



Congressional Budget Office

CBO and Its Access to Information

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Statutory Authority

“The Director is authorized to secure information, data, estimates, and statistics directly from the various departments, agencies, and establishments of the executive branch of Government and the regulatory agencies and commissions of the Government.

All such departments, agencies, establishments, and regulatory agencies and commissions shall furnish the Director any available material which he determines to be necessary in the performance of his duties and functions (other than material the disclosure of which would be a violation of law).”

Section 201(d) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974

CBO's Key Products

CBO uses data and other types of information for a variety of purposes:

- Economic forecasts,
- Policy analyses, and
- Cost estimates for legislation.

Sources of Data and Information

- Some main sources of data and information include:
 - Other federal agencies,
 - State and local governments, and
 - Groups affected by proposed legislation.
- Some of the government data and information is publicly available; some is provided specifically at CBO's request.
- Sometimes federal agencies run their forecasting models for a specific program using assumptions specified by CBO.
- CBO also purchases data collected or tabulated by private sources.

Confidential Data

Some data are highly confidential and careful arrangements have to be made to ensure security and protection of privacy.

Examples:

- Sample of data from individual tax returns: Used to develop baseline projections, analyses of the distribution of the tax burden (historically or for proposed policies), analysis of how changes in tax law would affect labor supply, and projections of pension contributions and distributions.

Examples of Confidential Data Used in CBO's Analyses

- Sample of data on people's earnings and Social Security benefits: Used to project long-term Social Security finances.
- Salaries and demographic characteristics of civilian employees of the government: Used to compare compensation of private-sector and government employees.

Examples of Confidential Data Used in CBO's Analyses

- Data on Medicare beneficiaries and providers of medical services that Medicare pays for: Used for analyses of the costs of that program.
- Detailed information about weapon systems and defense plans: Used to prepare policy analyses and cost projections.
- Detailed data on government loan programs: Used to analyze costs and borrowers' characteristics

Collecting Data Through Other Channels

- Less-sensitive information often obtained informally
- May be about how a program works, about how proposed legislation would be implemented, or feedback about a possible CBO estimate
- Important to develop relationships with knowledgeable people in other agencies
- Requires trust and assurance of confidentiality

Summary

- Data, information, and other assistance from agencies are critical to CBO's work.
- Some is obtained formally and officially; some very informally.
- Agencies are generally (but not always) cooperative.
- Building relationships over time is important.
- Carefully protecting confidentiality of sources and properly securing confidential data are essential.