

Budget Buffs

APRIL IS
Financial
Literacy
Month

Boston teens use budgeting skills to improve their city

Officials are hammering out the details of a \$1 million budget in a crowded meeting room in Boston's City Hall. But the people involved aren't just adults in suits. In fact, teenagers are leading the discussion and will get to decide where the money goes.

The teens are members of Boston's Youth Lead the Change (YLC): Participatory Budgeting Boston initiative. Launched in 2014, YLC was the first program in the U.S. to give teens and young adults a chance to directly affect their community by deciding how a chunk of the city's budget is spent. Any Bostonian between the ages of 12 and 25 can volunteer to become a YLC Change Agent.

Every year, YLC receives a \$1 million budget from the City of Boston. The group asks for people to suggest

ideas—through local assemblies and online submissions—for programs to improve Boston. YLC's Change Agents then review these ideas with city officials and turn the best of them into project proposals. Only Boston teens (whether they are part of YLC or not) are allowed to vote on which projects will eventually get funded.

"I think it's a great way to engage teens, since we don't get to vote in elections," says Laila McCain, a high school junior and youth budget specialist for YLC. In this role, Laila facilitates meetings between young people and city officials. "It's cool that we get to handle the budget," she says. "I've learned a lot and have met a lot of people who really care about what young people think."

Thanks to YLC's efforts last year, three Boston high schools received Chromebooks, and new surveillance cameras were installed in the Dr. Loesch Family Park in South Boston. A number of other projects to improve Boston's streets, parks, and playgrounds are also under way.

Some adults have expressed surprise at how innovative and practical Boston's teens proved to be while making big, community-shaping decisions. But Shari Davis, the executive director of Boston's Department of Youth Engagement and Employment—one of several departments that manages YLC—knew their potential all along.

"Our society needs to shift from the mentality that young people are our future leaders," Davis says. "With support, development, acceptance, and encouragement, young people can lead today—and they should lead today."

—Courteney Palis

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Total number of projects teens approved in 2014 and 2015.

CHANGE AGENT
LAILA MCCAIN,
16, shows Boston
Mayor Marty Walsh
a photo she took.

Youth Lead the Change invested in surveillance cameras to keep kids safe while they play in Dr. Loesch Family Park.

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A VIDEO
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MAKING A BUDGET WORK

The Youth Lead the Change (YLC) initiative receives \$1 million from the City of Boston to spend on projects that will improve the community. Participants use a budget—an estimate of expected income and expenses over a certain period of time—to make sure they spend only money they have.

Income: the amount of money received

Expenses: the amount of money spent on products and services

Example: YLC budgets \$90,000 to buy 270 Chromebook packages for high school students. These include a \$250 Chromebook, a \$10 keyboard protector, a \$20 carrying case, and a \$15 spare charger. **How much money will be left in the budget after these expenses?**

Step 1 Write an equation to calculate the expenses:

$$270 \times (\$250 + \$10 + \$20 + \$15) = \$67,500 + \$2,700 + \$5,400 + \$4,050 = \$79,650$$

Step 2 Subtract the expenses from the original budget to find the amount of money that remains:

$$\$90,000 - \$79,650 = \$10,350$$

→ So \$10,350 of the budget remains. If the total expenses were more than the original budget, that would indicate that YLC overspent.

BONUS
SKILLS
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One of YLC's winning projects was a proposal to repair the American Legion Picnic Grove playground in East Boston. The budget for the entire project was \$400,000. Say Change Agents budgeted \$200,000 to spend on equipment. Use the chart below to answer questions about the equipment budget.

COSTS OF EQUIPMENT

Item	Price
Picnic Table	\$8,500
Exercise Equipment	\$5,000
Game Table	\$3,667
Dish Swing	\$21,000
Monkey Bars	\$1,175
Swing Set	\$1,682
Slide	\$4,205
Balance Beam	\$787
Merry-Go-Round	\$5,557
Seesaw	\$1,527
Tetherball Set	\$236

1 A. Complete the chart below to calculate the expense for the equipment listed in the first row of the chart.

1B. What's left in the budget?

2 YLC participants haven't yet met their budget, so they decide to add 10 new pieces of exercise equipment to the playground. What is the total additional expense?

3 A. Did the YLC meet its budget after all expenses in questions 1 and 2 were factored in?

3B. By how much was the budget under or over?

3C. On a separate piece of paper, write your own list of equipment that gets as close to the budget as possible without going over.

ITEM	PICNIC TABLE	DISH SWING	GAME TABLE	MONKEY BARS	SLIDES	SWING SETS
Quantity	10	2	4	1	3	2
Total Expense	\$85,000					
Money Left in Budget	\$115,000					