Consistent with the goal of providing the Washington University research community with valid, timely, and parsimonious communication relating to federal funding, we offer the following information.

The automatic, across-the-board spending cuts of approximately 5% for most federal research accounts, also known as sequestration, remains current law and is slated to take effect on March 1st. Only a new law can stop or change the cuts.

While many in Congress and the Obama administration have expressed concern about the impact of sequestration to federal programs, a clear path forward to a new law to end or mitigate these cuts does not currently exist.

Official information regarding the specific plans to implement sequestration across the government remains extremely limited, but in recent days, more federal agency leaders have been talking publicly about the consequences of sequestration. Additionally, many of you have been helpful in passing along what you have heard through your own contacts about different ideas or proposals that may be under consideration by different agencies to implement the across-the-board cuts.

A recent source of official information was released last week as testimony provided during a Senate hearing. That written testimony can be found at the following link, and includes information about the NSF, NASA, Department of Energy, and NIH (through its parent agency, the Department of Health and Human Services): http://www.appropriations.senate.gov/ht-full.cfm?method=hearings.view&id=17d3de99-c065-4bec-a7c8-cfd374bf41a3

Where agencies believe they have some discretion in how they implement reductions, they are slowly providing limited information. For example, NIH yesterday issued a notice titled, "NIH Operation Plan in the Event of a Sequestration (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-13-043.html). That message is reproduced here:

“The NIH continues to operate under a Continuing Resolution as described in NOT-OD-13-002, and therefore all non-competing continuation awards are currently being funded at a level
below that indicated on the most recent Notice of Award (generally up to 90% of the previously committed level). Final levels of FY 2013 funding may be reduced by a sequestration. Despite the potential for reduced funding, the NIH remains committed to our mission to seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce the burdens of illness and disability. Should a sequestration occur, NIH likely will reduce the final FY 2013 funding levels of non-competing continuation grants and expects to make fewer competing awards to allow the agency to meet the available budget allocation. Although each NIH Institute and Center (IC) will assess allocations within their portfolio to maximize the scientific impact, non-competing continuation awards that have already been made may be restored above the current level as described in NOT-OD-13-002 but likely will not reach the full FY 2013 commitment level described in the Notice of Award. Finally, in the event of a sequestration, NIH ICs will announce their respective approaches to meeting the new budget level.”

Another example of federal agency guidance regarding the uncertainty surrounding FY13 funding is from the Department of Defense (http://cpol.army.mil/library/general/20130110-SecDef.pdf). Even if you do not have DoD funding, the first page is a concise framing of the current situation.

In these uncertain times, you might have already put some thought into how you might absorb such a reduction to your federal grants and/or contracts. The cuts to most research agencies will be around 5%. The 5% applies to the remaining portion of FY13 (through 30 Sep 13). It would be a reasonable exercise to imagine how you might deal with a cut of a similar magnitude to your federal funding.

The University continues to monitor the situation and will share information as it becomes available. In conjunction with key partners, including the AAU and AAMC, we are working to ensure that our federal leaders understand the implications of these cuts.

If you are concerned about sequestration and are looking for a way to communicate as a private citizen with your elected officials, one recent effort of note is an online petition organized by the Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). The petition urges the White House and Congress to achieve a bipartisan budget compromise that avoids sequestration and "moves the country on to sound fiscal footing without sacrificing our nation's crucial investments in science and technology." To access the petition, follow this link: http://membercentral.aaas.org/speakup