Participatory Budgeting
Real Money, Real Power

Marti Brown, Councilmember, City of Vallejo
What is participatory budgeting?

A democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend a discretionary portion of a budget (usually public).
What is participatory budgeting?

• Making real decisions about real money (NOT a consultation)

• An annual cycle (NOT a one-off event)

• Usually for part of a budget (NOT the whole budget)
How does it work?

Residents brainstorm ideas → Delegates develop proposals → Residents vote → The top projects win funding
Public assemblies

Brainstorm ideas and select delegates
Delegate meetings
Develop proposals
Vote on proposals
Implement projects
Where has participatory budgeting worked?

1,500+ PB processes in the world!

- Cities,
- States,
- Counties,
- Public housing,
- Schools,
- Community organizations

Porto Alegre, Brazil
Porto Alegre, Brazil

1989

- 1.5 million residents (50,000 participants per year)
- Decide as much as $200 million in spending per year (20% of budget)
- Key victories:
  - Doubled sanitation coverage
  - Doubled the number of students in schools
  - Expanded bus service to neglected areas
Participatory budgeting in North America

- **2001:**
  - City of Guelph, Ontario
  - Toronto Community Housing

- **2006:**
  - Plateau Borough, Montreal

- **2009:**
  - 49th Ward, Chicago

- **2011:**
  - New York City

- **2012:**
  - Vallejo, CA
  - PB Project (NY)

- **2013:**
  - San Francisco
PB Vallejo
Vallejo, CA

2012

- 117,000 residents
- First citywide process in U.S.
- $3.2 million (sales tax revenue)
- $200,000 allocated for implementation of process
- Funds for capital projects and programs & services
- 20-member Steering Committee
Vallejo, CA

1. Steering Committee (SC) (July-September 2012)
   SC develops rule book

2. Assemblies (October-December 2012)
   identify community needs, recruit budget delegates

3. Delegate Meetings (December 2012-April 2013)
   develop proposals

4. Project Expos (April 2013)
   get community feedback

5. Community & Council Vote (May 2013)

6. Implementation & Monitoring of projects
Vallejo, CA

“Whenever possible, err on the side of inclusion”
Pelton Stewart, PB Steering Committee Member

• All residents over 16 can vote, regardless of immigration status
• Special assemblies for youth, seniors, Spanish speakers
• Delegate committees for youth and Spanish speakers
• Targeted outreach workers
Vallejo, CA

Outcomes to date:

- **809** participants at assemblies & online
- **829** project ideas generated
- **115** volunteer budget delegates
- **60** project proposals submitted for vetting
- **502** attended Project Expos
- **33** projects on final ballot
Why participatory budgeting?
Stronger and more engaged communities
Spending that more fairly reflects the communities interests

LET ALL CHILDREN PLAY!
Vote for a park that includes the disabled

WHY A DISABLED PARK?

Vote for a Rampless Playground (CHU 13)

WAITING FOR A PLAYGROUND

MAKING CHU 13 PLAYGROUND ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

THREE BIG POINTS!
Deeper Democracy
Public education and Greater Understanding of Budgeting
More informed decisions
Accountability and transparency
What can participatory budgeting do for the Water Plan?
All of the above!
What types of projects would come out of a Water Plan PB process?
Committees:
• Stormwater Treatment and Capture
• Floodplain Management
• Low Impact Development (LID)

Projects:
• Rainwater Capture Systems
• Increasing Low Impervious Surfaces
• “Green” Streets
• Rooftop Gardens
• Urban Forestry
• Restoring natural waterways
Questions?