

# Let communities decide: Using participatory budgeting for renewable energy community benefits packages

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# 1: INTRODUCTION

It's not a question of whether Hawai'i's communities will or will not have a say in our state's clean energy future—they will demand it.

As our state moves forward toward achieving 100 percent clean energy by 2045, development of renewable energy projects, of varying sizes, will ramp up. The benefits of larger projects for the average ratepayer may not be as obvious and apparent as smaller-scale initiatives, such as rooftop solar that provide savings to homeowners. Further, there is no lack of examples of what can happen when a community perceives that its needs and concerns are not being heard.

It would not be an overstatement to say that Hawai'i is at a crossroads with a singular opportunity to shape our clean energy future in the best interest of its residents. The time has come for a new model to not only cultivate support for clean energy projects in the Islands but, more importantly, empower communities as full participating partners in the development of renewable energy projects that directly impact them. Hawai'i's leadership, electric utilities, and stakeholders are all recognizing that more is necessary for a more equitable energy transition.

This report explores “participatory budgeting” as a community-led approach to renewable energy community benefits. A participatory budgeting framework provides the opportunity for more inclusive conversations around community benefits, such as grants, sponsorships, scholarships, educational and cultural initiatives, and more. These options would be decided, not solely by the developer or elected officials, but with full involvement of the communities affected by the development.

The following pages outline a transformative way for how renewable energy development can be done in Hawai'i. It benefits all interests to adopt a community engagement model that provides real decision-making power to those most impacted by clean energy development.



Leo Asuncion  
Chairperson, Hawai'i Public Utilities Commission

A photograph of several wind turbines against a sunset sky with wispy clouds. The turbines are dark silhouettes. The image is decorated with several large, semi-transparent teal circles of varying sizes. One circle is in the upper left, another in the upper right, a large one in the lower center containing text, and another in the lower right.

“Hawai‘i is at a crossroads with a singular opportunity to shape our clean energy future in the best interest of its residents.”

Leo Asuncion  
Chairperson,  
Hawai‘i Public  
Utilities Commission

## 2: TRANSPARENCY, TRUST, AND REAL DECISION-MAKING POWER IN RENEWABLE ENERGY COMMUNITY BENEFITS

**In 2022, Hawaiian Electric, the electric utility for O‘ahu, Maui, and Hawai‘i Island initiated a competitive solicitation to procure utility-scale renewable energy for each of the islands.**

Also known as the Stage 3 Request For Proposals (Stage 3 RFPs), this procurement offers many different opportunities to connect the dots and build bridges between renewable energy developers and communities, and create meaningful investments in the issues that matter to communities. One of the [RFP’s requirements](#)<sup>1</sup> is that developers set aside money to invest in the communities in which they build. The amount they must set aside is \$3,000 per megawatt capacity of energy production developed, up to \$200,000 annually. According to the RFPs, “These funds shall be donated for actions and/or programs aimed at addressing specific needs identified by the host community, or to a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit community-based organization(s) to directly address host community-identified

needs.” (Throughout this report, we refer to this requirement as the “community benefits package.”)

Despite finalizing this requirement, there is no formal process for identifying community needs or allocating funding. Developers currently have the option to directly fund community-identified projects or select a nonprofit organization to administer and distribute the community benefits package. But neither of these options provide a clear blueprint for centering the needs of impacted community members in how funds are allocated.

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a proven and effective process for making sure that impacted community members have a direct say in how these funds are spent. PB can also bring transparency to spending decisions—and through PB, community members have the opportunity to build relationships and trust with local government and developers.

<sup>1</sup> This excerpt is from the draft Stage 3 RFP for O‘ahu; view the full draft [here](#). (Here are RFPs for [Maui](#) and [Hawai‘i Island](#).)

## What is participatory budgeting (PB)?

**Participatory budgeting is a democratic process that gives community members the power to decide together how to spend part of a public budget.<sup>2</sup> It gives people real power over real money.**

In PB, a steering committee of impacted community members designs the process and coordinates outreach, and community members propose ideas for how to spend funds to improve their community. (In this way, PB also provides a great context for defining who is most impacted by a particular budget or proposal—and defining those community members' needs, too.) Then Budget Delegates—community volunteers—sort through the ideas and work with key stakeholders (like government staff and local community groups) to turn them into feasible proposals for the ballot. Then the community votes to decide which projects to fund.

PB started in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 as an anti-poverty measure that helped reduce infant mortality by nearly 20%.<sup>3</sup> Since then PB has spread to over 7,000 cities around the world, and has been used to decide budgets from states, counties, cities, housing authorities, schools, and other institutions.

The heart of PB is a clear, proven process for community members and other stakeholders to follow—and which provides a practical model for sharing real decision-making power with the people most impacted by an issue. Beyond providing a concrete and transparent way to make community-led spending decisions, PB creates its own community benefits:

- **Participatory budgeting (PB) puts community members in conversation with each other, developers, elected officials, agency staff, and other stakeholders while working on a shared goal.** This experience helps humanize one another by creating opportunities to connect and learn about each other's experiences and perspectives. Through the process of collaborating and engaging stakeholders, community members also develop and sharpen leadership skills, such as public speaking.
- **PB highlights community needs and priorities** by collecting innovative ideas directly from the people closest to the problems. Local leaders have even taken these ideas as cues and funded projects or initiatives outside of the PB process.
- **PB results in more efficient spending** by putting decision-making power directly into the hands of residents (rather than a small number of leaders or officials), and funded projects respond directly to expressed needs of the community (rather than projects assumed to meet an assumed

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<sup>2</sup> PB can be done with a portion of any existing budget—new funding is not required. In addition to community benefits funds, potential funding sources include: city, county, or state budgets; housing authority or other public agency budgets; school, school district, or university budgets; community Development Block Grants or other federal funds; Tax Increment Financing (TIF); discretionary funds of elected officials; and non-governmental sources, like foundations or non-profit organizations.

<sup>3</sup> [Research has shown](#) that through PB, participants in Brazil redirected spending to critical priorities like sanitation and education, which is associated with lower infant mortality rates. This shift was observed in cities where PB had been in place for more than 8 years.

set of needs).

- **PB yields more equitable spending** by opening participation up to people who have historically been excluded from or faced barriers to civic participation and voting (e.g., young people, formerly incarcerated people, immigrants, etc.).
- **PB inspires participants to become more involved and stay civically engaged** because they see the tangible results of investing their time. In fact, PB increases engagement in elections, making people 8% more likely to vote.<sup>4</sup>

## Building on existing support for participatory budgeting (PB) in Hawai‘i

There is already a history of PB advocacy in Hawai‘i that organizers and advocates can draw from to show how allocating community benefits packages from renewable energy developments can create more equitable, effective, and visionary leadership throughout the state.

In 2016, eight members of the Hawai‘i House of Representatives put forward House Resolution No. 101, calling for a feasibility study of using PB to allocate funding for capital improvement projects. Although HR 101 was not adopted, this effort shows that even 8 years ago, leaders in Hawai‘i found the impacts and benefits of PB compelling enough to start a conversation. In [their proposed request](#), they specifically cited the following benefits of PB:

- PB transforms complex, often exclusionary language and civic procedures into relatively simple steps, reducing the barriers to participation.
- Meaningful public participation often remains limited to voting in elections, but PB is an “an alternative system in which citizens directly and regularly assume decision-making power and are empowered to act as their own advocates in negotiating among themselves and with elected officials for the distribution of scarce resources and implementation of public policy priorities.”<sup>5</sup>
- PB “has been shown to increase citizens’ participation in the democratic process, to spur reform in bureaucratic systems, and to rebalance the distribution of resources to low-income communities.”<sup>6</sup>
- Providing a clear way for constituents to name their needs and priorities allows elected officials and government agencies to better serve them.

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4 Carolina Johnson, H. Jacob Carlson, and Sonya Reynolds, “Testing the Participation Hypothesis: Evidence from Participatory Budgeting,” *Political Behavior*, 2021.

5 [House Resolution No. 101](#), State of Hawai‘i House of Representatives Twenty-Eighth Legislature, 2016.

6 Ibid.

## SPOTLIGHT: STRENGTHENING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

By design, PB is more inclusive than traditional elections. Voting can be opened up to the entire community, including youth under 18, people of all immigration statuses, and people who were formerly incarcerated. And participation in PB has positive impacts on traditional elections, too: [recent research](#) shows that participation in PB is associated with an 8% increase in the probability someone will vote. The increase is even bigger among people with fewer or no college degrees, young people, and people who are Black/African American and Asian.

In an evaluation of [New York City's](#) 2012 cycle, researchers found that PB created deeper connections to government and community for participants, many of whom were disillusioned or disengaged from politics:

- 82% of budget delegates said they were more likely to participate in a community organization after PB.
- 78% of PB voters felt that they understood the needs of their council district better after voting.

City Council Member Carlos Menchaca remarked: “What I love about PB is that it brings new people into a leadership relationship with government . . . PB participants teach government to operate better because the outcomes directly impact their own community, their families, and themselves.”



82%

of budget delegates said they were more likely to participate in a community organization after PB

### 3: ENVISIONING A PB PROCESS FOR COMMUNITY BENEFITS PACKAGES IN HAWAI’I

#### Laying the groundwork for PB

The planning and expectation-setting that goes into a PB process is critical to its success. How community members are engaged in the earliest stages of planning will have a critical impact on how much a PB process can shift power to marginalized communities and create equity. Organizing and resourcing a planning phase before the formal PB cycle launches can lay the groundwork for creating equity and accessibility. During this phase, all community stakeholders—including community members, developers, and public agencies (including the Public Utility

Commission, State Energy Office, Consumer Advocate, and others)—can come together to learn about the community benefits package, start a needs assessment, and start envisioning for how PB can be used to meet community needs. This planning phase could also help developers fulfill their community outreach and needs assessment requirements.

What follows is an overview of some of the specific steps and considerations organizers can take in planning for PB.

## **INTEGRATING PB INTO THE RFP PROCESS**

Thoughtfully integrating PB into the renewable energy RFP process will be a critical step for creating transparency and trust. As described by the Public Utility Commission (PUC), the process for selecting winning projects will take more than two years (between 28 and 29 months).<sup>7</sup>

In order to meaningfully shape their application with community input, developers who apply to the RFP will want to engage impacted communities and begin a needs assessment before their proposal has been approved. However, that means there's a risk that the proposal will not receive final approval—and that the funding for the community benefits package won't materialize. It's critical to communicate with community members and other key stakeholders clearly and with transparency about what is on the table at this phase in the process. While planning and needs assessment can start earlier, any formal PB process—where community members decide together how to spend community benefits package funds—should only begin once a proposal has been approved and funding is assured. PB organizers will also need to come up with a plan for communicating with community members over the course of the approval process, including providing periodic updates and re-engaging the community once projects are approved.

## **CONDUCTING COMMUNITY-LED NEEDS ASSESSMENTS**

One way to make sure a PB process is community-led from the beginning is conducting a community-led needs assessment. Through research and conversations shaped and led by impacted community members, organizers can start to get feedback on how the PB process should be designed, which communities are most impacted and should be centered in the process, and what goals should be prioritized. The information and relationships that are formed along the way can benefit a process in many ways, such as: helping inform equity guidelines for leadership roles, like the PB Steering Committee (more on that below); creating personal connections that can support outreach and engagement once the process kicks off; and identifying key community needs that should help shape process goals. Organizers should also identify which resources community members need to participate in needs assessments, like stipends or childcare.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the draft RFP, the process includes a three month bidding period; a seven-to-eight month bid evaluation period; a 12 month post-selection period for negotiations with agencies and final preparation of the PUC application; and a six month regulatory approval process. Projects are expected to be completed by December 2027.

## SPOTLIGHT: A NEEDS ASSESSMENT BY AND FOR COMMUNITY IN SEATTLE

As a direct result of grassroots advocacy that emerged from the racial uprisings of 2020, Seattle’s City Council allocated \$3 million for Black community-led research to lay the groundwork for a citywide PB process that will invest in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. With that money, [Black Brilliance Research](#) (BBR) engaged over 100 community members as paid community researchers in a [participatory action research project](#) to define community needs.

In the words of BBR, researchers “used their lived experiences to collect, analyze, and report the data. Researchers include youth, elders, people with experience in the criminal legal system, artists, healers, and others who have been invited—many for the first time— to engage as researchers in their own communities and lives.” This community-led research is now deeply informing Seattle’s \$28 million PB process, from shaping the criteria used to recruit Steering Committee members, to the working groups that will provide local expertise and lived experience in developing and reviewing project proposals.

## IDENTIFYING A MANAGER AND KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Identifying an organization or agency to manage community benefits package funds and support PB implementation is another key step of the planning process. Funds could be deposited with a local community-based organization or a public agency. Agencies and groups with long-standing relationships in communities—like the Public Utility Commission, Hawai’i State Energy Office, or even local neighborhood boards<sup>8</sup>—can play key roles in supporting the process, either by managing it or supporting it in other ways.

A portion of the funds—or additional funding—needs to be reserved or raised to cover the cost of PB process implementation (e.g., hiring and paying a PB Coordinator, providing stipends to volunteers,

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<sup>8</sup> It’s important to note that organizations and agencies may face restrictions on what they can spend money on (or how they can do it), and that these restrictions can impact what kinds of projects can be funded through the PB process. Identifying such restrictions early on, communicating them clearly to stakeholders, and assessing their impact (including whether another implementing entity should be identified) can help create clarity and accountability in the process.

resourcing community outreach, etc.). The implementing entity should be responsible for managing this implementation budget and carrying out key administrative tasks, like hiring and paying the PB Coordinator.

Communicating with any key stakeholders that might be impacted by the PB process is another important part of planning. If specific government agencies, community-based organizations, or businesses may be needed to support the process or help implement winning projects, they should be informed about PB and coordinated with from the beginning (or as soon in the process as possible). This helps create a strong network of support for the PB process, and helps ensure that winning projects can be implemented.

## DECIDING HOW TO STRUCTURE THE PB PROCESS

Deciding how to structure the process geographically is another key piece of laying the groundwork for PB. Some PB processes are organized across a single geography—like a city or school district. Other PB processes take into account the needs of distinct geographies, like neighborhoods or districts. In the case of community benefits packages, the [Renewable Energy Zones](#) identified by Hawaiian Electric—places with high potential for renewable energy development—could help inform how the process is organized. Identifying the most appropriate structure has implications for PB process implementation. For example, in a process that takes place across several neighborhoods, funding could be split among neighborhoods according to need, impact, or specific equity metrics. Centralizing certain parts of the PB process—like administration and evaluation—can create efficiency, while local committees like District or Neighborhood Committees can make sure outreach and engagement happen in a way that’s authentically connected to local needs.

[As Ulupono Initiative has already documented](#), there are also important considerations to be made when it comes to defining who is “impacted” by new renewable energy developments—and therefore holds decision-making power in the PB process. Ulupono points out that while census tracts are the current method for defining impacted “host communities,” alternative boundaries may better address the scope of impact. They also point out how critical it is to consider the disproportionate impact of people situated closest to developments.

Communicating with any key stakeholders that might be impacted by the PB process is another important part of planning. If specific government agencies, community-based organizations, or businesses may be needed to support the process or help implement winning projects, they should be informed about PB and coordinated with from the beginning (or as soon in the process as possible). This helps create a strong network of support for the PB process, and helps ensure that winning projects can be implemented.

## Understanding the PB cycle

The flexibility of PB allows communities to reap the benefits in a way that fits their unique context and needs. Typically, a PB process follows these steps, usually over the course of a year:



### DESIGN THE PROCESS

A steering committee that represents the community creates the rules and engagement plan.



### BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Through meetings and online tools, participants share and discuss ideas for projects.



### DEVELOP PROPOSALS

Volunteer “budget delegates” develop the ideas into feasible proposals.



### EVALUATE THE PROCESS

The steering committee and participants evaluate if goals were met and plan changes for the next cycle.



### FUND WINNING PROJECTS

The government or institution funds and implements the winning ideas.



### VOTE

Participants vote on the proposals that best serve the community’s needs.

## SPOTLIGHT: USING PB FOR TIF FUNDS

In Chicago, residents have long criticized the city’s Tax Increment Financing (TIF) program for providing valuable subsidies to developers while generating few community benefits. By inviting the West Humboldt Park community to [directly decide how \\$2 million in TIF funds were spent](#), grassroots organization Blocks Together shifted that paradigm—and strengthened local resilience at the same time.

Based in Chicago’s West Humboldt Park neighborhood, Blocks Together piloted their TIF PB process in 2014, in partnership with the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Great Cities Institute, the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), and the City of Chicago. Partners showed how PB can both achieve community goals, like strengthening climate resilience, while also bringing transparency and equity to local budgeting. Six community-developed projects were selected by community members—winning projects included new green roofs, a culinary institute, and a skate park. At the end of the process, 85% of respondents indicated that they felt that they had a better understanding of the needs in their community after voting in PB<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Blocks Together, UIC Great Cities Institute and PBP, [Democratizing Tax Increment Financing Funds Through Participatory Budgeting](#), 2016 (p. 42).

## KEY PB ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Community members** are the heart of the PB process, and they can participate in many different ways. Basic participation includes submitting ideas, and voting on final proposals; if they have more time, they can fill other roles in the process, like joining the Steering Committee, or becoming Budget Delegates, or Facilitators.
- The **PB Coordinator** is responsible for coordinating the entire process and making sure things happen according to the schedule. This is usually a full-time position. They manage timelines, coordinate communication between all of the process stakeholders, manage meeting and event logistics, and support outreach.
- The **Steering Committee** is one of the driving forces behind the PB process. It's made up of community members and representatives from local organizations who work in collaboration with government and decision-makers to decide on the rules that will guide the PB process. They also provide oversight to ensure the process meets its goals.
- Some processes may take place across multiple districts, neighborhoods, or regions (as opposed to taking place across one unified geography, like a city). These will need **District Committees** in addition to the Steering Committee to help manage the process locally. District Committees make decisions specific to their district, such as designating voting locations and identifying community participation goals and priorities. They help provide local information that Steering Committees may not be able to provide.
- **Budget Delegates** are volunteers from the community who research proposals submitted by community members during idea collection. They collaborate with local agencies and other key stakeholders to make sure project proposals are feasible and meet the needs of the community.
- Relevant **local agencies** will vet proposals submitted by Budget Delegates to ensure they meet PB eligibility criteria and are feasible before they go on the ballot for voting. Local agencies also provide cost estimates for proposals.
- **Nonprofits and community-based organizations** can provide additional support for PB processes related to their area of expertise. Examples include organizing/outreach, data provision during the proposal development phase, and arts integration during voting events. Most importantly, implementers should engage organizations who have existing community ties to help with outreach and mobilize the community. These organizations should also serve in the Steering Committee.

## Phase 1: Designing the Process

Once funds are secured, the Steering Committee can be formed. The role of the Steering Committee is to design and oversee the PB process; so, it should be made up of people directly impacted by the renewable energy project and include people from groups typically underrepresented in decision-making. The Steering Committee holds a lot of power over the PB process; taking time to make sure the people who make up the committee are representative of the impacted communities is critical to ensuring that the PB process actually shifts power.



### SPOTLIGHT: TAKING ACTION ON EQUITY

PB is an actionable process for making decision-making more equitable and inclusive. Historically marginalized groups tend to participate more in PB than in conventional public participation processes, leading to government leaders hearing new voices. But for this to happen, equity must be centered in the design and implementation of PB.

[Unincorporated King County's](#) 2021-2022 PB cycle provides one example of how PB can be designed to achieve equitable outcomes from the beginning. The communities selected to decide how to spend \$10 million in funding had experienced a great deal of disinvestment over time—and included areas of the county that have high numbers of BIPOC residents who have a lot of unmet needs as a result of this disinvestment. The Community Investment Budget Committee (CIBC)—which served as a steering committee for the PB process—included members from these communities. Equity showed up in the CIBC's leadership—and in other features of the PB process—in a number of ways. First, the CIBC kicked off their process with a deep dive into the county's approach to equity and how equity was defined. The county also empowered the CIBC to decide how to split funding between communities, based on their deep research into community needs and the potential for more equitable outcomes. And CIBC members were compensated for their time and labor—a practice that helps more people participate as leaders in the PB process, particularly people who might not have the time or resources to volunteer.

Together, the Steering Committee will directly shape the way PB looks in their community by “writing the rules” of the process. Writing the rules means deciding:

- **What the goals of the PB process are.** These may have initially been shaped through a community needs assessment or the process planning phase, but they should be confirmed, refined, and—if needed—expanded by the Steering Committee.
- **Who can participate**—including who is eligible to submit ideas, participate as a Budget Delegate, and vote. The rules around who can participate and how are another key place where the PB process can shift power and create equity. For example, people of all immigration statuses, young people, and people with conviction histories can be eligible to participate in PB.
- **Which projects are eligible** for funding—this can include specific criteria that projects must follow to be eligible (like the cost maximum cost of a project idea, or a specific community that should benefit from the project) or particular values or themes that ideas should reflect (for example, racial equity or sustainability). Steering Committee members should also confirm eligible categories of expenses: capital projects, services, and re-granting funds are just three examples of the kinds of expenses PB has been used for.

In addition, the Steering Committee will leverage their experiences as community members to make decisions about how to do outreach, communicate with, and engage the broader community in the PB process.

### WHY DESIGNING THE PROCESS MATTERS

- Decisions made during this phase of the PB process determine important aspects of the remaining phases of PB, such as who can submit ideas and who can vote.
- The goals of the process are decided and communicated by community members (i.e., Steering Committee), setting the foundation for community leadership and buy-in.
- The PB Coordinator and Steering Committee can work together to identify potential evaluation, outreach, and engagement partners.
- The Steering Committee and PB Coordinator learn about any restrictions on the funds that will be used for PB.

## Phase 2: Idea collection

Idea collection is often the first part of engaging the broader community in the PB process; it's also a structured and effective way of identifying community needs, which is a core requirement of community benefits packages. During idea collection, impacted community members are invited to submit ideas for how the community benefit package funds should be spent.



During this phase, the PB Coordinator works with the Steering Committee to determine how to do outreach for volunteer recruitment and idea collection. The Steering Committee should focus on how to reach underrepresented and disproportionately impacted community members as well as consider accessibility when deciding how to collect ideas (e.g., online, in person, at community events, etc.). Ideas can be collected virtually using commonly available tools and apps for creating online forms, and collected in person using paper forms, tablets, or phones.

### WHY IDEA COLLECTION MATTERS

- It's the first time most people in the community learn what PB is and how it works.
- It's one of the most exciting parts of the PB because community members share innovative, creative ways to use the funds.
- Ideas collected represent the needs and values of the community.
- It gives community members a chance to pivot from critiquing spending decisions to proposing solutions for unmet needs.
- It shows the community that their voices are essential to the PB process.
- It helps the Steering Committee better understand the broader community and can prompt creative problem solving during the proposal development phase.

## Phase 3: Proposal development

During proposal development, community volunteers called “Budget Delegates” work together to organize and vet ideas for eligibility and rank them. This means they group similar ideas, remove ineligible ideas or modify them for eligibility, and then use agreed upon criteria (e.g., equity) to rank and prioritize ideas. Top-ranked ideas are then built into project proposals with more details and estimated costs. The PB Coordinator will work with key stakeholders, such as any agencies or local stakeholders required to implement the project, to ensure they can offer feedback on the project’s feasibility and cost before going to the ballot.



### WHY PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

- The PB Coordinator, Steering Committee, and Budget Delegates learn about the needs and values of their community!
- Budget Delegates learn about the budget, and they have a chance to:
  - › Discuss and think about how to connect ideas to create even stronger proposals.
  - › Consider and discuss who benefits from the ideas put forward and how.
  - › Connect with local partners, city agencies, or other members of the community to learn about processes related to spending funds (like, procurement requirements).
  - › Collaborate together to build meaningful proposals that reflect and address real community needs.
- This phase can make or break the implementation of a winning project. The Budget Delegates, PB Coordinator, and relevant stakeholders need to be sure that every project on the ballot is feasible. This helps ensure that the process highlights the impact of community leadership and participation by setting up a smooth, timely implementation with some detailed planning up front.

## SPOTLIGHT: DEVELOPING NEW COMMUNITY LEADERS

There are many opportunities for leadership in PB, from joining the Steering Committee to being a facilitator or Budget Delegate. Participants gain valuable skills, including public speaking, research, and facilitation. And because participants in PB don't need to be of legal voting age, it offers powerful pathways for developing youth leadership.

### Phoenix Union High School District (PXU)

provides a powerful example of how PB can help develop the leadership of young people. The process started in one high school campus in 2013, and in a few years, the process expanded to all 18 high school campuses in the district and to other 4 school districts in Arizona. The empowering experience of real leadership and decision-making often leaves students more vocal, more confident, and more comfortable speaking with new people—especially adults. Tayza, a student at Cesar Chavez High School, explains it this way: “I saw [PB] as a way of getting my community service hours [for National Honor Society]. That’s all I wanted from it, but then when I came into PB it changed my views; I saw that not only can I change the campus, but I can also change other students’ lives. It really made us feel like we are in charge of this, and we are very important people, and our voices are being heard.” And Angel, a student at Cesar Chavez High School, notes: “PB has impacted me personally because I used to never be able to talk to people the same way that I am now. I used to be afraid to speak in front of large groups and now I’m more comfortable.”

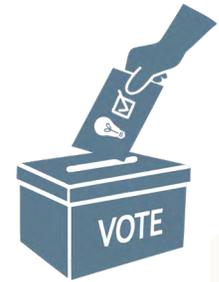
*“PB has impacted me personally because I used to never be able to talk to people the same way that I am now. I used to be afraid to speak in front of large groups and now I’m more comfortable.”*

Angel

Student, Cesar Chavez  
High School

## Phase 4: Voting

Once the project proposals have been vetted and fully developed, the projects that will go on the ballot can be confirmed and designed. There are a range of platforms available for designing and hosting PB ballots, including some that are free and open source. Next, outreach for voting can start. Similar to idea collection, the goal of voting outreach is to ensure access and inclusion of the community—especially those who have been historically underrepresented or are unable to participate in other civic processes.



### WHY VOTING MATTERS

- The community gets to see what ideas made it to the ballot and exercise their voice by voting for the projects they want funded.
- Community members who cannot or do not typically participate in other civic processes get the chance to vote in a process that will have real impact on their community.
- For young people, this can be their first chance to vote in a civic process—and a positive first experience makes a big impact on how they think about voting moving forward.
- The community can come together for a voting kick-off where they learn about and discuss each of the projects on the ballot before voting.

## Phase 5: Implementation

Once the votes have been counted, the winning projects are announced, and project implementation can begin! This is also the time to set up project monitoring and plan for updating the community on the timeline and progress of winning projects.



### WHY IMPLEMENTATION MATTERS

- Swift implementation shows community members the concrete impacts of their participation in the process.
- The winning projects represent what the community wants to see, and one of the best ways to show respect and care for voters is by following through with their decisions.
- Smooth and timely implementation of winning projects can boost participation in future PB cycles.
- The sooner the project is implemented, the sooner the community can benefit from the project and the PB process.
- Slow or poorly done project implementation risks undermining the whole PB process because participants can develop a sentiment that nothing is going to come from the process.

## Evaluation

An evaluation plan should be created to gather data about—and assess—whether the goals of the PB process are met. Working with local evaluators is the best way to ensure evaluation of a process—especially during its first year. However, evaluation can be done by the PB Coordinator and Steering Committee, if they choose. The evaluation process could also be designed to complement any reporting requirements developments must meet. PBP has put together an [evaluation toolkit](#) for municipalities that walks through key considerations when planning evaluation, and this can easily be adapted for non-municipal PB processes.

It's important to plan evaluation early to avoid missed opportunities to collect key data. For example, if participation and inclusion are key metrics for a successful PB process, it could be important to collect data about who is participating in the steering committee, who is submitting ideas, and so on. It's much easier to collect that information during those steps in the process rather than after.



### WHY EVALUATION MATTERS

- Evaluation results help stakeholders better understand and communicate the transformative power and benefits of PB.
- Results can be shared to celebrate the work, increase credibility of the process, renew or maintain funding in future cycles, and even spread PB to neighboring communities, organizations, cities, or schools.
- Evaluation can help track whether the process reaches underrepresented and significantly impacted community members.
- Evaluation can help identify the biggest obstacles or opportunities for improvement for future PB cycles.
- Evaluation provides insights into the experiences and perspectives of budget delegates and steering committee members.

## **SPOTLIGHT: PLANNING AND EVALUATING WITH INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE**

The ways we evaluate the success of a PB process depends deeply on how success is defined—and the culture, values, and context from which that definition comes from. And as cooperators at [Ho‘āhu Energy Cooperative Molokai](#) are showing, the transition to renewable energy shouldn’t only be measured in kilowatt hours—it should be measured according to the resilience, equity, sustainability, and cultural benefits it produces, too.

In partnership with the Ho‘āhu Energy Cooperative and Molokai residents (of whom over 60 percent are Kānaka Maoli, of Native Hawaiian descent), researchers at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa have been studying how energy planning practitioners can develop place-based and culturally-relevant frameworks to plan for and assess energy projects. By rooting in the Indigenous values of aloha ‘āina (love of the land), kuleana (responsibility), and pono (equity), these frameworks help align renewable energy goals with cultural and community values. They also support the objectives of Indigenous sovereignty, energy independence, community self-determination, and environmental justice. Frameworks like these could meaningfully shape a PB process in many ways, from guiding the Steering Committee in creating aligned goals for the process, to shaping the criteria community members use in brainstorming and developing project proposals.

## 4: MOVING TO ACTION

Here are some next steps advocates and organizers can take to advocate and lay the groundwork for using PB to decide how to allocate community benefits packages.

### Get community input on what a PB process should look like

Engaging community members in the earliest stages of planning is one of the best ways to make sure a PB process shifts power to marginalized communities and creates equity. Early engagement also supports the process of building buy-in and trust in the PB process. Here are some key questions to ask community members to weigh in on:

- What are the potential impacts of renewable energy developments on communities? How could those impacts be addressed?
- What are other community needs? How could they be addressed through a PB process?
- What vision should guide the PB process? What goals should we accomplish together?
- Who should participate in decision-making? Who is usually missing from budgeting decisions?
- What criteria should be used to select key roles, like Steering Committee members and Budget Delegates?
- How do we make PB an equitable and inclusive process that is culturally relevant across Hawai'i?
- What barriers might people face to participating in PB? What do they need for equitable access to the process?
- What existing infrastructure and institutions could be supportive of a PB process?

## Start laying the groundwork for PB

Advocates for PB can start organizing and tackling research that will greatly benefit the PB process down the road. Here are some activities to focus on:

- Start collecting data needed to inform the process, including information that helps identify which areas and communities have been historically underinvested in and have the greatest need. (This data can complement the information collected through a community-led needs assessment.)
- Identify who needs to be involved early. This should include community-based organizations, grassroots groups, and other community organizations that are trusted by community members, and can provide pipelines for feedback, outreach, and engagement.
- Start building the implementation budget. This should include assessing hiring needs, and a consideration of how volunteers in the PB process can be compensated for their time. (The implementation budget can and should be considered part of the community benefits package, and funded by developers.)
- Identify any legal constraints or other considerations that will impact the process, including restrictions on how community benefits package funds can be spent.

## Further reading

[Real Money, Real Power](#) is a short video that shows how the entire PB process works, centering the voices of real participants.

[PBcan.org](#) provides detailed case studies on the impacts of PB, organized by key issue areas, like Equity & Inclusion and Climate Resilience.

The [PB Scoping Toolkit](#) provides more detailed guidelines on what it takes to implement PB, including sample planning tools, like a timeline and budget.

[Participatory Budgeting: Next Generation Democracy](#) lays out the impacts of PB, and features the voices of civic leaders, including elected officials and PB participants.

[Digital Democracy: Tools and Approaches for Virtual Participatory Processes](#) gives an overview of commonly available tools that can support online participation in PB.



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Have questions about participatory budgeting and how to bring it to your community?

Reach out to [info@participatorybudgeting.org](mailto:info@participatorybudgeting.org) for more information.



