

Youth Lead the Change:
The City of Boston's Youth-Focused Participatory Budgeting Process
Pilot Year Evaluation

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Executive Summary

This year, the City of Boston initiated “Youth Lead the Change,” the nation’s first participatory budgeting process focused exclusively on youth. Its goals included civic education and engagement, and the inclusion of youth voices that are typically marginalized from politics in the City’s capital planning process.

Using quantitative survey questions and qualitative interviews with participants, in combination with archival research and census data, the present report assesses the successes and limitations of the pilot year, focusing in particular on: how the process itself worked, who participated, what were the decision-making processes and their results, and what impact it had on the participants themselves.

The Participatory Budgeting Process in Boston

Despite a shortened timeline, the program effectively implemented all key stages of the process: establishing a Steering Committee made up of youth-serving organizations which created a rulebook for the process, holding idea assemblies in a variety of neighborhoods throughout Boston to generate ideas, engaging a core group of young people as Change Agents to turn those ideas into specific proposals, and holding a vote to determine which proposals would be funded through the 1 million dollar youth budget.

However, the limited timeframe did result in challenges throughout the process, with participants feeling that they were unable to be as thorough as they would have liked. Participants felt that idea assemblies would have yielded better quality suggestions given more time for mobilization and reflection. Change Agents felt that they could have prepared more proposals and marketed them better. Steering Committee members felt that they could have done a better job of outreach with more time. There were also consistent challenges related to communication and information sharing, no doubt partly due to the time limitations, with many participants feeling confused at the various stages of the process. Communication could have been improved both with respect to logistics and with respect to the rules and the division of responsibilities within the process itself.

Who participated?

While the program fell short of its initial goals for total turnout, it did a great job of targeting young people of color from low-income neighborhoods. In general, neighborhoods with high youth populations were well represented. Of those who participated this year, more than half said that they would participate again, and many would like to participate in more in-depth ways than they did this year.

Participants were mostly of high school age and voters were mostly from Boston Public Schools. However, among Change Agents, a majority attended exam schools, charter schools or suburban schools through the METCO program, and most seem to have been previously engaged through other City-related programs and organizations, indicating a need to expand the deepest forms of participation to those least likely to have been reached by City services. In addition, young men were under-represented among participants relative to young women.

Attrition was a challenge, especially among youth members of the Steering Committee. In addition, young people who did come to the SC meetings didn’t always feel comfortable enough to share their

ideas. However, they cite the success of certain facilitation techniques, such as small group discussions, in helping to mitigate this problem.

Decision Processes and Results

An initial set of 473 proposals generated by the idea assemblies was divided into six categories and committees of Change Agents were tasked with turning them into concrete proposals. They engaged in a dialogue with City officials who determined whether or not the ideas were capital eligible and provided cost estimates for individual proposals. Some participants felt inhibited by the size of the budget and the capital eligibility limitations. In cases where an idea was ineligible, City officials were sometimes able to suggest changes that would make it eligible or suggest alternate paths through which projects could be pursued outside of this process.

Ultimately, Change Agents prepared a set of 14 proposals which were included on the ballot, and each voter could vote for up to four of these projects. The voting process resulted in funding for 7 projects, which included: Franklin Park Playground and Picnic Area Upgrade, Boston Art Walls, Chromebooks for 3 High Schools, a Skate Park Feasibility Study, Security Cameras for Dr. Loesch Family Park, Paris Street Playground Extreme Makeover Renovation, and New Sidewalks for New Parks.

When assembly participants and voters were surveyed about the three biggest problems in their communities, “violence” was the most common response by far. At least one of the winning projects directly reflected this concern (security cameras). The others arguably address it in more indirect ways by providing spaces for alternate activities, but it is very difficult to assess this with any certainty.

Relative to spending priorities reflected in the City’s five-year capital plan, the participatory budgeting outcomes allocated a greater proportion of funds to neighborhoods such as Dorchester, East Boston and Jamaica Plain, and to the category of Parks.

Change Agents made their decisions through deliberation and consensus, using a decision matrix which urged them to consider feasibility, impact and need. Voters, in contrast, were often hearing about the process for the first time when they arrived at the voting station, and there is some reason to believe that decision-making criteria of voters was more self-interested than that of Change Agents, raising some concerns around parochialism in the voting process.

Participatory Budgeting as a School of Democracy?

When asked about how involvement in YLC affected them personally, participants cited social benefits, increased knowledge and skills, and feelings of empowerment. Social benefits involved the camaraderie within Change Agent committees and a sense of community across the program more broadly.

Both Change Agents and youth members of the Steering Committee felt that they learned a lot through their participation in YLC. They cited a broader awareness of needs in other neighborhoods throughout the City and a better understanding of government processes and democracy in general. In addition, many participants reported gaining specific skills including leadership, teamwork, networking, communication and professionalism.

Many participants also expressed feelings of power or control or reported a sense that their voices had truly been heard. Some participants, however, reported quite the opposite – a sense of disillusionment

or disappointment with the process, particularly when they worked on projects which were deemed ineligible or which failed to garner sufficient votes to win funding. While this appears to be a minority of participants, it may represent the viewpoint of others who dropped out of the process earlier on and thus could not be interviewed, and therefore represents a risk to be mitigated in future years.

Recommendations

In general, an expanded timeline is recommended, as well as better communication throughout all stages of the process, with respect to logistics, roles and responsibilities of various actors, and rules of the process. Related to the theme of information availability, it would also be desirable to enhance the educational aspects of the program, which were cited as major benefits of the process by interviewees.

With respect to improving turnout and reducing attrition, participants recommend more direct youth involvement in outreach and marketing. In particular, improving the web presence of the program will be essential. For the more intensive forms of participation, specific efforts are required to engage more young men, more traditional public school students and more youth who are not already involved with City programming or related organizations. These efforts might involve street outreach (e.g., canvassing) and better coordination with the public school system.

Enhancing the social benefits (which proved so desirable for the Change Agents) within the Steering Committee could help to reduce attrition among the youth. In order to encourage participation by those youth who are already in attendance, the use of more participatory tools and activities during the SC meetings is also recommended. In general, Change Agents and SC Members should be made more aware of each other's work to encourage a more holistic understanding of the process.

Careful consideration should be given to how to ensure a good fit between community priorities and budget outcomes and to reduce the risk of parochialism in voting strategies. Expanded educational efforts may help to address this, for example through an attempt to coordinate directly with civic education programs within public schools. Other options to consider include expanding the size of the budget, subdividing the budget by geographic or thematic categories, complementing the capital budget with programmatic funding (perhaps through external donor contributions), or using the process as a channel of input for the City of Boston's capital planning more broadly.

Continued engagement for youth participants from this year still needs to be defined. Change Agents should continue to be involved in decision-making related to the implementation of the projects they proposed through this process to ensure that the final product reflects their vision. A de-briefing process should be established to report back to participants regarding the findings of this research and to allow for an honest discussion and exchange of ideas between different groups of participants regarding challenges faced this year and how to address them. Finally, now that there is a cohort of first-year youth participants who are already familiar with the process, YLC can draw on that resource to hire young people to serve in leadership roles in next year's process.

YLC's pilot year had some major successes with respect to effects on individual participants (at least among those most engaged in the process), but we are unable to say much with certainty about effects on decision outcomes after only this initial cycle. Since interviews reveal a risk of disillusionment if effects on decisions are believed to be minimal, paying careful attention to this category of effects moving forward will be essential to ensuring the future of the process and its success as a tool for youth empowerment.

I. Introduction

a. Background

Boston's "Youth Lead the Change" (YLC) is a participatory budgeting program for youth between the ages of 12 and 25. It is the first participatory budgeting process in the nation to focus exclusively on youth. The idea of bringing Participatory Budgeting (PB) to the City of Boston was initiated under Mayor Menino, and in keeping with a broader theme of Menino's time in office, the administration sought to add a youth civic education component to the typical PB process. By the time the process began, Mayor Walsh was beginning his term in office, and his administration expressed continued support for youth programming and for YLC in particular.

A million dollars was written into the 2014 fiscal year capital budget for "Youth Lead the Change" with the actual spending to be determined through the YLC process. However, because the money was allocated within the capital budget, only capital projects would be eligible. This meant that projects to be proposed through the PB process must be for physical infrastructure or technology, be located on City-owned property, cost no less than \$25,000 and last at least 5 years.

b. Goals of the Project

The present report proposes to evaluate YLC in terms of its own goals, from the perspective of the various actors involved in its genesis: the City of Boston, the contractor (Participatory Budgeting Project) and the participants themselves.

According to the original Request for Proposals (RFP) produced by the City of Boston, "the goals of Boston's Participatory Budgeting project are to:

- Help ensure the capital plan reflects the priorities, interests and energy of Boston youth.
- Teach youth about the City-building (and budgeting) process.
- Empower youth to participate in government."

The RFP goes on to explain that "[t]he City wants to evaluate two sets of outcomes... project outcomes (meeting the agreed-upon process milestones, etc.) and individual youth development outcomes."

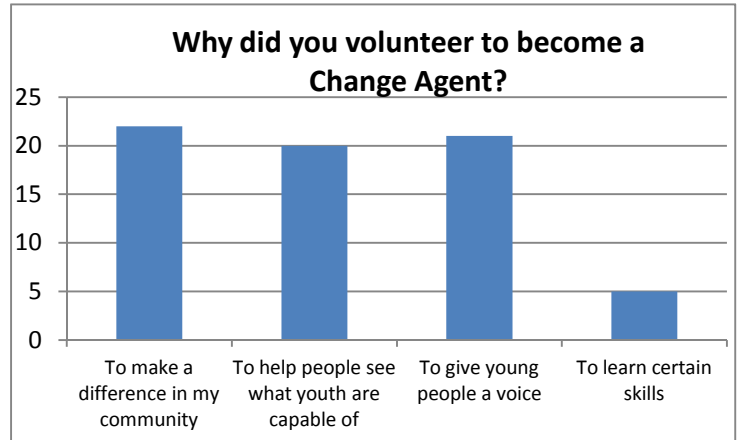
The proposal submitted by the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP) characterized the anticipated effects of the process as follows: "Giving Boston youth the ability to affect public spending will be an eye-opening experience with major impacts: (1) Education... (2) Community Building...(3) Empowerment... (4) Community Improvements..." The proposal later adds that PBP is "...particularly interested in engaging populations who are typically disenfranchised and marginalized from politics. This includes youth – especially low-income youth, youth of color and immigrant youth."

The Steering Committee that was engaged to write the rulebook for this year's PB process identified the following goals:

- Increase Youth Power
- Allow All Voices to Be Heard
- Build Stronger, Safer, and Healthier Communities
- Strengthen City-wide Sense of Pride, Solidarity and Equality

When asked why they chose to participate in YLC, participants were most likely to cite outcome-related reasons, for example:

- “This is something that’s gonna benefit the City.”
- “Being a part of creating a change in Boston... I just love helping people.”
- “I see kids struggling in certain neighborhoods and I want to be able to be that voice for them.”



Whereas the City documentation framed YLC mostly in terms of its effects on the youth,

young people who participated were much more likely to cite the change that they hoped to make in their community than their own personal development as their primary reason for participating.

This report, in addition to examining process outcomes (what actually occurred during this pilot year and who actually participated), will examine two sets of effects: those on the youth participants themselves and those on the actual decision outcomes generated through this process.

c. Research Questions

Based on the project goals and evaluation outcomes described above, the researcher proposes the following categories of research questions, which comprise the following sections of this report:

- **Process Tracing:** What was the process used in this year’s participatory budgeting program and how can it be improved for next year?
- **Participation:** Who participated, and how? Was participation this year representative of YLC’s intended target audience?
- **Effects on Decision Outcomes:** What decision processes did participants employ during this process? What were the outcomes of those decisions? Where do they fit within the broader context of community needs and City spending?
- **Effects on Youth:** What impact did this process have on the youth who participated?

d. Methodology and Data Sources

Methodology for this evaluation includes both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Quantitative data is derived from Boston census data and from surveys of YLC participants. Surveys were administered during the course of regularly scheduled YLC events with digital versions for those who could not attend, and participants were told they were optional. Respondents included 9 Steering Committee members, 26 Change Agents, 134 Idea Collection Assembly attendees, and 1,065 voters. This represents a response rate of 15.0%, 83.9%, 44.7% and 69.6% respectively. Additional data was derived from the vote count results themselves.

Researchers also conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 10 Steering Committee members, 15 Change Agents and 5 Change Agent Committee Facilitators. Interviews were open-ended but organized around the themes outlined in this report: motivations for participating, participation outcomes, impact

on participants themselves, decision processes and suggestions for improvement. Researchers also observed 6 of the 7 Idea Collection Assemblies, 2 Steering Committee meetings, the Change Agent Orientation, 4 Change Agent Committee Meetings, the Vote Kickoff event, 5 additional Vote sessions, the Vote Results announcement party, and sat in on several internal meetings between the City of Boston and PBP. Field notes from these meetings remarked upon turnout, the balance of youth vs adult participation, informal discussions with participants, etc.

In addition, the primary researcher had access to the PB Boston organizational google drive account, which houses all program-related documentation, and to City staff for questions regarding logistical details and use of technology.

II. The Participatory Budgeting Process in Boston

a. Process Overview

Once the decision was made to establish a PB process with a youth focus, **an Oversight Committee** was established, consisting of City staff representing the Budget Office, the Mayor’s Office of New Urban Mechanics, the Department of Health & Human Services, the Department of Youth Engagement and Employment, and the Mayor’s Youth Council. A Request for Proposals (RFP) was written and publicized in order to identify a contractor which would implement the logistics of the process, and a proposal submitted by **the Participatory Budgeting Project (PBP)** was selected. PBP provided educational, organizational and promotional materials that they had developed during their experiences with participatory budget exercises in other cities, including New York, Chicago and Vallejo. PBP also hired two Boston-based coordinators who would organize the events that would make up the process described in section II of this report.

A **Steering Committee (SC)** was established by reaching out to the City’s network of youth-focused organizations operating within Boston. After an initial informational session, organizations were encouraged to apply for positions on the SC. Those selected (by the Oversight Committee) were then asked to send two representatives from their organization, at least one of whom was a youth representative from the population of young people that they serve. Co-chairs were also selected to help facilitate the SC meetings and related outreach activities. The co-chairs were representatives from The Mayor’s Youth Council, The City School and Youth on Board.

Organizations Selected to Serve on the Steering Committee	
Asian American Resource Workshop	Health Resources in Action
Boston Neighborhood Network	Hispanic Black Gay Coalition
Boston Bar Association	Massachusetts Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health
Boston Workers Alliance	Mayor’s Youth Council
Chinese Youth Initiative/Chinese Progressive Association	New England Aquarium
The City School	Press Pass TV
Computer Club House	Right to the City Boston
Department of Neighborhood Development	Sociedad Latina
Dominican Development Center	Start Strong
Dorchester Bay Youth Force	Street Workers programs
Family Services of Greater Boston	Teen Empowerment

Food Project Franklin Park Zoo Morgan Memorial/Goodwill	VietAid Youth Justice and Power Union Youth on Board
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The Steering Committee then met to write the YLC Rulebook, which would guide the rest of the process. The rulebook established the roles and responsibilities of different actors in the process (see figure below) and the voting rules, for example, the eligibility requirements that stated voters must be between the ages of 12 and 25 and must be resident within the City of Boston.



(Source: YLC Rulebook)

PBP and City staff, together with members of the SC, then planned a series of **Idea Assemblies** in various neighborhoods throughout Boston. These assemblies were open to the public (of all ages) and were used both to inform people about the PB process and to collect ideas for projects that could be funded. Seven idea assemblies took place over the course of two weeks at BCYF facilities in Roxbury, Dorchester, East Boston, Mattapan, South Boston and Roslindale. A website was also created to allow people to submit ideas even if they could not attend one of the Idea Assemblies in person.

During the idea assemblies, young people were asked to sign up to become **Change Agents**. The Change Agents would take the ideas generated at the assemblies and turn them into actual proposals to be put up for the vote. Those who signed up were invited to an orientation session, after which point they were

divided into six committees. The committees were created based on a thematic grouping of the ideas generated through the assemblies: (1) Food, Health and Environment, (2) Community Centers, (3) Libraries, Arts and Culture, (4) Parks, (5) Schools and Education, and (6) Streets, Transit and Safety. A facilitator was hired to help guide each Change Agent Committee through the process, and a co-facilitator was selected from among the youth volunteers to serve in a leadership role alongside the facilitator.

Each Change Agent Committee received a list of ideas generated through the assemblies which fell within the category it had been assigned. The CAs then met weekly for about eight weeks to categorize and narrow down this list of ideas in order to generate specific proposals that could be included on the ballot. Each committee received feedback from the City's budgeting office regarding whether the project was capital eligible. They each also met with representatives from the City department most closely related with their topic, which then helped them to generate an accurate cost estimate for particular projects. Each committee came up with somewhere between one and four proposals that were included on the ballot.

Finally, ballots were generated listing the proposals that the Change Agents had developed, and these were put forward in a **Vote**. Young people could vote on final outcomes at a variety of times and locations, including six high schools, five community centers, four T stops and five collaborating organizations. Each voter could vote for up to four projects. The votes were then tallied, and those projects that received the most votes would be selected to receive funding, in order, until the entire million dollars had been allocated.

b. Feedback from Participants

With respect to the overall organization of this year's process, participants were generally sympathetic to the fact that this was the first year and that it was a learning process for everyone involved. However, some general suggestions for improvement stand out and are outlined below.

Time/Organization

"We felt like we were rushed to do what we were supposed to do."

A very persistent interview theme was "the time crunch." Insufficient time was cited as being one of the major challenges of the process this year. Within Change Agent groups, respondents report having run out of time to submit certain proposals for inclusion in the ballot. Limited time likely contributed to some of the other problems discussed below. For example, some participants believed that more meetings between Change Agents and City officials would have helped alleviate some confusion over the capital budgeting rules, that longer meetings and/or more of them would make it easier to accomplish what was needed and that more frequent meetings of the Steering Committee could have allowed for better organization of events and better marketing of the process.

A related theme was a perception that the little time that was had was sometimes inefficiently used: "The [Change Agent] meetings to be honest weren't that organized... And it was a... [long] T ride so it was also far... Honestly it discouraged me to go."

Communication/Information

"I feel like, I didn't always know what was going on and I would always ask someone... I was just always confused ... like, I'd be like, all right... what did we have to do now? ...And when things were.... By the end, I was just confused."

By far the most consistent interview themes were the need for better communication and organization, often in relation to "the time crunch" but not always. Participants across different stages of the process reported a lack of understanding of their own role/responsibilities and confusion as to the rules of the process. Many Change Agents seemed unaware of the role of the Steering Committee, and as a result felt that certain rules had been created without input from youth. Some participants also reported confusion around the initial idea collection rules: "The flyer said 1 million dollars to an idea, not a portion of a million dollars." Others misunderstood the City's commitment "to provide an additional million dollars" to support PB processes again next year to mean that the budget would be doubled, setting the stage for potential disappointment down the road.

Many Steering Committee members were unclear about where their role ended and the Change Agents' roles began, and wanted to continue to be, if not involved, at least informed about the ongoing process. SC members also seemed uncertain how much initiative they were expected to take, and felt that they weren't given enough advance notice to properly prepare for events. SC Members also reported not knowing when meetings were happening: "Yeah, and if we did get them [the messages], they would be half-full. So, like, 'there's a meeting today at the Tobin.' And then, OK... what time is the meeting? How long is the meeting going to be? And where at the Tobin is it going to be? ...You've gotta be more specific."

It is important to note that the theme of insufficient communication extends beyond logistical issues, contributing in some cases to feelings of powerlessness and undermining the central goals of the process. According to one participant, "Information is power... And so when people aren't being clued in or it's like they rely on one person to relay the information, or they had to go to this meeting..." This participant implies that if one goal of the process is to empower participants, then access to information is perhaps just as important as access to decision-making spaces themselves.

As will be discussed later on in this report, educational benefits were in fact a major success of the program. Improved communication and information dissemination would nicely complement efforts to enhance and expand these educational aspects of YLC.

III. Who participated?

a. Turnout for Assemblies and Voting

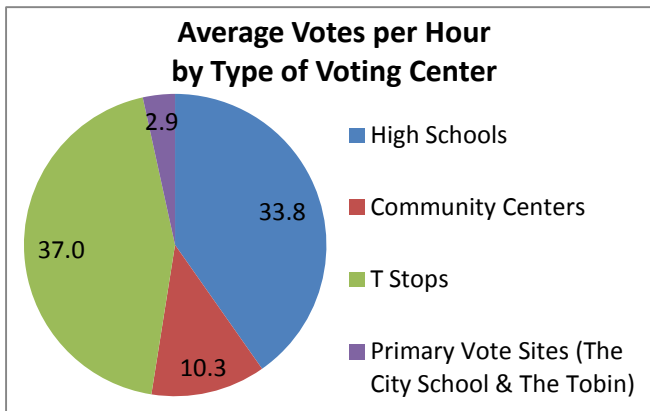
PBP's original proposal set out the following goals for turnout: "to deeply engage a core group of at least 25 budget delegates, to involve at least 400 more youth in budget assemblies, and to empower at least 2,000 youth to vote on projects to fund." During this pilot year, actual turnout involved about 300 attendees at the budget assemblies and exactly 1,531 voters. This represents an achievement of approximately 75% of the initial stated goals with respect to each.¹

¹ The total population of 12-25 year olds in Boston (as of the 2010 Census) was 170,684.

Attendance at the **Idea Assemblies** began very low with only about 20 people in attendance at the first event. Interviewees report that attendance improved significantly over time with some even suggesting that there were nearly 100 people in attendance at the final event though this may be an exaggeration. Researchers present at the first idea assembly reported only 12-18 actual participants in attendance, whereas the final assembly at the Condon Community Center was reported to have more than 80 people in attendance.

In terms of **web presence**, idea submission via the Citizinvestor website was very low, with only nine eligible submissions coming through prior to the deadline. However, 36 voters reported having submitted an idea online, indicating that perhaps the deadline, rules or submission procedures were unclear. While twitter and facebook were used to publicize the process, the related newsfeed activity reveals very little actual interaction by youth themselves. For example, the hashtag #youthleadthechange was used only twice (publicly, at least) by twitter users other than accounts run directly by City-related organizations, and seemingly only one of these was by an individual within the target age range of 12-25.

Voter Turnout varied significantly by type of voting center: high schools, community centers, T stops and collaborating organizations. The largest portion of the votes came from high schools, followed by community centers, but it is important to note that some of the community centers were open for multiple days, and that T stops actually turned out more voters on average per voting session.



Of the 1,066 voters surveyed, more than 70% had not participated in YLC in any other form. 17.6% of voters had attended an Assembly, 9.5% had submitted an idea, either in person or online, 8.5% had attended SC meetings and 3.3% had served as Change Agents.

b. Attrition among Change Agents and Steering Committee Members

Because the Steering Committee and Change Agent meetings took place over time, turnout varied and followed a downward trend as some participants dropped out of the process entirely.

The **Steering Committee** originally consisted of 68 individuals, representing about 30 organizations. Attendance sheets indicate that at least 32 people were in attendance, for example, at the second Writing the Rules Workshop in late January. By the time a researcher attended the final Steering Committee meeting on July 1st, there were only about 5 members present. One SC member interviewed reports: “I know I noticed it was getting smaller... And then at the last one... it went from like 20 to 3.” Attrition was particularly noticeable among the youth participants, according to interview respondents.

Only 9 SC members filled out the exit survey, but those who did seemed to agree with interviewees who suggested that youth involvement could be improved, both quantitatively and qualitatively. All of those surveyed said they would like to see more youth attending meetings, 6 out of 9 said they would like to see more youth sharing ideas, and 6 said that they would like to see more youth leading discussions. In

contrast only one person said they would like to see more adults attending meetings, one said they would like to see more adults sharing ideas and not a single survey respondent said they would like to see more adults leading discussions.

Initially, 61 young people signed up to serve as **Change Agents**, and by the end there were 31. However, according to interviews with the group facilitators, most of this attrition happened immediately, with many of those who signed up never having turned up to even a single meeting. The majority of those who came at all did stick with it for most of the process, according to facilitators. In two of the groups, facilitators even reported that additional people actually turned up to join the meetings, despite not having attended the original orientation. These tended to be people who came to advocate for a particular project.

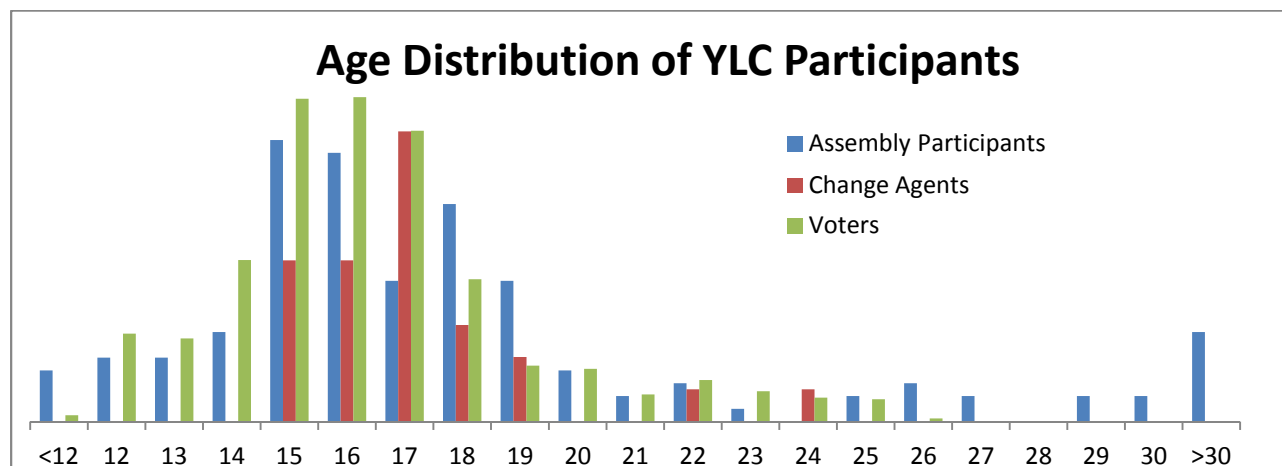
However, attendance did also decrease over time. During the final week of committee meetings, only about 20 Change Agents were observed to attend the final round of committee meetings, and at the final Vote Results Announcement Party, which was the symbolic culmination of the process, only 13 Change Agents were in attendance to receive their certificates and hear the announcement of the vote results.

c. Representativeness

In this section, the demographics of YLC participants are compared with those of Boston’s youth population as a whole. However, it is important to note that one of YLC’s explicit goals was “engaging populations who are typically disenfranchised and marginalized from politics.” Thus if YLC over-represents certain groups relative to the Boston census, this is viewed as positive provided that those groups are typically marginalized.

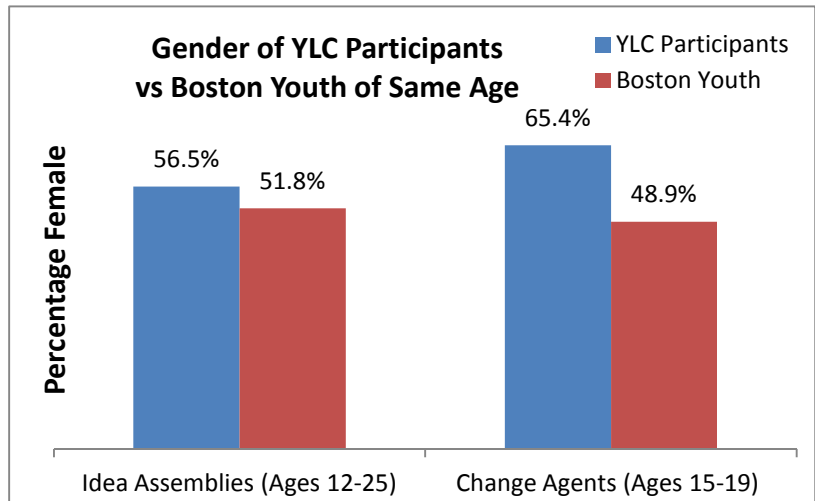
Age

While anyone between the ages of 12 and 25 was eligible to participate, in reality the majority of participants were of high school age. This was true of the Idea Collection Assembly Attendees and the Voters, but was particularly salient amongst Change Agents. All but two of the Change Agent survey respondents were between the ages of 15 and 19. Youth in the 14-19 age range accounted for 67.9% of idea assembly participants, 77.4% of voters and 92.3% of Change Agents.



Gender

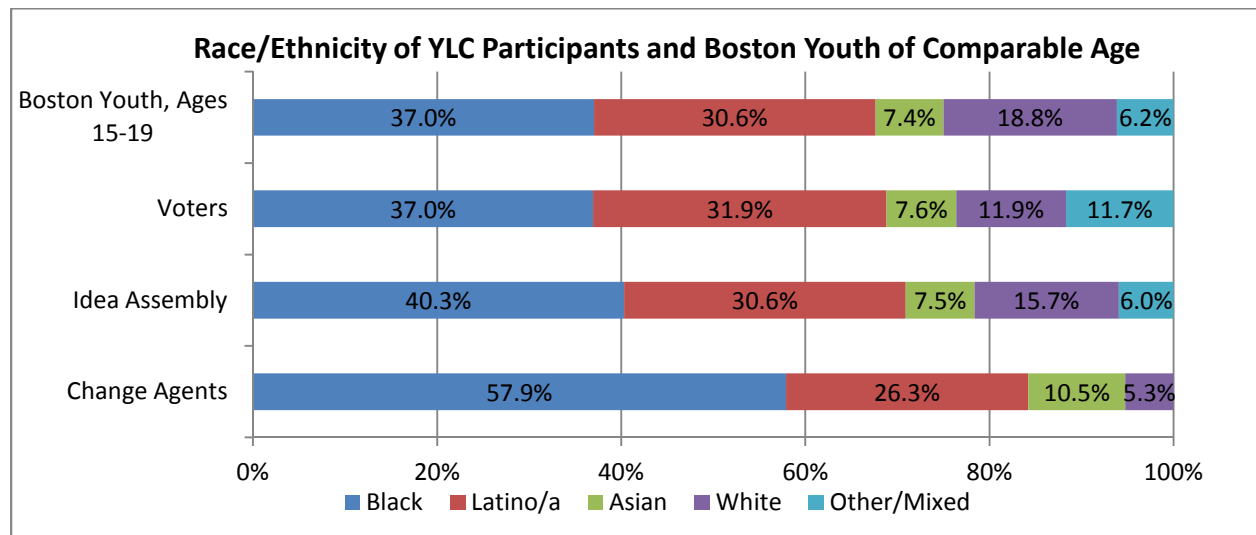
In comparison with census data for Boston residents in this age range, YLC participants were more likely to be female. This was particularly true of the Change Agents, and the difference is more drastic when taking into account that among Boston Youth under the age of 18, males actually outnumber females. (After age 18, Boston’s census data includes college students who move to the City from elsewhere and who are predominantly female.)



The gender of voters was more representative of the Boston population, with 50.19% of voters surveyed reporting as male, 49.43% reporting as female and 0.4% identifying with other genders or choosing not to identify at all.

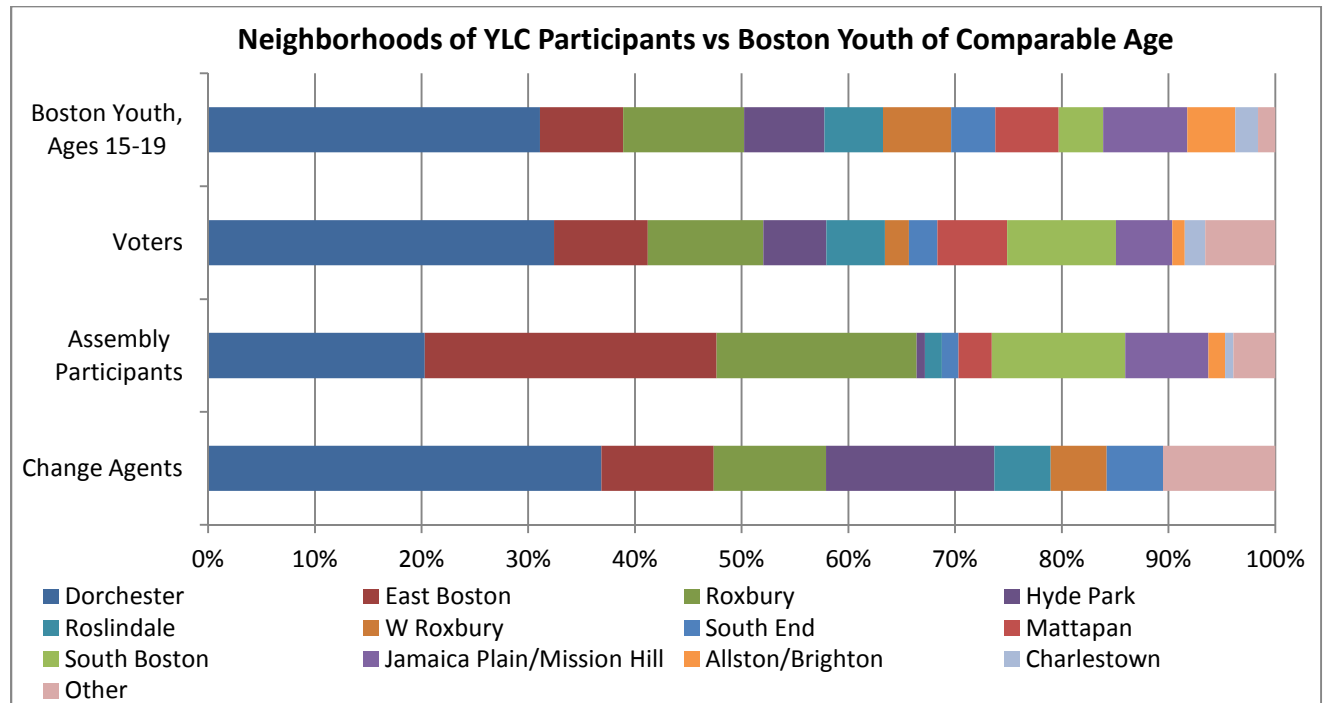
Race/Ethnicity

Because the racial composition of the City of Boston is shifting over time, and because census data after age 18 is biased by the influx of out-of-state college students (who are eligible to participate, but are not the primary target of this process), the race/ethnicity comparisons below are made with reference to the age that YLC participants would have been at the time of the 2010 census from which the data is extracted. In general, YLC participants are more likely to be black or latino than the general youth population. This is particularly true of the change agents, but holds for the idea collection assemblies and voters as well.



Neighborhood

Dorchester is the Boston neighborhood with the largest youth population in Boston. Although East Boston seems to have had the most well-attended Idea Assembly, Dorchester is the most-represented neighborhood among Change Agents and Voters, followed by Roxbury and East Boston. These three neighborhoods provided the most participants throughout the YLC process. South Boston is also very well represented amongst assembly participants and voters but is absent amongst the Change Agents we surveyed. There were also no Change Agents from Charlestown, Mattapan or Jamaica Plain (at least among those who filled out the survey).



School Attendance

Of the voters who answered the survey question, 77.9% were students at Boston Public Schools. We do not have any data about how many of those BPS students attend exam schools, but considering that 38.7% of votes were placed at Boston Public Schools themselves (Burke, Charlestown, East Boston, English, Madison Park and Snowden), it seems very likely that voters were largely from the target demographic in this category.

We do not have complete data regarding the type of school attended by Change Agents, but of those the research team spoke with directly, less than half attended regular Boston Public Schools. Several of the Change Agents we interviewed (who attended either charter schools, exam schools or suburban public schools through the METCO program) specifically highlighted an awareness of the greater challenges faced by students at other schools as one of the things they learned through this process.

- “Hearing like where other people are coming from in their neighborhoods that I never knew that they had problems with, that’s new to me. And that makes me feel bad. Like, I should feel fortunate compared to what other people don’t have and I have...”

- “Now that I’m part of this program it really helps sheds a light on how fortunate I have been going to a suburban school. You know, when we complained about different things in our school, it’s really not that much of a complaint, you know like hashtag first world problems.... In our suburban schools, we have had lots of complaints, but in East Boston they don’t even have doors to the bathroom. That’s just ridiculous.”

These themes were echoed by some of the Steering Committee youth we interviewed as well, indicating that perhaps more effort is required to engage non-exam school BPS students (who arguably face greater need) in the deeper forms of participation in this process.

Immigrant Status

Across all participants surveyed, around 19% were foreign-born. Around 12% of assembly participants and 13% of voters (but only 1 Change Agent) reported being most comfortable speaking a language other than English. The most commonly reported primary language other than English was Spanish (which accounted for almost half of foreign language speakers), followed by Haitian Creole, Cape Verdean Creole and Cantonese.

To put this in context, the City of Boston’s population is 26.7% foreign born according to the most recent census information, but this proportion is much smaller for youth within YLC’s target range. A recent City of Boston report indicates that only 9% of children in Boston Public Schools (K-12) are foreign born, although 45% of them have at least one parent who is foreign-born.²

Prior Engagement

Several participants explicitly suggested that there had been a failure to engage youth who are not already engaged in some way, and the data collected by researchers seem to support this. According to interviews with Change Agents, most had heard about the process through a personal connection. Many had been affiliated previously with City programs such as the Mayor’s Youth Council, BSAC or they had had summer jobs through the City’s Youth Fund. Others were affiliated with organizations serving on the Steering Committee, or heard about the process through friends who had been involved with either the City or SC organizations. Interviewees suggest that as a result, participants were largely youth who were already civically engaged in some way, whether through other City programs or through activism and community organizing.

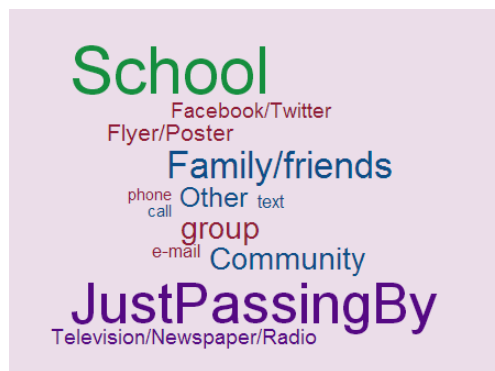
When asked how they learned about the process this year, 44.8% of Idea Assembly participants said that they heard about it through a Community Group (most likely a member of the Steering Committee), and 20.1% said that they heard about it through family or friends. Other responses (pictured in the word cloud to the right) included names of specific people affiliated with the program. Similarly, during site visits to voting sessions, volunteers were very often personal contacts of members of the PBP staff.



How Assembly Participants Heard about YLC

² http://www.cityofboston.gov/Images_Documents/BRA%20Briefing%20Book%20Education_tcm3-16612.pdf

This does not seem to be true of Voters (see word cloud to the right), who mostly heard about the process just from passing by the vote events. (School is the most frequent response, but given that several of the vote sites were schools, there is likely significant overlap between these two categories.) This indicates a potential source for engaging new people in future years, as those who only voted this year may be interested in deeper engagement next time.



How Voters Heard about YLC

Using race and neighborhood as a proxy, the process seems to have done quite well in terms of engaging groups that are typically marginalized from politics. However, qualitative data suggests that many (though certainly not all) of the youth engaged in the deepest ways (as Change Agents or as members of the Steering Committee) were likely to have been previously involved, if not in politics directly, then in youth-focused organizations run by the City or by non-profit groups.

Ineligible and Invalid Votes

The Voter Surveys also revealed several instances of ineligible people who had placed votes (presumably without realizing it since they subsequently admitted to it on the voter survey). The surveys, which account for just under 70% of the total number of votes, included at least 6 individuals who were outside of the eligible age range, and 7-8 individuals who reported living in neighboring cities and towns (Lynn, Revere, Malden, etc.). Both of these figures are likely underestimates considering that not all voters completed surveys, not all survey respondents answered these questions, and in some cases ineligible ages were not recorded by data entry interns. Even so, it is not a large proportion of votes, but indicates a potential risk for future years as the reach of the program increases.

There were also 56 ballots deemed invalid because more than 4 projects had been selected. This represents approximately 3.7% of the total votes cast. Surprisingly, the voting centers that produced the highest proportion of invalid ballots were community centers, not t stops or high schools as one might expect due to their higher volume and more hectic atmospheres. However, this difference was not large enough to draw any definitive conclusions.

d. Retention

Voters were surveyed as to if and how they would like to participate again next year. Seven hundred and eighty-five respondents (about 82% of those who answered the question) said that they would vote again. Two hundred voters said they would attend an assembly next year, 154 would submit an idea online, 126 would submit an idea at an assembly, and 114 would attend an SC meeting.

When asked in a survey whether or not they would participate again next year, 15 Change Agents said “Yes,” while 9 said “Don’t Know.” Those who said they would do it again gave reasons such as “It was fun. Although a lot of work.” And “It is great to see youth do many great things within the community.” Those who weren’t sure whether they would participate again mostly cited timing as the reason, with a few mentioning that they were about to start college. These surveys, however, took place prior to the end of the process.

On the voter survey, 35 survey respondents identified themselves as Change Agents, and of the 32 who answered the question about how they would participate again, only 15 of them said that they would like to serve as Change Agents again. However, 85 additional voters did indicate that they would be interested in serving as Change Agents.

During in-depth interviews that took place after the final vote results were announced, other potential reasons for non-retention of Change Agents came to the fore, such as disappointment on the part of some Change Agents when the proposals they worked on were deemed ineligible or were ultimately not selected through the voting process.

e. Feedback from Participants

Interviews with participants yielded several specific suggestions for how to improve turnout and reduce attrition:

More Youth Involvement in Outreach

In general there was a perception that some of the outreach wasn't very youth friendly, and that it could have been improved by involving youth more directly in the marketing process: "Maybe get a set of teenagers in marketing.... Maybe just one kid from every high school..."

This was true both of change agents, who were largely unaware of the outreach role of the SC ("That can be the job of change agents is spreading the word. Doing outreach.") and of youth members of the steering committee, who in some cases felt that their talents were underutilized ("If they communicated better with us, I could've got them some good resources.").

In particular, participants recommended a **more youth-friendly web presence** ("Putting all the information and the inquiry box in one website that's simple. You know, no kid wants to go in boston-cities-investor-dot-org-slash-the-government... you just want to go on google and type in PB and it's there, you know") and increased use of **street outreach or canvassing** ("Giving this many flyers in this area, covering all these areas.")

Improve Youth Participation on the Steering Committee

Some participants on the Steering Committee felt that youth voices were heard less than adult voices, and that youth connected to more elite institutions (the Co-Chairs presumably) were heard more than other youth. However, this does not appear to have been a result of domineering behavior on the part of the adults (who report really trying to step back and hear youth voices), but rather a result of some young people feeling inhibited from speaking up in the presence of so many adults. In addition, there was a perception that the appointing of co-chair organizations created a hierarchy within the group, with youth from other organizations feeling less inclined to participate as a result.

One suggestion for how to improve this was to make the meetings more fun and engaging: "[Y]outh should definitely be the ones facilitating the information... 'cause they were very boring... It should be youth deciding how we're gonna engage people in our community." Small group discussions were seen as a successful method of engaging those who would otherwise stay quiet.

Logistics as a Barrier to Turnout

Participants suggested better coordination with the schools and schools schedule. For example, this year the vote took place when certain schools had already let out for the summer, inhibiting turnout at those locations. Others talked about the difficulties of coordinating with the weekly CA meetings: “I know one school, Codman Academy, their school runs until like 7 or something, so they weren’t able to make it to those meetings.”

Others cited the inconvenience of the location as a barrier to participation: “My least favorite thing was the location. Because we had to take two trains to get here. And plus, it was during school days. We were already drained out from school and then we had to come over here.” One participant felt that this likely explained the fall-off between the Change Agent Orientation session and the actual Change Agent committee attendance: “At the first meetings, a lot were younger kids who probably lived [far away]. Like the meeting I went to was Dorchester, so maybe their parents wouldn’t let them get on the bus by themselves.”

IV. The Decisions

In this section, I examine the decision processes used by participants, the decisions they arrived at through these processes, and how those decisions compare with self-reported community needs and with existing City spending plans.

a. Decision Processes

Idea Assembly Participants

Individuals who attended the idea assemblies were asked to brainstorm about ways to spend the youth budget that would benefit the community. Here the emphasis was on generating ideas, not on evaluating or prioritizing them.

Several interviewees suggest that there was insufficient time to really capture good ideas. More preparation time would’ve been better, so that people could think more deeply about how to address community needs within the capital budgeting guidelines.

The Idea Assemblies generated 473 proposals. These were then organized into the six thematic categories that would become the six Change Agent committees.

Change Agents

Change Agents deliberated within their groups to narrow down the original set of 473 general ideas into a smaller set of specific proposals. Each committee received a list of somewhere between 47 and 111 suggested projects that corresponded to their committee theme. Each group also received some notes indicating which of those projects were considered capital ineligible and why. Of the original proposed projects, roughly 19.7% were not capital eligible, and another 27.9% were identified as “maybe eligible.”

	Arts & Libraries	Community Centers	Environment & Health	Parks	Schools & Education	Streets & Safety	Total
Initial Proposals	52	111	47	108	71	84	473
Capital Eligible (Maybe Eligible)	18 (29)	44 (45)	17 (14)	93 (11)	33 (17)	43 (16)	248 (132)
Proposals on PB Ballot	1	2	1	2	4	4	14
Winners of PB Vote	1	0	1	2	1	2	7

Number of Project Ideas over Time by Committee Topic

Change Agents either immediately eliminated those marked as ineligible or entered into a dialogue with the City about how to make them capital eligible. In at least one case, a project that typically would not be considered capital was able to be included on the ballot (Chromebooks for three area high schools). In other cases, a project could potentially have been eligible, but CAs were unable to come to an agreement with the City in time to include it. This was the case with a music studio (which could have been eligible if a new room were constructed to house it) and with a ‘fruit tree forest’ (which could have been eligible if a City-owned location could have been found for it).

In at least one case, a project was ineligible for the PB process, but City officials shared information with Change Agents which allowed them to continue to lobby on behalf of their project through other forums. Other projects were eligible, but were eliminated because they could be pursued through other means. For example, in some cases participants had proposed projects that were already included in the City’s capital plan but have not yet been implemented. One participant also cited an example in which the responsible City department told CAs that certain ideas were things they should already be fixing, and that there is a formal mechanism through which to file such complaints without going through the PB process.

Change Agents worked through the list to remove duplicate suggestions and group the ideas into thematic or geographic categories. Then they worked to prioritize projects based on need, impact and feasibility, using a decision matrix that had been provided by PBP. They conducted research to determine which projects were most deserving. For example, the schools committee visited individual schools to observe the state of infrastructure where assembly participants had suggested improvements. The Parks committee visited individual sites to interview park-goers about their use of the space and their opinions about various improvements.

In a few cases, individuals came to Change Agent meetings to advocate on behalf of particular projects. In these cases, the committees took the suggestions into consideration. Decisions were made through deliberation and consensus-building, with consideration for the need and impact of each project. The emphasis on need versus impact seemed to vary across committees depending on category.

After narrowing the project lists down to a set of proposals, the Change Agents worked to develop a proposal for each, which they would then submit to the relevant City department for a price quote. (For example, the Parks Committee worked with the City’s Parks and Recreation Department.) In some cases,

the City requested further information in order to correctly price the project. In the end, Change Agents were able to submit 14 proposals for inclusion on the ballot.

Voters

Youth were then invited to vote for their preferred projects at a variety of locations around the City over the course of about a week. We have no direct information regarding the decision processes used by voters, but there is some evidence that voting was more self-interested relative to the needs-based considerations made by the Change Agent committees. Researcher observations of voting centers suggest that most voters were hearing about the process for the first time when they stumbled upon the ballot box. In these cases, voters had very little time to assess the relative merits of different projects. This was particularly true of T Stops, where many voters were on their way somewhere and didn't have much time to spend on the decision.

83.2% of those who placed their votes at the Condon Community Center and 55.1% of those who placed their votes at the Cleveland Community Center placed a vote for Project I "General Renovations at the Cleveland and Condon Community Centers." At no other vote center did this project receive more than 28.1% of votes placed. Similarly, 85.7% of those who placed their votes at East Boston High School voted for Project M "New and Improved Bathroom for Eastie High." Fifty-five percent of voters at Paris Street Community Center, located in East Boston, also supported Project M. At no other vote center did this project receive more than 25.2% of the votes.

Of course, the fact that these projects received any votes at all from voting centers in other neighborhoods indicates that some voters did look beyond their own neighborhood's needs in making decisions. However, it is also unlikely that many people could find four projects on the ballot that were located directly in their own neighborhood. So, even the most self-interested voter, if they chose to use all four of their votes, would be likely to sometimes vote for projects in neighborhoods other than their own.

b. Decision Outcomes

Through their deliberative processes, Change Agents developed the 14 proposals listed below for inclusion on the ballot. The number of votes each received, and the ranking of each (according to number of votes) is included. The seven projects in bold are those which were selected to receive funding through the voting process.

Project Title from YLC Ballot	Total Votes	Cost
Franklin Park Playground and Picnic Area Upgrade	704	\$ 400,000.00
Boston Art Walls	687	\$ 60,000.00
TechKnowledge: Chromebooks for East Boston, Charlestown and Excel High Schools	501	\$ 90,000.00
Skate Park Feasibility Site Study	493	\$ 50,000.00
Security Cameras	462	\$ 105,000.00

Paris St. Playground Extreme Makeover Renovation	454	\$ 100,000.00
New Sidewalks for New Parks	425	\$ 110,000.00
Reclaiming Unused Street Space in Roxbury	418	\$ 525,000.00
General Renovations at the BCYF Cleveland and Condon Community Centers	408	\$ 400,000.00
Lights, Camera, Action: Let's give East Boston High Auditorium A Face Lift	306	\$ 570,000.00
Light It Up! At the BCYF Cleveland Community Center and School	293	\$ 100,000.00
New and Improved Bathroom for Eastie High	291	\$ 525,000.00
Rehab Snowden Bio Lab	248	\$ 350,000.00
Reclaiming Unused Street Space in JP	213	\$ 525,000.00

The estimated cost of the seven top-voted projects adds up to just under 1 million dollars, leaving 85 thousand dollars unallocated, which is available to cover unanticipated additional costs related to the implementation of the winning projects.

c. Putting the Results in Context

Were outcomes representative of community needs?

Both Idea Assembly participants and voters were asked to name the three biggest problems in their community. The responses are captured in the word clouds below (assembly participants on the left and voters on the right). As you can see, “violence” was by far the biggest concern for both groups of participants.

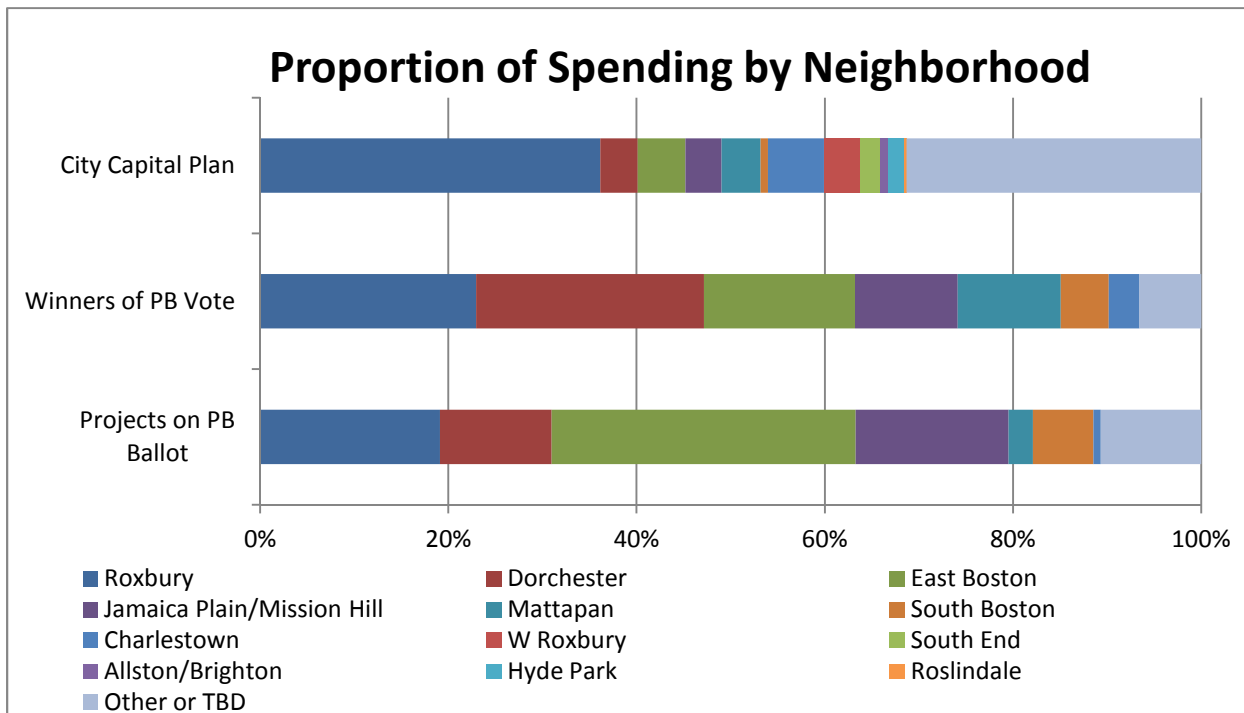


Only one project on the ballot was directly related to violence (Security Cameras in Dr. Loesch Family Park), suggesting that the highest priority of young people in the City may be difficult to address with capital projects. However, it could be argued that other projects on the ballot target the roots rather

than the end results of violence, by providing spaces for healthy activities and social outlets that may help young people in the future to avoid involvement in more dangerous activities.

Did youth budgeting outcomes differ from City budgeting priorities?

The charts on the following pages compare the projects proposed by Change Agents and selected by voters through the PB process with the projects in the City of Boston’s FY15-FY19 Capital Plan, which can serve as a point of comparison with PB decisions – How do City processes tend to allocate funds in comparison with how PB participants do so, when faced with the same restrictions on capital eligibility? Looking at number of projects and spending by neighborhood³, we can see that both the City and PB participants prioritized Roxbury in their budgets, but that PB participants also emphasized Dorchester, East Boston and Jamaica Plain/Mission Hill to a greater extent than the City did. The “Other” category is of course much more prominent in the City’s capital plan, which includes at least some spending in all of the City’s neighborhoods, whereas the much smaller youth budget could serve only a limited number of neighborhoods.

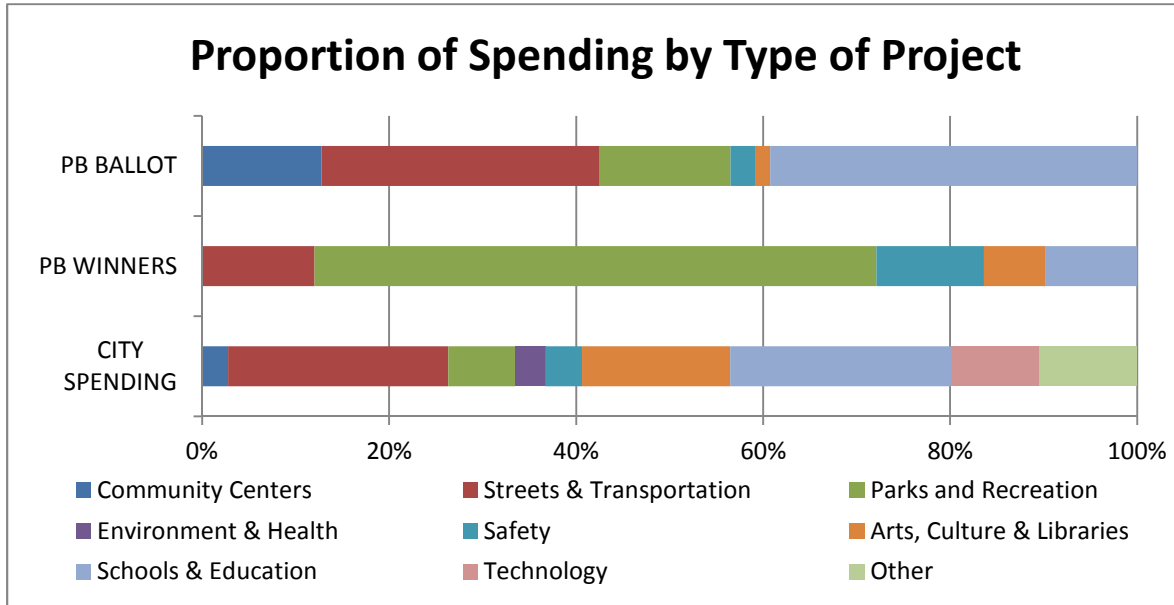


With respect to the types of projects selected⁴, it appears the PB process allocated a much more significant portion of the budget to Parks, while the City’s largest spending categories were Schools & Education and Streets & Transportation.

³ Number of projects per neighborhood was calculated by counting each project that could be considered to benefit a particular neighborhood. Thus, Franklin Park renovations counted as a project for all of the neighborhoods that border the park. In calculating spending per neighborhood, the cost of the project was divided evenly amongst the benefitting neighborhoods. City spending was divided according to the City’s own categorization by neighborhood within Capital Plan documentation.

⁴ City spending in this chart is derived from the capital plan for Fiscal Year 2015, which was deemed more representative of budgetary priorities than the full five-year capital plan would be. The type of project assigned to

It is difficult to draw any conclusions from this based on only one year of data. Naturally, because the entire City budget is larger, it will tend to have more diverse spending categories. However, it will be interesting to note if and how youth priorities evolve over time and compare with City allocations.



d. Feedback from Participants

Interview themes that emerged related to the decision outcomes and processes used to arrive at them included:

Feeling Limited by the Budget and Capital Eligibility

“A million dollars isn’t enough for everybody to get a piece of that, and so people are gonna be unhappy.”

Many youth participants report being impressed by the million dollars budget initially. However, one of the most commonly cited pieces of knowledge gained through the process was learning how much things cost and how relatively little can be accomplished with a million dollars. For many, this was simply another aspect of the learning experience, but for some this caused real frustration with the process.

“The best ideas were programming, and that’s what’s most needed.... There’s all this bureaucracy around what can be approved... And we didn’t even necessarily know why.”

Some Change Agents were also frustrated by the capital eligibility limitations, and saw them as a major hindrance to true youth power. However, it does seem that their frustrations could have been mitigated with clearer communication of the rules from the outset. Those who felt most strongly about this also

the PB outcomes was based on the City department that a similar project would fall under, not necessarily the Change Agent committee that proposed it.

complained that they didn't have enough interactions with the City to ask questions and receive feedback.

Other participants, while still regretful that they could not propose programming, felt that they were able to work around the capital eligibility framework and felt that the City was helpful in doing so: "Unfortunately, the million dollars is for capital budgeting stuff... not really certain types of programs necessarily. Now we are talking about the... auditorium and basketball court – those can actually be really helpful to change people. Because they just need something to do. Like playing basketball is better than selling weed in the streets. So if stuff like that can be improved and renovated, it can be small steps towards something better for the future."

Further Strengthening Youth Voices

"For the teens to have more hands on... Being in charge of it... and just having us just sit back and just guide them. 'Cause they can do it. They did the majority of the work."

Within Change Agent groups, participants felt that youth voices were heard and that youth were the ones primarily making the decisions, with adult facilitators mostly helping to keep them on task and provide guidance where necessary. However, some facilitators felt that the youth could take even more ownership of the process, and that one way to do so might be to flip the roles of the facilitator and co-facilitator, so that a young person is the titular head of the group. Another suggestion involved hiring a young person to serve as the main coordinator of the project.

Now that the pilot year is complete, YLC can draw on a cohort of young people who have already participated and understand how the process works. It is now possible to help get them prepared to take on more leadership roles within the process.

Desire for Continued Involvement

"We should have meetings here and there and then sit down with a board of people and see if... if we can give our ideas... what things we want to put in there, since it's our money, instead of theirs... 'cause it could be something totally different in the mindset of our image than what they want."

In groups where proposals had been allocated funding through the vote outcomes, participants expressed a desire to continue to be involved in the decision-making process as the project moves into the implementation phase. This represents another opportunity for further engagement of existing participants moving forward.

Tension between Need and Impact

Participants were split with respect to how successful they felt the results of the voting process were, in part because of differing emphasis on the criteria for consideration that Change Agents were trained to apply to their proposals – some emphasized directing funds to where the greatest need was felt, while others emphasized directing funds to where the greatest number of people would benefit.

As a result of this divide, some participants were disappointed with some of the vote results, because they thought some significant needs were ignored:

- “Art walls... I don’t think that’s more relevant than putting windows in a community center, or like renovating the floors or having furniture. ‘Cause people, like, no matter what people still do graffiti, like anywhere.”
- “I think the East Boston High auditorium... was kind of more important than the Chromebooks, ‘cause they have a theater program and the way their auditorium was – it was like really bad and that’s just messed up how they have to still try to go on and have their shows with the auditorium looking like that.”

But others felt that while certain projects demonstrated significant need, they weren’t far-reaching enough to deserve funding through this process:

- “That’s the thing. It’s not benefitting the community if it’s just... certain schools. It’s like one school or three schools, how is that benefitting everybody else? This is like a community thing.”
- “Yeah, it’s a different kind of project because ... It’s a need because it was in desperate need of renovation, but it was for a small group of people, and those people – that was the children who go to that school – it’s also like a need that needed to be fixed up, but it wasn’t like a community need. ... It was something that needed to be done, but not a lot of people would benefit from it. Only the people who go to the school.”

Risk of Parochialism

Related to the above, some change agents were very conscious of the fact that voting strategies were likely to favor the latter philosophy, with people voting only for those projects that they themselves could benefit from directly:

- “These are people from different communities. Of course they’re gonna say stuff from their community. So it’s kind of like a competition. ‘No my community needs it more.’ And like ‘oh no, mine needs it more.’ So it just like, turns into chaos basically.”
- “I think more community stuff got passed because more people can go outside and interact with them instead. I mean unless you have a computer room open to the community, who’s using those computers? Just the kids who are going to those schools.”
- “I kinda felt sympathy looking at the picture and the bathroom ones, but like, I don’t go there, so I wouldn’t put my money to something I wouldn’t use or anything.”

Some committee topics naturally lent themselves to one version or the other. Projects proposed by the schools committee, for example, were necessarily going to be located within individual schools, so they tended to focus on identifying the greatest need amongst those options. Community Centers are also, by their very nature, specific to a particular community, and so an assessment of relative need became particularly salient. So, if there is any concern about disappointment in failed proposals undermining the goals of the process, it may be useful to reconsider the way that committee assignments are organized.

Improvements in the Voting Process

A few participants had suggestions about how to improve the voting process itself. One suggested using BPS school id numbers to facilitate online voting while reducing the risk of double voting. Another believed that the vote results may have been influenced by City employees themselves and requested a system of third party vote counting to ensure that the results reflected the wishes of voters: “I think the result could have been handled by somebody who’s not affiliated with the program so the voting results wouldn’t be compromised.” Only one participant expressed this view, but it represents yet another risk

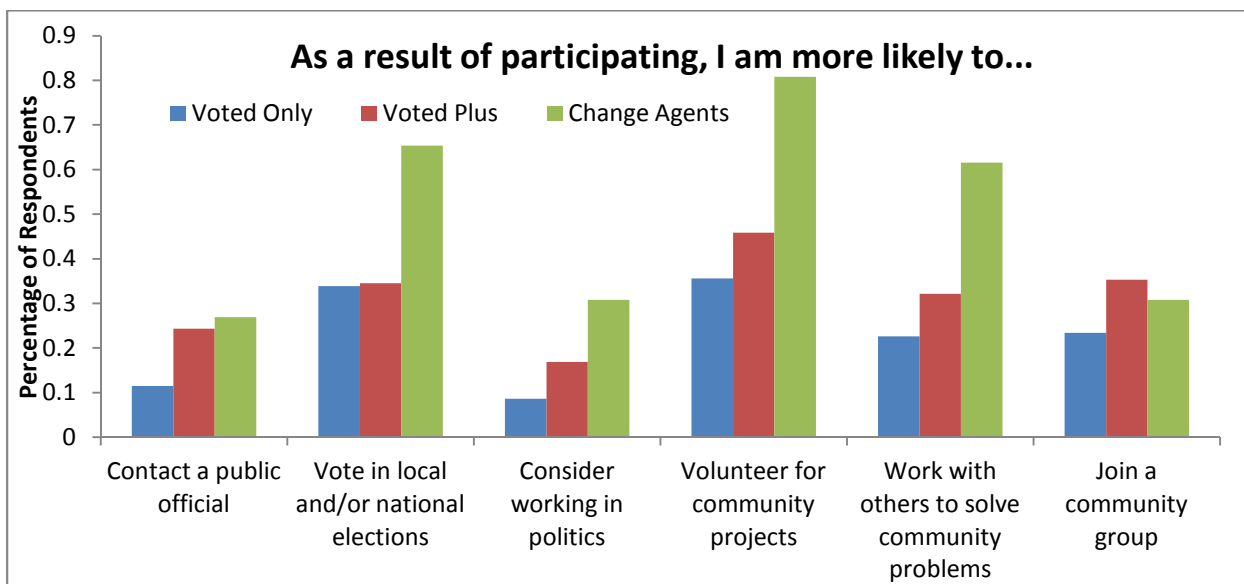
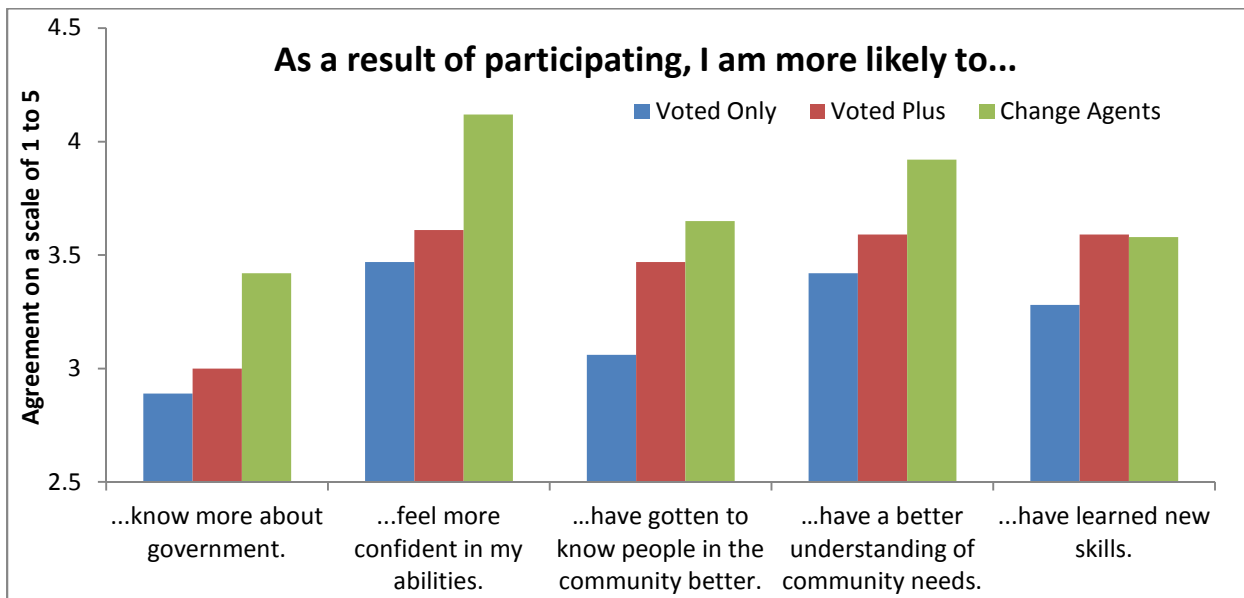
of unclear communication. Being more explicit about the vote count process may have easily eliminated this concern.

V. Participatory Budgeting as a School of Democracy?

a. Overview

Participants were asked a set of survey questions regarding how they felt being involved in YLC had affected them in terms of several dimensions of empowerment.

It is of course very difficult to interpret self-reported survey questions, but because we asked the same questions of individuals with varying degrees of participation, we are able to compare across groups to gain a bit more insight.



As you can see in the charts on the preceding page, the more deeply an individual engaged in the process, the more likely they were to report that it affected them in various ways. Tests of statistical significance uphold the notion that Change Agents self-report greater impact on every one of these measures than people who only voted.

In-depth interviews with Change Agents and youth representatives on the Steering Committee yielded several consistent themes regarding how participating in the process had affected them. These are outlined in the sections below. To protect anonymity, quotes are not attributed to individual characteristics, but all of the quotes below come from interviews with Change Agents, Facilitators or Steering Committee members. The majority of these responses were given in response to the open-ended questions “What was your favorite and least favorite thing about the process?” and “How do you feel that the process affected you personally?” – but follow-up questions were sometimes asked to elicit more specific explanations.

Social Benefits

When asked what their favorite thing was about the process, the majority of the youth interviewed cited the social benefits of the process. Of the 16 Change Agents interviewed, virtually every single one had something positive to say about the experience of working together with their team, without being directly questioned about it.

- “My favorite thing was meeting other teens that I share the same opinions with and coming together as a group, every week, and even though we were working we were still having fun.”
- “It helped me meet other students that actually cared about the City.”
- “My favorite [thing about the process] was creating a family within the group.”
- “I feel like I can reach out to anyone and collaborate for something else beyond this process. And for the young people that I worked with, if they ever need something, I hope that they would feel comfortable enough to reach out to me... There was a community that was built within this process.”
- “I love my group, and I loved spending time with them.”

Even among Change Agents who were somewhat critical of the process as a whole, the social aspects of it stood out as a benefit for them: “I think that’s one thing it did do is provide a space for that to happen... No matter how much we disagree with [issues with the City], we still got to sit there and vent about that... with a group that we liked and felt connected to. So that was one thing that it did that was cool. It really provided us with that space.”

Increased Awareness

Another consistent interview theme for both Change Agents and youth participants in the Steering Committee was a heightened sense of awareness about needs across Boston, about governmental processes themselves, and about broader issues related to youth.

Greater Awareness of Needs in other Parts of Boston

- “I definitely learned a lot about Boston being a Change Agent. Became more aware of projects happening around the City, redevelopment, and it made me more connected to the surrounding communities.”

- “Before I only thought about, for example, my community... and I would only think about what I thought [my community] needed, but... with all the other kids there I learned about their communities and... what other people thought they needed in their communities.”
- “It got me thinking... We have to think about – which they told us – we have to think about everybody, which is why we asked, when we went out [for our site visits], we asked everybody in the community, not just like the young people. We asked the older people, the younger people, to get a balance of what should be fixed within the community.”

These observations were often framed in terms of the participant’s own good fortune relative to needs they were seeing in other parts of the City.

- “We visited one [site]... and they had no windows, for example. In [my neighborhood], we have windows. And that was just sad to hear like, they don’t have fresh air.”

As with the social benefits described above, even where participants had doubts about the particular way that PB was implemented this year, there still seemed to be some consensus that an increased awareness of related issues was a major benefit of the process: “I think they are good problems to have... I think it's good. It's like we're expanding our minds. I feel like... we're evolving as human beings, as we try to settle these questions. And I think that's what's special to this project, to me, this evolution of the mind, this evolution of thought and ideology, you know, to try to reach this goal of democracy or equity, if you will...”

Civic Education

Participants also were very likely to report that they learned more about how government processes work.

- “It helped me to kind of see how ballots are in the voting process, like with the president and stuff. It helped me have a better picture on democracy.”
- “I liked how much they got to learn about the way the city operates, and how much they got to learn about how funds are allocated, why they are allocated.”
- “Learning new things. Just some things that I learned about the City of Boston that I didn’t know before... Like the money costs, how much stuff like that costs... And what capital is, because I didn’t know what capital projects was...”
- “What I personally gained was seeing how the process goes ... I didn’t know it was that difficult. I learned through this process that it takes time, it takes researching, it takes a lot of work and I give them a lot of credit who are doing it for a living.”
- “It made me more aware of what [the government] does with money and where it goes.”
- “It teaches us about like, what Marty Walsh has to do and like what, kinda sorta like what the president has to do when he has all these ideas being pitched on him, there is only so much he can do on that certain budget that you had.”

In some cases participants felt that they had developed good relationships with the City:

- “We built relationships with people who work in the City now. Like, with [the City official we met with] he recognized our face when we gave him the handshake. So, if we ever need anything we probably could contact him and he’d probably know who we were because we worked through this process.”
- “[My favorite thing,] It was probably getting to know Marty Walsh, Mayor Marty Walsh.”
- “I feel like it was cool because now I have a lot of connects with [particular City officials] now...”

Motivations for Collective Action beyond the PB Process

Learning about City processes was sometimes framed instead in terms of an awareness of how much things could be improved.

- “I don’t want to speak for them, but in my observation, all of [our team] left the program being like ‘yo, we need to change the way this City operates... It inspired people to become more active, so I like that.”
- “It’s definitely given me a different lens in terms of viewing the Boston Public School system as a whole. Maybe how the priorities of city officials are looking at these schools. For stuff like that, it should have been fixed already. It shouldn’t really need us to come in and give it more of a light. That is just ridiculous. Like not having toilet paper in bathrooms. Basic stuff like that should have already been covered. The fact that it hasn’t been is a real issue.”

Several participants also highlighted the role of the process in “bringing light” to existing needs in the City, expressing hopes that even those projects that weren’t selected through the vote are perhaps more likely to be funded as a result of being publicized through this process. They suggested that having seen the state of certain public infrastructure through this process, people may be motivated to push for renovations through other means.

In a few cases, Change Agents felt that City officials were helpful in providing information regarding alternate routes through which to pursue a project that was ineligible through the PB process. A prominent example is a building renovation that was proposed through the process, but deemed ineligible because the City had already begun an RFP process for it. City officials and their committee facilitator alerted Change Agents to an upcoming community meeting about the use of the building and put them in touch with local organizations working on related proposals. CAs attended the meeting to voice their concerns and continue to be involved in some lobbying to ensure that the space is used in a way that will benefit the community: “It was the PB process that exposed me to [this possibility]... One of the City Council... he said the proposal made it to his desk, so ‘you’re doing something right and whatever you’re doing, keep doing it.’”

Skill-building

Many participants also reported gaining valuable skills through the process and felt that it would benefit them in the future. Skills cited included leadership, teamwork, networking, communication and professionalism.

- “I gained skills of patience and how to find certain skills and definitely networking – That’s out of my comfort zone so just meeting new people and introducing yourself and if you want to get certain information, you gonna have to call certain people.”
- “I feel like I had to calm down, and listen to other people’s opinions... I can put a lot more stuff on my resume.”
- “How to be formal – like I was giving this person a handshake – and he said “oh you’re going far in the future because your handshake is nice’ ...And I thought about that – like we’ve been doing that all this time during this process. We’ve been giving handshakes and making eye contact, so I thought that was really nice for him to say that and for me to learn that, being here.”
- “It definitely honed a lot of skills that I already had, like for instance... communication skills.... And it made me more aware that you gotta pay attention to how people react in certain situations. Like, some people work good in big groups, some people work good in small groups.”

- “It has led me to be more outgoing because I had to participate in discussions with adults and leaders that I have never met before.”
- “In terms of skills, definitely, in the group setting, there are some leadership skills that are being developed; sharing your ideas, presenting your ideas to the group... And just working together collaboratively in groups, group work and teamwork skills that will be useful for the future.”

Feelings of Empowerment or Disempowerment

Many participants report feeling that they gained power or that they have more of a voice as a result of participating. Some said that they saw how much youth can accomplish.

- “When people get together and work together on a similar goal, everyone can do so much and there can be a lot of change that can happen, in schools, but also in parks and streets and these different aspects.”
- “We have power now, so they want to hear our voices instead, so that’s why I liked to do it.”
- “Since we voted and we created all this and it affects us personally, so I’m glad that I did it.”
- “My favorite thing was probably making the proposals and stuff like that, ‘cause I liked creating new ideas. Because I made it and I would like to see it get done in the future. So that was my favorite part.”
- “It was great. The CAs the people who submit their ideas, it definitely came from the youth so there definitely was no compromise from the adults. There were some adults in the meeting but it was still overwhelmed by youths and them wanting to see a change.”
- “My favorite part was knowing that the City was trying to let other youth be involved... ‘cause we pretty much did have the... not the power, but like... we controlled what projects would go in and what didn’t, so it was like... we had a say in what was going on and that, I think, I liked knowing that the youth had a say, I guess.”
- “I got a voice. I keep saying that, but I don’t think other people understand when you have a voice and you have like power to make rules, power to say what goes in your City, and I want to, like, stay here to see it get done... that’s really cool to see young people doing this kind of stuff, saying what they want and actually getting it done. “
- “yeah, and they do care about what we have to say too. Cuz as I mentioned before, he was – um, [a certain City official] really happy that we were trying to do this kind of stuff... and so that changed my mind, because when you think about um, these high-up kind of people, you think ‘oh they don’t care about what the youth say’ or what they do, so yeah, that was... that changed my mind about how they feel about us and how they feel about us in charge, in power, and what we are capable of doing as young people.”

However, in a few cases participants felt quite the opposite. Particularly in cases where young people worked hard on a particular proposal which failed to win enough votes to be implemented, some reported a sense of disillusionment:

- “I think it just disappointed the teens... because if they don’t win, it just disappoints them. Like, we did all this hard work, like, for nothing? I just feel disappointed.”
- “It showed me how you can go through all this process and all this effort but always a chance that it might not get submitted. So, it’s a risk.”
- “We ended up working on projects that nobody cared about, and... the projects weren’t necessarily something that they were... it felt random a little bit. Like... these are the proposals that are approved, so we gotta do the work to put them in a language that the city will approve

and then put them on the ballot and make these... you know do decorating for these three-prong posters and like... where's the real place where our voice gets heard?"

While positive reactions vastly outweighed negative ones, it is important to note that (1) researchers may have been more likely to interview those who were most positive about the experience, because these would be most likely to agree to an interview, and (2) this year many more projects were funded than anticipated, meaning that there are likely to be more CAs with reason to be disappointed in future years. So, it is worth considering ways to better prepare participants for the failure of some proposals or implement rules that will allow more proposals to pass moving into the future (either by increasing the budget or by allocating funds by theme/neighborhood, or both).

VI. The Future of Boston's PB

a. Summary of Key Findings

Despite a shortened timeline, the program effectively implemented all key stages of the process. However, the limited timeframe did result in challenges throughout, with participants feeling that they were unable to be as thorough as they would have liked. There were also consistent challenges related to communication and information sharing, no doubt partly due to the time limitations, with many participants feeling confused at the various stages of the process. Communication could have been improved both with respect to logistics and with respect to the rules and the division of responsibilities within the process itself.

While the program fell short of its initial goals for total turnout, it did a great job of targeting young people of color from low-income neighborhoods. In general, neighborhoods with high youth populations were well represented. Of those who participated this year, more than half said that they would participate again, and many would like to participate in more in-depth ways than they did this year.

Participants were mostly of high school age and voters were mostly from Boston Public Schools. However, among Change Agents, a majority attended exam schools, charter schools or suburban schools through the METCO program, and most seem to have been previously engaged through other City-related programs and organizations, indicating a need to expand the deepest forms of participation to those least likely to have been reached by City services. In addition, young men were under-represented among participants relative to young women.

Attrition was a challenge, especially among youth members of the Steering Committee. In addition, young people who did come to the SC meetings didn't always feel comfortable enough to share their ideas. However, they cite the success of certain facilitation techniques, such as small group discussions, in helping to mitigate this problem.

An initial set of 473 proposals generated by the idea assemblies was divided into six categories and committees of Change Agents were tasked with turning them into concrete proposals. They engaged in a dialogue with City officials who determined whether or not the ideas were capital eligible and provided cost estimates for individual proposals. Some participants felt inhibited by the size of the budget and the capital eligibility limitations. In cases where an idea was ineligible, City officials were sometimes able to suggest changes that would make it eligible or suggest alternate paths through which projects could be pursued outside of this process.

Ultimately, Change Agents prepared a set of 14 proposals which were included on the ballot, and each voter could vote for up to four of these projects. The voting process resulted in funding for 7 projects, which included: Franklin Park Playground and Picnic Area Upgrade, Boston Art Walls, Chromebooks for 3 High Schools, a Skate Park Feasibility Study, Security Cameras for Dr. Loesch Family Park, Paris Street Playground Extreme Makeover Renovation, and New Sidewalks for New Parks.

When assembly participants and voters were surveyed about the three biggest problems in their communities, “violence” was the most common response by a landslide. At least one of the winning projects directly reflected this concern. The others arguably address it in more indirect ways by providing spaces for alternate activities.

Relative to spending priorities reflected in the City’s five-year capital plan, the participatory budgeting outcomes allocated a greater proportion of funds to neighborhoods such as Dorchester, East Boston and Jamaica Plain, and allocated the largest portion of spending to Parks projects. In contrast, the City’s FY15 Capital Plan allocated the most funding to the categories of Schools & Education and Streets & Transportation.

Change Agents made their decisions through deliberation and consensus, using a decision matrix which urged them to consider feasibility, impact and need. Voters, in contrast, were often hearing about the process for the first time when they arrived at the voting station, and there is some reason to believe that decision-making criteria of voters was more self-interested than that of Change Agents, raising some concerns around parochialism.

When asked about how involvement in YLC affected them personally, participants cited social benefits, increased knowledge and skills, and feelings of empowerment. Social benefits involved the camaraderie within Change Agent committees and a sense of community across the program more broadly.

Both Change Agents and youth members of the Steering Committee felt that they learned a lot through their participation in YLC. They cited a broader awareness of needs in other neighborhoods throughout the City and a better understanding of government processes and democracy in general. In addition, many participants reported gaining specific skills including leadership, teamwork, networking, communication and professionalism.

Many participants also expressed feelings of power or control or reported a sense that their voices had truly been heard. Some participants, however, reported quite the opposite – a sense of disillusionment or disappointment with the process, particularly when they worked on projects which were deemed ineligible or which failed to garner sufficient votes to win funding. While this appears to be a minority of participants, it may represent the viewpoint of others who dropped out of the process earlier on and thus could not be interviewed, and therefore represents a threat to be mitigated in future years.

b. Recommendations

In general, an expanded timeline is recommended, as well as better communication throughout all stages of the process, with respect to logistics, roles and responsibilities of various actors, and rules of the process. Related to the theme of information availability, it would also be desirable to enhance the educational aspects of the program, which were cited as major benefits of the process by interviewees.

With respect to improving turnout and reducing attrition, participants recommend more direct youth involvement in outreach and marketing. In particular, improving the web presence of the program will be essential. For the more intensive forms of participation, specific efforts are required to engage more young men, more traditional public school students and more youth who are not already involved with City programming or related organizations. These efforts might involve street outreach (e.g., canvassing) and better coordination with the public school system.

Enhancing the social benefits (which proved so desirable for the Change Agents) within the Steering Committee could help to reduce attrition among the youth. In order to encourage participation by those youth who are already in attendance, the use of more participatory tools and activities during the SC meetings is also recommended. In general, Change Agents and SC Members should be made more aware of each other's work to encourage a more holistic understanding of the process.

Careful consideration should be given to how to ensure a good fit between community priorities and budget outcomes and to reduce the risk of parochialism in voting strategies. Expanded educational efforts may help to address this, for example through an attempt to coordinate directly with civic education programs within public schools. Other options to consider include expanding the size of the budget, subdividing the budget by geographic or thematic categories, complementing the capital budget with programmatic funding (perhaps through external donor contributions), or using the process as a channel of input for the City of Boston's capital planning more broadly.

Continued engagement for youth participants from this year still needs to be defined. Change Agents should continue to be involved in decision-making related to the implementation of the projects they proposed through this process to ensure that the final product reflects their vision. A de-briefing process should be established to report back to participants regarding the findings of this research and to allow for an honest discussion and exchange of ideas between different groups of participants regarding challenges faced this year and how to address them. Finally, now that there is a cohort of first-year youth participants who are already familiar with the process, YLC can draw on that resource to hire young people to serve in leadership roles in next year's process.

More specific recommendations regarding each aspect of the process are listed below. Many of these recommendations were directly offered by participants during interviews, others are suggestions of the researcher for how to address more general concerns mentioned by participants.

Timing and Logistics

- Extend the timeline.
- Include time management in the training process for volunteers and facilitators.
- Consistent, complete and appropriate messaging to repeatedly remind participants of meeting times and locations.
- Very clear messaging at each stage of the process about where actors fit within the broader scope of the process.
- More comprehensive civic education at each stage of the process, to explain clearly the budget limitations, the reason for them and alternate strategies for pursuing projects that are not eligible for this process – ideally in partnership with Boston Public Schools' own civics program.

Coordination with Boston Public Schools:

- Establish YLC participation and discussion about the process as a formal part of BPS civics programming.
- Have all BPS schools participate as vote sites and perhaps idea assembly locations.
- Plan the voting dates to coordinate better with the school calendar.

Outreach

- Involve more youth (both Change Agents and SC members) in outreach and marketing, and make it clear that they can take initiative to promote it.
- Recruit youth representatives for each high school and/or neighborhood to engage in street outreach and door-to-door canvassing to reach those who are not already engaged by existing youth programming.
- Consider engaging media specialists as SC members or consultants to help set up the website and promote the process more widely.
- Consider ways to increase engagement by those less engaged. For example, offer idea assembly participants occasional updates so that they feel as though they are still involved in the process.

Web Presence

- Create a user-friendly, easy-to-find, one-stop-shop main website that provides:
 - Information surrounding the YLC rules and process flow-chart, as well as City government processes.
 - Information regarding specific neighborhood demographics, incomes, etc.
 - Online discussion forums about the process – a way to provide feedback about the process itself.
 - Clear information about the timing and location of meetings and voting stations.
 - Online submission of idea proposals.
 - Specific in-depth information (including perhaps promotional videos) about each of the ballot projects to promote more informed voting.
 - Possibilities for online voting, at least for those participants with a unique BPS id number.
- Initiate a social media presence that is promoted by youth participants themselves – perhaps a targeted subcommittee of the SC.

Steering Committee Processes

- Specific guidelines regarding the responsibilities of the SC members, with exact targets (to be established by the SC itself in line with the goals it established in the rulebook) – for example, all youth members should tweet about the process once per month, organizations should link to the YLC website through their own site, etc.
- Also encourage (especially youth) members to take ownership/initiative with respect to those roles, and not feel constrained to do only what has specifically been asked of them.
- Require at least two youth per adult on the SC to ensure that the balance of youth presence can be maintained.
- Make the SC meetings more fun, engaging and participatory. Involve more youth in the planning and coordination of the meetings.
- Build some team-building activities into the meetings themselves, and plan fun social events in addition to meetings to help foster bonding between members.

- Provide more transparency surrounding the selection of co-chairs, what their role is relative to the rest of the committee, and perhaps allow the committee as a whole to be involved in the selection process.
- Continue to use small group discussions as a way to encourage participation.
- Seek out other participatory activities to help all voices be heard in the meetings.
- Consider alternating the meeting location to the sites of different member organizations to encourage networking and mutual learning.

The Rules

- In order to combat the risks of parochialism and disappointment:
 - Consider expanding the size of the budget.
 - Consider relaxing the capital budgeting rules or augmenting the budget with programmatic funding, perhaps through external donor funding.
 - Consider re-establishing the themes of the committees to re-align the supremacy of need over impact and vice versa in different groups.
 - Alternatively, consider organizing the committees by neighborhood rather than by theme. Pro: this could improve turnout by allowing meetings to occur in more convenient locations for many young people. Con: this could undermine the benefit of getting to know people from different parts of the City and learning more about the challenges they face.
 - Consider using the process as a channel of input for the City of Boston's capital planning and/or programmatic spending more broadly.

Idea Assemblies

- Consider adding more idea assemblies in more neighborhoods at non-BCYF sites.
- Consider Idea Assemblies in different languages, to include the voices and suggestions of a wider swath of the community.
- Announce the dates of idea assemblies farther in advance, giving neighborhood organizations and SC members more time to mobilize attendees and prepare them for what to expect.
- Include information about the capital budgeting limitations, but also give examples of how a non-capital idea can be tweaked to fit the guidelines, based on this year's experience.

Voting

- Have promotional materials available at vote sites with specific upcoming events (like the results party) and the YLC website.
- Consider using T stops to distribute information about the upcoming vote in advance, taking advantage of their greater volume while giving people time to consider their decision.
- Provide additional information about community needs and/or specific projects at the vote sites, in an eye-catching, youth-friendly way.

Change Agents

- Consider further emphasizing/enhancing the social benefits as a way to improve turnout and attrition. For example, one committee which retained large numbers would sometimes go for pizza or basketball in addition to their regular meetings.
- Consider offering explicit training or guidance regarding the skills that participants are implicitly learning already.

- Include in the Change Agent facilitator training and facilitation guides very explicit discussion of the capital eligibility rules, the voting process, its pros and cons, and the possibility of failure, so that CAs are prepared for what lies ahead.
- Consider a Change Agent seminar about halfway through the process to:
 - Allow CAs to ask questions of City officials after they have already worked through some of the proposals.
 - Chat about strategies for taking non-capital eligible ideas and either tweaking them to fit the rules or seeking alternate routes to implement them.
 - Foster a sense of identity as Change Agents more broadly, as opposed to members of individual committees.

Follow-up

- Plan a de-briefing for Change Agents (and perhaps SC members) to share best practices and lessons learned across groups, and to help participants process what they have learned.
- Involve Change Agents in decision-making related to the implementation of the projects they proposed through this process to ensure that the final product reflects their vision.
- Develop some kind of transparency mechanism so that participants can assess if and when PB projects are actually implemented, and whether they are implemented in the way anticipated by participants.

Enhancing Youth Leadership:

- Hire a youth as facilitator for Change Agent committees with an adult serving as co-facilitator to provide guidance.
- Invite both facilitators and co-facilitators to the training session to enhance skills.
- Consider hiring a youth for the coordinator position.

c. Areas for Future Research

Looking forward to future years, YLC can both strengthen its evidence regarding the research questions contained in this report and begin to ask new ones. In addition, it can introduce elements of participatory research, so that the evaluation itself can mirror the values upon which the rest of the process was established.

In terms of strengthening evidence related to existing research questions, recommendations include:

- Continuation of in-depth interviews in coming years to track what changes are made to the process and why participants opt to implement them.
- If changes are introduced with specific goals in mind, efforts should be made to track whether those goals are achieved through the change in process.
- Additional survey questions that (1) more directly proxy for income (for example, parents' education level) (2) distinguish between exam schools, charter schools and other public schools and (3) assess prior engagement including use of BCYF services (such as holding a job through BYF), involvement with SC organizations or participation in MYC or BSAC
- Tracking of individual participants and their participation over time at various stages
- Clearly track the projects that are generated in idea assemblies, proposed by Change Agents for inclusion in the ballot and ultimately selected through voting.

- Clear tracking and comparison of projects at each stage in the process (assembly proposals, CA proposals, vote results) by neighborhood and type of project with proportional City spending
- Track implementation of PB projects as they occur and participant satisfaction with results
- Make this information publicly accessible
- Conduct both pre- and post- surveys of Steering Committee members and Change Agents regarding each category of effects on participants
- Track participants beyond the end of the process to understand long-term impacts

Once the first-year projects actually begin to be implemented, **an additional category of research questions can be explored, regarding the actual interaction between participants and the results of their participation.** Are participants more likely to use a public work that was generated through this process? Are they more willing to volunteer time to protect and maintain it? If so, does this apply only to those Change Agents who worked on that particular project? Or is the general sense of legitimacy conferred through this process enough to make people value the outcomes more relative to similar projects that were implemented through more traditional decision-making structures?

Finally, while full-blown participatory research methods would likely be too cumbersome to introduce within an already intensive process, limited use of participatory research tools at the beginning and end of each cycle would nicely complement the existing structure. They provide another avenue for youth voices to be heard, they enhance the educational benefits that the process already confers, and they can provide a source for the types of participatory activities that can be used throughout the process to liven up meetings and encourage youth participation.

Existing findings should be presented to and validated by participants and community members. This accomplishes several goals. It educates participants further about both research methods (another hard skill set that they can be exposed to) and about the specific findings related to this process. It also gives them an opportunity to question those findings and offer alternative theories and suggestions. In addition, it fosters a dialogue about some of the higher level questions regarding the long-term goals of the process, allowing the Steering Committee (and other participants through suggestions to the SC) to make necessary changes where they see fit.

Participant voices should also be incorporated at the beginning of the research process, when indicators are established for the following year. The Steering Committee has already identified the four goals of the process from their perspective. Working together with researchers, SC members can brainstorm about ways to measure the extent to which each goal has been accomplished. Then those measures could be included in the research plan, and reported back to the SC at the end of the cycle each year.

d. Concluding Thoughts

Participatory budgeting processes generally can be thought to have two categories of effects – those on participants themselves and those on actual decision outcomes. These goals are likely to complement each other, but one does not guarantee the existence of the other. While the City government tended to emphasize the former in establishing this process, the participants largely prioritize the latter.

YLC's pilot year had some major successes with respect to effects on individual participants, who report social benefits, heightened awareness, and increased knowledge and skills. If nothing else, YLC has proven itself to be a powerful method for promoting youth civic engagement and education. With

respect to its effects on decision outcomes, however, we are unable to say much with certainty after only this initial cycle.

Many participants report feelings of empowerment, but those who felt the opposite base their claims on effects on decision outcomes – they felt that their participation didn't make a difference. This represented a minority of cases this year, but it demonstrates a risk for future years. If effects on decision outcomes are perceived to be minimal, it could set back the advances made in terms of benefits to participants.

Paying careful attention to this category of effects over time, being transparent about related successes and failures and collaborating with participants to address any barriers to reflecting youth priorities will be essential to ensuring the future of the process and its success as a tool for youth empowerment.