

Budgeting for Homeland Security

National tragedies since 2001 have revealed serious weaknesses in U.S. domestic preparedness. Since 2001, federal spending for homeland security has more than tripled in nominal terms. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created to pull together many facets of the federal effort to prevent terrorist acts, protect people and infrastructure, and mitigate the consequences of potential subsequent attacks. Unfortunately, the nation is not getting two results that experts and policy makers hoped would flow from these changes: spending tied clearly to the nation's top priorities and unity of effort across the entire federal homeland security establishment.

Crucial weaknesses remain. In DHS, weak internal processes, a lack of analytic capacity, and a lack of leadership attention early in the planning cycle are keeping the nation from getting its money's worth. The White House is still poorly organized for the job and short on people with the needed outlook and analytic skills. Congress is still hampered by a tangle of committee and subcommittee jurisdictions, a lack of analytic capacity in its support agencies, and outdated budget and account structures.

Solid structures and sound processes for planning and resource allocation can help. Improved organizations and processes are not the solution to every problem. Capable leaders can push their priorities into programs and budgets even when organizations are ill-equipped or processes are weak. Poor leaders can subvert even the most impressive processes. Nevertheless, solid structures and sound processes for planning and resource allocation can help decision-makers get needed information about the costs and potential consequences of the options available to them. They can help leaders establish control over priorities by strengthening the links between strategies and budgets. Most importantly for the federal homeland security effort, they can help pull the policies and budgets of competing organizations into a cohesive whole.

The pending transition to a new administration and Congress opens a window. The new administration and Congress can take a number of important steps to strengthen the links between strategies and budgets.

The next administration should:

- Reconfigure the Executive Office to strengthen White House planning and resource allocation to address long-term security challenges, especially when they lie at the intersection of homeland security and national security.
- Improve its articulated homeland security strategies and strengthen the linkage between strategy and resources.

The next Secretary of Homeland Security should:

- Call on an operational board of senior leaders to deliberate together about trade-offs, to advise the Secretary, and expand analytic capacity to conduct the trade-off studies that should inform the Secretary's broad resource allocation decisions.
- Improve the department's planning, programming, budgeting and execution processes and engage personally at key points in the process to build consensus among component heads.

The 111th Congress should:

- Consolidate oversight responsibility for DHS and overall homeland security policy in a single homeland security authorizing committee in each chamber.
- Provide the Congressional Budget Office the resources to conduct nonpartisan studies of homeland security issues and those that lie at the intersection of homeland security and national security to help lawmakers improve the allocation of resources.
- Rely more on the Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office for studies of homeland security issues and alternative solutions to them.
- Conduct cross-committee hearings to bring a more integrated approach to resource allocation and oversight of issues that lie at the intersection of homeland security and national security.

The next administration and Congress should:

- Work together to improve federal budget structures, account structures, databases, and reports to foster a more unified and mission-oriented approach to budgets and oversight.
- Leadership is needed for effective creation and operation of an emergency benefits network. It must come from the federal government because of its strength, capabilities, and ultimate responsibility for the safety, health, and welfare of the people of the United States.

Leadership backed by strength at the federal level, preferably from a strong agency such as the Office of Management and Budget, is needed to bring everyone, including the more influential stakeholders, to the table. ■

Resources

[Cindy Williams, "Homeland Security: Planning and Resource Allocation," \(IBM Center for The Business of Government\) 2008.](#)



This issue brief is one of a series of IBM Center for The Business of Government mission and program issue briefs prepared in anticipation of the 2008 national election and transition in government.

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