



Title: Federal Budget Allocation Activity

Length: 45 Minutes

Age: 11th and 12th Grade

In this lesson, students will:

Complete pre-class homework, considering where to cut costs and add costs to the federal budget independently. Then, they will come together to negotiate a federal budget with their classmates, resembling political negotiations in Congress.

Overview:

1. **Assign students homework** a few days prior to synchronous activity.
2. Teacher **explains synchronous activity** at the start of class time on Zoom.
3. Students **complete synchronous activity** in assigned breakout rooms on Zoom during class time.
4. Students reconvene as a class to **reflect on the synchronous activity** together.

Homework (60 Minutes):

- Use the debt fixer tool to reduce the United States' National Debt
<http://www.crfb.org/debtfixer/>
- As you go through the debt fixer, list 5 items that you would like to learn more about
- When you complete the debt fixer activity, select three of the decisions you made, and write two sentences for each explaining why you made that decision. You should have a total of six sentences written.
- Write one final sentence explaining what you found challenging about the activity. Were you able to reduce the budget by the full \$8,285 billion?
- Email these sentences to your teacher before class begins.

Teacher Explanation (10 Minutes):

- At the beginning of Zoom class time, spend 10 minutes explaining the **synchronous activity**.
- Assign Zoom breakout rooms for students. (Ideally 4-6 students per group.) *These should be planned before the class begins.* Try to ensure that across the groups, there are an equal amount of students who tend to lean in and students who tend to lean back.
- Assign one Chief Whip and one Record Keeper per group.
- Send this link to students in the Zoom chat for the Voting Record:
<https://ace-usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Federal-Budget-Voting-Record-1-2.pdf>
- Explain that the Record Keeper is in charge of this paper. They can print it out or use shorthand on a piece of paper nearby.
- Tell students that they will need to turn a picture of it in at the end of the class.
- Send students into breakout rooms.



Synchronous Activity (30 Minutes):

- Students will get together in a group of (#, 4-6) in a Zoom breakout room.
- One student in each group will be the Chief Whip. This person will be responsible for keeping the negotiations moving and calling the vote on each issue.
- One student in each group will be the Record Keeper. This person will be responsible for keeping track of votes and final decisions on the Voting Record worksheet.
- The objective is to decrease the deficit while also creating a budget which manages the priorities and values of the United States. Each person will interpret those priorities differently, and there is no “right” answer.
- A majority vote is needed to finalize each spending decision.
- Listen respectfully to your group members, allow everyone to speak, and be conscious not to allow a few voices to dominate the conversation. Recognize that even though this is just an exercise, the issues being discussed might be personal or emotional for group members, so avoid aggressive or inconsiderate language.
- After an initial draft of the budget is complete, revisit your key issues and negotiate with group members to get closer to your priorities.
- Keep track of which votes were close and what your group members’ priorities are to inform your negotiating platform.
- Do not spend too much time on any one issue, because the budget is large and government shutdowns hurt the country.
- The teacher will be checking in on each breakout room and the activity will last for 30 minutes.

Reflect on Activity (10 Minutes):

- Ask Record Keepers to send a picture of their group’s Voting Record Worksheet to you via email by the end of the day.

Reflection questions to ask students:

- How does the group budget differ from the one you completed alone?
- Did your group meet its goals in the allotted time?
- Which aspects created the most heated discussion? How did you work through them?