

# Equity in Local Budgets Reading List

## Who is this reading list for?

This reading list is created for advocates, organizers and anyone who wants to get involved in their city or county budget processes in California. The information and resources in this list provide an overview on how local budget works, the impact of recent federal COVID-19 relief dollars locally, and actionable steps for the reader to make demands for more racially equitable, transparent and accountable use of local resources.

## Why are local budgets so personal and why do we care?

### • People Power for Public Health:

- The murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and many others brought light to a national racial reckoning that put local budgets in the spotlight. The underinvestment in public health combined with the overinvestment in police, jails, prisons and other parts of the criminal legal systems has led to environments that disproportionately harm communities of color. [CPEHN's People Power for Public Health report](#) uplifts the theory of change that communities of color know exactly what they need to live in thriving and healthy neighborhoods and deserve the power to fund their own community solutions. *(Estimated Reading Time: 47 minutes)*

### • Centering the people through participatory budgeting:

- Advancement Project California's "[Budgeting for Justice: Participatory Budgeting as a Means of Advancing Racial Equity in California](#)" brief provides an overview of participatory budgeting through a racial equity lens. The brief summarizes various ways policy can put communities of color at disadvantage including turning racial biases into disparities, marginalizing working-class and low-income people, racial disparities in political power and the adoption of need-and color-blind policies. It states that participatory budgeting allows residents to participate directly in budget-decision making, with the aim of democratizing decision-making and allocating resources to marginalized communities. *(Estimated Reading Time: 40 minutes)*

### • Looking at local budgets with an abolitionist framework

- Interrupting Criminalization's "[#DefundPolice Toolkit: Concrete Steps Toward Divestment from Policing & Investment in Community Safety](#)" provides us with ten actions we can take to defund police and reduce the scope, power, and legitimacy of policing, and ultimately, move these resources into our communities to fund things like housing, quality health care for all, education, and other public institutions that make our communities safer. *(Estimated Reading Time: 25 minutes)*
- Vera's "[How to Use Budget Advocacy to Drive Justice Reform](#)" fact sheet provides practical strategies for analyzing budgets as well as a number of strategies to take action around budget advocacy. As they cover, the infusion of federal recovery funds under the American Rescue Plan into state and local governments makes budget advocacy especially important. *(Estimated Reading Time: 7 minutes)*

- [What's next: Safer and More Just Communities without Policing](#) via Community Resource Hub, a collaborative document put together and edited by Mariame Kaba, lays out a path towards a police-free future. It identifies ten major steps for a new model of public safety, answers some commonly asked questions and doubts that come up when thinking of a world without police, and provides existing examples of institutions that are already doing the work of creating real safety in many cities and communities across the country. *(Estimated Reading Time: 50 minutes)*
- **Connecting mutual aid with local budgets**
  - We included Dean Spade's ["Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival"](#) for its powerful analysis of our current crisis conditions and its compelling argument for the need to expand mutual aid strategies. As Spade argues, mutual aid is a way for: (1) everyday people to meet each other's most basic needs for survival, and (2) to mobilize and build large-scale movements for social transformation. As with local budget advocacy work, one of the aims of mutual aid is resource reallocation to meet the needs of those most marginalized and this is a brief introduction into how to do that work, why it's so necessary, and some potential pitfalls and challenges. *(Estimated Reading Time: 32 minutes)*

## Learning Local Budget Basics

- Advancement Project's ["Funding Racial Justice – Local Budget Basics Guide"](#) covers the local budget basics, including a breakdown of who funds which services (e.g., the county pays for the sheriff and jails), an overview of the budget structure, and an introductory look at the timeline for a budget. *(Estimated Reading Time: 5 minutes)*
- California Budget and Policy Center's ["Guide to the County Budget Process"](#) provides a comprehensive overview of the county budget process and details how Californians can engage with their local decision-makers to advocate for budget allocations that reflect residents' values and priorities. While a large portion of the county budget reflects state and federal priorities, county budgets also direct part of their budget to local priorities, where local budget advocacy can play a larger role. *(Estimated Reading Time: 20 minutes)*
- Strong Town's ["A How-To Guide for Making Sense of Your City's Budget"](#) includes a video which lays out how to break down the intricacies of a budget, including where to get started with your budgetary investigation, and how to find information to understand where funding is being allocated in your city. *(Estimated Reading & Viewing time: Hour and 10 minutes)*

## Reimagining Local Budget Making during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- **Leveraging American Rescue Plan Act Fiscal Relief Funds towards more equitable local budget processes**
  - During the pandemic, local governments including counties and cities across the country received \$350 billion direct fiscal relief funds from the U.S. Treasury under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to respond to the ongoing COVID-19 public health emergency. These dollars present critical opportunities for local governments to not just bolster COVID-19 responses and strengthen their public health infrastructure, but also address systemic racism and amend community relationships and trust with Black, Indigenous, immigrants and other Communities of Color. Through its official guidance, the U.S. Department of the Treasury who administers these funds encourages local governments to prioritize racial equity and engage their community residents in the budget and decision-making processes regarding the uses of funds. Local governments now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rethink budget making by understanding and prioritizing community needs and desires.

- The U.S. Department of the Treasury has a landing page on the American Rescue Plan Act Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund program (SLFRF).  
<https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments/state-and-local-fiscal-recovery-funds>.
- The Treasury's [Compliance and Reporting Guidance](#) encourages local governments to center their people in uses of these funds, through “written feedback through surveys, project proposals, and related documents; oral feedback through community meetings, issue-specific listening sessions, stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and additional public engagement; as well as other forms of input, such as steering committees, taskforces, and digital campaigns that capture diverse feedback from the community.”
- Specific ARPA SLFRF allocation for California’s local governments:
  - California counties (total \$7.7 billion):  
[https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/fiscalrecoveryfunds\\_countyfunding\\_2021.05.10-1a-508A.pdf](https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/fiscalrecoveryfunds_countyfunding_2021.05.10-1a-508A.pdf)
  - California metropolitan cities (total \$7 billion):  
<https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/fiscalrecoveryfunds-metrocitiesfunding1-508A.pdf>
  - California small cities (total \$1.2 billion): <https://dof.ca.gov/budget/local-fiscal-recovery-fund-allocations/>

- **Evaluating local governments’ ARPA spending with a racial justice and abolition lens:**
  - In Spring 2022, CPEHN reviewed and scored 11 California counties on the implementation of their ARPA funds to-date, including how racially equitable and community-driven their budgetary processes are. You can read more about this Equity Scorecard Project including individual county analyses, CPEHN’s methodology, a community-facing webinar, and additional findings here: <https://cpehn.org/arpascorecards/>
  - **Success story of a local ARPA budget campaign in Calexico City:** Local organizers at the Imperial Valley Justice and Equity Coalition shared how they advocated with Calexico City Council for ARPA investments for farmworkers and downtown infrastructure. Read about their success story here: <https://cpehn.org/arpascorecards/>
- **Additional resources on equitable local implementation of American Rescue Plan Act Fiscal Relief Funds**
  - “Ensuring Federal Stimulus Funds Support Communities, Not Cops.” *Community Resource Hub*, <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/ensuring-federal-stimulus-funds-support-communities-not-cops/>. (Estimated reading time: 6 minutes)
  - “Unmasked: Impacts of Pandemic Policing.” *Community Resource Hub*, <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/unmasked-impacts-of-pandemic-policing/>. (Estimated Reading Time: 2 hours and 10 minutes)

- **Taking action with your local budget process with lessons learned**

- **Coalition and base building:**

- Currently, the budget process lacks transparency and community participation; however, people in cities and counties across California are demanding a more participatory, community-led approach to budgeting. By understanding community needs, communicating demands, building coalitions for social change, and engaging with decision makers; our resources, funds, and time can go towards transforming our communities into places that foster our holistic wellness. Check out best practices, toolkits, and resources from the People's Budget Coalitions in California who utilize a community based participatory approach through coalition/base building for the budget process: [Los Angeles](#), [Sacramento](#), [Long Beach](#), [Orange County](#), [Redwood City](#), [Bakersfield](#), [Oakland](#), [Vallejo](#), [Hayward](#), [San Jose](#), [Merced](#), [Central Valley Empowerment Alliance](#)

- **Understanding community needs:**

- "[The Community Toolbox](#)" offers frameworks and toolkits for guiding, supporting and evaluating the work of community and system change. Chapters 2-5 shares information about how to assess and understand community needs and resources, share what matters to people in the community to decision makers, prioritize issues, and begin building a coalition. (*Estimated Reading time for toolkit Chapter 2: 2 minutes*)
- "[Oakland's People's Budget Survey](#)" is an example of a community survey based on thousands of conversations with folks from West Oakland to Rockridge to Eastmont to determine what the city's priorities should be. (*Estimated reading time: 3 minutes*)

- **Effectively communicating your needs:**

- Public Health Awakened's "[Investing in Health: A Budget Advocacy Toolkit Public](#)" states that health workers must address unhealthy systems by critically examining unhealthy budgets and includes useful communication tips such as sample messages for budget advocacy. (*Estimated Reading Time: 6 minutes*)
- Berkeley Media Studies Group's "[Framing 101](#)" and "[Media Advocacy 101](#)" introduces how to develop effective messages about public health and how to strategically use mass media to advance policies to improve health. (*Estimated reading time: 3-5 minutes*)
- Berkeley Media Studies Group offers "[Media Advocacy Trainings and Resources](#)" to communicate strategically about a message and share community demands. Learn how to get started with media advocacy basics, understand the agenda setting role of news, develop a message, deliver a message, use proactive and reactive media strategies, and read successful case studies. Resources are available online and trainings can be delivered in English and Spanish.
- "[10 Tips on Receiving Critical Feedback: A Guide for Activists](#)" shares advice on how to receive, grow, and learn from critical feedback. Effective movement building requires accountability. (*Estimated reading time: 11 minutes*)
- "[Our Relationships Keep Us Alive: Let's Prioritize Them in 2018](#)" warns us of the ways we can ruin movement building and reminds us of the values to repair relationships and rebuild trust if broken. (*Estimated reading time: 13 minutes*)

- **Engaging with decision makers**

- **Building relationships:** Human Impact Partner's "[Collaboration and Power Sharing Between Government Agencies and Community Power-Building Organizations](#)" resource guides health departments through the why and how of partnering with Community Power-Building Organizations (CPBOs) to advance health equity, via four guides with activities to build capacity and lay the groundwork for power sharing partnerships. (*Estimated Reading Time: 32 minutes*)
- **Identifying value-aligned power players:** Human Impact Partner's "[Activities to Deepen Your Power-Building Analysis](#)" suite of resources and activities is designed for governmental health departments and agencies to dive into power: what it is, who holds it, and how to leverage and redistribute it to create more equitable and healthy communities. (*Estimated Read Time: 25 minutes*)
- **Making demands, escalation plans:** Learn the components of a strong tactic that effectively applies pressure, builds leaders, and builds power in "[Campaign Planning 401: Tactics and Escalation Training Materials](#)." The training materials also clarify the difference between tactics and strategy and share how to plan escalating tactics and how to work backwards on a timeline to plan a campaign. (*Estimated reading time: 13 minutes*)