



## Guide to the Federal Budget Process

While the federal budget process is based on tradition, in recent years, policymakers have introduced and incorporated new funding methods to secure federal dollars for their issues. This document looks at both traditional federal budget process, and some alternative strategies used to create the federal budget. The federal budget can be confusing for even seasoned advocates so Advocacy and & Communication Solutions, LLC (ACS) developed this tool to help take the confusion out of the equation and make sense of the process you are likely to interact with, if you advocate at the federal level.

### The Federal Budget Process<sup>1</sup>

*Traditionally the federal appropriation process has included the following sequence.*

#### Step 1 The President's Budget Request

- ▶ The President's request is typically submitted to Congress on the first Monday in February, though the date may change, especially when a new administration takes office.
- ▶ The President's budget request details the administration's position on the full range of federal revenue and spending.
- ▶ The administration uses the budget request to introduce new policies, programs or changes they would like to see enacted.
- ▶ The budget request is a proposal and has no binding authority on Congress.

#### How You Can Participate:

- Review major proposals and initiatives related to your issue within the President's proposed budget.
- Prepare a few talking points about why you support/oppose the proposals as well as what additional policies/programs should be funded through the federal budget. Share those points with the media, policymakers and your networks.

*Step 2*

<sup>1</sup><http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/A-Brief-Guide-to-the-Federal-Budget-and-Appropriations-Process.aspx>

## Step 2 Congress' Response

- ▶ In response to the President's budget, Congress introduces concurrent congressional budget resolutions in both the U.S. House and the U.S. Senate, setting the total level of discretionary funding for the next fiscal year. Eventually, both chambers agree on a final budget resolution. While this resolution looks at total federal spending across a 10-year window, it is not binding beyond the approaching fiscal year.
- ▶ Budget resolutions are reviewed by relevant committees and must be approved by the both chambers.
- ▶ Unlike traditional bills, budget resolutions do not require presidential action and pass with a simple majority.

### How You Can Participate:

- Identify key committees, members, and staff who are likely to be involved in the drafting of budget resolutions related to your priorities.
- Work to engage them via letters, emails, and in-person meetings.

## Step 3 Congressional Appropriations

- ▶ Once discretionary funding limits have been determined, the funding process moves to the appropriations committees in each chamber.
- ▶ The appropriations committees determine program-by-program funding levels by addressing 12 separate appropriations bills that are generated by subcommittees covering federal agencies.
- ▶ Appropriations bills are supposed to be passed in "regular order," meaning the full passage through both chambers by the start of the federal fiscal year on October 1.
- ▶ As the fiscal year ends, leadership in both chambers often negotiate an omnibus bill, which combines all appropriations bills into one piece of legislation.
- ▶ The final step in enacting program funding consists of the President signing the bills or the omnibus. The President has the authority to veto appropriations bills and Congress can then attempt to override the veto.
- ▶ All appropriation bills are supposed to be fully passed through both chambers by the start of the federal fiscal year (October 1). Failure to provide appropriations results in a near complete shutdown of federal operations.

### How You Can Participate:

- Identify key committees, subcommittees, members, and staff involved appropriations connected to your issue.
- Work to engage these policymakers and their staff via letters, emails, and in-person meeting related to your funding and policy priorities.

### Continuing Resolutions

In recent years Congress has rarely passed appropriations bills as outlined above. Instead, legislators enact a series of continuing resolutions (stopgap measures), which are short-term spending bills that typically maintain funding at the previous year's levels in order to avoid a government shutdown.

Should Congress not complete the appropriations process or pass a continuing resolution by the start of the fiscal year (October 1st) the federal government, with a few exceptions, shuts down. We saw that in 2013 when the federal government shut down for 17 days until a bill was signed into law on October 17th. The funding standoff created during the time of a government shutdown results in hundreds of thousands of government employees out of work and takes an estimated \$1.5 billion out of the U.S. economy per day.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the threat of government shutdown is an often-used strategy for elected officials seeking particular priorities be included in or removed from continuing resolutions.

Continuing resolutions usually last for a number of weeks and are typically renewed when negotiations extend beyond the new deadline. Continuing resolutions can contain policy provisions as well as revisions to funding levels.

### Emergency Spending and Deficit Legislation

Congress also utilizes emergency spending and deficit legislation in order to influence funding changes outside of the typical budget and appropriations process. Emergency funding is commonly associated with ongoing military operations. Unlike most states (all but Vermont)<sup>3</sup>, there is no balanced budget requirement included the U.S. Constitution, permitting the federal government to carry debt year-to-year. As a result deficit legislation has also been used in an effort to address the federal deficit though the implementation of spending limits.

While the federal budget process can be intimidating, simply understanding the framework can help take the guesswork out of your advocacy efforts.

*To learn more about the federal budget process be sure to check out ACS' **Federal Budget and Appropriation Terms**. Be sure to contact ACS to learn more about opportunities to advance your advocacy efforts at the federal and state levels. View all of ACS' **Tools & Resources**.*

<sup>2</sup><http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2013/10/the-costs-of-the-government-shutdown>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.ncsl.org/research/fiscal-policy/state-balanced-budget-requirements.aspx>

## More Tools and Resources

[A Brief Guide to the Traditional Federal Budget Process](#)

[Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process](#)

[Impacts and Costs of the 2013 Federal Government Shutdown](#)

[The President's Budget Proposal](#)



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