



# Budgeting Process to Promote Public Engagement

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# Session Overview

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- What is public engagement?
- When developing the budget...
  - ✓ Why does public engagement matter?
  - ✓ What kind of public engagement works best?
- What make for good (or better) public engagement?
- Are there any organizations doing it well?

# Typical Budget Process

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# Budget Hearing: City of Cincinnati, Ohio

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# What is Public Engagement?

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- Broad term describing ways stakeholders may become more informed (and perhaps influence) public decisions
  - ✓ Information & outreach
  - ✓ Consultation
  - ✓ Participation & deliberation
- Sometimes called:
  - ✓ Community or Civic Engagement
  - ✓ Community Consultation
  - ✓ Public Involvement

# Public Engagement Benefits

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**Creates  
Awareness**

**Enhances  
Accountability**

**Expands  
Representation**

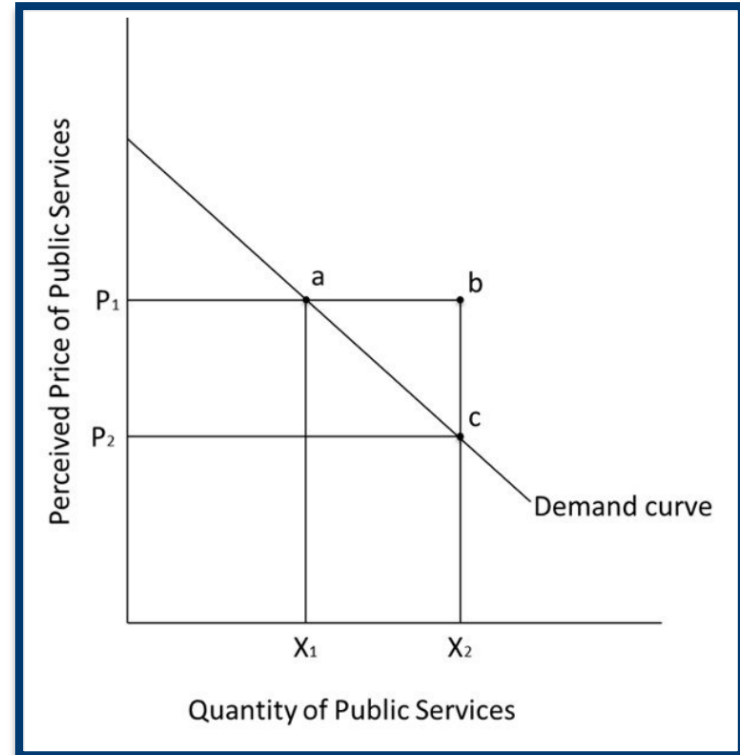
**Heightens  
Responsiveness**

**Improves  
Transparency**

**Cultivates  
Trust**

# Public Engagement Benefits, Continued

- What happens if the public does not understand...
  - ✓ Cost?
  - ✓ Market?
  - ✓ Regulations?
- Public engagement helps create reasonable demand for services



# Public Engagement Risks

- When done poorly, it may...
  - ✓ Create cynicism
  - ✓ Squander resources
  - ✓ Waste time
  - ✓ Cause backlash





# Public Engagement Risks, Continued...

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- The Citizens League found that Truth-in-Taxation alone...
  - ✓ Discouraged engagement
  - ✓ Created frustration
  - ✓ Lacked context
  - ✓ Limited feedback
- Truth-in-Taxation wasn't designed to be “default... [or] dominant process for citizen engagement”



“Lower my taxes!”

“Don’t fix my road!”

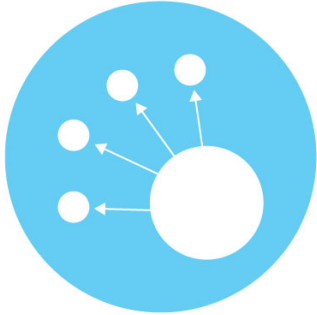
“Goats, not mowers!”

“Improve my park!”

**Involving the  
Community in the  
Budget Process...**

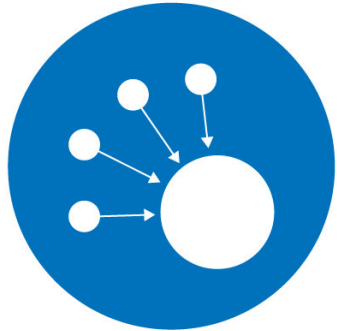
# Levels of Public Engagement

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY + PUBLIC IMPACT



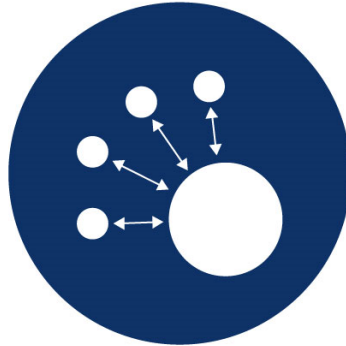
## INFORM

provide balanced, objective info that the public should know and act on



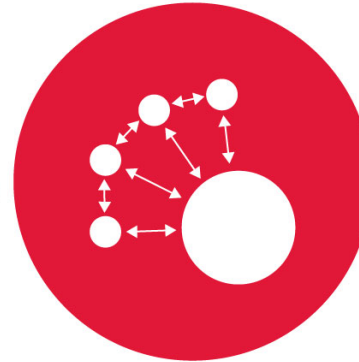
## CONSULT

obtain and consider feedback or input on issues, ideas and decisions



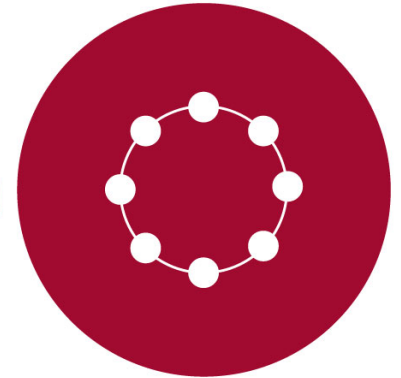
## INVOLVE

work with the public to understand issues and problems + include them in identifying options for moving forward



## COLLABORATE

partner with the public, seeking advice and innovations that become embedded as much as possible in decisions



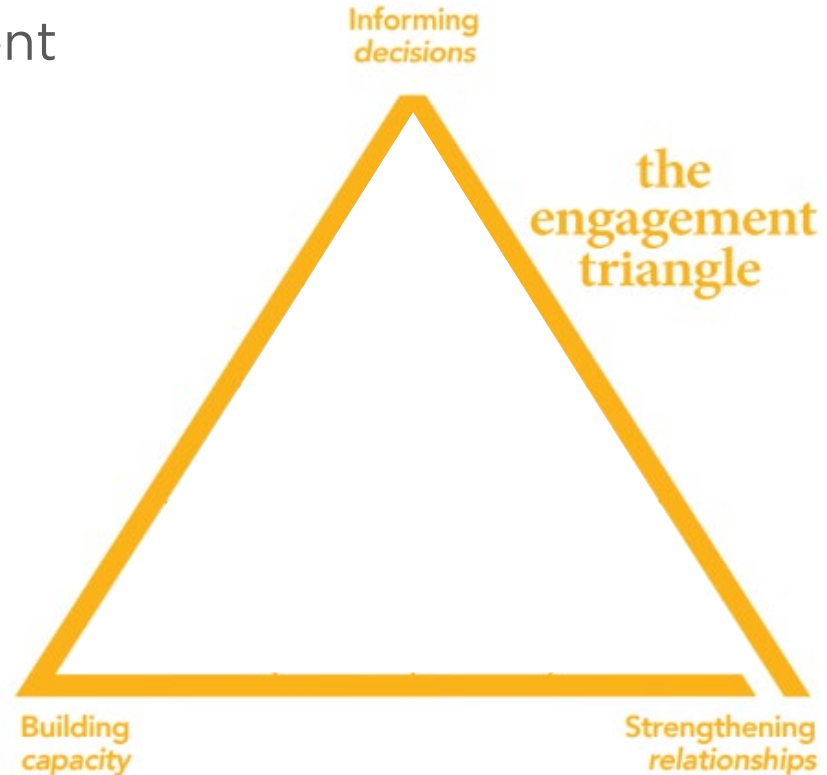
## EMPOWER

final decisions are made by the public, who are one of the players implementing those decisions

# What Are You Trying to Accomplish?

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- Through public engagement are you attempting to...
  - ✓ Promote participation?
  - ✓ Educate the public?
  - ✓ Build or improve partnerships?
- The answers to these questions should change your strategy



# Communicating Budget Impact

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- Be honest and transparent
- Provide background and education
- Keep it simple and relatable
- Use visuals



# Communicating Budget Impact

## Arlington, Texas

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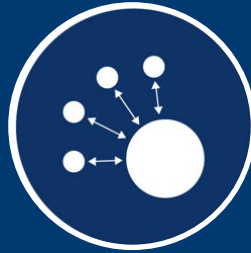
# Types of Public Engagement



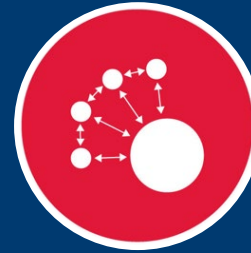
Newsletter  
Website



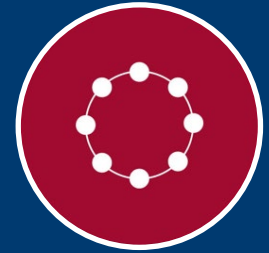
Open House  
Public  
Hearing  
Survey



Charrette  
Workshop



Advisory  
Commission  
Taskforce



Participatory  
Budgeting  
Referendum



# Which Type Works Best?

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## No single best way!

- Any public engagement effort should be tailored to the community
- When picking a strategy, consider...
  - ✓ Issue
  - ✓ Time & resources
  - ✓ Political & senior leadership
  - ✓ Consultants
  - ✓ Communications & feedback
  - ✓ Participants



# What else to think about?

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Be prepared to...

Promote  
problem solving

Respond to  
public emotion

Provide  
accessibility

Evaluate the  
effort

Be authentic

# Newsletters

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- Types
  - ✓ Quarterly publications
  - ✓ Budget-in-brief
- Strengths & weaknesses
  - + Broad reach
  - + Tailored to desired input
  - Little feedback
  - Decision passed



# Newsletters, Continued...

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## Strategies for Success

- Visually appealing
- Factual & easy to comprehend
- Focusing on areas of public interest
- Providing it early in the process
- Using it as a tool to inform on other opportunities to provide input

# Surveys

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- Types
  - ✓ Statistically significant
  - ✓ Non-statistically significant
- Strengths & weaknesses
  - + Potential to reach many residents
  - + Variety of opinions
  - Limited responses
  - Focused opinions



# Surveys, Continued...

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- Strategies for success
  - ✓ Be statistically significant
  - ✓ Use multiple media (mail, online, phone)
  - ✓ Incorporate facts & not just questions (current cost of services)
  - ✓ Choose the right questions (what are you trying to accomplish?)



# Workshops



- Types
  - ✓ Charrette
  - ✓ Workshops
- Strengths & weaknesses
  - + Opportunity to discuss opinions
  - + Chance to receive desired input
  - Limited attendance
  - Multiple meetings

# Workshops, Continued...

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- Strategies for success
  - ✓ Time it appropriately
  - ✓ Set up the room correctly
  - ✓ Combine other engagement tools (newsletters and surveys)
  - ✓ Include the right staff

# Boards & Commissions

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- Types
  - ✓ Advisory committees
  - ✓ Taskforces
- Strengths & weaknesses
  - + Help shape initiatives
  - + Voices in the community
  - + Use their expertise & education
  - Have a primary focus

**Agenda - Approved**  
**FINANCE COMMITTEE**

*Consider: Who benefits? Who is burdened?  
Who does not have a voice at the table?  
How can policymakers mitigate unintended consequences?*



# Boards & Commissions, Continued...

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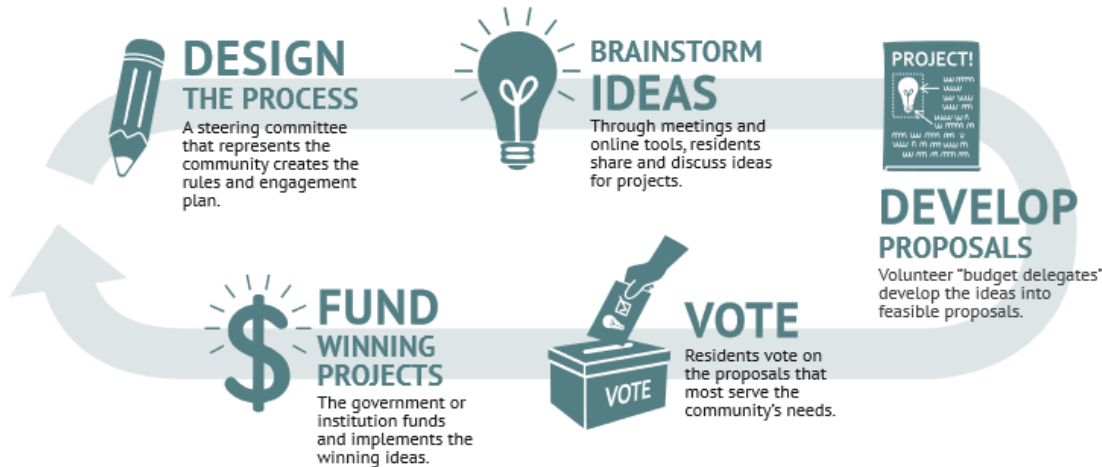
- Strategies for success
  - ✓ Pick the right participants
  - ✓ Assess community needs
  - ✓ Gather input from a cross-section of the community
  - ✓ Communicate with staff who deliver local services
  - ✓ Formulate budget needs



# Participatory Budgeting

- Types
  - ✓ Advisory
  - ✓ Decisive

- Strengths & Weaknesses
  - + Explore ideas & themes
  - + Works with groups & individuals
  - Time-consuming
  - Complicated

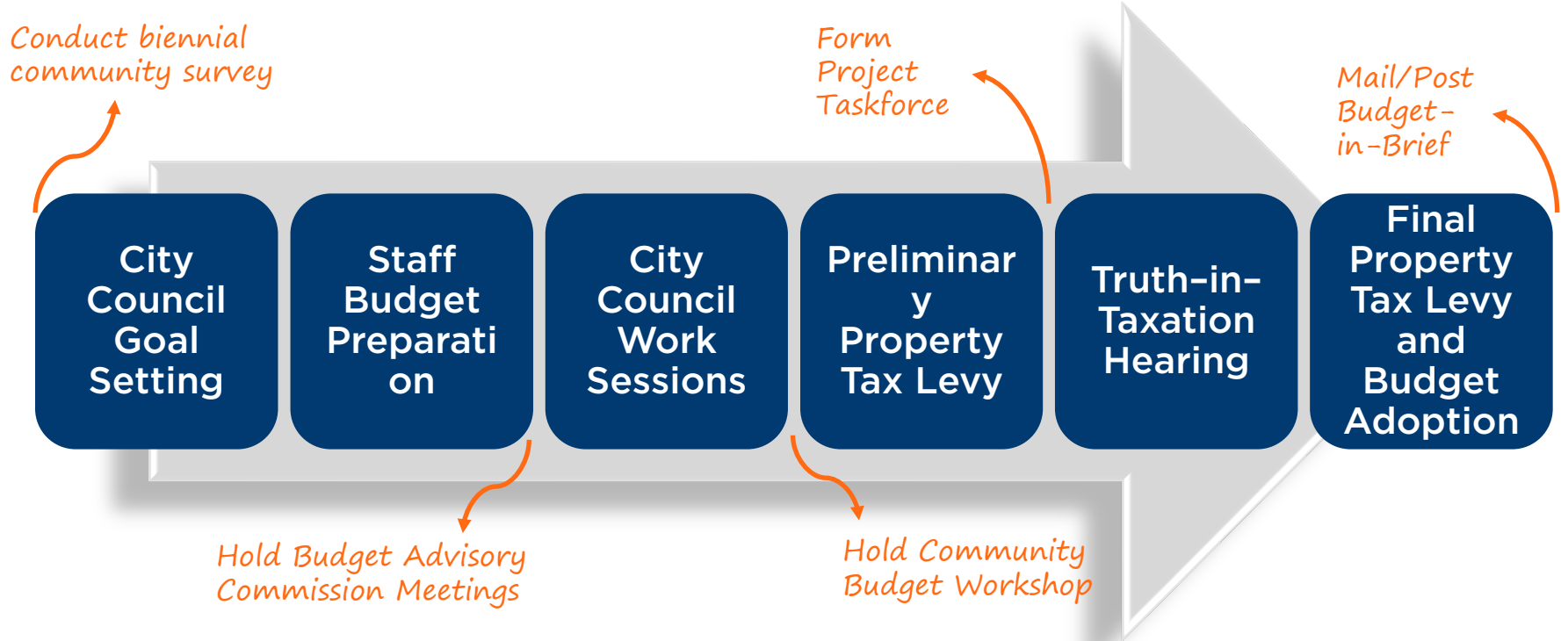


# Participatory Budgeting

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- Strategies for success
  - ✓ Use the advisory type
  - ✓ Communicate the process, rules & timeline
  - ✓ Educate participants about the budget & funding sources
  - ✓ Leverage a hybrid format for meetings
  - ✓ Employ a “shopping basket” form of voting
  - ✓ Give participants at least 30 days to vote

# Revised Budget Process



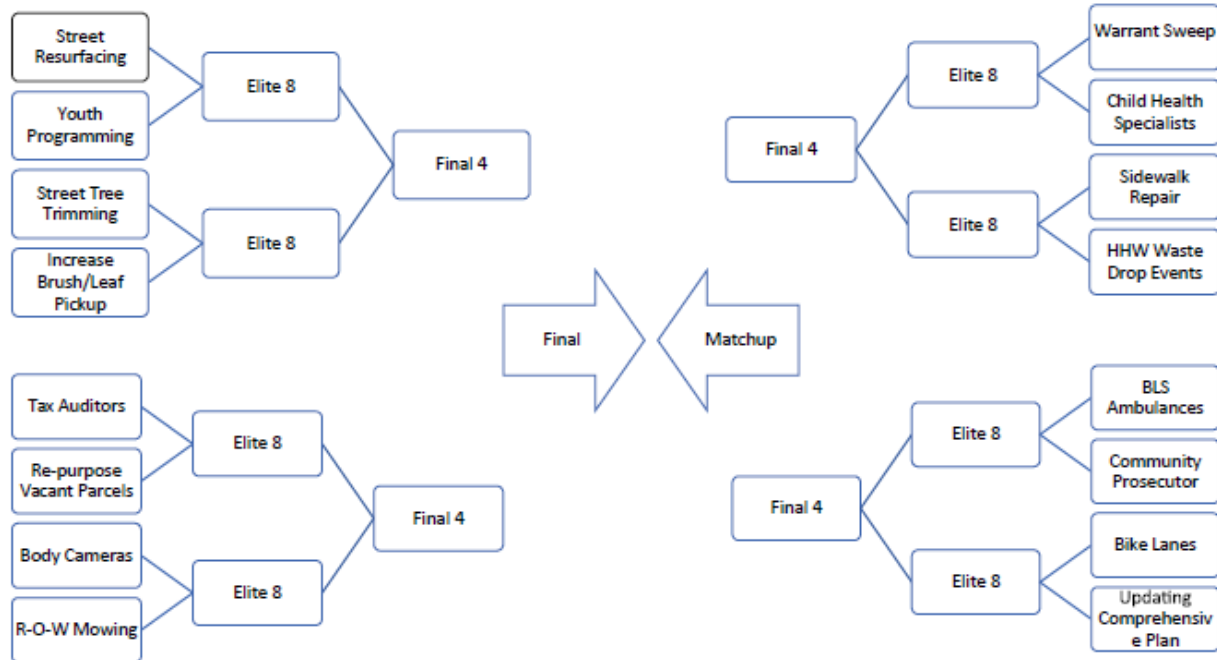
# Example: Kansas City, Missouri

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- Engaging residents
  - ✓ City Website, Twitter, Facebook, NextDoor
  - ✓ Resident work sessions & focus groups
- Online transparency tools to educate & inform
  - ✓ Open Data KC: data access portal
  - ✓ Open Budget: interactive tool
  - ✓ Pick your priority
  - ✓ Online budget simulation

# Example: Kansas City, Missouri

## Pick Your Priority



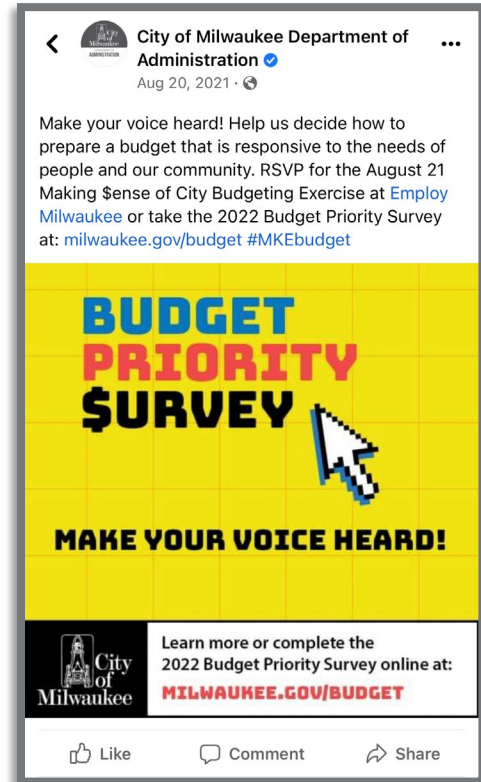
# Example: Kansas City, Missouri

- Results
  - ✓ 100+ residents participated in focus groups
  - ✓ Restored funding
  - ✓ Creation of new programs/initiatives
- Lessons learned
  - ✓ Start slow & think realistically
  - ✓ Align policies & tools with government's strategies, planning



# Example: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

- Mayor proclaimed first-ever “Budget Awareness Week”
- Included budget-themed events:
  - ✓ Virtual Budget Hearings
  - ✓ “Making \$ense of City Budgeting Exercise”
  - ✓ American Rescue Plan Webinar
  - ✓ Budget Priority Survey Challenge
- City provided webpage with budget resources in four languages





# Example: Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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- Lessons learned
  - ✓ Be creative
  - ✓ Provide information in multiple forums & formats
  - ✓ Provide tools for community partners (e.g., media kit)
  - ✓ Build on & around required events
  - ✓ Include elected & senior leadership



Always remember...

**What I hear when I'm being yelled at  
is people caring loudly at me.**

# Let's Talk!

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