

# WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING? (PB)

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FACTSHEET

**It's an innovative way to distribute funding fairly and transparently with local people or groups. These people or groups present ideas to their community and everyone has a vote on how the money will be allocated. Whoever has the most votes receives the money.**

Participatory Budgeting directly involves local people in making decisions on the priorities and spending for a defined public budget. This means engaging residents and community groups representative of all parts of the community to discuss and vote on spending priorities. (PBU, 2008).

## Why use participatory budgeting?

PB is based on the concept that when a whole community has a say when money is spent it leads to better decision making and to more people getting involved. There is an implicit understanding when using PB and that is the knowledge that "local people know their community best". (Welsh Govt.).

PB empowers communities, gets more people involved in democracy and improves local public services (PB network and PB partners).

PB originated in Brazil in particularly deprived areas where there was poor or no access to public amenities such as clean water, sanitation, healthcare or education. PB is a way to include and involve the most isolated members of the population in decision making about the services they need.

PB has found success in a number of countries emerging from conflict in the absence of democracy. This experience indicates that Northern Ireland could benefit from PB to grow participatory democracy, enhance relationships between community and political sectors and develop the role of local politicians..... (Observatory Policy Basic, 2011).

## There are 3 main ways in which funding can be distributed

- Community Grant Pot
- Devolved funds to wards or neighbourhoods
- Funding for mainstream services

## What is important in PB?

There are 9 values of Participatory Budgeting which are supported by a number of principles. PB has no set way to start but adherence to these values and principles is important. Participatory Budgeting will ensure that the core benefits of community empowerment, social cohesion and responsive services will result. PB is closely aligned to co-production as it builds on the assets of and within the community, and involves the community leading the commissioning process supported by statutory agencies and politicians.

## 9 Values of Participatory Budgeting

### 1. Local Ownership

*Principle: Residents should be involved in setting budget priorities and identifying projects for public spend in their area wherever possible.*

### 2. Direct Involvement

*Principle: PB should involve direct as well as representative engagement wherever possible.*

### 3. Support for representative democracy

*Principle: Participation mechanisms such as PB should be seen as supporting representative democracy rather than undermining it. Councillors hold a unique position as community advocates and champions. PB can increase citizens' trust of councillors and boost the role of ward councillors.*

### 4. Mainstream Involvement

*Principle: Over time PB processes should move towards residents being involved in decisions over mainstream budgets (as opposed to only small grants processes).*

### 5. Accessibility

*Principle: Participants must have good and clear access to PB processes.*

### 6. Transparency

*Principle: PB processes are designed to give citizens full and clear knowledge of public budgets in their area, even those over which they do not have a direct say.*

### 7. Deliberation

*Principle: PB processes should take citizens beyond personal choice and involve real deliberation around budget decisions*

### 8. Empowerment

*Principle: PB events are centrally concerned with empowering local citizens in decisions over local services and shaping their local area through allocating part of a public budget Standards: Although there may be several reasons for starting a PB project, all publicity, events and processes should make it clear that empowering local people is a priority.*

*Citizens, officers, councillors and partners should plan and lead PB events together, demonstrating local people's empowerment. Evaluation should explore how well PB has empowered people. Good capacity-building is essential for good community empowerment and should always be used in PB processes.*

### 9. Shared responsibility

*Principle: PB should build common purpose and a commitment from all stakeholders PB Unit*



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*"Participatory budgeting is recognised worldwide as an effective way for empowering local communities and a model of best practice in public and democratic engagement."* Jez Hall (Co-ordinator PB Partners UK).

## TRIANGLE

**Triangle Housing** Triangle has become a leading provider of innovative supported housing and support services for vulnerable people across Northern Ireland Triangle Housing Association have had participatory budgeting events with their service users.

Triangle Support Services directorate decided to create a 'Vote for Fun' project. Each of their 25 supported Living schemes were offered chance to win £500, they had to come up with an idea of how they would spend the money, something that would encourage and promote social inclusion within their supported living unit/scheme.

Triangle hosted a 'Vote for Fun' day where the schemes presented their plans to their fellow service users and everyone then voted for the best idea. There was one winner (each winning £500) from each of the 4 regional areas. Ideas ranged from gardening equipment, iPad's, garden sheds, pamper products for a group of ladies, sensory materials to help with destressing, musical instruments, garden makeovers, BBQ equipment and we even had we had a group who wanted to create a pitch and putt in their back garden!

The excitement and energy at the events were palable throughout the day. Clients were motivated to contribute to the process either with ideas, present the bids or vote. This was a fantastic demonstration of the power of PB as way to enage communties.

### Useful links and further reading

<https://pbnetwork.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Grant-Making-through-Participatory-Budgeting.-A-guide-for-Community-Choices.pdf>

<https://pbnetwork.org.uk/>

Grant making through Participatory Budgeting. A how to guide for Community Led Organisations and community engagement workers. Scottish Government Community Choices Programme.

### References

Participatory Budgeting Unit (2010) Participatory Budgeting in the UK. A toolkit. PB Unit. (2nd ed)

Participatory Budgeting Unit. Participatory Budgeting Values, Principles and Standards for Participatory Budgeting. PB Unit.

PB network and PB partners. Participatory Budgeting. An introduction. PB Partners and PB Network

Welsh Government. Participatory Budgeting Toolkit.

Observatory Policy Basic (2011) Participatory Budgeting: community decision making on public budgets. Policy Basics. Issue 3.

Building Change Trust and Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.

*If it feels like we have decided it's PB.*

*If it feels like someone else decided has decided, it is isn't*

VOTE

