



## Feds Lag in Publishing Funding Requests

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Congressional Budget Justifications (CBJs) are [plain-language explanations](#) of how an agency proposes to spend money it requests that Congress appropriate, but how easy is it for congressional staff and citizens to find these documents? Demand Progress surveyed 456 federal agencies and entities for fiscal years 2018 and 2019 and found:

- **7.5 percent of the 173 agencies with congressional liaisons**, i.e., 13 agencies, published their CBJs online for only FY 2018 or FY 2019, but not both. (Agencies with [congressional liaison offices](#) routinely interact with Congress). If you exclude subordinate agencies whose reports traditionally are included in a superior agency's reports, that figure becomes 3.3 percent, or 5 agencies, out of 152 agencies published a CBJ for FY 2018 or 2019. The failure of one agency to publish their report impacts a number of sub-agencies. Among the agencies/entities inconsistent in their reporting is the Executive Office of the President, which houses the Office of Management and Budget, the National Security Council, and the Office of the Vice President.
- **6.1 percent of the 456 agencies we surveyed** published their CBJs online for only FY 2018 or FY 2019, but not both. If you exclude subordinate agencies whose reports traditionally are included in a superior agency's reports, that figure changes to 3.1 percent, or 10 agencies, out of 318 agencies published a CBJ for FY 2018 or 2019. Among the agencies/entities that inconsistently published their CBJs online are (yet again) the Executive Office of the President and the Access Board.
- **21 percent of the 456 agencies we surveyed** did not publish a CBJ. This is on top of the 6.1 percent that published only one CBJ for 2018 and 2019. We do not know whether these agencies were required to publish a CBJ, or whether their justification might be aggregated under another agency that did not publish its report. Unfortunately, there is no publicly-available comprehensive list of agencies that must publish these justifications.
- **All 24 CFO Act agencies** — i.e., those agencies with a Chief Financial Officer created under the CFO Act — published their CBJs online.

Of the 456 agencies we reviewed, 141 of the agency CBJs traditionally would be included in CBJ's generated by 73 other agencies.

The White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is responsible for overseeing and approving executive branch agency Congressional Budget Justifications. OMB requires executive branch agencies, pursuant to [OMB Circular A-11, section 22.6](#), to publish their CBJs online within two weeks of sending the request to Congress. Legislative and judicial branch agencies do not fall under [OMB's online publication mandate](#).

Congress urged OMB to publish all CBJs online on a central website in its [2018](#) and [2019](#) reports accompanying those years' appropriations bills in a section entitled "online budget repository," but so far OMB has not done so. OMB already publishes many other budget documents on a [central website](#), and adding the CBJs to that site would be a useful resource for Congress, agency staff, journalists, watchdogs, and the general public.

**Independent agencies' CBJs were particularly difficult to locate**, with 35 percent of the 93 agencies missing at least one year's justification. If you exclude subordinate agencies whose reports traditionally are included in a superior agency's reports, that figure changes to 37.9 percent of 87 agencies.

**Legislative branch agencies had the highest percentage of missing CBJs:** 85 percent of the 20 agencies/offices did not publish at least one justification. (It is not clear to us how many of these report reflect subordinate agencies/offices.) While a few agencies/offices publish their CBJs online, we are not aware of a parallel obligation for legislative branch agencies to publish their CBJs online, although they are collected in the narrowly-distributed part 1 of the committee report on hearings before the appropriations committee subcommittee on the legislative branch. (Here is [part 2](#)).

OMB did not respond to our inquiry concerning Congress's repeated requests for them to publish the information online and their enforcement of the agency online publication requirement.

You can review or download our database of the 456 agencies [here](#).

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Easy, centralized access to agency Congressional Budget Justifications is crucial for agency accountability. As OMB apparently has declined to voluntarily publish agency CBJs on a central website, Congress should mandate that they do so.

In the meantime, OMB should publish a list of all the agencies/entities that they expect will submit a CBJ for FY 2020 or that submitted a CBJ for review for FY 2019.

In addition, to help ensure that CBJs are easily accessible and in a useful format, we recommend that each agency create a central budget webpage. Ideally, all agencies should follow a standard format, such as <https://www.AgencyName.gov/Budget>. The page should

include all of the sub-agency CBJs as well as historical CBJs — [the Treasury Department](#) does a good job of aggregating the CBJs.

Finally, Congress should publish online all legislative branch congressional budget justifications.

### **Methodology**

We gathered our list of 456 agencies/entities from the [CRS guide to federal agencies with congressional liaisons](#) and the [USA.gov federal agencies index](#). The database includes FY 2018 and FY 2019 CBJs.

To find each CBJ, we used a Google search for a variety of terms and also examined each agency's website. OMB does not publish a list of all agencies required to submit and publish CBJs, so this was our best approximation to make sure we covered the majority of the federal government. As a consequence, we likely included agency components that do not submit CBJs and missed some agencies/entities that may generate these documents.

Another hurdle was inconsistent terminology used across the government. Sometimes documents would be clearly labeled as a "congressional budget justification," but just as often a document would not be clearly labeled. We found more than 40 alternative document titles. Because many documents have similar titles, it is possible we overlooked relevant documents.