



Breaking down barriers on the path to democracy

Democracy offers the promise of a good life for all of us, no matter our race or background. That promise comes to life when we all can participate. That can be voting, going to a school board meeting, rallying for issues you care about, calling elected leaders, or finding other ways to show up.

Unfortunately, a few brazen politicians believe they should be able to rig the rules to favor themselves and their corporate donors, and to avoid being accountable to us - the people. For democracy to work, it must include all of us. Regardless of our political affiliation we can act to ensure our government works for the people.

The freedom to have a say in the decisions that impact our lives is important. While the pathway forward may look different for each community, all people deserve a say. It's that spirit of freedom that's guiding the coalition Participatory Budgeting Cleveland (PB CLE). PB CLE is a coalition of residents and grassroots groups who are making sure all people, no matter where they live or what they look like, have a say in our government. In the last century, Cleveland offered opportunity for people of all backgrounds. But some politicians and their corporate backers pit Clevelanders against each other based on where we're from and what we look like. They stoked racial fear, so we'd look the other way while they took our resources for themselves through unfair loans and government kickbacks. With PB Cle, we have a chance to come together to build a new future for Cleveland, where all people can share in the progress and prosperity. We can do that again and remove barriers to achieve more full participation. The residents of Cleveland understand best what they need to recover from the COVID crisis. Last year in Cleveland, 30.8% of residents experienced poverty. That's why we want residents to decide how to spend \$30.8 million the \$512 million Cleveland is receiving through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Participatory budgeting provides a hands-on approach to democracy where residents share ideas, develop proposals for projects, discuss their ideas in community, vote on which projects will be supported, monitor their progress, and then share those learnings before embarking on another budget cycle. It offers neighbors a space to build shared understanding of how our local budgeting process works and the problems we can solve together. You can [learn more from the Participatory Budgeting Project](#) and review ideas on [the American Rescue Plan from Democracy Beyond Elections](#).

Working with our political leaders, we can build stronger, healthier neighborhoods across Cleveland, together. When there are more ways for all of us to be included and participate in government, we'll do better to deliver for communities who've historically been excluded from participation. The American Rescue Plan provides us a great opportunity to center the people and communities most directly impacted by COVID. We can break down barriers that have kept us divided and create a Cleveland that works for all of us. When we come to the table and better understand our shared challenges, we'll take a giant step forward toward a city where we can all thrive.

Follow **PB CLE** on **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram** to learn how to get involved. Check out policymattersohio.org/CleForAll for updates on Cleveland coalitions who are helping make the most of the **American Rescue Plan**.