

IMPROVING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN THE CITY OF PITTSBURGH BUDGETING PROCESS

**CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY'S
HEINZ COLLEGE CAPSTONE PROJECT
MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY AND
MANAGEMENT, SPRING 2022**

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**Sponsored by:
Councilperson Erika Strassburger, Pittsburgh City Council, District 8**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report aims to improve transparency and engagement in the Pittsburgh budgeting process. Currently, city residents feel that budget dealings are done behind closed doors, which leads to a lack of trust in public officials and less incentive to participate in government activities. Furthermore, efforts to include the community through public hearings and comment periods only reach those who are already engaged with the City's governing processes, and therefore reach a limited audience. Even when there is public engagement with the budget, residents feel like they are weighing in on a final product rather than providing input for something that will be modified based on their suggestions.

Inspired by the large increase in public engagement around the budget following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests—

budget engagement was an estimated 10 times higher in 2020 compared to 2019[1] and then fell an estimated 92.9% in 2021[2]—coupled with Pittsburgh's release from the strict Act 47 budget oversight, Councilperson Erika Strassburger, in collaboration with the City of Pittsburgh, saw an opportunity to improve the budget process in order to increase transparency and promote public engagement from a broader diversity of voices.

To tackle this multifaceted challenge, our Capstone team took a three-pronged approach, creating three sub-teams focused on the budget process, budget engagement, and budget transparency. To determine the main budget and engagement pain points facing the city and its constituents, each sub-team researched current Pittsburgh processes and

About Act 47

In 2003, Pittsburgh entered Act 47 oversight, a statute in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania that outlines processes to stabilize municipalities struggling financially. With this designation, Pennsylvania cut Pittsburgh's spending in order to balance out their expenses with their revenues. It also required Pittsburgh to deliver a Preliminary Budget to the state in September, before the budget was approved at the end of the year.

A number of financial recovery plans were adopted by Pittsburgh City Council and signed by Pittsburgh Mayors throughout Pittsburgh's 14 years under state oversight, including plans in 2004, 2009, and 2014.

Pittsburgh was released from Act 47 in 2021, meaning many restricted funds will open up and many criteria handed down by the state will be lifted.[3]

conducted stakeholder interviews. Furthermore, the transparency-focused subteam explored and gathered best practices from other cities. The entire Capstone team collaborated to develop recommendations for improved budget and engagement processes in the city and held a focus group to test their ideas.

Interviews with city officials and community leaders, as well as research into budget and engagement best practices, highlighted many common

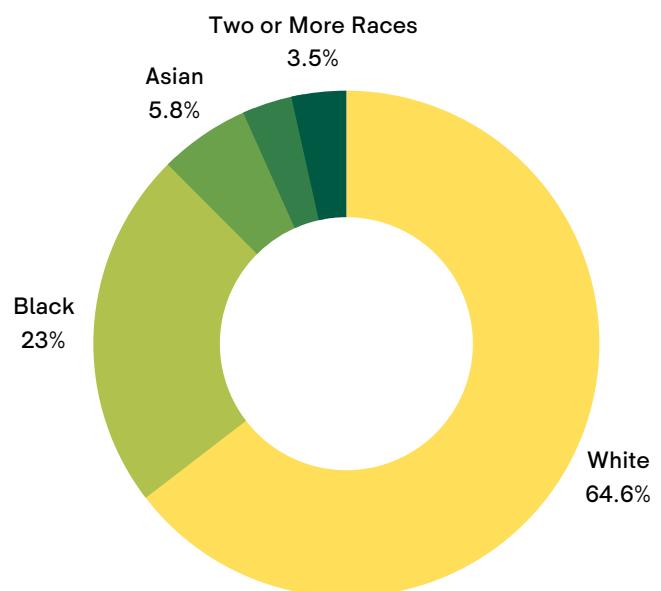
pain points and recurring themes. From city officials, we learned that the budget timeline and capacity limitations make it difficult to fully educate and engage with the public on the city budget. From community leaders, we learned that budget hearings in their current form are ineffective, budget information is hard to find and overwhelming, and there is a large gap in education around budget engagement.

Based on the team's findings, we developed key recommendations to improve engagement and transparency in the Pittsburgh budgeting process. In order to create more time for constituent feedback in the budgeting process, the City can engage the public throughout the year via surveys and an expanded budget hearing format and schedule. The City can also adjust the budget delivery timeline by eliminating the September preliminary budget and moving the final budget release from November to October. To improve accessibility to information, the City can centralize budget resources through a single Pittsburgh budget website. To close the budget education gap, the City can develop a new budget education curriculum that focuses on foundational learning with the capacity to add more specific and/or complex modules depending on need. Finally, to ensure that these changes, and the budget as a whole, are creating

equitable positive impact in the City, Pittsburgh can adopt an equity measure on the City's Capital Project Facilitation Committee scorecard.

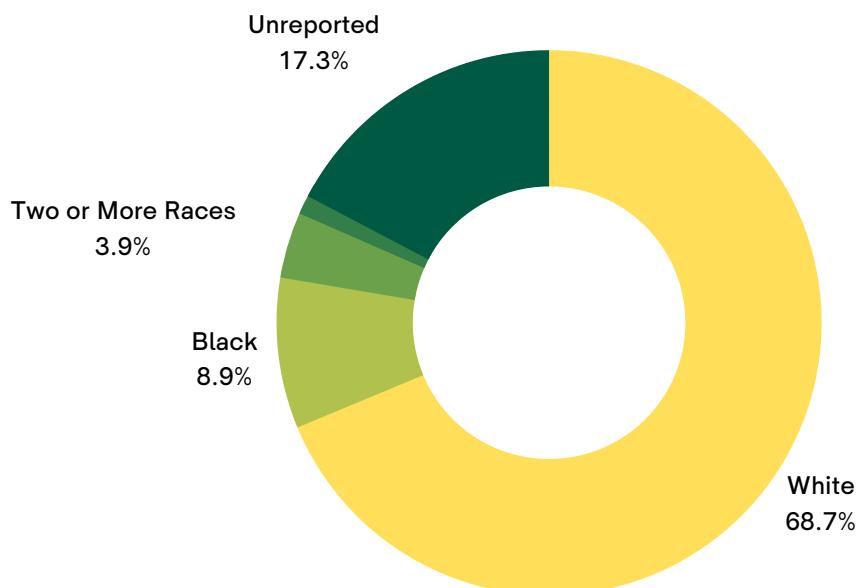
As seen in 2020, Pittsburgh's constituency has the ability and passion to engage with their city's budget and fiscal policy. However, the budgeting process is marred by capacity challenges, engagement obstacles, and education barriers. With Pittsburgh's removal from Act 47 state oversight, there is an opportunity for the City to overhaul its budget, engagement, and education processes in order to foster a culture of transparency and accountability. The recommendations found in this document aim to create such a culture.

Pittsburgh Demographics



Source: US Census

Pittsburgh 2022 Capital Budget Survey Respondents



Source: Pittsburgh OMB

CAPSTONE PROJECT OVERVIEW



As part of the graduation requirements for a Masters in Public Policy & Management at Carnegie Mellon University's Heinz College, students must complete a thesis-equivalent "Capstone Project". As explained in the following excerpt from the Class of 2022 Systems Synthesis Course Guidebook, the Capstone Project is an opportunity for students' education to move beyond the classroom.

"The major goal of the Systems Synthesis project course is to provide ... students with the skills necessary for structuring, managing, and carrying out projects in an organization. Textbooks and lecture courses cannot provide these skills. Instead, students need to acquire them through first-hand project experiences in relatively small groups with the guidance of seasoned faculty. Therefore, from its beginning in 1969, Heinz College has required students to complete a Systems Synthesis project."

Our Project Client, Councilperson Erika Strassburger (Pittsburgh City Council, District 8), sponsored our project to improve public engagement in the Pittsburgh Budget Process. Collaborating with Councilperson Strassburger, Emilie Yonan (Chief of Staff), and Lita Brillman (Graduate Student Consultant), and with the guidance of our Project Advisor, Alex Polzin, our Capstone Project culminated in this report of recommendations that we believe will improve public engagement in Pittsburgh's Budget Process.



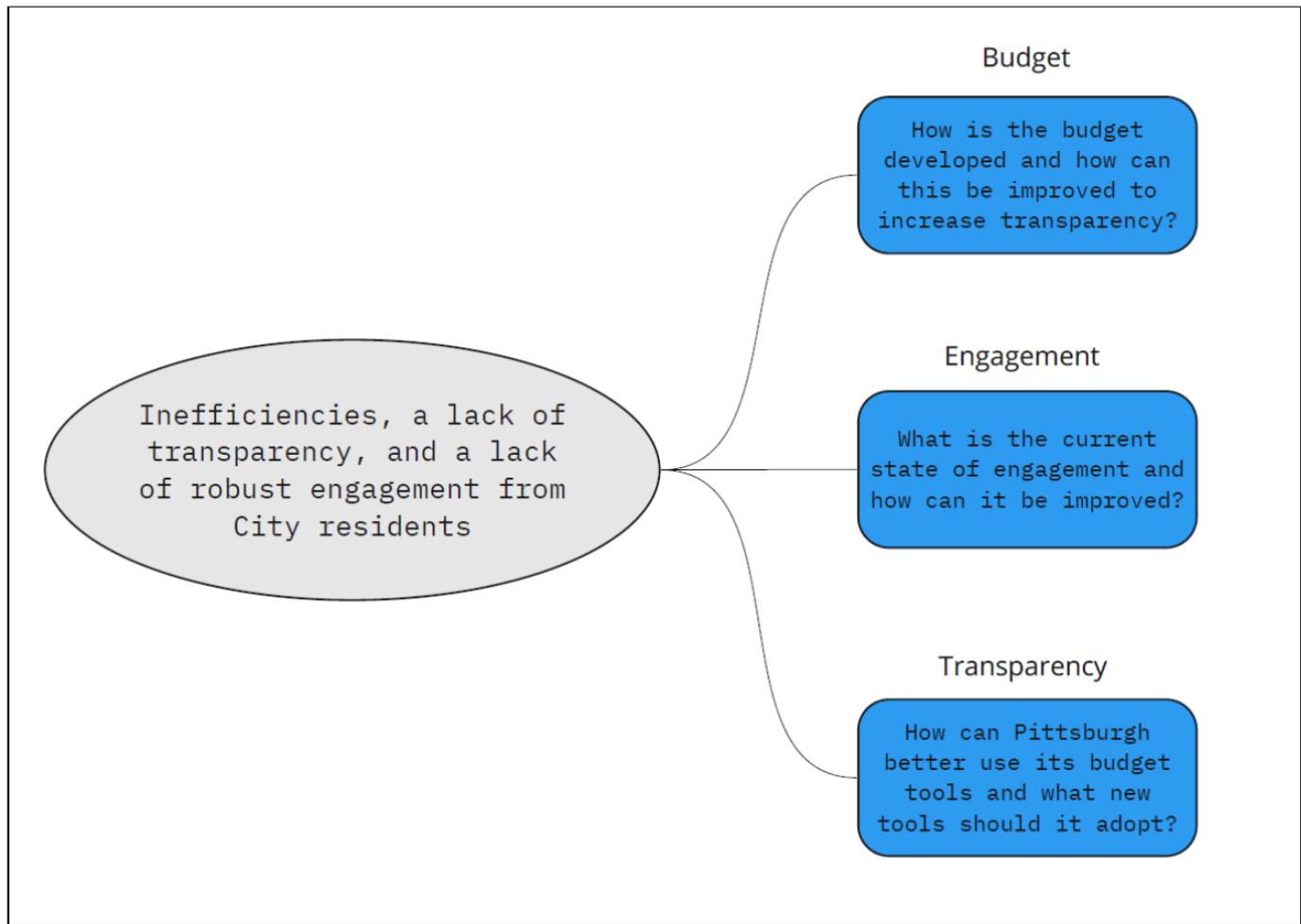
PROCESS AND METHODS

Before recommending solutions to improve engagement with the City budget, we needed to understand each barrier to engagement and its cause. When breaking down the problem into its many parts we found a natural grouping for internal issues and external issues. We began scheduling interviews with City and community stakeholders and found we would easily fill our team's time with these interviews, forcing us to limit the scope of our project to one aspect of the budget process. So, we decided to split our team up between these internal and external issues to allow us to cover more ground and give more comprehensive recommendations. The internal team was focused on budget processes and resource constraints, the external team was focused on the state of public engagement with the budget, and we decided to add another area of research: discovering what other cities are doing that Pittsburgh could adopt to improve its transparency and public engagement. This yielded three sub-teams: Budget, Engagement, and Transparency.

- **Budget Team:** Alec Harkins and Andy Nunn
- **Engagement Team:** Yuxuan Sheng and Michael 'Rich' Worth
- **Transparency Team:** Ben Christensen and Lori Zakalik

Each team was responsible for leading interviews associated with their focus. During the semester, we continually proposed recommendations to each other, bringing each team's insights together to craft better solutions to internal and external budget problems. Our final recommendations benefit from the combined research from each sub-team, our frequent internal discussions on possible solutions, and the many insights from stakeholders from the City of Pittsburgh, the community, our project advisor, and our advisory board.

Structuring the Problem



Interviews

The team sought to gather information from a diverse range of City of Pittsburgh employees, Councilmembers, community advocates, and employees of the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The initial goal of the interviews was to simply gather information. Review of budget materials and web research could only reveal so much about the Pittsburgh budget process. To properly understand the process on a deeper level, it would be necessary to learn directly from individuals involved in crafting and shaping the budget year after year.

The team initially spoke with several members of Pittsburgh's Office of Management and Budget in order to understand the budget process from an internal perspective. These initial interviews were largely devoted to understanding the people, time, and technology needed to craft the budget. When does the OMB issue its preliminary budget and what interactions take place between City of Pittsburgh government agencies and OMB employees? What software does the city use to formulate the budget and what are its capabilities?

Who determines which capital budget project proposals make it into the budget? These and similar questions helped the team develop a deeper understanding of the budget process that could not be gleaned from the budget materials available online.

After these initial interviews, the team widened the interview pool and subject matter discussed. Interviews were conducted with members of various advocacy groups such as the Economic Justice Circle and Pittsburgh United in order to identify pain points for citizens in voicing their opinions and accessing budget information. These interviews focused less on the internal budget process, and more on the public's ability to influence the budget. What avenues are available for you to comment on the budget? Are you able to locate educational resources that can help with understanding budget documents?

These interviews helped clarify exactly what issues the public might be having with engaging with the budget process.

The team continued to supplement its understanding of the budget process and its shortcomings by interviewing additional stakeholders throughout the semester. These discussions took place with various members of City Council, the City Controller's Office, current and former City government employees, equity consultants, and community advocates.

Focus Groups

While one-on-one interviews were informative, the team recognized a need for productive conversation and debate regarding potential recommendations. In the latter half of the project, the team held focus group sessions to bring together diverse perspectives representing government and the public. These sessions allowed for fruitful discussion and debate of the team's recommendations and helped to identify important considerations when implementing these recommendations.

Case Studies

The transparency team focused on identifying best practices regarding budget education and engagement from other cities. The team first identified cities with relatively similar population sizes and demographics to Pittsburgh. Next, they reviewed the relevant government websites and budget documents from these cities. Finally, the transparency team compared their findings to the state of budget education and engagement in Pittsburgh to identify areas for potential improvement.

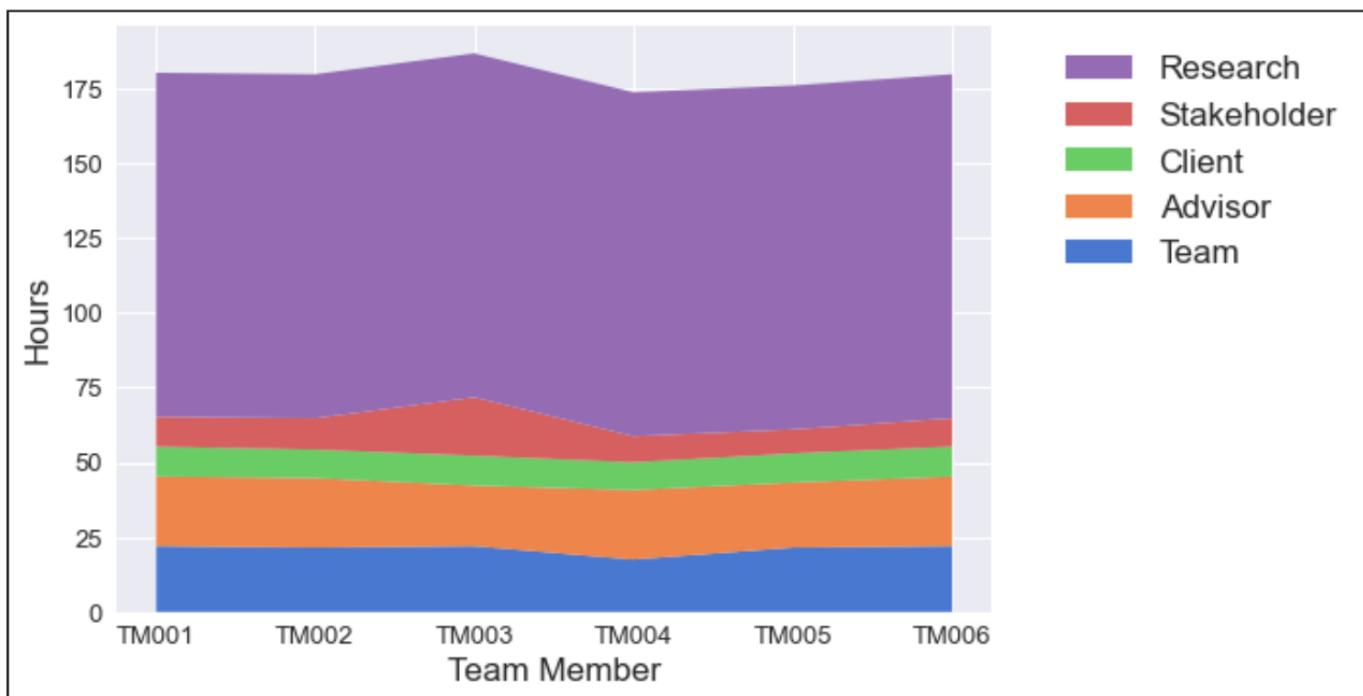
Desk Research

Initial research methods largely involved review of available budget documents, educational videos, and recorded budget hearings.

Budget Process Mapping

As interviews and desk research uncovered finer details regarding the budget process, the team worked toward developing a map of the budget process. The mapping process had multiple purposes. First, it allowed the team to synthesize information acquired from interviews and desk research into a single visualization. Second, it provided a valuable reference for team members as they conducted interviews and developed recommendations. Finally, it serves as a model that could be disseminated to the Pittsburgh community to increase public understanding of the budget process.

Capstone Team Collaborative Hours Worked





FINDINGS

After conducting 30 interviews and researching five additional cities' budget best practices, each subteam shared the common themes that surfaced during that work. From there, the subteams worked together to synthesize their themes into the 14 findings shared below. These findings fall under the larger categories of People, Public Engagement, Education, Technology, and Policy.

People	1	Lack of People Capacity
	2	Siloization of Divisions
	3	Opportunities for Collaboration
Public Engagement	1	Inadequate Public Participation
	2	Biased Public Representation
	3	Inconsistent Public Feedback Loop
	4	<i>Budget Engagement Best Practices</i>
Education	1	Lack of Accessible Budget Education
	2	<i>Budget Education Best Practices</i>
Technology	1	Better Utilization of Existing Technology
	2	Difficult to Track Projects Over Time
	3	<i>Budget Website Best Practices</i>
Policy	1	Processes Lack Equitable Framework
	2	Mandates Limit Transparency & Efficiency

People

Lack of People Capacity

Our interviews with city stakeholders consistently suggested there is not enough “People” capacity to effectively meet the demands of the current budget process. Most City employees expressed a desire for increased public engagement in the budget process and the need for more staff to allow them to do so. This need for more staff was most often a symptom of the current staff not having enough time.

Siloization of City Divisions

Both the Budget process and efforts to engage with the budget are siloed by City Division. The Budget process inherently involves working together, yet the lack of clear inter-division collaboration efforts have contributed to a budget process of “separate processes”. These separate efforts result in City Divisions being “in the dark” about each other's operations. Furthermore, this lack of clarity fosters independent opinions – as opposed to interdependent – on Pittsburgh’s priorities.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Despite the siloization, our interviews identified a widely accepted openness to collaboration and opportunities to do so. Divisions working in isolation but toward

the same goals, comes at the cost of wasted time, energy, and resources. Particularly, a lack of sustainable effective public engagement efforts have left uncertainty around investing staff time into engaging the public. The weight of allocating staff time may be less heavy with a shared collaborative approach – and may decrease the need for more people capacity.

Public Engagement

Inadequate Public Participation

City Council often sees the same few people attending Council meetings about the budget. Only 181 people responded to the survey for the 2022 Capital Budget, and there is general concern about public opportunity to participate with the Operating Budget. Overarching policy restrictions make the Operating Budget less flexible than the Capital Budget. Consequently, the public has become less and less involved in the Operating Budget.

Biased Public Representation

Although multiple hearings are held every year, the people that attend hearings are not representative of Pittsburgh at large. Those who attend these hearings tend to already those who understand the budget and are involved in community groups. This leads to biased suggestions in the hearings.

Inconsistent Public Feedback Loop

The lack of a proper feedback loop undermines public initiative and support for city government. A public activist and lawyer that we interviewed has had multiple interactions with the City of Pittsburgh on behalf of the people. In our conversation, he conveyed that without proper feedback, the public cannot know if their comments were actually heard. If their comments are not acknowledged, the public may feel disenfranchised and see little value in engaging with the city.

Another symptom of an inconsistent feedback loop is a missed opportunity to gain key input. When the government does not acknowledge the public comments, the public stops providing comments. In this situation, the government can not tell what is effective.

One of our interviewees communicated her frustration when it came to various public engagement meetings. She could never tell if the meetings were having a real impact. By focusing on and validating feedback, the city can build public support and improve efficacy.

The City of Pittsburgh Does Not Follow Budget Engagement Best Practices

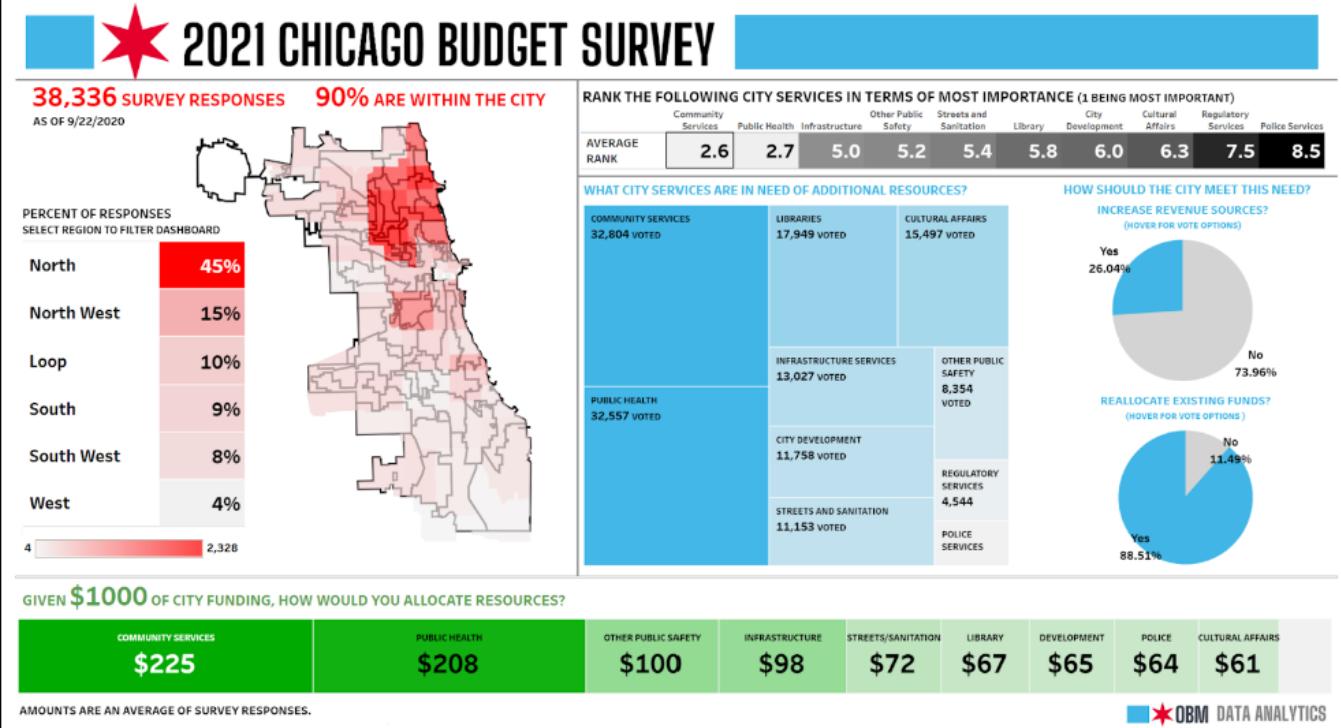
The rigidity of Pittsburgh's budget hearing format and schedule means that many people are unable to attend and participate in public forums around developing the city budget. We found that many cities provide more diverse forms of engagement around the budget outside of City Council or OMB budget hearings. In Chicago, the City developed a [Community Round Table](#) program where residents sign up to be "Budget Ambassadors".

The City provides training and a toolkit to lead discussions and provide feedback to City officials. The program saw participation in neighborhoods throughout the city.

Chicago also holds Virtual Town Halls that meet the people where they are by broadcasting on Facebook and Twitter. According to Pew Research Center, in 2021, 77% of American adults were on social media, including 77% of Black Americans and 80% of Latinx Americans.^[4] So social media broadcasts can reach a large and diverse audience. As such, the broadcasts include an ASL interpreter, and incorporate English and Spanish subtitles into the live feed. People are also able to ask questions via social media comments rather than a specific feedback form, which clears

Survey Result Dashboard for City of Chicago

Survey Results



Source: [Chicago Survey Dashboard](#)

obstacles for those interested in engaging.

Finally, Chicago surveys its constituents (in six different languages) about the budget and results are shared publicly to inform the community of their fiscal priorities. This gives constituents the information they need to hold their elected officials accountable.

Education

Lack of Accessible Budget Education

The problems revolving around the budget are complex and affect the entire city. It is not possible to have a productive discussion about budget

issues when everyone does not understand the various systems and processes that guide the budget process. In order to truly have a substantial impact on the budget, the public must first be provided with the necessary information. During her time as the Public Engagement Coordinator, Leah Friedman mentioned that she would dedicate a portion of the time she had for an engagement event to educating the public on the system, terms and issues. After enacting this policy, Friedman said the public feedback was much more specific and helpful.

Pittsburgh Does Not Follow Budget Education Best Practices Due to Lack of Capacity and Training

Pittsburgh's OMB puts in a great deal of effort to create budget education resources for the general public.

However, these educational websites are overloaded with information, making it overwhelming for those new to the budget process. There is also an introductory video on how to participate in the budget process, but it is 10 minutes long and consists of very detailed PowerPoint slides.

By contrast, Minneapolis has a simple, high level explainer on the steps of the budget process and how constituents can get involved. There are links to continue on to more information if a person is interested, but all pieces of information are shared in more bite-sized portions.

Minneapolis also provides its constituents with a [glossary of budget terms](#) that may be an obstacle for those trying to engage, as well as [short educational videos](#) on the budget process, all under 5 minutes in length. These videos offer a high level view of the budget process, as a way to help people dip their toes into engagement without overwhelming them.

Minneapolis Budget Education Website

Learn about the budget process

Every year, we create a budget that represents our needs and values as a community.

Ideas for the budget come from many sources, including:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Neighborhood groups
- City departments

In August, the Mayor recommends a budget.

At the end of the year, the City Council adopts a budget.

[Learn about all the steps in between](#)



Budget planning timeline

Planning the budget is a year-long process that

[See the steps >>](#)

Source: [Minneapolis Budget Education Website](#)

Finally, in New York City, the Campaign Finance Board (CFB) harnessed the power of [social media](#) as an educational tool ahead of the City's first-ever ranked-choice voting election. Using simple, eye-catching videos and graphics, the CFB social media account served as a resource for city residents unsure of the ranked-choice voting process.

Technology

Better Utilization of Existing Technology

Questica (budget creation) and JD Edwards (accounting) are the two major softwares utilized in the budget process. The City has made some efforts toward utilizing the data available from Questica and JD Edwards, but these efforts have been limited in scope. Efforts to utilize their data for greater transparency have been limited to a disjointed effort across divisions of tools and simulations that limit their accessibility. Pittsburgh does utilize the EngagePGH website, which displays active, on-going projects and updates – and during the budget season will display Capital & Operating pages for survey collection and useful links. However, it is difficult to find general budget resources on EngagePGH, and its current design creates an “overload” of information that could be improved

for a more accessible and professional engagement tool.

Difficult to Track Projects Over Time

While the final capital budget is published at the end of the year as a standalone document, this format does not fully capture the frequently changing nature of the capital budget. In particular, the City can and does reallocate funds from one project to another depending on City needs, capacity, and any other unforeseen circumstance that may arise. Thus, the finalized capital budget only provides part of the picture. For Pittsburgh residents to fully understand the capital budget, they need to be able to track capital budget projects over time to understand any changes that may occur throughout the year. Although EngagePGH can provide updates on active projects, changes are not always up to date and it excludes inactive projects. OMB and the City of Pittsburgh do not provide any real-time updates to the public regarding changes to capital budget projects despite tracking this information internally. Former OMB Director Kevin Pawlos noted that if residents want to stay up-to-date on capital projects, the only avenue available to them is to closely follow the legislative process.

Pittsburgh Does Not Follow Budget Website Best Practices

Currently in Pittsburgh, you have to visit no less than 10 different webpages in order to gather enough information to fully understand and interact with the budget.

In our research on best practices in other cities, we found that [Minneapolis](#) and [San Antonio](#) have well-organized, centralized budget websites at which constituents can find all the budget resources these cities provide.

San Antonio Budget Website

FY 2022 ADOPTED SUMMARY			
Total Budget \$3.1 Billion	General Fund \$1.36 Billion	Restricted Funds \$1.12 Billion	Capital Budget \$592.2 Million

FY 2022 ADOPTED BUDGET



BUDGET DOCUMENT



CAPITAL BUDGET



QUARTERLY REPORTS



TRANSPARENCY SA DATA PORTAL

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT



BUDGET CALENDAR



BUDGET WORK SESSIONS



COMMUNITY INPUT



CITY COUNCIL POLICY

Source: [San Antonio Budget Website](#)

Both cities had simple and clear URLs for their budget pages: [minneapolismn.gov/government/budget](#) and [sanantonio.gov/Budget](#), whereas none of the Pittsburgh budget page URLs are as intuitive.

Furthermore, the content on the pages is designed with the user in mind with simplified, task-oriented information displayed (i.e. “data portal”, “budget calendar”, “community input”) as well as a clean icon-driven design rather than a text heavy, navigationally challenging page.

Policy

Mandates Limit Transparency & Efficiency

Most of the Capital Budget Processes are governed by mandates that create tight windows and contribute to the demand for more capacity and time.

These demands reflect the issues of siloization and inadequate public engagement, and suggest that policy amendments will be necessary for greater transparency & efficiency.

Budget Processes Lack Equitable Framework

Capital budget projects are ranked and selected based on eight criteria.

Despite persistent gaps in health, income, employment, and education across gender and race groups, the current budget process includes no measure for assessing the impact of a capital budget project proposal along equity lines. Community advocates Amber Thompson and Kevin Quisenberry both noted the need for an equity rubric that the public can access to identify exactly how an individual community project promotes equity in Pittsburgh.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the synthesis of our findings, the team developed recommendations that directly address the pain points associated with the budget process in Pittsburgh as well as best practices found in other cities. Our recommendations are outlined below and discussed throughout this section.

1. Centralize Resources

- a. Centralize all Budget Resources to Improve Accessibility of Information for Constituents
- b. Explore Questica's OpenBook Tools Subscription for Greater Transparency and Collaboration

2. Expand Engagement

- a. Empower Engagement Teams to Steward Better Collaboration
- b. Broaden the Diversity of Perspectives Engaging in the Budget Process through Community Initiatives, Equity in Accessibility, and Expanded Surveying

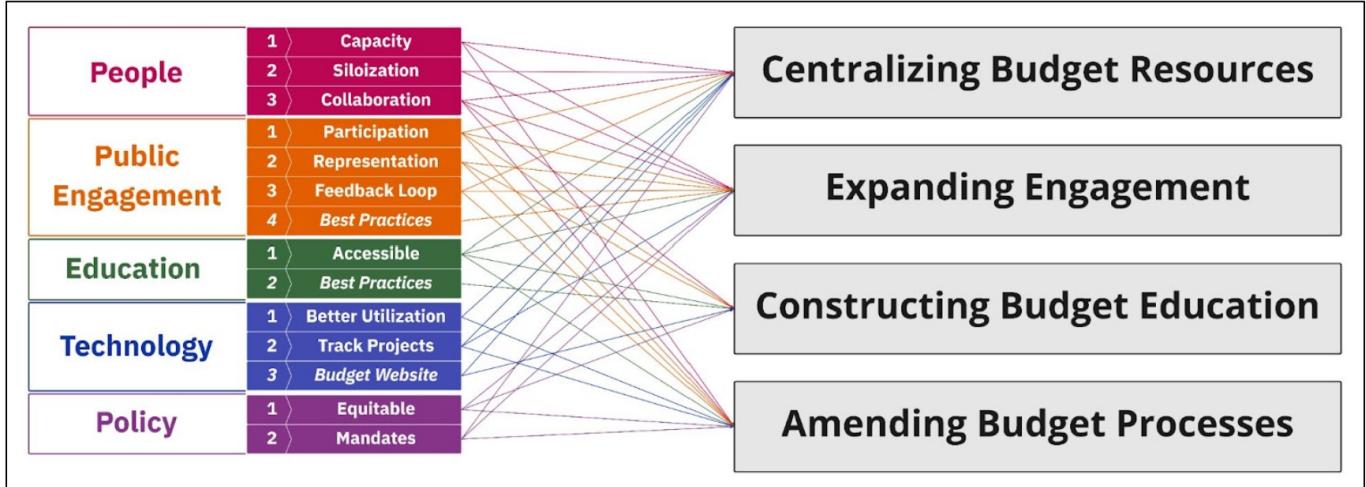
3. Revise Budget Education Strategy

- a. Develop a New Budget Education Curriculum to Set the Foundation for Community Engagement in the Budget Process

4. Modify Budget Processes

- a. Amend budget processes to provide more opportunities for public feedback and provide ample time for OMB to meet with government agencies and public
- b. Create a more equitable process by assessing equity impacts of budget proposals and implementing a participatory budgeting process

Mapping Findings to Recommendation Buckets



RECOMMENDATION: Centralize all Budget Resources to Improve Accessibility of Information for Constituents

The Pittsburgh Office of Innovation & Performance (I&P) has the technical capabilities for creating and maintaining a centralized budget website. Choosing what the website will look like and filling the site with content will require coordinated effort from the Office of Management and Budget, the City Council, and the Controller's office.

We recommend that OMB, Council, and the Controller work with I&P to design a centralized website that exhibits and makes available all budget content and related resources including:

- Strategic Budget Education
- The current Operating and Capital Budgets
- Surveys and other anonymous budget engagement opportunities
- Public budget engagement opportunities
- The Budget Timeline
- High-level budget information
- In-depth budget information such as data visualizations
- Displayed Survey Results

The centralized websites of San Antonio and Minneapolis may serve as a starting point, but the website design should also be informed by an educational strategy designed by the city. We discuss the education strategy as a separate recommendation.

Website Maintenance

One risk to consider when creating a website is the likelihood of information becoming outdated. If a constituent visits the website to find the budget calendar but is only able to see the calendar for the previous year, the website becomes obsolete.

For this tool to become a solution for improved budget transparency that lasts longer than one year, there must be a committed effort to maintain its content.

Some existing budget resources are currently out of date. The engage Pittsburgh budget website includes a survey on its main page that closed July 11, 2021. Without a change, in close to two months, this major component of the site would have been outdated for an entire year. Both the OMB Operating Budget and Capital Budget engagement websites give many ways to engage with the Operating and Capital budgets, but most of these opportunities are for summer of 2021. Again, this information is close to one full year of being outdated.

There are two possible approaches for establishing commitment to maintain updated content on the website: formal and informal. Which measure is taken is better decided by those with more intimate knowledge of the political feasibility of either.

- As a formal measure, City Council could adopt a resolution or update the City Code to require recurring, scheduled meetings by the responsible parties to discuss the centralized website and update its content.
- As an informal measure, City Council could garner commitment by meeting with the responsible parties and request commitments from each to meet regularly to discuss the centralized website and update its content.

While this initiative may require substantial effort and concentration at first, it has the potential for time savings in the long-term:

- Instead of maintaining many budget websites, the City will have fewer websites to maintain.
- A centralized website would be more effective for educating and engaging the public, becoming a resource that better satisfies community needs, lessening the need for direct contact with City officials on budget basics.
- Maintaining this effort precludes the need for future initiatives to engage the public like that seen for the 2022 budget, which required significant time from those involved.
- Beyond the time saved, this recommendation would substantially increase transparency by making budget resources more available and easier to find.

RECOMMENDATION: Explore Questica's OpenBook Tools Subscription for Greater Transparency and Collaboration

We recommend that Pittsburgh explores how they can better utilize their Questica Budgeting software to increase transparency and considers subscribing to Questica's OpenBook toolkit. [5] Pittsburgh currently utilizes Questica's budgeting software to formulate and create their budget. While exploring Questica we discovered their OpenBook toolkit – a software dedicated to increasing transparency. The Questica OpenBook toolkit provides a centralized page for the public to explore interactive budget-related dashboards and other data visualizations.[6]

The dashboards available with Questica OpenBook include data visualizations similar to the Controller's Office tools, including the Capital and Operating Budget Explorer dashboards.[7] There is also a Project Dashboard tool that allows for the exploration and updates to budget projects. This service would provide a solution to the difficulty of tracking Pittsburgh's projects. Questica also partners with Balancing Act and their OpenBook tools can be added into the Balancing Act Pop-up links currently utilized by Pittsburgh for a more interactive display.

Additionally, Questica is releasing an OpenBook Stories update which allows Cities to display the interactive tools and visuals in a narrative format (see Appendix VI). This would provide Pittsburgh a clean way to highlight data and a place to explain how to use dashboards.

The Controller's tools work well, yet Questica OpenBook provides a centralized and clean design, and reduces the need for Pittsburgh to "come up with their own design". Additionally, unlike the Controller's tools, OpenBook would not need to directly access Pittsburgh's J.D. Edwards ERP software to track real-time budget spending. This is because Questica is able to link to ERP software, so any accounting changes in J.D. Edwards are automatically updated and become available data in Questica.[8] While this may seem like competing efforts, managing OpenBook could be a collaborative effort with OMB and the Controller's Office. Pricing estimates to add OpenBook to Pittsburgh's subscription to Questica suggest a rough 18% increase over what Pittsburgh already spends on Questica, but these costs could be offset by the Controller no longer paying for their budget explorer services.

After speaking with the Pittsburgh Questica Representative, Todd Coulombe, we recommend that OMB work with him to explore the extent that the Questica OpenBook toolkit would benefit Pittsburgh's transparency efforts. The following list contain specific suggestions that

could be posted on Pittsburgh's Questica OpenBook website using the OpenBook Stories tool (& additional Openbook tool):

- Mayor's Priorities
- OMB Regulations
- Survey Results
- Project Proposals (Project Explorer)
- Current Projects (Project Explorer)
- Closed Out Projects (Project Explorer)
- Budgets & Actual Expenditures (Budget Explorer)[9]
- Employee & Payroll Explorer (Budget Explorer)[10]
- How Are My Tax Dollars Spent (Budget Explorer)
- Used in conjunction with Tax Receipt tool
- List not exhaustive of Available tools and displays

RECOMMENDATION: Empower Engagement Teams to Steward Better Collaboration

To improve the cooperation between the city government and the public, the current contact information and techniques should be centralized and standardized. The current situation relies on preexisting relationships and informal relations and this enables the inequity of who can and cannot engage with the budget process.

To counter this issue, we recommend reframing the engagement team in the mayor's office to act as liaisons between the city government and the public. A major issue for community groups when it comes to taking initiative and making change is they do not know who to contact, or which official to speak with if they have suggestions. As a result, rather than spending most of their time developing the solution, community groups have to work through the start-up cost of finding the part of city government that will support their cause. Likewise, government officials have the resources and want to tackle similar issues, but they need representatives within the neighborhoods to connect with the public and provide critical insights. Thus, the current situation of relying on preexisting relationships creates obstacles for city officials and members of the community who want to improve the status quo.

This liaison team should be the central hub for government and community group interaction. The liaison team should connect with current engagement focused groups throughout the city government. From these groups, the liaisons will collect the contact information for community groups and highly involved citizens, as well as the issues that they focus on. Simultaneously,

the liaisons will log the contact information for offices within the government that tackle those issues. As a result, any community group that wishes to address an issue can contact these liaison and be directed to the appropriate office focused on that issue. Vice versa, when a government official has a project that calls for community involvement, the official can speak with the liaison to find the appropriate community contact or organization.

Finally, the liaison team will also provide government offices with services and recommendations for engaging with the public. Such services include survey assistance, best practices for community events, and examples of past engagement products. Thus when government offices need to connect with the public, they can ensure they are doing so in the most effective way.

This team would not restrict contact between government and the public, but rather enable it. The preexisting relationships would continue; these liaisons would aid the spark of new relationships and connections. The team's main responsibilities would be updating the log of which organization or official is working on which issue and aiding those who need to establish new connections.

RECOMMENDATION: Broaden the Diversity of Perspectives Engaging in the Budget Process through Community Initiatives, Equity in Accessibility, and Expanded Surveying

Budget Ambassador Program

Long Term

In order to break down trust barriers between the City and its constituents and to encourage budget engagement from a broader diversity of voices, City Council, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Mayor's Office can develop a community-led budget hearing program. Similar to the Community Roundtable program in Chicago, the Budget Ambassador Program will feature volunteers from around Pittsburgh leading discussions on budget priorities and project needs within their own communities. The ambassadors will then report feedback and requests to their respective councilpeople.

The City can use the Civic Leadership Academy and its new education curriculum as a framework for developing a budget-focused crash course for budget ambassadors, providing them with the tools they need to lead constructive discussions about the city budget and create actionable feedback for city officials.

The City can also use the Registered Community Organizations (RCO) system that is already in place to source volunteer budget ambassadors. If a community does not have a designated RCO, the City can work with local community groups to nominate an ambassador.

The Budget Ambassador Program meetings should align with the city budget hearing schedule, so that ambassadors can collect feedback from their communities and use these hearings as a means to convey constituent priorities to elected officials.

We believe that it is through this pied piper approach, where a trusted member of the community is leading the discussion rather than a city official, that constituents will feel comfortable enough to participate, share their honest feedback, and highlight their greatest priorities.

Equitable Access to Budget Hearings

Short Term

Expand Language Assistance to Include Translators and Subtitles

In order to expand access to and increase participation in Pittsburgh budget hearings, City Council, OMB, and the Mayor's Office should work with I&P to add a subtitles option for hearing videos. While creating subtitles for every language spoken within Pittsburgh can be a difficult task, the City can focus on the top three to five languages outside of English in order to represent a larger share of the population. This will allow a more diverse group of constituents to stay informed on budgetary matters and provide them with the context they need to participate in the budget process.

For in-person community hearings, City Council representatives can hire translators for the next more common language in their districts outside of English. This will allow for a more diverse constituency to participate in or observe critical budget conversations.

Improving Post-Hearing Engagement through Meeting Summaries and a Digital Suggestion Box

In order to increase engagement in the Pittsburgh budgeting process for those who are not able to attend City Council's budget hearings, the Council can release meeting minutes that include a high-level summary of the meeting and key takeaways at the top of the document. This will allow those who were unable to attend to learn the key information that was discussed and any major decisions made during the budget hearing.

Providing that context in an easy-to-read, digestible fashion will equip constituents with the

knowledge they need to engage with the budget and make informed decisions and requests, even if they are unable to attend a hearing.

Furthermore, for those who are unable to attend live budget hearings virtually or in person and who do not easily have the ear of their district representatives, City Council can create a “suggestion box” that lives on the main budget website. This feedback form can allow constituents to submit comments or requests about the budget through the ease of an online text box and a district drop down menu without having to know their representative’s email address or phone number. The suggestion box can feed directly into the email inbox of the City Council’s community engagement staffer, who can disseminate feedback to the appropriate councilmember.

Mid-term

Expand Live Hearing and Feedback Formats for Broader Engagement Avenues

In order to increase opportunity for constituents to attend live meetings, City Council can expand its rigid hearing formats from in-person or Zoom-only to include livestreaming on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, or other online platforms. Increased touchpoints for meeting access, along with the expanded meeting schedule proposed with the new budget timeline, will allow for a great number of Pittsburghers to watch hearings, ask questions, and share feedback live.

As we learned via our interviews with community members, not everyone can travel or get off from work to attend live hearings, and while Zoom is one alternative, not everyone has Zoom access. Adding social media livestreams of Pittsburgh budget hearings can reach a currently underrepresented population.

The City can also use Facebook and Instagram Live comments, as well as YouTube comments, to field questions and collect feedback during budget hearings so that those who are not able to attend live still have the opportunity to participate in the process. Social media comments can be monitored by the City of Pittsburgh social media staffers or a City Council member’s social media manager.

Expanded Surveying

In order to receive timely and impactful feedback from the general public, and to close the feedback loop, we recommend the City of Pittsburgh invest to expand its current budget surveying process to a year-round well-structured process.[11] In recent years, OMB has made efforts to collect feedback from the public by utilizing the EngagePGH site to collect

survey data. This process has concentrated on assessing the public's budget priorities in May and June, with results not being publicized until the Budget PDF's are released.

As seen in the visualization on the following page, the recommended survey schedule should be interdependent with our recommendation to amend the OMB/Mayor public hearing schedule. Specifically, each round of surveying should begin with enough time for OMB to collect and analyze data ahead of the corresponding public budget meeting at which they will share the results. This survey methodology will help ensure that the will of the people is reflected in the city budget.

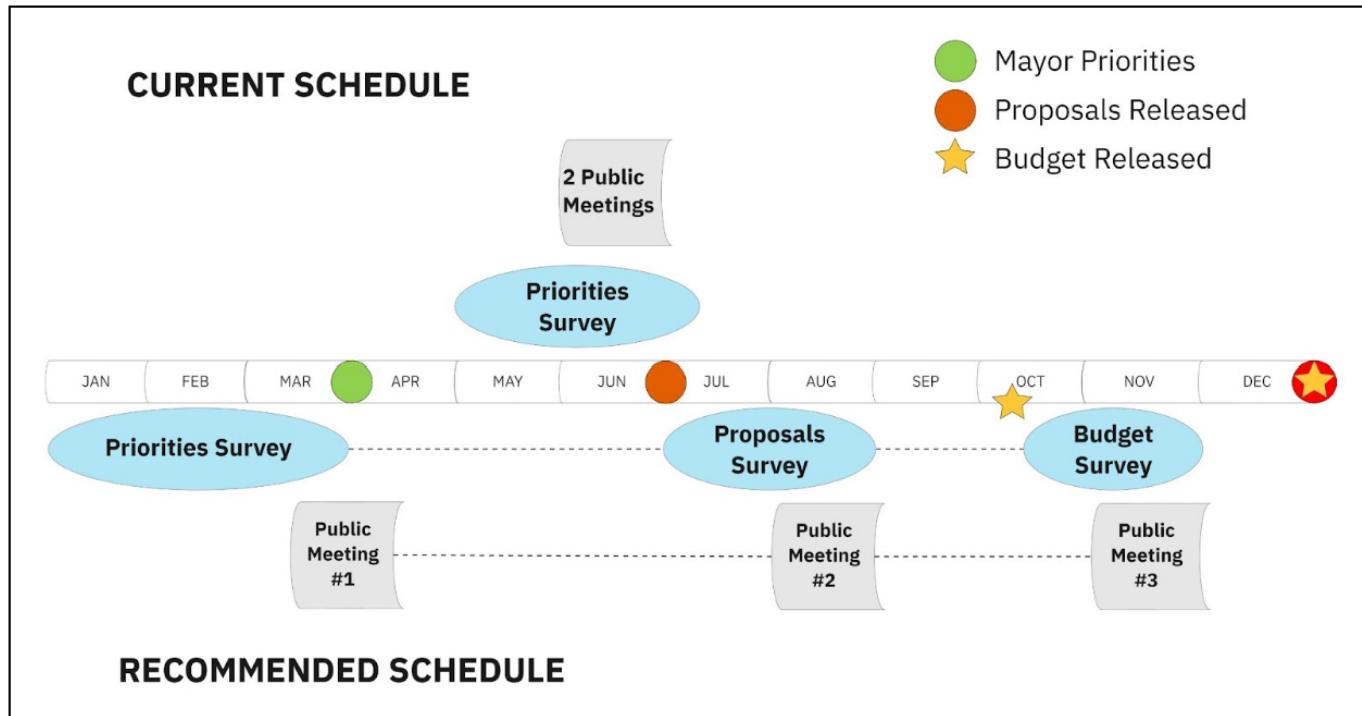
Explanation of Surveys

- 1. Priorities Survey:** Assesses the priorities and needs of the public and community organizations. Provides data to:
 - a. OMB to inform Public Meeting #1
 - b. Mayor to inform their Priorities
 - c. Departments and other Divisions to inform their budget proposals
- 2. Proposals Survey:** Assesses the public's opinion on the budget proposals. Provides data to:
 - a. OMB to inform Public Meeting #2
 - b. Mayor to inform Budget
 - c. City Council to inform collaboration with Mayor/OMB
- 3. Budget Survey:** Assesses the public's opinion on the Mayor's proposed budget. Provides data to:
 - a. OMB to inform Public Meeting #3
 - b. City Council to inform budget hearing topics and amendments to Mayor's budget

Additional Budget Survey Recommendations:

- **Collaboration:** Surveying and Public Engagement efforts will be most efficient with a collaborative outreach effort from OMB, the Mayoral Community Liaison team, City Planning, and the new City Council Engagement Role
- **Professional Tool:** Build on EngagePGH as the surveying tool by redesigning the layout for a more professional and clean design; or consider another Public Engagement Survey tool
- **Incentivize Public:** Offer gift card drawings for the public during each round of surveying as an incentive and way to give back (e.g. five \$100 visa gift cards – only \$1500 per year)
- **Feedback Loop:** Survey results should be posted via social media, on the centralized website previously recommended, and any other avenues to promote transparency

- **Ongoing Analysis:** Each survey round, analyses should be performed to identify who is not being represented in the survey responses (based on demographics collected)
- **Targeted Outreach:** In response to the demographic analyses, future engagement efforts should target communities and populations that are underrepresented in the survey data



RECOMMENDATION: Develop a New Budget Education Curriculum to Set the Foundation for Community Engagement in the Budget Process

Short Term

In order to increase understanding of the city budget, Pittsburgh's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) can create a budget glossary, as seen in Minneapolis. This glossary will feature common budget jargon and Pittsburgh-specific terms that can serve as a resource as constituents navigate the budget.

To best increase knowledge sharing around the budget, OMB, City Council, and the Controller's Office can work with the Office of Innovation and Performance to create a page of Frequently Asked Questions around the budget process and other budget-specific recurring inquiries the departments receive. Information on this page should be shared in layman's terms in order to reach the broadest possible audience.

Long Term

In order to increase engagement in the Pittsburgh budgeting process, Pittsburgh must close the knowledge gap between the general public's understanding of the budget and the fiscal and civic proficiency needed to effectively advocate for budget resources. To do this, the Office of Management and Budget, City Council, and the Mayor's Office can work together to create a budget education curriculum focused on foundational learning. In order to reach the largest possible audience, regardless of educational attainment, the City should design their curriculum at an elementary school level. It is recommended that the City partner with one of Pittsburgh's universities or hire an education consultant to aid in the development of this budget curriculum. If possible, the City can look to one of the many charitable foundations in Pittsburgh to help fund a consulting position.

The City can work with the Office of Innovation and Performance (I&P) to create short, high-level educational videos, as seen in Minneapolis, as well as to build out a webpage that follows [Hick's Law](#) of website design, featuring modules for each step of the budget process, from where the money comes from, how the budget is developed, and how constituents can provide feedback. Pittsburgh can use [Khan Academy](#)'s foundational and modular learning design as a guide when developing a new education curriculum. It is important that the City draft a creative brief and determine a final decision-maker before embarking on this video and website process with I&P. Once these videos and foundational modules are complete, the City can use social media to promote these education tools through eye-catching, simple to understand graphics and explanatory posts, as was done on the NYC Votes Instagram page ahead of New York City's first-ever rank choice voting election.

After creating foundational learning modules, the City can build off of that base-knowledge by working with the education consultant to create learning modules around other commonly occurring budget themes. For example, OMB can create a module around the differences between the Capital and Operating budgets, City Council can create a module around what councilmembers have the ability to change, versus what is out of their control, the Department of Mobility & Infrastructure (DOMI) can assess the most common 311 calls and build a module around how to engage with the budget to address the issues constituents are facing in everyday life.

Finally, it is important that councilpeople, staff members from OMB, and engagement officers in the Mayor's Office incorporate these foundational learning tools into their meetings and town halls with constituents, since not everyone has internet access or the knowledge to navigate through an online learning curriculum.

RECOMMENDATION: Amend Budget Process Policies to Provide for More Efficiency, Transparency, and Public Engagement Opportunities in the Budget Timeline

We recommend that Pittsburgh make the following policy changes to the Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances / Home Rule Charter in the table below.[14] The bolded amendments are further explained the table on the following page. Additionally, see Appendix X for a visual mapping of the current Operating and Capital Budget Timeline & of the recommended changes to the Capital Budget Timeline.

Make budget proposals available to public

Under the current budget process, the first time the public has any sense of budget proposals is when the preliminary budget is released in September. However, the OMB issues requests for these proposals from City Departments and City Council in May and they are due by the end of June. Thus, there is an opportunity for the public to be informed about the proposals submitted by each Department to the OMB well before the preliminary budget is actually formulated.

The request and deadline for these proposals is mandated by Pittsburgh Code, Chapter 218.04. Our team recommends that City Council make an amendment to this section of the code that requires budget proposals be made available to the public. This would increase budget transparency earlier in the process. This is a relatively low-effort improvement to the budget process as these proposals are already required. Under this change, they would simply have to be published to a centralized website accessible to the public.

Hold at least three OMB public meetings throughout the year to discuss priorities, project proposals, and budget proposal

As the process currently stands, OMB holds at least two public meetings in the month of June as mandated by code. While these meetings are an important method for gathering information from the public, they occur at a specific point in the year. The information gathered is only relevant to a particular portion of the budget process and the public has little insight into how those hearings may actually influence OMB and City Council to amend the budget.

Our team recommends that City Council amend the Pittsburgh code to require OMB to hold at least three public meetings throughout the year (ideally in March, August, and November). These meetings would each have a slightly different focus:

March: Discussion of general priorities

August: Discussion of specific project proposals submitted by City Departments

November: Discussion of the Mayor's budget proposal

Budget Process	Related Policy	Description of Amendment
Mayor's Priorities	<u>218.04 (1)</u>	Amend City Code to make Mayor's Priorities publicly accessible in April[15]
Budget Proposals	<u>218.04 (3-4)</u>	Amend City Code to provide for all budget proposals to be publicly accessible
Public Meetings	<u>218.04 (5); HRC 504</u>	Amend City Code to hold at least three OMB public meetings throughout the year to discuss priorities, project proposals, and budget proposal[16]
CPFC Rubric	<u>218.04 (6)</u>	Amend City Code to include an Equity Measure
CPFC Report	<u>218.04 (6)</u>	Amend City Code to move the deadline from the first week of August to the first week of September
Mayor's Budget	<u>218.05 (a-b); 219.03; HRC 505</u>	Amend City Code to eliminate the September Preliminary Budget & Amend City Charter (by referendum) to move the Mayor's November Budget to October[17]
Budget Hearing Schedule	None	Amend City Code to require that City Council Budget Hearings are scheduled a year in advance
Participatory Budgeting	None	Amend City Code to include a Participatory Budgeting Process in the Pittsburgh Budget Process
Closed Out Projects	None	Amend City Code to require public notification of closed out projects

By holding these three meetings at different points in the budget lifecycle, OMB can gather feedback from the public that is timely and relevant. For example, findings from the discussion of general priorities in March could be synthesized and incorporated into the Mayor's announcement of priorities in April. Similarly, feedback on budget proposals in August can influence the mayor's budget proposal in October. In essence, holding hearings throughout the year rather than only in June will allow OMB to gather relevant feedback that actually informs budget priorities, projects, and final proposals.

Change Budget Release Date to October

We recommend that the City of Pittsburgh seek a referendum to amend the City Code and Home Rule Charter to eliminate the September Preliminary Budget and move the Mayor's budget proposal to City Council from November to October. Under Act 47, Pittsburgh was required to release a preliminary budget in September. While the preliminary budget offers a rough draft to which the public can react, it also greatly limits:

1. The time the Mayor and OMB have to collect and incorporate public opinion into the budget
2. The time for Councilmembers to offer budget feedback informed by the concerns and desires of their constituents
3. The time City Council has to meet with Departments and hold budget hearings

With Pittsburgh no longer limited by Act 47, Council has the legal authority to adopt legislation for a single budget release that can alleviate some of these limitations. The current process involves the Mayor seeking and incorporating City Council feedback between the preliminary and November budgets. This amended timeline would encourage OMB, Mayor's Office, and City Council to engage in similar collaboration before the new October budget release while providing OMB time to meet with the public and incorporate feedback. Additionally, having the final budget released in October would provide an additional month for the City Council to conduct their budget hearings. This would give the Councilmembers ample time to receive public concern and feedback about the budget – and time to amend the budget based on that feedback – prior to adopting the budget by the end of the year.

Schedule City Council Budget Hearings a Year in Advance

We recommend a mandate (or formal process change) to require that City Council Budget Hearings are scheduled a year in advance. City Council budget hearings currently take place in November and December as OMB and City Council work toward finalizing the budget.

These hearings are open to the public and published online after the fact. However, there is still room to provide city residents ample time to plan to attend these events. For example, if these hearings were held on a regular schedule year after year, then city residents could plan to attend the budget hearing most relevant to their interests. If a resident is interested in a particular project proposed by the Department of Public Works (DPW), then that resident will know well in advance when the hearing for DPW will take place. This is another small improvement that can be made in the short term to modestly increase public participation in City Council budget hearings.

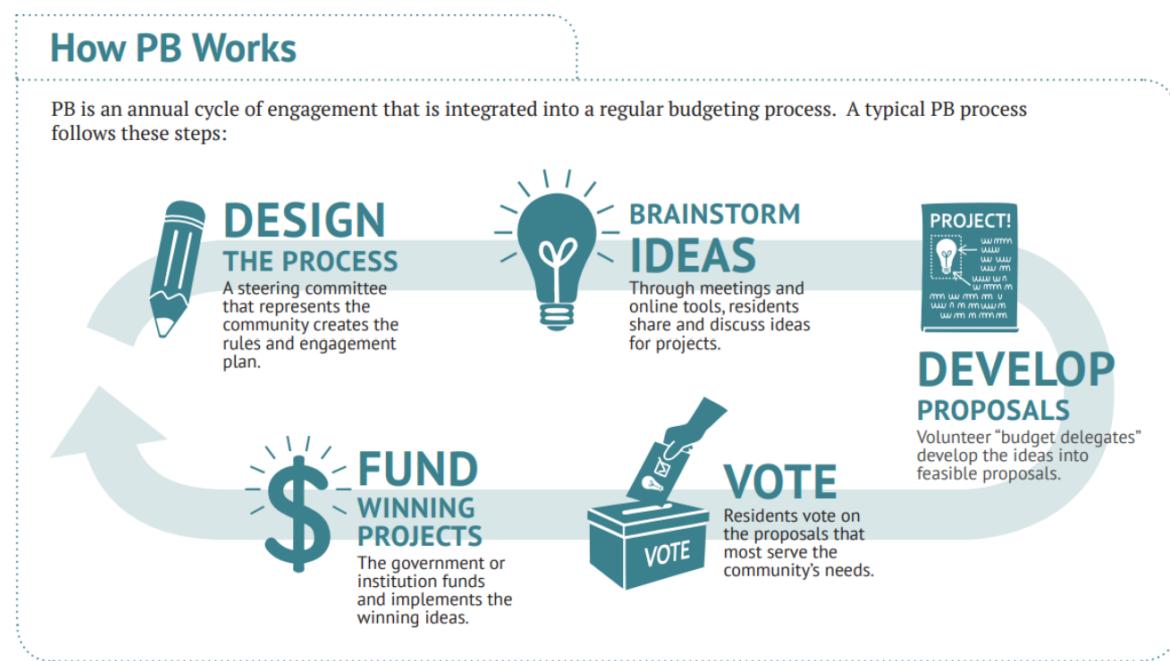
Explore and Implement Participatory Budgeting Process

We recommend that the City Council work with the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) to explore and implement a Participatory Budgeting process into Pittsburgh's Budget Process.[18]

What is Participatory Budgeting (PB)?

"PB is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. It gives people real power over real money." [19]

With PB, the public is responsible for determining how the city will spend some determined amount of money. As shown below, the public controls the PB process from beginning to end. This allows for the community to have direct involvement with and an immediate impact in the budgeting process, ultimately growing a sense of trust between the public and the government.



PBP provides services to help local governments and other institutions begin, grow, and improve their PB practice.[21] Costs of services vary by institutional need, but Pittsburgh should be able to use the American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA) Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to assist with funding PBP services, as long as the initial PB process is focused on how to implement the ARPA funds.

The SLFRF Final Rule states that the “Treasury recognizes that collecting high-quality data and developing community-driven, evidence-based programs requires resources to hire and build the capacity of staff” such that recipients may use funding for “Capacity building resources to support using data and evidence in designing, executing, and evaluating programs, including hiring public sector staff, contractors, academics, consultants, and others with expertise in evaluation, data, technology, and community engagement ... to support effective implementation of SLFRF-funded programs...”[22] Additionally, the U.S. Department of the Treasury SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance states that local governments are required to report on how funding incorporates “diverse feedback from constituents, community-based organization, and the communities themselves.”[23] With PB directly rooted in community engagement, Pittsburgh can utilize the PBP as consultants for assisting in the process of how to best utilize ARPA funding.

ARPA funds could be used to fund the start of a Pittsburgh PB Process and for the “project funding” used within the process. Thus, the groundwork for a sustainable PB process would be set for when ARPA funding is no longer available.

RECOMMENDATION: Create a more equitable process by assessing equity impacts of budget proposals and converting to a participatory budgeting process

Include an equity measure on the Capital Project Facilitation Committee (CPFC) scorecard to better support underrepresented and historically disadvantaged communities

In the current process, the Pittsburgh City Code mandates the creation of a Capital Project Facilitation Committee (CPFC) to review and rank capital budget project proposals. The Code states:

“A committee shall be established which shall advise the Mayor and City Council on the selection and prioritization of the capital projects, special revenue projects, and intergovernmental projects, to ensure that the capital budget is carried out and that all encumbered funds are expended.”

The code also mandates the criteria by which project proposals must be ranked. The eight criteria are detailed in the scorecard used by the CPFC to rank project proposals. This scorecard is available to the public on page 173 of the 2022 capital budget.

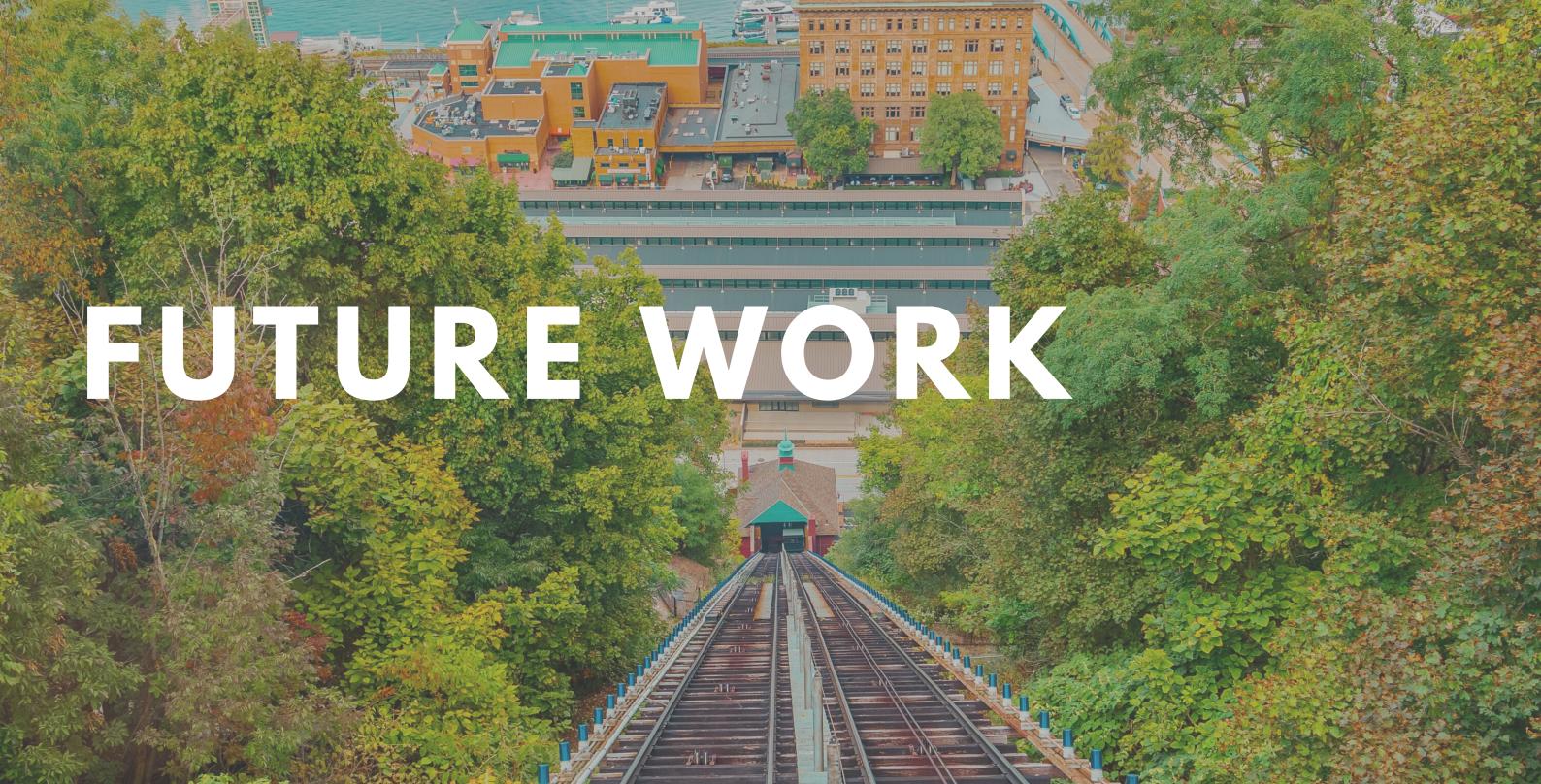
	Criteria	Definition	Weight	Scoring Values
1	Safety	Extent to which the project eliminates, prevents, or reduces an immediate hazard to safety	5	0: Could create a negative impact on health and safety 1: Neutral - no impact on health or safety 2: Significant hazard mitigation 3: Essential/critical to mitigate hazard to safety
2	Mandates	Extent to which the project helps the City meet new or existing mandates	5	0: Is not a mandate or does not require legal compliance 1: Some services depend on it 2: Helps achieve compliance with general state and federal statutes, like the Americans with Disabilities Act 3: Is a mandate or requires State and Federal legal compliance; is required by contract, code, or legislation
3	Non-City Funds	Ability to leverage non-City funds to fund the project	5	0: Does not leverage non-City funds 1: 0 - 25% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities 2: 26 - 50% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities 3: 51 - 100% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities
4	Impact on Operating	Extent to which the project is funded using non-General Fund revenues	4	0: Project will create new operating expenses 1: Project has negligible impact on existing operating expenses 2: Project alleviates some existing operating expenses 3: Project creates a significant positive operating results by generating new revenue or automating the work of City employees
5	Improved Efficiencies	Extent to which the project contributes to efficiencies or effectiveness of service delivery	4	0: Does not improve efficiencies 1: Some improved efficiencies 2: Many improved efficiencies 3: Essential/critical to improve efficiencies
6	Quality of Life	Extent to which the project improves the quality of life in all City neighborhoods	4	0: Does not impact residents/neighborhoods in a direct way 1: Important project for the neighborhood 2: Important project for the surrounding community/multiple neighborhoods 3: Improves the quality of life in all neighborhoods
7	Public Support	Extent to which the project achieves broad community support	3	0: No public support 1: Some public support 2: Much public support 3: Significant public support
8	Comp Plan	Extent to which the project achieves strategic alignment with goals, objectives, and numerous components in the Comprehensive Plan	3	0: Does not achieve alignment with the Comp Plan 1: Some alignment with the Comp Plan 2: Significant alignment with the Comp Plan 3: Essential/critical to the Comp Plan

We recommend that City Council propose an amendment to the City Code to include an equity criteria on the above scorecard. While the above scorecard measures important budget proposal impacts such as safety and quality of life, it does nothing to recognize project impacts on historically disadvantaged communities and populations in Pittsburgh.

In 2019, Pittsburgh's Gender Equity Commission released a report evaluating Pittsburgh's livability across gender and race, and found that gender and racial inequality persist across health, income, employment, and education in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh CPFC should take into account these inequities as they rank project proposals, and favor those that promote equity for disadvantaged groups, whether that be through improved health outcomes or increased access to employment and education. In assessing a project's impact on equity, it may be useful to request certain information from government agencies regarding project proposals. This [Equitable Development Scorecard](#) developed by community leaders in Minneapolis and Saint Paul provides an example of relevant information needed to properly assess the equity impact of a project proposal.

Also, we conducted research on the City of San Antonio who has implemented a Budget Equity Tool (BET) to integrate explicit considerations of racial and economic equity into decisions. The BET aims to ensure that departments evaluate how projects, programs, plans and proposals may improve equity in service delivery and community participation. It includes a set of questions to guide governmental departments in assessing how budget requests benefit and/or burden communities, specifically communities of color and low-income communities.

We found that Pittsburgh has also made similar efforts in this area. It is a member of Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) which is a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity. It helped Pittsburgh to build a racial equity toolkit to improve equity. However, the issue is that the city has not published the result so far and the toolkit is not directly related to budget. The allocation of city investment seems to be biased in that richer and whiter neighborhoods get more economic investment than poorer communities of color. Therefore, it is necessary for Pittsburgh to Improve its equity scorecard to show how equity is tied to individual community development projects and where the money goes each year.



FUTURE WORK

We acknowledge that, due to the time limits associated with a semester-long project, there is still work to do to ensure greater transparency and engagement in the Pittsburgh budget process. Below we share some next steps the City can take to further this mission.

Survey the Needs of the General Pittsburgh Public

The team hoped to gather information from a significant portion of the Pittsburgh public and developed a survey. Unfortunately, the team was unable to access a large pool of participants to gather statistically significant data and information. The City may consider bolstering the findings in this report by surveying the public regarding pain points in the budget process and potential solutions. Please see Appendix I to access the survey.

Interview Stakeholders from other Cities

While many of the recommendations in this report are based on a review of the budget process in other cities, we were unable to formally speak with anyone from the OMB or city government in those areas. Thus, it is unclear if these methods play out exactly as these cities claim in their budget materials. If the City of Pittsburgh seeks to imitate a practice from another area, the City should consider contacting the appropriate government employee from that city to gather more information.

Develop Cost Projections

While the team has generally grouped recommendations in order from least to most costly to implement, the team was unable to develop specific cost projections. If the City decides to pursue a specific recommendation in this report, it may be worth developing cost projections

or hiring a consulting team to assess the staff, time, and money necessary to implement the recommendation.

Gather Information Throughout the Budget Process

Due to the nature of the systems synthesis project as a single-semester course, the team was only able to conduct interviews and gather information between the months of January and May. Interviews and focus groups during the latter half of the budget process may have elicited different responses from participants. Moreover, the team did not have the opportunity to sit in on the budget hearings that happen later in the year, and could only review hearings from prior budget cycles.



CONCLUSION

The city budget is a moral document. It reflects the values, ethics, and ideals of the people it represents. If city residents are unable to understand budget documents and engage with the budget process, then the budget will not truly reflect the people it purports to represent. Thus, it is crucial that the city address the main pain points discussed in this report. In terms of the budget process itself, there is a need for more staff devoted to engaging with the public and increased collaboration between City Divisions. For engagement, there is a need for far greater input from a representative set of the public and consistent feedback between the City and its residents. Finally, there is room for expanded education, effective use of technology, and increased focus on equity to make the budget process more efficient and transparent.

The six broad recommendations laid out in this report, each with more specific sub-recommendations, work toward addressing the issues uncovered during our research process. Many of these recommendations may seem unattainable, but the City has already proven a willingness to make the budget more accessible to the public through public hearings, surveys, and publication of budget documents and resources. Implementation of these recommendations will build upon the City's prior successes in expanding budget engagement and transparency.

APPENDIX

I. Engagement - Survey Questions

We drafted a survey that didn't get off the ground, but can be released when doing future work on this initiative. To get a sufficient number of responses, we recommend each councilperson sending this survey to their constituent contacts, but we also suggest using community groups to help promote the survey to those who are less likely to engage with elected officials.

The survey questions are as follows:

Part 1 Engagement

Have you participated in the Pittsburgh city budget process before? *

- Yes
- No

If you have not participated before, what has prevented you from participating? *

Your answer

What best describes your satisfaction with the City of Pittsburgh's budget process? *

- Very satisfied: I am confident in my ability to participate and be heard
- Satisfied: I feel that I am able to participate
- Unsatisfied: I want to participate but am not sure how to engage
- Very unsatisfied: I try to engage but it is difficult to do so
- N/A: I am not interested in participating in the budget process

Part 1 Engagement

How would you like to engage? *

- Be informed through email/mail
- Advise us through surveys
- Attending budget forums/hearings
- Submitting an ideal Operating/Capital Budget through Balancing Act
- Other: _____

How have you engaged before? *

- Be informed through email/mail
- Advise us through surveys
- Attending budget forums/hearings
- Submitting an ideal Operating/Capital Budget through Balancing Act
- I have not engaged with the budget process
- Other: _____

What else would you like to share about how the Pittsburgh budget process might be improved? *

Your answer

Part 2 Basic

Are you a Pittsburgh resident? *

- Yes
- No

Part 2 Basic

What neighborhood do you live in? *

Choose



Age *

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

Race (You may choose one or more races) *

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
- Other: _____

Gender *

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/other

Income per year *

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000 to \$34,999
- \$35,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- Over \$100,000
- Prefer not to say

Education *

- Some High School
- High School
- Some College
- Bachelor's Degree
- Master's Degree
- Ph.D. or higher
- Trade School
- Prefer not to say

II. Transparency - Identifying Other Cities to Research

- *Criteria for Other Cities*
 - Demographics
 - Population Size
 - Region
 - Industry
 - Politics/Political Mood
 - Referrals based on known best practices
- *Cities Researched*
 - Buffalo
 - Chicago*
 - Los Angeles
 - Minneapolis*
 - New Orleans
 - San Antonio*

* Pulled best practices from these cities for inclusion in report and recommendations

III. Transparency - Pittsburgh Budget Resources

Buckets developed based on pain points uncovered during the interview process.

Website	Notes
engage.pittsburghpa.gov	Pittsburgh engagement resources
engage.pittsburghpa.gov/2022budgets	Education on how to engage with the budget
pittsburghpa.gov/omb/operating-budget-engagement	Education on how to engage with operating budget
pittsburghpa.gov/omb/cip	Education on how to engage with capital budget
pittsburghpa.gov/council	City Council website
pittsburghpa.gov/council/budget-office	City Council Budget Office
fiscalfocus.pittsburghpa.gov	Pittsburgh Budget Explorer and other tools

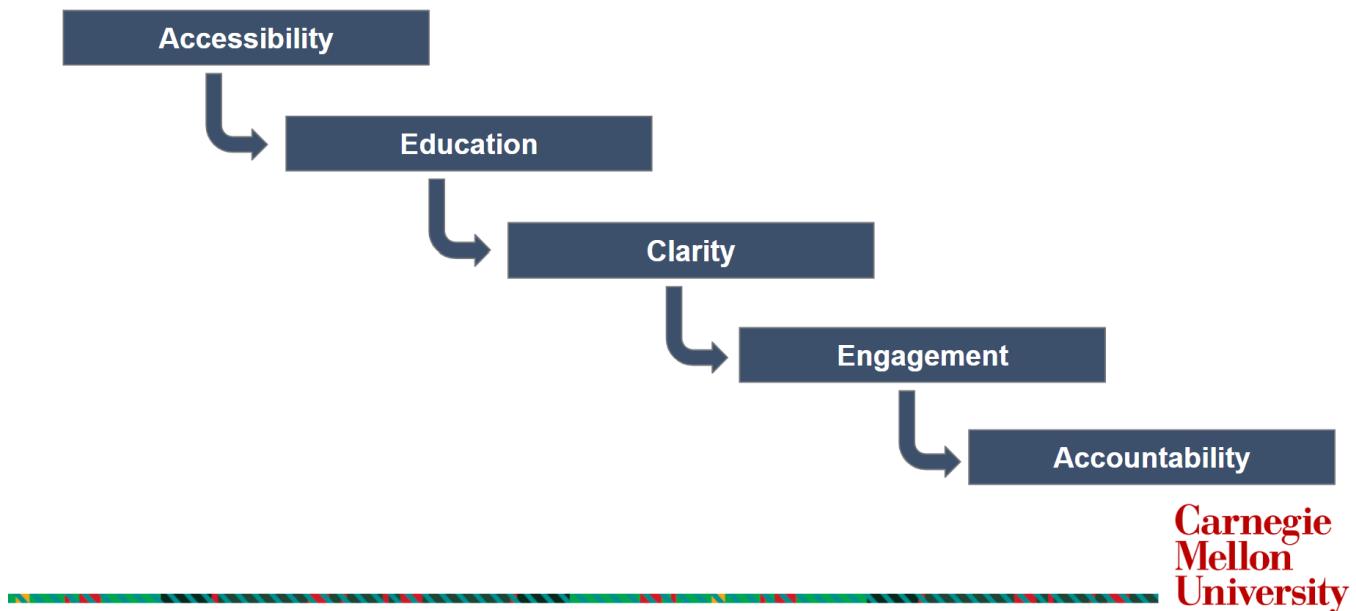
IV. Transparency Definition Buckets

Buckets developed based on pain points uncovered during the interview process.

25

Defining Transparency

Working Definition



26

Accessibility

Ease of use: Equitable access for general public to all budget tools and communications with city government. Presentation of information encourages increased participation by the user.

- Chicago holds Virtual Town Halls that are broadcast on Facebook and Twitter, include an ASL interpreter, and incorporate English and Spanish subtitles.
- Many cities have multiple avenues for education around and feedback on the budget process: in person hearings, community information sessions, digital suggestion box, social media comments, and direct contact with city council officials.
- Minneapolis shows information in an inviting way instead of overwhelming the user.

Carnegie
Mellon
University

Transparency Bucket - Education

Helping constituents understand the budget, budget process, and tools available to them.

Minneapolis provides its constituents with clear, high level information about all steps in the budget process.

The city also developed a simple [3 minute video](#) that explains where money comes from, how it is allocated, and how constituents can participate in the process.

Learn about the budget process

Every year, we create a budget that represents our needs and values as a community.

Ideas for the budget come from many sources, including:

- Residents
- Businesses
- Neighborhood groups
- City departments

In August, the Mayor recommends a budget.

At the end of the year, the City Council adopts a budget.

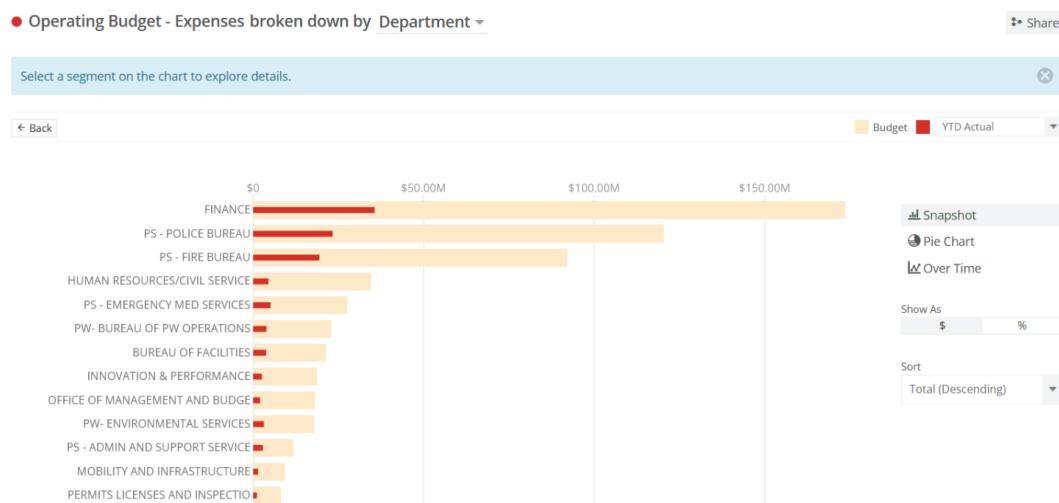
[Learn about all the steps in between](#)



Carnegie
Mellon
University

Transparency Bucket - Clarity

Communicating how money is spent. Information is easy to navigate and digest.

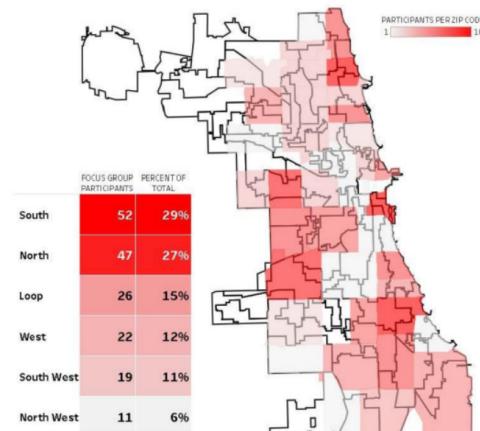


Carnegie
Mellon
University

Transparency Bucket - Engagement

More diverse opportunities for the public to advocate for and provide feedback on the budget.

- Chicago developed a Community Round Table program.
- Residents sign up to be Budget Ambassadors.
 - City provides training and a toolkit to lead discussions and provide feedback to City officials.
- Saw participation in neighborhoods throughout the city.

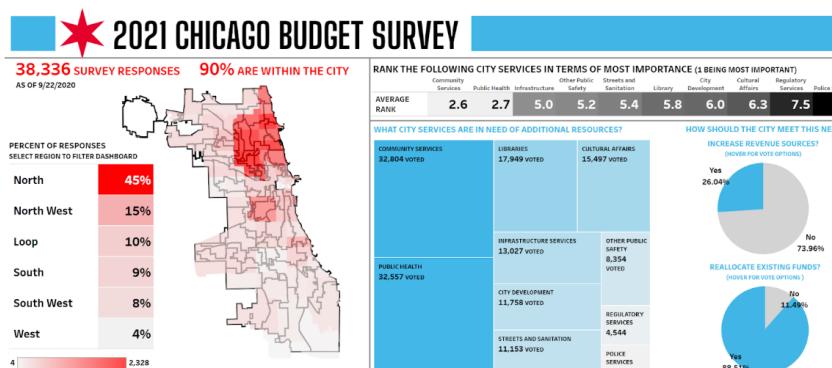


**Carnegie
Mellon
University**

Transparency Bucket - Accountability

Feedback mechanisms are in place to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Survey Results



Chicago budget survey results are shared publicly to inform community of their fiscal priorities.

This gives constituents the information they need to hold their elected officials accountable.

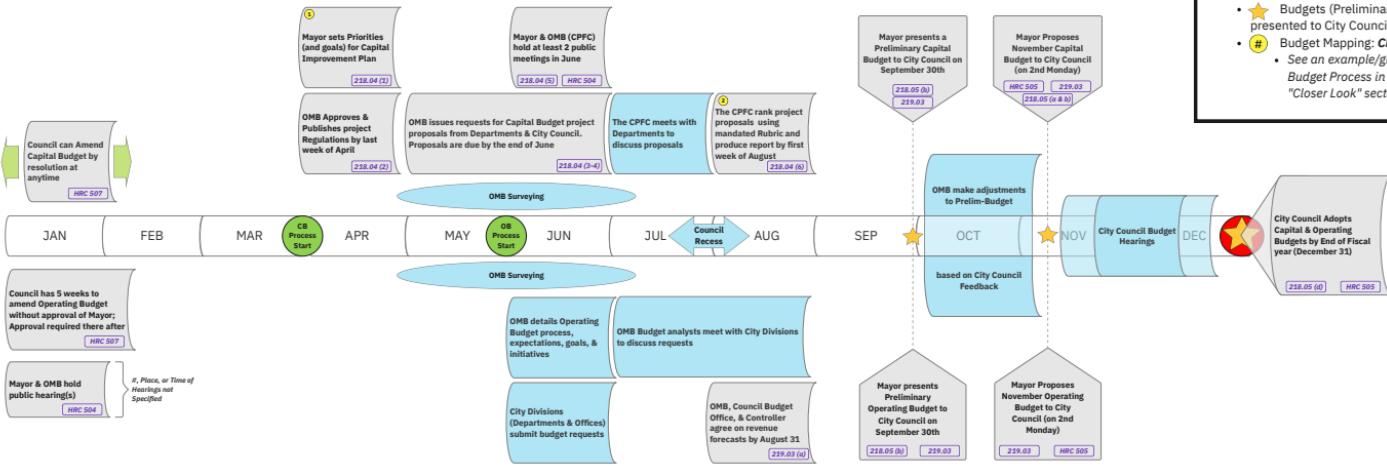
**Carnegie
Mellon
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V. Budget - Pittsburgh Budget Timeline Mapping

Current and Recommended

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Visual Mapping of the Current Pittsburgh Budget Process Timeline



Budget Process Mapping Key

- ● Capital Budget (CB) or Operating Budget (OB) Process Starts
- ● End of Fiscal Year and Budget Process
- █ Gray shapes indicate processes mandated by the Pittsburgh Code and/or Home Rule Charter (HRC)
- text Purple text boxes indicate the specific Code or HRC policy or policies that mandate that process
- *CLICK* the box to open the policy in a webpage
- █ Blue shapes indicate processes that are unaffiliated with policy
- ★ Budgets (Preliminary or Final) presented to City Council
- # Budget Mapping: *Closer Look*
 - See an example/greater detail of Budget Process in the corresponding "Closer Look" sections that follow

Budget Mapping: ***Closer Look***

1 Mayor sets Priorities (and goals) for Capital Improvement Plan

218.04 (1)

THE MAYOR'S 2022 CAPITAL BUDGET PRIORITIES

Each year, the Mayor provides a list of Capital Budget priorities to all departments. These priorities are an expression of the Mayor's values and guide departments in selecting and designing proposals for the next year's Capital Budget.

Equity: Ensuring inclusive growth in all our neighborhoods across the City by addressing equity within the policies, programs and services that the city provides or support

Critical Infrastructure: Building a 21st century infrastructure system that is reliable, secure and efficient to keep the city moving and connected

Mobility: Connecting communities to economic opportunity and supporting improvements for all types of mobility, to ensure our roads, streets and paths are safe, reliable, and convenient

Housing: Providing safe, affordable, and sustainable housing in new development and redevelopment projects across the city

Children and Families: Investing in spaces and programs that benefit our families and youngest residents by improving the access to early childhood centers and increasing the types and quality of programming and services within the city's recreation and senior centers

Neighborhood Empowerment: Empowering all residents to contribute to the growth and vibrancy of their neighborhoods by ensuring that basic needs are met, diversity of all types is celebrated, and residents have equal access to resources and opportunity

Workforce and Entrepreneurship: Eliminating barriers to opportunity for education and employment for all Pittsburghers by investing in workforce development and entrepreneurship

Critical Communities: Improving the overall wellness of people in Pittsburgh by improving resource access for people who use drugs, experience homelessness or food insecurity

Green Infrastructure: Ensuring that our parks and rivers are safe and clean for recreation and commerce every day of the year

Climate: Eliminating waste, reducing building energy use and greenhouse gases by 50% and moving towards 100% renewable energy electricity in all city run buildings and facilities

Arts, Culture, and Open Space: Providing all residents with affordable and equitable access to art and open spaces in their neighborhoods so that all can enjoy

By their nature, priorities are meant to be broad and inspirational, but not prescriptive. As in years past, some respondents used this space to talk about specific concerns:

- Abandoned properties/code enforcement and property maintenance
- "Get rid of bike lanes"
- Maintenance of public spaces like hillsides, sidewalks, and streets
- "Salting and plowing roads"

Surveys responses also reflect prioritization for people who were not explicitly referenced in "Critical Communities" including seniors and those with disabilities.

Budget Mapping: Closer Look

2 The CPFC rank project proposals using mandated Rubric and produce report by first week of August

218.04 (6)

In the current process, the Pittsburgh City Code **218.03** mandates the creation of a Capital Project Facilitation Committee (CPFC) to review and rank capital budget project proposals. The Code states:

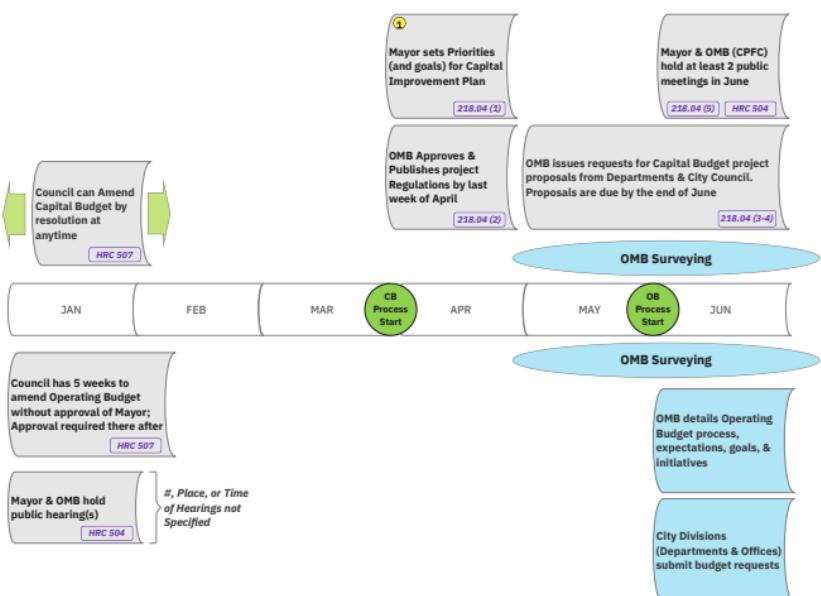
A committee shall be established which shall advise the Mayor and City Council on the selection and prioritization of the capital projects, special revenue projects, and intergovernmental projects, to ensure that the capital budget is carried out and that all encumbered funds are expended.

The code **218.04 (6)** also mandates the criteria by which project proposals must be ranked. The eight criteria are detailed in the following scorecard used by the CPFC to rank project proposals.

Criteria	Definition	Weight	Scoring Values
1 Safety	Extent to which the project eliminates, prevents, or reduces an immediate hazard to safety	5	0: Could create a negative impact on health and safety 1: Neutral - no impact on health or safety 2: Significant hazard mitigation 3: Essential/critical to mitigate hazard to safety
2 Mandates	Extent to which the project helps the City meet new or existing mandates	5	0: Is not a mandate or does not require legal compliance 1: Some services depend on it 2: Helps achieve compliance with general state and federal statutes, like the Americans with Disabilities Act 3: Is a mandate or requires State and Federal legal compliance; is required by contract, code, or legislation
3 Non-City Funds	Ability to leverage non-City funds to fund the project	5	0: Does not leverage non-City funds 1: 0 - 25% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities 2: 26 - 50% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities 3: 51 - 100% of project costs covered by grants/outside entities
4 Impact on Operating	Extent to which the project is funded using non-General Fund revenues	4	0: Project will create new operating expenses 1: Project has negligible impact on existing operating expenses 2: Project alleviates some existing operating expenses 3: Project creates a significant positive operating results by generating new revenue or automating the work of City employees
5 Improved Efficiencies	Extent to which the project contributes to efficiencies or effectiveness of service delivery	4	0: Does not improve efficiencies 1: Some improved efficiencies 2: Many improved efficiencies 3: Essential/critical to improve efficiencies
6 Quality of Life	Extent to which the project improves the quality of life in all City neighborhoods	4	0: Does not impact residents/neighborhoods in a direct way 1: Important project for the neighborhood 2: Important project for the surrounding community/multiple neighborhoods 3: Improves the quality of life in all neighborhoods
7 Public Support	Extent to which the project achieves broad community support	3	0: No public support 1: Some public support 2: Much public support 3: Significant public support
8 Comp Plan	Extent to which the project achieves strategic alignment with goals, objectives, and numerous components in the Comprehensive Plan	3	0: Does not achieve alignment with the Comp Plan 1: Some alignment with the Comp Plan 2: Significant alignment with the Comp Plan 3: Essential/critical to the Comp Plan

Visual Mapping of the Current Pittsburgh Budget Process Timeline (1/3)

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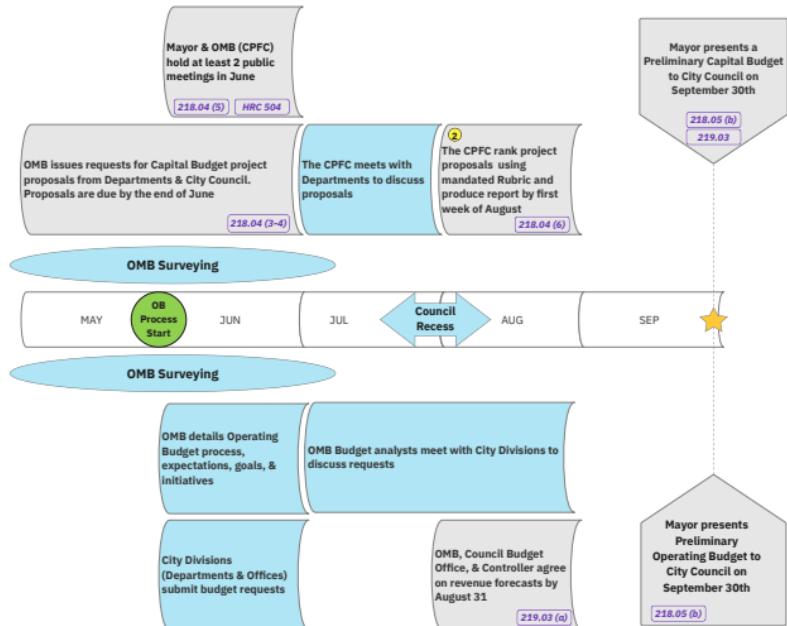
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- Budget Mapping: **Closer Look**
 - See an example/greater detail of Budget Process in the corresponding "Closer Look" sections

Visual Mapping of the Current Pittsburgh Budget Process Timeline (2/3)

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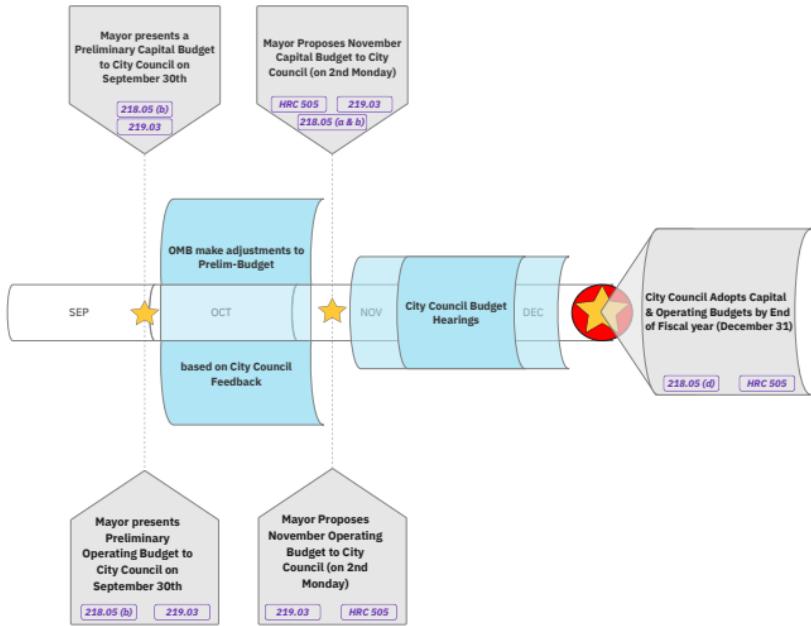


Budget Process Mapping Key

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 - See an example/greater detail of Budget Process in the corresponding "Closer Look" sections

Visual Mapping of the Current Pittsburgh Budget Process Timeline (3/3)

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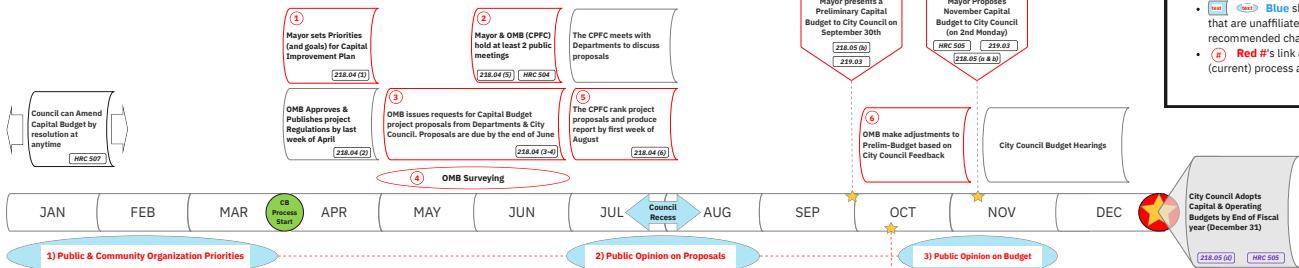


Budget Process Mapping Key

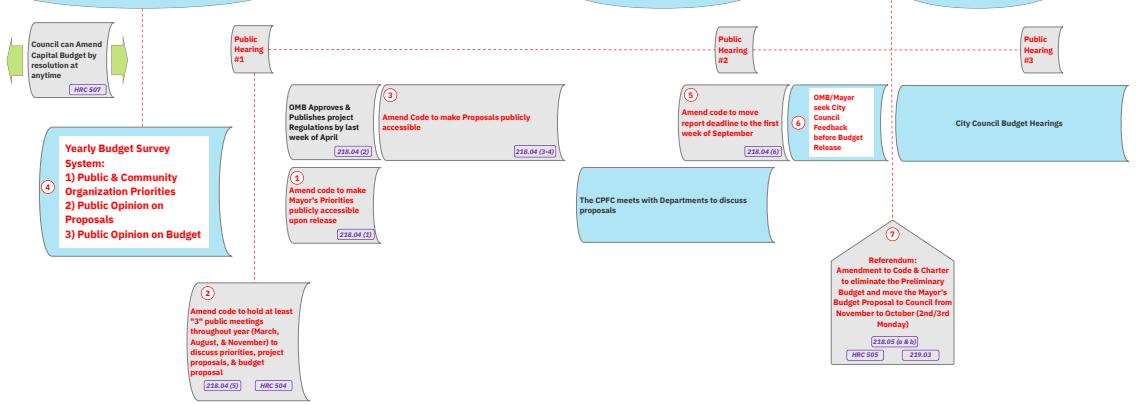
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- # Budget Mapping: **Close Look**
 - See an example/greater detail of Budget Process in the corresponding "Close Look" sections

Capital Budget Timeline: Current & Recommended

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Capital Budget Amendment Mapping Key

Current CB Process

- Gray outline shapes indicate processes that stay the same
- Red outline shapes indicate processes that are recommended to change
- Red #'s link a red outlined process to its corresponding (recommended) amendment below
- Shapes with text black text boxes are processes mandated by policy (*CLICK* the box to open the policy in a webpage) and shapes without are processes unaffiliated with policy

Recommended CB Process

- Gray shapes with black text indicate processes mandated by policy that are unchanged
- Gray shapes with red text indicate processes mandated by policy and include the recommended amendment
- Purple text boxes indicate the specific Code or HRC policy or policies that mandate that process *CLICK* the box to open the policy in a webpage
- Blue shapes with black text indicate processes that are unaffiliated with policy and unchanged
- Blue shapes with red text indicate processes that are unaffiliated with policy and include the recommended change
- Red #'s link an amended process to its corresponding current process above

Capital Budget Amendment Mapping Key

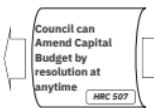
Current CB Process

- Gray outline shapes indicate processes that stay the same
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- Red # link a red outlined process to its corresponding (recommended) amendment below
- Shapes with HRC black text boxes are processes mandated by policy (*CLICK* the box to open the policy in a webpage) and shapes without are processes unaffiliated with policy

Recommended CB Process

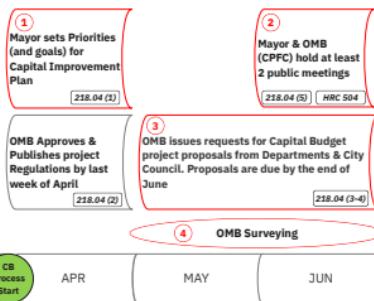
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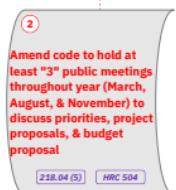


Capital Budget Timeline: Current & Recommended

(1/3)

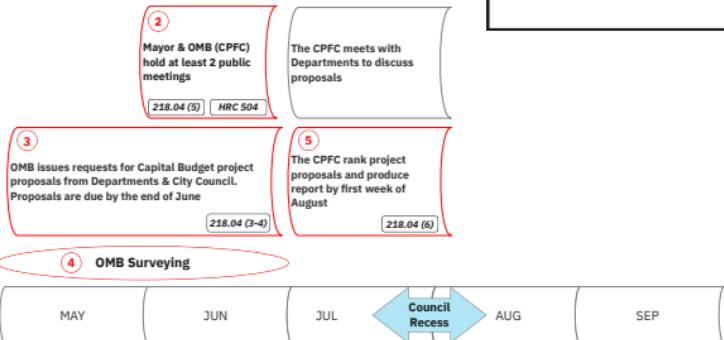


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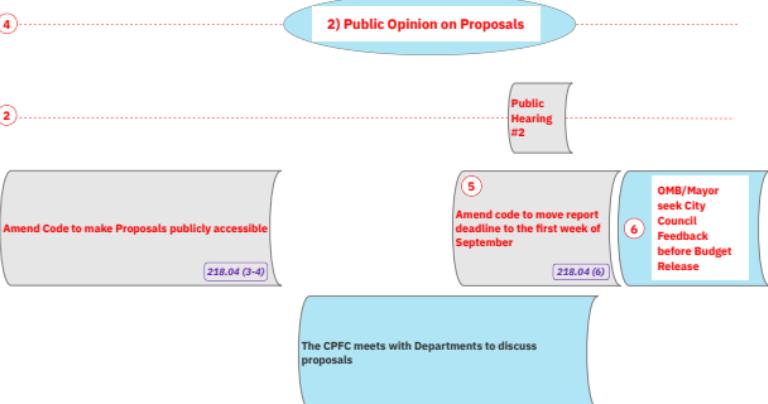


Capital Budget Timeline: Current & Recommended (2/3)

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Capital Budget Amendment Mapping Key

Current CB Process

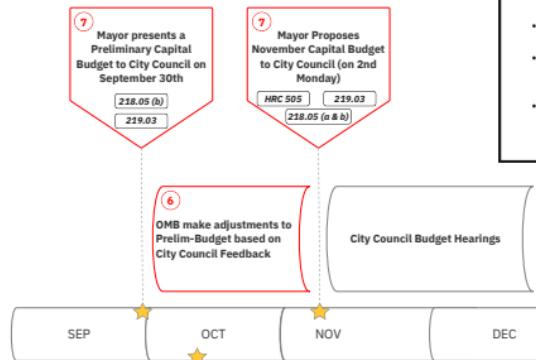
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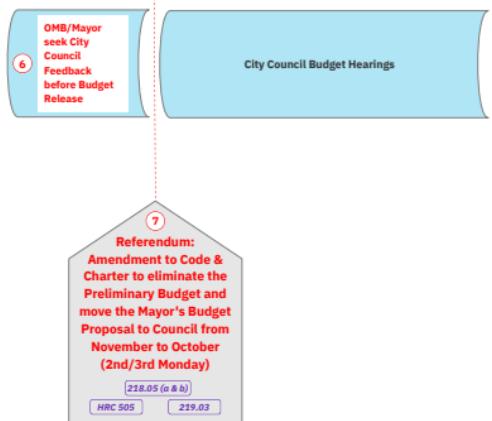
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Capital Budget Timeline: Current & Recommended (3/3)

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Capital Budget Amendment Mapping Key

Current CB Process

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VI. Budget - Questica OpenBook Stories Example

American Rescue Plan (ARP)



 **Emily Archer**
CPA, Director of Finance
March 21, 2022

Operating Capital

f t in e

About the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA)

President Biden has signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), which provides \$1.9 trillion in federal stimulus funding to help state and local governments – as well as individual taxpayers and businesses – address the impact of COVID-19. This act provides just over \$170.3 billion to education, making this the federal government's largest ever single investment in our schools. State and district leaders now have the opportunity and responsibility to use these funds to address short-term needs associated with the pandemic and to invest in the structural changes that will, over the long term, make schools more equitable and whole-child focused ARPA.

" This act provides just over \$170.3 billion to education, making this the federal government's largest ever single investment in our schools.

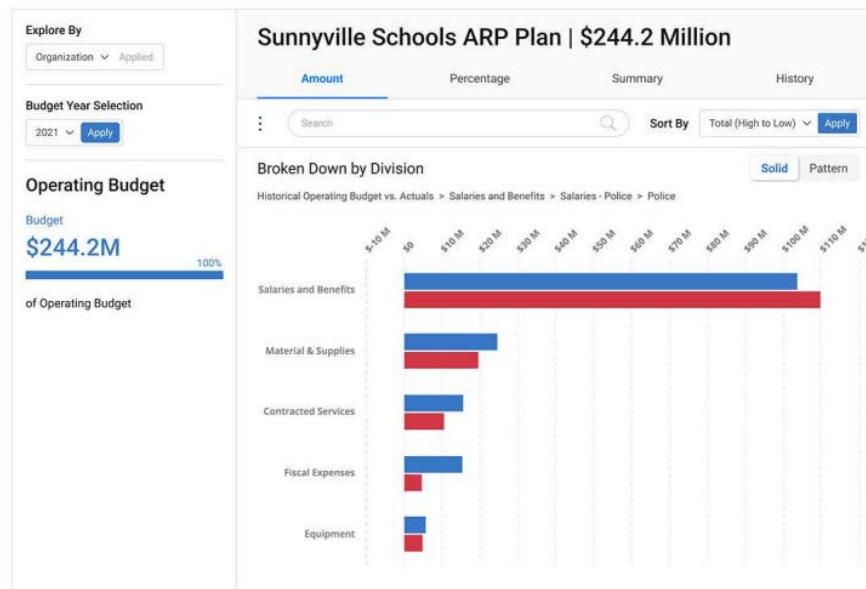
COVID - Relief Spending Plan

As we finalize our American Rescue Plan (ARP) COVID-relief spending plan, we would like to share with the community how these dollars are being spent. Big public investments inevitably lead to public scrutiny, and ARP's historic investment in education is no exception!

We've created this site to facilitate communication with stakeholders about resource allocation to support students' needs. We also welcome inquiries from reporters to help build positive community relationships and show this district's commitment to fiscal transparency.

We know you are highly aware of these new ARP funds, and you'll want to know what this money means for children. Will the money go to thank-you payments for staff? Hiring more teachers and counselors for students? Updating technology and curricula? Please read on to find out.

We hope that this report will "connect the dots" between school spending and student learning and outcomes. We also want you to have full access to school board meeting documents and final district plans on school spending. We are making these accessible and easy to understand in order to show transparency and build trust.



Related Links

School board home page
<https://www.sunnyville.us/>

Links to our budgets and financial statements
<https://www.sunnyville.us/Page/370>

Comments and questions from press reporters can be entered here:
<https://www.sunnyville.us/cms/module/selectsurvey/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=202>

Information about board meetings
<https://www.sunnyville.us/boardmeetings>

VII. Contributors

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- Ben Christensen, Master of Public Policy and Management
- Alexander Harkins, Master of Public Policy and Management
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- Michael 'Rich' Worth, Master of Public Policy and Management - Data Analytics
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Advisor

- Alexander Polzin

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- Lita Brillman
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- Amelia Haviland, Professor, Carnegie Mellon University
- David Hutchinson, Assistant Director of Capital Budget, Pittsburgh OMB
- Jake Pawlak, Deputy Mayor and Director Office of Management and Budget
- Kevin Quisenberry, Litigation Director, Community Justice Project
- Yvonne Rainey
- Amber Thompson, Founder, de-bias

Footnotes and Citations

- [1] Based upon discussion with OMB official and submissions on the Balancing Act page
- [2] Based upon interview with OMB official
- [3] PittsburghPA.gov
- [4] Social Media Fact Sheet. Pew Research Center.
(www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media)
- [5] Questica OpenBook (www.questica.com/openbook) is transparency and data visualization software that is not to be confused with the City Controller's OpenBook webpage (www.openbookpittsburgh.com) that provides a way to search city contracts, campaign finance data, registered lobbyists, and elected official finance data.
- [6] See the City of Largo's OpenBook website (largo.openbook.questica.com)
- [7] See the Controller's Budget Explorer Tools:
(budgetexplorer.pittsburghpa.gov/#!/year/default)
- [8] After Pittsburgh separated from a joint ERP system with Allegheny County, the link between J.D. Edwards and Questica was disconnected. Currently OMB is working with J.D. Edwards and Questica to re-establish this connection.
- [9] To display the same information as the Controller's Budget Explorer
(budgetexplorer.pittsburghpa.gov/#!/year/default) & Checkbook PGH
(checkbookpgh.pittsburghpa.gov/#!/year/2022) tools
- [10] To display the same information as the Controller's Payroll Explorer tool
(payrollexplorer.pittsburghpa.gov/#!/year/2019)
- [11] See Appendix V for a visualization of this recommendation in the full Recommended Budget Timeline Mapping.
- [12] The City of Rochester, Minnesota utilizes Polco to conduct community surveys (www.nlc.org/article/2021/08/10/rochesters-solution-to-maximizing-engagement-and-eliminating-silos)
- [13] Results should be featured on Pittsburgh's Questica OpenBook page if the city subscribes to that software.
- [14] See the "Related Policy" column for reference to the specific policies that would be affected by the amendments. Some recommendations are not related to a current mandate and are identified with: None. The "Description of Amendment" column provides a high level description and does not contain specific language for recommended legislation.
- [15] The Mayor's Priorities are currently released with the Preliminary/November Budget, so making them available in April would increase transparency with the public. This recommendation could also be a formal process change as opposed to a mandate.
- [16] The Public meetings should be interdependent with our recommended "Expanded Surveying Initiative" so the city can discuss the findings from the public related to priorities, project proposals, and the budget.
- [17] This change had strong support from many city officials including City Controller Michael Lamb & Dave Hutchinson and Patrick Cornell of the OMB.
- [18] Visit the PBP contact page to begin the process.
www.participatorybudgeting.org/contact-us

Footnotes and Citations Continued

- [19] What is PB? www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb
- [20] PBP Info Sheet download. www.participatorybudgeting.org/download/pbp-general-info-sheet/?wpdmld=13374&masterkey=5ba414424841f
- [21] PBP clients include the New York City Council, City of Oakland, City of Seattle, City of Minneapolis, and the City of Boston. www.participatorybudgeting.org/our-clients
- [22] Coronavirus SLFCF Final Rule, page 4388 (page 51 of PDF).
www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-27/pdf/2022-00292.pdf
- [23] See 4. Community Engagement, page 30. home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Compliance-and-Reporting-Guidance.pdf

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- Cover: *Vidar Nordli-Mathisen, UnSplash*
- Executive Summary: *Jaime Casap, UnSplash*
- Capstone Project Overview: *Yuhan Du, UnSplash*
- Process and Methods: *Katherine Hanlon, UnSplash*
- Findings: *Jonathan River, UnSplash*
- Recommendations: *Venti Views, UnSplash*
- Future Work: *Nathan Kelly, UnSplash*
- Conclusion: *Venti Views, UnSplash*

End of Report