

Building a Better Budget Process

THE BUDGET PROCESS IS BROKEN...

Each passing year brings new evidence of the need to repair the process for managing the \$4 trillion U.S. budget. Budget resolutions and spending bills narrowly pass, often very late, with lukewarm promises of hammering out priorities in the following budgeting cycle. It has been more than 20 years since all appropriations bills were passed prior to the beginning of the fiscal year. With so many missed deadlines and little attention paid to longer-term budget priorities and oversight, it is obvious the process needs to change.

BUT IT IS NOT BEYOND REPAIR...

Convergence Center for Policy Resolution convened a group of policy and budget experts, executives, and advocates with a wide range of business, government, and nonprofit experience to find agreement on how to fix the broken system. This group of seemingly strange bedfellows reached consensus on a set of budget reform proposals in February 2018, after a 16-month facilitated dialogue called the *Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P)*.

In their final report, the B3P participants proposed that a better budget process should include:

1. **A Budget Action Plan**—negotiated by the President and Congress at the beginning of a new Congress and enacted into law—to synchronize the budget cycle with the electoral cycle and to change expectations for the process. The plan would make certain key fiscal decisions – setting discretionary funding levels and adjusting the debt limit, for example – for a two-year period.
2. **A Fiscal State of the Nation Report**, published every four years at a key point in the national election cycle, to make the federal budget more accessible to the American public and elevate the discourse about the country’s finances.
3. **A review of the performance of portfolios of federal programs** that involve long-term or inter-generational commitments (e.g., retirement security, health coverage, education or national security). This review conducted by Congress, through the Government Accountability Office, would reinforce the importance of the long-term effects of budget decisions.
4. **Strengthening the Budget Committees** by revising the membership rules and assigning responsibility to create new expectations for the budget process so that Congress and the public can expect more timely action on budget decisions.
5. **Investment in agencies that support the congressional budget process**, including the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT), so these institutions can continue to provide high-quality and independent information the nation relies on in making budgetary choices.

A full copy of the report is available on the Convergence website.

While process reforms alone cannot fix all the problems facing the country, B3P participants believe the proposals will, if adopted, provide “better rules of the game” by improving the odds that the federal budget process would function more effectively, and give Congress time to focus on other priorities facing our country.

BUILDING A BETTER BUDGET PROCESS PARTICIPANTS

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Sara Chang *	Brian Pallasch
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* B3P dialogue members have joined in their individual capacities with institutional affiliations provided for identification purposes only.

Convergence Center for Policy Resolution works to bring together people and groups with divergent views build trust, identify solutions and form alliances on critical national issues.

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