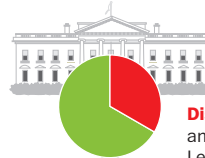


A guide to the federal budget process

The president's budget request is the first step in the complex process of funding the federal government.



Discretionary spending is subject to annual approval by Congress. Legislators have less control over **mandatory** spending, which is devoted to entitlement programs.

By **Karen Yourish and Laura Stanton**

1 On or before the first Monday in February, **the president submits to Congress** a detailed budget request for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

2 Based on the president's proposal, the **House and Senate budget committees propose budget resolutions** that set targets for spending and tax revenue and identify any policies that will need to move through reconciliation. These are sent to the floor for a vote, and differences are resolved in conference.

3 The **House and Senate appropriations committees** divide the **discretionary spending** set forth in the budget resolution among each of their 12 subcommittees.

Each subcommittee conducts hearings on the programs under its jurisdiction and votes out a bill. The full committee marks up the bill and sends it to the floor. Both chambers pass their bills and iron out the differences in conference. The House and Senate vote again, and the conference report is sent to the president for his signature or veto.

All of the appropriations bills are supposed to be signed by the president by Oct. 1, but this rarely happens. To avoid a government shutdown, a series of continuing resolutions are approved to continue funding the agencies at their current levels.

Reconciliation occurs if Congress needs to legislate policy changes in mandatory spending or tax laws to meet the annual targets laid out in the budget resolution. The resolution requires the relevant authorizing committees to come up with a plan and report back to the budget committees. The budget committees combine all of the authorizing plans into an omnibus package and send it to the floor for a vote. The House and Senate work out differences in conference, vote again and send the final version to the president for signature or veto.

