



YOUTH VOICE
YOUTH VOTE
PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

YOUTH VOICE YOUTH VOTE PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

www.pboregon.org

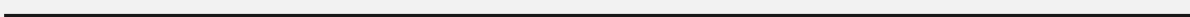




TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction	1
What is PB	2
Why PB & Why Youth?	3
Phases of YV ² PB	4
Winning Projects	5
Youth by the Numbers	6
Youth Testimonials	7
Impact	8
Recommendations	9



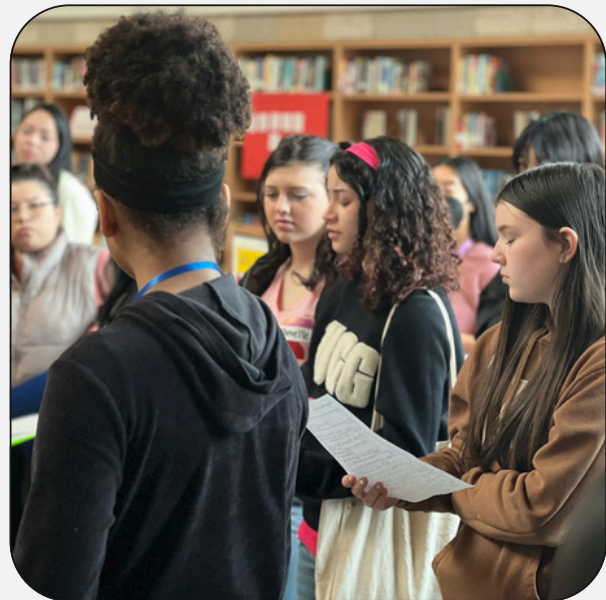


I. INTRODUCTION

Youth Voice, Youth Vote (YV² PB) is Oregon’s first participatory budgeting (PB) process, a community driven initiative that put \$500,000 in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds directly into the hands of East Multnomah County youth to decide how to support COVID-19 recovery in their communities. PB Oregon partnered with 9 community-based organizations and a community foundation to engage over 1,200 youth, ages 14-25, in designing and running the entire process.

YV² PB demonstrated that when youth— particularly Black, Brown, immigrant, and low-income youth— are trusted with real power, they deliver creative, relevant, and impactful solutions. Participants not only allocated funds to address pressing community needs, but also built skills in leadership, public speaking, organizing, and civic engagement. Many went on to take on new leadership roles in their schools and communities.

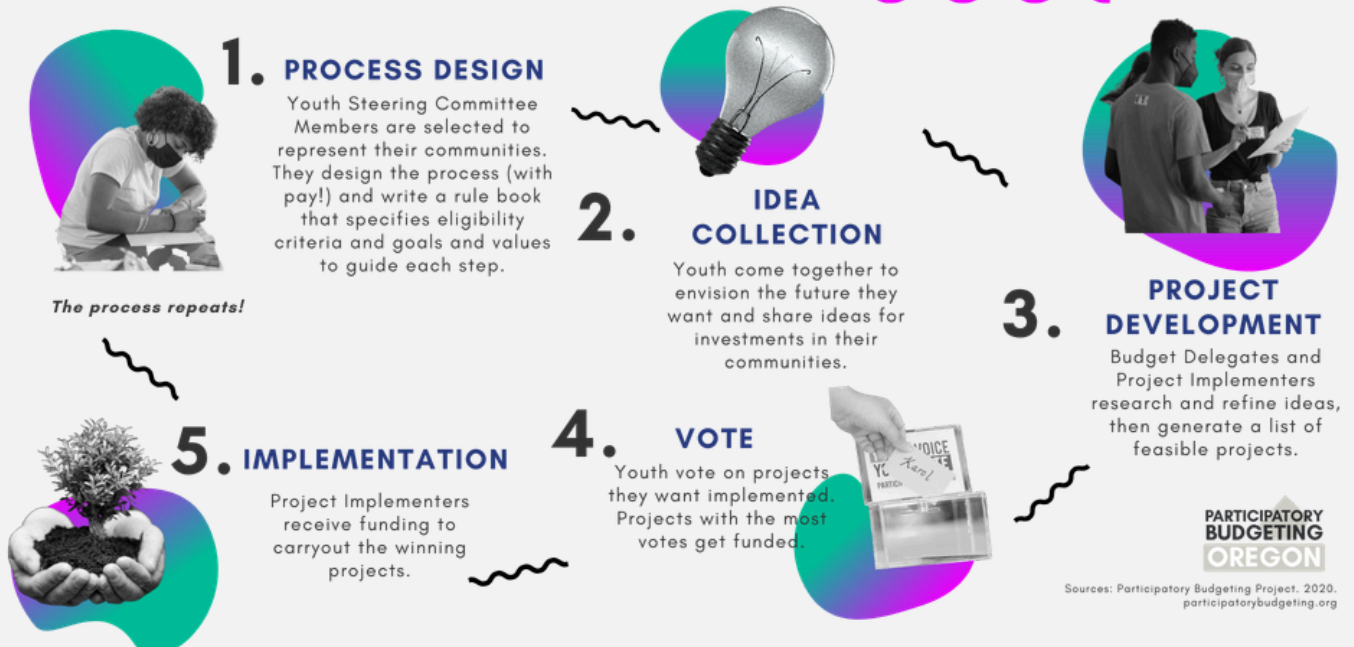
This report documents the YV² PB process, shares stories from youth participants, and outlines lessons learned. It also offers recommendations for building on this momentum, including launching school-based PB in East Multnomah County, training community organizers in PB, and engaging government leaders to expand PB statewide





II. WHAT IS PB?

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING EXPLAINED



PB is a deliberative democratic process with distinct phases wherein ordinary people decide how to allocate a portion of a public budget, within parameters, through a binding vote. PB provides a tool for people to directly share in a primary way the governments exercise power: public budgeting. PB is practiced in well-over 30,000 municipalities on six continents, including dozens in the United States since beginning in Chicago in 2009.





III. WHY PB & WHY YOUTH?

Our theory of change is based on the foundational understanding that how public policy is designed and who designs it matters in driving policy implementation and impact. It matters for the efficacy and equity of outcomes but also for expanding everyone's ability to exercise and build their collective power. Public budgets also matter; they are a primary way governments exercise power. Yet, access to this power is highly uneven. Youth and non-citizens who are disproportionately Black, Brown or Indigenous face the greatest barriers to participating in and influencing government decision-making and are key to making it more accessible for all.

PB transforms the relationship between community members and their governments. It is adaptable to a wide range of settings, institutions, and funding sources; it is a proven method for deepening and broadening participation and uplifting the expertise of underrepresented communities. Critically, PB allows residents who are ineligible to vote (e.g. youth and non-citizens) to exercise their power as equals with the entire community to decide how public funds are spent on their behalf.

PB strengthens movements. Participants gain civic engagement skills while demystifying the budgeting process. Participants not only build relationships and understanding with each other, they build their knowledge by researching and learning how government functions. Research overwhelmingly shows that those who participate in PB demonstrate positive changes in their civic knowledge, levels of trust, attitudes, skills and practices and go on to be leaders in the community. In the process, PB can also make governments more responsive and trustworthy.

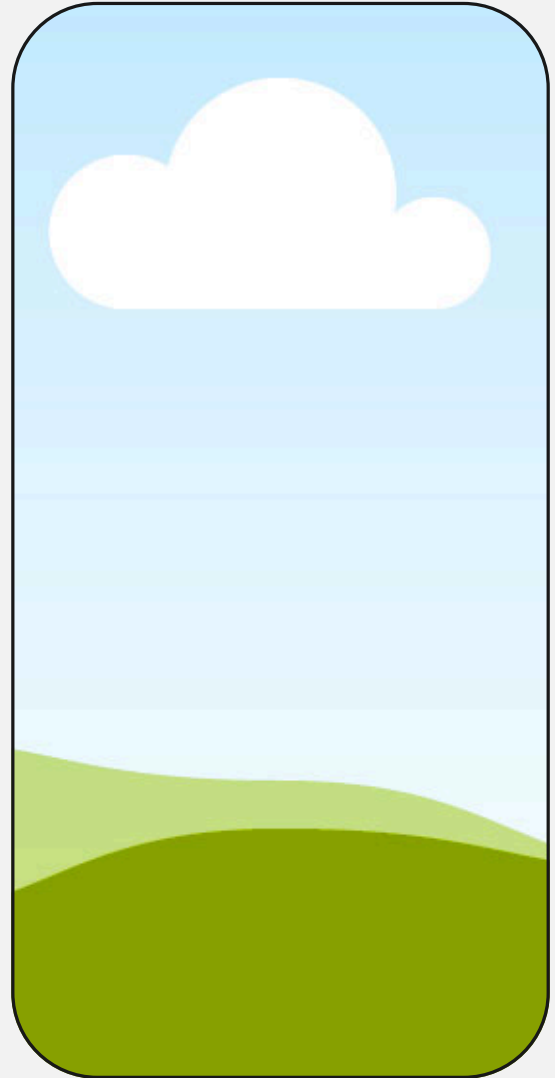


PB & YOUTH

PB reimagines this relationship by creating direct, hands-on opportunities for youth to engage in real decision-making. In youth-focused PB young people are not just consulted, they lead and decide. They identify community needs, design project proposals, build coalitions, and ultimately vote to determine how public funds are spent. Through this process, they gained civic skills, developed political confidence, and strengthened peer networks for organizing and advocacy.

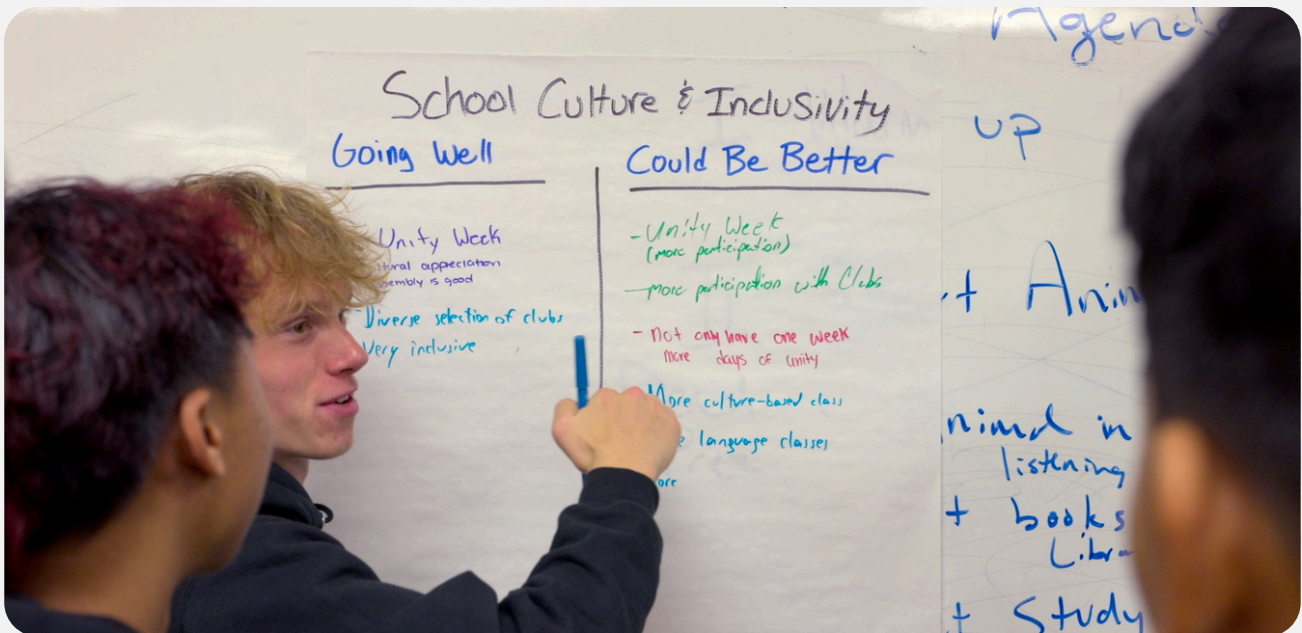
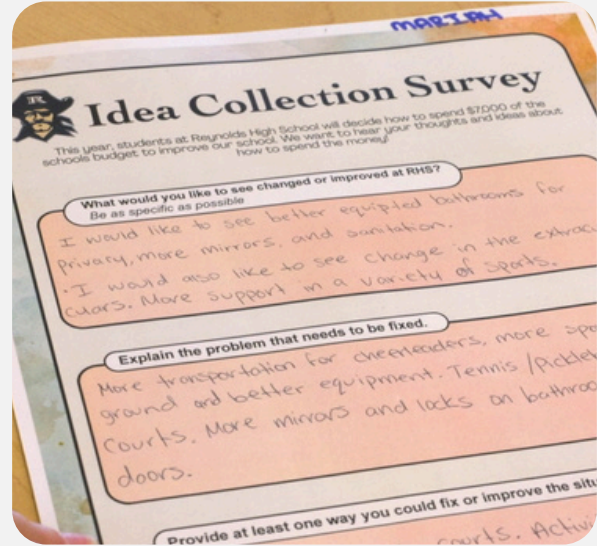
Our experience with Youth Voice, Youth Vote PB has proven that when young people are given real power, they rise to the occasion. They brought creativity, urgency, and vision to the table- and they made decisions grounded in lived experience. This project not only resulted in more responsive and relevant projects, but also helped cultivate a new generation of civic leaders.

At its core, youth PB challenges the idea that government is done to young people, and instead shows that it is more effectively something done with them.



PB & SCHOOLS

School participatory budgeting (SPB) has been a growing trend in recent years, largely due to the fact that it promises to share power with youth to directly shape their learning environment with multiple benefits for student development, confidence, and sense of ownership and responsibility for their school. SPB began in the U.S. in Phoenix in 2013 and has since been adopted and implemented in over 70 schools statewide with the most recent process piloting at Reynolds High School in Oregon with the Reynolds Participatory Budgeting & Jollification Process (PB&J).





IV. THE PHASES OF YV² PB





1. PROJECT PLANNING



CORE 5

In 2021, PB Oregon convened four community-based organizations with youth-centered programming (Unite Oregon, Play Grow Learn, East County Rising Community Projects, and The Rosewood Initiative) and a private foundation (Seeding Justice) to collaboratively implement YV² PB. Our collaborative secured \$500,000 from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) put forward by Senator Kayse Jama, Senator Chris Gorsik, and House Representative Ricki Ruiz. The goal was simple, to allow youth living in Oregon State district 24 & 25 to decide how to invest \$500K to help them recover from the impacts of COVID-19.



YOUTH CONSULTANTS

YV² staff convened a team of five Youth Consultants from the outset of the project and formed the YV Steering Committee. The Youth Consultants met for several months and set the initial criteria for community outreach and project goals. Their main responsibility was to design the Steering Committee application and to score and select committee members from a pool of 54 applicants.





2. STEERING COMMITTEE



The Youth Consultants selected 12 youth aged 14-25 who live throughout the project area to participate on the steering committee. The committee's job was to research the needs of youth and to learn from community experts and leaders. They used their lived experience and knowledge to design the rules for YV2. The YV2 Steering Committee met weekly to co-create transparent PB process rules within Federal and State constraints on the use of ARPA funds. Together they created the parameters for the PB process (project eligibility, project size, who votes, etc) and published it in a [YV² PB Rule Book](#).





3. IDEA COLLECTION

Youth from across the project area contributed their ideas on solutions to help youth recover from COVID-19. A series of idea collection events and activities took place around the region. A popular method was hosting pop-up idea collection events at schools, churches, and community spaces where youth could learn about the project, discover how to get involved, and think critically on the needs of youth and the issues they face. Other activities included tabling at community events, posting flyers, and using social media campaigns to collect ideas virtually. Partnerships were crucial in this phase and leveraged relationships with youth-based organizations, schools, and elected officials to increase outreach efforts to youth.

243 ideas were collected in total.

“
Free health products in schools and health centers
”

“
Having a class where it gets you ready for the real world, like how to do taxes and use your money properly.
”

“
Bringing culturally specific and healthy food to youth in the region
”





4. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

YV2 recruited an additional 5 local organizations and nearly 75 youth to work together over a span of 3 months to turn the collected ideas into tangible, feasible project proposals with developed budgets. This phase produced a total of 14 projects each with a budget of \$100K, five of which would be selected by vote in the voting phase. The participating organizations Asian Pacific American Network of Oregon (APANO), Day One Tech (DOT), Hey Doc Clinic, Friends of Noise, (FoN) and Portland's Centers for the Arts, would become responsible for implementing the winning projects.

5. COMMUNITY VOTE

In the final phase of the process, YV2 hosted a series of voting events inviting youth to learn about the process, the proposed projects, and vote for their favorite projects. The YV2 rulebook outlines that any youth aged 13-25 who live, play, or pray within the project boundary are eligible to cast a vote. Youth submitted their votes either by a physical ballot or submitting a digital ballot.

A total of 782 ballots were collected.





6. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

With the winning projects selected by the community vote, it was time to turn the projects into reality. The organizations recruited to work with youth in developing projects were now tasked with implementing the winning projects. All winning projects were completed by their respective organization by the end of 2024. The next section of this report showcases the implementation of these projects.



**APANO originally developed their projects with youth and passed the baton to Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) to carry out the implementation of the project.*



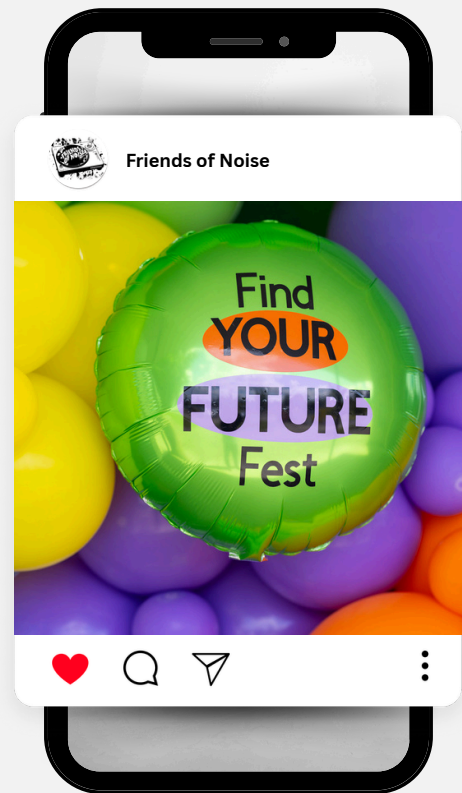
V. WINNING PROJECTS



FIND YOUR FUTURE FEST

Vote Count: 417

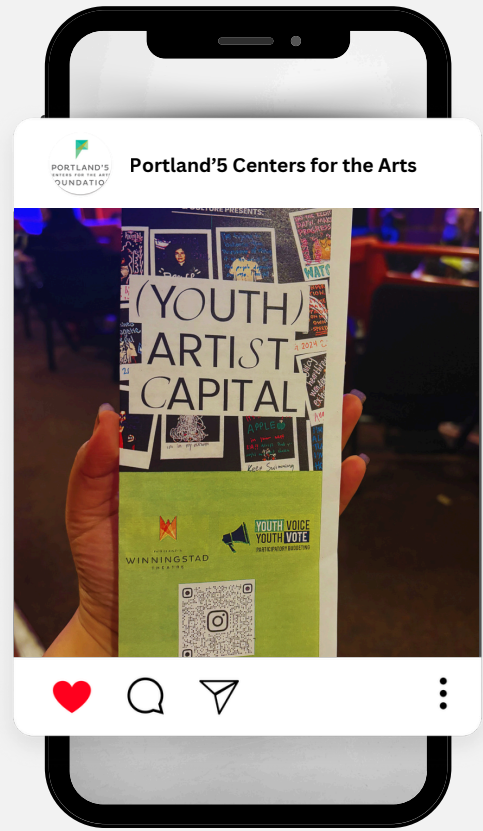
Find Your Future Fest was a free, large-scale public event that offered local youth the chance to explore their future with cool career insights, hands-on activities, and real talk with pros. The event had over 20 exhibitors from local employers, entrepreneurs, educational resources, community organizations, and life coaches! All with the goal to help youth discover career paths they may have never considered! The Festival ended on a high note with a live concert featuring a selection of youth musicians that were paid for their time and creativity. Youth who attended and visited all the exhibitors received a \$100 Visa gift card.



YOUTH ARTIST CAPITAL

Vote Count: 403

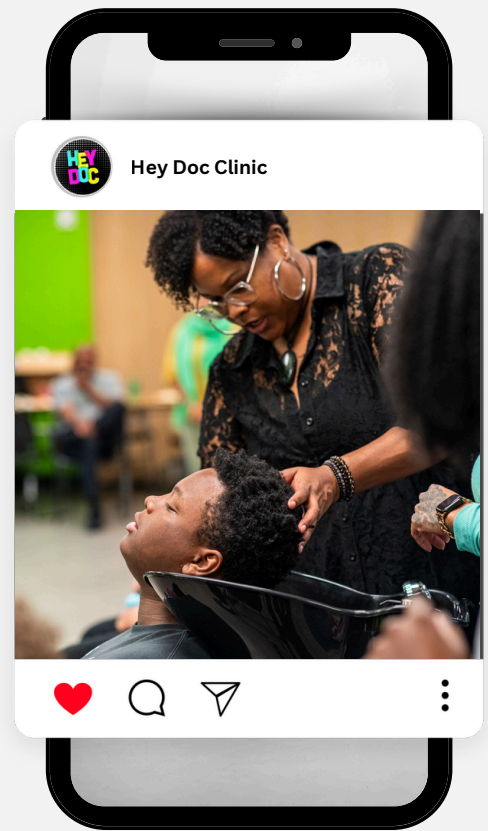
Youth Artist Capital convened 10 youth artists for a two week intensive mentorship program. Youth artists were matched with an experienced artist mentor to support them learning how to practice, market, and network their art. During the two weeks, youth developed their art and showcased them at a closing ceremony event. All youth artists received a \$1,750 stipend to participate.



BEYOND SNAP

Vote Count: 358

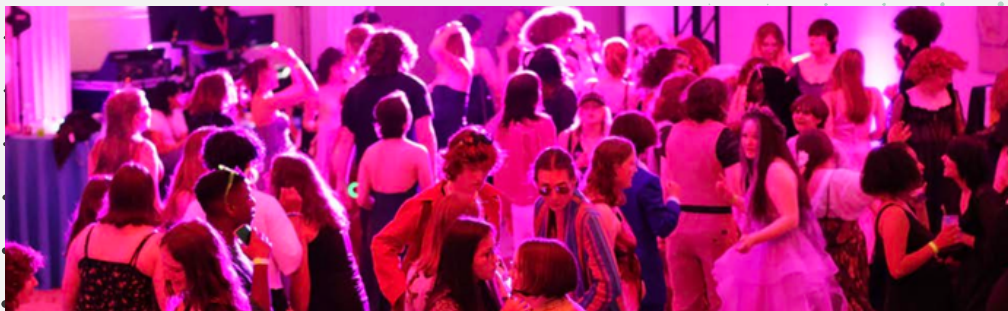
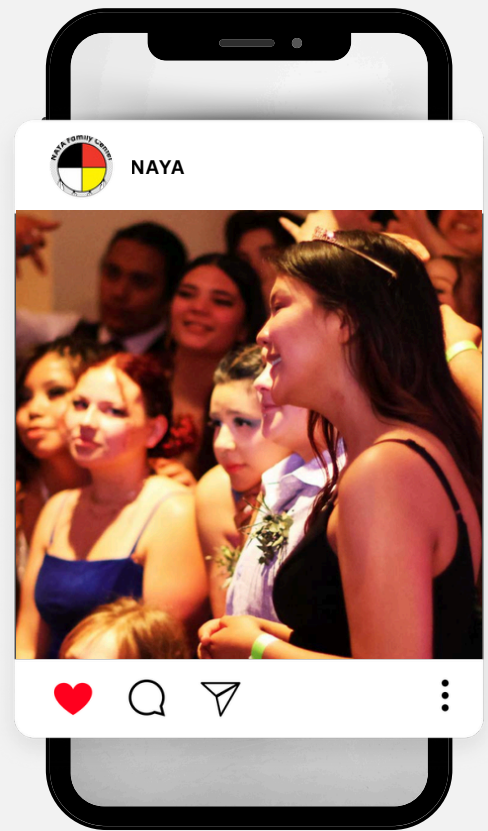
This collaborative project centered on providing culturally responsive health and hygiene resources to students and families, with a focus on Black, Brown, and immigrant communities. Efforts included hair care, skin care, and hygiene product distribution, directly reaching 250 families across schools. Promethean Hair Lounge played a key role, offering free haircuts with 10-11 stylists and continuing ongoing support for Rosemary Anderson High School.



YOUTH RESOURCES

Vote Count: 360

This project centered on creating affirming, youth-led spaces for LGBTQ2S+ young people. This project offered ongoing onsite support at NAYA for 25–30 youth at a time, providing consistent community and care. Additional programs reached homeless youth and engaged BIPOC youth through dedicated outreach, ensuring inclusivity and access to resources. The project also sponsored Queer prom which brought together 340 youth and featured performances and created intentional spaces for Two-Spirit youth to engage and celebrate identity.



YOUNG PROFESSIONALS

Vote Count: 505

This program convened a cohort of youth and equipped them with essential financial literacy, personal budgeting, and self-management skills to prepare them for employment and long-term career growth. Grounded in trauma-informed practices, it addressed intergenerational barriers while fostering leadership, professional development, and an understanding of how businesses operate- from entry-level roles to management pathways. Participants built relationships with local businesses and organizations, gaining firsthand insight into business models and workplace expectations.





VI. YV² BY THE NUMBERS





VII. YOUTH TESTIMONIALS

JESSICA MONJE-PEREZ

YOUTH CONSULTANT

Jessica Monje-Perez's journey with YV² gave her more than an introduction to participatory budgeting, it gave her tools to step into leadership. Through the process, she learned not only the mechanics of PB but also the power of youth-led change. "I was able to practice my facilitation skills and connect with other youth in my surrounding community," she shared, noting how much she gained from working alongside her peers.

Her experience quickly turned into action. While still involved with YV², Jessica canvassed during an election campaign and used her role at a youth-serving organization to connect students with civic opportunities. She carried forward what she had learned: that civic engagement is not abstract, but a direct way to make communities stronger.

For Jessica, PB is essential because it offers young people the chance to shape decisions that impact their daily lives. She believes that when youth are trusted with real decision-making power, they gain first-hand experience of how democracy can lead to change.



Jessica's message to officials considering PB

“The youth in the community are the leaders we should be supporting and elevating. By allowing youth to have a voice and vote through civic engagement, we are teaching them how to take their experiences and advocate for a future they hope to live in.”

LISBETH MARQUEZ - DELGADO

YOUTH CONSULTANT



Lisbeth's message to officials considering PB

“
Launching PB projects for youth will not only benefit high school youth, but it will leave a lasting impact for future generations. Investing in youth leaders involved in PB processes today will become the innovative leaders who participate in public office and civic engagement opportunities in the future.”
”

For Lisbeth Marquez-Delgado, Youth Voice, Youth Vote PB was a launching point for finding her voice and using it to strengthen her community. She credits YV² with helping her grow as a communicator, especially in public speaking, and with giving her a clear understanding of participatory budgeting and the legislative process. The program's emphasis on mentorship and collaboration opened new doors: "I'm grateful for the people I met during my time with Youth Voice Youth Vote because it helped me feel even more connected to my community," she reflected.

Her PB experience sparked a long-term commitment to civic engagement. Lisbeth went on to participate in a fellowship in Mexico, working with high school youth and recognizing striking similarities between their hopes and those of youth in the U.S. better schools and stronger opportunities. She now envisions her future career as one centered on helping underrepresented communities thrive in Portland and East Multnomah County.

Lisbeth sees PB as a way to rebuild trust in public institutions and empower youth to lead with purpose. She emphasizes that PB teaches young people that they are equals in decision-making and that their ideas matter. "PB is one democratic step that progresses us towards achieving a more equitable society,"

XAVIER JUAREZ

BUDGET DELEGATE



Xavier first encountered participatory budgeting (PB) during a challenging transition into high school, when he was feeling isolated after COVID. Drawn in by the chance to be “civically engaged” (a term he admitted he didn’t fully understand at the time). PB quickly became a turning point. Initially introverted and hesitant, Xavier found confidence and purpose through the process. PB opened doors to leadership opportunities on councils and organizations, even taking him to Washington, D.C. for networking.

He learned that his voice could matter and was inspired by peers who modeled confidence and dedication to their communities. Since then, Xavier has committed himself to advocacy and civic engagement, sharing his experiences with his family and drawing them into the journey as well. For Xavier, PB not only deepened his connection to his community but also cemented his sense of purpose.



NATAN HAGDU

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER

Natan first discovered participatory budgeting (PB) on Twitter as a 16-year-old who had just arrived in the U.S. and was eager to explore opportunities he had never experienced in his home country. At first, PB was confusing, but as he became more deeply involved, Natan saw its beauty and impact, both for himself and for other youth. The process helped him recognize the power of his own voice, the importance of community, and the role of young people in leadership and democracy. PB not only gave Natan a way to serve his community but also opened doors to personal growth, shaping the leader he is today.



VIII. IMPACT

Advancing Civic Leaders

Youth who got involved, stayed involved. Many youth continued their participation in additional phases of the project beyond their entry point. We also observed many youth advancing to obtain additional leadership roles or civic engagement opportunities.

Led to School PB in Oregon

YV2 fostered strong relationships and built PB knowledge with students, teachers, and district administrators in the region. School leaders gained a shared understanding of how PB functions and witnessed the impact of youth-led decision making. This involvement created the conditions for Reynolds High School to eventually adopt their own PB process allowing students to decide how to spend a portion of the schools budget.

Capacity Building

PB supported the capacity and growth of the participating organizations, particularly project implementers. YV² PB brought together ten community organizations, one community foundation, three State officials, and hundreds of youth creating substantive relationship networks for base building. Implementing organizations were funded to develop new programs developed through YV² PB, several of which continued those programs after the completion of the process.

Fostered Connection & Shared Responsibility

YV² PB created meaningful opportunities for youth from different racial, cultural, and identity backgrounds to work together, build relationships, and deepen their understanding of one another's experiences. Some of the winning projects, such as Beyond Snap, were designed to benefit specific identities suggesting that youth were willing to invest in people whose lived experiences differed from their own.



IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

The successes of Youth Voice, Youth Vote PB amplified the growing movement for more public participation in budget decisions within Oregon. Our work aims to direct this significant momentum and usher in a new wave of democracy by centering the people in key decisions that affect their lives and communities through PB. To do so, our organization identified three key opportunities to scale PB in Oregon:

1. **Expand civic participation by bringing participatory budgeting to schools**

School PB offers youth an introductory experience in democratic decision-making while building skills and knowledge necessary to engage meaningfully in civic life. The success of YV² PB, and the track record of participants advancing to additional civic leadership roles, demonstrates that schools can serve as powerful incubators for democratic practice.

2. **Centering marginalized youth in decision-making**

School PB offers youth an introductory experience in democratic decision-making while building skills and knowledge necessary to engage meaningfully in civic life. The success of YV² PB, and the track record of participants advancing to additional civic leadership roles, demonstrates that schools can serve as powerful incubators for democratic practice.

3. **Build PB competency and leadership through hands-on learning.**

Educating and training potential constituents and leaders on the fundamentals of PB can increase the capacity for future implementation. YV² PB highlighted that engaging teachers, administrators, and public officials alongside youth builds shared understanding, collaborative decision-making, and encourages replication. Structured opportunities for learning can support PB adoption statewide.