

Alameda County’s informational budget resources offer limited explanations or breakdowns of budget processes, posing a significant obstacle in functional community engagement. To improve accessibility and constituent engagement, our initiative proposes implementation of the following measures: (1) redesigning the budget webpage, (2) developing a comprehensive instructional guide, (3) instituting engagement workshops, (4) increasing asynchronous participation options, and (5) improving outreach through social media and public surveys.

We advise a complete redesign of the Alameda County budget webpage to improve ease of viewing, navigation, and comprehension of the budget process. The webpage should utilize a streamlined layout and succinct explanations to encourage user-friendly navigation. We recommend the County film short instructional videos ranging (5-6 minutes) that break down the basics of the budget process system, such as key terminology, budget timelines and deadlines, and primary sources of funding and County expenses. These videos should employ strong visual elements to appropriately demonstrate relevant graphics pertaining to the county’s annual budget cycle.<sup>1</sup>

Upon their availability, resources such as the recommended budget, adopted budget, and the final adopted budget should be included. Resources such as FAQ sheets for commonly asked questions and opportunities for community involvement in budget hearings and public comment periods should be included.<sup>2</sup> The webpage should organize relevant budget documents for previous fiscal years into a budget archive, clearly demarcated and separated from the current fiscal year’s documents.<sup>3</sup> For greater accessibility, resources on the webpage should be available in multiple languages, such as Mandarin, Spanish and Vietnamese.

In order to increase transparency within the budget process, Alameda County should create a comprehensive budget process guide for citizens. A similar guide by Orange County details the responsibilities of the various departments and roles each program plays in the county government, as well as provides a comprehensive overview of the County’s budget process, funding sources, allocations, and key initiatives. It explains how the County develops its budget through the Strategic Financial Plan, including forecasting, departmental requests, and public input, leading to Board adoption. The guide also includes a calendar of budget planning and public engagement opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

Alameda County should hold citizen engagement budget workshops in order to educate community members about the budgeting process, each year’s funding allocations, budget priorities, issues, and fiscal year budget priority changes and their causes, and how the public can

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of strong websites and instructional videos can be found in [LA County](#) and [San Diego County](#).

<sup>2</sup> Examples of detailed and informative FAQ sheets can be found in [San Diego County](#) and [Orange County](#).

<sup>3</sup> Examples of extensive budget archives can be found in [LA County](#), [Orange County](#), and [San Bernardino County](#).

<sup>4</sup> Examples of budget process guides can be found in [Orange County](#) and [Riverside County](#).

participate in the budget process.<sup>5</sup> Providing an easily-understandable, and in-depth presentation during the workshop that is also available on the website for remote and later viewing is advisable.<sup>6</sup> Community engagement workshops should be held at least two weeks in advance of the recommended budget deadline, allowing ample time for community members to provide input and County Supervisors to incorporate community input into the recommended budget. Moreover, we recommend that the County make every effort to hold the workshop outside of typical working-day hours to increase public attendance and engagement.

Alongside in-person accessibility and engagement efforts, we recommend that Alameda County provide greater opportunities for asynchronous civic participation. The county should update existing asynchronous services in accordance with the following standards: all budget hearings at which the public may provide comment should be live-streamed, allow for the submission of moderated public comment in real time through virtual conferencing platforms like Zoom or Vimeo, recordings of proceedings should be archived on the budget page for constituents to reference and opportunities for advanced written comment submission should be made available on the budget website.<sup>7</sup> Alameda County should ensure that the recommended community budget workshops similarly provide constituents the opportunity to attend and comment, reference recorded meetings, and receive centralized, informative resources on the budget asynchronously. In deference to Alameda County's diversely multilingual population, engagement opportunities should allow constituents to request translation services in a simple, streamlined manner. We recommend that Alameda County centralize clear, informative resources for any asynchronous opportunities on its budget website, including dates, times, locations, and links where possible.<sup>8</sup>

We advise the County further supplement engagement efforts through intensified social media presence and campaigns as a means to reach a greater demographic of constituents. Maintaining a consistent presence on platforms such as Instagram, X, and Facebook, provides platforms for the County to showcase short-form graphics and statistics from the proposed and adopted budgets, budget development and adoption timelines, and key County initiatives. Social media also provides constituents with the opportunity to interact and ask questions, and regular posting and stronger campaigns will encourage greater community response. The county can further utilize these social media campaigns to recommend constituents opt into the Alameda County Connections newsletter and receive greater detail on these processes. County newsletters are another opportunity to provide constituents with in-depth, detailed information on budget process events, updates, or key information through the option of an email or text message subscription.

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<sup>5</sup> Examples of public workshops can be found in [Orange County](#).

<sup>6</sup> Example presentation from [Orange County](#).

<sup>7</sup> Examples of opportunities for asynchronous participation can be found in [San Diego County](#).

<sup>8</sup> Examples of clear and accessible information about asynchronous participation can also be found in [San Diego County](#).

Upon a similar example from Riverside County’s newly implemented Civic Engagement Campaign, we also recommend Alameda County fields a yearly budget priorities survey to gauge budget allocation between departments and services for the next fiscal year. Participants can identify services of greater need in their areas, as well as indicate categories of spending to receive more or less funding. This survey would allow Alameda County to conduct primary source data analysis on the opinions of the public, and proactively integrate such input throughout the entire budget process, and allow the office of the County Administrator to integrate these priorities into the final rendering of the recommended budget.<sup>9</sup>

Taken together, these recommendations provide Alameda County with a path toward strengthening transparency, accessibility, and public trust in its budget process. By redesigning the budget webpage, developing comprehensive instructional materials, expanding both in-person and asynchronous engagement opportunities, and enhancing outreach through social media and annual surveys, the County can create a more informed and participatory civic environment. Implementing these measures will not only improve constituent understanding of the budget but also ensure that community perspectives are meaningfully incorporated into fiscal decision-making.

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<sup>9</sup> Riverside County Civic Engagement Campaign can be found [here](#).