

Promoting Participatory Budgeting in Canada: Building Community Capacity for Deliberative Local Governance in the Greater Vancouver Region

1. Summary of Proposed Research: This proposed five-year CURA, to be led and hosted by the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning (UBC-SCARP), brings together academics and community organizations from Vancouver and other urban areas in Canada to explore the potential for implementing participatory budgeting processes in Canadian municipalities. Participatory budgeting refers to the direct participation of community groups, neighbourhood associations and common citizens in a negotiated process of deliberation to select priorities for the allocation of the municipal budget. The driving force behind this CURA are the community partners who have approached the academic co-applicants for assistance, and have since, been working collaboratively in developing this project. The CURA will address the following research question: How can participatory budgeting processes become a vehicle for promoting greater citizen participation, transparency, and deliberative local governance in Canadian municipalities? The subsidiary questions are: (1) what lessons can Canadians learn from cities and other municipalities abroad that have utilized participatory budgeting processes? (2) How can participatory budgeting processes result in resource allocations that take into account social justice, gender equity, and the needs and rights of women, ethnic minorities, and children?

To address these questions, our team of academic and community partners will undertake international comparative research of participatory budgeting initiatives in Canada and in selected countries of Latin America, Asia and Europe to create a web-based database on participatory budgeting. The research results will be disseminated to a broad range of potential end-users in academia, government (e.g., Finance Departments of interested city governments), and organizations (such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Union of B.C. Municipalities) and the general public through an interactive website, a CD-ROM, a documentary video, special policy briefs, and popular education materials. One International Conference on "Participatory Budgeting in the Americas", and one National Conference on "Can Participatory Budgeting Work in Canada?" will be held to provide inputs to the database. Ten local workshops will be held in the Greater Vancouver and Toronto areas to help improve local

community capacity in understanding and engaging in participatory budgeting processes. These workshops will be part of the CURA's action research component. Initially, two cities (Vancouver, North Vancouver) and one smaller municipality (Bowen Island) will serve as case sites for undertaking exploratory exercises in budgetary analysis (i.e., analysis of sources of municipal revenues and allocations of expenditures), policy analysis (i.e., examination of the key actors and factors that shape priorities and decisions in the allocation of public funds), and modeling of locally appropriate participatory budgeting processes. These exercises will be facilitated by academics and community leaders, assisted by graduate students in SCARP's practicum and internship programs using, in part, SCARP's Cosmopolis Participatory Planning Laboratory and computer access at strategically located municipal offices and community centres. Learning from these exercises will be continuously fed into the database and will enrich the curricula of UBC and other universities. Hence, this CURA will contribute to the advancement of knowledge on local governance and budgeting processes in Canada and other countries, enrich university curricula in participatory governance and planning practice, build community capacity for public policy engagement and promotion of citizenship, and create local alliances and national networks that could support democratization of local governance.

2. DETAILED DESCRIPTION

RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE: Canada is facing a crisis in civic engagement. Voter turnout rates, typically at 30-40% in municipal elections, have been falling steadily in provincial elections, and are among the lowest in all Western democracies at the federal level.¹ Trusts in government and political leaders have reached alarmingly low levels.² And while citizen groups have demanded more opportunities for participation in decision-making, most initiatives for public participation in local governance are often merely consultative, and have not allowed for real, deliberative decision-making. Such initiatives may only create unmet expectations, and could even lead to greater voter apathy and distrust of government. This democratic deficit creates difficulties in addressing social exclusion, economic dislocation and environmental degradation, and in fostering citizenship in as multicultural, multi-ethnic context like Canada.

¹ Globe and Mail, "This Canadian way is not the democratic way" August 20, 2003 - Page A15

² Environics polling shows that 67% of Canadians say they have little or no confidence in their political leaders. Public Policy Forum, http://www.ppforum.com/NewsLetters/issue_6/english/

These challenges however are collective in nature, and can only be addressed through collective action, the normal vehicle for which is government.

The direct involvement of citizens in governmental budgeting or participatory budgeting, can provide potential solution to this crisis. Why budgeting? Political analysts have referred to budgets as “policy without the rhetoric”. Government budgets reflect a country’s political culture, its dominant governance practices, and the state’s relationship with its citizens. They are essential policy and planning tools for understanding the governments’ key policy priorities, for broadening citizen participation, and improving public accountability. In other words, real decisions about public policy are made in the budgeting process, which provides a concrete space for effective citizen involvement. As both a deliberative and representative process, participatory budgeting provides immense opportunity for citizen education, promotion of citizenship, and involvement in civic affairs.

Participatory budgeting (PB) as an example of deliberative processes³, is already being implemented successfully in other countries, especially in the South, and has generated much academic interests.⁴ Perhaps the best known example is that of Porto Alegre, Brazil where PB has provided a vehicle for citizen education and brought improvements in vital infrastructure and services to disadvantaged communities, leading to increased trust in government.⁵ This project thus promotes cross-cultural learning through North-South linkages, and concretizes the popular mantra “thinking globally, acting locally”. As there is a rapidly growing interest in PB processes, and increased political importance of cities and municipalities to Canada’s federal government’s political framework, the timing is opportune for accelerating the theory and practice of local deliberative democracy through a CURA-structured project that is locally-based yet informed by international experiences and grounded theories.

³ On deliberative processes, see Jane Mansbridge, “A Deliberative Theory of Interest Transformation”, in The Politics of Interest Groups: Interest Groups Transformed (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), pp. 32-57.

⁴ See for instance, papers presented at the “Experiments for Deliberative Democracy Conference” held at the University of Wisconsin in January 2000.

⁵ On the Brazilian experience, see the works of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Director of Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal; and Marcelo Lopez de Sousa, Department of Geography, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES: The purpose of this project is to determine the possibilities and conditions under which participatory budgeting can work in Canada to revitalize local democracy and help address communities' social, economic, and environmental problems. It will create avenues and opportunities for mutual learning between academics, students, political leaders, and community organizations as they analyze existing knowledge and practice in participatory budgeting, create new knowledge through experimentation, and develop models for participatory budgeting that work in the Canadian context. These mutual learning processes are expected to (1) raise public awareness about budgets and the budgetary process, (2) promote citizenship, (3) build community capacity for public policy engagement, (4) enrich existing university curricula in participatory governance and planning practice, and (5) create local alliances and national networks that could support participatory budgeting practices in the future.

METHODOLOGY: Our project combines research, training and popular education, and knowledge mobilization based on action research principles. Throughout the project, we will engage scholars in research and analysis, build the capacity of community groups and citizens to participate in budgeting processes, inform the policy community (governments, media and the broader public) of the process and the contributions it can make to Canadian democracy. We will then bring the knowledge learned from these processes back to the classroom through student training new courses and improved curricular content and teaching practices. By the end of the project, we will have created a network of engaged scholars and community participants, a rich database on participatory budgeting, new forms of teaching materials and training tools, and a set of institutions that will carry the research and practice of deliberative democracy forward.

A. Research: We will fully develop our on-line database on PB theory and practices through three streams that capture baseline information at the international, national and local levels.

A.1. International and Canadian Experience with Participatory Budgeting: CURA team members from UBC, SFU, UVic, U of Toronto, Queen's and U of Manitoba will collaborate with community organizations, and municipal officials in Canada and other countries that have experience with deliberative budgeting processes. They will synthesize and analyze existing knowledge on how and when PB processes were established, how they work, the profile of participants and their personal stories, the necessary reforms in local government administration to support PB, the challenges and limitations, the results and lessons learned. They will identify

those aspects in international and Canadian PB experience that are unique to the country, state/province or locality due to legislative, organizational, political, cultural, or historical factors. They will identify and evaluate the resources and structures found essential to providing communities with the capacity to participate fully in deliberative participatory budgeting. CURA team members will also identify characteristics of the PB models that may be relevant to local government budgeting in the Canadian context. They will examine the types and degrees of public consultation or participation in budgetary decision-making, including the level of organised community response and the resources that enable communities to respond. Particular focus will be given to those local government bodies that have experimented with or utilized a deliberative model of public participation in aspects of their budget decision-making processes.

A.2. Analysis of the Greater Vancouver Area Local Government Budgetary Processes: An interdisciplinary research team from UBC and SFU will conduct in-depth budgetary analysis (analysis of sources of revenues and allocation of expenditures), and policy analysis (examination of the key actors and factors that shape priorities and decisions in the allocation of public funds) of local government budgeting in the Vancouver area. The analysis will initially involve the City of Vancouver, the City of North Vancouver, and the Municipality of Bowen Island, which represent a diversity of communities by population, ethnic mix, budget size, and operations. The team will conduct analyses of existing legislative frameworks and interview local government officials and other key informants to examine in detail the structure, policies and decision-making procedures of operating and capital budgets, and the public consultation practices employed. Their research will also include surveys of, and participation from, Vancouver area community organizations that have a history of active interest in local government issues and budgeting. They will also assess the current capacities of citizens and local community organizations to engage in the process, their needs in order to maximize participation, and the resource requirements of local government to facilitate participation and manage the budgeting process overall. Our target will be to establish baseline information needed to design an appropriate participatory budgeting model or models for experimentation.

A.3. Action Research: Modelling an Appropriate Participatory Budgeting Design: Based on findings from the national, international and local research, the community partners will collaborate with academics in the design of a participatory budgeting model (or models) appropriate to Vancouver area local governments. With the full support of the Councils of

Vancouver, North Vancouver and Bowen Island, the CURA team will organize and conduct an experimental participatory budgeting process utilising that model (or models). Data collection for the experiment will include inputs from local governments and agencies, scholars, community groups, and citizen-participants. We will measure participation rates and other quantitative results against targets that will be established in the research and model design stages. Qualitative data will be gathered through both structured questionnaires and open-ended channels such as in-person and online discussion forums. We will analyse both quantitative and qualitative results against independent variables such as population base and density of the participating jurisdiction, size of budget involved, and characteristics of the legal framework for budgeting, in order to draw conclusions about how and where participatory budgeting can be best used in Canada. These action research exercises will benefit from the inputs from academic collaborators across Canada who are also monitoring budgets in their own localities.

B. Student Training and Community Capacity Building: A key aim of this project is to improve partner community organisations' research skills, understanding of (participatory) budgeting processes, and capacity for effective civic engagement. This CURA will engage the community partners in developing an on-line database (interactive website and CD-ROM) on PB using the facilities of the SCARP Cosmopolis Participatory Planning Laboratory and in producing popular education materials (a training manual, a documentary video, posters, cartoons, brochures) on PB. We will hold ten local workshops on various themes and training emphases (e.g. Understanding the Budget Process in Your City or Municipality; How Participatory Budgeting Works; Creating a Gender-Aware Budget and Participatory Budgeting Process, Comparative Models of Participatory Budgeting Practice, etc.) in the Greater Vancouver area to help improve local community capacity to engage in participatory budgeting processes. In the course of project, the CURA will create 5 paid Graduate Research Assistant positions and 15 unpaid Graduate Student Internships in co-operation with three municipal councils involved. Over the course of the project we will employ 2 Ph.D. students to direct specific research project activities. We will support through the project at least 10 M.A. and/or PhD theses and an annual essay / research paper competition in the area of Participatory Budgeting. The outcomes and learning gained from our community capacity-building practice will be brought back to the university. We will utilise the CURA activities, processes and results to improve the content and pedagogy of SCARP courses such as: (1) Planning Practicum; (2) Data for Planning Practice; (3)

Planning Theory (4) Participatory Planning Methods and Tools; and (5) Gender and International Development Planning. Furthermore, we will develop a new course on Sustainability, Participation, and Governance. These courses will employ the pedagogy of problem-based and project-based learning for effective knowledge transfer.

C. Knowledge Mobilization and Transfer: *Knowledge dissemination is integral to this CURA in all its stages, from design to implementation and evaluation. Our CURA Team's specific plans for knowledge mobilization and transfer to three key stakeholders are as follows:*

C. 1. Academic Community and Partner Organizations: *UBC and U of Toronto will organize an International Conference on "Participatory Budgeting in the Americas" in the first year of the project. Shortly after, the community partners and academic collaborators in three provinces will also organise a National Conference on "Can Participatory Budgeting Work in Canada?". These Conferences will showcase this CURA project, present existing research and practice, provide publication opportunities, and initiate the development of a National Network for PB Research and Practice. We will disseminate the knowledge on participatory budgeting, and new pedagogical techniques learned through this CURA by writing five articles in refereed international journals (i.e. Journal of Planning Education and Research, Planning Theory, International Planning Journal, Planning Literature Review, Journal of International Development). In addition, we will edit two special journal issues on participatory budgeting in Plan Canada and the Canadian Journal of Development Studies.*

C.2. Policy-Makers and Practitioners: *Key political leaders and policy-makers at the national, provincial and local levels will be invited to the International and National Conferences. We will disseminate copies of the CD-ROM, policy briefs and news bulletins for NGOs and policy-makers, especially in the Finance Departments of all levels of government, City and Municipal councils, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and Union of BC Municipalities. We will publish jointly with the Canadian Council on Policy Alternatives a policy paper on participatory budgeting and local governance in Canada. Together with the Friends of B.C. Women and Children, we will publish two special issues on how poor families, women, new immigrants and children are affected by budget priorities in B.C. The academic and community partners will also develop and publish a training manual on participatory budgeting based on the results of our ten workshops. This "how to" manual will be distributed to community organisations and local governments across Canada, particularly in British Columbia.*

C.3. General Public: BC residents in particular and Canadians in general will get to know more about budget processes, participatory budgeting processes, and our CURA project through news releases and feature articles in the *Vancouver Sun*, *Vancouver Courier*, *Youthink* magazine and other local and national newspapers. Partner community groups and scholars will cultivate contacts with journalists, issue media releases at key project stages, and seek coverage through non-news information programming such as Ideas on CBC Radio. We will actively publicize our CURA project –its website, CD-ROM, training manual, documentary film, conferences, workshops and academic articles – by contacting various listserves and e-groups dealing with policy issues. This website will house scholarly papers, updates on this project and international PB initiatives, calls for papers and conference announcements, and links to relevant organisations and researchers. Project participants will also contribute in relevant local and national conferences, symposia and workshops held by other institutions. Lastly, we will create an information and training “hub” at the SCARP Cosmopolis Laboratory and computer access at three Municipal Offices and six community centres that are open to the general public.

PARTNERSHIPS, ALLIANCES, COLLABORATION AND GOVERNANCE: This CURA is an initiative of community partner organizations who have been collaborating since 1999 in monitoring the City of Vancouver’s budgeting processes. Many of our Vancouver-based community partners have been part of the network Alternative Budget Working Group that has been doing budgetary analyses in Vancouver. The Group is initiating the establishment of a non-profit umbrella organisation that would co-ordinate the participation of the diverse community organizations in the CURA. At least two community partner organizations are CURA grant recipients, and could provide further guidance on effective strategies for community-university collaboration. This CURA thus draws on the front-line experience with participatory processes of our community partners and the integrative capacities of our host institution (UBC-SCARP), the research strengths of our academic collaborators across Canada (SFU, U of Toronto, Queen’s, U of Manitoba) and the commitment of three municipal councils in Greater Vancouver. The UBC-SCARP, which houses the Centre for Human Settlements and Cosmopolis Participatory Planning Lab, has a 50-year history of community engagement and training of students, professional planners and planning educators around the world. The co-applicants are SCARP faculty members who have strong interests in participatory governance and the democratization of planning, developing university-community-government partnerships, as well

as in linking community development with social policy. They have researched and published either as individuals or collaboratively on the topics of community-university partnerships, capacity-building, planning processes, and governance issues. Our interdisciplinary CURA team of economists, political scientists, geographers, public policy experts, sociologist, historian, planners and educators has first-hand knowledge of PB models and processes. They have connections with organizations and local governments abroad that have implemented participatory budgeting, and have begun to build a database of contacts, research papers, and best practices in Participatory Budgeting. **Project Supervision:** This project will be carried out by the academic and community partners under the supervision of the Director who has experience in managing two large university-community partnerships on agrarian reform, funded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, and on localized poverty reduction, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency. There will be an Advisory Committee comprised of five academic co-applicants and collaborators and five representatives from the community partners to be selected by the General Assembly composed of all community and academic partners. The Advisory Committee will oversee the general direction of the project and ensure the rigorous application of proven project management methods. The General Assembly will meet once a year to set general project guidelines and prepare monthly and annual plan of activities. This CURA will utilize small working groups composed of academics, community partners and graduate students to implement project activities and will endeavour to make decisions based on consensus. Project administration, financial controls, general communications, and logistics will be managed by SCARP-CHS administrative staff led by a Project Manager. The academic co-applicants and collaborators will provide the intellectual guidance and leadership in setting the research agenda, ensuring rigor in data collection and analysis, directing peer reviewed articles, and co-supervising graduate student theses and interns with qualified community partners. The community partners, on the other hand, will lead in their organizational capacity assessments and will provide the necessary support in the action research component of the project. They will be fully involved in all activities as equal participants in the action research, conferences, training workshops, and production of written outputs and popular education materials such as policy papers, policy briefs, documentary film, training manuals, news bulletins, posters and brochures.