

## Federal Appropriations: It's (not that) Complicated

### What are federal appropriations?

Good question; let's start there! The federal appropriations process is simply how the federal government allocates (AKA "appropriates") funds to different federally-funded programs. Any program that receives US government funding is affected by this process.

### How do federal appropriations work?

The fiscal year begins on October 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on September 30<sup>th</sup>. The budget process runs year-round on this timeline; the budget enacted on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2016 is for "Fiscal Year 2017" or "FY 17." The following timeline is a rough outline; dates of hearings and submissions change regularly:

- **October-November:** Programs submit funding requests to Cabinet secretaries
- **November:** Secretaries send budget requests to the President of the U.S. (POTUS)
- **December-January:** POTUS consults the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to decide budget numbers
- **February:** POTUS releases budget request
  - After the President's budget is submitted, the House and Senate Budget Committee sets a "cap" for the total budget, and suggest total amounts for each "account." The account we will be dealing with is the foreign aid account, "the 150 account."
- **Late Winter/early Spring: House and Senate members submit "wish lists" to the Appropriations Committee/Appropriations Subcommittees** (the committee that appropriates money to programs in different accounts) including their requests for specific program funding.
- **Spring-Summer:** Hearings are conducted in the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to create the budget.
  - Hearings are first held in Appropriations Subcommittees, followed by a full-committee hearing and vote. **The Subcommittee in charge of the foreign aid budget is the State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, or "SFOPS."** There is one SFOPS Subcommittee in the House and one in the Senate.
- The final budget must then be passed by a full-chamber vote by September 30<sup>th</sup>. If it is not, Congress must pass a "continuing resolution" (CR) to extend the deadline

**In a federal election year, the release of the proposed budget can be delayed by as much as a month. Look out for updates to see when the budget is released.**



## How can we influence federal appropriations?

There are a number of key moments in which we, as grassroots and constituents, have a great deal of power to influence the federal appropriations process.

### Now – Mid-March

Before the budget is released, we can still act. By meeting with our members of Congress and writing about the importance of lifesaving programs for health, like PEPFAR, the Global Fund, and USAID, we can help prime Congress for the asks we'll have in the spring.

Once the President has released his budget request, we turn our focus entirely to Congress. Here, our greatest impact can happen as they put together their appropriation requests, or "wish lists." During their "wish list" phase, we want to make sure they include our budget asks in their priorities!

The final deadline for congresspeople to submit their wish lists to the SFOPS Subcommittee of Appropriations is in mid-March, but each congressional office has their own internal deadline to hear and consider input from their constituents, often weeks in advance. Wish lists are where we can have maximum impact in our districts, so make sure you know your congresspeople's deadlines and follow up with their offices before wish lists are submitted!

### Mid-March -- Summer

After wish lists are submitted, we will try to influence the appropriators themselves as much as possible, both by meeting with them and by asking other congresspeople to continue expressing their support for our budget requests.

If your congressional members sit on the Appropriations Committee or SFOPS Subcommittee, remember, they are especially important to this process – they're in the room when budget decisions are made! We need to get firm commitments from these "appropriators" saying that they will actively fight for our budget asks during negotiations in committee.

If your congressional members are not appropriators, you can also ask them to talk with their colleagues on the committee. Look out for opportunities from the National Team to ask your congresspeople to sign on to specific letters of support throughout the appropriations season.

**That's it. That's the basics.** Of course, there are intricacies, complications, and extra opportunities to act throughout the year – and we'll do our best to update you when they arise! In the meanwhile, sit back and revel in your newly unlocked achievement: Federal Appropriations Expert!