



CITY OF  
SOMERVILLE

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# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING GUIDEBOOK

A Guide to the First-Ever Cycle of PB in Somerville



**DEVELOPED BY**

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# WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory Budgeting, or PB for short, is a democratic process in which community members will propose and vote on how to spend \$1,000,000 of public money in Somerville.

Participatory Budgeting is a way for a city's residents to suggest, discuss, and vote on ideas to improve the quality of life in Somerville. It is a tool of direct democracy that creates a shared decision-making process.

The aim of Participatory Budgeting is to make the city's development more equitable and to create transparency for citizens to learn and deliberate about priorities for their community. Participatory Budgeting framework puts a lot of emphasis on personal connections and in-person events.

City governments benefit from a participatory process because citizens assist in targeting investments and setting budget priorities. It allows the community to pilot new and innovative ideas.

The first instance of Participatory Budgeting was launched in Porto-Alegre in Brazil in 1989. Since then, it has been implemented in many cities around the world. The closest example is in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 2023, Cambridge will be in their 10th cycle of Participatory Budgeting.



# ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Projects that are ideal for Participatory Budgeting follow these criteria:

- Serve public benefit
- Are limited to a one-time expense
- Can be implemented on city-owned public property
- Cost less than \$1 million

Projects won't be accepted if:

- Implementation requires the City to hire additional staff
- Location requires private, state, or MBTA property
- Acquisition or completion requires a specific service or intellectual property, such that the city cannot receive bids from multiple vendors (ex: The City should buy XX service/product from XX company)
- Existing City policies would be compromised

Before being submitted to the public vote, all projects must be approved by the City Solicitor to ensure that legal requirements are met.



# GOALS OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

- The community views this process as fair, open, and democratic.
- The budget is maximized for the community. People have direct influence over how their government spends a portion of their funds for the things that matter to them.
- The community sees that change is possible and that any citizen can bring about change. People feel engaged and believe that they have the ability to affect local government.
- At least 100 ideas are submitted.
- At least 2,000 votes are received. Participating in the budgeting process is viewed as important and a key element of civic life.
- No voices are missing from the process. The people submitting ideas, conducting community outreach, refining ideas and voting are representative of the diversity and demographics in Somerville.
- That outreach efforts focus particularly on underrepresented groups
- Participation is a frictionless experience. Participation is easy, engaging and fun, with accommodations for language and access.



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# PHASES OF PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

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# PROCESS DESIGN & PLANNING PHASE

The goal of this phase is to design the process in conjunction with the community, adapting the Participatory Budgeting framework to meet the needs of Somerville residents.

The first half of this phase involved the Working Group, made up of 11 residents and one City Councilor, meeting with city staff over a period of eight weeks to understand PB and city functions, and also establish guidelines and processes for the inaugural cycle.

Inspiration was drawn from various cities already conducting Participatory Budgeting. This guidebook serves as the formal work product. Other printed materials, events, and planned outreach strategies build off this framework.

A new process design and planning phase will start after the results of a Participatory Budgeting cycle are published, and based on monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness.

The goal of this phase in future years is to update the guidebook and all related PB processes and materials. to best serve the community's needs based on the feedback we receive.





# IDEA SUBMISSION PHASE

This stage will aim to accomplish three tasks:

- 1) Educate residents on what is meant by Participatory Budgeting
- 2) Encourage ideas from all demographics of Somerville residents
- 3) Recruit volunteer Budget Delegates who are interested in further reviewing the submissions

## WHERE CAN PEOPLE SUBMIT IDEAS?

The main method by which residents will submit ideas will be through the City of Somerville's website:

<https://www.somervillema.gov/pb>

A paper submission form will also be available at Somerville City Hall, the three public libraries, and other locations upon request. Community members can also call the City of Somerville 311 office or 617-625-6600 ext. 2107.

## WHO CAN SUBMIT AN IDEA?

Anyone 12 and older living in Somerville is welcome to submit an idea, regardless of citizenship status.

## OUTREACH

Many channels described in Appendix A, including a social media campaign, flyers and ads around the city, and various types of in-person events will be utilized to connect citizens with a variety of resources including the website, PB volunteers and City Staff. Volunteers and staff will be well-versed in PB and serve as an accessible source of information for those who need it.

## WHAT INFORMATION IS REQUIRED TO SUBMIT AN IDEA?

Mandatory information on the website and the paper-based submission form:

- Project idea

*Short description of the proposed project*

- Project location

*Location where the project should be implemented*

- How will this idea improve Somerville?

*Short description of how the idea serves the community's needs*

- Category

*Select one for the following:*

*Community-wide resources, Parks & Green Spaces, Streets & Sidewalks, Arts & Culture, Education, or Other*

- One or two words to describe your project



# IDEA SUBMISSION PHASE (continued)

## IDEA CATEGORIES

### 1. Community-wide Resources

Ideas in this category may pertain to smaller items that would be implemented in multiples throughout the city such as drinking fountains, restrooms, benches, public wifi, or composting bins.

### 2. Parks & Green Spaces

Ideas in this category could include play structures, greenery, new sports equipment, or other natural features that would be implemented in a single location.

### 3. Streets & Sidewalks

Ideas in this category would refer to anything implemented on roadways, sidewalks, crosswalks, or having to do with pedestrian safety, bicyclists, or other modes of vehicle transportation.

### 4. Arts & Culture

Ideas in this category would refer to murals or other installation of public art, cultural events or festivals, beautification of the city, or programming that would build community.

### 5. Education

Ideas in this category involve improving school buildings, providing materials to the libraries, educational programming, or support for early education.

### Use of 'Other' Category

If someone is unsure which category to select, they will have the option to select 'Other'. City staff will review separately to determine which category is best suited for their idea.



# PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT PHASE

The goal of this stage is to evaluate the ideas submitted and determine in a methodical manner which ideas will make it onto the voting ballot.

## GETTING INVOLVED

Interested residents will be able to sign up to become a Budget Delegate via the PB website, at an in-person event, by calling, or by emailing. The time commitment will consist of an orientation and 10 weekly 2 hour meetings, approximately June - August.

## COMMITTEES

During orientation, Budget Delegates will have the opportunity to choose which of the five committees they would like to join. Following the categories residents can select from to define their idea when submitting, the committees will consist of Community-Wide Resources, Parks & Green Spaces, Streets & Sidewalks, Arts & Culture, and Education. A committee must consist of four people at a minimum.

How many projects a committee will select for the final ballot of 20 will be determined by the proportionality of how many ideas were submitted in that category, with a minimum of one.

This method ensures that the process remains democratic. In future years categories can be adjusted to ensure fair representation of ideas submitted.

## WORK PROCESS

Committees will be responsible for reviewing all submitted ideas in their respective categories.

They will review, discuss, and research each idea, in consultation with city staff, and narrow down a smaller selection to research further and grade based on the following criteria:

- Need (5 points)
- Impact (5 points)
- Feasibility (5 points)

With these criteria in mind, as well as feedback from city staff on project cost, the committees will select the final allotted proposals for the ballot.

The location of an idea is subject to change based on committee decision.



# VOTING PHASE

During the Voting phase, members of the public will be asked to vote on projects for implementation within the city.

## WHO CAN VOTE

Anyone 12 and older living or working in Somerville is welcome to vote, regardless of citizenship status. One vote per person.

## WHERE TO VOTE

Voting will be primarily done online at <https://somervillema.gov/pb>, with paper ballots available at any library branch or city hall. Residents may also call 311 for assistance.

## HOW TO VOTE

The ballot will contain 20 ideas selected by the budget delegate committees, with a minimum of one in each category. Voters will rank their top 5 projects in order and winning projects will be selected until funding runs out.

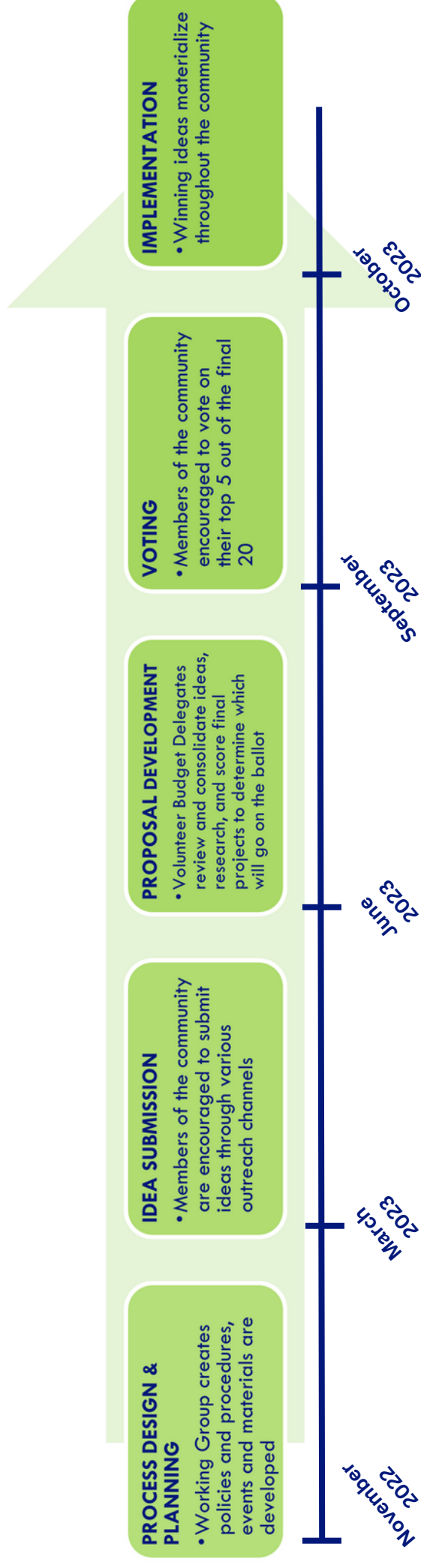
The list of projects in the voting phase will be mailed out to residents, and shared with the community applying the outreach methods detailed in Appendix A, with the focus of in-person events being on canvassing.

## WHEN WILL THE WINNING PROJECTS BE ANNOUNCED?

After the conclusion of the voting period, the Mayor will announce winning projects. Final results will also be available on the website for transparency, along with the status of the project to be updated when it is complete.



# TIMELINE



## PROCESS DESIGN & PLANNING

The Working Group, made up of 11 residents and one City Councilor, met with city staff over a period of 8 weeks to establish these guidelines and establish processes for the inaugural cycle. Inspiration was drawn from various cities already conducting PB. This guidebook serves as the formal work product, with other printed materials, events, and planned outreach strategies building off this framework.

## IDEA SUBMISSION

In this stage of PB the primary goal is to solicit ideas from the public on how to

improve the city using \$1 million.

Multiple outreach channels are detailed further and will be employed over a period of approximately two months. Efforts will include education on what projects are eligible, and on recruiting Budget Delegates.

## PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

During Proposal Development, volunteers called Budget Delegates will meet in committees to review, research, and evaluate submitted ideas in order to reach the final 20 ideas presented on the ballot.

## VOTING

During the Voting stage, members of the public will be asked to vote on ideas for implementation within the city. Ranked choice will allow voters to select multiple ideas, and ideas will be chosen until funding runs out.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The Mayor's Office will request approval from City Council to spend the funding, after which departments may begin to procure and implement the winning ideas.



# VALUES OF THE WORKING GROUP

## TRANSPARENCY

We hold ourselves accountable to the community of Somerville. Our aim in developing this Guidebook is to share our decision-making process in a transparent and accessible way, and to highlight what values we used to guide our choices. Community members are asked to be involved throughout the process, and data on all ideas submitted and final vote tallies will be made public.

## INCLUSIVITY

We must ensure all community members are able to access and engage with the process. This should be demonstrated through translation of materials into the languages of Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese, as well as any accommodations requested through ADA for written content or for in-person events when requested.

## EQUITY

A desired outcome is that we can inspire people to be involved in the development of their community. Through our planning, we aim to engage populations who have not previously been involved in the city as well as those in underrepresented groups. This approach will require more effort to solicit ideas and votes in non-traditional channels.

## TRUST

This will be a city-wide effort to bring ideas to life and we hope this process builds trust that the city will fulfill its promise to deliver these projects in the community. A clear timeline, with steps to get there, and defined roles for all involved will make the vision a reality.

## COMMUNITY

Through careful planning and attention to these values and more, we want all residents in Somerville to be proud that Somerville is launching Participatory Budgeting and will join us to celebrate winning ideas once they materialize. We want to demonstrate that Somerville is a community we are lucky to be a part of now, and for generations to come.



# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

## BUDGET DELEGATES

Anyone in the community is welcome to volunteer to be a Budget Delegate. Their role is to review submitted ideas for eligibility, similarities, and location. An orientation with clear instructions, timelines, and roles will assist in this process. They will also meet periodically with relevant City Staff to coordinate on preexisting strategies and plans, and cost.

Budget Delegates will be working in smaller committees based on submission categories and the review process will be conducted in weekly meetings.

Committees draft project scopes from ideas, and document ineligible submissions with explanations. Each committee will propose at least one project for the ballot.

Throughout their work, Budget Delegates will also be able to provide feedback on the Participatory Budgeting process and at the evaluation workshop(s) after the results of the voting phase are published.

## FACILITATORS

Each committee will appoint one person to serve as the facilitator. This person will make sure that the group stays on track during the meeting, allotting enough time to discuss each item on the agenda, each idea, etc., and that each member has a voice in the conversation. They may take notes themselves or appoint another member to take notes to ensure documentation of ideas and support needed from city staff.

They will serve as the point person for Finance Staff to communicate with and are responsible for bringing any questions or concerns to the attention of City Staff.

## CITY DEPARTMENTS

City Staff assists the work of Budget Delegates in order to determine the eligibility, cost, and feasibility of the submitted ideas. They will meet with committees twice throughout the vetting process and help screen ideas to make sure they are in line with existing plans.



# ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES (cont.)

## COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members of Somerville are residents who are eligible to participate in the Participatory Budgeting and are responsible for submitting ideas and voting on the final ballot.

## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteer opportunities will arise and be communicated through the Participatory Budgeting email list. Anticipated needs include canvassing commercial and residential districts, tabling at citywide events, speaking to community groups about Participatory Budgeting, and more.

## WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

The 11 Working Group members applied to the Working Group in the fall, and met on 8 occasions to discuss and determine the policies and procedures of how PB will run in Somerville for the first year. They may assist throughout the remainder of the Process Design & Planning stage. The appointment is for one cycle of PB, and will reopen ahead of the next cycle.





# MONITORING AND EVALUATION

After each cycle, members of the Working Group, Budget Delegates, and other PB Volunteers are invited to a monitoring and evaluation process which allows the organizers of PB to reflect on the results and impact of this initiative.

Based on the feedback and outputs of the evaluation, the rules for next year's cycle will be updated and a new guidebook will be presented to the Mayor, City Council, and the general public.

The following qualitative measures will be reported throughout the PB process for monitoring and evaluation:

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree, how would you rate the following statements:

- I am satisfied with the Participatory Budgeting initiative.
- Participatory Budgeting in Somerville was able to reach all demographics of the city.
- The effort allocated to each Outreach Method was appropriate.
- PB was well-organized.
- I received adequate instruction for my role in PB.

- I would volunteer with next year's cycle of PB.
- I have a greater understanding of local government and decision-making through PB.
- I am more likely to engage in local government as a result of my time with PB.

The following are examples of quantitative data points reported that may be used for monitoring and evaluation:

- Level of participation
- Demographics
- Number of ideas submitted
- Number of votes
- Number of volunteer hours, available and filled by Outreach channel
- Number of contacts
- Feedback forms at events
- "How did you hear about PB?"
- 311 calls and emails
- Languages
- Newsletter subscription, newsletter engagement, website visits

See Appendix B for detailed KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and monitoring methodology.



# APPENDIX A: OUTREACH METHODS

## FLYERS & ADVERTISEMENTS

Printed materials may be our most visible strategy employed. With limited space, key information to be noted should contain dates, city website, phone, and a QR code with instructions on how to use. As with all written forms of communication, to ensure equity, the materials must be translated by SOIA (Somerville Office of Immigrant Affairs) with two weeks' notice. Current translated languages include Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Nepali, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese. Placement of materials will also determine if we are able to reach non-English speakers.

The types of advertisements could include, but are not limited to, local newspapers, MBTA buses and trains, street banners on electric poles or overhead, billboards, yard signs, and on city-owned trash cans.

Flyers can be hung in city buildings including libraries and schools, parks, in windows of businesses, as well as miscellaneous boards in grocery stores and community gathering places.

## CITY NEWSLETTERS & SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS

One of the quickest ways to reach people will be the official city communications, including newsletters and city social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok. These outreach channels are most likely to reach those already connected into City activities, and must take into consideration which communities and what level of engagement to expect on each platform.

## MAILERS

Sending citywide mailers to every residential address in Somerville has the potential to be the most reliable way to spread the word. Mail with the city seal is respected and trusted as a source of information. For this reason, it can contain the most information and resources. Two citywide mailers will be sent, one at the beginning of the Idea Submission Phase and one containing the final ballot.



# APPENDIX A:

## OUTREACH METHODS (CONT.)

### TABLING

One type of in-person communication channeling will be having a presence at functions throughout the city such as the Somerville Winter Farmer's Market, SomerStreets, or other large-scale events. Being able to have conversations with residents, along with outreach materials, will likely be the most impactful communication. However, it is dependent on people already being aware of city festivals and events being held.

### DROP-IN/COORDINATED EVENTS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

A widely-held belief in PB outreach is to meet people where they already gather in their communities through interest groups, nonprofits, houses of worship, etc. This also refers to people already engaged with their government through the twice annual community meetings held in each ward, Boards & Commissions, and other events held by departments. For this reason, instead of hosting events specifically for Participatory Budgeting, events will be in partnership with existing groups and could look like attending meetings with materials, a short activity, or brainstorming. All groups are welcome and will coordinate through PB staff.

This strategy will likely reach those who are already connected to their neighbors/city government and has the benefit of reaching a large audience at once. How many groups are able to be reached may depend on the availability of PB staff or volunteer availability.

### CANVASSING

A large amount of the volunteer efforts will center around two pushes for canvassing. During the Idea Submission phase, volunteers will look to canvas commercial districts and local businesses with flyers. Ahead of the Voting phase, canvassing will focus on residential districts throughout the city.

### COORDINATION WITH SCHOOLS

Depending on the involvement desired by the schools, Participatory Budgeting will look to engage with students and parents. At a minimum, information can be emailed out to parents. A more time-intensive strategy could include the development of a lesson plan being used to explain how the process works in conjunction with a lesson on democracy, local government, funding, etc. or inclusion in a school-wide assembly.



# APPENDIX B:

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### Level of participation

Share of participants vs eligible residents.

### Demographics

Where possible, collect anonymized information about age, race, gender, housing status, ward to be able to report on results of outreach efforts.

### Number of submitted ideas, and by ward

Reporting the number of submitted ideas allows the Working Group and the City Hall to see engagement, the same metric by ward allows the City Hall to report on equity goals.

### Number of votes, and by ward

Reporting the number of votes allows the Working Group and the City Hall to see engagement, the same metric by ward allows the City Hall to report on equity goals.

### Number of volunteer hours available, and filled

From sign-up sheets, determine how many hours were needed for each activity and how many were filled.

### Number of contacts

How many people were we able to talk to during Tabling, Canvassing, or other in-person events.

### Feedback forms at events

A mix of quantitative and qualitative information regarding in-person outreach, screening participants' expectations and interests.

### How did you hear about PB?

As part of the idea submission form, folks will be provided a list of all the outreach methods and asked how they came across PB.

### 311 calls and emails

Monitoring the number of 311 calls and frequently asked questions allows the PB team to update outreach documents with relevant information.

### Languages

Monitoring the number of ideas submitted in each language allows PB team to report on equity goals.

### Newsletter subscription, newsletter engagement, website visits

Analytics reporting of open rates, click rates, website visits and events allows PB team to constantly improve content and usability of digital platforms.





