

AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

IN GOVERNMENT FINANCE



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2020 Winner for Exceptionally Well Implemented Best Practice



MECKLENBURG COUNTY, NC BUDGET PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

The Mecklenburg County Management & Budget (OMB) developed a Budget Public Engagement Initiative to give the community transparent access to county budget information and a say in budget priorities. When the OMB started gathering information about public participation in mid-2019, it had five goals in mind:

- **Inform:** Provide residents with the information and tools they'd need to understand the budget process.
- **Consult:** Gather public feedback on decisions and alternatives.
- **Involve:** Get residents directly involved via workshops and random, representative polling.
- **Collaborate:** Include residents in an equal partnership regarding important budget decisions.
- **Empower:** Put the final decision-making power in the hands of residents.

In line with GFOA's Best Practice on Public Engagement in the Budget Process, Mecklenburg County made use of technology, social media, community partners, and local news media outlets to ensure a broad reach and to maximize participation. The county distributed a budget priority survey to help gauge public priorities and promoted it via social media and appearances on local television and radio. Mecklenburg County authorized an additional public hearing in FY2020 to reach a larger and more diverse group of residents. Town Hall meetings and virtual Facebook Live events were also employed to answer questions, gather feedback, and address concerns. As GFOA recommends, the county used multiple communication mechanisms to notify residents about opportunities to be involved.

The Budget Public Engagement Initiative includes broad plans for community outreach in coming years. These plans include a budget priority survey and a Balancing Act Budget Simulator, which were particularly important in gathering feedback for the FY2021 operating budget.

GFOA Best Practice: Public Engagement in the Budget Process