

**SHOW US THE STIMULUS:
AN EVALUATION OF STATE GOVERNMENT
RECOVERY ACT WEBSITES**

by

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The production of this report is part of the ongoing work of Good Jobs First on transparency and accountability issues relating to the Recovery Act. Good Jobs First co-chairs the Coalition for An Accountable Recovery (www.coalitionforanaccountablerecovery.org), which works on these issues at the federal level, and we coordinate States for a Transparent and Accountable Recovery, or STAR Coalition (www.accountablerecovery.org), which works with state-level organizations.

This report, along with the state scoring sheets used to compile the results, can be found on the web at www.goodjobsfirst.org/stimulusweb.cfm

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every state government now has a website reporting on its role in implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the \$787 billion federal stimulus bill that is shoring up state finances, reinforcing the social safety net and funding job-creating infrastructure and energy-efficiency projects. Yet there are wide differences in the quality and quantity of the information the websites offer. Some state ARRA sites reinforce President Obama's promise that the stimulus plan would be carried out with "an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability." Others are half-hearted efforts that provide residents little useful data on the largest federal stimulus since the New Deal, making it harder to measure ARRA's success.

These are the conclusions of Good Jobs First after a review and evaluation of the states' ARRA websites. We considered how effective the sites are in conveying information about:

- the categories of stimulus spending;
- the distribution of that spending in different parts of the state; and
- specific projects being carried out by private contractors, including their employment impact.

The study rates each state twice on a scale of 0 to 100: once for its main ARRA website and again for a high-profile aspect of stimulus spending—highway projects (whether that reporting is done through the main ARRA site or a separate transportation department web page). In each case we evaluate the sites according to about ten factors relating to the quality and quantity of the information presented on the many forms of ARRA spending taking place in every state.

Most states do not score very high. The average of all the state scores for ARRA sites is only 28.2, and the median is 25. Scores for ARRA highway reporting are somewhat better—an average of 37.8 and a median of 38—but still not very impressive.

Only six states score 50 or better for their ARRA website: Maryland (80), Colorado (68), Washington (63), West Virginia (60), New York (53) and Pennsylvania (50). Thirteen do so for their highway reporting, led by Maryland (75), Washington (73), Colorado (65), Nebraska (60) and California and New York (each at 58). Only four states (Colorado, Maryland, New York and Washington) score 50 or better on both measures.

In contrast to these, two states score zero for their websites (Illinois and Utah), and two get a goose egg for their highway reporting (Illinois and Kentucky), so that Illinois is the only state to strike out completely in both ratings. Most states that score poorly for their main

ARRA website do better with their highway reporting, but apart from Illinois, there are four states that score very low for both: Alabama, District of Columbia, Kentucky and Vermont. Low-scoring states are ones that provide few specifics on how ARRA money is being used in the state. Illinois, for instance, has figures only at a national level and nothing on how much will be spent in the state.

On pages 7 and 8 are summary tables displayed alphabetically by state name and by ranking.

Although this study focuses on state ARRA websites, we also include an evaluation of New York City's impressive NYCStat Stimulus Tracker, which is comparable in quality to the top state ARRA sites.

Here are highlights of the state scores for specific criteria:

- Most states do a good job of providing information on the categories of ARRA spending. Forty-two states display the data for broad categories (energy, housing, transportation, etc.), and 37 of these also provide details on specific programs. States such as Iowa, West Virginia and Wisconsin use animated bar graphs to highlight the information. On the other hand, some states such as Colorado and Idaho bury the information in secondary web pages or linked PDF documents.
- Geographic breakdowns are less common than data on program areas. Eighteen states provide the information, and in only three cases (Maine, New Mexico and Virginia) does the website show the information both for each county individually and for all counties side-by-side for comparison purposes. States such as Oregon, Tennessee and Washington use interactive maps to display county breakdowns.
- Few states juxtapose the geographic distribution of stimulus spending with patterns of economic distress, such as county unemployment rates or foreclosure levels. Only Maryland provides this information on its main ARRA website. Five states—California, Florida, Missouri, South Dakota and Washington—do so in their highway project reporting.
- Apart from county dollar totals, state residents may be interested to know where individual ARRA projects such as the repaving of a road or repair of a school building are taking place. Eleven states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Carolina) provide project maps on their main ARRA website, while 30 provide maps as part of their ARRA highway project reporting. Some of these are

static PDF files, while states such as California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island have interactive maps.

- Twenty-one states provide project or contract detail on their main ARRA site, while nearly all (48) do so in their highway reporting—though in some cases the descriptions are minimal. Some states provide project details through interactive maps with pop-up information boxes, though it is not always the case that all types of projects are included.
- Only 10 states (Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington and West Virginia) provide contractor names and dollar amounts on their ARRA website. The results are better in highway reporting, where 29 states have both contractor names and dollar figures. Massachusetts is the only state that has indicated it will provide online access to the full text of ARRA contracts, while Delaware and Maine are beginning to do so for transportation projects.
- The paramount objective of the Recovery Act is to address mounting unemployment through job creation and retention. Yet only four states—Colorado, Maryland, Washington and West Virginia—currently provide any employment data for individual projects on their main ARRA site. Eighteen states do so in their highway reporting.
- Despite the importance of knowing how long a project will last and how much of it has already been completed, only 7 states provide project status information on their ARRA websites; 19 do so in their highway reporting.

Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations:

- Put a summary of key information about ARRA spending at the top of the home page of the site. A clear bar graph, pie chart or table showing the main spending flows goes a long way in helping the user begin to see what the Recovery Act is all about. There should be clear links to pages with details about the various specific programs. Avoid putting the details in large PDF files that may be difficult to open and tedious to read.
- Provide a map or a table showing how overall ARRA spending and the amounts in key categories are being distributed around the state.
- Along with information on spending streams, provide information on individual projects being funded by those programs, such as a particular transit improvement or weatherization effort. Where possible, display the location of the projects on

maps. Interactive displays that allow one to drill down for details are better than static PDF maps.

- For projects carried out by private contractors, be open about the contract award process and the identity of the companies that win bidding competitions. Post the bids and the details, including the full text, of the contract awarded to the winner. Include data on contractor parent companies and use standard identifiers.
- While the federal government's Council of Economic Advisers is responsible for estimating the overall employment impacts of ARRA and the Recovery.gov website will report jobs data on some (but not all) individual projects, state ARRA sites should also include employment data in their project reporting.
- State ARRA sites should make it clear when individual projects began work (or are expected to start), how long they are expected to run and what percentage was complete as of the latest reporting date. It would also be helpful to indicate which projects are using both ARRA and state funds (and how much of each).
- States should make their ARRA websites as user-friendly as possible. This means keeping all or most of the program and project information on the main site, rather than requiring users to engage in an online scavenger hunt across agency web pages. The data should also be updated as often as possible and should be available in machine-readable feeds. Sites should have standard web features such as a search engine and a site map.
- ARRA sites should provide readily accessible information about the ways that individuals, organizations and businesses can apply for stimulus grants and contracts. This should include contact names (with phone numbers and e-mail addresses) and selection criteria.

Most of these recommendations are simply matters of good web design and best practices in government transparency. Yet the use of ARRA websites to inform the public is more than a matter of providing a service to state residents. The way in which the information is presented shapes public attitudes toward the stimulus and could play a significant role in debates over future government interventions in the economy.

(Scoring summaries are on the next two pages)

STATE SCORING SUMMARY TABLE (on scale of 0 to 100)

State	Score for Main ARRA Website	Rank		State	ARRA Highway Reporting Score	Rank
Alabama	10	47 (tie)		Alabama	15	46 (tie)
Alaska	15	34 (tie)		Alaska	35	29 (tie)
Arizona	15	34 (tie)		Arizona	30	35 (tie)
Arkansas	45	8 (tie)		Arkansas	53	9 (tie)
California	48	7		California	58	5 (tie)
Colorado	68	2		Colorado	65	3
Connecticut	40	10 (tie)		Connecticut	53	9 (tie)
Delaware	15	34 (tie)		Delaware	43	19 (tie)
District of Columbia	15	34 (tie)		District of Columbia	10	49
Florida	15	34 (tie)		Florida	55	7 (tie)
Georgia	25	23 (tie)		Georgia	45	16 (tie)
Hawaii	20	28 (tie)		Hawaii	15	46 (tie)
Idaho	20	28 (tie)		Idaho	53	9 (tie)
Illinois	0	50 (tie)		Illinois	0	50 (tie)
Indiana	30	19 (tie)		Indiana	30	35 (tie)
Iowa	15	34 (tie)		Iowa	50	12 (tie)
Kansas	10	47 (tie)		Kansas	35	29 (tie)
Kentucky	10	47 (tie)		Kentucky	0	50 (tie)
Louisiana	15	34 (tie)		Louisiana	43	19 (tie)
Maine	40	10 (tie)		Maine	40	22 (tie)
Maryland	80	1		Maryland	75	1
Massachusetts	35	15 (tie)		Massachusetts	25	38 (tie)
Michigan	35	15 (tie)		Michigan	43	19 (tie)
Minnesota	15	34 (tie)		Minnesota	45	16 (tie)
Mississippi	30	19 (tie)		Mississippi	20	43 (tie)
Missouri	25	23 (tie)		Missouri	40	22 (tie)
Montana	25	23 (tie)		Montana	20	43 (tie)
Nebraska	25	23 (tie)		Nebraska	60	4
Nevada	15	34 (tie)		Nevada	25	38 (tie)
New Hampshire	38	13 (tie)		New Hampshire	48	14 (tie)
New Jersey	20	28 (tie)		New Jersey	25	38 (tie)
New Mexico	30	19 (tie)		New Mexico	25	38 (tie)
New York	53	5		New York	58	5 (tie)
North Carolina	30	19 (tie)		North Carolina	25	38 (tie)
North Dakota	20	28 (tie)		North Dakota	38	26 (tie)
Ohio	40	10 (tie)		Ohio	38	26 (tie)
Oklahoma	20	28 (tie)		Oklahoma	33	34
Oregon	25	23 (tie)		Oregon	55	7 (tie)
Pennsylvania	50	6		Pennsylvania	35	29 (tie)
Rhode Island	38	13 (tie)		Rhode Island	38	26 (tie)
South Carolina	33	18		South Carolina	50	12 (tie)
South Dakota	15	34 (tie)		South Dakota	40	22 (tie)
Tennessee	15	34 (tie)		Tennessee	35	29 (tie)
Texas	15	34 (tie)		Texas	40	22 (tie)
Utah	0	50 (tie)		Utah	30	35 (tie)
Vermont	15	34 (tie)		Vermont	15	46 (tie)
Virginia	35	15 (tie)		Virginia	35	29 (tie)
Washington	63	3		Washington	73	2
West Virginia	60	4		West Virginia	45	16 (tie)
Wisconsin	45	8 (tie)		Wisconsin	48	14 (tie)
Wyoming	20	28 (tie)		Wyoming	20	43 (tie)

SUMMARY OF STATE RANKINGS (on scale of 0 to 100)

State	Score for Main ARRA Website	Rank		State	ARRA Highway Reporting Score	Rank
Maryland	80	1		Maryland	75	1
Colorado	68	2		Washington	73	2
Washington	63	3		Colorado	65	3
West Virginia	60	4		Nebraska	60	4
New York	53	5		California	58	5 (tie)
Pennsylvania	50	6		New York	58	5 (tie)
California	48	7		Florida	55	7 (tie)
Arkansas	45	8 (tie)		Oregon	55	7 (tie)
Wisconsin	45	8 (tie)		Arkansas	53	9 (tie)
Connecticut	40	10 (tie)		Connecticut	53	9 (tie)
Maine	40	10 (tie)		Idaho	53	9 (tie)
Ohio	40	10 (tie)		Iowa	50	12 (tie)
New Hampshire	38	13 (tie)		South Carolina	50	12 (tie)
Rhode Island	38	13 (tie)		New Hampshire	48	14 (tie)
Massachusetts	35	15 (tie)		Wisconsin	48	14 (tie)
Michigan	35	15 (tie)		Georgia	45	16 (tie)
Virginia	35	15 (tie)		Minnesota	45	16 (tie)
South Carolina	33	18		West Virginia	45	16 (tie)
Indiana	30	19 (tie)		Delaware	43	19 (tie)
Mississippi	30	19 (tie)		Louisiana	43	19 (tie)
New Mexico	30	19 (tie)		Michigan	43	19 (tie)
North Carolina	30	19 (tie)		Maine	40	22 (tie)
Georgia	25	23 (tie)		Missouri	40	22 (tie)
Missouri	25	23 (tie)		South Dakota	40	22 (tie)
Montana	25	23 (tie)		Texas	40	22 (tie)
Nebraska	25	23 (tie)		North Dakota	38	26 (tie)
Oregon	25	23 (tie)		Ohio	38	26 (tie)
Hawaii	20	28 (tie)		Rhode Island	38	26 (tie)
Idaho	20	28 (tie)		Alaska	35	29 (tie)
New Jersey	20	28 (tie)		Kansas	35	29 (tie)
North Dakota	20	28 (tie)		Pennsylvania	35	29 (tie)
Oklahoma	20	28 (tie)		Tennessee	35	29 (tie)
Wyoming	20	28 (tie)		Virginia	35	29 (tie)
Alaska	15	34 (tie)		Oklahoma	33	34
Arizona	15	34 (tie)		Arizona	30	35 (tie)
Delaware	15	34 (tie)		Indiana	30	35 (tie)
District of Columbia	15	34 (tie)		Utah	30	35 (tie)
Florida	15	34 (tie)		Massachusetts	25	38 (tie)
Iowa	15	34 (tie)		Nevada	25	38 (tie)
Louisiana	15	34 (tie)		New Jersey	25	38 (tie)
Minnesota	15	34 (tie)		New Mexico	25	38 (tie)
Nevada	15	34 (tie)		North Carolina	25	38 (tie)
South Dakota	15	34 (tie)		Mississippi	20	43 (tie)
Tennessee	15	34 (tie)		Montana	20	43 (tie)
Texas	15	34 (tie)		Wyoming	20	43 (tie)
Vermont	15	34 (tie)		Alabama	15	46 (tie)
Alabama	10	47 (tie)		Hawaii	15	46 (tie)
Kansas	10	47 (tie)		Vermont	15	46 (tie)
Kentucky	10	47 (tie)		District of Columbia	10	49
Illinois	0	50 (tie)		Illinois	0	50 (tie)
Utah	0	50 (tie)		Kentucky	0	50 (tie)

INTRODUCTION

The \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed into law with great fanfare last February, is now facing a summer of discontent. Conservatives, who opposed the stimulus plan from the start, are now loudly proclaiming the Act a failure. Citing mounting unemployment figures, others are saying that the Act is insufficient and needs to be supplemented by new stimulus spending. Caught in the middle, President Obama is urging patience, saying that most ARRA programs have yet to kick in.

It is remarkable to see such intensive debate on the effectiveness of a federal spending program so soon after its enactment. But it was perhaps unavoidable, given that the stimulus may be the country's main hope of reversing one of the worst economic downturns in modern U.S. history.

The pressure on ARRA to deliver is also compounded by the fact that the stimulus plan was promoted as one that would set new standards for government openness. During the signing of the Recovery Act in February, President Obama called it "a plan that will be implemented with an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability."

In addition to the transparency provisions of ARRA itself, many of which are to be implemented through the Recovery.gov website, the Obama Administration created special stimulus web pages at each of the federal agencies handling the 200-plus spending streams encompassed in the Act. The Administration also successfully pressured each of the states to put up its own website to provide public information about the more than \$200 billion of ARRA spending that passes through state and local government entities.

ARRA reporting is primarily the responsibility of Recovery.gov and other federal websites such as USASpending.gov, Grants.gov and FedBizOpps.gov (Federal Business Opportunities). At the very least, the state sites should mirror the information provided by the federal sites. But they can do much more, especially during the current period when the federal sites are not yet fully operation. Recovery.gov, for instance, has not yet received the first wave of ARRA recipient data, which is expected in October and which in its initial form will probably be incomplete.

Beyond that, the state sites can provide much more detail about programs and projects than is likely to be available on federal web sources covering the entire country. They can also offer features such as interactive maps that the feds may not provide.

It is not an unreasonable burden for states to use the websites to provide deeper descriptions of stimulus activities. They are already collecting a great deal of information about ARRA projects, especially those involving infrastructure, to satisfy federal reporting

requirements established by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The Study

In this report Good Jobs First analyzes and rates the stimulus websites created by the 50 states and the District of Columbia. We look at content of the sites as of late July 2009, about five months after the enactment of ARRA. Our focus is on how effective the sites are in explaining the different aspects of stimulus spending and the extent to which they provide information on specific projects. Given our longstanding concern about private-sector use of taxpayer money, we pay special attention to projects being carried out by contractors. Specifically, we rate the sites based on whether they include the following features:

- Planned spending totals by broad categories (energy, housing, transportation, etc.) as well as more specific programs;
- Data on the distribution of spending among the state's counties (or other geographic divisions);
- The inclusion of maps showing the location of the projects;
- Descriptions of specific spending projects and the contracts associated with them;
- Contract details, including dollar amounts, the name of the contractor and the text of the contract;
- Data on the jobs created or retained by the project; and
- The status of the project (portion completed and expected duration).

We also rate the sites on whether they include all ARRA project information (as opposed to having it spread out among various agency web pages) and on how up to date that information is.

In addition to rating the state ARRA websites overall, we evaluate the information each state provides specifically on highway projects. We do this because road projects have traditionally been a favorite way to trying to jumpstart a faltering economy, and they (along with other transportation projects) constitute one of the larger individual portions of the Recovery Act. Surface transportation spending was put on a faster track than most

other parts of ARRA and thus has been a center of attention in discussions of the effectiveness of stimulus spending.¹

We discovered that many states have placed information on transportation stimulus projects not on their main ARRA page but rather on a separate stimulus page added to the website of their transportation department. We originally intended to rate disclosure of data on all forms of ARRA transportation spending, but states do not always report data on highway, transit, rail and airport projects the same way. To avoid making the scoring too complicated, we decided to look only at highway reporting.

We evaluate each state's highway project information regardless of where it appears online. We use most of the same criteria as with the main ARRA webpages, but we added another factor: whether the state provides a breakdown of spending between repairs and new roads. There are two reasons this information is useful: new roads are seen by many environmental activists as undesirable contributors to suburban sprawl, and repair/restoration projects usually can begin work sooner than new highways.

We evaluate both the main state ARRA sites and their highway reporting on a scale of 0 to 100. We use ten categories for rating the ARRA sites and nine for highway reporting, which together add up to nearly 1,000 separate ratings for the 50 states and DC.

See below for more on our scoring system and the general results. The scoring sheets for each state can be found on the Good Jobs First website at www.goodjobsfirst.org/stimulusweb.cfm. The appendix at the end of this report lists the web addresses for each state's ARRA website and its department of transportation ARRA web page.

¹. We recognize that highway projects do not necessarily represent all ARRA transportation projects or all commitments of Surface Transportation Program funds.

FINDINGS

Our overall finding is that, while a few states have impressive websites for conveying information about ARRA programs and projects, most are not making adequate use of online technology to tell the story of the stimulus.

Most states do not score very high in our rating system. The average of all the state scores for ARRA sites is only 28.2, and the median is 25. Scores for ARRA highway reporting are somewhat better—an average of 37.8 and a median of 38—but still not very impressive.

Only six states score 50 or better for their ARRA website: Maryland (80), Colorado (68), Washington (63), West Virginia (60), New York (53) and Pennsylvania (50). Thirteen do so for their highway reporting, led by Maryland (75), Washington (73), Colorado (65), Nebraska (60) and California and New York (each at 58). Only four states (Colorado, Maryland, New York and Washington) score 50 or better on both measures.

In contrast to these states, two states score zero for their websites (Illinois and Utah), and two get a goose egg for their highway reporting (Illinois and Kentucky), so that Illinois is the only state to strike out completely in both ratings. Most states that score poorly for their main ARRA website do better with their highway reporting, but apart from Illinois, there are four states that score very low for both: Alabama, District of Columbia, Kentucky and Vermont. Low-scoring states are ones that provide few specifics on how ARRA money is being used in the state. Illinois, for instance, has figures only at a national level and nothing on how much will be spent in the state.

The next page has a summary of the state scores (see page 8 for a table arranged by rank).

RESULTS BY SCORING COMPONENTS

Allocation by Program

ARRA consists of more than 200 different funding streams. States should show residents how the stimulus money coming from the federal government is divided by broad categories (energy, housing, transportation, etc.) and by specific programs. We give the highest score (10) when both broad and narrow category totals are made available; 5 points when only broad categories are used.

This is an obvious feature that should be prominently displayed on every state ARRA website. And in many cases it is. Forty-two of the states have spending breakdowns by broad program area, and 37 of these also provide data on specific programs.

Summary of State Scores (on a scale of 0 to 100)

State	ARRA Website Score	Rank	Highway Reporting Score	Rank	State	ARRA Website Score	Rank	Highway Reporting Score	Rank
Alabama	10	47 (tie)	15	46 (tie)	Montana	25	23 (tie)	20	43 (tie)
Alaska	15	34 (tie)	35	29 (tie)	Nebraska	25	23 (tie)	60	4
Arizona	15	34 (tie)	30	35 (tie)	Nevada	15	34 (tie)	25	38 (tie)
Arkansas	45	8 (tie)	53	9 (tie)	New Hampshire	38	13 (tie)	48	14 (tie)
California	48	7	58	5 (tie)	New Jersey	20	28 (tie)	25	38 (tie)
Colorado	68	2	65	3	New Mexico	30	19 (tie)	25	38 (tie)
Connecticut	40	10 (tie)	53	9 (tie)	New York	53	5	58	5 (tie)
Delaware	15	34 (tie)	43	19 (tie)	North Carolina	30	19 (tie)	25	38 (tie)
District of Columbia	15	34 (tie)	10	49	North Dakota	20	28 (tie)	38	26 (tie)
Florida	15	34 (tie)	55	7 (tie)	Ohio	40	10 (tie)	38	26 (tie)
Georgia	25	23 (tie)	45	16 (tie)	Oklahoma	20	28 (tie)	33	34
Hawaii	20	28 (tie)	15	46 (tie)	Oregon	25	23 (tie)	55	7 (tie)
Idaho	20	28 (tie)	53	9 (tie)	Pennsylvania	50	6	35	29 (tie)
Illinois	0	50 (tie)	0	50 (tie)	Rhode Island	38	13 (tie)	38	26 (tie)
Indiana	30	19 (tie)	30	35 (tie)	South Carolina	33	18	50	12 (tie)
Iowa	15	34 (tie)	50	12 (tie)	South Dakota	15	34 (tie)	40	22 (tie)
Kansas	10	47 (tie)	35	29 (tie)	Tennessee	15	34 (tie)	35	29 (tie)
Kentucky	10	47 (tie)	0	50 (tie)	Texas	15	34 (tie)	40	22 (tie)
Louisiana	15	34 (tie)	43	19 (tie)	Utah	0	50 (tie)	30	35 (tie)
Maine	40	10 (tie)	40	22 (tie)	Vermont	15	34 (tie)	15	46 (tie)
Maryland	80	1	75	1	Virginia	35	15 (tie)	35	29 (tie)
Massachusetts	35	15 (tie)	25	38 (tie)	Washington	63	3	73	2
Michigan	35	15 (tie)	43	19 (tie)	West Virginia	60	4	45	16 (tie)
Minnesota	15	34 (tie)	45	16 (tie)	Wisconsin	45	8 (tie)	48	14 (tie)
Mississippi	30	19 (tie)	20	43 (tie)	Wyoming	20	28 (tie)	20	43 (tie)
Missouri	25	23 (tie)	40	22 (tie)					

On the sites of states such as Minnesota, Nevada and Virginia, charts showing the distribution of ARRA spending by program areas are conspicuously displayed on the main page. States such as Iowa, West Virginia and Wisconsin use animated bar graphs to highlight the information. On the other hand, some states such as Colorado and Idaho bury the information in secondary web pages or linked PDF documents.

Average score: 7.7 of 10 for ARRA websites.

Allocation by Geography

Residents have an interest in knowing how stimulus spending is being distributed in different parts of their state. We examine whether ARRA websites provide a breakdown of spending by county (or by town in states that prefer that geographic division). Sometimes this information is displayed separately for each county (through a pop-up on an interactive map, for example), while in other cases the totals for each county are compiled in one place in a way that allows quick comparisons. We give the highest score (15) to states that provide the information in both forms; 10 points when only one type is made available. We do not give points to sites that have lists of projects arranged by county that one must add up manually to get county totals. Note that not all forms of ARRA spending can be easily tracked by geography.

New York City's Stimulus Tracker

One of the best Recovery Act websites was created not by a state but by a city government. New York's NYCStat Stimulus Tracker— www.nyc.gov/stimulustracker—is an example of good disclosure and effective presentation. It has clear charts showing allocations by broad and narrow spending categories as well as the distribution of spending among the five boroughs. Users can drill down to pages that describe specific projects and provide dollar amounts, schedules, status indicators and estimated employment impact.

These pages also have links to more detailed info sheets, to an interactive map and to a database of contract and payment information. As of July 25 many of the latter links did not yet point to actual data. It is unclear whether there will be links to contract documents. The only significant missing feature is a comparison of the geographic distribution of spending to the pattern of economic distress in the city.

Given the depth of the data, it takes some time to figure out how to navigate the various areas of the site. But it is worth the effort.

Geographic breakdowns are less common than data on program areas. Eighteen states provide the information, and in only three cases (Maine, New Mexico and Virginia) does the website show the information both for each county individually and for all counties side-by-side for comparison purposes. Some states use interactive maps with the county breakdowns (see the box on page 16 for details).

Average score: 3.8 of 15 for ARRA websites; 3.8 of 15 for ARRA highway reporting.

Allocations Compared to Need

While the economic crisis is affecting the entire country in one way or another, some areas are being hit harder than others. State residents will want to know how the distribution of stimulus spending compares to geographic patterns of economic distress, as determined by measures such as the unemployment rate, the foreclosure rate or the poverty level. We give 10 points to state ARRA sites when they made an effort to provide such information, regardless of the exact form it takes.

Surprisingly, only one state, Maryland, provides this information on its main ARRA website. Its interactive map can show project locations superimposed on patterns of distress and other variables. Five states—California, Florida, Missouri, South Dakota and Washington—

show the location of highway projects compared to economic distress patterns. Washington has an interactive map to display this information, while the other four states use static PDF maps. In Ohio, information sheets on individual highway projects refer to Community Distress Factors such as unemployment levels.

Average score: 0.2 of 10 for ARRA sites; 1.2 of 10 for ARRA highway reporting.

Mapping of Projects

Apart from county dollar totals, state residents may be interested to know where individual ARRA projects such as the repaving of a road or repair of a school building are taking place. We give 5 points for any kind of map of individual projects.

Eleven states (California, Colorado, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and South Carolina) provide project maps on their main ARRA website, while 30 provide maps as part of their ARRA highway project reporting.

Some of these are static PDF files, while states such as California, Massachusetts, New York and Rhode Island have interactive Google maps. Maryland and Colorado have maps that allow one to enter a specific address to locate nearby ARRA projects. Arkansas offers an iPhone application for locating nearby projects.

We do not give extra points for advanced web mapping features, but the sites that have them are undeniably easier to use. See the box on page 16 for more details on the various interactive mapping approaches taken by the states.

Average score: 1.1 of 5 for ARRA websites; 2.9 of 5 for ARRA highway reporting.

Project/Contract Details

Taxpayers have a right to know the details of projects funded by stimulus dollars, especially when the work is being carried out by outside parties such as for-profit contractors. Ideally, this would mean descriptions both of the projects and the contracts given to companies to carry them out. We give 5 points for either of these items, 10 for both. In cases where a single contractor is doing the work, a description of the project may in effect also be a description of the contract. But unless the state ARRA website speaks specifically of the contract terms, we give only 5 points in these instances.

Mapping the Recovery

The Recovery Act is improving the quality of state government transparency both in terms of what is disclosed and *how* the data are presented. The ARRA websites (or state DOT ARRA sites) in more than half the states include interactive maps that illustrate where stimulus funds are being spent.

These maps take various forms. Fifteen states provide maps of their counties (or towns in the case of Connecticut) that can be clicked to display total ARRA funding a county is receiving and often a breakdown by key categories. While some of the states have maps with a unique design (such as Arkansas, Maine, Michigan, Ohio, Virginia and West Virginia), eight states (Colorado, Connecticut, Maryland, Montana, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington and Wisconsin) are using graphic displays based on interfaces developed by ESRI, a California-based company that pioneered the use of geographic information systems (GIS). Georgia uses a Google map application to display county information.

Thirteen states focus on mapping individual ARRA projects, especially those involving highways and other infrastructure improvements. Eight of these states (California, Delaware, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Washington) use Google maps to display the project locations. The other five (Arizona, Indiana, North Carolina, Texas and Utah) use different graphic displays. In all these instances, the maps have pop-up information boxes with project descriptions and sometimes dollar amounts and contractor names.

Some of the most elaborate mapping features are ones that combine data on geographic distribution with information on individual projects within the counties. Colorado and Maryland use interfaces developed by ESRI that show spending totals (overall and by category) for each county while also displaying the location of specific projects. A user can also type in a specific address to find nearby ARRA projects. One can also drill down from the county information to see project details via pop-up boxes or do so directly by clicking on the icons representing individual projects.

In the case of Maryland—whose governor, Martin O'Malley, has been a leading proponent of government use of GIS-based analytics since he was mayor of Baltimore—the ARRA map has an additional feature. Using a tab marked Need, one can make the background of the project map display different variables. For overall spending, the map can show the pattern of population density and population growth around the state. Each project category has its own variable. For example, transportation projects can be displayed against a backdrop showing those parts of the state where a high percentage of people don't own cars. Washington has a more limited version of this—and only for transportation projects.

Pat Cummings of ESRI points out that every state already uses the firm's GIS software for one purpose or other, and the company is making its ARRA templates available at no additional cost. Asked why more states are not using the templates, Cummings speculates that the people working on ARRA issues may not be aware of the GIS capacity the state already has. Hopefully, that will soon change.

Interactive maps—especially when variables such as patterns of economic need are included—can help convey the facts about stimulus spending in a much more compelling manner.

Twenty-one states provide project or contract detail on their main ARRA site, while nearly all (48) do so in their highway reporting—though often the descriptions are minimal.

While we do not give extra points in these situations, we were impressed with the more advanced project maps that not only show locations but also contain pop-up information boxes with project details. One of the best of these is on the New York ARRA site.

Average score: 2.3 of 10 for ARRA websites; 9.6 of 15 for ARRA highway reporting

Contract Award Data

Part of contractor accountability is disclosing the identity of the company and the amount it is receiving for the work. It is also preferable for taxpayers to be able to see the text of the contract (or Request for Proposal) for additional details. We give 5 points for the presence of one of these three items, 10 for two and 15 for all three. We give credit even if the contract information is included only in a posted copy of a monthly Form 1585 that states are required to submit to the Federal Highway Administration. No points are given for contractor information mentioned only in press releases.

Despite our generosity in giving credit for information buried in PDF documents such as federal filings, it is disappointing that only ten states (Colorado, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Washington and West Virginia) provide contractor names and dollar amounts on their ARRA website. The results are better in highway reporting, where 29 states have both contractor names and dollar figures. Another three (Arkansas, California and Wisconsin) have dollar amounts but no contractor names on their ARRA website, and 12 do this in their highway reporting.

Even more frustrating is that we found only one instance, Massachusetts, in which a state is planning to provide online access to ARRA contract documents in all categories; Delaware and Maine are beginning to do so for highway contracts only, though in no case is much information available yet.

Average score: 2.4 of 15 for ARRA websites; 7.1 of 15 for ARRA highway reporting.

Jobs Data

The paramount objective of the Recovery Act is to address mounting unemployment through job creation and retention. It is still early in the process to expect a great deal of employment data, but we looked for signs that states intend to supply this information on

their ARRA projects. We give 15 points for the inclusion of any projected or actual jobs data, even if it appears only on a posted copy of a monthly Form 1587 that states are required to submit to the Federal Highway Administration.

This is another area in which even a generous scoring method yields disappointing results. Only four states—Colorado, Maryland, Washington and West Virginia—provide jobs data for individual projects on their main ARRA site. Eighteen states do so in their highway reporting. The rest not only fail to include jobs information in their project descriptions but also fail to post their Form 1587. Hopefully, states will do a much better in their job reporting once the federal government's ARRA recipient reporting system is up and running.

Average score: 1.2 of 15 for ARRA websites; 5.3 of 15 for ARRA highway reporting

Project Status

Announcing a stimulus project is not sufficient. Taxpayers need to know when a project is beginning and how long it is expected to last. It is also useful to know, at any given time, how much of a project has been completed. We give 3 points for the presence of either duration or portion completed, 5 points when both are displayed.

Perhaps this sort of information will become more common when more stimulus projects are underway, but currently only 7 states provide any project status information on their ARRA websites; 19 do so in their highway reporting.

Average score: 0.5 of 5 for ARRA websites; 1.3 of 5 for highway reporting.

Centralization

Presumably, the point of creating a state ARRA website is to provide information on all stimulus activities in one place, making it easier for one to see the full picture. Some states, however, spread the information around on the websites of individual state agencies. We give a state ARRA website the highest score (10) if it appears to contain all key project information or else clearly links to additional information on an agency webpage. We give a lower score of 5 where it appears that some information is available only on agency sites and is not clearly linked. And we award 0 points if it appears that everything is on agency sites without links from the main ARRA webpage. We also give 0 points if there appears to be no project information on either the main site or agency pages. Note that, because of

time limitations, we were not able to review every agency site in every state, but we made sure to check transportation information in every case.

Most states (33) appear to put all their project information on the main ARRA website, though in many cases such information is limited or non-existent.

Average score: 7.8 of 10 for ARRA websites.

Currency of Information

An obvious advantage of websites is that data can be updated easily and frequently. Taxpayers have a right to up-to-date information on Recovery Act spending. We give 5 points when the project data on a state site is said to be current within one month, 3 points when it is older. We award 0 points when currency is not clearly indicated.

Eleven states have information less than a month old on their main ARRA site, while 28 states manage this for their highway reporting.

Average score: 1.2 of 5 for ARRA websites; 6.5 of 10 for ARRA highway reporting.

Repair vs. New Roads

For our analysis of reporting on ARRA highway projects, we added one new category: Repair vs. New Roads. Environmental groups such as Smart Growth America have argued that more highway stimulus spending should go toward fixing existing roads as opposed to building new ones.²

There are two reasons: new roads are seen as contributors to suburban sprawl, and repair/restoration projects usually can begin work sooner than new roads. We give states 10 points if they provide a clear breakdown of how their ARRA highway spending is divided between repair projects and new capacity. Individual descriptions usually indicate which category a project falls into, but we give credit only when the totals are displayed.

Only one state—South Carolina—posts information showing how highway spending is divided by type of project.

Average score: 0.2 of 10 for ARRA highway reporting.

² See, for example: <http://stimulus.smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/03/20-projects-report-compressed.pdf>).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

States deserve credit for creating general Recovery Act websites—and many agency ARRA pages—relatively quickly, but there are wide variations in the depth and quality of what they have produced.

Some states are trying hard to help residents understand a plan that has an overwhelming number of features. They are using charts, graphs, maps and databases to convey the information and are posting many of the reports that state agencies are creating for their own use and to satisfy reporting requirements set by the federal government. These states—the ones that score highest in our survey—are living up to the Recovery Act's aim of stimulating the economy in a way that is transparent and accountable.

Other states seem to have put up their ARRA sites reluctantly. Their web pages are often lacking in detail, or else the information is buried in secondary pages that most users will fail to see or in linked PDF documents that few will bother to open. They are not fulfilling the spirit of the Recovery Act nor are they contributing to the new era of open government made possible by the Internet.

There is significant room for improvement in the higher-scoring ARRA websites as well as the mediocre ones. To assist all states in improving their sites, we offer the following recommendations:

- Put a summary of key information about ARRA spending right at the top of the home page of the site. A clear bar graph, pie chart or table showing the main spending flows goes a long way in helping the average user begin to see what the Recovery Act is all about. There should be clear links to pages with details about the various specific programs. Avoid putting the details in large PDF files that may be difficult to open and tedious to read.
- Provide a map or a table showing how overall ARRA spending and the amounts in key categories are being distributed around the state. This would be a good place to tell users which spending streams are determined by established formulas, and those for which state agencies have discretion on how and where to spend the funds.
- Along with information on spending streams, provide information on individual projects being funded by those programs, such as a particular transit improvement or weatherization effort. Where possible, display the location of the projects on maps. Interactive displays that allow one to drill down for details are better than static PDF maps.

- For projects carried out by private contractors, be open about the contract award process and the identity of the companies that win bidding competitions. Post the bids and the details, including the full text, of the contract awarded to the winner. Include data on contractor parent companies and use standard identifiers.
- While the federal government's Council of Economic Advisers is responsible for estimating the overall employment impacts of ARRA and the Recovery.gov website will report jobs data on some (but not all) individual projects, state ARRA sites should also include employment data in their project reporting.
- State ARRA sites should make it clear when individual projects began work (or are expected to start), how long they are expected to run and what percentage was complete as of the latest reporting date. It would also be helpful to indicate which projects are using both ARRA and state funds (and how much of each).
- States should make their ARRA websites as user-friendly as possible. This means keeping all or most of the program and project information on the main site, rather than requiring users to engage in an online scavenger hunt across agency web pages. The data should also be updated as often as possible and be available in machine-readable feeds. Sites should have standard web features such as a search engine and a site map.
- ARRA sites should provide readily accessible information about the ways that individuals, organizations and businesses can apply for stimulus grants and contracts. This should include contact names (with phone numbers and e-mail addresses) and selection criteria.

Most of these recommendations are simply matters of good web design and best practices in government transparency. They apply not only to ARRA websites and reporting but also to the regular websites and reporting systems used by state governments.

Ultimately, the use of ARRA websites to inform the public is more than a matter of providing a service to state residents. The way in which the information is presented could be decisive in determining public attitudes toward the stimulus and play a significant role in debates over future government interventions in the economy.

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APPENDIX

State	Main Recovery Act Website	DOT Recovery Act Website
Alabama	http://stimulus.alabama.gov/	http://www.dot.state.al.us/stimulus2009/
Alaska	http://www.alaska.gov/recovery	http://www.dot.state.ak.us/econstim/
Arizona	http://az.gov/recovery/	http://www.azdot.gov/Recovery/index.asp
Arkansas	http://recovery.arkansas.gov/	http://www.arkansashighways.com/ARRA2009/ARRA2009.htm
California	http://www.recovery.ca.gov/	http://www.dot.ca.gov/Recovery/
Colorado	http://www.colorado.gov/recovery/	http://www.dot.state.co.us/arra/
Connecticut	http://www.ct.gov/recovery	http://www.ct.gov/dot/cwp/view.asp?a=1372&q=436026
Delaware	http://recovery.delaware.gov/	http://www.deldot.gov/information/projects/recovery/index.shtml
District of Columbia	http://recovery.dc.gov/recovery/site/default.asp	none
Florida	http://flarecovery.com/	http://www.dot.state.fl.us/planning/economicstimulus/
Georgia	http://stimulusaccountability.ga.gov/	http://dot.state.ga.us/informationcenter/gastimulus/Pages/default.aspx
Hawaii	http://hawaii.gov/recovery	none
Idaho	http://www.accountability.idaho.gov/	http://itd.idaho.gov/accountability/stimulusprojects.html
Illinois	http://www.recovery.illinois.gov	http://www.dot.il.gov/stimulus/index.html
Indiana	http://www.in.gov/gov/INvest.htm	none
Iowa	http://www.iowa.gov/recovery/	http://www.iowadot.gov/recovery/index.htm
Kansas	http://www.governor.ks.gov/recovery	http://www.ksdot.org/Economic_Recovery/
Kentucky	http://kentuckyatwork.ky.gov	none
Louisiana	http://www.stimulus.la.gov/	http://www.dotd.la.gov/arra/

Maine	http://www.maine.gov/recovery/	http://www.maine.gov/mdot/recovery/index.htm
Maryland	http://statestat.maryland.gov/recovery.asp	http://www.e-mdot.com/Planning/Economic_Recovery/Index
Massachusetts	http://www.mass.gov/recovery	http://www.eot.state.ma.us/recovery/
Michigan	http://www.michigan.gov/recovery	http://www.michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621_53334--00.html
Minnesota	http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/recovery	http://www.dot.state.mn.us/federalrecovery/
Mississippi	http://stimulus.ms.gov/	http://www.gomdot.com/Divisions/Highways/Resources/Programming/ARRA/Home.aspx
Missouri	http://transform.mo.gov/	http://www.modot.mo.gov/arra/index.htm
Montana	http://www.recovery.mt.gov	http://www.recovery.mt.gov/mdt/default.mcpix
Nebraska	http://www.recovery.nebraska.gov/	http://www.dor.state.ne.us/ARRA/index.html
Nevada	http://nevada.gov/recovery	http://www.nevadadot.com/projects/Stimulus/default.asp
New Hampshire	http://www.nh.gov/recovery/	http://www.nh.gov/dot/recovery/index.htm
New Jersey	http://www.nj.gov/recovery/	http://www.nj.gov/transportation/capital/stimulus/
New Mexico	http://www.recovery.state.nm.us/	http://nmshtd.state.nm.us/main.asp?secid=16555
New York	http://www.recovery.ny.gov/	https://www.nysdot.gov/recovery
North Carolina	http://www.ncrecovery.gov/	http://www.ncdot.org/recovery/default.html
North Dakota	http://nd.gov/recovery/	http://www.dot.nd.gov/business/federalrecovery.htm
Ohio	http://recovery.ohio.gov/	http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Communications/Pages/FederalStimulusProjectListing.aspx
Oklahoma	http://oklahoma.gov/recovery/	http://www.okladot.state.ok.us/recovery/
Oregon	http://www.oregon.gov/recovery	http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/recovery/economic_stimulus.shtml
Pennsylvania	http://recovery.pa.gov	http://www.dot.state.pa.us/Internet/Bureaus/CPDM.nsf/CPMDHomepage?OpenFrameset&frame=main&src=/Internet/Bureaus/CPDM.nsf/econRecovery?OpenForm
Rhode Island	http://www.recovery.ri.gov/	http://www.dot.state.ri.us/recovery.asp
South Carolina	http://www.stimulus.sc.gov/	http://www.dot.state.sc.us/inside/ARRA.shtml
South Dakota	http://recovery.sd.gov	http://www.sddot.com/pe/proidev/planning_stip.asp

Tennessee	http://tnrecovery.gov/	http://www.tdot.state.tn.us/recovery/default.htm
Texas	http://window.state.tx.us/recovery/	http://www.txdot.gov/project_information/stimulus/default.htm
Utah	http://www.recovery.utah.gov/	http://www.udot.utah.gov/arra/
Vermont	http://recovery.vermont.gov/	http://apps.vtrans.vermont.gov/stimulus/
Virginia	http://www.stimulus.virginia.gov	http://virginiadot.org/newsroom/stimulus_info.asp
Washington	http://recovery.wa.gov/	http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Funding/stimulus/default.htm
West Virginia	http://www.recovery.wv.gov/	none
Wisconsin	http://www.recovery.wisconsin.gov/	http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/recovery/
Wyoming	http://wyoming.gov/recovery/	http://wyoming.gov/recovery/dot.aspx