A People's Budget:

A Research and Evaluation Report on Participatory Budgeting in New York City

Executive Summary

Cycle 3

URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

By the Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center with the PBNYC Research Team

From September 2013 to April 2014, more than 18,000 New Yorkers in ten City Council districts came together for the third cycle of Participatory Budgeting in New York City. Through this community-driven budgeting process, they brainstormed ideas to improve their neighborhoods, volunteered to refine those ideas into project proposals for the district ballots, and, ultimately, came together to vote on which proposals should be funded. These New Yorkers exercised direct decision-making power to allocate over $14 million of City Council funds: an increase of nearly $9 million from the first cycle of Participatory Budgeting in New York.

Participatory Budgeting (PB) allows community members—instead of elected officials alone—to determine how public funds should be spent, from start to finish. Three years ago, in 2011-12, a historic pilot process in four City Council districts brought this unique form of direct democracy to the city. In 2012-13 the process doubled to eight districts, and in the third cycle it has grown to ten. This year 16,642 voters cast PB ballots, making this cycle the largest PB process in the United States.[i]

Annual PB Cycle

Neighborhood Assemblies
September–November

At public meetings in each district, the Council Members present information on the budget funds and residents brainstorm project ideas and select budget delegates.

1,661 people participated in 69 assemblies.

Evaluation, Implementation & Monitoring
April & onwards

Delegates and other participants evaluate the process, then continue to meet and oversee the implementation of projects.

Delegate Orientations
November

Delegates who volunteered to serve at assemblies learn about the budget process, project development and key spending areas, then form committees.

Research and Evaluation

Voting
April

Delegates present the final project proposals and residents vote on which projects to fund.

16,642 people voted citywide.

Delegate Meetings
November–March

Delegates, with support from Council Member staff, meet in committees to review project proposals, meet with city agency staff to discuss the eligibility of projects, and ultimately transform the community's initial project ideas into full proposals.
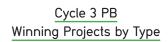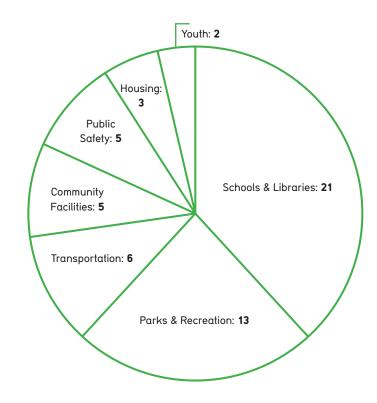
Project Expos
March

Delegates return to the community in another round of meetings to present draft project proposals.
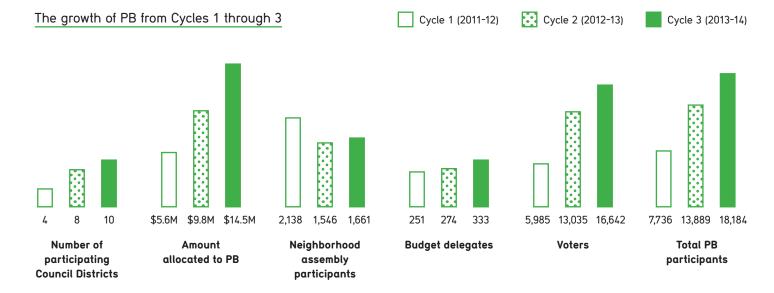
Total overall funds allocated to all winning projects: $14,532,785

Number of winning projects: 55

Average cost of a winning project: $264,232

Youth: **2**

Housing: **3**

Public Safety: **5**

Community Facilities: **5**

Schools & Libraries: **21**

Transportation: **6**

Parks & Recreation: **13**

The growth of PB from Cycles 1 through 3

☐ Cycle 1 (2011-12)   ▨ Cycle 2 (2012-13)   ■ Cycle 3 (2013-14)

	Number of participating Council Districts	Amount allocated to PB	Neighborhood assembly participants	Budget delegates	Voters	Total PB participants
Cycle 1	4	$5.6M	2,138	251	5,985	7,736
Cycle 2	8	$9.8M	1,546	274	13,035	13,889
Cycle 3	10	$14.5M	1,661	333	16,642	18,184

Participating City Council Districts

10 Council districts participated in this third cycle of PB in New York City. Districts 8 (Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, D), 23 (Mark Weprin, D), 31 (Donovan Richards, D), 32 (Eric Ulirch, R), 33 (Stephen Levin , D), 39 (Brad Lander, D), 44 (David Greenfield, D), 38 (Sara Gonzales, D; succeeded by Carlos Menchaca, D) and 45 (Jumaane D. Williams, D) took part in the full PB cycle. They were joined during the vote by District 5 (Ben Kallos, D).

PB voters in each of these districts selected up to five projects from their district's ballot. Across the city, 55 winning PB projects were selected by participating New Yorkers. Projects range from computer technology for senior centers to park improvements to playground upgrades at public housing developments. The partici-pating Council members will allocate $14,532,785 in capital discretionary funding to bring these projects to fruition: an increase of nearly $9 million from the first cycle of Participatory Budgeting in New York.

Who participated in the Cycle 3 PBNYC Vote (2013–14)?

- Two-thirds of PB voters were women. This is a larger share of women than the 2013 local elections (56%).
- 62% identify as a person of color, compared to 41% last cycle.
- Nearly half of voters over 25 (49%) had less than a Bachelor's degree, compared to 29% last cycle.
- Nearly half (49%) have household income below $50,000 compared to 32% last cycle. The Area Median Income is $63,000.
- 36% were born in a country other than the U.S., compared with 24% last cycle.
- 22% of centrally-counted ballots were cast in a language other than English.
- 69% have lived in their neighborhood for 8 or more years.

How is this different from previous cycles of PBNYC?

- Increased participation of people of color, low-income people, young people, women, people with limited English proficiency and people born outside of the U.S.

Research Methodology

- **Nearly 9,000 surveys:**

  - 1,096 from neighborhood assembly participants
  - 226 from budget delegates
  - 7,632 from voters

- **53 observations** of neighborhood assemblies

- **61 exit interviews** with PB voters

- **104 in-depth interviews** with past and current budget delegates; city agency representatives; and organizations and individuals working with immigrants, youth and public housing residents

- **Analysis of 12,613 PB ballots** which were counted centrally at the New York City Council offices

- **Background and secondary research** on the NYC budget, population demographics and voting patterns. Data sources include the census, the Voter Activation Network (VAN) and Catalist

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PB provides an entry point into civic engagement for people that have barriers to vote or are not active in their community.

- 51% of PB voters were not members of other civic or community organizations.
- 68% had never worked with others in their community to solve problems (outside of PB).
- More than one in five (22%) identified a barrier that makes them unable to vote in traditional elections, compared to 14% last cycle.
- 14% reported that they are not eligible to vote in traditional elections because they are not a U.S. citizen, compared to 5% last cycle.
- 6% of PB voters were between 16 and 17.
- 22% of ballots were cast in a language other than English.
  - In District 38, 65% of ballots were cast in a language other than English and 36% of PB voters were not U.S. Citizens.

PB participants learn about community needs.

- *"I was really able to see the needs [of] the community in a way I've never seen before…I didn't know how bad of an asthma cluster there was in public housing. I don't have kids so I don't know about needs at school. I don't have any relatives that live in senior housing so I didn't know about the issues they faced. So I got to learn about the needs of other populations in the district."*
—District 8, Budget Delegate Interviewee 2

PB participants gained an understanding of government and the work of people in government. For some, this resulted in having more respect for the job of elected officials.

- *"It makes me less likely to criticize and throw stones. It is easy to criticize the work that politicians do, but now I have a better sense of the…complex set of issues. I have more respect for that process. I'd be less quick to criticize until I know more."*
—District 39, Budget Delegate Interviewee 6

Community groups, schools and face-to-face interactions help to engage low-income people, people of color, those that are foreign born, with limited English proficiency and with barriers to voting.

- Across all demographic categories, word of mouth and family or friends were the methods by which the most people heard about PB.

- Of the people who heard about the vote through a school, 40% had a barrier to voting (compared with 22% of PB voters overall).
- Of the people who heard about the vote through a community group, 57% reported a household income below $50,000 (compared with 49% of PB voters overall).

Social media and online engagement strategies reached more upper income, white people with higher levels of education. Few low-income people, people of color or people with limited English proficiency heard about PB through these methods. Of people who learned about the vote online (through email, Facebook/Twitter, or other online engagement):

- 76% earned $50,000 or above (compared with 51% of PB voters overall).
- 69% were White (compared with 40% of PB voters).
- 96% listed English as their primary language (compared with 81% of PB voters overall).

Overall, projects related to schools and libraries were prioritized by PB voters.

- 80% of participants voted for a project related to a school or library. The second-highest category was parks and recreation (58%).
- When asked to choose which category of projects they voted for was most important to them, 46% of voters selected schools and libraries.[ii] The second most selected option was public safety (14%).

However, there were some district-specific and demographic differences in voter project priorities.

- In District 8 (East Harlem and South Bronx), 82% of people voted for a project related to housing. Notably, District 8 has the highest density of public housing in the city.
- 89% of PB voters in District 31 voted for a project related to youth, according to ballot data. A youth organizing group, Rockaway Youth Task Force, was one of the anchor community organizations in District 31.
- Of people who listed housing as the most important project they voted for, 89% were people of color (compared with 62% of PB voters overall).

Recommendations as PB in New York City Expands

In the upcoming cycle (2014-15), Participatory Budgeting in New York City will undergo a major expansion—more than doubling in size, from 10 participating Council members to 23.[iii] In addition, the PB process will, for the first time, be supported centrally by the City Council Speaker's office, with Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, one of the four Council members to pilot PB in the city, contributing resources and centralized coordination support. This upcoming expansion and the prospect of ongoing central support positions New York to become a leader in the implementation of PB processes in the United States. Recommendations—derived from researcher observation, feedback in interviews and surveys, and the work of the PBNYC steering committee—are offered. Specific recommendations are detailed in the report.

The major thematic categories are:

- Provide and sustain central resources sufficient to support and coordinate PB as it grows in NYC.
- Ensure that the PB process reaches, is accessible to, and promotes participation by traditionally disenfranchised New Yorkers.
- Make adjustments or additions to the existing process, to ensure that as many people as possible can contribute.
- Create tools and templates to standardize processes and centralize information.
- Promote a focus on equity and need.
- Encourage robust, consistent interaction between PB participants and government actors.
- Develop feedback loops about winning projects from past cycles to reduce frustration with project implementation.

Please see the report for a comprehensive list of recommendations.

i   "Real Money, Real Power: A Report on the First Five Years of the Participatory Budgeting Project." Participatory Budgeting Project. April, 2014. http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/PBP-5-Year-Report.pdf

ii Note that schools and libraries—as public institutions—were combined as a single answer option on the survey administered to voters, and are thus reported as a combined category throughout the report.

iii "Participatory Budgeting FAQ: Is my Council Member Participating?" New York City Council. Retrieved 8/12/204 http://council.nyc.gov/html/action/pb.shtml#cm

Steering Committee Members - 2013-2014

City Council Members
Council Member Ben Kallos, District 5
Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, District 8
Council Member Mark Weprin, District 23
Council Member Donovan Richards, District 31
Council Member Eric Ulrich, District 32
Council Member Stephen Levin, District 33
Council Member Carlos Menchaca, District 38
Council Member Sara M. Gonzalez, District 38 (former)
Council Member Brad Lander, District 39
Council Member David G. Greenfield, District 44
Council Member Jumaane D. Williams, District 45

Resource Persons and Organizations
Community Voices Heard
The Participatory Budgeting Project
Adhikaar
Arts & Democracy Project
BRIC
Brooklyn Food Coalition
Center for Urban Pedagogy
Chhaya Community Development Corporation
Common Cause New York
Community Development Project at the
  Urban Justice Center
Community Service Society
Desis Rising Up and Moving
Fifth Avenue Committee
Human Impacts Institute
The Laundromat Project

Lower East Side Ecology Center
New Immigrant Community Empowerment
New York Civic
New York Immigration Coalition
The New York World
New Yorkers for Parks
NYC Community Garden Coalition
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA
Pratt Institute
Project for Public Spaces
Public Agenda
Public Policy Lab
Right to the City Alliance
Transportation Alternatives
596 Acres
Celina Su, Brooklyn College
Ron Hayduk, Queens College

District Representatives
David Giordano, Children's Aid Society, District 8
Frank Toner, District 23
Patricia Kehoe, District 23
John Cori, District 32
Reverend Eleni Marudis, District 32
Benjamin Solotaire, District 33
Leah Hebert, District 38
Mamnunul Haq, District 39
Rachel Fine, District 39
Matt Green, District 39
Joan Bakiriddin, District 45
Hazel Martinez, District 45

About the Authors

The Community Development Project (CDP) at the Urban Justice Center strengthens the impact of grassroots organizations in New York City's low-income and other excluded communities. We partner with community organizations to win legal cases, publish community-driven reports, assist with the formation of new organizations and cooperatives, and provide technical and transactional assistance.

For more information about CDP please visit:
www.cdp-ny.org
www.researchfororganizing.org

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