

## Participatory budgeting in schools

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### Concept of participatory budgeting

When it comes to budget transparency, public authorities and institutions usually see it through the legal obligations concerning the disclosure and consultation of documents, as well as through reporting requirements on decision making transparency. The legal framework<sup>1</sup>, on which the budget transparency is ensured through its provisions, provides the citizens and their representatives with the right to be informed, consulted and involved in the budget process. Concurrently, the legal framework does not expressly impose certain top limits in this process, but it requires the public authorities to ensure the public finance management in compliance with the good governance principles<sup>2</sup>. In other words, authorities can choose the most appropriate forms and mechanisms to ensure the transparency, including through different forms of citizen participation.

One of the participation approaches over the recent years is the Participatory Budgeting (PB). In this context, there is the need for a delimitation between the concepts of *participation* and *participatory budgeting*. There are several definitions of PB in the literature, but there has not been selected a predominant one so far [3]. Throughout this publication the definition of the term PB will be applied, which is based on the concept of separation of certain forms of participation from all possible forms of participation, according to several criteria. Thus, by PB it will be understood only those forms of participation of the participation spectrum (see Table1), which comply at least with 3 conditions<sup>3</sup>:

- ▶ Existence of a fund of financial means specifically allocated to be distributed on the basis of decisions or with the participation of citizens or their representatives;
- ▶ Citizens or their representatives shall take part in deciding how these funds will be spent;
- ▶ Implementation of the project shall take place according to the opinions of the public who is voting.

Concurrently, we find it relevant to supplement the above conditions with one more. Its core lies in a cyclical process of PB implementation (and not a single application), which is found in the definition given in [3]. Thus, according to this approach, only those forms of participation that comply with all

<sup>1</sup> Legal framework on ensuring budget transparency is based on three laws: Law No 982 of 11 May 2000 on Access to Information, Law No 239 of 13 November 2008 on Transparency in Decision-Making Process and Law No 181 of 25 July 2014 on Public Finance and Budgetary-Fiscal Accountability.

<sup>2</sup> "Good governance - governing method as to achieve the objectives by complying with principles of transparency, accountability, economy, efficiency and effectiveness, legality and equity, ethics and integrity", Law No 229 of 23 September 2010 on Public Internal Financial Control.

<sup>3</sup> Emyr Williams, Emily St. Denny and Dan Bristow, Participatory Budgeting: An Evidence Review, 2017, Public Policy Institute for Wales.

above four conditions would be part of the Participatory Budgeting. This is the definition of PB that will be used further.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the spectrum of forms of participation has a continuous character, thus there is an infinite number of particular forms between the two extremes (Information and Empowerment). The forms presented in Table 1 are rather conventional steps in this process, which express the depth of participation in the budget processes. These steps serve only as benchmarks of the level of participation and allow for a relative comparison between different budget processes of the level of participation, as well as help to develop different involvement techniques and methods depending on the level of participation.

**Table1 Spectrum of the forms of participation**

	<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b>Public Participation Goal</b>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process of participation to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
<b>Promise to the Public</b>	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

*Source: Emyr Williams, Emily St. Denny and Dan Bristow, Participatory Budgeting: An Evidence Review, Public Policy Institute for Wales, 2017, [http://ppi.w.org.uk/files/2017/08/PPIW-report\\_participatory-budgeting-evidence-review\\_-July-2017-FINAL.pdf](http://ppi.w.org.uk/files/2017/08/PPIW-report_participatory-budgeting-evidence-review_-July-2017-FINAL.pdf)*

From the criteria presented for defining PB it can be noticed that not all forms of the participation spectrum fall under this definition. Thus, the level of participation at the 'inform' stage cannot certainly be considered as a form of PB. Whereas the forms at the stages of 'collaborate' and 'empower' can be certainly considered as forms of PB. The level-two Local Public Authorities (LPAs) in the Republic of Moldova make extensive use of the Youth Grants Program, which can be considered a PB program. Under the said program, there is a sum of money in the level-two LPA budget available to young people, and the projects are developed and selected with the participation of young people. Moreover, in some LPAs, full empowerment is achieved on this subject, where young people have control over the entire implementation of the grants program through an NGO.

### **Benefits of applying PB programs in educational institutions**

Applying Participatory Budget programs in educational institutions has benefits that far outweigh the direct benefits, such as increasing the efficiency of public resources for ensuring the education process. The benefits that could be achieved following the application of PB in educational institutions can be grouped in 4 large categories:

1. Civic education;
2. Training process resulting from the curriculum;
3. Personal development;
4. Improve the efficiency of public resources.

At the same time, it is very important to bear in mind that the benefits from categories 1-3 are even greater as the main objective to solve some real problems of the students and the educational institution is kept, avoiding to transform it into a process of training significance only.

### **Organization and implementation of the PB program in educational institutions**

Implementation of PB in educational institutions (but also in local authorities) consists in two stages:

- I. Initiation and creation of the framework for carrying out PB;
- II. Actual implementation of the PB program:

The **first stage**, in its turn, can be done through a number of steps:

#### ➤ ***Step 1. Start of process***

At this stage the initiative group is formed if the initiative does not come from the person in charge of resource management or the working group if the initiative comes from the principal of the educational institution. If the initiative comes from students (from beneficiaries or their representatives), once the idea of the PB program is made clear, it is brought to the attention of the institution management. Finally, if the initiative comes from the beneficiaries or their representatives, it is important to obtain a prior agreement, principally from the management and its subsequent involvement in the process. So, as a result of the activities at this step, a working group with the involvement of students (their representatives) will be set up to develop a framework for carrying out PB.

#### ➤ ***Step 2. Finalize the goal of introducing Participatory Budgetary***

The general goal of the PB program is further finalized. As mentioned above, PB can bring many benefits and it is necessary to set as specifically as possible what it is desired to be achieved through this process. This could be, for example, increased efficiency in the public money use, but also increased trust of beneficiaries in the authority/institution, increased accountability of beneficiaries for public goods, etc. In addition to the said objectives, other objectives may also be included for the schools related to achieving the benefits of the above-mentioned categories, such as improved quality of training on specific subjects, education of democracy, development of abilities and interactions skills, teamwork, decision-making and development of an attitude of protection of school goods, etc.

#### ➤ ***Step 3. Determine the level of participation***

At this stage, based on the proposed objectives, but also on the experience of the educational institution (authority) in applying PB forms, the level of participation is set. I.e. where exactly the PB

will be in the participation spectrum. Will this be a form of total Empowerment or a form closer to Collaboration? In this respect, for each of the key stages of the PB process, the level of participation will be established. For secondary schools and high schools, it seems that a form close to Empowerment can be applied relatively easy. This would imply that students develop project proposals, but using the help of facilitators (from teachers or volunteers, including local NGOs who are aware of PB techniques). The same format for selection of projects can be used, after which the list of projects is submitted to the administration, which approves the list. It is crucial that the administration does not intervene in the students' decision, only to validate it in order to be implemented. For the implementation phase, besides involving students in monitoring the implementation of selected projects and assessing the outcomes, students may also be involved in certain forms of implementation (depending on the nature of the projects). In any case, it is necessary to provide an independent assessment (carried out by the students and the implementation team) of the outcomes.

➤ ***Step 4 Finalize the scope and scale of the PB program***

Based on the objectives and desired level of participation, the area of PB program can be finalized. In education, it is advisable first to set the target groups by study grades (e.g. senior grades in secondary, high school, etc.). After that, in line with PB objectives, the area of projects to be covered by the PB program (e.g. layout of sports grounds, energy efficiency, environment, etc.) is identified. As a result, a description of the project areas to be eligible for the PB program will be provided, the target group of beneficiaries and who can come up with project proposals will be specified.

➤ ***Step 5 Identify the stakeholders involved in PB and their role***

The results achieved in previous steps allow to identify all major stakeholders that need to be involved in the preparation and implementation of the PB program, as well as to determine their role. In the PB processes in education, a maximum involvement of students is desired, especially of those from high school and/or from senior grades of secondary schools, but also of other stakeholders (including outside the school, if any) without whom the success of projects would be affected. At the same time, the involvement of stakeholders outside school should not affect students' autonomy concerning PB.

➤ ***Step 6. Prepare PB framework***

At this stage, it is intended to prepare all documents necessary for good implementation of the PB program and to get the approval of a final decision by the management on the implementation of the PB program. In this context, for each important stage of the PB program cycle (i) the level of participation per each stage will be determined, (ii) the best way (how participation will technically take place) of participation will be selected. Thus, as a result of this activity for each of the following stages: approval of the PB amount, development of proposals, selection of winning projects, monitoring of the implementation, assessment and report of the results - the level and way of achieving the participation of students (their representatives) should be specified. In the context of PB implementation in educational institutions, the following general approach can be applied: for each of the above stages a full transfer in terms of the organization of activities and decision-making to the students and their representatives is required, i.e. application of full empowerment is intended. After which, the constraints and limitations of each stage regarding the application of a full form of empowerment, including those related to the lack of experience, nature of the projects, organization activities, costs,

etc., shall be identified. As a result, the best form of participation will be obtained for each stage of the PB program cycle.

When choosing the way of participation, the available material resources and possibilities (equipment) will be considered to be put into practice. In general, there are many ways of participation, such as face to face debates, voting, surveys, etc. The students or their representatives can be directly involved in these processes. Also, IT applications or traditional means can be used as technical means.

All these results will be turned into implementation documents (regulations, guides), which will also include the responsible persons and their role in the PB program implementation. It is also necessary to issue a final decision on the PB program implementation, including by allocating, where appropriate, additional financial resources, e.g. for drawing up PB documents (which cannot be drawn up within the institution).

Once the set of documents is prepared and formal approvals for implementing the PB program are in place, it is time to pass **to the second phase** of the actual implementation of the program. This phase is cyclical and is incorporated in the respective budget process. Thus, in the second phase the following activities will be carried out:

- 1) Substantiate the amount intended for PB for the respective budget year (according to the documents approved in the first phase);
- 2) Approve the amount allocated for PB by the relevant authority;
- 3) Announce the call for projects within PB;
- 4) Develop and collect PB projects;
- 5) Select winning projects;
- 6) Implement and monitor the winning project(s);
- 7) Report and assess the projects implemented under PB program.

In each budgetary year, depending on the results and needs, the PB program can be revised by introducing the respective changes in the documents underlying the PB program implementation.

## Conclusions

Like any other involvement tool, the application of Participatory Budgetary can provide a number of benefits. They relate to the development of democracy, civic education, increased expenditure efficiency, accountability, etc. With regard to the application in schools, the proper application of PB creates even more benefits, as they can also become an important form of training and education.

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