



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT  
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET  
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM: Jeffrey D. Zients   
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SUBJECT: Planning for Uncertainty with Respect to Fiscal Year 2013 Budgetary Resources

In the coming months, executive departments and agencies (agencies) will confront significant uncertainty regarding the amount of budgetary resources available for the remainder of the fiscal year. In particular, unless Congress acts to amend current law, the President is required to issue a sequestration order on March 1, 2013, canceling approximately \$85 billion in budgetary resources across the Federal Government. Further uncertainty is created by the expiration of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2013 (CR) on March 27, 2013. This memorandum directs agencies to take certain steps to plan for and manage this budgetary uncertainty.

The Administration continues to urge Congress to take prompt action to address the current budgetary uncertainty, including through the enactment of balanced deficit reduction to avoid sequestration. Should Congress fail to act to avoid sequestration, there will be significant and harmful impacts on a wide variety of Government services and operations. For example, should sequestration remain in place for an extended period of time, hundreds of thousands of families will lose critical education and wellness services through Head Start and nutrition assistance programs. The Department of Defense will face deep cuts that will reduce readiness of non-deployed units, delay needed investments in equipment and facilities, and cut services for military families. And Federal agencies will likely need to furlough hundreds of thousands of employees and reduce essential services such as food inspections, air travel safety, prison security, border patrols, and other mission-critical activities.

At this time, agencies do not have clarity regarding the manner in which Congress will address these issues or the amount of budgetary resources that will be available through the remainder of the fiscal year. Until Congress acts, agencies must continue to prepare for the possibility that they will need to operate with reduced budgetary resources.

Prior to passage of the American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012 (ATRA), the President was required to issue a sequestration order on January 2, 2013. Although the ATRA postponed this date by two months, agencies had already engaged in extensive planning for operations under post-sequestration funding levels before this postponement was effected. In light of persistent budgetary uncertainty, all agencies should continue these planning activities, in coordination with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and should intensify efforts to identify actions that may be required should sequestration occur.

Agencies should generally adhere to the following guiding principles, to the extent practicable and appropriate, in preparing plans to operate with reduced budgetary resources in the event that sequestration occurs:

- use any available flexibility to reduce operational risks and minimize impacts on the agency's core mission in service of the American people;
- identify and address operational challenges that could potentially have a significant deleterious effect on the agency's mission or otherwise raise life, safety, or health concerns;
- identify the most appropriate means to reduce civilian workforce costs where necessary – this may include imposing hiring freezes, releasing temporary employees or not renewing term or contract hires, authorizing voluntary separation incentives and voluntary early retirements, or implementing administrative furloughs (appropriate guidance for administrative furloughs can be found on the OPM website [\[here\]](#)); consistent with Section 3(a)(ii) of Executive Order 13522, allow employees' exclusive representatives to have pre-decisional involvement in these matters to the fullest extent practicable;
- review grants and contracts to determine where cost savings may be achieved in a manner that is consistent with the applicable terms and conditions, remaining mindful of the manner in which individual contracts or grants advance the core mission of the agency;
- take into account funding flexibilities, including the availability of reprogramming and transfer authority; and,
- be cognizant of the requirements of the Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act, 29 U.S.C. §§ 2101-2109.

While agency plans should reflect intensified efforts to prepare for operations under a potential sequestration, actions that would implement reductions specifically designed as a response to sequestration should generally not be taken at this time. In some cases, however, the overall budgetary uncertainty and operational constraints may require that certain actions be taken in the immediate- or near-term. Agencies presented with these circumstances should continue to act in a prudent manner to ensure that operational risks are avoided and adequate funding is available for the remainder of the fiscal year to meet the agency's core requirements and mission. Should circumstances require an agency to take actions that would constitute a change from normal practice and result in a reduction of normal spending and operations in the

immediate- or near-term, the agency must coordinate closely with its OMB Resource Management Office (RMO) before taking any such actions.

All agencies should work with their OMB RMO on the appropriate timing to submit draft contingency plans for operating under sequestration for review. Furthermore, should Congress take action that affects the current budgetary uncertainty, OMB will provide agencies with additional guidance as appropriate.