

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** CMAP Board

**From:** CMAP Staff

**Date:** April 24, 2024

**Subject:** Community Outreach to Engage and Empower: Participatory Budgeting

**Action Requested:** Information

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CMAP staff have undertaken work on pilot projects to equip and empower residents to inform funding decisions of capital projects in their communities. The Participatory Budgeting pilot, supported by Chicago Community Trust (CCT), provided elected officials and residents in the Villages of Lansing and Dixmoor an approach to a more equitable public budgeting process.

**Project Design**

In 2023, CMAP received CCT funding to support components of Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and Grant Readiness technical assistance projects with capacity-constrained municipalities. The pilot element added to CIP was Participatory Budgeting (PB). The project team created a scope to produce a multi-year CIP with key trainings (asset inventories, creating prioritization criteria, implementing the plan) to be led by consultants. A staff-led effort would recruit a steering committee, provide education on PB, calibrate a community-inclusive approach, and then conduct engagement to allow for transparent and community-informed decision-making. CIP projects were awarded to Villages of Lansing and Dixmoor, and work began with the communities.

**Project Activities**

Participatory budgeting generally follows five phases: 1) design the process, 2) gather ideas, 3) develop project proposals, 4) vote, 5) implement. The pilot projects have followed similar phases to gather input and empower residents to have direct impact on how the municipality budgets for future investments.

Both projects include a steering committee of residents, village leadership, and village staff. The steering committee is charged with informing engagement activities and developing proposals for community voting. Community engagement activities have included joining already-scheduled community events, placing surveys in high traffic community spaces, and a community wide mailing of a survey with a pre-paid return envelope.

The Lansing project recently completed the second phase, gathering responses from approximately 15% of households. The Lansing steering committee then used community responses to generate a set of five proposals that village staff could feasibly implement. These proposals will be presented back to residents to vote on in May and June. The winning proposals will be included in the CIP for immediate implementation.

The Dixmoor steering committee has been formed and met to provide important insights on how to reach residents and generate input. This resulted in creating a participation incentive of a gift card raffle for completed surveys. Surveys have been mailed village-wide to all residents with prepaid return envelopes. The project team is working with the steering committee to connect with schools and other upcoming events to generate more community input before moving forward with proposal development.

### **Lessons Learned**

Work is ongoing, but key understandings and best practices have already been identified through project activities, such as:

- There has been great success in mailing surveys with prepaid return envelopes. The majority of feedback received in Lansing was from the mailing effort.
- Resident steering committee members often have social networks and awareness of gatherings that can be leveraged alongside municipal communications for broader outreach success.
- Incentives to participate including providing meals at steering committee meetings and gift card raffle entries for respondents, are needed to help compete with and/or support participants' demands of everyday life.
- Feasibility is an important ingredient to the process. At the beginning of the project, the partner and team should discuss what the partner budget can realistically implement, and what might necessarily be addressed by seeking external funding.
- No single approach to participatory budgeting will fit every community's situation- flexibility and adaptability are keys to success.
- Participatory budgeting principles can be applied to budgets without needing a large sum of money to fund a project. Residents can shape how a municipality invests in the community by shaping budgeting priorities or identifying a key geographic area.
- Participatory budgeting does not necessarily need to be named and explained. It can simply be the engagement strategy used for the CIP. This helps alleviate the need to explain two very technical topics (capital improvement planning and PB), while trying to invite community ideas and preferences.