

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING CITY OF BOSTON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process where community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. By engaging residents in this way, PB deepens democracy, builds stronger communities, and supports 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 cycles, the Office engages the public to elevate community-centered projects that advance social and racial equity.

By participating in **Ideas in Action**, Boston's PB process, Bostonians take an active role in identifying, shaping, and prioritizing project ideas to address local needs while helping inform the City's annual budget. Residents 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 project ideas to benefit the community.

OPB and its Board, on a yearly basis, update the "[Participatory Budgeting Rulebook](#)" to provide a framework and standard set of rules and operations for this initiative in Boston.

FIGURE 1: PB PROCESS TIMELINE AND DATES FOR IDEAS IN ACTION 2026 - 2027 CYCLE



WHEN AND HOW TO ENGAGE IN IDEAS IN ACTION



**IDEA
COLLECTION**
(Jul. 2026)

During the month of July, Boston residents have multiple avenues to share their project ideas with the Office of Participatory Budgeting. Ideas can be submitted through an online PB Portal, a PB phone line (**617-635-3059**), and in-person at City Hall and designated City spaces, such as certain BCYF Community Centers and Public Library

branches. Residents can also attend events hosted in partnership with community organizations across the City.

Project Eligibility and Criteria

Boston's 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 following eligibility criteria:

- Projects are limited to a one-time expense, and do not create new permanent positions;
- Project ideas may include programs and services, as well as funding for physical improvements, such as community enhancements on City-owned public property (benches, trash containers, green infrastructure, etc.)
 - ▶ Physical improvement 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.) Increase access to fresh and healthy food through community garden programs or community fridges administered by local organizations.

Examples of Ineligible Ideas: Paying for the salary of a public employee to provide services; Repairing or enhancing 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' Increase surveillance, policing, and/or other measures that negatively and disproportionately impact residents.





PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT
(Oct. - Dec. 2026)

Residents engage with the Office of Participatory Budgeting and relevant City Departments through a series of in-person forums to review, discuss, and assess the feasibility, equity, and impact of the ideas submitted over the summer. Once the ideas are prioritized, forum participants, with guidance from City staff, draft proposals for the PB ballot.

These draft proposals are shared online for a two-week public comment period in mid-November, before relevant City Departments and the Finance Cabinet conduct a final feasibility assessment and determine estimated costs for each project.



VOTING, PROJECT FUNDING, AND IMPLEMENTATION
(Jan 2027 -)

Residents vote for up to five (5) ballot proposals. Voting occurs online and in-person at City Hall and other designated spaces across the City. Ballot proposals with the most votes are awarded up to the funding cap for the particular PB cycle. The City and the Office of Participatory Budgeting will announce the winning proposals with the final voting results in late February. The implementation of

projects is monitored by OPB and the relevant City Departments.



CONTACT THE OFFICE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

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

Website: www.boston.gov/participate

Email: pb@boston.gov

