

# Visegrad Youth Participates

## Strengthening Democracy through School Participatory Budgeting



Partners

**PARTICIPATION  
FACTORY**

 fundacja  
**pole  
dialogu**

 Alternatív  
Közösségek  
Egyesülete

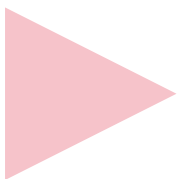
Funded by

 Visegrad Fund

# Table of contents



Context	3
Project Overview	4
Partners	6
Study Visit to Kutna Hora and Prague 7	8
Creating the Space for School Participatory Budgeting	11
Systematising School Participatory Budgeting on a City-Level	18
Going Beyond School Participatory Budgeting	25
Conclusions	31
Suggested Reading	33
Authors and Acknowledgements	36

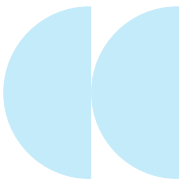
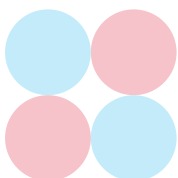


# Context

Current models of political participation and education around the world do not provide sufficient opportunities for youth participation and leave young people ill-prepared for active citizenship. As current political institutions in Central and Eastern Europe face the decline of democracy and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, we see a greater need to engage young people in an ongoing dialogue about the future of local democracies in order to preserve national, regional and global stability and prosperity.

To address these issues, some actors, including the Visegrad Group countries, are beginning to experiment with school participatory budgeting (SPB). Such PB involves students in deciding how to spend part of their institution's budget. These processes help develop young people's leadership skills, improve civic education and inspire lifelong active citizenship, which is essential for the health of democracy. It is often the first opportunity for young people to propose and vote on real projects to improve their community.

Central and Eastern Europe is not different in this regard and while some progress has been made, there is still a lot to be done in our respective countries. For example, there is a wide range of experiences with School and youth PBs that have not been exchanged among actors within their respective countries and beyond them. Additionally, School PB advocacy has not been consistent across the Visegrad region and there is currently no shared depository of know-how, case studies, methodologies, and best practices required for advocacy and implementation. In addition to that, there is no regional network of school PB practitioners and advocates with shared vision and a common understanding of Visegrad context.



# Project Overview

Youth Visegrad Participates project aimed to address those issues and allow partners to not only map existing best practices but also exchange their know-how and share it among local decision makers and other relevant stakeholders. We believe that this systematic approach to gathering and spreading knowledge is instrumental in fostering the environment where active citizenship and the principles of civil society are extended to the young people.

By running this project we hope to create a space where children and young people are not left out of important discussions about daily life in their schools and communities. Instead they are invited to express their opinions, speak up, get involved and be an active citizen alongside their math and grammar skills.

In order to reach this objective, our team of partners closely cooperated on exchanging know-how, documenting approaches to School PB in our respective countries, creating guidelines for advocates and other practitioners, and training them based on lessons learned and best practices from our work within and beyond this project.

Considering different contexts, needs and past experiences we have decided to focus on three core points that is covered by one partner and is based on their particular context:



## 1. Creating the Space for School Participatory Budgeting:

analysing advocacy needs, best practices, and alternatives to standard school spaces



## 2. Systematising School Participatory Budgeting on a city-level:

exploring a path from singular school Participatory Budgeting to a broader sustainable network of school PBs



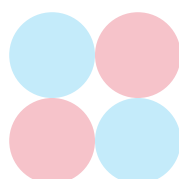
## 3. School Participatory Budgeting and Beyond:

building bridges between school participation and broader youth engagement in city political life

In order to thoroughly analyze the context, deduct the best practices, and run pilot activities, we have designed a process that fits following stages:



This report is a final overview of the work delivered within this project and the main findings from each context in Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic.



# Partners

## Participation Factory - Czech Republic

Participation Factory is a company with the aim of spreading good practice in participatory planning and designing sustainable processes based on data and collaboration with citizens and key stakeholders. In this way, they contribute to greater trust between people and authorities, organizations and institutions, improving the quality of life and creating an environment where the development of a municipality, city or region is directly influenced by its inhabitants. The team members have years of experience in youth-oriented participatory projects in a number of countries.

## Fundacja Pole Dialogu - Poland

The Field of Dialogue Foundation has wide experience in the subject of participatory budgeting. It advises institutions introducing participatory budgets (City of Łódź, Institute of Urban Culture in Gdańsk), participates in the work of the Public Council for Participatory Budgets at the Mayor of Warsaw. Since 2015 they have been building expertise in the connections between education, schooling and the participatory school budget mechanism. Each year supports a dozen schools in the implementation of SPB.

## Alternatív Közösségek Egyesülete - Hungary

The Alternatív Közösségek Egyesülete has been working for more than twenty years to create a strong and active civil society in Debrecen. They welcome civic initiatives into community space to help develop and ensure their survival and organize with them cultural programs, distribute food to the needy and help in crisis situations. The AKE is part of many international projects (Erasmus+, Civic Europe Capacity Building Program) with the aim of learning from other partners and sharing experiences in the field. For the last 4 years they were working on the capacity building of civic organizations in the North Plain region within the Regional Community Centers Program.

## Funded by

### Visegrad Fund

The International Visegrad Fund is a donor organization established in 2000 by the governments of the Visegrad Group countries – Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The Fund follows the vision of President Vaclav Havel, President Lech Wałęsa and Prime Minister József Antall and supports regional cooperation of civil society organizations. The Fund seeks original approaches that help the region progress in seven main areas of Culture, Education, Innovation, Democratic Values, Public Policy, Environment and Tourism, and Social Development. Their vision is a Central Europe with full understanding of its shared history and the necessity of mutual respect and cooperation towards a better future in the broader European context.

# Study Visit to Kutna Hora and Prague 7

The project kicked off with a study visit of the partner organizations to the Czech Republic for the purposes of the study trip to the city of Kutna Hora, a city with a pioneering approach to connecting youth parliament, school PB, and broader youth and youth led participation on a municipal level.

## Context

Kutna Hora is a Czech town with more than 21 000 inhabitants. In the city, the Council of Secondary School Parliaments is well established and works with great success in bringing together representatives of the school parliaments from each school. At the same time, the local schools have experience with School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) that were established before the city-wide Participatory Budgeting (PB).

When the city decided to start a PB process at the city level, they found that they did not have sufficient capacity within their office. The city decided to take a different route and create a unique process set up. The city hall committed to working with the young people who already had experience with participation through School Parliaments, the Council, and SPBs and invited them to form a project team.

In the pilot year, four students applied and successfully implemented a city-wide PB process even in the COVID-19 lockdown time. After the pilot year, the students were reinvented to manage the next cycle of city Participatory Budgeting, which saw doubling in the number of participants between the first and second year.

Their responsibilities of the youth management team include organizing the project, setting the schedule, establishing rules, managing communication, and facilitating public workshops. This process also included intensive capacity-building of the youth management team members on skills related to project management, communication, participation and civic tech basics, online and in-person facilitation skills and other fields of expertise. This capacity-building along with the practical experience of their application is one of the core values, as these young people received transferable skills valuable in their future civic, political, and possibly professional life. At the same time, young people were invited to take on an active role of an owner of a participatory process, providing them with real power, responsibilities, and a strong sense of ownership. This process also paved the way for building a strong relationship built on trust between the youth, the general public, and the city hall.

The process was delivered with the expert support of Participation Factory, which provided the project team with training in project management, participatory methods and facilitation, ensuring that the students were well prepared to take the initiative forward, and troubleshooting issues that came along the way.

## About the visit:

Dates of the visits: 30.11.2022 - 03.12.2022

## Activities concluded:

**Partner's Introductions and Initial Planning** - introduction, overview of the whole project, discussion on the local research deliverables, presentation of Czech context and local School Participatory Budgeting methodology as well as tools used, and an online presentation about SPBs in Slovakia by Linda Zuzcakova from Ministry of Interior of Slovak Republic.

**Prague 7 Study Visit** - a presentation about the Youth Council structure followed by a discussion with representatives of the Prague 7 municipality and a student about local youth engagement context.

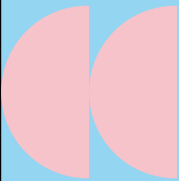
**Kutna Hora Study Visit** - a meeting at the city hall with former deputy mayor Vít Šnajdr, who was present at the introduction of the student-led participatory budget with a subsequent presentation and discussion. It was followed by a meeting directly with students who participated in the project and shared their experience and lessons learned from the process.

## Lessons learned:

- The main driven of the School Participatory Budgeting differs context by context and creates favorable environment for different types of School PB both in terms of the structure, initial scale, and the participants' age:
  - » In the Czech Republic, school Participatory Budgeting is initiated by municipalities or directly by school principals. Thus, in the Czech Republic, most School Participatory Budgeting takes place in an isolated school or municipality and has a wide degree of variation when it comes to the methodology.
  - » In Slovakia, Participatory Budgeting is managed from the top-down from the Ministry of Interior through the regional level governments. This set up demands a uniform methodology for school PB and targets high schools. This scale of initial activities requires a strong political will and provides little autonomy for individual schools.
- The meaningfulness of School Participatory Budgeting is affirmed by the quality of individual proposals as students often decided to spend money on sustainable and inclusive projects that benefit their community at large, i.e. by purchasing air purifiers.
- Existing youth engagement structures like Youth and School Parliaments can serve as a strong foundation for higher levels of youth engagement and participation.
- Young people can and should be more involved in local participatory processes both as participants (i.e. through School Parliaments and School PB) but also as active implementers and managers of these processes.
- In order to engage youth at the city level, the city leadership, which is open to such processes, needs to provide them with expert support and capacity-building activities.
- It is essential to find the right young people who can commit to the project fully.



- Despite possible assumptions local communities are open to seeing young people in leadership roles and they show increasing levels of trust and support of processes led by young people as seen from the rise in participation in the Kutna Hora PB case.
- The motivations of students to participate in this type of project may be different. Some want to participate in the running of the city, to gain valuable experience and expertise, or to be heard by older citizens. Some may just enjoy specific tasks like making a website or social media management.



# Creating the Space for School Participatory Budgeting

In Hungary, in recent years, several governments have started participatory budgeting, where local residents can decide on the use of money specifically labeled for participation. The amount is usually within a few hundred million HUF, while in Budapest, the participatory Budgeting is 1 billion HUF. However, Participatory Budgeting programmes specifically for young people have not been established on municipal level, or even on public school level before. At the same time, the minimum age for participation in the Budapest Community Budget is 16. So young people can also be involved in the process, but this is a very limited space for the participation of young people.

The K-Monitor Office has been studying the chances for broader launch of Participatory Budgeting in Hungarian governments for several years, but there is no school-wide study on Participatory Budgeting for youth within and outside schools neither by public or civil actors.

The Alternative Communities Association used a US based method of school Participatory Budgeting as a basis for its first pilot in Hungary in 2021. With the support of the K-Monitor, we initiated the first Participatory Budgeting program in a high school in Debrecen, Hungary. The project was funded by the U.S. Embassy in Budapest.

The project was run as a pilot, and since we could not find any Hungarian examples, we had to rely on the US school participatory budgeting experiences. Our mentor was Madison Rock, who has coordinated several School PBs as a member of the Center for the Future of Arizona. We will refer to the process as Student Budgets hereafter.

The Student Budget, like the municipal version, gave students real power, involvement in decision-making and real money for the development of the student community.

„There is a saying that the Hungarian education system does not put enough effort into teaching skills that are necessary for civic life (public finance, interpretation of laws, debate culture, leadership - presentation skills, etc.), neither does it put enough emphasis on raising interest in these skills (sense of responsibility towards the community, civic discipline, critical thinking). Many people say that the problem with citizenship education is that when it does actually take place, it is not experience-based. And the gap between didactic learning and the public realities experienced by students seems impossible to cross.

If there were expectations that the students' budget could somehow directly raise the issue of civic participation and the importance of democracy, this was not the case, but rather a collaborative learning experience and a surprising discovery. The students' budget became a community experience that was in many ways about active participation, campaigning, persuading each other, money and organizing, but was first and foremost about the community itself. It was like the high school itself: open, creative, artful, with a strong emphasis on self-expression, community collaboration and campaigning. And perhaps less than originally imagined, it placed less emphasis on democracy, on the abstract catchwords of civic education and budgeting.“ (Miklós Merényi - municipality expert, K-Monitor Association, Student's Budget manual, 2022)

Despite its small shortcomings, we feel that the Student's Budget has been successful in creating an operational group that has been involved in the operational planning and implementation,

in creating a bridge between us and the students of the school, and in showing that the members of the group are more active than their classmates, at least interested in other tasks and responsibilities, and able to become an active part of the process.

## **Purpose of the Pilot**

Beyond the mission, that we want to see the Hungarian youth thrive in a democratic environment, we believe that education should be a medium that can play a positive role in becoming a citizen. School plays a huge role in the political and civic socialization of students. If it gives students the opportunity to have a say in decisions, if it teaches them the importance of thinking in the community and having an active role in issues that affect them, if it empowers them to take action, it has successfully contributed to this socialization process. Throughout our consultations and workshops, we have sought to show participants the benefits and opportunities of participatory budgeting for this process.

Our goal goes beyond the Participatory Budgeting method. We feel that democratic functioning and participatory approaches need to be established in Hungarian schools first. This attitude is of course not completely lacking in all schools, and there are a number of good practices we can rely on, where the method of School Participatory Budgeting can be easily applied. These good examples were our main focus during the pilots.

## **Main Challenges of Finding the Space for a School PB**

The main challenges of the Hungarian process are largely concerned with the lack of the space, understanding and the willingness to launch School Participatory Budgeting. In essence the main challenges are:

### **Dependency on the willingness of school principals to do it**

Based on our experience and research, we have concluded that there are basically no legal or any other obstacles to the implementation of participatory budgeting in a school. It is up to one person, the school principal, to decide whether or not the school community will engage in this process. In our consultations, we have found that it is the openness, the attitude to participation and the real understanding of the methodology of school PB that determines whether such a process is launched or not. If any of these aspects are missing, we have failed to involve the school into piloting.

### **Low level of understanding of what participation is**

In Hungary, the concept of participatory democracy is not widely known yet. We can find initiatives or even very consciously built systems based on this approach, but for rural Hungary this approach has not yet taken off. Since 1989, the citizens' understanding of democracy has been taking shape. Different perceptions of democratic functioning have emerged within society, with commitment to democratic values extremely low, with an earlier survey showing that around 60 % of Hungarians would support authoritarian leadership, 12 % reject democracy and only 18 % are committed to democracy.

## **The lack of financial resources**

Given that state schools do not have a budget that they can decide on independently, this is one of the biggest challenges in employing the participatory budgeting method. While the possibility of bringing in financial resources from outside exists for the school, the management and documentation of the budget itself raises questions and can effectively block such a process funded from external sources.

## **Low or no human capacity for implementation**

Schools do not have teachers or trainers with the capacity to coordinate the process within schools, which poses a great difficulty in bringing a School Participatory Budgeting to life. The problems of bureaucratic processes and teacher shortages are too much of a burden for school staff, and such a task can only be accomplished with real commitment to the method. External coordination by an expert is also problematic because it requires a good knowledge of the school and trust on the part of the parties involved.

## **The fear about the level of engagement**

This concern was expressed by several stakeholders when discussing the involvement of young people. The COVID-19 period was seen by all as a period that had a negative impact on community life and social relations. There may be some recent development in a positive direction, but there is a positive nostalgia for the pre-COVID days when there was activity. Student council members regularly report that whatever they try, they find it very difficult to engage their fellow students.

## **The “We know the best” attitude**

There are huge differences between student councils in different schools, even within a city. The differences can be in terms of activities, tools, methods, support or financial resources. For example, the intensity of the activity of the teacher in charge of student council, makes a big difference. This is why there are schools where the student council is outstandingly active and it tries new methods whether it is organizing forums, or voting. But there are also educational institutions where the money allocated to the student council is used for the functioning of the institution, and there are no programmes that can be run by the council. In the former case, the previous challenge (low level of students' involvement) is the decisive factor, but in the latter case, even if there is an openness to new methods, there is a strong, internal, closed sense of identity that does not allow external proposals inside the school community.



# Main Opportunities in Response to Challenges

Despite the challenges described above, certain opportunities for launching School Participatory Budgeting exist. They can be described as following:

## Educating school citizens about participation

Our consultation sessions and workshops have been extended to include knowledge about the participatory approach at large as well. We believe that it is important that those who are interested in our methods are also familiar with democratic values and the different levels of participatory decision-making.

## Creating alternative budget making strategies

We have collected good examples and ways for financial resources to implement participatory budgeting within a school. For each institution, we always try to identify the existing conditions and opportunities and choose the most appropriate way to raise the funds.

## Finding progressive teachers and principals

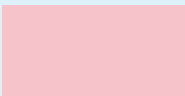
Education actors are the main stakeholders who must commit to the method, since without their contributions and involvement, adaptation is not possible. In the case of other methods, and on the basis of our previous experience, we have seen that the teachers' commitment, interest and even the leaders' open minds have played the greatest role in trying out and introducing new things.

It is very important to be able to reach out to these stakeholders, to involve them in the process, taking into account their capacities. We are looking for schools where progressive methods have already appeared.

## Training of student councils

Student council members are elected by the citizens of the school, so we believe that one way to spread participatory budgeting is for student councils to be partners in the method and to be able to be users of the method.

School student councils play an important role in reaching the students in a school. In addition to being a user of the method, student councils play an important role in reaching and communicating with students. The student council may express opinions and make proposals on all matters relating to the operation of the educational institution and to the pupils, and is therefore an instrument of collective rights in the school.



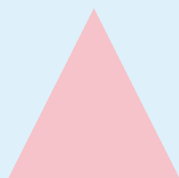
## Collecting materials

The creation and collection of materials about good practices happening in Hungary is essential. We would like to follow each success story, and to provide a know-how for anyone interested in the method. It also helps the dissemination and the documentation of the method's development in Hungary.

## Building allies

In recent years, NGOs have played a very important role in making participation an important issue across sectors. As in the case of the SPB, we need to find those allies who are willing to adapt, disseminate and professionally develop the method in practice in Hungary. With their cooperation, we can strengthen the network of professional implementers and lobbies that plays a key role both in the pilots and in systemic adaptation. Their training, their introduction to the method, their mentoring and the exchange of experience and joint action between them are all important steps from our perspective.

The lobbying power of the established professional, civil society circle can be increased by cooperation with larger youth networks and organizations on the topic, who can also introduce the school PB method into their own agenda.



# Case study

## Participatory Budgeting in a primary school in a village

### Kölked, Hungary

In 2023 from February to June in a little village called Kölked, a partner organization called Mural Moral Association implemented a school PB process. The process took 5 months long and the association involved plural actors of the village to be allies during the process. The organization had previous experiences in the settlement, because it was the third pillar of a 3 years long youth advocacy project, in which the children first expressed their desires using film and Mural Moral Method (community painting), then with the help of community organizing and participatory budgeting they realized them. The coordinator of the project, Krisztina Katona was familiar with the PB method before, and she contacted Agnes Molnar, from Alternative Communities Association, when she saw they were implementing a school PB process in Debrecen.

Agnes and Kriszta held a whole day training for local stakeholders about participatory budgeting and made a common plan with the main actors of the process. Kriszta was the coordinator of the process.

The realization of the winning small projects are still in progress.

In the process also participated young people who are 15-16 years old or those who attend other schools but they live in Kölked.

We collected ideas and elaborated small projects connected to the school and also to the village.

#### The winning projects were:

- Youth disco in the summer
- Volleyball-field
- Basketball-field
- Visit to the Mancs Ranch (a shelter and zoo of animals)
- Bike-tour with joint canoe-tour to Erdőfű (national park area in the neighborhood)
- Leather footballs for the school

#### Approximate size of the community that conforms the initiative

- Size of the village: ca. 1000 inhabitants
- Size of the school: 51 pupils
- Primary school with a big percentage of children with less opportunities (Roma, poverty, disabilities, etc.)



## Conditions for success

- Support through a charity event supported by a DJ and the locals
- Support by the local government, national minority government (Roma) and by the Foundation for Kölked
- Existing youth group and the community of families around

## Links to more information, materials

- [Baranyai jövőképek: közösségi költségtervezés gyerekekkel | pecsma.hu](https://pecsma.hu)
- [facebook.com/MuralMoral](https://facebook.com/MuralMoral)





# Systematising School Participatory Budgeting on a City-Level

Municipal Participatory Budgeting (PB) faces several challenges in Polish cities, including a stagnation in participant numbers and escalating criticism from local elected officials and decision-makers due to implementation issues. Amidst these difficulties, it is noteworthy that PB is thriving in schools and cultural institutions. This development raises interesting observations about the initiative's origins in Poland, as PB initially emerged from the efforts of cultural institutions. The first PB initiative in the capital of Poland originated as a pilot experiment in a cultural center in a Warsaw district, and its success served as inspiration for scaling it up into a city-wide participatory program by local authorities. Presently, PB is coming full circle, returning to its institution roots.

From the analysis of online content, it can be concluded that the first School Participatory Budgeting was implemented in 2015. It originated as a grassroots effort made by Parent Councils and Student Councils, drawing inspiration from the rising popularity of municipal PB processes in the country since 2011. They paved the way for the launch of the first comprehensive School PB process in 2015. Field of Dialogue Foundation has extensive experience in the field of participatory budgeting as their experts provide advice to institutions implementing Participatory Budgeting and train their staff. The Foundation was also responsible for implementing the first participatory budget in Warsaw in 2012 at the Śródmieście Cultural Center. In addition to that, the Foundation conducted the School Participatory Budgeting project, funded by the City of Warsaw, and has been supporting several Warsaw schools in budget implementation every year since then.

Within the Polish framework, School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) is commonly perceived as a procedure wherein the school community collectively determines the allocation of a portion of the school budget. Typically, the amount is predetermined either by the school management or parents. All constituents of the school community, encompassing students, parents, teachers, and other staff members (such as janitors), contribute ideas, formulate projects, and subsequently select those they deem most appealing and essential.

A systemic School Participatory Budgeting is one in which the implementation of school budgets is not done on an individual basis in one or two institutions within a municipality, initiated by involved school management or parents. Instead, it is a concept in which the initiative extends beyond the school (to a local non-governmental organization, municipal office, or public institution) and involves multiple institutions with a time horizon longer than a year.

For context, it's worth mentioning that our aspirations for the systemic approach are grounded in the specifics of public education management in Poland. While the authority over the curriculum lies in the hands of the central Ministry of National Education, the actual operation of schools (including their funding, development, teacher employment, and organization of extracurricular activities) is the responsibility of local governments, including cities. In the realm of developing systemic School Participatory Budgeting (SPB), innovations are already emerging from the practical experiences of cities. In the city of Poznań, the fifth largest in Poland, schools are not only encouraged to participate in School Participatory Budgeting, but municipal officials also extend financial support to cover supplementary budgets in places like Kraków and Poznań.

Additionally, Poznań provides a unified e-voting platform. Similarly, Lublin, the ninth largest city with a population of 340,000, consistently invites most municipal schools to engage in the SPB process.

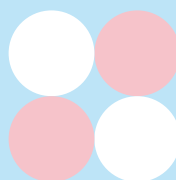
In collaboration with local non-governmental organizations, Lublin supports 20-25 schools by offering additional funds (approximately €1,500) and providing a pre-established framework. This framework allows schools considerable freedom to implement their own model, including the choice of decision-making mechanisms. The city further facilitates this process by offering support from officials, mentoring by NGOs, and hosting training workshops.

As part of our internet content analysis, we identified 23 examples that fit the definition of systemic School Participatory Budgeting:

- Mrągowo
- Lublin
- Kraków
- Poznań
- Warszawa
- Tczew Region
- Koszalin
- Opole
- Choroszcz
- Tychy
- Gdynia
- Olkusz Region
- Szczecin
- Rybnik
- Aleksandrów Kujawski
- Pszczyna
- Sopot
- Świdwin
- Jastrzębie Zdrój
- Wołomin
- Chojnice Region
- Suwałki
- Bobolice

After observing these interactions between cities and schools, and considering the organizing entity, a list of seven possible arrangements used in Poland to implement school participatory budgeting were identified:

- Parents Council;
- Student Council;
- School administrators and teachers;
- A local community organization;
- A national community organization;
- Local municipality;
- Local municipality with support from community organizations.



## Purpose of the Pilot

A key objective of Field of Dialogue was to establish a systematic approach, fostering a mindset among local decision-makers to recognize School Participatory Budgeting (PB) as a potent instrument for urban participation. This transformation is currently underway in numerous major cities in Poland, with Field of Dialogue experts actively promoting the implementation of PB in schools and providing support for various processes.

Within this project, we explored the notion that School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) can be a city-wide tool, applicable to all (or the majority) of schools in a given city. It can be managed either independently by the municipal office or with the support of non-governmental organizations. We had the opportunity to conduct a study (content analysis on the internet and mini-interviews) regarding systemic SPBs. In the next pilot phase, we organized a networking/training meeting for individuals

managing school budgets in cities. The aim was to share insights from the implementation of systemic School Participatory Budgeting (SPB) and find solutions to common challenges. Subsequently, we provided consultation hours to cities that are currently transitioning from a point-based SPB to a systemic solution - including in Lublin, Krakow, Świdwin, and Warsaw.

## **Main Challenges of Systematising School PB on a City-Level**

The systemic approach is becoming increasingly popular in Poland, to the point where it could be slowly termed a trend. However, as with any trend, challenges accompany it, and it is crucial to address them proactively to ensure the resilience of the tool:

### **Lack of political will for systemic decisions**

The reluctance to adopt systemic decisions on School Participatory Budgeting reflects a lack of commitment from political authorities to implement widespread changes. Without a clear endorsement from key decision-makers, the establishment of city-wide systemic approaches faces significant hurdles. In Poland, this stems from a low political culture more focused on winning elections than on effective city management and the well-being of the community. Additionally, participatory and educational initiatives are often considered „soft“ priorities by decision-makers, taking a backseat to infrastructure concerns.

### **Utilization of the tool for political gains**

The risk of exploiting School Participatory Budgets for political advantages undermines the genuine democratic purpose of the initiative. When the tool becomes a means for personal or political gain, it detracts from its intended function as a fair and inclusive process. Especially when implementing School Participatory Budgeting during the period leading up to elections.

### **Lack of focus on the democratic quality of the process**

Emphasizing the scale over the democratic quality of the process poses a challenge, as the success of School Participatory Budgeting should not only be measured by the number of projects but also by the depth of democratic engagement. A mere focus on quantity can compromise the integrity of the participatory process.

### **Absence of a democratic foundation in schools and a culture of participation**

The lack of a democratic foundation in schools and a prevailing culture that encourages participation hinder the effective implementation of School Participatory Budgets. Without a supportive environment, the participatory spirit may struggle to take root among students, teachers, and school staff.

## **Insufficient financial resources for larger citywide projects**

The scarcity of financial resources for expansive city-wide projects limits the potential impact of School Participatory Budgeting. The lack of funding may restrict the execution of significant initiatives that could bring about substantial improvements across multiple schools.

## **Overloading the curriculum and lack of time**

The demanding curriculum places constraints on the time available to both teachers and students, making it challenging to actively engage in additional School Participatory Budgeting projects. This time limitation may impede the quality and effectiveness of the participatory process.

## **Absence of legal frameworks supporting resilience**

Without legal foundations supporting the resilience of School Participatory Budgeting in schools, the initiative may face instability and uncertainty. Clear legal frameworks are essential to provide a stable and supportive environment for the long-term success of systemic approaches in educational institutions.

# **Main Opportunities in Response to Challenges**

Despite significant challenges, the world of systemic School Participatory Budgeting is flourishing in Poland, with an increasing number of non-governmental organizations supporting authorities in implementing such tools. Our experience from the pilot phase and the entire project, however, indicates that a multitude of opportunities is now open through School Participatory Budgeting in Poland. Below is the list of the main opportunities identified:

## **Seizing national policy change**

Taking advantage of the evolving national educational priorities in Poland, particularly with civic education gaining emphasis, provides an opportunity to encourage local authorities to adopt systemic SPB. This could involve aligning with changes in the core curriculum or advocating for guidelines promoting SPB.

## **Administrative embedding and Council support**

Ensuring the integration of systemic SPB within the administrative framework and garnering broad support from the Council is essential to prevent potential misuse by incumbent politicians. This entails creating a robust foundation for the tool's implementation.

## **Fostering democratic culture in schools**

Beyond SPB, there is an opportunity to nurture a democratic ethos within schools by promoting student self-governance, facilitating school council elections, and supporting student-led initiatives. This groundwork builds a foundation for the successful implementation of SPB.

## **Utilizing Parent Council commitment:**

Capitalizing on the commitment and financial resources of Parent Councils presents an opportunity to advance SPB development in Polish schools. Engaging with these councils can enhance the effectiveness and reach of SPB initiatives.

## **E-Learning for teacher training**

The popularity of e-learning in the training system for Polish teachers offers an opportunity to enhance their skills in coordinating SPB. Integrating SPB-focused content into e-learning programs can empower educators to effectively implement participatory budgeting.

## **Parent and school involvement in municipal PBs**

Leveraging the active participation and substantial funds in municipal PBs by parent groups and schools allows for proposing ideas and pushing for the implementation of systemic SPB. This collaborative approach encourages comprehensive SPB programs in various localities.

## **Collaboration for unconventional funding**

The power of collaboration and tapping into unconventional funds, such as partnerships between NGOs and local authorities, offers opportunities for SPB. Seeking governmental or foreign funding through joint efforts can provide additional financial support for the successful execution of SPB initiatives.



# Case study

## School Participatory Budget in Lublin

Since 2021, Lublin has been systematically supporting schools in conducting School Participatory Budgets. This involves the local government allocating additional funds for interested schools to implement the process. Additionally, they provide support with ready-made promotional materials, a series of training sessions for teachers, and mentoring for school working teams.

The first edition of SPB started in 2021, with 10 educational institutions qualifying and successfully implementing 26 winning projects. In the following school year, 20 schools participated, selecting 37 projects for implementation. In the current edition, 20 schools are also taking part, working on projects throughout the school year. Ideas proposed by students typically revolve around transforming school spaces into more colorful and welcoming areas for learning, relaxation, and leisure. Among the projects implemented so far are the purchase of a foosball table, a cybercafe installation in the school courtyard, placement of benches in a green corner near the school, and the creation of a relaxation zone.

The Foundation's team has been supporting Lublin from the beginning in implementing this systemic tool, providing advisory guidance and organizing training sessions for teachers and working teams. The city also utilizes the substantive materials developed by our team.

### Approximate size of the community that conforms the initiative

- Size of the city: 342 039 inhabitants
- 50 schools involved since 2019
- 200,000 PLN allocated for youth ideas
- several dozen projects successfully implemented.



### Conditions for success


- External funding engagement - The city has long been exploring systemic solutions in the area of SPB, but the opportunity to secure financing from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism (EEA Grants) served as a starting point for implementation. After completing the SPB cycle with external funding, the city is now prepared to allocate its municipal budget for this purpose.
- Synergy with nationwide and local organizations - The case from Lublin illustrates that the most effective actions happen through partnerships. On one hand, the city invited a nationwide organization with expertise in SPB and materials to collaborate. On the other hand, a local organization rooted in civic education provides on-site mentoring, showcasing the synergy between various entities for successful SPB implementation.

## Links to more information, materials


- <https://lublin.eu/mieszkanicy/partycypacja/szkolny-budzet-obywatelski/sbo-iii-edycja/>
- <https://lublin.eu/mieszkanicy/partycypacja/szkolny-budzet-obywatelski/aktualnosci/podsumowujemy-szkolne-budzety-obywatelskie.53.4942.1.html>







# Going Beyond School Participatory Budgeting



The first School Participatory Budgeting in the Czech Republic took place in the town of Říčany in the year 2016 in two primary schools established by the town. The city provided the schools with twenty thousand crowns for the children's ideas. From the schools in Říčany, the idea of School Participatory Budgeting quickly spread throughout the country.


School PBs are growing in popularity in the Czech Republic and are happening in primary schools in larger and smaller towns. Region-supported school participatory budgets in secondary schools is not a common practice, but it exists, for example, in the South Moravian Region. There is no direct and systematic link to other youth-focused activities, but there are possible collaborations for example with school parliaments.

A great support for the implementation of school participatory budgeting is the Školní péběčko app provided by Decision21. This application offers the school coordinator a precise methodology for implementing a school participatory budget in his/her school, consultation and, if necessary, training of coordinators. However, this is not necessary in most cases. The app includes a website for the school participatory budgeting in a given school. On the website, children can view the projects and vote online. The results are available immediately after the voting is closed. The results can then wait for the official announcement or be automatically sent out via email. However, the process is not purely online as there is the campaign phase that happens before the voting. During this stage pupils present their projects to explain them to their classmates and convince them to vote for it. This part plays an important role because young people learn not only technical but also soft communication skills.

After the expansion of the methodology of school participatory budgets, repeated implementation has proved successful. After several iterations, the question arose as to what the next step should be and where the methodology can grow. Kutna Hora became a pioneer in taking it a step further by involving young people in a delivery of the participatory budgeting process of the city. When the Kutna Hora City Council decided to introduce a participatory budget with which it had no experience, it encountered several problems. The city had to come up with a Participatory Budgeting proposal that they would be able to handle in a sustainable fashion. They found that they did not have enough capacity for this process, but they recognised an opportunity in active school parliaments, experiences of School PB and decided to put young people in a leadership role by creating a youth-led project team for this process.

This project team had four members. The youngest was a ninth grade student in primary school, the oldest was a fourth grade student in high school. Every week students had two-hour training and consultation sessions where they learned what participatory budgeting, project management, facilitation are. Even though they have received support from city hall and external experts, they have managed to successfully deliver a lot of activities such as creation and management of a website, communication on social media, facilitating online meetings, and acting as a liaison between public project proponents and officials.

Youth participation is a relatively new sector in the Czech Republic, but we see continuous innovation and are looking forward to mainstreaming them across the country, Visegrad region, and beyond.





## Purpose of the Pilot

We believe that beyond traditional subjects like math and language, it's crucial for children to learn how to express their opinions, engage in dialogue, participate actively, and contribute as citizens. In practice, this involves informal education tied to real-life situations in their surroundings.

School participatory budgeting serves as a great method for children to actively shape their school environment and develop those skills. Through this process, participants learn how to propose, develop, present, and vote on their own projects. However, it's vital to broaden this impact and involve youth in a wider context. In our pilot initiative, we seek sustainable ways to enhance youth participation and empowerment at the city level. We believe that School Participatory Budgeting is a stepping stone to a broader youth-led participation.

This principle guided our pilot project, „Lepší Odolka“ and the outcomes indicate that young people are driven to be active participants and facilitators of school and city-wide processes and that the needs and perspectives of children and youth closely align with those of adults.

## Main challenges of Switch from School to the Broader Participation of Young People



Despite the Czech Republic proving to be a fairly favorable environment for school based participation and gradual move towards a broader empowerment of young people, certain barriers remain:

### **The willingness of the city hall to do it**

This point highlights a fundamental challenge in moving from school-based initiatives to broader youth involvement. Without the support and commitment of the city hall, efforts to expand participation may face resistance or lack of resources. Building an alliance between the city hall's goals and the objectives of youth engagement initiatives is crucial for the success of youth participation on a broader scale.

### **Adherence to strict cycles: election and budgetary**

Transitioning from school-based projects to city-wide involvement requires navigating established electoral and budgetary processes. Adhering to these cycles while still accommodating the specific schedules of young participants poses a significant logistical challenge. Flexibility in scheduling and coordination is necessary to ensure smooth integration into existing city procedures.

### **Cooperation with school, city hall and children - specific time limits of young people and therefore a need to adapt the project/process**

Balancing the interests and time availability of schools, city hall, and youth is a complex challenge. Young people often have limited time due to school commitments and extracurricular activities. Adapting project timelines and processes to accommodate these time constraints while maintaining effective collaboration among all parties requires careful planning and communication.

## **Finding the right team also making sure it's not just the “best students”**

Selecting an inclusive and diverse team is crucial for ensuring broad representation and meaningful engagement. Relying solely on school performance may overlook valuable perspectives and talents among youth. Finding a balance between school achievement and diverse skill sets is essential for creating an effective and inclusive team.

## **Retaining the team and capturing their attention**

Engaging young volunteers without compensation presents challenges in maintaining their commitment and interest over time. Factors such as the transition to online learning, time management, and tracking progress add complexity to the retention process. Providing meaningful incentives, mentorship, and support structures can help mitigate these challenges.

## **Need for resources**

Securing the necessary resources, including human and financial, is essential for the successful implementation of youth engagement initiatives. This includes support from city hall staff or external experts to oversee the project and provide guidance. Additionally, funding is required for team expenses, expert assistance, and project implementation.

## **Legal limitations for payment of young people under the age of 15 based on the Czech Labor code**

Legal constraints, such as limitations on paying children under the age of 15, present additional challenges in resource allocation and compensation. Overcoming these barriers may require innovative solutions or alternative forms of support to ensure equitable participation and recognition of young people's contributions.

## **Main Opportunities in Response to Challenges**

Despite the existing challenges and barriers, our research, pilot project, and experiences in the Czech Republic and beyond have led us to identifying the following opportunities and actions that can help alleviate the barriers and move forward with not just creating Participatory Budgeting in schools but also taking a next step forward in youth-led participation on a higher level. Below is the list of the main opportunities identified:

### **Cooperation with School Parliaments**

Reach out to schools where student parliaments exist and are active. Collaborate with them to enhance their understanding of participation and its importance. Offer support and resources to help them effectively engage in civic processes and advocate for a launch of School PB and broader youth-led participatory processes.

## **Awareness Raising and Advocacy Events**

Organize events in collaboration with the city hall to raise awareness about the significance of youth participation. Advocate for the inclusion of youth voices in decision-making processes. Educate both youth and city officials on the value that youth engagement brings to the community.

## **Teaching and Providing Tools**

Provide educational sessions to those who are unaware of the importance of participation and are not familiar with the tools available. Use these sessions to convince them of the benefits and relevance of youth involvement in civic affairs and to explain the practical sides of launching youth engagement initiatives: from necessary resources to step-by-step breakdown of a process. Where relevant, share already existing resources.

## **Support for Existing Initiatives**

Collaborate closely with government officials, institutions, organizations, and individuals who already prioritize participation. Offer support and assistance to strengthen their efforts in fostering youth engagement.

## **Non-partisan Approach**

Ensure that youth participation is perceived as a non-partisan issue. Emphasize the importance of inclusivity and representation from diverse backgrounds and ideologies.

## **Cooperation with Teacher Associations**

Engage with teacher associations to promote the integration of participation into educational curricula. Work together to empower educators with the knowledge and resources to encourage student involvement in civic activities.

## **Leveraging Electoral Cycles**

Prior to elections, advocate for youth participation to be included in the political agenda. This way not only politicians can pledge their commitment but they can also encourage their counterparts to take a more active stance. It can also serve as a vehicle to educate the broader public. After elections, provide orientation sessions for newly elected officials to emphasize the importance of youth engagement and hold them accountable for their commitments.



# Case study

## Lepší Odolka (Better Odolka)

### Odolena Voda, Czech Republic

In cooperation with the city leadership and Participation Factory, a unique project was created to involve primary school pupils in a participatory process at the city level.

The first part of the project was a school participatory budget at a local primary school, which involved a team of young coordinators aged 12 - 15 years made up of pupils from the school. The young coordinators helped, for example, with the promotion and communication of the school participatory budgeting.

For two months, the young coordinators had weekly online training sessions with experts from the Participation Factory, where they learned, among other things, how to plan participatory processes, work with digital tools, create and evaluate a survey, facilitate a public meeting, and develop a communication strategy. Since facilitation plays an important role in the participatory process, Participation Factory experts invited a youth team to learn it by practice during an in-person project day.

After a theoretical introduction, the young coordinators tried out several icebreakers and participatory methods, and in the second half of the project day, the school parliament joined in. It was the first focus group of the planned youth-oriented participatory process within a Lepší Odolka project.

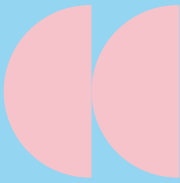
The second focus group was focused on the primary school pupils. Representatives of all second grade classes participated in a workshop led by the youth coordinators with the support of their trainers. Participating students were able to express what they like and wish to see improved in their city and recorded their specific suggestions on a map.

The third part of the project was an online public survey focusing on the needs of local residents and youth. The questionnaire survey was prepared in cooperation with the trainers and the youth coordinators. In order to ensure the wider reach of the survey, one of the youth coordinators created the poster and led a social media campaign around the project.

The results of the processes are going to be passed to the local government and used for designing a more youth-inclusive city environment.

### Approximate size of the community that conforms the initiative

- Size of the city: 6,136 inhabitants
- Size of the school involved: 935 pupils
- 5 student participation coordinators



## Conditions for success

- Close cooperation with the city leadership, which was aware of the positive impact of involving youth in the participatory process
- The course was a hybrid - students could easily sign up for the lessons and attend them online, while at the same time they could practice everything during the face-to-face meetings

## Links to more information, materials

- <https://participationfactory.com/primary-school-students-as-participation-coordinators-it-is-possible/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=700210895556090&set=a.419173076993208>



# Conclusions

As seen in the course of our project and through thorough review of the respective contexts in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, implementation of School Participatory Budgeting largely depends on a current political climate and a local will to support these initiatives. It makes these processes either easy or almost impossible to implement due to the lack of funding, know-how and space or a wrong attitude of possible organizers, supporters, and implementers for these participatory efforts.

Yet, we observe a gradual growth of School Participatory Budgeting from launching a first School PB to moving towards a broader youth engagement as countries such as Poland and the Czech Republic also had to start from creating a space for this form of youth engagement and finding non-state sources of funding and borrow know-how and methods from elsewhere.

At the moment, each context poses a unique set of challenges, yet previous and current experiences from one can greatly benefit actors from another country and help them find a creative solution to a local problem. Focusing on overcoming challenges by adopting existing best practices and leveraging existing opportunities can help you move forward with establishing your very first School PB and working on gradually systematizing it on the city level and using it as a foundation for further youth-focused and youth-led activities.

Practically, advocacy for development of School PB should focus on building strong relationships with possible allies whether state or non-state actors, increasing a general level of understanding about the value of School PB as an instrument of practical learning and improvement of a school ecosystem, providing positive examples from simple contexts to illustrate how it works in practice among skeptics, and, if needed, finding creative ways to fund or implement, for example, through leveraging existing youth participation mechanisms such as school parliaments or utilizing avenues outside of schools such as libraries and extracurricular classes.

All the cases explored in this project and report, highlight the importance of awareness raising, advocacy events, and providing educational tools to stakeholders involved in participatory processes. This includes engaging with school parliaments, cooperating with teacher associations, and leveraging existing initiatives to strengthen youth involvement.

The Czech case, in particular, underscores the need for a non-partisan approach, cooperation with city hall, and collaboration with young coordinators as facilitators of participatory processes. Additionally, there is an opportunity to integrate participation into educational curricula and leverage electoral cycles for advocacy.

In conclusion, while challenges exist, the successes and opportunities identified in these initiatives provide a roadmap for the successful implementation and expansion of School Participatory Budgeting and broader youth participation. Learning from these experiences can inform future initiatives seeking to empower youth and enhance civic engagement.

# Main opportunities for scaling up School Participatory Budgeting



## 1. Creating the Space for School Participatory Budgeting:

Cooperation with progressive educators and youth parliaments, building alliances, and exploring alternative budget making models



## 2. Systematising School Participatory Budgeting on a city-level:

Showcasing the benefits of SPB implementation to policymakers; seeking external funding to launch a systematic approach



## 3. School Participatory Budgeting and Beyond:

Showcasing the benefits of SPB implementation to policymakers; seeking external funding to launch a systematic approach

# Suggested Reading

If you want to learn more about School PB you can find useful materials here:

## Participatory Budgeting: Pupils Create Their School

**Organizations:**

D21

**Content:**

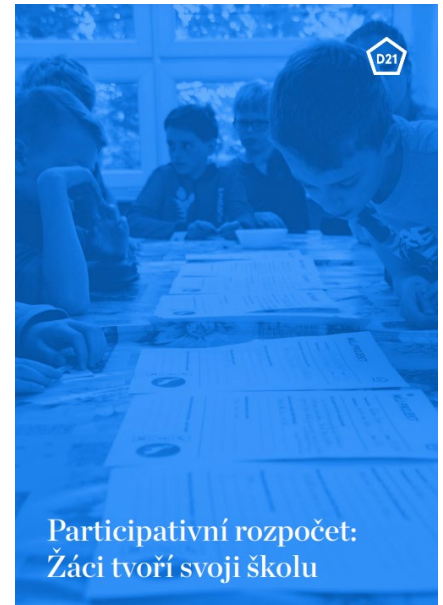
Manual for schools to implement school participatory budgeting

**Language:**

Czech

**Link:**

<https://1url.cz/duXQw>



## Every School is Different - Participatory Budgets in Schools

**Organizations:**

Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic

**Content:**

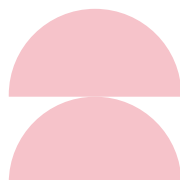
Manual for school participatory budgets

**Language:**

Slovak

**Link:**

<https://1url.cz/GuXQf>





# School Participatory Budgeting: A Toolkit for Inclusive Practice

**Organizations:**

Center for the Future Arizona, Arizona State University

**Content:**

Toolkit presenting 5 good practices

**Language:**

English

**Link:**

[CFA PB Toolkit-2020-10-22-v2.pdf - Google Drive](#)

## School Participatory Budgeting: A Toolkit for Inclusive Practice



Tara Bartlett, Madison Rock, Daniel Schugurensky, and Kristi Tate  
Center for the Future of Arizona & Participatory Governance Initiative 2020



# Budget of Students

**Organizations:**

Alternative Communities Association, K-Monitor

**Content:**

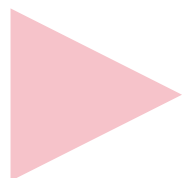
This manual is presenting the process of the first school PB in Hungary.

**Language:**

Hungarian

**Link:**

[Diákok költségvetése - bemutató kiadvány \(1\).pdf - Google Drive](#)



# Budget of students

**Organizations:**

Alternative Communities Association, K-Monitor

**Content:**

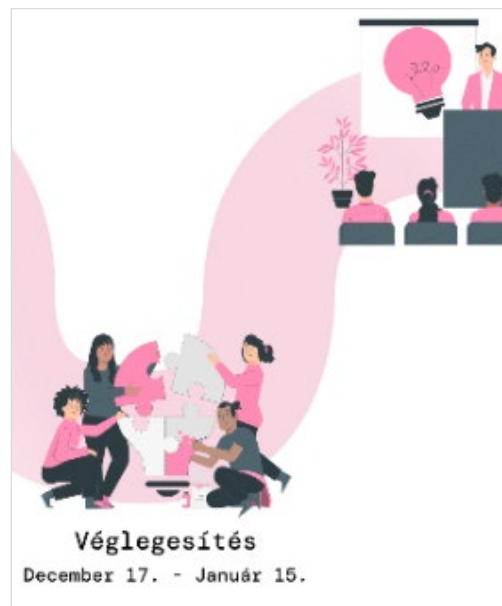
Video about the first school PB in Hungary

**Language:**

Hungarian

**Link:**

[Diákok költségvetése \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



# Do it Yourself

**Organizations:**

Fundacja Laboratorium Badań i Działań Społecznych „SocLab”, Fundacja Pole Dialogu, Shared Future, Community Places, Medialab UGR, Universidad De Granada

**Content:**

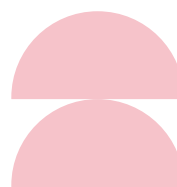
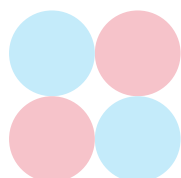
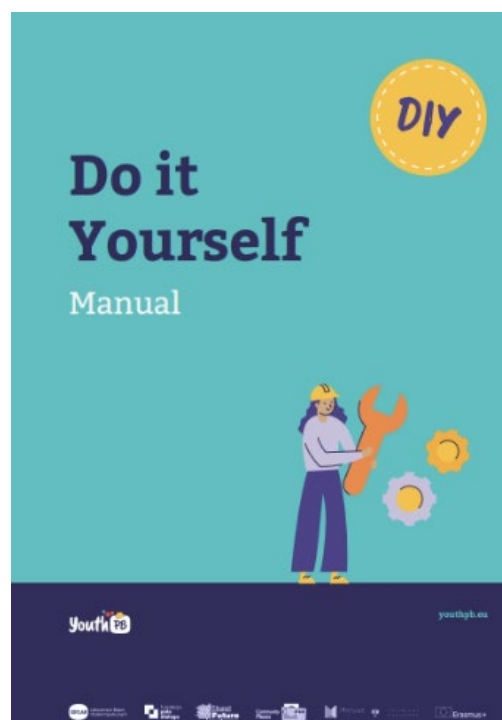
Manual about how to start school or youth PB

**Language:**

English

**Link:**

[Do It Yourself - Manual - Youth PB](https://www.youthpb.eu/)



# School Participatory Budget Tips for Beginners

## Organizations:

The Field of Dialogue Foundation, Shipyard Foundation

## Content:

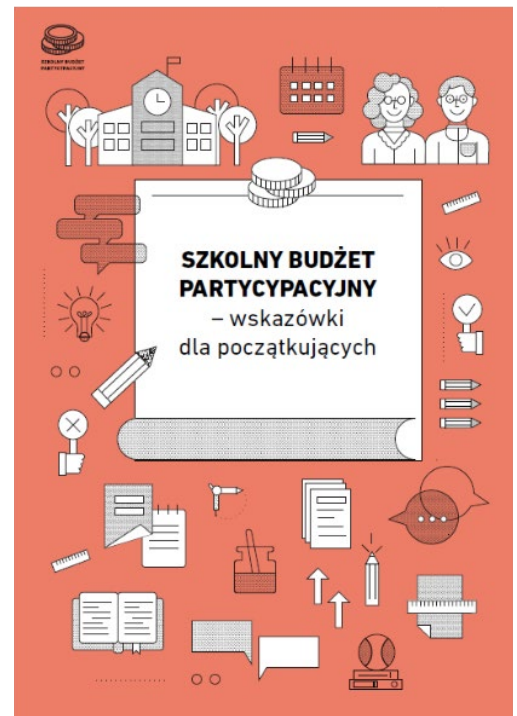
Step-by-step guide on conducting School Participatory Budget. Material intended for teachers or school working teams. It also includes ready-made templates for tools such as an evaluation meeting script or a voting card.

## Language:

Polish

## Link:

[Szkolny budżet partycypacyjny – wskazówki dla początkujących](#)



# School Participatory Budget The Opportunity for Deliberation in Schools

## Organizations:

The Field of Dialogue Foundation

## Content:

In the brochure, we provide guidelines for the implementation of the deliberative model of School Participatory Budget. It serves as an alternative to the referendum-based model described in a previous publication.

## Language:

Polish

## Link:

[Szkolny Budżet Obywatelski – o szansie na deliberację w szkole](#)



# Authors and Acknowledgements

The report is produced by a collective of authors from partner organizations:

- Lenka Sebkova, Karel Kolar, Katya Petrikevich from Participation Factory;
- Agnes Molnar and Agnes Toth from Alternative Communities Association;
- Mateusz Wojcieszak from The Field of Dialogue Foundation.

We are grateful for the support of our teams along the way, the sponsorship provided by the Visegrad Fund, and the invaluable knowledge that has been generated by the youth participation experts in our region and beyond prior to this project.

We extend our special thanks to Prague 7 and Kutna Hora city hall and youth representatives, all the participants of our respective local workshops, and the members of our local communities excited for an increase in quantity and quality of youth engagement.

## Partners

**PARTICIPATION  
FACTORY** 

 fundacja  
**pole  
dialogu**

 **Alternatív  
Közösségek  
Egyesülete**

## Funded by

 **Visegrad Fund**