

From Demands to Deliberation: Participatory Budgeting in Pittsburgh

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In 2015, the City of Pittsburgh partnered with several community organizations to design and pilot a unique model of PB tailored to best meet its needs. As a result of this effort, the City implemented Deliberative Community Budget Forums as a more engaging and inclusive method for soliciting public input on the 2016 Capital Budget. This paper seeks to evaluate the impact of the Deliberative Forums on the quality and level of community participation, deliberation, and engagement, as well as measure outcomes in the budget. Data collected from the 2014 Community Budget Hearings are used as a baseline for comparison. The study found the forums led to considerable quantitative and qualitative improvements in the budget process with respect to public participation and deliberation, and increased general knowledge of the budget and political engagement among participants. The study also determined areas where the forums could be improved, particularly in regards to diversity and political voice. The impact of the forums on the Capital Budget were not able to be determined. At the end, several key recommendations to address these issues are made. This paper concludes by briefly summarizing the findings of the study and discussing their positive implications for the future of the forums as an effective alternative form of PB in Pittsburgh and possibly in the United States.

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PREFACE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This introduction covers the basis of participatory budgeting and its practice around the world, its theoretical foundations within Deliberative Democracy, and the importance of the principles underlying it therein as discussed in the literature. An overview of the model of participatory budgeting designed and implemented in Pittsburgh is also provided. The introductory chapter leads into the details of the empirical studies presented later in this paper together with an in-depth review of the findings from the baseline and evaluation, respectively.

1.1 WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) broadly describes any process which grants a general population greater say in deciding how to allocate resources. Naturally, there is no single “standard” model of PB, but that is not to say that there aren’t any unifying principles or certain fundamental elements that collectively define how it works in both theory and practice (Wampler, 2012). Distilled to an atomic level, the formula for PB essentially entails openly inviting ordinary people to convene in public spaces where they are provided resources to collaboratively and communicatively make collective allocations decisions on a budget. Ultimately, the motivation behind PB is to improve a budgeting process to be more inclusive, engaging, and transparent so that allocations decisions are thereby more equitable, efficient, and legitimate (Wampler, 2012; Hartz-Karp 2012).

Although scholars often cite the origins of PB as beginning in 1989 when it was implemented in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Ernesto Ganuza; Goldfrank, 2012), its larger history extends back much further to the New England Town Hall Meeting (Brian Wampler, 2012).

Despite their many similarities, PB is usually considered as a separate and relatively modern institution most often characterized by the model used in Porto Alegre, where citizens gather in local and city-wide assemblies to set and vote on spending priorities for a part of the city's budget.

Today, there are over 1500 cities and institutions implementing PB around the world (Ernesto Ganuza, 2012). This includes a handful of cities in the United States that have only recently begun implementing PB on a district or city-wide level, most notably New York, Chicago, and Vallejo, California. The expansion of PB in the United States and abroad is likely to continue, as institutions such as the White House, World Bank, and United Nations are promoting it as a means of democratizing public finance and as a “best practice” for “good governance,” and are encouraging governments to find ways to adopt and adapt it to their local needs (Goldfrank). As PB has diffused around the world as both an idea and a “malleable” set of institutions, it has seen consistent change and innovation. This has led to a fundamental transformation of PB from a series of concrete institutional reforms into an ambiguous and broadly appealing political “device” capable of improving local governance and restoring trust in government (Ernesto Ganuza, 2012).

1.2 WHY PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING MATTERS

A history of PB around the world has led to a growing body of empirical research that has found several important pragmatic benefits associated with its practice. One of the more surprising findings is the fact that extensive opportunities for direct political participation lead to lower tax evasion and higher intrinsic motivation to pay taxes, even more so than traditional deterrence measures (Torgler, 2007; Cabannes, 2004). The rationale behind this is that taxpayers are more inclined to contribute if they perceive that their interests and preferences are properly represented by political institutions and if they have a better understanding of how public funds are spent.

PB has also been found to increase efficiency as it encourages a more targeted and evidence-based allocation of resources while reducing corruption and fiscal irresponsibility

(Schneider & Goldfrank, 2002; Zamboni, 2007). Moreover, PB improves the quality and delivery of public services, and tends to increase pro-poor investments (Baiocchi, et al., 2005; World Bank, 2008; Cabannes, 2015). Participatory civic engagement in processes such as PB which build social capital have long been found to increase trust in institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Keele, 2007; Tampubolon, 2010), and there is clear evidence that PB can help reduce barriers to implementation regarding budget decisions made collaboratively (Cabannes, 2004). In effect, drawing in citizen political participation requires an initial government investment but can pay dividends later, producing both tangible and intangible benefits.

Given these findings, it is obvious why governments have been eager to experiment with PB. Beyond this, however, there are a number of more specific reasons why PB interests individual actors such as politicians, policymakers, and community members alike. As Wampler notes, PB can achieve several different aims, and as such “motivations range from wanting to have one’s own street paved to wanting to create a deliberative public sphere” (2007). For politicians, PB has strong potential to build a base for political support, and has been cited as a key factor in helping elected officials involved in the process win office or re-election (Wampler, 2007). In particular, PB can expand political support to marginalized groups who are normally excluded from politics, and can subvert entrenched clientelism and political patronage ties within government (Wampler 2007). On the other hand, policymakers embrace PB as a vital source of qualitative and quantitative data (resulting from public judgment) that enables a smarter allocation of resources (as discussed before), and as a helpful method for educating the public on formal budgetary matters and procedures as well as general political knowledge.

Ordinary citizens, too, have many reasons to participate in a PB process. Perhaps the most important reason citizens are supportive of PB is that it affords them greater direct access to public decision-making procedures. For many people who participate in PB, it is often the first time they had the ability to speak publicly and be heard in a way that their input could actually amount to substantive change. Furthermore, as an open and transparent process, PB reduces the likelihood of back-room deals between private parties and elected officials deciding the budget (Wampler, 2007). A second major reason is that PB provides access to information. Despite the central importance of a public budget in many people’s daily lives (though they might not realize it), hardly anyone aside from a few government officials are aware of even the most basic details. PB thus paves a new way for citizens to learn about policymaking and government procedures

beyond the surface, even gaining an understanding of technical details such as zoning and land-use laws (Wample, 2007).

1.3 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PB

The motivation and principles behind PB stem from a larger theoretical tradition that has begun to take root in democratic theory and political philosophy over the last 20 years, known as deliberative democracy (Cavalier, 2011; Ganuza & Francés, 2011; Dryzek, 2000). The philosophical foundations of deliberative democracy are drawn from the writings of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, who argued for the essentiality of political participation and reasoned political discourse as hallmarks of democratic citizenship (Cavalier, 2011; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Deliberative theorists emphasize open and informed public deliberation as a central method of participatory and sustained democratic governance, and as an effective and egalitarian means of resolving political and moral disagreement among all those who are affected by a decision (Cavalier, 2011; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Fishkin, 2009; Nabatchi 2004; Avritzer 2012; Mathews 2014; Thomas 2014). To clarify, “openness” refers to the inclusion of all perspectives so that everyone affected by a decision has a voice in the discussion, and “informed” refers to the requirement that these discussions are based upon “the best information and arguments available” (Cavalier, 2011). Furthermore, “deliberation” can be defined as “collaborative discourse between diverse participants, which has the potential to influence policy and decision-making” (Brian Wampler, 2012).¹

There is good reason for the recent attention afforded to the role of deliberation in modern political thought. Tina Nabatchi summarizes this best as driven by the strongly supported belief that deliberative civic engagement² “is a potential remedy for the philosophical and

¹ It is essential to note that the notion of ‘deliberation’ is distinguished from simple ‘discussion’ or ‘mere talk,’ as it follows a set of conditions and idealized principles (reciprocity, publicity, accountability, etc.) that must be met in order to consider a discussion as truly “deliberative” (for more on this, see Gutmann & Thompson 1996 and Cavalier 2011).

² Deliberative civic engagement is specifically defined as “processes that enable citizens, civic leaders, and government officials to come together in public spaces where they can engage in constructive, informed, and decisive dialogue about important public issues” (Nabatchi, 2012, p. 7).

practical shortcomings of current governmental practices, including the limitations of voting, the deteriorating ties among citizens and between citizens and government, and the apparent inability of government to address systemic policy problems” (2004). Deliberative democracy also has many perceived advantages over other forms of democracy (Cavalier, 2011), mainly, it is an everyday process of answering “What we ought to do” through mediated public discussions that take us beyond periodic voting and through a process of interpersonal reflection, learning, and understanding as engaged and informed citizens of a democratic society.

As it relates to theory, PB represents one of the most widely used institutional forms of deliberative democracy. By engaging citizens to convene publicly and discuss their preferences for the distribution of scarce resources within a budget, deliberation itself is a critical part of any PB process. However, some models focus more intentionally on it than others as a decision-making procedure. In this regard, two main categories of PB can be conceptually identified: “vote-centric” and “talk-centric.”³ The former more “results-oriented” approach operates primarily by aggregating votes as participants directly determine spending projects, whereas the latter is more of a “consultative” “process-oriented” model, with deliberation aimed at inviting diverse perspectives to have an equal voice on the issue that then informs or contributes to policy and budget decisions (Brian Wampler, 2012; Cavalier, 2011; Gilman 2012).

1.4 THE PITTSBURGH MODEL

In 2015, as the City of Pittsburgh implemented their own model of PB in the form of Deliberative Community Budget Forums for the 2016 Capital Budget. The model of the Deliberative Forums largely parallels that of James Fishkin’s “Deliberative Poll” (Fishkin), but has been uniquely adapted to work within the context of city budgeting in Pittsburgh. The reasons for adopting a “talk-centric” model as described earlier were two-fold. The first was ideological. Organizers involved in designing the forums were concerned that a “vote-centric”

³ Rather than view these as mutually exclusive categories, they might best be interpreted as extremes along a spectrum. This point is important in considering the many valuable applications of voting procedures within deliberative environments, as defended empirically and theoretically by Gerry Mackie and others (Cavalier, 2011).

model presented risks associated with “gaming the vote” (see Poundstone, 2008), and that the likelihood of cooptation of the process by civil society would crowd out representation of marginalized or disenfranchised groups who would benefit most from participating. The second reason was more pragmatic; Pittsburgh simply did not have available discretionary funds that are typically set aside for PB at a district level, as they are in New York City and other U.S. cities. Instead, a city-wide PB process was deemed most appropriate. For this reason, organizers agreed that a more robust deliberative method would prove more manageable given the complexity of prioritizing a multi-million dollar capital budget.

The forums were held on two different dates and locations in June, but they each followed the same general format. First, public announcements circulated by the city’s Office of Community Affairs invited residents and community groups to attend the forums (held in public and widely accessible spaces). Participants were then randomly assigned to sit in one of the available round tables in the room. Trained, volunteer moderators sitting at each table directed participants to read the prepared materials they were provided that explained what the capital budget is and how the budget process worked, as well as the procedure of the forums and how they fit into the overall budgeting process. City officials also prepared a presentation to explain the importance of the forums, and to walk participants through the budget process as they referred back to the documents.

Participants were then asked to introduce themselves to the others in their group, sharing stories on where they lived and worked for example. This was meant to build mutual trust by establishing a sense of familiarity and shared connection among the group. This was followed by a series of deliberations on the Mayor’s priorities for the budget, where participants were asked to consider and discuss what they believed to be of greatest need in their neighborhoods as well as in the city altogether, and whether they thought the Mayor’s priorities reflected those needs. Questions brought up during these deliberations were then asked publicly during a Q&A session with a resource panel composed of the directors of several diverse City departments and divisions.

After all questions had been answered, participants were given time to complete individual surveys where they were asked to evaluate each of the Mayor’s priorities using a kind of range-voting, classifying them as either “Important,” “Somewhat Important,” or “Not Important.” The surveys also asked participants to: suggest new priorities not included in the

Mayor's list, identify the types of projects that they felt needed the most attention in the coming year, as well as identify specific projects that need to be completed in their neighborhood in 2016. A final portion of the survey asked participants to evaluate the efficacy of the forums across a number of key metrics. The information collected from these surveys is the primary source of data analyzed in this study.

There are several motivations behind each aspect of the design of the forums. By asking participants to connect and relate the needs of their neighborhoods with those of the whole city, they were challenged to think of themselves as more than just a member of their immediate communities. The intention was also to create a shared understanding of the issues affecting other residents in different areas of the city. This exchange of perspectives can possibly convince some to reconsider their preferences. Consistent with deliberative theory, this can, together with a better grasp of the budget process and the inherent trade-offs involved, lead to more informed budget decisions and efficient allocation of public funds.

2.0 EVALUATING PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN PITTSBURGH

Independent evaluations of local PB processes contribute to our understanding of the important differences between models used around the world, and help to answer whether those differences lead to new outcomes. This information can lead researchers to discover what works well in each set of circumstances, and allows policymakers to learn from each other's experiences so that improvements can be made. Furthermore, this kind of empirical work plays an essential role in testing the assumptions and expectations that underpin various theoretical models of PB.

This particular study is the first of its kind to evaluate Pittsburgh's pilot PB project. The findings and recommendations from this study are intended for the City of Pittsburgh government and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Deliberative Forums to help guide and improve efforts in the future. However, other readers may also find this research useful as it can help determine whether Pittsburgh's Deliberative Forum model of PB represents a viable alternative to the predominant "vote-centric" model used in other cities and districts throughout the United States.

This section of the paper begins by summarizing the design, methodology and results of the baseline study. This information provides a useful basis for comparison before moving on to the details of the main evaluation, including an in-depth analysis of the data and summary of the results. After discussing the findings of both studies, this paper ends with a list of recommendations and some final concluding remarks.

2.1 BASELINE STUDY

2.1.1 METHODOLOGY

Since PB was implemented in Pittsburgh for the first time in 2015, there was no data available to directly compare the performance or efficacy of the Deliberative Forums. Instead, data gathered on the city's Capital Budget Hearings was used as a baseline. The Capital Budget Hearings were selected to serve as a baseline for comparison because until the forums they were the only direct means by which residents could provide feedback or input on the Capital Budget.

Each year, two hearings were held in the fall to discuss the Capital Budget, after it had already been drafted and presented to City Council and the Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority. At the hearings, city representatives would field questions or comments from the people who attended, one by one, allotting a few minutes per speaker. The city government was already in the process of amending the timeline of the hearings to be held earlier in the budget process when they were first introduced to the idea of PB as a potentially better alternative altogether. The baseline study gathered data from the 2014 Capital Budget Hearings. There were two meetings held in senior recreation centers that year: one in Highland Park and another in Mount Washington. The City of Pittsburgh Office of Management and Budget (OMB) did not keep records on any Capital Budget Hearings prior to 2014, so a comparison of the data from the forums is limited to an analysis of data from only the prior year.

The baseline study focused on several key metrics including participation, quality of deliberation, and budget outcomes. Participation was measured both quantitatively and qualitatively, by looking at the number of people who attended the hearings and the demographics of participants. Registration lists from the hearings that were obtained from the OMB were used to find the number of recorded participants that attended each hearing. Since the OMB did not ask residents to provide information regarding their age, sex, or race, information on the demographics of the participants had to be inferred. Addresses voluntarily provided by participants at the hearings were used to map where most of the residents live. This map was then compared with city data mapping racial diversity and poverty levels across neighborhoods

in Pittsburgh to ascertain whether the participants came from areas of high or low income and whether those areas had high or low racial diversity.

Quality of deliberation concerns the dynamics and nature of discussion and engagement between participants and the city representatives. Specifically, this metric aims to measure whether or not the deliberations were well-structured, informative, and egalitarian. Given that the baseline study was conducted retroactively, this information also had to be inferred since any meaningful data was not collected at the time. The best method of approximating the quality of deliberation was to review the transcripts recorded during both of the Capital Budget Hearings. The written transcripts recorded all of the questions and comments from residents that were brought before the city representatives and discussed. These transcripts were also obtained from the OMB.

The baseline study looked at budget outcomes to determine whether or not any changes had been made to the capital budget as a result of the hearings. This is a way of measuring how much influence residents have in determining how their tax dollars are spent, and whether their participation in the budget process has any real effect. The method for measuring budget outcomes was to examine whether the issues raised during the hearings were addressed in the budget, or whether the priorities of the participants were reflected in the allocation of funds within the budget. This can be nearly impossible to detect from simply looking into the multi-million dollar capital budget, without any insider perspective on what went behind the final decisions and initial drafts. Thus, budget outcomes were measured by interviewing city representatives and hearing testimonials of the effectiveness of the hearings. Each member of city council as well as the director, assistant director, and chief analyst of the OMB were interviewed and asked a number of questions, including whether or not they could comment on the efficacy of the capital budget hearings and the current method of public input and participation in the budget process.

2.1.2 RESULTS

Though the baseline study suffered from a wide array of limitations, an effort was made to glean as much information as possible from the available data that could be useful for the future evaluation of the forums. With that said, there were several important findings worth mentioning here. The findings are broken down into separate sections corresponding to the three main metrics highlighted above, namely: participation, quality of deliberation, and budget outcomes.

2.1.2.1 Participation

The analysis of the baseline data revealed that a total of 68 participants attended the Capital Budget Hearings in 2014. Of the total number of participants, 18 had attended the hearing in Mount Washington while the other 50 went to the hearing in Highland Park. Regarding the first hearing in Mount Washington, 61% of participants provided their address upon registration. Of those who provided this information, most lived in the neighborhood, while only a few came from outside the Mount Washington area. Similarly, of the 44% of participants in the Highland Park hearing that stated their area of residence, a substantial portion came together from the South Side Slopes neighborhood as well as Bloomfield. Figure **2.1** below is a map visualizing this information.

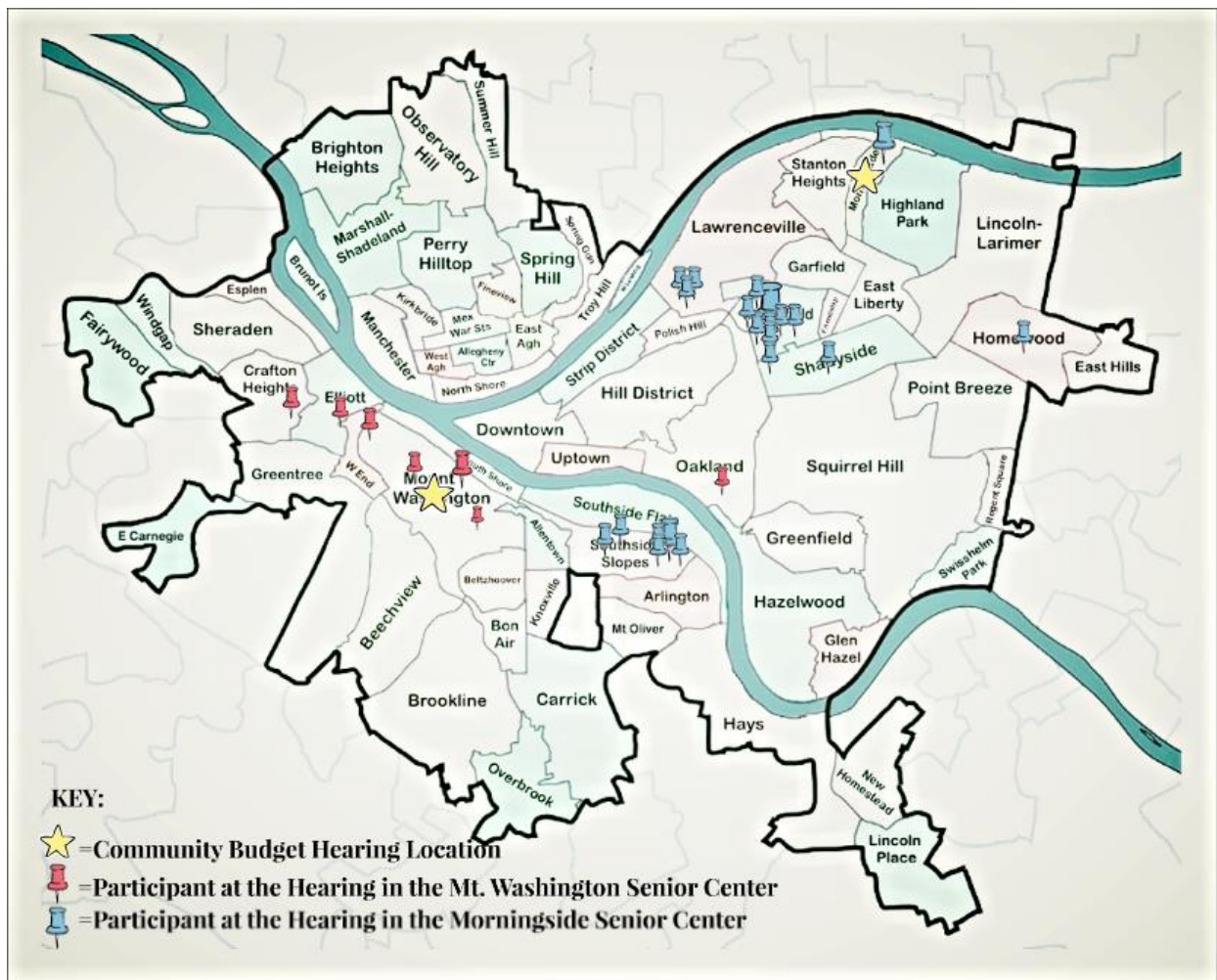


Figure 2.1: Map of participants that attended the 2014 Community Budget Hearings.

This can perhaps be explained by what OMB officials described as an over-representation of interest groups, particularly neighborhood development associations and block watches that organized community residents to attend. It is also worth noting that the Highland Park hearing had attracted an unusually large number of participants—more so than in previous years by a wide margin, according to the OMB. They explained that most hearings in the past were similar to the one held in Mount Washington, where they saw less than 20 people attend. Moreover, the analysis of registration data also showed that most residents came from high-income neighborhoods with little racial diversity. Altogether, the baseline study concluded that the Capital Budget Hearings failed to attract a large number of residents throughout the city, and that they were hardly inclusive enough to be considered a representative sample.

2.1.2.2 Quality of Deliberation

As far as the quality of deliberation is concerned, the analysis found the hearings could not in any way be described as deliberative, let alone discussion-based. Only a minority of the participants that attended either hearing spoke during the event. Those that did believed they were speaking as representatives of their neighborhoods or local communities. After raising their concern, the city representatives would only thank them for their input before calling up the next person in line to speak. This meant that the hearings were essentially a one-way conversation, with little or no back-and-forth dialogue between the city and its residents. Furthermore, residents that attended the hearings also were not asked to formally engage with other participants, leaving little opportunity for sharing perspectives and discovering common needs and values in any substantive way. This lack of deliberation is one the most important findings from the baseline study, as it was a primary consideration in designing the forums and a likely area where the most significant improvement could be observed.

2.1.2.3 Budget Outcomes

Though the hearings were not very effective in encouraging serious deliberation, this may not have made much of a difference in the end. Information gathered through several interviews with city council members and administrative staff within the OMB came to a clear consensus: that the late timing of the hearings at the end of budget process meant they would always have very little effect on the budget. Even if serious issues were raised during the hearings, the city would have had little opportunity to make any big changes, as the budget would already be moving to be finalized by that time. From this, the baseline study determined that the Capital Budget Hearings likely did not result in any substantive changes in the capital budget. As mentioned earlier, this was the main motivation behind policymakers' decision to redesign the hearings and hold them earlier in the budget process when real changes can still be made.

2.2 EVALUATION STUDY

2.2.1 METHODOLOGY

Much of the expected results of this evaluation were informed by deliberative theory, discussed at the beginning of this paper. Theory would suggest that the more robust methods of deliberation of the forums, together with a larger push by the city to invite diverse groups of participants, would result in clearer and more legitimate budget priorities that could then influence real changes in the final budget. Therefore, the central hypothesis of this study was that the newly designed forums were likely to produce positive results across all the metrics measured in the baseline study. Furthermore, given the theoretical effects deliberation is supposed to have on participants' viewpoints and their general knowledge of whatever is being deliberated, this study aimed to measure whether the forums could produce these effects empirically. That is to say, another key metric looked at in the evaluation measured attitudinal and educational outcomes in forum participants, in addition to all of the other metrics mentioned before in the baseline study. If the evaluation did indeed find such broad indicators of improvement, it would mean that the forums can be considered a powerful new tool able to replicate such effects elsewhere. This would add to a growing arsenal of options for policymakers interested in participatory budgeting, who might also be in similar circumstances and face the same constraints as did the City of Pittsburgh.

As explained earlier, surveys were designed and distributed to participants at the end of each forum. This was the primary method for gathering the data needed for the evaluation, though again there were several limitations. First, there was not adequate funding to allow for any rigorous randomized sampling of participants to attend the forums, so a convenience sample had to be used.⁴ The city's Office of Community Affairs publicly posted fliers throughout various media announcing the forums, but most of the recruiting was done within their existing

⁴ Random sampling is an essential part of Fishkin's Deliberative Poll, and its absence in the Deliberative Forum process is an important difference between the two methods of political consultation. Without random sampling, it is more difficult to ensure that participation is representative of the larger population (which has consequences for the reliability of the surveys). A convenience sample of self-selected participants can still provide relatively robust results if planning is done correctly to ensure the forums are widely accessible and known to the public.

networks of community organizations. There was also not enough funding to do any kind of long-term post-forum phone surveying of participants that attended to assess the longevity of the effects observed.

Time was also limited since the forums were supposed to be held in June of 2015 but were still in the design phase until late March of that year. Surveys for the forums had to be quickly adapted from previous deliberative forums held on separate issues, and so there was little opportunity to make changes or add any questions. Beyond these logistical and budgetary constraints, there were also legal and ethical issues which hindered the rigor of the surveys used in the study. In particular, the City of Pittsburgh was made responsible for the distribution and handling of the surveys which they wanted to use for their own internal evaluation of the forums. A separate survey was needed to gather demographic data and other information more thoroughly than the surveys used by the city, however, the City as well as the other key organizers were concerned that a series of surveys would give participants the wrong impression that they were subjects in a kind of experiment, rather than residents engaging in dialogue with each other and their city representatives about the needs of their communities. Thus, the possibility of a longer and more detailed survey was dismissed in lieu of guaranteeing that the pilot of the forums would go smoothly and be well received, ensuring further continuation by the City (and thereby providing new opportunities for more rigorous research to be conducted in the future).

Regardless of these various limitations, the surveys did manage to gather information of interest to this evaluation and to others looking to replicate the Deliberative Forums in their city. For instance, aside from the budget-specific questions listed earlier, participants were also asked to evaluate the forums. Participants had to rate the efficacy of the forums in the following five areas:

Knowledge Acquisition: “How well did the forum give you an understanding of the important issues involved in the City Capital Budget?”

Shared Perspectives: Did the forum cause you to consider points of view that you had not previously considered?

Feeling Heard – As a forum participant, do you feel as though your voice has been heard by the City?

Shared Stories – Did the structure of the forum allow you to share stories and experiences with residents from other parts of the City?

Engagement – Has participating in the forum made you more likely to become engaged in making your neighborhood stronger?

Participants were given ample time to reflect on the deliberations they had during the forums before rating these metrics along a spectrum ranging from “Very,” “Somewhat,” “A little,” and finally “Not at all” effective. In part, these metrics for evaluating the efficacy of the forums aim to capture the complexity of the deliberations themselves, as this is by itself a meaningful result of the forums that is often underappreciated in empirical evaluations (O’Doherty, 2013).

2.2.2 RESULTS

In this section of the paper, the results of the evaluation are summarized. The results are broken down into subsections to focus discussion on each different metric separately. This is followed by a synthesis of the findings into a list of recommendations for the city. Some brief concluding remarks on the current state and likely future of participatory budgeting research and practice in Pittsburgh are made at the end.

2.2.2.1 Participation

In terms of the number of participants that attended, the forums saw a substantial improvement over the traditional hearings. Although sign-in sheets from the day of the forums were not made available (the City unfortunately did not provide this information upon request before the time of this writing), the total number of forum participants can be estimated in other ways. In total, 130 people *registered* to attend the forums. There were also 114 *unique* surveys from the total of 192 surveys collected (most of the people that attended the first forum attended the second as well, so to assess the total number of individual persons that attended either forum without double-counting, each survey was only counted once to find the total number of “unique” surveys). It is safe to assume that not everyone that registered actually attended the forums (or that some people attended without registering), and that not everyone who attended actually completed the

survey. However, the number of completed surveys can be used as the lower-bound for the estimate, while the number of total registrants is a reasonable upper-bound. This puts the total number of participants at somewhere between 114 and 130 people.

Whatever the actual number may be, just from looking at the minimum estimate of 114 people it is evident that the pilot of the Deliberative Forums saw a marked increase in the number of participants from the “record” total of 68 at the hearings. Of the 192 collected surveys, a total of 116 surveys were from the first forum while 76 surveys were from the second forum. This indicates that absolute attendance declined between the first and second forum (despite the fact that almost everyone who attended the first went to the second, a good sign in terms of retention rates), though both were held late in the evening so that many people could attend. There are many possible explanations for this, but without a closer look at the data there is only speculation. This point will be returned to later in the paper.

Just as was done during the baseline study, addresses voluntarily provided by residents attending the forums were mapped to visualize the “reach” of recruitment efforts, as well as infer demographics based on the dispersion of participants across neighborhoods. Of the 115 attendees at the first forum, 82% provided their area of residence upon registration; and of the 77 registered attendees at the second forum, 91% provided their address. Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.3 below are maps displaying where these participants that provided their address information at the first and second forum, respectively, live in Pittsburgh. These maps can be compared with census data to estimate the median income and racial diversity of those neighborhoods.

At first glance, it appears the forums drew in large groups of people from all over the city, including a few from the surrounding suburbs. Comparing the participant map of the first forum with that of the second, there is a high degree of overlap—indicating that the forums had a high “retention rate” as many of those that attended the first chose to return for the second. This could mean the forums were well received, and that many people were willing to continue the deliberations they had in the first forum. Returning to the point made about declining levels of participation between the first and second forum, it is important to note the differences between the participant maps. The first forum was held in the neighborhood of Greenfield, and so naturally, there is cluster of people from Greenfield that attended. Interestingly, this cluster is seen in the first map, but not in the second, where the forum was held in the Southside neighborhood. This could hint at the likely possibility that attendance is a matter of convenience

for community residents, which could explain at least part of the decline between forum locations.

It is abundantly clear from looking at the participant maps that there is a wider range of neighborhoods that were represented at the forums than there were in the 2014 hearings, as seen in the map shown earlier from the baseline study (see Figure 2.1). In this sense, the forums can be considered a step in the right direction. However, when viewing maps of racial diversity (see Figure 2.4 below) and median household income levels (see **Error! Reference source not found.** below) within Pittsburgh neighborhoods represented at the forums, it is easier to see that there is still more progress to be made. The racial dot map is a visualization of the geographic distribution of people living in Pittsburgh, as well as the population density and racial diversity of those areas. Careful examination of the racial dot map reveals the “gaps” in the participant maps, which seem to be areas home to large non-white populations. Most the large “clusters” of participants at either forum are within predominantly white neighborhoods. Similarly, the income map shows “pockets” of participants mostly clustered in the relatively wealthier areas of Pittsburgh: Southside, Highland Park, Brookline, Perry North, and Brighton Heights. Bloomfield, closer to the lower end of the income-level spectrum, is the small exception. This may be because residents in this neighborhood are more collectively organized and active in civil society groups and associations. This was explained as a reason for the observed high participation from Bloomfield in the 2014 Capital Budget Hearings. Altogether, the forums attracted the highest participation from residents living in neighborhoods around the middle of the income spectrum.

There are many possible explanations for these observations. For example, it could be that many families with younger children, especially in poorer households, simply did not have the time to make the required 2.5 hour long commitment of the forums. Or it could be something totally exogenous from the forums like longstanding distrust in government efficacy and declining social capital, well documented in the United States today (Baiochi et al., 2014; Putnam, 1995). However, there is at least one explanatory factor that *can* be controlled and significantly improved: recruitment. Before the launch of the Forums, the City of Pittsburgh did not have much time to plan, coordinate, and execute a large recruitment effort. The Office of Community Affairs was forced to rely on reaching out through their existing networks and ties to community groups to spread the word about the forums. This ultimately limited the sample of the

Pittsburgh population that participation could be drawn from to only those people who are already politically active. The problem is that people who frequently attend city meetings, are part of neighborhood associations or other interest groups, and follow the city's announcements on social media already have a strong political voice. The marginalized groups that remain disenfranchised are those that could benefit most from participating, yet these people are unintentionally and indirectly excluded from the process.

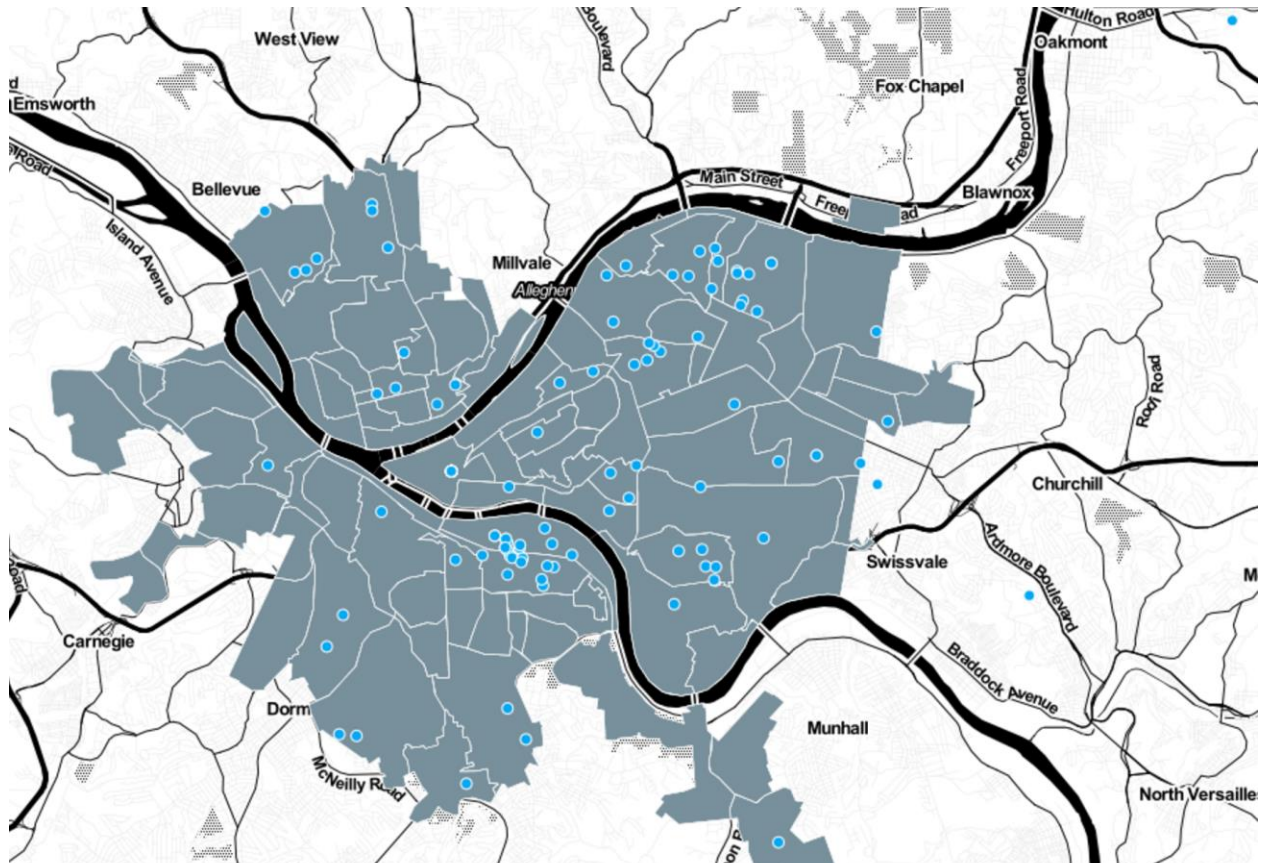


Figure 2.2: Map of participants that attended the first Deliberative Forum in Greenfield.

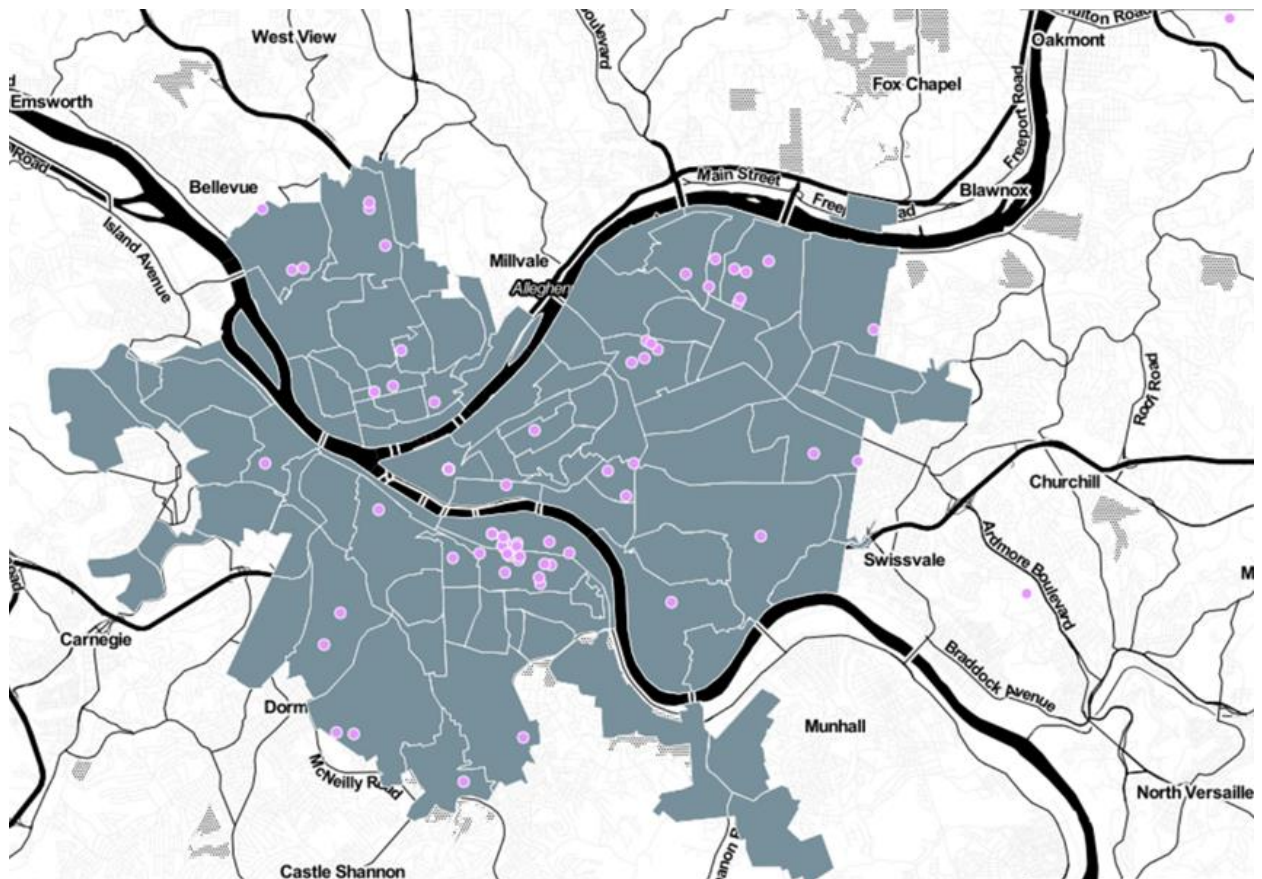


Figure 2.3: Map of participants that attended the second Deliberative Forum in South Side.

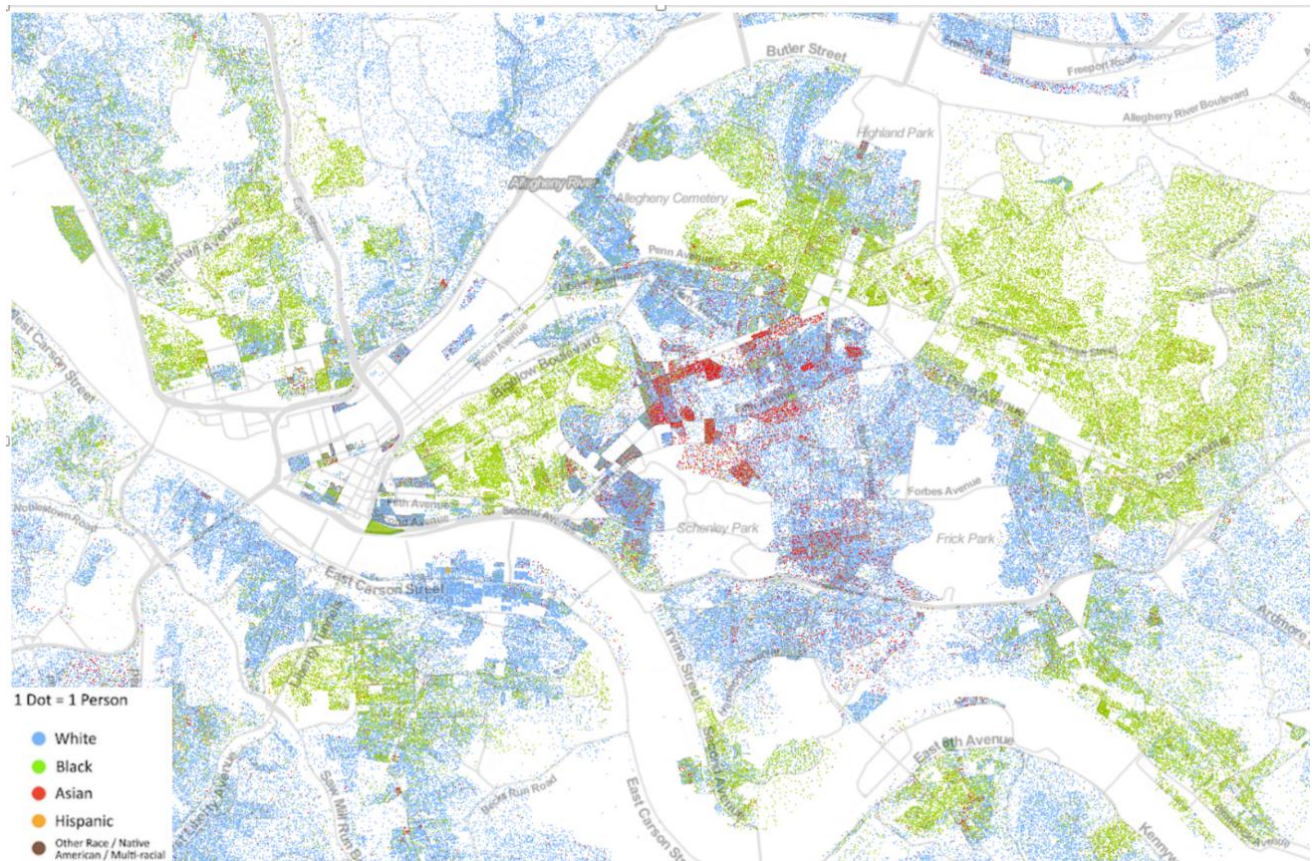
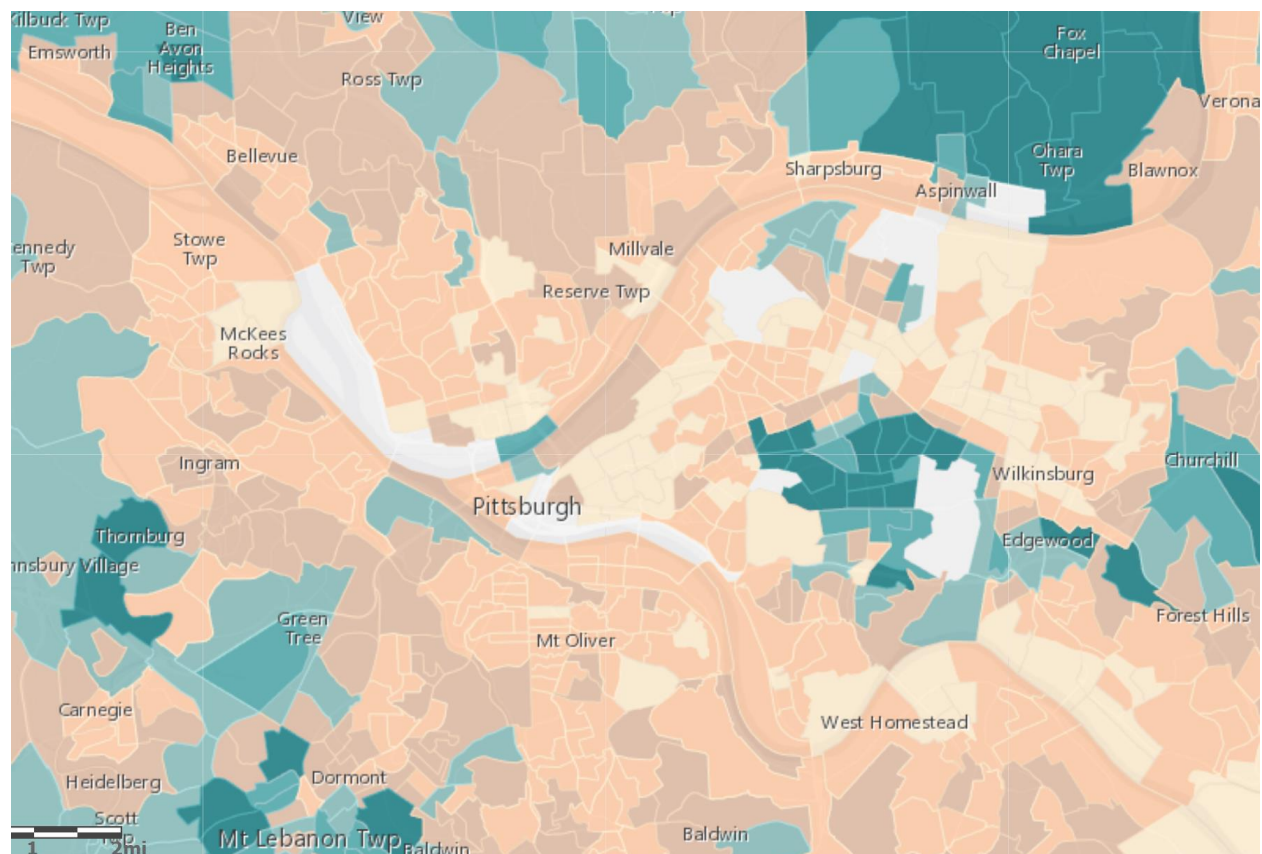


Figure 2.4: Racial Dot Map.⁵

⁵ All data are from the 2010 U.S. Census. Courtesy of the Racial Dot Map project; citation: Image Copyright, 2013, Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia (Dustin A. Cable, creator)



Legend

USA Median Household Income

Median Household Income

Block Groups

- More than \$82,000
- \$68,001 to \$82,000
- \$53,001 to \$68,000
- \$39,001 to \$53,000 (US median: \$50,157)
- \$24,001 to \$39,000
- \$24,000 or less
- No households

Figure 2.5: Median household incomes in Pittsburgh, by neighborhood.⁶

⁶ Data taken from the Esri 2012 Updated Demographics using Census 2010 geographies. More information can be found here: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=1e79439598494713b553f990a4040886/>.

2.2.2.2 Deliberation & Its Effect on Participants

Data was collected from a total of 114 surveys that had the evaluation section completed. Table 2.1 contains data used to measure the quality of deliberation at the forums and the effect this deliberation had on knowledge acquisition as well as political attitudes of participants. As such, this section covers both of these metrics, summarizing the findings from this data and evaluating it in comparison to the baseline data discussed earlier.

Table 2.1: Participant survey responses on the efficacy of the Forums.

	Very		Somewhat		A Little		Not at All		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Learned About Issues	47	41%	59	52%	7	6%	1	1%	114	100%
New Points of View	37	32%	54	47%	21	18%	2	2%	114	100%
Feeling Heard	23	20%	54	47%	34	30%	3	3%	114	100%
Shared Stories	75	66%	28	25%	10	9%	1	1%	114	100%
Engagement	65	58%	38	34%	7	6%	3	3%	113	100%

In comparison to the hearings, the forums focused much more on encouraging participants to actively deliberate with one another and the representatives of the city serving on the resource panel. Rather than a one-way conversation where participants make demands of the city, as was the case with the hearings, the forums aimed to expose participants to new perspectives and information through deliberation with their fellow citizens and policymakers. Ultimately, the purpose of the deliberative process is to shape the pre-formed preferences that participants come in with into “enlightened preferences,” as they are typically called in theoretical literature (Cavalier, 2011; Young, 2002; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). That way, when asked to provide input on the budget, community participants can do so with better

understanding and a broader-based position on budget decisions. The forums are then a public space for bringing together the knowledge that residents have about the needs of their communities and the in-depth insider-knowledge that policymakers who create the budget have on long-term plans and formal policies and procedures.

With that said, the metrics in Table 2.1 are a good way to capture whether the forums were successful. In what follows, each of these metrics are reviewed separately in detail. This is to help break the data down for thorough analysis, as the table contains a lot of important information.

“Learned About Issues”

Knowledge acquisition is an integral part of the deliberative process because its effects extend far beyond the singular event. Not only are participants able to provide more informed input into the budget, but they walk away with a better understanding of the complexity surrounding public budgets that they take with them and share with others through their conversations. This understanding can also dissuade criticism or address concerns residents may have if their demands are not immediately met, as they come to realize how funding restrictions, long term budget plans, and prioritization of other community needs all interplay during the budgeting process. Finally, as residents come to learn more about the budget, it is easier for them to validate spending decisions since they are exposed to the bigger picture of where the public funds come from, what restrictions are attached to them, and how the money is allocated across functional areas of the budget. This transparency thus lends greater legitimacy to budget decisions and is part of the reason why PB processes have been found to reduce tax delinquency and increase revenues (Cabannes, 2004).

In the survey, participants were asked the question, *“How well did the forum give you an understanding of the important issues involved in the City Capital Budget?”* Evidently, approximately 93% of participants said that the forums were either “Very” (41%) or “Somewhat” (52%) effective (Figure 2.6). Of the 114 survey respondents, only 1 person (1%) reported that the forums were “Not at all” effective in this regard. This is a substantial improvement over the Capital Budget Hearings, where participants were only asked to come in and share their views of what is needed in the budget without being given any prior information about the budgeting process. This data also supports the theoretical expectation that through

deliberative processes, people come to know more about the issues being discussed and that these modes of engagement are highly effective as methods of sharing information and explaining complex topics in an easily digestible format (Mathews, 2014; Esterling et al., 2011).

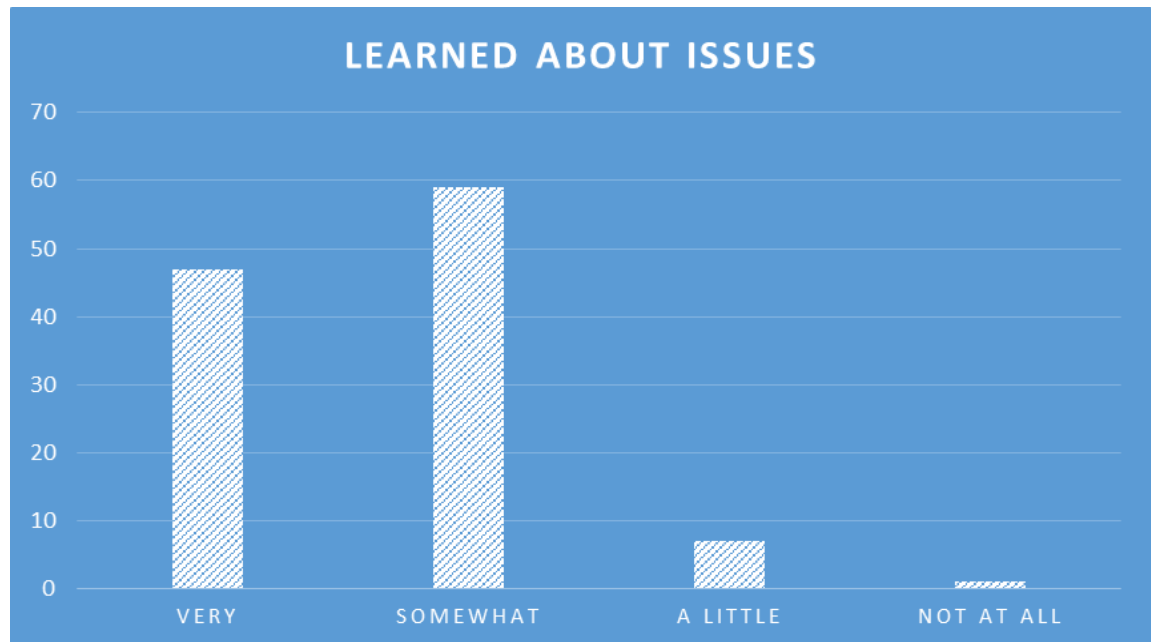


Figure 2.6: Participant survey responses regarding knowledge acquisition.

“New Points of View”

An equally essential part of any deliberative process is its potential to expose participants to new perspectives. The wealth of experiences and diversity of political or economic views that are represented in a well-structured deliberative environment can confer important benefits to participants (Mutz, 2006). Considering rational and emotional appeals openly exchanged between participants in respectful and meaningful discourse creates new opportunities for personal reflection on the issue and allows participants to appreciate political disagreement as morally justifiable. Despite these postulated benefits, research has found that people tend to actively avoid these kinds of interactions, selectively choosing to associate with those who agree with them (Mutz, 2006). This research is certainly not conclusive, however, as some more recent experimental studies have shown that the quality of deliberation in producing these benefits is less a function of the deliberative capacity of individuals and more one of institutional design (see Esterling et al., 2011; Ganuza & Francés, 2012). Cavalier notes “when tapped to participate

in well-structured, informed discussions of issues with clear choices or focus, conversations that stakeholders agree to take seriously in terms of policy implementation, Americans show a remarkable degree of interest and engagement” (2011).

Ultimately, this means that the potential for deliberative forums to bridge this divide by “engaging difference as a resource” is all the more important for producing a robust public sphere and healthy democracy. Much like knowledge acquisition, exposure to new points of view can also bolster the legitimacy of political decisions, such as the allocation of public funds in the Capital Budget, because it ensures that “no one could see the end result as arbitrary rather than reasonable and justifiable, even if not what he or she happened to see as *most* justifiable” (Fearon, 1998). To test whether the forums succeeded in this area, participants were asked, “*Did the forum cause you to consider points of view that you had not previously considered?*”

Approximately 80% of survey respondents said the forums were either “Very” (33%) effective or “Somewhat” (47%) effective in exposing them to new perspectives, while 20% felt that the forums were only “A little” (18%) or “Not at all” (2%) effective (Figure 2.7). It is important to note that even though 18% of participants agreed that the forums were only slightly effective, this can still be considered a valuable outcome in the context of its relative absence outside of such a deliberative forum setting. Even so, a clear majority of the participants left the forums with a better understanding of how their fellow citizens and city representatives view the budget, suggesting the forums were successful in this respect. It may be that more participants would have felt more strongly about the efficacy of the forums in exposing them to new perspectives had the city been able to recruit a more diverse population of people to attend. Still, compared to the hearings where only a few people from select areas of the city that are members of small associations and interest groups attended, the Deliberative Community Budget Forums were a substantial improvement.

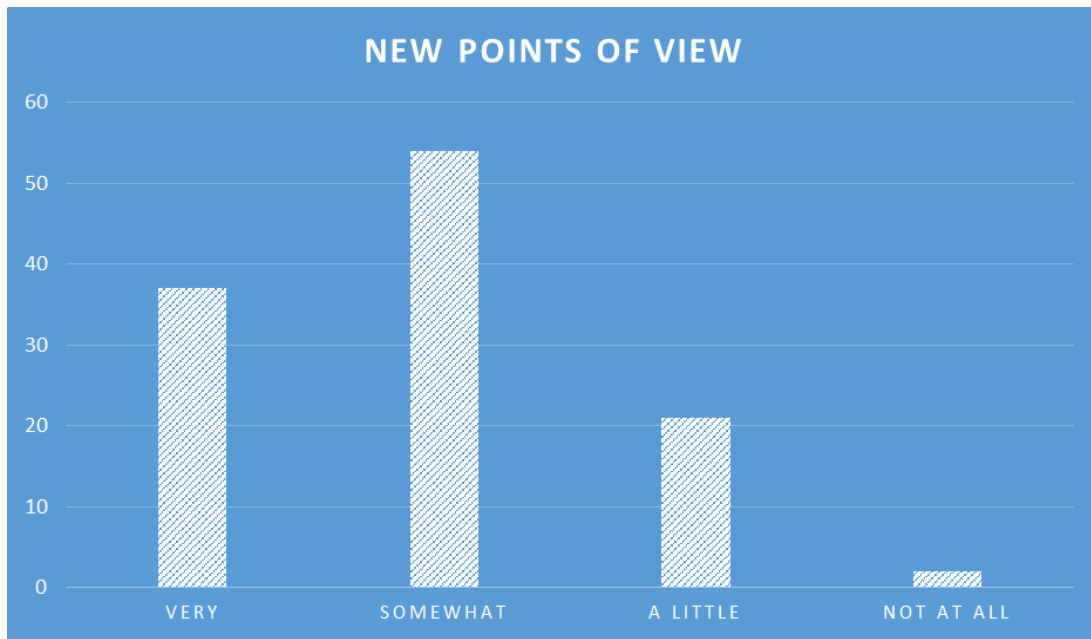


Figure 2.7: Participant survey responses regarding hearing new perspectives.

“Feeling Heard”

Measuring whether or not participants felt that their voice had been heard by the City is critical to evaluating the success of the forums. The main point of inviting inclusive citizen input into the budget is to gather valuable feedback that will inform allocations decisions and guide public spending to better match the needs of communities who do not otherwise have a voice in the process. Even if city representatives truly *do* take into account citizen input and make a sincere effort to accommodate all public demands, the process may still fall apart if the community is not reassured that their contribution is important. If residents are expected to take time away from their daily lives to participate in these kinds of forums or hearings, they need to know that it will be worth their time—that their concerns will be heard and seriously considered. A major criticism of the Community Budget Hearings process was that they were ineffectual, and it was this bad reputation which contributed to their consistently low rates of participation. The forums were able to attract such large numbers of people precisely because they were framed in stark contrast to the hearings as a process by which residents can have a voice in the process and actually be heard by the city in a meaningful and impactful way.

The survey asked participants, “As a forum participant, do you feel as though your voice has been heard by the City?” The survey responses (Figure 2.8) captured the relatively low-trust

sentiment that participants were feeling the day of the forums. Approximately one-third of participants felt that their voice was heard “A little” (30%) or “Not at all” (3%) during the forums, while only 20% of participants strongly felt that their voice was heard. This information has a number of important implications. On the one hand, the low confidence that participants have in the City’s appreciation of public input might have more to do with lingering distrust from the history of failed hearings than the initial pilot of a new process. It takes time to rebuild public confidence and trust in the efficacy of government programs, and new programs especially need to overcome widespread cynicism before they are viewed favorably. Under this interpretation, the data can be viewed as signs of progress, where only 3% of participants felt they were not heard at all, as opposed to perhaps the majority of those who attended the hearings in the year prior to the forums. On the other hand, the data can also be interpreted as an indication that the City did not do enough to signal their commitment to hearing what participants had to say nor make clear their intention that they will act on or at least respond to the feedback they receive. However, one must remember that mistrust was present on both sides of the exchange, as the City also had their doubts that the forums would be successful in generating useful feedback after witnessing years of disappointing hearings.

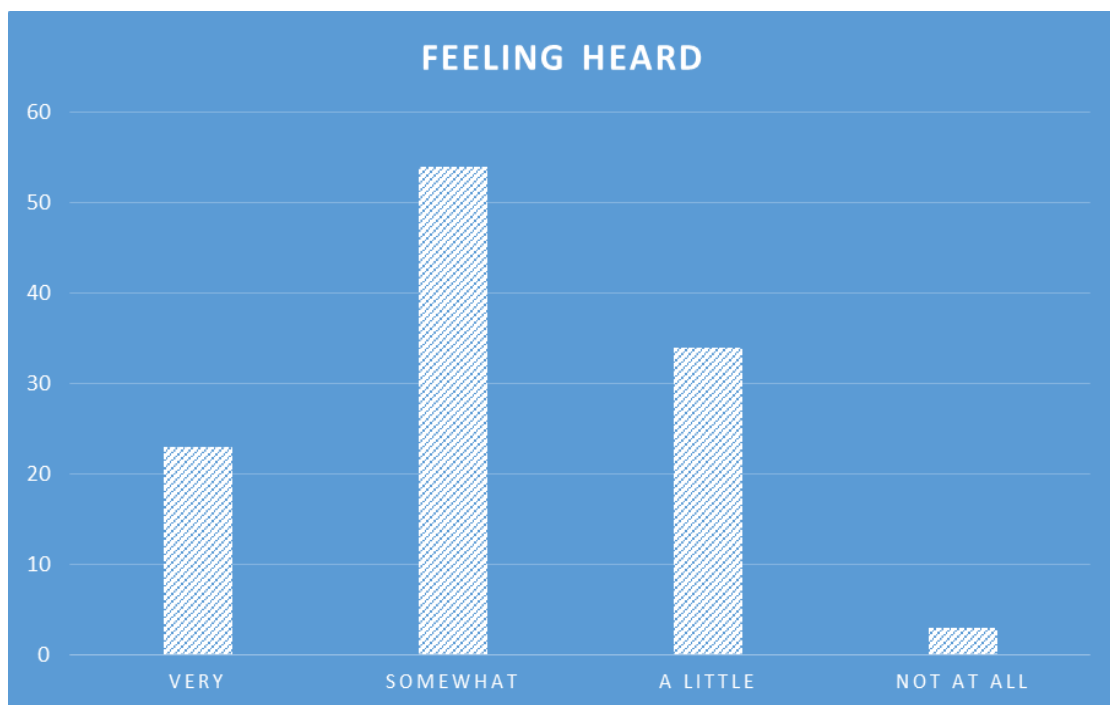


Figure 2.8: Participant survey responses regarding political voice.

“Shared Stories”

One of the main differences between the forums and the hearings is that the forums placed as much if not *more* emphasis on getting participants to talk to each *other* than it did on encouraging a dialogue between the city and the participants exclusively. To do this, the forums were structured to allow participants to preface the deliberations by first their sharing stories and experiences as a resident of the city with others. Moderators asked participants to introduce themselves to the others sitting at their table, and to include details about why they chose to participate in the forums, where they live and work, or whether they have families or are part of any neighborhood associations or community groups, etc. This element of “sharing stories” does a lot more than diffuse tensions as an “ice breaker” (Young, 2002; Black, 2013). By hearing the daily experiences of other residents in the city, participants are engaging in a collective exercise where they are constructing a narrative of the city as a single community (for more on how deliberative dialogue can bridge divides, see Stains, 2014). In doing so, it becomes easier for participants to think beyond the strong localized neighborhood identities that are embedded in Pittsburgh. This sets the tone and foundation for the deliberations that follow immediately thereafter, as participants have begun to situate themselves conceptually as part of a broader city-wide community and are thus “primed” for the task of prioritizing the city budget that affects much more than themselves.

The surveys asked, “*Did the structure of the forum allow you to share stories and experiences with residents from other parts of the City?*” The responses (Figure 2.9) clearly convey that the forums were most effective in this aspect. Approximately 90% of participants felt the forums were either “Very” (66%) successful or “Somewhat” (24%) successful in allowing them to get to know their neighbors. It is surprising to consider just how powerful the forums were as a method of sharing experiences given that they were only allotted a comparatively small amount of time for this purpose during the actual events (approximately the first 10 minutes after everyone has arrived and the forums have started). These results are demonstrative that even small changes to the format of the hearings could have gone a long way in improving the process. Even if the forums proved completely unsuccessful in all else, this metric suggests they would still have been useful in helping to form deeper ties between

residents from other communities—something vital that was often overlooked before Putnam’s influential research on the benefits of developing social capital (Putnam). It is possible to draw a connection between the efficacy of the forums in allowing participants to share their experiences and stories and its success at generating engagement, discussed next.

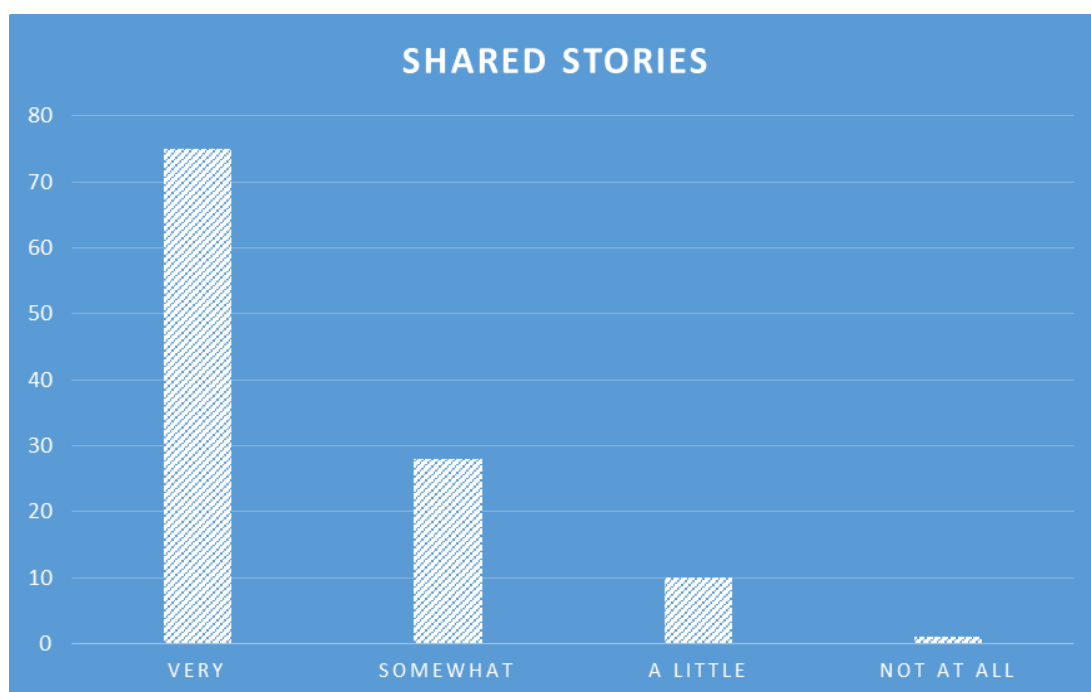


Figure 2.9: Participant survey responses regarding sharing stories.

“Engagement”

The final metric included in the surveys was engagement, which was measured by asking participants, *“Has participating in the forum made you more likely to become engaged in making your neighborhood stronger?”* This question comes from the theoretical expectation that deliberative democracy has the potential to strengthen civic life by reinvigorating political participation and community engagement. It is important because it helps answer whether PB is an effective means of reversing the negative trends in associational and political life documented most prominently in Putnam’s work mentioned earlier, among others. Motivating participants to become more active and invested in their communities also helps insure the sustainability of the deliberative forums and similar programs because those residents then have even greater incentive to participate again in the following year to be a voice for their community.

The data (Figure 2.10) comes from 113 total survey respondents. It appears the forums were overwhelmingly successful in engaging participants. A clear majority of participants (58%) found the forums were “Very” effective in making them more likely to be engaged in their communities, while 40% felt they were at least “Somewhat” (34%) or “A little” (6%) effective. As mentioned before, it is unclear how much of this effect can be attributed to the fact that participants were asked to share stories and experiences during the forums, though it would not be unreasonable to suggest it may have played a part. For example, some people may have found that others they had not met before work in the same area as they do, or enjoy taking their kids to the same park as them, and this might have encouraged them to work together to improve those areas because of their shared investment. Or they may have wondered how many commonalities they have with others in their immediate neighborhoods that they had not considered before they realized those they had with others at the forums. It could also have been as simple as them recognizing the value of engagement from having attended the forums that they wish to replicate or reinvest into their own communities. Regardless of where this effect comes from, it remains to be seen how long this engagement lasts. Funding was not available to poll participants in intervals after the forums, so the duration of these effects could not be estimated.

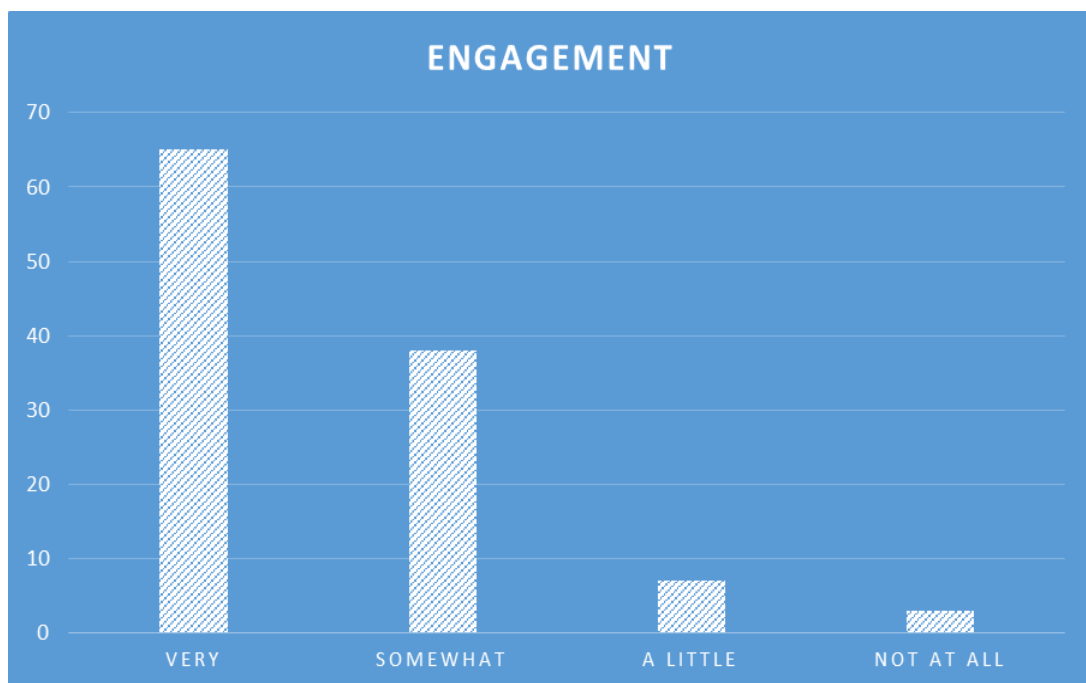


Figure 2.10: Participant survey responses regarding political engagement.

2.2.2.3 Effect on the Capital Budget

The surveys distributed to participants after the deliberative forums also asked them to rate the Mayor's priorities for the 2016 Capital Budget using a method similar to the one used to evaluate the forums themselves. The Mayor's priorities represent the values of the administration, and they guide how the funds within the Capital Budget will be used throughout the year. Thus, gathering public input on these priorities can help shift focus and more efficiently target funds where they are needed. Requiring the priorities to be reviewed by the public also affords greater government accountability and added legitimacy to the budget. For the surveys, participants had to categorically label each of the priorities accordingly as either "Very," "Somewhat," or "Not at all" important. The difference that using this kind of "range-voting" method makes with respect to other methods of prioritization, such as using ordinal ranks, is an important one. This method avoids asking people to make impossible decisions such as ranking what is *most* important between other things that could be equally as important but in different ways. The data on the first two priorities were collected from a total of 116 completed surveys, while data for the remaining three priorities were collected from a total of 115 surveys.

Evaluating the Mayor's Priorities for the Capital Budget

The Mayor proposed a total of five priorities for the 2016 Capital Budget which were each evaluated by community residents attending the forums (see Table 2.2 below). The first was labeled "Fixing it first," which aims to focus spending on "extending the useful life and capabilities of existing assets over the acquisition of new assets." The second was on adopting a "Complete Streets" approach to "infrastructure construction and maintenance encompassing and supporting all forms of transportation." Another priority was "a goal of supporting a quality of life in our neighborhoods by improving our public facilities across the City." One of the priorities also outlined the need for "investments in processes and infrastructure that will help the City deliver services faster, more efficiently, with greater customer service, at a lower cost over time." The final priority expressed a "commitment to communities in need through economic development and neighborhood building support."

Table 2.2: Forum participants' evaluation of the proposed budget priorities.

Priority	Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Fixing it First	80	69%	32	28%	4	3%	116	100%
Complete Streets	79	68%	35	30%	2	2%	116	100%
Improving Public Facilities	78	68%	35	30%	2	2%	115	100%
Better Services	84	73%	30	26%	1	1%	115	100%
Economic Development	89	77%	21	18%	5	4%	115	100%

Though the main purpose of the forums was to invite the public to deliberate and evaluate the Mayor's priorities for the budget, this information seems to be the least revelatory from the surveys. It is clear from the table that there was a shared consensus that all of the priorities were in some way important. There seemed to be strongest agreement on the issue of economic development, where 77% of participants that completed the survey felt it was an important priority for the City of Pittsburgh and thus should be focused on within the budget. Better services, through investments in infrastructure, was also regarded as a high priority among the greatest majority of participants surveyed. The rest of the priorities above all had a similar split in terms of prioritization, where just over two-thirds of participants felt they were important, while the rest viewed them as only somewhat important. However, it is not obvious how this information may be useful to policymakers, as there are only slight differences discernable in prioritization. Indeed, many participants commented in the surveys that the priorities were too high-level or abstract, and that greater specificity might have probed more feedback. Yet, an absence of disagreement does not necessarily have to be considered a defect of the forum design, as it could just as well mean that the Mayor's priorities for his administration closely aligned with the preferences of participants.

Additional Priorities Suggested by Forum Participants

Beyond simply evaluating the Mayor's priorities, forum attendees were asked to provide their own priorities they would like to add that are not included on the Mayor's list. The most

common responses are below with the number of attendees citing the priority in parentheses and some specific responses listed.

Green Infrastructure (18) - *"River and Trail Cleanups," "Improved Air Quality," "Community Park Improvements"*

Public Safety (16) - *"More Police Presence in Communities," "Improved Lighting," "Vision Zero Approach," "Crime Deterrence through Security Cameras"*

Infrastructure Management (14) - *"Digital Infrastructure," "Bridge Repair," "Sewers, Storm water Management," "Sidewalk Repair and Maintenance"*

Community Development (13) - *"Neighborhood Development," "Traffic Calming," "Ordinance Enforcement," "Make neighborhoods more family friendly," "Increase in CDBG funding available to CDCs"*

Affordable Housing (9) – *"Housing Development Construction," "Increased funding for URA"*

It is worth noting that these are only collective groupings of the most *common* additional priorities under “umbrella” terms, and that almost all participants responded, suggesting a diverse range of new priorities that do not all fit neatly within these groups. These suggested priorities are certainly valuable information as they give the City a better idea of what they may be overlooking when considering public needs. From the data, it is apparent that participants at the forums had highest demand for green infrastructure that could improve environmental quality around the City. This information must be cautioned, however, as simple aggregations of preferences in this manner may exclude information on the relative *intensity* of those preferences, and so may skew demand in such a way as to reduce overall public welfare. For example, though a higher number of people at the forums viewed green infrastructure as a high priority, those who highlighted public safety as a main concern, though fewer, may benefit *more*, collectively, from improvements.

City-Wide Projects Suggested by Forum Participants

Another part of the surveys asked citizens at the forums to identify, across the city as a whole, the types of projects that need the most attention in the coming year. A distinction between city-wide and neighborhood-specific projects was made because part of the forums

emphasized the need for participants, and community residents in Pittsburgh as a whole, to begin thinking beyond their own neighborhood needs and to consider what would best for the city altogether. This section of the survey was meant to capture whether the forums succeeded in “broadening the horizons” of participants’ preferences. As before, the most common responses are below with the number of attendees citing the project type in parentheses and some specific responses listed.

Infrastructure (38) – *“City Facilities,” “Complete Streets Projects,” “Bike Lanes,” “Playgrounds,” “Infrastructure Repairs,” “Retaining Walls,” “Sewer Lines”*

Street Repair (35)

Pedestrian Infrastructure & Safety (26) – *“City Steps,” “Curb Repair,” “School Bus Stop Crosswalks,” “Sidewalks”*

Green Projects (20) – *“Green Infrastructure,” “Capitalizing/Activating Land Bank, Open Space PGH,” “Remediation of Illegal Dump Sites,” “Mellon Park Restorations,” “Stormwater Management”*

This data is expected given the proposed additional priorities given by participants. In both lists, infrastructure (including green infrastructure) is at the top as an area of high concern, in terms of both city priorities and projects.

Neighborhood-Specific Projects Suggested by Participants

The last part of the survey concerning the budget had asked attendees to identify specific capital projects they felt were most urgently needed in their neighborhoods to be completed in 2016. In total, the surveyed participants suggested 168 specific projects. This data was then analyzed by the City’s Office of Management and Budget. The following chart (Figure 2.11) of the distribution of Project Types and map (Figure 2.12) showing the dispersion of project locations were provided by the OMB, and are included and commented on below.

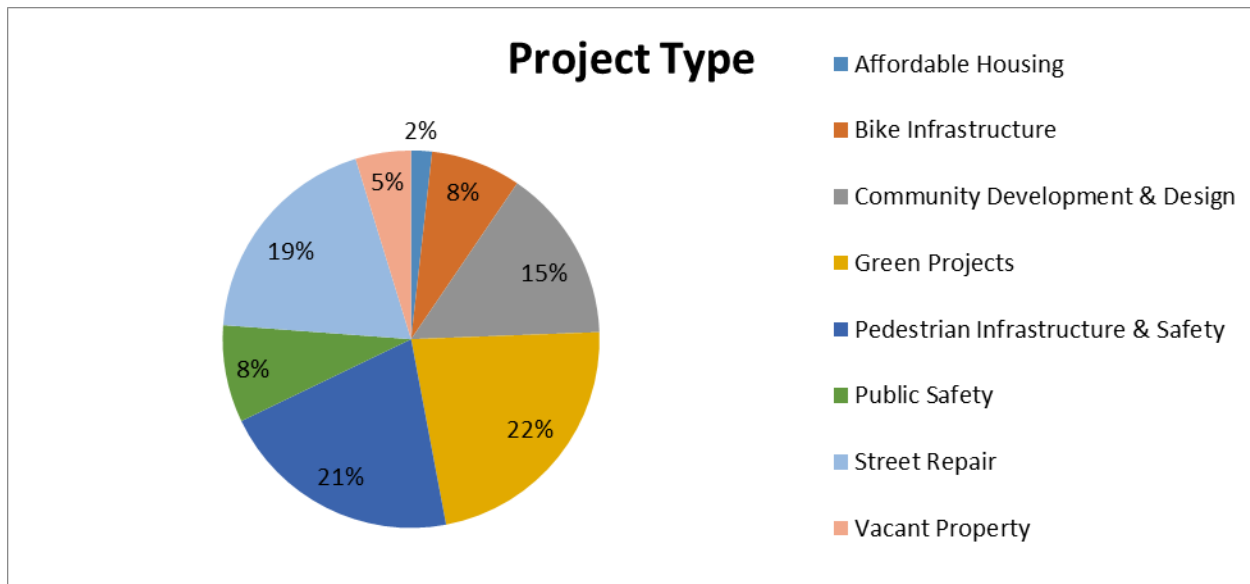


Figure 2.11: Distribution of suggested neighborhood capital projects, by type.

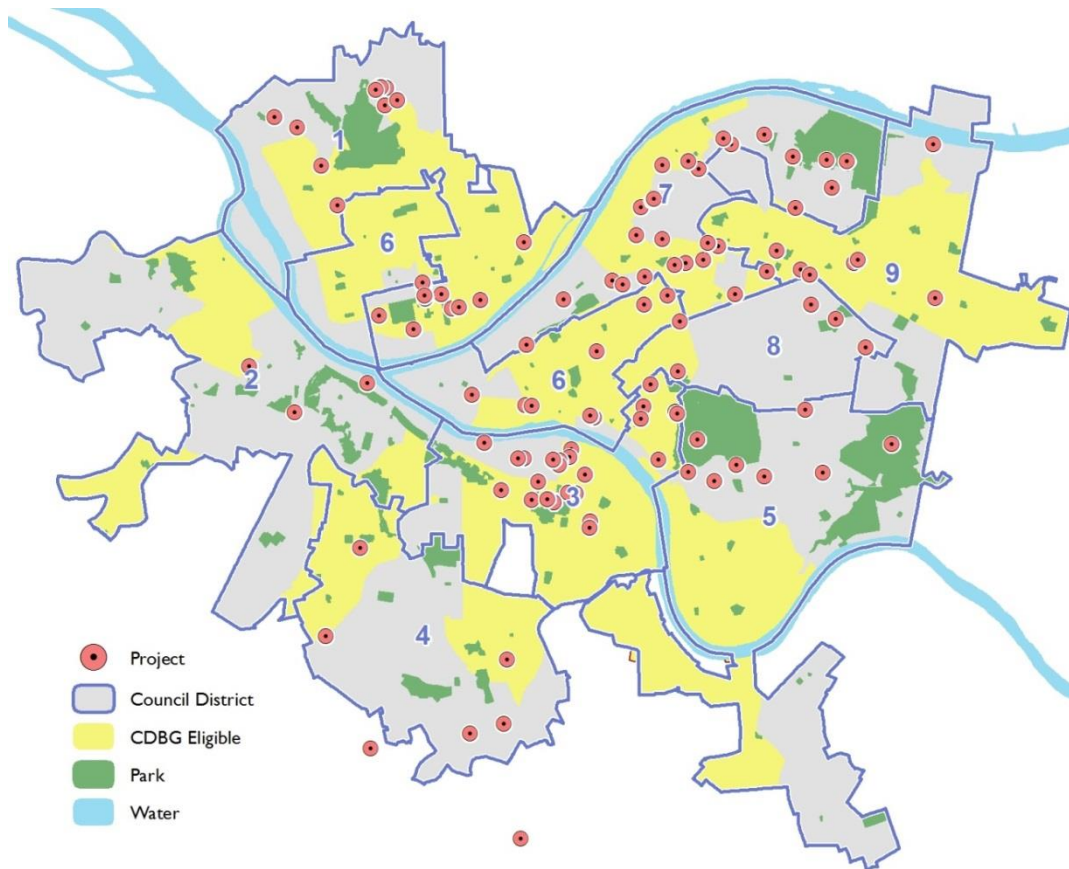


Figure 2.12: Dispersion of suggested neighborhood capital projects.

There are several notable points to be made about this information. First, the map shows just how wide-spread the neighborhood projects suggested are, which mirrors the map of participants in demonstrating that the forums were able to attract a much larger group of community residents compared to the budget hearings the year prior. Though they were perhaps not quite as diverse racially as they could have been, the sample population was at least a more diverse representation of neighborhoods and areas of the city.

Second, the chart showing the distribution of project types is interesting because of both its consistencies and its discrepancies with the participant's list of priorities and projects needed city-wide that was discussed earlier. A reasonable expectation one might have is that the needs of the whole city would differ at least to some noticeable degree from the needs of specific communities at the neighborhood level, given the difference in scale and the increasing complexity that comes with it. This expectation is motivated by the theoretical view that participants would come into the forums to advocate for specific projects in mind that are needed in their neighborhoods, but upon hearing about others' experiences, they would have also have gained a broader understanding of the city's needs as a whole. The data seems to tell a slightly different story. Although green projects, pedestrian infrastructure and safety, community development and design, and street repair were all listed as high priority projects for the city as a whole, they are again repeated at the neighborhood level. This may suggest that some, but not all, participants were acting strategically by repeating what they wanted in their own neighborhoods in the parts of the survey that asked about what they felt was needed throughout the city as a whole, thus over representing those projects and maximizing the likelihood that it would be included in the budget.

The few exceptions to this trend that shed some doubt on this explanation are public safety and vacant property. Though public safety was listed as the second highest additional city-wide budget priority by participants, only a comparably small fraction of suggested neighborhood-specific projects (8%) were related to public safety. Conversely, vacant property was not listed as a high priority city-wide, but constitutes a sizeable share (5%) of neighborhood-specific projects. This indicates that participants may feel improving public safety is of top priority for the city as a whole, but is not necessarily a problem within their specific neighborhood, and vice versa with respect to vacant property projects. If this is indeed the case,

then it would support the expectation described earlier, and suggest that the forums were at least partially effective in shaping participants' preferences.

One final point that can be made about the data above has to do with how representative it is of the population of the city that did *not* attend the forums. There is good reason to believe that the participants of the forums were not a very representative sample of the overall population, considering the demographic data analyzed in the previous sections. Moreover, the data relevant to budget outcomes is also telling of why this kind of bias can be detrimental to the process and how it undermines the legitimacy of the forums as an inclusive form of PB.

For example, due to the City's reliance on existing community networks to draw in participation, several community groups were among the first to hear about the forums and also those most able to mobilize members to attend. An indication of this is evident by the prominence of bicycle-related projects and priorities suggested at the city-wide and neighborhood-specific level. Though it certainly may be true that these are actually a high priority for the majority of Pittsburgh residents, the alternative hypothesis is also likely given the fact that one of the many community-based groups represented at the forums was a pedestrian bicycle advocacy organization that had several members attend. It is clear that if equal representation is not achieved, any organization can "crowd-out" the voices of other participants and thus skew the results of the forums. That affordable housing projects constituted only 2% of suggested neighborhood-specific projects while bicycle infrastructure represented 8% begs the question of how these results would differ if a more diverse group of participants from poorer neighborhoods had attended the forums.

Changes in the Actual Budget

At this point in the evaluation, all that remains to be seen is whether the forums had any discernable impact on the official 2016 Capital Budget after all. This is perhaps the hardest part to analyze due to the size of the Capital Budget and the lack of transparency in regards to the budgeting process after the forums. It is difficult to translate the Mayor's priorities for the budget to the end result, as the actual budget does not follow the same simplified layout. To illustrate this point, the official Capital Budget from 2015 (when public input was solicited via budget hearings) and 2016 (when the forums were piloted instead) are shown below in Figures 2.13 and

2.14, respectively. The Capital Budget is organized into functional areas. The description of each functional area is provided below, taken from the budget document itself.⁷

Engineering and Construction: These projects are improvements to the walls, steps, fences, roads, sidewalks, and bridges throughout the City of Pittsburgh. They also include large highway and bridge projects (TIP), street resurfacing, as well as projects to make our streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.

Facility Improvements: These projects are major repairs or rehabilitation of City-owned assets, such as parks, playgrounds, pools, ballfields, and buildings.

Public Safety: These projects repair and replace important infrastructure for the health and well-being of City residents, and eliminate public safety risks.

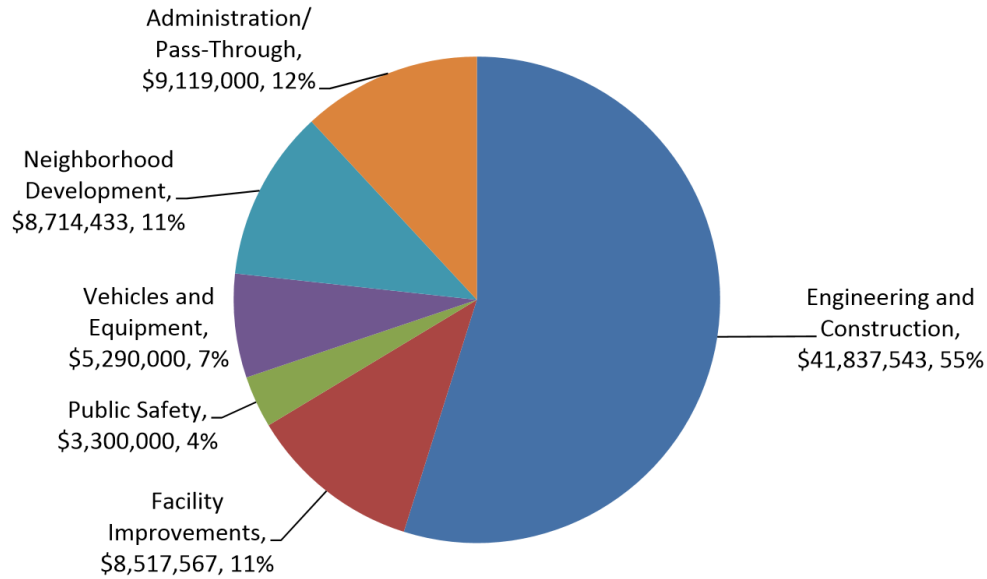
Vehicles and Equipment: These projects involve the purchasing of vehicles and heavy equipment for public safety and service-delivery.

Neighborhood Development: These projects are investments in our City's neighborhood business districts, residential communities, and small businesses that raise the quality of life for residents.

Administration and Pass-Through: These projects are distinct from the other functional areas in that they are typically pass-through grants dispersed to various nonprofits and community-based organizations. Other projects include costs associated with the administration of the City's Capital Improvement Plan and City-owned assets.

⁷ Information on the City of Pittsburgh's budget is available here: <http://pittsburghpa.gov/information/budget>

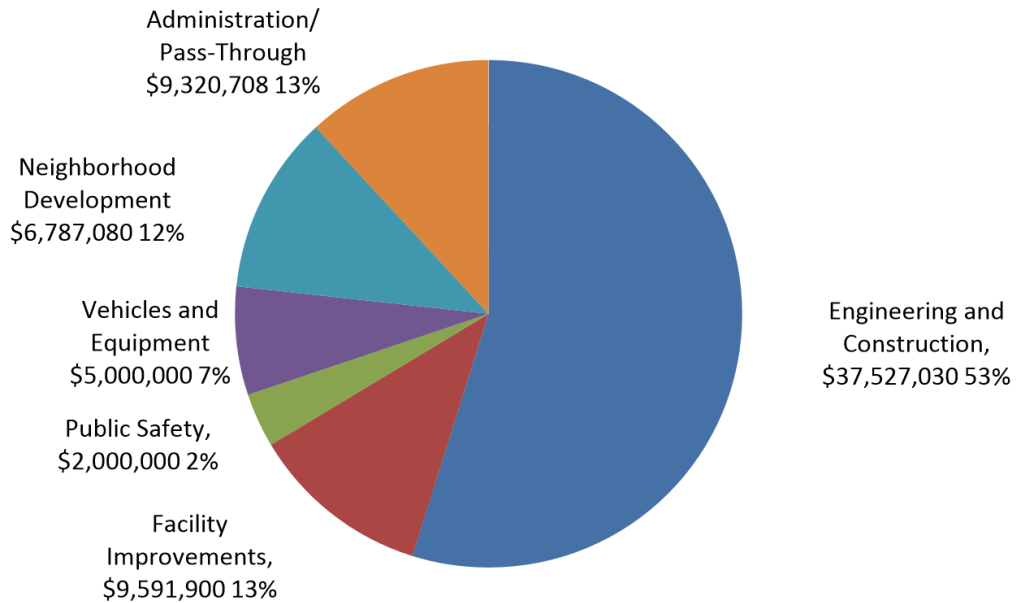
2015 Capital Budget By Functional Area



Total \$76,778,543.00

Figure 2.13: Distribution of funds within the approved 2015 Capital Budget.

2016 Capital Budget By Functional Area



Total \$70,226,718

Figure 2.14: Distribution of funds within the approved 2016 Capital Budget.

Some notable changes are increases in investments for public safety, facilities improvements, and neighborhood development, which were all listed as either part of the Mayor's priorities (with high approval from participants) or as suggested priorities by the participants themselves. This apparent correlation between the forum input and the budget outcomes is disrupted by a tangent decrease in engineering and construction, which was among the highest priorities of participants. Despite these changes, there is no reliable method for determining whether the input from the forums was in any way responsible for them since there is no information from which this conclusion can be based. The City of Pittsburgh OMB did not respond when asked to comment on or explain how the input and data from the forums was used in the budgeting process and whether it had any influence or led to any changes in the official budget. Nor did the City or OMB make any official public announcements as a follow up for the forums, signaling that they are using the information in any substantive way. All documents are released as part of several transparency initiatives, but they are not accompanied by any explanation of the action "behind the scenes," so only assumptions can be made. This absence of communication perhaps contributes to the feelings of low confidence expressed by forum participants and evident in the survey data that their voice was truly being heard by the city. This section concludes the summary of the findings from this research.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section of the paper outlines several specific recommended changes that can be made to improve the design and efficacy of the Deliberative Community Budget Forums in the future. The findings from this research have highlighted several possible areas for improvement, most notably in recruitment. The key recommendations made here, listed in descending order of importance within each section below, propose individual solutions to address each of these aforementioned issues and areas for improvement brought up during the analysis and prior discussion.

3.1 TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FORUM DIVERSITY

The City's Office of Community Affairs should **expand outreach efforts** within targeted unrepresented communities through more active recruitment, including a combination of door-to-door canvassing, mailed written invitations, phone banking, and community events such as block parties. This ensures that information about the forums is more widely known, and that traditionally excluded groups feel particularly invited to participate (something which has been found to be a critical component in increasing participation).⁸

⁸ For more on the dynamics influencing political participation, see Verba & Nye (1972) and Ganuza & Francés (2012).

The City's Office of Community Affairs should **arrange for temporary child care services** to be made available at the locations of the Deliberative Forums so that parents are able to attend without worrying about their children during the 2.5 hour long time commitment, thus reducing high costs to participation.

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **hold more forums on separate dates and in various locations around the city** to maximize convenience and accessibility of participation.

The City's Office of Community Affairs should **announce the forums earlier** through digital and physical communications such as social media and flyer postings so that residents know what they are and when they will be further in advance.

3.2 TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF POLITICAL VOICE

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **hold more forums later in the budget process** to allow residents to review what capital projects and allocations decisions have been proposed since the last forums and engage in a dialogue about whether they feel their input was properly taken into account and is at least partially reflected in the proposed budget.

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **increase transparency of the post-forum budget process** by making the data from the forums publicly available as well as issuing a follow-up public announcement explaining how the forum input was internally deliberated and acted upon (or not and why).

3.3 TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF FORUM DESIGN

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **focus the forums on more specific priorities** in cooperation with the Mayor. Priorities which are too generic can limit the reliability of public feedback while priorities that are too specific can cause participants to miss the bigger

picture. A balance must be struck where the priorities deliberated are tailored directly toward the purpose of engaging the public for useful input on the budget.

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **provide more thorough training for volunteer moderators** in cooperation with the Art of Democracy. The quality of the deliberations depends heavily on the strength of the moderators in keeping the deliberations fair and focused (see Spada & Vreeland, 2013). More training can help ensure that moderators are able to subdue efforts by any one participant to domineer the discussion, and can also make them more aware of how to limit their own bias during the deliberations. In particular, moderator training can reduce the damaging risk of gender bias and inequality within the forums by giving female moderators the tools and confidence to counter efforts by others to assert authority over the conversation, and can provide skills to make sure women's voices are not ignored during the discussions (both of which were partially observed during the Capital Budget forums).⁹

The City's Office of Management and Budget should **improve the quality of the resource panel** so that answers they provide can be more useful to forum participants. Polling the community before the forum to ask who they would be most interested in seeing represented at the panel can be one way to do so. Another way would be to ensure that panelists are effective communicators with experience providing answers that are relevant and easy to understand by a general audience.

⁹ A further recommendation can be made here to expand the question of "Feeling Heard" in the survey to include more than just "by the City" but also "by other participants." This information, combined with participant gender data collected in the surveys, could yield more valuable insight into the prevalence of gender inequality and the gendered experiences of participants during the forums. This could also be similarly applied within racial or economic assessments as well, provided such data on participants is collected and available from the surveys.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The findings from this research point to several commendable improvements in the budget process attributable to the Deliberative Community Budget Forums. In many ways, the forums led to positive qualitative and quantitative changes in participation, deliberative quality, knowledge acquisition and political engagement. However, the findings also showed that there are many areas where the forums did not show as much progress from the baseline budget hearings as they did elsewhere, most notably in the diversity of community participation and in reassuring participants that they have been heard by the City. Altogether, the forums showed considerable promise as a new method for engaging the public and were well received politically, though they fell short as an effective consultative tool to tangibly affect policy.

The success of the budget forums have led the City administration to use the process in new ways, such as a series of forums on affordable housing¹⁰ and the creation of a youth budget council to give feedback to City Council and the Mayor and to learn effective ways to advocate for their needs. Though these new initiatives are well-intentioned and indicate that the Pittsburgh is heading in the right direction, their success will depend on the administration's ability to learn from experiences and their willingness to continue to improve the process. Altogether, whether the Deliberative Community Budget Forums can be considered an effective alternative to the more traditional vote-centric PB in the United States remains to be seen. As always, more research is necessary before any meaningful conclusions can be drawn, given the many limitations that were present in this study and the nascent nature of the forums. Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest that the model of the Deliberative Forums has been a success for Pittsburgh, and will likely continue to shape the political landscape there in the years to come.

¹⁰ It should be mentioned that the City held a total of six forums on Affordable Housing in several areas of Pittsburgh to great success, attracting high numbers of participants. This lends more legitimacy to the recommendations offered here for the Capital Budget forums.

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