

# The People's Budget Campaign

## Toward Spending and Revenue Policies based on Human Rights



**Anja Rudiger, Ph.D.**  
**National Economic & Social Rights Initiative (NESRI)**

# What Is Human Rights Budgeting?



## Human rights budgeting:

- strives to meet people's needs and rights
- is based on human rights principles

## Participation in human rights budgeting:

- starts at the beginning of the budget process
- influences both spending and revenue decisions
- is tied to an assessment of people's fundamental needs
- amplifies the voices of those most disadvantaged



- **Universality:** everyone's needs and rights are met
- **Equity:** we get what we need and give what we can
- **Transparency:** budget information is clear and accessible to all
- **Accountability:** progress toward meeting needs/rights is measured
- **Participation:** people participate directly in deciding spending/revenue goals and initiatives

Human Rights Budgeting

# Human Rights and Budget Advocacy

A human rights approach to budget advocacy:

- intervenes proactively in defensive fights against budget cuts
- offers positive alternative to austerity agenda
- debunks scarcity myth, exposes inequitable distribution
- stops competition over shrinking slices of the budget
- raises expectations about government obligations

➤ Focus is on a new approach to budget and revenue policy, rather than more engagement in the current budget paradigm

# The Paradigm Shift



- A public budget must seek to meet people's fundamental needs
- Revenue policy must be designed to fund a needs-based budget
- Spending/tax initiatives must be guided by human rights principles
- An accountability system must measure budget outcomes
- The budget & revenue process must start with public participation

Human Rights Budgeting

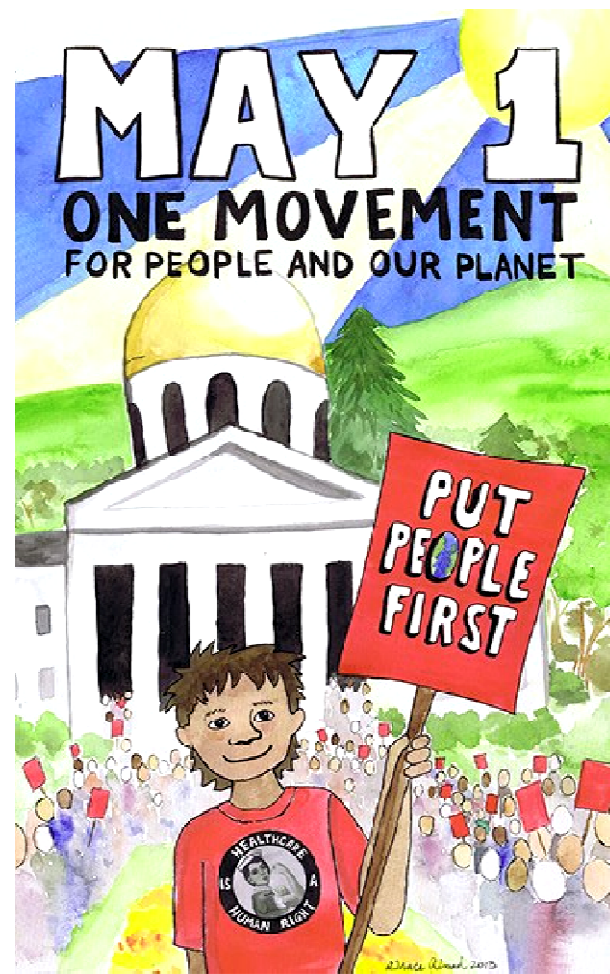


# The People's Budget Campaign in Vermont

Human rights based grassroots organizing  
by the **Vermont Workers' Center**

Put People First movement:

- ❖ **Healthcare Is a Human Right Campaign**  
(since 2008, universal healthcare law in 2011)
- ❖ **The People's Budget Campaign** (since 2011)



# The Breakthrough in the 2012 Legislature



New language in Vermont Statutes:

✓ “The state budget should be designed to address the needs of the people of Vermont in a way that advances human dignity and equity.”

# Prioritizing Needs

- ✓ “Spending and revenue policies will ... recognize every person’s need for health, housing, dignified work, education, food, social security, and a healthy environment.”



The Breakthrough



# Including Public Participation

- ✓ “The Administration shall develop budget and revenue proposals as part of a transparent and accountable process **with direct and meaningful participation** from Vermont residents.”
- process for public participation in developing budget goals and prioritizing spending and revenue initiatives

# Increasing Accountability

- ✓ “continuous evaluation of the raising and spending of public funds by systems of outcome measurement based on indicators that measure success in accomplishing the purposes of the state budget”



The Breakthrough

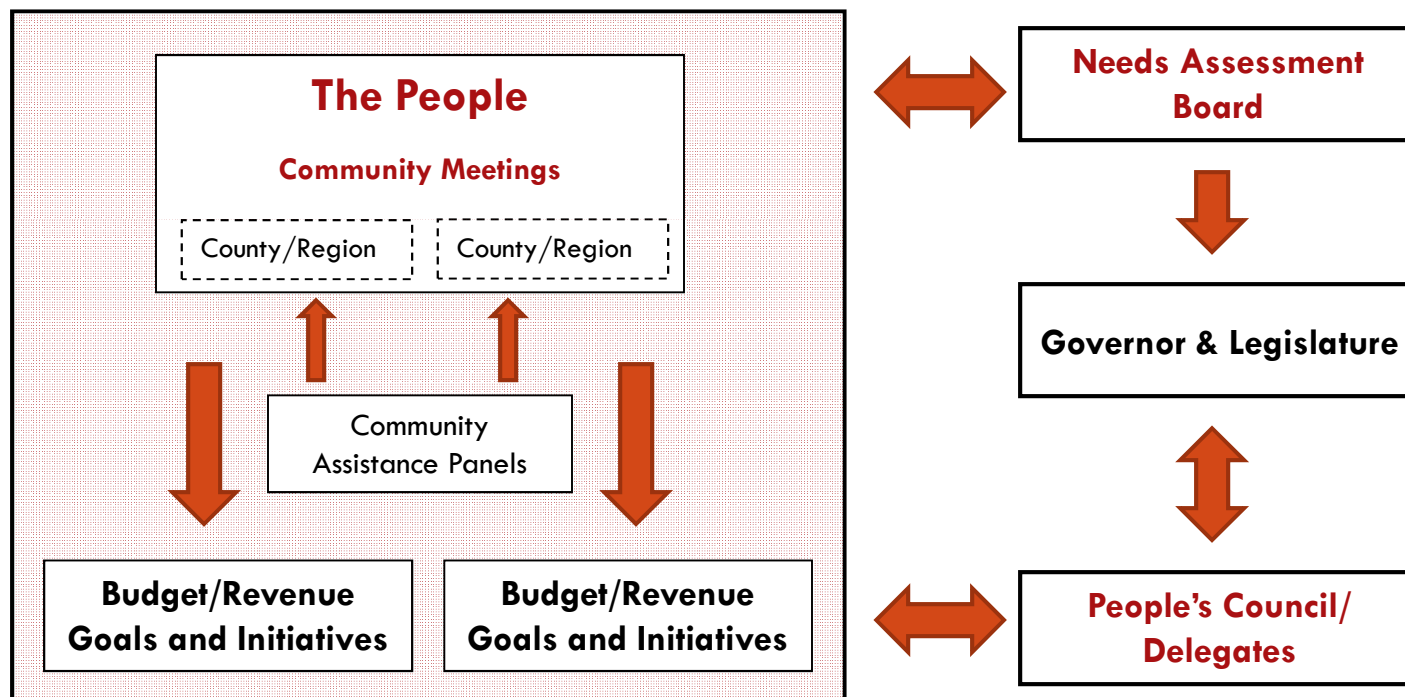
# Next Steps: Participation and Needs Assessments

People's Budget Bill for public participation and needs assessments in state budget and revenue decisions



# Participation

Proposal for piloting direct public participation in two regions



Participation

# Needs Assessments



Proposal for annual needs assessments that measure unmet needs in all communities:

- ☐ Set up an independent board to collect quantitative and qualitative data and report on the state of needs and rights in Vermont
- ☐ Formally integrate a needs assessment into the budget process



# Contact Us



[www.nesri.org](http://www.nesri.org)

[www.workerscenter.org](http://www.workerscenter.org)