

Mayor De Blasio: The Civic Engagement Commission Charter Mandate is at Risk of Failure

Fulfill your Commitment and Fund Citywide PB

January 2020

In November 2018, New York City voters overwhelmingly approved ballot question #2 to create a groundbreaking Civic Engagement Commission and citywide participatory budgeting (PB) process. The mandate was clear: New Yorkers demand more meaningful ways of being engaged in budget decisions. **The citywide PB initiative is now at risk due to slow follow through – it needs a strong commitment of \$500 million now to comply with the Charter and establish a successful legacy program for the Administration.**

Supporters of that ballot measure were thrilled to see the Civic Engagement Commission launched and Commissioners appointed in April 2019. But eight months later, we're increasingly concerned that funding has not been allocated to the PB process. Members of the Commission's new PB Advisory Committee are committed to supporting the launch and implementation of the PB process. But we and other allies cannot continue this support without fundamental information about the process.

Citywide PB is a crucial engagement tool in meeting the goals of DemocracyNYC. It guarantees that every New Yorker can have a voice regardless of immigration status and sets young people up to be civically involved throughout their lives.

In your presidential campaign you made a bold \$1.65 billion commitment to national PB. “Participatory budgeting allows everyone to participate in their government, encourages civic engagement, and empowers historically marginalized communities.”¹ **Now is the time for an equally bold Mayoral commitment, to ensure that citywide PB is a successful legacy program, not an unfulfilled promise.**

Building on a comprehensive policy memo delivered to the Administration and the Commission in 2019, we say:

Commit at least \$500 million by mid-February including both capital and expense funds for residents to allocate.

¹ De Blasio Presidential Campaign *Restoring Democracy* <https://billdeblasio.com/democracy/>

\$500 million — in some combination of capital and expense funding — would make a statement as the largest total PB budget in the world and fulfil the voters’ mandate for a significant PB expansion beyond the current Council process.

Research has shown that processes with larger and more flexible pots of money have higher participation and more impact on equity.²

This budget would be larger than PB in the city of Paris, which currently ties Madrid for the largest pot of funds for PB. Paris allocates €100 million (~\$111.35 million USD) each year to projects at the city, district, and school levels — in a city a quarter of the size of NYC.³

Just as in Paris, however, the NYC process can and should work in collaboration with Council’s PBNYC process so residents can easily vote on projects at both the local and citywide levels.

It would also be larger than the next biggest process in North America, in Mexico City. Their new Citizen Participation law mandates 3.25% of the total city budget for PB in 2020, or 1.42 billion pesos⁴ (~\$75.611 million USD), and an increase of 0.25% each year until PB allocates 4% of the city budget in 2024.⁵

Other leading PB processes have much higher per capita budgets. To reach the same 4% as Mexico City, New York would be allocating billions of dollars!

Just as with Mexico City, however, the NYC process can and should grow over time.

A strong initial investment of \$500 million would be the largest pot of funds for PB in the world now, and would turn NYC into a global leader in democracy. Baselining PB in the FY22 budget would ensure that the process remains meaningfully and well supported in the future.

New York has the unique opportunity to make an unprecedented investment in establishing citywide participatory budgeting infrastructure to run a successful large scale PB process for all New Yorkers.

It will be the largest PB process in the country.

It should be the largest and best in the world.

² Wampler and Touchton, *Designing institutions to improve well-being: Participation, deliberation and institutionalisation*. European Journal of Political Research, 2018.

³ Cabannes, Y. (2017) *Participatory Budgeting in Paris: Act, Reflect, Grow*. In: Another city is possible with Participatory Budgeting. Montréal/New York/London: Black Rose Books, pp. 179 – 203 https://budgetparticipatif.paris.fr/bp/plugins/download/PB_in_Paris.pdf

⁴ Expansion Política. *20 claves del Proyecto de Presupuesto de la CDMX para 2020* <https://politica.expansion.mx/cdmx/2019/11/29/20-claves-del-proyecto-de-presupuesto-de-la-cdmx-para-2020>

⁵ Instituto Electoral de la Ciudad de México *Presupuesto Participativo* www.iecm.mx/participacionciudadana/presupuesto-participativo/