DATA+SOUL RESEARCH

Participatory Budgeting Evaluation *2024-25*

Office of Participatory Budgeting

March 2025
Final Report Presentation

Important Context

1/

Today's presentation will focus on ==data highlights== and ==findings== useful for ==rulebook revision==

2/

Final report expected ==in April==

Idea Collection

1,238 ideas for addressing local needs were submitted by 789 Boston residents across every neighborhood.

Residents shared their ideas through:

- **The online portal** (758 ideas)

- **City-sponsored workshops** (312 ideas)

- **Individually organized community meetings** (98 ideas)

- **PB Corners** at City Hall (15 ideas) and Boston's Libraries (52 ideas)

- **PB Phone Line** (3 ideas)

Key outcomes

1,238
idea submissions

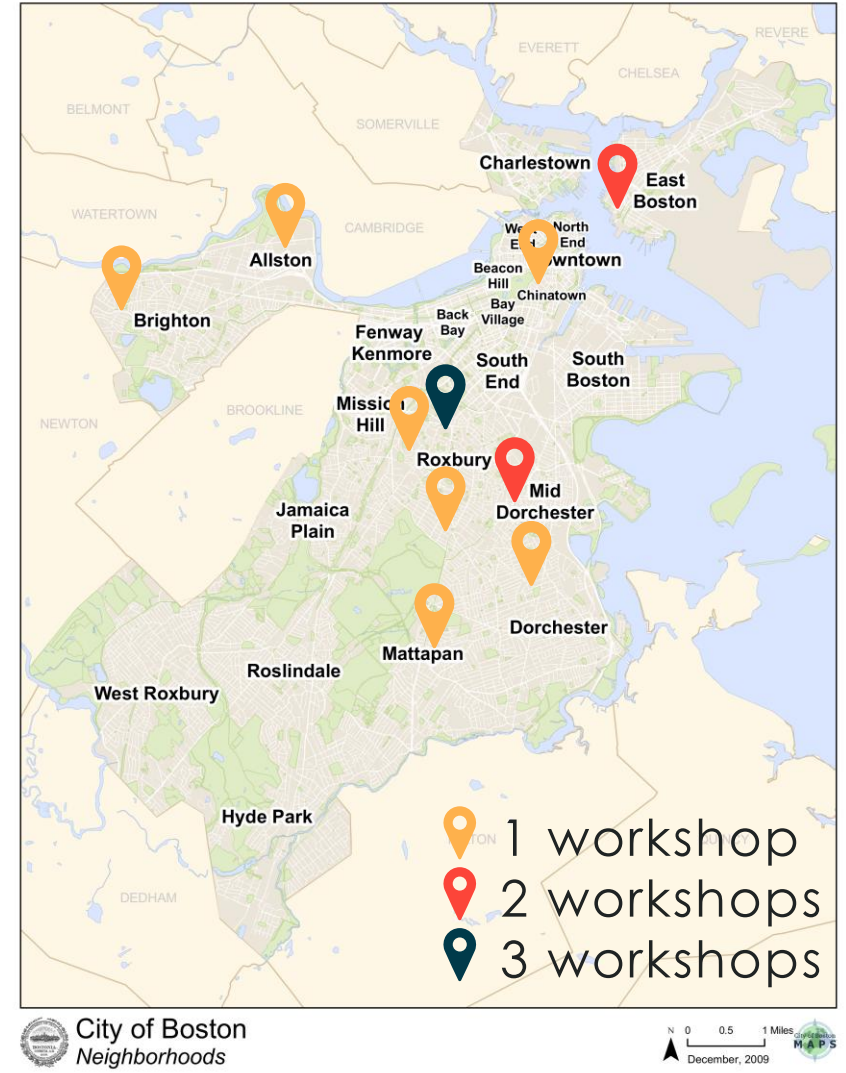**789 residents**
contributing ideas

19 workshops
sponsored by the city

Contracted Community Partners hosted 14 in-person workshops and 5 virtual workshops to engage priority populations:

- Residents who cannot or do not participate in civic life

- Residents with historically excluded or underrepresented identities

- Residents living in historically underserved neighborhoods

Source: Contracted Community Partner debriefs

Visioning Forums

OPB and Contracted Community Partners hosted **3 in-person forums** in October 2024.

- During forums, residents reviewed submitted ideas from 9 community priorities and developed draft ballot proposals.

- Food, interpretation, and childcare were provided.

- Most participants (88%) heard about forums from the co-hosting Contracted Community Partners; the rest heard about forums from City of Boston outreach.

Key outcomes

4 contract partners
engaged as co-hosts

~25 city staff
attended and contributed
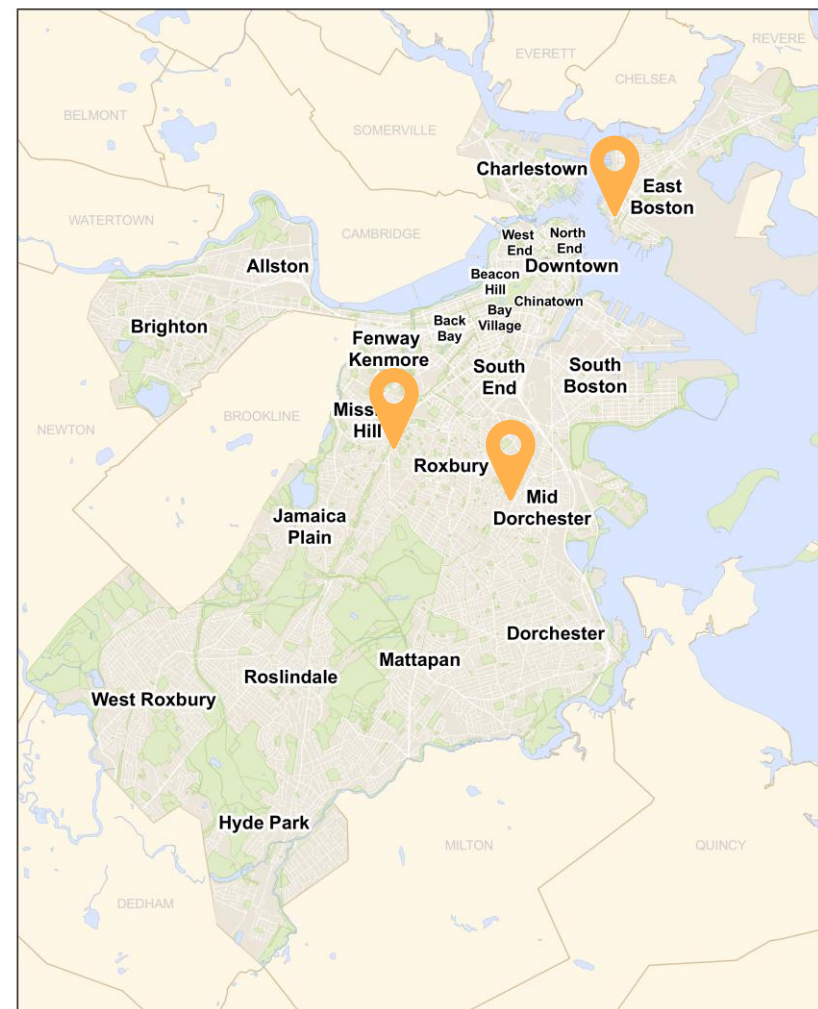
~110 residents
participated

15 draft ballot proposals
developed by residents

Visioning Forums were co-hosted with Contracted Community Partners with the goal of engaging priority populations.

- East Boston with Maverick Landing Community Services + Neighbors United for a Better East Boston (NUBE)

- Roxbury with Union Capital Boston

- Dorchester with Center for Teen Empowerment + Sociedad Latina

Source: OPB

Voting

4,462 Boston residents voted in Ideas in Action.

- **4,449 Boston residents voted online**

- **13 votes were submitted in person at City Hall**

- **4.35 (high) average number of projects selected per voter** indicates engagement with PB as whole, rather than isolated support driven by individual project campaigns

- The strong support for winning projects, combined with the high average number of projects selected per voter, means that most participants will see at least some of their chosen projects funded and implemented.

Key outcomes

⭐ **4,462**
votes

📊 **4.35 (high)**
average number of projects selected per voter

This evaluation explores 4 questions

We address three in this presentation

1. **Participation.** Who participated, and how?

2. **Impact.** What impact did PB have on those who participated?

3. **Process.** What was the process used in the pilot year and how can it be improved?

4. **Equity.** Is Boston's PB process equitably distributing resources?

Mixed Methods, Embedded Approach

- **Demographics**: race/ethnicity, income, age, civic participation
- **Impact**: three survey questions related to civic trust, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement
- **Feedback**: what worked well? what could be improved?

- Surveys with Ideas in Action participants (paper and online)

- Observation during Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums

- Debriefs with contracted community partners (conversations and online forms)

- Feedback forms for City Staff (online)

- Reflection conversations with the EOB (Fall and Spring)

- Reflection conversations with Ideas in Action participants (after voting)

- OPB staff quarterly retrospectives

- Analysis of process data

Evaluation Question 1

Who participated, and how? To what extent did Ideas in Action engage priority populations? These are:

- residents living in historically underserved neighborhoods

- residents with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and

- residents who cannot or do not participate in civic life

Data Sources

Neighborhood

- **Portal data** and **Voting data**: Collected neighborhood information from all participants.

Identity (race/ethnicity, income, age) and participation in civic life

- **Workshop surveys**: 270 responses out of ~560* = ~**48%** response rate.
  *Total based on estimates from Contracted Community Partners and is likely an <u>over</u>estimate, which would suggest the response rate is an <u>under</u>estimate.

- **Portal surveys**: 36 responses out of ~590* = **~6%** response rate.
  *Total based on estimates from Analytics Team. This number is likely an <u>over</u>estimate, which would suggest the response rate is an <u>under</u>estimate.

- **Forum surveys**: 83 responses out of ~110 = **~75%** response rate.

- **Voting surveys**: 130 responses out of 4,462 = **3%** response rate.

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> low response rates =
> low confidence that data
> is representative

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Finding 1

Ideas in Action engaged a diverse group of Boston residents through multiple platforms, representing **every neighborhood**, especially underserved ones…

Ideas in Action engaged residents from every neighborhood in both Idea Collection and Voting.

Some neighborhoods submitted ideas and voted at higher rates per capita than others, some at rates higher than Boston's overall per capita rate.
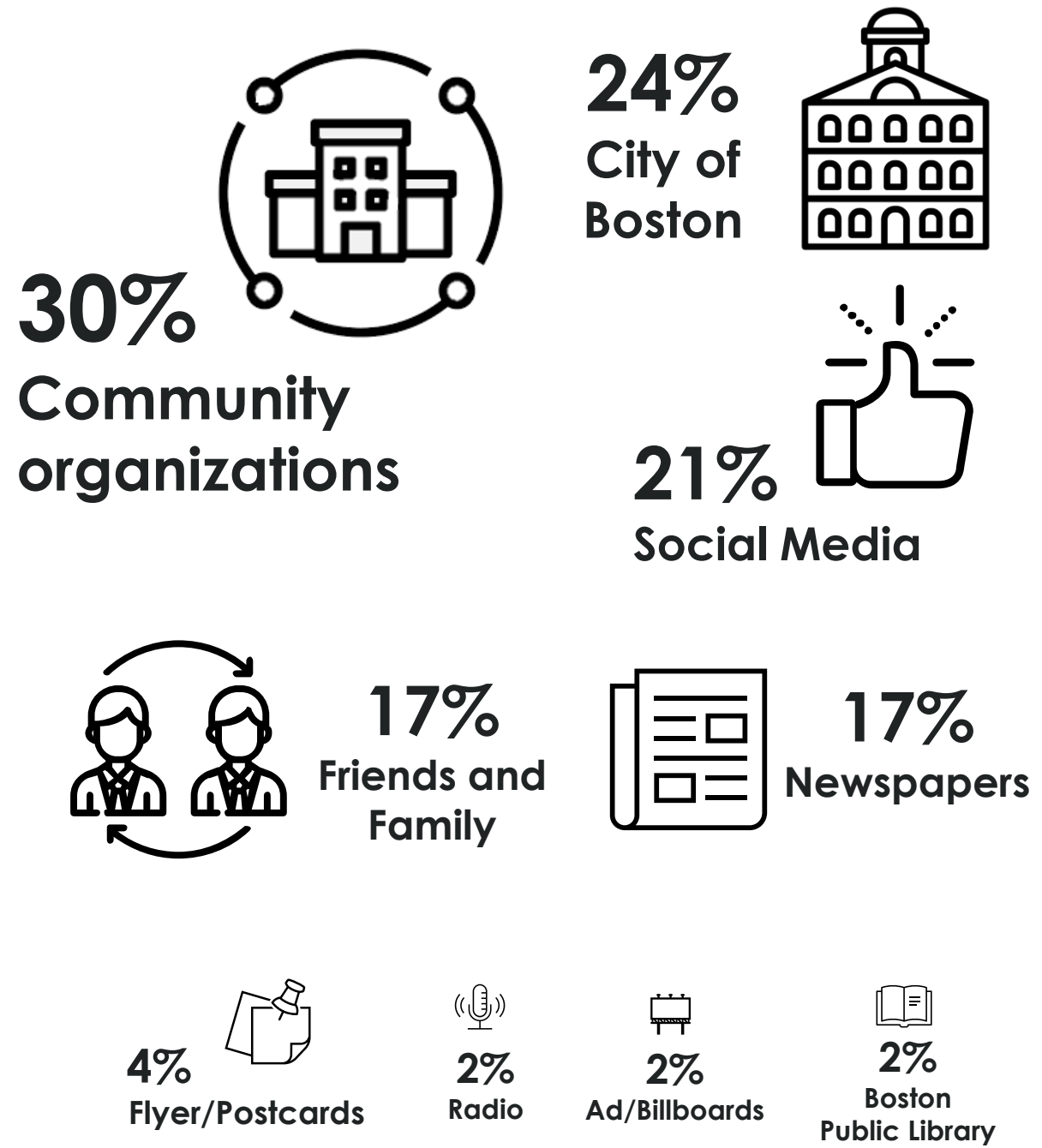
Neighborhood	Submitters per capita	Votes per capita	OPB events
Allston	2.2	5.0	W
Brighton	2.2	12.2	W
Charlestown	2.1	7.2	
Chinatown	2.1	5.6	
Dorchester	2.3	8.4	WWWWF
Downtown	4.0	8.3	W
East Boston	3.4	8.1	WWF
Hyde Park	1.9	7.0	
Jamaica Plain	3.4	3.6	W
Longwood	0.2	6.7	
Mattapan	1.7	3.3	W
Roxbury	1.4	7.6	WWWF
South Boston	0.7	8.3	

Source: Online portal data + Vote data + Boston 2020 census data
Boston-wide submitters per capita = 1.8; Boston-wide votes per capita = 6.6

Voters* heard about Ideas in Action through community organizations, official City of Boston channels, and their social networks.

*... who responded to the survey... A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

30%
Community organizations

24%
City of Boston

21%
Social Media

17%
Friends and Family

17%
Newspapers

4%
Flyer/Postcards

2%
Radio

2%
Ad/Billboards

2%
Boston Public Library

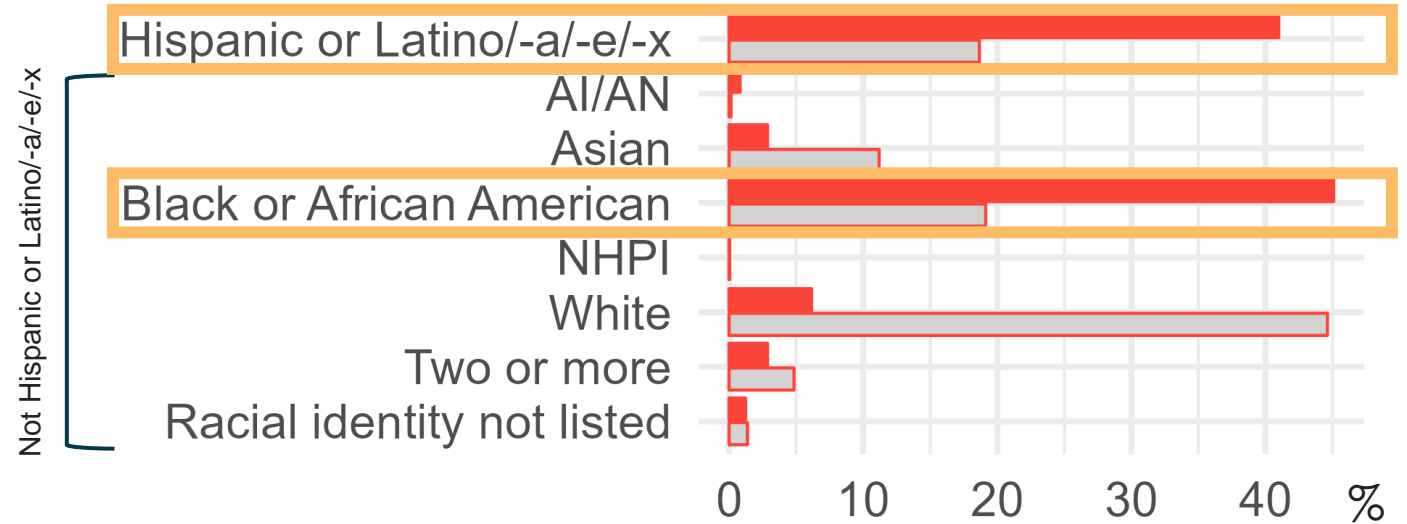Source: Voting surveys (2025); n=126

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Finding 1

Ideas in Action engaged a diverse group of Boston residents through multiple platforms, representing every neighborhood, especially underserved ones; **many demographic groups**, especially with historically excluded or underrepresented identities…

Workshops engaged more residents who identify as Latinx and Black relative to their share of the Boston population. **Forums engaged a similar demographic.**

Online portal users* and voters* were more representative of Boston's population in terms of race/ethnicity.

Not Hispanic or Latino/-a/-e/-x

- Hispanic or Latino/-a/-e/-x
- AI/AN
- Asian
- Black or African American
- NHPI
- White
- Two or more
- Racial identity not listed

0 10 20 30 40 %

Notes:
- Hispanic or Latino/-a/-e/-x... of any race
- AI/AN = American Indian or Alaska Native
- NHPI = Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

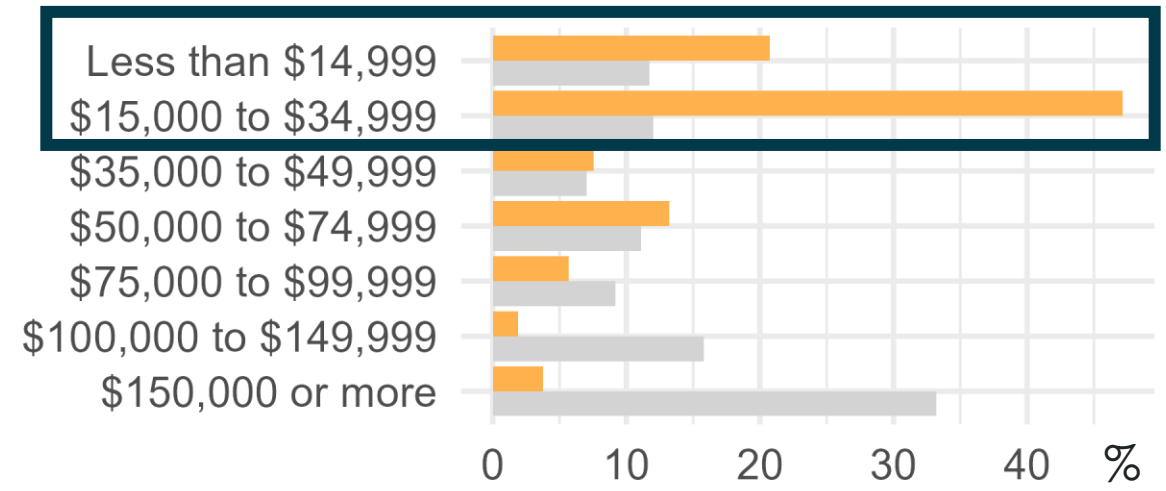Source: Idea Collection Workshop surveys (2024) + Boston 2020 census data
n=244

* ... who responded to the survey...
A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

Visioning Forums engaged residents who reported lower-incomes relative to their share of the Boston population.

Survey responses from all other phases showed a similar pattern, with slightly higher incomes reported among portal users* and voters*.


Less than $14,999
$15,000 to $34,999
$35,000 to $49,999
$50,000 to $74,999
$75,000 to $99,999
$100,000 to $149,999
$150,000 or more

0 10 20 30 40 %

Source: Visioning Forum surveys (2024) + Boston 2020 census data
n=74 for income

* … who responded to the survey…
A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

Workshops engaged residents who were younger and older relative to their share of the Boston population.

Forums engaged a similar demographic.

Online portal users* and voters* were more middle-aged and older.
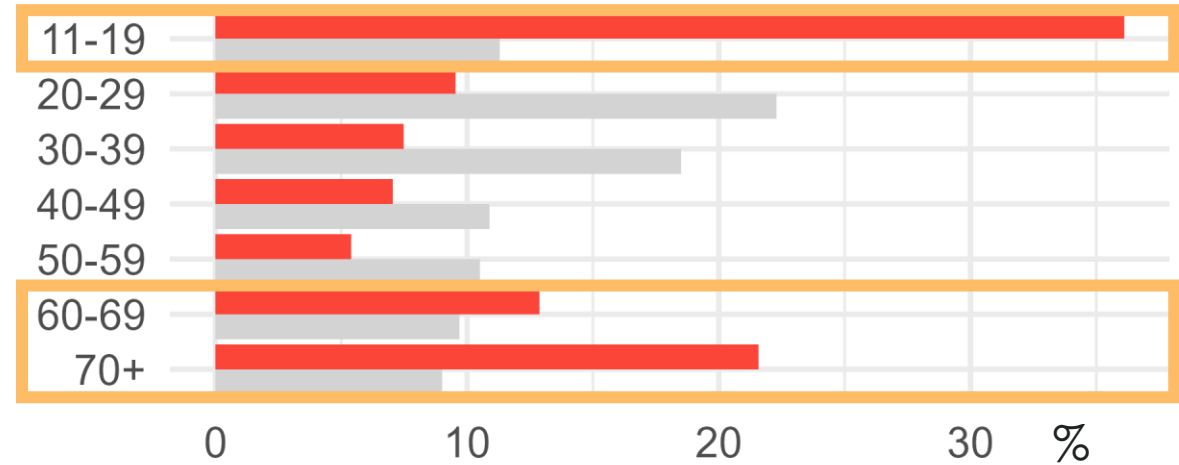
Source: Idea Collection Workshop surveys (2024) + Boston 2020 census data

n=__

* … who responded to the survey… A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

Finding 1

Ideas in Action engaged a diverse group of Boston residents through multiple platforms, representing every neighborhood, especially underserved ones; many demographic groups, especially with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and people who were **more or less civically engaged**.

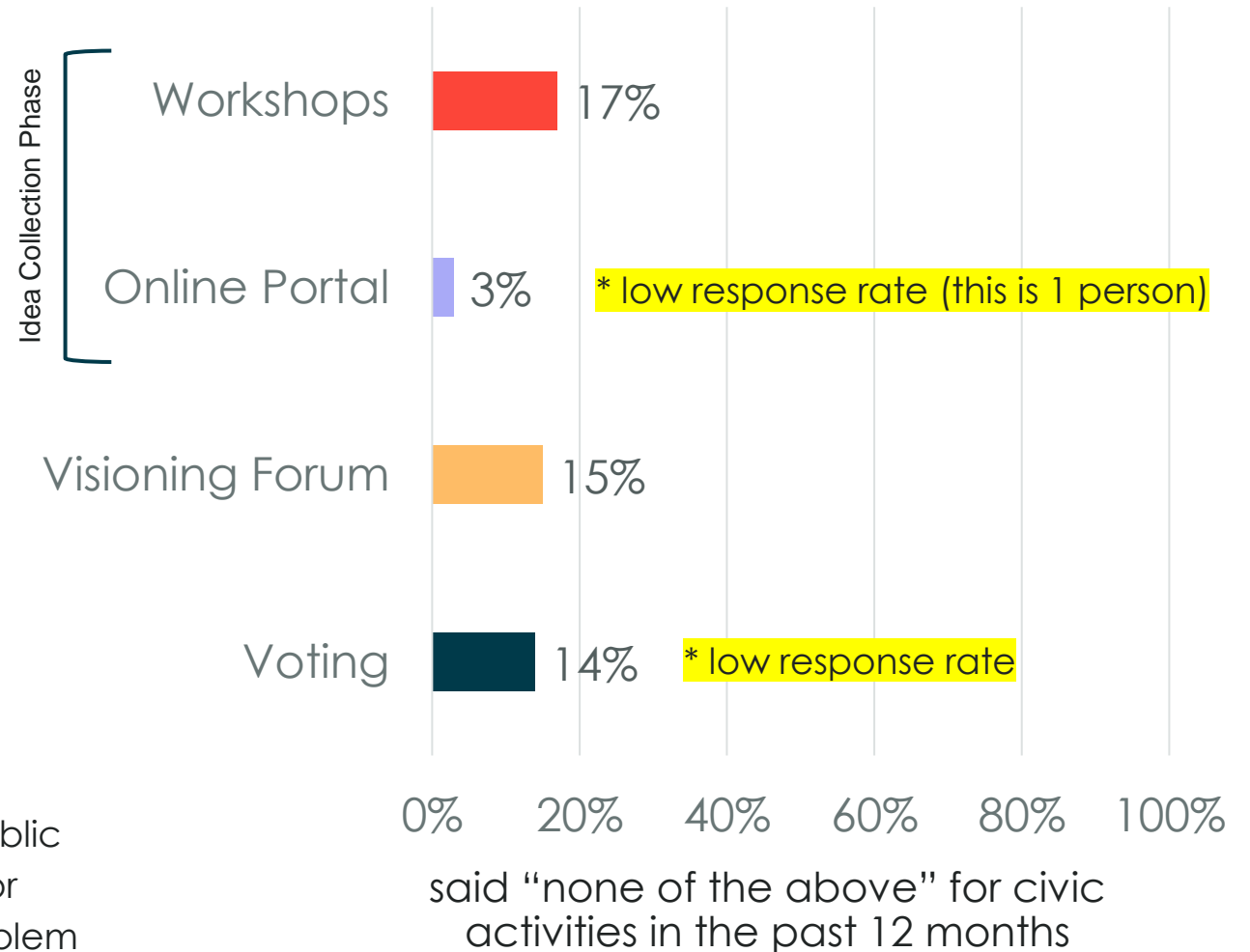## Only a small portion of survey respondents were <u>not</u> civically engaged.

We assume that people who choose to complete surveys are <u>more likely to be civically engaged</u>.

Notes:
- Civic activities included calling 311, attending a public meeting, contacting a public official, advocating or campaigning, working with others to fix a local problem

Source: All surveys

n=207, 34, 69, 117 respectively, top to bottom

Idea Collection Phase

Workshops — 17%

Online Portal — 3% *low response rate (this is 1 person)

Visioning Forum — 15%

Voting — 14% *low response rate

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

said "none of the above" for civic activities in the past 12 months

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Finding 1

Ideas in Action engaged a diverse group of Boston residents through multiple platforms, representing every neighborhood, especially underserved ones; many demographic groups, especially with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and people who were more or less civically engaged. **Participation varied by phase. We know the least about Online Portal users and Voters.**

Evaluation Question 2

What impact did Ideas in Action have on those who participated? How did it affect:

- Trust in city government

- Civic knowledge (especially budgeting)

- Interest in future civic engagement, including future cycles of Ideas in Action

Data Sources

- Survey questions related to civic trust, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement (see previous slides for notes about response rates)

- Reflection conversations with Ideas in Action participants (March 2025)

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Finding 2

Residents had a positive experience with Ideas in Action across all measures of civic benefits, including trust in city government, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement.

Across all phases, participants felt that Ideas in Action allowed their voices to be heard by the City of Boston.

This is an indicator for trust in city government.
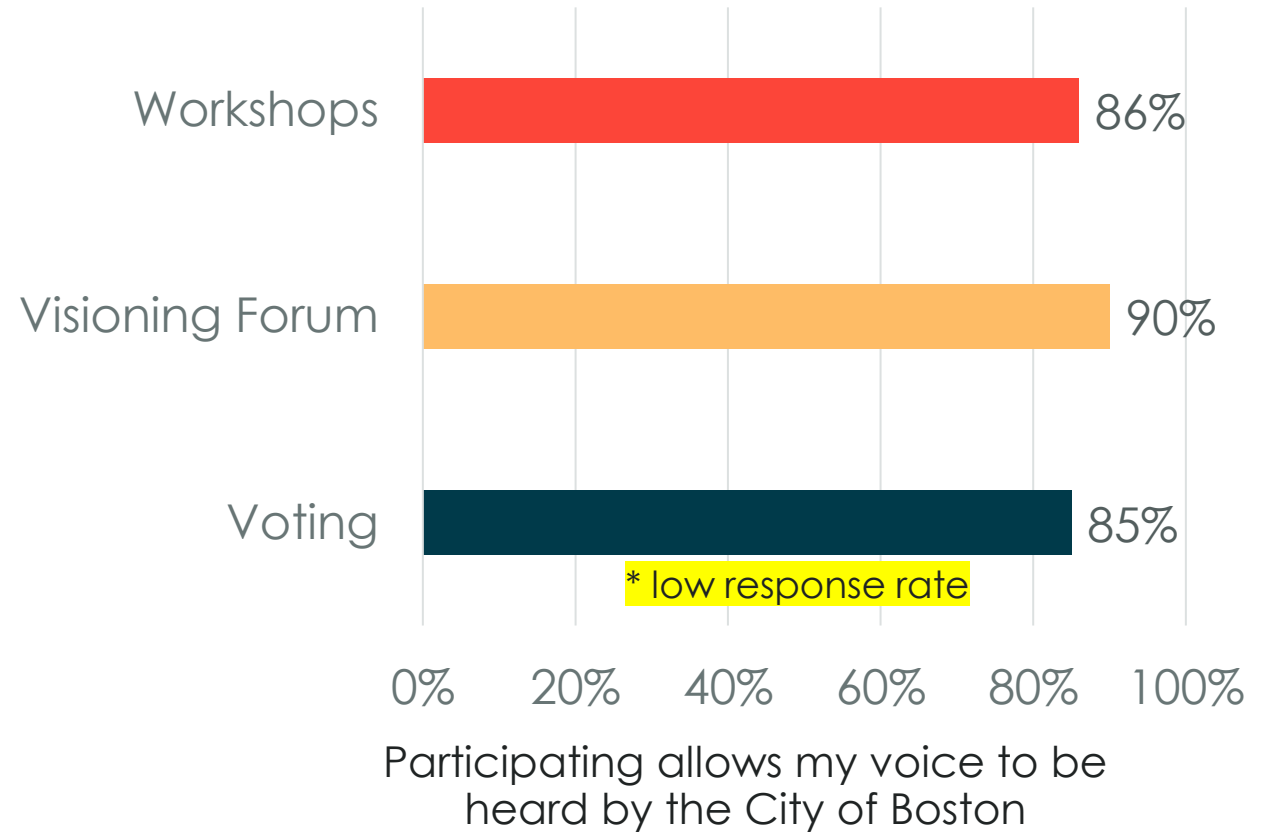
Source: Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting
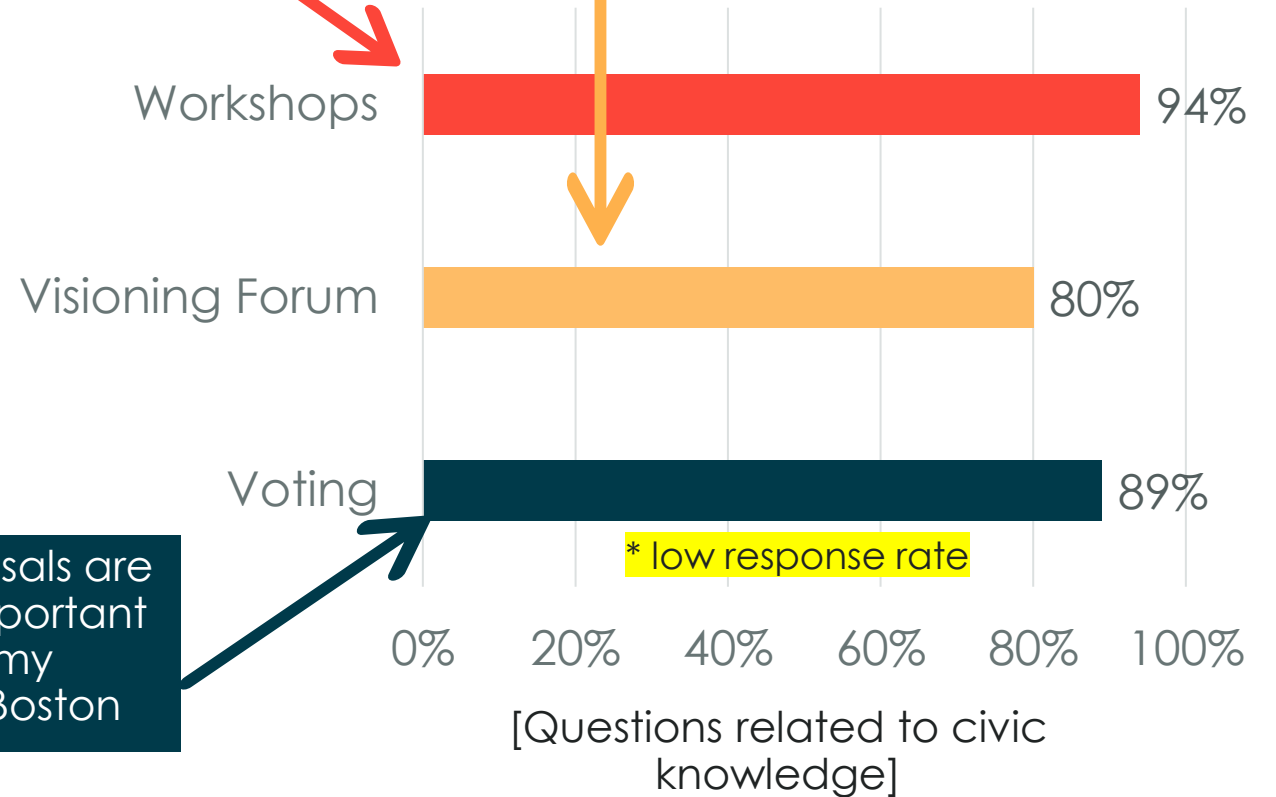n=___, 82, 119, respectively, top to bottom

Workshops 86%

Visioning Forum 90%

Voting 85%

* low response rate

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Participating allows my voice to be heard by the City of Boston

I think it gave me the opportunity to voice my ideas… a lot of times we feel like we're not being heard or listened to, or like we're not our complaints or things are not being taken seriously, But I see for even us, by us participating… it has shown me that our voice and opinion do matter, because we could kind of see by the projects that were picked. I feel like now that it's very important to voice our ideas and opinions regarding certain things, especially things that's going to affect us in our in the generations to come.

– REFLECTION CONVERSATION PARTICIPANT

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Participating in Ideas in Action boosted civic knowledge in different ways for each phase.

Workshop helped me considered other viewpoints

Forum helped me better understand how Boston's budgeting process works

The ballot proposals are relevant and important to me and my community in Boston

* low response rate

Workshops — 94%

Visioning Forum — 80%

Voting — 89%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

[Questions related to civic knowledge]

Source: Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting
n=211, 81, 120, respectively, top to bottom

This event was great for engaging with city staff about ideas as to how to improve our community
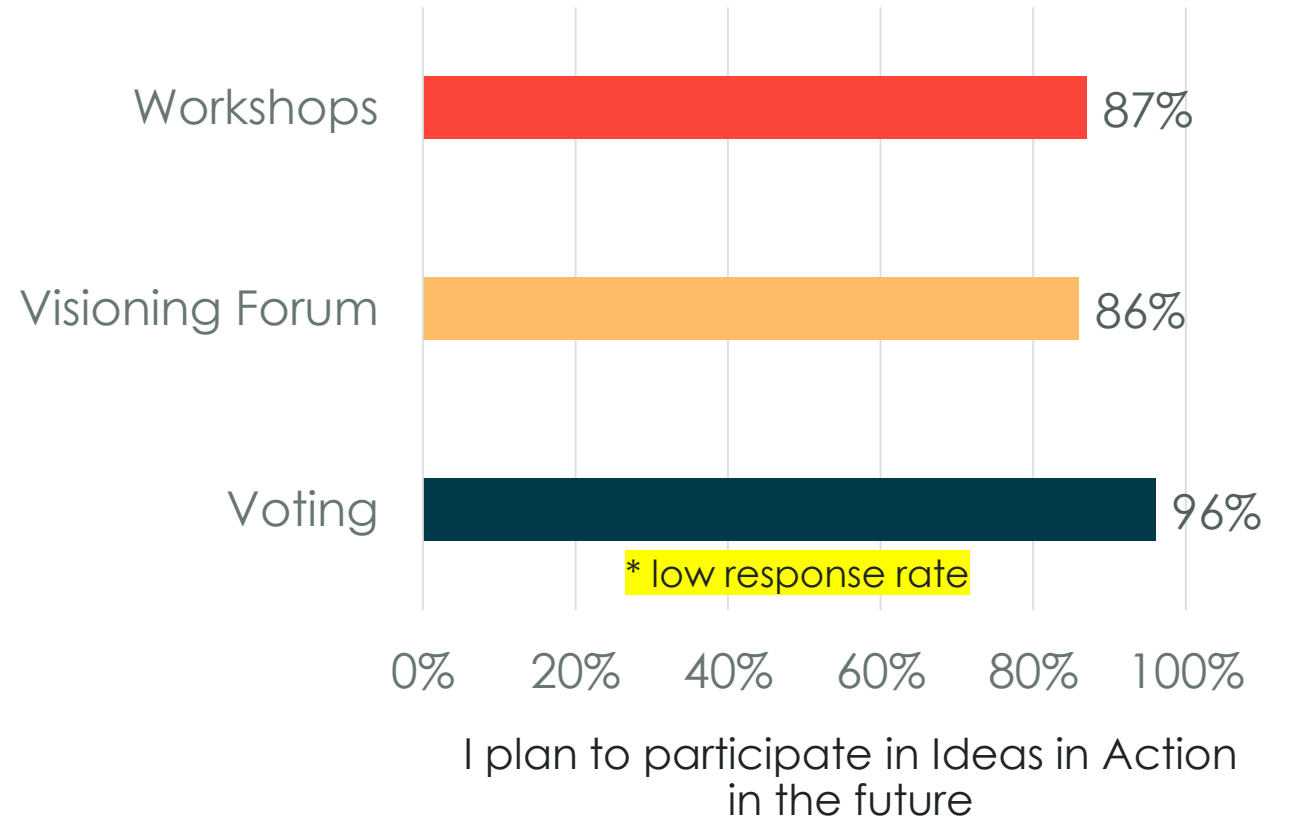
– FORUM PARTICIPANT

Presentation during Dorchester Visioning Forum.
Photo credit: OPB

Across all phases, participants were interested in engaging in Ideas in Action again.

Notably, almost all voters* who responded to the survey planned to vote again.

Source: Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting
n=___, 78, 117, respectively, top to bottom

Workshops 87%

Visioning Forum 86%

Voting 96%

* low response rate

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

I plan to participate in Ideas in Action in the future

I applaud the city for doing this, you know, because you all went to the community… You can't do anything for us without our input. So I love that the city came to us… there's only so many things that we could put the money into and do those ton of ideas… this is the first step of many. So we'll be back for more input, and we'll bring more and we'll make sure that y'all listen.

— REFLECTION CONVERSATION PARTICIPANT

Evaluation Question 3

What was the process used in the pilot year and how can it be improved, especially via changes in OPB operations and resources?

- What facilitated participation or got in the way, especially for the priority populations?

- How well did OPB collaborate with other aspects of city government and community organizations?

Data Sources

- Open response survey questions about what went well and what could be improved (see previous slides for notes about response rates)

- Debriefs with contracted community partners (conversations and online forms)

- Reflection conversations with Ideas in Action participants (March 2025)

- OPB staff quarterly retrospectives

Idea Collection + Visioning Forums

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Finding 3

High-touch engagement strategies with contracted community partners (i.e., Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums) were effective at engaging priority populations and elevating resident voice.

Partners valued the high touch support, training, materials (incl. translations), and financial support provided by OPB.

Some Visioning Forum participants and hosts felt that forums were rushed and wished for more of a throughline between phases.

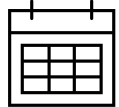High-touch strategies were time-intensive for OPB and required flexibility for managing staff capacity.

Summary of ideas for improving Workshops

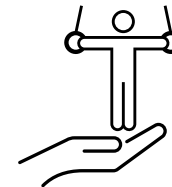Continue investing in relationships with community organizations

Continue leveraging organizational expertise in community engagement

Start workshop planning and outreach earlier

Expand training for Contracted Community Partners

Improve (and reduce!) materials and support flexible public use

Source: debriefs conversations with Contracted Community Partners + retrospective reflections with OPB staff

At the end of the forum… there was a **general sense of accomplishment** in the room…[but] I do believe it was **extremely challenging** to discuss and assess the feasibility & impact of the submitted ideas and submit proposals in the same session.

– FORUM HOST

Voting + Overall

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Finding 4

Residents expressed enthusiasm about Ideas in Action; many expressed a desire for the initiative to have greater visibility.

Voters* appreciated the voting experience and Ideas in Action overall

- The voting platform felt easy and simple to navigate (n=28)
- Proposals had the right level of detail and felt relevant and important (n=14)
- Enthusiasm that the process exists and allowed residents to contribute to budget decisions (n=10)

* … who responded to the survey…
A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

Source: Voting surveys (2025); n=130

"This is an amazing program!!! Such a cool idea. I wish more people knew about it. I loved reading the descriptions of each program. It was so hard to vote for just 5 of them because they all seem amazing."

- Voting survey respondent

Voters* shared ideas for improving the process

- Increase visibility and awareness of Ideas in Action through social media, public transportation ads, in local news, mail, library, and schools (n=36)

- Improve accessibility through community events, partnering with community organizations, and in-person voting (n=12)

- Increase the overall size of the budget so as to fund more projects (n=5)

- Provide more context or details about proposals, especially how they relate to existing projects (n=3)

* … who responded to the survey…
A low response rates means we should be careful making conclusions.

Source: Voting surveys (2025); n=130

"More advertisement for the voting process so that residents are alerted and encouraged to participate -- I found out by word of mouth and was unaware of the initiative until now."

- Voting survey respondent

I mean, [you may not be part of an organized] group, but we all get a Dunkin Donut. We all go to the grocery to buy something. We all go to Goodwill. We all go to Macy's. Yeah, so let's have a sign or something there. Just make it easy. Click and go.

– REFLECTION CONVERSATION PARTICIPANT, on the question of how to engage residents

Next steps for Evaluation

- Engage with your questions and feedback

- Prepare the final evaluation report (expected mid-April)

Recommendations for Evaluation (lessons learned + looking ahead)

- Incorporate key survey questions into the online portal and voting platform; seek other ways to integrate evaluation into OPB workflows

- Prioritize light-left methods to reduce evaluation effort for all involved

- Develop an evaluation framework for selected projects and their implementation

Thank you

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