KEY QUESTION

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What are important decision-making opportunities in Canada's annual budget process?

Fiscal year runs from April to March

Canada's fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31. Key stages in Canada's budget process include:

- **Central agencies work with departments to develop budget strategies:** In June, the Cabinet convenes to review the current budget and identify priorities for the upcoming fiscal year. From June to September, central agencies (Privy Council Office, Department of Finance, and Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS)) work with the government departments to incorporate the results of the Cabinet review, in order to develop budget proposals for the Finance Minister to consider. By September, all government departments, including GAC, send budget letters to the Finance Minister, which includes requests for budgetary changes.

- **Pre-budget consultation process, including public outreach and parliamentary consultations with external stakeholders, begins**: From June to August, the Department of Finance invites CSOs and other stakeholders to submit suggestions on the full budget, including for development. These are compiled and may be taken into account by the Finance Minister, during the development of the budget. The pre-budget consultation process provides direct opportunities to advocate for issues around the overall ODA file.

- **Minister of Finance consults with Parliament:** In October, the Minister of Finance releases Budget Consultation Papers and begins consultation with the House of Commons' Standing Committees. These consultations run from October to December; participants from within government as well as other experts are invited to give testimony on policy areas and budget lines. Results of the consultation process and recommendations of the Standing Committees and Cabinet policy committees are compiled and taken into account by the Finance Minister in the development of the budget. Continued engagement with key decision-makers is key during this time. Further, during this period, the Department of Finance launches its annual consultation on ODA, a criteria under the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. While not part of the official budget consultant, this is a critical opportunity to advocate for increases for overall ODA or specific initiatives.

- **Fall Fiscal Update and Public Accounts of Canada are released:**In fall – typically November – the Department of Finance tables its Fall Fiscal Update and Public Accounts. These provide an update of economic and fiscal projections since the previous budget. Around this time the House of Commons' Finance and Foreign Affairs Committees hold consultations. These may provide direct opportunities to advocate for development issues, especially during the discussion of the Public Accounts, at which the status of the execution of the previous year's budgets are released.

- **Finance Minister develops budget strategy, Cabinet reviews it;** Prime Minister and Finance Minister make final decisions: In early December, the Minister of Finance develops a budget strategy, with input from the Memoranda to the Cabinet from all departments. These outline both policy priorities and financial asks. The Cabinet reviews these and budget proposals from December to January. The Prime Minister and the Finance Minister may make final adjustments until February/March. At this time, the PMO and other Cabinet level officials are able to 'push in' funding for specific development initiatives.

- **Main Estimates are tabled, Finance Minister delivers Budget Speech; budget is approved:** The budget is usually presented to the House of Commons in February/ March in a speech by the Finance Minister. The Main Estimates, which are the detailed spending plans for each department for the upcoming financial year, are tabled by the President of TBS no later than March 1. However, there will be areas of surplus not included in the ME, as the government will look to maintain a 'surprise' factor around highly political areas, including development spending.

December - January
Finance Minister develops
Budget strategy; Cabinet reviews

Prime Minister and Finance
Minister make final decisions

October - December
Department of Finance develops
Budget Consultation Papers

February - March
Finance Minister delivers
Budget Speech

March - June
Departments prepare and
review draft budgets

June - September
Central agencies and departments
develop budget strategies

June - August
Pre-budget consultation
process begins

DECEMBER
JANUARY
NOVEMBER
FEBRUARY
OCTOBER
MARCH
SEPTEMBER
APRIL
AUGUST
MAY
JULY
JUNE