



October 22, 2020

An Introduction to CBO: Its Role, Services, Products, and Communications

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CBO's Role and Structure

CBO was created by the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974 to give the Congress a **stronger role in budget matters**.

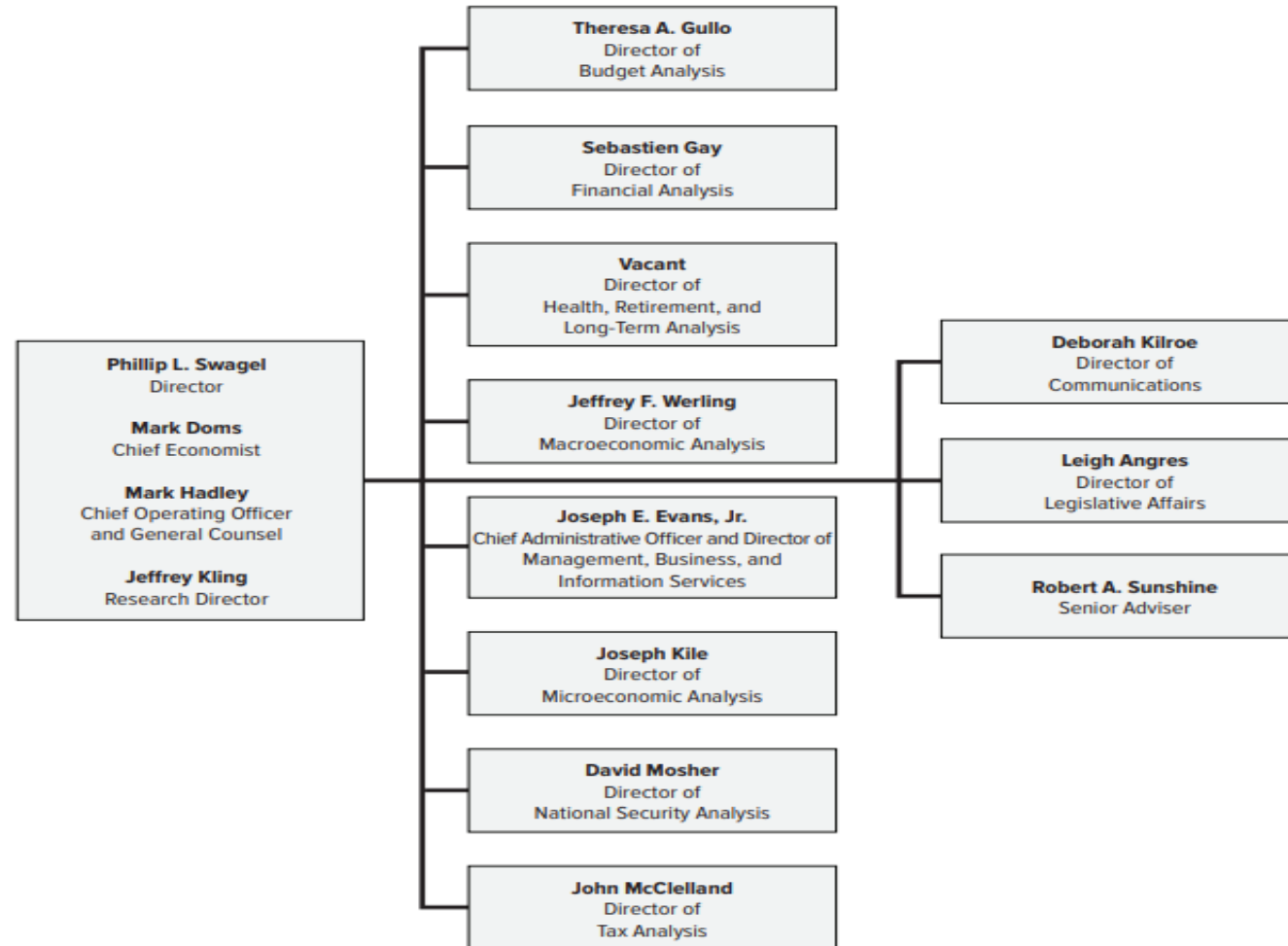
It provides analysis of budgetary and economic issues that is **objective** and **impartial**. The agency is strictly **nonpartisan** and **does not make policy recommendations**.

CBO's mission is to **help the Congress make effective budget and economic policy**. In carrying out that mission, CBO offers an alternative to the information provided by the Office of Management and Budget in the executive branch.

The **Director** is appointed jointly by the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore of the Senate and has a four-year term.

CBO has about **260 employees**. They are hired solely on the basis of professional competence, without regard to political affiliation. Most have advanced degrees.

CBO is organized into the **Office of the Director** and **eight divisions**.



CBO's Services

CBO **assists the Congress** in:

- Developing a budget plan,
- Staying within that budget plan,
- Assessing the impact of federal mandates, and
- Considering issues related to the budget and economic policy.

CBO helps the Congress **develop a budget plan** by:

- Preparing a **10-year baseline** to serve as a benchmark (updated three times a year). The baseline incorporates the assumption that **current law generally remains unchanged** and relies on CBO's forecasts of **key economic factors**.
- Producing estimates of proposals in the President's budget.
- Estimating budgetary effects of legislative options. (Most such estimates are informal, but a volume of budget options is produced every few years.)

The Budget Committees use the information to develop a budget resolution.

CBO helps the Congress **stay within its plan** by:

- Preparing **cost estimates** for each bill approved by a committee, as well as for bills and amendments at other points in the process as requested. These inform lawmakers whether enacting legislation would worsen or improve the projected budget deficit.
- Providing **preliminary analysis** on an informal basis. This informs lawmakers about potential budgetary effects so that they can make desired changes before taking action.
- **Tracking appropriation actions.** This informs committees whether they are within allocations specified in the budget resolution.

CBO's **key characteristics**:

- **Advisory** – CBO has no enforcement power; its influence depends on the quality and objectivity of the work.
- **Independent** – CBO's appropriation is separate; the agency works for both the majority and minority; Director appointed by both Houses of Congress.
- **Nonpolitical** – The agency is nonpartisan by law; it provides objective analysis.
- **Transparent** – CBO explains the basis of its findings and answers questions about its methods; it publishes all formal work on its website.

CBO's work reflects the agency's **objective, impartial, and nonpartisan analytical assessments**. Those assessments are based on:

- A detailed understanding of federal programs and the tax code;
- Careful reading of the relevant research literature;
- Analysis of data reported by the government's statistical agencies and by private groups;
- Consultation with outside experts in academia, think tanks, industry groups, the private sector, federal agencies, and state and local governments; and
- Discussion with CBO's Panel of Economic Advisers and Panel of Health Advisers.

CBO's Products

CBO's products include:

- **Baseline budget projections and economic forecasts** covering the 10-year period used in the Congressional budget process;
- **Long-term budget projections;**
- **Cost estimates** for legislation, including analyses of federal mandates;

- **Analyses of the President's budget**, including its likely economic effects and their budgetary feedback;
- **Scorekeeping** for enacted legislation; and
- **Analytic reports** examining specific federal programs, aspects of the tax code, and budgetary and economic challenges.

CBO's yearly output typically includes:

- Producing **roughly 750 formal cost estimates** and related mandate statements;
- Fulfilling **thousands of requests for technical assistance**, typically from committees and Members before legislation is formally introduced; and
- Publishing about **70 reports**, testimonies, and working papers.

All reports and analyses of **public proposals are shared widely** and made available on CBO's website.

CBO's Communications and Digital Innovations

CBO is committed to providing information that is **objective, insightful, timely, and clearly presented.**

CBO's mission is to **serve the Congress**. By law, CBO's primary responsibility is to provide information to committees of the Congress. Much of this is **communicated directly** to Members and their staff.

At the same time, CBO's analysis is also conveyed via the press, academics, and researchers in think tanks, among others.

CBO therefore works hard to ensure that its work is **portrayed accurately** and is as **accessible as possible** on its website and social media platforms.

CBO has implemented a number of significant innovations aimed at enhancing the **online presentation** and **accessibility** of its work.

Examples of CBO's recent **digital innovations** include:

- Producing **fully digital versions** of all of its reports along with PDF versions, making the reports easier to consume on mobile devices, which represent an increasing share of website traffic;
- Publishing **interactive graphics** along with its reports to make the key takeaways more easily accessible and developing a variety of **stand-alone interactive products**;
- Launching **enhancements to make cost estimates easier to find and search** (e.g., predictable URLs, new search filters, and basic information about estimates in XML); and

- Creating **a new page** on the agency's website to honor the legacy of CBO's founding Director, Alice Rivlin. Launched on CBO's 45th anniversary in February, the page recounts her efforts to get the agency up and running and describes the guiding principles she imparted, which the agency continues to follow.



CBO has also developed pages on its website to provide users a “**one-stop shop**” for:

- Major recurring reports,
- Budget and economic data,
- Baseline projections for selected programs,
- Reports with policy options,
- Information on CBO’s transparency efforts, and
- CBO’s interactive products.

The pages are intended to make CBO's work **easier to find** and have been well received.



ABOUT CBO

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[Major Recurring Reports](#)

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Major Recurring Reports

This page covers recurring reports that CBO has published since 2000. Some of the reports listed here have been published since the 1970s; those earlier reports are all available on CBO's website but are not shown here.

- [Budget and Economic Outlook and Updates](#)
- [Analysis of the President's Budget](#)
- [Budget Options](#)
- [Long-Term Budget Outlook](#)
- [Long-Term Projections for Social Security](#)
- [Long-Term Implications of the Future Years Defense Program](#)
- [Analysis of the Navy's Shipbuilding Plan](#)
- [Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces](#)
- [Distribution of Household Income and Federal Taxes](#)
- [Accuracy of CBO's Baseline Projections](#)
- [Economic Forecasting Record](#)
- [Federal Debt and the Statutory Limit](#)
- [Review of Activities Under the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act](#)
- [Monthly Budget Review](#)
- [Expired and Expiring Authorizations of Appropriations](#)
- [Fair-Value Estimates of the Cost of Federal Credit Programs](#)
- [Sequestration](#)
- [Public Spending on Transportation and Water Infrastructure](#)

Budget and Economic Outlook and Updates

CBO regularly publishes projections of economic and budget outcomes which incorporate the assumption that current law regarding federal spending and revenues generally remains in place. Those baseline projections cover the 10-year period used in the Congressional budget process. Most of the reports on those projections also describe the differences between the current projections and previous ones; compare the economic forecast with those of other forecasters; and show the budgetary impact of some alternative policy assumptions. The budget projections and economic forecast are generally issued each January and updated in August; the budget projections are also generally updated each March.

[Sep 2020](#)[Jul 2020](#)[May 2020](#)[Mar 2020](#)[Jan 2020](#)[Aug 2019](#)[May 2019](#)



DATA

[Budget and Economic Data](#)[Details About Baseline Projections for Selected Programs](#)[Estimates of the President's Budget Proposals](#)[Publications with Data Files](#)

Budget and Economic Data

CBO regularly publishes data to accompany some of its key reports. These data have been published in the [Budget and Economic Outlook and Updates](#) and in their associated supplemental material, except for that from the [Long-Term Budget Outlook](#).

BUDGET

- [10-Year Budget Projections](#)
- [Long-Term Budget Projections](#)
- [Historical Budget Data](#)
- [10-Year Trust Fund Projections](#)
- [Revenue Projections, by Category](#)
- [Spending Projections, by Budget Account](#)
- [Estimates of Automatic Stabilizers](#)
- [Tax Parameters and Effective Marginal Tax Rates](#)

ECONOMIC

- [10-Year Economic Projections](#)
- [Potential GDP and Underlying Inputs](#)
- [Historical Data and Economic Projections](#)

10-Year Budget Projections

Projections of spending and revenues by category and of deficits and debt held by the public.

Sep 2020	Mar 2020	Jan 2020	Aug 2019	May 2019	Jan 2019	Apr 2018
Jun 2017	Jan 2017	Aug 2016	Mar 2016	Jan 2016	Aug 2015	Mar 2015
Jan 2015	Aug 2014	Apr 2014	Feb 2014	May 2013	Feb 2013	Aug 2012
Mar 2012	Jan 2012	Aug 2011	Jan 2011	Aug 2010	Jan 2010	Aug 2009
Mar 2009	Jan 2009	Sep 2008	Jan 2008	Aug 2007	Jan 2007	

DATA

[Budget and Economic Data](#)

[Details About Baseline Projections for Selected Programs](#)

[Estimates of the President's Budget Proposals](#)

[Publications with Data Files](#)

Details About Baseline Projections for Selected Programs

CBO publishes detailed information underlying its 10-year budget projections for selected programs up to three times a year.

EDUCATION

- [Pell Grant Program](#)
- [Student Loan Programs](#)

HEALTH

- [Children's Health Insurance Program](#)
- [Federal Subsidies for Health Insurance \(Includes Effects of the Affordable Care Act\)](#)
- [Medicaid](#)
- [Medicare](#)

SOCIAL SECURITY AND PENSIONS

- [DoD Medicare-Eligible Retiree Health Care Fund](#)
- [Military Retirement](#)
- [Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation](#)
- [Railroad Retirement](#)
- [Social Security Disability Insurance](#)

OTHER INCOME SECURITY

- [Child Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Child Support Collections](#)
- [Child Support Enforcement](#)
- [Foster Care and Adoption Assistance](#)
- [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#)
- [Supplemental Security Income](#)
- [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#)
- [Unemployment Compensation](#)

OTHER PROGRAMS

- [Federal Programs That Guarantee Mortgages](#)
- [Highway Trust Fund Accounts](#)
- [Post-9/11 GI Bill Benefits](#)
- [USDA Mandatory Farm Programs](#)
- [Veterans Disability Compensation and Pension Programs](#)



Reports With Policy Options

CBO produces numerous reports with specific options or broad approaches for changing federal tax and spending policies.

CBO periodically publishes a reference volume, often referred to as "[Budget Options](#)," that includes dozens of policy options to reduce federal budget deficits.

CBO also prepares analytic reports that examine specific federal programs, aspects of the tax code, and budgetary and economic challenges. A list of recent reports, organized by broad issue area, is given below.

- [Defense and Veterans](#)
- [Disability Benefits](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Homeland Security](#)
- [Housing](#)
- [Infrastructure and Transportation](#)
- [Medicare](#)
- [Poverty and Income Security](#)
- [Social Security and Retirement](#)
- [Taxes](#)

Defense and Veterans

[Costs of Creating a Space National Guard](#)

Report | June 2, 2020

CBO examines two options for establishing a Space National Guard to support active component Space Force personnel, estimating the additional costs beyond those incurred for existing Air and Army National Guard units that have space-related missions.

BUDGET OPTIONS

[Options for Reducing the Deficit: 2019 to 2028](#)

(December 2018)

[Find Budget Options](#) by major budget category, budget function, and topic.

QUICK LINKS

[Latest Publications](#)

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Transparency

Transparency is a top priority for CBO, and the agency continues to bolster its efforts to be transparent. CBO is committed to maintaining equitable access to the information and analysis that it provides, ensuring that its work is widely available to the Congress and the public. Those efforts help CBO continue its long-standing dedication to providing clear, objective, insightful, and timely information.

CBO's transparency efforts have three principal goals:

- To promote a thorough understanding of CBO's analyses through accessible, clear, and detailed communication;
- To help people gauge how estimates might change if policies or circumstances differed; and
- To enhance the credibility of the agency's analyses and processes by showing the underlying data, professional research, and feedback from experts.

To achieve those goals, CBO undertakes the following activities:

TESTIFYING AND PUBLISHING ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS



Read *Transparency at CBO: Future Plans and a Review of 2019*

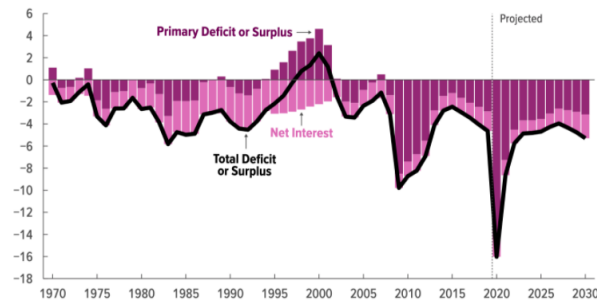
Listen to CBO's podcast episode on transparency



Interactives

Total Deficit, Primary Deficit, and Net Interest

Percentage of Gross Domestic Product



How Changes in Revenues and Outlays Would Affect Debt Service, Deficits, and Debt

October 16, 2020

This interactive workbook allows users to see how revenues and outlays that differed from those in CBO's September 2020 baseline budget projections would increase or decrease net interest costs and thus affect deficits and debt.

FISCAL
YEAR 2019

REVENUES, \$3.5 TRILLION



OUTLAYS, \$4.4 TRILLION



The Federal Budget in 2019: An Infographic

April 15, 2020

The federal deficit in 2019 was \$984 billion, equal to 4.6 percent of gross domestic product. Learn more about the deficit with a new interactive version of the infographic.

New Approaches for Assisting the Congress During the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic

CBO has released budget and economic analysis **more frequently** this year and **in shorter formats** to assist the Congress as it confronts the consequences of the pandemic.

CBO's Director participated in **virtual briefings** with lawmakers to discuss CBO's work and **testified before the Congress**, both in person and virtually, about the agency's long-term budget projections.

CBO developed a **new page on COVID-19** to make its work related to the pandemic easier to find.

Throughout the year, CBO kept the Congress **abreast of its plans** by releasing a schedule for its major recurring reports and **communicating changes to the schedule** through its blog.

Please feel free to reach out to CBO anytime. We welcome your questions and feedback.

The best way to reach me is by e-mail:
communications@cbo.gov.