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Participatory Budgeting and Civic Tech: The Revival of Citizen Engagement (Georgetown Digital Shorts)

Hollie Russon Gilman

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In a time when citizens are deeply dissatisfied with the basic institutions and elected officials that govern them, the participatory budgeting movement empowers citizens to get results for pressing community needs. It creates a transparent process where citizens can propose projects through traditional community meetings or use civic technologies to provide input online, work with elected officials to craft budget proposals, and vote on where and how to spend public funds. Unlike other forms of civic engagement, participatory budgeting involves spending real public money on the priorities that the community identifies.

In this brief work, Hollie Russon Gilman explains the history and concepts of participatory budgeting. First used abroad, participatory budgeting has been piloted in Chicago, New York City, Boston, and several other cities across the United States since 2009. She relates participatory budgeting to other forms of civic innovation and proposes ways for new digital tools to increase entry points for civic engagement. This brief and accessible work is an ideal introduction to participatory budgeting for students, scholars, and practitioners.

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