CMTYENGA 3A03 Winter 2023 - The Art of Change
Proposed Improvements to Making Hamilton's Budget Process More Accessible
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Lydia Pedersen, Megan Marsh, Jeffrey Sun, Chandini Ranganathan, Juliana Wadie

Summary: This is a comprehensive document that outlines a specific issue that Hamilton Community Benefits Network (HCBN) would like to overcome—improving accessibility to Hamilton's budgeting process. Currently residents do not have adequate access and awareness surrounding the City of Hamilton budget process. This document will outline what the current issue is, what the city is currently doing, the challenges faced by the group, and opportunities to address the issue.

Meet the Group - Who is the HCBN?

- The HCBN is a not-for-profit organization, which consists of representatives from the Hamilton Building Trade, the Immigrant Working Centre, Hamilton Food Share and other organizations.
- The HCBN works to envision and plan for an inclusive Hamilton where residents have equitable opportunity to contribute to a healthy community.[1]
- HCBN's organizational goals: promote economic inclusion, distinguish justice from charity, ensure economic justice, ensure commitment and accountability from all when creating community benefits agreements (CBAs).[2]

What is the Problem? Currently, there is a lack of community accessibility and understanding of the municipal budgeting process, resulting in low engagement. This leads to inadequate communication between community groups and government systems.

Goal: The HCBN is working towards making Hamilton's budget process more accessible and comprehendible to residents. We intend on providing simplified and purposeful information to residents aged 18 to 55 years old to enhance their understanding and engagement in the Hamilton community budgeting process. The project is aimed at answering: how can the HCBN make the City of Hamilton's budgeting process more accessible and demystified to the identified target population?

Background and Current Context: The HCBN was created in 2017.[2] However, community benefits agreements (CBAs), originated in the late 90s in the United States.[3] CBAs were created in order to give residents a voice in how the city's money should be spent during times of economic struggles.[4] This allowed for promoting inclusivity and opening the door to the opinions of the residents.[4] It wasn't until 2010 that CBAs started to be used in Canada when the Olympic village was being built in Vancouver.[4] A CBA was first used in Ontario when Regent Park was planning to undergo re-development.[4] Most recently, HCBN hopes to use CBA as a tool to engage more of the public in deciding how much money should be spent in which context during the budgeting process.[4] In 2020,

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[1] https://hcbn.ca/foundation-principles
[2] https://hcbn.weebly.com/
[3] https://hcbn.ca/about-community-benefits
[4] https://hcbn.ca/

HCBN partnered with the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion (HCCI) in order to focus on community engagement by focusing on improving resident engagement in City of Hamilton budgeting processes.[4]

In recent years, there have been more organized efforts to increase engagement from members in the Hamilton community to participate in the budgeting process. For instance:

- As part of the Just Recovery Hamilton Coalition, HCBN has co-hosted many training sessions helping members of the community understand the budgeting and delegation process of the municipal government.[4]
- Additionally, Just Recovery Hamilton encourages members of the community to attend delegation meetings to apply the skills they have trained them in.[4]
- Unexpectedly, the COVID-19 pandemic also made delegation meetings more accessible to the municipality as they have been moved to Zoom. This removed many transportation and geographic barriers for residents to attend these meetings, facilitating greater participation and representation of the community.[4]

Challenges Faced: While educating the community on delegation and budgeting is achievable, the main challenge lies in encouraging residents to participate in delegation. Delegation requires time, energy, and resources, and residents are unlikely to engage with the government if there is no foreseeable benefit from their efforts. This is especially difficult considering the inadequate transparency from the government to share any information and encourage community members to delegate at meetings where the City's budget is being deliberated. **Specific challenges include:**
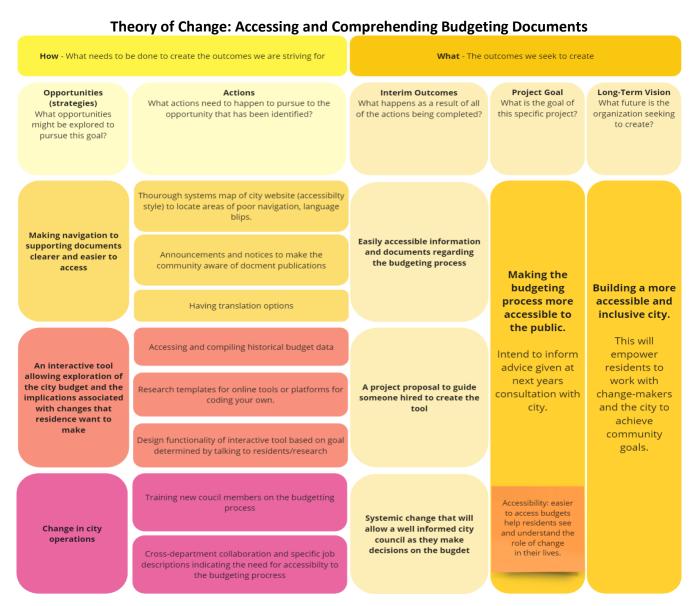
- While the municipal government has technically made these meetings accessible to the public, there is no genuine effort to engage the community in a large capacity and make decision-making processes more representative of local needs.[4] Local residents are only able to delegate the budget on two days every year.[4]
- Information on budgeting is convoluted and is indigestible to most residents.[4] The numbers do not carry tangible meaning. Complex political processes and jargon make any reported information difficult to understand and make meaningful use of.[4]
- Municipal budgeting documents are technical containing information on multiple accounts, expenses, and funds that total over 500 pages.[4] Additionally, the process is complex and hard to understand without technical background knowledge.[4]
- Budget consultation with residents is often done after most decisions have already been made, creating little opportunity for residents to truly influence the operations of the city.
- Additionally, only 5 minutes are given to each community member who is offered the opportunity to speak at these meetings.[4]

Opportunity for Change – Identifying Leverage Points: The first point we identified in the system to leverage is enhancing information flows, which entails making the budgeting process more accessible to our target population.[5] We will do so by enhancing the quality of information presented to make it more comprehendible. The second leverage point identified is to shift the mindsets of Hamilton city counsellors by encouraging them to make the budgeting process more accessible through outlining its

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[5] http://radicalteacher.com/uploads/MeadowsIntroOne.pdf

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significance.[5] Changing their mindset would empower city counsellors to take the proposed steps to ensure the budget is accessible for everyone.[5]

The following pages show a theory of change graphic identifying the overall goal and identified opportunities for change along with accompanying action steps. The different colours group different kinds of opportunities. They tend to fall within the leverage points specified above. To carry out these actions we would need to engage in conversations with city staff, change the way the city is currently delivering information, and improve methods of communication between residents and the city, as well as city to city communication. These opportunities have shifted since the community dialogue. After having a conversation, our group realized the main goal is to eliminate the resistance from community partners and city council to create change. It was evident during the discussion that the information to create change is there but not being actively used or is looked over. Therefore, in learning this, Karl Andrus (HCBN) and our group are enthusiastically providing the city with a comprehensive document, including actions, recommendations, and lessons.

Theory of Change: Accessing and Comprehending Budgeting Documents

How - What needs to be done to create the outcomes we are striving for		What - The outcomes we seek to create		
Opportunities (strategies) What opportunities might be explored to pursue this goal?	**Actions** What actions need to happen to pursue to the opportunity that has been identified?	**Interim Outcomes** What happens as a result of all of the actions being completed?	**Project Goal** What is the goal of this specific project?	**Long-Term Vision** What future is the organization seeking to create?
Making navigation to supporting documents clearer and easier to access	Thourough systems map of city website (accessibilty style) to locate areas of poor navigation, language blips.	**Easily accessible information and documents regarding the budgeting process**	**Making the budgeting process more accessible to the public.** Intend to inform advice given at next years consultation with city.	**Building a more accessible and inclusive city.** This will empower residents to work with change-makers and the city to achieve community goals.
	Announcements and notices to make the community aware of docment publications			
	Having translation options			
An interactive tool allowing exploration of the city budget and the implications associated with changes that residence want to make	Accessing and compiling historical budget data	**A project proposal to guide someone hired to create the tool**		
	Research templates for online tools or platforms for coding your own.			
	Design functionality of interactive tool based on goal determined by talking to residents/research			
Change in city operations	Training new coucil members on the budgetting process	**Systemic change that will allow a well informed city council as they make decisions on the budget**	Accessibility: easier to access budgets help residents see and understand the role of change in their lives.	
	Cross-department collaboration and specific job descriptions indicating the need for accessibilty to the budgeting procress			

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Consult other cities and organizations	Research Progress TO and Horizons Ottawa	Understand the scope of budget inaccessibility through different perspectives (local residents, change agents, experts)	**Making the budgeting process more accessible to the public.** Intend to inform advice given at next years consultation with city.	**Building a more accessible and inclusive city.** This will empower residents to work with change-makers and the city to achieve community goals.
	Research other cities budgets and initiatives and how their budgets are portrayed			
Advising municipal government to consult lay audiences and residents	Increasing frequency of delegation and other forms of communication between the municipal government and the residents	Identification of challenges in understanding/accessing budget process		
	Inquiring about resident perspectives; simply asking others how they do or would want to access budgeting information			
	Focus groups and other means of interviews/surveys			
Improving communication with the public; making information more attainable	City or NGO publish an easy to follow How-To instruction package/document outlining how to access and engage with the budget as a resident	Concise, easy-to-understand documents and graphics for local residents to understand the city budgeting process		
	In order to prevent fake news and information overload, city compose abstract summary document citing the official authority documents to make quantity manageable and maintain validity.		Accessibility: easier to access budgets help residents see and understand the role of change in their lives.	
	Dissecting what communication municipality has already published to seek improvements, look into using different media outlets for outreach			
Different methods of data portrayal/translation	Creating infographs, charts and graphs to representing what community members are particularly interested in addressing.			
	Translating documents to layman's term and including analogies to enhance the level of comprehension			

Stakeholder Engagement Recommendations: Based on our explorations this term and aligned with the details within the theory of change outlined on previous pages, this section of the art of change proposal focuses on the proposed stakeholders that HCBN might engage with on this work going forward. It also notes 3 principles of community engagement that are critical to consider, framing how these principles might be applied as this work advances.

Stakeholders to Engage: Based on our discussions and background research to develop a theory of change for this project, we have identified the following individuals and organizations as key stakeholders to engage with going forward. Each stakeholder recommendation also includes a sentence or two that provides details (where relevant) on how the stakeholder might engage with this work.

- **City of Hamilton:** Given the City's is in charge of the budgeting process; they should be engaged in making the budgeting process more accessible and understandable.
- **Dave Heidebrecht (McMaster University):** Dave's work is focused on community engagement and educating students on the fundamentals of change. He could bring insights that relate to interacting Hamilton residents on educating them on the budgeting process.
- **Hamilton Community Benefits Network (HCBN):** A Hamilton-based organization working to ensure that Hamilton residents receive the promised benefits from city-based projects. As HCBN is the organization that brought up the issue of inaccessibility and the lack of comprehension of the Hamilton city budgeting process, consulting them will be beneficial to create a solution.
- **Balancing Act:** A simulation-based engagement tool for budgeting that is used by many municipalities across the world.[6] This tool can be used by council members and Hamilton residents in order to create hypothetical budgets that can be presented as alternatives.[7]
- **Engage Hamilton:** An organization that allows residents to share their opinions on city initiatives. This can be a great way to collect data on the resident's current understanding of the budgeting process in Hamilton.[8]
- **Strong Towns:** A Canada and USA based organization that is dedicated to educating and garnering attention through social media on ways for residents to collaborate with their municipal governments to develop a more financially strong and resilient cities.[9]
- **Progress TO:** A Toronto based organization that advocates and organizes for a progressive city.[10] They run educational workshops to engages the community on the City of Toronto's budgeting process and directs them on what they can do to push for the changes the residents want to see in the city.[11]
- **Horizons Ottawa:** This organization helps develop economically progressive priorities that Ottawa can use to create an inclusive city where everyone can thrive.[12] This organization has experience helping residents educate themselves on the budgeting process and how to bring up budget-related issues with their city council.[12]

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[6] https://abalancingact.com/customers
[7] https://abalancingact.com/
[8] https://engage.hamilton.ca/
[9] https://www.strongtowns.org/about
[10] https://www.progresstoronto.ca/our-story
[11] https://www.progresstoronto.ca/
[12] https://www.horizonottawa.ca/about

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Principles of Community Engagement: As HCBN moves this work forward with the above stakeholders and others, the following principles of community engagement will be important in guiding any collaborative efforts:

- **Relationships:** Municipal budgeting is a very complex and subjective process to interpret as it relies on the experiences of people to be evaluated. Therefore, in order to identify weaknesses in the municipal budgeting system, HCBN must form strong relationships with other community partners and residents of Hamilton. This means respecting their time with quick responses over email and organizing plans for meetings in advance so that they are informed. During discussions, relationships are maintained by having introductions to build rapport. It is also important to give everyone the opportunity to speak if they wish. HCBN should also acknowledge that different residents may be unfamiliar engaging in this work and should be welcomed so they feel more comfortable stating their opinions
- **Equity:** As change-makers, our social positions are different from those in the Hamilton community. Therefore, different perspectives must be considered by HCBN when proposing change, as doing so will allow their work to be more equitable and benefit populations of interest. This means identifying populations that are underserved and unhappy with the municipal budgeting system. Reaching out to these residents via organizations they already interact with will help them feel more comfortable sharing the diverse opinions needed to make equitable change.
- **Openness to Learning:** Differing perspectives by the City of Hamilton and HCBN during our discussions reveal how there is not necessarily one truth about the municipal budgeting process. To make change that is truly conducive to the attitudes of residents and institutions, HCBN must be open to seeking perspectives they are unfamiliar with. One important goal would be to have conversations with the city council, even if they disagree with fundamental issues. It is important to realize that the city holds the authority to make the budgeting process more accessible. Therefore, being open to understand the city's perspective will be important in proposing solutions that both parties can agree on.

2023 Action Recommendations: Reflecting action recommendations directly outlined in the theory of change in pursuit of making the budgeting process more accessible to the public. This will be done by creating a how-to-kit, researching more on what other cities or municipalities are doing, and using media to spread the word on the budgeting process amongst other actions. The goal of this section is to give HCBN and the other stakeholders clear next steps to advance this work in the coming months. It breaks these actions down into short-term (1-2 month), medium-term (3-6 month), and long-term (6-12 month) actions as follows:

Short-Term Actions (April 1 to May 31 2023)
- **Create how-to kit:** Create a document with accessible language for the public that breaks down what the residents' roles are. Essentially, this document would be a how-to kit publicly published with step-by-step instructions on how to get involved, contacts, and resources. This document will also entail how their contributions are meaningful and informative during upcoming meetings on the budget process.

- **Connect with other municipalities:** Reach out to other cities and municipalities to observe their take on how they make the budgeting process more accessible to the public. Reaching out would also entail researching strategies on engaging the public such as interviewing the public.
- **Promote public awareness:** Use media and other venues to create awareness on the budgeting process. Gaining resident's attention to participate can also increase engagement.
- **Powerpoint presentation with findings:** Create a PowerPoint presentation describing some of our actions for Karl to present to city counsellors.

Medium-Term Actions (June 1 to September 30 2023)
- **Recommend training for new councillors:** Advise the city to establish a formal training module on the budget for new counsellors. This will help orient the counsellors on how the budget process works, acquaint them with scale of impact different decisions hold and the importance of engaging the public.
- **Explore means of engagement:** Determine preferred communication methods between the city and residents. Find out how residents prefer to be reached, where they would like announcements and updates posted, and improve communication channels so feedback does not get lost internally from community engagement. Examples include Facebook, twitter, Instagram, snapchat etc.

Long-Term Actions (October 1 2023 to March 31 2024)
- **Change public meeting structure**: The city adds public budget delegations to the Budget General Issues Committee meetings while maintaining the 2 general budget delegation days. This allows for timely, relevant input from the public to be incorporated throughout the process instead of hearing from the residents months after the issues were discussed. As the GIC meetings are schedule during typical work hours the general budget delegation meeting should be scheduled outside of typical work hours increasing their accessibility to residents who cannot attend the GIC meetings due to work so their voices can still be heard.
- **Publish community-oriented summary alongside the official budget document**: Create and publish an easy-to-read summary style document supplementary to the official budget document. Citing the official document reduces suspicions of fake news. It shall include important abstracts, easily digestible graphics, key stats, notable changes from the previous year so if someone did not want to read the entire budget, they could read this summary and understand the key decisions and main points.
- **Delegate ensuring budget accessibility to a specific job position**: By assigning the responsibility to a city staff member it will not be overlooked and once written into the job description even when there is an employee turnover the responsibility will not be lost.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned & Recommendations for Future Students
Over the course of this project, and as part of the broader Art of Change course, our team learned that communication and planning are important aspects to create meaningful change through the collaboration with our community partner, Karl Andrus. This concluding page frames both some of the most significant learnings from this process that will stick with us in future change efforts and

collaborations, and also includes recommendations we would make for students pursuing collaborative Art of Change projects in the future.

Lessons Learned

- The most important lesson we learned is communication in the group. As people with different skills and educational backgrounds, we needed to ensure that our work was a fair representation of all of us. This meant allowing everyone to speak, encouraging others to participate if they have not, and using everyone's input in the decision-making process. While many of us had disagreements with each other, we learned to compromise and be open to learning about other's perspectives. In the process, we have learned to value different opinions, even if we do not agree with them at the start.
- Being adaptable in the moment was also another key lesson learned from this group project. Specifically, during the dialogue, it was important to be adaptable when the conversation started to divert. This meant trying to re-focus the conversation to where it needed to be in order to stay on track and obtain the information we needed. On a separate note, it was also essential for us to be adaptable as a group to any feedback that was provided by Karl and implementing it accordingly to fill in any gaps.
- Our community dialogue taught us about planning and facilitation. Next time we would start planning the dialogue sooner so we can carefully think about who we want to speak to and invite them. Our dialogue was city staff heavy and although that shone light on certain challenges there were things we wanted to learn about how residents access the budget that we couldn't learn from them. We would prepare in advance by either inviting different people or changing the scope of our questions to match the audience. For facilitating narrowing the scope of the questions would allow a more insightful and directed conversation to unfold. We struggled to evenly balance speaking time between stakeholders so learning conversationalist strategies for that would be helpful.
- The implementation of this project outside of the classroom has many moving parts and stakeholders. The system is more complex than an academic teacher-student setting. Compared to what we are used to, it is trickier to balance all the different components. More diligence and collaboration is required. We also saw a glimpse of the scope and how the law of inertia applies to creating change. To create change it takes a lot of effort to get the ball rolling. Thinking to the amount of work and mental space this project took while its outcome is a mere proposal that the city council may or may not listen to. If they do, the work of implementing the actions still must be done and that won't be a simple process. This provides us with a realistic idea of what is required to do this sort of work going forward so we aren't discouraged but know what we are signing up for.

Recommendations for Future Students

- It is very important for future students picking an engaging topic to them. Have more student input in deciding what the topic will be. The interest that is displayed by the student for the topic is crucial in determining how enjoyable the project will be. Having the students input early on in this process will ensure that students have more time to become well versed in the issue at hand before starting the project.

- Our group highly recommends planning your semester ahead of time. This is important for your group and community partner, as everyone is busy. By creating an idea of when you will meet with your group, complete tasks, and create agendas for community partner meetings is important, so the team can be as prepared as possible. Creating an individual schedule and group schedule, allows for group members to stay on task, prioritize group work, and understand everyone's place in the course and semester. Coordinating a group of five is often not the easiest task, planning ahead always makes it easier. People have different expectations, work ethic, and principles when it comes to work, so it is important to outline these at the beginning as well. For example, some people leave things to the last minute, while others complete tasks right away. Having a conversation about these things are important at the beginning to achieve success. This ties into our next recommendation, as throughout the semester students will be meeting with community partners, classmates and influential individuals.
- As a note passed on from our community partner, it would be nice to start interacting with the students earlier in the semester to become acquainted with each other and the collaborate more choosing the issue to be investigated later. This gives a little more opportunity for relationship building. An early introduction would also be nice so the students can keep their topic in mind as they learn the theoretical portion of the course. Learning the bulk of the theory before working on the project set us up for success. It also gives time to do a little bit more background research into the issue.