

the little book of

HEURISTICS

FOR

PARTICIPATORY

BUDGETING

WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget. It started in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989. Over the years it has spread to over 3000 cities around the world and developed into a step by step process that ensures participation of citizens in budgets from states, counties, housing authorities, schools and other institutions.*

WHAT ARE HEURISTICS? WHAT PURPOSE DO THEY SERVE IN THE CONTEXT OF PB?

While heuristics are defined as mental shortcuts which aid problem solving and decision making, the list presented in this book is inspired by the *Usability Heuristics for User Interface Design* that was proposed by the Nielsen Norman Group in 1994. These can be considered as general guiding principles for participatory budgeting, as broad rules of thumb rather than specific guidelines for conducting PB which are available in the form of toolkits like the one provided by Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), New York or the detailed evaluation criteria created by other organisations such as the Center for Environment Education (CEE), Pune.

The following pages present 6 heuristics identified for assessing participatory budgeting efforts with criteria for scoring between 0 and 5 and illustrated examples from existing projects.



1. AVAILABILITY OF DEDICATED AND PLANNED FUNDS

It is not possible to make 100% of the budget at any level of administration open for citizen participation given the complex nature of funding of development projects which involve the interests of different actors both internal and external to the body and its jurisdiction. Accountability increases when a dedicated pool of money is made available for deliberation by the local government body. A further level of commitment is demonstrated when the funds are divided into dedicated portions for various schemes and interest groups e.g. Women's Component Plan in Kerala's PB budget in 1996

Criteria for 0

No commitment of dedicated funds for PB

Criteria for 5

A dedicated, planned and high amount (% and quantum) of funds allocated for PB

Heuristic

Availability of Dedicated Budget Head for Participatory Budgeting

CASE A

State Government of Assam invited suggestions from citizens on how to prioritize and improve allocations under various heads of expenditure of the State government such as health, agriculture, education, etc.

Rating

1

CASE B

From 1996 to 2001 the State of Kerala ran participatory budgeting campaigns which allowed citizen inputs to decide how **40%** of the State revenue would be spent. This amount was also planned and included certain components like Women's Component Plan (around 10 percent) which ensured that citizens from different groups of society were able to propose specific projects under those components.

Rating

4



2. TRANSPARENCY OF PROCESS AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

At every stage of citizen participation in budget (which is an ongoing and year-long process) it is important to have information readily available in the public domain. It must be possible for citizens to learn about how budgets work, their rights and how PB works. They should also be able to view the results of their vote, the charter of demands as it passes through various local governance bodies, the annotations and changes along the way and information about the implementation details and status of projects proposed by citizens.

Criteria for 0

Little to no information available in public domain

Criteria for 5

Readily accessible information available in multiple formats and over multiple channels to cover maximum groups of people.

Heuristic

Transparency of Process and Access to Information

CASE A

In the case of PB in Pune there is enough material for the purpose of educating citizens about budget and inviting them to provide suggestions but once ideas are submitted there is no transparency in the process of finalising the list or the decisions that get taken on projects. Decisions and outcomes are not communicated back to the citizens.

Rating

2.5

CASE B

An organisation called Centre for Youth and Social Development (CYSD) in Odisha uses community radio by broadcasting and narrowcasting specific budget information that is relevant to specific groups before and after budget consultations. All kinds of budget related information is published in local language and in various easily accessible formats like booklets, posters and reports and even interactive plays!

Rating

4



3. MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION OF CITIZEN

The higher the level of budget up for deliberation the more difficult it becomes for volunteers on the ground to convince citizens that their participation will be worthwhile and lower engagement levels in following public deliberations. While there is nothing wrong in, say, State reaching out directly to get feedback from citizens, the exercise might not be very productive given that citizen might be far removed from the scale and concerns of state-wide projects and budgeting strategies. Meaningful participation happens when the participation is sought at a level where the citizen feels that the engagement is most worthwhile to their local and everyday context and at a scale at which they can perceive and anticipate change.

Criteria for 0

Namesake feedback asked by a far removed governing body without catering to local issues

Criteria for 5

Citizens get to demand their local governing body on what gets funded in their neighbourhood

Heuristic

Meaningful participation of citizens / depth of engagement.

CASE A

State Government of Assam invited suggestions from citizens on how to prioritize and improve allocations under various heads of expenditure at the State level such as health, agriculture, education, etc.

Rating

2

CASE B

In 2015, the Delhi Government proposed to hold participatory budgeting exercise at the *mohalla* (neighbourhood) level where a kitty of 5 lakh rupees was set aside for the *mohalla* to decide what project the money should be spent on. The corporators were also requested to add to this kitty from the funds allocated to them for projects in their wards.

Rating

5



4. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

When limited channels of communication are used and special effort is not made to reach out to vulnerable and marginalised groups in the community like those below poverty, women, children, elderly, homeless, lower castes and so on, the participation tends to come from a small group of privileged and powerful people. This reduces the social impact of the PB and results in poor quality of participation.

Criteria for 0

No special efforts made to communicate to and solicit participation of diverse groups in the community.

Criteria for 5

Dedicated efforts are made to ensure that there is adequate representation from different groups in the community.

Heuristic

Diversity and Inclusion

CASE A

The PB done in cities like Pune has constantly come under criticism for poor quality of outreach that ends up making it an exclusionary process which results in the largest share of voice being that of upper middle class, literate and informed sections of the society.

Rating

1

CASE B

The CYSD in Odisha ensures that their volunteers reach out to different targeting socioeconomic groups in the community to get their feedback on specific budget information that is relevant to them. Their work also ensures that regional and district level differences are highlighted so that sectoral budgets at the State level factor these in during allocation and disbursal.

Rating

4



5. ACCOUNTABILITY TO CITIZEN

Participatory budgeting is not a process that is only meant to let citizens put forward their demands to their local governing bodies. Systems that ensure that citizens are informed about the flow of funds in their local governing bodies and about the status of projects that they voted on in the previous session. While RTI caters to this at a universal level in India, given the time and effort it takes for this route, more local access to information must be given for the benefit of citizens. Without accountability of people, process and outcomes, the entire PB exercise loses its credibility.

Criteria for 0

No communication to the citizen about the outcome of their participation and/or lack of systems to ensure accountability of results.

Criteria for 5

Complete disclosure of the outcomes of the participatory budgeting (feedback loops) with mechanisms to track the status of work and hold officials responsible/demand answers.

Heuristic

Accountability to Citizen

CASE A

Lack of legislation and other reasons makes it difficult to hold the PMC accountable for its implementation of projects proposed by the citizens. The data and analysis of the suggestions given and the process of finalising the list is not available in the public domain.

Rating

1

CASE B

On NYC OpenData there is a section that lets citizen track the funding and progress of winning participatory budget projects giving details about the project status, cost, agency in charge, particular tasks and the location of the project activity.

Rating

5



6. EFFECTIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Participatory budgeting involves many steps and activities done at a community level all the way to the level of an entire state or country making it cumbersome to work with offline paper based systems. Using technology for the appropriate purposes accelerates the process and makes it more efficient. Broadly this covers using technology like open data platforms to conduct analysis of the votes, give access to citizens to track project statuses, co-ordinating activities between community, volunteers and government officials at various levels.

Criteria for 0

Paper based and manual process with limited access.

Criteria for 5

Effective use of a combination of ICTs to address various needs in PB

Heuristic

Effective Use of Technology

CASE A

State Government of Assam uses paper based forms which are filled manually collected and filled by citizens at treasury and sub treasury offices. To complement this suggestions were also invited on the myGov and Finance Department websites via comment sections and online forms. Majority of the responses were paper based and are being analysed manually by volunteers / govt. officials.

Rating

2

CASE B

In Belo Horizonte, ICTs are used for the purpose of voting, accessing information about PB, virtual visits to building sites of winning projects and sending messages to PB teams and officials. These efforts did not replace but rather complemented physical polling booths and other forms used for information dissemination.

Rating

4

THIS ISN'T COMPLETE! HELP ME MAKE THIS BETTER

This little book is a humble attempt to enable and easy evaluations of participatory budgeting efforts and provide organising parties to agree on certain broad metrics while planning and executing their PB projects. It's also an open source project and invites contributions from folks working in research, civictech, social science, design or anyone interested in making PB more relevant in the Indian context.

To contribute visit **github.com/thedigitalmonk/pb-heuristics**

Criteria for 0

No suggestions / improvements / feedback

Criteria for 5

Tons of edits / calls / sharing and co-creating!

