



Greensboro PB

GREENSBORO PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING 2015-2016 RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“PB allowed a different type of person an equal opportunity to participate, for a change.” – *Steering Committee Member*

In April 2016, more than 1,000 residents voted in Greensboro’s first Participatory Budgeting process for projects they deemed important to be included in the 2016-2017 city’s budget. With a total of \$500,000 allocated for capital projects, divided equally among the city’s five districts, residents voted for two new bus shelters, a city-wide bus tracking phone app, installation of five crosswalks across neighborhood thoroughfares, two mural projects, “Welcome to Greensboro” signage, and public safety and recreation amenities for a total of 26 projects to be installed throughout the city.

Greensboro, NC holds the distinction of hosting the first Participatory Budgeting (PB) process in the South. It is only one of a few in the United States to date to involve the entire city. Additionally, Greensboro’s PB process remains unique in one other way. The funds for the process were derived from the city’s general fund, rather than from discretionary dollars, menu money, or specified tax dollars as is the case in most other U.S. locales. These factors and others, including an initial split vote of support from the City Council, meant that Greensboro’s PB process unfolded differently than elsewhere around the country. Throughout the research/evaluation process, we documented those distinctions along with the challenges and opportunities that arose.

In fall 2015 and spring 2016, a research team led by the University of North Carolina under the direction of Dr. Spoma Jovanovic with graduate assistant Vincent Russell and undergraduate assistant Rodney Johnson, attended more than 74 Greensboro PB events, including steering committee meetings, volunteer trainings, budget delegate meetings, expos, and voting days. The research team analyzed 724 surveys administered both at the beginning of the process and at the end of it, completed dozens of interviews with residents, volunteers, elected officials, city staff and PB staff, and completed research on prior city reports to help educate and inform the process as it was unfolding. The results of that research, along with the recommendations for future iterations of Greensboro Participatory Budgeting, are provided in this report.

“What was so great was not just my ideas, but all the other ideas. It was good to see people involved.”
– *Budget Delegate*


Greensboro residents advocated for Participatory Budgeting for four years before the Greensboro City Council approved money for the process. Advocates argue PB holds the potential to not only reconnect citizens to their government, but also to: foster relationships among neighbors; build coalitions across political, racial and class lines; address inequalities where they persist; and, renew faith that government can be the transparent, equitable, inclusive, and empowering institution that residents of Greensboro want.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Greensboro's first cycle of Participatory Budgeting accomplished its many goals detailed in this report, even under less than ideal circumstances: uneven support from elected officials; a slow start and then a rushed schedule of events that had the effect of hindering some of the desired deliberation; and structural constraints that limited the possibility of transformative projects. Still, Greensboro PB engaged a record number of people in a collaborative, positive, hopeful process, one that the residents assert is important for their city to continue. Building on the accomplishments of the first cycle, and incorporating feedback and recommended changes as detailed by all PB stakeholders, the outlook for Greensboro PB is bright.

KEY FINDINGS

Overall and based on extensive research throughout the entire process, it is clear that Greensboro Participatory Budgeting was well received among all constituent groups, most notably the residents of the city.

 **“This is such an important process that has huge potential to get folks feeling more connected to one another and potentially a greater sense of authentic citizen empowerment.”** – *Idea Collection Participant*

Survey responses, interview answers, and informal comments at the myriad events are included throughout this report providing evidence for the following:

- 1. Greensboro PB successfully included people of color and low-income residents,** reflecting the city's population in ethnicity, income and gender. The latter part of the process was more successful in actively engaging the international community.
- 2. Resident participation in government budget activity increased.** Notably, 85% of PB participants were new to the city's budgeting process. The 2,000 people involved with PB in its first year stands in stark contrast to citizen involvement in information-only budget meetings in the previous five years (2012-2016) that amounted to only 298 people.¹
- 3. Greensboro PB boosted civic engagement** with 70% of the 2,000 participants² not previously involved in city/community endeavors. PB volunteers (in addition to steering committee members) devoted nearly 1,000 hours throughout the process. College students were active in researching and promoting PB.
- 4. Greensboro PB was an easy, positive gateway for residents to engage with city government officials.** Residents exclaimed that their contact with city officials were helpful, upbeat, and indicative of good government. This is particularly relevant considering that 19% of survey

1 See [Appendix](#) for participation history details.

2 60% of survey respondents in idea collection and 72% of voters reported no involvement in other forms of community engagement.

3 20% of survey respondents in idea collection and 18% of voters indicated they did not trust political leaders at least some of the time.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

respondents³ reported they did not trust their political leaders much or at all. A District 1 resident said, “I thought this was a good thing, and I’m hoping that’s how city government conducts other types of business.” A city staff member said, “There are a lot of people who may not know who to contact about particular issues; PB offered a direct way to get involved.”


5. **Residents viewed Greensboro PB as a positive change-making process that builds social capital.** Participants were offered multiple points of entry into the process, allowing engagement in one phase or all, based on resident interests and scheduling. Budget delegates reported that their involvement led to improvements in their ability to relate to neighbors, organize meetings, and build consensus for neighborhood projects.
6. **Greensboro PB motivated residents to want to do more in their city.** Budget delegates overwhelmingly reported that after participating in PB they would be more likely to attend other community meetings. Many, if not most, also indicated wanting to be involved in the next PB cycle to take on greater responsibilities.
7. **The most successful outreach efforts involved community groups,** particularly neighborhood associations. Following that, residents reported they learned of PB from friends/family and through online sources, particularly social media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this first-time effort, Greensboro PB accomplished the goals it had established. At the same time, there was no way to fully anticipate all the needs required for the complex, five-district process. Challenges were exacerbated due to lack of time to deeply consider the implications and needs of the process. The research suggests that for PB to reach its fullest potential, there are a number of changes that should be implemented in future processes.

1. **Greensboro Participatory Budgeting (PB) should continue as an annual process to engage residents.** An overwhelming percentage of residents surveyed support continuing the process. Voters said they believed PB is “good for the city.” A city council member said, “I have not had anyone tell me they didn’t want it [PB] or didn’t see the advantage of it.”
2. **Invest more money into Greensboro PB and promote the process fully.** Best practice guidelines suggest \$1 million be allocated for PB for every 100,000 people. For Greensboro, that would mean allocating \$2.5 million for PB. We also recommend fully using city-available media—newsletter, email-blasts, TV, press releases, flyers, brochures—and council member networks to better promote PB throughout all phases. Greensboro PB should be branded to be eye-catching and enticing with a logo, thematic color scheme, slogan, and possibly even animation. PB needs to be part of the fabric of the city, rather than implemented as a separate process.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

 “This process included more community members, and they actually developed a deeper understanding of the budget and the amount of work that goes into what staff does. My favorite part was seeing people get injected into city processes.” – *City Staff Member*

- 3. Develop deeper partnerships with community organizations and established city commissions.** Community partnerships and communication with commissions can be deepened and leveraged. Community groups can provide meeting locations, refreshments, childcare, and translation services. Involvement by city commissions in PB is to be encouraged to coordinate activity. PB money for programs could be designated for area nonprofits to implement which would lighten the load on city staff time.
- 4. Add programmatic projects** for PB consideration. Residents, staff, steering committee members, volunteers, and elected officials all expressed interest in using PB to address issues such as affordable housing, food security, and accessible transportation that benefit low-income adults and children, environmental/beautification projects, and parks and recreation programming.

- 5. Encourage higher quality project ideas rather than a larger quantity of ideas during the idea collection phase.** More time and focus on deliberation and vetting of ideas by community members will save staff time. Collect contact information and idea details from participants. Idea collection events should be restructured to promote deeper discussion of priority, community needs.
- 6. Clarify roles and responsibilities** for elected officials, steering committee members, budget delegates, city department heads, and city staff. Invest in discussions to detail expectations, develop sign-off processes, and affirm authority structures (ex: who can say “yes” or “no” throughout the process). The Steering Committee members need to be the face of PB in the community and acting as liaisons with budget delegates and city council members.
- 7. Incorporate more formal citizen education about city services, departments, and the budget into the PB process** to assist citizens in learning the scope of services the city provides or could provide⁴.


⁴ See [Appendix](#) for an overview of city services.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

8. Adjust Greensboro's PB to be a citywide process, rather than district-based. Project proposals will benefit from less constraints and outreach activity will be more efficient. By expanding PB beyond district boundaries. Most residents are unaware of the district they live in, indicating they are interested in projects around the city, but not necessarily according to district boundaries. If district apportionment is kept, budget delegates should be grouped by district instead of interest area to ensure the necessary dialogue about district priorities and needs.

9. Modify the timeline of PB to align with the city's existing budget process. By starting Phase 1 in spring 2017, there will be time for staff to properly consider adjustments needed for vetting projects and communicating more effectively. With a spring start date and fall vote, city staff members will be able to integrate PB projects into their budgets due the following February, as they desire.

10. Establish a city staff PB task force comprised of members from multiple departments—budget, communications, IT, human relations, etc.—to ensure that PB is integrated smoothly across departments. This task force should be considered internal PB representatives to more broadly educate staff and departments. Similarly, they should be external PB representatives to coordinate with budget delegates and the steering committee members.


 **"I felt grateful that some people in our local government would accept or invite the PB process here."**

– *Idea Collection Participant*

11. Increase youth and international outreach efforts to promote engagement, following the national trend in PB processes to communicate trust and confidence in youth and newer residents to engage in civic matters. Develop mobile idea collection and voting programs for middle schools, high schools, and area colleges and universities.

12. Designate a Greensboro PB volunteer coordinator and develop simple on-line recruiting tools (see National Folk Festival model) to deepen participation. Provide t-shirts and other PB branded materials for volunteers.

13. Build in celebratory and thematic features to PB. For the next cycle of PB to launch with the needed fanfare, support, and visibility for the even greater participation that is desired, the city should host a kick-off event with awards, stories, and updates from first cycle activity. A theme, such as "We're In This Together" or "Arts For All" can provide needed focus on the desired impact of PB such as improving resident-government relationships or enhancing the city's commitment to the arts.

 **"What was most rewarding was seeing the citizens becoming more engaged and more understanding of differing views."** – *Steering Committee Member*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

YEAR ONE AT-A-GLANCE

Greensboro PB 2015-2016

Year One At-a-Glance

01

August–December 2015

Phase 1: Idea Collection



1098 people
Contributed ideas



18 Steering Committee Members
Appointed by City Council



\$108,300 in donations
Collected to launch Greensboro PB



7 PB training days
For City Staff, Steering Committee and Volunteers



77 Volunteers



675 ideas collected
At neighbourhood assemblies, mobile events and online at ideasgreensboro.org

02

December 2015–March 2016

Phase 2: Proposal Development



40 Budget Delegates
Turned Ideas into project proposals



5 Budget Delegate Committees
Arts & Culture, Parks & Recreation, Safety & Environment, Special Projects, and Streets Sidewalks & Transportation



Over 200 Expo Attendees



1247 Volunteer Hours

03

April 2016

Phase 3: The Vote



1123 Voters
Greensboro residents age 14 and older



46 Projects on 5 Ballots



\$470,000 for Winning Projects



26 Winning Projects
Approved by City Council on 6/7/16



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GREENSBORO PB PARTICIPATION AT-A-GLANCE: *Phases I, II, III (2015-2016)*

	PHASE I* Idea Collection	PHASE II* Budget Delegate	PHASE III* Voter	Census/ACS
Age				
15 - 17 years old ¹	3%	0%	3%	5%
18 - 24 years old	15%	8%	18%	18%
25 - 44 years old	44%	61%	29%	34%
45 - 64 years old	27%	23%	34%	29%
≥ 65 years old	11%	8%	16%	14%
Gender²				
Male	41%	60%	40%	47%
Female	59%	40%	60%	53%
Education (residents ≥ 25)				
Less than high school diploma	2%	0%	1%	11%
High school diploma, GED or equivalent	5%	8%	7%	23%
Some college or AA	17%	15%	25%	29%
Bachelor's degree	41%	36%	31%	24%
Graduate or Professional Degree	36%	36%	37%	13%
Annual Household Income				
< \$10,000	15%	8%	12%	9%
\$10,000 - \$24,999	8%	14%	11%	20%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	28%	35%	25%	29%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	21%	27%	20%	17%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	14%	5%	12%	10%
≥ \$100,000	15.3%	11%	20%	15%
Race/ethnicity				
Asian	3%	0%	0%	4%
Black or African American	38%	49%	37%	41%
Hispanic or Latino/a	3%	5%	4%	8%
Other	1%	0%	2%	NA
White	51%	49%	53%	46%
Total surveys collected	160	40	524	NA
Response Rate	59%	100%	47%	NA

* Percentages in this column are computed based on completed survey questions only.

5 Though 14 years old was the minimum age for voting, the youngest Greensboro PB voter was 16 and thus we could compare to census data for 15-17 year olds.

6 Transgender and other gender identity are not included in census data. Therefore voter survey respondents who identified this way were excluded from census comparisons here.