

Slicing Up the Federal Budget Pie

Helping people understand the wide disparity in spending within the Discretionary Budget

Materials

- FY 2011 Proposed Discretionary Budget Pie Chart
- Two round **uncut** pizza pies
- Index cards with Spending Categories (see list at right)

Activity time

30 minutes

Directions

1. Start the activity by reviewing the definition of the discretionary budget and discussing budget categories (at right). Ask participants to define the categories, and help them fill in information when needed. Students can label paper plates with each of the categories.
2. Cut one pizza to mirror the Discretionary Budget Pie Chart. Pass out slices on appropriate paper plates. Divide the other pizza equally; distribute.
3. Ask participants to compare the sizes of their slices and consider the following questions in small groups, or as a large group after reviewing the contents of each spending category.



Federal Budget Definitions & NPP Spending Categories

Discretionary Spending: *The portion of the federal budget the President must request and Congress must approve each year. One-third of total federal spending.*

Mandatory Spending: *Automatically budgeted without Presidential or Congressional action, based on existing law. Includes Social Security and Medicaid.*

Income Security & Labor: *Job training, disability, retirement, unemployment insurance, Social Security.*

Health: *Medicare, Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program, other health-related expenses.*

Military: *National defense and security, nuclear weapons activities, international security assistance.*

Food: *Agriculture and nutritional assistance.*

Veterans' Benefits: *Healthcare, housing, and income benefits for veterans.*

Transportation: *Development and support of air, water, ground, and other transportation.*

Education: *Elementary, secondary, higher, vocational education.*

Environment, Energy & Science: *Natural resources and environment, supply and use of energy, science and research activities.*

Housing & Community: *Housing assistance, credits, community development, disaster assistance, services supporting social needs.*

International Affairs: *Diplomatic, development, humanitarian activities abroad.*

Government: *Commerce, law enforcement, overhead costs of federal government.*

Interest on Debt: *The cost of borrowing money in previous years.*

Guiding Questions for Facilitators

- What do you notice about your slices of pizza?
- Do you have enough to eat?
- Are other people's slices different than yours? What do you notice about them? What do you think about those differences?
- What do you think about the way the pizza -- the discretionary budget-- is divided?
- What is the process for deciding how big the slices are?
- How can we influence how the slices are cut?



National Priorities Project makes federal budget information transparent and accessible so people can prioritize and influence how their tax dollars are spent. NPP holds the vision of an informed and engaged democracy where all people affected by federal spending priorities have the ability and opportunity to shape our nation's budget.