



Idea Collection Workshop, July 31, 2024  
hosted by Union Capital Boston  
Photo credit: CPB

# Ideas in Action

*Evaluation of the  
Pilot Year (2024-2025)*

## FINAL REPORT

Prepared For: Office of Participatory Budgeting  
By: Data+Soul Research  
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# Executive Summary

In 2024, Boston's Office of Participatory Budgeting (OPB) launched its pilot year of participatory budgeting, called *Ideas in Action*. This initiative provided an opportunity for Bostonians to discuss their budget priorities, identify impactful project ideas, and take action to help decide what projects get implemented for the benefit of the City. The pilot year has come to a close, and in the end, thousands of Boston residents participated by sharing their ideas and voting on how to spend \$2 million in community-driven projects.

This Evaluation Report answers key questions about the pilot year and surfaces recommendations to guide future cycles of *Ideas in Action*.

**Who participated, and how?** *Ideas in Action* engaged a diverse group of Boston residents, demographically and economically, through each phase of the process, using multiple platforms and means of engagement. Participants represented every neighborhood, especially underserved ones; many demographic groups, especially with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and people who are civically engaged.

**What impact did *Ideas in Action* have on those who participated?** 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. They expressed enthusiasm about the process and felt that participating was important, easy, and straightforward.

**What was the process used in the pilot year and how can it be improved?** Throughout the pilot year, OPB built and strengthened partnerships with City departments and agencies, community organizations, and members of the public. Major approaches for engaging residents included:

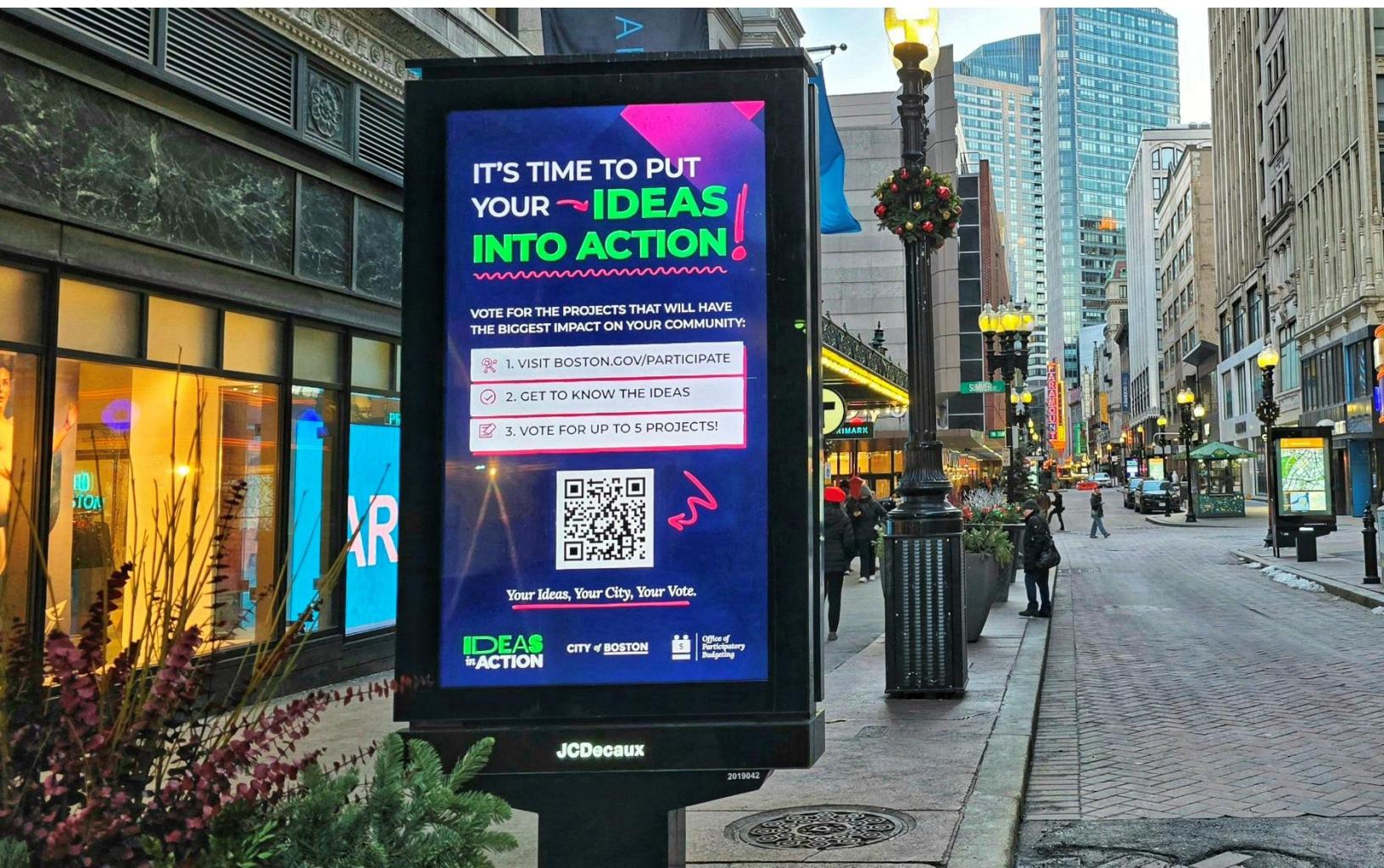
1) high-touch strategies with Community Partners aimed at engaging priority populations; and 2) marketing and communications strategies aimed at engaging residents throughout Boston, especially historically excluded Boston residents. These strategies, combined with independent efforts from residents and community organizations, were successful at boosting participation in *Ideas in Action*. Community organizations and City staff that collaborated with OPB consistently expressed appreciation for how the office involved partners and prioritized resident participation throughout the process. Collaborators felt well supported and eager to participate in the future.

**Is *Ideas in Action* equitably distributing resources?** OPB made significant efforts to embed equity in *Ideas in Action*. Efforts to engage historically excluded or underrepresented groups were successful, and perhaps as a result of those efforts along with additional equity guidelines, all selected projects explicitly center equity in their focus on youth, residents with limited or inconsistent access to nutritious food, and areas with high residential density or transit needs, for example.

## Key Recommendations

1. Continue and expand partnerships with community organizations to ensure representation of historically excluded or underrepresented groups and historically underserved neighborhoods in Boston.
2. Increase visibility and awareness of *Ideas in Action* and the ways residents can participate.
3. Prioritize engagement of residents who are not otherwise civically engaged.
4. Increase OPB's capacity for implementation, especially working with Community Partners and supporting city-sponsored events.
5. Initiate implementation processes and workflows earlier.

See [Recommendations section](#) for a complete list, including those specific to each phase.



Street advertisement for *Ideas in Action* in Downtown Crossing  
**Photo credit:** OPB

# Introduction

## Participatory Budgeting in Boston

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process where community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.

Participatory Budgeting started as an anti-poverty measure in 1989 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Since then, it has spread to hundreds of cities around the world. Participatory Budgeting is a practice that deepens democracy, builds stronger communities, and helps create a more equitable distribution of public resources.

In the 2021 Municipal Election, Boston voters approved a grassroots-led ballot measure to create the Office of Participatory Budgeting with a goal of providing an official entry point for Boston residents to contribute to the city's budget process.

In 2023, an ordinance establishing the Office of Participatory Budgeting was adopted by Mayor Wu and the City Council. The Office of Participatory Budgeting (OPB) advances its mission by:

- Furthering public engagement and direct democratic involvement
- Building collective capacity on issues of racial and social justice
- Aligning with the City's goals of achieving and embedding equity and inclusion into the City practices

In the summer of 2024, OPB launched *Ideas in Action*, Boston's first city-wide PB initiative. The goals of *Ideas in Action* are to offer opportunities for the public to propose creative new ideas to address local needs and gauge resident priorities to inform the City's annual budget process.

A high level timeline on the following page illustrates what happened during the pilot year. See the [2024-2025 Rulebook](#) for additional background information on *Ideas in Action*, as well as project eligibility, timeline, and the planned phases for the pilot year. See OPB's [Ideas in Action website](#) for frequently updated information about the pilot year and the current cycle.

## *High level timeline, by the numbers:*

In the winter and spring of 2024, OPB established and began meetings with its **External Oversight Board** to develop an equity-centered **Rulebook** that would guide the implementation of *Ideas in Action*. During this time OPB hired and onboarded two new staff; established new procedures, systems, and workflows as a new department; developed working relationships with city staff from various departments; and contracted with nine community organizations for the upcoming Idea Collection phase.



**Idea Collection:** In July, 2024, 789 Boston residents submitted 1,238 unique project ideas for addressing local needs. Residents submitted ideas through an **Online PB Portal**, in-person “**PB Corners**” at City Hall and across Boston’s Libraries, and through a dedicated multilingual **PB Phone Line**. OPB also partnered with community organizations (“**Community Partners**”) to host 19 **Idea Collection Workshops**, primarily in person and some virtual, across the City. During these Workshops, residents brainstormed and discussed project ideas in small facilitated groups and submitted them through the Online PB Portal or on paper through workshop hosts.



**Review Priorities:** In late summer, 2024, OBP worked with the City’s Data Analytics team and the External Oversight Board to sort eligible project ideas into nine (9) Community Priorities such as “Expanding Economic Opportunity” and “Community Health and Wellbeing.” OPB also created an Idea Submissions Dashboard to display all submitted ideas for easy viewing by departmental staff and the public.



**Visioning Forums + Proposal Development:** In the autumn of 2024, OPB co-hosted three in-person **Visioning Forums** in East Boston, Roxbury, and Dorchester, with Community Partners. Across the three forums, about 110 residents worked with City of Boston staff from relevant departments to review, assess, and draft project proposals for the PB Ballot based on the Community Priorities. After the forums, OPB continued working with departmental staff to refine proposals for feasibility and considered an additional 45 public comments. In the end, OPB published 14 proposals for the ballot.



**Vote on Proposals:** In the winter of 2025, 4,462 Boston residents **voted** for their preferred proposals, ultimately selecting six (6) top projects to be funded by the \$2 million project cap. On average, voters selected 4.35 projects per ballot, out of five (5) total. OPB engagement and accessibility efforts included a multilingual online voting platform, in-person voting at City Hall (13 people voted in-person; the rest voted online), outreach to 6th to 12th grade social studies classrooms at Boston Public Schools, and OPB “office hours” at six libraries throughout Boston.

The pilot year came to a close in the spring of 2025 with the publication of this Evaluation Report, revisions to the Rulebook, and preparation to implement the winning projects and launch Cycle Two of *Ideas in Action*.

## About the evaluation

The evaluation of *Ideas in Action* aimed to assess early outcomes of the pilot year and provide insights and recommendations to help improve the process and advance OPB's mission. The evaluation questions were:

1. Who **participated**, and how? To what extent did *Ideas in Action* engage priority populations?
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
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?
4. Is *Ideas in Action* **equitably** distributing resources?
  - Were more resources devoted toward engaging priority populations?
  - Will selected projects serve priority populations?

### Priority Populations

- Residents living in historically underserved neighborhoods;
- Residents with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and
- Residents who cannot or do not participate in civic life

Evaluation questions were developed by Data+Soul Research, the evaluation contractor, through a collaborative process with OPB staff and with input from the City's finance cabinet, City departments that manage similar or related processes, External Oversight Board members, and representatives of the Better Budget Alliance along with authors of *An Evaluation and Oversight Framework for Participatory Budgeting in Boston* (Clark et al. 2022). The evaluation was designed to provide process improvements that are feasible for the City of Boston and actionable for OPB.

## How to use this report

The purpose of this Evaluation Report is to answer the above evaluation questions in a succinct and useful manner. Each section that follows answers one of the questions by sharing an overall finding and then topical sub-findings. Three key sources will provide additional details about *Ideas in Action*, beyond what is presented in this report.

1. The report's [Appendix](#) includes information about evaluation methods, additional data, and a glossary.
2. A published survey dataset (forthcoming in 2025) includes cleaned survey responses and is available for download and further analysis.
3. OPB maintains minutes and presentations from External Oversight Board meetings [on its website](#), including evaluation presentations on October 3, 2024 and March 20, 2025.

## Methods overview

Data+Soul used a mixed methods, embedded approach, to answer the four evaluation questions that included the data collection strategies below. See [Appendix A](#) for a detailed explanation of methods.

Method	Question 1: Participation	Question 2: Impact	Question 3: Process	Question 4: Equity
Surveys with <i>Ideas in Action</i> participants (paper and online)	Demographics (race/ethnicity, income, age) and participation in civic life	Civic trust, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement	What went well and what could be improved, and how participants heard about <i>Ideas in Action</i>	Perceptions of <i>Ideas in Action</i> 's ability to address inequities in the community and to make the community better
Observation during Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums			Perceptions of <i>Ideas in Action</i> and process improvements	
Debriefs with Community Partners (conversations and online forms)	Outreach goals and strategies	Resident perceptions of <i>Ideas in Action</i>	What went well and what could be improved	

## Methods overview (continued)

Method	Question 1: Participation	Question 2: Impact	Question 3: Process	Question 4: Equity
Feedback forms for City Staff (online)			What went well and what could be improved	
Reflection conversations with the External Oversight Board (Fall and Spring)			What went well and what could be improved	
Group reflection conversations with <i>Ideas in Action</i> participants after voting concluded (two conversations conducted in March 2025 with 13 participants in total)		Themes and quotes related to civic trust, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement	What went well and what could be improved	Themes and quotes related to equity impact of selected projects
Retrospective reflections with OPB staff (quarterly)			What went well and what could be improved	Process documentation related to equity strategies
Review of process and participation data	Neighborhood data from the Online PB Portal and voting platform		Timestamp data from the Online PB Portal and voting platform; marketing campaign report	Process documentation related to equity strategies
Gathering of publicly available data (i.e., census records)	Boston Neighborhood populations from the 2020 Census			

**Important note:** Low response rates from Online PB Portal surveys and Voting surveys (~6% and 3% respectively) give us low confidence that data from those sources are representative. Whenever Online PB Portal or Voting survey data are presented, an (\*) will be used and a note will be provided to remind readers about this low response rate.

# Findings

## Evaluation Question 1: Participation

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

## Finding 1

*Ideas in Action* engaged a diverse group of Boston residents through each phase of the process, using multiple platforms and means of engagement. Participants represented every neighborhood, especially underserved ones; many demographic groups, especially those with historically excluded or underrepresented identities; and people who are civically engaged. We know the least about Online PB Portal users and Voters.

Dorchester Visioning Forum, October 30, 2024,  
hosted by Center for Teen Empowerment

**Photo credit:** OPB



## Neighborhood

**Sub-finding 1-1:** *Ideas in Action* engaged residents from every neighborhood in both Idea Collection and Voting phases. Some neighborhoods submitted ideas and voted at higher rates per capita than others, some at rates higher than Boston's overall per capita rate.

**Table 1.** Boston's most active neighborhoods in terms of submitting ideas and voting.

Neighborhood	Population	# ideas	Ideas as % of Total	Ideas per capita	Votes	Votes as % of Total	Votes per capita	OPB events
Allston	24,904	54	4.4%	2.17	124	2.8%	4.98	W
Brighton	52,047	116	9.5%	2.23	633	14.2%	12.16	W
Charlestown	19,120	40	3.3%	2.09	137	3.1%	7.17	
Chinatown	6,211	13	1.1%	2.09	35	0.8%	5.64	
Dorchester	122,191	282	23.1%	2.31	1026	23.1%	8.40	WWWWF
Downtown	13,768	54	4.4%	3.92	114	2.6%	8.28	W
East Boston	43,066	148	12.1%	3.44	350	7.9%	8.13	WWF
Hyde Park	34,172	64	5.3%	1.87	239	5.4%	6.99	
Jamaica Plain	40,015	136	11.2%	3.40	146	3.3%	3.65	W
Longwood	5,186	1	0.1%	0.19	35	0.8%	6.75	
Mattapan	23,840	40	3.3%	1.68	78	1.8%	3.27	W
Roxbury	54,533	77	6.3%	1.41	414	9.3%	7.59	WWWWF
South Boston	37,917	26	2.1%	0.69	313	7.0%	8.25	

**Notes:** Boston-wide ideas per capita (1,000) = 1.8; Boston-wide votes per capita (1,000) = 6.6. Cells shaded blue indicate participation above the city-wide per capita rates. OPB-sponsored events are as follows: W = Idea Collection Workshop; F = Visioning Forum. See [Appendix B1](#) for data from all neighborhoods.

**Source:** Online PB Portal data + Vote data + Boston 2020 census data

While residents from all neighborhoods participated in *Ideas in Action*, some neighborhoods were better represented than others, especially those where city-sponsored events took place in collaboration with Community Partners. In particular, Brighton, Dorchester, Downtown, and East Boston all showed high levels of participation for both Idea Collection and Voting; these neighborhoods all hosted city-sponsored events such as Idea Collection Workshops and/or Visioning Forums.

For a detailed breakdown of participation by neighborhood, see [Appendix B1](#). For locations of city-sponsored events, see [Appendix B2](#).

*“I think that Ideas in Action went very well, everyone had something to speak on based off their neighborhoods. It was good seeing everyone connect”*

- *Ideas in Action* participant

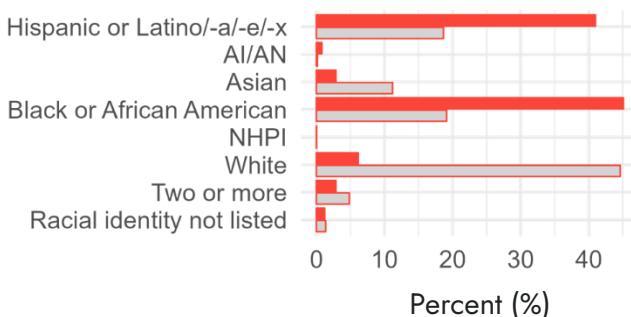
**(Source:** Idea Collection Workshop survey)

## Demographics

**Sub-finding 1-2:** *Ideas in Action* engaged many demographic groups, especially those with historically excluded or underrepresented identities.

Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums engaged a greater share of residents that identified as Latinx and Black, reported lower incomes, and were younger and older, relative to their share of the Boston population. Figures 1 and 2 show race/ethnicity and income for Workshops and Visioning Forums, respectively, as examples of participation by demographics for these two phases. For a detailed breakdown of demographic data by phase (race/ethnicity, income, age, and immigrant identity), see [Appendix B3](#).

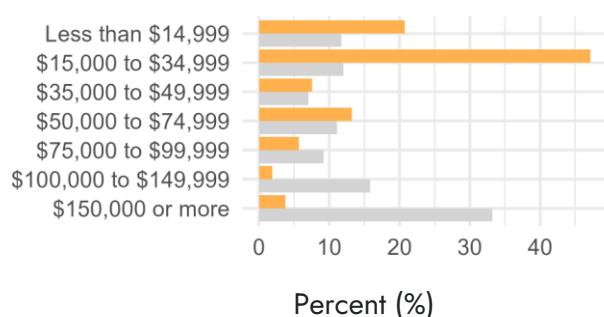
**Figure 1.** Race/ethnicity of Idea Collection Workshop participants (red) relative to the Boston population (gray) (n=244).



**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

**Figure 2.** Reported household income of Visioning Forum participants (orange) relative to the Boston population (gray) (n=74).



**Source:** Visioning Forum surveys (2024) + Boston 2020 census data

Due to low response rates from the Online PB Portal and Voting surveys, we know less about these participants. PB portal users and voters who responded to the survey:

- Reflected Boston's population in terms of race/ethnicity.
- Reported slightly higher incomes than residents who participated in workshops and forums, but still lower incomes relative to the Boston population.
- Were more middle-aged and older than the Boston population.

The most effective strategies for engaging residents with historically excluded or underrepresented identities appeared to be city-sponsored engagements with Community Partners, i.e., Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums. In fact, Community Partners intentionally focused on engaging residents with these identities and were successful in doing so.

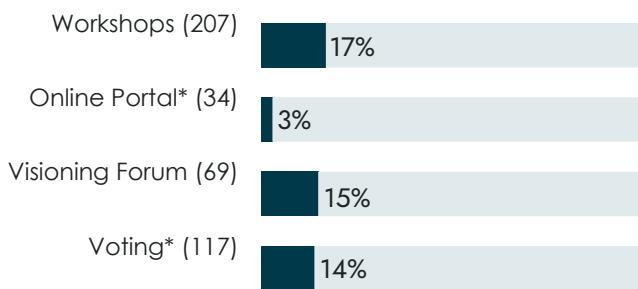
For a description of Community Partner outreach goals, see [Appendix B4](#).

## Civic participation

**Sub-finding 1-3:** *Ideas in Action* engaged residents who are already civically engaged. Only a small portion of survey respondents (less than 20% for each phase) were not civically engaged.

Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums engaged a greater share of residents that identified as Latinx and Black, reported lower incomes, and were younger and older, relative to their share of the Boston population. Figures 1 and 2 show race/ethnicity and income for Workshops and Visioning Forums, respectively, as examples of participation by demographics for these two phases. For a detailed breakdown of demographic data by phase (race/ethnicity, income, age, and immigrant identity), see [Appendix B3](#).

**Figure 3.** Proportions of *Ideas in Action* participants who were **not** civically engaged, displayed by phase (n).



**Notes:** Participants were considered to be not civically engaged if they selected “none of the above” when asked which civic activities they participated in during the past 12 months. These activities included calling 311, attending a public meeting, contacting a public official, advocating or campaigning, and working with others to fix a local problem.

\*Note that low response rates from the Online PB Portal and Voting surveys give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

**Source:** All surveys

One goal of *Ideas in Action* was to engage residents who cannot or do not participate in civic life.

Instead, survey responses show that those who participated in *Ideas in Action* are already civically engaged. Numerous factors may explain this:

1. OPB worked with Community Partners to engage residents in city-sponsored Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums, but engagement efforts may have been limited due to constraints in timelines. As such, it is likely that residents who participated were more likely to be those that were already civically engaged. With more lead time, Community Partners could have engaged residents who typically do not participate in civic life.
2. OPB used various marketing and communications strategies to raise public awareness of *Ideas in Action* across the city. Civically engaged residents may have been more likely to receive these communications (e.g., read local newspapers) and decide to participate.
3. Civically engaged residents are more likely to complete optional surveys. It is therefore likely that *Ideas in Action* engaged many residents who are not civically engaged, but if they didn’t respond to the survey, they are underrepresented in the sample.

## Evaluation Question 2: Impact

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

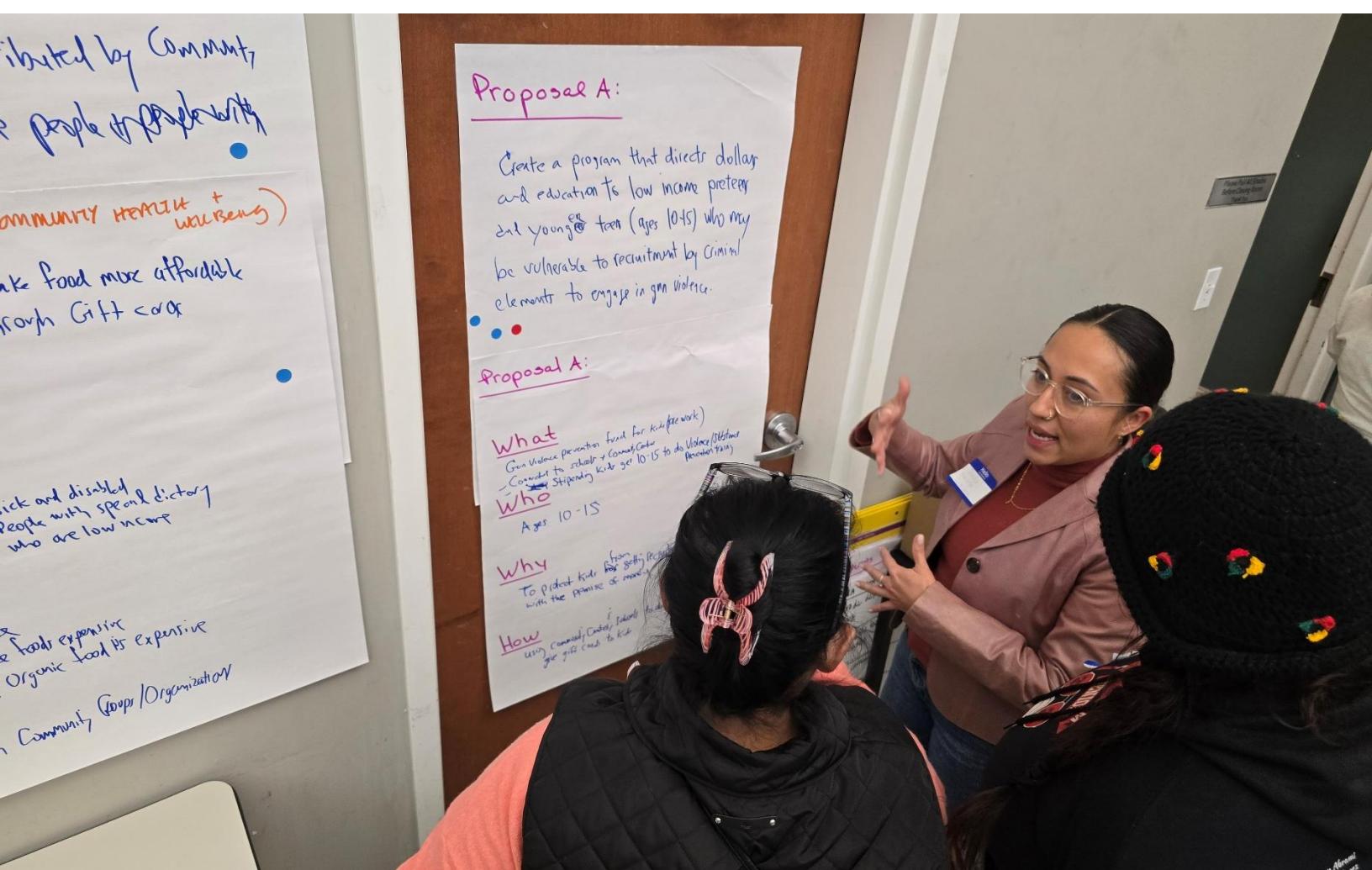
- Trust in city government
- Civic knowledge (especially budgeting)
- Interest in future civic engagement, including future cycles

## 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.

Visioning Forum, October 14, 2024  
hosted by Maverick Landing and NUBE;

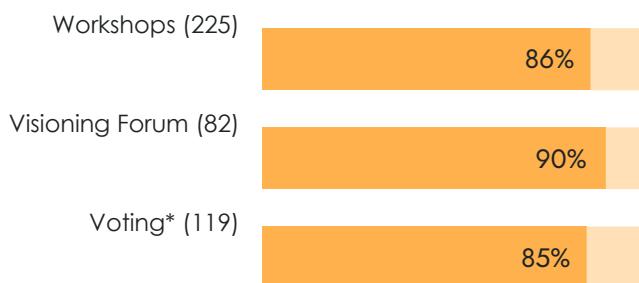
**Photo credit:** OPB



## Trust in city government

**Sub-finding 2-1:** Across all phases, participants felt that *Ideas in Action* allowed their voices to be heard by the City of Boston. This is an early indicator for trust in city government.

**Figure 4.** Proportions of *Ideas in Action* participants who agreed that “Participating allows my voice to be heard by the City of Boston,” displayed by phase (n).



\*Note that low response rates from the Voting survey give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

**Source:** Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting

For city-sponsored events in particular, participants felt heard thanks to the opportunity to speak with representatives of the City of Boston. However, some participants expressed skepticism that projects would be implemented as originally presented on the ballot. Ideas from participants who participated in Reflection Conversations to address these concerns included: 1) communicating updates about project implementation, and 2) inviting the public to give input on project implementation.

*“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 the generations to come.”*

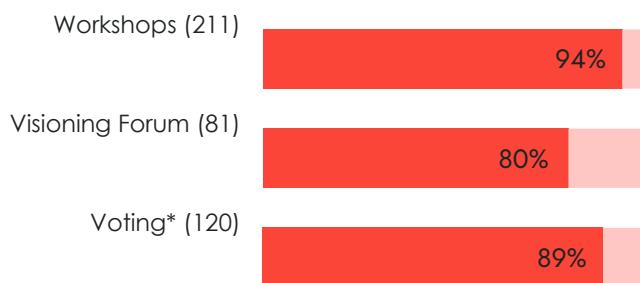
— *Ideas in Action* participant

**(Source:** Reflection Conversation)

## Civic knowledge, especially budgeting

**Sub-finding 2-2:** Participating in *Ideas in Action* boosted civic knowledge in different ways for each phase.

**Figure 5.** Proportions of *Ideas in Action* participants who indicated a civic knowledge benefit, displayed by phase (n).



**Notes:** Unique questions were asked for each phase:

*Workshops:* This workshop helped me consider other viewpoints about priorities for Boston residents

*Visioning Forum:* This event helped me better understand how Boston's budgeting process works

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

\*Note that low response rates from the Voting survey give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

**Source:** Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting

Gains in civic knowledge varied across each phase, given that each phase presented a different way to participate and learn. Idea Collection Workshops provided a hands-on opportunity for participants to hear each other's ideas and understand each other's viewpoints. Visioning Forums had a similar goal for participants to understand each other's viewpoints, and 96% of respondents agreed that the event was helpful in doing so (n=82). Visioning Forums had an additional goal of helping residents understand how the City's budgeting process worked, and we saw a strong majority agree that the event was successful in that regard, with room for improvement. Relative to the other phases, Voting presented a more limited opportunity for participants to actively increase their civic knowledge, besides seeing what projects were deemed important by other residents.

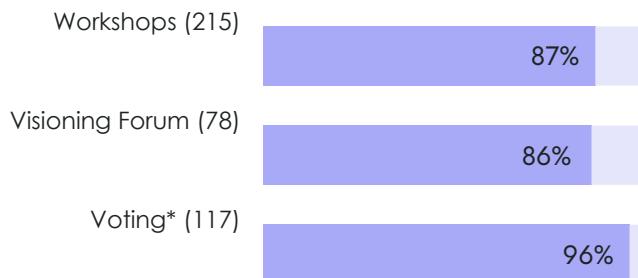
*“This event was great for engaging with city staff about ideas as to how to improve our community”*

-- *Ideas in Action* participant  
**(Source:** Visioning Forum survey)

## Interest in future civic engagement, including future PB cycles

**Sub-finding 2-3:** 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.

**Figure 6.** Proportions of *Ideas in Action* participants who plan to participate in the future, displayed by phase (n).



**Notes:** Unique versions were asked for each phase:

*Workshops:* I plan to participate in future phases...

*Visioning Forum:* I plan to vote in the final phase...

*Voting:* I plan to vote again... during the next cycle

\*Note that low response rates from the Voting survey give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

**Source:** Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting

Participants showed a high degree of interest in participating in *Ideas in Action* in the future in general. In fact, 72% of Workshop participants said they plan to submit additional ideas during the current cycle (n=210), suggesting that Workshops were effective in motivating participants to stay involved even after Workshops were over. However, only 21% of Voters said they planned to submit ideas during the next cycle (n=121). This lower rate may be because some voters prefer voting on proposals that are already developed, instead of creating their own ideas, or because, as numerous voters explained in their survey responses, they were unaware of the opportunity to submit ideas during the current cycle.

*"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."*

- *Ideas in Action* participant

**(Source:** Reflection Conversation)

## Evaluation Question 3: Process

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?

## Finding 3

The process used in *Ideas in Action*'s pilot year combined 1) high-touch strategies with Community Partners aimed at engaging priority populations; and 2) marketing and communications strategies aimed at engaging residents throughout Boston, especially historically excluded Boston residents. These strategies, combined with independent efforts from residents and community organizations, were successful at boosting participation in *Ideas in Action*. The External Oversight Board and numerous City of Boston staff played key roles in supporting implementation and ensuring a successful launch of the new office and initiative. Ultimately, the process effectively solicited ideas from residents, developed proposals that aligned with feasibility and equity criteria, and selected winning projects through a public vote. Residents expressed enthusiasm about the process overall. Numerous opportunities to improve the process are detailed in this section and in the [Recommendations section](#) of this report.

Findings for Evaluation Question 3 are further elaborated on through the following topics:

1. The participant experience
2. High-touch engagement strategies
3. Marketing strategies
4. The External Oversight Board and independent efforts from residents and community organizations
5. Involvement of City of Boston staff

## The participant experience

**Sub-finding 3-1:** Residents expressed enthusiasm about *Ideas in Action* and felt that participating was important, easy, and straightforward. Residents offered ideas to improve logistical or technical aspects of each phase.

**Figure 7.** Net Promoter Scores (NPS) for each phase (n).

Net Promoter Score (n)	
Workshops (144)	50
Forums (80)	50
Voting* (121)	67.75

NPS is calculated by taking the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed that they would recommend that particular phase of *Ideas in Action* to other Boston residents ("promoters") and subtracting the percentage of respondents who were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed ("detractors").

\*Note that low response rates from the Voting survey give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

**Source:** Surveys for Workshops, Visioning Forums, and Voting

Residents consistently shared enthusiasm about *Ideas in Action*, as evidenced by high Net Promoter Scores across all three phases (scores above 44-50 are generally considered excellent). Themes from open response survey questions and the Resident Reflection Conversations demonstrated a high degree of public support. For example, one voter shared through the online survey, "I love the idea of making City Hall more accessible to great ideas from the community! Cheers Boston!"

Residents shared ideas about how the process could be improved, from their perspectives.

1. Idea Collection:
  - a. Continue hosting gathering so that residents can brainstorm and share ideas together
  - b. Consider usability of the online map and how it might encourage place-specific versus city-wide ideas
2. Visioning Forums:
  - a. Improve translations of ideas into languages other than English
  - b. Include a process checklist and more context on feasibility
  - c. Have City staff from relevant departments sort through ideas first
  - d. Ensure in-person venues are physically comfortable and that participant voices are heard
3. Voting:
  - a. Improve accessibility through community events, partnering with community organizations, and in-person voting
  - b. Provide more context or details about proposals, especially how they relate to existing projects
4. Overall:
  - a. Increase visibility and awareness of *Ideas in Action* and the ways residents can participate in each phase, using social media, public transportation ads, local news, mailers, library, and schools
  - b. Create more of a throughline between phases, so that participants are informed how *Ideas in Action* is progressing, and invited to participate in subsequent parts of the process.
  - c. Increase the overall size of the budget so as to fund more projects

*“I was happy Boston did this sort of initiative, and that we were all able to participate in it by giving our own input first, you know, things that we wanted to see happen. I think it was just a wonderful opportunity for everyone within Boston to be able to just voice their concerns and their needs.”*

– *Ideas in Action* participant  
(Source: Reflection Conversation)



Dorchester Visioning Forum, October 30, 2024, hosted by Center for Teen Empowerment

**Photo credit:** OPB

## High-touch engagement strategies

**Sub-finding 3-2:** City-sponsored events with Community Partners (i.e., Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums) were effective at engaging priority populations and elevating resident voice. Community Partners valued the high touch support, training, materials (including translations), and financial support provided by OPB. High-touch strategies were time-intensive for OPB and required flexibility for managing staff capacity.

As demonstrated in findings for Evaluation Question 1 (“Who participated, and how?”), Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums engaged Boston residents with historically excluded or underrepresented identities and took place in historically underserved neighborhoods such as Dorchester and East Boston.

By the numbers, these City-sponsored events with Community Partners engaged ~560 residents in 19 Idea Collection Workshops (~400 participated across 14 in-person workshops and ~160 participated across five online workshops) and ~110 residents across three Visioning Forums.

City-sponsored events were high-touch in that they brought residents directly and intimately into the process and provided a chance for residents to speak with each other; with staff from Community Partner organizations, City of Boston departments, and OPB; and with External Oversight Board members. Events were also high-touch in that they involved close coordination between OPB and Community Partners for scheduling and logistics; food, interpretation, and accommodations; printed materials; and training and facilitation. For Idea Collection Workshops, OPB developed facilitation materials (moderator guides, slideshows, participant briefings and worksheets, and an interactive card game to support table conversations), provided training for Community Partners in advance, and was responsive for questions and troubleshooting. Facilitation materials were developed in partnership with

Northeastern Center for Design. For Visioning Forums, OPB similarly developed facilitation materials (agendas, participant sheets, community priorities booklets with sorted ideas), provided training, and was responsive for questions and troubleshooting. OPB also oriented City staff from relevant departments about what to expect and included staff from the Office of Budget Management in the opening presentation.

### Idea Collection Workshops: a closer look

#### *Outreach*

Community Partners used a range of outreach strategies to engage residents, including in-person communications, calls and text messages, email and social media, and event flyers. Some hosts incorporated workshops into existing programming.

#### *Hosting*

Community Partners leveraged their organizational expertise to customize workshop agendas and materials for their specific audiences, for example by modifying or omitting the slideshow or changing the structure of table conversations. For a full list of customizations, see [Appendix B5](#). Based on survey feedback and workshop observations, participants especially appreciated the opportunity to discuss ideas in depth with other residents and representatives from community organizations and OPB. During online workshops in particular, participants frequently used the chat feature to share resources or solutions to address concerns that other residents had shared.

*Reflections*

Community Partners felt OPB staff were accessible, responsive, and helpful. They shared appreciation that OPB staff and External Oversight Board members attended workshops, and that Community Partners had a direct opportunity to learn more about the interests and needs of the communities they serve. All Community Partners expressed an interest in staying involved in *Ideas in Action*, though many shared concerns about balancing collaboration with other priorities and limited staff capacity.

Community Partners shared recommendations for improving Idea Collection Workshops in the future. These are:

- Continue investing in relationships with community organizations
- Continue leveraging organizational expertise in community engagement; create flexibility for how organizations engage residents as alternatives to the pilot year workshop structure (e.g., door knocking, phone calls, tabling at events, pop up events)
- Start workshop planning and outreach earlier; continue to keep organizations informed about *Ideas in Action* throughout the process
- Expand training for Community Partners; consider creating videos for those who cannot attend trainings and/or for other organizations seeking to host workshops; ensure facilitators are prepared to support participants using the Online PB Portal
- Improve (and reduce!) materials and support flexible public use; continue providing outreach materials in multiple languages

**Visioning Forums: a closer look***Outreach*

Community Partners use a range of outreach strategies to engage residents, primarily focusing on those that had participated in Idea Collection Workshops over the summer. Outreach approaches included emails and texts, and phone banking. Efforts at re-engagement were successful: 81% of Visioning Forum participants said they had participated in an earlier part of *Ideas in Action*, for example, by submitting an idea, attending an Idea Collection Workshop, or attending an External Oversight Board meeting (n=73).

*Hosting*

Community Partners provided accommodations and served as a trusted liaison for Visioning Forums. After a presentation from OPB, Community Partner facilitators led small group reviews of ideas, sorted by subtopic, and worked with participants to draft feasible and equitable proposals. Based on survey feedback and forum observations, participants generally found forums to be enjoyable and appreciated the opportunity to discuss ideas and proposals with other residents and with departmental staff.

*Reflections*

Hosts appreciated OPB's responsiveness, flexibility, and commitment to including residents and community organizations throughout *Ideas in Action*. All Community Partners expressed an interest in staying involved, for example by helping with voting outreach and hosting Idea Collection Workshops or Visioning Forums again in future cycles.

The primary critique of Visioning Forums from all involved was that they had an ambitious agenda and felt rushed. Regardless, all three Forums achieved their goals of drafting project proposals.

Host organizations shared ideas for improvement.

- Hold training sessions further in advance so facilitators can build their understanding of the process
- Filter ideas for feasibility so participants don't get stuck or overwhelmed by the details
- More time and/or sessions so participants can better discuss, synthesize, and draft proposals; provide fewer ideas for participants to process at a time
- Rethink how participants and City staff prepare for forums so as to have more productive discussions about proposal feasibility and equity considerations

*“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.”*

— Visioning Forum host

**(Source:** Community Partner debrief)

During quarterly OPB retrospectives, staff shared that it was challenging to implement the high-touch components of *Ideas in Action* due to limited capacity. Because each component involved creating new infrastructure and workflows, the work often took more time than expected. However, OPB made adjustments as needed in order to accomplish the goals of *Ideas in Action*. For example, OPB originally planned to host five Visioning Forums, but ultimately decided to host three.

## Marketing strategies

**Sub-finding 3-3:** Communications, especially through city channels, appeared helpful for increasing idea submissions and votes. Residents commonly shared a desire for *Ideas in Action* to have more visibility.

Communications about *Ideas in Action* occurred through 1) ASG, the marketing agency contracted by OPB; 2) official City of Boston communications channels; 3) efforts from External Oversight Board members, community organizations, and local media; and 4) word of mouth.

Marketing activities led by ASG had a campaign goal to create awareness for *Ideas in Action* and promote idea submission and voting amongst historically excluded Boston residents. Strategies across the two phases included advertising and earning media in trusted traditional and ethnic media including digital and paper news outlets, radio, and social media. Key metrics from ASG's campaign include over 3.5 million impressions (times users saw content), nearly 20 thousand digital clicks (times users clicked on content), over 750 radio spots, and 10 press placements and interview opportunities.

OPB leveraged city channels to publicize *Ideas in Action* as well. For example, during the Voting phase, OPB coordinated with the Mayor's Office on content for social media posts on the City's account, as well as the video from Mayor Wu encouraging residents to vote. OPB also worked with the Office of Neighborhood Services and other departments to promote voting in their newsletters, social media, and city-wide billboard advertising.

While it is beyond the scope of this evaluation to document the activities of External Oversight Board members, community organizations, local media outlets, or word-of-mouth promotion, we know that these efforts occurred and that OPB provided support and materials upon request to aid in outreach and engagement.

Data is not available to fully tease apart the effectiveness of these various strategies. Here's what we do know:

- Idea submissions and votes appeared to increase along with an accumulation of marketing activities.
- Residents who submitted ideas in the Online PB Portal\* and that voted online\* shared that they heard about *Ideas in Action* primarily through community organizations (26% and 30%, respectively), City of Boston newsletters, events, or public officials (29% and 24%, respectively), and social media (26% and 21%, respectively). For a detailed breakdown about how participants heard about *Ideas in Action* for these two phases, see [Appendix B6](#).

\*Note that low response rates from the Online PB Portal and Voting surveys give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

Despite the efforts described above, participants commonly expressed a desire for *Ideas in Action* to have greater visibility. One participant during a Reflection Conversation said, “*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.*”

Recommendations from ASG follow this theme and are reproduced below:

- Launch campaigns earlier to allow for a longer period of time to share messaging
- Launch paid media campaign across numerous diverse media channels and outdoor placements to reach people where they are; explore paid opportunities such as podcasts, morning shows, and radio interviews to maximize reach with captive audiences
- Place greater emphasis on digital ads, given their ability to yield direct web clicks and drive participation

## The External Oversight Board and independent efforts from residents and community organizations

**Sub-finding 3-4:** The External Oversight Board served as a useful sounding board for implementation and helped hold and navigate multiple perspectives from the City of Boston, from advocates, and from the public. Some board members felt they could have benefitted from more clarity upfront about their expectations and how they would contribute to the process. Outside of formal city efforts, residents, community organizations, and advocates promoted *Ideas in Action* through word of mouth, social media, and organized campaigns. These efforts were effective in engaging residents in the process.

External Oversight Board members felt they played an important role in providing feedback to OPB throughout the process, and appreciated OPB's responsiveness to their input. Because board members were able to follow *Ideas in Action* proceedings closely, and because some members had familiarity working with or for the City of Boston, they could appreciate tradeoffs and understand challenging decisions that OPB needed to make in order to balance perspectives from the City of Boston, from advocates, and from the public.

Some board members wished to have more clarity about expectations upfront in terms of time commitment. In winter 2024, board members met weekly to create the Rulebook, for example, and then tapered to bi-weekly, then monthly, over time. Indeed, throughout the course of the pilot year, board membership decreased from nine members to six. These board members' departures reflected a mix of personal circumstances and shifts in individual priorities. Board members also wished for more clarity around how they could contribute to the process in terms of decision-making power. OPB has since worked to address these concerns through communications to the board and individual outreach.

Residents, community organizations, and advocates also promoted *Ideas in Action* and encouraged participation. While this evaluation focuses on OPB operations and strategy, external efforts were an important part of what made *Ideas in Action* a success.

During the Idea Collection phase (July 1 - August 15), community organizations hosted their own workshops and encouraged residents to submit ideas during existing community events and meetings. For example, Center for Economic Democracy (CED), on behalf of the Better Budget Alliance (BBA), worked with six organizations and organized or attended 11 events to engage upwards of 465 residents in submitting ideas and spread awareness about *Ideas in Action* to over 200 residents.

Notably, OPB opened the Online PB Portal early so that youth could submit ideas during a June 27 BBA Workshop in Roxbury that included 30 participants. During the Voting phase (January 15 - February 15), CED, on behalf of the BBA, worked with 15 organizations to directly engage voters and/or spread the word about voting through newsletters, text databases, social media, flyers, and during meetings. Direct voter outreach efforts reached upwards of 450 residents. See [Appendix B7](#) for an itemized list of activities, courtesy of the BBA.

## Involvelement of City of Boston staff

**Sub-finding 3-4:** Staff in over a dozen City of Boston departments played critical roles in supporting OPB as a new office and ensuring a successful launch of *Ideas in Action*. Staff appreciated how OPB involved them in the process and felt well supported. In future cycles, staff look forward to staying involved, having more lead time to collaborate, and seeing resident ideas gain greater visibility.

City of Boston staff across 24 departments played critical roles in ensuring a successful pilot year of *Ideas in Action*. Staff across these departments supported the development of OPB as a new office; helped raise awareness of *Ideas in Action* and encourage public participation during the Idea Collection and Voting phases; and attended Visioning Forums and contributed to Proposal Development. See [Appendix B8](#) for a complete list of City departments and their roles in *Ideas in Action*.

**Table 2.** City of Boston staff (n=6) provided feedback about their experience collaborating with OPB on *Ideas in Action*. Open responses were coded thematically.

Theme	# of staff who mentioned theme	Representative quote
Appreciation for how OPB involved City staff in various parts of the process	6	<i>"[OPB Director] Renato and his team are excellent collaborative partners."</i>
OPB communicated well and were well-organized	3	<i>"Excellent ongoing communication with [the] team, clear and measured decision-making processes."</i>
General enthusiasm and sense that the overall process was successful	3	<i>"The program was well marketed and the tech was all on point. Very smooth, well built, and easy to use."</i>
Uplift resident priorities in a useful way by sharing with departments	2	<i>"I appreciate OPB's focus on making sure that the submissions were easily available to internal department staff as well - this is a very rich data source of what residents would like to see change about the City!"</i>

**Source:** City Staff feedback forms

City staff also shared ideas about how the process could be improved, from their perspectives.

- Outline processes and expectations earlier in the process and with more clarity
- Involve departmental staff in feasibility checks before including residents
- For idea sorting, consider re-using categories from the pilot year rather than creating new categories from scratch

## Evaluation Question 4: Equity

Is *Ideas in Action* equitably distributing resources?

- Were more resources devoted toward engaging priority populations?
- Will selected projects serve priority populations?

## Finding 4

OPB made significant efforts to equitably distribute resources through the *Ideas in Action* process. Substantial resources were devoted toward engaging priority populations through 1) a strategic focus on city-sponsored events with Community Partners; and 2) marketing strategies focused on historically excluded Boston residents. All six selected projects explicitly center the needs of priority populations, especially youth, residents with limited or inconsistent access to nutritious food, and areas with high residential density or transit needs. In addition, OPB embedded principles into each phase of *Ideas in Action* and contracted with vendors that are primarily minority-owned and women-owned businesses.

Idea Collection Workshop,  
July 13, 2024 hosted by  
Maverick Landing and NUBE;  
**Photo credit:** OPB



## Engaging Priority Populations

**Sub-finding 4-1:** Substantial resources were devoted toward engaging priority populations through 1) a strategic focus on city-sponsored events with Community Partners; and 2) marketing strategies focused on historically excluded Boston residents.

OPB contracted with nine Community Partners during the Idea Collection phase to host 19 workshops, and four Community Partners during the Visioning Forum phase. Each Community Partner focused on engaging different priority populations as noted in [Appendix B4](#). OPB staff invested considerable time toward building trusting relationships with each Community Partner and worked to provide them with sufficient support and resources to host their events successfully.

Beyond the Community Partners strategy OPB provided online opportunities for Boston residents to engage in *Ideas in Action*. During Idea Collection, residents could submit ideas through the Online PB Portal or call a multilingual PB Phone Line. During the Visioning Forum phase, residents could provide online public comment feedback on draft proposals. And during the Voting phase, residents could vote online.

OPB also provided in-person opportunities for residents to engage in *Ideas in Action* beyond Idea Collection Workshops and Visioning Forums. During the Idea Collection phase, residents could submit ideas through PB Corners at City Hall and Boston Public Library Branches. And during the Voting phase, residents could vote in-person voting at City Hall, assisted by Age Strong volunteers. OPB put additional effort into engaging residents 1) at Boston Public Libraries, by hosting “office hours” at the East Boston, Roxbury, Dudley Square, Copley, Brighton, and Chinatown branches; and 2) through the Boston Public Schools, by facilitating voting among 6th to 12th grade social studies classrooms.

In terms of marketing, OPB and their marketing vendor ASG secured earned media and radio spots in key neighborhood newspapers and ethnic media outlets, covering six languages. These were:

- Dorchester Reporter (English)
- East Boston Times (English)
- SAMPAN (Chinese)
- El Mundo (Spanish)
- Mega 96.5 (Spanish)
- TNT Radio (Vietnamese)
- Radio Concorde (Haitian Creole)
- Planet Compas (Haitian Creole)
- Radio Tele Boston (Haitian Creole)
- Insuperavel (Brazilian Portuguese)
- Show do Leandrino (Brazilian Portuguese)
- Brazilian Magazine (Brazilian Portuguese)

All online interfaces (the Online PB Portal and the voting platform) were also available in seven languages (Cape Verdean Creole, Chinese, English, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Spanish, and Vietnamese), and interpretation and materials were provided for all in-person events.

## Beneficiaries of Selected Projects

**Sub-finding 4-2:** All six selected projects explicitly center the needs of priority populations, especially youth, residents with limited or inconsistent access to nutritious food, and areas with high residential density or transit needs.

Project Name	Funding	Intended population served
Expand Access to Fresh Foods in Boston	\$400,000	Residents facing food insecurity
Rat Prevention Initiatives in Dense Residential Areas	\$500,000	High-density residential areas
Programs to Support Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Youth	\$250,000	Youth ages 14-21 who are formerly or currently incarcerated
Rental Assistance for Boston Youth Ages 16-24	\$200,000	Residents between the ages of 16-24 [in need of housing stabilization]
Support Community Gardens in Boston's Neighborhoods with Limited Affordable Food Access	\$500,000	Areas where people have limited access to affordable, nutritious food.
Install Benches at High Ridership Public Transit Bus Stops in Boston	\$150,000	High-ridership bus stops across the City [prioritizing] neighborhoods with the greatest need... while ensuring accessibility for those who may have difficulty standing

During Visioning Forums and Voting, we asked participants in surveys if they felt that *Ideas in Action* had the ability to address inequities in the community and to make the community better. Strong majorities agreed with both questions. Among Visioning Forum participants, 88% agreed that *Ideas in Action* has the ability to address inequities in the community and 89% agreed that *Ideas in Action* has the ability to make the community better (n=81, 80); for voters\*, these numbers were 77% and 90%, respectively (n=121, 121).

\*Note that low response rates from the Voting survey give us lower confidence that these responses are representative.

We asked residents who participated in multiple phases of *Ideas in Action* how they felt about the selected projects (Reflection Conversations, n=13). Some were disappointed that the projects they had worked on during Visioning Forums and voted for did not win. Others were happy to see a democratic process take place and to learn what other residents cared about. Others wished for more details about what the projects would entail, how they would be implemented, and what opportunities there may be for continued public input. In general however, residents took a long view to process and looked forward to future cycles of *Ideas in Action*, which they expected would only improve in its quality of implementation and rate of public participation.

*“I did benefit personally if only knowing that the list of winners are important to others; as they are to me... Even though I didn't vote for them, it's good to know that these issues are of concern and important enough in our city to be brought to Our City's attention.”*

*Ideas in Action* participant

**(Source:** Reflection Conversation)

*“I'm not disappointed in this list [of winning projects]. You know, this is just one phase... but the fact that the City is taking a poll, and it's about who voted for what, so we need to get more people out there voting. When you go to a meeting that's about a budget, bring along a friend or two.”*

*Ideas in Action* participant

**(Source:** Reflection Conversation)

## Embedding Equity into Process and Operations

**Sub-finding 43:** OPB embedded equity principles into each phase of *Ideas in Action* and contracted with vendors that are primarily minority-owned and women-owned businesses.

OPB researched best practices and developed an equity framework tailored to the unique context of Boston. With approval from the Board, this framework was formally integrated into the Rulebook, which outlines the approach and includes an Equity Statement, Equity Goals, and Equity Guidelines. OPB aimed to embed this framework into every phase of *Ideas in Action* and these guidelines were operationalized in each phase in different ways. During Idea Collection, Community Partners were selected to ensure representation of priority populations. In addition, the Idea Collection form asked how project ideas might positively impact the community and/or advance social and racial equity. During the Visioning Forums, participants identified a short list of resident proposed project ideas and developed them into project proposals by utilizing OPB's equity scoring rubric. The rubric guided participants in assessing which projects may address known inequities in communities that would benefit all Boston residents, including priority populations. During the Voting phase, equity guidelines informed how OPB prioritized marketing efforts and library "office hours." And finally, for the evaluation, equity guidelines shaped which evaluation questions were asked and informed data collection methods so as to prioritize learning from and about priority populations while minimizing data collection burden.

Following the City of Boston's [Equitable Procurement Goals](#), OPB contracted with a majority of vendors (4 out of 7) that are minority-owned and women-owned enterprises. These were: ASG (communications), Data+Soul Research (evaluation), Poe Public (Idea Submission Portal), and Sylvia Stewart (Rulebook design). The three vendors that did not meet these criteria were Northeastern Center for Design (public engagement and workshop facilitation, Black Math (branding and design) and Decision 21 (voting platform).

# Recommendations

## Overall Recommendations

- 1. Continue and expand partnerships with community organizations to ensure representation of historically excluded or underrepresented groups and historically underserved neighborhoods in Boston.**  
Re-engage organizations from pilot year and continue engaging new organizations throughout and across phases within the cycle. Prioritize partnerships that will engage residents who are not otherwise civically engaged.
- 2. Increase visibility and awareness of *Ideas in Action* and the ways residents can participate.** Launch media campaign across media channels and outdoor placements to reach people where they are (e.g., public transportation ads, businesses); explore opportunities such as podcasts, morning shows, and radio interviews to maximize reach with captive audiences. Place greater emphasis on digital ads and social media, given their ability to yield direct web clicks and drive participation. Launch campaigns earlier to allow for a longer period of time to share messaging. Prioritize tactics that will reach residents that are not otherwise civically engaged (e.g., high-volume public events, mailers, partnerships with libraries and schools).

- 3. Prioritize engagement of residents who are not otherwise civically engaged.** Set this goal as an explicit focus for Community Partners and marketing strategies. Initiating processes earlier will also help reach this population.
- 4. Increase OPB's capacity for implementation, especially working with Community Partners, supporting city-sponsored events, and implementing pilot year projects.** Boost staff capacity to collaborate with and support Community Partners in each phase of *Ideas in Action*, and to promote, organize, facilitate event logistics. Implementing projects from the pilot year will demand new workflows and infrastructure, and is therefore likely to require additional capacity from OPB.
- 5. Initiate implementation processes and workflows earlier.** Launch workflows with Community Partners and City departmental staff earlier so as to ensure collaborators have the clarity, materials, and support they need to be successful. Initiating processes sooner with Community Partners will facilitate their engagement of residents who are not otherwise civically engaged. Keep departmental staff and Community Partners informed about *Ideas in Action* throughout the process. Continue supporting efforts from external groups to engage residents in *Ideas in Action* by providing materials for flexible public use.

**6. Explore ways to create more of a throughline between phases.** Keep participants informed how *Ideas in Action* is progressing and invite them directly to participate in subsequent parts of the process. Examples: invite idea submitters to attend Visioning Forums or submit public comment on proposals, invite public commenters to vote, notify voters and Visioning Forum attendees about winning projects, notify all participants about project implementation. Consider leveraging the OPB newsletter as a vehicle for carrying participants through the process, for example, by emphasizing newsletter subscription and increasing its visibility during each phase.

**7. Provide more clarity on External Oversight**

**Board commitment and contribution.**

Provide more details about board expectations throughout the cycle, including when members may be asked to attend events and/or review materials and proposals. Provide clearer guidelines about how board members contribute to the process in terms of decision-making power. Consider a more regular cadence of board meetings and include occasional in-person meetings to build stronger relationships among board members and with OPB staff.

**8. Embed the evaluation survey into the**

**Online PB Portal and voting platform.**

Response rates for the Online PB Portal and the voting platform were too low to make confident conclusions about participation, outcomes, and process feedback for those aspects of *Ideas in Action*. Embed evaluation survey questions into online platforms directly so that participants have the chance to answer questions as part of submitting ideas or voting, rather than through an optional survey at the end.

## Phase-specific Recommendations

### *Idea Collection*

**1. Continue leveraging organizational expertise in community engagement.**

Increase the number of “contract partnerships” available, perhaps through an application process. Create flexibility for how organizations engage residents as alternatives to the pilot year workshop structure (e.g., door knocking, phone calls, tabling at events, pop up events).

**2. Expand training for Community Partners.**

Consider creating instructional videos for those who cannot attend trainings and/or for other organizations seeking to host workshops; ensure facilitators are prepared to support participants using the Online PB Portal.

**3. Revamp materials and support flexible public use.**

Improve and reduce materials so that workshop facilitation is more manageable. Make materials more user friendly, accessible, and visual for participants. Continue providing workshop and outreach materials in multiple languages. Provide access to materials for any community organization to host idea collection events.

*Proposal Development*

- 4. Identify opportunities to simplify the Proposal Development phase.** This may include building in the option for idea feasibility checks prior to forums to help create a more manageable list of ideas for residents to review.
- 5. Build more time and scaffolding into Visioning Forums so residents can engage more deeply.** More time and support around understanding feasibility of projects will help residents provide more substantive input on equity and impact.
- 6. Improve training sessions for facilitators.** Provide training further in advance and increase the depth of the training so facilitators can build their understanding of the proposal development process.

*Voting:*

- 7. Increase resident engagement in voting by leveraging existing City events and partnering with community organizations.** Outreach to residents at existing events held by the City of Boston and community organizations. Partner with organizations for creative outreach strategies such as door knocking, phone calls, and tabling at events. Consider opportunities for organizations to support voting education and outreach.
- 8. Build on partnerships with Boston Public Schools and City Departments.** Consider ways that students can raise awareness of *Ideas in Action* with parents/guardians. Identify potential avenues with City Departments for engaging their constituencies (e.g. seniors, youth, formerly incarcerated individuals)

- 9. Revamp in-person voting at City Hall and Boston Public Libraries.** Consider tactics that may be more effective and/or fit within OPB staff capacity.

- 10. Provide more context about proposals on the ballot.** Provide links to additional background information about proposals, such as similar initiatives already in place, how proposals map onto identified needs within the City, and how implementation might unfold.

*Project Implementation*

- 11. Communicate widely about the implementation of winning projects.** Use the OPB newsletter and mass media to communicate updates about project implementation, so as to foster enthusiasm and trust for *Ideas in Action* and build momentum for future cycles.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for the Boston residents who participated in *Ideas in Action* and shared their reflections on the process and information about themselves. Thank you to the City of Boston staff, Community Partners, External Oversight Board members, and representatives of the Better Budget Alliance for providing perspectives and information along the way. Thank you also to the OPB staff for their collaboration on developing the evaluation framework, supporting data collection, and making sense of the data together. This report stands on the shoulders of many Participatory Budgeting reports before it, in particular *Youth Lead the Change: The City of Boston's Youth-Focused Participatory Budgeting Process Pilot Year Evaluation and Participatory Budgeting Evanston Final Report 2022/2023* and we are appreciative for the communities that have led the way in telling the story of participatory budgeting.

Congratulations to the City of Boston, all the residents that participated in *Ideas in Action*, and the movement that advocated for Participatory Budgeting in Boston in the first place. The pilot year is complete!

## About Data+Soul

Data+Soul (formerly known as MXM Research Group) is a research and evaluation consulting firm based in Boston that specializes in design, strategy, and evaluation for social impact. We support organizations to co-create solutions with the communities they serve by facilitating planning, data management, and organizational learning through evaluation. This project was led by Evan Kuras and Min Ma with support from Kayla Benitez Alvarez, Outlaw, Bobbie D Norman, Elizabeth Whitcher, and Andrés Castro Samayoa.

## Questions for the evaluation team?

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