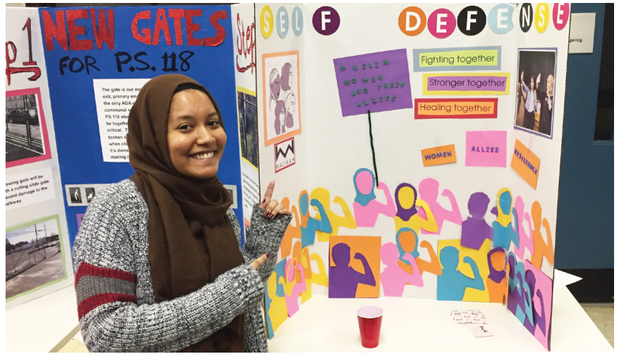
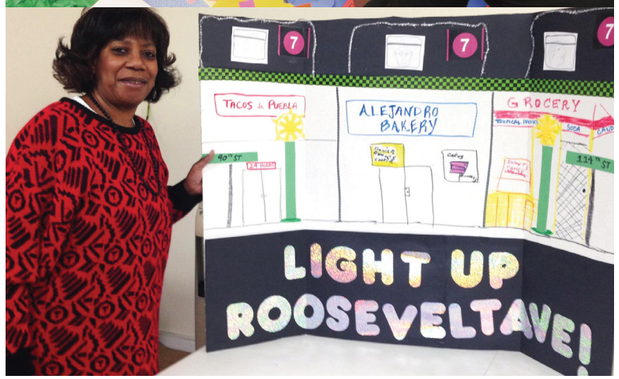


Arts + Participatory Budgeting





ARTS & DEMOCRACY

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT

ART WORKS. National Endowment for the Arts

NYC Cultural Affairs HECTOR



Arts + Participatory Budgeting

Adding arts throughout your participatory budgeting process can make it more fun, meaningful, and powerful. This brochure shares examples for incorporating arts as you brainstorm ideas, develop proposals, get out the vote, and fund winning projects.



Develop leaders

Include multiple generations

Collaborate with arts partners

Build community

Enjoy the process

Lift participant voices



Make PB more fun and engaging



Spark meaningful interactions

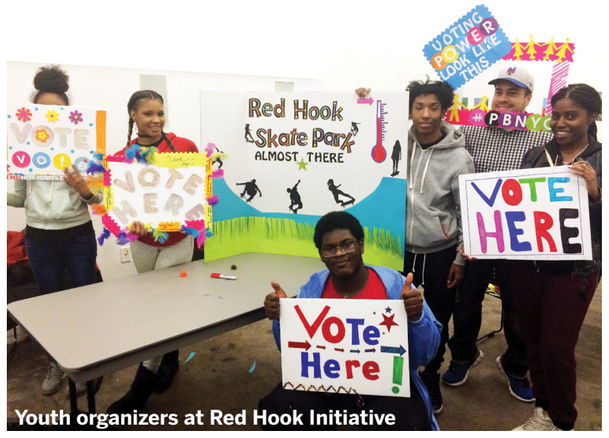
Imagine and create change

Improve deliberative decision-making

Participatory budgeting is a leap of imagination—art helps people make that leap!

"Participatory Budgeting, at its core, answers the question, 'How can we improve our home?' In order to do this you must simply engage a lot of people. Art has a language that can be universally understood. Through incredibly inclusive collaborations, artistic expression bridges the gap between people to identify what the





Youth organizers at Red Hook Initiative



"Through Participatory Budgeting, people pour their hearts and selves into thinking about how to make everyday places better, and arts and design are an essential part of making projects come alive. Using art and design, we can show projects in fun, creative, and soulful ways to reach and engage more people and make PB more inclusive and dynamic. Art is a special part of PB, and I encourage its increased incorporation throughout the process."
—Brad Lander, NYC Council Member



Boston VoteFest poster

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process where community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It involves gathering ideas for community improvements, researching and selecting projects for a ballot, and inviting the full community back to vote. Projects with the most votes get funded and implemented.

This brochure shares experiences from across the United States where Arts + PB has sparked leaps of imagination and created welcoming opportunities for all to participate. Arts + PB embraces the creativity and culture that is a powerful part of all of our communities. We hope to show that by involving the arts at all stages of the process we can further realize PB's vision of democracy and equity from the community up.



NYC District 3 PB Festival with Friends of the High Line

Collaborate with arts partners

Community cultural organizations make great partners. Local arts councils, theater companies, settlement houses, museums, public housing cultural centers, artist collectives, and arts schools all bring creative resources to the table. They can provide spaces for meetings, workshops, and festivals, and opportunities to collaborate with ongoing programs.

These organizations also can connect you with **artists**. Arts councils often keep registries of neighborhood artists—and artists may be looking for a chance to work in their local communities. Consider teaching artists, designers, media makers, and craftspeople who can help with everything from model making to video making and sign painting.

Young people bring great creativity, energy, and questioning minds to the process. You can engage them through school curricula, youth councils, employment programs, media programs, and by establishing youth-led PB committees. When integrated into sustained leadership programs, the PB process allows young people to connect their vision and imagination with civic engagement.

Make PB more fun and engaging

Graphics and logos



A consistent visual style and logo helps people identify, recognize, and understand all kinds of PB materials. In New York City, this Go Vote design by Eric Comstock was used on flyers, shirts, and tote bags.

Organize a silkscreen party

A highlight of the annual NYC celebration of PB volunteers is creating tote bags with local print shop Works in Progress. Volunteers and their families screen their own bags and use them to get out the vote. Bag designs are created each year by commissioned artists. The 2018 bag encouraged voting in English, Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and Bengali.

Use participatory theater to collect project ideas



To make idea collection more fun and inclusive, Theatre of the Oppressed NYC uses techniques like "forum theater" to free people's imaginations about changes they want to see in their communities.



Create media about PB and community projects





Creative media helps people understand PB, amplifies volunteer voices, engages youth, and gets out the vote. To get PB started where you live, a short video like Meerkat Media Collective's "Real Money, Real Power," commissioned by Participatory Budgeting Project, can explain the process in exciting ways and recruit supporters. In Denver, Warm Cookies of the Revolution created videos and art installations titled "This Machine Has a Soul!" about PB and how to get involved. In NYC, Arts & Democracy produced delegate videos conveying the passion and commitment of volunteers to promote their projects. PB hip hop videos use music to spread the word. Producing media offers opportunities to build skills. Hands-on DIY media workshops can teach participants how to interview, shoot effective phone videos, and develop social media strategies. Youth and community media groups can offer resources for training and production.

Document your PB process

To share experiences and expand conversations, create a poster, booklet, video, or animated GIF to tell your community's PB story from brainstorming to implementation. Show how the process worked, how ideas were selected, and how projects were developed. In NYC, students from International Community High School collaborated with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) and teaching artist Dillon de Give on "Common Cents," a project examining the participatory budgeting process.



"The arts really allow youth to shine, express themselves, and to push the boundaries of what is possible by articulating the city or neighborhood they wish for in new ways."
—Celina Su, urban studies professor

Improve deliberative decison-making



Make fliers with spirit

Students from local art and design high schools and colleges can sometimes receive academic credit for designing PB materials like this flier by Seneca College students in Toronto.

Hold a project expo

PB project expos are community celebrations where neighbors meet each other and learn about the projects on the ballot. Expos often look like science fairs, featuring posters illustrating the projects with drawings, written explanations, and photographs of existing conditions. People can chat with neighbors who identified and researched the projects, and decide which they want to support with a vote. When expos are held during voting, participants can learn about projects, visualize them, and vote right away.

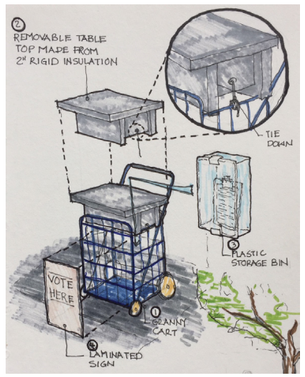
Prepare for the expo with a fun poster-making workshop. After the intense process of project development, multi-generational workshops build community through food, music, and creativity. Volunteers and other community members can collaborate with local artists, architects, design students, and cultural organizations to create project posters. After brainstorming images that best represent the project, people create storyboards and write headlines to attract voters' attention. Providing materials and artist support helps everyone express their creativity. You can also make posters to get out the vote, create "I voted" frames for social media, and decorate ballot boxes.

Celebrate voting

Celebrations and community events are fun, lift up local culture, and provide spaces for creative participation. Youth Lead the Change in Boston held VoteFest, where young people participated in spoken word, dance performances, DJing, and more. In NYC, the District 3 Festival with Friends of the High Line joined voting with Double Dutch, chalk drawing, and salsa lessons. In Cleveland, the Ballot Box Project's "Democracy on Parade" created a joyful procession to the polls including performances by local artists.





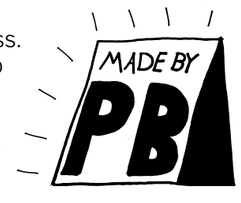


Bring voting to the people with a mobile cart

NYC architect and volunteer Jason Boutin used a grocery cart to make a mobile voting booth. The district's PB Youth Committee put it to good use canvassing the neighborhood for votes.

Commemorate and honor PB accomplishments

Once the voting is over, make PB's tangible impacts visible, both for community accountability and to keep people engaged in the process. Websites and newsletters can help track progress of funded projects. Walking tours, illustrated maps, and public markers can tell stories behind completed projects.







"At the beginning of the workshop, participants often say, 'I'm not very artistic' or 'I haven't done this since I was a kid.' They're nervous about making a poster that looks good and can effectively communicate their idea. I encourage them to just try things without worrying about getting it perfect, because as soon as they get into the material—the paper, letters, and shapes—you can see their creativity start to chug along. By the end of the workshop, people are saying, 'I never knew I could do this! I love it!'"
—Elizabeth Hamby, artist