

Investing in Health: A Budget Advocacy Toolkit



Making racial and health equity a reality: Why budgets are critical

Public health practitioners are becoming increasingly active in advocating for social policies that impact health. However, for the public health community to truly be proponents for justice, we must also be advocates for equitable *budgets* that link multiple social determinants of health, invest in overall health, increase equity, acknowledge and address current power inequities, and divest from systems that harm us and the environment.

Health inequities are due to oppressive policies and systems that prioritize profit over people, place the wealth of some over the health of most, and invest in harmful systems over structures to support health. This underscores the necessity for public health workers to address unhealthy systems by critically examining unhealthy budgets. We know communities are healthier when people have their basic needs met — affordable housing, jobs with dignity, safe working conditions, living wages, quality schools, access to food and health care, and more. This is why understanding the social determinants of health, as well as how racism shapes the social determinants to create more harm, is needed.

Addressing our societal systems as public health workers requires us to examine what health promoting strategies we are investing in and what harmful ones we must divest from. Budget and tax policies do not operate in neutral ways, and without intervention only perpetuate an inequitable distribution of resources and power caused by white supremacy, colonialism, classism, and the resulting state-sponsored violence we see harming Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. In particular, the state-sponsored violence of policing, prisons, and immigration enforcement harms public health. To reflect our values and priorities of health justice and equity in how our public resources are distributed, we must ensure we are divesting from the [Prison Industrial Complex \(PIC\)](#) and instead invest in evidence-based health strategies that we know will actually advance health.



Art by
Ashley Lukashevsky
[@ashlukadraws](#)

Strategy tips for local budget advocacy

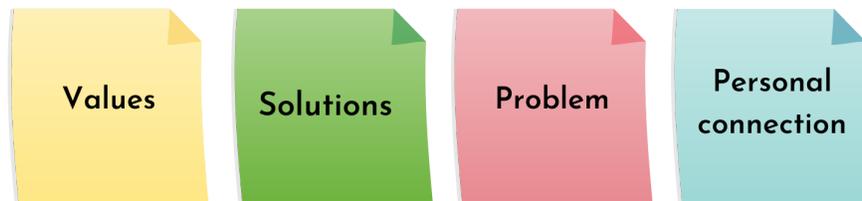
Here are some tips for who to engage with and how to engage when doing budget advocacy. You can engage in budget advocacy at the city, county, or state level. There are also opportunities to do budget advocacy around school districts, commissions, and other government agencies.

- Prioritize asks made by organizers in your community and especially the people most impacted by state violence
 - Follow, reach out to, and engage with organizers who are already engaged in budget advocacy work
 - Review their past demands as well as present ones
 - Participate in their media campaigns and actions around budget demands
- Find budget advocacy organizations in your area
 - Learn how these organizations align with demands from organizers and uplift those
 - An example of a [progressive budget advocacy group](#) (Washington DC)
- Participate in government hearings, public testimony opportunities, and engagement opportunities
 - Budget season in cities and counties usually involves some version of the following public opportunities:
 - Townhalls: Residents have an opportunity to engage with elected officials, learning and sharing about city/county priorities
 - Budget engagement forums: Residents have an opportunity to weigh in on the proposed budget while it's being developed
 - Committee oversight hearings: This is where the elected officials will review an agency's progress or actions over the past fiscal year
 - Committee budget hearings and public hearings: This is where the budget of specific agencies in a committee are discussed
 - Legislative working sessions: While there might be little opportunity to engage as a resident, these are usually broadcasted so that residents can watch and hear elected officials debate
 - Engage year-round:
 - There might be smaller divisions of neighborhoods that elected officials represent (in Washington DC, for example, Ward Councilmembers have several Advisory Neighborhood Commissions that they regularly attend). These smaller, neighborhood level meetings are held regularly and are a consistent way to apply pressure to elected officials
 - Sign up for alerts and emails from your elected officials so you can follow the budget season and get events on your personal calendar
 - Consider your options for how you can engage in budget advocacy if you are a government worker
 - Even if you work for a government agency, there are still ways to participate in advocacy efforts on your personal time
 - Take a look at this [flowchart](#) to help you decide how you can engage

Communication tips

Developing a strategy & messages:

- **Have an overall strategy:** Before knowing what you want to **say**, it's always helpful to know what you want to **do**. Talking points will differ — drafting a report to highlight the need for investing in public health instead of policing, testifying at a local city council meeting on police budgets, or engaging in a state legislative campaign may all have similarities, but your message will be stronger if you solidify what you want to achieve before you start creating your talking points or message. One short, helpful tool for this is Berkeley Media Studies Group's [Layers of Strategy](#).
- **Include the [components of a strong message](#).** Messages that move people include:
 - 1) **The values:** Why this issue matters (e.g., dignity, fairness, justice, liberation, unity, interconnectedness, etc.) to not just illustrate more data on the problem — it's more about what's in our hearts
 - 2) **The solution:** What we want to see happen
 - 3) **The problem:** We often focus here in public health but strong messages reverse that and spend more time on values and solutions
 - 4) **Personal connection:** Why this matters to you — can include professional expertise and/or related lived experience



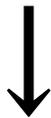
Tips for Effective Communication

- To create context, [compare the police budget in your city](#) to other priority areas, such as the health department, affordable housing investment, investments in childcare, or jobs opportunities. In most cities there are non-police agencies that work on public safety. Comparing the police budget to those agencies will clearly demonstrate the lack of investment in violence prevention compared to punishment in the form of police and jails.
 - Other ideas for comparisons: Look up how much the city spends on police complaint settlements, how much they spend on imprisoning people, etc.
- Consider creating budget asks for the next fiscal year AND the next 4 years. Cities typically build balanced budgets across a 4 year financial plan, so it's important to demonstrate how you want your goals met in the next year, but also across the next 4 years.
- Be as specific as possible with divestment recommendations, including reducing police force, police vehicles, police weaponry, the scope of work of police, etc. Use numbers as often as possible.

- Example: “We ask that the budget of MPD be decreased by \$100 million by reducing the police force by 1,000 officers; eliminating the use and stock of rubber bullets, pepper spray, and tear gas; and eliminating the contract for school resource officers in all public schools.”
- Be as specific as possible with investment recommendations. Consider including which agency you want to see increased investment in; which programs you want to see created or increased; and by how much. Use numbers as often as possible. Consider looking up how big the agencies you want to see increased are and scale your ask in comparison.
 - Example: “We ask that the budget for the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement be increased from \$10 million in FY20 to \$15 million in FY21 and by \$5 million in every following year until it assumes complete authority over public safety strategy for our city.”

Sample message:

On the next page is an example that uses the components of a message — values, solution, problem, and personal connection. You can use resources like Public Health Awakened's [Tax Narrative](#) and the End Police Violence Collective's [Talking Points](#) to tailor your message to your specific goal and context.





Sample Message for Budget Advocacy



I'm calling in to today's City Council meeting to support investing \$X into our communities to keep us safe during COVID-19 and beyond.

Solutions:
investment in communities

Values:
community

I have worked in public health for X years and understand both the research showing that we need to divest from policing and invest in health and have seen firsthand how this is true.

Personal connection

Solutions:
investment in communities

We have an opportunity today to reimagine, reinvent, and transform our systems to create what we need to be healthy right now and create healthier communities for future generations.

Solutions:
vision for the future, focus on systemic change

Values:
inter-connectedness

Much of our city budget comes from taxes — how we pool our resources to do together what we cannot do alone. The decisions we make about budgets show what we value — they reflect who we are and who we want to be as a society.

Values:
inter-connectedness

We know that investing in [ensuring people can stay in their homes / helping our unhoused neighbors / supporting our children in schools / ensuring our public health workers are resourced / providing good jobs / helping people weather the economic storm of COVID-19] is critical to health.

Solutions:
public health investments, systemic change

And yet right now these critical building blocks of our healthy communities are facing budget cuts while our city continues to pour money into systems that are not just ineffective, but also cause harm. Our police budget [give a concrete data point such as "more than X, Y, and Z budgets combined" or "has increased over X% in the last Z years."]

Problem:
using data to illustrate the problem

There is an immense amount of research that shows that funding communities through stable housing, educational resources, employment opportunities, mental health care, and other systematic supports does much more to promote health, well-being, and safety than continually increasing police budgets. Police departments cannot address the root causes of our lack of safe affordable housing. They don't provide much-needed resources for preventing or addressing substance use. They don't provide the quality childcare that is chronically underfunded but shows clear links to safer communities. Yet we keep funding them and expecting better results. In reality, dumping money into these budgets has increased police violence and drained resources from what we know works for health and safety.

Problem:
using data to illustrate the problem

Problem:
not addressing root causes, investing in police

Solutions:
investing in community needs

It's time for the city council to be on the right side of history, to be at the forefront of change, and to address the challenges we are all facing during the COVID-19 pandemic by making commonsense budget decisions that help us right now and set us up for a better future. Once again, I'm asking you to invest in our communities and move the \$X from policing to solutions that work.

Solutions:
investment in communities and our future

Values:
commonsense, community, pride of place, justice

Resources to describe the problem and solutions

Here are a few examples of resources to pull local data and talking points from.

Budget Data and Info:

- [Police Budget Breakdown](#) by Action Center on Race & the Economy
- [How Much Do U.S. Cities Spend On Policing?](#) Infographic and overview of report by The Center for Popular Democracy, Law for Black Lives and the Black Youth Project 100
- [Cities Financial Data](#) by California State Controller's Office (California specific)

Toolkits and Talking Points:

- [Divest and Invest One-pager](#) by Michigan Public Health Awakened Chapter (Michigan specific but can be adapted for your area)
- [Fund Services, Not Cops](#) by People's Budget LA
- [Talking Points: APHA's Statement on Law Enforcement Violence](#) by End Police Violence Collective
- [Resources to Challenge Policing and Incarceration as Part of a COVID-19 Response](#) messaging toolkits by Human Impact Partners
- [Interrupting Criminalization #DefundPolice Toolkit: Interrupting Criminalization](#) an initiative at the BCRW Social Justice Institute
- [Talking Points for Budget Advocacy on Jailing, Policing, Criminalization & Abolition \(and in Spanish\)](#) by the No New SF Jail Coalition
- [National Priorities Project's Tool - Trade-Offs: Your Money, Your Choices](#) by National Priorities Project (focuses on military spending)

This resource was created by Public Health Awakened
PublicHealthAwakened.org

Special thanks to the Public Health Awakened members who contributed to this resource: Omid Bagheri Garakani, Lizzie Corcoran, Celeste Davis, and Katherine Schaff.

