



Participatory Budgeting

What is it?

Participatory budgeting (PB) directly involves local people in making decisions on the spending and priorities for a defined public budget. Essentially, PB is about giving local people more say in how public funding is spent in their area.

PB was first used in Brazil around 20 years ago, and is now used in many countries. In the UK, the Department for Communities and Local Government is responsible for rolling out PB.

PB has already been used in various ways throughout England such as Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and New Deals for Communities.

PB is being promoted by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the government wants all local authority areas to be implementing PB by 2012.

How does it work?

A pot of money is allocated to the community and they are then facilitated through a process to decide (discuss, vote and prioritise) how the money should be spent.

Why is it important?

The positive impacts of PB could be far-reaching. It has the potential to bring people from diverse backgrounds together to make decisions for local communities. Through enabling the participation of citizens in budget setting, it is hoped that local governance will become more effective, democratic and relevant.

However, we know from experience and research of other mechanisms (such as Local Strategic Partnerships) that 'women's issues' and women's/gender equality can be easily overlooked and marginalised.

What can I do?

Because discrimination against women and women's equality are often not prioritised in government policy, may be invisible, seen as irrelevant ('women now have equality'), or seen as 'private' or individual problems (such as domestic violence), it is vital that we have 'women's champions' engaging and influencing PB.

Working with others: How can you work with other organisations and individuals interested in women's equality? You are more likely to be effective if you are working and organising with others. Also, you could consider if it is appropriate to involve volunteers and service users.

Find out what your local area is doing: Get in touch with your local infrastructure organisation (such as Council for Voluntary Service, Rural Community Council), community empowerment network, equalities network or LSP lead (usually based in the council). They are likely to be involved in PB and can let you know about how you can get involved.

Identify key issues: The aim of PB is to spend time understanding the issues and then deciding together on the solutions. However, we know from experience how easily women's equality can be overlooked or seen as unimportant by others who have no experience or knowledge of what's happening for women in local communities. Being prepared with good information and evidence about women's needs may enable you to have more constructive conversations with others who are unaware of how and what issues are having particular impacts on women.

Talk with your local council: Ask your local council if they are experimenting with PB and how you can get involved in improving services. Look on their website to find out how local people are currently involved. If you are in a regeneration area, talk to the people responsible for spending money in your area. There may be regular area forums or other public meetings organised by the council. In more rural areas there will often be a parish council to go to. Your local library is always a good place to start to find out who to speak to, as are community centres and your local Council for Voluntary Service.

Talk with your local councillors: Local councillors are elected to represent the whole community in your local council area. They have access to important knowledge and make many decisions that affect local services. Ask them how you can become involved to improve services. Express your desire to have your voice heard and promote the opportunities through greater participation by all.

Talk with the Participatory Budgeting Unit: The PB Unit exists to support the development of participatory democracy through involvement in public budgets. It is the leading organisation supporting councils and communities interested in participatory budgeting.

Where can I get more information/support?

Your **local infrastructure organisations**, umbrella bodies and second tier organisations (such as your Council for Voluntary Service (CVC), Rural Community Council (RCC), equalities networks and forums etc) are likely to be involved:

- www.navca.org.uk (to find the details of your local CVS)
- www.acre.org.uk (to find the details of your local RCC)
- www.fairplaysw.org.uk (Fair Play South West)
- www.equalitysouthwest.org.uk (Equality South West)

The **Participatory Budgeting Unit** is helping communities and public bodies with PB. It has lots of useful resources, case studies and information, including details of events in different areas:

- www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

The **Women's Resource Centre** can provide practical help and advice (e.g. through our 'Stronger Together' programme) about influencing participatory budgeting and other mechanisms:

- www.wrc.org.uk

The DCLG's **draft national PB Strategy**, and responses to the consultation, is available online. This will give you a good idea of the government's plan to fulfil its ambition to roll out PB in all local authority areas by 2012:

- www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/participatorybudgeting

Urban Forum is the umbrella body for community and voluntary groups with interests in urban and regional policy, especially regeneration. They **produce policy briefings** on a range of issues affecting local organisations including the Duty to Involve, participatory budgeting and LSPs:

- www.urbanforum.org.uk