what is participatory budgeting?

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a different way to manage public money. It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. PB gives ordinary people real decision-making power over real money.

how does it work?

Community members make budget decisions through an annual series of meetings and voting. They usually decide how to spend "discretionary funds" – the part of the budget that is not set aside for salaries or fixed spending. There are many models of PB, but the following cycle illustrates a typical process:

1. Neighborhood Assemblies
   Community members identify local needs and spending priorities, and choose budget delegates to represent their neighborhood.

2. Delegate Meetings
   With help from experts, budget delegates transform community priorities into full project proposals.

3. Voting
   Budget delegates propose projects and community members vote on which projects to fund.

4. Implementation & Monitoring
   Staff implement the chosen projects. Community members monitor the projects and revise the process for next year.
where has it worked?
The Brazilian city of Porto Alegre started the first full PB process in 1990, for its municipal budget. In Porto Alegre, as many as 50,000 people have participated each year, to decide as much as 20% of the city budget.

In the past twenty years, PB has spread to over 1,000 city budgets in Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe, and North America. Countries such as the United Kingdom and Dominican Republic have passed laws requiring that all local governments implement PB. States, counties, public housing authorities, schools, and community organizations have also used PB for their budgets.

what are the benefits?
Elected officials, community organizations, academics, and even the United Nations have declared PB a model for democratic government. Why?

- **Gives community members a say**
  Ordinary people have more voice – and they get to make real decisions.

- **Makes for better and more equitable decisions**
  Local residents know best what their neighborhood needs. When they meet face to face, they often decide to focus budget proposals on communities with the greatest needs.

- **Develops active and democratic citizens**
  Community members, staff, and officials learn democracy by doing it. They gain more understanding of complex political issues and community needs.

- **Builds communities and strengthens community organizations**
  People get to know their neighbors and feel more connected to their city. Local organizations get to spend less time lobbying, and more time deciding policies themselves. Budget assemblies connect groups and attract new members.

- **Connects politicians and constituents**
  Politicians build closer relationships with their constituents. Community members get to know their elected officials and local governments.

- **Makes government more accountable and efficient**
  When community members decide spending through democratic voting, there are fewer opportunities for corruption, waste, or costly public backlash.