



Participatory budgeting

Participatory budgeting and public valuation are techniques that allow the public to debate the social and economic values they attach to particular policy, activity or design options. Using small groups of citizens representative of a particular area and community affected by the issues to be discussed, the groups deliberate on their preferences for forest use, planned activities, planting schemes, landscape design and infrastructure options. The aim is that a public discussion will revolve around maximising the public goods instead of benefiting individuals.

To bring real focus and meaning to the discussion a variety of methods can be used to value various options, or the discussion can turn towards deliberating the allocation of actual budgets for the proposals. Whereas valuation asks stakeholders to provide a notional value for features and options being discussed, the overall goal of participatory budgeting is to reach a consensus about actual spending and resource allocation of a specified budget. Participatory budgets can be used at different levels, from a project through to a regional or departmental budget. Citizens are provided with information that enables them to prioritise the needs of their neighbourhoods or community of interest, debating new services and project proposals to set budget allocations in a democratic and transparent way. Different levels of engagement can be designed in using different techniques to discuss and assign values and budget segments, so the process meets different levels of participation.

Resources and requirements

Skills

- Requires good facilitation skills.

Equipment

- Publicity materials.
- Information on budgets.
- Flip charts and similar materials.

Time

- Awareness-raising/promotion is needed before the event so participants have required information and knowledge of objectives.
- Is likely to require a series of events rather than a single meeting.

Costs

- Staff time.

Level of engagement

INFORMING:

CONSULTING: ★

INVOLVING: ★★

PARTNERSHIP: ★★★

Strengths

- It is a powerful technique for facilitating consensus between stakeholder groups over the use of public goods and services within a project or programme.
- It helps participants to understand each other's viewpoints and to come to some agreement about shared priorities.

Weaknesses

- Some agencies have reservations discussing resource allocation issues in a public forum.
- It does not work well if agencies involved have restricted budgets linked to central targets, which limit the amount of decision-making power that people have over project and activity design.

- Venues).
- Costs may be quite high depending on the number of meetings and people involved.

Useful sources of information

Case studies

- Discourse-based valuation of ecosystem services: establishing fair outcomes through group deliberation. M. Wilson and R. Howarth (2002). *Ecological Economics* **41**, 431–443.
- A variety of UK cases can be found at: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/case-studies

Reports

- Bringing budgets alive: participatory budgeting in practice. Community Pride Initiative and Oxfam's UK Poverty Programme. Oxfam (2005).
www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk/documents/Bringing-20budgets-20alive.pdf

Web

- The Participatory Budgeting Unit: www.participatorybudgeting.org.uk

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox