The index is a weighted average of 85 indicators of growth in 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.

Why are there three index values?
Each month, we provide a monthly index (the CFNAI), 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 instead 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?
A zero value for the monthly index has been associated with the national economy expanding at its historical trend (average) rate of growth; negative values with below-average growth (in standard deviation units); and positive values with above-average growth. Periods of economic expansion have historically been associated with values of the CFNAI-MA3 above –0.70 and the CFNAI Diffusion Index above –0.35. Conversely, periods of economic contraction have historically been associated with values of the CFNAI-MA3 below –0.70 and the CFNAI Diffusion Index below –0.35. An increasing likelihood of a period of sustained increasing inflation has historically been associated with values of the CFNAI-MA3 above +0.70 more than two years into an economic expansion.

The next CFNAI will be released:
September 21, 2020
8:30 am Eastern Time
7:30 am Central Time

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Production-related indicators contributed +1.09 to the CFNAI in July, down from +2.21 in June. Manufacturing industrial production increased 3.4 percent in July after rising 7.4 percent in June, and manufacturing capacity utilization moved up by 2.3 percentage points in July after increasing by 4.6 percentage points in the previous month. The contribution of the sales, orders, and inventories category to the CFNAI moved down to −0.31 in July from +0.77 in June.

Employment-related indicators contributed +0.38 to the CFNAI in July, down from +1.94 in June. Nonfarm payrolls increased by 1.8 million in July after rising by 4.8 million in June, and the unemployment rate decreased by 0.9 percentage points in July after falling by 2.2 percentage points in the previous month. The contribution of the personal consumption and housing category to the CFNAI decreased to +0.02 in July from +0.42 in June.

The CFNAI was constructed using data available as of August 20, 2020. At that time, July data for 51 of the 85 indicators had been published. For all missing data, estimates were used in constructing the index. The June monthly index value was revised to +5.33 from an initial estimate of +4.11, and the May monthly index value was revised to +4.24 from last month’s estimate of +3.50. 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 revisions to both the June and May monthly index values were primarily due to the latter.