Participatory Budgeting Case Study

Spirit of Ruchill & Possilpark and Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting

The Democratic Society
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This case study presents the experiences of Spirit of Ruchill and Possilpark (SoRP) and their use of digital tools for the 'Spirit Marketplace' participatory budgeting initiative in the Possilpark and Ruchill area of Glasgow, which took place in early 2017. The initiative provided the opportunity for people to vote for community projects that could receive a proportion of a £15,000 funding pot made available by the Scottish Government Community Choices Fund.

SoRP was supported by a team from The Democratic Society to select, embed and test a digital tool which was provided as part of the 'Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting (PB) in Scotland' programme. Funding for the digital tool and support was made possible by provision of grant funding from Scottish Government to The Democratic Society.

Background

'Spirit Marketplace' is a participatory budgeting initiative that gives people the opportunity to propose and vote to fund projects and activities that will benefit residents of the Ruchill and Possilpark communities.

SoRP set up a steering group, comprised of members of the local community, to oversee
and run the Spirit Marketplace process. The group was supported by staff at Foundation Scotland and The Democratic Society.

The Digital Tools for Participatory Budgeting in Scotland programme, managed by The Democratic Society, enabled SoRP to test one digital tool during their PB process: D21 was used for the voting phase.

Approach

The Spirit Marketplace involved two phases, idea generation and voting. Through the idea generation phase there were 21 applications submitted. The steering group used a traditional application approach for this phase, which is a process SoRP have used in previous PB projects.

The online voting phase ran from February 20th to March 6th. A community event (‘Marketplace’) was held on February 25th, 2017 at which members of the community could come together, find out more about each project at ‘market stalls’ and cast votes on paper ballot or online. All residents of the Possilpark and Ruchill area aged 10 years and over were invited to participate in 2 ways: online, through the D21 website at spirit.d21.me; or offline, by attending a face to face event.

Participants could vote in two categories: for projects requesting up £500; and for projects requesting up £2,000.

Set Up and Planning

In December 2016, a subgroup from SoRP met with The Democratic Society to discuss the possibility of using a digital tool to enhance engagement in the Spirit Marketplace PB process. Options were presented to the SoRP Steering Group in January 2017 and D21 was selected for the voting phase of Spirit Marketplace. The Democratic Society liaised with D21 to ensure the requirements of SoRP were met and the voting website was set
up on time. A timeline was produced to assist SoRP with the planning and set up of digital voting.

The Democratic Society delivered training to SoRP in February 2017. The training introduced the D21 PB Platform and guided attendees through processes for set up, administration, and monitoring of progress. The skills learned in the workshop enabled SoRP to use D21 to support the Spirit Marketplace process. The training also allowed SoRP to plan their community event and decide how digital voting was to be implemented.

A timeline was produced to assist SoRP with the planning and set up of digital voting.

Figure 2: Timeline produced by The Democratic Society to support the use of D21 during the voting process

The Democratic Society attended the Spirit Marketplace community event and assisted attendees to vote using D21 in the digital voting area set up in the Possilpoint Community Centre’s IT suite. This process used D21’s Kiosk Mode which enables vote organisers to register a PC, laptop, smart phone or tablet, to be used to capture multiple votes. The ability to launch Kiosk Mode was restricted to registered administrators and password protected to ensure a fair process. This enabled the IT suite to be transformed into an online polling station at the event, with a new ballot paper appearing after the previous voting session had concluded. Members of SoRP and Demsoc staff monitored the digital voting area to ensure participants did not vote more than once.

Voting System

D21 provides the option of providing both traditional voting, via selection of preferred options, and a positive and negative voting option, with one negative vote being made available for every two positive votes cast.

The SoRP steering group decided that they would like to participants to simply select their favourite projects on each of the £500 and £2000 ballot papers, as the group felt the option to register negative votes took away from the upbeat community feel of the Spirit Marketplace PB process.
D21 uses an algorithm to make the optimum number of votes available to participants based on the number of options on each ballot paper. The £500 ballot paper consisted of ten options, and the £2000 ballot paper had eleven options. The D21 algorithm ensured that participants were able to vote for up to three options on each ballot paper.

Verifying the voters

During the planning process the security of the voting system was discussed with the steering group. SoRP stated that they wanted to make the online voting process as accessible as possible, whilst ensuring a level of security that would minimise ineligible votes and multiple votes.

It was decided that automatic postcode verification would be added to the voting process to ensure only those living in the specific areas of Possilpark and Ruchill were able to participate.

When potential voters visited the Spirit Marketplace voting website they were asked to enter their postcode. Their postcode was checked against a database of valid postcodes for the Possilpark and Ruchill area, if the postcode was valid they were redirected to the voting ballots, if it was invalid an explanatory message was displayed.

![Figure 3: Screenshots of Spirit Marketplace voting site, including postcode entry page and invalid postcode page](image)

D21 is set up to ensure that a user can only vote once from an individual device. If a user attempts to vote more than once on the same browser the user is automatically redirected to the ‘Thank You’ page displayed at the end of the voting process. The online process was also monitored throughout for potential fraudulent activity such as multiple votes from the same I.P. address or suspicious voting patterns. There is no evidence to suggest that the voting process was compromised and SoRP were happy with the balance struck between accessibility and security.
Promotion and Outreach

The Spirit Marketplace PB process was promoted via tapping into local networks, and encouraging applicants to promote the process. To support promotion, posters and flyers were produced. Information and invitations to participate were disseminated across the Ruchill and Possilpark area, including through direct delivery to households across the participating area. SoRP also used social media to promote the voting site via dedicated twitter and Facebook accounts. SoRP steering group members, volunteers, applicants and those supportive of the project also shared the voting opportunity on their personal social media channels.

![Figure 4: Example of social media posts produced by SoRP and public to promote the PB process and digital tool](image)

Outcome and evaluation

Participation results

Staff and volunteers at SoRP and Foundation Scotland understand Spirit Marketplace to be their largest participatory budgeting exercise to date. Digital voting did not seem to adversely affect event turnout with 179 members of the public attending the Spirit Marketplace event (compared to 150 people at their previous PB event.)

In total, **1007 votes** were cast. This is **9.4%** of the population of Ruchill and Possilpark area. **913 people voted online** and **94 people** chose to use paper ballots provided at the voting event. These paper ballots were then scanned and uploaded to be combined with the online votes.

Some of those who completed the online feedback form (240 respondents out of 913 digital voters) after voting, stated that the availability of the digital voting had made it
possible for them to participate as they were unable to make the event or they struggled to leave the home due to mobility.

The steering group felt that the exercise was successful in involving people in a decision making process and encouraging people to share their ideas. The group felt the process had raised awareness of participatory budgeting and “planted a seed for future phases”.

![Graph indicating break down of votes per day, note spike at vote launch and during voting day event](image)

**Figure 5: Graph indicating break down of votes per day, note spike at vote launch and during voting day event**

**Evaluation**

The following section provides a thematic synthesis of the lessons from:

- **An evaluation survey** for participants in the voting phase of the process, for which a link was built into the D21 voting website;
- **An evaluation meeting** with the steering group;
- **Observations, experiences** and **feedback** between The Democratic Society and SoRP steering group.

**Evaluation Survey Results**

Below is a summary of the results from the participant evaluation survey that provides a snap shot of opinion from a sample of 26.3% of participants (240 respondents) who voted online during the Spirit Marketplace PB process:
The website was easy to use...

- Strongly Agree: 3%
- Agree: 38%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 43%
- Disagree: 13%
- Strongly disagree: 1%

The website made it possible for me to participate at a time that suited me...

- Strongly Agree: 2%
- Agree: 37%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 47%
- Disagree: 11%
- Strongly disagree: 3%

The website is a good way to take part in decision making...

- Strongly Agree: 1%
- Agree: 12%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 45%
- Disagree: 2%
- Strongly disagree: 40%
The results of the evaluation survey show that:

- **82%** found the voting website easy to use
- **84%** agreed that the voting website made it possible to participate at a time that suited them
- **85%** agreed that the voting website was a good way to take part in decision making
- **83%** would consider using a similar voting website in the future

Respondents were given the opportunity to highlight, in their own words, what was good, and not so good about the voting website, and provide suggestions for improvement.

We also discussed the process with the SoRP steering group during an evaluation session on 28th March 2017.

Evaluation of survey responses and the steering group discussion points to positive outcomes and key lessons that should be kept in mind for future digital engagement processes.

**Lessons Learned**

**Increased Participation and Accessibility**

The use of the digital engagement tool dramatically increased participation in the Spirit Marketplace PB process. SoRP were delighted with the high participation rate of 1007 people, 9.4% of the local population. The use of digital engagement enabled SoRP to increase participation in their PB process by over 670% compared with their previous PB event that attracted 150 people to their voting day.
Survey respondents noted that they were pleased they “got a chance to vote” if they could “not make the open (voting) day.” Others noted that they felt the voting website provided “excellent accessibility, definitely a great way to vote for people who can’t attend” the voting day.

The SoRP steering group felt that the main benefit of using D21 was “getting more people involved” and “reaching people who would not have taken part (in PB processes) before”.

SoRP also noted that:

**Having digital [participation options] meant more people could be included. It reached people who would not usually take part.**

### Ease of Use & Clear Information

Many respondents commented on how “easy”, “simple”, “clear” and “straight forward” the D21 voting website was to use. Respondents found D21 voting site “user friendly”, “simple to navigate” and thought the “multiple choice (voting system) was clear and easy to understand.”

Respondents appreciated the amount of information made available to them on the ballot paper. Each ballot paper displayed the details and value of each project and provided the option to expand each project to find out more information and see photos.

![Figure 6: Example of online voting ballot](image)

![Figure 7: Example of online voting ballot expanded to include photos](image)
One respondent commented that the voting website:

*Provided the exact information needed: Who wanted money, why and how much. Simple, no jargon easy to understand. I feel it was easy to navigate! I think it was all good!*

Another respondent felt that even more information could have been provided including “more information about candidates’ financial backgrounds.”

A small number of respondents raised concerns around the lack of clarity when switching between ballot papers – from £500 grants to £2000 – as they felt that it was hard to “notice straight off that there was a second page of projects to choose from, this could be clearer, rather than have a button marked ‘continue’ it should say next page’ or next ballot paper, vote and proceed to next ballot paper.

The SoRP steering group noted that they would like to utilise D21’s ability to embed videos into ballot papers in the future as this could provide more information in an even more accessible manner.

**Ability to Deliberate and Choose**

D21’s multiple votes process enabled voters to deliberate and think about the options available for funding. The SoRP steering group noted that:

> “the multiple votes option meant people were taking time to look at each project, not just voting for their pals. At (previous) face to face (PB) events, if people could see the buckets with tokens, they may give a token to the project that had fewer tokens. Online they took time to look around and consider each project.”

The steering group felt that the multiple vote system contributed to a wider variety of local projects being funded as opposed to the “same old faces” receiving funding.

Analysis provided by D21 showed that despite a significant number of projects in both ballots, the results indicated that the ‘most-favoured’ projects in each section had an encouragingly high rate of community consensus – 33% people selecting a top option for the £500 ballot and 40% for the £2,000 ballot. SoRP noted that “this shows the positive impact of the multiple-vote system, in that more community members will be able to feel proud that they had a direct role in funding these projects.”

**Digital did not impact on Voting event turnout**

The SoRP panel were concerned during the set-up of the digital tool that an online voting option may have a negative impact on the turnout the Spirit Marketplace voting event on 25th February 2017. However, there was a healthy turnout at the event with a total of 216 people attending, with 179 people voting. SoRP noted that “some people who had already voted online still came to the event” to learn more about community projects and enjoy the entertainment and atmosphere.

The steering group stated that:

> The digital aspect helped raise awareness and it had a knock-on effect on the face to face event. It also raised the credibility of the panel group. There was a feeling up to that point it was a bunch of local folk
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Access to Statistics & Ability to Provide Prompt Feedback

The group were impressed with the option to collect data from participants so they could learn more about participants. D21 can request that users disclose their age, gender, and other data. On this occasion, the group decided not to capture that data via D21 to minimise the amount of time users would spend participating in the process. Instead they collected anonymous data via the evaluation survey that users were automatically redirected to after voting.

The 239 participant sample indicated that “a wide range of ages participated” in the Spirit Marketplace process:

![Figure 8: Graph showing breakdown by age of feedback survey respondents](image)

SoRP also appreciated D21’s ability to allow them to track participation throughout the process and give them confidence that people were participating, and if additional promotion was required to increase participation.

They were also delighted that D21 enabled automatic feedback once the results of the vote were announced to participants who opted to provide their email address:

It was great to know we could automate feedback if someone left an email address and a couple hundred people did leave their email addresses!

This meant that more participants were promptly provided with feedback and this contributes to building trust in PB processes and confirms to voters that their participation had an impact.

Kiosk Mode could have been better utilised

Whilst the SoRP steering group were happy with the level of participation, they believed they could have generated even more participation by using D21’s Kiosk Mode beyond the digital voting area at the Spirit Marketplace voting event.
They said they would be keen to use the Kiosk Mode to do pop up voting events and encouraging people to vote on the street, at the supermarket or other public space. They felt that increased use of the Kiosk Mode would allow them to enable even more people to participate.

Local community links increases trust in the process

The large amount of participation stemmed from the amount of local support the project achieved. This was in part due to the process being lead by the SoRP panel, a group of local people wanting to make the area better.

The amount of traction the group received on social media, with many local people sharing information about the Spirit Marketplace process, also highlights the need for PB processes to be embedded and co-created within local communities.

Perhaps local authorities should collaborate with community organisations in order to help them increase their PB activity and enable more people to take part in allocating budgets.

Final Reflections

Overall participants seemed to really enjoy using D21 as part of the Spirit Marketplace PB process stating that they found the process: “excellent”, “great”, and “truly amazing.”

One participant noted that further PB would be welcomed in the area:

Possilpark and Ruchill need more participatory budgeting within their communities. Give the people their voice.

The SoRP steering group felt that despite initial nerves about using the digital engagement tool they were extremely pleased about the use of D21. One steering group member said:

I felt apprehensive about the platform but in reality it was easy to use and easy for others to understand.

The group are now keen for digital engagement to be part of future PB processes noting that digital engagement is “potentially one of the biggest things we can do in the future” and something that helped them to organise “one of the biggest public consultations” carried out in Possilpark and Ruchill.

Next Steps

The experience gained during this project enabled SoRP and Foundation Scotland to develop their thinking on digital engagement and they plan to use the learning from this case study to support the design of future PB approaches. They have expressed an interest in applying for further Community Choices funding in the future to help them continue with the Spirit Marketplace project and try and get even more people involved in deciding how funding should be spent in their local area.
Further information

Online tools

Reference and link to site used (note formatting below)

Participatory Budgeting in Scotland

The Democratic Society
demsoc.org/participatory-budgeting-in-scotland

Scottish Government – Participatory Budgeting
gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/Participatory-budgeting

PB Scotland
pbscotland.scot

PB Network (Scotland)
pbnetwork.org.uk/category/geographic/scotland

The Democratic Society

Better democracy, everywhere

The Democratic Society (Demsoc) works for more and better democracy, where people and institutions have the desire, opportunity and confidence to participate together.

We work to create opportunities for people to become involved in the decisions that affect their lives and for them to have the skills to do this effectively. We support governments, parliaments and any organisation that wants to involve citizens in decision making to be transparent, open and welcoming of participation. We actively support spaces, places and processes to make this happen.

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