

Appendix B: Overview of the State Budget Process

The Governor and the Legislature adopt a new budget every year. The Constitution requires a balanced budget such that, if proposed expenditures exceed estimated revenues, the Governor is required to recommend changes in the budget. The fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30.

Governor’s Budget Proposal. The California Constitution requires that the Governor submit a budget to the Legislature by January 10 of each year. The Director of Finance, who functions as the chief financial advisor to the Governor, directs the preparation of the Governor’s Budget. The state’s basic approach is incremental budgeting, estimating first the costs of existing programs and then adjusting those program levels. By law, the chairs of the budget committees in each house of the Legislature—the Senate Budget and Fiscal Review Committee and the Assembly Budget Committee—introduce bills reflecting the Governor’s proposal. These are called budget bills, and the two budget bills are identical at the time they are introduced.

Related Legislation. Some budget changes require that changes be made to existing law. In these cases, separate bills—called “trailer bills”—are considered with the budget. By law, all proposed statutory changes necessary to implement the Governor’s Budget are due to the Legislature by February 1.

Legislative Analyses. Following the release of the Governor’s Budget in January, the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) begins its analyses of and recommendations on the Governor’s proposals. These analyses, each specific to a budget area (such as higher education) or set of budget proposals (such as transportation proposals), typically are released beginning in mid-January and continuing into March.

Governor’s Revised Proposals. Finance proposes adjustments to the January budget through “spring letters.” Existing law requires Finance to submit most changes to the Legislature by April 1. Existing law requires Finance to submit, by May 14, revised revenue estimates, changes to Proposition 98, and changes to programs budgeted based on enrollment, caseload, and population. For that reason, the May Revision typically includes significant changes for the California Community Colleges budget. Following release of the May Revision, the LAO publishes additional analyses evaluating new and amended proposals.

Legislative Review. The budget committees assign the items in the budget to subcommittees, which are organized by areas of state government (e.g., education). Many subcommittees rely heavily on the LAO analyses in developing their hearing agendas. For each January budget proposal, a subcommittee can adopt, reject, or modify the proposal. Any January proposals not acted on remain in the budget by default. May proposals, in contrast, must be acted on to be included in the budget. In addition to acting on the Governor’s budget proposals, subcommittees also can add their own proposals to the budget.

When a subcommittee completes its actions, it reports its recommendations back to the full committee for approval. Through this process, each house develops a version of the budget that is a modification of the Governor’s January budget proposal.

A budget conference committee is then appointed to resolve differences between the Senate and Assembly versions of the budget. The administration commonly engages with legislative leaders during this time to influence conference committee negotiations. The committee’s report reflecting the budget deal between the houses is then sent to the full houses for approval.

Budget Enactment. Typically, the Governor has 12 days to sign or veto the budget bill. The Governor also has the authority to reduce or eliminate any appropriation included in the budget. Because the budget bill is an urgency measure, the bill takes effect as soon as it is signed.

SEQUENCE OF THE ANNUAL STATE BUDGET PROCESS

