



The Congressional Budget Office's Work in 2015: A Report to the Congress

The Congressional Budget Office was established under the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 to provide information that would support the Congressional budget process and help the Congress make effective budget and economic policy. CBO provides estimates and other analyses in response to requests from the Committees on the Budget; the Committees on Appropriations; the House Committee on Ways and Means and the Senate Committee on Finance; other committees; and the leadership of the House and Senate.

The agency is committed to providing information that is:

- Objective—representing not the personal opinions of CBO staff but the consensus and diversity of views of experts from around the country;
- Insightful—making use of the best new evidence and innovative ideas as well as the lessons of experience;
- Timely—providing a response as quickly as possible to the needs of the Congress; and
- Clearly presented and explained—so that policymakers and analysts understand the basis for the agency's findings and have the opportunity to question the assumptions used.

In keeping with CBO's mandate to provide analysis that is objective as well as impartial, the agency makes no policy recommendations. Instead, it strives to present fully and fairly the likely consequences of alternative proposals being considered by the Congress so that the Congress can make informed policy choices.

To fulfill its mission to serve the Congress, CBO does the following:

- Analyzes trends and recent developments related to federal spending and revenues, and constructs budget projections for the next 10 years and the longer term;
- Estimates the cost of legislative proposals—which involves providing formal cost estimates for all bills reported by committees of the House and Senate (most of which included estimates of the cost of intergovernmental and private-sector mandates), many more informal cost estimates while legislation is being developed, estimates of the cost of all appropriation bills, and estimates of the cost of numerous amendments as legislation is considered by the House and Senate;
- Prepares projections of budgetary and economic outcomes for the coming decade and reports describing them;
- Examines the effects of the President's budgetary proposals and numerous alternative policy choices for the budget and the economy, including many options being considered by the budget committees in the course of developing a budget resolution;
- Conducts policy studies of governmental activities that have significant budgetary and economic impacts—which involves analyzing Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, other benefit programs, national security, energy policy, environmental issues, tax policy, labor markets, education policy, housing policy, government credit programs, infrastructure, immigration policy, and many other topics; and

Table 1.

Allocation of CBO Staff, December 31, 2015

	Number of Staff
Principal Areas for Analysts	
Health	40
National Security, Veterans' Programs, and International Affairs	24
Education, Immigration, Income Security, Labor, and Retirement	22
Macroeconomics	19
Taxation	16
Energy, Environment, Natural Resources, and Transportation	16
Budget Outlook	11
Finance and Housing	8
Mandates	7
Appropriations	6
Commerce, Justice, Science, and General Government	4
Principal Types of Activities for Other Staff	
Information Technology	13
Human Resources, Financial Management, and Other Support	12
Publication Services	9
Clerical Support	9
General Management	7
Legal Services	4
Website	4
Interns	2
Total	233

Source: Congressional Budget Office.

Numbers are positions filled. Although staff are assigned to a primary type of analysis or activity in this table, they often work in many areas.

- Provides testimonies on a broad range of budget and economic issues.

The agency employs analysts with many types of expertise who undertake those activities in collaboration with managers and support staff. At the end of December 2015, 233 positions at CBO were filled, with the largest concentration in the area of health (see Table 1).

CBO's Accomplishments in 2015

In calendar year 2015, CBO produced hundreds of formal cost estimates and mandate statements as well as thousands of informal estimates, ongoing “scorekeeping” estimates for appropriation acts, and more than 90 analytic reports and working papers (see Table 2). CBO also continued its efforts to make the agency an appealing place to work, to develop the skills of its staff, and to provide the tools necessary to maximize its staff's productivity.

Formal Cost Estimates and Mandate Statements

CBO completed 640 formal cost estimates in 2015. They generally included explanations of the components of the estimates and the estimating methodology used. The vast majority also included mandate statements, which assess whether legislation contains intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and, if so, assess the magnitude of the mandates' effects on the private sector and on state, local, and tribal governments.

That count of formal estimates greatly understates CBO's total cost-estimating workload because most of the agency's estimates are provided on a preliminary, informal basis, when legislative proposals are still at the early stages of development by committees or by the leadership of the House or Senate. CBO provided thousands of informal cost estimates in 2015.

Table 2.

Products by the Congressional Budget Office, 2015

Type	Products
Formal Cost Estimates and Mandate Statements ^a	640
Scorekeeping Tabulations	118
Data Files Related to Baseline Budget and Economic Projections	48
Analytic Reports and Working Papers ^b	94

- a. In addition to those formal estimates, CBO produces thousands of informal estimates at various points in the legislative process each year to assist committees in the development of legislation.
- b. Includes CBO's major recurring reports providing budget and economic projections and analyses, the *Monthly Budget Review*, reports on a broad range of topics, testimonies, answers to questions for the record following a Congressional hearing, letters to Members of Congress, and working papers providing technical descriptions of official CBO analyses or presenting independent research by CBO analysts.

Scorekeeping Tabulations

On an ongoing basis during 2015, CBO provided spending estimates with account-level detail for individual appropriation acts at all stages of the legislative process. Those tabulations totaled 118 last year. The agency also provided periodic summary tables showing the status of discretionary appropriations (by appropriations subcommittee) and running totals on a year-to-date basis.

Baseline Budget and Economic Projections and the Data Underlying Them

CBO issued 10-year budget and economic projections in January and August and an update of the 10-year budget projections in March. In June, the agency issued long-term budget projections looking ahead decades further. In conjunction with all of those projections, CBO posted on its website (in 48 separate files) detailed data on spending and revenues and on different aspects of the economy.

Analytic Reports and Working Papers

To describe those projections, CBO produced two major reports about the budget and economic outlook (in January and August) as well as one about the updated budget projections (in March). The agency also provided a comprehensive analysis of the long-term outlook for federal budget, spanning a 25-year horizon, which also included analysis of the economic outcomes under

different budgetary paths and of the uncertainty surrounding long-term budget projections.

In addition, CBO produced two analyses of the President's budgetary proposals, one of which addressed the macroeconomic effects of those proposals.

Besides those major reports, CBO released its *Monthly Budget Review* at the beginning of every month. That report provides a timely analysis of the previous month's outlays and revenues and a review of budgetary developments for the fiscal year to date.

CBO published numerous other analytic reports in 2015—with increased emphasis on providing explanations of the agency's analytical methods in appendixes and as separate documents. Some of those analyses took the form of formal reports; others were conveyed as answers to questions for the record following a Congressional hearing, letters to Members of Congress, and working papers providing technical descriptions of official CBO analyses or presenting independent research by CBO analysts.

CBO also presented the results of its work in the form of testimony at Congressional hearings. The agency submitted written testimony to Congressional committees on a variety of topics, including the veterans' health care system, spending on highways, the renewable fuel standard, naval shipbuilding, and nuclear waste disposal.

In conjunction with some of its analytic reports, CBO posted supplemental data on its website. The agency also posted 39 presentations, most drawn from published analyses. And it produced some in-depth blog posts on various topics.

The agency's full list of analytic reports, arrayed by category below, and working papers totals 94.

PROJECTIONS AND BUDGET ISSUES IN MAJOR RECURRING REPORTS

An Update to the Budget and Economic Outlook: 2015 to 2025 (August)

A Macroeconomic Analysis of the President's 2016 Budget (August)

The 2015 Long-Term Budget Outlook (June)

- An Analysis of the President's 2016 Budget* (March)
- Updated Budget Projections: 2015 to 2025* (March)
- The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2015 to 2015* (January)
- BUDGET ISSUES**
- Monthly Budget Review* (12 issues)
- Final Sequestration Report for Fiscal Year 2016* (December)
- Updated Information About Federal Debt and the Statutory Limit* (Letter to the Honorable Orrin G. Hatch) (October)
- Federal Debt and the Statutory Limit, October 2015*
- CBO's Projections of Federal Receipts and Expenditures in the National Income and Product Accounts* (September)
- Federal Debt and the Statutory Limit, August 2015*
- Sequestration Update Report: August 2015*
- Understanding the Long-Term Budget Outlook* (Testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs) (July)
- Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on The 2015 Long-Term Budget Outlook Conducted by the Senate Committee on the Budget* (July)
- Communicating the Nation's Fiscal Status* (Letter to the Honorable Ron Johnson) (June)
- The 2015 Long-Term Budget Outlook* (Testimony before the Senate Committee on the Budget) (June)
- Budgetary and Economic Outcomes Under Paths for Federal Revenues and Noninterest Spending Specified in the Conference Report on the 2016 Budget Resolution* (April)
- A Review of CBO's Activities in 2014 Under the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act* (March)
- Legislation Enacted in the 113th Congress That Will Affect Mandatory Spending or Revenues* (March)
- Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on the Budget and Economic Outlook for 2015 to 2025 Conducted by the House Committee on the Budget* (March)
- Budgetary and Economic Outcomes Under Paths for Federal Revenues and Noninterest Spending Specified by Chairman Enzi* (March)
- Budgetary and Economic Outcomes Under Paths for Federal Revenues and Noninterest Spending Specified by Chairman Price* (March)
- Letter to the Honorable Tom Price regarding accounting for automatic spending reductions in CBO's baseline projections (March)
- Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on the Budget and Economic Outlook for 2015 to 2025 Conducted by the Senate Committee on the Budget* (March)
- Federal Debt and the Statutory Limit, March 2015*
- The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2015 to 2025* (Testimony before the Senate Committee on the Budget) (January)
- The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2015 to 2025* (Testimony before the House Committee on the Budget) (January)
- Unauthorized Appropriations and Expiring Authorizations* (January)
- Final Sequestration Report for Fiscal Year 2015* (January)
- ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES**
- Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on the Renewable Fuel Standard Conducted by the Subcommittee on Environment and the Subcommittee on Oversight of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology* (December)
- The Federal Government's Responsibilities and Liabilities Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act* (Testimony before the Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, House Committee on Energy and Commerce) (December)
- Federal Support for the Development, Production, and Use of Fuels and Energy Technologies* (November)

The Renewable Fuel Standard: Issues for 2015 and Beyond (Testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Subcommittee on Environment, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology) (November)

Using ESPCs to Finance Federal Investments in Energy-Efficient Equipment (February)

HEALTH CARE

Budgetary and Economic Effects of Repealing the Affordable Care Act (June)

Comparing the Costs of the Veterans' Health Care System With Private-Sector Costs (Testimony before the Subcommittee on Health, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs) (January)

HOUSING, POVERTY AND INCOME SECURITY

CBO's 2015 Long-Term Projections for Social Security: Additional Information (December)

Social Security Policy Options, 2015 (December)

The Federal Role in the Financing of Multifamily Rental Properties (December)

Federal Housing Assistance for Low-Income Households (September)

Child Nutrition Programs: Spending and Policy Options (September)

The Effects of Potential Cuts in SNAP Spending on Households With Different Amounts of Income (March)

Letter to the Honorable Tom Price regarding spending for means-tested programs (March)

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: Spending and Policy Options (January)

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Answer to a Question for the Record Following a Hearing on the Future of Highway Funding Conducted by the Senate Committee on Finance (July)

Answer to a Question for the Record Following a Hearing on the Long-Term Financing of the Highway Trust Fund

Conducted by the House Committee on Ways and Means (July)

The Status of the Highway Trust Fund and Options for Paying for Highway Spending (Testimony before the Senate Committee on Finance) (June)

The Status of the Highway Trust Fund and Options for Paying for Highway Spending (Testimony before the House Committee on Ways and Means) (June)

Letter to the Honorable Sander M. Levin regarding the estimated revenue shortfall if spending authority for the Highway Trust Fund were extended beyond May 31, 2015 (May)

Public Spending on Transportation and Water Infrastructure, 1956 to 2014 (March)

MACROECONOMIC ANALYSIS

The Macroeconomic Effects of Eliminating Automatic Reductions to Discretionary Spending Caps (Letter to the Honorable Bernard Sanders) (August)

CBO's Economic Forecasting Record: 2015 Update (February)

Why CBO Projects That Actual Output Will Be Below Potential Output on Average (February)

Estimated Impact of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act on Employment and Economic Output in 2014 (February)

NATIONAL SECURITY

Replacing Military Personnel in Support Positions With Civilian Employees (December)

CBO's Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2016 Shipbuilding Plan (Testimony before the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces, House Committee on Armed Services) (December)

An Analysis of the Navy's Fiscal Year 2016 Shipbuilding Plan (October)

Preserving the Navy's Forward Presence With a Smaller Fleet (March)

Projected Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2015 to 2024
(January)

TAXES

CBO's Revenue Forecasting Record (November)

Effective Marginal Tax Rates for Low- and Moderate-Income Workers in 2016 (November)

OTHER ISSUES

Proceeds From Auctions Held by the Federal Communications Commission (Letter to the Honorable Dean Heller) (April)

Federal Contracts and the Contracted Workforce (March)

Report on the Troubled Asset Relief Program—March 2015

How Changes in Immigration Policy Would Affect the Federal Budget (January)

Federal Reinsurance for Terrorism Risk: An Update
(January)

CBO OPERATIONS

Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing by the House Committee on the Budget on the Work of the Congressional Budget Office (July)

Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on the Work of CBO Conducted by the Senate Committee on the Budget (June)

The Work of the Congressional Budget Office (Testimony before the House Committee on the Budget) (June)

The Work of the Congressional Budget Office (Testimony before the Senate Committee on the Budget) (May)

Answers to Questions for the Record Following a Hearing on CBO's 2016 Appropriation Request Conducted by the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, Senate Committee on Appropriations (April)

CBO's Appropriation Request for Fiscal Year 2016 (Testimony before the Subcommittee on the Legislative Branch, Senate Committee on Appropriations) (March)

WORKING PAPERS

The Costs to Different Generations of Policies That Close the Fiscal Gap (December)

How CBO Estimates the Effects of the Affordable Care Act on the Labor Market (December)

Changes in Medicare Spending per Beneficiary by Age
(November)

How CBO Estimates the Automatic Stabilizers (November)

Do Large-Scale Refinancing Programs Reduce Mortgage Defaults? Evidence From a Regression Discontinuity Design (October)

China's Growing Energy Demand: Implications for the United States (June)

Federal Reinsurance for Terrorism Risk in 2015 and Beyond
(June)

Pricing Freight Transport to Account for External Costs
(March)

The Fiscal Multiplier and Economic Policy Analysis in the United States (February)

Do We Know Why Earnings Fall With Job Displacement?
(January)

Improvements in Internal Management in 2015

In 2015, CBO continued its efforts to enhance staff development and internal communication. To ensure that staff members stay current on topics of importance to CBO's work for the Congress, the agency hosted presentations by a broad range of outside researchers and other experts, and staff members participated in numerous seminars to share information on their analyses, data, and estimating techniques. When the new Director was appointed, he met in small groups with all CBO staff.

CBO continued to emphasize training. The agency funded participation in conferences of researchers, practitioners, and government employees on various economic and policy topics, as well as training in analytic tools and various skills. The agency also continued to emphasize the need to clearly communicate the results of

analyses by providing courses on writing analytic reports, reviewing reports, and writing cost estimates.

CBO implemented numerous improvements to its IT (information technology) infrastructure and practices last year. Among other advances, CBO:

- Upgraded network switches to increase the speed of data transfers between the agency's location at the Ford House Office Building and the offsite Alternate Computing Facility by 50 percent, in order to facilitate backups;
- Installed new server equipment to centralize the use of some software, allowing staff to share those resources and facilitating recovery after a disaster should the need arise;
- Improved the agency's ability to monitor and remediate potential cyber threats around the clock and conduct more in-depth vulnerability assessments on a recurring basis;
- Streamlined and enhanced data storage capability and reliability to ensure that increasing requirements for using large data sets are met;
- Migrated the agency's email system to a cloud-based system, which reduced the equipment and labor needed and facilitated disaster recovery if needed; and
- Continued to improve remote access capabilities, to cover the entire workforce.

CBO continually strives to make its work more easily accessible on its public website and on its social media platforms. In 2015, CBO:

- Redesigned the website's document landing pages as part of a broader strategy to make the agency's website more mobile friendly;
- Significantly upgraded the website's search capabilities;

- Created new website topics pages on dynamic analysis and methods for analyzing health insurance coverage to make the agency's work in those areas easier to find and to bolster transparency;
- Expanded the presentation of budget options online to include all options included in analytic reports and not just those in the agency's periodic volume devoted to the topic; and
- Added a new page on the agency's website detailing the policy for its panels of advisers regarding political activity and financial interests, which includes links to the required forms.

In addition to making use of CBO's website, people interested in the agency's work can read the agency's blog, follow CBO on Twitter and SlideShare (a presentation-hosting service), monitor the agency's YouTube channel, or sign up for RSS (really simple syndication) feeds or email alerts.

Also in 2015, CBO migrated its intranet to a new, upgraded platform, a complex project that for the first time was handled completely in-house.

To help keep the Congress informed about its work and operations, CBO prepared this report. It was written by Mark Smith, with contributions from Deborah Kilroe, Terry Owens, Stephanie Ruiz, and John Skeen and with guidance from Joseph E. Evans Jr.

Jeffrey Kling and Robert Sunshine reviewed the report, and Maureen Costantino prepared it for publication. An electronic version is available on CBO's website (www.cbo.gov/publication/51290).



Keith Hall
Director



