



Federal Budget and Appropriation Terms

The amount of federal budget terms and phrases can easily become overwhelming as you embark upon advocacy efforts at the federal level. To help take the confusion out of the equation, ACS has developed this Federal Budget and Appropriation Terms document, in order to make sense of those you are most likely to hear as you advocate at the federal level.

While this is an extensive list, it is not all encompassing, and we encourage you to explore the resources listed at the end of this document. Additionally, while many of these terms are also used at the state level, they may have slightly different meanings; we recommend that you research the meaning of key terms in your own state as part of your state-level advocacy efforts.

Appropriation

An appropriation enables an agency or department to make spending commitments and expenditures. Generally speaking an appropriation determines how many dollars the federal government will spend on the program in a fiscal year.

Appropriations Committees

Appropriations committees in both the House and Senate are responsible for determining the precise levels of budget authority for all discretionary programs.

Appropriations Subcommittees

Appropriations subcommittees in both the House and Senate are made up of members of the full Appropriations Committee. Each of these subcommittees has jurisdiction of funding for a different area of the federal government. In both the House and Senate there are the following 12 Appropriations subcommittees:

- Agriculture, Rural Development, and Food and Drug Administration
- Commerce, Justice, and Science
- Defense
- Energy and Water
- Financial Services and General Government
- Homeland Security
- Interior and Environment
- Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education
- Legislative Branch
- Military Construction and Veterans Affairs
- State and Foreign Operations
- Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development

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Authorization Bill

An authorization bill gives a government agency the legal authority to fund and operate its programs (i.e. Child Care Development Block Grant, HeadStart, etc.). An authorization bill also sets maximum funding levels and includes policy guidelines. Government programs can be authorized on an annual, multi-year, or permanent basis.

Balanced Budget

A budget in which revenues and spending are equal in a given year.

Budget Resolution

A non-binding resolution passed by both chambers of Congress that serves as a framework for budget decisions and sets the overall spending limits but does not include funding levels for specific programs.

Conference Committee

Members of the House and Senate work together to reconcile differences in their respective versions of a bill. Both the House and Senate must pass identical versions of any legislation before it can be signed into law by the president.

Congressional Aide

Support staff or members of Congress.

Continuing Resolution (CR)

A piece of legislation that extends funding for federal agencies—typically at the same rate that they had previously been funded.

Deficit

The amount by which government expenditures are greater than tax collections in a given year.

Discretionary Spending

Spending determined by the Appropriations Committee and Congress. Most early childhood and education programs are discretionary spending programs.

Discretionary Spending Caps

Spending limits, which if exceeded may trigger across the board funding cuts.

Earmarks

Provisions added to legislation to designate money for a particular project, company, or organization, usually in the congressional district of the lawmaker who sponsored it.

Entitlement Programs

An entitlement program requires the government to pay benefits to anyone who is eligible under the program guidelines (i.e. social security, student loan program, school lunch).

Fiscal Year

October 1–September 30th

House Committee on the Budget

The committee in the U.S. House of Representatives that is responsible for writing a budget resolution, among other responsibilities.

Mandatory Spending

Entitlement programs and other programs that Congress designates as mandatory programs do not rely on the appropriations process.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

Part of the executive branch of government, OMB gives guidelines to federal agencies instructing them how to prepare their strategic plans and budgets. It also serves as the president's accounting office.

Poverty Line

Also called the poverty level or the poverty threshold, the poverty line is determined by annual income. For example, the federal poverty line for a family of four in 2014 was \$23,850.

President's Budget

the White House releases the annual spending proposal of the president each February. It represents the administration's priorities as reflected in the specific funding requests of various federal agencies.

Revenues

Funds flowing into the U.S. Treasury from such things as individual and corporate income taxes, payroll taxes, and user fees.

Sequestration

The term for automatic, across-the-board spending cuts triggered by legislation.

Subsidy

Direct assistance from the federal government to individuals or businesses for certain activities, which helps defray the costs of those activities.

More Tools and Resources

[A Federal Budget Glossary](#)

[Federal Poverty Guidelines, Research, and Measurement](#)

[The President's Budget Proposal](#)

[Office of Management and Budget Agency and Program Oversight](#)

[Additional Federal Budget Terms](#)

[View all ACS Tools & Resources](#)

