



Fast

# FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

there is an alternative.

April 29, 2013

## The PB Potential: Participatory Budgeting for Winnipeg?

**C**itizens are becoming more aware of the importance of equitable and accountable city management and development. Attendees at a recent forum organized by local non-profit and community groups expressed concerns about land development and other decisions being made by city council in Winnipeg. They noted frustrations such as difficulty accessing information, token public participation and a general concern with the culture at city hall.

With current forms of representative democracy, multi-level governance structures, isolated sector-based policy and limited revenue sources, Canadian cities struggle to meet their citizen needs. This leads to skepticism, distrust of leadership and seeking more responsive and relevant governance processes and solutions. CCPA Manitoba has long noted the importance of city budgets as critical policy tools. Through our Alternative Budgets we have demonstrated how our city government could make different choices leading to a budget that is more equitable and just. A next step would be for the City of Winnipeg to fully engage citizens in budget making through a participatory budgeting process.

**Participatory budgeting (PB)** is a community planning and governance tool that requires citizen participation in prioritizing local needs in the financial decision-making process. Although budgets and public accounting may not seem like an exciting topic for citizen engagement, PB offers potential to increase fiscal transparency of governments, and can support the allocation of resources to areas of greatest need, while allowing for greater public input

on funding priorities.

As a deliberative democratic process, PB is an innovative practice of public participation, and has been widely successful in capturing greater participation in democratic dialogue. In a sense, PB is democratic civic education, stimulating community debate and introducing greater ownership and leadership by communities. It is an experiment in redefining city structures, management and collective rights and obligations to the city and fellow citizens.

A growing number of jurisdictions are recognizing the benefit of PB. There are now several examples of participatory budgeting processes aimed at increasing public participation, improving government accountability and raising public awareness of government challenges and responsibilities.

The city of Porto Alegre in Brazil was the first to implement PB in 1989. PB can now be found in over 1,500 cities around the world. While PB emerged through democratic social movements in opposition to inequitable distribution of resources and corruption, North American PB grows from the interest to revitalize meaningful “civic engagement and public interest in local governance” (Angeles, 2003, p.12). In Canada where communities often enjoy great linguistic and ethnic diversity, PB offers a gateway to political participation as well as an opportunity for all community members to exchange ideas about public priorities

CCPA-MB  
309-323 Portage Ave.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3B 2C1

phone  
(204) 927-3200

email  
ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca

website  
www.policyalternatives.ca/  
manitoba

blog  
www.policyfix.ca

twitter  
@ccpamb



continued...

and undertake shared decision-making.

PB can have many practical and ethical challenges however the opportunity to broaden the scope of public input and directly engage citizens in identifying and setting fiscal priorities is great.

The following examples provide a snapshot of ongoing PB initiatives, and point to both the diversity and possibilities for its implementation.

**Chicago's 49th Ward** was the first jurisdiction in the US to establish a PB process in 2009. The Ward allocates approximately \$1 million dollars per year (with \$300,000 saved for potential project overrun) of the Alderman's discretionary funds for infrastructure projects. In 2010 1,652 of approximately 60,000 residents voted on 36 project proposals through the PB process. In 2012 over 1,300 voted. All residents over 16 years old, regardless of citizenship or voter registration status are able to participate and vote.

**New York, NY** established a PB process in 2011 with a scheduled 2013 vote to allocate four City Council members capital discretionary funds totalling approximately \$10 million, in 8 Council Districts.

**Vallejo, CA** established the first US city-wide PB process in 2012. The city government allocated approximately \$3 million of sales tax revenue for projects. Vallejo residents and stakeholders proposed over 800 spending ideas and volunteers have developed dozens of project proposals. The first vote is scheduled for June 2013.

**San Francisco, CA** began a pilot PB process in 2013 in one electoral district using \$100,000 of discretionary funding. If the PB model is successful it could lead to a city-wide process with an allocation of tens of millions of dollars.

**Toronto Community Housing Co-op**, Toronto, ON introduced a PB process in 2002. Since then, approximately 164,000 social housing tenants from 58,500 residential units have had the opportunity

to lead and participate in PB processes with staff support. In 2011, \$9 million dollars (10% of budget) was allocated for projects and improvements that lead to growing tenant participation, local ownership, new civic spaces. In 2012, the once consistent funding for capital repairs were cut by 75% leaving only \$2 million to be allocated by PB. This is a reminder that the possibilities of PB are dependent upon the financial resources governments make available.

**Hamilton, ON** introduced a planning process in 2012, with a first vote expected in August 2013. Over 300,000 residents of Ward 2 will decide how to allocate a \$1 million dollar capital budget.

These are a few examples of PB that serve as examples of how citizens can be engaged in the budget process. They show that participatory budgeting has the potential to offer Winnipeg residents an opportunity to get engaged in budget decisions. This would lead to greater civic engagement more generally and could improve the responsiveness of government programs and services. Building a culture of community engagement in decision-making requires investing time, energy and resources into a community. As shown by the above examples, there are a growing number of cities taking up the challenge.

*Laura Rempel is a graduate student in city planning at the University of Manitoba and a CCPA- Mb Board Member.*

**Links to above PB initiatives:**

Participatory Budgeting Project: [www.participatorybudgeting.org/](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/)

PB Unit: [www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk)

Chicago: <http://participatorybudgeting49.wordpress.com/>

New York: <http://pbnyc.org/>

Vallejo: [www.pbvallejo.org/](http://www.pbvallejo.org/)

Toronto: [www.torontohousing.ca/pb](http://www.torontohousing.ca/pb)

San Francisco: [www.participatorybudgeting.org/category/san-francisco/](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/category/san-francisco/)

Hamilton: <http://pbhamont.ca/>

Angeles, L. (2003). Participatory budgeting in Canadian municipalities: Building community and government capacity for deliberative local governance. [www.chs.ubc.ca/participatory/docs/CURA%20Final%20PB%20Proposal%202004.pdf](http://www.chs.ubc.ca/participatory/docs/CURA%20Final%20PB%20Proposal%202004.pdf)

CCPA-MB  
309-323 Portage Ave.  
Winnipeg, MB  
R3B 2C1

phone  
(204) 927-3200

email  
[ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca](mailto:ccpamb@policyalternatives.ca)

website  
[www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba](http://www.policyalternatives.ca/manitoba)

blog  
[www.policyfix.ca](http://www.policyfix.ca)

twitter  
[@ccpamb](https://twitter.com/ccpamb)



*Fast Facts are produced and distributed free via email. They can be reproduced as an OpEd or opinion piece without obtaining further permission, provided they are not edited, and full credit is given to both the author and the source, CCPA-MB. Please contact CCPA-MB today to begin your free subscription.*