

The budget system of the United States Government provides the means for the President and the Congress to decide how much money to spend, what to spend it on, and how to raise the money they have decided to spend. Through the budget system, they determine the allocation of resources among the agencies of the Federal Government and between the Federal Government and the private sector. The budget system focuses primarily on dollars, but it also allocates other resources, such as Federal employment. Budget decisions made affect the Nation as a whole, State and local governments, and individual Americans. Many decisions have worldwide significance. The Congress and the President enact budget decisions into law. The budget system ensures that these laws are carried out.

This chapter provides an overview of the budget system and explains some of the more important budget concepts. It includes summary dollar amounts to illustrate major concepts. Other chapters of the budget docu-

ments discuss these concepts and more detailed amounts in greater depth.

The following section discusses the budget process, covering formulation of the President's Budget, action by the Congress, and execution of enacted budget laws. The next section provides information on budget coverage, including a discussion of on-budget and off-budget amounts, functional classification, presentation of budget data, types of funds, and full-cost budgeting. Subsequent sections discuss the concepts of receipts and collections, budget authority, and outlays. These sections are followed by discussions of Federal credit; surpluses, deficits, and means of financing; Federal employment; and the basis for the budget figures. A glossary of budget terms appears at the end of the chapter.

Various laws, enacted to carry out requirements of the Constitution, govern the budget system. The chapter refers to the principal ones by title throughout the text and gives complete citations in the section just preceding the glossary.

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## THE BUDGET PROCESS

**The budget process has three main phases, each of which is related to the others:**

1. Formulation of the President's Budget;
2. Action by the Congress; and
3. Execution of enacted budget laws.

### ***Formulation of the President's Budget***

The Budget of the United States Government consists of several volumes that set forth the President's fiscal policy goals and priorities for the allocation of resources by the Government. The primary focus of the Budget is on the budget year—the next fiscal year for which the Congress needs to make appropriations, in this case 2027. (Fiscal year 2027 will begin on October 1, 2026, and end on September 30, 2027.) The Budget also covers the nine years following the budget year in order to reflect the effects of budget decisions over the longer term. It includes the funding levels provided for the current year, in this case 2026, which allows the reader to compare the President's Budget proposals with the most recently enacted levels. The Budget also includes data on the most recently completed fiscal year, in this case 2025, so that the reader can compare budget estimates to actual accounting data.

In a normal year (excluding transitions between administrations), the President begins the process of formulating the budget by establishing general budget and fiscal policy guidelines, usually by late spring of each year. Based on these guidelines, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) works with the Federal agencies to establish specific policy directions and planning levels to guide the preparation of their budget requests.

During the formulation of the budget, the President, the Director of OMB, and other officials in the Executive Office of the President continually exchange information, proposals, and evaluations bearing on policy decisions with the Secretaries of the Departments and the heads of the other Government agencies. Decisions reflected in previously enacted budgets—including the one for the fiscal year in progress, reactions to the last proposed budget (which the Congress is considering at the same time the process of preparing the forthcoming budget begins), and evaluations of program performance—all influence decisions concerning the forthcoming budget, as do projections of the economic outlook, prepared jointly by the Council of Economic Advisers, OMB, and the Department of the Treasury.

Agencies normally submit their budget requests to OMB, where analysts review them and identify issues that OMB officials need to discuss with the agencies. OMB

and the agencies resolve many issues themselves. Others require the involvement of White House policy officials and the President. This decision-making process is usually completed by late December. At that time, the final stage of developing detailed budget data and the preparation of the budget documents begins.

The decision-makers must consider the effects of economic and technical assumptions on the budget estimates. Interest rates, economic growth, the rate of inflation, the unemployment rate, and the number of people eligible for various benefit programs, among other factors, affect Government spending and receipts. Small changes in these assumptions can alter budget estimates by many billions of dollars. (The “Economic Assumptions” chapter of this volume provides more information on this subject.)

Thus, the budget formulation process involves the simultaneous consideration of the resource needs of individual programs, the allocation of resources among the agencies and functions of the Federal Government, and the total outlays and receipts that are appropriate in light of current and prospective economic conditions.

The law governing the President’s Budget requires the transmittal of the following fiscal year’s Budget to the Congress on or after the first Monday in January but not later than the first Monday in February of each year. The budget is usually scheduled for transmission to the Congress on the first Monday in February, giving the Congress eight months to act on the budget before the fiscal year begins. However, because a significant portion of budget formulation depends on analyzing current year funding levels, budget timing can be affected by the timing of enactment of appropriations for the current year. In addition, in years when a Presidential transition has taken place, the timeline for budget release is commonly extended to allow the new administration sufficient time to take office and formulate its budget policy. While there is no specific timeline set for this circumstance, the detailed budget is usually completed and released in April or May. However, in order to aid the congressional budget process (discussed below), new administrations often release a budget blueprint that contains broad spending outlines and descriptions of major policies and priorities earlier in the year.

### **Congressional Action<sup>1</sup>**

The Congress considers the President’s Budget proposals and approves, modifies, or disapproves them. It can change funding levels, eliminate programs, or add programs not requested by the President. It can add or eliminate taxes and other sources of receipts or make other changes that affect the amount of receipts collected. The Congress does not enact a budget as such. Through the process of adopting a planning document called a budget resolution, the Congress agrees on targets for total

spending and receipts, the size of the deficit or surplus, and the debt limit. The budget resolution provides the framework within which individual congressional committees prepare appropriations bills and other spending and receipts legislation. The Congress provides funding for specified purposes in appropriations acts each year. It also enacts changes each year in other laws that affect spending and receipts.

In making appropriations, the Congress does not vote on the level of outlays (spending) directly, but rather on budget authority, which is the authority provided by law to incur financial obligations that will result in outlays. In a separate process, prior to making appropriations, the Congress usually enacts legislation that authorizes an agency to carry out particular programs, authorizes the appropriation of funds to carry out those programs, and, in some cases, limits the amount that can be appropriated for the programs. Some authorizing legislation expires after one year, some expires after a specified number of years, and some is permanent. The Congress may enact appropriations for a program even though there is no specific authorization for it or its authorization has expired.

The Congress begins its work on its budget resolution shortly after it receives the President’s Budget. Under the procedures established by the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (Congressional Budget Act), the Congress decides on budget targets before commencing action on individual appropriations. The Congressional Budget Act requires each standing committee of the House and Senate to recommend budget levels and report legislative plans concerning matters within the committee’s jurisdiction to the Budget Committee in each body. The House and Senate Budget Committees then each design and report, and each body then considers, a concurrent resolution on the budget. The Act calls for the House and Senate to resolve differences between their respective versions of the congressional budget resolution and adopt a single budget resolution by April 15 of each year.

In the report on the budget resolution, the Budget Committees allocate the total on-budget budget authority and outlays set forth in the resolution to the Appropriations Committees and the other committees that have jurisdiction over spending. These committee allocations are commonly known as “302(a)” allocations, in reference to the section of the Congressional Budget Act that provides for them. The Appropriations Committees are then required to divide their 302(a) allocations of budget authority and outlays among their subcommittees. These subcommittee allocations are known as “302(b)” allocations. There are procedural hurdles associated with considering appropriations bills that would breach an Appropriations subcommittee’s 302(b) allocation. Similar procedural hurdles exist for considering legislation that would cause the 302(a) allocation for any committee to be breached. The Budget Committees’ reports may discuss assumptions about the

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of the congressional budget process, see Saturno, James, “Introduction to the Federal Budget Process,” *Congressional Research Service* (2023), <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R46240>, as well as Keith, Robert and Allen Schick, “Manual on the Federal Budget Process,” *Congressional Research Service* (1998), <https://budgetcounsel.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/crs-budget-process-manual-98-720-august-28-1998.pdf>.

## **Budget Calendar.** Scheduled Dates for Significant Budget Events During a Normal Budget Year

Between the 1st Monday in January and the 1st Monday in February .....	<b>President Transmits Budget</b>
Six Weeks Later .....	<b>Congressional Committees Report Budget Estimates to Budget Committees</b>
April 15 .....	<b>Action to be Completed on Congressional Budget Resolution</b>
May 15 .....	<b>House Consideration of Annual Appropriations Bills May Begin Even if Budget Resolution Has Not Been Agreed to</b>
June 10 .....	<b>House Appropriations Committee to Report the Last of its Annual Appropriations Bills</b>
June 15 .....	<b>Action to be Completed on "Reconciliation Bill" by the Congress</b>
June 30 .....	<b>Action on Appropriations to be Completed by House</b>
July 15 .....	<b>President Transmits Mid-Session Review of the Budget</b>
October 1 .....	<b>Fiscal Year Begins</b>

level of funding for major programs. While these assumptions do not bind the other committees and subcommittees, they may influence their decisions.

Budget resolutions may include “reserve funds,” which permit adjustment of the resolution allocations as necessary to accommodate legislation addressing specific matters, such as healthcare or tax reform. Reserve funds are most often limited to legislation that is deficit neutral, including increases in some areas offset by decreases in others. The budget resolution may also contain “reconciliation directives” (discussed further below).

Since the concurrent resolution on the budget is not a law, it does not require the President’s approval. However, the Congress considers the President’s views in preparing budget resolutions, because legislation developed to meet congressional budget allocations does require the President’s approval. In some years, the President and the joint leadership of the Congress have formally agreed on plans to reduce the deficit. These agreements were then reflected in the budget resolution and legislation passed for those years.

If the Congress does not pass a budget resolution, the House and Senate typically adopt one or more “deeming resolutions” in the form of a simple resolution or as a provision of a larger bill. A deeming resolution may serve nearly all functions of a budget resolution, except it may not trigger reconciliation procedures in the Senate.

Once the Congress approves the budget resolution, it turns its attention to enacting appropriations bills and authorizing legislation. The Appropriations Committee in each body has jurisdiction over annual appropriations. These committees are divided into subcommittees that hold hearings and review detailed budget justification materials prepared by the Executive Branch agencies within the subcommittee’s jurisdiction. After a bill has been drafted by a subcommittee, the full committee and the whole House, in turn, must approve the bill, sometimes with amendments to the original version. The House then forwards the bill to the Senate, where a similar review follows. If the Senate disagrees with the House on

particular matters in the bill, which is often the case, the two bodies form a conference committee (consisting of some Members of each body) to resolve the differences. The conference committee revises the bill and returns it to both bodies for approval. When the revised bill is agreed to, first in the House and then in the Senate, the Congress sends it to the President for approval or veto.

Since 1977, when the start of the fiscal year was established as October 1, there have been only three fiscal years (1989, 1995, and 1997) for which the Congress agreed to and enacted every regular appropriations bill by that date. When one or more appropriations bills are not enacted by this date, the Congress usually enacts a joint resolution called a “continuing resolution” (CR), which is an interim or stop-gap appropriations bill that provides authority for the affected agencies to continue operations at some specified level until a specific date or until the regular appropriations are enacted. Occasionally, a CR has funded a portion or all of the Government for the entire year.

The Congress must present these CRs to the President for approval or veto. In some cases, Congresses have failed to pass a CR or Presidents have rejected CRs because they contained unacceptable provisions. Left without funds, Government agencies were required by law to shut down operations—with exceptions for some limited activities—until the Congress passed a CR or appropriations bill the President would approve. Previous shutdowns have ranged in duration from just one day to several weeks.

The Congress also provides budget authority in laws other than appropriations acts. In fact, while annual appropriations acts fund the majority of Federal programs, they account for only about a third of the total spending in a typical year. Authorizing legislation controls the rest of the spending, which is commonly called “mandatory spending.” A distinctive feature of these authorizing laws is that they provide agencies with the authority or requirement to spend money without first requiring the Appropriations Committees to enact funding. This category of spending includes interest the Government pays on the public debt and the spending of several major programs,

such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment insurance, and Federal employee retirement. Almost all taxes and most other receipts also result from authorizing laws.

Some authorizing legislation making changes to laws that affect receipts or mandatory spending may be developed under a unique set of procedures known as reconciliation. The budget resolution often includes reconciliation directives, which direct each designated authorizing committee to report amendments to the laws under the committee's jurisdiction that would achieve changes in the levels of receipts or mandatory spending controlled by those laws. These directives specify the dollar amount of changes that each designated committee is expected to achieve, but do not specify which laws are to be changed or the changes to be made. However, the Budget Committees' reports on the budget resolution frequently discuss assumptions about how the laws would be changed. Like other assumptions in the report, they do not bind the committees of jurisdiction but may influence their decisions. A reconciliation instruction may also specify the total amount by which the statutory limit on the public debt is to be changed.

The committees subject to reconciliation directives draft the implementing legislation. Such legislation may, for example, change the tax code, revise benefit formulas or eligibility requirements for benefit programs, or authorize Government agencies to charge fees to cover some of their costs. Reconciliation bills are typically omnibus legislation, combining the legislation submitted by each reconciled committee in a single act.

The Senate considers such omnibus reconciliation acts under expedited procedures that limit total debate on the bill. To offset the procedural advantage gained by expedited procedures, the Senate places significant restrictions on the substantive content of the reconciliation measure itself, as well as on amendments to the measure. Any material in the bill that is extraneous or that contains changes to the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and the Federal Disability Insurance programs is not in order under the Senate's expedited reconciliation procedures. Non-germane amendments are also prohibited. Reconciliation acts, together with appropriations acts for the year, are usually used to implement broad agreements between the President and the Congress on those occasions where the two branches have negotiated a comprehensive budget plan. Reconciliation acts have sometimes included other matters, such as laws providing the means for enforcing these agreements.

## ***Budget Execution***

Government agencies may not spend or obligate more than the Congress has appropriated, and they may use funds only for purposes specified in law. The Antideficiency Act prohibits agencies from spending or obligating funds in advance or in excess of an appropriation, unless specific authority to do so has been provided in law. The Antideficiency Act also requires the President to apportion the budgetary resources available for most executive branch agencies. The President has delegated this authority to OMB. Some apportionments are by time periods (usually by quarter of the fiscal year), some are by projects or activities, and others are by a combination of both. Agencies may request OMB to reapportion funds during the year to accommodate changing circumstances. This system helps to ensure that funds do not run out before the end of the fiscal year.

During the budget execution phase, the Government sometimes finds that it needs more funding than the Congress has appropriated for the fiscal year because of unanticipated circumstances. For example, more might be needed to respond to a severe natural disaster. Under such circumstances, the Congress may enact a supplemental appropriation.

On the other hand, the President may propose to reduce a previously enacted appropriation, through a "rescission" or "cancellation" of those funds. How the President proposes this reduction determines whether it is considered a rescission or a cancellation. A rescission is a reduction in previously enacted appropriations proposed pursuant to the Impoundment Control Act (ICA). The ICA allows the President, using the specific authorities in that Act, to transmit a "special message" to the Congress to inform Members of these proposed rescissions, at which time the funding can be withheld from obligation for up to 45 days on the OMB-approved apportionment. Agencies are instructed not to withhold funds without the prior approval of OMB. If the Congress does not act to rescind these funds within the 45-day period, the funds are made available for obligation. In 2025, the President proposed, and the Congress enacted, \$9.4 billion in rescissions from previously enacted appropriations.

The President can also propose reductions to previously enacted appropriations outside of the ICA; in these cases, these reductions are referred to as cancellations. Cancellation proposals are not subject to the requirements and procedures of the ICA and amounts cannot be withheld from obligation. The 2027 President's Budget includes \$27.9 billion in proposed cancellations.

**COVERAGE OF THE BUDGET**

***Federal Government and Budget Totals***

The budget documents provide information on all Federal agencies and programs. However, because the laws governing Social Security (the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and the Federal Disability Insurance trust funds) and the Postal Service Fund require that the receipts and outlays for those activities be excluded from the budget totals and from the calculation of the deficit or surplus, the budget presents on-budget and off-budget totals. The off-budget totals include the Federal transactions excluded by law from the budget totals. The on-budget and off-budget amounts are added together to derive the totals for the Federal Government. These are sometimes referred to as the unified or consolidated budget totals.

It is not always obvious whether a transaction or activity should be included in the budget. Where there is a question, OMB normally follows the recommendation of the 1967 President’s Commission on Budget Concepts to be comprehensive of the full range of Federal agencies, programs, and activities. In recent years, for example, the budget has included the transactions of the Affordable Housing Program funds, the Universal Service Fund, the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board, the Securities Investor Protection Corporation, Guaranty Agencies Reserves, the National Railroad Retirement Investment Trust, the United Mine Workers Combined Benefits Fund, the Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council, Electric Reliability Organizations (EROs) established pursuant to the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Corporation for Travel Promotion, and the National Association of Registered Agents and Brokers.

In contrast, the budget excludes tribal trust funds that are owned by Indian Tribes and held and managed by the Government in a fiduciary capacity on the Tribes’ behalf. These funds are not owned by the Government, the Government is not the source of their capital, and the Government’s control is limited to the exercise of fiduciary duties. Similarly, the transactions of Government-sponsored enterprises, such as the Federal Home Loan Banks, are not included in the on-budget or off-budget totals. Federal laws established these enterprises for public policy purposes, but they are privately owned and operated corporations. Nevertheless, because of their public charters, the budget discusses them and reports summary financial data in the Budget *Appendix* and in some detailed tables.

The budget also excludes the revenues from copyright royalties and spending for subsequent payments to copyright holders where: 1) the law allows copyright owners and users to voluntarily set the rate paid for the use of protected material; and 2) the amount paid by users of copyrighted material to copyright owners is related to the frequency or quantity of the material used. The budget excludes license royalties collected and paid out by the Copyright Office for the retransmission of network broadcasts via cable collected under 17 U.S.C. 111 because these revenues meet both of these conditions. The budget includes the royalties collected and paid out for license

**Table 06–1.** Totals for the Budget and the Federal Government

In Billions of Dollars

	2025 Actual
Budget authority	
Unified .....	7,602
On-budget .....	6,163
Off-budget .....	1,439
Receipts:	
Unified .....	5,236
On-budget .....	3,953
Off-budget .....	1,284
Outlays:	
Unified .....	7,011
On-budget .....	5,580
Off-budget .....	1,432
Deficit (-) / Surplus (+):	
Unified .....	-1,775
On-budget .....	-1,627
Off-budget .....	-148

fees for digital audio recording technology under 17 U.S.C. 1004, since the amount of license fees paid is unrelated to usage of the material.

The *Appendix* includes a presentation for the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for information only. The amounts are not included in either the on-budget or off-budget totals because of the independent status of the System within the Government. However, the Federal Reserve System transfers its net earnings to the Treasury, and the budget records them as receipts.

The “Coverage of the Budget” chapter of this volume provides more information on this subject.

***How the Budget Measures Costs***

A budget is a financial plan for allocating resources—deciding how much the Federal Government should spend in total, program by program, and for the parts of each program, and deciding how to finance the spending. The budgetary system provides a process for proposing policies, making decisions, implementing these policies, and reporting the results. The budget needs to measure costs accurately so that decision makers can compare the cost of a program with its benefits, the cost of one program with another, and the cost of one method of reaching a specified goal with another. Furthermore, these costs need to be fully included in the budget up front, when the spending decision is made, so that executive and congressional decision makers have the necessary information and the incentive to take the total costs into account when setting priorities. Finally, the budget needs to differentiate

between transactions that allocate resources—and therefore represent a cost to the Government—and transactions that finance those costs. (See “Means of Financing” later in this chapter for additional details.)

For most programs, the most transparent and easily comparable measure of cost to the Government (or value, in terms of revenues) are cash outlays and cash receipts. The budget records these outlays and receipts in full, as they occur; this approach is often referred to as “cash budgeting” or “the cash budget.” In addition to facilitating comparisons between competing programs, cash budgeting has the benefit of producing intuitive aggregate totals, as the difference between spending and revenue in a given year is equal to that year’s deficit or surplus. The cash budget also aligns with the requirements of the recording statute (31 U.S.C. 1501), which directs agencies to record their obligations in full, against available resources, as they are incurred. The primary exception to the cash budget is provided for Federal credit programs. (See “Federal Credit” later in this chapter for additional details.)

Unlike private sector accounting, or most State and local government budgeting, the Federal budget does not differentiate between capital and operating costs. The budget records capital investment on a cash basis, and it requires the Congress to provide budget authority before an agency can obligate the Government to make a cash outlay. However, the budget measures only costs, and the benefits with which these costs are compared, based on policy makers’ judgment, must be presented in supplementary materials. By these means, the budget allows the total cost of capital investment to be compared up front in a rough way with the total expected future net benefits; this is similar to the way in which policy makers are able to compare operating costs with the benefits of that spending. In addition, such a comparison of total costs with benefits is consistent with the formal method of cost-benefit analysis of capital projects in Government, in which the full cost of a capital asset as the cash is paid out is compared with the full stream of future benefits (all in terms of present values). (The “Federal Investment” chapter of this volume provides more information on capital investment.)

### **Functional Classification**

The functional classification system is used to organize budget authority, outlays, and other budget data according to the major purpose served—such as agriculture, transportation, income security, and national defense. There are 20 major functions, 17 of which are concerned with broad areas of national need and are further divided into subfunctions. For example, the Agriculture function comprises the subfunctions Farm Income Stabilization and Agricultural Research and Services. The functional classification meets the Congressional Budget Act requirement for a presentation in the budget by national needs and agency missions and programs. The remaining three functions—Net Interest, Undistributed Offsetting Receipts, and Allowances—enable the functional classification system to cover the entire Federal budget.

The following criteria are used in establishing functional categories and assigning activities to them:

- A function encompasses activities with similar purposes, emphasizing what the Federal Government seeks to accomplish rather than the means of accomplishment, the objects purchased, the clientele or geographic area served (except in the cases of functions 450 for Community and Regional Development, 570 for Medicare, 650 for Social Security, and 700 for Veterans Benefits and Services), or the Federal agency conducting the activity (except in the case of subfunction 051 in the National Defense function, which is used only for defense activities under the Department of War).
- A function must be of continuing national importance, and the amounts attributable to it must be significant.
- Each basic unit being classified (generally the appropriation or fund account) usually is classified according to its primary purpose and assigned to only one subfunction. However, some large accounts that serve more than one major purpose are subdivided into two or more functions or subfunctions.

In consultation with the Congress, the functional classification is adjusted from time to time as warranted. Detailed functional tables, which provide information on Government activities by function and subfunction, are available in the *Analytical Perspectives* volume online.

### **Agencies, Accounts, Programs, Projects, and Activities**

Various summary tables in the *Analytical Perspectives* volume of the Budget provide information on budget authority, outlays, and offsetting collections and receipts arrayed by Federal agency. A table that lists budget authority and outlays by budget account within each agency and the totals for each agency of budget authority, outlays, and receipts that offset the agency spending totals is available in the *Analytical Perspectives* volume online. The *Appendix* provides budgetary, financial, and descriptive information about programs, projects, and activities by account within each agency.

### **Types of Funds**

Agency activities are financed through Federal funds and trust funds.

*Federal funds* comprise several types of funds. Receipt accounts of the **general fund**, which is the greater part of the budget, record receipts not earmarked by law for a specific purpose, such as income tax receipts. The general fund also includes the proceeds of general borrowing. General fund appropriation accounts record general fund expenditures. General fund appropriations draw from general fund receipts and borrowing collectively and, therefore, are not specifically linked to receipt accounts.

*Special funds* consist of receipt accounts for Federal fund receipts that laws have designated for specific purposes and the associated appropriation accounts for the expenditure of those receipts.

*Public enterprise funds* are revolving funds used for programs authorized by law to conduct a cycle of business-type operations, primarily with the public, in which outlays generate collections.

*Intragovernmental funds* are revolving funds that conduct business-type operations primarily within and between Government agencies. The collections and the outlays of revolving funds are recorded in the same budget account.

*Trust funds* account for the receipt and expenditure of monies by the Government for carrying out specific purposes and programs in accordance with the terms of a statute that designates the fund as a trust fund (such as the Highway Trust Fund) or for carrying out the stipulations of a trust where the Government itself is the beneficiary (such as any of several trust funds for gifts and donations for specific purposes). *Trust revolving funds* are trust funds credited with collections earmarked by law to carry out a cycle of business-type operations.

The Federal budget meaning of the term “trust,” as applied to trust fund accounts, differs significantly from its private-sector usage. In the private sector, the beneficiary of a trust usually owns the trust’s assets, which are managed by a trustee who must follow the stipulations of the trust. In contrast, the Federal Government owns the assets of most Federal trust funds, and it can raise or lower future trust fund collections and payments, or change the purposes for which the collections are used, by changing existing laws. There is no substantive difference between a trust fund and a special fund or between a trust revolving fund and a public enterprise revolving fund.

However, in some instances, the Government does act as a true trustee of assets that are owned or held for the benefit of others. For example, it maintains accounts on behalf of individual Federal employees in the Thrift Savings Fund, investing them as directed by the individual employee. The Government accounts for such funds in *deposit funds*, which are not included in the budget. (The “Trust Funds and Federal Funds” chapter of this volume provides more information on this subject.)

## RECEIPTS, OFFSETTING COLLECTIONS, AND OFFSETTING RECEIPTS

### *In General*

The budget records amounts collected by Government agencies two different ways. Depending on circumstances, they are recorded as either:

#### **Governmental Receipts**

Governmental receipts are compared in total to outlays (net of offsetting collections and offsetting receipts) in calculating the surplus or deficit; or

#### **Offsetting Collections or Offsetting Receipts**

Offsetting collections or offsetting receipts are deducted from gross outlays to calculate net outlay figures. These amounts are recorded as offsets to outlays so that the budget totals represent governmental rather than market activity and reflect the Government’s net transactions with the public. They are recorded in one of two ways, based on interpretation of laws and long-standing budget concepts and practice. They are offsetting collections when the collections are authorized by law to be credited to expenditure accounts. Otherwise, they are deposited in receipt accounts and called offsetting receipts.

Offsetting collections and offsetting receipts result from any of the following types of transactions:

- *Business-like transactions or market-oriented activities with the public.* These include voluntary collections from the public in exchange for goods or services, such as the proceeds from the sale of postage stamps, the fees charged for admittance to recreation areas, and the proceeds from the sale of Government-owned land; and reimbursements for

damages. The budget records these amounts as offsetting collections from non-Federal sources (for offsetting collections) or as proprietary receipts (for offsetting receipts).

- *Intragovernmental transactions.* Collections from other Federal Government accounts. The budget records collections by one Government account from another as offsetting collections from Federal sources (for offsetting collections) or as intragovernmental receipts (for offsetting receipts). For example, the General Services Administration rents office space to other Government agencies and records their rental payments as offsetting collections from Federal sources in the Federal Buildings Fund. These transactions are exactly offsetting and do not affect the surplus or deficit. However, they are an important accounting mechanism for allocating costs to the programs and activities that cause the Government to incur the costs.
- *Voluntary gifts and donations.* Gifts and donations of money to the Government, which are treated as offsets to budget authority and outlays.

#### **Offsetting Governmental Transactions**

Collections from the public that are governmental in nature and should conceptually be treated like Federal revenues and compared in total to outlays (e.g., tax receipts, regulatory fees, compulsory user charges, custom duties, license fees) but are required by law or longstanding practice to be misclassified as offsetting. The budget records amounts from non-Federal sources that are governmental

in nature as *offsetting governmental collections* (for offsetting collections) or as *offsetting governmental receipts* (for offsetting receipts).

### **Governmental Receipts**

Governmental receipts are collections that result from the Government's exercise of its sovereign power to tax or otherwise compel payment. Sometimes they are called receipts, budget receipts, Federal receipts, or Federal revenues. They consist mostly of individual and corporation income taxes and social insurance taxes, but also include excise taxes, compulsory user charges, regulatory fees, customs duties, court fines, certain license fees, and deposits of earnings by the Federal Reserve System. Total receipts for the Federal Government include both on-budget and off-budget receipts (see Table 6-1, "Totals for the Budget and the Federal Government," which appears earlier in this chapter.) The "Governmental Receipts" chapter of this volume provides more information on governmental receipts.

### **Offsetting Collections**

Some laws authorize agencies to credit collections directly to the account from which they will be spent and, usually, to spend the collections for the purpose of the account without further action by the Congress. Most revolving funds operate with such authority. For example, a permanent law authorizes the Postal Service to use collections from the sale of stamps to finance its operations without a requirement for annual appropriations. The budget records these collections in the Postal Service Fund (a revolving fund) and records budget authority in an amount equal to the collections. In addition to revolving funds, some agencies are authorized to charge fees to defray a portion of costs for a program that are otherwise financed by appropriations from the general fund and usually to spend the collections without further action by the Congress. In such cases, the budget records the offsetting collections and resulting budget authority in the program's general fund expenditure account. Similarly, intragovernmental collections authorized by some laws may be recorded as offsetting collections and budget authority in revolving funds or in general fund expenditure accounts.

Sometimes appropriations acts or provisions in other laws limit the obligations that can be financed by offsetting collections. In those cases, the budget records budget authority in the amount available to incur obligations, not in the amount of the collections.

Offsetting collections credited to expenditure accounts automatically offset the outlays at the expenditure account level. Where accounts have offsetting collections, the budget shows the budget authority and outlays of the account both gross (before deducting offsetting collections) and net (after deducting offsetting collections). Totals for the agency, subfunction, and overall budget are net of offsetting collections.

### **Offsetting Receipts**

Collections that are offset against gross outlays but are not authorized to be credited to expenditure accounts are credited to receipt accounts and are called offsetting receipts. Offsetting receipts are deducted from budget authority and outlays in arriving at total net budget authority and outlays. However, unlike offsetting collections credited to expenditure accounts, offsetting receipts do not offset budget authority and outlays at the account level. In most cases, they offset budget authority and outlays at the agency and subfunction levels.

Proprietary receipts from a few sources, however, are not offset against any specific agency or function and are classified as undistributed offsetting receipts. They are deducted from the Government-wide totals for net budget authority and outlays. For example, the collections of rents and royalties from outer continental shelf lands are undistributed because the amounts are large and for the most part are not related to the spending of the agency that administers the transactions and the subfunction that records the administrative expenses.

Similarly, two kinds of intragovernmental transactions—agencies' payments as employers into Federal employee retirement trust funds and interest received by trust funds—are classified as undistributed offsetting receipts. They appear instead as special deductions in computing total net budget authority and outlays for the Government rather than as offsets at the agency level. This special treatment is necessary because the amounts are so large they would distort measures of the agencies' activities if they were attributed to the agency.

### **User Charges**

User charges are fees assessed on individuals or organizations for the provision of Government services and for the sale or use of Government goods or resources. The payers of the user charge must be limited in the authorizing legislation to those receiving special benefits from, or subject to regulation by, the program or activity beyond the benefits received by the general public or broad segments of the public (such as those who pay income taxes or customs duties). Policy regarding user charges is established in OMB Circular A-25, "User Charges." The term encompasses proceeds from the sale or use of Government goods and services, including the sale of natural resources (such as timber, oil, and minerals) and proceeds from asset sales (such as property, plant, and equipment). User charges are not necessarily dedicated to the activity they finance and may be credited to the general fund of the Treasury.

The term "user charge" does not refer to a separate budget category for collections. User charges are classified in the budget as receipts, offsetting receipts, or offsetting collections according to the principles explained previously.

See the "Offsetting Collections and Offsetting Receipts" chapter of this volume for more information on the classification of user charges.

## BUDGET AUTHORITY, OBLIGATIONS, AND OUTLAYS

Budget authority, obligations, and outlays are the primary benchmarks and measures of the budget control system. The Congress enacts laws that provide agencies with spending authority in the form of budget authority. Before agencies can use these resources—obligate this budget authority—the resources must be apportioned by OMB. After OMB apports the resources, agencies can enter into binding agreements to purchase items or services or to make grants or other payments. These agreements are recorded as obligations of the United States and deducted from the amount of budgetary resources available to the agency. When payments are made, the obligations are liquidated and outlays recorded. These concepts are discussed more fully below.

### ***Budget Authority and Other Budgetary Resources***

Budget authority is the authority provided in law to enter into legal obligations that will result in immediate or future outlays of the Government. In other words, it is the amount of money that agencies are allowed to commit to be spent in current or future years. Government officials may obligate the Government to make outlays only to the extent they have been granted budget authority.

In deciding the amount of budget authority to request for a program, project, or activity, agency officials estimate the total amount of obligations they will need to incur to achieve desired goals and subtract the unobligated balances available for these purposes. The amount of budget authority requested is influenced by the nature of the programs, projects, or activities being financed. For current operating expenditures, the amount requested usually covers the needs for the fiscal year. For major procurement programs and construction projects, agencies generally must request sufficient budget authority in the first year to fully fund an economically useful segment of a procurement or project, even though it may be obligated over several years. This full funding policy is intended to ensure that the decision-makers take into account all costs and benefits at the time decisions are made to provide resources. It also avoids sinking money into a procurement or project without being certain if or when future funding will be available to complete the procurement or project, as well as saddling future agency budgets with must-pay bills to complete past projects.

Budget authority takes several forms:

- *Appropriations.* Provided in annual appropriations acts or other laws, permit agencies to incur obligations and make payments;
- *Borrowing authority.* Usually provided in permanent law, permits agencies to incur obligations but requires them to borrow funds, usually from the general fund of the Treasury, to make payments;
- *Contract authority.* Usually provided in permanent law, permits agencies to incur obligations in advance of a separate appropriation of the cash for payments or in anticipation of the collection of receipts that can be used for payments; and

- *Spending authority from offsetting collections.* Usually provided in permanent law, permits agencies to credit offsetting collections to an expenditure account, incur obligations, and make payments using the offsetting collections.

Because offsetting collections and offsetting receipts are deducted from gross budget authority, they are referred to as negative budget authority for some purposes, such as Congressional Budget Act provisions that pertain to budget authority.

Authorizing statutes usually determine the form of budget authority for a program. The authorizing statute may authorize a particular type of budget authority to be provided in appropriations acts, or it may provide one of the forms of budget authority directly, without the need for further appropriations.

An appropriation may make funds available from the general fund, special funds, or trust funds. An appropriations act may also authorize the spending of offsetting collections credited to expenditure accounts, including revolving funds. Borrowing authority is usually authorized for business-like activities where the activity being financed is expected to produce income over time with which to repay the borrowing with interest. The use of contract authority is traditionally limited to transportation programs.

New budget authority for most Federal programs is normally provided in annual appropriations acts. However, new budget authority is also made available through permanent appropriations under existing laws and does not require current action by the Congress. Much of the permanent budget authority is for trust funds, interest on the public debt, and the authority to spend offsetting collections credited to appropriation or fund accounts. For most trust funds, the budget authority is appropriated automatically under existing law from the available balance of the fund and equals the estimated annual obligations of the funds. For interest on the public debt, budget authority is provided automatically under a permanent appropriation enacted in 1847 and equals interest outlays.

Annual appropriations acts generally make budget authority available for obligation only during the fiscal year to which the act applies. However, they frequently allow budget authority for a particular purpose to remain available for obligation for a longer period or indefinitely (that is, until expended or until the program objectives have been attained). Typically, budget authority for current operations is made available for only one year, and budget authority for construction and some research projects is available for a specified number of years or indefinitely. Most budget authority provided in authorizing statutes, such as for most trust funds, is available indefinitely. If budget authority is initially provided for a limited period of availability, an extension of availability would require enactment of another law (see “Reappropriation” later in this chapter).

Budget authority that is available for more than one year and not obligated in the year it becomes available is carried forward for obligation in a following year. In some

cases, an account may carry forward unobligated budget authority from more than one prior year. The sum of such amounts constitutes the account's *unobligated balance*. Most of these balances had been provided for specific uses, such as the multiyear construction of a major project, and so are not available for new programs. A small part may never be obligated or spent, primarily amounts provided for contingencies that do not occur or reserves that never have to be used.

Amounts of budget authority that have been obligated but not yet paid constitute the account's *unpaid obligations*. For example, in the case of salaries and wages, one to three weeks elapse between the time of obligation and the time of payment. In the case of major procurement and construction, payments may occur over a period of several years after the obligation is made. Unpaid obligations (which are made up of accounts payable and undelivered orders) net of the accounts receivable and unfilled customers' orders are defined by law as the *obligated balances*. Obligated balances of budget authority at the end of the year are carried forward until the obligations are paid or the balances are cancelled. (A general law provides that the obligated balance of budget authority that was made available for a definite period is automatically cancelled five years after the end of the period.) Due to such flows, a change in the amount of budget authority available in any one year may change the level of obligations and outlays for several years to come. Conversely, a change in the amount of obligations incurred from one year to the next does not necessarily result from an equal change in the amount of budget authority available for that year and will not necessarily result in an equal change in the level of outlays in that year.

The Congress usually makes budget authority available on the first day of the fiscal year for which the appropriations act is passed. Occasionally, the appropriations language specifies a different timing. The language may provide an *advance appropriation*—budget authority that does not become available until one fiscal year or more beyond the fiscal year for which the appropriations act is passed. *Forward funding* is budget authority that is made available for obligation beginning in the last quarter of the fiscal year (beginning on July 1) for the financing of ongoing grant programs during the next fiscal year. This kind of funding is used mostly for education programs, so that obligations for education grants can be made prior to the beginning of the next school year. For certain benefit programs funded by annual appropriations, the appropriation provides for *advance funding*—budget authority that is to be charged to the appropriation in the succeeding year, but which authorizes obligations to be incurred in the last quarter of the current fiscal year if necessary to meet benefit payments in excess of the specific amount appropriated for the year. When such authority is used, an adjustment is made to increase the budget authority for the fiscal year in which it is used and to reduce the budget authority of the succeeding fiscal year.

Provisions of law that extend into a new fiscal year the availability of unobligated amounts that have expired or

would otherwise expire are called *reappropriations*. Reappropriations of expired balances that are newly available for obligation in the current or budget year count as new budget authority in the fiscal year in which the balances become newly available. For example, if a 2027 appropriations act extends the availability of unobligated budget authority that expired at the end of 2026, new budget authority would be recorded for 2027. This scorekeeping is used because a reappropriation has exactly the same effect as allowing the earlier appropriation to expire at the end of 2026 and enacting a new appropriation for 2027.

The Federal Government uses budget enforcement mechanisms to control revenues, spending, and deficits (see the "Budget Process" chapter of this volume for a detailed discussion of the budget enforcement framework). For purposes of budget enforcement, the budget classifies budget authority as *discretionary* or *mandatory*. This classification indicates whether an appropriations act or authorizing legislation controls the amount of budget authority that is available. Generally, budget authority is discretionary if provided in an appropriations act and mandatory if provided in authorizing legislation. However, the budget authority provided in appropriations acts for certain specifically identified programs is also classified as mandatory by OMB and the congressional scorekeepers. This is because the authorizing legislation for these programs entitles beneficiaries—persons, households, or other levels of government—to receive payment, or otherwise legally obligates the Government to make payment and thereby effectively determines the amount of budget authority required, even though the payments are funded by a subsequent appropriation.

Sometimes, budget authority is characterized as current or permanent. Current authority requires the Congress to act on the request for new budget authority for the year involved. Permanent authority becomes available pursuant to standing provisions of law without appropriations action by the Congress for the year involved. Generally, budget authority is current if an annual appropriations act provides it and permanent if authorizing legislation provides it. By and large, the current/permanent distinction has been replaced by the discretionary/mandatory distinction, which is similar but not identical. Outlays are also classified as discretionary or mandatory according to the classification of the budget authority from which they flow (see "Outlays" later in this chapter).

The amount of budget authority recorded in the budget depends on whether the law provides a specific amount or employs a variable factor that determines the amount. It is considered *definite* if the law specifies a dollar amount (which may be stated as an upper limit; for example, "shall not exceed ..."). It is considered *indefinite* if, instead of specifying an amount, the law permits the amount to be determined by subsequent circumstances. For example, indefinite budget authority is provided for interest on the public debt, payment of claims and judgments awarded by the courts against the United States, and many entitlement programs. Many of the laws that authorize collections to be credited to revolving, special, and trust funds make all

of the collections available for expenditure for the authorized purposes of the fund, and such authority is considered to be indefinite budget authority because the amount of collections is not known in advance of their collection.

### **Obligations**

Following the enactment of budget authority and the completion of required apportionment action, Government agencies incur obligations to make payments (see earlier discussion under “Budget Execution”). Agencies must record obligations when they incur a legal liability that will result in immediate or future outlays. Such obligations include the current liabilities for salaries, wages, and interest; and contracts for the purchase of supplies and equipment, construction, and the acquisition of office space, buildings, and land. For Federal credit programs, obligations are recorded in an amount equal to the estimated subsidy cost of direct loans and loan guarantees (see “Federal Credit” later in this chapter).

### **Outlays**

Outlays are the measure of Government spending. They are payments that liquidate obligations (other than most exchanges of financial instruments, of which the repayment of debt is the prime example). The budget records outlays when obligations are paid, in the amount that is paid.

Agency, function and subfunction, and Government-wide outlay totals are stated net of offsetting collections and offsetting receipts for most budget presentations. (Offsetting receipts from a few sources do not offset any specific function, subfunction, or agency, as explained previously, but only offset Government-wide totals.) Outlay totals for accounts with offsetting collections are stated both gross and net of the offsetting collections credited to the account. However, the outlay totals for special and trust funds with offsetting receipts are not stated net of the offsetting receipts. In most cases, these receipts offset the agency, function, and subfunction totals but do not offset account-level outlays. However, when general fund payments are used to finance trust fund outlays to the public, the associated trust fund receipts are netted against the bureau totals to prevent double-counting budget authority and outlays at the bureau level.

The Government usually makes outlays in the form of cash (currency, checks, or electronic fund transfers). However, in some cases agencies pay obligations without disbursing cash, and the budget nevertheless records outlays for the equivalent method. For example, the budget records outlays for the full amount of Federal employees’ salaries, even though the cash disbursed to employees is net of Federal and State income taxes withheld, retirement contributions, life and health insurance premiums, and other deductions. (The budget also records receipts for the amounts withheld from Federal employee paychecks

for Federal income taxes and other payments to the Government.) When debt instruments (bonds, debentures, notes, or monetary credits) are used in place of cash to pay obligations, the budget records outlays financed by an increase in agency debt. For example, the budget records the acquisition of physical assets through certain types of lease-purchase arrangements as though a cash disbursement were made for an outright purchase. The transaction creates a Government debt, and the cash lease payments are treated as repayments of principal and interest.

The budget records outlays for the interest on the public issues of Treasury debt securities as the interest accrues, not when the cash is paid. A small portion of Treasury debt consists of inflation-indexed securities, which feature monthly adjustments to principal for inflation and semi-annual payments of interest on the inflation-adjusted principal. As with fixed-rate securities, the budget records interest outlays as the interest accrues. The monthly adjustment to principal is recorded, simultaneously, as an increase in debt outstanding and an outlay of interest.

Most Treasury debt securities held by trust funds and other Government accounts are in the Government account series. The budget normally states the interest on these securities on a cash basis. When a Government account is invested in Federal debt securities, the purchase price is usually close or identical to the par (face) value of the security. The budget generally records the investment at par value and adjusts the interest paid by Treasury and collected by the account by the difference between purchase price and par, if any.

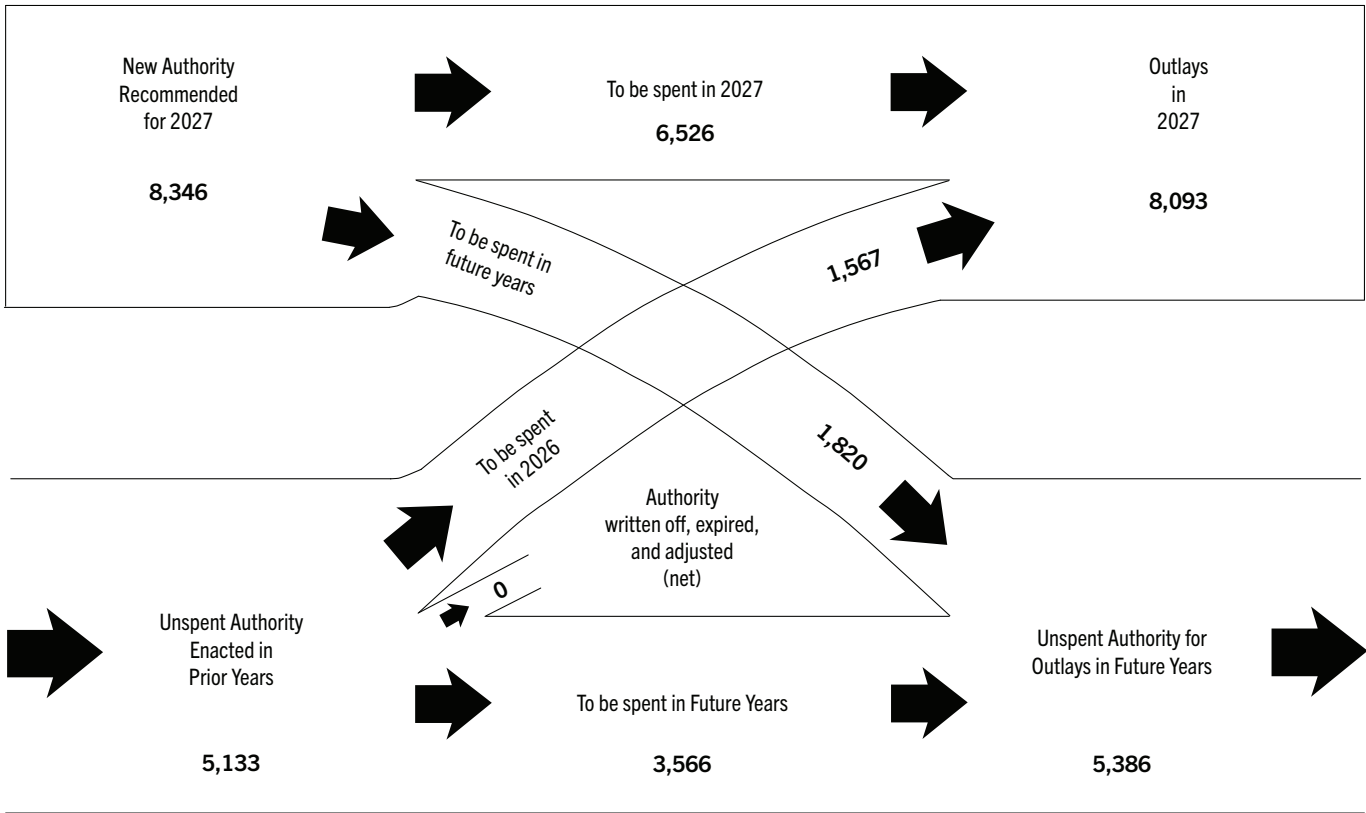
For Federal credit programs, outlays are equal to the subsidy cost of direct loans and loan guarantees and are recorded as the underlying loans are disbursed (see “Federal Credit” later in this chapter).

The budget records refunds of receipts that result from overpayments by the public (such as income taxes withheld in excess of tax liabilities) as reductions of receipts, rather than as outlays. However, the budget records payments to taxpayers for refundable tax credits (such as earned income tax credits) that exceed the taxpayer’s tax liability as outlays. Similarly, when the Government makes overpayments that are later returned to the Government, those refunds to the Government are recorded as offsetting collections or offsetting receipts, not as governmental receipts.

Not all of the new budget authority for 2027 will be obligated or spent in 2027. Outlays during a fiscal year may liquidate obligations incurred in the same year or in prior years. Obligations, in turn, may be incurred against budget authority provided in the same year or against unobligated balances of budget authority provided in prior years. Outlays, therefore, flow in part from budget authority provided for the year in which the money is spent and in part from budget authority provided for prior years. The ratio of a given year’s outlays resulting from budget authority enacted in that or a prior year to the original amount of that budget authority is referred to as the outlay rate for that year.

**Figure 06–1. Relationship of Budget Authority to Outlays for 2027**

In Billions of Dollars



As shown in the accompanying chart, \$6,526 billion of outlays in 2027 (81 percent of the outlay total) will be made from that year’s \$8,346 billion total of proposed new budget authority (a first-year outlay rate of 78 percent). Thus, the remaining \$1,567 billion of outlays in 2027 (19 percent of the outlay total) will be made from budget authority enacted in previous years. At the same time, \$1,820 billion of the new budget authority proposed for 2027 (22 percent of the total amount proposed) will not lead to outlays until future years.

As described earlier, the budget classifies budget authority and outlays as discretionary or mandatory. This classification of outlays measures the extent to which actual spending is controlled through the annual appropriations process. About 27 percent of total outlays in 2025 (\$1,875 billion) were discretionary and the remaining 73 percent (\$5,136 billion in 2025) were mandatory spending and net interest. Such a large portion of total spending is mandatory because authorizing rather than appropriations legislation determines net interest (\$970 billion in 2025) and the spending for a few programs with large amounts of spending each year, such as Social Security (\$1,575 billion in 2025) and Medicare (\$988 billion in 2025).

The bulk of mandatory outlays flow from budget authority recorded in the same fiscal year. This is not necessarily the case for discretionary budget authority and outlays. For most major construction and procurement projects and long-term contracts, for example, the budget authority available at the time the projects are initiated covers the entire estimated cost of the project even though the work will take place and outlays will be made over a period extending beyond the year for which the budget authority is enacted. Similarly, discretionary budget authority for most education and job training activities is appropriated for school or program years that begin in the fourth quarter of the fiscal year. Most of these funds result in outlays in the year after the appropriation.

## FEDERAL CREDIT

Some Government programs provide assistance through direct loans or loan guarantees. A *direct loan* is a disbursement of funds by the Government to a non-Federal borrower under a contract that requires repayment of such funds with or without interest and includes economically equivalent transactions, such as the sale of Federal assets on credit terms. A *loan guarantee* is any guarantee, insurance, or other pledge with respect to the payment of all or a part of the principal or interest on any debt obligation of a non-Federal borrower to a non-Federal lender.

Under the budgetary treatment specified by the Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990, as amended (FCRA), the budget records obligations and outlays for direct loans and loan guarantees up front, for the net cost to the Government, rather than recording the cash flows year by year over the term of the loan. By differentiating between the net cost to the Government (which represents an allocation of resources) and the cash flows associated with the direct loan or loan guarantee (which represents the financing of that cost), FCRA treatment allows the comparison of direct loans and loan guarantees to each other, and to other methods of delivering assistance, such as grants, on an apples-to-apples basis.

The cost of direct loans and loan guarantees, sometimes called the “subsidy cost,” is estimated as the present value of expected payments to and from the public over the term of the loan, discounted using appropriate Treasury interest rates.<sup>2</sup> Similar to most other kinds of programs, agencies can make loans or guarantee loans only if the Congress has appropriated funds sufficient to cover the subsidy costs, or provided a limitation in an appropriations act on the amount of direct loans or loan guarantees that can be made.

The budget records the subsidy cost to the Government arising from direct loans and loan guarantees—the budget authority and outlays—in *credit program accounts*. When a Federal agency disburses a direct loan or when a non-Federal lender disburses a loan guaranteed by a Federal agency, the program account disburses or outlays an amount equal to the estimated present value cost, or subsidy, to a non-budgetary *credit financing account*. The financing accounts record the actual transactions with the public. For a few programs, the estimated subsidy cost is negative because the present value of expected Government collections exceeds the present value of expected payments to the public over the term of the loan. In such cases, the financing account pays the estimated subsidy cost to the program’s negative subsidy receipt account, where it is recorded as an offsetting receipt. In a few cases, the offsetting receipts of credit accounts are dedicated to

a special fund established for the program and are available for appropriation for the program.

The agencies responsible for credit programs must reestimate the subsidy cost of the outstanding portfolio of direct loans and loan guarantees each year. If the estimated cost increases, the program account makes an additional payment to the financing account equal to the change in cost. If the estimated cost decreases, the financing account pays the difference to the program’s downward reestimate receipt account, where it is recorded as an offsetting receipt. FCRA provides permanent indefinite appropriations to pay for upward reestimates.

If the Government modifies the terms of an outstanding direct loan or loan guarantee in a way that increases the cost as the result of a law or the exercise of administrative discretion under existing law, the program account records obligations for the increased cost and outlays the amount to the financing account. As with the original subsidy cost, agencies may incur modification costs only if the Congress has appropriated funds to cover them. A modification may also reduce costs, in which case the amounts are generally returned to the general fund, as the financing account makes a payment to the program’s negative subsidy receipt account.

Credit financing accounts record all cash flows arising from direct loan obligations and loan guarantee commitments. Such cash flows include all cash flows to and from the public, including direct loan disbursements and repayments, loan guarantee default payments, fees, and recoveries on defaults. Financing accounts also record intragovernmental transactions, such as the receipt of subsidy cost payments from program accounts, borrowing and repayments of Treasury debt to finance program activities, and interest paid to or received from the Treasury. The cash flows of direct loans and of loan guarantees are recorded in separate financing accounts for programs that provide both types of credit. The budget totals exclude the transactions of the financing accounts because they do not represent an allocation of resources by the Government; rather, they affect the means of financing a budget surplus or deficit (see “Credit Financing Accounts” in the next section). The budget documents display the transactions of the financing accounts, together with the related program accounts, for information and analytical purposes.

The budgetary treatment of direct loan obligations and loan guarantee commitments made prior to 1992 was grandfathered in under FCRA. The budget records these on a cash basis in credit liquidating accounts, the same as they were recorded before FCRA was enacted. However, this exception ceases to apply if the direct loans or

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<sup>2</sup> Present value is a standard financial concept that considers the time-value of money. That is, it accounts for the fact that a given sum of money is worth more today than the same sum would be worth in the future because interest can be earned.

loan guarantees are modified as described above. In that case, the budget records the subsidy cost or savings of the modification, as appropriate, and begins to account for the associated transactions under FCRA treatment for direct loan obligations and loan guarantee commitments made in 1992 or later.

Under the authority provided in various acts, certain activities that do not meet the definition in FCRA of a direct loan or loan guarantee are reflected pursuant to FCRA. For example, the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008 (EESA) created the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) under the Department of the Treasury, and authorized Treasury to purchase or guarantee troubled assets until October 3, 2010. Under TARP, Treasury purchased equity interests in financial institutions. Sec-

tion 123 of the EESA provides the Administration the authority to treat these equity investments on a FCRA basis, recording outlays for the subsidy as is done for direct loans and loan guarantees. The budget reflects the cost to the Government of TARP direct loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments consistent with the FCRA and Section 123 of EESA, which requires an adjustment to the FCRA discount rate for market risks. Similarly, Treasury equity purchases under the Small Business Lending Fund are treated pursuant to FCRA, as provided by the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act authorized certain investments in programs and facilities established by the Federal Reserve. Section 4003 of the CARES Act provided that these amounts be treated in accordance with FCRA.

## BUDGET DEFICIT OR SURPLUS AND MEANS OF FINANCING

When outlays exceed receipts, the difference is a deficit, which the Government finances primarily by borrowing. When receipts exceed outlays, the difference is a surplus, and the Government automatically uses the surplus primarily to reduce debt. The Federal debt held by the public is approximately the cumulative amount of borrowing to finance deficits, less repayments from surpluses, over the Nation's history.

Borrowing is not exactly equal to the deficit, and debt repayment is not exactly equal to the surplus, because of the other transactions affecting borrowing from the public, or other means of financing, such as those discussed in this section. The factors included in the other means of financing can either increase or decrease the Government's borrowing needs (or decrease or increase its ability to repay debt). For example, the change in the Treasury operating cash balance is a factor included in other means of financing. Holding receipts and outlays constant, increases in the cash balance increase the Government's need to borrow or reduce the Government's ability to repay debt, and decreases in the cash balance decrease the need to borrow or increase the ability to repay debt. In some years, the net effect of the other means of financing is minor relative to the borrowing or debt repayment; in other years, the net effect may be significant.

### *Borrowing and Debt Repayment*

The budget treats borrowing and debt repayment as a means of financing, not as receipts and outlays. If borrowing were defined as receipts and debt repayment as outlays, the budget would always be virtually balanced by definition. This rule applies both to borrowing in the form of Treasury securities and to specialized borrowing in the form of agency securities. The rule reflects the common-sense understanding that lending or borrowing is just an exchange of financial assets of equal value—cash for Treasury securities—and so is fundamentally different from, say, paying taxes, which involve a net transfer of financial assets from taxpayers to the Government.

In 2025, the Government borrowed \$1,973 billion from the public, bringing debt held by the public to \$30,167 billion. This borrowing financed the \$1,775 billion deficit in that year, as well as the net impacts of the other means of financing, such as changes in cash balances and other accounts discussed below.

In addition to selling debt to the public, the Department of the Treasury issues debt to Government accounts, primarily trust funds that are required by law to invest in Treasury securities. Issuing and redeeming this debt does not affect the means of financing, because these transactions occur between one Government account and another and thus do not raise or use any cash for the Government as a whole.

(See the “Federal Borrowing and Debt” chapter of this volume for a fuller discussion of this topic.)

### *Exercise of Monetary Power*

Seigniorage is the profit from coining money. It is the difference between the value of coins as money and their cost of production. Seigniorage reduces the Government's need to borrow. Unlike the payment of taxes or other receipts, it does not involve a transfer of financial assets from the public. Instead, it arises from the exercise of the Government's power to create money and the public's desire to hold financial assets in the form of coins. Therefore, the budget excludes seigniorage from receipts and treats it as a means of financing other than borrowing from the public. The budget also treats proceeds from the sale of gold as a means of financing, since the value of gold is determined by its value as a monetary asset rather than as a commodity.

### *Credit Financing Accounts*

The budget records the net cash flows of credit programs in credit financing accounts. These accounts include the transactions for direct loan and loan guarantee

programs, as well as the equity purchase programs under TARP that are recorded on a credit basis consistent with Section 123 of EESA. Financing accounts also record equity purchases under the Small Business Lending Fund consistent with the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010, and certain investments in programs and facilities established by the Federal Reserve consistent with Section 4003 of the CARES Act. Credit financing accounts are excluded from the budget because they are not allocations of resources by the Government (see “Federal Credit” earlier in this chapter). However, even though they do not affect the surplus or deficit, they can either increase or decrease the Government’s need to borrow. Therefore, they are recorded as a means of financing.

Financing account disbursements to the public increase the requirement for Treasury borrowing in the same way as an increase in budget outlays. Financing account receipts from the public can be used to finance the payment of the Government’s obligations and therefore reduce the requirement for Treasury borrowing from the public in the same way as an increase in budget receipts.

### ***Deposit Fund Account Balances***

The Treasury uses non-budgetary accounts, called deposit funds, to record cash held temporarily until ownership is determined (for example, earnest money paid by bidders for mineral leases) or cash held by the Government as agent for others (for example, State and local income taxes withheld from Federal employees’ salaries and not yet paid to the State or local government, or amounts held in the Thrift Savings Fund, a defined contribution pension fund held and managed in a fiduciary capacity by the Government). Deposit fund balances may be held in the form of either invested or uninvested balances. To the extent that they are not invested, changes in the balances are available to finance expenditures without a change in

borrowing and are recorded as a means of financing other than borrowing from the public. To the extent that they are invested in Federal debt, changes in the balances are reflected as borrowing from the public (in lieu of borrowing from other parts of the public) and are not reflected as a separate means of financing.

### ***United States Quota Subscriptions to the International Monetary Fund (IMF)***

The United States participates in the IMF primarily through a quota subscription. Financial transactions with the IMF are exchanges of monetary assets. When the IMF temporarily draws dollars from the U.S. quota, the United States simultaneously receives an equal, offsetting, interest-bearing, Special Drawing Right (SDR)-denominated claim in the form of an increase in the U.S. reserve position in the IMF. The U.S. reserve position in the IMF increases when the United States makes deposits in its account at the IMF when the IMF temporarily uses members’ quota resources to make loans and decreases when the IMF returns funds to the United States as borrowing countries repay the IMF (and the cash flows from the reserve position to the Treasury letter of credit).

The U.S. transactions with the IMF under the quota subscriptions do not increase the deficit in any year, and the budget excludes these transfers from budget outlays and receipts, consistent with the budgetary treatment for exchanges of monetary assets recommended by the President’s Commission on Budget Concepts in 1967. The only exception is that interest earnings on U.S. deposits in its IMF account are recorded as offsetting receipts. Other exchanges of monetary assets, such as deposits of cash in Treasury accounts at commercial banks, are likewise not included in the Budget. However, the Congress has historically expressed interest in showing some kind of budgetary effect for U.S. transactions with the IMF.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the history of the budgetary treatment of U.S. participation in the quota and New Arrangements to Borrow (NAB), see pages 139-141 in the *Analytical Perspectives* volume of the 2016 Budget. As discussed in that volume, the budgetary treatment of the U.S. participation in the NAB is similar to the quota. See pages 85-86 of the *Analytical Perspectives* volume of the 2018 Budget for a more complete discussion of the changes made to the budgetary presentation of quota increases in Title IX of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2016.

## BASIS FOR BUDGET FIGURES

### Data for the Past Year

The past year column (2025) generally presents the actual transactions and balances as recorded in agency accounts and as summarized in the central financial reports prepared by the Department of the Treasury for the most recently completed fiscal year. Occasionally, the Budget reports corrections to data reported erroneously to Treasury but not discovered in time to be reflected in Treasury's published data. In addition, in certain cases the Budget has a broader scope and includes financial transactions that are not reported to Treasury (see the "Comparison of Actual to Estimated Totals" chapter of this volume for a summary of these differences).

### Data for the Current Year

The current year column (2026) includes estimates of transactions and balances based on the amounts of budgetary resources that were available when the Budget was prepared. In cases where the Budget proposes policy changes effective in the current year, the data will also reflect the budgetary effect of those proposed changes.

### Data for the Budget Year

The Budget year column (2027) includes estimates of transactions and balances based on the amounts of budgetary resources that are estimated to be available, including new budget authority requested under current authorizing legislation, and amounts estimated to result from changes in authorizing legislation and tax laws.

The Budget *Appendix* generally includes the appropriations language for the amounts proposed to be appropriated under current authorizing legislation. In a few cases, this language is transmitted later because the exact requirements are unknown when the budget is transmitted. The *Appendix* generally does not include appropriations language for the amounts that will be requested under proposed legislation; that language is usually transmitted later, after the legislation is enacted. Some tables in the budget identify the items for later transmittal and the related outlays separately. Estimates of the total requirements for the Budget year include both the amounts requested with the transmittal of the budget and the amounts planned for later transmittal.

### Data for the Outyears

The Budget presents estimates for each of the nine years beyond the budget year (2028 through 2036) in order to reflect the effects of budget decisions on objectives and plans over a longer period.

### Allowances

The budget may include lump-sum allowances to cover certain transactions that are expected to increase or decrease budget authority, outlays, or receipts but are not, for various reasons, reflected in the program details. For example, the budget might include an allowance to show the effect on the budget totals of a proposal that would affect many accounts by relatively small amounts, in order to avoid unnecessary detail in the presentations for the individual accounts.

### Baseline

The Budget baseline is an estimate of the receipts, outlays, and deficits or surpluses that would occur if no changes were made to current laws and policies during the period covered by the Budget. Its construction is governed by rules codified in BBEDCA. The baseline assumes, with limited exceptions, that receipts and mandatory spending, which generally are authorized on a permanent basis, will continue in the future consistent with current law and policy. Funding for discretionary programs is inflated from the most recent enacted appropriations using specified inflation rates. (The "Current Services Estimates" chapter of this volume provides more information on the baseline in the 2027 Budget.)

Baseline outlays represent the amount of resources that the Government would use over the period covered by the Budget on the basis of laws currently enacted.

The baseline serves several useful purposes:

- It may warn of future problems, either for Government fiscal policy as a whole or for individual tax and spending programs.
- It may provide a starting point for formulating the President's Budget.
- It may provide a benchmark against which the President's Budget and alternative proposals can be compared to assess the magnitude of proposed changes.

## Principal Budget Laws.

The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 created the core of the current Federal budget process. Before enactment of this law, there was no annual centralized budgeting in the Executive Branch. Federal Government agencies usually sent budget requests independently to congressional committees with no coordination of the various requests in formulating the Federal Government's budget. The Budget and Accounting Act required the President to coordinate the budget requests for all Government agencies and to send a comprehensive budget to the Congress. The Congress has amended the requirements many times and portions of the Act are codified in Title 31, United States Code. The major laws that govern the budget process are as follows:

**Article 1, section 8, clause 1 of the Constitution.** Empowers the Congress to lay and collect taxes.

**Article 1, section 9, clause 7 of the Constitution.** Requires appropriations in law before money may be spent from the Treasury and the publication of a regular statement of the receipts and expenditures of all public money.

**Antideficiency Act (codified in Chapters 13 and 15 of Title 31, United States Code).** Prescribes rules and procedures for budget execution.

**Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended.** Establishes limits on discretionary spending and provides mechanisms for enforcing mandatory spending and discretionary spending limits.

**Chapter 11 of Title 31, United States Code.** Prescribes procedures for submission of the President's budget and information to be contained in it.

**Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, as amended (Public Law 93–344).** This Act comprises the:

- Congressional Budget Act of 1974, as amended, which prescribes the congressional budget process;
- Impoundment Control Act of 1974, as amended, which controls certain aspects of budget execution; and
- Federal Credit Reform Act of 1990, as amended (2 U.S.C. 661–661f), which the Budget Enforcement Act of 1990 included as an amendment to the Congressional Budget Act to prescribe the budget treatment for Federal credit programs.

**Chapter 31 of Title 31, United States Code.** Provides the authority for the Secretary of the Treasury to issue debt to finance the deficit and establishes a statutory limit on the level of the debt.

**Chapter 33 of Title 31, United States Code.** Establishes the Department of the Treasury as the authority for making disbursements of public funds, with the authority to delegate that authority to executive agencies in the interests of economy and efficiency.

**Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, as amended (Public Law 103–62).** Emphasizes managing for results. It requires agencies to prepare strategic plans, annual performance plans, and annual performance reports.

**Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010.** Establishes a budget enforcement mechanism generally requiring that direct spending and revenue legislation enacted into law not increase the deficit.

## Glossary of Budget Terms

**Account.** A separate financial reporting unit used by the Federal Government to record budget authority, outlays and income for budgeting or management information purposes as well as for accounting purposes. All budget (and off-budget) accounts are classified as being either expenditure or receipt accounts and by fund group. Budget (and off-budget) transactions fall within either of two fund groups: 1) Federal funds and 2) trust funds. (Cf. Federal funds group and trust funds group.)

**Accrual method of measuring cost.** An accounting method that records cost when the liability is incurred. As applied to Federal employee retirement benefits, accrual costs are recorded when the benefits are earned rather than when they are paid at some

time in the future. The accrual method is used in part to provide data that assists in agency policymaking, but not used in presenting the overall budget of the United States Government.

**Advance appropriation.** Appropriations of new budget authority that become available one or more fiscal years beyond the fiscal year for which the appropriation act was passed.

**Advance funding.** Appropriations of budget authority provided in an appropriations act to be used, if necessary, to cover obligations incurred late in the fiscal year for benefit payments in excess of the amount specifically appropriated in the act for that year, where the budget authority is charged to the appropriation for the program for the fiscal year following

the fiscal year for which the appropriations act is passed.

**Agency.** A Department or other establishment of the Government.

**Allowance.** A lump-sum included in the budget to represent certain transactions that are expected to increase or decrease budget authority, outlays, or receipts but that are not, for various reasons, reflected in the program details.

**Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended (BBEDCA).** Legislation that altered the budget process, primarily by replacing the earlier fixed targets for annual deficits with a Pay-As-You-Go requirement for new tax or mandatory spending legislation and with caps on annual discretionary funding. The

## Glossary of Budget Terms, Continued

Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, which is a standalone piece of legislation that did not directly amend the BBEDCA, reinstated a statutory pay-as-you-go rule for revenues and mandatory spending legislation.

**Balances of budget authority.** The amounts of budget authority provided in previous years that have not been outlayed.

**Baseline.** A projection of the estimated receipts, outlays, and deficit or surplus that would result from continuing current law or current policies through the period covered by the Budget.

**Budget** means the Budget of the United States Government, which sets forth the President's comprehensive financial plan for allocating resources and indicates the President's priorities for the Federal Government.

**Budget authority (BA).** The authority provided by law to incur financial obligations that will result in outlays. (For a description of the several forms of budget authority, see "Budget Authority and Other Budgetary Resources" earlier in this chapter.)

**Budget Control Act of 2011.** Legislation that, among other things, amended BBEDCA to reinstate discretionary spending limits on budget authority through 2021 and restored the process for enforcing those spending limits. The legislation also increased the statutory debt ceiling; created a Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction that was instructed to develop a bill to reduce the Federal deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion over a 10-year period; and provided a process to implement alternative spending reductions in the

event that legislation achieving at least \$1.2 trillion of deficit reduction was not enacted.

**Budget resolution.** See concurrent resolution on the budget.

**Budget totals.** The totals included in the Budget for budget authority, outlays, receipts, and the surplus or deficit. Some presentations in the Budget distinguish on-budget totals from off-budget totals. On-budget totals reflect the transactions of all Federal Government entities except those excluded from the Budget totals by law. Off-budget totals reflect the transactions of Government entities that are excluded from the on-budget totals by law. Under current law, the off-budget totals include the Social Security trust funds (Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds) and the Postal Service Fund. The Budget combines the on- and off-budget totals to derive unified (i.e., consolidated) totals for Federal activity.

**Budget year.** The fiscal year for which the Budget is being considered, that is, with respect to a session of the Congress, the fiscal year of the Government that starts on October 1 of the calendar year in which that session of the Congress begins.

**Budgetary resources.** Amounts available to incur obligations in a given year. The term comprises new budget authority and unobligated balances of budget authority provided in previous years.

**Cap.** The legal limits for each fiscal year under BBEDCA on the budget authority and outlays (only if applicable) provided by discretionary appropriations.

**Cap adjustment.** Either an increase or a decrease that is permitted to the statutory cap limits for each fiscal year under BBEDCA on the budget authority and outlays (only if applicable) provided by discretionary appropriations only if certain conditions are met. These conditions may include providing for a base level of funding, a designation of the increase or decrease by the Congress, (and in some circumstances, the President) pursuant to a section of the BBEDCA, or a change in concepts and definitions of funding under the cap. Changes in concepts and definitions require consultation with the Congressional Appropriations and Budget Committees.

**Cash equivalent transaction.** A transaction in which the Government makes outlays or receives collections in a form other than cash or the cash does not accurately measure the cost of the transaction. (For examples, see the section on "Outlays" earlier in this chapter.)

**Collections.** Money collected by the Government that the Budget records as a governmental receipt, an offsetting collection, or an offsetting receipt. **Concurrent resolution on the budget.** The concurrent resolution adopted by the Congress to set budgetary targets for appropriations, mandatory spending legislation, and tax legislation. These concurrent resolutions are required by the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, and are generally adopted annually.

**Continuing resolution.** An appropriations act that provides for the ongoing operation of the Government in the absence of enacted appropriations.

## Glossary of Budget Terms, Continued

**Cost.** Legislation or administrative actions that increase outlays or decrease receipts. (Cf. savings.)

**Credit program account.** A budget account that receives and obligates appropriations to cover the subsidy cost of a direct loan or loan guarantee and disburses the subsidy cost to a financing account.

**Current services estimate.** See Baseline.

**Debt held by the public.** The cumulative amount of money the Federal Government has borrowed from the public and not repaid.

**Debt held by the public net of financial assets.** The cumulative amount of money the Federal Government has borrowed from the public and not repaid, minus the current value of financial assets such as loan assets, bank deposits, or private-sector securities or equities held by the Government and plus the current value of financial liabilities other than debt.

**Debt held by Government accounts.** The debt the Department of the Treasury owes to accounts within the Federal Government. Most of it results from the surpluses of the Social Security and other trust funds, which are required by law to be invested in Federal securities.

**Debt limit.** The maximum amount of Federal debt that may legally be outstanding at any time. It includes both the debt held by the public and the debt held by Government accounts, but without accounting for off-setting financial assets. When the debt limit is reached, the Government cannot borrow more money until the Congress has enacted a law to increase the limit.

**Deficit.** The amount by which outlays exceed receipts in a fiscal year. It may refer to the on-budget, off-budget, or unified budget deficit.

**Direct loan.** A disbursement of funds by the Government to a non-Federal borrower under a contract that requires the repayment of such funds with or without interest. The term includes the purchase of, or participation in, a loan made by another lender. The term also includes the sale of a Government asset on credit terms of more than 90 days duration as well as financing arrangements for other transactions that defer payment for more than 90 days. It also includes loans financed by the Federal Financing Bank (FFB) pursuant to agency loan guarantee authority. The term does not include the acquisition of a federally guaranteed loan in satisfaction of default or other guarantee claims or the price support “loans” of the Commodity Credit Corporation. (Cf. loan guarantee.)

**Direct spending.** See mandatory spending.

**Disaster funding.** A discretionary appropriation that is enacted that the Congress designates as being for disaster relief. Such amounts are a cap adjustment to the limits on discretionary spending under BBEDCA, when such limits are in place. The total adjustment for this purpose cannot exceed a ceiling for a particular year that is defined as the total of the average funding provided for disaster relief over the previous 10 years (excluding the highest and lowest years) and the unused amount of the prior year’s ceiling (excluding the portion of the prior year’s ceiling that was itself due to any unused amount from the year before). Disaster relief

is defined as activities carried out pursuant to a determination under section 102(2) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act.

**Discretionary spending.** Budgetary resources (except those provided to fund mandatory spending programs) provided in appropriations acts. (Cf. mandatory spending.)

**Emergency requirement.** An amount that the Congress has designated as an emergency requirement. Such amounts are not included in the estimated budgetary effects of PAYGO legislation under the requirements of the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010, if they are mandatory or receipts. Such a discretionary appropriation that is subsequently designated by the President as an emergency requirement results in a cap adjustment to the limits on discretionary spending under BBEDCA, when such limits are in place.

**Entitlement.** A program in which the Federal Government is legally obligated to make payments or provide aid to any person who, or State or local government that, meets the legal criteria for eligibility. Examples include Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly Food Stamps).

**Federal funds group.** The moneys collected and spent by the Government through accounts other than those designated as trust funds. Federal funds include general, special, public enterprise, and intragovernmental funds. (Cf. trust funds group.)

**Financing account.** A non-budgetary account (an account whose transactions are excluded

## Glossary of Budget Terms, Continued

from the budget totals) that records all of the cash flows resulting from post-1991 direct loan obligations or loan guarantee commitments. At least one financing account is associated with each credit program account. For programs that make both direct loans and loan guarantees, separate financing accounts are required for direct loan cash flows and for loan guarantee cash flows. (Cf. liquidating account.)

**Fiscal year.** The Government's accounting period. It begins on October 1 and ends on September 30, and is designated by the calendar year in which it ends.

**Forward funding.** Appropriations of budget authority that are made for obligation starting in the last quarter of the fiscal year for the financing of ongoing grant programs during the next fiscal year.

**General fund** means the accounts in which are recorded governmental receipts not earmarked by law for a specific purpose, the proceeds of general borrowing, and the expenditure of these moneys.

**Government-sponsored enterprises.** Private enterprises that were established and chartered by the Federal Government for public policy purposes. They are classified as non-budgetary and not included in the Federal budget because they are private companies, and their securities are not backed by the full faith and credit of the Federal Government. However, the budget presents statements of financial condition for certain Government sponsored enterprises such as the Federal National Mortgage Association. (Cf. off-budget.)

**Intragovernmental fund.** See Revolving fund.

**Liquidating account.** A budget account that records all cash flows to and from the Government resulting from pre-1992 direct loan obligations or loan guarantee commitments. (Cf. financing account.)

**Loan guarantee.** Any guarantee, insurance, or other pledge with respect to the payment of all or a part of the principal or interest on any debt obligation of a non-Federal borrower to a non-Federal lender. The term does not include the insurance of deposits, shares, or other withdrawable accounts in financial institutions. (Cf. direct loan.)

**Mandatory spending.** Spending controlled by laws other than appropriations acts (including spending for entitlement programs) and spending for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps. Although the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 uses the term direct spending to mean this, mandatory spending is commonly used instead. (Cf. discretionary spending.)

**Means of financing.** Borrowing, the change in cash balances, and certain other transactions involved in financing a deficit. The term is also used to refer to the debt repayment, the change in cash balances, and certain other transactions involved in using a surplus. By definition, the means of financing are not treated as receipts or outlays and so are non-budgetary.

**Obligated balance.** The cumulative amount of budget authority that has been obligated but not yet outlayed. (Cf. unobligated balance.)

**Obligation.** A binding agreement that will result in outlays, immediately or in the future. Budgetary resources must be available before obligations can be incurred legally.

**Off-budget.** Transactions of the Federal Government that would be treated as budgetary had the Congress not designated them by statute as "off-budget." Currently, transactions of the Social Security trust funds and the Postal Service are the only sets of transactions that are so designated. The term is sometimes used more broadly to refer to the transactions of private enterprises that were established and sponsored by the Government, most especially "Government-sponsored enterprises" such as the Federal Home Loan Banks. (Cf. budget totals.)

**Offsetting collections.** Collections that, by law, are credited directly to expenditure accounts and deducted from gross budget authority and outlays of the expenditure account, rather than added to receipts. Usually, they are authorized to be spent for the purposes of the account without further action by the Congress. They result from business-like transactions with the public, including payments from the public in exchange for goods and services, reimbursements for damages, and gifts or donations of money to the Government and from intragovernmental transactions with other Government accounts. The authority to spend offsetting collections is a form of budget authority. (Cf. receipts and offsetting receipts.)

**Offsetting receipts.** Collections that are credited to offsetting receipt accounts and deducted from gross budget authority and outlays, rather than

## Glossary of Budget Terms, Continued

added to receipts. They are not authorized to be credited to expenditure accounts. The legislation that authorizes the offsetting receipts may earmark them for a specific purpose and either appropriate them for expenditure for that purpose or require them to be appropriated in annual appropriation acts before they can be spent. Like offsetting collections, they result from business-like transactions or market-oriented activities with the public, including payments from the public in exchange for goods and services, reimbursements for damages, and gifts or donations of money to the Government and from intragovernmental transactions with other Government accounts. (Cf. receipts, undistributed offsetting receipts, and offsetting collections.)

**On-budget.** All budgetary transactions other than those designated by statute as off-budget. (Cf. budget totals.)

**Outlay.** A payment to liquidate an obligation (other than the repayment of debt principal or other disbursements that are “means of financing” transactions). Outlays generally are equal to cash disbursements, but also are recorded for cash-equivalent transactions, such as the issuance of debentures to pay insurance claims, and in a few cases are recorded on an accrual basis such as interest on public issues of the public debt. Outlays are the measure of Government spending.

**Outyear estimates.** Estimates presented in the Budget for the years beyond the budget year of budget authority, outlays, receipts, and other items (such as debt).

**Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terrorism (OCO/GWOT).** A discretionary appropriation that is enacted that the Congress and, subsequently, the President have so designated on an account by account basis. Such a discretionary appropriation that is designated as OCO/GWOT results in a cap adjustment to the limits on discretionary spending under BBEDCA, when such limits are in place. Funding for these purposes has most recently been associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Pay-as-you-go (PAYGO).** Requirements of the Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 that result in a sequestration if the estimated combined result of new legislation affecting direct spending or revenue increases the on-budget deficit relative to the baseline, as of the end of a congressional session.

**Public enterprise fund.** See Revolving fund.

**Reappropriation.** A provision of law that extends into a new fiscal year the availability of unobligated amounts that have expired or would otherwise expire.

**Receipts.** Collections that result from the Government’s exercise of its sovereign power to tax or otherwise compel payment. They are compared to outlays in calculating a surplus or deficit. (Cf. offsetting collections and offsetting receipts.)

**Revolving fund.** A fund that conducts continuing cycles of business-like activity, in which the fund charges for the sale of products or services and uses the proceeds to finance its spending, usually without requirement for

annual appropriations. There are two types of revolving funds: Public enterprise funds, which conduct business-like operations mainly with the public, and intragovernmental revolving funds, which conduct business-like operations mainly within and between Government agencies. (Cf. special fund and trust fund.)

**Savings.** Legislation or administrative actions that decrease outlays or increase receipts. (Cf. cost.)

**Scorekeeping.** Measuring the budget effects of legislation, generally in terms of budget authority, receipts, and outlays, for purposes of measuring adherence to the Budget or to budget targets established by the Congress, as through agreement to a Budget Resolution.

**Sequestration.** The cancellation of budgetary resources. The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 requires such cancellations if revenue or direct spending legislation is enacted that, in total, increases projected deficits or reduces projected surpluses relative to the baseline. The Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended, requires annual across-the-board cancellations to selected mandatory programs through 2032.

**Special fund.** A Federal fund account for receipts or offsetting receipts earmarked for specific purposes and the expenditure of these receipts. (Cf. revolving fund and trust fund.)

**Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010.** Legislation that reinstated a statutory pay-as-you-go requirement for new tax or mandatory spending legislation. The law is a standalone piece

## Glossary of Budget Terms, Continued

of legislation that cross-references BBEDCA but does not directly amend that legislation. This is a permanent law and does not expire.

**Subsidy.** The estimated long-term cost to the Government of a direct loan or loan guarantee, calculated on a net present value basis, excluding administrative costs and any incidental effects on governmental receipts or outlays.

**Surplus.** The amount by which receipts exceed outlays in a fiscal year. It may refer to the on-budget, off-budget, or unified budget surplus.

**Supplemental appropriation.** An appropriation enacted subsequent to a regular annual appropriations act, when the need for additional funds is too urgent to be postponed until the next regular annual appropriations act.

**Trust fund.** A type of account, designated by law as a trust fund, for receipts or offsetting receipts dedicated to specific purposes and the expenditure of these receipts. Some revolving funds are designated as trust funds, and these are called trust revolving funds. (Cf. special fund and revolving fund.)

**Trust funds group.** The moneys collected and spent by the Government through trust fund accounts. (Cf. Federal funds group.)

**Undistributed offsetting receipts.** Offsetting receipts that are deducted from the Government-wide totals for budget authority and outlays instead of being offset against a specific agency and function. (Cf. offsetting receipts.)

**Unified budget.** Includes receipts from all sources and outlays for all programs of the Federal Government,

including both on-and off-budget programs. It is the most comprehensive measure of the Government's annual finances.

**Unobligated balance.** The cumulative amount of budget authority that remains available for obligation under law in unexpired accounts. The term "expired balances available for adjustment only" refers to unobligated amounts in expired accounts.

**User charges.** Charges assessed for the provision of Government services and for the sale or use of Government goods or resources. The payers of the user charge must be limited in the authorizing legislation to those receiving special benefits from, or subject to regulation by, the program or activity beyond the benefits received by the general public or broad segments of the public (such as those who pay income taxes or custom duties). 