

Informing with Evidence: When to Disseminate during the Federal Budget Cycle

The federal budget process provides an important opportunity for researchers to share evidence with policymakers and inform their funding decisions. At any given point in a year, policymakers are handling budgets for three fiscal years—evaluating and reporting on last year’s budget, implementing the current year’s budget, and preparing for the coming year’s budget.

The timeline that follows depicts the key steps in the budget and appropriations process, as well as entry points for researchers and advocates to educate policymakers.*

Timeline

May – Aug		Agencies develop their budget requests for <i>next</i> fiscal year.	
Sept – Jan		Agencies submit budget requests for <i>next</i> fiscal year to the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB); OMB reviews and provides feedback to agencies. This back-and-forth between agencies and OMB is known as “passback.”	
Feb		On the first Monday of February, President submits budget request for <i>next</i> fiscal year to Congress; and reports on previous fiscal year’s activities.	
Feb – Apr		Congress reviews President’s budget request for <i>next</i> fiscal year; holds congressional hearings with agency officials.	
May – Jul		House, Senate draft and approve appropriations legislation for <i>next</i> fiscal year in their respective chambers.	
May – Aug		Agencies develop their budget requests for the <i>NEXT</i> next fiscal year.	
Aug – Sept		House, Senate finalize bicameral appropriations legislation for <i>next</i> fiscal year; President signs legislation into law by September 31.	
Oct – Sept		Fiscal year begins October 1. Administration implements appropriations law and executes activities.	

Legend

 The “President’s Budget” is a roadmap of the administration’s funding priorities. This funding request represents where the administration would invest if it had the authority to do so. Ultimately, the “power of the purse” lies with Congress, and it is up to Congress to determine what activities are funded and at what level.

 Under the U.S. Constitution, Congress retains the “power of the purse,” making funding available to the administration to execute federal programs. The Congress grants the administration the authority to spend money each year through the annual appropriations process.

 Federal agencies have the responsibility of implementing appropriations legislation by administering federal programs, and reporting on these activities to Congress.

 Key decisions have been made. If new evidence is available, hold until next cycle to disseminate and inform future budget decisions.

 Schedule meetings with policymakers to share new evidence that will inform budget decisions.

 Share new evidence now! Important decisions about funding priorities will be made, with or without evidence.

Suggested Citation

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* It’s important to note that this timeline represents how the appropriations process should work. In reality, an appropriations cycle that should be completed in 12 months often takes closer to 16 or 18 months. Researchers should pay close attention to media accounts of the progress of the appropriations process.