

PEOPLE'S BUDGET CLEVELAND

OVERVIEW

In 2023, People's Budget Cleveland launched a historic ballot initiative to direct the City of Cleveland to put aside funds equivalent to 2% of the City of Cleveland's General Fund each year towards participatory budgeting. While the vote was razor thin, the measure did not pass. This campaign built on previous advocacy efforts to ask the city government to allocate \$30.8 million of American Rescue Plan Act ("ARPA") funds towards participatory budgeting, a democratic process in which community members directly decide how public funds are spent.

While participatory budgeting is not yet part of Cleveland's annual budgeting process, organizers learned many valuable lessons from these advocacy campaigns. These fights ignited public interest in the city's budgeting process, built new alliances between local advocacy groups, and monumentally shifted the conversation. The people of Cleveland better understand now what it could look like to have meaningful decision-making power in their government, and local government electeds and officials have learned that they must better engage with their residents. The ground has also been opened up for future participatory budgeting advocacy in the city.



BACKGROUND

The history of the City of Cleveland is representative of the exclusionary history of democracy, politics, and community development in the US during the 20th century. Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and other historically marginalized communities in Cleveland strived to build good lives for themselves while navigating racial segregation, housing redlining, income inequality, underinvestment in their communities, brutal fights over union rights, and a lack of real representation in city government and policy making.

In the 2000s, a powerful Democratic Party machine dominated local Cleveland politics led by Mayor Frank Jackson, who served for four terms - a total of 16 years - from 2004-2020. It included the mayor, city council, their staff members, and powerful local business leaders. Together, this group directed a local government that catered to business interests and made sure money flowed toward white, professional neighborhoods on the West Side while paying empty lip service to everyone else, continuing the cycle of segregation and inequality.

They allocated money towards renovating state-of-the-art stadiums owned by billionaires while leaving the East Side of the city underserved, underinvested, and unrepresented. If this was democracy, then democracy was broken, and with it, a lack of means for everyday Clevelanders to build better lives and ultimately to thrive.

Finally, in 2021, a new mayor was elected, who, while not immune to the lure of outside money and influence, was not part of that machine. Mayor Justin Bibb's election and a slate of new City Council members offered a sense to Clevelanders that, finally, some change was possible.

In the face of this significant shift, local organizers were hungry for a way to make people feel included and heard by their new government. They wanted to center empathy and inclusion in politics, build trust in government, and bridge the gap between how the government was spending public funds and what people actually wanted/needed. They saw a huge opportunity to model how people could participate and wield power together and begin to repair the harms of past administrations to Cleveland's poorest neighborhoods.



At the same time, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan Act to support communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the poorest big cities in America, Cleveland was awarded \$512 million.

Organizers realized that the American Rescue Plan Act was a historic opportunity not only to build back their communities and economy after the devastating COVID-19 pandemic but also to address deeply embedded inequities in access and voice in their local government. So, they formed a coalition, Participatory Budgeting Cleveland (“PB CLE”), and asked the city government to put aside ARPA funds towards participatory budgeting, a democratic process in which residents would directly decide how

to spend the money. The coalition received funding and support from the Democracy Beyond Elections coalition to support their efforts to advance the use of participatory processes with these recovery funds and other future Cleveland public funds.

THE PB CYCLE

Participatory budgeting is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It is a way to empower and include residents in the most important and basic function of government – how to spend the budget. Using community-led decision-making helps ensure investments match real community needs and gives communities a say

in where the funding goes. Participatory budgeting increases equity, access, and accountability in spending decisions, transforming and deepening democracy.



DESIGN THE PROCESS

A steering committee that represents communities highly impacted by criminal justice systems creates the rules and engagement plan.



BRAINSTORM IDEAS

Through meetings and online tools, residents share and discuss ideas for projects.



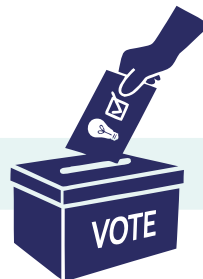
DEVELOP PROPOSALS

Volunteer “budget delegates” develop the ideas into feasible proposals, with guidance from experts in restorative justice, health and social services, education, and community development.



FUND WINNING PROJECTS

The government or institution funds the winning ideas.



VOTE

Residents vote on the proposals that most serve the community’s needs.

THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT: A COMMUNITY-LED RECOVERY OPPORTUNITY

The signing of the American Rescue Plan Act on March 11, 2021, was a pivotal moment in the United States' journey toward recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. With an impressive \$350 billion in funding, the program was designed to strengthen state, territorial, local, and tribal governments' response to the economic and public health impacts of COVID-19. Out of the \$350 billion in ARPA funds, Ohio received \$5.4 billion, with another \$5.3 billion for its counties, municipalities, and townships. Cleveland received the eighth-largest allocation of ARPA funds, totaling \$512 million over two years. Cleveland was scheduled to receive the first half of these dollars in the fall of 2021 and the remainder in the summer of 2022.

In the wake of this announcement, a coalition of grassroots groups and residents assembled to advocate for a deeply democratic public process for allocating these ARPA funds. They were eager to shift away from the city's historically exclusionary budgetary process of committee and Council meetings and center community voices. The PB CLE coalition envisioned a Cleveland where all people, no matter where they lived or what they looked like, would have a say in how public dollars are spent.

They believed participatory budgeting would be the perfect opportunity to pilot transformative change

during COVID recovery. They saw participatory budgeting as a powerful instrument that would offer Cleveland residents dignity and power to make decisions for themselves and their communities, deepen their understanding of local government, and cultivate new community leaders. They believed it would also strengthen trust between residents and the government and increase resident participation in democracy.¹

Galvanized by a common guiding goal of deepening democracy in Cleveland, PB CLE set out to introduce the concept of participatory budgeting and crowdsource ideas on how the program could work in Cleveland. The coalition organized community events and house parties across all 17 wards. It rapidly grew to include over 800 participants, 60 local organizations, and a Coordinating Committee of dozens of residents to transform ideas into policies. The PB CLE Coordinating Committee worked with the community to develop an ask of the City Council to reserve 6% of ARPA funds, \$30.8 million, for participatory budgeting, also known as a People's Budget.² The \$30.8 million was chosen to represent the 30.8% of Cleveland residents living in poverty.

At this critical juncture, the Cleveland City Council was gearing up for a historic municipal election, preparing to elect Councilmembers to all 17 Council Wards and replace then-Mayor Frank Jackson, the longest-serving mayor in Cleveland's history. First-time mayoral candidate Justin Bibb was gaining momentum heading into the September 2021 primary with a community

¹ *Participatory Budgeting Cleveland, "Story Narrative."*

² *People's Budget Cleveland, "About PB Cle." <https://www.pbcle.com/about>*



Coalition rallies outside city hall

promise to bring new leadership to Cleveland. Bibb emerged victorious in the mayoral primary and won in a landslide in the November general election.

In December 2021, PB CLE met with Mayor-elect Bibb to discuss how to incorporate community-led decision-making into city budgeting. PB CLE organizers remember the Mayor-elect wondering aloud how to design processes inviting Cleveland residents to weigh in on spending across the entire city budget – far more than just a portion of ARPA funding. So, PB CLE continued its popular education and outreach with the original budget of \$30.8 million throughout the winter and spring of 2022. Activities during this time included a comprehensive “PB Action Plan,” outlining how the City of Cleveland could establish and sustainably fund a participatory budgeting program with a budget of \$30.8 million.

PB CLE also hosted two large community events to raise awareness around their campaign. In the fall of 2022, Mayor Bibb told PB CLE about his plan to draft legislation for a participatory budgeting pilot program. It was then that PB CLE learned that Mayor Bibb would be reducing the amount of ARPA funding for participatory budgeting from \$30.8 million to \$5.5 million. After much deliberation, PB CLE agreed to this substantial reduction and began to collaborate with the Mayor’s staff to shape the Mayor’s legislative proposal.

In January 2023, Mayor Justin Bibb introduced legislation co-created with PB CLE and co-sponsored by four members of the Cleveland City Council: Council Members Stephanie Howse-Jones, Deborah

Gray, Jenny Spencer, and Rebecca Maurer. When the legislation for a \$5.5 million participatory budget pilot was introduced, 75 PB CLE supporters rallied on the front steps of City Hall, demanding “nothing about us without us” and inviting members of the Council to join this movement for deeper democracy in Cleveland.

Shortly after, the legislation moved to Cleveland City Council’s Finance Committee, which invited PB CLE and a representative from the Mayor’s office to respond to questions. What was assumed by PB CLE to be an opportunity to build support was instead a coordinated attempt by Council President Blaine Griffin to provoke PB CLE and undermine their proposal to introduce participatory budgeting in Cleveland. It became clear that Council President Griffin and his allies on the Council saw the proposal as a disruption of the status quo and a threat to their authority over the budget. During the hourslong committee meeting, three representatives of PB CLE and a policy advisor to the Mayor faced an onslaught of questions and disparagement that revealed that a Council majority strongly opposed the legislation. For all intents and purposes, it looked as if participatory budgeting in Cleveland was dead.



PB CLE presents at the Finance Committee Meeting

THE PEOPLES BUDGET CHARTER AMENDMENT: A FIGHTING CHANCE FOR PB IN CLEVELAND

While the legislation to create participatory budgeting died in committee, PB CLE continued their efforts to advance democracy. In fact, the level of animosity that members of the city council displayed towards PB CLE generated sympathy and energy from community members not yet involved with PB CLE, and convinced them that there must be something powerful about participatory budgeting if the council was so set on killing it. The City Council's combative and dismissive attitude ultimately served to fuel the community's determination to persist and explore alternative avenues.

By March 2023, PB CLE and its allies agreed that there was only one path to move forward given the city council's opposition: a ballot initiative approved by voters to institutionalize participatory budgeting in the city's annual budget cycle. Wishing to maintain the momentum and attention they had amassed during the ARPA fight, they decided to write a charter amendment to allocate an amount equal to the 2% of the city's General Fund to participatory budgeting and gather the necessary signatures by that summer so that it would be on the ballot in November.

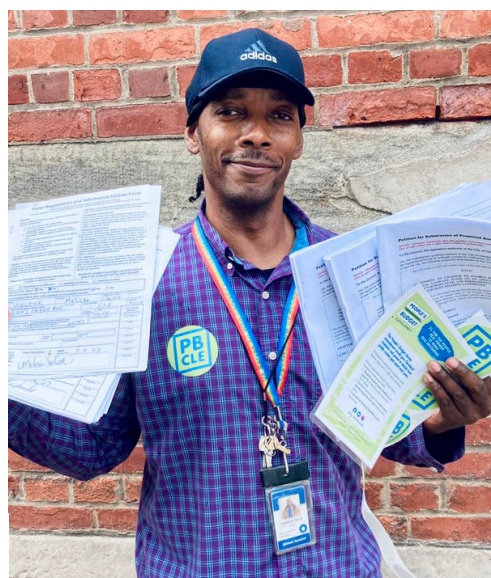
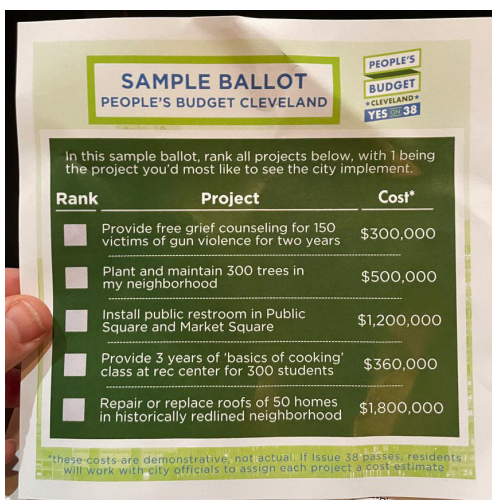
PB CLE's strategy of going to the people directly when legislative options failed was not new. In recent years, PB CLE members participated in local grassroots ballot initiative campaigns with varied degrees of success to eradicate lead in homes, prevent public subsidies

of sports stadiums, and promote police accountability in Cleveland. PB CLE members were also aware of a similar ballot initiative in Boston that institutionalized participatory budgeting in the city's charter. These bold, scrappy campaigns inspired PB CLE to fight hard against the council's opposition and go right to the people.

To start, PB CLE changed its name to People's Budget Cleveland to indicate a new chapter in their campaign, distancing themselves from some of the negativity of the previous campaign and emphasizing the idea that budgets should be by and for the community. Also, the new name was easier to say.

People's Budget Cleveland formed a new Steering Committee composed of representatives from the Working Families Party, Cleveland VOTES, Cleveland Owns, Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless ("NEOCH"), and Building Freedom Ohio. NEOCH provided facilities for the committee to use throughout the process. People's Budget Cleveland also incorporated as a political action committee for a ballot initiative, its first legal incorporation without a fiscal sponsor, and opened a bank account.

A charter amendment subgroup was established to draft the legislation within the tight deadline. The subgroup included a paid lawyer who could help draft the language with the hope of upholding the campaign's values while ensuring flexibility for future budget cycles. The subgroup held multiple meetings and shared the draft language with members and allies for review. Ultimately, 25 individuals looked over the language.



Sample Ballot, Campaign members collect ballot signatures, register voters

This group engaged in a vigorous back and forth with city officials on the draft language, particularly around how members of the steering committee that would set the rules for implementing participatory budgeting would be selected from the community. While city officials wanted these committee members to be selected by mayoral political appointment, People's Budget Cleveland advanced lottery or sortition selection options in the draft language that would ensure community members across the city were fairly and equitably represented.

The city also pushed back on People's Budget Cleveland's proposed budget amount of funds equivalent to 2% of the city's annual General Fund, or some \$14 million dollars. This percentage value mirrored Boston's participatory budgeting charter amendment. People's Budget Cleveland compromised with the city on the selection process and eliminated sortition, but kept the 2% value in the draft language. The final draft language specified that the funding source(s) for the PB funds could come from various sources of city funds, such as the Capital Budget, General Fund, and other avenues such as new or existing tax revenues.

However, this ambiguity about the funding source proved to be a point of disagreement between the two sides. Considered one of the poorest large cities in the US, the city had many demands on its budget. In recent years, the city had spent more than half of its General Fund on fire, police, and emergency medical services³. The Mayor's Office asked People's Budget

Cleveland to identify a dedicated funding source for their new proposed program, which the campaign declined to do. This meant that this new proposed use of city funds would likely come from existing streams annually allocated across city departments, programs, and services. Due to limited time, People's Budget Cleveland did not run the ballot initiative language by other impacted parties, such as municipal unions. That decision and the refusal to name a funding source would become a significant obstacle to victory.

With the ballot initiative language set, they also needed to secure funding for the campaign. Ohio Voice, a member of the national network State Voices, proved to be a key ally and funder to People's Budget Cleveland, providing crucial data and technology tools, strategic planning, communications support, and fundraising support. Several 501c3 and 501c4 organizations donated cash and in-kind to the campaign's PAC. By the end of the campaign, contributions totaled some \$167,000.

By the time the charter amendment legislation was complete, People's Budget Cleveland had less than two months to garner 6,000 valid signatures to get the charter amendment on the ballot in November. People's Budget Cleveland and their allies organized house parties throughout the city to educate residents. Summer events were leveraged, and 10 canvassers were hired along with 180 volunteers recruited to collect signatures, which were submitted in early July 2023. Ultimately, they successfully gathered 10,000 signatures, with 7,000 deemed valid, enough to qualify

3 <https://signalcleveland.org/cleveland-budget-spending-2024/>



for the November ballot.

With the signatures secured, the campaign was on, and People’s Budget Cleveland commissioned a poll to hone their messaging. They found populist messages resonated most across Cleveland communities. So, they focused their narrative around the idea that the ballot initiative was a chance to counteract political agendas favoring businesses and developers over community interests. One of their favorite slogans was “Streets Over Stadiums.” This was particularly resonant as Cleveland, a city of 375,000, had lavished money on its three professional sports teams while ignoring the needs of areas outside of downtown. Local media outlets produced dozens of stories⁴ about the campaign on radio, social media, and op-eds⁵. Noteworthy platforms such as Cleveland Signal⁶, Cleveland.com⁷, and local radio shows like WOJU also ran stories.

Along with the education and media coverage, People’s Budget Cleveland used a significant Get Out The Vote (“GOTV”) strategy with door-to-door campaigning, text messages, and phone calls. At the same time, outside issues began to affect the campaign. In August 2023, an Ohio Special Election aimed to change the voter threshold on ballot initiatives to amend the State’s Constitution from a simple majority to 60% (among other changes). Targeting those voters was key, as they would also likely vote in November 2023 to pass

a separate state ballot initiative to protect access to reproductive rights, which was also garnering a lot of attention.

Then, in the state capital, Republican State Senator Jerry Cirino introduced Senate Bill 158 to outlaw participatory budgeting. Faced with this existential threat to their legislation, People’s Budget Cleveland launched a campaign within a campaign, garnering support from State Representatives and Senators, rallying dozens of supporters to submit written committee testimony, and organizing a dozen supporters to make in-person testimony in Columbus. Local leaders weighed in, too: Mayor Bibb opposed SB 158, while the chamber of commerce supported it. While still sitting in the State House committee chambers after making testimony against SB 158, People’s Budget Cleveland received the news that SB 158 had failed. The path to victory in Cleveland remained open.

In Cleveland, opposition to the People’s Budget Cleveland charter amendment, now called Issue 38, was fierce. Members of the city council continued to assert that Cleveland’s financial constraints rendered participatory budgeting unfeasible. Business interests, sensing a threat to their cozy relationship with city hall, also opposed the ballot vociferously. Billionaires maxed out personal contributions to the Council President’s Leadership Fund, a PAC that financed

4 pbcle.com/news

5 clevescene.com/news/why-clevelanders-should-support-participatory-budgeting-42754898

6 signalcleveland.org/issue-38-who-would-run-a-peoples-budget-process/

7 cleveland.com/opinion/2023/11/issue-38-would-empower-clevelanders-with-long-overdue-control-over-city-spending-justice-b-hill.html



much of the opposition. Municipal labor unions raised concerns about how the measure would affect their funding. Council President Griffin and two other council members emerged as prominent adversaries, citing misinformation that outside progressive entities were behind the push for participatory budgeting, and that they planned to divert funds for personal gain. The origin of this narrative remains unclear, given the diversity within the movement for participatory budgeting.

Unusually, the City Council issued a debate challenge, leading to a public debate between People’s Budget Cleveland organizers Aleena Starks and Jonathan Welle against Council Member Kris Harsh and Ward 13 resident Robyn Kaltenbach. Starks and Welle remained calm and thoughtful throughout the debate, emphasizing the need for more community say in budget decisions. Council Member Harsh, in particular, was visibly seething at the thought of participatory budgeting and attacked it from every conceivable angle. Both Harsh and Kaltenbach made unsubstantiated assertions suggesting that the process was corrupt and a money grab by special interests. They raised concerns about the ability to validate votes from residents who were under 18 years of age, as well as some imprecise language in the proposed charter amendment.

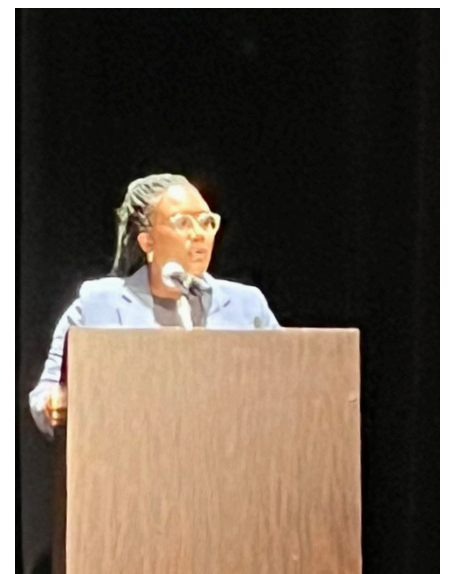
These language concerns were partially valid in a few sections of the proposed amendment, and as with any new substantial city program, open questions remained on the details of how to administer and maintain it.

People’s Budget Cleveland felt some arguments made along those lines were generally made in good faith, and with more time to revise the amendment language, the specific language concerns could have been resolved. Their choice in 2023 to get the issue on the ballot for the coming elections instead of waiting another year and potentially losing the momentum from the ARPA campaign necessarily led to some tradeoffs, and the main one was that putting the ballot initiative language together was rushed. Also, with a more robust implementation program plan, People’s Budget Cleveland could have quelled fears about administrative questions.

People’s Budget Cleveland also failed to engage a key stakeholder in meaningful conversations before drafting the amendment: labor unions representing municipal workers. Unions and their allies raised substantial and realistic worries about how allocating an amount equivalent to 2% of the city’s General Fund to participatory budgeting would impact operations in the city. Without a dedicated source of funding for participatory budgeting projects, unions suggested that individual departments like EMS and Fire could see cuts to their budget in order to pay for this new program, with no guarantee that residents would fund participatory budgeting projects that would send dollars back to the same departments that saw the cuts. To answer these concerns, People’s Budget Cleveland published a list of specific budget line items that could serve as sources for the charter amendment, including an annual subsidy to the Cleveland Brown stadium set to expire in 2028 and an annual City Council slush fund that could be reallocated to fund



Organizers speak in opposition to SB 158 at state house, Aleena Starks on stage at debate



participatory budgeting.

Participatory budgeting works with a range of different kinds of public budgets. That includes capital budgets, which typically fund physical improvements in a particular place (like street repairs or new playground equipment—i.e., “capital projects”). It also includes budgets for services or programming, like funding for mental health services. A rule of thumb is that if you can spend it, you can do participatory budgeting with it. The People’s Budget Cleveland charter amendment allowed for up to 60% of annual participatory budgeting spending in Cleveland to come in the form of capital expenditures, ensuring both programmatic and capital projects had a chance to get funded while also allowing the city to fund participatory budgeting projects in multiple ways, such as selling bonds for capital projects and by allocating money in the General Fund for programmatic projects.

One concern opponents of Issue 38 raised was that since participatory budgeting projects are selected annually, it would mean that the money could go to repaving roads one year and a senior center the following year without consistent funding for either. Their concern was that this type of spending does not lend itself to steady, union jobs. They were afraid that the city would contract selected participatory budgeting projects to non-union workers. A robust conversation with labor unions about the content of the policy could have surfaced key areas of opposition and given People’s Budget Cleveland the opportunity to adjust the policy by, say, naming a dedicated source of public funding or reducing the allocation amount. In the end, with ballot initiative language that left their concerns unaddressed, several unions campaigned against the amendment with with spending, door knocking, and public opposition. In Cleveland, lingering memories of the 2008 recession and subsequent 10% across-the-board cuts to city department budgets instilled fear. Because of these concerns and other political considerations, the unions joined the city council and the business community to oppose the ballot initiative.

Opposition messages insinuated that participatory budgeting’s implementation would compromise public safety, with claims suggesting a shortage of ambulances if the ballot passed. People’s Budget Cleveland called this argument “fear-mongering” since it willfully ignored that half the annual participatory budgeting allocation could come from the capital

budget, and instead assumed the worst possible outcome – that participatory budgeting’s impact on the budget would negatively affect basic services.

Even the Mayor and four city council members who had initially supported using participatory budgeting for ARPA funds opposed the ballot initiative, balking at the \$14 million price tag, a significant increase from the \$5.5 million they had once supported, and the fact that the charter amendment was permanent, rather than a one-time pilot. This lack of support disappointed People’s Budget Cleveland, who felt that members of the council who co-sponsored participatory budgeting legislation made little effort to move this work forward once ARPA legislation failed.



After an intense four-month campaign that included mailings, door knocking, deep canvassing, phone calls, texts, house parties, and debates, the votes were in. The ballot initiative lost by only 1,387 votes, less than 2% of the electorate in Cleveland. The closeness of the vote, despite an intense and expensive opposition campaign, which spent more than \$300,000, nearly double the People’s Budget Cleveland’s expenditures, speaks to the deep desire of the people of Cleveland to have a say in their government. Despite this loss, the campaign gave Clevelanders a transformative opportunity to rethink the status quo of local policymaking and the relationship between residents and their local government. It created a lasting civic effect by empowering residents to mobilize and advocate for the change they want to see, propose innovative solutions, and demand space for community voices and robust public participation in city budgeting and policymaking.

LESSONS IN BUILDING A PEOPLES BUDGET MOVEMENT

The campaign had its successes, such as getting the charter amendment on the ballot, even if the ultimate goal has yet to be achieved. With it comes some lessons that can be built on and that other organizers and coalitions can learn from.

People are hungry for a say in their government.

Despite a well-funded opposition campaign, the ballot initiative lost by less than 2% of votes. This speaks to how much everyday people want to participate in their democracy. Never underestimate how much people want change.

Communication is key.

While organizers had kept open channels with council members and the new mayor during the ARPA campaign, People's Budget Cleveland did not open lines of communication with unions, whose opposition was key to defeating the ballot initiative. People don't like to be the bearer of bad news, so never assume that silence means everything is fine. Keep checking in.

If you build it, they will come.

PB CLE/People's Budget Cleveland took a hit and kept fighting. Instead of accepting defeat after the initial ARPA loss, they built a stronger coalition by reaching out to friends and allies, taking an idea, and building a movement.

Participatory budgeting works best with a dedicated revenue stream.

Most budgets are tight. Allocating a piece of it and asking for a different approach to decision-making can feel threatening to city departments and workers who are already scrambling to make every dollar count, especially if there is a lack of clarity on how that money will be spent or if there are no guardrails to protect existing jobs.

Prepare for opposition.

Most people who have power don't want to share it – and will act accordingly. The level of anger and outrage by some electeds at the thought of participatory budgeting took even some organizers by surprise. The reality is that too often, people are in power for the wrong reasons or have become so used to the status quo that they perceive any kind of change as a threat. When possible, reach out and keep communication channels open to blunt this reaction. And when necessary, prepare to fight.

Don't get trapped in adversarial relationships.

Keep talking and don't give up. We know relationship-building is important, and it's doubly important with powerful people who disagree with us. Reach out, have coffee, listen. Find some common ground whenever possible, and remind them who you are fighting for – those with the least power and who are the most underserved. A "no" is the beginning of the conversation, not the end.

Engage with people outside your bubble – especially unions.

We all have our bubbles, and it becomes too easy to listen only to people who agree with us when time is tight. But time and again, we have seen promising campaigns wither and die as a result of union opposition. We can never take union support for granted, and we should always listen to their concerns with open hearts – they often have unique insights.

You can ignite everyday people when you challenge elite power.

Developing a broad framework around power unites people. Many Clevelanders voted for participatory budgeting despite all the negative campaigning and fear-mongering because they understood that this was about pushing back against elite power.

The movement to build a people's budget in Cleveland is ongoing. The issues it has raised about the insularity of the Cleveland city government and the importance of providing everyday Clevelanders with a voice and role in the budgetary decision-making process remain. Despite the painful, narrow defeat of the ballot measure, a coalition now exists that did not before, and it has an agenda and a deep awareness that the residents of Cleveland are hungry for participatory democracy.

Following the campaign, People's Budget Cleveland spent six months reflecting and strategizing. The coalition decided to focus its next steps on launching a six-month participatory budgeting pilot in which residents of a Cleveland neighborhood generate ideas, develop proposals, and then vote to allocate \$100,000 or more towards one or two specific community-based projects. They feel this is one of the best ways to make the long-term case for bringing participatory budgeting to Cleveland. People's Budget Cleveland has expanded the coalition of groups supporting this new goal and has raised \$150,000 to implement it. In September 2024, People's Budget Cleveland elected a new steering committee to lead this next phase of work.

While the ballot initiative campaign lost, there have been many gains. Residents now understand what participatory budgeting is and that it's possible to have a direct voice in their government. Alliances have been built that can be used in the next fight. PB CLE/ People's Budget Cleveland showed what a disciplined campaign looked like and what it could accomplish. They took the slogan, "Streets Over Stadiums," and touched a nerve. They expanded the political imagination of Clevelanders, pointing out that the government could and should make different choices that better served its people. People got involved and canvassed for the first time, learning valuable skills, and organizers now have concrete data to use for the next fight.

Perhaps more importantly, the city government of Cleveland has been put on notice by the people of Cleveland. The mayor's team and city council members have started hosting community forums on the budget. People demand a greater say in their government. They want to stop funding projects and initiatives that make the rich richer while leaving the rest of Cleveland behind. They want good schools, smooth roads, and a safe city – for everyone. They want an economic system

that works for everyday people. One way to give them a voice is through participatory budgeting, but that is just one tool in a host of different ways that Cleveland can engage in participatory democracy. There is a hunger for change, and the people of Cleveland must now decide how they want to move forward. Do they want to try again with participatory budgeting? The choice is theirs.

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