Participatory Budget

A Participatory Budget is a participation method that allows citizens to propose and decide on projects to improve their neighbourhood, municipality, or city. A predefined public budget is made available to fund selected ideas. The method combines participation with tangible outcomes, enabling citizens to directly influence how public funds are invested in their community.

Participation Depth	Have a say
Project Phase	Project Planning
Goals	Decision-Making
Format	Analogue, Digital, Hybrid
Duration	Several Weeks, Several Months
Target Group	Directly Affected, Interested Public, Hard-to-Reach Groups, Organised Actors
Group Size	Large Group from 30
Characteristics	Structured, Activating

GOAL OF THE METHOD

The goal of a Participatory Budget is to actively involve citizens in shaping their neighbourhood, municipality, or city. Participants can submit their own project ideas and decide collectively which proposals should receive funding from the available budget.

PROCEDURE

Preparation

1. Define the budget and framework
At the beginning, clarify:

- How much funding is available?
- Who provides the budget?
- How often will the participatory budget take place?
- Which types of projects are eligible for funding?

Important:

Communicate the available budget and financial framework transparently from the very beginning.

2. Define the funding categories
It can be helpful to specify thematic areas, such as:

- public spaces

- mobility
- leisure
- environment
- neighbourhood development
- culture

It should also be clearly stated which types of proposals are not eligible.

A helpful guiding question is: *"Which projects can realistically be implemented at the municipal level?"*

3. Plan participation opportunities
Citizens should be able to submit ideas through various channels, for example:

- an online platform
- a submission box or postal mail
- municipal offices
- information stands
- participation events

The simpler the submission process, the more people are likely to participate.

4. Reach out to target groups
Particular attention should be given to involving people who rarely participate in public engagement processes.

Possible approaches include:

- outreach activities
- information stands in public spaces
- cooperation with local organisations
- visits to youth centres
- discussions in senior centres

Execution

1. Information and launch

At the beginning of the process, citizens are informed about:

- the timeline
- the available budget
- participation requirements
- selection criteria

Important:

Communication should be clear, transparent, and easy to understand.

2. Collect project ideas
Citizens submit their ideas through one or more available channels.

Providing multiple submission options helps increase participation across different target groups.

Helpful guiding questions include:

- "What would improve our neighbourhood?"
- "Which idea is currently missing?"
- "How should the available budget be used?"
- "Which project would benefit the greatest number of people?"

Avoid:

- overly complex application forms
- technical language
- unclear eligibility criteria

3. Review the proposals
Submitted ideas are assessed based on:

- responsibility and jurisdiction
- feasibility
- estimated costs
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legal requirements

Important:

Maintain transparency throughout the review process.

If proposals cannot be accepted, clearly explain the reasons.

4. Conduct the vote
Citizens decide which projects should receive funding.

Voting may take place through:

- online voting
- public voting events
- workshops

The selection process should be transparent, fair, and easy to understand.

5. Implement the projects
The selected projects are then implemented.

Depending on the model, implementation may be carried out by:

- the public administration
- citizens
- a partnership between citizens and the administration

Regular progress updates should be published throughout implementation.

Evaluation

1. Document the results
After the process, publish information such as:

- the number of submitted ideas
- the number of participants who voted
- the selected projects
- the allocated funding

- the implementation status

2. Evaluate the process
Helpful evaluation questions include:

- Which groups participated?
- Which groups were underrepresented?
- Which topics were most important?
- What barriers emerged during the process?

These insights can improve future participatory budgeting initiatives.

3. Provide feedback
Participants should be informed about:

- which projects were selected
- why certain proposals could not be implemented
- the current implementation status

Visible feedback strengthens trust in future participation processes.

Showing the tangible impact of citizens' ideas encourages continued engagement in future initiatives.

Source: https://partizipation.at/partizipation-anwenden/methoden/

WHEN USEFUL?

- citizens should develop their own ideas for improving their community
- local projects should become visible and be implemented directly
- participation should lead to concrete outcomes
- encouraging civic responsibility and engagement
- attracting new target groups to participation
- neighbourhood, municipal, or community development
- strengthening collaboration between the public administration and citizens

WHEN NOT USEFUL?

- no funding is available
- policymakers or the public administration are unwilling to implement the selected projects
- projects require very rapid implementation
- there is little or no previous experience with participatory processes

TIPS

- Communicate the available budget and selection criteria early.
- Keep the submission process as simple as possible.
- Offer both online and offline participation opportunities.
- Explain decisions transparently.
- Allow sufficient time to review submitted proposals.
- Regularly communicate the implementation progress.
- Actively involve underrepresented groups.
- Make successful projects highly visible.

NOT SUITABLE FOR

- situations where no funding is available
- projects without support from policymakers or the public administration
- processes lacking resources for proposal review and implementation
- situations with unclear rules or framework conditions
- contexts with little or no previous experience in participatory processes

View online: https://methoden.urbankit.de/en/methods/buerger-innenbudget