



**Power of the Purse Portfolio, 2014-2018:  
External Evaluation Report**

*The Madison Initiative of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation*

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# ACRONYMS AND SHORTENED NAMES

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|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| B3P         | Building a Better Budget Process                                   |
| BPC         | Bipartisan Policy Center   |
| CAP         | Center for American Progress                                       |
| CBO         | Congressional Budget Office  |
| CBPP        | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities                             |
| Convergence | Convergence Center for Policy Resolution                           |
| CRFB        | Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget                         |
| CRS         | Congressional Research Service                                     |
| GAO         | Government Accountability Office                                   |
| GMU         | George Mason University  |
| GWU         | George Washington University                                       |
| JSC         | Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform |
| NBR         | National Budgeting Roundtable                                      |
| OMB         | Office of Management and Budget                                    |
| TMI         | The Madison Initiative   |

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## I. ABOUT THE EVALUATION

This retrospective evaluation examines The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative's (TMI's) power of the purse portfolio between 2014 and 2018. It reflects on the problem that the portfolio addresses and progress grantees have made responding to the problem. In this way, it adds to TMI's learning about its investments to date in its power of the purse portfolio and informs the evolution of the portfolio's strategy.

To conduct this evaluation, the evaluation team reviewed documents and conducted 54 interviews and a survey. The interviews were with TMI staff (2), grantees (22), peers (17), and Members of Congress and staff (13). Ten out of 21 grantees also responded to a brief survey.

In addition, the evaluation team analyzed 55 interviews that TMI grantee Convergence Center for Policy Resolution (Convergence) conducted as it was designing Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) in 2016. These interviews were conducted with experts in fiscal policy, as well as others working for organizations with interests in federal funding for specific populations or issues, such as the elderly or youth, agriculture, transportation, and universities. Some of the interviewees were also among the 54 people the evaluation team interviewed for this evaluation. The evaluation team analyzed the Convergence interviews to broaden its list of interviewees and to explore whether there were any changes over time in the perspectives of individuals interviewed for this evaluation and by Convergence, particularly in light of the intervening 2016 elections. No meaningful changes were noted.

The evaluation's interview questions were open ended. This allowed for gathering broad information and unexpected responses, and revealed for how many interviewees certain responses were top of mind. However, as a result of using this approach, response numbers do not reflect the total number of interviewees who may have offered a particular response had the interview questions been closed-ended and offered limited lists of possible responses.

## II. ABOUT THE POWER OF THE PURSE PORTFOLIO

In 2014, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation launched the Madison Initiative (TMI) and its "power of the purse" grantmaking portfolio, which was focused on generating ideas for reforming Congress's budget and appropriations processes. Between 2014 and 2018, TMI awarded grants to six grantees, with grants totaling U.S.\$4.5 million. These grants funded two convening processes: the National Budgeting Roundtable, chaired by the Brookings Institution, and the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution's (Convergence's) B3P; and work of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), and the Center for

American Progress (CAP). In 2013-2014, TMI also made modest research grants to scholars at George Mason University (GMU) and George Washington University (GWU). In addition, TMI has provided general operating support to a number of other think tanks who engage in budget policy-related work.

By the second half of 2018, portfolio grantees had achieved a number of milestones, including the publication of reports containing policy ideas for improving the Congressional budget process, highlighted by the publication of a consensus report that emerged from B3P; and the hosting of a first annual budget summit that featured the work of multiple grantees and attracted an audience of press, public, policy experts, and Congressional staff.

As Congressional elections took place in 2018 and a new shift in the political environment was anticipated, TMI wanted to review its approach with its power of the purse portfolio, considering both short-term opportunities and long-term goals.

### III. KEY FINDINGS

#### The Problem: The Budget Process or Fiscal Policy Decision Making

**All Congressional offices interviewed believed that the problem is the problem.** That is, they were concerned that lawmakers are not coming together to agree on solutions to long-term economic issues. Within this group, while some also saw the budget process as a problem (see below), others believed the process is fine, and that the problem is in people's willingness to use it. A few noted that a process cannot force political will. However, some believed that a better process can make working constructively easier, when political will is present.

**Some members of Congress and their staff were frustrated by regular delays in the budgeting and appropriations processes and the lack of consequences for this,** according to six out of 13 Congressional offices interviewed, evenly split between Democratic and Republican offices. Some were concerned about the long-term consequences of these delays. Five members of Congress and their staff – three Democrats and two Republicans – expressed concerns about the government's deficits and debt.

**Notably, Democratic offices were more likely to state that the process is fine and that the problem lies in Members' willingness to use it.** They also mentioned the impact of partisan polarization on reaching bipartisan compromise. This might result from having lost some of their moderate Republican colleagues with whom they partnered in the past to new Members of Congress

espousing more conservative views and less willing to compromise. As one interviewee noted, “There is no one more vulnerable in Congress than a moderate Republican.”

**Although two Congressional offices observed that Congress does not have time to work on two budget-related issues within one Congress – the budget process and economic and fiscal issues, they disagreed on, therefore, where Congress should place its energy.** One felt that working on process was not a good expenditure of time, while the other felt that achieving process reform would free up the time Congress needed to address bigger issues.

**Grantees, peers, and Convergence’s 2016 interviewees, with whom grantees and peers had much overlap, recognized both the process and the problem as the problem,** with many grantees and peers having greater faith than the Congressional offices interviewed in the ability of a process solution to contribute to a policy solution. Like some Congressional offices, some emphasized that the budget process and fiscal policy disputes are caught up in a much larger problem, which is the polarization that exists within Congress, and pointed to overcoming that polarization as where most attention must be paid. Some, agreeing with some Congressional offices, felt that the process may be fine, and that the problem lies in politics and policymakers’ resulting willingness to use the process.

**A number of Convergence’s 2016 interviewees felt that the current budget process was not good at helping Congress confront tradeoffs or set priorities.** They described the process as “complex,” and the budget resolution as “weak” and “inconsequential.” They observed that lawmakers distrust the budget process, because they perceive colleagues to be gaming it in favor of an outcome.

**Five Congressional offices, primarily Democratic, and a small number of Convergence interviewees felt it will take a crisis, scandal, or concerted effort by a sufficient number of people to motivate policymakers to resolve the problem.** Three Congressional offices felt Members of Congress needed greater incentives to work across the aisle, and that having a divided government or requiring a super majority could promote this.

### Compelling Ideas for Reform

**Grantees and peers were asked to name reform ideas they believed could help improve the Congressional budget process.<sup>1</sup> Because many of the grantees and peers interviewed participated in Convergence B3P, they frequently put forward the recommendations that emerged from that process as the best ideas for reform.** Some of these ideas were also supported by non-B3P participants and Convergence’s 2016 interviewees. These included, in order of how much

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<sup>1</sup> Congressional offices were not asked about ideas for reform.

support interviewees gave them:

- Adopting a budget action plan,
- Producing a fiscal state of the nation report,
- Strengthening Congressional Budget Committees,
- Regularly reviewing budget portfolios, and
- Strengthening the Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation.

Other ideas that resonated with grantees, peers, and Convergence’s 2016 interviewees mixed process and policy recommendations. Among them, the following were cited most frequently:

- Including goal setting in the budget process to make the process economic, as well as fiscal;
- Focusing more on the long term;
- Addressing the debt limit;
- Placing spending – discretionary and mandatory – and revenues on the table;
- Forcing conversations on hard choices to make Congress set budget priorities;
- Redefining how Congress uses reconciliation instructions; and
- Changing Congressional accountability and incentives (including potentially bringing back earmarks) to get the budget done.

Many other ideas were listed by small numbers of interviewees.

**Several interviewees observed that there are not a lot of new ideas out there.** They were less interested in trying to generate new ideas and more interested in seeing how those ideas could be put into action.

### **The Difference Ideas Are Making**

**Because many of the grantees and peers interviewed were Convergence B3P and National Budgeting Roundtable participants, it was not surprising that many pointed to B3P’s and NBR’s work when asked what difference these ideas and efforts to put them forward made.** They talked about:

- Adding momentum to the conversation by showing that more groups are interested in the topic and are having more discussions;
- Contributing information;

- Serving as an educational resource for Congressional offices, the public, the media, and others working on these issues;
- Offering published recommendations backed by a diverse group; and
- Demonstrating to Congress, through their process, that agreement is possible.

**Most grantees and peers interviewed felt that the work they had done over the past few years has prepared them for an open policy window.** They stated that, as a result of the work they have done together, they have ideas that have been workshoped and are ready to offer when an opportunity arises, as happened after the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC) to which they were able to offer ideas via their published report and invited testimony. They noted the broad support that these ideas have received among those working on this issue.

**Grantees were grateful to the Hewlett Foundation for helping them come together to make progress toward these ends.** They have worked with diverse groups and come up with ideas they can stand behind.

### Factors Facilitating Progress

**Many of those involved in Convergence B3P or the National Budgeting Roundtable talked about the willingness of people to come together and find common ground.** Some grantees noted that having a sizeable grant over a good period of time allowed them to engage thoughtfully and consistently on the issue. Some also pointed to external factors encouraging progress, such as broad agreement that the process is broken, as well as events demonstrating the system's dysfunction. Some talked about the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC) as creating an opening to advance the issue.

### Factors Impeding Progress

**The factors listed as impeding progress were largely the same ones identified when grantees and peers were discussing the nature of the problem:** polarization, partisan mistrust, and lack of political will in Congress to resolve the problem.

### Unexpected Results

**Grantees and peers were most surprised by the creation of the JSC.** Some were also surprised that the Convergence B3P resulted in a published consensus report with agreed upon recommendations. They were further surprised by the opportunity these two achievements provided for external organizations to interact with Congress on this issue, particularly through testifying before the Committee and broadly sharing the Convergence B3P report.

### Constructive and credible individuals and organizations

**Congressional offices, grantees, and peers identified similar groups of constructive and credible individuals and organizations dedicated to budget process reform.** There was some variation in



those identified, depending on the interviewee's political party affiliation, although a few were named by both Democrats and Republicans.

### *Congressional Perspective: Constructive and Credible Individuals and Organizations*

Members of Congress and staff listed individuals and organizations based on their expertise, constructive approaches, interest in problem solving, intellectual honesty, and ability to build trust-based relationships. They also noted individuals and organizations for their grounding in the political reality and experience in a range of political climates.

**The Congressional offices interviewed pointed to the constructive approaches of other Members of Congress.** A few Congressional offices listed current and former staffers, especially from the Budget Committees, former heads of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and others who have held positions like these in the past, due to their experience and expertise. They also listed a number of organizations.

**Three Democratic Congressional offices did not identify anyone as constructive or credible on this issue.** Two felt the focus needed to be on fiscal policy or Members' political will to work across the aisle and support compromise, rather than process reform. The third felt that the ideas being put forward were neither new nor interesting or were too modest to make a difference.

### *Grantee and Peer Perspective: Constructive and Credible Individuals and Organizations*

When asked who was putting forward the most compelling ideas on this topic, grantees and peers, like the Members of Congress and staff members, listed a broad range of organizations, individuals (current and former staffers, CBO, etc. and also academics), and Congressional offices.

They described this broad range of organizations, individuals, and Congressional offices as constructive and credible because:

- They have been working on the issue for years;
- They are bipartisan or nonpartisan, trusted by Republicans and Democrats; and/or
- They have CBO, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), or Congressional Research Service (CRS) experience, or are former Congressional staffers.

They saw these organizations and individuals:

- Generating good information and reliable data;
- Educating peers and Congress on the topic; and
- Demonstrating external support for the topic.

## The National Budgeting Roundtable

Because the National Budgeting Roundtable (NBR) convenes a large number of portfolio grantees, grantees and peers were asked to comment on it specifically. Hosted at the Brookings Institution, the [National Budgeting Roundtable](#) is a bipartisan group of scholars and practitioners working in the fields of government, budgeting, and political science who seek to improve federal budgeting. The group produces ideas for consideration by those involved in the policy process.

**The NBR is seen to be making progress**, according to those involved in it, by:

- Offering a forum for conversation among a diverse group;
- Fostering a sense of community around these issues;
- Being nonpartisan and presenting a range of views;
- Generating new information;
- Serving as an educational resource for Congress and participants; and
- Creating a body of work on the topic.

**Grantees and peers described it as comprised of thought leaders and producing good academic work on the issue.** As a result of participating in the NBR, some respondents reported knowing more and that what they have learned has influenced their work.

**Some peers stated that it primarily includes traditional budget process reformers who have been involved in these conversations for decades.** Some wondered how to bridge the gap with younger practitioners and especially Congressional staff who are unfamiliar with the issue's history. To further strengthen its effectiveness, some grantees and peers would like the NBR to have greater visibility and share ideas more frequently, especially with policymakers. They would like the NBR to move from ideas to action.

## Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P)

Because the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) project convened a large number of portfolio grantees, grantees and peers were also asked to comment on it specifically. In [Building a Better Budget Process](#), Convergence brought together people representing a diverse set of interests and perspectives to generate and reach consensus on a set of proposals aimed at improving Congress's budget process. While some participants were budget experts, others represented interests such as infrastructure, universities, and health, youth and veterans, and had not focused specifically on Congress's budget process in the past.

**Convergence B3P was praised by participants for producing a unified, common sense report on budget process reform from among diverse participants.** In accomplishing this, Convergence B3P proved that a diverse group of participants could reach consensus and demonstrated that there is an appetite for the issue.

However, the distrust that exists between left and right-leaning organizations and individuals and the effort required to overcome it were evident in some of the comments about the process's membership. There was a sense among a few on the left and the right that more organizations like them (more organizations on the left or more organizations on the right) would have been welcome and that the other side was overly represented.

**Most interviewed participants reported being able to achieve more as a result of their participation in B3P.** While some knew many other participants prior to their participation in B3P, others interviewed described building new relationships through their participation and, with these new colleagues, starting conversations about other topics of mutual interest.

**Convergence itself benefited from leading B3P.** As a result of its work, Convergence is now seen as an honest broker and has been invited to help Congress' Bipartisan Working Group in their efforts to build trust and find common ground.

**Some felt that there was nothing Convergence needed to change about its approach.** They appreciated how Convergence brought people together and facilitated a trust and consensus-building process. They further appreciated Convergence's flexibility in the process, as it faced challenges such as participants' busy schedules and a demanding external political context.

#### **TMI's grant-making approach**

**Most grantee survey respondents felt that TMI's approach to grant making significantly helped their ability to carry out this work,** while a couple reported that it was somewhat helpful. They appreciated TMI's generous and flexible funding. Where there was room for improvement, grantees asked for greater certainty and flexibility in the funding they were receiving.

**Almost all grantee survey respondents felt their TMI program officer significantly strengthened their ability to carry out this work, and all grant survey respondents state that TMI is very responsive in meeting their needs.** Grantee survey respondents described TMI as facilitating helpful introductions and offering collaboration.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**To generate ideas for reforming Congress's budget and appropriations processes, TMI funded six organizations through its power of the purse portfolio between 2014 and 2018.** TMI and its grantees recognized the larger challenge of helping Members of Congress work together across the aisle to resolve the country's long-term fiscal policy issues. They believed that by generating ideas that could improve Congress's budget and appropriations processes, they could help Congress have more time to address the larger issues, and also demonstrate to Congress that finding bipartisan agreement on fiscal issues is possible. Simultaneously, they would be showing

Members of Congress that increasing numbers of people and organizations are concerned about the country's fiscal problems and are committed to helping Congress resolve them.

**The grantees funded within this portfolio between 2014-2018 reached milestones that represented significant progress toward achieving their aims.** They published reports on budget process reform, including a report with consensus recommendations agreed by a group of stakeholders with diverse interests and perspectives; convened diverse groups of traditional budget reformers and others to generate ideas and reach consensus on recommendations about how to advance budget process reform; and educated each other and Members of Congress on these ideas through their published reports and Congressional testimony. By promoting bipartisan cooperation on budget process reform, TMI's power of the purse portfolio played an important role within the broader Madison Initiative, which seeks to "support U.S. democracy in a time of polarization."

**Grantees and peers agreed that it is now time to shift from idea generation to seeking ways to help those ideas gain traction.** They want Congress to increase its sense of urgency that the country's fiscal challenges must be resolved, as well as its perception that they can be resolved in a bipartisan way.

Based on the evaluation's findings, the following recommendations emerge for TMI:

- 1) **Continue funding budget process reform, as part of broader TMI efforts.**
- 2) **Shift to focus on what it will take to gather increasing support for these ideas,** recognizing that grantees have already generated and workshopped sufficient ideas about how the budget process can be improved.
- 3) **Foster a new generation of leaders and experts who understand the issue and who can carry it forward.**
- 4) **Continue providing general operating support, rather than project funding, wherever possible.** Providing trusted grantees with general operating support gives them more leeway to take the steps they see as necessary to advance budget process reform.
- 5) **Maintain a diverse portfolio of grantees.** Because of the profound distrust that exists between many Democrats and Republicans in Congress, as well as between many left- and right-leaning organizations that work on these issues, TMI must use care to be seen to be equally supporting all perspectives.

# I. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

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## A. PURPOSE

This retrospective evaluation examines The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative's (TMI's) power of the purse portfolio between 2014 and 2018. It reflects on the problem that the portfolio addresses and progress grantees have made responding to the problem. In this way, it adds to TMI's learning about its investments to date in its power of the purse portfolio and informs the evolution of the portfolio's strategy.

## B. METHODS

To conduct this evaluation, the evaluation team reviewed documents and conducted interviews and a survey. Documents included TMI documents relevant to the portfolio; grantee proposals and reports; documents related to the Center for Evaluation Innovation's Power of the Purse Cluster Assessment, which was completed in June 2017; and published blogs, articles, and reports. These contributed to the evaluation team's understanding of the context and portfolio and informed the interview questions.

The evaluation team conducted 54 interviews with TMI staff (2), grantees (22), peers (17), and Members of Congress and staff (13). Interviewed grantees were from TMI's power of the purse portfolio and also included other TMI grantees who do some work in that area. Peers included other members of the TMI-supported National Budgeting Roundtable and Convergence Center for Policy Resolution's (Convergence's) Building a Better Budget Process (B3P), as well as former heads of the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), former Congressional staffers who worked on the federal budget, and others who, in the past, held similar positions. The Members of Congress and staff who were interviewed either worked on budget issues or represented leadership. They included eight Democratic and five Republican offices, five Senate and eight House offices.

The evaluation team surveyed all 21 grantees included among the interviewees to gather information about TMI's grant-making approach. Ten grantees responded.

In addition, the evaluation team analyzed 55 interviews that TMI grantee Convergence conducted as it was designing B3P in 2016. There was significant overlap between Convergence's interviewees and those later interviewed as part of this evaluation. Almost half of the interviewees were experts in fiscal policy. Some were former Congressional staffers or formerly

worked for the White House, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), CBO, or the Congressional Research Service (CRS). A few had military backgrounds. Others worked or had worked for advocacy organizations, non-profit organizations, foundations, or trade associations. A number worked on particular issue areas such as elderly or youth, agriculture, transportation, or universities. While most focused on the federal level, some worked at the state or county level. The evaluation team analyzed these interviews to broaden its list of interviewees and to explore whether there were any changes over time in the perspectives of individuals interviewed for this evaluation and by Convergence, particularly in light of the intervening 2016 elections. No meaningful changes were noted.

### C. LIMITATIONS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The evaluation's interview questions were open ended. This allowed for gathering broad information, including unexpected responses, and revealed for how many interviewees certain responses were top of mind. However, as a result of using this approach, response numbers do not reflect the total number of interviewees who may have offered a particular response had the interview questions been closed-ended and offered limited lists of possible responses.

Some interview questions related to results, grantees, and collaboration were only posed to approximately half to two-thirds of the grantee and peer interviewees. As a result, for these questions, findings are based on responses from a smaller number of interviewees. They are also more heavily reflective of the perspectives of Convergence B3P staff and participants, who were all part of that smaller sample. To overcome that bias, the evaluation disaggregates findings according to B3P staff and participants vs. non-B3P participants.

Since the 2016 Convergence interviews were conducted for a different purpose, they do not all gather the same information. They also posed open-ended questions. As a result, they give a sense of ideas that were important to the interviewees, but provide less certainty regarding the number of interviewees who held particular points of view.

## II. ABOUT THE POWER OF THE PURSE PORTFOLIO

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In 2014, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation launched the Madison Initiative (TMI) and its "power of the purse" grantmaking portfolio, which was focused on generating ideas for reforming Congress's budget and appropriations processes. Between 2014 and 2018, TMI awarded grants to six grantees, with grants totaling U.S.\$4.5 million. The first three grants funded the National Budgeting Roundtable, chaired by the Brookings Institution; scholarly research on the topic; and the work of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB). A second round of grantmaking supported the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution (Convergence) to lead the

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Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) project, as well as the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) and the Center for American Progress (CAP) to make sure that a range of ideological perspectives were represented at the National Budgeting Roundtable and B3P. In 2013-2014, TMI also made modest research grants to scholars at George Mason University (GMU) and George Washington University (GWU). In addition, TMI has provided general operating support to a number of other think tanks who engage in budget policy-related work.

By the second half of 2018, portfolio grantees had achieved a number of milestones. Several of the grantees had published reports containing policy ideas for improving the Congressional budget process. Convergence had convened and facilitated a consensus-building process among a diverse group of stakeholders that resulted in a published report with agreed recommendations for budget process reform. In addition, another grantee, in collaboration with others, hosted a first annual budget summit that featured the work of multiple grantees and attracted an audience of press, public, policy experts, and Congressional staff.

As Congressional elections took place in 2018 and a new shift in the political environment was anticipated, TMI wanted to review its approach with its power of the purse portfolio, considering both short-term opportunities and long-term goals.

### III. FINDINGS

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#### THE PROBLEM: THE BUDGET PROCESS OR FISCAL POLICY DECISION MAKING

**All Congressional offices interviewed believed that the problem is the problem.** That is, they are concerned that lawmakers are not coming together to agree on solutions to long-term budget issues. Within this group, while some also saw the budget process as a problem (see below), others believed the process is fine, and that the problem is in people's willingness to use it. A few noted that a process cannot force political will. However, some believed that a better process can make working together constructively easier, when political will is present. Some pointed to the problem of incentives created by the partisan primary processes and polarization, and one noted the need for leadership to make resolving the problem a priority.

**Some members of Congress and their staff were frustrated by regular delays in the budgeting and appropriations processes and the lack of consequences for this,** according to six out of 13 Congressional offices interviewed, evenly split between Democratic and Republican offices. They talked about the polarized environment. They stated that the budgeting process had become a

political game, with some believing that some Members benefit from the brinksmanship and the leverage it gives them.

**Some were concerned about the long-term consequences of these delays.** Five members of Congress and their staff – three Democrats and two Republicans – expressed concerns about the government’s deficits and debt, with two Democrats identifying multiple deficits, including deficits in infrastructure, human capital, environmental, and climate investments. Five out of the eight Democratic Members of Congress and staff members interviewed pointed to Congress’s inability to pass long-term, bipartisan budgets that address both spending and revenue as a way to address these challenges.

*Table 1: The problem is the problem, and the process is fine, according to interviewed Congressional offices.*

|  | Democratic Offices | Republican Offices | Total Offices |
|--|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| The problem is the problem: lawmakers are not coming together to agree on solutions to long-term fiscal policy issues.         | 8                  | 5                  | 13            |
| The process is fine. People choose not to use it.  | 7                  | 2                  | 9             |
| A better process can make working constructively easier, when political will is present. (One Democrat noted: at the margins.) | 3                  | 3                  | 6             |
| The process is part of the problem.  | 2                  | 3                  | 5             |
| This is a problem of incentives created by the partisan primary process and polarization.                                      | 3                  | 1                  | 4             |
| The process is not the problem, but it does not help.  | 2                  | 1                  | 3             |
| The process cannot force political will.   | 3                  | -                  | 3             |
| Congress needs leadership to prioritize resolving this.  | -                  | 1                  | 1             |

Notably, Democratic offices were more likely to state that the process is fine and that the problem lies in Members’ willingness to use it. They also mentioned the impact of partisan polarization on reaching bipartisan compromise. This might result from having lost some of their moderate Republican colleagues with whom they partnered in the past to new Members of Congress espousing more conservative views and less willing to compromise. As one interviewee noted, “There is no one more vulnerable in Congress than a moderate Republican.”



*Table 2: Some Congressional offices differ on the greatest frustration: the budget process or the lack of political will to compromise on fiscal policy.*

| The broken process is the greatest frustration.   | The problem lies in a lack of political will, not the process.   |
|---|--|
| <p><i>“From my standpoint, the most frustrating thing is that decisions don't get made in a timely manner. When you look at the appropriations process annually, you look at the budget agreements that we seem to be doing every two to three years at this point. All of those essentially are being done at the 13th hour. So, you end up with less process to make sure you're making considered decisions. You're also making decisions generally midway through a fiscal year, meaning that you've got even less time to actually execute whatever decisions have been made properly and in a way that protects taxpayers.” — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> <p><i>“It seems unlikely that the current setup of how to execute on the broader budget process and then the 12 annual appropriations bills and then all the issues that are contained in the broader budget process [will] get through the House and Senate in that construct in any given two-year period.” — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> | <p><i>“When compromise is a dirty word, it is hard to get anything done.” — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> <p><i>“Many people in the government budget community feel that, if they build the perfect mousetrap, everyone will come along. Most people in the budget community are idealists, and at the end of the day, the realists get what they want.” — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> <p><i>“Process is a refuge for scoundrels... [The] basic problem is not the budget process. The budget process is simply one example of how our political system has crippled the legislative system.” — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> |

Although two Congressional offices observed that Congress does not have time to work on two budget-related issues within one Congress – the budget process and economic and fiscal issues, they disagreed on, therefore, where Congress should place its energy. One felt that working on process was not a good expenditure of time, while the other felt that achieving process reform would free up the time Congress needed to address bigger issues.

*Table 3: Some Congressional offices disagree on where Congress should place its energy.*

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>You don't have time to do something small and then something big.</p>   | <p>With the budget process on track, we would have time and energy to spend on the larger economic issues.</p>  |
| <p><i>"[There is] not a lot of bandwidth in Congress to do more than one thing at a time. The effort required to do one small thing, can take half a year. In the House, you have one or two years to legislate. In the House, this year we spent three months standing up the new majority. If you are continuing the status quo as the previous year, you have more time. But you don't have time to do something small and then something big. [By the time you are done doing something small,] you might have a different set of people in there making decisions." — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> | <p><i>"I think if we could get the budget and appropriations processes on track, a couple of years of doing that, we would find the time and energy to spend on the larger economic issues that befall us. We don't have time. We are spending too much time and energy working with each cliff we have to walk off." — Member of Congress or staff</i></p> |

Grantees, peers, and Convergence's 2016 interviewees, with whom grantees and peers had much overlap, recognized both the process and the problem as the problem, with many grantees and peers having greater faith than the Congressional offices interviewed in the ability of a process solution to contribute to a policy solution. This was not surprising, given that the grantees and many of the peers interviewed have chosen to work on budget process reform as a way to facilitate fiscal policy agreement.

Like some Congressional offices, some emphasized that the budget process and fiscal policy disputes are caught up in a much larger problem, which is the polarization and resulting distrust that exists within Congress. They pointed to overcoming that polarization as where attention must be paid. Some stated that Congress's structure contributes to that polarization, while others pointed to the roles played by gerrymandering and the money that flows into political campaigns.

Some, agreeing with some Congressional offices, felt that the process may be fine, and that the problem lies in politics and policymakers' resulting willingness to use the process. They pointed to disagreements regarding raising revenue, spending – both discretionary and mandatory, deficits and the size of the debt. Some noted that some lawmakers benefit from the chaos of not following the process, and would not be in favor of reform. Others felt that a focus on process was a way for some to avoid making tougher policy decisions.

**A number of Convergence’s 2016 interviewees felt that the current budget process was not good at helping Congress confront tradeoffs or set priorities.** They described the process as “complex,” and the budget resolution as “weak” and “inconsequential.” They observed that lawmakers distrust the budget process, because they perceive colleagues to be gaming it in favor of an outcome. They also noted that Congress was not using reconciliation instructions as intended. Those working at the state level or within certain industries that depend on Congressional funding, such as transportation, reported that the uncertainty created by the dysfunctional budget process was destabilizing, since both states and industries make investments that rely on long-term government funding.

**Five Congressional offices, primarily Democratic, and a small number of Convergence’s 2016 interviewees felt it will take a crisis, scandal, or concerted effort by a sufficient number of people to motivate policymakers to resolve the problem.** Two Congressional offices wondered if a crisis could be effective in this way, since the latest government shutdown did not seem to motivate action. Three Congressional offices looked to increased mobilization on the issue, both on and off the Hill, as having the greatest likelihood of inspiring change. They stated that people need to tire of polarization and demand action. Three Congressional offices felt Members of Congress needed greater incentives to work across the aisle, with having a divided government or requiring a super majority as two situations that would promote this.

**Two Congressional offices wondered if the budget process itself could garner that much attention.** They suggested that, instead, those concerned about it should have proposals ready to present when larger fiscal policy reform is being discussed or when another special process, such as a joint select committee, has been set up, so that they can put those proposals forward at that time.

Other observations included needing leadership’s political will to act on this issue, Congressional incentives, and consequences for Congress if it does not fulfill its fiscal responsibilities. One Congressional office, linking the problem to the broader problem of polarization, called for redistricting and the strengthening of the independent press.

A small number of Convergence’s 2016 interviewees felt that Congress would not reform the process until there was a change in the political environment, or when there was broad enough agreement within Congress that the process is broken and should be fixed. This group felt that reform was unlikely in the near future.

## COMPELLING IDEAS FOR REFORM

Grantees and peers were asked to name reform ideas they believed could help improve the Congressional budget process.<sup>2</sup> Because many of the grantees and peers interviewed participated in Convergence B3P, they frequently put forward the recommendations that emerged from that process as the best ideas for reform.<sup>3</sup> Some of these ideas were also supported by non-B3P participants.

*Table 4: The Convergence B3P recommendations received broad support from grantees and peers interviewed.*

| Convergence B3P recommendations               | Support received  |
|---|---|
| Budget action plan                            | <b>Support received:</b> 19 individuals – both grantees and peers, including seven who did not participate in B3P, and a number of Convergence’s original interviewees from 2016  |
|   | <b>Comments:</b> They acknowledged that this would codify existing practice and allow more time for strategic thinking. However, one peer feared that, in this way, Congress would lose some of its ability to provide oversight, while another noted that this would only be a benefit if the appropriations cycle also shifted. |
| A fiscal state of the nation report           | <b>Support received:</b> 13 individuals – both grantees and peers, including three who were not B3P participants  |
|   | <b>Comments:</b> They stated the report – covering both mandatory and discretionary spending – would inform the public about how Congress was managing the country’s finances, so that they could hold Members accountable at election time.  |
| Strengthening Congressional Budget Committees | <b>Support received:</b> Nine individuals – both grantees and peers, including three who were not B3P participants  |

<sup>2</sup> Congressional offices were not asked about ideas for reform.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix 2 for more information about Convergence B3P.

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <i>Comments:</i> Many interviewees pointed to the Budget Committees' current lack of authority. They noted that budget resolutions have become political statements and, in some years, are not passed. A few outside B3P agreed that having the Chairs of the Appropriations, House Ways and Means, and Senate Finance Committees co-chair the Budget Committees would strengthen them, since the same people passing the budget would also implement the ideas. |
| Regularly reviewing budget portfolios                                     | <i>Support received:</i> Eight individuals - both grantees and peers, including three who were not B3P participants, and a number of Convergence's original interviewees from 2016  |
|   | <i>Comments:</i> They listed regularly reviewing budget portfolios – including both mandatory and discretionary spending – as an important way to improve the budget process.   |
| Strengthening Congressional Budget Office and Joint Committee on Taxation | <i>Support received:</i> Five individuals – both grantees and peers   |
|   | <i>Comments:</i> They listed strengthening the Congressional Budget Office and the Joint Committee on Taxation as an important way to strengthen the budget process.  |

Other ideas that resonated with grantees, peers, and Convergence interviewees mixed process and policy recommendations. Among them, the following were cited most frequently:

- Including goal setting in the budget process to make the process economic, as well as fiscal;
- Focusing more on the long term;
- Addressing the debt limit;
- Placing spending – discretionary and mandatory – and revenues on the table;
- Forcing conversations on hard choices to make Congress set budget priorities;
- Redefining how Congress uses reconciliation instructions; and
- Changing Congressional accountability and incentives (including potentially bringing back earmarks) to get the budget done.

Many other ideas were listed by small numbers of interviewees.

Several interviewees observed that there are not a lot of new ideas out there. One person noted that similar conversations took place leading up to the Budget Act of 1974 and in the 1980s. Because of that, this person was less interested in trying to generate new ideas and more interested in seeing how those ideas could be put into action. The National Budgeting Roundtable leadership similarly reported that they are now “talking more about what it takes to move ideas forward vs. focusing on the policy changes themselves.”

*“The challenge with budget process reform is that there are not a ton of new ideas out there. It is rather remarkable when you go back and read the debates leading up to the Budget Act of 1974 that created the modern budget process, how much these exact same conversations are being had. Same in the 1980s. If the goal is to fund is to new ideas about budget process reform, I don’t think you’ll get a lot of new ideas. If we’ve defined a universe of approaches around budget process reforms – reports people have put forward, think about how do these think about the democratic process more broadly and how do we get these things done, that’s worth funding.” - Grantee*

### THE DIFFERENCE IDEAS ARE MAKING

Because many of the grantees and peers interviewed were Convergence B3P and National Budgeting Roundtable (NBR) participants, it was not surprising that many pointed to B3P’s and NBR’s work when asked what difference these ideas and efforts to put them forward made.

They talked about:

- Adding momentum to the conversation by showing that more groups are interested in the topic and having more discussions;
- Contributing information;
- Serving as an educational resource for Congressional offices, the public, the media, and others working on these issues;
- Offering published recommendations backed by a diverse group; and
- Demonstrating to Congress, through their process, that agreement is possible.

**Most grantees and peers interviewed felt that the work they had done over the past few years has prepared them for an open policy window.** They stated that, as a result of the work they have done together, they have ideas that have been workshopped and are ready to offer when an opportunity arises, as happened after the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC) to which they were able to offer ideas via their published report and invited testimony. They noted the broad support that these ideas have received among those working on this issue.

*“Somebody I know said that places like Brookings, etc. are like the monasteries keeping the flames burning during the Dark Ages. We need people to keep focus on these issues to lay the foundation for changes that will happen in the future. I don’t think they’ve had much impact today. I think they are important investments in the future.” – Peer organization*

*“When the policy windows open, it will be important to have these ideas in place. We won’t have time then to do the fine tuning. It is important to have experts workshop these ideas, so that they are available and thought through.” – Peer organization*

**Grantees were grateful to the Hewlett Foundation for helping them come together to make progress toward these ends.** They have worked with diverse groups and come up with ideas they can stand behind.

*“In the past, the focus has been on a laundry list. In the last few years, thanks in part to the Hewlett grantees, we have been thinking about how we get from A to B. We have talked about what it takes to move ideas forward vs. focusing on the policy changes themselves.” – Grantee*

*“TMI encourages collaboration, reduces partisanship, and gets people working together.” – Grantee*

*“With Convergence B3P and the NBR, we had ideas and groups of people ready to respond to ideas that Congress was putting forward. This was really important.” – Grantee*

*“That’s the reason for funding processes like this, because you never know what is going to happen.” – Grantee*

*“If you don’t have those time-tested ideas in there, then politicians have nothing to coalesce around.” – Grantee*

## FACTORS FACILITATING PROGRESS

Some grantees noted that having a sizeable grant over a good period of time allowed them to **engage thoughtfully and consistently on the issue**. One grantee noted, “You can think about work that is funded. Other work you get to it in your spare time when you can.”

Many of those involved in Convergence B3P or the National Budgeting Roundtable talked about **the willingness of people to come together and find common ground**. They praised both initiatives’ processes for bringing together diverse groups of people and building trust among participants. They appreciated the opportunity to think about the issue in new ways and from different perspectives.

Some also pointed to **external factors encouraging progress**, such as broad agreement that the process is broken, as well as events demonstrating the system’s dysfunction.

Some talked about the creation of the Joint Select Committee on Budget and Appropriations Process Reform (JSC) as **creating an opening to advance the issue**. They also talked about progress made by the JSC, pointing to the benefits of cross-aisle relationship building, trust, and an openness to learn from each other.

## FACTORS IMPEDING PROGRESS

The factors listed as **impeding progress were largely the same ones identified when grantees and peers were discussing the nature of the problem**: polarization, partisan mistrust, and lack of political will in Congress to resolve the problem. A few also noted that this is a hard issue that is no one’s top priority and is not of interest to the public. Further, one noted, it is unclear what needs to be done procedurally to improve it.

## UNEXPECTED RESULTS

**Grantees and peers were most surprised by the creation of the JSC**, which they acknowledged was then-Speaker Paul Ryan’s idea and was not influenced by their external efforts. Some were also surprised that the Convergence B3P resulted in a published consensus report with agreed upon recommendations. They were further surprised by the opportunity these two achievements provided for external organizations to interact with Congress on this issue, particularly through testifying before the Committee and broadly sharing the Convergence B3P report.

## CONSTRUCTIVE AND CREDIBLE INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS

**Congressional offices, grantees, and peers identified similar groups of constructive and credible individuals and organizations dedicated to budget process reform**. There was some variation in those identified, depending on the interviewee’s political party affiliation, although a few were seen as constructive and credible by both Democrats and Republicans.

Some individuals and organizations may have been named more frequently, if interviewees had been presented with a list from which to choose. However, it is significant to note which



individuals and organizations were top of mind for interviewees, in response to this open-ended question.

### **Congressional Perspective: Constructive and Credible Individuals and Organizations**

Members of Congress and staff listed individuals and organizations based on their expertise, constructive approaches, interest in problem solving, intellectual honesty, and ability to build trust-based relationships. These individuals and organizations were also noted for their grounding in the political reality and experience in a range of political climates.

**The Congressional offices interviewed pointed to the constructive approaches of other Members of Congress.** A few Congressional offices listed current and former staffers, especially from the Budget Committees, former heads of CBO, and others who have held positions like these in the past, due to their experience and expertise.

**Congressional offices identified a number of characteristics that made organizations constructive and reliable.** According to their observations,

- These organizations come in with credible information, offer helpful analysis and solutions, and create a good working relationship.
- They are consistent and insightful.
- They can bring together diverse groups and help them reach consensus.

Two offices that offered critiques were seeking new ideas and bold recommendations or disagreed with some of the organizations' approaches.

**Three Democratic Congressional offices did not identify anyone as constructive or convincing on this issue.** Two felt the focus needed to be on the budget or Members' political will to work across the aisle and support compromise, rather than process reform. The third, as noted above, felt that the ideas being put forward were neither new nor interesting or were too modest to make a difference.

*“Show me someone talking about budget process, and I see someone not interested in policy reform.” – Member of Congress or staff person*

### **Grantee and Peer Perspective: Constructive and Credible Individuals and Organizations**

When asked who was putting forward the most compelling ideas on this topic, grantees and peers, like the Members of Congress and staff members, listed a broad range of organizations, individuals, and Congressional offices. They described them as constructive and credible because:

- They have been working on the issue for years;
- They are bipartisan or nonpartisan, trusted by Republicans and Democrats;
- They are able to convene diverse groups of experts on the topic;
- They are able to produce consensus ideas; and/or
- They have CBO, OMB, or CRS experience or are former Congressional staffers.

They saw these organizations and individuals:

- Generating good information and reliable data;
- Educating peers and Congress on the topic; and
- Demonstrating external support for the topic.

### THE NATIONAL BUDGETING ROUNDTABLE

Because the National Budgeting Roundtable (NBR) convenes a large number of portfolio grantees, grantees and peers were asked to comment on it specifically. Hosted at the Brookings Institution, the [National Budgeting Roundtable](#) is a bipartisan group of scholars and practitioners working in the fields of government, budgeting, and political science who seek to improve public budgeting. The group produces ideas for consideration by those involved in the policy process.

**The NBR is seen to be making progress**, according to those involved in it, by:

- Offering a forum for conversation among a diverse group;
- Fostering a sense of community around these issues;
- Being nonpartisan and presenting a range of views;
- Generating new information;
- Serving as an educational resource for Congress and participants; and
- Creating a body of work on the topic.

**Those not directly involved with the National Budgeting Roundtable described it as comprised of thought leaders and producing good academic work on the issue.** They stated that it brings together different voices, offers historical memory, and provides a safe forum to test ideas. Its composition gives it credibility on the left and right and makes it a “fair umpire” on budget process.

Some grantees and peers observed that the NBR primarily includes traditional budget process reformers who have been involved in these conversations for decades. They described them as a good range of practitioners and academics, with appreciation for outside speakers. However, some wondered how to bridge the gap with younger practitioners and especially Congressional staff who are unfamiliar with the issue's history. A few would like Congressional staff to attend more frequently, although a few also recognized that that would change the tone and focus of the conversation.

*“Sometimes it feels a bit like the veterans of budget wars past: the budget wonk equivalent of the American Legion Post.... We need to find a way to explain to young congressional staff why the budget process is the way it is, so that they can think about how it can be different.” - Peer*

*“It is a bunch of older players in the budget process who worked on the Hill or in the executive branch, as well as some people from other think tanks that Hewlett is supporting, I presume. It has been quite good at reaching out to Hill staff, although Hill staff participate rather minimally, I would say, but that's because of the nature of the work demands that they're under. Whenever individuals show up from the Hill or executive branch, it's clear that they are getting a lot out of this.” - Peer*

As a result of participating in the NBR, some respondents reported knowing more and that what they have learned has influenced their work. Among interviewed grantees and peers, a few reported knowing NBR participants before, while some stated they met people via the NBR and, in some cases, have invited these new connections to participate in their organizations' activities. A few reported greater visibility for their work, as a result of their participation.

To further strengthen its effectiveness, some grantees and peers would like the NBR to have greater visibility and share ideas more frequently, especially with policymakers. They would like the NBR to move from ideas to action. The biggest obstacle it was seen to face in this regard was that, by not focusing on consensus, it could not produce public statements broadly supported by its participants. A few participants would like it to be a source of new thinking by producing papers with recommendations about what should be done. A few participants pointed to the challenge of remaining committed to advancing budget process issues within the current political context.

Participants listed a number of other opportunities for the NBR to strengthen its effectiveness, with each being named by one person:

- If there are a small number of people, most without power, who are interested in these issues, what new ways can be found to help the group have influence?
- There is a gap between those who have been involved in these issues for decades and many Congressional staff who are unfamiliar with the issues' history. What role can the NBR to play bringing in and educating the next generation?
- Some say that the same ideas have been put forward over the decades. What will it take to lead to uptake? (Stuart Butler, who leads the NBR, has noted a focus on this.)

### CONVERGENCE BUILDING A BETTER BUDGET PROCESS (B3P)

Because the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) convened a large number of portfolio grantees, grantees and peers were asked to comment on it specifically. In [Building a Better Budget Process](#), Convergence brought together people representing a diverse set of interests and perspectives to generate and reach consensus on a set of proposals aimed at improving Congress's budget process. While some participants were budget experts, others represented interests such as universities and health, youth and veterans, and had not focused specifically on Congress's budget process in the past.<sup>4</sup>

**Convergence B3P was praised by participants for producing a unified, common sense report on budget process reform from among participants with diverse perspectives and interests.** In accomplishing this, Convergence B3P proved that such a group of participants could reach consensus and demonstrated that there is an appetite for the issue.

**Most interviewed participants felt that no category of organizations or people was missing.** While the participants represented many important budget stakeholders, one regretted AARP's absence, since Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are central to many budget debates.

**However, the distrust that exists between left and right-leaning organizations and individuals and the effort required to overcome it were evident in some of the comments about the process's membership.** There was a sense among a few on the left and the right that more organizations like them (more organizations on the left or more organizations on the right) would have been welcome and that the other side was overly represented. A participant on the right wished there had been more think tanks on the right. This participant felt that the group was comprised of too many budget stakeholders and left-leaning think tanks who were in favor of spending more money. In contrast, three participants wished more left-leaning advocacy groups had participated. One, identified by many grantees and peers as on the left, described itself as "in the center of progressives," and wished that some organizations that were more "truly on the left"

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<sup>4</sup> For an overview of B3P, see Appendix 2.

had engaged. Another speculated that perhaps some left-leaning advocacy groups were wary of participating because of the conservative groups there, and they worried that a process presented as objective would actually favor fiscal outcomes supported by conservatives.

**While some knew many other participants prior to their participation in B3P, others interviewed described building new relationships through their participation and, with these new colleagues, starting conversations about other topics of mutual interest.** One was grateful that Convergence, with the Hewlett Foundation's support, was forcing participants to engage with people on different parts of the ideological spectrum. S/he noted that, absent this opportunity, this was not something s/he would do naturally. Another noted that participating in B3P led to her/his raised visibility and invitations to interact with other participants in other venues. One participant representing one side of the political spectrum reported continuing to follow the work of another participant's organization on the other side of the political spectrum. S/he said s/he recently retweeted news about a report the other organization had just published.

Convergence also benefited from new relationships it forged through B3P. Convergence staff reported that, as a result of their participation in the process, two B3P participants joined Convergence, one as a member of Convergence's Board of Trustees and another on its Leadership Council, while others are talking with Convergence about being engaged in other Convergence-led processes.

**Most interviewed participants reported being able to achieve more as a result of their participation in B3P.** Most reported that it added to their thinking, while a few said that budget process reform became more of a priority for their organizations.

**Convergence itself benefited from leading B3P.** As a result of its work, Convergence is now seen as an honest broker and has been invited to help Congress' Bipartisan Working Group in their efforts to build trust and find common ground.

**The biggest challenge Convergence B3P faced was the political context.** This included maintaining participants' focus on a lower-priority issue, in spite of other activity taking place within Congress. The passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act during the Convergence B3P highlighted participants' ideological differences, as they were trying to forge common ground. One participant, considering the Senate leadership's lack of support for the JSC, asked, "What does a consensus process do about people in powerful positions who are not interested in consensus?"

Participants also mentioned the following challenges at least once: keeping busy participants engaged, reaching consensus, and getting the message out. One person noted that, while it was good to have diversity among participants, it is important to make sure that budget process experts are in charge of the messaging.

**Some felt that there was nothing Convergence needed to change about its approach.** They appreciated how Convergence brought people together and facilitated a trust and consensus building process. They further appreciated Convergence’s flexibility in the process, as it faced challenges such as participants’ busy schedules and a demanding external political context.

**To further strengthen Convergence B3P’s effectiveness,** a few wanted to broaden the constituency at the table and agree earlier on a stronger communication and outreach plan.

### TMI’S GRANT-MAKING APPROACH

**Most grantee survey respondents felt that TMI’s approach to grant making significantly helped their ability to carry out this work,** while a couple reported that it was somewhat helpful.

**They appreciated TMI’s generous and flexible funding.** They described TMI as unusual in funding governance and institutional reform, while other foundations focus exclusively on issues. One commented, “TMI is one of the most engaged funders in this work, and takes the role of social science research more seriously than most other funders in this space.”

**Where there was room for improvement, grantees asked for greater certainty and flexibility in the funding they were receiving.** They asked for longer duration grants or greater certainty that funding would be renewed, so that they could focus on carrying out the work, with less anxiety about receiving ongoing support for it. They also valued general operating support, because it maximizes organizational flexibility.

**Almost all grantee survey respondents felt their TMI program officer significantly strengthened their ability to carry out this work, and all grant survey respondents state that TMI is very responsive or helpful in meeting their needs.** They described their TMI program officer as “a good partner” and “[getting] involved in the right ways at the right time” by helping grantees make connections, sharing information that helped grantees advance their work, and taking time to be involved in their work.

**Grantee survey respondents described TMI as facilitating helpful introductions and offering collaboration.** They valued TMI’s efforts to bring grantees working on similar issues together through convening, introductions, and a listserv where grantees could share information about their work. This opened the possibility for new collaborations. They valued the introductions TMI made to other stakeholders who work on budget process reform. They also valued TMI’s insights into the political landscape, which helped inform grantees’ work.

## IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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To generate ideas for reforming Congress’s budget and appropriations processes, TMI funded six organizations through its power of the purse portfolio between 2014 and 2018. TMI and its grantees recognized the larger challenge of helping Members of Congress work together across the aisle to resolve the country’s long-term fiscal policy issues. They believed that by generating ideas that could help improve Congress’s budget and appropriations processes, they could help Congress have more time to address the larger issues, and also demonstrate to Congress that finding bipartisan agreement on fiscal issues is possible. At the same time, they would be showing Members of Congress that increasing numbers of people and organizations are concerned about the country’s fiscal problems and are committed to helping Congress resolve them.

The grantees funded within this portfolio between 2014-2018 reached milestones that represented significant progress toward achieving their aims. They published reports on budget process reform, including a report with consensus recommendations agreed by a group of stakeholders with diverse interests and perspectives; convened diverse groups of traditional budget reformers and others to generate ideas and reach consensus on recommendations about how to advance budget process reform; and educated each other and Members of Congress on these ideas through their published reports and Congressional testimony. By promoting bipartisan cooperation on budget process reform, TMI’s power of the purse portfolio played an important role within the broader Madison Initiative, which seeks to “support U.S. democracy in a time of polarization.”

Grantees and peers agreed that it is now time to shift from idea generation to seeking ways to help those ideas gain traction. They want Congress to increase its sense of urgency that the country’s fiscal challenges must be resolved, as well as its perception that they can be resolved in a bipartisan way.

Based on the evaluation’s findings, the following recommendations emerge for TMI:

- 1) **Continue funding budget process reform, as part of broader TMI efforts.**
- 2) **Shift to focus on what it will take to gather increasing support for these ideas**, recognizing that grantees have already generated and workshopped sufficient ideas about how the budget process can be improved.

- 3) **Foster a new generation of leaders and experts who understand the issue and who can carry it forward.**
- 4) **Continue providing general operating support, rather than project funding, wherever possible.** Providing trusted grantees with general operating support gives them more leeway to take the steps they see as necessary to advance budget process reform.
- 5) **Maintain a portfolio of grantees with diverse perspectives.** Because of the profound distrust that exists between many Democrats and Republicans in Congress, as well as between many left- and right-leaning organizations that work on these issues, TMI must use care to be seen to be equally supporting all perspectives.



## APPENDIX 1. EVALUATION TEAM

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**Carlisle Levine, Ph.D., President and CEO, BLE Solutions, LLC (lead evaluator)** is an advocacy, peacebuilding and international development evaluator with 26 years of international development experience and 19 years of evaluation experience, 11 of which have been focused on advocacy evaluation. She is a skilled facilitator and trainer with expertise in leading complex evaluations, building staff evaluation capacity, developing M&E systems, fostering collaborative learning processes within dispersed and diverse teams, and developing knowledge sharing systems. Her work has contributed to organizational strategic decision making and more effective practices for foundations, international non-governmental organizations and the U.S. government. Clients have included the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts, The Mastercard Foundation, the U.S. Institute of Peace, Save the Children, InterAction and Rise Up, among others. Prior to launching her own business, Carlisle worked for CARE USA, Catholic Relief Services, USAID and the Inter-American Foundation and with InterAction; her work has taken her to Latin America, Central and West Africa and Europe.

**David Shorr** spent the bulk of his career as an advocate in the foreign policy community. After an extended consultancy in 2014-2015 to handle the wind-down of the Hewlett Foundation's Nuclear Security Initiative, he has been building an evaluation practice focused on organizations active in the policy realm, with special emphasis on Congress, which has been the subject of four of his recent projects. David's clients have included the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Democracy Fund, Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Aspen Institute. As a subcontractor for the Center for Evaluation Innovation, David evaluated Madison Initiative grants to Partnership for a Secure America and the Faith and Politics Institute.

## APPENDIX 2. CONVERGENCE B3P – OVERVIEW, PRINCIPLES, AND PROPOSALS

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In November 2016, Convergence convened the [Building a Better Budget Process \(B3P\)](#) project to generate ideas for reforming the federal budget process. B3P brought together 23 stakeholders representing a range of interests and diverse perspectives. While some stakeholders were federal budget experts, others had never before made the federal budget process a top priority. This latter group included stakeholders whose primary interests were infrastructure, health, universities, veterans, or youth, among other topics.

Over the course of a little more than a year, Convergence guided the B3P stakeholders in reaching consensus on nine principles to steer their work and by which to judge the appropriateness of the recommendations they generated and five proposals that could improve Congress’s budget process. They captured both in a published report that attracted Congressional attention and presented them to Congress as part of invited testimony.

The nine principles included the following, according to the [published report](#):

- **“Comprehensive:** The budget process should consider and oversee all of the government’s financial resources, spending and revenue of all kinds, over the short and long-term.
- **Unbiased:** The budget process should not tilt toward a specific outcome, or ideology.
- **Strategic:** The budget process should develop and establish a plan that includes clear and achievable goals for fiscal policy and guides budgetary decision making.
- **Inclusive:** The process should allow for differing viewpoints, including majority, minority, and stakeholder opinions, to be presented and discussed in an open and structured debate.
- **Durable:** The budget process should be durable across administrations, Congresses, the political environment, the economic climate, and time.
- **Informed:** The budget process should be informed by objective, independent, non-partisan, and high-quality data that is accessible to all users.
- **Transparent:** The steps of the budget process should be clear and understandable to all users including lawmakers, executive agencies, and the public.
- **Predictable:** The budget process should be completed according to meaningful and achievable deadlines.
- **Simple:** The budget process should be as straightforward as possible.”

The five proposals included the following, according to Convergence’s [press release](#):

1. **“A Budget Action Plan**—negotiated by the President and Congress at the beginning of a new Congress and enacted into law—to synchronize the budget cycle with the electoral cycle and to change expectations for the process. The plan would make certain key fiscal decisions – setting discretionary funding levels and adjusting the debt limit, for example – for a two-year period.
2. **A Fiscal State of the Nation Report**, published every four years at a key point in the national election cycle, to make the federal budget more accessible to the American public and elevate the discourse about the country’s finances.
3. **A review of the performance of portfolios of federal programs that involve long-term or inter-generational commitments** (e.g., retirement security, health coverage, education or national security). This review conducted by Congress, through the Government Accountability Office, would reinforce the importance of the long-term effects of budget decisions.
4. **Strengthening the Budget Committees** by revising the membership rules and assigning responsibility to create new expectations for the budget process so that Congress and the public can expect more timely action on budget decisions.
5. **Investment in agencies that support the congressional budget process, including the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT)**, so these institutions can continue to provide high-quality and independent information the nation relies on in making budgetary choices.”

## APPENDIX 3. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

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1. Interview protocol – Grantees
2. Survey protocol – Grantees
3. Interview protocol – Peers and peer organizations
4. Interview protocol – Members of Congress and staff

## 1. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - GRANTEES

### Introduction

Thank you for taking time to talk with us about the Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative's work on budget process reform. The Foundation has contracted us – Carlisle Levine of BLE Solutions and David Shorr – to gather insights into the overall direction of the portfolio, experience since 2014, and the assumptions underlying it, the kinds of progress its grantees are making, and the nature of the relationship between the Foundation and its grantees. Our evaluation will inform the portfolio's direction moving forward. This conversation is an important part of the feedback we're gathering.

Today's conversation will take approximately 60 minutes. Your individual responses will be confidential. We are talking with all six Hewlett grantees in this portfolio and to six more grantees who have undertaken similar work. We are also talking with some of your peer organizations and key Congressional offices. We will combine all the information we are receiving and draw out common themes, which we will present grouped into categories such as Hewlett Foundation grantees, other experts, and Members of Congress and staff. We will produce an internal report for the Foundation, as well as a public report to which you will have access.

A note on confidentiality: for purposes of our report to the Foundation, most of this interview will be conducted on a for-attribution basis. As it seems useful, we will sometimes refer—only in the confidential internal report—to categories of interviewees (grantees, other experts, Members of Congress and staff) or, when appropriate, to specific organizations. That will help the Foundation better understand how the evaluation findings can be used to inform strategic decision making.

However, we recognize that some questions may be sensitive, such as the questions about TMI's grantmaking approach. If you would prefer that your responses to these or any other questions remain confidential and not be attributed to you or your organization, we will honor that. Please just flag those questions for us. In addition, we won't share the interview transcripts with anyone, and any information you provide will not be attributed in the public version of our evaluation report.

Do you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality?

For the sake of accuracy, I would like to record this interview. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Do you have any additional questions or concerns before we begin?

For all of our questions, please think about efforts made between 2014 and 2018 to inform Congress' reform of its fiscal policy process.

### Section 1: Results

Please think about efforts made between 2014 and the end of 2018 to pave the way for reform of Congress' fiscal policy process.

1. What are some of the main ideas that you have generated as an individual, organization, or as part of a group to open the possibilities for reform?
  - a. Which organizations or groups were involved in generating these ideas?
  - b. What specific problem(s) did these ideas seek to address?
  - c. What difference do you think generating these ideas has made?
  - d. Given the assessments you've just offered, to what degree do you feel the budget policy community has laid the ground with analyses or broad principles to be ready for policy windows, or even help them open?
2. What factors have helped you make progress on these issues?
3. What factors have inhibited your progress and how have you responded to these factors?
4. Have you experienced any unexpected results, based on your efforts, positive or negative? If yes, what were they, and how did they come about?
5. What have you learned and how, as a result, did you change your strategy for budget process work over the last four years?
6. How does your organization track, measure and report its impact? How helpful have you found this, and are you considering any changes?

### Section 2: Grantees and collaboration

We now have some questions about the composition of Hewlett grantees in this portfolio and how you work together.

7. When you think about the different members of the Hewlett Foundation's budget process reform portfolio, how would you describe the relative roles, strengths and contributions of different grantee organizations?

8. Thinking particularly about the National Budgeting Roundtable,
  - a. What do you see as the Roundtable's goal(s)?
  - b. What progress has the Roundtable made toward advancing its goals? How has this come about?
  - c. What obstacles has the Roundtable faced when trying to advance its goals? How has it worked to overcome these?
  - d. To what degree does the Roundtable consist of the members who are required to meet its needs? Are any types of members missing? Please explain.
    - i. In what ways has the Roundtable adjusted its membership over time to meet its changing needs?
  - e. What role does your organization play in the Roundtable, and what has been your organization's primary contribution?
  - f. Have you forged any especially useful relationships or collaborations in the Roundtable, and for what purposes?
    - i. Are there other organizations within the Roundtable with which your organization should be connecting but is not? Please explain.
  - g. To what degree does participating in the Roundtable enhance your organization's ability to generate ideas about how Congress can improve its fiscal decision making?
    - i. To what degree is your organization able to achieve more by participating in the Roundtable than your organization could achieve on its own?
  - h. What changes, if any, might strengthen what the Roundtable is able to achieve?
9. Thinking particularly about the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P),
  - a. What did you see as the Convergence B3P's goal(s)?
  - b. What progress did the Convergence B3P make toward advancing its goals? How did this come about?
  - c. What obstacles did the Convergence B3P face when trying to advance its goals? How did it work to overcome these?

- d. To what degree did the Convergence B3P consist of the members required to meet its needs? Were any types of members missing? Please explain.
  - i. In what ways did the Convergence B3P adjust its membership over time to meet its changing needs?
- e. What role did your organization play in the Convergence B3P, and what were your organization's primary contribution?
- f. Did you forge any especially useful relationships or collaborations in the Convergence B3P, and for what purposes?
  - i. Were there other organizations within the Convergence B3P with which your organization should have connected but did not? Please explain.
- g. To what degree did participating in the Convergence B3P enhance your organization's ability to generate ideas about how Congress could improve its fiscal decision making?
  - i. To what degree was your organization able to achieve more by participating in the Convergence B3P than your organization could have achieved on its own?
- h. What changes, if any, might have strengthened what the Convergence B3P was able to achieve?

### Section 3: General

The questions that follow are about the portfolio's assumptions. The Hewlett Initiative seeks to support broadly Congress's ability to exercise its constitutional powers of the purse. It thinks of these as taxing and spending, with the budget process being a link between the two, in which Congress sets national priorities that both taxing and spending must support.

- 10. Is the process the problem or is the problem (the ideological divide between the parties on taxing and spending) the problem? Could reforming the budget process help bridge the ideological divide, so that the parties can constructively resolve taxing and spending issues? Please explain.

### Section 4: TMI's grant-making approach

We sent you questions about how the Hewlett Foundation's Madison Initiative has worked with you. Thank you for your responses to them. At this point, we want to check in with you on them to see if there's anything you'd like to add. (We will not go through these questions one by one. Rather, we'll refer to the section in general and ask for any further comments.)



11. To what extent did TMI's approach to grant making help you or inhibit your ability, individually and collectively, to carry out this work? For example, please think about project support vs. general operating support and when each is most appropriate. Or think about grants and whether or not overhead is covered. Or the requirements and duration of the grant application and reporting cycles.
  - a. Are there any changes TMI should consider for the next phase?
12. To what degree has your TMI program officer been engaged with your organization in the ways that help you or inhibit your ability to carry out this work?
  - a. Are there things that your TMI program officer or others in The Madison Initiative have been doing that you would prefer they not do? Are there other things that you'd like your TMI program officer or others in The Madison Initiative to do to better support your work?
13. In what ways does TMI provide you with meaningful, non-grant support, such as facilitating introductions and collaboration?
  - b. Would you like more of this type of support or is the amount you receive sufficient? Please explain.
14. Are there ways in which TMI could be more responsive to or helpful in meeting your needs? Please explain.
15. Have you been able to acquire resources from other funders to also support this work? If yes, from whom?

*Thank you for your time!*

## 2. SURVEY PROTOCOL – GRANTEES

### Introduction

Thank you for taking time to provide us with information about the Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative’s work on budget process reform. The Foundation has contracted us – Carlisle Levine of BLE Solutions and David Shorr – to gather insights into the overall direction of the portfolio, experience since 2014, and the assumptions underlying it, the kinds of progress its grantees are making, and the nature of the relationship between the Foundation and its grantees. Our evaluation will inform the portfolio’s direction moving forward.

This brief survey is an important part of the feedback we’re gathering. It should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Your individual responses will be confidential. They will be combined with the responses of Hewlett’s six grantees in this portfolio, and we will pull out key emerging themes to share with the Foundation. Please be in touch with Carlisle Levine ([carlisle.levine@blesolutions.com](mailto:carlisle.levine@blesolutions.com)) with any questions or concerns.

For all of our questions, please think about efforts made between 2014 and 2018 to inform Congress’ reform of its fiscal policy process.

### TMI’s grant-making approach

These questions ask about how the Hewlett Foundation has worked with you.

1. To what extent did TMI’s approach to grant making help you or inhibit your ability to carry out this work? For example, please think about project support vs. general operating support and when each is most appropriate; whether or not overhead is covered; the requirements and duration of the grant application and reporting cycles; etc. (please select one)
  - a. It significantly helped our ability to carry out this work.
  - b. It somewhat helped our ability to carry out this work.
  - c. It neither helped nor inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
  - d. It somewhat inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
  - e. It significantly inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
2. Please explain your answer to question 1. Are there any changes TMI should consider in its approach to grant making for the next phase? (text response)

3. During your grant implementation period, to what degree has your TMI program officer been engaged with your organization in the ways that help you or inhibit your ability to carry out this work? (please select one)
  - a. They significantly helped our ability to carry out this work.
  - b. They somewhat helped our ability to carry out this work.
  - c. They neither helped nor inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
  - d. They somewhat inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
  - e. They significantly inhibited our ability to carry out this work.
4. Please explain your answer to question 3. Are there things that your TMI program officer or others in The Madison Initiative have been doing that you would prefer they not do? Are there other things that you'd like your TMI program officer or others in The Madison Initiative to do to better support your work? (text response)
5. In what ways does TMI provide you with meaningful, non-grant support, such as facilitating introductions and collaboration? (text response)
6. Would you like more non-grant support or is the amount you receive sufficient or too much? (Multiple choice: more/sufficient/too much)
7. To what degree is TMI responsive to or helpful in meeting your needs? (please select one)
  - a. Very responsive and/or helpful
  - b. Somewhat responsive and/or helpful
  - c. Somewhat unresponsive and or unhelpful
  - d. Very unresponsive and or unhelpful
8. Please explain your answer to question 7. Are there ways in which TMI could be more responsive to or helpful in meeting your needs? (text response)
9. Have you been able to acquire resources from other funders to also support this work? (Y/N)
  - a. If yes, from whom? (text response)

*Thank you for your time!*

### 3. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – PEERS AND PEER ORGANIZATIONS

#### Introduction

Thank you for taking time to talk with us about the Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative’s work on budget process reform. The Foundation has contracted us – Carlisle Levine of BLE Solutions and David Shorr – to gather insights into the overall direction of the portfolio and the assumptions underlying it, the kinds of progress its grantees made over the last four years, and the nature of the relationship between the Foundation and its grantees. Our evaluation will inform the portfolio’s direction moving forward. This conversation is an important part of the feedback we’re gathering.

Today’s conversation will take approximately 45 minutes. Your individual responses will be confidential. We are talking with 20-25 organizations working in this area. We are also talking with key Congressional offices. We will combine all the information we are receiving and draw out common themes, which we will present grouped into categories such as Hewlett Foundation grantees, other experts, and Members of Congress and staff. We will produce an internal report for the Foundation, as well as a public report to which you will have access.

A note on confidentiality: for purposes of our report to the Foundation, most of this interview will be conducted on a for-attribution basis. As it seems useful, we will sometimes refer—only in the confidential internal report—to categories of interviewees (grantees, other experts, Members of Congress and staff) or, when appropriate, to specific organizations. That will help the Foundation better understand how the evaluation findings can be used to inform strategic decision making.

However, we recognize that some questions may be sensitive. If you would prefer that your responses to these or any other questions remain confidential and not be attributed to you or your organization, we will honor that. Please just flag those questions for us. In addition, we won’t share the interview transcripts with anyone, and any information you provide will not be attributed in the public version of our evaluation report.

Do you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality?

For the sake of accuracy, I would like to record this interview. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Do you have any additional questions or concerns before we begin?

For all of our questions, please think about efforts made between 2014 and 2018 to inform Congress’ reform of its fiscal policy process.

## Section 1: Results

Please think about efforts made between 2014 and the end of 2018 to pave the way for reform of Congress' fiscal policy process.

1. Among the ideas generated, which struck you as opening the possibilities for reform?
  - a. Which organizations or groups were involved in generating these ideas?
  - b. What specific problem(s) did these ideas seek to address?
  - c. What difference do you think generating these ideas has made?
  - d. Given the assessments you've just offered, do you feel the budget policy community has laid the ground with analyses or broad principles to be ready for policy windows, or even help them open?
2. What factors have helped these efforts make progress on these issues?
  - a. What factors have inhibited their progress and how have those involved responded to these factors?
3. Who do you see as particularly influential on fiscal process reform and why? In other words, which are the voices you find most constructive and credible?
  - a. What about them makes or made them constructive and credible?
  - b. What difference did they make?
4. Have there been any unexpected results, based on these efforts, positive or negative? If yes, what were they, and how did they come about?

## Section 2: Grantees and collaboration

Now, we'd like to ask you some questions about the Hewlett Foundation's budget process reform portfolio, its grantees and collaboration among them.

5. When you think about the different members of the Hewlett Foundation's budget process reform portfolio, how would you describe the relative strengths and contributions of different members? (TMI grantees include Brookings Institution's Economic Studies Program, including the National Budgeting Roundtable; the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget; the Convergence Center for Policy Resolution; the Center for American Progress; the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)

6. What role do you see the National Budgeting Roundtable play among efforts to promote fiscal policy reform? (If interviewee participated, ask more questions from the grantee protocol.)
  - a. What changes, if any, might strengthen its role and enhance its ability to achieve its objectives?
7. What role did the Convergence Building a Better Budget Process (B3P) play among efforts to promote fiscal policy reform? (If interviewee participated, ask more questions from the grantee protocol.)
  - a. What changes, if any, might have strengthened its role and enhanced its ability to achieve its objectives?

### Section 3: General

The question that follows is about the portfolio's assumptions. The Hewlett Initiative seeks to support broadly Congress's ability to exercise its constitutional powers of the purse. It thinks of these as taxing and spending, with the budget process being a link between the two, in which Congress sets national priorities that both taxing and spending must support.

8. Is the process the problem or is the problem (the ideological divide between the parties on taxing and spending) the problem? Could reforming the budget process help bridge the ideological divide, so that the parties can constructively resolve taxing and spending issues? Please explain.

*Thank you for your time!*

## 4. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL – MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND STAFF

### Introduction

Thank you for taking time to talk with us about the Hewlett Foundation Madison Initiative’s work on budget process reform. The Foundation has contracted us – Carlisle Levine of BLE Solutions and David Shorr – to gather insights into the overall direction of the portfolio and the assumptions underlying it, the kinds of progress its grantees made over the last four years, and the nature of the relationship between the Foundation and its grantees. Our evaluation will inform the portfolio’s direction moving forward. This conversation is an important part of the feedback we’re gathering.

Today’s conversation will take 15-20 minutes. Your individual responses will be confidential. We are talking with 10-15 Congressional offices working in this area. We are also talking with Foundation grantees in this portfolio and their peer organizations. We will combine all the information we are receiving and draw out common themes, which we will present grouped into categories such as Hewlett Foundation grantees, other experts, and Members of Congress and staff. We will produce an internal report for the Foundation, as well as a public report to which you will have access.

The perspectives of current and former Members and staffers are especially important to get an inside view. We’d love to know what you think of Congress’ processes for taxing and spending – both an inside view from the Hill and looking at the broader climate for potential reform. We’re not interested in the legislative details but rather the general outlook and prospects for change.

A note on confidentiality: for purposes of our reports, this interview will be conducted on a not for individual attribution basis. As it seems useful, we will sometimes refer to categories of interviewees (Hewlett Foundation grantees, other experts, Members of Congress and staff). Do you have any questions or concerns about confidentiality?

For the sake of accuracy, I would like to record this interview. Do I have your permission to record our conversation?

Do you have any additional questions or concerns before we begin?

The Hewlett Initiative seeks to support broadly Congress’s ability to exercise its constitutional powers of the purse. It thinks of these as taxing and spending, with the budget process being a link between the two, in which Congress sets national priorities that both taxing and spending

must support.

1. In terms of Congress' current budget and appropriations process, what have you found particularly frustrating and unproductive?
2. Looking beyond any specific reforms or proposals, what do you think it would take to galvanize bipartisan action to address Congress' fiscal policymaking process? What would help make this an issue that Members really felt they had to resolve?
3. Is the process the problem or is the problem (the ideological divide between the parties on taxing and spending) the problem? Could reforming the budget process help bridge the ideological divide, so that the parties can constructively resolve taxing and spending issues? Please explain.
4. Who have you seen as particularly influential on fiscal process reform and why? In other words, which are the voices you have found most constructive and credible?
  - a. What about them makes or made them constructive and credible?

*Thank you for your time!*