



# Building OUR CITY Budget

New York City's budget sets how much money goes to public services like schools, trash pick-ups, libraries, and more. The budget should align with New Yorkers' needs, and this often requires communities coming together to build power and pressure decision makers. Read on to learn how the budget process works, who those decision makers are, and how you can influence the budget to help your community thrive.



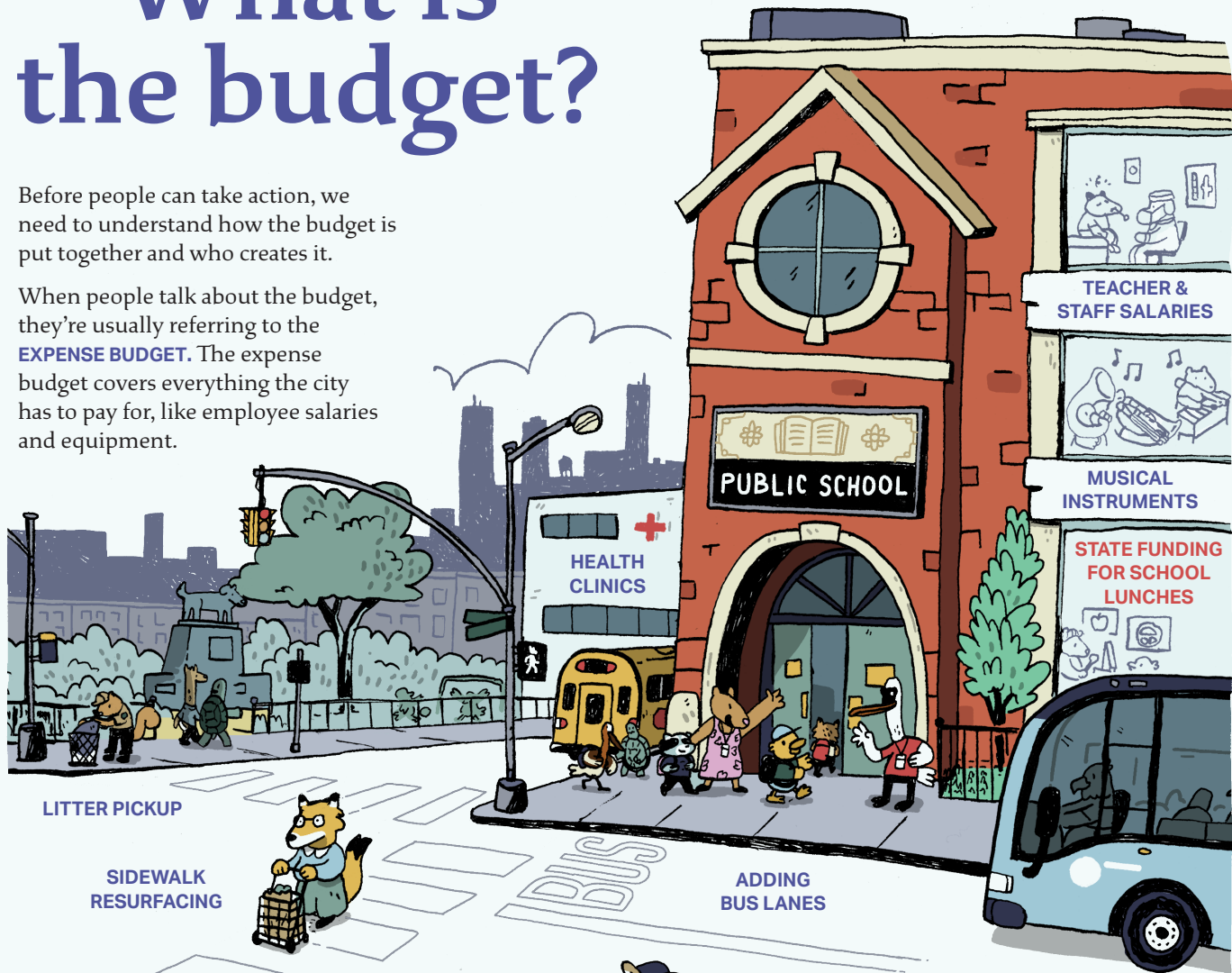
MAKING  
POLICY  
PUBLIC



# What is the budget?

Before people can take action, we need to understand how the budget is put together and who creates it.

When people talk about the budget, they're usually referring to the **EXPENSE BUDGET**. The expense budget covers everything the city has to pay for, like employee salaries and equipment.



LITTER PICKUP

SIDEWALK RESURFACING

ADDING BUS LANES

ROADWORK

FLOOD PREVENTION

SALES TAX

PERMITS

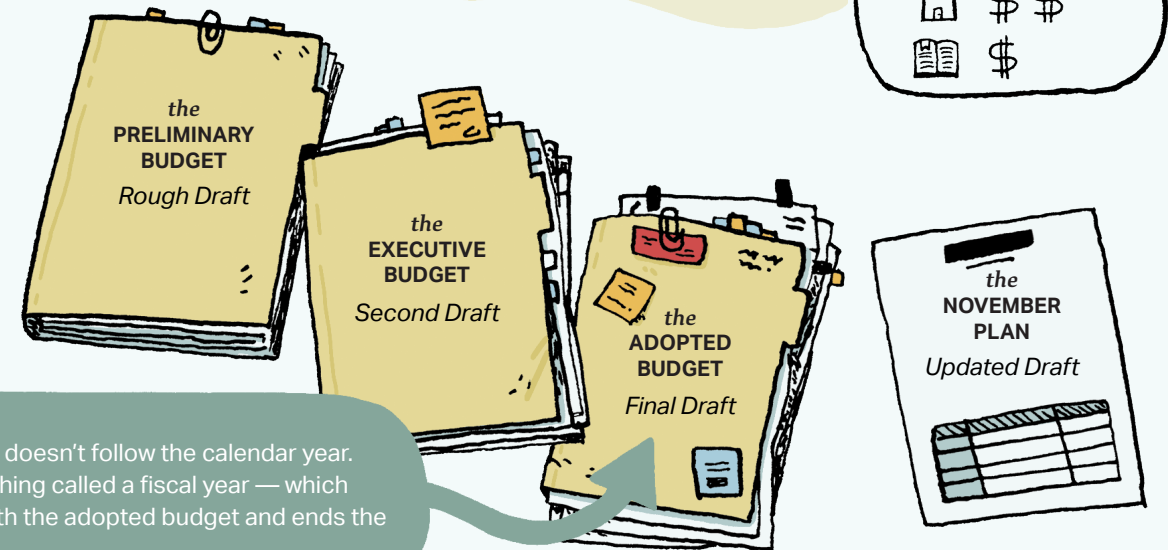
The amount the city has to spend each year comes from the **REVENUE BUDGET**. This number is an estimate based on what the city made the year before from things like taxes, permits, and any additional federal and state money. The Expense and Revenue budgets have to equal each other.

There's also a third kind of budget called the **CAPITAL BUDGET**. This is the budget the City uses to fund multi-year "capital projects" like building new schools or renovating playgrounds.

# How is the budget made?

Every year the city has a new budget. The Mayor will work with elected officials, city agencies, and other offices, like the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to decide what to fund, but it's mostly what the Mayor says is important. This means that, in order to influence the budget, people have to influence the Mayor.

The Mayor makes 4 versions of the budget over the year:



The city budget doesn't follow the calendar year. It follows something called a fiscal year — which starts in July with the adopted budget and ends the following June.

Each time the Mayor releases a new budget, look at where the money is going and where it's not going. You can see the budget documents on OMB's website (*see back cover*).

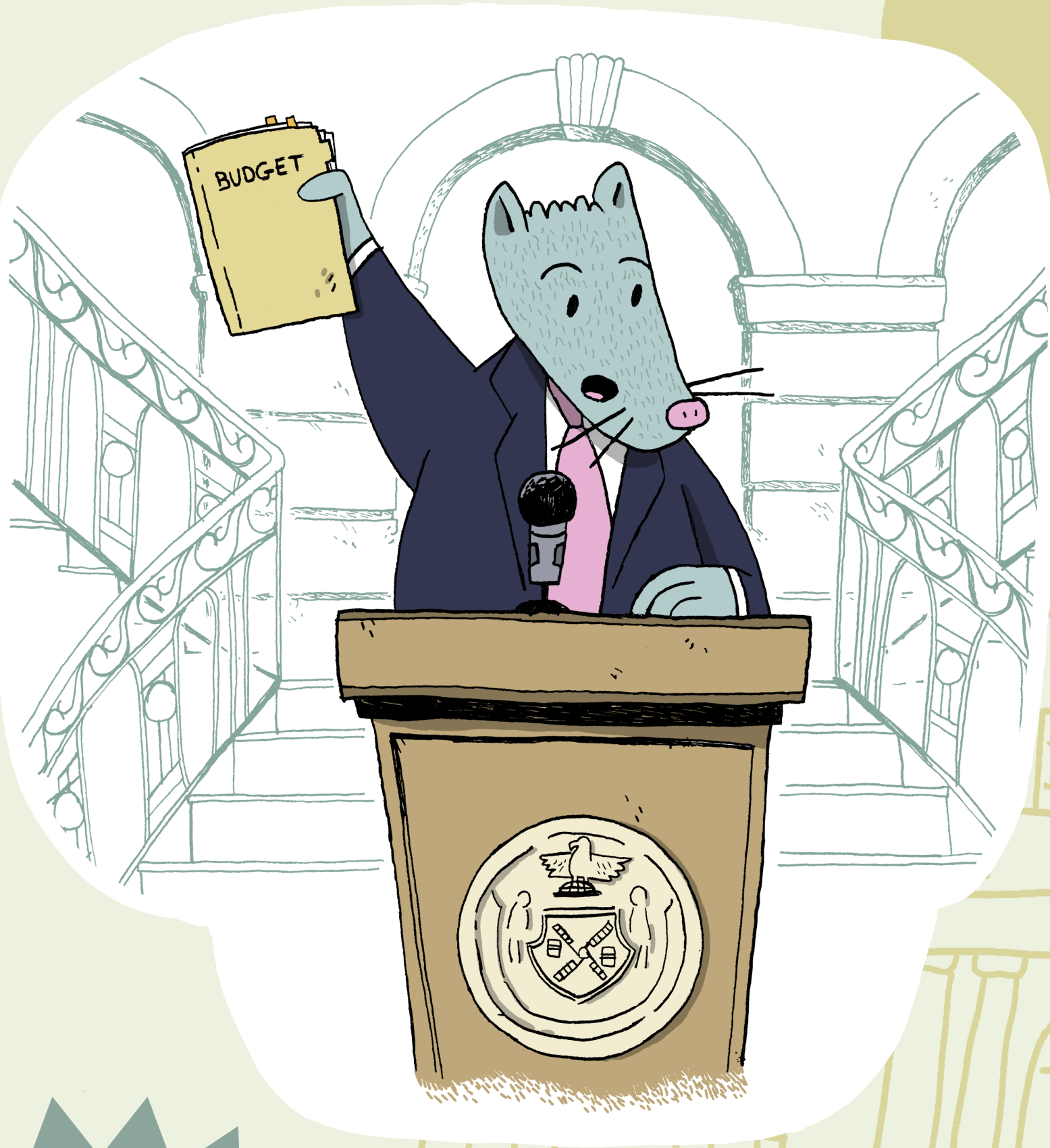


Work with others to shift the Mayor's agenda. The Mayor will have to respond to community power.

Reach out to organizations and community groups that advocate for the issues you care about to get involved (*see back cover*).



# Who has the most say on the budget?



## The Mayor

The Mayor has the most influence. In addition to presenting different versions of the budget, the Mayor also leads budget modifications and negotiates with City Council to approve the budget.

The Mayor is supposed to fund programs and services for all NYC residents. If you've looked at the budget and don't see things that are important to your community, make sure the Mayor knows (see poster and back cover)!



## City Council Speaker

The City Council Speaker has the second most influence. As the head of City Council, they're in charge of setting City Council's political priorities.

They also decide which Council Members are on each committee and the Budget Negotiation Team (BNT).

All these people can help move your issue into the budget in a different way. Make sure they know your issues and how their constituents are impacted. Research their priorities to figure out how to move them to your side and invite your allies to show up for your actions.

And don't forget — all these individuals are elected by the people! We need to hold them accountable to meeting our needs.

## Council Budget Negotiation Team (BNT)

Council Members on the BNT are the main people involved with the Mayor and Speaker during behind-the-scenes budget conversations and negotiations. This is different from the Finance Committee (see right).

Depending on the City Council Speaker, the BNT can be secretive — it can be hard to find out who is on it or which members have the most influence. Get in touch with coalitions and organizations working on the issues you care about to know who the best targets are. Then, talk to those Council Members and their staff.



## Council Finance Committee

The Finance Committee leads the hearings in May that help decide what's in the adopted budget (called "the executive budget oversight hearing process"). The Finance Chair is one of the most powerful positions to hold on

City Council. You can see which Council Members are on the Finance Committee here: [council.nyc.gov/committees/finance/](http://council.nyc.gov/committees/finance/)

Council Members are supported by the City Council's Finance Division (a group of analysts, lawyers, and economists that provide Council Members with budget information). They release easy-to-read budget reports here: [council.nyc.gov/budget](http://council.nyc.gov/budget)

## Council Members

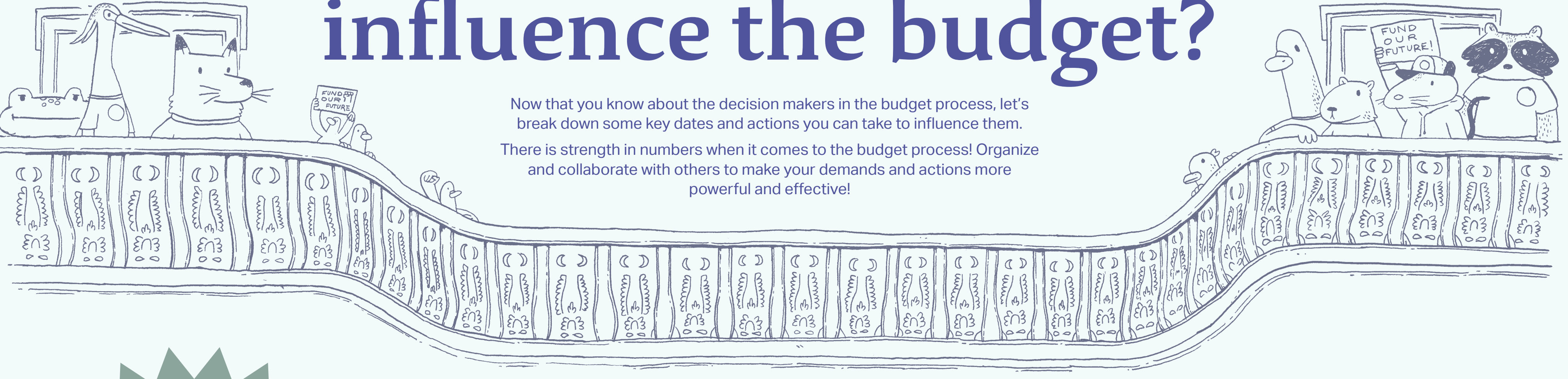
All Council Members are part of the budget process at some point, but not all Council Members have the same influence. For the most impact, make your priorities known to the Speaker and BNT.



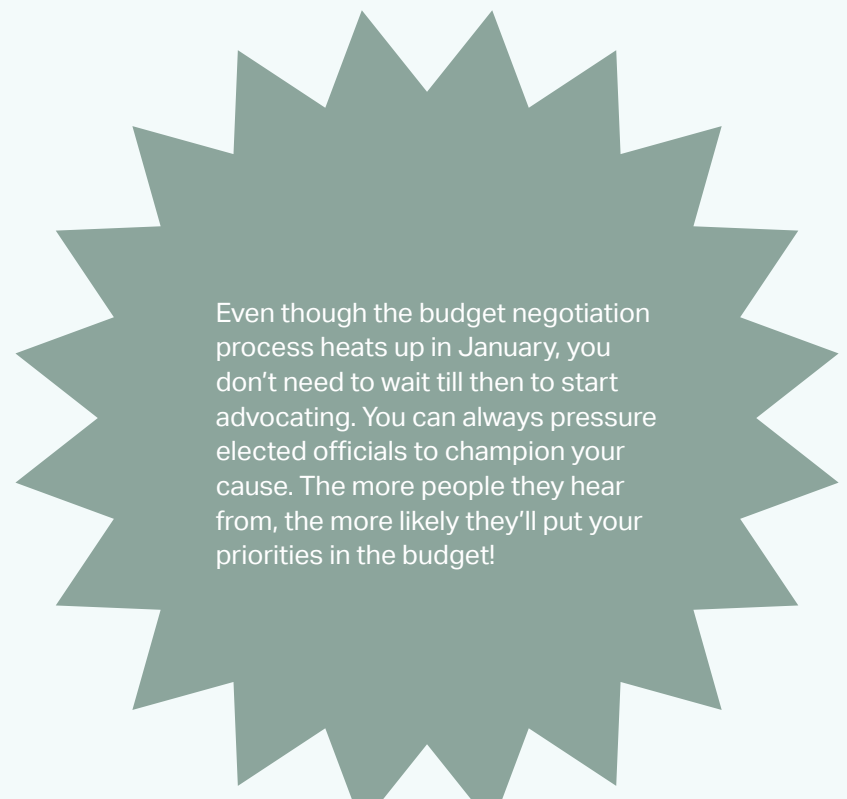
Open the poster to learn more about the budget timeline and how these decision makers fit in.



# When can you influence the budget?



Now that you know about the decision makers in the budget process, let's break down some key dates and actions you can take to influence them. There is strength in numbers when it comes to the budget process! Organize and collaborate with others to make your demands and actions more powerful and effective!



Even though the budget negotiation process heats up in January, you don't need to wait till then to start advocating. You can always pressure elected officials to champion your cause. The more people they hear from, the more likely they'll put your priorities in the budget!



## January 16 Mayor's Preliminary Budget Deadline

The Mayor's first draft of the budget is due by January 16. This kicks off budget season! The Mayor will hold a press conference and share information, like a Budget Summary (what the Mayor thinks is important) and sometimes a Citywide Savings Program (what programs and services the Mayor wants to cut).



### TAKE DIRECT ACTION!

Get together with others and reach out to target Council Members to tell them what's important to you. The goal is to get City Council to see that your issue impacts a lot of people and aligns with their own stated values.

The preliminary budget will get a lot of press coverage and can be a good time to draw attention to your cause. Reporters often get a special briefing and see it before the public does — you can push reporters to ask the Mayor and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) about your issue.

## March 1-25 City Council Public Hearings on the Preliminary Budget

After the preliminary budget is released, the first round of City Council oversight hearings happen. At these hearings, Council Members will ask city agencies about their spending, and the public can testify and share their experiences on how the budget impacts them and their community. You can find which Council Committee has say over which city agency here: [council.nyc.gov/committees](http://council.nyc.gov/committees). **Anyone** can testify at the March hearings!



### TAKE DIRECT ACTION!

Testifying is a chance to speak directly to Council Members. The more people who show up and testify with a united message, the more public pressure there is on Council Members to respond to your issue before moving forward with the budget.

Hearings are also a chance to see which Council Members are on your side already and who you might want to convince.



## April 1 City Council Preliminary Budget Response Deadline

City Council is supposed to release their budget priorities by April 1. This is the starting point for negotiations between the Mayor and City Council.



### GET ANSWERS! BUILD POWER!

You can find the Council's budget response on their website — it's a big written report sorted by issue area. Check if your demands were heard and let your Council Members know what's missing!

You can meet with Council Members, write letters, make phone calls, and send emails. Get others in your community to do the same and show City Council that the people they serve care about your issue (see back cover for more ways to get involved).

## April 26 Mayor's Executive Budget Deadline

The Mayor must release a second draft of their budget plan, the Executive Budget, by April 26. The Mayor will hold another press conference and this budget should show the Mayor's revised priorities based on what they heard from City Council and the public.



### GET ANSWERS! BUILD POWER!

You can find the Mayor's budget message and other helpful documents on OMB's website (see back cover). Check these documents to see if/how the Mayor's funding priorities have changed.

Be strategic! Look again at which Council Members support your priorities, and which could still be persuaded. See the back cover for activities you can use to convince those "undecideds"!

## May 6-25 City Council Public Hearings on the Executive Budget

Council Committees will spend the month in hearings reviewing the Executive Budget with the Finance Committee. The schedule of hearings will be posted on the City Council website by the end of April.

Unlike in March, where the public can testify at each hearing, in May, there's one day dedicated for the public to speak. So, it's important to rally people to testify! The Finance Chair and their staff will be there to listen and note your demands.



### TAKE DIRECT ACTION! GET ANSWERS! BUILD POWER!

Council Members will be voting on the budget soon. Keep the pressure on! Time is running out, so think about who can still be moved. Use some tactics from the back cover to recruit more people to your side and keep building power!



Committees hold oversight hearings all year long about all sorts of issues, so you can put pressure on any committee (not just Finance) to hold budget-related hearings at any time.

For example, if you see an issue with school budgets, you could push the Committee on Education to hold an oversight hearing at any point in the calendar year. Then, you can show up with others to testify at that hearing.



## June 1-30 City Council Adopts or Amends the Budget

After the May hearings, City Council will wrap up negotiations with the Mayor. The Mayor and Council Speaker will publicly shake hands to show that they've reached an agreement. After that, City Council will come together to vote. If a majority of City Council votes 'aye', the budget is adopted.

Even though it doesn't usually happen, the City Charter allows the City Council to amend the Mayor's executive budget and vote on their own version. The Mayor can veto this, but City Council can also override the Mayor with a two-thirds majority.



### BUILD POWER!

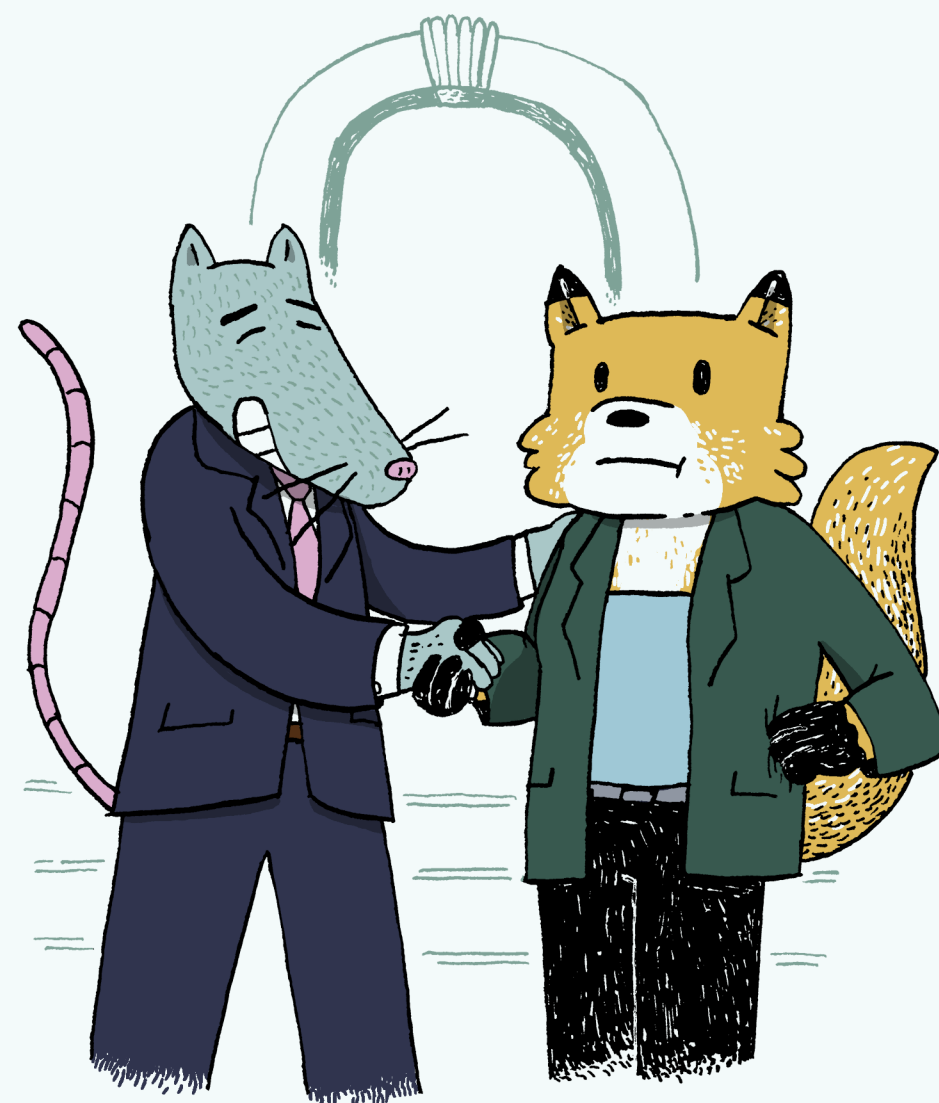
There will be some time between negotiations and when the vote actually happens.

You can use this time to keep the pressure on by getting involved in public actions and directing your attention to undecided Council Members.

## What happens when the budget is late?

If the new budget hasn't been adopted by June 5, the previous year's budget will continue into the new fiscal year until a new one gets adopted.

If it takes a really long time to approve a budget after the fiscal year starts, the city might not have all the money it needs to run its services. The State Financial Control Board could also take control of the budget away from the Mayor and City Council, placing the Governor in charge. If this happened, the budget would be less accountable to the people of NYC.



## November 15 Mayor's November Plan Deadline

The November Plan shows where the Mayor would like to modify spending and any estimated changes for the next few fiscal years. City Council can vote to approve or reject some of the changes — if Council takes no action, the Mayor's changes are automatically approved. Around the same time, City agencies also have to submit their budget estimates to OMB for the next fiscal year.



### GET ANSWERS!

If you want an agency, like the Department of Education, to include your demands for the next fiscal year, you need to let them know early!

The best time to change hearts and minds is November-March, not during the heat of budget negotiations (April-June).







# Get Involved

Get the answers you need, build power, and take direct action to move decision makers!

Your first step should always be to try to connect with groups who are already working on the issues you care about. Search online or talk to people in your community to find organizations or local groups you can join.

## Get Answers

To find budget documents, go to: **Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB):** [nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/publications.page](https://nyc.gov/site/omb/publications/publications.page)

Find other information on the budget at:

**City Council:** [council.nyc.gov/budget](https://council.nyc.gov/budget)

**Comptroller:** [comptroller.nyc.gov/reports](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports)

**Independent Budget Office (IBO):** [ibo.nyc.ny.us/publications.html](https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/publications.html)

You can call 311 to connect to any of these offices.

## Take Direct Action

Testify during March and May City Council hearings. Figure out your



target Council Members and get a group together to request a meeting with them. In these meetings, you can talk about your issues and ask Council Members to advocate for them.

Make calls, write letters, use social media, and send emails to Council Members. Keep in mind: more effort shows more commitment — a handwritten letter is more impactful than an email, but that doesn't mean you can't do both.

Organize a protest or rally. Ask Council Members who support your issue to join these public events. As it gets closer to June, get louder and more active!

## Build Power

Organize the people around you to make the biggest impact — talk to people in your community and get them to join you. Think about where else you might find others who care about your issue. There's more power in numbers.



**MAKING POLICY PUBLIC** is a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). CUP partners with policy advocates and graphic designers to produce foldout posters that explain complicated policy issues, like this one.

### COLLABORATORS

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**Design & Illustration:** Noah Jodice



**Teachers Unite** is a member-led organization of educators working alongside students and parents to end the school-to-prison pipeline and transform New York City public schools. [teachersunite.org](https://teachersunite.org)

**Noah Jodice** is an illustrator living and working in St. Louis, Missouri. You can see more of his work at [noahjodice.com](https://noahjodice.com)

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**The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)** is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to support meaningful civic engagement, in partnership with historically marginalized communities. [welcometocup.org](https://welcometocup.org)



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