

Redemocratizing Democracy, or Affirmative Governmentality?  
New York's Recent Experiences with Participatory Budgeting  
Celina Su, May 2015.

In 2011, at age 24, Corin Mills was not confident that he was capable of completing long-term projects, let alone attend college. He had dropped out of high school and served a brief jail sentence. Then, through a New York community-based organization called Getting Out Staying Out, Mills became involved in participatory budgeting (PB)—a process in which community members, rather than elected officials, decide how to allocate public funds—in New York.

Mills researched the need for and feasibility of project ideas pitched by his neighbors in the fall of 2011. Over the winter, he helped to develop a proposal for a mobile laptop lab to be shared by nine public schools. In the spring of 2012, the proposal Mills worked on won \$450,000. His experiences with PB had already been transformative. Before, Mills had only interacted with administrative elites and authority figures, such as local school principals and elected officials, in surveilling and punitive ways; now, he built upon his newfound skills and sense of accomplishment to pursue an even more ambitious goal—to apply to and attend college. Mills was even able to partly cover his college costs with an online crowdfunding campaign<sup>1</sup> that movingly related his struggles.

Mills' story speaks to PB's potential to engage traditionally marginalized constituents to help them inform policy-makers of their priorities and concerns, bring constituents closer to the governments they elect, hold states accountable, and, put bluntly, (re)enfranchise them. Indeed, PB has received tremendous attention since it first began in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1989, spreading to over 1,500 cities worldwide. Since 2010 alone, PB has spread from one American city to a projected forty-five this year. Community organizing coalitions like Right to the City have advocated for PB as one means of reclaiming the commons, and President Obama recently announced PB as a key element of his latest "Open Government" initiative.<sup>2</sup>

Still, as PB continues to gain traction, there remain questions as to whether PB can sustain engagement among the traditionally disenfranchised and help engender a more equitable reallocation of public funds, as in well-known past cases (Wampler, 2010). Some researchers have argued that PB now runs the risk of becoming a buzzword-turned-fuzzword, an empowering and

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/help-corin-go-to-college>

<sup>2</sup> See the White House press release on "Transparency and Open Government" at <http://1.usa.gov/1dLtUiU> (accessed March 17, 2014).

democratizing process that diffused and watered down into a politically malleable, innocuous set of procedures (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014).

In this paper, I examine the largest PB process in North America— that of New York City, which just completed its fourth cycle in summer 2015. In this case study of the New York City experience, I examine PB’s contested role as an empowering, pro-poor tool for social justice, and traces the difficulty of implementing meaningful collaborative governance. I focus on the relationships and interactions between everyday participants in PB and city agency representatives, the bureaucrats involved in the process. I draw upon surveys and observations, as well as interviews with budget delegates and representatives from all relevant city agencies.

In the New York case thus far, PB has successfully broadened notions of stakeholdership and citizenship for many constituents (especially youth and undocumented citizens). Still, it has not necessarily prompted, just yet, a re-prioritization of budget allocations or changes in power dynamics between city agencies and constituents. In order to amplify material, distributive and discursive impacts on budgeting in New York City, the PB process must treat city agency representatives as political stakeholders, and enhance capacity-building for all constituents, in order to redouble efforts to address power inequalities.

In the remainder of this article, I briefly review two literatures—that of democratic participation and that of citizen-bureaucrat dynamics in co-production and collaborative governance—and how they converge in analyses of participatory budgeting. I then present key findings from the PB process in New York City thus far, focusing on how PB has successfully (re)enfranchised traditionally marginalized constituents. I trace emerging motifs from interviews with budget delegates (those who volunteered to vet project ideas and develop them into full fledged proposals to appear on final ballots) and city agency representatives (those who worked to ensure the feasibility of final project proposals). Taking an ecosystem view of different sets of actors in the PB process and from both bottom-up and top-down perspectives, I conclude with implications for future PB and similar participatory policy-making processes.

### **A decline in American participation**

American political participation of all sorts—voting, writing to elected officials—has steadily declined since World War 2. Although there was a small uptick in voting in 2012, overall voting rates remain lower than they were in 1960 (McDonald, 2014).

Further, participation is not evenly distributed among demographic groups. For example,

Latinos and Asian Americans, women, and low-income constituents tend to vote at lower rates than other racial groups, men, and higher-income constituents, respectively. As income and education levels increase, so does participation in a wide range of political activities, such as working with fellow citizens to solve community problems, making financial contributions, or getting in touch with public officials. Over 90% of those with annual incomes of \$75,000 and above vote, while only 50% of those with household incomes of \$15,000 vote (Macedo et al., 2005). Comparatively, among more than thirty high-income countries, the United States reported the highest difference in voting rates between those who have completed high school and those who have not (OCED, 2011).

At the same time, new laws in the United States often result in the further disenfranchisement of Americans. In 2011 alone, just before the 2012 Presidential election, 41 American states have introduced over 180 legislative bills to restrict voting for laws demanding photo IDs, proof of citizenship, banning same-day registration and university IDs. These laws, all in the name of combating voter fraud, tend to disproportionately discourage eligible voters with fewer resources, such as youth, non-white citizens, lower-income citizens, and immigrants, those who report lower rates of participation to begin with (Weiser & Norden, 2011). The United States also boasts of the largest prison population in the world, with the highest incarceration rate in the world, 716 out of every 100,000 people (Walmsley, 2014). One of every three African American males is likely to enter prison in his lifetime, with many losing voting rights as they do so (Mauer, 2013).

These trends suggest that low participation rates in the United States reflect more than apathy or narcissism, popular lines of discourse about Americans (and American youth in particular) in the mainstream media (Bergman, Fearington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Kaklamanidou & Tally, 2014). Most recently, Occupy Wall Street and protests regarding police brutality and other social issues further deepen the puzzle. If Americans do engage in politics, why do they loathe to do so via institutional channels?

### **A proliferation of discourse on and initiatives for participation**

This decades-long distress regarding the decline and professionalization of American political participation parallels a rise in academic interest in participation worldwide (Putnam, 2001; Skocpol, 1997, 2004). While some scholars paint a more optimistic picture about American democracy, especially in the field of community organizing, others emphasize the limited success

of attempts at larger-scale social movements, especially in the context of a \$1.3 trillion activist “sector” and industry (Graeber, 2013; Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, 2007; Warren, 2005).

In recent years, the domestic and international literatures on political participation, previously largely parallel, have begun to intersect more consistently and substantively. Much of the international participation literature was inspired by the need for constituents throughout the Global South to have a say in the mass-scale dam projects, economic policies, and other governmental (or government-binding) decisions being made by elites, whether domestically or by international institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. Prominent titles in this literature included *Rural Development: Putting the Last First, Whose reality counts?*, and the World Bank Sourcebook on templates for stakeholder analyses and the limits of relying solely on technical experts in the 1980s and 1990s (Carnemark, Pagiola, Sawyer, Ansari, & Narayan, 1996; Chambers, 1997, 2014).

By the early 2000s, practitioners and scholars had already begun to call “participatory frameworks” the “new tyranny,” a way for funders and institutions to pay lip service to participation while perpetuating the received wisdom (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Such critiques in international development were especially acute because calls for democratic participation and a strengthening of civil society came in the post-Cold War context, accompanied by policies meant to transition societies and economies away from socialism. Just as “civil society” helped to topple communist regimes in Eastern Europe, perhaps it would battle corruption and keep government in check elsewhere, as well (Chandhoke, 2007). (Indeed, all other papers in the same World Bank series as the *Participation Sourcebook* focused on combating state corruption.) Some of the most recent works on community participation explicitly tie War on Poverty-era Community Action Programs not just to global post-colonial community development campaigns, but also to current trends in grassroots initiatives both domestically and abroad (Immerwahr, 2014).

Because so much of the discourse on participation accompanied policies aiming at decentralizing and devolving budgets and policy-making, “participation” became a call of the neoliberal right as well as the left. A particularly fascinating case study in post-Pinochet Chile disentangles many of the contradictory uses of participation discourse by politicians on all points of the political spectrum post-dictatorship. An emphasis on “community participation” by politicians might bring policy-making closer to the people, rendering the state accountable in a

bottom-up way, but it might also highlight the burden on individuals to assume responsibilities that had traditionally been those of the welfare state (Paley, 2001).

As the distrust of government deepens and participatory programs proliferate, the tensions embedded in democratic experiments' potential for both empowerment and co-optation have only deepened. But can these experiments really re-democratize democracy? Many of the scholarly debates on this question have been framed in the admittedly, “perhaps oversimplified... opposition” between Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault (Purcell, 2008; Silver, Scott, & Kazepov, 2010, p. 457). While their original works clearly carry more nuance, Habermas is more often cited in analyses of a discursive formation of public goods and collective will, whereas Foucault is more often cited to emphasize the ubiquity of power inequalities, and the coercive, pervasive, soft power of dominant logics, with power part and parcel of all social practices (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Foucault, 1982, 1991; Habermas, 1984, 1985).

In response, the deliberative and participatory democracy literature has emphasized the need for analyses of alternatives to individual-focused, electoral, market-based models of decision-making and governance, across a range of contexts in both the Global North and the Global South (Cornwall & Coelho, 2007; de Sousa Santos, 2005; de Souza Briggs, 2008; Fung & Wright, 2003). As the need for ground-level analysis gained institutional legitimacy and political credence, both policy-makers and scholars have also questioned whether calls for greater public involvement in holding governments accountable were actually being realized—Who has been participating? For whose benefit? Thus, rather than prescribing universal templates for participation, this now formidable literature has moved beyond vanguard models (Kerala, Porto Alegre, etc.) to emphasize more context-specific triumphs and challenges from cases around the world, as well as tensions to bear in mind. These include how and why democratic experiments were first implemented and their relationships to political parties, individual versus organizational participation, consultative versus binding decision-making, the risks of rent-seeking and clientelism, the transformative innovations along the way, and the particular, context-specific manifestations of discursive and contested politics in these experiments, especially in diverse and unequal landscapes (Baiocchi, 2005; Boulding & Wampler, 2010; Fung, 2004; Lerner, 2014; Silver et al., 2010).

### **Public administration and community engagement**

Finally, as participatory democratic experiments become institutionalized, the role of public administrators—bureaucrats, city managers, city agency representatives, and other non-elected public servants—has also come to the fore. While both the participatory democracy and public administration literatures have tackled issues of community participation in citizen-state relations and governance, the literatures remain largely distinct. The participation literature has focused more attention on elected officials, community organizations, and community members (even when the spaces are “invited” rather than created of “invented” from the bottom-up), whereas the administration literature has emphasized what bureaucrats do, especially in response to the dominant New Public Management model (Cornwall, 2008; Hendriks, 2002). However, as underscored by a recent review of more than 250[!] articles and books on designing participatory processes from a public administration perspective, previously top-down practitioners are now also preoccupied with how they can better design participatory processes (Bryson, Quick, Slotterback, & Crosby, 2013).

At first glance, this seems antithetical to popular views of public administration, long filled with jokes about unfriendly, inflexible service at the local DMV. Such a reputation of our government agencies was partly a response to the traditional public administration model, a historical product of the twentieth century that began with the progressive era and became epitomized by post-war modernist thinking (with a deep faith in scientific progress, and high trust in government) (Stoker, 2006). Public managers were assumed to implement policies in response to well-defined political objectives and contested elections (in which they took no part); hierarchies in government service were assumed to hold everyone accountable. Politics and administration were seen as separate spheres, even if real life was inherently more complicated.

In the 1980s, Thatcher and Reagan forwarded neoliberal policies with the assumption that “government is the problem,” including a reliance of market forces and competition in the public sector (Salamon, 2002). By the 1990s, Blair and Clinton had further institutionalized New Public Management through large-scale implementation of performance reviews, metrics, and incentives, for a “customer-driven government” (Thomas, 2013, p. 788). In this model, public managers were not just implementing programs developed by elected officials, but developing a combination of insurance, subsidy, tax, and other products to deliver government services to recipients deemed “customers,” rather than citizens. Public managers should be

“entrepreneurial,” developing service products that beat out the competition from other governmental sectors.

While the New Public Management model remains dominant, widening inequalities, the financial crisis, and deep distrust of government have prompted calls for yet another model of public administration, one that asks public managers “to *govern*, not just manage, in increasingly diverse and complex societies facing increasingly complex problems” (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014, p. 447). There is no name yet for this emerging model, though scholars have forwarded suggestions like New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), public value management (Stoker, 2006), and new civic politics (Boyte, 2005). In this emerging model, citizens are not just customers or voters but partners and co-creators in policy-making, and public managers must act as collaborators, conveners of networks of deliberation, and capacity builders. Government responds to active community participation to deliver collectively defined public goods, emphasizing democratic values and bureaucratic administration’s interactions with others in the public sphere.

How do public managers break out of decades of the New Public Management culture, in a larger political economy stacked against non-elites (Dahl & Soss, 2014), and share authority after a century of the traditional public administration model? Some articles present a linear spectrum of “responsiveness to collaboration,” outlining an ideal in which non-elites are given equal partnership status alongside bureaucratic technical experts (Vigoda, 2002), much as canonical articles in participation presented a linear ladder (Arnstein, 1969). More recent works focus on more specific tensions, such as re-building trust, civic education (especially challenging given the diminishing role of nonprofits in this, with the rise of “checkbook” participation), capacity-building, and providing resources to make participation possible, politically acceptable, and administratively sustainable in an era of austerity (Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2006; Yackee, 2014). In particular, public servants and those with private sector experience continue to be invested with perhaps too much trust, whereas community participants are consistently perceived as “emotional, illogical, and lacking in credibility” (Bryer, 2013, p. 263). Without careful implementation and bureaucrat retraining, experiments in democratizing public administration may further discredit community input and further marginalize constituents (Durant & Ali, 2013).

### **Literatures converging: The case of participatory budgeting**

Still, even among those who lament the overuse of “more participation” as a prescription for

revitalizing democracies or silver bullet for civil society, there are no calls to give up the struggle, or to deem participatory programs a futile venture. Rather, participation by non-elite stakeholders remains important for social transformation, but in order to work towards equity as well as transparency, it must be “re-articulated to serve broader struggles” (Leal, 2010, p. 96).

Over the past few years, there have been increasing calls in both the participation and public administration literatures for empirical analyses to move beyond binaries, such as whether deliberative assemblies or elections lead to better public decisions, or pitching “consensus” versus “conflict” as if they are well-defined, easily delineated, consistent processes. In the public administration literature, “the most striking feature is the relative absence of empirical investigation” of the emerging model’s outcomes in an era of networked governance (Williams & Shearer, 2011, p. 1374), with scholars lamenting that the conversations have been too insular and might benefit from crossing disciplinary lines (Wright, 2011). Analyses might also include ecosystem perspectives—taking the views of more than one set of actors, acknowledging the ways in which extrainstitutional social movements also impact what happens within legislatures and governments, and paying attention to “counterpublics” within a larger public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012). Important areas that remain understudied include how and why certain elements of deliberation or direct participation make a difference, being sensitive to context, and distributive outcomes alongside process and procedure (Silver et al., 2010; Thompson, 2008).

This cross-fertilization of perspectives and literatures is significant in several ways. First, the lines between government, civil society, and business continue to blur, with ever more private-public partnerships, social enterprises, and co-production of traditionally public services (Bryson et al., 2014; Harvey, 1989; Kathi & Cooper, 2005). An ecosystem perspective here, too, is helpful in tracking new iterations of the shift from *government* to *networked governance*; now, neither community nor public servants can be adequately defined without the other.

Second, as attested by both community participants’ experiences on the ground and articulated in the literature, democratic experiments like PB are only meaningful when accompanied by significant administrative reforms; they cannot be plopped into a larger context of ossified market-based or traditional top-down logics, for instance, and still make a significant difference in policy-making (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014; Dahl & Soss, 2014).

The case of participatory budgeting is ripe for an analysis of changing dynamics between everyday constituents and government officials, especially non-elected ones, and the changing



social contract between an individual and the state. Although it first began in Brazil in 1989, the process of PB has since spread to over 1,500 institutions and governments around the world. By far most prominent example of participatory democracy globally and in North America, it is usually conducted at the municipal level, but various institutions—such as Toronto Community Housing—have also devoted a portion of their funds to PB (Wampler & Hartz-Karp, 2012).

Because of its popularity, there is now a large literature examining its results in terms of deepening participation by the poor, increasing efficiency, and redistributing resources (Baiocchi, 2005; Lerner, 2014; Wampler, 2010). PB attempts to give stakeholders an opportunity to draw upon their knowledge of local needs, articulate proposals, interact with neighbors, deliberate over priorities, and select—not just consult on—which proposals receive funding. Closer examinations of especially more recent cases of PB—where the process was not introduced by new administrations or accompanied by wholesale regime changes— can help us to not only better understand how folks can better participate in democracy, but also to examine the political configurations in which these new participatory spaces are embedded, pinpoint the tensions and struggles of bureaucrats in these new systems of shared governance, and to articulate the conditions that might lead to more meaningful outcomes and collaborations.

### **Case study setting and methods**

In New York, four City Councilmembers devoted a portion of their discretionary funds to PB in 2011. The New York process is co-conducted by district committees, city councilmembers and their staff, the two lead organizations, and a bevy of volunteers. By the 2014-2015 cycle, roughly half of City Councilmembers participated in PB, rendering around four million city residents eligible participants. A steering committee, the Participatory Budgeting Project (an organization providing education and technical assistance to PB processes around North America), and Community Voices Heard (an community organizing group providing coordination for outreach) provide input on rules and strategies along the way. Since 2014, the City Council has also worked to coordinate efforts city-wide, and to host the steering committee. I have been a member of the city-wide steering committee and the research board since the inaugural process, helping to evaluate patterns in participation and outcomes.

In the fall of each year, each city councilmember hosts neighborhood assemblies throughout his or her district, and hundreds of New Yorkers attend to pitch proposals for community projects. Over each winter, some residents volunteer to become budget delegates,

conducting feasibility and needs assessments to curate the proposals that will end up on the ballot, and working with city agencies to develop ideas into full-fledged proposals. Each spring, residents turn out to vote for the proposals that win funding via PB (Kasdan & Cattell, 2012).

As a member of the research board headed by the Urban Justice Center Community Development Project (CDP), I work with other researchers to hone key research questions, instruments, data collection, and analysis. Each year, the research board collects information on the demographics, civic experiences, and opinions of participants. In 2014, the board collected 8,000 surveys, dozens of interviews, and observation fieldnotes on both experiences with PB and potential barriers to participation.

Interview protocols for budget delegates and city agency representatives were developed with the CDP-led research board. For this paper, I drew upon notes and transcriptions for more than seventy semi-structured interviews conducted with budget delegates; I conducted five of these, but the bulk of these interviews were conducted by other research board members (or their students and assistants) in 2014. Of these, 45 interviews were conducted with current budget delegates, and 30 were conducted with past budget delegates. In some cases, the interviews were conducted in the context of graduate classes. In addition, I have conducted over twenty 1- to 3-hour interviews with PB participants and allies, including outreach staff and representatives of all city agencies involved in New York's PB process, and attended numerous events to observe deliberations. For this paper, I coded observation and interview data according to thematic codes, engaging in several interpretive iterations of fieldwork and data analysis to explore themes grounded in the data, such as changing perceptions about government and governance in general, and the role of city agencies in budgeting and community development. I read the analytical memos of other research board members, based on the same budget delegate interviews, but I also reviewed original notes and transcripts myself. The names of all fieldwork participants and affiliated agencies or organizations have been withheld for confidentiality reasons.

### **Broadening stakeholderhood on an uneven terrain**

New York's PB process has broadened some notions of stakeholderhood, engaging traditionally disenfranchised constituents in the city. For instance, the first rulebook dictated that anyone over age sixteen who lives, works, attends school, or is the parent of a student in a district could participate in neighborhood assemblies and project-vetting, and residents over age eighteen, including undocumented immigrants, could vote on the allocations. Enthusiastic youth

participation in neighborhood assemblies was instrumental in convincing adults to lower the PB voting age to 16, and the participation age to 14, in 2012. Some districts further lowered the voting age to 14 this year.

According to the survey data collected by the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center, constituents from traditionally marginalized subpopulations participated in PB at much higher rates than in traditional elections in every cycle thus far. For example, 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 (Kasdan & Cattell, 2012). Along lines of race and gender, PB also engaged traditionally underrepresented stakeholders.

Survey data also suggest that strong outreach efforts appear to pay off; lower-income and foreign-born constituents were more likely to learn about PB through word-of-mouth or targeted campaigns, rather than online or through governmental-institutional channels. Districts that hosted assemblies specifically catering to youth or non-English-speaking constituencies saw, in turn, much higher voting rates by those constituents. Notably, half of 2014 PB voters had never worked with others on a community issue before. One-third were foreign-born. In one district, over two-thirds of distributed ballots were in languages other than English (Kasdan, Markman, & Covey, 2014). In many ways, then, PB in New York has succeeded in engage traditionally marginalized constituents, even as more intensive forms of political participation are usually and paradoxically practiced by those with most resources (Stolle & Hooghe, 2011).

Indeed, budget delegates spoke repeatedly about how the PB process allowed and compelled them to engage in discussions with neighbors they may not have met otherwise, and to listen to members of their community who are not property or business owners, parents, and formal citizens, and thus not typically represented by local associations. As one delegate remarked,

At the meetings you meet people from all over the community. You may walk by them on a daily basis and not know what they're into. It was a good gathering for people to interact, those for women's rights, LGBT, you have all these organization and representatives and say "Oh, cool you're trying to do that, maybe I'll participate in that" and they're like "Oh, yeah, sure, come on down" or whatever. So it really helped me understand how I can help my community.

Delegates also noted the substance and tenor of their conversations through PB, and the fact that they now worked with neighbors from distinctly different background "repeatedly, on a serious but still social level" that felt different from organizing street fairs as a block association.

Several participants noted that they especially learned a lot about local community priorities, both because of formal needs assessments and through conversations generally. One delegate from East Harlem noted,

I was really able to see the needs [of] the community in a way I've never seen before...I didn't know how bad of an asthma cluster there was in public housing. I don't have kids, so I don't know about needs at school. I don't have any relatives that live in senior housing, so I didn't know about the issues they faced.

Remarkably, among all of the delegate interviewees, none cited friction with other delegates as a barrier to further participation. In fact, although such friction certainly existed, many stated took pains to assert that despite feeling disappointed when their project proposals did not win enough votes to be funded, they felt that their relationships with fellow budget delegates were more collaborative than competitive. One delegate stated that because the committees' topics and target populations tended to vary, "It's not a competition; it's about understanding other populations' needs." Another young delegate, who stopped participating after the first cycle because of time constraints, reminisced,

Doing the budget, it was cool. You can actually come together; voice your opinion, and get something done good. You know, it was hell of an experience and I hope I can participate in upcoming cycles. I do miss it, I miss the people getting heated, "I want this project," "No, I want this project," or whatever. I miss that; [that] whole friendly competition is cool.

Overall, budget delegates emphasized how PB has a very different, inclusive, and deliberative—encouraging the exchange of ideas and compromise—qualitative feel that contrasted the tenor of electoral politics, even for those already politically active. For one delegate, the combination of working with others unlike herself and working towards binding budgetary decisions gave the PB process a sense of impact lacking in her usual civic engagement: "Every four years, I make an informed choice and vote ... being in this district, with the diversity of the community and feeling like this process is really inclusive and responsive to community input, which you don't often feel.... That is pretty powerful."

One lesson from the budget delegate interviews lies in the potential for cross-cutting alliances of groups of residents or organizations, who might usually lobby for funds independently. Budget delegates spoke to the ways in which the PB deliberations allowed them to emphasize more than one aspect of their lives and identities—*e.g.*, as African Americans, as Harlemites, as parents, as public housing residents, as sports fans, etc.—and emphasize issues of intersectionality, rather than a single identity—by race, gender, or other social axis. For instance,

one delegate spoke about how he was at first disappointed to be the only person of color, and the only young person, on his PB parks committee. However, he quickly bonded with the other adults by emphasizing different aspects of his lived experience and background with each. Along the way, these delegates develop proposals they may not have otherwise, such as a playground fit for both local public housing residents and disabled children from around the neighborhood, mobile laptop labs or cooking vans co-sponsored by several schools or nonprofits, and a mobile audio-visual equipment van co-sponsored by three arts organizations that might usually compete for funds.

*A need for critical pedagogy, especially vis-à-vis city agencies.*

Many delegates also testified to the skills they learned by participating in the process, as well as the need for additional training. The formerly incarcerated youth I interviewed, for instance, testified to the terror they felt in speaking to school principals during site visits to research project proposals, since they were only used to state institutions as policing, surveiling, and punitive. In fact, one youth mentor spoke of PB as a *de facto* leadership development program:

In terms of interacting with the community, it's more difficult in an institutionalized setting, such as a school. To kind of go in and act under an authority that you're not necessarily granted by being [a budget delegate]... I can see how intimidating that is. Not only just to set it up but then to follow through. There's a security officer. You have to check in. You have to hand their ID. And then go and actually explain [why you're there, what you're working on]... That was definitely a challenge for them....

Some of the training likely to edify and empower budget delegates might seem surprising to the uninitiated, yet commonsensical in retrospect. Training in public speaking and poster-making, during preps for the pre-vote expos, for example, were taken for granted by middle-class parents active in Parent Teacher Associations, but just as important as literacy and quantitative needs assessment training for the formerly incarcerated youth I interviewed. The youth mentor continued,

And then the next phase, making the project poster boards, I actually think that was the portion that most of the delegates had the most fun with. It's basically... almost a big arts and crafts project, but also at this point, they've become more invested after going to all these meetings, participating in some of the site visits.... Once they made the poster board, I think, that... helped in its completion, then that kind of solidified their investment. It was tangible as something they could point to and take ownership of.

Such training helps constituents to break out of a “hegemonic discursive code,” full of technical jargon that many find difficult to master, and to instead use visual or performative languages to

present their arguments in compelling ways (Hajer, 2005; Su, 2010).

Indeed, many of the budget delegates spoke of the need for critical pedagogy on governmental structures, budgeting, and planning. City agency representatives, who help to define which project proposals are “feasible” and “appropriate,” also figured prominently in interviews, and end up shaping the participants’ experiences in profound ways. Outside of time constraints, interactions with city agencies were by far the most commonly cited challenge to meaningful participation.

Between the first and second cycles of New York PB, for example, the number of project ideas proposed plummeted by 70% in some districts—and in some categories, the number of proposed ideas went from 200 to 0 in one year. It remains unclear whether this happened because stakeholders have become less interested on those issues, or if they have decided to censor themselves, and to focus their energies elsewhere.

More specifically, delegates stated that city agencies were primarily difficult to work with because, first, many representatives were slow to respond to inquiries, and second, because so many organically developed project proposals could not move forward, or had to be adjusted dramatically to become eligible. The sentiment that “the [agency] is not responsive and it took almost a year to do a walk through with them and even then we didn’t go through every [location neighbors suggested],” for instance, appeared repeatedly in the interviews. One delegate lamented that they did not have sufficient opportunities to iterate or revise proposals:

[T]he individuals who had the original ideas, they have almost no interaction with the agencies responsible for doing the work— they have no idea what things will cost. Agencies are too vague and don’t allow the team to change their proposal to be realistic and implementable.

Others felt frustrated by the lack of coordination between agencies, or felt confused because the same project idea—a greenroof, for instance—might involve different agencies depending on who owned the parcel of land. Several delegates spoke about the difficulties of building new community gardens on identified vacant lots: “[My experience with PB] wasn’t really impactful.... It was for a space for a community garden. We searched out a number of areas; some areas weren’t feasible and the areas we chose were under [two agencies]... It became very difficult... because of all the agencies involved.” Another delegate, working in a different district, similarly noted,

They [the agencies] have the power to say if they will give the money to the project. That happened with the second proposal I worked on about a community garden that was

going to be built in a public housing facility. They agreed to do it, the City Council agreed to do it, but it broke at the level of the city agency without further explanation.

The lack of communication thus made it more difficult for delegates to understand why so many of their proposals were deemed unfeasible. Overall, many delegates stated that agencies appeared to reject their proposals because of technicalities, rather than working with them to make the project feasible. As one delegate recounted,

We also had some issues with the other city agencies, particularly, if you’ve talked to anybody who’s been on [another] committee in this district they’ll probably mention the... [local facility], and it’s a jurisdictional nightmare. All the agencies, [where] it’s kind of a hot potato issue... they say, “It’s not our problem, talk to [transport], talk to parks.” So, a lot of them know more than they’re willing to let on I think. But I think the agencies are getting better as we’ve gotten further with PB.

In such situations, delegates noted that more specific criteria, guidelines, and explanations for city agency decisions would have helped them to not only develop better proposals, but to emotionally accept rejections as well. They asked for stronger, instant and direct contact with city agencies and different actors in local governance, including an “appeals process to agencies to appeal agency decisions or city council decisions—we felt the agency misunderstood or misrepresented the projects.” Another delegate also questioned the credibility agency responses to their proposals: “I found that certain agencies to be— not duplicitous— but they seemed to make up data compared to research that we had done. For example, [I think they made] disingenuous claims that a project wasn’t possible due to the Americans with Disabilities Act, when that wasn’t really true.”

As these remarks suggest, budget delegates did not view city agency representatives as neutral parties, but as simultaneous facilitators and gatekeepers with distinct stakeholder interests.

### **The view from the grass-middles**

PB automatically introduces new tasks and roles for citizens that are not usually discussed, and forces stakeholders to articulate new guidelines for effective and meaningful collaborations. In interviews with representatives from all city agencies involved with PB in New York, an emerging theme concerned how agency representatives felt caught between a hierarchical, top-down, “old generation” bureaucratic culture and bottom-up, “new generation” attempts at democratization, collaboration, and co-production.

In interviews, a number of city agency representatives spent considerable time discussing

how PB is promises to be a great political, democratic experiment overall, but that they work in an exceptional policy arena in which local knowledge plays little role, and technical expertise reigns supreme. At first glance, such statements corroborated with budget delegates’ frustrations with city agencies, and with their impressions that city agency representatives devalued their perspectives and stonewalled them. Yet, interviews with the representatives point to more complex subtexts as well, substantive as well as political reasons behind such statements, and a range of constraints and conditions to meet alongside PB imperatives. For instance, the agencies varied greatly by organizational structure, funding streams (especially regarding the level of government funding them), and missions.

The following table presents a preliminary typology of agency-delegate interactions, based on observations, as well as interviews with both budget delegates and city agency representatives. Representatives from the following agencies were interviewed: arts and cultural affairs, environmental protection, health, libraries, parks and recreation, public housing, public transit, sanitation, school construction, and transportation.

One basic finding is just that there is no linear ladder of participation, nor a clear spectrum of straightforward “responsiveness” to collaboration. Rather, the different agencies adhered to different implicit models of participation, with different logics, articulated motivating factors for the agencies, and responding roles for the city agency representatives. Nevertheless, they were not mutually exclusive, and some agencies that attempted to contain or almost discourage PB delegates’ demands one year, for instance, moved onto enthusiastically develop project proposals the next year.



Type of interaction	Managed participation/containment	Choice, facilitation, and outreach	Enthusiastic recognition	Partnership, collaboration
<b>Key motivators for city agencies</b>	Passive participation or avoidance, endearing citizen interests	Funds needs for existing, large-scale projects; organized groups of constituents guarantee funds for “enhancements” that help to make up for budget shortfalls	Mission is read in a way that make process of PB a key goal	Long-term partnerships, resource allies & cultural translators; crises: pressure form both above and below
<b>Key role of agency</b>	Respond to emergencies and small-scale requests; educate constituents on what they do	Research and present fact sheets and menu of large-scale projects in need of funding; vet, give cost figures; help flesh out proposal ideas that enhance institutions; focus non-PB funds on “meat and bones” and direct PB delegates to the “extras” they would not be able to currently afford otherwise	Devote resources and perform outreach, with greater citizen participation as key goal	Through multiple iterations, work with constituents on goals, funding priorities, design ideas, and project progress
<b>Key sentiments (as paraphrases, except for phrases in quotes)</b>	We don’t get any funding, PB needs to be larger-scale to make a difference; as far as PB is concerned, “it’s a wash for us”	Projects that we know we can do are more attractive than what constituents try to come up with. “We have a well-oiled machine.”  Every single one of our project proposals on the ballots won funding; we got the word out.	“We could not <i>not</i> be involved”; indirectly the projects have an overarching systems change effect on our community	The community needs to let us know what design elements they would like and make sure that what we do has public support and legitimacy, beyond discretionary funds

Briefly, the agencies largely fell into four main categories of agency-budget delegate interactions. First, some agencies worked to contain budget delegates’ expectations of PB-funded projects. Although several of these agencies hosted sessions with community members during the PB process, these were largely informational; when budget delegates asked questions about potential project ideas, representatives emphasized technical rules, restrictions, or funding restrictions in their answers. Agency representatives also worked to immediately address pressing needs outside of the PB process, and to announce planned and strategic changes to the agency’s overall funding priorities.

A second group of agencies prepared helpful flyers for budget delegates, detailing eligibility criteria in accessible ways, including typical projects that are or are not eligible for PB funds. For several agencies, these presentations and flyers graphically dimmed more ambitious projects, as to manage PB participant expectations. Several agencies also presented at neighborhood delegate meetings having done research on hyper-local, large-scale projects already under way, ones which needed a relatively small amount of additional funding to be completed; representatives presented these as giving budget delegates “extra bang for [their] buck.” Later in the cycle, after project proposals were developed and before voters determined which would be funded, some of the agencies with discrete, neighborhood brick-and-mortar outposts (like parks, libraries, schools, or community centers that were easily contained within a district) also

conducted outreach on behalf of the PB process to local patrons; as per campaigning guidelines, all were also careful to state that voters can choose up to five projects on each ballot.

Third, one agency stood out as enthusiastically devoting significant staff time and resources to the PB process—not out of a sense of obligation or to garner PB funds, but as part of their mission. Greater civic engagement, a sense of individual agency, and community participation were seen as larger goals of their agency mission, broadly conceived. Thus, the representative stated that, “We could not *not* get involved.” This was the only agency that did not track whether agency-related projects won PB votes, but simply worked to promote PB overall.

Finally, no agency has thus far consistently worked in partnership with PB delegate groups on funding priorities, design ideas, and project progress through multiple iterations. As many of the projects funded will take multiple years to be fully implemented, this may be due to the fact that agencies have not yet had the chance to develop such relationships. Based on the interviews, however, this may also be due tensions between delegates and city agency representatives, as discussed below.

*Balancing local knowledge with technical expertise.*

City agency representatives acknowledged that PB allowed community members to draw upon local knowledge, and to identify local priorities. One, for instance, stated that “the community is good about identifying the need and saying, ‘Yes, this is a really dangerous intersection.’” Nevertheless, a far more common sentiment in city agency interviews concerned the relative lack of technical expertise of budget delegates, as reflected in comments such as, “Budget delegates should be put in a room and educated. I’m not sure who is educating them,” or, “It would help if delegates were more informed before they met with us. As far as what are capital needs. I felt like we spent a lot of time explaining to people what projects can’t move forward because they weren’t capital-eligible.” These remarks speak to the challenges public managers face in acting as liaisons between different technical, political, and local or experiential perspectives in their work (Feldman & Khadermian, 2007).

One specific frustration lay with the cost of proposed projects, and what representatives felt were outsized expectations by the PB delegates. “They need to understand what things are worth. You can’t get a [project] with this money, you can get a... study [on that sort of project].” Another agency representative quipped, “I think the[ir] weakness is the champagne taste with a

beer pocketbook.” In those cases, these bureaucrats felt as if they were easily villainized, and that the PB process punished the messengers of high cost figures.

Representatives thus repeatedly asked for more budget delegate education before meetings with them. Sometimes, delegates asked about projects they expected to cost a few hundred thousand dollars, but which might actually cost twenty million dollars. As one agency representative stated, “These are the relative costs of certain things. This is how much a playground set costs for the parks department to put in, [or] to build a new sewer costs this... much per foot.”

Over the past few years, however, the training for budget delegates has improved, and representatives, too, have stepped up to prepare helpful presentations on eligibility criteria. Thus, the most common mistakes—thinking that air conditioners and iPads might be capital-eligible, for instance, when the city states that they are not—are now largely avoided. Further, even the agency representatives that complained about the PB process feeling like “a waste of time” appeared to enjoy this educative role, and to converse with the infrastructure “geeks” who knew a lot about their policy arena.

In the last year, reports of some deliberation with delegate groups have become more common. One reported, “In this case, it was obvious the greenroof would come through us and not [the Department of Environmental Protection] because it was on our property. The delegates already knew that much.” Another stated that this past year,

Groups... came to us with projects laid out and with details of the project and the specifications of the project. I think the more homework they do, the better. And we... also have that information to them; we were able to show up to the meeting with cost stuff and have a much better discussion.

Other common frustrations involved technical details of eligibility and coordination that were difficult for lay constituents to grasp, and that might be difficult to comprehensively cover in city- or borough-wide trainings. For instance, several representatives stated that they could not work on certain improvements—building repairs, intersections, greenroofs, gardens, etc.—because, for instance, “We don’t just own that land. It’s actually adjacent to a highway; it’s a combination of state land, park land, [and an agency] facility.” Other representatives complained that their employers were technically not agencies, but authorities, and that constituents did not understand the intricacies of how they worked differently. There thus remain questions regarding just what and how much “typical” informed constituents and budget delegates should be expected to know, in order to participate in PB.

At the same time, interviews and observations also suggested that city agency representatives, too, might benefit from training and coordination. For instance, some agency representatives did not know about the PB calendar year, or the basic mechanics of the process, during their public information sessions with delegates. Further, to what extent should budget delegates—many of them volunteering amidst one or more other full-time jobs, and many of them from traditionally marginalized constituencies—be expected to limit their proposals to ones they could easily develop to perfectly fit individual agencies’ respective norms and criteria? Might agency representatives be trained to take the spirit of project proposals, to better incorporate local knowledge and priorities, rather than mandate changes?

Doing so would require a greater amount of discretionary decision-making power to accompany the PB discretionary funding, as well as training in dealing with uncertainty, community-based research and stakeholder analysis alternative project development (to address local needs as well as technical criteria), and coordination with other agencies. Representatives may require advisement and experience on how playground designs, library spaces, and other expenditures might improve with public input, and how agencies can welcome and make good use of such input.

Interestingly, one representative stated that she began to do so after serving as a budget delegates herself, in her home neighborhoods and working on a committee that worked with an agency other than that she worked with. Other representatives had some past experiences working with community groups or constituents via non-PB processes, and they cited resource ally groups as an essential resource. Such resource ally groups helped lay constituents understand planning regulations or architectural designs, for instance, or translated public focus group data and technical documents into accessible, readable documents into several languages other than English, and with smart graphic design. Without such experiences, agency representatives had difficulty knowing the types of data visualization, exercises, and documents that would make the greatest difference in facilitating deliberative back-and-forth conversations with budget delegates on project proposals.

*Defenders of the quiet wheels, negotiating funding politics.*

Some scholars have argued that some issues framed as “technical” by public agency experts are actually political in nature, and such framing further alienates constituents in a vicious circle

(Durant & Ali, 2013, p. 279). A related tension from city agency interviews, then, concerned the disparate ways in which representatives portrayed their relationship to contested politics.

In keeping with technocratic and governance discourse around policy-making, many of the agency interviewees asserted that they were apolitical: “We have no vested interested in any of the projects that are being voted on or... discussed.... I don’t want to give any information that would... alter plans or make it seem as if the [agency] has an interest in what’s being selected.” These interviewees also stated that they are “not really interested in taking their money to do things we’re supposed to be doing. So they were all, at the end of the day, mostly pleasant interactions, if they had issues.” Such statements, while friendly, also worked to keep delegate expectations contained or perhaps redirected to other agencies: “To be honest, I’d say spend your money on other things, just tell me what you need done, and we’ll go fix them if it’s an issue.”

Such comments dovetail well with scholars’ findings that regulators “feared commitment to ideas or decisions reached by non-expert... stakeholders,” and that contested politics inevitably distort definitions of the “public good” (Bryer, 2013, p. 264). One (non-education) agency representative, for instance, cited inequalities in political participation in his reasoning: “I think PB is a good process... in theory... but especially in the education committee, only the school [parent groups] that were already really well-organized were able to get parents to come out and vote and have the time to be budget delegates and get involved. The schools that weren’t organized weren’t able to do that, though [their] needs are, you know, [dire] needs.” In such cases, they viewed themselves as conducting more “objective” needs assessments, acting as neutral arbiters of public needs, and helping to protect constituents without the resources to lobby for projects at so many evening meetings.

Likewise, other agency representatives spoke about how PB might encourage rent-seeking and special interest lobbying, citing examples where a small group of active constituents might end up with “millions of dollars” to build “their own clubhouse,” rather than a facility that might serve a broader range of residents. “And that’s a waste of money... And what you had was the groups that bang on the table the loudest, won. And, they beat out other, quite frankly, other projects that were more beneficial.” Because of this, “we would be really hesitant to support a program that put a lot of money into it because... there’s a lot of passion involved, and a lot of competing interests.” Agency representatives also stated that contested politics emphasized certain, “sexier” projects (new buildings rather than repairs, for instance) and shorter timelines, in ways that are unrealistic for capital projects. In these cases, agency representatives did not

necessarily speak to greater outreach and training for marginalized constituents as an alternative approach. Rather, they emphasized the extent to which they had the public interest in mind in doing their jobs. Their remarks also implied that there were clear, objective ways to define such a “public interest.”

Given such comments, it is notable that with each cycle, a greater number of city agencies have embraced the PB process— on their own terms, namely emphasizing existing plans and priorities. One interviewee, for instance, stated,

I think that they would like to see something implemented or a ribbon cutting before they leave office. So being that capital projects take so long, that’s why it’s better to have an existing project cause it’s further along in design and there’s a potential for them to have that ribbon cutting.

Further, “Existing capital projects are... more attractive than projects [constituents] conceived on their own ...so we come to *them* with projects we know— that are capital, that we can do.” This approach appeared to resonate profoundly with several agencies because they have been experiencing severe budget cuts in this era of austerity, and PB allows them to address specific budget shortfalls. One representative, for instance, declared, “So we try to think about projects that maybe have smaller funding gaps, not a twenty million dollar project that needs fifteen million dollars. Something that needs a few hundred thousand.”

Another city agency representative stated that,

For every dollar that we spend, we probably could spend another ten dollars on, to actually meet our needs. So... we’re able to spend money [on bigger repairs,] whereas the [PB] discretionary projects are... very helpful... [for] quality-of-life, [smaller projects] that, you know, we normally would have trouble funding. So... they’re very useful and appreciated by, not only the [agency], but also the residents.

In fact, one interviewee predicted that, PB votes are “going to become that much more competitive because agencies are going to see now you’re looking at twenty-three, twenty-four million dollars out there.” Indeed, a representative from yet another agency stated that they have recently stepped up their outreach, and that “a lot of patrons understand and see the need. They know there’s a need [here], and that unfortunately, the officials don’t always supply the funds.” Further,

We hosted a lot of the events before the vote. We reached out to our patrons and got them involved and pushed them to become delegates. And work with the councilmembers. So our patrons were the ones that got involved.

Such efforts have paid off: “Because of our community outreach, all of our projects were voted on and in; all of our projects that people proposed in PB came through.”

The division between these disparate approaches to funding politics in PB appeared to run largely along lines of scale. That is, agencies that worked on city-wide infrastructure or large geographical areas—such as public transit, sanitation, environmental protection, and other agencies—had trouble mobilizing specific groups of patrons to vote for related projects, or to develop small-scale project that could be funded by the relatively small pots of PB funds. Representatives from these agencies were also more likely to express views that PB process exacerbated inequalities, since the eligible pots of money are so small and divided by district, when proper reprioritizing would involve much larger economies of scale and coordination across districts in a racially and economically segregated cityscape. They were also less likely to receive city funds, and to express conflicts between local, state, and federal demands. By contrast, agencies that worked with buildings, intersections, or identifiable spots contained in single districts were more likely to become actively involved in PB.

### *Navigating limited or conflicting missions.*

One can hardly fault city agency representatives for attempting to fund programming and repairs amidst shrinking budgets. Limited staffing time also figured prominently as a factor for participation in agency interviews. One interviewee, for example, stated that “my one criticism is that it is time-consuming. And as an agency, we already have a lot of things to do”; another proclaimed that, “We will vet five projects but we don’t have the resources to do more than that.” Interactions with delegates are thus further exacerbated when they feel like they fall outside of the agency’s core mission:

It’s easy enough to tell anyone ‘no,’ that a particular project is not feasible, that it isn’t going to happen. But when a project is doable, we have to price these projects. Then we involve our colleagues. It’s fine if we spend our time on this, but we don’t to take our colleagues away from their regular responsibilities and jobs with this if it feels like it’s not going anywhere.

By contrast, the representative from one agency, the department of health, stated that PB was part of their core mission, and thus staffing and funding constraints were immaterial:

We need to be there just to see what it was and it was a different mechanism, an innovative mechanism for the community voice to really be heard and not to-- for funding, for programs and project going on in the community to be dictated by our public officials without the buy in from the community.

While the department of health cared about transparency in the decision-making, they did not express more interest in projects tackling proximal health factors, like poor diet in a proposal for a mobile cooking lesson van traveling to farmers' markets in various neighborhoods, than they did in projects tackling more distal health factors, such as education. Because greater participation overall was seen as part of their mission, "indirectly, many of the projects that were selected and funded will have an overarching environmental systems change effect on public health." This agency representative, in turn, also attended PB events and characterized discussions as deliberative, rather than primarily contested:

Obviously, everyone didn't always agree on what was being put out on the table... But the fact that... people were being respectful in their disagreements and while not every project was selected, the fact that they felt that it was done fairly and that it really spoke to what the needs of the community were. I think that that really kind of struck a chord.

To her, a community perspective via PB complemented her "macro" policy analyses with more holistic ones:

So we can step back and take a macro look at... where we potentially see areas of improvement. But I think, as a community member.... it's about, "I live here every single day and this is what I'm witnessing, this is what's not working for me in my day to day." So really being able to take that step back and see the full picture [is important].

Finally, many of the city agency representatives were not in the position to exercise greater discretion, or to incorporate innovative community ideas into their agency missions. As such, they could be deemed so-called "grass-middles," acting as liaisons between the grassroots and the formally policy-making grassstops. For example, one representative lamented that, "Some ideas are great, but they just don't work with the mission of the agency. Some folks wanted a resource center [here] that offered health services... and it's not really the mission of [our agency] right now." As a result, most agencies primarily "worked together [with delegates] to make sure that they fit... our existing priorities in other ways."

## **Discussion**

As both everyday residents and city agency representatives become adept at navigating the PB process, it becomes tempting to simply forward whatever proposals they now know to be most palatable to city agencies, even when these proposals sideline the concerns and local knowledge that compelled them to participate in the first place. One budget delegate described a hypothetical but, to him, archetypal set of responses:



“I want new street lights. My street lights aren’t broken, but I want prettier street lights” ...that often doesn’t affect the quality of life for constituents as much as other things. But that’s often how those things get done because... funds are available for that purpose.

Another delegate complained that he was told to “think small”: “I put [my idea] out there. It was shut down! Even by my peers, those fools around me! They say why it can’t, why it won’t... it’s... too big! ... We don’t think; we behave small.”

Such comments prompt questions on whether New York’s PB process risks perpetuating a sort of “affirmative governmentality” (Kwon, 2013). From one perspective, these participants appear to have given up on changing budget allocations, demanding more from government, or working towards reforms, but have instead either dissented via exit (Hirschman, 1970) or become easily placated “educated citizens” as the city agencies would define them, adept at navigating the system, and adopting the state’s priorities and aspirations as their own. The status quo social contract between citizen and state is then not just intact, but reified. Dovetailing with Kwon’s notion of affirmative governmentality, however, the delegates’ comments appear to be more complex; many are voicing community concerns as best they can within the confines of PB, even as they wish for more power. Rather than blindly internalizing the city agencies’ priorities, delegates self-consciously adopt pre-existing limits and criteria—sometimes resisting them, sometimes reifying them, and sometimes simultaneously doing both. Here, PB neither creates an ideal discursive public forum nor inherently succumbs to predicted inequalities. Participation acts as a double-edged sword.

An attempt at an ecosystem analysis, with both bottom-up and top-down perspectives, drawn from interviews with participants and former participants, helped to pinpoint tensions and potential lessons in the PB process. The interview data with both budget delegates and city agency representatives suggest that city agencies are not value-neutral referees, but that New York PB has not yet fully addressed the complex power dynamics between them, city councilmembers, and budget delegates. Bureaucrats are stakeholders, too, working in the public sector—This may seem commonsensical in retrospect, but many of their remarks suggest that city agency representatives feel left out of most conceptualizations of public deliberation, and feel as if they have not had opportunities to help shape the decision-making process that they are mandated to now accommodate and follow.

If this pattern continues, then the city agencies most likely to embrace PB are also those most likely to win funding for pre-existing projects through the process, and the ones most likely

to dominate budget delegate deliberations on feasible projects—especially in the context of austerity, amidst ever-tightening budgets. At its extreme, this dynamic embodies almost a consumer choice model, rather than a deliberative one, with representatives giving pitches for PB funds, and telling delegates exactly what ready-made projects need funding in their neighborhoods. Some city agency representatives made statements such as, “We jumped in right away, [be]cause we already had a well-oiled machine when it came to soliciting funds, so we just tailored that towards PB.” Delegates might then go through the motions of “choosing” the very projects the state would have forwarded in the first place.

In New York, no dominant order has taken hold. It remains to be determined whether agency representatives primarily do work *for* or *with* specific communities, and what tweaks and repeated efforts must be made along the way, so that the process adapts to changing conditions, and so that no dynamic becomes ossified. As with other “wicked” problems, the crux here lies not with ill intentions, but with institutionalized power inequalities. None of the above patterns is inevitable, and again, many of the agency-delegate dynamics have shifted considerably in the past two years. Given hints of institutional isomorphism among the agencies, further studies might also examine how practices of critical deliberation and capacity-building travel from one agency to another (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Indeed, these tensions underscore the need for accompanying administrative reforms, without which PB becomes depoliticized as a communicative strategy for transparency (rather than equity or empowerment) (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014). Without addressing questions of power, public value models of administration, too,

may ultimately reinforce and extend neoliberalism by embedding market logics more deeply in progressive uses of state power... [and] run a high risk of folding citizen-centered, deliberative and participatory procedures into a broader mode of governance that (1) leaves political inequalities undisturbed, and (2) subordinates open-ended democratic contestation to the production of specific ends (Dahl & Soss, 2014, pp. 496-497)

Without critical dialogues, PB runs the risk of serving as a technocratic tool for “good governance,” romanticizing the role of the individual and reifying a neoliberal logic, enlisting “citizens in measuring, auditing and monitoring... in a depoliticized technical process that defuses conflicts and treats them as consumers,” rather than as political stakeholders (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). After all, should it really be the job of busy, working New Yorkers to research and address which schools need basic repairs, or to “choose” which curbs require extensions to be

safe, and by extension, which do not? Discussions regarding taxation and the shape and size of the figurative public budget pie, in such a scenario, are sidelined by competitive exercises determining the slices of the pie. In a neoliberal order of budgeting, lay constituents compete with other budget delegates to develop state-sanctioned projects, including those that were traditionally paid with core rather than discretionary funds, and to interact with city agencies as primarily evaluative authority figures. How might New York, then, enact “agency recombination,” so that “technical expertise is subservient to the popular mandate, and not the other way around” (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2014, p. 37)?

The case study in this paper suggests that such participatory processes might benefit from dialectical relationships between top-down and bottom-up reform, with greater attention to prestige, legitimacy, and mission (as with the department of health) as well as PB funds as sources of leverage and buy-in, and to the civil servants’ relative status vis-à-vis both the top administration and elected officials as well as ordinary constituents. Further, some agencies appeared to have different relationships with delegates from different districts, largely depending on whether they had established relationships with city council staff or community organizations who act as translators or liaisons. With fairly limited resources, the anchoring organizations, the Participatory Budgeting Project and Community Voices Heard, have also acted as resource allies and cultural translators that enable *other* participants to meaningfully engage one another. And after just one cycle with City Council coordination, there are also some signs that the City Council may act as a *de facto* resource ally, helping to legitimize meaningful participation and set parameters for longer-term collaborations.

Another potential lesson lies in how city agency representatives and administrators need more resources and capacity-building as well, and how their material conditions, funding streams, and economies of scale might be better served by larger pots of funds. Both agency and delegate interviewees repeatedly asked for cross-district coordination and expense funding for staffing, alongside capital funding for infrastructure.

Further, even within a single city, no one PB process fits all policy arenas. While libraries, parks, schools, and some other agencies have consistently worked with delegate groups with winning projects, sanitation, environmental protection, public transit, and other agencies have not. It may be that running two, concurrent PB tracks—including one that is less intensive, but larger-scale—might help currently marginalized delegate groups and agencies to become more engaged. For instance, in helping city agencies to approve and implement project that abide by

the spirit of community needs, rather than judging proposals by the letter of the laws and dismissing them because of technicalities, the New York PB process might also host neighborhood assemblies in which constituents list community priorities, and then let agencies hash out the details. Both city agency representatives and budget delegates forwarded this model as a promising alternative. For one delegate, “the original meetings, the neighborhood assemblies were the best and most useful part... the whole room could vote on problems which they think were important, [and] city councilmembers could take that and guide” subsequent iterations of conversations between agencies and delegates.

The New York case thus far has been impressively successful in broadening notions of stakeholderhood and who is counted in the “community,” working against a deficit model of formerly incarcerated youth as troublemakers or undocumented immigrants as a drain on the welfare state, and in facilitating face-to-face deliberations between different stakeholders, allowing them to voice grievances and ideas. Nevertheless, there remain challenges in shifting dynamics of power between political stakeholders and governmental agencies, with contestations over who represents the public here, what sorts of knowledge should be valued in what ways, and how equity ought to be best defined and achieved.

An especially promising strand of future research on PB lies in investigating, documenting, and analyzing impacts from an ecosystem perspective that includes more than budget delegate and city agency perspectives. Because the New York PB-eligible funds remain rather limited, many of the most interesting and profound outcomes of PB thus far take the form of spillover effects. For instance, renovations for elementary school bathrooms won PB funds consistently, and PB participants were outraged by the fact that they were devoting discretionary funds for what they deemed to be a basic need. In response, one Councilmember launched a new initiative to set aside other, non-PB funds for such bathroom renovations. Councilmember Brad Lander, of Brooklyn, similarly began a new public art fund co-administered with two local arts organizations, when local residents complained about the lack of PB-funded arts programming. In almost all districts, City Councilmembers have worked with residents to find funding for more projects than the formal PB process allowed, and to work with disgruntled residents on finding alternative ways to implement unfunded proposals. At least one agency has developed a new web portal to enable anyone to more easily search through its recent expenditures and planned projects, and the City Council is developing a project tracker that will enable lay constituents to more easily analyze the progress and patterns found in PB-funded projects. These promising

developments are likely to have ripple effects beyond PB, in other forms of public administration and governance.

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