



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Youth Lead the Change: Participatory Budgeting Boston

Region	North America
Award Scheme	Guangzhou Award
Themes	Municipal Finance Planning & Design Public Space Youth & Livelihoods
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Summary

Boston's mayor sought a way to empower youth (aged 12 to 25) to become active participants in the civic affairs of their city government. His solution: a process of participatory budgeting, inviting young people to collect ideas for capital projects, distill them into concrete proposals, and then hold a city-wide youth vote to determine which proposals would be funded by \$1 million set aside for the project.

Background and Objective

The Mayor of Boston wants to empower youth to become civic leaders. To advance this, the city created the program of Youth Lead the Change and included this program in the city's capital budget. Through this participatory budgeting program, youth had the opportunity to collect ideas for capital projects, distill those ideas into concrete proposals, hold a city-wide vote to determine which projects get funded, and - ultimately - directly determine how \$1 million is spent to improve Boston for everyone.

Actions and Implementation

The goals of Boston's Participatory Budgeting project are to:

- Help ensure the capital plan reflects the priorities, interests and concerns of Boston youth.
- Inform youth about the city-building and budgeting process as well as get better understanding of the innovative use of crowdfunding platforms. •Engage future leaders in the developing and planning of Boston infrastructure to allow for community building and increase community ownership.
- Engage people who are traditionally underserved such as homeless youth, disconnected youth, those from low income families or with socio-economic barriers. •Foster partnerships between the city government and youth serving agencies.

Outcomes and Impacts

- Increase civil participation and the openness of the government: Over 1,500 young people cast a vote. For many it was their first time engaging in a voting process.
- Promote the development of the community, foster the economy and contributes to urban planning: Education regarding the city budget process and capital planning took place at all idea collection assemblies. Throughout the process we saw over 450 ideas generated to improve Boston. Ideas not feasible for execution through this process were forwarded to various city departments to take under consideration for future projects and planning.
- Raise youth's attention towards environment and infrastructure: The program encouraged residents to review their communities and consider projects based on need, feasibility, and sustainability. Projects were designed to improve communities, public safety, outside environments and school environments.



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- Reduce the public's barriers for participating in policy making: Material was translated into different languages as often as possible and idea collection assemblies were held in accessible venues. Target groups included people who are traditionally underserved. Text messaging and online idea gathering was used to reach those that were unable to attend assemblies.
- Participants have a broader awareness of needs in other neighborhoods throughout the city and a better understanding of government processes and democracy in general. Many participants reported gaining specific skills including leadership, teamwork, networking, communication and professionalism. Many participants also expressed feelings of power or control or reported that their voices had truly been heard.

Innovative Initiative

Youth Lead the Change has created an innovative pathway for young people to get involved in the government's decision-making process. From the launch of the project to the end of year one, young people were the driving force behind not only the project's success, but they were also the generators of the movement. Through surveys and focus groups with the Mayor's Youth Council, city leadership was able to understand the desire for young people to contribute to the decisions that are being made around them and also understand the benefit and strength of having young people participate in real decision making. The project began with the assembly of a steering committee composed of young people connected to youth serving organizations. It was important to make sure that young people on the steering committee were supported by adults to allow for youth development moments and intentional relationships between youth and adults. This cohort of young people and supporting adults created the rules that would govern the process with a focus on the voices of young people. Once the rules were written, the steering committee members began community outreach and facilitated idea collection assemblies. Locations for idea collections assemblies had a focus on traditionally underserved neighborhoods. As ideas were collected in person and though an online platform, young people and residents had the opportunity to interact with local government in a positive and empowering way that promotes real change and ownership in communities. Change agents applied to serve to transform ideas into capital projects based on community need, project feasibility and project impact in the community. Change agents worked with city departments to vet ideas and approve proposals. Throughout this process, young change agents had an opportunity to collaborate and learn with adults in city leadership. Once projects made it to ballot, only young people could decide how funds would be spent. Some 14 projects made it to the first ever Youth Lead the Change Ballot and seven projects were selected by young people as winners. Those projects will be implemented. This sort of real and tangible process empowered youth to get engaged in their communities and indicated that they can affect real change in their communities. The goal is that this initiative promotes civic engagement, changes social behaviors, increases trust and communication between youth and local government and promotes education about budgetary and democratic processes.