

# OUR VOICE, OUR BUDGET

## A GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN CHICAGO

WITH ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON PARTICIPATORY  
DEMOCRACY IN LOCAL DECISION-MAKING



# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING - WHAT IS IT?

Participatory Budgeting (PB) is a democratic process that involves community members in deciding how to allocate public funds. It's a way to engage citizens and align public spending with community needs.<sup>1</sup>

## DOES PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING TAKE PLACE IN CHICAGO?

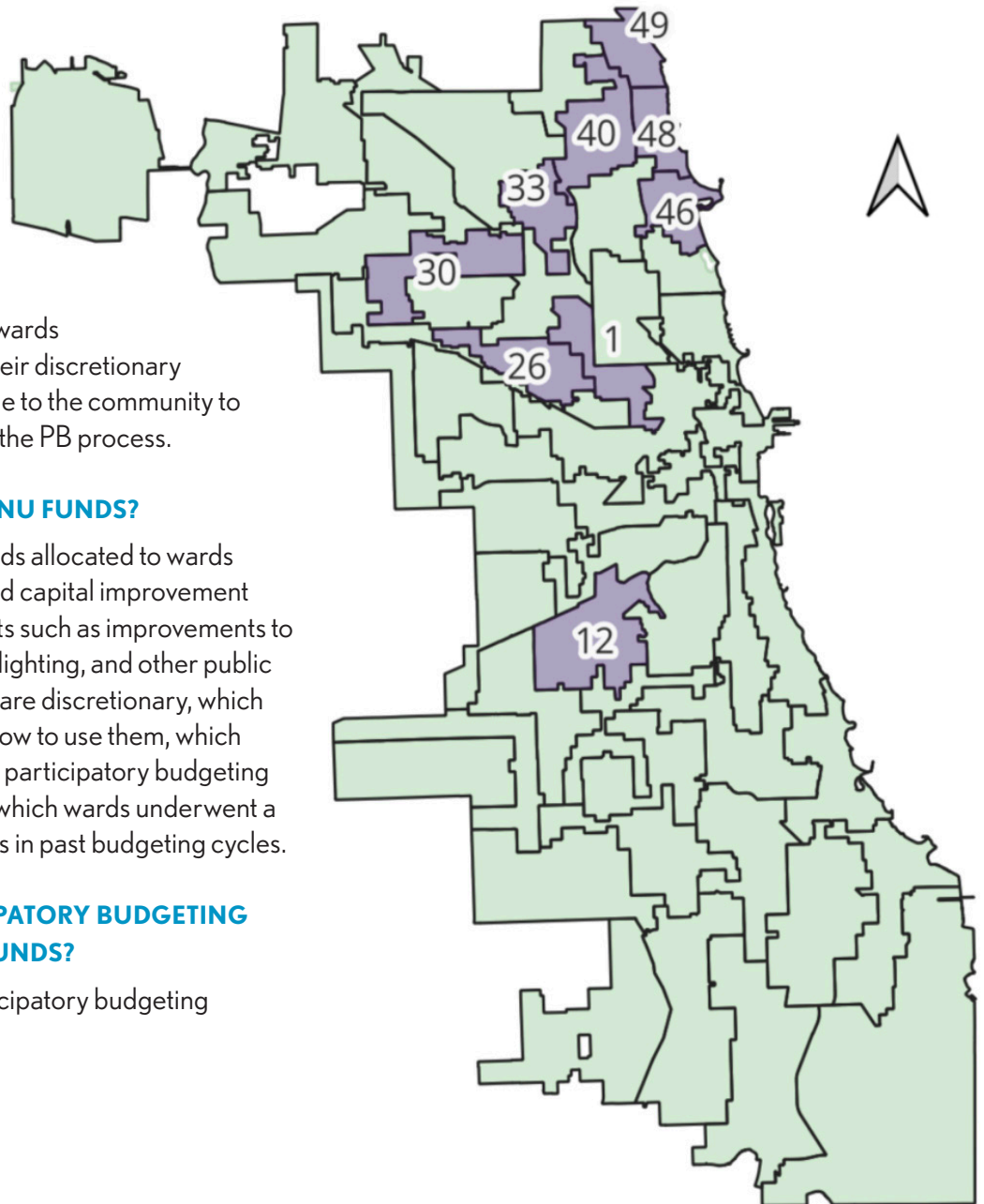
Yes! Participatory Budgeting is present in multiple Chicago wards, beginning in 2009 in the 49th Ward. In the process, wards will make a certain amount of their discretionary aldermanic menu funds available to the community to decide how to spend it through the PB process.

## WHAT ARE ALDERMANIC MENU FUNDS?

Aldermanic menu funds are funds allocated to wards to use towards infrastructure and capital improvement projects, which includes projects such as improvements to streets, sidewalks, alleys, street lighting, and other public infrastructure. The menu funds are discretionary, which means that alders can choose how to use them, which makes them more applicable to participatory budgeting processes. This map highlights which wards underwent a participatory budgeting process in past budgeting cycles.

## WHICH WARDS USE PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING WITH ALDERMANIC MENU FUNDS?

This map highlights where participatory budgeting is used at the ward-level.



### Wards with Participatory Budgeting

#### 1st Ward

East Logan Square, Wicker Park, West Town, Noble Square

#### 12th ward

Mckinley Park, Brighton Park, Back of the Yards

#### 26th ward

East Humboldt Park, West Hermosa

#### 30th Ward

Belmont Cragin, Belmont Central, South Old Irving Park

#### 33rd Ward

Albany Park/West Ravenswood

#### 40th Ward

Andersonville/Lincoln Square/Edgewater

#### 46th ward

Buena Park, Uptown, Edgewater

#### 48th ward

Roger's Park

#### 49th Ward

Roger's Park

# WHAT DOES PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING LOOK LIKE?

Walk with us through a typical participatory budgeting process!

While every ward has its specific PB process, with different wards choosing to allocate different amounts of menu funds or differences in how ideas are chosen, here is a **general overview** of what PB looks like at the ward-level in Chicago:



## 1. IDEAS ARE SUBMITTED FOR REVIEW



Generally, wards will allocate up to \$1 million dollars of menu funds available towards participatory budgeting. Here are the kind of projects the menu funds can cover public infrastructure.<sup>2</sup>

- Repair and upgrade of streets, alleys, curbs, sidewalks, traffic signals
- Street and alley lighting
- Street pole painting

## 2. VOLUNTEER-BASED COMMITTEE REVIEWS SUBMISSIONS



A committee of ward residents is formed from volunteers to review the ideas submitted. Ideas are reviewed under feasibility & cost considerations such as:

- Is the project within the ward boundaries?
- Does the project fit within the allocated menu fund budget?
- Is the project directed towards public property?

## 3. FINAL PROPOSALS ARE DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED AT PROPOSAL EXPOS



Attend an expo to hear about the proposals selected to be up for voting to learn more about them and start thinking about which project you would like to see be funded

## 4. GET OUT AND VOTE!



Voting is typically available either online or in person. To vote, you typically must be 14 and older and be a resident of the ward. Some wards in Chicago use rank-choice voting.

## 5. VOTES ARE TALLIED, AND THE PROJECT PROPOSAL WITH THE MOST VOTES WILL BE CHOSEN.

Alders and ward staff work closely with city departments on implementation next steps.

## PB PROJECTS IN CHICAGO WARDS

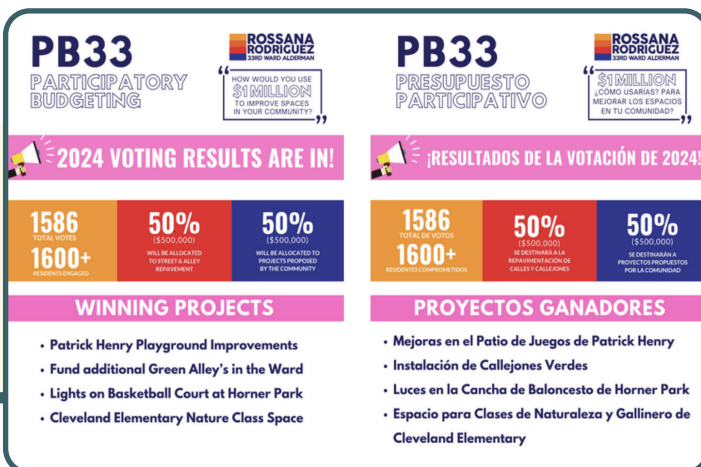
Check out some of the projects that have been ideated, voted on, and selected across Chicago wards through PB processes. To see more specific information, visit each ward website's PB page [linked above](#). Here are some highlights:

### 40TH WARD

In 2021, 40th ward residents voted to use menu funds to install a pedestrian island on Western/Winnemac to make way for safer and easier pedestrian crossings.<sup>3</sup>



Installation of pedestrian island at Western/Winnemac through PB funding

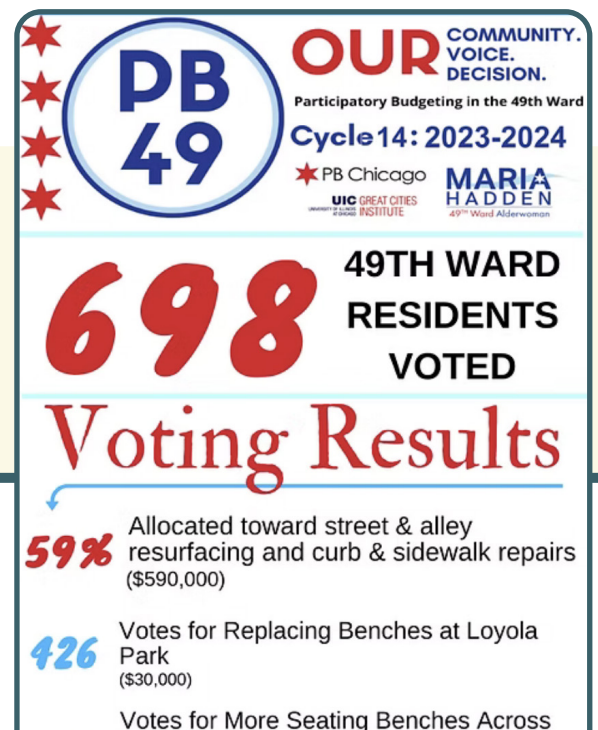


### 33RD WARD

In 2024, 33rd ward residents voted for playground improvements, building space for an elementary school nature class, creating more green alleyways, and adding lights to local park basketball courts.<sup>4</sup>

### 49TH WARD

The 2023-2024 voting cycle in the 49th ward paved the way for residents to vote for street and alley re-surfacing, curb and sidewalk repairs, adding additional benches for seating, pedestrian safety improvements, adding bike racks, and more.<sup>5</sup>



## CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN CHICAGO

For PB to be successful, there must be vast community awareness about the process to ensure sufficient turnout in both the ideation and the voting process. Taking steps to build institutional trust with community members is key to ensure populations that have faced historic harm or distrust in governmental processes feel that their participation will be accounted for.<sup>6</sup>

Since ward boundaries can capture a diverse set of populations and community needs, ward offices must ensure they engage with all parts of the ward and take specific steps to reach populations that are not turning out to vote.

## OTHER FORMS OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

If Participatory Budgeting is currently not the right fit for your community, consider other forms of Participatory Democracy. One great tool for this is the Participation Playbook<sup>7</sup>, managed by People Powered, which is an interactive website to help advocate for and implement a participatory program for governments and communities. An example of two other processes of participatory democracy include:



**Participatory policy making** is a participatory democracy practice that invites community members to directly identify and develop policy proposals within an institution, such as schools, city agencies, or municipalities.<sup>8</sup>

This has been put into practice in cities in Spain, Uruguay, and Belgium to help advance community-created solutions in policymaking, strategic planning, and policy proposal processes.<sup>9</sup>



**A Citizen's Assembly** is a gathering of randomly selected members of a community that are convened by an institution to learn about a policy issue and provide solutions.<sup>10</sup>



**To see the entire Participation Playbook by People Powered, scan this QR code**

# END NOTES

- 1 <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/about-pb/>
- 2 [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/obm/provdrs/cap\\_improve/svcs/aldermanic-menu-program.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/obm/provdrs/cap_improve/svcs/aldermanic-menu-program.html)
- 3 <https://40thward.org/city-services/participatory-budgeting/>
- 4 <https://33rdward.org/2024-participatory-budgeting-results/>
- 5 <https://www.49thward.org/pb49-cycle14>
- 6 <https://lafollette.wisc.edu/news/chicagos-participatory-budgeting-a-positive-but-incomplete-step-toward-inclusion/>
- 7 <https://participationplaybook.org>
- 8 <https://www.democracybeyondelections.org/policy>
- 9 <https://participationplaybook.org/participatory-policymaking>
- 10 <https://participationplaybook.org/citizens-assembly>