PARTICIPATORY POLICY–MAKING TOOLKIT

A toolkit for community-led decision-making

Participatory Budgeting Project & Democracy Beyond Elections

After over a decade of advocating for and helping implement participatory budgeting—including engaging more than 700,000 participants across the U.S. and Canada to decide together how to spend more than $380 million in public funds (and growing!)—the Participatory Budgeting Project has found that solutions generated by community-led decision-making are unmatched by anything created behind closed doors. As part of our commitment to transforming our democracy through community participation, we convened Democracy Beyond Elections, a collaborative, national campaign rooted in equitable, accessible, and significant community-led decision-making practices. Democracy Beyond Elections brings together partners engaged in all levels of community power-building and participatory democracy advocacy, from local base-building organizations, to national movement builders, and experts in participatory practices. Learn more at democracybeyondelections.org

The Center for Popular Democracy

The Center for Popular Democracy (CPD) is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country. The CPD network is comprised of 48 affiliated base-building organizations in 35 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. CPD is a part of the Democracy Beyond Elections campaign and the participatory policy-making working group. Learn more at www.populardemocracy.org

CO-AUTHORED BY:

Antonnet Johnson, Phd., Participatory Budgeting Project; Kate Hamaji, Center for Popular Democracy
REPORT DESIGN: Samara Collective | samaracollective.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy-making, like other civic processes, has offered limited to no opportunities for community members to play a decision-making role. At worst, policy-making processes neglect to actively engage community members, or intentionally exclude Black, Indigenous, and communities of color (BIPOC); low-income communities; and formerly and currently incarcerated people from political participation. At best, well-intentioned public servants and elected officials face administrative or cultural barriers to sharing their power, and community members' experiences and solutions are met with closed-door meetings and half-hearted initiatives. There are too few processes that give community members the most integral part of changemaking and problem solving: the power to make the decisions that impact them the most.

This toolkit uses the umbrella term "participatory democracy" to refer to processes that put real decision-making power in community hands, such as ballot initiatives, policy juries or assemblies, and participatory policy-making. We believe participatory democracy is the promise of democracy, and we advocate for a participatory democracy rooted in community-led decision-making that is:

- **Equitable:** ensures that community members who have been systematically excluded from political processes are centered in decision-making;

- **Accessible:** ensures language access, disability access, and economic access, for example, and;

- **Significant:** establishes community-led decision-making processes with power over significant budgets or policies.

By creating shared power between community members and elected officials, and by centering those most impacted by the decisions on the table, participatory democracy works to bridge the divide between elected officials and the communities they serve.

EQUITABLE

ACCESSIBLE

SIGNIFICANT

This toolkit provides an overview of participatory democracy practices focused on policy-making, shares the results of a participatory policy-making (PPM) process focused on safety in four co-located Brooklyn schools, and offers guidance for organizers, activists, and advocates to work with elected representatives to bring PPM to their communities. Specifically, it includes:

1. **An overview of participatory policy-making practices, including examples and a description of the components of our model.** The toolkit reviews ballot initiatives and policy juries and assemblies. It details the components of the new hybrid model that draws from the best parts of existing practices.

2. **Best practices for participatory policy-making processes.** These fundamental practices, which informed the development of the participatory policy-making model, are integral to any participatory policy-making process regardless of the policy context. Best practices include ensuring that processes are adequately resourced and staffed, creating a community policy team that centers the most impacted community members, bringing together base-building groups and community members as experts and leaders, and creating an implementation and accountability plan.

3. **An overview of the participatory policy-making pilot as implemented through the Safe Schools program.** The Safe Schools program—which empowers young people to make spending and policy decisions in their schools to make them more supportive and safe—provided a natural opportunity for piloting the model. This section highlights lessons learned from the pilot, including reflections on running the program virtually and in the time of COVID-19. While implemented in a high school context, these learnings can inform participatory policy-making processes in other contexts, including municipalities.

4. **Guidance for local leaders on advocating for and bringing participatory policy-making to their communities.** This section includes strategies for organizers, activists, and advocates who are working with local elected officials to obtain buy-in and build support for participatory policy-making.

We hope this toolkit serves as a complementary resource to the ongoing advocacy work of movement builders and community organizers working to realize the promise of democracy. Together, we can continue moving toward a just democracy that not only includes but centers decision-making power in BIPOC and low-income communities. These communities are the most impacted, yet have the least amount of power in our current policy-making structures and processes.

INTRODUCTION:
THE PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY

The promise of democracy is, at its core, a promise of governance by the people for the people.

Democracy in the United States has been deeply flawed since its inception, with exclusionary tactics designed to create and maintain deep inequities within the currently limited avenues of democratic participation. BIPOC communities have long been excluded from participation, from the legal exclusion of enslaved people, women, and noncitizens from voting, to systemic racial discrimination at the ballot box, to racial gerrymandering and voter suppression.[1] This structural political inequality may work well for those in power, but it is also fueling deep polarization, distrust of government, and skepticism of democracy itself.

---

1   "Who got the right to vote when? A history of voting rights in America," Al Jazeera, August 18, 2020, https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/2016/us-elections-2016-who-can-vote/index.html; Andrew Prokop, "What is racial gerrymandering," November 14, 2018, *Vox*, https://www.vox.com/2014/8/5/17991986/racial-gerrymandering.

Image source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Democracia_real_YA_Madrid.jpg

Movements for direct democracy, community-led decision-making, and co-governance are urgent efforts to realize the promise of democracy. This promise is central to the sentiments of a broad spectrum of Americans who want to play a greater role in how their communities are governed. According to research conducted by Public Agenda in 2019:

- **67% of Americans agree with this statement:** "It's mostly our responsibility as Americans to help find solutions—it's not enough to just vote and pay taxes."[2]
- **80% agree that** "when enough people get involved, they have a lot of influence over how their community addresses problems."[3]
- **85% agree that it is at least somewhat helpful to:** "[Bring] community members together to develop ideas about how to spend some local tax dollars, and then having the entire community vote on which ideas to fund."[4]

Despite this data, opportunities for civic participation remain limited in scope, mostly offering advisory roles like participating in boards, committees, or merely responding to surveys. There are too few processes that give community members the most integral part of changemaking and problem-solving: the power to make the decisions that impact people the most.

We believe participatory democracy is the promise of democracy, and we advocate for a participatory democracy rooted in community-led decision-making that is equitable, accessible, and significant. We use the umbrella term "participatory democracy" to refer to processes that put real decision-making power in the hands of community members. Examples include ballot initiatives, policy juries or assemblies, and participatory policy-making.

By sharing power with community members and not only including but centering those most impacted by the decisions on the table, participatory democracy works to bridge the divide between elected officials and community members. **When we make decisions together, we make decisions that are better.**

---

2   David Shleifer and Antonio Diep, "Strengthening Democracy: What Do Americans Think?" The 2019 Yankelovich Democracy Report from Public Agenda, 2019, https://www.publicagenda.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Strengthening_Democracy_WhatDoAmericansThinkFINAL.pdf, 10.
3   David Shleifer and Antonio Diep, 10.
4   David Shleifer and Antonio Diep, 14.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides an overview of participatory democracy practices focused on policy-making, shares the results of a participatory policy-making (PPM) process focused on safety in four co-located Brooklyn schools, and offers guidance for organizers, activists, and advocates to work with elected representatives to bring PPM to their communities.

We believe that participatory democracy practices are essential pathways to co-governance: the sharing of power by a governing entity with community members or community organizations.

Our aim is to advocate for participatory policy-making processes that are equitable, accessible, and significant by sharing what we've learned about the possibilities for co-governance through participatory democracy.

When designed to center **equity**, participatory democracy practices give community members who have been systematically excluded from political processes the power to decide how to solve the issues they are impacted by. When communities that are most often excluded from decision-making are centered in participatory democracy practices—including Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities, low-income communities, and formerly and currently incarcerated communities—

policy outcomes are both more equitable and effective.

When designed to center **accessibility**—including but not limited to language access, disability access, and economic access—participatory democracy practices can expand who has access to decision-making power, making political processes more inclusive and representative of the communities in which they take place.

When designed to center **significance**—that is, community-led decision-making processes with power over significant budgets or policies—participatory democracy has the power to transform people's relationship with government, demonstrating how their engagement can transcend tokenizing surveys and "feedback loops."

We hope this toolkit will serve as a complementary resource to the advocacy work of movement builders and community organizers working to realize the promise of democracy. Together, we can continue moving toward a just democracy that not only includes but gives decision-making power to BIPOC and low-income community members, who are the most impacted and have the least amount of power in our current policy-making structures and processes.

POLICY FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

Policy-making, like other civic processes, has offered limited to no opportunities for community members to play a decision-making role. At worst, policy-making processes neglect to actively engage community members, let alone the most impacted community members. At best, well-intentioned public servants and elected officials face administrative or cultural barriers to sharing their power, which results in community members' experiences and solutions being met with closed-door meetings and half-hearted initiatives.

In this section, we provide an overview of participatory policy-making practices that put real decision-making power into community hands and introduce the model we co-created as part of the Democracy Beyond Elections participatory policy-making working group.

BALLOT INITIATIVES

Ballot initiatives—sometimes called ballot measures or citizen initiatives—allow citizens to organize petitions and create, amend, or even repeal laws by gathering a minimum required number of signatures from registered voters. Depending on the state, ballot initiatives with enough petition signatures either go to the legislature or directly to the ballot for voting.[5]

Example: Oklahoma State Questions 780 & 781

Oklahoma has a direct ballot initiative process: with enough signatures, ballot initiatives—also called State Questions (SQ)—go directly onto the ballot for voters to decide on. In 2016, Oklahoma voters passed SQ 780 and SQ 781, initiatives that respectively focused on reducing the prison population and providing mental health and substance abuse treatment funds to counties that were on the ballot.[6] SQ 780 changed simple drug possession crimes from a felony to a misdemeanor and increased the threshold that classifies a property crime as a felony rather than a misdemeanor from $500 to $1000.[7] Using the cost savings from the implementation SQ 780, SQ 781 directed money to a fund distributed to counties for mental health and substance abuse treatment and services. Under SQ 781, total annual savings are determined by the state's Office of Management and Enterprise Services, and are then distributed to each county proportional to its population.[8]

Oklahomans for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) were able to get both SQ 780 and SQ 781 on the ballot and in front of voters by collecting a minimum of 65,987 signatures. Support for the two ballot initiatives surpassed the minimum requirement with each topping 110,000 signatures.[9] This is participatory democracy in action: voters having the power to create, change, and repeal laws in states with a ballot initiative process.

---

5   The National Conference of State Legislatures provides an overview of initiative and referendum processes by state. To learn more, see: https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/initiative-and-referendum-processes.aspx#/.

6   Ryan Gentzler, "Five years later: Voters still waiting for SW 781's investments in mental health, substance use disorders," Oklahoma Policy Institute, June 25, 2021, https://okpolicy.org/five-years-later-voters-still-waiting-for-sq-781s-investments-in-mental-health-substance-use-disorders/.

7   Ryan Gentzler, "SQ 780 is already reshaping Oklahoma's Justice System," Oklahoma Policy Institute, February 19, 2018, https://okpolicy.org/sq-780-already-reshaping-oklahomas-justice-system/.

8   Ryan Gentzler, "Five years later: Voters still waiting for SW 781's investments in mental health, substance use disorders."

9   Gene Perry, "State Questions 780 & 781: Criminal Justice Reform, Oklahoma Policy Institute, May 2, 2019, https://okpolicy.org/state-questions-780-781-criminal-justice-reform/.

Benefits and Limitations

As legally codified opportunities for voters to create, change, and repeal laws are one of the most widespread examples of direct democracy in the United States, ballot initiatives are an important mechanism of change. Large or more densely-populated states often require significant resources to raise awareness and collect requisite signatures for putting a ballot initiative in front of legislators or voters, which can make it more challenging to successfully carry out.[10] However, there are examples of successful volunteer-based initiatives. For instance, Ballotpedia reports that Washington Referendum 90 (also called the Sex Education in Public Schools Measure) was successfully passed with zero cost in November 2020.[11] By voting to approve Referendum 90, voters supported the passage of Senate Bill 5395, which requires public schools to provide all students with comprehensive sexual health education and to excuse students when requested by parents.

Because ballot initiatives rely on collecting signatures and votes from registered voters, they are not as inclusive as we believe they should be. And, in states where ballot initiatives go directly to a ballot, they are subject to the same inequities we see in voting more broadly, such as voter disenfranchisement. However, we believe that ballot initiatives are a stepping stone on the path to realizing the promise of democracy because they legally codify the power of voters to propose and change laws through direct democracy.

The legal codification of ballot initiative processes provides opportunities to research processes and outcomes, use data to develop strategy, and build momentum to lean into the possibilities of direct democracy that they offer. We look to organizations such as the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center (BISC) whose work centers this. BISC seeks to "leverage ballot measures across the United States as part of a larger movement to strengthen democracy, center people of color, queer, low-income, immigrant, indigenous and other marginalized communities, move towards racial equity, build and transform power, and galvanize a new progressive base."[12] BISC tracks ballot measures, provides training to advocates, protects ballot measure processes, and designs and shares research on ballot measures and impacts.[13] Such work, particularly in combination with information available on Ballotpedia, provides us with useful data to help us understand not only the challenges and limitations of the ballot initiative process, but also the value of the process.

---

10 Learn more about Ballotpedia's cost per signature analysis at: https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_measures_cost_per_re-quired_signatures_analysis.
11 Washington Referendum 90, Sex Education in Public Schools Meausre (2020), Ballotpedia.org, accessed July 11, 2021, https://ballotpedia.org/Washington_Referendum_90,_Sex_Education_in_Public_Schools_Measure_(2020); "Ballot measure signature costs, 2020" Ballotpedia.org, accessed July 11, 2021, https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_measure_signa-ture_costs,_2020.
12 Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, accessed July 11, 2021, https://ballot.org/.
13 "What we do," Ballot Initiative Strategy Center, accessed July 11, 2021, https://ballot.org/#whatwedo.

POLICY JURIES OR ASSEMBLIES

A policy jury, citizen jury, or citizen assembly is a form of participatory democracy that convenes a group of people to produce a decision or statement on a public policy.

Example: Ireland's Citizen Assembly[14]

From 2016 to 2018, the Irish government instituted a deliberative "Citizen Assembly." This consisted of one government-appointed chairwoman and 99 randomly selected Irish citizens who were meant to represent a sample of the general public.

The participants of the Citizen Assembly were selected randomly by a market research firm, which knocked on doors across the country and asked people if they wanted to participate. The sample aimed to be representative in terms of gender, age, region, and socioeconomic status. Over the course of one year, the participants attended ten weekend-long sessions to learn from experts, deliberate together, and make recommendations for a set of five issues preselected by Parliament. The five topics deliberated were:

- the eighth amendment to the Constitution (right to abortion);
- how to best respond to the challenges and opportunities of an aging population;
- how the state can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change;
- the way referenda are held; and
- fixed-term Parliaments.

The assembly was guided by six key principles: openness, fairness, equality of voice, efficiency, respect, and collegiality. The participants were arranged in circular tables of seven to eight, with a trained facilitator and note-taker at each table. For each session, the following process was used:

1. Presentations by legal, ethical, and scientific experts, with briefing papers circulated days in advance. These presentations were designed to be as objective as possible.

2. Presentations by advocates and personal testimonials, which included question and answer sessions.

3. Facilitated deliberative conversations in small groups. These conversations were not recorded, but summaries of key points from these deliberations were presented back to the larger group of participants.

---

14   "Democracy Beyond Elections: Case Studies on Democracy Beyond Elections," Participatory Budgeting Project, accessed July 16, 2021, https://www.democracybeyondelections.org/.

4. Private reflective time, followed by group deliberations. This provided individual time for participants to write responses to a series of questions.

5. The group then reconvened to discuss—and ultimately vote on—a series of recommendations to be presented to Parliament for debate.

6. Parliament then considered the recommendations of the Citizen Assembly in order to determine what to put back to the people for a vote in a referendum, as well as referendum language, and other follow-up items such as creation of a parliamentary committee to further study an issue.

The Assembly's recommendation on abortion led to a referendum with historically high voter turnout. As a result of the referendum, the Irish people voted to change the constitution to legalize abortion, an issue that had divided Ireland and created political gridlock for decades. In addition, in May 2019, Ireland became the second country in the world to declare a climate emergency.
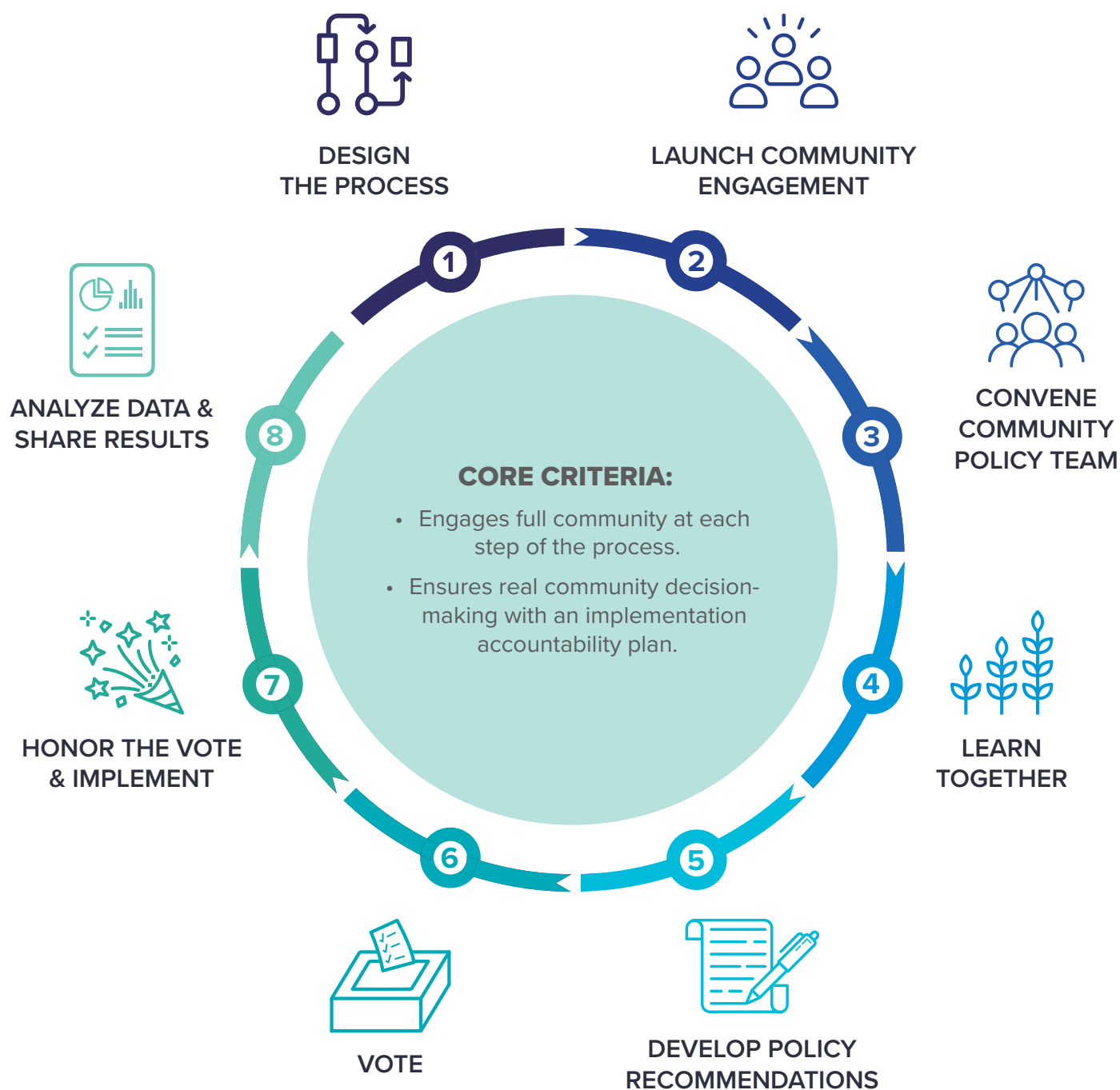
Benefits and Limitations

Citizen assemblies are a form of participatory democracy that offer deepened participation opportunities by bringing together a representative group of community members to learn about, deliberate, and make recommendations to address complex issues. This process gives everyday people the chance to engage in meaningful dialogue and propose solutions to public problems rather than relying solely on the will of elected representatives. However, like ballot initiatives and other participatory processes, the benefits yielded by a process depends on how implementation is designed and carried.

Theoretically, a policy jury or assembly would be representative of the community but it is unclear whether such processes are sometimes limited to citizens only. In cases where only citizens are on the policy or citizen jury, perspectives are limited and exclude participation from residents who are still impacted by decisions made through the process. In addition to potential restriction of participation to citizens, policy jury processes can have other limitations. For instance, if the process is lengthy and unpaid, it is less likely to include participants who would have to miss work. Variables include but are not limited to:

- how representative and inclusive the citizen assembly is;
- the size of the citizen jury;
- length of time spent on learning and deliberation;
- whether members of the citizen assembly are paid; and
- whether there is a commitment from the government to sharing power with the citizen assembly by carrying out assembly recommendations.

We believe that citizen assemblies can be powerful participatory policy-making processes when carried out in an equitable, accessible way, and when the government publicly commits to responding to and carrying out the recommendations of the policy jury.

PARTICIPATORY POLICY–MAKING MODEL

DESIGN THE PROCESS

LAUNCH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

ANALYZE DATA & SHARE RESULTS

CONVENE COMMUNITY POLICY TEAM

CORE CRITERIA:

- Engages full community at each step of the process.

- Ensures real community decision-making with an implementation accountability plan.

HONOR THE VOTE & IMPLEMENT

LEARN TOGETHER

VOTE

DEVELOP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8

11

We advocate for a participatory policy-making model that combines the strengths of several participatory democracy practices, and that is built on community decision-making power and community engagement throughout the process. This participatory policy-making model, grounded in real decision-making power for community members, was designed to work in a variety of contexts.

A participatory policy-making process has eight phases:

1. **Design the process:** Build internal support and convene a steering committee (including community members and issue experts) to work together to plan the process and make key decisions about how to:

   - Recruit and support the Community Policy Team, who is responsible for learning and deliberating about the policy issue as well as creating a policy proposal
   - Engage the full community during each step of the process
   - Set and evaluate process goals
   - Ensure accountability to the community through policy implementation

2. **Launch community engagement plan:** Kick off community engagement plan to ensure multiple opportunities for the full community to participate in the process.

3. **Convene the Community Policy Team:** Convene an equitably representative Community Policy Team to learn about the process and to determine roles, responsibilities, and a timeline. Carry out relevant evaluation plans for this step.

4. **Learn together:** Engage in deep learning about the policy issue to understand the problem, its impacts, and a variety of perspectives about possible solutions; carry out any relevant evaluation plans for this step.

5. **Develop policy recommendations:** The Community Policy Team, with support from the convening body (e.g., city government, school administrators, etc.), creates one or more policies informed by community input as well as their own learning and experiences.

6. **Vote:** Hold a community vote. The convening body collects relevant evaluation data.

7. **Honor the vote & implement:** Announce the winning policies; convene elected(s) and staff to plan for policy implementation; share the timeline, accountability plan and community follow-up measures.

8. **Analyze data & share results:** Analyze and share relevant evaluation findings with participants and steering committee.

How we approached co-creating this model

This model was built on the work of a participatory policy-making working group, which convened to discuss and brainstorm ways that policy-making processes could engage community members as decision-makers. Members of the working group included: The Participatory Budgeting Project, The Center for Popular Democracy, Coro Center, Demos, People's Action, Generation Citizen, The Center for New Democratic Processes, Local Progress, PolicyLink, and State Innovation Exchange.

Leveraging the experiences and expertise of working group members, we built a participatory policy-making model that combines the best parts of participatory budgeting (broad community engagement, opportunities for underrepresented community members to participate, and decision-making on budgetary spending) and policy juries (an equitably selected group of community members who engage in deep learning and deliberate together in order to propose policy recommendations).

What is Participatory Budgeting?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget, giving people real power over real money.

PB is an annual cycle of engagement that is integrated into a regular budgeting process. In a typical PB process, community members discuss and brainstorm ideas for projects, develop proposals into feasible projects, and vote on projects that most serve the community's needs. A government institution then funds the winning projects.

For more information, see: https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/

PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING PROCESS CHECKLIST

This document summarizes the eight phases of the participatory policy-making process.

- [ ] **1. DESIGN THE PROCESS**

  Build internal support and convene a steering committee (including community members) to work together to make key decisions about the process, using the core criteria.

- [ ] **2. LAUNCH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

  Kick off community engagement plan to ensure multiple opportunities for the full community to participate in the process.

- [ ] **3. CONVENE COMMUNITY POLICY TEAM**

  Convene the Community Policy Team to explain the process, including compensation, roles, responsibilities, and timeline; collect relevant evaluation data.

- [ ] **4. LEARN TOGETHER**

  Engage in deep learning about the policy issue to understand the problem, its impacts, and a variety of perspectives about possible solutions; collect relevant evaluation data.

- [ ] **5. DEVELOP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

  The Community Policy Team, with support from the convening body, creates one or more policies informed by community input as well as their own learning and experiences.

- [ ] **6. VOTE**

  A community vote is held. Convening body collects relevant evaluation data.

- [ ] **7. HONOR THE VOTE & IMPLEMENT**

  Announce the winning policies; convene elected(s) and staff carry out policy implementation; share timeline and accountability and community follow up measures.

- [ ] **8. ANALYZE DATA & SHARE RESULTS**

  Analyze and share relevant evaluation findings with participants and steering committee.

FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICES
PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING:
Considerations for Elected Officials

Until participatory policy-making processes are widely adopted or legally codified, buy-in from elected officials remains essential to bringing a PPM process to your communities. As such, this section offers a set of considerations primarily for elected officials who are seeking to bring PPM processes to their jurisdictions, while the advocacy section offers guidance for organizers, activists, and advocates working with el ected representatives to bring PPM to their communities.

Although the participatory policy-making (PPM) model is intended to be adaptable to a variety of contexts, timelines, and goals, we believe that the following practices will lead to the most successful implementation. We recommend identifying these practices early in advocacy efforts, whether working to build community momentum around participatory policy-making or trying to get buy-in from colleagues and partners to do a PPM process.

Secure Public Commitment to Community Decision-Making Power

Since local legislators and electeds will be expected to formalize and implement any policy that is approved by vote, they should be part of early conversations and planning. It is essential that these individuals have opportunities to raise questions and discuss concerns because their buy-in and investment in the value of the process helps reduce unforeseen roadblocks. They know the existing process and can use their experience and knowledge to ask questions and make contributions that others might not. Moreover, a successful process relies on their commitment to carrying out the will of the community policy team and voters. One way to help ensure this happens in practice is for the government entity involved to make a public commitment to community decision-making through a press release, community announcements, or other communications.

Ensure that processes are adequately resourced and staffed

Successfully shifting decision-making power to community members requires staff with knowledge of the current policy-making process to help plan, structure, and facilitate the new participatory policy-making process with the community. Someone will need to carry out essential components of the process like recruiting members of the Community Policy Team, planning learning sessions, and carrying out a successful community engagement plan. Staff who hold these responsibilities should be part of the Steering Committee.

Well-resourced processes typically result in better outcomes, particularly when it comes to ensuring an equitable and accessible process. We know from experience that having a volunteer-based participatory process can lead to the outcomes that only represent the interests of people with enough income and free time to dedicate themselves to the process. Moreover, a process cannot truly be inclusive without making materials and opportunities available in the languages members of the community speak.

We recommend creating a budget that includes funding for:

- Paying speakers who contribute to learning sessions
- Paying Community Policy Team members
- Paying a program evaluator (e.g., consultant, city staff) to learn from the process
- Recruiting an equitable Community Policy Team, including the cost of outreach staffing and materials
- Providing childcare, translation, and transportation services for Community Policy Team members as well as speakers
- Securing a convening space, childcare, and food for in-person events
- Software or tools needed to facilitate and share updates in a virtual process or enhance accessibility at in-person events[15]
- Print materials like ballots, handouts, flyers, or other communications

Create a Community Policy Team that Centers the Most Impacted or Historically Underrepresented Community Members

We recommend oversampling for members of the community who are historically and currently impacted most by the issues that the PPM process seeks to address. However, if you do not yet know the focus of the participatory policy-making process, we recommend oversampling for underrepresented community members to ensure their perspectives and expertise are present on the Community Policy Team.

---

15 Digital Democracy: Tools and Approaches for Virtual Participatory Processes, https://www.democracybeyondelections.org/portfolio/tools-virtual-engagement/

We know that there are many barriers to participating in civic processes, including the inability to miss work without pay, the inability to afford or find childcare, the inability to communicate across language barriers, and the inability to show proof of citizenship. To work against such barriers, we recommend allowing any member of the community to participate regardless of citizenship. In addition, we recommend paying Community Policy Team members for their time and work, providing childcare and translation (as needed), and ensuring that both virtual and in-person meetings are accessible to all members of the Community Policy Team.

Bring Together Base Building Groups and Community Members as Experts and Leaders

The Community Policy Team should be given the opportunity to learn a variety of perspectives on an issue. We recommend inviting base building groups, researchers, educators, and other community members to be part of the Learn Together phase. Make it clear to participants who are invited to speak during learning sessions that the goal is to share information and perspectives with the Community Policy Team, and be sure that your timeline allows adequate time for deliberation before the Community Policy Team is asked to put forward recommendations during policy development.

Create Opportunities for Widespread Community Engagement

One of the core criteria of PPM is engaging the full community through the process. It is critical that community members most impacted by a policy outcome are centered in planning and developing new PPM initiatives—and not just looped in once a process has been established. In addition to voting on policy proposals, community members should have an opportunity to plug into the process. Local electeds should conduct outreach to relevant community-based organizations in their jurisdictions to engage them in brainstorming and visioning sessions as a part of imagining what a successful process could look like. Other ways of engaging the community throughout the process may include discussions, participation in learning sessions, providing input at meetings, or completing needs or attitude assessments related to the issue policy aims to address.

Create a Policy Implementation and Accountability Plan

Once the vote on a policy is final, share an implementation and accountability plan that identifies the timeline for implementation, the steps in the implementation process, and tells the community where they can find updates as implementation progresses.

BRINGING PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING TO YOUR JURISDICTION

This document summarizes a set of considerations primarily for elected officials who are seeking to establish a PPM processes in their jurisdiction.

☐ **SECURE PUBLIC COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY DECISION-MAKING POWER**

Local legislators and electeds should be part of early conversations and planning to ensure their buy-in and investment, as a successful process relies on their commitment to community decision-making.

☐ **ENSURE THAT PROCESSES ARE ADEQUATELY RESOURCED AND STAFFED**

Well-resourced processes typically result in better outcomes, particularly when it comes to ensuring an equitable and accessible process. Create a budget that includes funding for staff that can structure and facilitate the process with the community and compensation for Community Policy Team members, among other considerations.

☐ **CREATE A COMMUNITY POLICY TEAM THAT CENTERS THE MOST IMPACTED OR HISTORICALLY UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Oversample for members of the community who are historically and currently impacted most by the issues that the PPM process seeks to address. Any member of the community should be allowed to participate regardless of citizenship status.

☐ **BRING TOGETHER BASE BUILDING GROUPS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS AS EXPERTS AND LEADERS**

In order to provide the Community Policy Team with a variety of perspectives on an issue, invite base building groups, researchers, educators, and other community members to be part of the Learn Together phase.

☐ **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WIDESPREAD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Create opportunities for community engagement throughout all stages of the process, including initially to envision what a successful process could look like. Other ways of engaging the community throughout the process may include discussions, participation in learning sessions, providing input at meetings, or completing needs or attitude assessments related to the issue policy aims to address.

☐ **CREATE A POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN**

Once the vote on a policy is final, share an implementation and accountability plan that identifies the timeline for implementation, the steps in the implementation process, and tells the community where they can find updates as implementation progresses.

SUMMARY
OF THE PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING PILOT

After engaging in shared learning and model development with the working group, PBP piloted the new participatory policy-making model for the first time through the Safe Schools program. The program, in which young people directly decide on spending and policy priorities in their schools, offered an existing infrastructure and established mechanisms for student participation.

Participatory decision-making models can work in both school and municipal contexts and lessons learned in one context can be applied to another. For example, as participatory budgeting has been adopted in a number of municipalities, school districts have also begun launching participatory budgeting programs. Although the PPM pilot took place in a high school context, it offers some important learnings that could be applied in a variety of policy contexts, and in municipalities.

Below is a description of the pilot process, including outcomes and reflections on lessons learned.

The Safe Schools Program Background

In the spring of 2021, PBP partnered with Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams on the third year of the Safe Schools program, which was launched to address rising school safety concerns and empower students to directly decide on spending and policies to make their schools more supportive and safe. Since 2019, PBP has supported the implementation of this program, working with students as they brainstorm ideas, create proposals, and ultimately vote on projects and policies designed to create safe, supportive campuses.

Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams meets with Acorn/Gotham students about school PB for safety. Credit: Erica Krodman/Brooklyn BP's Office

Each year, participating campuses have contributed at least $10,000 for students to spend as part of the project, in addition to capital funds provided by Borough President Adams. Because policies play an equally important role in cultivating a healthy school environment, students also have the opportunity to propose and vote on new and/or revised policies in addition to capital and expense projects.

> *"The principals are not going to decide, the administration at the Department of Education is not going to decide. The students decide. That is a very powerful feeling, when you no longer feel like someone is dictating to you."*
>
> —Eric Adams, Former Brooklyn Borough President

Safe Schools Program Results (2019-2020)

Since the program's launch in 2019, PBP has partnered with the Brooklyn Borough President's Office to work with 15 high schools in Brooklyn on a safety-focused participatory process led by and for students. To date, students, with the support of PBP staff, have decided how to spend $1.5 million to make their schools more safe and supportive. They have achieved this by brainstorming ideas, developing proposals, and voting on capital and expense projects as well as school policies. For example, students have envisioned and won the following policy changes:

- A switch to universal start- and end-times for all schools, which gives students from all schools on a shared campus the same access to before- and after-school programming and events.
- The creation of a School Safety Council for students, administrators, and school safety officers to regularly come together to discuss and improve school safety.
- Bathroom renovation, which students determined should provide an updated, safe, and clean, gender-neutral space.

In the first year of the program, nearly 1,500 students cast a ballot and 95% of them said that these projects and policies would make the campus safer and more supportive. More than 400 students volunteered to join the student safety councils after voting.

The Participatory Policy-making Pilot (2021)

Although students have successfully established and revised school or campus policies in every year of the Safe Schools program, the policy-making component in previous cycles was supplemental to the PB process, rather than established as a participatory democratic process in and of itself. The goal of the pilot was to ground the policy-making component in the newly established participatory policy-making model.

Some aspects of the participatory policy-making model align with the participatory

budgeting process, while other features are unique. For example, both the participatory budgeting and the participatory policy-making models include a proposal development step, in which delegates or committee members develop budget or policy ideas that are informed by community input and their own personal experiences. However, the participatory policy-making model uniquely incorporates a step for shared learning, in which participants engage in deep learning about a policy issue to understand the problem and its impacts. For this phase of the pilot, PBP had envisioned bringing in guest speakers whose work focuses on school safety and/or youth engagement in civics, as well as Safe Schools alumni and past partners to speak with students about their experiences.

In 2021, high school students in four co-located schools on Bushwick High School Campus in Brooklyn, New York, participated in the policy-making pilot. Over an eight week period, students brainstormed both spending and policy ideas, turned them into proposals, and voted to decide which projects to fund and policies to implement.

The Winning Projects

Students, their families, and staff voted on capital and expense projects as well as policy proposals. PBP created ballots and collected votes in three languages: English, Spanish, and Arabic! Young people ultimately approved:

- **Upgrades to the 1st Floor Gender Neutral Student Bathroom (Capital Project):** $150,000 in capital funds to make upgrades to gender-neutral bathrooms, which included the upgrades of new stalls, toilets, and tiles, as well as improvements to wheelchair accessibility.

- **Campus-wide Field Trips (Expense Project):** $5,000 in expense funds that will give Bushwick Campus students opportunities to leave campus for a mix of educational (i.e. museums) and recreational (i.e. ice skating) activities. At least three times a year, all Bushwick Campus students have the opportunity to leave campus for activities. Field trips offer students a break from school, provide an opportunity for students to have fun and build relationships with classmates.

- **New Gym/Exercise Equipment (Expense Project):** $5,000 in expense funds for new gym equipment (i.e. kettlebells, treadmills, and yoga blocks).

- **Expand Restorative Justice Program (Policy):** The implementation of a more robust restorative justice system, including the creation of a social justice campus team to resolve any building-wide issues. The team will consist of students, staff, and parents who will together comprise the majority of participants.

Phases of the Safe Schools PPM Pilot

This year, the Safe Schools program operated on a shorter, condensed timeline. This was largely due to uncertainties about funding from the Brooklyn Borough President's office, which significantly reduced planning time and delayed the program start date. In turn, this made coordinating with school administrators more challenging. Although PBP has typically begun planning at the end of the calendar year before the process begins, this year PBP began to lay the groundwork several months later than usual, in February 2021, when they were contacted by the Brooklyn Borough President's office with approval to use funds. Because of this constraint, there was not enough spaciousness between meetings to carry out the work as there would be in a typical 12 week timeline. At this point in the process, participating schools had not yet been identified.

In March, PBP solicited interest from campuses and reviewed existing data to assess the funding needs of interested schools. PBP met with principals from the selected campus to discuss the process, secure commitments of $10,000 for expense projects, and identify how to recruit students for the Community Policy Team.

In April, PBP kicked off the pilot by virtually convening an eight-member Community Policy Team. The team was composed of six students, a social work intern, and a restorative justice coordinator. The purpose of the team was to develop funding and policy proposals, and then design and conduct outreach to engage the student body in a campus-wide vote.

The following is a description of the major phases of the pilot and the primary activities of the Community Policy Team:
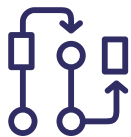
Convene Community Policy Team & design the process. In the initial session, PBP introduced the process and its principles to the Community Policy Team. Participants engaged in a rapid, mock participatory budgeting process to develop an understanding of what the ensuing process would entail. PBP outlined a plan for engaging the broader school community, including decisions about who could submit policy and spending ideas and who could vote. PBP collected baseline evaluation data to understand students' previous experiences with engagement and leadership at school. Students shared their thoughts on what makes a school safe and supportive to cultivate a shared understanding of the term "safety."

Launch community engagement. With more time, students would have launched a community engagement process to promote the Safe Schools program to the broader student community and collect community input and data. Because of time constraints, this step was made as low-lift as possible, and PBP created communications for students to share on social media during idea collection and voting.

Learn together. PBP led a session on research and data related to school safety. Participants looked at the NYC Department of Education School Quality Guide to consider what available data tells us about the economic needs of schools, the attitudes students hold about disciplinary actions, and general feelings about their school environment. Participants considered the ways that data can inform policy and funding decisions. PBP had originally envisioned bringing in guest speakers whose work focuses on school safety and/or youth engagement in civics, as well as Safe Schools alumni and past partners to speak with students about their experiences, but was unable to secure these speakers. Although PBP reached out to a number of potential speakers, offering stipends for participation, none were able to commit within the timeline of the process.

Develop policy recommendations. The Community Policy Team developed policy recommendations based on the obstacles and challenges they personally encounter and observe their peers encountering at school—obstacles that impede their ability to thrive at school. They then shared these policy recommendations with administrators who vetted the recommendations. Policy ideas included: abolishing school uniforms, allowing students to have their cell phones on them for use during breaks, allowing a certain number of mental health absences each year, and establishing a more robust restorative justice system. Only the restorative justice proposal was approved by administrators. Students also developed capital proposals and sent them to the School Construction Authority for feedback and eligibility vetting. Students developed policy and spending ideas in small and large groups, using interactive jamboards for ideation.
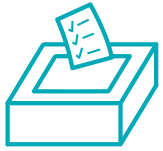
Vote. Students brainstormed the most effective ways to reach their peers during the time of distance learning. They considered creative mechanisms for engaging their peers and developed an outreach plan that consisted of in-class announcements, teacher/administrator support, and online promotion. Students developed language for the ballots, prepared 'get out the vote' materials, and made personal outreach commitments. Students and administrators led a campus-wide student voting process on policy and spending proposals. In total, students cast 235 ballots, while their families and teachers cast an additional 59 ballots.

Honor the vote and implement. PBP counted votes and shared the winning policies and projects with the team. Students reflected on the process, celebrating both successes and identifying opportunities for growth in future cycles.

Analyze data and share results. PBP collected evaluation data to determine whether students' attitudes and ideas about engagement and leadership at school had evolved since the start of the process. PBP and the Center for Popular Democracy (CPD) synthesized key takeaways and lessons learned from the pilot.

Students voting in the 2019 Safe Schools Program. To learn more about the 2019 process visit: https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/participatory-justice/

KEY TAKEAWAYS
FROM THE PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING PILOT

Below are a set of reflections from the first participatory policy-making pilot. These learnings can help to inform future cycles of the program, as well as the implementation of this model in other policy contexts.

- **The participatory policy-making model can be done virtually, but there are some distinct challenges.** In previous cycles, which were held in-person, student attendance and engagement was much more robust. The virtual format made it more difficult for committee members to build relationships with one another and with the PBP staff. It also had a negative impact on consistent attendance, which in turn impacted the ability of the team to collect robust evaluation data. Because students were already experiencing burnout from all-day virtual learning due to COVID-19, an additional weekly, two-hour virtual meeting was a significant commitment. As such, the virtual setting may have created even more retention challenges than it would have if students had been learning in person.

  Secondly, because students were developing spending proposals for physical projects on campus, it was a challenge that students could not be in the school to assess the building layout as they developed proposals.

- **Incentives or compensation for policy member participation is important.** In future cycles, PBP would advocate for providing incentives or compensation for community policy team members committee members for their time and participation. This is not only a meaningful way to honor the time and expertise of members, but could help address inequities and improve attendance and retention.

- **Strong relationships with administrators and mutual accountability are critical for success.** Because of the virtual setting, it was more difficult than in previous years to build strong relationships with school administrators. In previous cycles, face-to-face exchanges helped both parties to articulate their needs and obtain answers to questions in a timely way in order to move the program along. This cycle, the PBP team developed a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) to ensure that all participants were grounded in a clear understanding of roles and expectations. This document could be strengthened in future cycles to ensure an even more collaborative partnership.

- **Sufficient planning time is essential when running the participatory policy-making model on a condensed timeline.** Due to external constraints, the program launched later than in previous years and the team lost critical planning time. As a result, PBP had to cut some steps in the model because of the condensed timeline. For example, there was not sufficient time to incorporate the "launch community engagement" step as described above. In addition, the team was unable to bring in external speakers for the "learn together" phase as originally planned. Finally, limitations on planning time meant that the team did not have a plan in place for rebuilding the student policy committee when retention became a challenge.

- **The integration of the participatory policy-making model with the participatory budgeting process presents both opportunities and challenges.** In the context of the Safe Schools program, the participatory policy-making model and participatory budgeting processes have a significant amount of alignment that make for a natural integration. One of the benefits of this integration is that the additional funding opportunities with the participatory budgeting component makes the program especially attractive to potential schools, whereas a policy-making process on its own may not have generated the same interest. However, on the condensed timeline, and due to the time-intensive vetting required for budget proposals, there was inadequate time allotted for conversations about policy proposals with school administrators. Ultimately, school administrators rejected a number of policy proposals that the student team generated and approved only one policy proposal, which appeared on the ballot. With more time dedicated to the policy-making component, there may have been additional opportunity to explore the viability of additional policy proposals.

- **Accountability mechanisms for administrators and clear criteria for students in designing policy proposals may help with policy implementation.** In addition to insufficient time, there were opportunities to strengthen accountability around policy implementation. Although the PBP team developed a MOU that included a description of expectations about reviewing and vetting policy proposals, the MOU could have included additional expectations. For example, in future cycles, the MOU could specify that administrators should work to approve a minimum number of policy proposals for the ballot and join meetings to help students understand which types of policies they have the power to influence (i.e., policies set by the school versus inflexible policies set by the NYC Department of Education). This would give students a clearer set of parameters for making policy proposals and help them better understand which types of policies are possible to get approved before significant time goes towards ideation.

- **The translation of voting materials is a critical way to facilitate broader student engagement during voting.** In order to ensure accessibility and foster broad community engagement, PBP translated the ballot into Spanish as well as Arabic—the two most widely spoken languages at the campus besides English. Due to robust outreach efforts, nearly 250 students voted in this cycle—a great success. While this is comparable to the number of students who voted in previous cycles, it was impressive given that outreach was all conducted virtually.

While this pilot took place in a high school setting, it offers important lessons for implementing PPM in a variety of contexts, including in local municipalities. Many of these takeaways—including considerations about meeting format, establishing accountability mechanisms, offering incentives, and making materials accessible to speakers of languages other than English—are relevant regardless of the policy context.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE PARTICIPATORY POLICY–MAKING PILOT

This document summarizes key takeaways from the participatory policy-making pilot, which may help to inform the implementation of this model in other policy contexts.

- **The participatory policy-making model can be done virtually, but there are some distinct challenges.** The virtual format made it difficult for committee members to build relationships with one another and with the PBP staff. It also had a negative impact on consistent attendance, which may have been exacerbated by a higher level of virtual learning fatigue due to COVID-19.

- **Incentives or compensation for policy member participation is important.** Incentives offer a meaningful way to honor the time and expertise of members and could help address issues of retention and attendance.

- **Strong relationships with administrators and mutual accountability are critical for success.** Because of the virtual setting, it was more difficult than in previous years to build strong relationships with school administrators.

- **Sufficient planning time is essential when running the participatory policy-making model on a condensed timeline.** Due to external constraints, the program launched later than in previous years and the team lost critical planning time, which forced the team to shorten or cut components of the model.

- **The integration of the participatory policy-making model with the participatory budgeting process presents both opportunities and challenges.** In the context of the Safe Schools program, the participatory policy-making model and participatory budgeting processes have a significant amount of alignment that make for a natural integration. However, in future cycles, additional time must be dedicated to the policy-making component to fully explore the viability of policy proposals.

- **Accountability mechanisms for administrators, and clear criteria for students in designing policy proposals may help with policy implementation.** In future cycles, an MOU could more clearly specify the role of administrators and students could be provided a clearer set of parameters for making policy proposals.

- **The translation of voting materials is a critical way to facilitate broader student engagement during voting.** In order to ensure accessibility and foster broad community engagement, PBP translated the ballot into Spanish as well as Arabic— the two most widely spoken languages at the campus besides English.

ADVOCATING FOR PPM:
STRATEGIES FOR OBTAINING BUY-IN

A successful PPM process requires buy-in from the community, elected officials, and government staff. In this section, we offer guidance for organizers, activists, and advocates to work with elected representatives to build understanding and momentum for participatory policy-making, regardless of the policy context.

To help people envision and imagine what a PPM process could look like in your community, you can engage in brainstorming and visioning during community forums, meetings, and in conversations with local electeds. These discussions should be rooted in shared values and grounded with concrete examples. Here's where to start:

Get the conversation started by explaining what PPM is.

* Introduce the idea during community forums, meetings, relevant discussions, and/or in email threads.

    Adapt what you've learned from this toolkit and related resources to create talking points that you believe will resonate most with elected officials, or simply share information we've already put together:

    > Participatory policy-making one-pager

    > Democracybeyondelections.org/policy

Help people envision what a future with PPM looks like.

* Create a big-picture goal and vision for your PPM process. It could be as simple as: "We're doing this to create more important work, together, in a participatory and equitable way." It could also be framed as an opportunity to have a direct influence over a specific issue impacting people's lives. A few examples include policy decisions that impact people's housing, jobs, or their kids' education.

    Use these case studies to show what kind of transformative changes are possible with participatory policy-making.

28

Share how PPM might work to address some of the policy challenges you have historically encountered and/or are currently facing in your community. For example, you might start by asking community members to identify some of the most pressing issues impacting their day-to-day lives. After identifying a common issue or problem, you could facilitate a discussion about how recent policy decisions or lack thereof have fallen short, and imagine how things could look different if community members were to have direct input.

Discuss the values and goals that should drive the PPM process.

- Making sure that the values and goals of the PPM process are aligned is critical. This alignment will help create a shared vision of why PPM matters in your community and will help define what a successful process and project looks like. For example, you may ground conversations about participatory policy-making in some of the principles discussed in this toolkit: equity, accessibility, and significance (see "About this Toolkit").

Brainstorm strategies for advocating together.

- Here are some prompts that can help with discussion and visioning:
  - → Can we leverage existing spaces, processes, or structures to advocate for PPM?
    - ❖ Are there upcoming opportunities to call for decision-making power in policy-making (e.g., forums, town halls, surveys on use of funds, etc.)? How might you connect PPM to ongoing conversations, mandates, or decisions on the horizon?
  - → What examples of participatory policy-making, or, more broadly, participatory democracy, resonate with us? How can we use these in our dialogue with other local leaders, in community forums or discussions, etc?
  - → What talking points can we co-create to help address people's concerns or answer questions as we move this forward in other spaces?

Spend time addressing people's concerns.

- Introducing a new way of doing things can be challenging, and some will be more comfortable with change than others. Make sure you create time to answer people's questions and concerns.

ADVOCATING FOR
PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING

This document summarizes recommendations for advocating for participatory policy-making in your community.

☐ **GET THE CONVERSATION STARTED BY EXPLAINING PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING**

Introduce the idea during community forums, meetings, relevant discussions, and/or in email threads.

☐ **SPEND TIME ADDRESSING PEOPLE'S CONCERNS**

Introducing a new way of doing things can be challenging, and some will be more comfortable with change than others. Make sure you create time to answer people's questions and concerns.

☐ **BRAINSTORM STRATEGIES FOR ADVOCATING TOGETHER**

Put together some options for advocating for PPM such as creating or using existing talking points, plugging into upcoming opportunities (e.g., forums, town halls, meetings, community meetings or boards, etc.).

☐ **USE EXISTING RESOURCES TO HELP ADVOCATE FOR PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING**

Participatory policy-making one-pager, democracybeyondelections.org/policy

☐ **HELP PEOPLE ENVISION WHAT A FUTURE WITH PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING LOOKS LIKE**

Use these case studies to show what kind of transformative changes are possible with participatory policy-making. Then, co-create a big-picture goal and vision for your PPM process.

☐ **DISCUSS THE VALUES AND GOALS THAT SHOULD DRIVE THE PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING PROCESS**

Decide together what equity and accessibility could look like in this process and surface important goals for the process.

MAKING THE CASE FOR
PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING

Below are key talking points to help you advocate for participatory policy-making to a variety of stakeholders. These are targeted talking points, but lean on what you know about your community and audience to choose, modify, or create talking points!

Why should elected officials engage in PPM?

- Participatory policy-making helps build relationships with voters by showing that you value their experiences and voices.
- PPM gives those who are typically excluded from civic process the opportunity to make meaningful decisions that impact their community.
- PPM is an opportunity to use tax dollars to find collaborative solutions to hot-button issues.
- The Community Policy Team can provide insightful information about key experiences and perspectives on one or more policy issues.

Why should community groups and advocates engage in PPM?

- PPM puts people at the center of local policy making processes.
- The opportunity for community members to engage in shared learning, deliberate on, and propose policies is likely to result in solutions that better meet the needs of the community.
- PPM is a way to build community power through a process built on values of transparency, participatory justice, and equity.
- PPM amplifies the voices of those who are frequently left out of civic processes such as immigrant and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Why should residents and other community members engage in PPM?

- PPM lets you shape local policies to better reflect the change you want to see!
- PPM gives community members real decision making power over policy issues
- PPM is a unique opportunity to create policy solutions to the problems that most impact you and your neighbors.
- PPM isn't just voting on an idea; it's using your knowledge and experience of your communities needs to propose and decide on policy solutions that address pressing issues.
- PPM can help you build or strengthen relationships by creating a chance to learn about and understand the thoughts, needs, and priorities of others.

CONCLUSION

To build decision-making power that is equitable, accessible, and significant, policy-making processes must center the people most impacted and harmed by unjust systems and institutions. For example, those who have been harmed by the legal and carceral systems, policing, and our inequitable economy are best-suited to re-envision them. Simply put, the people closest to the issues are the best equipped to solve them.

We hope this toolkit will serve as a complementary resource to the critical, ongoing advocacy work of movement builders and community organizers working to realize the promise of democracy. Together, we will build a democracy that centers those closest to the problems in both identifying issues and enacting their policy solutions.

Special Thanks

Thank you to the members of the 2020 Participatory Policy-making Working Group for sharing important insights, asking challenging questions, and ultimately, shaping the participatory policy-making model we advocate for in this toolkit:

Center for New Democratic Processes, Kyle Bozentko

Center for Popular Democracy, Kate Hamaji

Demos, Laura Williamson

Generation Citizen, Scott Warren

Local Progress, Tarsi Dunlop

People's Action, Joy Blackwood

People's Action, Laurel Wales

Pipeline to Power, Francesco Tena

Policy Link, Tracey Ross

State Innovation Exchange, Na'ilah Amaru

APPENDICES:
TOOLS & RESOURCES

- Participatory Policy-making One-pager
- PPM Pilot Outreach Materials

DEMOCRACY BEYOND ELECTIONS

Participatory policy-making means community-led decision-making.

What is Participatory Policy-Making?

Participatory policy-making (PPM, for short) focuses explicitly on ways the community can inform and decide on policy. More specifically, it refers to a policy-making process that invites community members to identify, develop, and decide directly on policy proposals.

Why Participatory Policy-Making?

At worst, policy-making processes neglect to actively engage those most impacted by the issue they seek to address. At best, public servants and elected officials trying to engage their community during a policy process hit barriers to sharing their power, and community member experiences and solutions are met with closed-door meetings and half-hearted initiatives.

We're joining communities across the country in their demand for real community decision-making. Participatory policy-making is a practical model that puts real decision-making power into community hands.
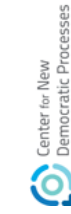
The Working Group

We convened a PPM Working Group every two weeks for three months. We shared learning about participatory practices, models, and tools. Building on that learning, we collaboratively brainstormed and discussed the kind of participatory policy making we'd like to see in the world.

Leveraging the experiences and expertise of working group members, we built a participatory policy-making model that combines the best parts of participatory budgeting (broad community engagement and decision-making opportunities) and policy juries (a core group of representative members of the community working together to address a specific problem).

The model is designed to:

- Work in a variety of policy-making contexts
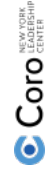- Give community members real decision-making power that is equitable, accessible, and significant

PARTICIPATORY POLICY–MAKING MODEL

CORE CRITERIA:

- Engages full community at each step of the process.
- Ensures real community decision-making with an implementation accountability plan.

1. DESIGN THE PROCESS

Build internal support and convene a steering committee (including community members) to work together to make key decisions about the process, using the core criteria.

2. LAUNCH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Kick off community engagement plan to ensure multiple opportunities for the full community to participate in the process.

3. CONVENE COMMUNITY POLICY TEAM

Convene the Community Policy Team to explain the process, including compensation, roles, responsibilities, and timeline; collect relevant evaluation data.

4. LEARN TOGETHER

Engage in deep learning about the policy issue to understand the problem, its impacts, and a variety of perspectives about possible solutions; collect relevant evaluation data.
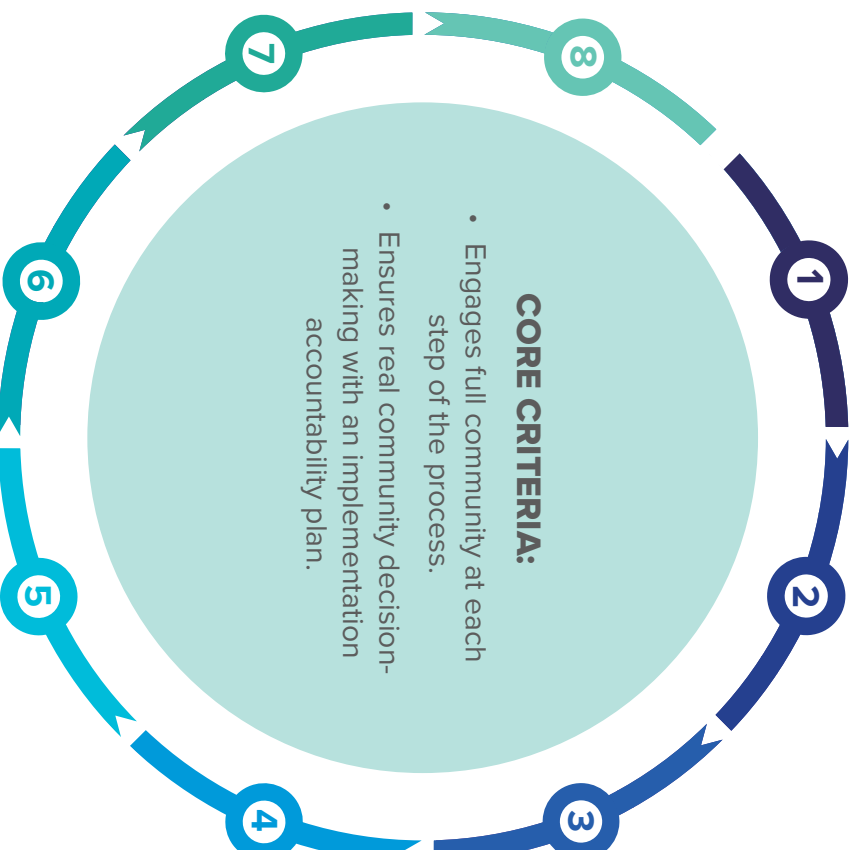
5. DEVELOP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Community Policy Team, with support from the convening body, creates one or more policies informed by community input as well as their own learning and experiences.

6. VOTE

A community vote is held. Convening body collects relevant evaluation data.

7. HONOR THE VOTE & IMPLEMENT

Announce the winning policies; convene elected(s) and staff carry out policy implementation; share timeline and accountability and community follow up measures.

8. ANALYZE DATA & SHARE RESULTS

Analyze and share relevant evaluation findings with participants and steering committee.

PPM Pilot Outreach Materials

WE GET TO DECIDE HOW TO SPEND OVER $250,000 AND CREATE POLICIES FOR A SUPPORTIVE AND SAFE CAMPUS FOR ALL STUDENTS

SHARE YOUR IDEA!

bit.ly/PBIdeas2021

¿QUÉ HARÁ QUE EL CAMPUS DE BUSHWICK SEA MÁS SEGURO Y MÁS SOLIDARIO PARA TODOS LOS ESTUDIANTES?

¡NOSOTROS DECIDIMOS!

¡VOTA HOY!

bit.ly/tudecides2021

STUDENTS GET TO DECIDE HOW TO SPEND OVER $250,000 AND VOTE ON POLICIES
TO CREATE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE CAMPUS FOR ALL STUDENTS

SHARE YOUR IDEAS!

bit.ly/PBIdeas2021

It's fast and easy, and you can see your impact!

TENEMOS UNA OPORTUNIDAD REAL DE MARCAR LA DIFERENCIA
Y PARA HACER EL CAMPUS DE BUSHWICK MÁS SEGURO PARA TODOS LOS ESTUDIANTES

¡VOTAR!

bit.ly/tudecides2021

How could we make our campus more safe and supportive for ALL students?

share your ideas!

bit.ly/PBIdeas2021

We get to decide how to spend over $250,000 and propose and vote on policies that we believe create a safe and supportive environment for all students on campus.

¡VOTA HOY!

bit.ly/tudecides2021

¿Qué hará que el campus de Bushwick sea más seguro y más solidario para todos los estudiantes?

"This is great because we get to take the choice out of people's hands who don't know how this is going to have a direct impact on our life. You get to put that power of choice into the hands of the student."

—Monica, Gotham Academy Student

DEMOCRACY
BEYOND
ELECTIONS