Government Publishing Office Conference 2019
Your Guide to America’s Finances
Linnea Powell, Bureau of the Fiscal Service
Pop Quiz!
Question 1

How much money did the federal government collect in revenue last year?
In 2019, the federal government collected $3.5 trillion in revenue.
Question 2

How much did the government spend last year?
In 2019, the federal government spent $4.4 trillion.
Question 3

What’s the difference between deficit and debt?
A **deficit** occurs when the money going out exceeds the money coming in. When the U.S. government has a deficit, most of the deficit spending is covered by the government taking on new debt. The **total debt** that the government owes is essentially the accumulation of deficits over time, minus repayments of debt.
Overview

• **Your Guide to America’s Finances** is intended to increase the general public’s awareness of the federal government’s finances, by translating the complicated aspects of federal finance into a simple, straightforward, and engaging product.

• Today’s presentation will provide the history and philosophy of the project, along with a site demonstration.

• This is an interactive demonstration, so please ask questions.

• There will be time for questions at the end.
Origins

- *Your Guide* is a re-invention of the *Citizen’s Guide to the Financial Report of the U.S. Government*, a static PDF issued every year by the Treasury Department.

- The idea for the project originated with Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, who proposed the idea of evolving the PDF version of the into a visually appealing and engaging website that explores federal finances.

- The result is a shareable, mobile-friendly site created using publicly available data, as well as open source tools and code.
We might hope to see the finances of the Union as clear and intelligible as a merchant's books, so that every member of Congress, and every person of any mind in the Union should be able to comprehend them, to investigate abuses, and consequently to control them.

Thomas Jefferson to Albert Gallatin, 1802 (edited)
The Project Team

• The cross-functional team was comprised of 2 developers, 1 content creator, 1 financial analyst, 1 UI/UIX designer, 1 scrum master and 1 product owner from the Bureau of the Fiscal Service, the Federal Reserve Banks of Kansas City and St. Louis, and Booz Allen Hamilton.

• Key Principles of the Project:
  – Human Centered Design
  – Neutral and Objective Approach
  – Open-Source technology
  – Agile/SCRUM methodology
The team spoke with 200+ members of the public in Washington, DC, St. Louis, and Kansas City during summer 2018.

Discussions occurred at all phases of the product development lifecycle, and feedback included:

- Site name – preferred “Your Guide” to “Public’s Guide”
- Navigation preferences – *Does this link take you to the information you are expecting to see?*
- Terminology – Income vs. Revenue, Debt and Deficit
- Design feedback on wireframes and visualizations
Human Centered Design Feedback (cont’d.)

- From a technology perspective, participants stated the product:
  - must work well on mobile devices
  - should be accessible through search
  - should lead with visualizations
Sample Feedback

• I would assume it’s just for general information for the public…it’s for everyone.

• I can’t imagine that anyone actually understands what a trillion dollars is, it’s such a huge number.

• I can’t say that I actually know where money is spent that we are paying in taxes?

• I would like to see personalized examples…like average family contributions.
Neutral and Objective Approach

- Treasury is viewed as a source of objective, unbiased information about federal finance
- *Your Guide* does not include value judgements
- Language is neutral
- Data is provided and the user is allowed to explore it
Data Sources and Methodology

• Data Sources are cited and linked throughout the website.
  – U.S. Treasury Department reports
    • Monthly Treasury Statement
    • Monthly Statement of the Public Debt
  – U.S. Census Bureau Data
    • Population Clock
  – Bureau of Economic Analysis:
    • GDP Data
    • National Income and Product Account Handbook
Open Source Technology

- Analysts and developers can “fork” existing code, and re-use it free of cost as a starting point for their own projects.
- Data is available for download, and its code is available to inspect.

In 2019, the federal government spent $984 billion more than it collected, resulting in a deficit.

How did we end up with a deficit? A deficit occurs when the money going out exceeds the money coming in. Since the federal government spent $4.4 trillion and collected $3.5 trillion in 2019, the government ran a deficit for the year.

$1 Billion

What is the deficit and how does that compare to the national debt?

984 dots x $1 billion = $984 billion
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Visit *Your Guide to America’s Finances* and check out our sister websites: