



# Participatory Budgeting Evaluation *2025-26*

Office of Participatory  
Budgeting

May 2026

Full-Cycle Presentation

Idea Collection Workshop  
hosted by the Golden  
Age Center of Greater  
Boston on July 15, 2025

**Photo credit:** OPB





# Context

1/

Today's presentation will focus on **data highlights** and **findings** useful for **rulebook revision**

2/

Final report expected **in late May**

# Idea Collection

1,203 ideas for addressing local needs were submitted by Boston residents across every neighborhood.

Residents shared their ideas through:

- **City-sponsored workshops and tabling events**  
(554 ideas)
- **PB Corners** at City Hall, Boston's Public Libraries, and BCYF Community Centers (166 ideas)
- **The Online PB Portal + Multilingual Phone Line**  
(483 ideas)

## Key outcomes



**1,203**

project ideas submitted



**19 partners**

engaged residents



**31 events**

co-sponsored by the city

# Visioning Forums

OPB hosted **5 in-person forums** in October and November 2025.

- October forums (3) were hosted in **Mattapan, East Boston, and Brighton**, in partnership with community organizations
- November forums (2) were hosted at **City Hall**
- Food, interpretation, and childcare were provided

## Key outcomes



**15 community partners**

helped host and recruit residents



**25 city staff**

attended to workshop proposals



**200+ residents**

participated across the 5 forums



**14 draft ballot proposals**

developed by residents

# Voting

4,919\* Boston residents voted in Ideas in Action for Cycle 2.

- **4,480 Boston residents voted online (91%)**
- **439 Boston residents voted through paper ballots at City Hall, at BCYF sites, and with Community Partners (9%)**
- **4.5 (out of 5) average number of projects selected per voter** indicates engagement with PB as whole, rather than isolated support driven by individual project campaigns. This high number means that most participants will see at least some of their chosen projects funded and implemented.

\* The initial vote count announcement was 4,841. Due to ballots received after voting was tabulated, the updated and final number of ballots is 4,919. This report utilizes the updated number. These late ballots did not ultimately impact which projects were selected.

## Key outcomes



**4,919**

votes



**4.5/5 (high)**

average number of  
projects selected  
per voter

# This evaluation explores 4 questions

We address three in this presentation



**1. Participation.** Who participated, and how?



**2. Impact.** What impact did *Ideas in Action* have on those who participated?



**3. Process.** What was the process used and how can it be improved? (especially operations, resources)

**4. Objectives.** How are the selected projects meeting the objectives of the PB Ordinance in terms of uses of funding and populations served?

# Mixed Methods

- Surveys with *Ideas in Action* participants (paper and online)
  - Debriefs with Contracted Community Partners (brief online form after Idea Collection)
  - Debriefs with Proposal Development “implementers (OPB, facilitation, and evaluation teams) (brief online form after Forums)
  - Debriefs with City Staff involved with proposal development (brief online form after Voting)
  - Participant observation during city-sponsored events/outreach
  - OPB staff quarterly retrospectives
  - Analysis of process data (voting data, idea submission data)
  - Group brainstorm about engaging new and returning participants during the In Person Announcement of PB Winning Ideas (Feb 19, 2026)
- **Demographics:** race/ethnicity, income, age, civic participation
  - **Impact:** questions on trust in local government, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement
  - **Feedback:** what worked well? what could be improved?



## *Evaluation Question 1*

**Who participated, and how? To what extent did *Ideas in Action* engage residents...**

- living in historically underserved neighborhoods
- who have been historically excluded or underrepresented; and
- who cannot or do not participate in local government decision making

Ideas in Action engaged residents from every neighborhood, reflecting investments from OPB.

Dorchester and East Boston had the highest turnout for Ideas and Forums. JP turned out the most voters.

Neighborhood (top 12)	Ideas (% of total)	Forums (% of total)	Votes (% of total)	OPB investments
Allston	5.1%	10.2%	8.0%	TTTT*
Brighton	6.5%	8.2%	12.1%	TTTT*F
Charlestown	1.0%	-	1.7%	
Chinatown	8.0%	-	0.8%	WWA
Dorchester	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>15.0%</b>	<b>12.3%</b>	WWA
Downtown	2.5%	2.0%	0.7%	F
East Boston	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>	7.1%	TTTTWWFA
Hyde Park	3.6%	4.8%	2.3%	A
Jamaica Plain	8.5%	4.8%	<b>19.5%</b>	
Mattapan	2.7%	3.4%	1.3%	FA
North End	0.7%	-	2.3%	
Roslindale	4.4%	4.8%	6.4%	
Roxbury	7.4%	6.8%	4.0%	TWWA

Source: Cycle 2 Surveys for Idea Collection + Forums + Voting + Boston 2020 census data  
**Bolded numbers** = top two neighborhoods by %. **Shaded blue cells** = neighborhood participation rates that exceeded Boston's overall participation rate.

\*The Brighton Farmers Market serves Allston and Brighton



**Participants heard about *Ideas in Action* through different means across phases, reflecting changes in OPB’s marketing strategy.**

**During Idea Collection, for example, Contract Partners played a larger role and there was a higher spend on paid media and ads.**

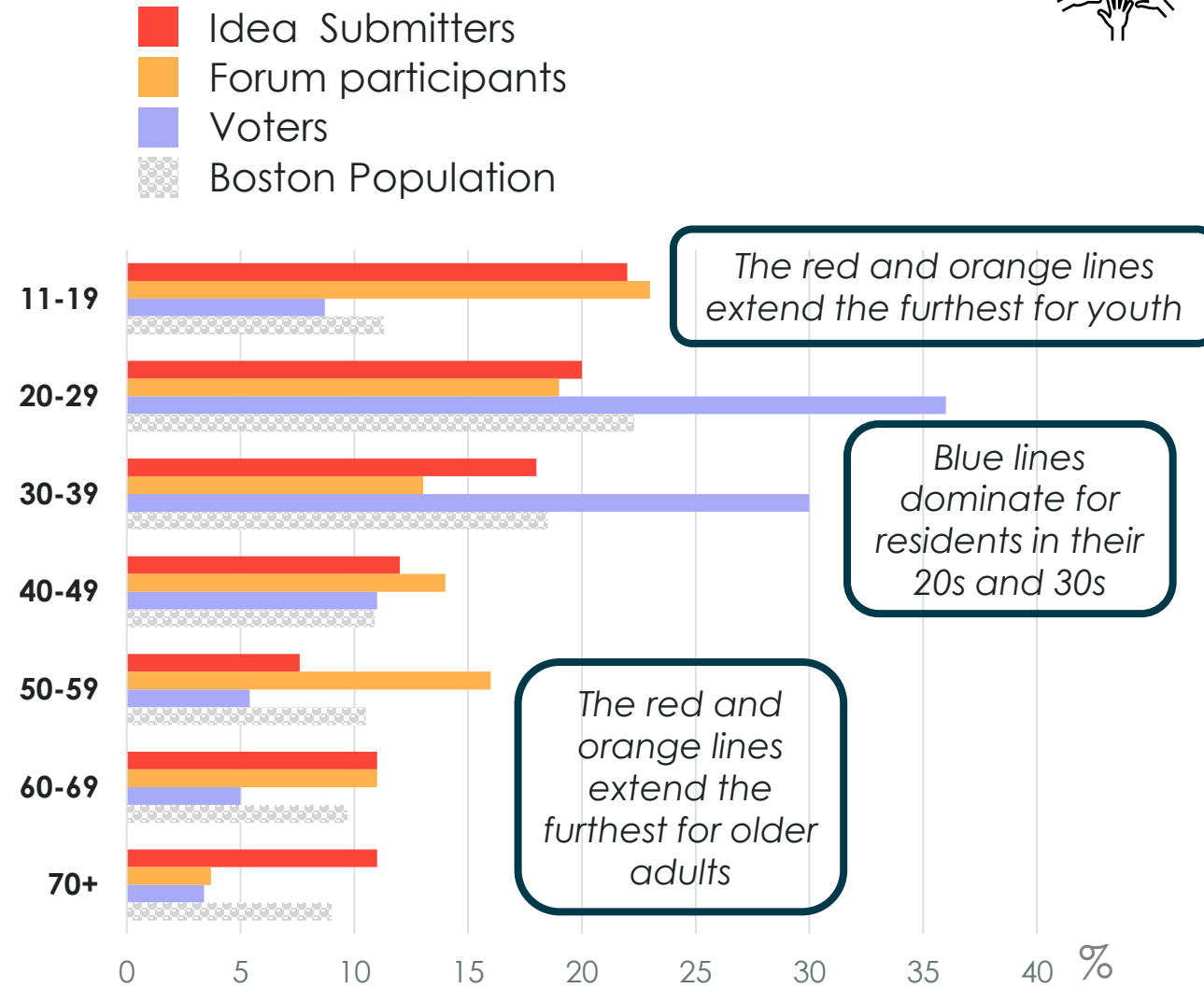
Method	Idea Collection	Voting
Ad/Billboards (incl. bus + billboard ads)	16%	8%
City of Boston (incl. city outreach/ elected officials)	17%	26%
Community Organizations	75%	20%
Friends and family / word of mouth	12%	34%
Social Media	11%	9%*

Source: Cycle 2 Idea Collection + Voting surveys  
 \*Social Media was NOT included as a standalone category in the Voting survey.



**Idea Collection and Forums engaged youth at high rates, as well as older adults.**

**Voters were mostly in the 20s and 30s.**

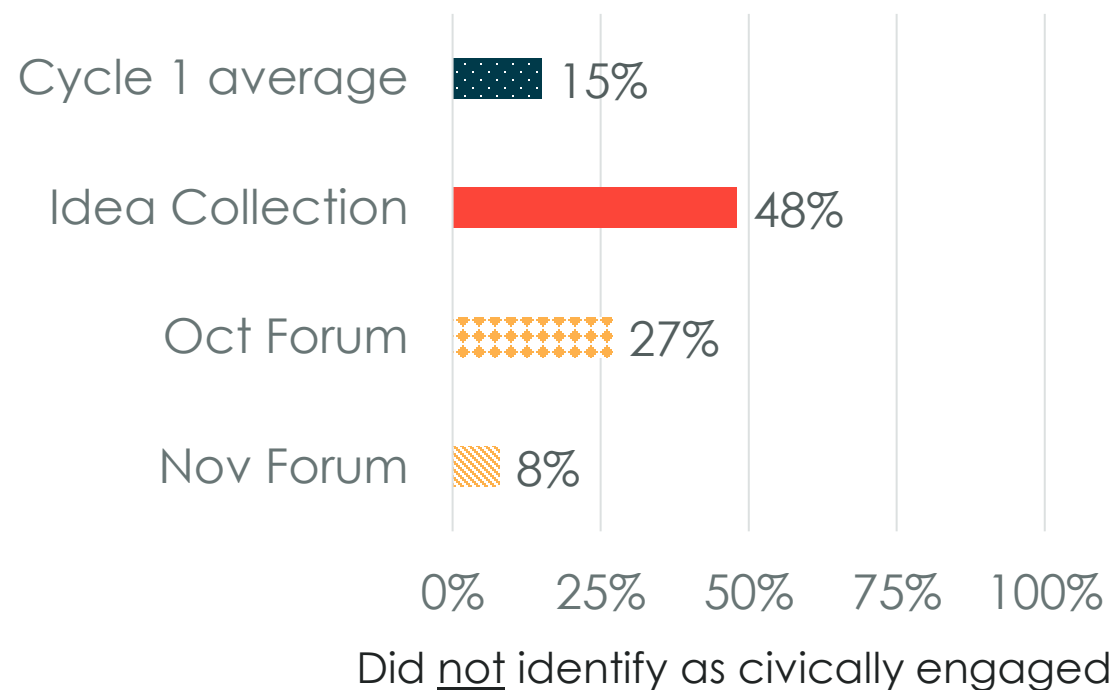


Source: Cycle 2 Surveys for Idea Collection + Forums + Voting + American Community Survey 2023 data



## Cycle 2 (Idea Collection and Forums) engaged more residents who do not identify as civically engaged, compared to Cycle 1.

Insights from Voting were limited to two BCYF sites, in which 77% of participants did not identify as civically engaged.



### Notes:

- In the past 12 months, did you attend public meetings, advocate for a local issue or candidate, or work with others to improve your neighborhood or city?

Source: Cycle 2 Surveys for Idea Collection + Forums



## *Finding 1*

*Ideas in Action* engaged a diverse group of Boston residents across all phases. Trusted partner organizations were essential for reaching under-served and under-engaged groups, particularly during Idea Collection and Forums, and through paper ballots at voting. Earlier phases showed the strongest success engaging these populations.



## *Evaluation Question 2*

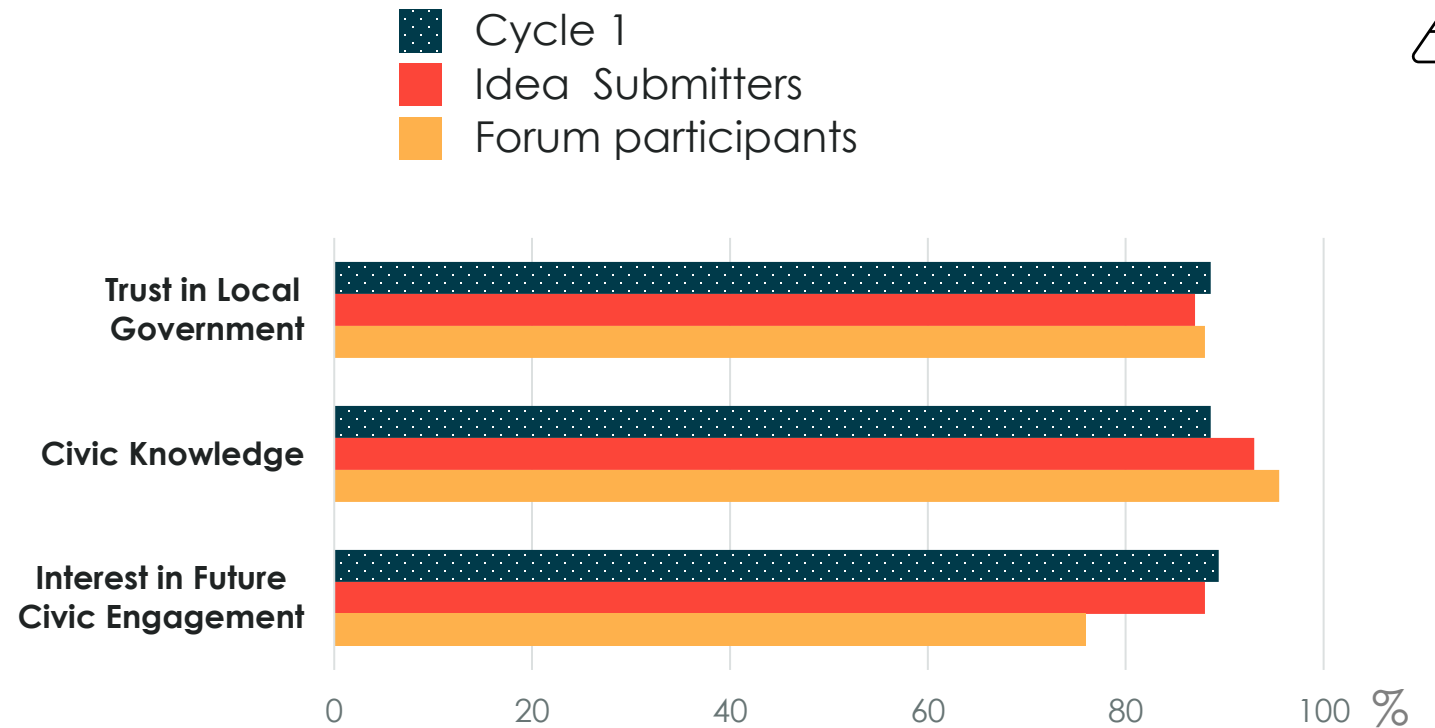
**What impact did Ideas in Action have on those who participated? How did it affect:**

- Trust in local government
- Civic knowledge (especially budgeting)
- Interest in future civic engagement, including future cycles of Ideas in Action



**During Idea Collection and Forums, most participants self-reported trust in the process, gains in civic knowledge, and an interest in participating again.**

These findings mostly mirror Cycle 1, with some exceptions.



**Trust in Local Government:** Participating allows my voice to be heard by the City of Boston

**Civic Knowledge:**

- Submitting an idea helped me think about issues that affect me and my community
- October Forum helped me consider other viewpoints
- November Forum helped me better understand how Boston's budgeting process works

**Interest in Future Civic Engagement:** I plan to participate in *Ideas in Action* in the future

Source: Cycle 2 Surveys for Idea Collection + Forums



## What is working well?

- ✓ “The contact with aspects of city govt & residents of Boston I would not have otherwise met. **Breakdown of city processes.**”
- ✓ “Esta funcionando que se esta **tomando en cuenta las ideas de las personas** para que haya mas claridad.” *“What’s working is that people’s ideas are being taken into account to create more clarity.”*

– NOVEMBER FORUM PARTICIPANTS



## *Finding 2*

Residents continued to benefit from *Ideas in Action* across all measures, including trust in city government, civic knowledge, and interest in future civic engagement.



## *Evaluation Question 3*

**What was the process used in Cycle 2 and how can it be improved?**

- What facilitated participation or got in the way, especially for key populations?
- How well did OPB collaborate with other aspects of city government and community organizations?



# Cycle 2 Changes and Innovations

## Partnerships

- Grew number of contract partner organizations and allowed flexibility for how they engaged residents; expanded contracts to include voting
- Expanded partnerships with BCYF and City of Boston initiatives such as Coffee Hours

## Implementation

- Started all processes earlier than in Cycle 1
- Communicated updates about Cycle 1 winning projects through the listserv
- Split forums into two parts and hosted all five
- Hosted a Celebration event to announce winning projects for Cycle 2

## Staffing

- Implemented a “distributed leadership model” where team members each led different parts of the work
- Brought on a Community Engagement & Outreach Specialist Fellow (Alexandra); managed parental leave and staff turnover

## Evaluation

- Embedded key survey questions into the online portal for Idea Collection as well as the voting platform
- Developed “phase briefs” after each phase



# Participants shared positive reactions throughout *Ideas in Action*

- Participants valued the welcoming, inclusive environments at in-person workshops and forums
- Participants appreciated being included and the diversity of fellow participants
- Returning participants noted improvements in Cycle 2, including clearer activity structures and better logistics

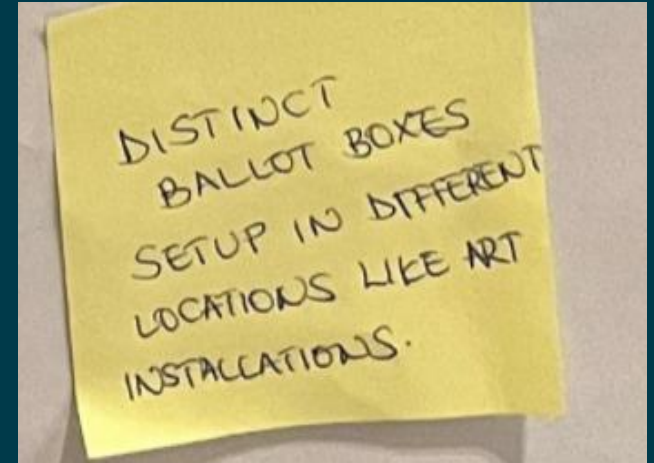
Reports following each phase include additional perspectives on the participant experience.



# Participants shared ideas for expanding and deepening engagement

Some ideas were novel:

- ❑ Increase recognition and visibility of the OPB team, for example, by equipping staff with distinctly colored jackets
- ❑ Increase public awareness through pop ups and public art related to projects
- ❑ Boost participation by pairing *Ideas in Action* events with film screenings or concerts



“Distinct ballot boxes setup in different location like art installation”

- Response to prompt about keeping participants engaged



## *Finding 3*

Participants valued *Ideas in Action* and appreciated its intentionality, inclusivity, and improvements from Cycle 1. Residents shared ideas for increasing the visibility of *Ideas in Action* by continuing OPB efforts and trying new things.



# Bi-modal Engagement: Trusted Partners and Mass Media

## Partnerships

- Partners – with City of Boston entities and community organizations – were **essential for engaging key groups (see Eval Question 1)**
- Partnerships were high-touch and took **time and effort to manage** with limited capacity

## Mass Media

- OBP's marketing strategy - implemented through ASG - was **effective at reaching a broad and intentional audience**
- **Social media from partners also helped;** for example, a social media post from the Better Budget Alliance received over 130K views and led to ~400 additional votes

*Reflections from the evaluation team...*

Some participants may only engage through a trusted partner (e.g., Golden Age, BCYF)

It is possible that hearing about *Ideas in Action* from multiple sources will have the most sustainable impact (e.g., Golden Age + SAMPAN + geo-targeted Meta ads in Chinatown)



## *Finding 4*

Participants engaged in *Ideas in Action* thanks to trusted partners, mass media, and word of mouth (during voting).



# Staff valued the proposal development process

Staff felt **supported by OPB** and found the templates and pre-Forum preparation helpful. Staff appreciated the **diversity of participants** and had ideas for ways to expand outreach and engagement. Notable observations:

- The sequencing of proposal development allowed staff to draft **feasible proposals that aligned with resident priorities and existing programs**.
- **Broad idea categories were useful** for workshopping with residents but did not capture the individualism of original ideas.
- **Table conversations worked best when comprised of resident voices**, not just CBO staff.

*“The process allowed us to first apply our expertise to the proposal, then allow the community voices to shape our proposal.”*

- City staff respondent



# The process influenced how staff think and work

- Staff **expanded** and **validated** their knowledge of resident priorities and **feel more prepared to be responsive** to those needs.
- Staff are considering ways they can **improve, add to, or alter their current services in accordance with residents' desires**. For example, one staff reported pre-mobilizing to act on priorities when funding becomes available. Another described reallocating internal funds to act now.

*“The idea that was decided upon, although not chosen, is going to be implemented using existing/reallocated internal funds since we do believe it's a necessary addition to the work we do...”*

- City staff respondent



## *Finding 5*

The new Proposal Development Forum structure was successful in the eyes of participants, implementers, **and city staff**.

Forums brought together diverse residents who enjoyed being civically engaged in community. Strong preparation helped implementers **and city staff** support forum goals and provide participants with a positive experience.

**City staff's involvement strengthened their understanding of resident priorities and influenced internal planning and service delivery.**

# Recommendations

Recommendations focus on sustaining what works and maximizing partnerships and City resources. **What stands out to you as something we should discuss further?**

1. Continue investing in partnerships and extend engagement through the full cycle.
2. Grow and deepen partnerships with City of Boston entities.
3. Actively support partners in their communications about Ideas in Action.
4. Prioritize the marketing campaign where it generates the highest reach and return.
5. Communicate about Cycle 1 project implementation to build trust and engagement.
6. Strengthen the throughline between phases and across cycles.
7. Start Cycle 3 planning and partner contracting earlier.
8. Maintain the two-part Proposal Development Forum structure with minor implementation updates.
9. Expand and improve the use of paper ballots.
10. Continue embedding evaluation into *Ideas in Action* infrastructure.



# Recommendations

- What other strategies would you like to uplift as ways to sustain what's working and maximize partnerships and City resources?
- What else would you like recommend for Cycle 3?



# Next steps for Evaluation

- Engage with your questions and feedback
- Prepare the final evaluation report for EOB review
- Support the OPB team in developing the Evaluation Workplan for Cycle 3
- Collect outcomes from projects completed to date and publish a report as an addendum to the Cycle 2 Final Report

# Thank you

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**Evan Kuras, Bobbie D Norman, Kayla Benitez Alvarez, Min Ma**

**[evan@dataplussoul.com](mailto:evan@dataplussoul.com)**

**[min@dataplussoul.com](mailto:min@dataplussoul.com)**

**[www.dataplussoul.com](http://www.dataplussoul.com)**

