What is the FOMC and when does it meet?

The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) is the monetary policymaking body of the Federal Reserve System. The FOMC is composed of 12 members--the seven members of the Board of Governors and five of the 12 Reserve Bank presidents. The Chairman of the Board of Governors serves as the Chairman of the FOMC; the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York is a permanent member of the Committee and serves as the Vice Chairman of the Committee. The presidents of the other Reserve Banks fill the remaining four voting positions on the FOMC on a rotating basis. All of the Reserve Bank presidents, including those who are not voting members, attend FOMC meetings, participate in the discussions, and contribute to the assessment of the economy and policy options. See the current list of FOMC members.

The FOMC schedules eight meetings per year, one about every six weeks or so. The Committee may also hold unscheduled meetings as necessary to review economic and financial developments. The FOMC issues a policy statement following each regular meeting that summarizes the Committee's economic outlook and the policy decision at that meeting. Four times per year the Chairman holds a press briefing after the FOMC meeting to present the FOMC's current economic projections and to provide additional context for the FOMC's policy decisions. A full set of minutes for each FOMC meeting is published three weeks after the conclusion of each regular meeting, and complete transcripts of FOMC meetings are published five years after the meeting.

By law, the Federal Reserve conducts monetary policy to achieve its macroeconomic objectives of maximum employment and stable prices. Usually, the FOMC conducts policy by adjusting the level of short-term interest rates in response to changes in the economic outlook. Since 2008, the FOMC has also used large-scale purchases of Treasury securities and securities that were issued or guaranteed by federal agencies as a policy tool in an effort to lower longer-term interest rates and thereby improve financial conditions and so support the economic recovery.

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