

How Congress Works

A Comprehensive Review

December 17, 2025



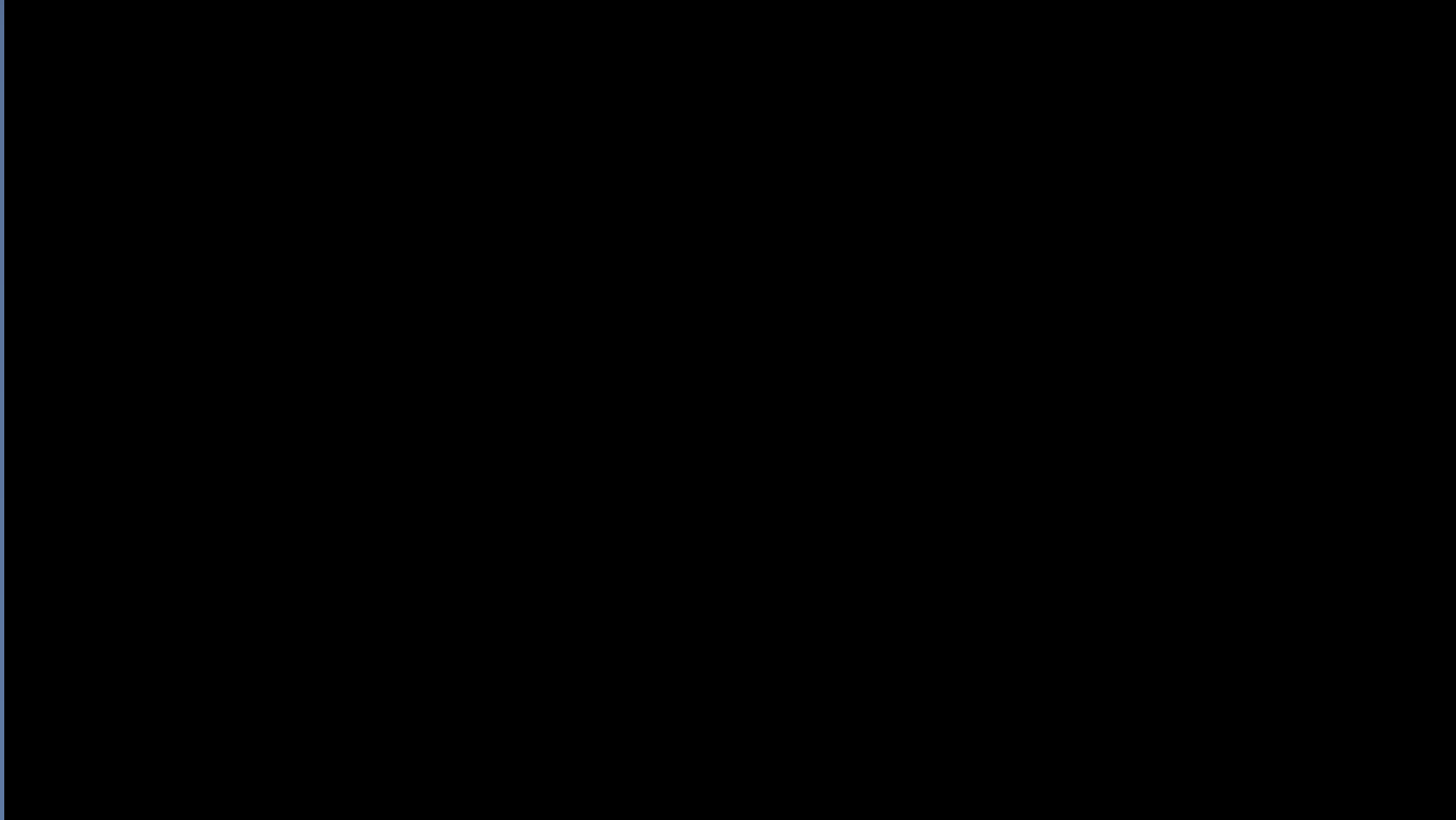


Overview

- The Legislative Process
- Congressional Office Structure
- How Congress Appropriates Funds
- Requesting a Congressional Meeting
- Conducting a Meeting
- Issue Papers
- Q&A



The Legislative Process





The Legislative Process

- **Bill Development** – Problem identified and policy solution developed
- **Bill Introduction** – Bill drafted and introduced
- **Committee Process** – Hearings and Markups (i.e. Business Meetings)
- **Floor Action** – Votes (Simple Majority v. 60-vote threshold)
- **Packages or Vehicles** – How most bills pass these days
- Both chambers need to pass identical legislation
- Conferencing differences – reserved for major legislation
- Presidential signature or veto



The Congressional Office (DC)

- **Staff Assistant**– These staffers work the front desk and answer the phones. They sometimes assist with meetings and help manage intern duties.
- **Legislative Correspondent (LC)** – Legislative support staff. Is responsible for responding to constituent letters and supports the Legislative Assistant on policy matters.
- **Legislative Assistant (LA)** – The lead staffer responsible for managing a legislative portfolio. They are intended on being issue area experts and directly advise the Member.
- **Legislative Director (LD)** – Manages the legislative staff and the Member's overall legislative agenda – In the House they also usually have a legislative portfolio of their own.
- **Chief of Staff (COS)** – They are the top staffer in an office, and are second only to the Member themselves. The most senior position in an office.\
- **State Staff***



Committee Assignments

Each Member in the House and Senate receives committee assignments—and they are most impactful on issues and policies that are within the jurisdiction of their assigned committees.



Legislative Committees

House of Representatives

Agriculture
Appropriations
Armed Services
Budget
Education and Workforce
Energy and Commerce
Ethics
Financial Services
Foreign Affairs
Homeland Security
House Administration
Judiciary
Natural Resources
Oversight and Government Reform
Rules
Science, Space, and Technology
Small Business
Transportation and Infrastructure
Veterans' Affairs
Ways and Means

Senate

Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Appropriations
Armed Services
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Budget
Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Energy and Natural Resources
Environment and Public Works
Finance
Foreign Relations
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Homeland Security and Governmental
Affairs
Judiciary
Rules and Administration
Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Veterans' Affairs



Overview

Congressional Appropriations



House and Senate Appropriations Committees and Subcommittees

Role of the Appropriations Committee:

- Reviews, amends, and passes appropriations bills
- Hearings to examine budget requests
- Markups to modify and vote on funding levels
- Preparation of appropriations bills

House and Senate Subcommittees:

- Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
- Labor, Health and Human Services, Education
- Defense
- Legislative Branch
- Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies
- State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
- Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
- Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
- Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies
- Financial Services and General Government
- Homeland Security
- Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies



Appropriations Deadlines for Member Requests

Importance of Member Requests

- Members of Congress play a crucial role in the appropriations process by advocating for funding priorities that align with the needs and interests of their constituents or national policy priorities.
- Member requests provide an opportunity to influence funding decisions and ensure that key projects and programs receive adequate resources.

Deadline for Member Requests

- Members typically submit their appropriations requests to the Appropriations Committee in the Spring.
- This timeframe allows the committee to consider and incorporate input from Members when formulating appropriations bills and as they are taking into consideration the President's annual budget request.
- Meeting the deadline ensure that Members' funding priorities are given due consideration during the budget deliberations.

Member Requests

- When submitting Member requests, Members need to effectively communicate their justification for their requested funding allocations.
- Justifications should highlight the impact on constituents, emphasizing the benefits, outcomes, and value that the proposed funding would bring to the district, state or nation.
- Showing broad bipartisan support for a request can increase the likelihood of success dramatically.



Presidential Budget Requests and Timelines

The President's Role in the Budget Process

- The President is responsible for formulating and submitting the annual budget request to Congress, which outlines the Administration's fiscal priorities, policy initiatives, and funding recommendations.

Timeline for Presidential Budget Requests

- The President typically submits the budget request to Congress on the first Monday in February. However, recent administrations have submitted their requests late.

Components of the Budget Request

- Revenue Projections
- Spending Priorities
- Policy Initiatives
- Detailed Programmatic Funding Levels

Role of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

- OMB plays a critical role in the budget formulation process. It assists the President in developing the budget request by working with federal agencies to gather budgetary data, reviewing agency funding proposals, and coordinating interagency budget priorities.
- OMB also conducts analysis and evaluation of budget proposals, assesses their alignment with administration policy goals, and works with the President to finalize the budget request before submission to Congress.



Authorizations for Appropriations vs. Actual Appropriations

Authorizations for Appropriations

- Authorizations for appropriations refer to the legislative acts that establish or continue the legal basis for Federal agencies, programs, and activities.
- These acts define the mission, objectives, and funding levels for specific programs or agencies, providing the framework for subsequent appropriations.

Appropriations

- Appropriations refer to the actual provision of funds by Congress to Federal agencies and programs.
- Appropriations are the concrete financial resources that enable the implementation and operation of authorized programs and activities.
- They reflect the decision made by Congress regarding the allocation of funds and the priorities for federal spending.

Relationship Between Authorizations and Appropriations

- Authorizations and appropriations are distinct but interconnected processes in the budgeting cycle.
- Authorizations provide the legal authority for the programs and set the maximum funding levels that Congress can appropriate.
- Appropriations, in turn, provide the actual funding within the authorized levels, taking into account budgetary constraints and competing priorities.



Report Language vs. Programmatic Language

Report Language

- Report language is written instruction included in committee reports accompanying appropriations bills.
- Reports provide additional guidance/directives to Federal agencies regarding intended use of appropriations.
- Report language may specify how funds should be allocated within programs, highlight areas of concern or emphasis, or provide instructions on program implementation and oversight.

Programmatic Language

- Programmatic language refers to the statutory language included in appropriations bills themselves.
- This language specifies the program or project purpose, eligibility criteria, funding levels, and any restrictions or requirements associated with the funds.
- Programmatic language is legally binding and provides the framework for how appropriated funds should be utilized.

Relationship Between Report Language and Programmatic Language

- Report language and programmatic language are complementary.
- While Programmatic language establishes the legal framework for funding and program operation, report language provides additional instructions, recommendations, or guidance on how to interpret and implement the programmatic language.
- Report language helps to clarify Congressional intent and provide context.



Eligible Recipients for Appropriated Funds, Earmarks

Programmatic v. Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS) /Community Project Funding (CPF)

- Appropriated funds can be allocated to two main types or recipients: programmatic recipients and Congressionally directed recipients (aka “earmarks”).

Programmatic Recipients

- Programmatic recipients are entities, organizations, or individuals eligible to receive funds based on established program criteria, guidelines, and statutory requirements.
- These recipients typically include federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, and other entities identified as eligible.
- Typically, the funds are spent based on the Administration’s interpretation of the law—and recipients are selected by administration officials via statutory process.

Congressionally Directed Recipients (CDS, CPF)

- Congressionally directed recipients, also known as earmarks, refer to specific allocations of funds designated by individual Members of Congress for projects, programs, or entities in their districts or states.
- These recipients can include local infrastructure projects, research initiatives, community development programs, and other initiatives priorities by individual Members.
- Congressionally directed spending is subject to specific rules, disclosure requirements, and transparency measures to ensure accountability and prevent misuse of funds—among other eligibility requirements (e.g. nonprofit).



Earmarks (cont'd)

- House v. Senate
- Account Selection
 - Guidelines (Congressional Official & Office Specific)
 - Importance of Precedent
- Deadlines
- Process (rounds of “cuts”)
- Markups
- Final Passage
- Allocation of Funds



Appropriations Committee Leadership and Roles

Chair

- The Chair of the Appropriations Committee is a senior member of the committee selected by their respective party leadership.
- The Chair plays a critical role in overseeing the operations of the committee, setting its agenda, and leading the appropriations process.
- Responsibilities of the Chair include coordinating with the subcommittee chairs, managing the committee's legislative activities, and representing the committee in interactions with other committees and leadership.

Ranking Member

- The Ranking Member is the most senior member of the minority party on the Appropriations Committee.
- The Ranking Member represents the interests of the minority party in the appropriations process, providing input on funding decisions and priorities.
- Responsibilities of the Ranking Member include offering amendments, advocating for alternative proposals, and voicing concerns or perspectives different from those of the Chair or the majority party.

Committee Members

- The Appropriations Committee consists of Members of Congress in both the House and the Senate.
- The Committee Members play a vital role in reviewing and amending appropriations bills, participating in hearings and markups, and voting on final legislation referred out of Committee.



How Disaster Supplementals Can be Involved

Disaster Supplementals

- Disaster supplementals refer to additional funding measures enacted by Congress to provide emergency assistance and resources in response to natural disasters, emergencies, or unforeseen events.
- These supplemental appropriations are intended to address the immediate needs of affected areas and support recovery, relief and rebuilding efforts.

Involvement in the Appropriations Process

- When a disaster occurs, Congress may pass a separate disaster supplemental appropriations bill to allocate funds specifically for response and recovery efforts.
- The disaster supplemental appropriations bill can be separate from or included within the regular appropriations bills, depending on the circumstances and timing of the disaster.

Impact on the Appropriations Timeline

- The inclusion of disaster supplementals can impact the overall appropriations timeline, as the need for additional funding and the urgency of response may require expedited consideration and approval by Congress.
- The allocation of funds for disaster response and recovery can affect the available resources for other federal programs and initiatives, potentially requiring adjustments to funding priorities or additional appropriations measures.



Previous Budget Handling – Omnibus/CR

Omnibus Bills

- An omnibus bill is a single piece of legislation that combines multiple appropriations bills (12 total) into one comprehensive package.
- Omnibus bills are typically used when Congress has not been able to pass individual appropriations bills for each government agency or program before the start of the fiscal year.
- By consolidating various appropriations bills, Congress can provide funding for the entire government in a single vote, avoiding government shutdowns or reliance on temporary funding measures.

Continuing Resolutions

- Continuing Resolutions are temporary funding measures used when Congress has not passed all the necessary appropriations bills before the start of the fiscal year.
- A CR allows federal agencies and programs to continue operating at their current funding levels for a specific period, usually a few days, weeks, or months.
- CRs provide a stopgap measure to maintain government operations and prevent a funding gap while Congress works to pass the regular appropriations bills.

Implications

- Budget uncertainty: The reliance on omnibus bills and CRs can create uncertainty for federal agencies and programs, as they may operate under temporary funding levels that do not align with their long-term needs.
- There can be programmatic implications for contractors – particularly if Congress fails to pass a CR/Omnibus.



How to Request a Meeting

Most official business and policy work is handled at the staff level:

Legislative Assistants (LAs) and Legislative Directors (LDs) are the front line for policy or appropriations requests (also known as your “ask”). They vet these requests before they ever get to the Member for consideration.

To request a meeting, you need to find out the staffer and their email, they are available via calling:

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CELESTE MALOY
SERVING THE TWO DISTRICTS OF UTAH

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WASHINGTON DC

Washington DC Office
249 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Phone: (202) 225-9730

DISTRICT OFFICES

Bountiful District Office
585 W 500 S #230
Bountiful, UT 84010

Phone: (801) 364-5550

St. George District Office
111 East Tabernacle
St. George, UT 84770

Phone: (435) 703-7720

Richfield District Office
250 N Main #B14
Richfield, UT 84701
Hours: Wednesdays from 10am-4pm (call for appointments)

Phone: (435) 691-9746

Delta District Office
71 S 200 W
Delta, UT 84624
Hours: Mondays from 9am-4pm (call for appointments)



How to Conduct a Meeting

Plan on about 25-30 minutes for each meeting – and a full stop at 30 minutes unless they keep asking questions. For example:

- Introductions (minutes 1-5)
- Issue Presentation (minutes 6-20)
- Answer questions, gain feedback, or gain commitments (minutes 20-30)
- They may not give a commitment but will take your requests under consideration. That's normal.

Tips for Success

- Look up the Member's district, interests and committee assignments ahead of time
- Be on time and check in at the front desk – saying you have a meeting the staffer you are meeting with
- If you aren't alone - pick a lead person before starting the meeting.
- Briefly introduce yourself (or go around the horn) and explain your role and its importance
- Try to give examples how the NSGIC issues impact your state and/or the district
- Thank them for their time and consideration and be sure to follow up



How to Conduct a Meeting

Additional Tips:

- Remember – they take about a dozen of these meetings a day – don't stress
- Avoid going way too into the weeds
- Allow them the opportunity to talk and ask questions
- Avoid acronyms and highly technical terms
- Don't take more time than scheduled
- Remember the “ask”
- If they ask you a question you don't know how to answer – say you will get back to them

Lastly – remind them that you can serve as a resource to their office if they have any GIS related questions

LEAVE WITH AN EXCUSE TO FOLLOW UP



Issue Papers



Questions?