

A People's Budget:

Toward Spending and Tax Policy based on Human Rights

What is a People's Budget?

A People's Budget is a state budget (spending and taxation policy) that puts people's needs and rights first.

The purpose of democratic government is to ensure that our fundamental human needs are met and our rights upheld. The budget is the government's plan for funding the public services, programs and infrastructure that help us meet our needs (spending), along with a plan for raising this money (revenue). How this public money is spent and raised determines how well our government is fulfilling its obligation to us.

A People's Budget process starts with an assessment of our needs and with our participation. Once we know how much money we must spend to satisfy unmet needs, we decide how to raise that money through taxes. We seek to meet everyone's needs by sharing our tax contributions in an equitable way.

A People's Budget:

- begins with a commitment to satisfying our fundamental human needs, consistent with human rights principles, and proposes spending initiatives to fix unmet need;
- enables all of us to participate in every step of the budget process;
- measures unmet need using indicators based on human rights principles, and ensures accountability by explicitly connecting budget initiatives to meeting those needs;
- develops revenue policy to fund needs-based spending proposals, guided by human rights principles.

What has the People's Budget Campaign achieved so far?

We have written into law, for the first time, what the ***purpose of our state budget*** is. Vermont's budget must now "address the needs of the people of Vermont in a way that advances human dignity and equity."

We have begun to focus the budget on human ***needs***: "Spending and revenue policies will ... recognize every person's need for health, housing, dignified work, education, food, social security, and a healthy environment."

We have also begun to strengthen people's voice and ***participation*** in our democracy. The law now requires that the "administration shall develop budget and revenue proposals as part of a transparent and accountable process with direct and meaningful participation from Vermont residents."

Human Rights Principles for a People's Budget

Vermont's budget and revenue policies must be developed and implemented consistent with the human rights principles of universality, equity, transparency, accountability and participation.

Universality

Vermont must ensure that adequate resources are raised and spent to meet everyone's needs, including healthcare, housing, education, food, education, social and income security, good jobs, and a healthy environment.

Equity

Vermont must raise and distribute resources in an equitable way, with particular attention to meeting the needs of those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.

Transparency

Processes within our government must be open to public scrutiny and enable people to see easily how public institutions and processes are managed and run. Budget information must be readily accessible and comprehensible.

Accountability

Vermont must set up mechanisms that enable its residents to hold government accountable for developing and implementing a budget that meets people's needs and ensures human rights.

Participation

Vermont must support meaningful and direct public participation in budget and revenue decisions, including in setting budget goals and evaluating progress in meeting needs.

