

Participatory Budgeting (PB): Voting

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This guide provides an overview of different techniques and methods that can be used to support the voting stage of a Participatory Budgeting (PB) process

What is Participatory Budgeting?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which local people decide directly on how to allocate part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money.

What does a PB process look like?

PB comes in all shapes and sizes, but typically it looks like this:

1. Ideas are generated about how a budget should be spent
2. People vote for their priorities
3. The projects with the most votes get funded



Mostly, participatory budgeting is about bringing people together at local events. Sometimes it also happens online, where digital tools can help even more people to get involved.

Project Ideas

There are a number of different methods that can be used to communicate information about project ideas ahead of, or as part of the voting process:

| Method | Overview | Pros | Cons |
|---------------------|---|---|---|
| Summary of Projects | A summary of each of the Projects is made available in written form, such as a newsletter or booklet. | Projects can be grouped by funding pot/theme, or by budget size (i.e. small grants and large grants). | Can be lengthy if there are many projects. |
| Marketplace | Within a voting event, each participant has a stall to promote their project. | Scope to share examples of work that will be undertaken (i.e. through photographs, maps, visual representations). Encourages people to ask questions about projects ahead of voting. Works well in a situation where there are many projects that have been put forward, and time is limited. | |
| Pitch | Participants pitch their project idea to the audience ahead of a vote. | Scope for innovative and creative ways of communicating the idea (i.e. video, drama). | Some participants will be more comfortable doing this than others. The time needed depending on number of projects |
| Speed dating | Participants rotate around each of the tables in turn, to present and answer questions about their ideas. | People get a chance to speak to groups individually about their ideas. The order in which people hear about projects is randomised. | The time needed depending on number of projects. |

Voting Options

The voting system can be set up in a number of different ways, depending on what is most suitable to the PB process at hand. See below for examples of different voting methods:

| Voting Method | Overview | Pros | Cons |
|---------------|--|---|--|
| Approval | Setting and requiring a maximum number of votes that a person can make under each budget heading, i.e. choose 3 or 5 projects from the list. | Most common type of voting used in PB. It is easy to follow, and helps to ensure that people vote for other projects other than their own. | Need to make sure that enough choices are available to suit both the amount of funding that is available, and the number of projects that there are. |
| Rating | Each person gives a rating to each project (i.e. on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is should definitely be funded). | Works well with electronic voting at an event. | System can be gamed by rating own project higher than other projects. |
| Knapsack | Each person chooses the projects they want to vote for, up to the amount of funding that is available. | Online system can keep track of the total cost of chosen projects until the funding threshold has been reached. | Difficult for people to hold this in memory, unless using some kind of tokens to physically allocate to individual projects. |
| Preference | Each person votes for an agreed number of projects, but votes are weighted (i.e. first choice scores 3, second choice scores 2, third choice scores 1 point) | Can be used at an event to give additional weight to in-person voting. | Cannot currently be done online within CONSUL. People have difficulty ranking preferences beyond a certain number (7 +/- 2) |

There are also decisions to be made about the timing of the voting, whether it needs to happen at the same time, or can happen at different times:

| Method | Overview | Pros | Cons |
|-------------|---|--|---|
| In advance | People are given the opportunity to vote in advance. This can be via paper ballot, text, or online. | Everyone can vote in a way, and at a time that suits them. Ballot boxes can be located in key locations within a community | Need to allow enough time to get votes out and back. |
| At an event | Voting takes place in-person at an event, either through a paper ballot or counting of tokens | Everyone votes at the same place at the same time. | Can exclude people who are unable to attend the event. Paper ballots can take time to count on the day. |
| Online | Voting can be done online over an agreed period of time leading up to an event. | Enables a wider group of people to get involved in the voting process. People can vote at a time and place that suits them. | Not everyone will feel comfortable voting online. May need to sign up to an online platform, which may require an email address, verification. |
| Hybrid | A combination of online, paper and in-person voting can be used. | Can include a wider group of people in the voting process. Can combine results from online, paper and in-person voting methods. | Requires careful planning, for example, closing and counting online or paper votes in advance of the final voting event. |

Summary

This guide provides a flavour of the different choices that could be made about how the voting system might be set up to support your local PB process, and how project ideas will be communicated to those who will be taking part in the voting stage of this.

Other useful information and resources

Let's Talk about Our Fife (online platform)

<https://fif.communitychoices.scot/>

Latest news and events from PB Scotland network

<https://pbscotland.scot>

Ayrshire Participatory Budgeting Toolkit

<https://northayrshire.community/participatory-budgeting-toolkit/35030/>

Fife Example: CLIMB - Community Led Improvements for Methil and Buckhaven

<https://www.clearfife.org.uk/webs/49/documents/MethilCLIMBGuidanceNotesincCAP.pdf>