

Making Democracy Fun

How Game Design Can Empower Citizens and Transform Politics

Wednesday

April 30

3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Great Cities Institute

412 South Peoria Street

Suite 400, CUPPA Hall

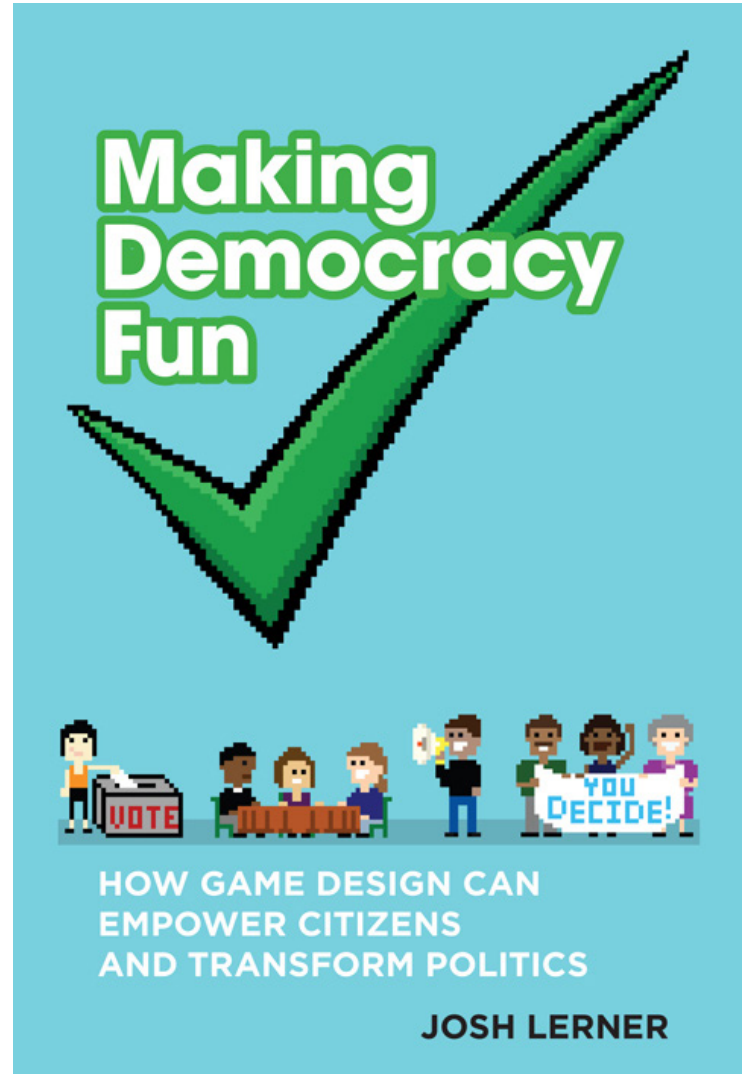
Book Talk with the Author:

Josh Lerner, Executive Director, The Participatory Budgeting Project

Anyone who has been to a public hearing or community meeting would agree that participatory democracy can be boring. Hours of repetitive presentations, alternately alarmist or complacent, for or against, often with no clear outcome or decision. Is this the best democracy can offer? In *Making Democracy Fun*, Josh Lerner offers a novel solution for the sad state of our deliberative democracy: the power of good game design. What if public meetings featured competition and collaboration (such as team challenges), clear rules (presented and modeled in multiple ways), measurable progress (such as scores and levels), and engaging sounds and visuals?

Drawing on more than a decade of practical experience and extensive research, Lerner explains how games have been integrated into a variety of public programs in North and South America. He offers rich stories of game techniques in action, in children's councils, social service programs, and participatory budgeting and planning. With these real-world examples in mind, Lerner describes five kinds of games and twenty-six game mechanics that are especially relevant for democracy. He finds that when governments and organizations use games and design their programs to be more like games, public participation becomes more attractive, effective, and transparent. Game design can make democracy fun—and make it work.

Josh Lerner is the Executive Director of The Participatory Budgeting Project. He completed a PhD in Politics at the New School for Social Research and a Masters in Planning from the University of Toronto. In addition to teaching at Fordham University and The New School, he has worked as a popular educator with the Brooklyn Center for the Urban Environment and as a community development adviser on UNDP projects in Slovakia. Since 2003, he has researched and worked with dozens of participatory budgeting processes in North America, Latin America, and Europe. Josh is the author of *Making Democracy Fun: How Game Design Can Engage Citizens and Transform Politics* (MIT Press, 2014). His articles have appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The National Civic Review*, *YES! Magazine*, *Shelterforce*, *the Journal of Public Deliberation*, and the *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting and Financial Management*.



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