

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. Participatory Budgeting is a practice that can deepen democracy, build stronger communities, and support 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 PB cycles, the Office engages the public to elevate community-centered projects that advance social and racial equity.

Throughout Cycle Two of **Ideas in Action**, Boston's PB process, Bostonians will take an active role in identifying, shaping, and prioritizing project ideas to address local needs while helping inform the City's annual budget. Residents will 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 community-initiated project ideas.

For this first pilot year, OPB and its Board have created a "[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



WHEN AND HOW TO ENGAGE IN THE PB PROCESS!



**IDEA
COLLECTION**
(Jul. 2025)

Boston residents will have multiple avenues to share their project ideas with the Office of Participatory Budgeting. In July, the Ideas in Action will launch a city-wide Idea Collection Campaign accessible to all Boston residents. Ideas can be submitted through an online PB Portal, a PB phone line, in-person at Public Library branches and at City Hall, and at events hosted in partnership with community organizations.

Project Eligibility and Criteria

The 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 the following eligibility criteria:

- Projects are limited to a one-time expense, and do not create new permanent positions;
- Project proposals may include programs and services, as well as physical infrastructure; technological improvements, and community enhancements on City-owned public property.
 - ▶ Infrastructure 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. 2025)

OPB will host a series of forums for residents to engage with relevant City Departments to review, discuss, and assess the feasibility and impact of the submitted project ideas. Through this process, forum attendees will draft statements to define up to 15 ballot proposals. For residents who cannot attend these Forums, an online option will be available to provide feedback.

A PB ballot with up to 15 proposal statements drafted by residents will be finalized by OPB and the Board by reviewing and incorporating relevant online feedback. The Office and relevant City Departments will conduct a final feasibility assessment and determine estimated costs for each ballot proposal.



VOTING, PROJECT FUNDING, & IMPLEMENTATION (Jan. 2026 -)

Voting for Participatory Budgeting proposals will occur in-person and online. On the PB ballot, Boston residents 11 years of age (or in 6th grade) and older will be able to select five (5) out of up to 15 proposals, each with an estimated dollar amount. Proposals with the most votes will be awarded, up to the funding cap for the particular PB Cycle. The City and OPB will announce the winning proposals

with the final voting results. The implementation of projects will be monitored by OPB and the relevant City Departments.



CONTACT THE OFFICE OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

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

Website: www.boston.gov/participate

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