

Q1: What is School Participatory Budgeting (SPB)?

School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) is an innovative civic learning program designed to build student agency, collaboration, and critical thinking skills while creating equitable opportunities for students to authentically contribute to their communities and civic life. SPB is at the same time a tool for citizenship education, a tool for civic engagement, and a tool for school democracy. The school process stems from the widely adopted municipal Participatory Budgeting (PB) model.

Q2: What is the municipal Participatory Budgeting (PB) model?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process through which community members directly decide how to spend a portion of a public budget. PB originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989 and has since expanded to over 11,000 cities and towns across the globe. The municipal PB has been applied to other settings, including public housing units, cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions (SPB).

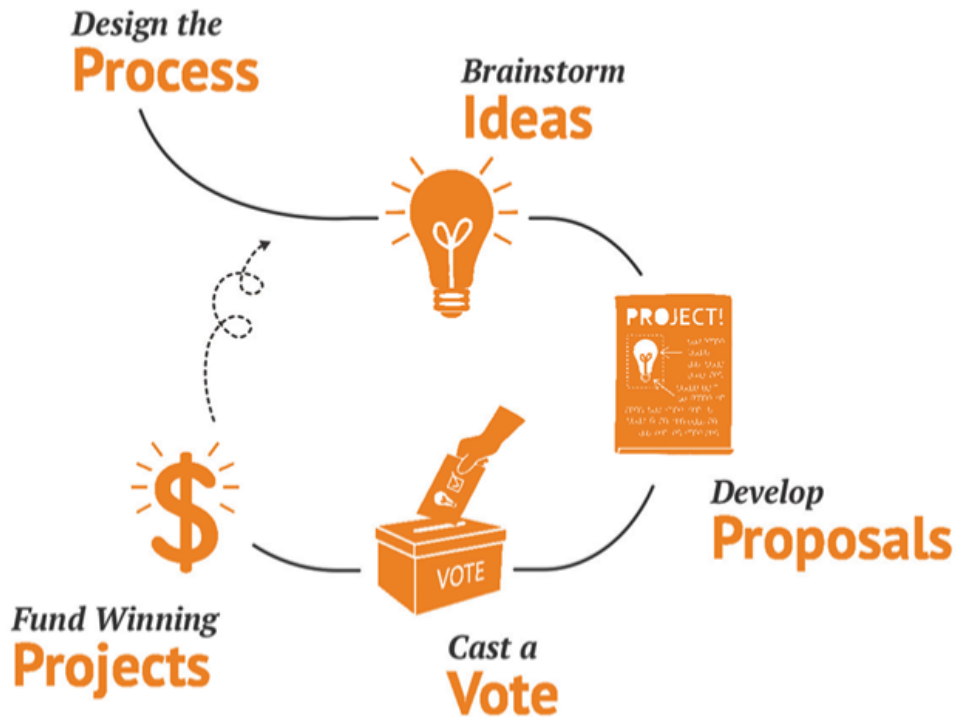
Q3: Where is SPB being implemented?

SPB is being implemented in many countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Russia, South Korea, Spain, Russia, United Kingdom and United States. In Portugal SPB is implemented in every school of the country, with federal funds. In South Korea, it is implemented in hundreds of schools in several cities. In the United States, SPB is implemented in several states, including California, New York, Illinois and Arizona. Although SPB is most often practiced in high schools, it has been implemented in elementary and middle schools. In some countries, like Argentina and the United States, it takes place in colleges and universities.

Q4: How does SPB work?

The SPB process is typically organized in five phases:

1. Students propose ideas to improve the school community
2. Students transform ideas into proposals by conducting research on cost, implementation timeline, sustainability, feasibility, and impact
3. Students deliberate on viable proposals and discuss the pros and cons
4. Students vote on proposals to select winning projects
5. Winning school improvement projects are funded and implemented



Before the process begins, a steering committee of students designs the process, comes up with process parameters, and communicates them to the rest of the school community. After the process ends, students, teachers, and school stakeholders conduct an evaluation and make recommendations for improvements for the next SPB cycle. All phases of the process are led by the students themselves, with the support of their teachers and the community.

Q5: When and where did SPB start in the US?

In 2013, Bioscience High School in Phoenix Union High School District (PXU) launched the first SPB process in the United States, as a pilot project. By 2016, in partnership with the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP), Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA), and Arizona State University Participatory Governance Initiative (PGI), PXU adopted the first school district-wide SPB model in the United States, beginning with five schools and 3,500 students and expanding the process incrementally to all twenty PXU schools by 2019.

Q6: How many schools are implementing SPB in Arizona?

As of Fall 2021, SPB in Arizona involves 47 schools across six school districts, engaging upwards of 63,000 students annually.

Q7: How long is the process?

The process typically spans one full academic year with the launch occurring in August/September and culminating with the final vote and project implementation in March/April. The voting should take place in early spring to allow sufficient time for project implementation prior to the end of the school year when possible. Depending on school size and depth of engagement, the process can be implemented successfully on a shorter timeline.

Q8: Who can participate in SPB?

The SPB process centers student voice in the decision-making process. To this end, students typically lead and participate in all phases of the SPB process. In some schools and school districts, educators, non-teaching staff, families and the surrounding community participate in the process as well by helping develop proposals and voting on the final ideas.

Q9: What is needed to start SPB?

To start a SPB process, all that is needed is a budget and a willingness to promote a participatory, student-led process to allocate that budget. The process could be launched by school leaders, a group of teachers or even by one teacher who is eager to start a pilot project. The SPB process can be implemented in different settings: from one classroom or a department within a school, from one school to multiple schools within a district, and from several districts to all schools in a state or even a country (e.g. Portugal).

Buy-in from folks with decision-making power over a budget is essential to launching a successful SPB process. The budget could come from different sources (district funds, school funds, discretionary budget of the principal, parent-teacher association, fundraising, donations, etc.). Once a budget is secured, a student steering committee needs to be formed to design and coordinate the process, beginning with idea collection and culminating in a vote.

Q10: How does SPB work when it is adopted and implemented at the school district level? What are the roles played by different actors?

Once the SPB process is adopted and implemented at the school district level, successful coordination involves the active participation of five stakeholders:

- **Steering Committee:** The group of students who guide the process among their peers starting with the idea collection phase through project implementation and evaluation.
- **Teacher Sponsors:** One or two teachers who support the students on the steering committee.

- **School Leaders:** Campus administrators who provide general support to the process and assist the steering committee by offering feedback on ideas and guiding students as they develop project proposals.
- **PB District Leaders:** District staff who work with PB advisors to develop resources, plan workshops, guide implementation, and serve as the liaison between steering committees and district leadership. In addition, district administrators and staff play a key role in guiding students through the proposal development phase. Their expertise and partnership is invaluable to creating feasible proposals that comply with district, state, and federal guidelines. This group may include the superintendent, assistant superintendent, governing board members, and maintenance and procurement/purchasing personnel.
- **PB Advisors:** Implementation experts who work alongside district staff to develop resources, plan workshops, and provide mentorship and guidance through the PB process. Advisors include the Center for the Future of Arizona, the Participatory Governance Initiative, the Participatory Budgeting Project and People Powered.

Q11: How is the steering committee formed?

There are many ways to form a steering committee. The most usual are appointment, self-appointment, election, randomization, and a combination of these models:

- a) **Appointment:** steering committee members are appointed by school community stakeholders (teachers, school administrators, counselors, etc.), sometimes following particular criteria, sometimes on a discretionary basis. In many cases, school community stakeholders tend to appoint students who already have leadership experiences.
- b) **Self-appointment:** school administrators and teachers make an open call to students inviting them to participate in the steering committee. Students who express interest join the steering committee.
- c) **Election:** steering committee members are elected by their peers, sometimes with a number of representatives per class. A variation of this model is to rely on the student government (an elected body) to perform the functions of the steering committee. In some schools the steering committee is formed by an equal number of student government members and class representatives.
- d) **Randomization (lottery):** steering committee members are randomly selected from the totality of the student body. This model is similar to appointment but without any particular criteria.
- e) **Representation:** steering committee members are selected to ensure that the committee reflects the demographics of the school, considering factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity and dis/ability, This model is also known as 'minipublic', and it is often used in citizen juries and citizen assemblies.
- f) **Combination:** some schools combine two or more of the above models. For example, a school could combine randomization and self-appointment (through

selected invitations) to ensure a balance of buy-in and experience within the steering committee.



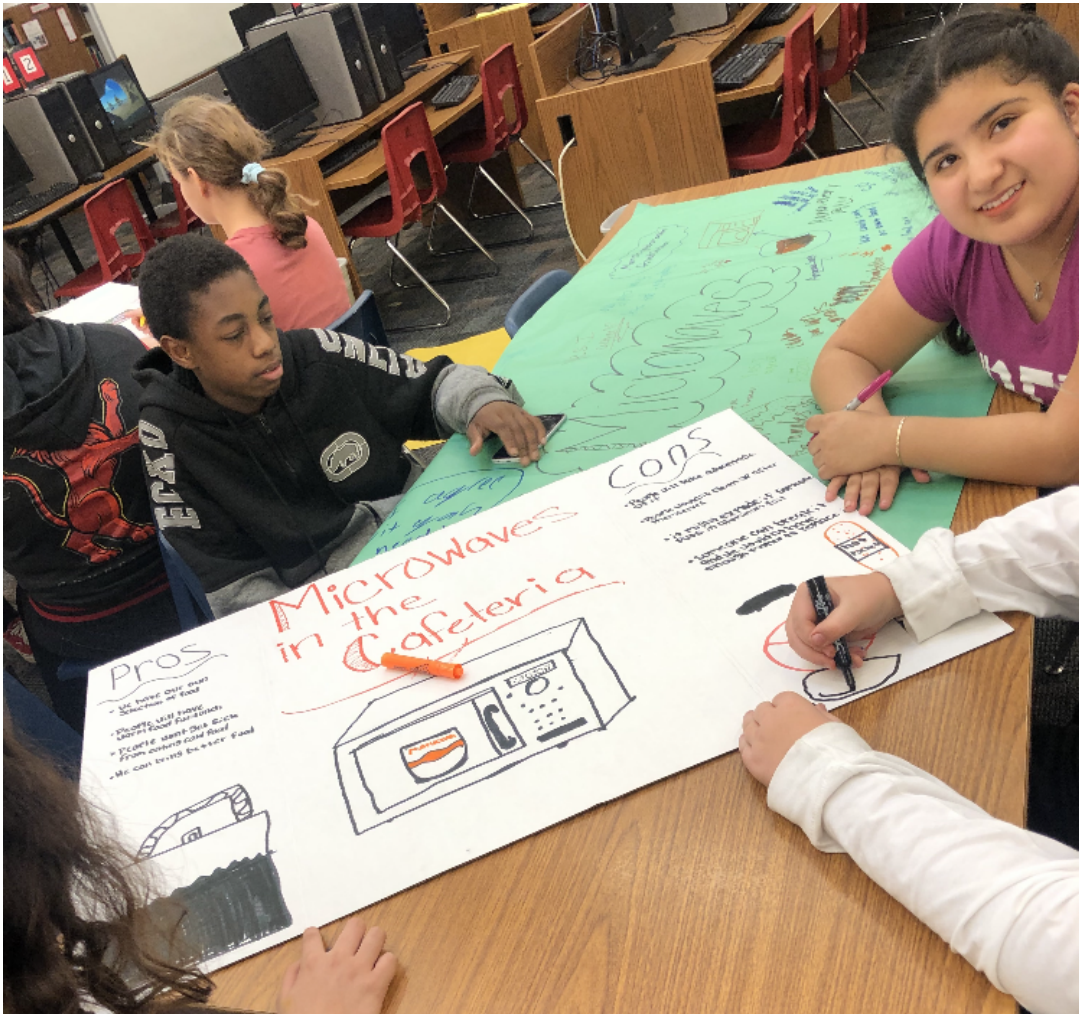
Each model has strengths and weaknesses, and it is up to each school or school district to select the one that is more appropriate for their circumstances and their goals. Steering committees formed through appointments, self-appointments and elections tend to be effective and autonomous, but they tend to attract students with more leadership experiences and thus run the risk of reinforcing the civic engagement gap. The randomized model may require more mentorship and support but, in line with the representation model, provides leadership opportunities for students with little or no leadership experience and can contribute to narrowing the civic engagement gap.

Q12: How are students not on the steering committee involved throughout the process?

Students who are not on the steering committee can participate in different ways, according to their level of interest and time availability. Usually there is significant participation of students at the beginning of the process (during the idea collection phase) and at the end of the process (at the moment of voting for projects). To encourage student involvement in between those phases, some steering committees invite students to attend their meetings and engage in proposal development activities related to projects that they feel passionate about, organize a primary voting to select the final proposals, and facilitate classroom discussions about the strengths and weaknesses of the different proposals under consideration.

Q13: What types of projects are funded through SPB?

To date, SPB projects have primarily focused on campus improvement projects (capital investments). This includes water filtration systems, water bottle refill stations, shade structures, additional seating, cafeteria and library upgrades, bathroom renovations, lab equipment, printers, community gardens, school spirit and beautification projects, industrial washers and dryers, and social emotional learning projects like a campus therapy dog and meditation or game rooms. In some schools, SPB projects included programs and activities like driving lessons and field trips (e.g. visits to college campuses). Depending on the overall program objectives and budget capacity, the SPB process can be used to decide on school programming, curriculum, services, and/or policies. A case in point is the Phoenix Union High School District (see Q14).



Q14: How much money is needed to do SPB?

From a pedagogical perspective, the amount of money is not as important as designing and implementing a good process. Having said that, budgets for each SPB process vary

by school district and school size. Some districts allocate US \$1000 per school while others allocate upwards of \$20,000 per school site. Schools can always start small and build their SPB budgets over time. In some districts, large schools receive more funding than smaller schools.

In 2020, the Phoenix Union High School District, after years of successful SPB implementation with relatively modest amounts (\$4,000 for small schools and \$7,000 for large schools), expanded its SPB process to engage educators, students, and families in re-imagining school safety with a budget allocation of \$1.2 million. As the scope of the process continues to expand, schools and school districts invest in the time and effort of administrators, staff, educators, and school staff charged with implementing the SPB model. In district-level SPB processes, some school communities allocate a portion of the budget to support teacher sponsor stipends.

Q15: Are there potential difficulties that could be avoided?

Two potential challenges that could be avoided relate to feasibility and duplication. Regarding feasibility, it is important that participants know from the beginning the eligibility criteria, so there is a clear understanding of which type of projects are allowed and which are not allowed. Some restrictions may be due to the source of the funds. Other restrictions may be due to specific regulations (e.g. historical buildings). Regarding duplications, it is important that participants are aware of projects already planned by the school or the district so they focus on other projects. Moreover it is possible that two or more groups of students propose similar projects during the idea collection phase. In those cases, it would be fruitful to connect these groups so they could combine their ideas into a stronger proposal. In the end, these potential difficulties can be avoided with a good communication process and strategies.

Q16: How much time can teachers sponsors expect to spend on SPB?

On average, teacher sponsors can expect to meet with the steering committee once a week. This is an average, and the amount of time varies in different phases of the process. For example, during the idea collection phase it is recommended that the teacher sponsor meets with the steering committee once every two weeks, and the proposal development phase may require educators to meet with the steering committee once or twice per week, depending on the number of proposals to be developed.

As the depth of engagement with the broader student body increases by implementing opportunities for dialogue, deliberation, and shared decision-making (e.g. pros and cons discussions, primary vote, tabling at lunch, etc.), educators can expect to increase the amount of time spent on SPB implementation. Additionally, as the scope of the process expands to the district level, teachers sponsors might participate in district-wide workshops and trainings at key points throughout the process, including:

- SPB Kickoff & Idea Collection Workshop
- Proposal Development Workshop

- Campaign & Vote Training
- Evaluation Celebration

Q17: What do students learn from SPB?

Through experiential learning, students acquire a great variety of civic knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices (KASP) as well as other important competencies. Among them are the following:

- Deliberative skills (including public speaking, listening and taking turns)
- Social-emotional learning
- Leadership and teamwork
- Critical thinking and research skills
- Financial literacy competencies



Q18: How does SPB connect to curriculum and support academic standards?

SPB can certainly connect to existing curriculum and support the teaching of K12 academic standards across a myriad of subject areas. Examples of curriculum connections include:

- History of voting and voter rights
- Elections and the electoral process
- Governmental structures, roles, duties, and procedures
- Current events and social justice issues (dependent on the projects or overall process theme)

Examples of Arizona academic standards SPB supports:

- History and Social Science
 - Disciplinary Skills and Processes
 - Civics
 - Economics
- English Language Arts
 - Informational Text (Key Ideas and Details, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas)
 - Writing (Argumentative and Informative Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Speaking and Listening, Language)
- Math
 - Mathematical Practices
 - Number Systems
 - Statistics and Probability
 - Financial Literacy
- Arts and Science (dependent on project or overall process theme)
- Social Emotional Learning/Character Education

Q19: How does SPB support civic learning?

SPB complements civic learning and other civic education programs in its authenticity of learning democracy by doing democracy. Through SPB, students learn democracy through research and deliberation around real resources and by making decisions that are relevant to them and to future generations of students in their schools. In SPB, students acquire the building blocks of self-governance and participation including the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and practices (KASP) necessary for long-term engagement in civic life.

Q20: How does SPB deepen civic engagement on campus?

SPB is designed to engage everyone and not just a selected group of students. It strives to create equity in engaging diversity of student voices, and every student has a variety of opportunities to participate. Moreover, SPB gives students real power over real money, empowers them to discover their agency and collective voice, emboldens them in decision-making processes, fortifies youth-adult partnerships, builds critical thinking and communication skills, creates meaningful solutions to everyday problems, mirrors actual voting processes, and prepares young people to be lifelong civic participants. SPB also promotes interactions among participants, a sense of community, mutual trust, school democracy and a positive climate.



Q21: How does SPB prepare students for long-term civic engagement and participation?

SPB empowers students to “learn democracy by doing” by deciding how district dollars are used to improve their school communities and prepares young people to be active, informed, and engaged participants in civic life. Students lead the process of curating ideas, developing proposals, and participating in a school-wide vote to select a “winning proposal” to be implemented on their campus. The student-led process gives students real power over real money, enables them to learn the power of their voices, sheds light on school community needs, and helps them learn their role in and responsibility for community decision-making.

Importantly, schools are supported in mirroring a real-life election day to decide how the district dollars will be used. Students use ballots and voting equipment to experience firsthand how the voting process works. Students who are then eligible to register for the next state and federal elections are given the opportunity to do so at SPB Vote Days. In Arizona, thousands of eligible students have been registered to vote in municipal, state and federal elections through SPB Vote Days.

Q22: Can SPB address the civic engagement gap and promote inclusiveness?

Yes, SPB can narrow the civic engagement gap by providing leadership and civic learning opportunities to students who are often underrepresented in student

government and student clubs that nurture leadership skills and encourage civic participation. We recommend considering inclusiveness in the design and implementation of the SPB process. For strategies to promote inclusive processes, see [School participatory budgeting: A toolkit for inclusive practice](#).

Q23: What research has been done on SPB, and what are some of the main findings?

Because SPB is a new practice, there is still a dearth of studies on this topic. The incipient research shows promising results. For instance, research on these processes in Spain found that they have a positive impact on the development of knowledge (rights and duties), skills (participatory competence), values (prosocial dispositions) and attitudes (self-esteem, confidence, psychological empowerment (García-Leiva et al., 2021) in children and adolescents. They also found that SPB led students to interact more positively with their peers' sense of well-being, group cohesion, and popularity of previously isolated children among their peers. Moreover, they developed greater trust in government institutions and increased financial literacy. (Cano-Hila et al., 2020; Duncikaite, 2019; García-Leiva et al., 2021; Albornoz-Manyoma et al., 2020, 2021). Research on SPB in the United States reports similar findings (Cohen et al., 2015; Crum & Faydash, 2018; Gibbs et al., 2020; Keidan, 2020; Kinzle, 2019). Studies on youth participatory budgeting in different contexts (e.g. Augsberger et al., 2017; Grillos, 2014; Brennan, 2016) also confirm these results. To evaluate the impact on learning and change, some researchers use an instrument called KASP-SC that explores changes in civic knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices, on the one hand, and school climate, on the other. The impact of PB and SPB on learning and education have been summarized in a [research brief](#) (Schugurensky et al. 2021).

Q24: Is there any short video summarizing the SPB process?

Yes, there is a [short video on SPB](#) (under 4 minutes) that was produced by the Participatory Budgeting Project in Phoenix. There is another short video (4') on the broader [PB municipal process](#) that can provide more details and broader context.

Q25: Where can schools find external assistance for SPB processes?

External advisors from the [Center for the Future of Arizona](#), the [Participatory Governance Initiative](#), the [Participatory Budgeting Project](#) and [People Powered](#) may provide guidance, professional development workshops and mentorship opportunities as needed.

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