

CITY OF BOSTON

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DRAFT

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process where community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. Participatory Budgeting is a practice that deepens democracy, builds stronger communities, and creates a more equitable distribution of public resources. Several cities in the United States, including New York, Chicago, Durham, Cambridge, and Somerville, have adopted and implemented PB processes to increase the civic and budget engagement among its residents.

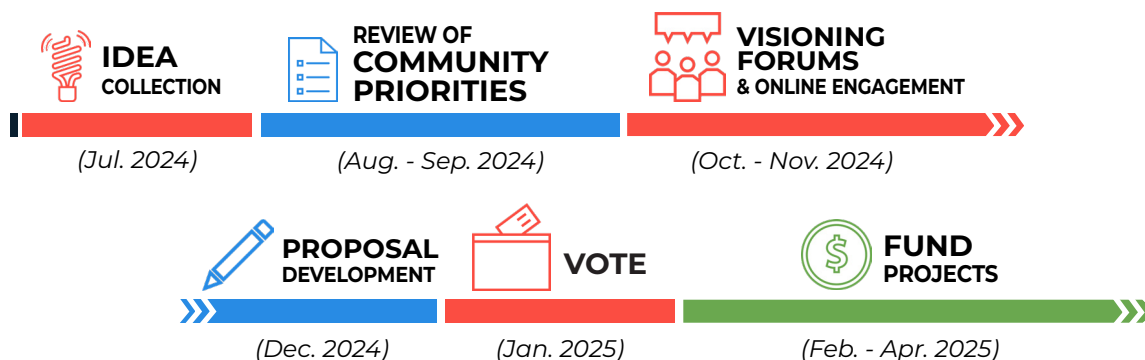
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN BOSTON

The Office of Participatory Budgeting (OPB) was established by [Ordinance](#) in the spring of 2023. The mission of the Office is to provide an official point of entry for Boston residents to contribute to the City's budget process. Through yearly PB cycles, the Office will engage the public and elevate community-centered projects that advance social and racial equity.

In PB Cycle One, Bostonians will take an active role in identifying, shaping, and prioritizing project ideas to address local needs while helping inform the City's annual budget. Residents will work collaboratively with the Office of Participatory Budgeting, its External Oversight Board, relevant City Departments, and community organizations to help determine the eligibility and feasibility of community-initiated project ideas.

For this first pilot year, OPB and its Board have created a "[Participatory Budgeting Rulebook](#)" to provide a comprehensive framework and standard set of rules and operations for this new initiative in Boston.

FIGURE 1: PB PROCESS TIMELINE AND DATES



WHEN AND HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE PB PROCESS



**IDEA
COLLECTION**
(Jul. 2024)

Boston residents will have multiple avenues to **share their project ideas** with the Office of Participatory Budgeting. In July, the Office will launch a city-wide Idea Collection campaign accessible to all Boston residents. Ideas can be submitted through an online PB Portal, a PB phone line, in-person at Public Library branches and at City Hall, and at events hosted in partnership with community organizations.

Based on the results of this initial phase, OPB will assess and identify the top 15 Community Priorities based on the type and the number of similar ideas submitted by residents across the City.

Project Eligibility and Criteria

The PB process prioritizes project ideas that build collective capacity on issues of social and racial justice. Project ideas can be submitted by City of Boston residents, regardless of age, and must meet the the following eligibility criteria:

- Projects are limited to a one-time expense, and do not create new permanent positions;
- Project proposals may include programs and services, as well as physical infrastructure; technological improvements, and community enhancements on City-owned public property.
 - ▶ Infrastructure projects on private, state, or federal property are not eligible, such as projects concerning the Department of Conservation & Recreation (DCR) or the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA).
 - ▶ Project ideas related to programs and services in non-City owned facilities are eligible.
- Project ideas must be feasible to implement, and be consistent with existing City policies, laws, regulations, and the Participatory Budgeting Ordinance; and
- Projects must be implemented or managed by the appropriate City Department or agency receiving direct budget appropriations.

Examples of Eligible Ideas: Programming to strengthen mental health among Boston youth; Expand the City's Wicked Free WiFi network to reach more low-income areas; Digital literacy classes for senior citizens to learn new skills and promote social connections; Enhance public spaces through infrastructure projects (public art, street trees, benches, etc.)

Examples of Ineligible Ideas: Paying for the salary of a public employee to provide services; Repairing a privately owned building; Helping an organization renovate a space that it rents from a private landlord; Helping a religious institution repair its sanctuary; Increase the frequency of MBTA buses or trains.





VISIONING FORUMS & ONLINE ENGAGEMENT (Oct. - Nov. 2024)

At **Visioning Forums**, residents will engage with relevant City Departments to review, discuss, and assess the feasibility and impact of the ideas nested under community priorities. Through this process, the public will help identify a short list of ideas that best address each community priority. Residents will also be able to provide recommendations for the development of ballot proposals online.

OPB and the External Oversight Board will draft 15 ballot proposals based on resident feedback and equity guidelines. The Office and relevant City Departments will conduct a final feasibility assessment and determine estimated costs for each ballot proposal.



VOTING, PROJECT FUNDING, & IMPLEMENTATION (Jan. - Feb. 2025)

Voting for Participatory Budgeting proposals will occur in-person and online. On the PB ballot, Boston residents 11 years of age (or in 6th grade) and older will be able to select up to five (5) of a total of 15 proposals, each with an estimated dollar amount. Proposals with the most votes will be awarded, up to the funding cap for the particular PB Cycle. The City and OPB will announce the winning

proposals with the final voting results. The implementation of projects will be monitored by OPB and the relevant City Departments.



CONTACT THE OFFICE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Looking for ways to get involved? Please reach out to the Office of Participatory Budgeting!

Website: www.boston.gov/participate

Email: pb@boston.gov

