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Is Participatory Budgeting Coming to a Local Government Near You?

Amid an influx of billions of federal dollars, some think the tool may see an uptick in use.

Welcome back to Route Fifty's Public Finance Update! I'm Elizabeth Daigneau, subbing in for our Public Finance guru Liz Farmer while she's on vacation, and this week, I'm writing about participatory budgeting.

It's far from a new idea, and you've probably been reading about it for years, but participatory budgeting has slowly been growing since it was first introduced in the U.S. in Chicago in 2009. Many anticipate it is about to see a boom as billions of federal dollars continue to pour into local communities.

For the uninitiated, participatory budgeting is a tool that encourages citizens to decide how a portion of taxpayer money should be spent. It has been utilized by school districts in Arizona and Central Falls, R.I.; counties such as King County, Washington; and countless cities. It started in Brazil in 1989, and to date, roughly 7,000 cities around the world have used the tool, including 29 here in the U.S. where residents have collectively allocated $386 million, according to the nonprofit Participatory Budgeting Project.

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