

City of Boston Office of Participatory Budgeting External Oversight Board Meeting

Thursday, September 17th, 2026

EOB members present:

Jim Kennedy, Marilyn Forman, Jarrett Wright, and Carla Stovell

OPB Staff present: Renato Castelo, Director, Office of Participatory Budgeting; Julia Morales, Community Partnerships & Project Coordinator; Tia Perkins, Community Engagement Fellow

Director Castelo provided an overview of the agenda and the proposed schedule for the next few Board meetings. Upcoming board meetings will include November 10, 2026 and mid-December. Previous meeting minutes will be reviewed and adopted at the following meetings pending quorum.

New members of the Participatory Budgeting team, Julia Morales and Tia Perkins, introduced themselves to the board. Mr. Castelo also announced other staffing updates, including Blanca Teixeira transitioning out of her role and beginning the hiring process for a new Finance and Operations Manager.

Mr. Castelo then shared an update on FY25 and FY26 cycles' winning projects. From FY25, three projects are completed and three are in progress and set to be completed shortly. From FY26, one project is completed, four are in progress, and three are still in the planning stage. Questions were posed by the board about creating a deadline for when City Departments must use their PB funds. Though it has not been a problem thus far, members were concerned about funds not being used up and being left dormant. Board member Wright recommended unfunding projects if funds are not spent within three years, and board member Kennedy recommended discussing possible processes with the City Auditor. Mr. Castelo will bring additional ideas about this to the next board meeting.

Mr. Castelo discussed where to find updates for winning projects, including on the website and newsletter. Projects completed by the time of the annual report will be included in the report.

The FY27 Idea Collection phase, conducted over the summer, was then recapped. Mr. Castelo shared that the Central Library had a table and ballot box for idea collection, and approximately

50 ideas were collected through that branch. Other branches did not have a ballot box, but shared information about participatory budgeting.

Director Castelo then shared a list of 17 community partners involved in this year's Idea Collection phase. Mr. Kennedy was curious about the recruitment process and how community partners were selected. Mr. Castelo shared that engagement with African American and veteran communities increased, and a focus has been placed on working with organizations that serve underrepresented populations and groups related to the mission of the participatory budgeting department. About 50% of the ideas collected this year were through community partners.

Mr. Castelo then shared some data on resident engagement during the Idea Collection phase from Data+Soul's research. Of those who submitted their ideas this cycle, 55% were new to the participatory budgeting process, 32% had participated in the past, and 13% were not sure. Half of survey respondents learned about Ideas in Action from a local community organization, 17% from City of Boston promotion, and 10% from BCYF.

Mr. Castelo then shared media outcomes from ASG's promotion of Participatory Budgeting. Funding was focused on channels that had worked well in FY25 and FY26. There were over 800,000 ad impressions across channels. The campaign was run in 5 languages.

The upcoming Proposal Development forums were then discussed. There will be three forums in October for reviewing and prioritizing ideas collected, and one forum in November to draft ballot language. There will then be two weeks for public comment before Thanksgiving.

Board member Stovell was curious about how so many ideas could be prioritized to 12 in only three forums. Mr. Castelo shared how the City's Data Analytics team and Northeastern University's Center for Design teams have supported OPB in creating a review process where each small group table at a given forum will then have to review about 40 ideas, making the reviewing and prioritization task more manageable for participants.

Ms. Stovell then closed out the meeting with a comment period. There were no questions. Ms. Stovell then adjourned the meeting at 7:15pm.

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