

# **DEMOCRACY BEYOND ELECTIONS**

**CASE STUDIES ON EXPANDING  
DEMOCRACY BEYOND ELECTIONS  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **WHY DEMOCRACY BEYOND ELECTIONS?**



## ***Democracy Beyond Elections is an emerging collaborative campaign to win structural democracy reforms that deepen participatory democracy and civic engagement, beyond and between elections.***

What follows is an exploration of structural democracy reforms beyond elections in four locations worldwide — Ireland, Scotland, Madrid and New York City — to provide a framework for what is possible across the United States and set the stage for collaboration. Our current system of governance privileges the interests of the elite few over the needs of the majority, which fuels deep polarization and undermines support for public programs. In fact, 80% of Americans don't trust the government, and just 19% say that

government is run for the benefit of all. And yet, most responses to this systemic crisis in democracy — efforts to boost voter turnout and elect new people — are confined within our dysfunctional political process.

We need to invest in new models of participatory democratic governance to foster meaningful engagement within our communities, develop solutions to public problems, and decide together. A growing movement of political leaders and

reformers around the world are already turning to participatory democracy to make government more responsive, transparent, and equitable. It is our hope that through a deep study, consideration, and discussion of leading models of participatory democracy, we can learn together and build more ways to expand democracy beyond elections.

While there are many other examples of successful participatory democracy initiatives, these were chosen because they provide a spread of jurisdiction level (municipal and national), are located in developed countries with relatively high levels of social and economic inequality and showcase a variety of approaches to participatory democracy.



# CASE STUDIES

## ***Next is a summary of the expansion of democracy beyond elections in each of the four cases.***

A more extensive analysis of the strategies, actors, mechanisms, outcomes and takeaways is included in the full report and accompanying appendices.

### **Ireland**

National Government, Pop. 4.84 million  
*Processes Implemented:* Citizen Assembly/Jury, leading to referendum on key policy issues.

### **Scotland**

National Government, Pop. 5.4 million  
*Processes Implemented:* Package of legislation promoting community empowerment. National commitment to mainstream participatory budgeting within local budgets.

### **Madrid (Spain)**

Municipal Government, Pop. 3.2 million  
*Processes Implemented:* Decide Madrid: Citiwide program with range of Participatory Democracy initiatives.

### **New York City (United States)**

Municipal Government, Pop. 8.4 million  
*Processes Implemented:* Participatory budgeting, Civic Engagement Commission established within Mayor's office.

# IRELAND

In 2016-18, the Irish government instituted a deliberative “Citizen Assembly.” This consisted of 99 randomly selected Irish citizens who were intended to represent the of the general public.

The participants attended ten weekendlong sessions, over a period of a year to learn from experts, deliberate, and make recommendations for a set of five issues pre-selected by the Irish Parliament.

The Assembly’s recommendation on abortion led to a referendum with historically high turn-out where the

Irish people voted to change the constitution to legalize abortion, an issue that has divided Ireland and been caught in political gridlock for decades.



# SCOTLAND

In 2016, the Scottish Parliament passed the Community Empowerment Act as a part of a decade long strategy to improve governance strengthen local democracy. This 11-part national legislation aims to give communities more say in the decisions that affect them. It provides new rights for community bodies and places new duties on public authorities. Some examples include granting community bodies a legal right to make a request to participate in improving the outcome of a public service and to make a request to use public land or buildings.

While not directly included in the legislation, participatory budgeting has been at the heart of Scotland's community empowerment agenda and an important mechanism to deliver the objectives of the Community Empowerment Act. It has spread to over 200 processes across Scotland in the past five years and the national and local governments entered into an agreement to "mainstream PB" or allocate 1% of each local budget for Participatory Budgeting.



# MADRID

Decide Madrid is a comprehensive civic participation program and online platform created in 2015 and implemented by Madrid's Mayor and City Council. The program is overseen by the Department for Citizen Participation, Transparency, and Open Government and has four main functions: proposals and votes for new local laws, debates, participatory budgeting, and consultations.

To date, several major infrastructure projects have been designed using Decide Madrid and two proposals, initiated by citizens, have been voted on by the public and transformed into public policy by the City

Council. Madrid has also allocated 100 million Euros per year for participatory budgeting, including 70 million for local projects and 30 million for citywide project.





# NEW YORK CITY

Participatory Budgeting in New York City (PBNYC) started in 2011 in four city council districts. It is now in its 9th cycle with over half (31) of the City Council running a PB process in their district and with a centralized office within the City Council overseeing the process. PB processes are also held in public schools across New York City.

In 2018, the Mayor called for and appointed a Charter Review Commission to review the entire City Charter with the broad mandate of making democracy reforms. The Commission proposed changes to the Charter; held hearings and

consultations with the public to get input on proposals; and revised proposals based on input from the public. As a result, three questions were put on the ballot for voters in NYC during the 2018 elections focused on campaign finance, civic engagement and community boards and all measures were passed by voters.

Following the passage of the ballot measures, a nine-person Civic Engagement Commission (CEC) was formed in 2019 to be embedded within the Mayor's office. The CEC is charged with developing and implementing initiatives, and



partnering with public and private entities, to support and encourage all New Yorkers to meaningfully participate in civic life. Setting up a citywide participatory budgeting process by 2020 is one of the core initiatives of the CEC.

# LESSONS LEARNED



*The following are key takeaways from the case studies and should be considered by those that are pushing for expansion of participatory democracy*

1

**ENSURE FROM THE BEGINNING THAT THE DESIGN OF A PARTICIPATORY PROCESS IS ITSELF PARTICIPATORY.**

Multiple stakeholders from diverse backgrounds should be involved in the design and resources and technical expertise to implement the initiative should in place.

The careful design and selection of participants for the Irish Citizen

Assembly as well as the collaborative design process of PBNYC helped legitimize the processes.

2

**LEVERAGE MOMENTS OF POLITICAL CHANGE TO PUSH FOR PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

In several of the case studies, we saw that political change or crisis presents an opportunity to advocate for democratic reform

within government institutions. This is apparent in Scotland with the Independence Referendum, in Ireland and Madrid with the economic crisis and in New York with the election of a new progressive Mayor and the aftermath of the election of Trump.

In these cases, an interest from government in expanding democracy was transformed into participatory democracy initiatives through organizing, advocacy and communications work by non-governmental actors.

3

**SECURE BUY-IN FROM A DIVERSE SET OF CHAMPIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

Secure buy-in from a diverse set of champions and stakeholders within and outside government: It is important to find champions within government that represent a diverse set of constituencies and political ideologies to prevent the process from becoming pigeonholed as belonging to one party or population.

This was seen in PBNYC with the four council members (3 democrats and 1 republican) who initiated PB and who represented four very different constituencies. The Irish case also saw intentional advocacy for the deliberative assemblies targeted across the political spectrum.

4

## **MAKE RESEARCH, DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION A**

## **CORE COMPONENT**

Make research, documentation and evaluation a core component of any process and ensure that researchers center the values of community participation: This requires identifying a research partner that understands the goals of the process, is respected by government officials, can conduct a rigorous evaluation and present data in a clear and accessible way.

5

## **USE PILOT PROCESS AND RESEARCH TO ESTABLISH A "PROOF OF CONCEPT"**

that can be used to educate and build upon to expand participatory democracy. This was seen in

Scotland with the evaluation of various aspects of the Community Empowerment Act and in New York City with regular evaluations of PB which were then used as a tool to advocate for expansion. In Ireland, a pilot process of a deliberative mini-public and the resulting research created the foundation for the process to be institutionalized within government.

6

## **CAST A WIDE NET TO TEST OUT A VARIETY OF APPROACHES TO PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY**

Several of the case studies showcased a variety of types of participatory democracy that were run simultaneously. In Madrid, Decide



Madrid offers a range of approaches to participation while Scotland also offered a menu of reforms through the Community Empowerment Act. Over time, these approaches can be evaluated and tweaked based on what is working and what is not.

## **7 CREATE A MIX OF FACE TO FACE AND DIGITAL APPROACHES**

While innovations in technology present new and exciting opportunities to expand participatory democracy, face to face interaction is still critical. Digital tools can be inaccessible to some populations and do not always allow for quality deliberation or the ability to build relationships and power. Face to face

approaches can also be helpful to identify and develop new leaders.

## **8 BUILD NETWORKS AND SHARE BEST PRACTICES**

For each case study, those pushing for participatory processes built networks of practitioners, academics, community members and government officials to provide technical expertise, capacity and share ideas towards expansion. These actors were also intentional about building relationships with people from other cities and countries to learn from their experience.

## **9 FOCUS RESOURCES ON OUTREACH**

## **AND ENGAGEMENT OF COMMUNITIES THAT ARE TRADITIONALLY EXCLUDED FROM DECISION-MAKING.**

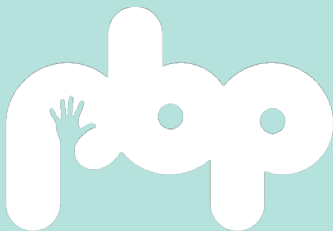
This will help to ensure participation beyond the usual suspects and will promote equity.

## **10 IMPLEMENTATION IS KEY**

Once the expansion in participatory democracy is won, there must be the resources to implement and evaluate the plan. Space must be made to improve the process based on feedback.







# PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING PROJECT

Booklet designed by Hester Tittmann of Rabbit  
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Research and text prepared by Alexa Kasdan.

For more information about the Democracy  
Beyond Elections Campaign please go to  
[participatorybudgeting.org/dbe](http://participatorybudgeting.org/dbe)