

Participatory Budgeting Racial Equity Toolkit Worksheet

Overview and Outcomes

Description:

Participatory budgeting is a new program in DON focused on youth ages 11-25 where youth develop and vote on projects that the City will fund. Anyone who is a resident of Seattle can contribute an idea to be developed by youth budget delegates into concrete proposals and eventually voted on by youth citywide, ages 11-25, to fund projects up to \$700,000.

The program had a steering committee constituted before the first phase of the process made up of 19 community organizations that work with or serve different youth constituencies. The steering committee set the funding parameters and eligible project types, as well as set goals for outreach and engagement in the idea collection and vote phases of the process. Additionally, the steering committee was a key element of the outreach strategy throughout the process.

The process has four phases: idea collection, project development, vote week, and project implementation. The first three phases of the process are largely external facing and geared towards increasing engagement while the final phase is the responsibility of the City to implement. Idea collection was held over the course of a month at locations across the city including schools, libraries, community centers, and community organizations. Project development lasted roughly two and a half months and weekly meetings were held at City Hall. Vote week was also held at locations across the city and online for a little over a week.

1a. What does your department define as the most important racially equitable community outcomes related to the issue?

The primary racially equitable community outcome for this program is increasing participation of youth of color in the civic process. This outcome was defined by both the department and by the steering committee. The steering committee set specific goals around engaging immigrant and refugee youth; LGBTQ youth; Native youth; homeless youth and youth of color. Both the department and the steering committee also set outcomes related to reducing barriers to participation in the participatory budgeting process. At the beginning of the process, this was broadly defined to include all phases; however, over the course of the project and during evaluation, steering committee members and project staff focused specifically on the project development phase of the process.

1b. What racial equity opportunity area(s) will the issue primarily impact?

Education and community development

1c. Are there impacts on:

The participatory budgeting process is designed to increase youth participation in City government budgeting processes. The Seattle pilot set goals from the outset to focus on youth of color, immigrant and refugee youth, LGBTQ, Native and homeless youth as the target populations for outreach and engagement. The process is geared at building trust with communities that have not historically been engaged by government and requires intentional and inclusive outreach and sustained engagement with these communities. Additionally, by building relationships with these communities and organizations through this process, the intent is to develop partnerships to better serve these communities in the future.

Stakeholder and Data Analysis

2a. Are there impacts on geographic areas? Yes—all Seattle neighborhoods

2b. What are the racial demographics of those living in the area or impacted by the issue?

According to 2010 US Census Bureau data, 69.5% of the city of Seattle identifies as White, 7.9% as Black or African American, 0.8% as American Indian/Alaska Native, 13.8% as Asian, 0.4% as Native Hawaiian/API, and 2.4% as some other race and 5.1% reported as two or more races. Around 33.7% of the city's population identifies as persons of color. Of the

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close to 34% identifying as persons of color, 21.5% (44,035 youth) are under the age of 17, which represents 7.2% of the city's population and 49% of the city's population under the age of 17 (90,484 youth). While this age range does not align with the program's focus age range, it does provide detail in how the racial demographics of the city vary by age.

Around 18% of the city's population is between the ages of 11-25, the focus population for this program. According to the "Seattle Public Schools and Housing Report" from 2015, of the 52,000 youth that attend Seattle Public Schools, 2,370 are homeless. Seattle Public Schools also has demographic data on a number of relevant intersections between homelessness and other demographics. In a snap shot chart from 2014, Seattle Public Schools reported that black immigrant youth accounted for 75% of the homeless immigrant youth in the schools, while black immigrant youth comprised only 30% of the total immigrant youth population in the schools. Additionally, according to the "Homelessness Investment Analysis" from 2015, up to 40% of the homeless youth and young adult (YYA) population identify as LGBTQ.

Immigrant and refugee youth were also a focus population of the program. As of 2014, the Seattle Public Schools immigrant population was 0.02% American Indian/Native American; 41% Asian; 30% Black; 16% Hispanic/Latino; 2% Multi-Racial; 0.37% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander; and 11% White. These youths speak close to 130 different languages and as of 2013, Seattle Public Schools had over 5,000 English Language Learner (ELL) students enrolled. As of 2014, more than 25% of Seattle Public School students identified a language other than English as the primary language spoken in their home.

Lastly, there is also data to show the geographic distribution of youth across the city. Of the 44,000 youth of color in the city under the age of 17, nearly 35% live in Council District 2 and over 65% live in Council Districts 1, 2 and 3, based on 2010 census data.

2c. How have you involved community members and stakeholders?

Since this was the pilot year of the program, we heavily involved stakeholders in the design of the program as well as to collect feedback, input and gather concerns throughout the process. The steering committee served as our main vehicle for stakeholder engagement and included individuals (youth and adults) from community organizations that focused or worked with youth, especially immigrant and refugee, Native American, youth of color, homeless youth and other youth advocacy organizations. Ten out of the 19 organizations represented on the steering committee have their offices in Council Districts 1, 2, and 3.

This group established outreach and participation targets, decided on parameters for funding, eligibility for vote week and other criteria of the program. This community-driven process was supplemented by evaluation and surveying throughout the process at events, assemblies and voting locations. We gathered over 1,900 responses to our voter survey that captured key demographic data as well as allowed participants to provide feedback on the process. We also conducted interviews with members of the steering committee at the end of the process, received formal reports from several project development facilitators and had a focus group session with budget delegates, facilitators and some steering committee members to discuss process improvements and barriers/opportunities to improve future programming.

With each group of participants the DON staff spent a significant amount of time with (Steering Committee, Facilitators, Idea Assembly participants, and Budget Delegates) we had discussions on racial equity and its importance to participatory budgeting, a process designed to engage historically underserved populations. Through all processes and artifacts created in our process, we wove in equitable practices and discussed with participants the intentionality of this inclusion. Particularly, when Budget Delegates narrowed down the pool of ideas collected to just 19 projects that made it on the ballot, we worked with the youth volunteers to help them assess the need and impact of ideas and where they would be most needed in the city.

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2d. What does data and your conversations with stakeholders tell you about existing racial inequities that influence people's lives and should be taken into consideration?

The data, community conversations and feedback combine to describe the unique experience of youth living in the city. Youth of color comprise a greater percentage of their peer groups relative to their white peers than the overall city population (49% vs 34%). These numbers alone speak to the need to ensure inclusive outreach in youth-focused programming is intentional and representative of the city's youth population. Additionally, the geographic dispersion of youth of color across the city indicates a need to be intentional in outreach efforts and to focus attention and resources on areas of the city where more youth of color live (it should be noted again that this analysis used 2010 census data and we know that demographics have changed rapidly in Seattle over the last six years. To the extent that the department can update this analysis with more recent data in the future that will be done).

The data and community conversations also speak to the intersections of race, socio-economic status and other issues like homelessness, access to resources and opportunity. The Office of Economic Development notes that the median wage per hour in Seattle for a white person is \$27 while the median wage per hour for a person of color is \$20. Time and location are two of the most important factors that influence participation rates in programs like participatory budgeting. To the extent that there is a relationship between race and socio-economic status and at the same time youth of color live predominantly in specific parts of the city, this has significant implications for access to meetings, events and other hosted program gatherings. For participatory budgeting, a fair amount of the program is designed to take place in person--every step of the process is meeting intensive.

Some of the feedback we got early on, especially from community organizations serving homeless youth was that it was difficult to convince youth in their program to attend events outside of the program as there were practical challenges around transportation, food and other logistic issues as well as social dynamics that youth are especially receptive to and aware of that can inhibit participation. Taking into account the time, location, and context of when and where events are held for the program is key to addressing racial inequities in the program's design. We saw and heard this social dynamic around youth participation with most non-school based youth we worked with through the program.

2e. What are the root causes or factors creating these racial inequities?

The root causes of these racial inequities relate to access--access to transportation, access to resources, financial or other networks of support to be able to participate, and access to organizations, groups or networks that know about City processes and programs. The idea collection and vote week phases provide multiple opportunities for engagement that can occur in a number of different ways—online or in-person, at school, a community organization, at home or at a City-sponsored event. In comparison, the project development phase required youth participants to attend weekly meetings after school at City Hall for eight weeks. These meetings required youth to arrange transportation and block off two hours of their afternoon every week to attend.

Some City and other government policies also are factors that created or contributed to racial inequities—specifically around allowable expenses related to stipends, transit and food. Current policies restrict what City funds can be used on in order to encourage participation in programs and services. For this process in particular, this contributed to existing inequities around access by limiting the mitigating strategies we could implement.

These causes also directly tie back to the broader racial inequities related to housing, employment, education and health among others that directly impact the lives of the youth. Issues of access that contribute to racial inequities are only amplified when working with youth. For many youth, decisions to participate or not participate were directly related to networks of support, such as schools, family, friends or community organizations that connected the youth to the program.

Determining Benefit and/or Burden and Strategies to Minimize Harm

3. How will the policy, initiative, program, or budget issue increase or decrease racial equity?

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The participatory budgeting process is designed to reduce barriers to participation in government processes. The program has multiple opportunities for individuals to get involved and in an array of capacities--there are multiple ways to be a participant of the participatory budgeting process and involvement is not necessarily continuous throughout the program. This is one of the ways that the program is intended to increase racial equity by providing different levels of engagement and participation that are all meaningful. The one chief exception to this is during the project development phase. During this part of the process, youth are required to attend eight weekly meetings to turn the ideas into projects. This creates a barrier to participation for youth that are not able to attend a weekly meeting.

The program does not require much in the way of formal application materials or paperwork, instead favoring a high volume of meetings to gather ideas and vote on projects. While this reduces the burden on individuals to fill out a long application, it creates another potential burden by requiring alternative ways of gathering ideas that make it harder to track an idea through the process. There are three potential ways that this was done: online via social media and a web form, at events hosted by the City and at regular events or standing meetings hosted by schools and community organizations. Having these different ways of participating is meant to increase racial equity by providing a number of different ways that people can engage with the program.

Based on the model used by other cities implementing participatory budgeting processes, the department focused its attention on building and hosting its own events for idea collection—creating one event in each of the seven Council Districts. This decision diverted attention and limited staff time away from building partnerships with community organizations and schools that ultimately proved to be more effective at reaching the youth focused populations, particularly youth of color.

Overall, the program seeks to increase racial equity by designing a process that reduces traditional barriers to participation, providing multiple opportunities for participation and at different levels of engagement that all achieve the same outcome (for the specific phase of the process), and by adapting the program model to the between phases to account for feedback and data from the phase before to ensure the program is reaching its target audience of youth of color.

4. How will you address the impacts (including unintended consequences) on racial equity?

Program Strategies

There are several program strategies that were utilized and/or could be utilized in the future to address the impacts on racial equity.

1.) Collect feedback and evaluation data throughout the process. This was a program strategy used throughout the pilot that allowed staff to understand what was working and what was not as well as who we were reaching and who we were missing. This allowed staff to adjust the program model, refocus the outreach, and reallocate resources in ways that would increase the racial equity outcomes of the program.

One example of this is with regards to meetings. During the first phase of the process, the department placed a heavy emphasis on hosting its own events, driving attendance to those events and focusing less on existing community meetings. This was in line with the approach prescribed in the international model; however, after completing a few of the City hosted events and experiencing low yields, staff looked at the numbers and saw that participation was much higher at community organizations and schools where youth were already gathered. By the end of the first phase, participation data confirmed that we had diminished yields of ideas collected in direct relation to the "manufactured" quality of the events. The more able we were to set up community organizations and school staff with the materials and have them run the processes, the higher participation was likely to be. This was especially true for participation rates amongst youth of color.

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2.) Meet people where they are at a time and place convenient to them. Driven largely by experience and data as mentioned above, this strategy also helps to mitigate issues of access to transportation or the time to attend another meeting.

3.) Simplify the proposal development process with Budget Delegates. Even with a relatively streamlined process, there are opportunities to reduce the burden placed on individuals, especially school and community organization staff who would like to host an event, in order to increase the reach and participation of youth of color. Many community organizations and schools that serve primarily youth of color, immigrant and refugee youth and other vulnerable populations are already stretched thin for their own resources and time. Providing an opportunity for their youth while also minimizing the time and effort required of them to do so is essential to increasing racial equity in participation.

Instead of holding proposal development meetings at City Hall, a new mobile-participation model could be used that focus on different geographic-based coalitions spread throughout the city. These coalitions could be formed by different community-based organizations within the area that each bring several youth. These coalitions would work on developing proposals and possibly even having field trips to visit different coalitions. These coalitions could be matched with facilitators who have deep knowledge and skills on how to guide based on the make-up of the groups.

While the exact details to simplify the Budget Delegate proposal development process are still to be determined, one perk of meeting at a central location with youth from all over the city is that youth were able to interact with peers from different neighborhoods that they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to meet. The conversations between these youth from varying backgrounds were at times very eye-opening for them; however this process is modified in future years, retaining some aspect of youth from different neighborhoods meeting together would be a good aspect to retain.

4) Outreach to more immigrant youth and homeless youth. For this pilot year, staff focused engaging youth of color by focusing outreach in Districts 1, 2, and 3 as areas with the largest numbers of youth of color. But as immigrant and homeless youth are also populations that the City would like to increase participation in local government in order to achieve racial equity, staff will also target outreach to these communities and individuals that are dispersed throughout the city. If the program continues a second year, the department would be able to devote more time to outreach efforts, as many of the programmatic pieces have been established in the pilot year, freeing up time for increased and more intensive outreach.

5.) As this program moves into the project implementation phase, equitable RFPs and contracting must be made a priority. As this program is intended to engage participation from historically underserved communities, projects need to be implemented by and with the communities they serve.

6.) Outreach should be more front-loaded than time allowed for during the pilot year. Inclusive outreach and engagement requires in-depth planning and forethought as well as continual opportunities for relationship building. If the program continues, more time should be allocated before the process begins to ensure that the proper steps are being taken to outreach to youth of color, immigrant and refugee youth, English-language learners, homeless youth, and LGBTQ youth.

Policy Strategies

Economic barriers around transportation and meals at meetings affected who was able to participate in the program. Since people of color make proportionally less money than white people in Seattle, the City must work to ensure that participation in this program has as few economic barriers to participation as possible. Ways that the City could improve this are to provide transportation or transportation stipends to youth who come to recurring meetings and making sure that meetings are held in centrally located areas. Also, providing meals at meeting will reduce economic burdens for youth and their families.

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An equitable and meaningful strategy would be to continue participatory budgeting in some form for another year. There is a sentiment among communities of color that there are programs designed to engage underserved communities that are widely publicized that everyone becomes excited about for the first year, but then are not continued for subsequent years. Building a second year off the success of this pilot year might increase trust in communities of color.

Partnership Strategies

During this pilot year, the City has engaged many schools and community-based organizations in partnerships. The City will continue to work with schools and organizations that have large populations of youth of color and in potential subsequent cycles, the City will also strengthen the outreach to community-based organizations working with youth experiencing homelessness and school programs working with English Language Learners to deepen the engagement with these populations in particular.

Ongoing Evaluation and Accountability

5. How will you evaluate and be accountable?

Evaluation is a key component of the participatory budgeting process. We have embedded pre- and post-participation surveys into different steps of the program, as well as interviews, focus groups and general surveys into the process. From this, we have been able to capture a fair amount of data in the first year of the program. If the program were to continue, we would maintain this level of data collection to compare participation rates over time as well as to compare the efficacy of certain outreach methods and event styles.

Our evaluation time line is currently relatively tight--we aim to have our evaluation of the first year completed by the end of July on the external facing process. We will also review the full process, including contracting and project implementation, at the end of the year when we are further along in that phase of the work. In future years, we would maintain this level of data collection, analysis and reporting in order to make program adjustments between phases as needed.

Based on this year's experience and what the data shows about our participation rates--we feel that the program is well on its way to achieving its racial equity outcomes; however, we realize we can always do better. The program had a participation rate of 2.98% of eligible youth citywide, and more than 8% of youth in of focus populations participated. The national median for participation in participatory budgeting processes is 1.7% of the eligible population.

If the program continues a second year, we would like to retain some of the steering committee organizations on for a second year and infuse the group with some new energy as well. The role of the steering committee and the time and energy required on both sides to make that engagement meaningful was a learning lesson this year that we will fine tune between cycles given the feedback of this year's steering committee members.

To maintain accountability, we would also look for ways to increase participation in the project implementation phase in future cycles. The last phase of the process is largely left to the City to execute and diminishes the work that has been done up to this point to select the projects and the role of youth. We will continue to look for ways to involve youth and specifically youth of color in this work.

This process has also been a good first touch at raising awareness about racial inequity in processes and participation with our fellow City departments. Although the work required to vet and advise on the projects was confined to a short period of time, many of our City partners provided feedback that they enjoyed the process and were impressed with the number of youth and specifically the number of youth of color that participated in this process. As we look forward to working with others more closely in the future through this process and others, many of the lessons learned through this process will be shared internally and externally.

5b. What is unresolved?

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Issues around access to transportation and creating meaningful opportunities to engage with English language learners are two issues we will need to continue to partner on and improve. Moving to a model of events hosted at regular gatherings, schools, standing meetings, etc. has helped address the first issue for the both the idea collection and vote week phases of the process; however, we have not been able to resolve this issue as relates to the project development phase and need to develop some creative options if the program continues.

Engaging youth who do not speak English or have limited proficiency is another challenge that we need to continue to partner with community organizations, schools, media resources, commissions and others with expertise and established networks in order to do better in future years. This outreach is intensive and requires resources; however, we need to prioritize this in future years to ensure that we're reaching the growing immigrant and refugee youth population in the city.

6. Share analysis and report responses from Step 5 with Department Leadership and Change Team Leads and members involved in Step 1.

References

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