



## City Administrator & Staff Update

2023.01.27

- **Gear Avenue Trail Tentative Timeline:**

- Concept Statement to DOT – March 21, 2023
- Preliminary Plans – April 18, 2023
- Check Plans – June 6, 2023
- Final Plans and PDC – July 18, 2023
- Iowa DOT Bid Letting – October 17, 2023

Construction start would largely be left open to the prospective contractor for maximum schedule flexibility and most competitive bids. We'd offer free winter work (don't count working days) in the hopes of attracting a good bridge contractor during a less busy time. Otherwise, the project would have a "Late Start Date" sometime during the 2024 construction season, I would guess June at the latest. So, in a nutshell, I'd see construction starting on the bridge in the winter of 2023-24 with the bulk of the trail construction during the 2024 construction season with completion by November or earlier. Richard Voelker, PE, Snyder, and Associates

- **Community Visioning:** This is an important reminder for Focus Groups Saturday coming up on Feb. 18<sup>th</sup> from 9:00-12:30 at City Hall. It is vital that we all do our best to try and recruit participants from around town to be a part of the focus groups. Ask your friends, family, acquaintances, etc., and then add their names to the list on our Google drive and ask them to sign up on the [Community Visioning Website](#) or use the QR codes provided in the focus group flyer. At the moment, we only have a couple of people signed up, so we really need to push recruitment. Peter Lundgren, Community Visioning (Trees Forever).
  - Attached are the community visioning flyer and an explanation of the focus group day.
- **IISC:** I am preparing the second, more detailed part of the application for the Iowa Institute for Sustainable Communities program. It provides more information about the community and a list of possible projects. Send me your ideas!
- **CIP:** The Draft CIP is pulled together. I need to make some edits, review scoring add a few items, but should have the full draft out to you soon. Next step will be Mayor and Council additions and scoring.

- **Developer:** I was contacted by a regional developer who is still looking to do a multi-res or senior housing project in town. He has identified his top sites and is working finalize a site to submit for tax credits.
- **League:** Please see the attached link to [The recording on the Business Property Tax Credit](#) conversion to a permanent, partial rollback reduction webinar provided by the Iowa League.
- **McClure:** While attending the IGHCP health insurance meeting next week, I am planning to meet with McClure Engineering to discuss their planning services (Comp Plan, Economic Development, etc.).
- **ABB:** ABB confirmed receipt of our demand letter related to the RISE grant repayment. Their CP of Government Relations is reviewing the matter.
- **IWD:** The DOL has sent along the final paperwork for electronic signature for the IWD Apprenticeship program. Hope to have this finalized soon!
- **Mt. Pleasant Street:** The grant application for STBG funding through SEIRPC for the Mt. Pleasant Street Phase 3 project has been submitted. Attached is the application.
- **Articles:** Attached are a couple of articles that may be of interest.
- **Iowa Legislature:** Article attached on the Legislative error related to the rollback.

#### IT (Newberry)

- This week I am focusing on studying for my upcoming class and exam. I will be taking the CySA+ certification at the end of the class. This will also give me an additional stackable certificate called the CompTIA Security Infrastructure Expert. I also had to fix one of my computers that I will be using in class this week. Class will be from February 6 – 10. I have included links to the certifications I will hopefully obtain under useful links. I am also working on a ATAK server for natural disaster using prototypes I have built in the event of a natural disaster. I will see if emergency management wants to use it when I am complete. ATAK was released by the Department of Defense for situational awareness in disasters of all types. I will include a link to ATAK with a video to explain it. I have been wanting to build a prototype for a long time and I am finally doing it. If they don't use it will be good information for myself as I am building off grid communication prototypes for use in natural disasters. I also checked on backups this week to ensure proper restoration. The backups all passed and booted. I will try to get analytics out next weekly update for the website.
- Definitions
  - **Android Team Awareness Kit (ATAK)** is an [Android](#) smartphone geospatial infrastructure and military [situation awareness](#) app. It allows for precision targeting, surrounding land formation intelligence, situational awareness, navigation, and data sharing. This Android app is a part of the larger TAK family of products
  - **Stackable Certificate** – Is obtained by completing several certifications. In this case I will have obtained the CompTIA Cysa+, Pentest+, Security +, and CASP+ certifications required to obtain this stackable certification.

- Useful links about the CySA+ Certification
  - <https://www.comptia.org/certifications/cybersecurity-analyst#:~:text=CySA%2B%20focuses%20on%20the%20candidates,daily%20work%20of%20security%20analysts>
- About the CompTIA Security Infrastructure Expert
  - <https://www.credly.com/org/comptia/badge/comptia-infrastructure-security-expert-csie-stackable-certification>
- ATAK Videos
  - <https://youtu.be/CSbLibPAcQk>
  - <https://www.dhs.gov/medialibrary/assets/videos/22957>

### **Police (Logan)**

- A couple of us went out to Sioux City on Monday, they went live with Flex about 5 months ago. It was very beneficial for us to make that trip. We learned several things on how to make the transition smoother. We are in the middle of training the Officer's on different portions of the system.
- I did order a new UHF radio for the new car, but the E911 will pay for it. They set aside \$5,000 for each department every year for purchases of new radios, and with our UHF radios being 15-20 plus years old I want to start replacing them when I can.
- Applications on Indeed are closing on January 31. We have about 10 of them that came in that way. I do have 1 certified officer that applied, but currently we do not have an opening.

### **Building/Fire (Ryan)**

- Nuisances – 321 Ramsey was resolved.
- Building Permits and Licenses: Permits caught up. Permit issued for commercial expansion of storage.
- Code Review - Reviewing garage application on Brushtown Road. Replied to questions regarding renovations at a local business. Replied to email regarding business' desire to use temporary structure and questions on engineering studies.
- Rental Inspections –
- Alcohol -
- Fire Dept –
  - Engine 1 – had looked at for communications port issue on motor. Centre State will be able to do the work and it is all under warranty.
  - Had new extrication equipment on E1 inspected. All is good, no issues. (Yearly maintenance by 3<sup>rd</sup> party)
  - Developing training for upcoming RIT (Rapid Intervention Team – aka, firefighter rescue) and Art of Reading Smoke courses for our department.
  - Had one member take and pass his EMT. He paid for this on his own.

- Have a second member taking the EMT class and is also paying for it on their own.
- The new engine was clipped in a call assisting Burlington with a structure fire. Burlington will do the report. This happened late afternoon on 1/26, more info to come.

### **Public Works (Brissey)**

- Water lab
- Sewer lab
- Lift station rounds
- Parks and Broadway trash and recycling
- Locates
- Service trucks and squad cars
- Working on new budget
- Still working on issues with water tower.
- Sign maintenance
- Cleaning up at sewer plant
- Hauling sand and rock
- Patching
- VFD at south lift is going to be covered by warranty getting installed this week.
- 2 pool pumps, 1 pump in west 3 lift station are back and installed and 1 pump in east lift station pulled and being repaired.
- Trimming brush around town
- Plowing snow
- Training classes
- Backhoe and dump truck training for new higher.



# An Invitation to Participate



## ...In Designing Your Community

WEST BURLINGTON is participating in the 2023 Community Visioning Program. Iowa State University is gathering information from community members to learn your opinions on how to improve the community's landscape through transportation enhancements. Your input is an important part of this process and your ideas about community design and enhancement are valuable to the West Burlington Visioning Committee.

### Join a Focus Group at our Feb 18<sup>th</sup> Workshop

Residents are invited to share their ideas regarding transportation opportunities and needs in West Burlington in a small group setting. The Workshop will be held at West Burlington City Hall, 122 Broadway Street.

Register for one of six focus groups:

- Group 1 – Older Adults: 9:00 – 10:00 am
- Group 2 – Mobility Challenged: 9:00 – 10:00 am
- Group 3 – Parents: 10:15 – 11:15 am
- Group 4 – Youth 12 and Under: 10:15 – 11:15 am
- Group 5 – Youth 13 and Older: 10:15 am – 11:15 pm
- Group 6 – Active Recreationalists: 11:30 am – 12:30 pm

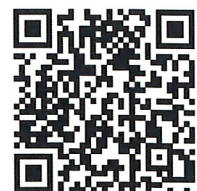
Early Registration  
is encouraged.

To participate in one of the focus groups, go to:

[www.communityvisioning.org/west-burlington/](http://www.communityvisioning.org/west-burlington/) and click on the Public Input button or register using the QR Codes below. You will also need to complete the Participation Consent Form. Early Registration is encouraged.

Adult Consent Form

Parent-Child Consent Form



### For more information contact....

West Burlington City Administrator Gregg Mandsager

Phone: 1-319-752-5451

Email: [mandsagerg@westburlington.org](mailto:mandsagerg@westburlington.org)

Dated: 1/26/23



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Extension and Outreach



# Visioning and Focus Groups

West Burlington is one of 10 communities participating in the 2023 Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning Program, the goal of which is to develop a transportation enhancement plan that graphically illustrates the vision of West Burlington residents. Funded by the Iowa Department of Transportation, the Community Visioning Program uses a participatory approach to assist community leaders and volunteers in making sound and meaningful decisions about their local landscape. Part of this process involves obtaining input from residents on how they use the transportation system in West Burlington, compiling the information we collect, and presenting it to the West Burlington Community Visioning steering committee.

This spring Iowa State University will invite residents from different demographic groups to participate in focus groups at a local venue in West Burlington on Saturday, February 18th from 9-12pm, during which they will identify and map transportation assets and barriers, as well as desired improvements. We will also be conducting a random-sample survey in which we ask adult residents to indicate where they travel in West Burlington, how they travel, and why they choose the routes they take.

A sample schedule for Saturday would look like this:

*Group 1 – Older Adults: 9:00 – 10:00 am*  
*Group 2 – Mobility Challenged: 9:00 – 10:00 am*  
*Group 3 – Parents: 10:15 – 11:15 am*  
*Group 4 – Youth 12 and Under: 10:15 – 11:15 am*  
*Group 5 – Youth 13 and Older: 10:15 am – 10:15 pm*  
*Group 6– Active Recreationalists: 11:30 am – 12:30 pm*  
*Group 7 – Steering Committee: 11:30 am – 12:30 pm*

If you would like to sign up to participate, you can do so online with the following QR codes:

Adult Consent:

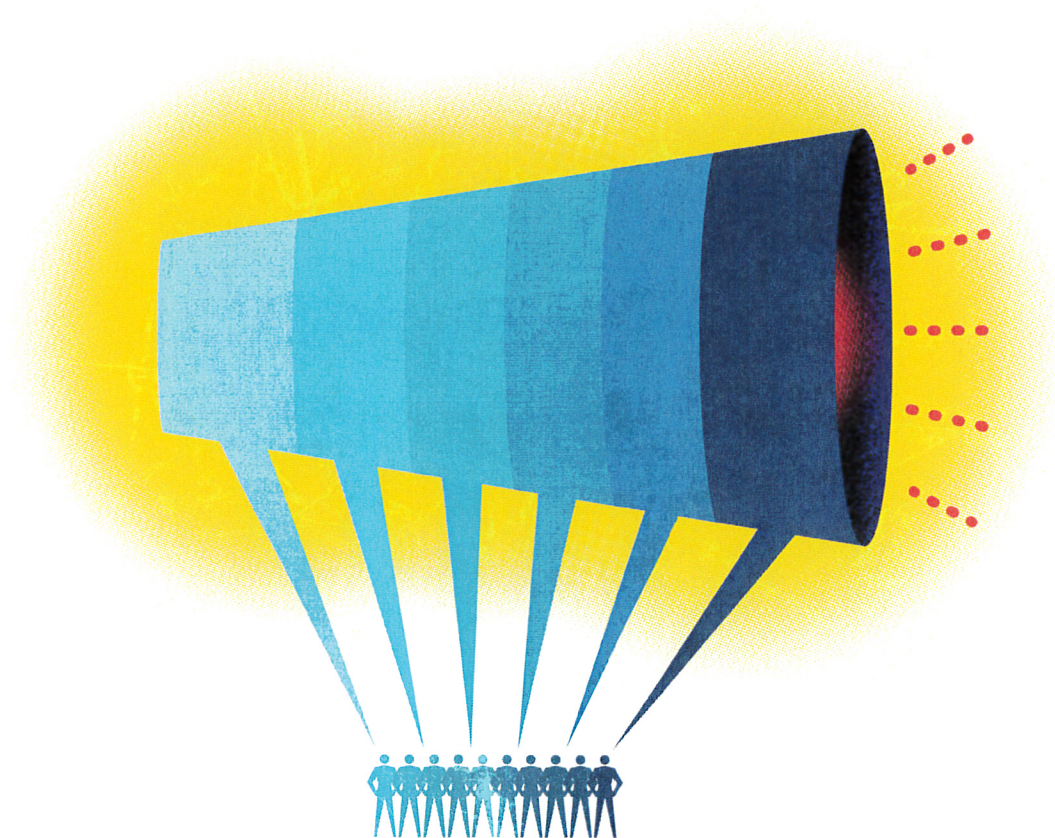


Parental Youth Consent:









## PERSPECTIVE

## Beyond the Town Hall Meeting

Innovations in the Quest for Public Input

BY KATHERINE BARRETT AND RICHARD GREENE



**T**here's no argument about the value of public input in making important government decisions.

According to GFOA, good public participation practices can help governments be more accountable and responsive and can also improve the public's perception of governmental performance and the value the public receives from the government.

But despite their potential, these benefits aren't easy for many communities to achieve. Scores of people have told us that their community's approach to garnering citizen input is limited to holding regular public meetings. That's a popular approach, certainly, and one that's often required

by statute, but it may fall far short of garnering the kind of information leaders can use to make hard decisions.

"We often hear from budget managers that at a budget meeting you have the same relatively small group of people who show up and you already know what their input is going to be before they provide it," says Chris Adams, CEO of Balancing Act, which has worked with over 150 cities to create online budget simulations to help get input from people. "While it's important to give residents that opportunity, it's not always useful."

Even though virtual platforms like Zoom are expanding public meetings to a larger group, they won't necessarily attract people who are representative of the community, especially those who



live in less affluent areas and have long felt disenfranchised by their governments. "Localities have to do a better job of identifying what the makeup of their community really is to reach out to them. And public meetings haven't typically delivered that kind of representation," said Daniel Bevarly, founder and principal of New Democracy Partners and an adjunct professor at Florida State University.

Fortunately, a growing number of local governments are reaching out to the public to draw opinions from a far more representative population than what's often described as "the usual gang of suspects."

Consider Roseville, California, a city with more than 140,000 residents. Roseville was confronting a \$10 million structural deficit and had been borrowing from reserves to make its budget whole. After about 10 years of budget cuts, along with adjustments to compensation and service, "we had done everything we could do without the public noticing," Megan Scheid, Roseville deputy city manager, said. "We had to get public input to help us prioritize."

The solution? "We sent postcards to every one of the 60,000 households in the city," Scheid recalled. "We wanted to make sure the outreach effort allowed residents to access ways to communicate with us, whether they had a lot of time or a little time, whether they were comfortable speaking at a public meeting or not, whether they were comfortable with electronic communications or not."

Roseville offered citizens the opportunity to make their sentiments known with input from Balancing Act's budget simulator and another vehicle created by FlashVote, a company that provides easy surveying on any topic, from any communications device. The city made it clear to residents that there were consequences attached to every cut they made. If they chose to take money from parks, for example, it was made clear that choice might affect the quality of play on sports fields.

The results were startling. "We heard from the community that they wanted an opportunity to raise revenue rather than make additional cuts," Scheid

Even though virtual platforms like Zoom are expanding public meetings to a larger group, they won't necessarily attract people who are representative of the community.



said. So, the city council put a measure on the ballot for an additional half-cent in the local sales tax. "We were sweating it because the cuts available were those we didn't want to have to make." When the voters approved the measure, the city was able to preserve its existing service levels and even expand in priority areas like parks and public safety.

Resident input can be used not just to help with broad guidance on a budget but also to help get community members to weigh in on very specific issues.

The City of Asheville, North Carolina, for example, had problems in a neighborhood that enjoyed a lush canopy of beautiful old trees—but the roots from those trees were creating dangerous problems for pedestrians because they were causing the sidewalks to buckle. "The roots were big, and it looked like plate tectonics, where the sidewalk had buckled up," Dawa Hitch, communication and public engagement director for Asheville, said. "This was a real issue for people walking with their kids and with strollers, and things needed to change so they could have a safer experience."

Still, while the pedestrians were concerned about safe walking, others in the neighborhood wanted to do anything they could to preserve the tree canopy. A bond issue would cover the remediation of the sidewalks, but how could that be done in a way that would please the most people?

A public survey was released in the summer of 2019, leading to the production of some early concept sketches showing alternatives. That was followed up with a public meeting in October 2021, and in January 2022 there was a neighborhood meeting, followed by yet another survey to clarify the community's preferences.

Three options evolved:

1. Replace the existing sidewalk on both sides with a six-foot-wide sidewalk, remove the trees, add curb extensions, and then plant trees in yards to replace the trees that would be removed.
2. Replace the existing sidewalk on only one side, removing the trees from that side only, coupled with saving the healthy trees on the other side and planting additional ones to help replace the lost canopy.
3. Create a four-foot-wide sidewalk on both sides and then add a two-foot grass strip between the curb and the new sidewalk while preserving the existing trees where possible and replacing those that would have to be removed with new ones in the grass buffer strip.

Of the 378 responses received, 89 percent chose option three. As of mid-September, the city was heading in that direction, though it was still open to further comments. The results were widely publicized so anyone who had



voiced an opinion knew that they had been heard in the decision-making process. “Public trust is such a fragile thing,” Hitch said. “Not everyone is happy with every decision, but making it clear how we got to where we are is critical.”

Meanwhile, the City of Oakland, California, has been experimenting with the best way to use its residents’ expertise for the benefit of the city with its innovative “City Challenge Oakland” initiative. This effort—a collaboration between the Oakland Fund for Public Innovation, Mills College at Northeastern University, the Burns Center for Social Change (including its Governance Lab) at Northeastern, and the city government of Oakland—is an attempt to determine several areas in which the expertise of residents could bring real value: homelessness, violent crime, and illegal vehicles/illegal dumping.

City Challenge Oakland engages residents to suggest ways to improve homelessness, violent crime and illegal vehicles/illegal dumping.

The city challenge team designed the process to help residents make suggestions in a way that would allow as many Oaklanders as possible to participate. Questions were posed in plain language with versions in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese. In addition, the City Challenge website was designed to ensure easy accessibility by mobile devices.

“We just asked questions like, ‘What’s your idea and how would it solve the problem? How do you think you’d go about it? Who do you need help from to make it happen?’” Henri Hammond-Paul, a fellow with the Governance Lab, said.

The effort is too new to see the concrete outcomes of the solutions offered, but in terms of participation it was a roaring success—850 Oaklander residents voted on the 237 ideas that were submitted to refine the list to a manageable number.

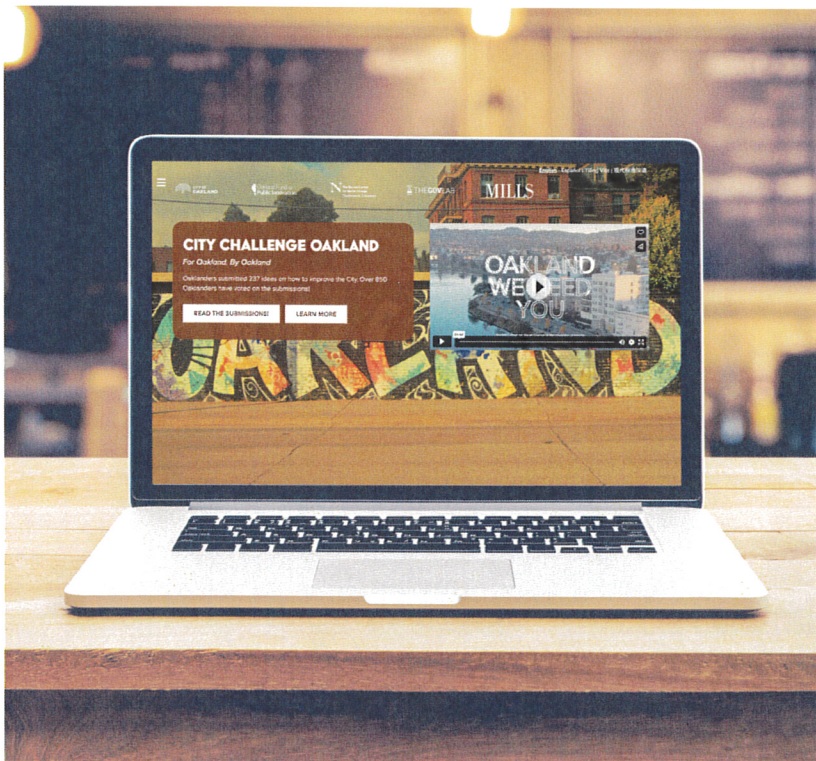
A couple of months ago, the city announced the six suggestions it plans to pilot and potentially scale—in partnership with the individuals who first proposed the idea, where that’s feasible.

One of the winners was based on this suggestion: “A recent analysis of a crime prevention program from Liberia found that providing therapy and cash assistance to young men at high risk of violent crime dramatically decreased the chance that they would commit violent crimes, even 10 years later. We could replicate this program here in Oakland, working through the Department of Violence Prevention, which is already connected to these young men.”

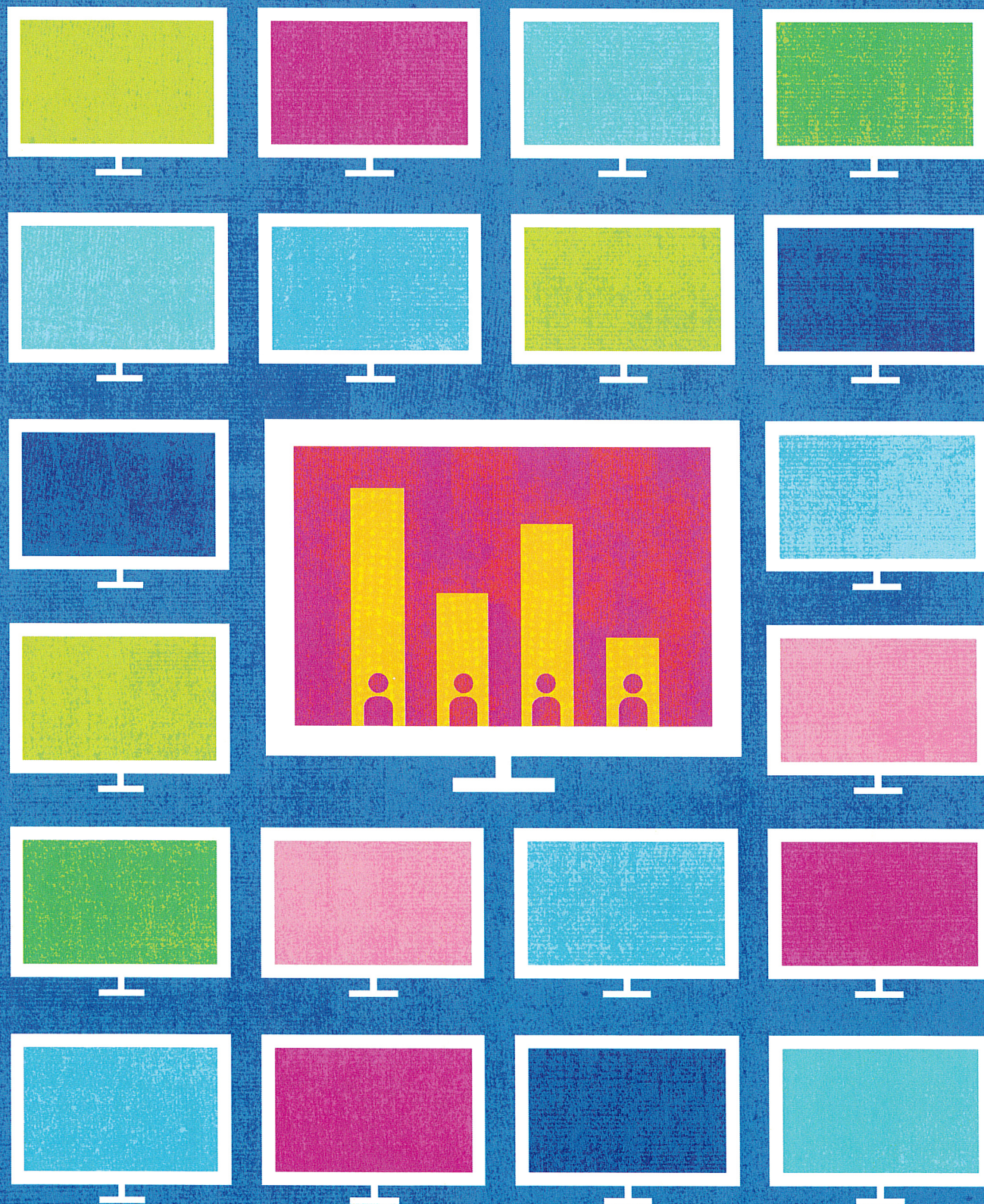
Beth Simone Noveck is a professor at Northeastern University, where she directs the Burnes Center for Social Change. She’s one of the nation’s leading authorities on getting input from residents and has worked with us to assemble a list of eight proven practices for this important exercise. They are as follows:

1. Start by figuring out exactly what you want to know, who wants to know it, and how you plan to use the information.
2. Determine the formats that are easiest for you and for those who are participating.
3. Pick a platform that enables the process you need. You don’t necessarily need complicated or expensive tools with lots of bells and whistles.
4. Residents don’t just have opinions; they have expertise that you can tap.
5. Be clear about precisely what you’re looking for—for example, proposals that can be implemented in a year.
6. It’s important to tell the people how their input will be used. People participate when they feel their participation matters.
7. It’s not enough to create an opportunity to engage. You must advertise the opportunity, especially to those who are least likely to participate.
8. Resident engagement about ways to solve a problem can also include professional engagement such as with experts at universities or your own workplace.

**Katherine Barrett and Richard Greene** are principals of Barrett and Greene, Inc ([greenebarrett.com](http://greenebarrett.com)), and are co-authors of the recently released *Making Government Work: The Promises and Pitfalls of Performance-Informed Management*.









# The Benefits of Budget Engagement

How budget simulations helped Syracuse City School District gain community input

BY CHRIS ADAMS

The Syracuse City School District (SCSD), accustomed to tight budgets and advocating to legislators for more funding, recently found itself in an unfamiliar position: It had more money than it could spend.

The extra dollars were due to an influx of pandemic federal stimulus grants plus staffing challenges that left more than 350 vacancies this past spring, from a normal district employment of over 5,000 people. Without enough staff, it was impossible to launch new programs, leaving \$22 million in unspent stimulus dollars planned for use in 2021-22 to carry over to the current school year. "We don't usually have any money here in Syracuse, so we're in this strange space where we have money, and we can't spend it," Chief Financial Officer Suzanne Slack said.

In response, SCSD set out this summer to gather community feedback on how to prioritize the uses of its \$157 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) funds, allocated over three years.

While these budget circumstances were unusual, what wasn't unusual was how frequently SCSD's leaders sought public input on their budget decisions. Rather than simply check a box in their budget process with an in-person public meeting that might attract only a couple of people, SCSD makes regular use of online budget engagement, in a variety of circumstances and across a broad spectrum of stakeholders—and gains significant benefits in the process.

These benefits include increased contextual understanding of how the budget works, greater trust built from learning about funding constraints, more accountability from district leaders in their funding decisions, and more empathy from raising awareness of the consequences of

budget decisions, such as how they specifically affect students, families, teachers, and staff.

The combination of budget simulation tools and broad outreach to increase participation in the exercises "has really changed things here," Slack said. "There's a very simple way to explain these numbers that are huge and overwhelming to the public," she said, and budget simulations transform the engagement process so "it's not a math problem, it's an operational decision-making tool."

## SEEKING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The public expects a certain level of data accessibility, and those expectations are on the rise everywhere, from personal banking to federal taxes. SCSD is meeting that trend in schools through increased budget transparency—but while it is increasingly important to get the public's input on the budget, Slack said, it's also increasingly difficult. Before the district started



using online budget simulation tools, she had never had more than two people come to a budget hearing—in a city of 141,000 people.

One of the five largest districts in the state, SCSD is funded by a combination of local, state, and federal funds, with local and state funds appropriated each year from the City of Syracuse and the State of New York. Because it is one of the larger districts, the city council votes on SCSD's budget, and it doesn't need to be approved by a vote of residents.

While this might seem to make the jobs of Slack and Director of Budget Mary Habib easier, they don't want to gloss over budget engagement. Rather, they are strong advocates for it. "Really, it's all about the planning," Slack said, "and although the two of us could do our budget very quickly and very easily, tell the superintendent, and get approval, what really matters is that this is a budget for the people. It's for the kids in this community."

About five years ago, they started searching for ways to bridge the gap. One idea was to have a mock vote, with taxpayers coming out one day to vote on the school budget and share feedback, but it generated only a small amount of

feedback for a lot of effort. Another idea was a manual game played with small groups, which produced great feedback but had limited reach.

Then, in 2018, they started using an online budget tool to gather community input on the annual budget, asking residents, "How would you balance the budget?" and encouraging participation with the slogan, "Your voice counts!"

### SEEKING IDEAS FOR FEDERAL STIMULUS MONEY

When the pandemic hit in 2020, making in-person meetings more difficult, SCSD added regular CoVideo chats to continue engagement with students, staff, families, and the community during the shutdown. They also used this platform to provide outreach related to the budget simulations.

Now, with stimulus funds carried over for the 2022-23 school year, SCSD wanted creative ideas for those funds, such as how to address learning loss, add more robust tutoring programs, and implement its plan for a virtual school. "I think those are new, big things that the public would be interested in," Slack said, "and I'd like to have the public voting on them."

For this effort, SCSD used the online budgeting tool to gather input during June and July on the best uses for its year 2 and 3 stimulus funds of \$91 million. The ARPA Planning Year 2 simulation invites visitors to consider 27 funding priorities, individually or by subcategories. A few examples of the 27 priorities include free dental clinics, student laundry service, classroom technology, computer network upgrades, virtual high school, and paid parent partners. If participants want to consider the priorities as subcategories, they can look at social emotional supports, acceleration of instruction, technology, physical health and safety, and professional development.

The district used social media, its website, and radio advertisements to ask: "Would you like to see the SCSD spend more on mental health supports? How about SCSD Office of Family Engagement events, gatherings, or giveaways? Should we offer virtual high school, or upgrade our district's technology? Would you like to see us offer free dental clinics, student laundry service, or added security screenings? We need your input to help us decide how to invest American Rescue Plan Act funding over the next two years! Take just a few minutes to select your top priority areas and rank them. Your suggestions will help shape our funding decisions!"

After participants chose their top 10 priorities, they could rank them by importance. The simulation also encouraged participants to enter comments throughout and add any additional feedback on the exit questionnaire. The aggregated data showed priorities for program planning and comments that could be mined for common words and ideas to further refine strategies for the funds.

Participants in the simulation generated 1,378 pageviews and 387 submissions, with a 28 percent submission rate. They ranked mental health supports at the top, followed by social-emotional learning curriculum, and access to resources for homeless students and families.

"What really matters is that this is a budget for the people. It's for the kids in this community."

SUZANNE SLACK, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER,  
SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT





ARPA PLANNING  
YEAR 2 SIMULATION  
BY THE NUMBERS

27

Funding Priorities

1,378

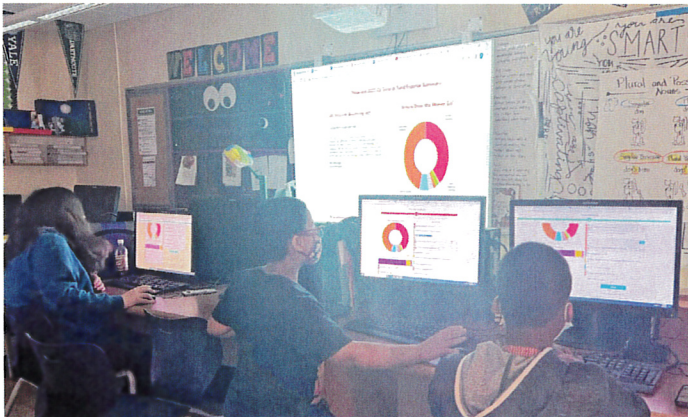
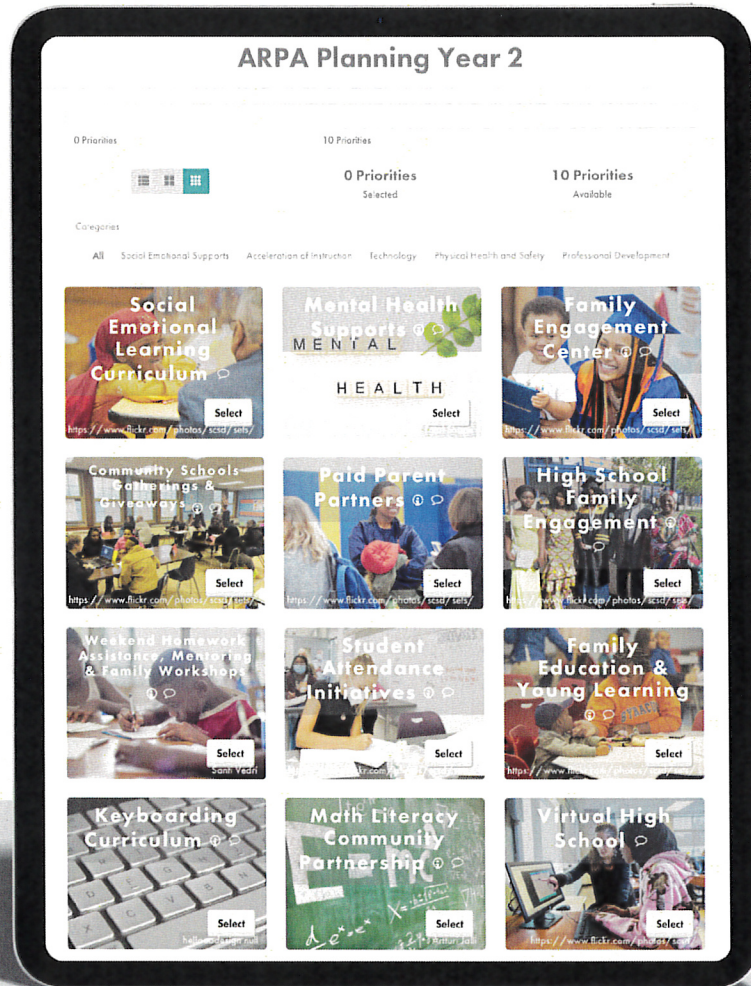
Pageviews

387

Submissions

28%

Submission Rate





## POSITIVE IMPACTS FROM BUDGET ENGAGEMENT

While engagement with the annual budget is the primary way the district uses budget simulations, the district budget leaders haven't stopped there. Internally, they've used the district budget simulation with large groups of teachers and principals, giving them an opportunity to help shape the budget, taking costs and limited resources into account. They also brought the budget simulation to the social studies curriculum director to incorporate into civics classes and get a perspective from young people on how best to spend limited tax dollars—and in an interesting twist, they implemented participatory budgeting (designating a small pot of money that stakeholders can directly allocate) to help seven schools identify and vote on projects to spend \$5,000 at the building level. Participatory budgeting is now part of the district's civics curriculum.

Over the course of these different uses, Slack and Habib have identified these benefits of budget engagement for school districts:

### Enable richer participation.

By providing an interactive online budget within a framework of ideas, participants can respond to a set of ideas and serve as editors rather than carrying the burden of creating solutions.

### Iterate more easily over time.

Rather than using public engagement on the budget only to compare and critique data from one year to the next, participants are helping district leadership refine strategies and generate new ideas.

### Gain qualitative as well as

**quantitative feedback.** While quantitative information is the first information gathered, qualitative information also yields a significant value, with the comments from participants carrying a lot of weight. For example, in a discussion on mental health services, comments indicated that rather than adding more nurses to schools, more social workers or psychiatrists/psychologists would have more impact.

### Generate community empathy and

**buy-in.** In one example, participants gained an understanding of the way charter schools are funded, and rather than recommend more state aid to combat a shortfall, they instead searched for ways to trim spending. "That's a huge shift in what we've seen people do in the past," Habib said. Effective communication includes nuance. An online tool that reaches a broad audience and is interactive and visually appealing makes it easier for people to digest budget categories and share ideas and opinions.

**Identify holes in the strategy.** By using keywords to mine the comments on budgets, Habib and Slack can see what might be missing in programming strategies.

### Develop civic-minded students.

By incorporating budget simulations in the civics curriculum, the next generation is graduating with more knowledge and skills as citizens who will vote and participate in their communities.

### Empower internal decision-making.

Sharing tools with principals and teachers makes it possible for district employees to use them for different stakeholder groups to make their voices heard, which is more meaningful than top-down decision-making.

**Reduce emotional reactivity.** Rather than relying on a narrow segment of voices, budget simulation exercises help communities solve community-wide problems in constructive, less emotionally charged ways.

**Ease long-range planning.** Paper budgets make it harder to look far into the future, but simulations help demonstrate options and the results that could be expected from various decisions, such as preparing for major budget shortfalls from declining enrollment or allocating one-time funding sources.

With budget engagement now a regular part of the process at SCSD, Habib and Slack are looking forward to reviving in-person meetings for added impact. "I am hopeful that we're back in person soon for these types of meetings where we get the community together to do a simulation together," Slack says. "But I will never give up on the virtual option because it reaches the masses." ■

*Chris Adams is president of Denver, Colorado-based public engagement software company Balancing Act and has worked in public policy and facilitation for more than 25 years. He is also a Senior Fellow at the University of Colorado School of Public Affairs.*

Effective communication includes nuance. An online tool that reaches a broad audience and is interactive and visually appealing makes it easier for people to digest budget categories and share ideas and opinions.

