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Whose Budget? Our Budget? Broadening Political Stakeholdership via Participatory Budgeting

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Abstract

In this thought piece, I attempt to contextualize New York City's inaugural participatory budgeting (PB) process in the larger landscape of American political participation. I discuss how the bottom-up way in which stakeholders wrote the process's rules in the first place, alongside the core role played by the two lead organizations, helped to broaden notions of stakeholdership among constituents. Ultimately, the first year's primary achievement regarding political participation was not a specific set of outcomes, but a debut as an unfinished form of governance—one that *began* to engage traditionally marginalized constituents, to trigger their political imagination, and to prompt them to demand more.

Keywords

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Introduction

Well-designed participatory budgeting processes can help engender a more equitable reallocation of public funds, as well as higher constituent approval of public expenditures (Wampler 2007). It is now too early to evaluate the distributive outcomes of New York City's inaugural budgeting (PB) process, which took place from May 2011 until May 2012. We know what types of projects were proposed and what types of projects ultimately won funding, but we have yet to evaluate whether they will be implemented properly and in a timely manner. In this thought piece, I focus on what I consider to be an important, intermediary step towards more equitable redistribution of public resources, as well as an outcome in its own right—whether and how PB might engender greater or more equitable political participation. How did the organizers and designers of NYC's PB process attempt to encourage more diverse participation? Who participated in the first year of NYC's PB process? Were they more representative of New York's diverse constituents than those who voted in recent elections?

In the remainder of this piece, I present a brief overview of the landscape of American political participation today. This landscape is marked by low civic participation rates overall, especially among low-income residents, immigrants, and youth. I review some of the more prominent models for civic renewal in the United States being discussed in the literature, as well as a key tension that remains unresolved—namely, whether meaningful participation can be institutionalized and sustained beyond single campaigns. I then turn to New York's PB process, in order to examine whether it holds the potential to engage traditionally marginalized stakeholders in democratic institutions. I reflect upon how the PB process was itself designed in bottom-up ways, and how it helped to broaden notions of stakeholdership. Finally, I review and discuss data on who ultimately participated in NY's inaugural PB process, drawn from a research evaluation spearheaded by the Urban Justice Center. I conclude with potential implications for practice and further research.

An Exclusive Democracy?

One challenge for participatory budgeting in the United States lies in getting people to show up—at neighborhood assemblies, to work as budget delegates, to

vote, and to monitor the implementation of winning projects—in the first place. American political participation, primarily measured by voting rates, has been declining since World War 2. Although there was a small uptick in voter turnout during the 2008 Presidential election, the percentage of eligible citizens who voted remained lower than in 1960. This holds true despite the fact that many barriers to voting have been lifted since the Voting Rights Act. In fact, all indicators of political participation—letter-writing, wearing a campaign button or expressing some sign of affiliation with a candidate of choice, volunteering, and participating in rallies and demonstration—have been on the decline for decades (Macedo et al. 2005). There appears to be lower civic participation overall; even sports clubs and non-political social activities, for example, are not as common or active as they used to be (Putnam 2001).

This decline in American participation is not distributed evenly across demographic groups or levels of government. Political participation is especially suffering at the local level, despite Tip O'Neill's quip that "all politics is local" (O'Neill and Hymel 1994, p. 208). Further, inequalities in our nation's democratic participation continue to increase. Asian Americans and Latinos report far lower levels of participation than whites, African Americans, and Native Americans. The wealthy, the highly educated, and men donate more money, attend more meetings, and are generally more active in politics than their contrasting counterparts (Brady et al. 1995). For example, over 90% of those with annual incomes of $75,000 and above vote, while only 50% of those with household incomes of $15,000 and below vote. To those who believe that political participation is essential to a robust democracy, it is especially troubling that immigrants and young people report the lowest levels of political participation because political habits tend to be lifelong, and set early on (Levine and Lopez 2002; Youniss and Levine 2009).

Immigrants, youth, and low-income people tend to vote at lower rates for a wide range of reasons, including perceptions that their engagement would not be welcome at civic institutions, a lack of resources and contacts to contribute to political campaigns, and a lack of opportunities that adequately reflect their concerns and make use of their skills (Macedo et al. 2005; Godsay et al. 2012). This highlights the need for research on innovative attempts to revitalize American democracy, especially amongst those most disenfranchised.

A particular challenge lies in averting the "participation paradox"— whereby more intensive forms of political participation are only practiced by those with most resources. Stolle and Hooghe argue: "Since most of these expansions of the participation repertoires require a substantive amount of cognitive skills and material resources, it is plausible that the participation paradox might lead to more unequal outcomes for these emerging action

repetoires than would be the case for conventional or institutionalized participation acts" (2011, p. 208).

Whither a civic renewal
Partly because rates of official political participation have been so dismal, policy-makers and researchers have been examining whether other avenues for civic engagement—social movements, community organizing, and other community organizations or informal networks—hold promise.

Social movement organizations appear to also provide fewer opportunities for meaningful participation when they become hierarchical, professionalized, and divorced from the grassroots (Skocpol 1997; Skocpol 2004; Fisher 2006). Ordinary members can do little but send in their membership fees or make donations each year, while paid lobbyists from Political Action Committees form the core of these organizations. While these social movement organizations play an important role in politics, they hardly contribute to a deep, healthy democracy at the local level.

Despite this sobering backdrop, some scholars paint a more optimistic picture about American democracy, especially in the field of community organizing (Warren 2001; Wood 2002; Warren 2005; Orr 2007). These researchers focus on large, national networks of local community organizing groups, such as IAF (the Industrial Areas Foundation) and Gamaliel. Further, the most attention has been paid to IAF, originally founded by Saul Alinsky and really a coalition of religious congregations, and especially to Texas IAF, which has launched several successful labor and education campaigns. Studies on the IAF pay attention to the ways in which organizers help low-income families, mostly African American and Latino, to fight moneyed power with people power. They especially highlight how these organizations tap into faith-based social networks, often assumed to be a conservative force, and join them for progressive goals. The case studies suggest that American political apathy or disenfranchisement, even amongst low-income people of color, is not inevitable.

Social change organizations—grassroots organizations embedded in local communities and working towards systemic social change—can thus play a pivotal role in potentially revitalizing American democracy, by engaging everyday citizens and non-citizens (including both documented permanent residents who have not yet received American citizenship and undocumented residents), facilitating social and political participation in sustained campaigns, and building cross-cutting alliances (Chetkovich and Kunreuther 2006). Barack Obama's background as a community organizer (Minkler 2012), the Tea Party movement (Ashbee 2011; Williamson et al. 2011), and the Occupy movement in the summers and autumns of 2011 and 2012 (Smith and Glidden 2012; van Stekelenburg 2012) have all fueled further interest in a possible resurgence in

American community organizing. Still, there remain questions about larger-scale coordination, and whether meaningful change can be institutionalized.

New York's PB: A bottom-up process

Thus, those involved in collaboratively designing New York's PB process worried about engaging increasingly disillusioned voters, involving traditionally marginalized stakeholders, and sustaining meaningful participation over the course of a year.

The process began with four City Council members (Brad Lander, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Eric Ulrich, and Jumaane Williams) who turned over part of their capital discretionary funds. On-going expenses, such as operational costs and staffing, were not eligible for consideration, but infrastructural costs like park enhancements were.

City Council members, and some of their staff, individuals and representatives from a range of local governance and community institutions also participated in the city-wide Steering Committee. These included members of local Community Boards (existing appointed, volunteer advisory groups throughout New York City dealing with land use and local services delivery), researchers, educational institutions, local community development corporations and services agencies, think tanks and national coalitions focused on urban issues.[1] This Committee began to meet in May 2011, convening regularly over the next few months to determine key eligibility rules, voting procedures, and the timing and overall structure of neighborhood assemblies, budget delegate meetings, and evaluation.

New York's PB was designed to be a bottom-up process in two key ways. First, two lead organizations helped to coordinate efforts by the four City Council members. They also helped to organize neighborhood assemblies, budget delegate meetings, and outreach with enough public education and information, so that these activities would not easily be manipulated or used as political tools for voter consolidation. The Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) acted as the lead organization providing technical assistance.[2] A grassroots group with over two decades of experience, Community Voices Heard (CVH), acted as a core partner focused on outreach throughout the process.[3]

As a non-academic, non-governmental, membership-based organization with deep-seated ties with low-income residents throughout the city, CVH lent the PB process grassroots legitimacy. CVH's participation helped to reassure

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[1] For a full list of partners on the Steering Committee, see http://pbnyc.org/content/about-new-york-city-process#partners

[2] See the article by Josh Lerner and Donata Secondo in this journal volume and at http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/

[3] See the organization's website http://www.cvhaction.org/ for more information.

constituents that the decisions they made through their votes would be binding, and that the PB process would not be yet another process whereby politicians made promises and let constituents advise, but not make decisions. More substantively, CVH helped to ensure that everyday constituents (including those with fewer resources and lower levels of educational attainment) participated in and informed the year-long process. They were experienced in leadership development and mass mobilization, and they could organize large numbers of staff, across different offices, to coordinate PB events and assemblies. They could quickly train less experienced constituents and volunteers to assume leadership responsibilities, such as co-chairing meetings. Their organizers knew, for instance, the number of people they would need to reach by telephone or via door-knocking in order to guarantee a turnout of 200 people at a neighborhood assembly, which strategies were more likely to yield low-income participants, and how to translate often technocratic information on policies and governmental structures into clear, accessible presentations.

Second, New York's PB structure was designed in bottom-up way; a wide range of participants wrote the rules that would govern the process for the rest of the year. Each participant proved essential to the process—community board members, for instance, could help to ensure that PB rules did not conflict with theirs, pinpoint which governance institution or bureaucracy had jurisdiction over implementation of likely project proposals, and help to evaluate whether there would be enough local political support for certain initiatives. In other words, the principles of transparency and participatory decision-making were applied not just to the budgeting process, but to the preceding PB rule-making process as well.

The Steering Committee made decisions via a combination of larger-group voting and smaller-group deliberation. All participating members were polled for key decisions (such as whether non-citizens would be allowed to vote), but small working groups ultimately made specific recommendations. Committee members joined these working groups both according to their interests and by random assignment.

For example, I acted as a participant-observer in the working group that recommended specific rules for online participation. Based on the PB experiences of other cities, PBP had already prepared an agenda with key questions to be answered, e.g., *Would people be allowed to submit ideas online? Would they be allowed to vote via text messaging?* Working group members discussed available technologies, resources, and effects on voting, e.g., *How would such votes be tabulated, or duplicates prevented?* There was at least one person with relevant technical expertise in each group, i.e., software development and website design for interactive platforms in the online participation group, or a community organizer for the outreach group. Most members, however, brought their own professional and personal interests to the table. While some members were more

concerned with encouraging as much participation as possible, others wondered whether online participants would deliberate the merits of proposals as much as assembly participants would. They decided to allow online submission of project ideas, but to limit voting to paper ballots.

After small working groups made preliminary decisions regarding the rules that would govern New York's PB process, all SC members voted to approve or reject the handbook as a whole.[4]

Broadening notions of stakeholdership

The PB process helped traditionally marginalized constituents, such as low-income citizens, to become more involved in local governance. They also helped to broaden notions of who constituted a legitimate stakeholder and, in effect, whose opinion counted in local policy debates.

Steering Committee members designed neighborhood assemblies open to the public at large to be as inclusive as possible. Thus, anyone could submit project proposals to be considered for placement on PB ballots. Some questioned, however, who should be allowed to serve as a budget delegate (working closely with city agencies in vetting the feasibility of project proposals, tinkering with them to fit within city budgeting guidelines, and selecting those that end up on the ballot), and who should be allowed to vote on the projects that would ultimately receive funding. In a Steering Committee-wide poll, an overwhelming majority of attending members wanted non-citizens, including undocumented immigrants, to be eligible to serve as budget delegates and/or vote.

From the outset, participants decided that the participatory budgeting process would not only be open to local citizens, but to all sorts of stakeholders—those who cared about and possessed local knowledge regarding the neighborhood and City Council district. This included anyone who was at least 16 years old and lived in the district, worked in the district, owned a business or attended school in the district, or parents of children who attended school in the district. Through this process, participants helped to define their community and then calibrate rights and responsibilities usually associated with citizens to better fit their definition of community.

The range of legitimate stakeholders broadened further over the course of the PB process. For example, no youth participated in the SC during the first year, even though school infrastructural improvements and local safety crossings were popular proposals in the PB process, and despite the fact that youth-led community organizing in New York City has thrived in the past decade. Indeed, based on my participant observations, one of the most contentious decisions from the first round was to limit eligible voters to residents ages 18 and up. While most

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[4] The handbook for New York's 2011-2012 PB process can be found at
http://pbnyc.org/sites/default/files/PB.Handbook.toPrint.9.30.11.pdf

Steering Committee members present wanted youth to be eligible to vote as well, some members felt more strongly about this issue than others, and a few were not willing to participate unless youth were excluded the first year.

In some ways, it is not surprising that youth participation in PB was rather limited. Youth—especially black and Latino teenagers—are often sidelined as stakeholders and underrepresented in public forums on local policy-making. For example, in 2009, the New York State Assembly held five public hearings (one in each borough) on whether mayoral control of city schools should be renewed. The hearing organizers gave each participant just a few minutes to speak and give a testimony, with no time allotted for discussion and deliberation. In total, around 250 members of the public spoke at these five hearings. Nine of the speakers were youth, though there are more than 1 million students in the school system.[5] In other words, the public at large was given little chance to provide critical feedback on mayoral control, and youth—the ultimate stakeholders of the school system— were especially underrepresented at the public forums.

New York's first PB process did not give youth the right to vote, but as compared to the mayoral control hearings, they did give youth more opportunities to substantively participate in other ways. At a youth neighborhood assembly hosted by City Councilor Melissa Mark-Viverito, roughly 100 youth (aged between 10 to 16) pored over maps of the City Council district and immediately gave ideas for new skate parks in areas of inadequate public space, or identified potential spots to be addressed via capital projects, e.g., an abandoned building on 103rd street between Lexington and Third Avenue. They quickly scaled their proposal ideas to fit within the budget guidelines.

In my participant observations, I witnessed how youth surprised some adults in their ability to identify local neighborhood trouble spots, articulate proposals, and present cogent arguments about why some proposals appeared to deserve great attention—because of a variety of criteria, including need, cost, and the constituencies most likely to be served. Over the course of the two hours, I observed both youth and adults—including the police officers serving as security at the event—initially express boredom but become enthusiastic in identifying neighborhood needs. This corroborates data from surveys of neighborhood assembly facilitators and observations by researchers of the PB process; citywide, 94% of neighborhood assembly participants spoke during small group sessions, and 84% made specific budget proposals.

Although adults were separated from youth in the small working group sessions of this neighborhood assembly, each small working group presented its top two proposal ideas to everyone who attended. During this last component of

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[5] I calculated these by tabulating speakers via the transcripts available via New York State Assemblywoman Catherine Nolan's website:
http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/?ad=037&sh=postings

the assembly, several of the adults expressed pleasant surprise that the youth presented proposals they had wanted to forward as well, and that some of the youth's more novel or innovative ideas clearly spoke to local needs. Over the course of just one neighborhood assembly, it became clear that although the youth sometimes lacked technical expertise, they had the capacity to think about neighborhood needs and draw upon local knowledge, i.e., what infrastructural improvements were most needed in their classrooms and school buildings, what spaces were most welcoming to students after school, and which areas were in dire need of such spaces.

Youth from poor communities are often labeled "troublemakers" if they speak critically about local institutions and policies (Alonso et al. 2009; Su 2010). It is significant, then, that the PB neighborhood assemblies gave youth opportunities to not only articulate local problems and weaknesses, but to also generate concrete ideas for project proposals and provide constructive feedback.

Indeed, face-to-face interactions such as those I observed may have helped to spur changes in PB rules. For the second 2012-2013 year, residents ages 16 and up became eligible to vote; youth above the age of 14 could submit proposals. According to my observations during the "writing the rules" sessions and interviews with Steering Committee members, some of those who had objected to youth voting in the first year no longer did so; for them, what seemed radical in the first year became normalized by the second.

Notions of stakeholdership did not just broaden by age. In another neighborhood assembly hosted by City Councilor Melissa Mark-Viverito, I observed constituents (not just residents, but also business owners and local parents) from lower-income East Harlem engage in sustained conversations about local needs with constituents from the higher-income Upper West Side. More than once, participants explicitly articulated a change of opinion about district priorities. One Upper West Side resident, for instance, stated that he had attended the assembly to forward his idea for a stop sign at an intersection near his home, but that laundry rooms for senior citizens in public housing should receive higher priority. Given that some of these senior citizens were not US citizens, these neighborhood assemblies broadened notions of legitimate stakeholdership for them as well.

Notably, Argentine President Cristina Fernandez recently proposed a law allowing 16-year-olds and foreigners with two years or more of permanent residency to vote in national elections (Leff 2012). Although questions about who should be allowed to hold the rights and responsibilities of voting—college students who live in campus town for only part of the year, or formerly incarcerated citizens who have served their sentences—arise on a regular basis in the US as well, they are often framed in limiting ways, i.e., regarding who should *denied* the right to vote. PB provides a focused, potentially expansive way in

which to engage such questions with specific individuals in mind, and in conversation.

The focused agenda on concrete problems also appeared to be essential to broadening notions of stakeholdership and, as a corollary, facilitating cross-cutting alliances. The agenda provided anchors for otherwise abstract discussions on the right amount of arts funding a school should receive, or perceptions of public safety and crime across neighborhoods. In Eric Ulrich's City Council district in the Rockaways section of Queens, teachers from one school with a strong drama program discovered that a neighboring school had no drama activities at all. What began as a venue to procure potential funds for their respective schools became an opportunity for new collaborative efforts and relationships between schools.

Such a broadening of notions of stakeholdership could only take place if a wide range of constituents attended the neighborhood assemblies in the first place. Partly because they are used to being dismissed or excluded from public fora, such constituents were unlikely to show up unless they were explicitly welcomed, and unless targeted outreach took place. Some of those who did attend neighborhood assemblies first felt more comfortable among themselves, so that the small working groups acted as *de facto* "safe spaces" in which they could speak their own language (literally or figuratively), articulate common interests, and vet ideas before presenting them to the larger public (Evans and Boyte 1992; Guinier and Torres 2003). Yet, such safe spaces were not enough on their own. Traditionally marginalized stakeholders could only attain legitimacy in the eyes of others if the larger assemblies engaged constituents across age, racial, income, and citizenship lines, but this remains difficult midst pervasive residential segregation by class and race.

A social contract to be renewed, renegotiated, and expanded

The Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center spearheaded a research evaluation to gauge who participated in the process, what participants might have learned from the process, and how the process might be improved in future iterations. The research team collected data via 963 neighborhood assembly surveys, 344 budget delegate surveys (including surveys both at the beginning and at the end of the process), 3,721 voter surveys, and dozens of interviews and participant observations. Alexa Kasdan of the Urban Justice Center served as the lead investigator; I sat on the research committee as well.[6]

According to the data, New York's inaugural PB process engaged quite a few long-term stakeholders with previously low levels of political participation. For instance, although 75% of neighborhood assembly participants lived in their

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[6] See http://www.cdp-ny.org/ for more information.

respective neighborhoods for more than 8 years, a third had never worked with others in their community work on local problems before PB.

Constituents from traditionally marginalized subpopulations participated in PB at much higher rates than in traditional elections. For instance, in District 8, Latinos constituted 39% of voters in 2009 City Council elections but 48% in PB. Participation rates by low-income stakeholders increased more dramatically via PB. In District 8, the very poor—those with incomes of $10,000 or less—constituted 4% of voters in 2009 City Council elections but 22% of PB voters. Although voters with incomes of $25,000 or less constituted only 9% of PB voters in District 32, this was a nine-fold increase from 2009 City Council elections.

These data are impressive partly because inequalities in political participation in the City Council districts where PB took place largely mirror those of America as a whole. For instance, 35% of very poor participants had contacted an elected official in the year before PB, as compared to 60% of those with incomes higher than $150,000. Among budget delegates, 24% of the women reported that they felt "very comfortable" with public speaking prior to the PB process, compared to 40% of the men.

Yet, PB seems to have been a transformative and educative experience for many of the participants. Women constituted a majority of participants through the PB process, as neighborhood assembly attendees, budget delegates, and voters. Among PB voters, 78% reported that they better understood their respective districts' needs through PB. An overwhelming majority of budget delegates, 82%, reported that they were more likely to join a community organization after working with others on neighborhood problems in PB. Over a third of delegates became "very comfortable" in public speaking via the PB process.

This data, though preliminary, suggest that PB has the potential to untangle the participation paradox—when designed from the bottom up, and when implemented with significant grassroots outreach. PB has the potential to engage those with the fewest resources but the most to gain from municipal budgeting and redistribution. Indeed, 79% of NY budget delegates with an income of less than $15,000 were "very interested" in making neighborhood decisions, whereas 63% of those with incomes greater $100,000 reported being so. While this does not guarantee more equitable distribution of public expenditures, it does suggest that NYC's PB has already succeeded in taking intermediary step towards redistribution, i.e., addressing inequalities in participation.

Such stakeholders will participate—and even participate intensively, conducting research, meeting with city agencies, evaluating proposals, and attending many meetings over months—when given the guidance and incentive to do so.

Notably, the Bangladeshi-American community in Brad Lander's 39th District mobilized around an "International Mother Language" monument that did not win enough votes to be funded immediately, but did win enough to gain notice for other potential funding. The PB process also mobilized some stakeholders to demand more in other ways. The winning project in that district, bathrooms renovations at an elementary school, outraged many stakeholders. Several of these stakeholders noted that they thought the renovations should have been covered by standard school district funds rather their City Councilor's discretionary funds; this prompted them to question larger educational budgets outside of the PB process. Others wondered why expenses budgets could not be subject to the same sort of transparency and bottom-up accountability. Indeed, 12% of project ideas were deemed ineligible because they were expenses ideas.

That said, PB runs the risk of replicating patterns embedded in community organizing overall (especially when the organizing is network-based), i.e. it can work to help the less powerful while still excluding the least powerful. Although Spanish-speaking participants served as budget delegates at rates comparable to those of English-speaking participants, participants with other dominant native languages—Haitian Creole, Cantonese and Mandarin, and others—did not. At one of the District 8 neighborhood assemblies I attended, there were some Chinese residents from local senior-only public housing projects, and there were both Mandarin- and Cantonese-language interpreters ready to translate for them. However, there had not been enough resources for targeted outreach, and translations of written materials into Spanish, Chinese, Yiddish, Russian, Polish, Bengali, and Haitian Creole were all performed by volunteers. While Community Voices Heard and City Council staff have done an admirable job at reaching constituents on incredibly small budgets, the equality principle of the PB process will be undermined unless more resources are devoted to outreach.

Conclusion

New York's first PB process was able to engage thousands of New Yorkers who stated that they were previously not involved in their communities, and who expressed little trust in government. The bottom-up way in which stakeholders wrote the process's rules in the first place, alongside the core role played by the two lead organizations, helped to encourage bottom-up participation in the city's inaugural PB process.

In addition, two key findings on political participation emerge from the research thus far. First, it is possible to elicit participation by constituents with few resources, but this requires substantial funds for mobilization. Some constituents from traditionally marginalized groups became quite engaged in PB; they proposed ideas, they spent hundreds of hours volunteering as budget delegates, and they voted at high rates. Predictably, those who did not benefit

from targeted outreach remained on the sidelines. Meaningful participation is unlikely to occur without greater efforts in targeted outreach, and as PB expands into twice the number of City Council districts, reliance upon volunteer labor becomes increasingly risky. Further research might investigate what is needed to mobilize the hardest-to-reach, as well as what is needed to sustain meaningful participation over multiple years. The latter will become increasingly important as constituents work with city agencies to ensure that winning projects are implemented in a timely manner.

Second, face-to-face deliberations outside of voting, a focus on concrete problems, and a framework for constructive proposals were essential to broadening notions of legitimate stakeholdership. The youth, for example, may have had a much more difficult time winning adult allies if they had not first gathered in small working groups that acted as *de facto* "safe spaces," had not been given explicit budgeting guidelines for project ideas, and had not then received the opportunity to present their ideas to a larger, more diverse audience (including adults as well as youth) at neighborhood assemblies. This participation helped to shape adult Steering Committee members' views of youth as stakeholders during the second year's handbook-writing process and, in turn, helped 16- to 18-year-olds to garner the right to vote. Thus, PB organizers faced significant challenges in articulating constituents' most salient identities and the discrete groups to be targeted (by age, race/ ethnicity, gender, neighborhood, student/ work status, primary language spoken), and in balancing intra-group deliberations with inter-group ones. In social capital parlance, this would involve building and harnessing both bonding and bridging social capital in the PB process (Woolcock 1998). The latter goal—of facilitating public forums where members of different groups participate and speak up—is especially difficult in a larger context of pervasive racial/ethnic and socioeconomic segregation.

It is much too early to evaluate whether New York's inaugural PB process yielded constructive distributive outcomes, in terms of public funds allocated. Still, in the landscape of American political participation, it has already made some significant accomplishments—it has signaled that participatory governance is inherently a perpetual work in progress. Each new iteration of PB must be reinvented to truly fit the local context and empower local stakeholders, but this does not mean that New Yorkers reinvented the PB wheel from scratch. The two lead organizations helped to ensure that, rather than participating in free-wheeling discussions about abstract ideals, a wide range of local stakeholders had blueprints to work from and specific questions to answer. These adjusted blueprints formed a new social contract to be renewed, renegotiated, and expanded. As Freire wrote, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift" (1968); meaningful accomplishments in political participation and democratization can only come about via such struggles.

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