A brief guide to:
the annual budget, appropriations and funding for science

OVERVIEW

Each year the federal government establishes a budget for the upcoming fiscal year, which goes from October 1 to September 30.

Budget Breakdown

Mandatory Spending
• Typically ~60% of the budget
• Dominated by earned-benefit or entitlement programs
• Spending levels determined by eligibility rules
• Does not take place through appropriations

Discretionary Spending
• Typically ~30% of the budget
• Broken into two relatively equal categories Defense and Non-Defense
• Determined through appropriations

National Debt Interest
• The interest the government pays to the nation’s accumulated debt, minus the interest income received on assets it owns

Funding for most scientific agencies falls under a small portion of the non-defense discretionary funding, which is determined through appropriations. This includes: NIH, NSF, NOAA, NASA, DOE, EPA and USGS

APPROPRIATIONS

Idealized appropriations timeline

Oct. 1   Nov 1   Dec 1   Jan 1   Feb 1   Mar 1   Apr 1   May 1   June 1   July 1   Aug 1   Sept. 30

Executive branch
President’s proposed budget released to Congress
President signs bills into law

Legislative process

Executive Branch
• Starts with funding proposals submitted by federal agencies
• Is led by the Office of Management and Budget
• Acts as a statement of the administration’s fiscal goals and policy preferences
• Has no binding authority

The Administration’s budget request:

Legislative Process

BUDGET RESOLUTION

House Budget Committee, review and budget resolution
floor vote

Senate Budget Committee, review and budget resolution
floor vote

Conference committee, sets overall spending by April 15
floor votes

House Appropriations Committee, markup hearings and votes

Senate Appropriations Committee, markup hearings and votes

Floor roll call votes to the President

Floor vote of appropriations bills

Floor vote of reconciliation bills

House floor vote

Senate floor vote

Floor vote of continuing resolution or stopgap bill

Floor vote of omnibus bill

Floor vote of omnibus bill

Funding becomes law

President vetoes bill

Things to know:

Government shutdown: occurs if the appropriations bills are not finalized by September 30, and federal agencies must discontinue all non-essential functions until new funding legislation is signed into law—essential services and mandatory spending programs continue to function

Continuing resolution or a stopgap bill: a temporary funding measure to allow Congress more time to reach an agreement on the appropriation bills, averting a government shutdown

Omnibus: a type of bill that packages many appropriations bills into one larger bill that can be passed with one vote in both the House and the Senate

Subcommittees:
1) Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration
2) Commerce, Justice, & Science (NASA, NSF, NOAA)
3) Defense
4) Energy & Water Development (DOE)
5) Financial Services & General Government
6) Homeland Security
7) Interior & Environment (EPA, USGS, Forest Service)
8) Labor, Health & Human Services, Education (NIH)
9) Legislative Branch
10) Military Construction, Veterans Affairs
11) State, Foreign Operations
12) Transportation, Housing & Urban Development

Scientists’ roles:

Science engagement is an important part of the appropriations process because it:

1) helps protect and increase funding for science
2) facilitates innovation and advances discovery
3) brings public visibility to the importance of science

Scientific engagement makes a difference. Reaching out to legislative offices, scientists can provide important perspective on both the personal importance of science as well as how federal funding for science bolsters communities

Want to get involved, but not sure where to begin? Find resources at www.geosociety.org/policy or reach out to GSA’s policy office at sciencepolicy@geosociety.org