

Here's What You Need to Know About DC's FY 2019 Budget Season

By DCFPI Staff

The DC budget—our community's decisions about how to spend our resources—is the central tool for addressing challenges like widening racial inequities in access to affordable housing, quality health care, and educational opportunities. By crafting a budget that strengthens our community, we can ensure that all DC residents have the resources they need to thrive. Throughout budget season there are a number of opportunities to voice our values and shape the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 DC budget. You can—and should—have a say in where our community invests our resources.



Even though 2018 just started, the process of planning the District's FY 2019 budget has already begun, and there are opportunities right now for residents to shape the budget for next year. The District's fiscal year runs from October through September, and the budget process for a given fiscal year starts about a year beforehand. Here's the timeline for the FY 2019 budget process:

TABLE 1.

Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Season

Budget Instructions Issued to Agencies	Fall 2017
Current Services Funding Level Released	November 20, 2017
Office of Budget and Planning Finalizes Agencies Budgets	Winter 2017-18
Announcement of FY 2017 Surplus	February 1, 2018
Revenue Forecast Released	February 2018
Agency Performance Oversight Hearings	February 7 – March 9
Mayor's Budget Proposal Released	March 21
Council Hearings on Proposed Agency Budgets	March 26 – April 26
Council Hearing on Overall Proposed Budget	April 27
Council Committee Budget Mark-Ups	May 2-4
Main Budget Vote	May 15
Second Vote on Budget	May 29

Budget Instructions Issued to Agencies: Fall 2017

The Office of Budget and Planning (OBP) in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) issues instructions to each agency that set the terms for the agency's budget request. The agency requests are submitted back to OBP in the fall using the format set out in the instructions.

Much of the instructions are intended to determine current services funding needs—the amount needed to maintain existing services and meet legal obligations. The current services budget reflects changes in salary expenses, utilities, and other fixed costs.

Release of the FY 2019 Current Services Funding Level: November 20, 2017

The CFO completes work on the FY 2019 Current Services Funding Level (CSFL). Ideally, this is an estimate of the costs of maintaining current services, by factoring changes in costs for salaries, rent, supplies and other expenses. It does not include any funding that was designated “one-time” in the previous year. The CSFL can be compared to the Mayor's proposed budget to look for changes to an agency's budget. An advocate could take the Mayor's proposed budget and compare it to the CSFL to see what, if any, funding reductions or additions were proposed over what the agency is currently doing. The FY 2019 CSFL can be found [here](#).

Office of Budget and Planning Hones Agencies' Budget Requests: Winter 2017-18

OBP vets each agency's budget request. Has all one-time funding from the prior year been eliminated? Did the agency accurately reflect costs associated with expected staffing levels? Did the agency include something in the baseline that should be considered an enhancement?

OBP passes back a modified request to the agency and allows the agency to appeal. This back-and-forth relates mostly to the CSFL. OBP generally does not comment on enhancement requests, since decisions over new initiatives or enhanced funding for existing services are political and made by the Mayor. The CFO is independent and avoids policy recommendations. Enhancement requests are passed on directly to the Mayor's office.

Mayor's Budget Team Works to Assemble Mayor's Budget Proposal: Winter 2017-18

The Mayor's budget review team works to assemble the budget proposal and policy decisions about program cuts or increases, and revenue increases.

At this time, you can contact the Mayor's office to make a request for additional funding (or to maintain funding) for a program or services you care about. Most often, this is easiest to do by finding out who is responsible in the City Administrator's office or in the Mayor's Office of Budget and Finance for the issue area you are concerned about and meeting with them or sending them a letter or email.

Announcement of FY 2017 Surplus: February 1, 2018

The annual audit of the District's finances—the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR)—shows a \$287 million increase in the city's fund balance at the close of 2017. The balance represents DC's accumulated monetary assets, including various reserve funds—a mix of federally-required and locally-controlled rainy-day funds to help DC manage its bills. According to this year's audit, the city's fund balance has grown substantially in recent years, from just over \$1 billion in 2009 to a record \$2.7 billion in 2017. Read more about how DC used its surplus [here](#).

Revenue Forecast Released: February 2018

In late February, the CFO issues a revenue forecast that includes projected revenues for FY 2019. The budget submitted in March must be balanced. This means that total spending cannot exceed the total revenues from the February forecast unless the budget also includes provisions to increase revenue. In recent history, forecast revenue has tended to grow from year to year, due to increases in population and economic activity. If there are no increases to taxes or fees, or major cuts to existing programs, this future revenue growth is what will be available for program enhancements or new programs in FY 2019.

Agency Performance Oversight Hearings: February 7 – March 9, 2018

The Council holds hearings on the FY 2018 performance and spending of every agency. These are free-form open hearings where any member of the public can comment on virtually any aspect of the agency, and where agency heads are questioned by committee chairs and other Councilmembers. The written questions submitted by Committees to the agencies in advance of the hearing, as well as the agencies' responses, can be found [here](#) on the Council website. The schedule of performance oversight hearings can be found [here](#).

This is a good time to testify on programs and services that you think are working well and help make the case they should be continued or expanded in the upcoming fiscal year. It is also a good time to discuss any changes or improvements you think could be made to the programs and services you care about.

Mayor's Budget Proposal Released: March 21, 2018

The Mayor submits a proposed Budget and Financial Plan, which describes proposed operating funding for all DC government agencies and services, in late March. The Mayor also will submit a proposed capital budget, which is a six-year plan for building and improving government facilities and infrastructure.

The budget legislation that reflects proposed funding levels is called the Budget Request Act. The Mayor also submits a Budget Support Act, which includes legislation for any budget proposal that requires a statutory change.

The proposed FY 2019 budget and related documents will be posted [here](#) on the Chief Financial Officer's website.

Agency Budget Oversight Hearings: March 26 – April 26, 2018

Shortly after the budget is submitted, each Committee holds hearings on the budgets of the agencies the Committee oversees. There are both public witnesses and executive branch witnesses. The DC Council posts questions regarding agency budgets that are submitted by Committees to the agencies, as well as the agencies' responses, [here](#). The schedule of budget hearings can be found [here](#).

This is a good time to testify on elements of the Mayor's budget that you do and do not like, especially if things are not included at all.

Council Hearing on Overall Proposed Budget: April 27, 2018

Each year, the full DC Council holds a hearing on the Mayor's budget proposal shortly after it is released. Video archives of this hearing, along with other hearings, can be found [here](#) on the Council's web site.

Council Committee Budget Mark-Ups: May 2-4, 2017

Each Council Committee meets to mark-up the budgets for the agencies they oversee. The Committees cannot appropriate more in total for their agencies than the amount in the Mayor's proposed budget, but they can shift funds within and between their agencies. Committees can also transfer funds to agencies in other Committees, or request and accept the transfer of funds from other Committees' agencies to theirs. The Committees can make recommendations for things they were not able to fund but that they hope the full Council will find a way to fund. The Committees also adopt recommendations on the Budget Support Act provisions that relate to the Committee.

After each Committee has completed mark-up, there is a short period during which the Council members work to merge the Committee actions into a comprehensive budget. This work happens behind the scenes. There is no mark-up on the Council's comprehensive budget.

Main Budget Vote: May 15, 2018

The full Council (Committee of the Whole) votes on the Budget Request Act (BRA), which sets the appropriations level for each agency. There is only one vote on the BRA. Also in May, the Council will hold its first vote of the Budget Support Act (BSA). There is a second vote on the BSA.

Final Vote on the Budget: May 29, 2018

The Council holds the second vote on the Budget. The federal portion of the budget is then submitted to the U.S. Congress for approval.

Final Revenue Forecast: Summer 2018

The CFO releases a new revenue forecast in the summer, though the specific timing changes from year to year. If the new revenue forecast is lower than the February forecast, the Mayor and Council must work to find additional budget savings. If the revenue forecast is higher than the February forecast, the Council can support some additional funding proposals.

In recent years, the summer revenue forecast has been released after the final budget vote. When that occurs, responses to any change in projected revenues must occur outside the standard budget process.

Resources

- [Budget & Financial Plans](#), for FY 2018 and prior years, via the Office of the Chief Financial Officer. The Mayor's proposed FY 2019 budget will appear here on March 21.
- [Resident's Guide to the DC Budget](#)
- [DCFPI Budget Toolkit](#), which includes budget by issue areas (e.g. child care, education, health), and other helpful resources. The FY 2019 budget toolkit will be available in early April 2018.