

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING IN GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

This case study of Participatory Budgeting Greensboro (PB GSO) and the City of Greensboro, North Carolina, was constructed through a series of firsthand accounts¹¹ (from both government officials and citizens) and through thorough analysis of news articles about efforts to bring PB to Greensboro. It took more than three years for this citizen-initiated innovation to be adopted by its jurisdiction. Despite the fact that both citizen and government actors were reasonable and respectful, there were tensions and frustrations. This highlights the need for public administration to understand the challenges that are created by administrators and elected officials.

Background of Greensboro, North Carolina

Greensboro is the third largest city in North Carolina, with a population of approximately 270,000. It is demographically diverse: 48 percent of its population is white, 41 percent is African American, and 8 percent is Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Approximately 16 percent of the population is housing cost burdened,¹² and between 2000 and 2007 the number of very low income households¹³ doubled (ACS, 2007). Figure 1 presents a map of the City of Greensboro and its five council districts, shaded by level of economic strength. This economic inequality is one of the reasons that PB

¹¹. This includes both interviews conducted by the author and an article by two of the leaders of PB GSO, Spoma Jovanovic and Vincent Russell (2014). The interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and via email with practitioners from multiple offices within Greensboro, including the budget office, and citizens that were (or are) involved with PB GSO. These citizen perspectives span those who were in leadership to those who were merely low-level sometime volunteers.

¹². *Housing cost burdened* is defined as more than 30 percent of a household's income going to housing costs.

¹³. *Very low income households* are defined as those households with an income that is 30 percent less than the median income of the area. In the case of Greensboro, NC, this would be households with incomes of \$16,080 or less. The number of very low income households in Greensboro went from 10,000 in 2000 to 20,000 in 2007.