

Budget Reconciliation Activity

Description:

This activity involves each participant filling out a Debt Fixer tool to balance the federal budget, then coming together in a group to negotiate a shared budget.

Why you should do it:

Balancing the budget on your own is hard enough, but trying to negotiate with people with different priorities is both realistic and wildly difficult. This activity demonstrates the real-life tradeoffs which politicians make every fiscal year. It should help each participant understand the complex budget reconciliation process, weigh their own political priorities, and recognize the challenges of both balancing the federal budget and making progress on their policies.

What you will need:

- Copy of “Federal Budget Reconciliation Guidelines”
- Copy of “Voting Record” for each participant
- Pens
- One computer per participant

How it works:

1. Go over the ground rules, included in the “Federal Budget Reconciliation Guidelines.”
2. Each participant fills out the Debt Fixer tool, found here: <http://www.crfb.org/debtfixer/>, and prints it.
3. Come together as a group and fill out a new Debt Fixer tool, voting and negotiating on each aspect until you have reached a final one which you can all agree on.
 - a. Note: The recommended time limit is 1 hour 20 minutes for a group of 5. Adjust it accordingly, adding more time for a larger group. Whatever time is decided at the beginning, try to stick to it.
4. Reflect on your finished budget and discuss as a group.
 - a. How does the group budget differ from the one you completed alone?
 - b. Did you meet the Primary Goal? How about the Secondary Goal?
 - c. Which aspects created the most heated discussion? How did you work through them?
 - d. The budget proposed by President Trump for 2021 made the following changes, how do they compare with the budget you designed?
 - i. Increases:
 1. Defense spending
 - a. Specifically, space force and high speed weapons
 - b. Decrease intelligence-gathering

2. Border security
 3. New agency to regulate tobacco
- ii. Decreases:
1. Medicaid and Obamacare by almost 1 trillion
 2. Education programs
 3. EPA
 4. Food stamps

If you enjoyed the activity, be sure to send us an email with your finished budget and reflections from the discussion. We would love to hear from you!

More Information:

Overview of the budget process: <https://www.usa.gov/budget>

Ranking of national debt to GDP around the world:

<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/countries-by-national-debt/>

Two perspectives on President Trump's budget proposal for 2021:

<https://www.govexec.com/management/2020/02/11-major-agency-reforms-trumps-2021-budget/163049/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/10/business/economy/trump-budget-explained-facts.html>