

News Release

Embargoed for release:
8:30 am Eastern Time
7:30 am Central Time
January 22, 2013

Contact:
Laura LaBarbera
Media Relations
Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago
312-322-2387

What is the National Activity Index?

The index is a weighted average of 85 indicators of national economic activity drawn from four broad categories of data: 1) production and income; 2) employment, unemployment, and hours; 3) personal consumption and housing; and 4) sales, orders, and inventories.

A zero value for the index indicates that the national economy is expanding at its historical trend rate of growth; negative values indicate below-average growth; and positive values indicate above-average growth.

Why are there three index values?

Each month, we provide a monthly index, its three-month moving average, and a diffusion index. Month-to-month movements can be volatile, so the monthly index's three-month moving average, the CFNAI-MA3, provides a more consistent picture of national economic growth. The CFNAI Diffusion Index captures the degree to which a change in the monthly index is spread out among its 85 indicators, averaged over a three-month period.

What do the numbers mean?

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves below -0.70 following a period of economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. Conversely, when the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above -0.70 following a period of economic contraction, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended.

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above $+0.70$ more than two years into an economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

The next CFNAI will be released:
February 25, 2013
8:30 am Eastern Time
7:30 am Central Time

FEDERAL RESERVE BANK
OF CHICAGO

Chicago Fed National Activity Index

Index shows economic growth moderated in December

Led by declines in production-related indicators, the Chicago Fed National Activity Index (CFNAI) decreased to $+0.02$ in December from $+0.27$ in November. Two of the four broad categories of indicators that make up the index decreased from November, and only two of the four categories made positive contributions to the index in December.

The index's three-month moving average, CFNAI-MA3, edged up from -0.13 in November to -0.11 in December—its tenth consecutive reading below zero. December's CFNAI-MA3 suggests that growth in national economic activity was below its historical trend. The economic growth reflected in this level of the CFNAI-MA3 suggests subdued inflationary pressure from economic activity over the coming year.

The CFNAI Diffusion Index also moved up in December, increasing to -0.05 from -0.12 in November. Forty-one of the 85 individual indicators made positive contributions to the CFNAI in December, while 44 made negative contributions. Thirty-six indicators improved from November to December, while 48 indicators deteriorated and one was unchanged. Of the indicators that improved, 17 made negative contributions.

Chicago Fed National Activity Index, Three-Month Moving Average (CFNAI-MA3)



CFNAI, CFNAI-MA3, and CFNAI Diffusion for the latest six months and year-ago month

	Dec '12	Nov '12	Oct '12	Sep '12	Aug '12	Jul '12	Dec '11
CFNAI							
Current	+0.02	+0.27	-0.61	-0.06	-1.11	+0.05	+0.67
Previous	N/A	+0.10	-0.64	-0.06	-1.09	+0.01	+0.69
CFNAI-MA3							
Current	-0.11	-0.13	-0.59	-0.37	-0.52	-0.23	+0.16
Previous	N/A	-0.20	-0.59	-0.38	-0.52	-0.25	+0.16
CFNAI Diffusion							
Current	-0.05	-0.12	-0.36	-0.19	-0.25	-0.07	+0.13
Previous	N/A	-0.15	-0.31	-0.19	-0.25	-0.08	+0.14

Current and Previous values reflect index values as of the January 22, 2013, release and December 21, 2012, release, respectively. N/A indicates not applicable.

Production-related indicators contributed +0.12 to the CFNAI in December, down from +0.49 in November. Industrial production increased 0.3 percent in December after rising 1.0 percent in November, and manufacturing production increased 0.8 percent in December after moving up 1.3 percent in the previous month.

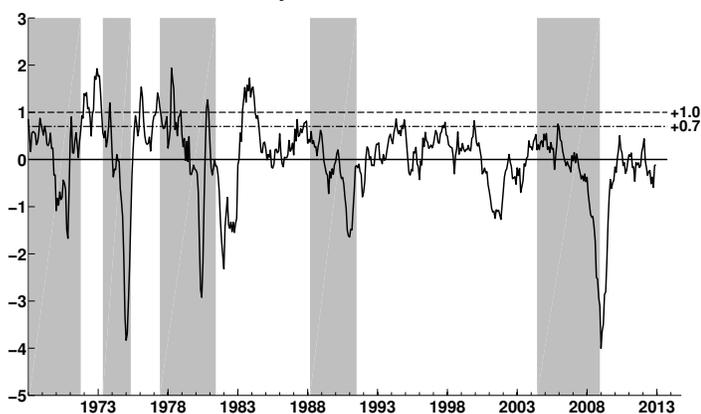
Employment-related indicators contributed +0.09 to the CFNAI in December, up from -0.02 in November. Private nonfarm payrolls rose by 168,000 in December after increasing by 171,000 in November, and civilian employment rose by 28,000 in December after decreasing by 51,000 in November. The contribution from the sales, orders, and inventories category to the CFNAI also increased in December, edging up to -0.01 from -0.06 in November.

The contribution from the consumption and housing category to the CFNAI decreased to -0.17 in December from -0.14 in November. Housing permits edged up to 903,000 annualized units in December

from 900,000 in November. Housing starts also increased, rising to 954,000 annualized units in December from 851,000 in the previous month. Consumption indicators generally made small negative contributions to the CFNAI in December, pushing the overall contribution of the consumption and housing category down slightly from November.

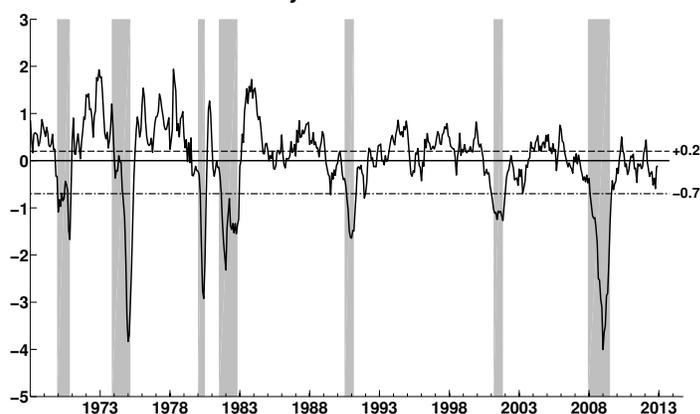
The CFNAI was constructed using data available as of January 17, 2013. At that time, December data for 49 of the 85 indicators had been published. For all missing data, estimates were used in constructing the index. The November monthly index was revised to +0.27 from an initial estimate of +0.10. Revisions to the monthly index can be attributed to two main factors: revisions in previously published data and differences between the estimates of previously unavailable data and subsequently published data. The revision to the November monthly index was due primarily to the latter.

CFNAI-MA3 and Inflation Cycles



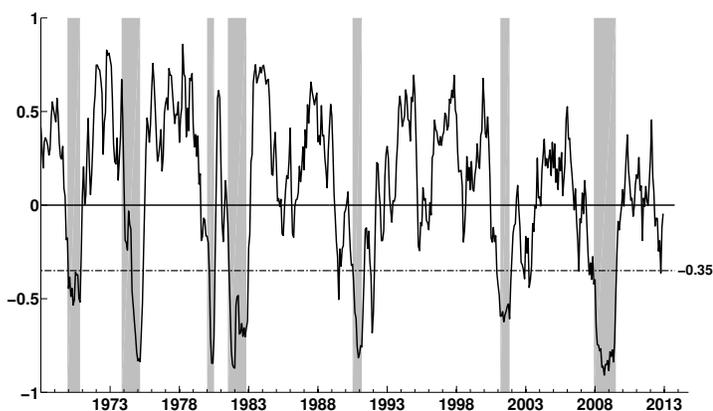
Notes: Shading represents periods of substantial inflation increases. A CFNAI-MA3 value above +0.70 more than two years into an economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above +1.00 more than two years into an economic expansion indicates a substantial likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

CFNAI-MA3 and Business Cycles



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. A CFNAI-MA3 value below -0.70 following a period of economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above -0.70 following a period of economic contraction indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended. A CFNAI-MA3 value above +0.20 following a period of economic contraction indicates a significant likelihood that a recession has ended.

CFNAI Diffusion Index, Three-Month Moving Average



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The CFNAI Diffusion Index represents the sum of the absolute values of the weights for the underlying indicators whose contribution to the CFNAI is positive in a given month less the sum of the absolute values of the weights for those indicators whose contribution is negative or neutral in a given month. Periods of economic expansion have historically been associated with values of the three-month moving average of the CFNAI Diffusion Index above -0.35.

CFNAI, Monthly Index

