

The United States Congress holds the purse strings for the nation's spending and is responsible for producing an annual budget that funds all federal programs.

This federal budget process provides **Congress** with the opportunity to shape our nation's priorities through the allocation of federal resources.

The **White House** starts the process with the President's budget proposal, a detailed blueprint and wish list for specific programs. Congress is free to either follow or disregard the President's budget, but it is a valuable look at upcoming policy priorities from the White House.

The budget process also gives **advocates** the opportunity to make their voice heard on the importance of protecting programs that help end childhood hunger and protect families from hardship and need.



Terms To Know

Appropriations Process: Congress has the power to fund the federal government through the appropriations process, which sets spending levels for specific programs each year.

Mandatory Spending: Making up two-thirds of the federal budget, "mandatory spending" is funding for entitlement programs. Mandatory program funding happens automatically and is not dependent on the annual appropriations process. Instead, this spending depends on the policy structure of the entitlement program and how many people are eligible for the specific program.

Examples: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), School meals and Social Security.

Discretionary Spending: Making up one-third of the federal budget, "discretionary spending" includes funding for non-entitlement programs. This funding must go through the annual appropriations process and cannot be allocated without Congressional approval.

Examples: Head Start, WIC, public health and education programs.

Continuing Resolution (or CR): If Congress fails to pass a final budget at the end of the fiscal year, they must pass a temporary spending solution (or "continuing resolution"). This stopgap measure keeps the government running until the full appropriation bill is signed into law.

Omnibus: An omnibus spending bill bundles a number of the individual appropriations bills into one large bill.

Nutrition Programs and the Budget

Most of the federal nutrition programs fall into the mandatory spending bucket – including **school meals, afterschool meals, summer meals, and SNAP**. This means they are not dependent on the annual appropriations process for funding. Major changes to the programs' structure and funding levels come through the authorization process and legislation such as the Farm Bill and Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

WIC (the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program) is the main exception as a discretionary program.



The Proposal The White House

The federal budget process begins with the President submitting a budget request to Congress. This proposal acts only as a recommendation. As the president has no power to set appropriations levels, Congress is free to use or disregard the White House Budget.

Timing: First Monday in February

The Budget Resolution: House & Senate Budget Committees

The House and Senate Budget Committees each draft a budget resolution, which sets targets for federal spending and revenue, and can instruct Congressional Committees to reduce spending.

Timing: April 15th.

The Appropriators: House & Senate Appropriations Committees

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees, looking to the Budget Resolution as a guide, divide discretionary spending among their 12 subcommittees, each representing different policy areas. Each subcommittee holds hearings and votes on a bill that sets funding levels for discretionary programs.

Timing: Spring and Summer

The Votes: Full House & Senate

Once the individual bills are passed out of the Appropriations Committees, they are sent to the House and Senate floors for approval.

Timing: Summer

The Compromise Bipartisan Conference

After the floor votes, any differences in the House and Senate bills are addressed in a bipartisan conference made up of members of both chambers. These final bills are then sent back to the House and Senate for final votes.

The Deadline: Final day of the fiscal year.

Most of the deadlines in the appropriations process are not enforceable and often missed. The final deadline, however, is the end of the fiscal year. If this deadline is missed, Congress must pass a continuing resolution to keep the government running.

Timing: September 30th