility, Holland says.

An interactive map showing the locations and types of projects proposed in Durham’s PB process, along with detailed descriptions of those projects and information on how to get involved.

As ideas are submitted in Seattle, the city’s department of transportation and parks department determine the feasibility of each idea and then give the realistic ideas back to the community for what Smith calls the project development phase, he says. This year, about 600 ideas were submitted in Seattle, with about 300 ideas making it to the project development phase.

In the current PB cycle, city staff set up community meeting groups to have residents discuss which of the feasible project ideas that were part of their district were of the highest priority, Smith says. Community members were able to submit feedback on project idea priority through the city’s online PB platform as well. City staff had residents rank between eight and 10 projects in their districts based on need and equity.

“It’s really been a great opportunity to get that first initial access and entry way for a community to realize they have a say in what happens in their neighborhood, and kind of give that power back to them,” Smith says. After the city’s department of transportation and parks department conduct a final review of the ranked projects, the city then submits the winning projects to the ballot for a vote.

Voting on and funding projects

Smith says that PB can be, “a way for people who may not be used to the voting process, who may not vote on a regular basis, it could be an entry way for them to have an opportunity to vote, especially for the youth as well.” After all, in Seattle’s PB process, community members as young as 11 can participate.

“I think PB is a great way to show young people a lot of different civic skills such as group discussions, dialogue, compromises, learning about how the sausage is really made [regarding] city policy. It’s sort of a hands-on civics education in a lot of ways,” Russon Gilman says.

Delivery of the winning projects can be tough, though.

“We’re trying to move a bureaucracy. And so, getting timely project development back from the departments with full consideration of project impacts and all that is a challenge at times,” Mantilla says, noting the need for working across departments to make it a seamless process.

Durham residents ages 13 and up voted on the projects during this past May, Holland says. Residents were able to vote either on paper ballots or online through the free-to-use, open-source Stanford Participatory Budgeting Platform developed by Stanford University.

Over 10,000 people voted, and Holland considers Durham’s maiden PB flight “extremely successful.”

Now, the city is focused on implementing the project ideas — Durham has promised to implement 50 percent of the winning PB projects within the first year of implementation, Holland says.

But that doesn’t mean that citizen engagement with the PB process has stopped.

“Even today, I receive phone calls and emails... [asking] about, ‘hey, when will my project be implemented in my community?’ That is, to me, one of the most remarkable and most encouraging things that I’ve witnessed, is knowing that you have a good number of residents who are continuing on following us and the progress thus far,” Holland says.

Thinking beyond budgets

Holland’s point underscores a major benefit of PB: it changes a government’s relationship with its people.

“Creating opportunities for folks to get on the same side of the table builds rapport and support,” PBP Co-Executive Director Shari Davis says. “And I think that PB is part of the answer here, but I think one of the challenges in moving PB forward is making sure that folks are on the same side of the table so this is not just another top-down mandate or an example of folks doing intense advocacy not being heard.”

While PB empowers residents in the budgeting process, it yields benefits outside of finance, too. Designing projects and services to tackle complex issues like growing economic inequality, climate change and resilience requires a regular dialogue between a government and its public, so that the government can truly know what they know, Menser says. PB can help strengthen this dialogue and thus allow a government and its constituents to collaborate on solving these complex issues together.

“It brings together the public, the elected [officials] and the city government workers. All three,” Menser explains. “Another way to think about it is that it brings together the government, the community and the expertise: the people who actually understand the technical difficulties of an energy system or of a water system or of a transportation system.”

“With the complex things that cities are trying to solve like around transportation, or around flooding, you need everybody,” he adds.

Editor’s note: A previous version of this story incorrectly omitted Seattle’s 2015 contract with the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) to help the city set up its PB process. The story has been corrected to reflect that Seattle set up its PB process by contracting with PBP in addition to working with community members.

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