



Our Voice, Our Choice Budget

Columbus' Participatory
Budgeting Program 2026

Created by
Our Voice, Our Choice Budget
Steering Committee

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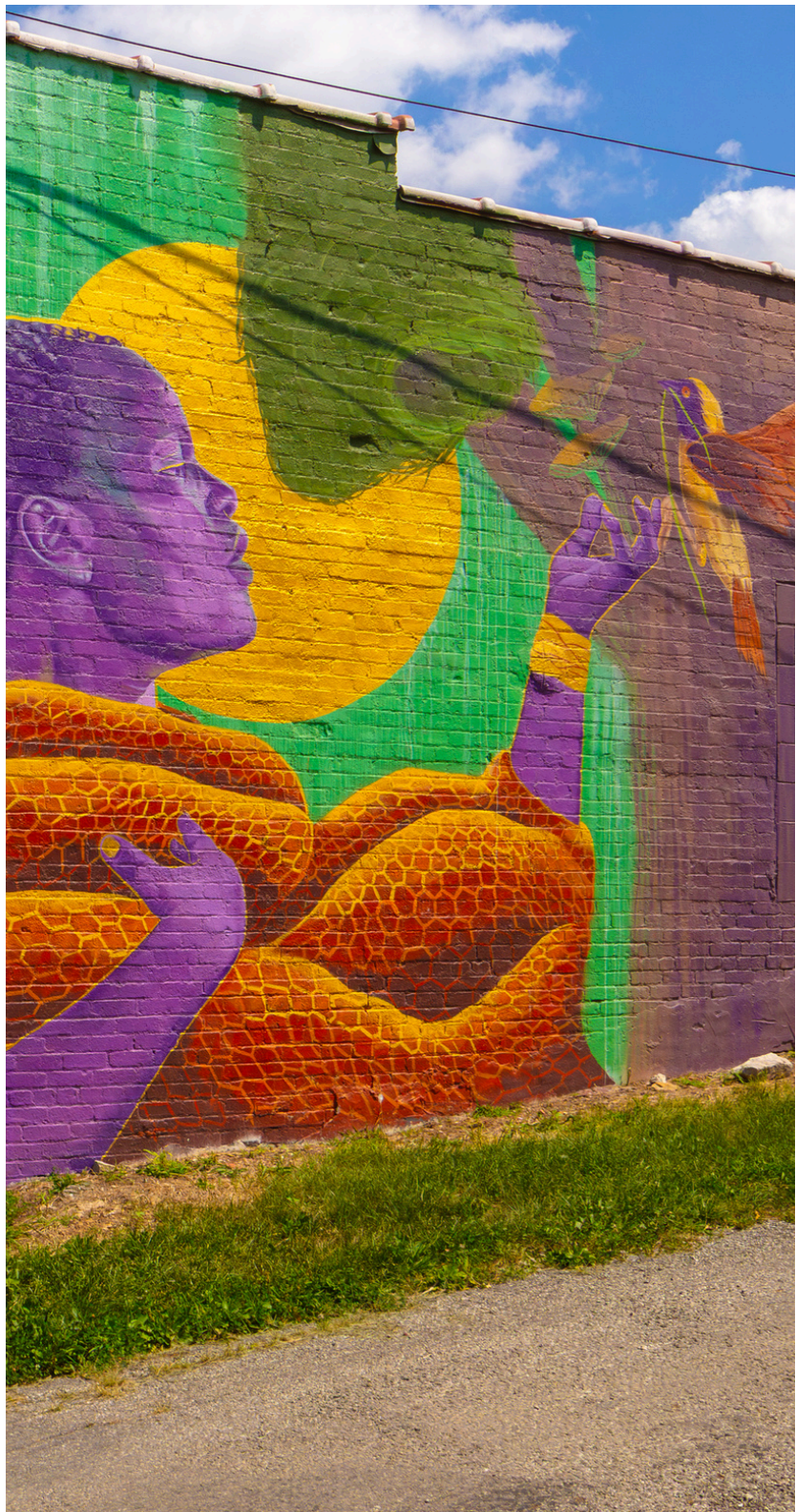


About the Guidebook

This guidebook documents the development of the City's pilot Participatory Budgeting (PB) program and highlights the resident-led decisions and recommendations established by the "Our Voice, Our Choice" Steering Committee.

No two participatory budgets look alike! PB is intended to facilitate community-led decision-making, and is therefore adapted to the needs, interests, and visions of specific communities.

To tailor the process to these local conditions and ambitions, a group of residents (typically referred to as the "steering committee") comes together to "design" the process for each unique cycle. These decisions form the Guidebook: the document that allows community members, participants, and other stakeholders to get a sense of what the process will look like in practice and how they can get involved.



About Participatory Budgeting



PB is a democratic process that gives ordinary people, particularly with those whose perspectives are often excluded from civic processes, direct decision-making influence over a portion of a public budget.

While PB does not replace the City's responsibility to manage taxpayer dollars, it complements the traditional budget by carving out a dedicated space for community voice.

Leaders in over 3,000 cities and municipalities have implemented PB to spend a portion of their budgets in direct partnership with community members, to better listen to residents, and, perhaps most importantly, to build trust between city leadership and communities.

A PB process involves a cycle of engagement that can be combined with regular budgeting activities that spark a variety of powerful, lasting impacts across a community.

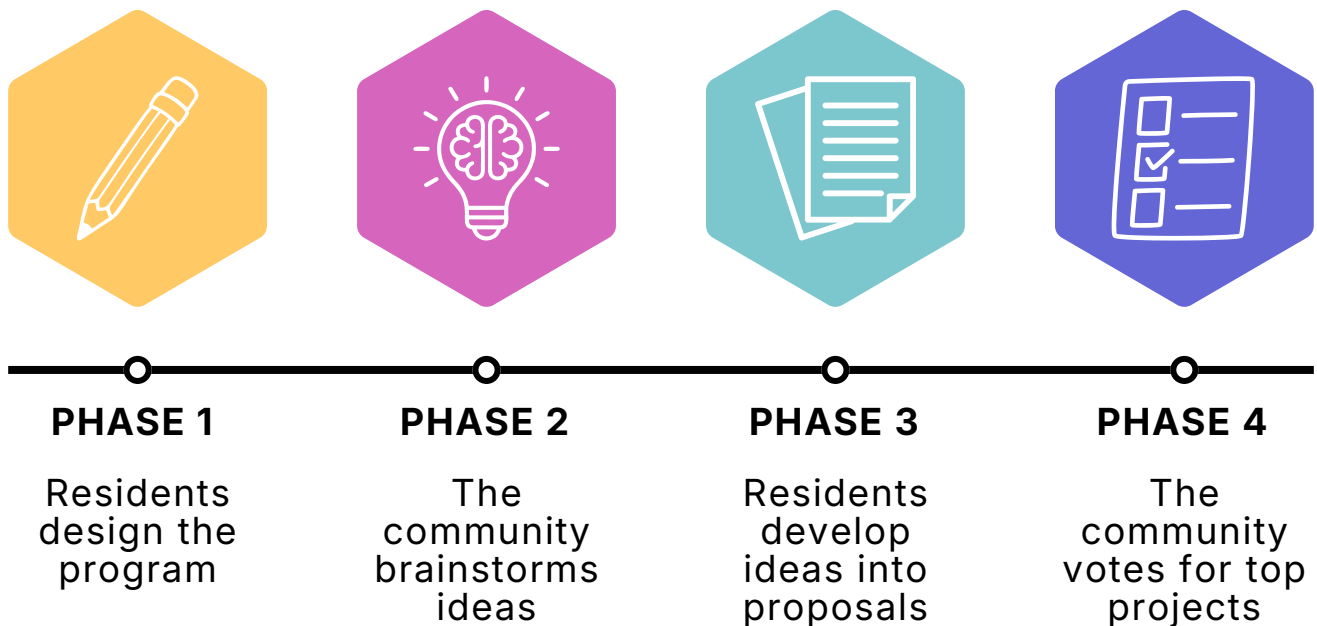
Our Voice, Our Choice

In 2025 Councilmember Nicholas J. Bankston secured \$9 million via the City's Capital Budget to support the establishment of the City's first-ever PB process.

The \$9 million in capital funds will be distributed equally among the City's nine Council Districts and will fund resident-led projects via a robust community engagement process. In this community-driven cycle, residents do more than just vote—they lead the way by designing the process and brainstorming neighborhood improvements.

For those looking to lend a hand with this effort, the City invites you to serve as a "Budget Delegate." In this role, Budget Delegates work side-by-side with City staff to transform initial ideas into full proposals—complete with cost estimates and timelines—while gaining hands-on experience in municipal infrastructure planning.

Residents in each of the nine Columbus council districts will come together and brainstorm to submit their ideas of what projects should be built in their neighborhood with a \$1 million dollar budget.



Steering Committee

The Our Voice, Our Choice Budget Steering Committee for 2025-2026 is made up of 18 community members representing the 9 Columbus Districts. The Steering Committee came together in a series of eleven workshops to make key decisions about the implementation of Our Voice, Our Choice Budget for this pilot cycle, including:

- The values, principles and goals guiding this pilot process
- Eligibility criteria for participation in the idea collection and voting phases
- The voting system



District 1

Brandy Ranjan
Gibika Sapkota

District 2

Kimberly Clark
Kristen J Hosni

District 3

Irfan Ali Shah Akhundzada
Leonardo Rodriguez

District 4

Cynthia Engmann
Smith Francois

District 5

Sumayo Abdi
Comfort Cole-Kenneh

District 6

Lawrence Jackson
Linda Steward

District 7

Briona Hall
Nicole E. Harris

District 8

Sandra Harris
Tendeko Mopeh-Thomas

District 9

Shayanna Hinkle-Moore
Ronald Murray

Participatory Budget Coordinator

Melissa Bila

Participation Eligibility

Idea Collection

- Who can submit: All Columbus community members are invited to participate in idea collection activities.

Proposal Development (Budget Delegates)

- Eligibility: Must be 14 years or older and live, work, or attend school in the district.
- Verification: Proof of residency, employment, or school enrollment is required during the application process.

Voting

- Eligibility: Must be 16 years or older and live in the district.
- Verification: Self-Attestation
 - During voting participants will agree: I affirm that I meet the eligibility requirements for this participatory budgeting process and that I currently live within the district. I understand that no proof of residency is required and that this process relies on good-faith participation to ensure broad and equitable community access.

Voting System

- Residents will vote to select and to prioritize projects within their district. Top-ranked projects that fit within the \$1 million budget will be recommended for implementation.



Outreach and Engagement

To ensure that the PB process is truly equitable, the Steering Committee has identified four priority groups. The goal is to meet residents where they are, remove participation hurdles, and build trust through established community networks.

Priority 1: ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Households

- Conduct "pop-up" tabling and canvassing at high-traffic essential locations like grocery stores, food banks, and school sporting events.
- Utilize hyper-local platforms such as NextDoor, community newsletters, and "Columbus Helps" pages.
- Accessibility: food, childcare, transportation and flexible "call-in" and time options for activities.

Priority 2: Historically Underserved Communities

- Work directly with social workers, anti-violence professionals, and existing reentry or support organizations.
- Train partner organizations to lead conversations, ensuring the PB message comes from a trusted, familiar source.
- Accessibility: food, childcare, transportation and flexible "call-in" and time options for activities.

Priority 3: Youth & Young Adults

- Use school announcements and campus "third spaces" for idea collection.
- Pivot away from official City social media pages; instead, leverage influential local voices and giveaways to drive interest.
- Frame the Budget Delegate role as a professional development opportunity for resume building, references, and community service hours.



Outreach and Engagement

Priority 4: New Americans, Immigrants, & Refugees

- Provide fully translated materials and on-site interpreters for all engagement activities.
- Focused outreach through WhatsApp groups, faith-based bulletins, and interactive, prize-based educational events.
- Accessibility: Ensure all meetings include language support and are held in spaces where these communities feel safe and welcomed.

Across all groups, the following supports are mandatory to ensure a diverse participation and Budget Delegate pool:

1. **Logistics:** Provide transportation and varied location access.
2. **Care:** Provide childcare services and food and beverages during in-person meetings.
3. **Flexibility:** Alternate calling-in options and varied timing to respect non-traditional work schedules.
4. **Outreach:** Utilize social media platforms.



Process Values and Goals

Strengthen the PB process through the Steering Committee's active involvement in creating partnerships and collaborations between the City of Columbus and residents, and their dedicated commitment to advancing all PB goals.

Empower and Educate by increasing the community's understanding of and participation in the public budgeting process and showing how public budgeting can address their needs and create important projects that help the City, each neighborhood, and everyone who lives in Columbus.

Promote Stability through a peaceful, unified, and safe community by prioritizing PB projects that strengthen community support and expand access to infrastructures.

Expand Community Engagement by strengthening long-term trust between communities and the City through inclusive participation, increasing awareness of the PB process, and encouraging cooperation across communities.



Values & Principles

Community

Bring residents, students, local leaders, and neighbors together by actively asking for and respecting input from people of all cultures and backgrounds for the good of the whole Columbus community.

Equity & Inclusion

An open, fair, and equitable process for all Columbus residents, that focuses on providing equal access to opportunities, information, and resources to people most affected by local decisions so that everyone can participate.

Transparency, Integrity, & Trust

Grounded in openness, honesty, and accountability. Ways are created for resident input, so participants feel comfortable asking questions without fear. Communication and information will be clear and trustworthy to increase transparency in decision-making.

Empowerment

Actively listen and value community voices by educating community members about local government decision making and creating awareness of opportunities to participate in sharing ideas, submitting proposals, and voting on projects to be implemented in their district.

Sustainability

Promote a sustainable and responsible PB process, by focusing on projects that are built to last, are maintainable, and deliver visible, long-term community benefits through good management of public funds.

Community Partners

The City has contracted with nine Community Organization Partners to lead outreach and engagement, encouraging residents to participate in the Idea Collection and Voting phases of the Our Voice, Our Choice Budget.

The Idea Collection phase of this process will begin the week of July 6, 2026. You can connect with the following Community Organization Partner for your district for more information.

District 1: Ohio Hispanic Coalition

Josue Vicente - josue@ohiohispaniccoalition.org
Sarah DeMeo - sarah@ohiohispaniccoalition.org

District 2: Community Refugee and Immigration Services

Angela Plummer - aplummer@cris-ohio.org
Tyler Reeve - treeve@cris-ohio.org

District 3: Elevate Northland

Lynnise Smith - lynnise@elevatenorthland.org
Alice Foeller - alice@elevatenorthland.org

District 4: Community of Caring Development Foundation

Adam K. Troy - atroy@callingallconnectors.org
Sharon Gordon - sharon@urbantrendsetters.com
donna Hicho - dhicho@callingallconnectors.org

District 5: See Brilliance

Nathan Harris - info@seebrilliance.org

District 6: Transit Columbus

Stephanie Pasamonte - stevie@transitcolumbus.org

District 7: Community for New Direction

John Dawson - jdawson@cndcolumbus.org

District 8: South Side Thrive Collaborative

Sarah Lenkay - Sarah.Lenkay@nationwidechildrens.org

District 9: Columbus Literacy Council

Tatiana Bogdanova - tbogdanova@columbusliteracy.org
Joy D. Reyes - jreyes@columbusliteracy.org

If you do not know which district you live in, you can find out by going to

[COLUMBUS.GOV/COUNCIL](https://columbus.gov/council)