

BUILDING BLOCK INQUIRY C3 TEACHERS

National Budget

What *Should* the U.S. Spend Its Money On?

C3 Framework Standard

D2.Eco.1.9-12. Analyze how incentives influence choices that may result in policies with a range of costs and benefits for different groups.

Economics is grounded in the concept of scarcity, which ultimately means there is not enough stuff (e.g., food, movie theaters, healthcare) to go around. As a result, economic reasoning emphasizes making informed decisions about how to distribute goods and services efficiently and in ways that yield the best outcomes. It seems like a straightforward process, but this process is value laden -- What do individuals value? How should we reconcile different values? This inquiry lesson sets the stage for wrestling with competing priorities at both the macro and personal levels.

Featured Sources

Source A: [Budget Priority Cards](#)

Source B: "[Policy Basics: Where do our federal tax dollars go?](#)" Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2023

Formative Performance Task

DELIBERATE: Rank order the Budget Priority cards from #1-10 based on how you think the government should spend its money.

COLLABORATE: Pair up with a classmate and compare rank orders noting differences between each other's ranking. Input rankings in a [google form](#).

PRODUCE: Compare your rankings with the actual US budget and note the difference/s between student priorities and national priorities.

Instructional Snapshot

Begin class with a collaborative sorting exercise in which students work to prioritize 10 cards (Source A) that have competing budget priorities on them. For example, one card features an image of U.S. soldiers with the caption: "MILITARY: Spending for national defense and support for U.S. allies and interests abroad." Another card reads, "HEALTH CARE: Spending for research to cure or prevent disease and services for low-income and elderly Americans." Students are then asked the question, "What should we spend our money on?" and in small groups deliberate which order to place the cards (e.g., Military, Healthcare, Education, Environment) -- 15 minutes. Then, students put their rankings into a Google form and examine in real time how the entire class ranks the various priorities -- 10 minutes. The teacher might end the class with students examining a pie chart of the current budget priorities to compare their priority list with the reality of the U.S. Budget -- 10 minutes. Students may be surprised at how little proportionally the government spends on education.