

**SHOW US THE STIMULUS (AGAIN):
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 has a website reporting on its role in implementing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, the \$787 billion federal stimulus bill designed to shore up state finances, reinforce the social safety net and fund job-creating infrastructure and energy-efficiency projects. Many states have made substantial improvements since these sites were first created in Spring 2009, but there are still wide differences in the quality and quantity of the information offered.

A growing number of state ARRA sites deliver on President Obama's promise that the stimulus plan would be carried out with "an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability." Yet some remain half-hearted efforts that provide taxpayers little useful data on the largest federal stimulus since the New Deal.

These are the conclusions of Good Jobs First after a new review and evaluation of the states' ARRA websites. As in our previous report published last July, 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
- the details of specific projects funded by ARRA grants and contracts, including their employment impact.

On a scale of 0 to 100, the average state score is 44, and the median is 42. Although changes in our scoring system limit the ability to make direct comparisons, it is notable that in our previous survey the average was significantly lower at 28 and the median 25.¹

Transparency is improving, but not as quickly as the public's demand for greater openness.

In this new survey, 20 states score above 50: Maryland (87), Kentucky (85), Connecticut (80), Colorado (72), Minnesota (72), Wisconsin (72), California (69), Illinois (69), Oregon (67), Massachusetts (65), Georgia (64), West Virginia (64), New Mexico (62), New York (62), Pennsylvania (62), Montana (61), Arkansas (60), New Hampshire (58), Washington (54) and Iowa (52).

At the other end, there are 11 states with scores below 20, reflecting the absence of adequate data on ARRA programs or projects. Starting from the bottom, they are: North

¹. These were the results for the scoring of each state's main ARRA website. We had also separately scored the states' ARRA highway data, which was often on their Department of Transportation website. That was not repeated in the new survey.

Dakota (5), District of Columbia (6), Missouri (10), Alaska (13), Vermont (13), Louisiana (16), Mississippi (17), Idaho (18), Oklahoma (18), Texas (18) and South Carolina (19).

Again keeping in mind the change in methodology, there are cases in which states experienced major changes in the rankings from our previous survey to this one. The biggest Cinderella stories are Kentucky, which soared from 47th place to 2nd (an increase of 45 places); Illinois, which jumped from 50th to 7th (43 places); Minnesota, which climbed from 34th to 4th (30 places); and Utah, which rose from 50th to 24th (26 places).

The improved standings of these four states all reflect substantial enhancements to their sites. By contrast, the greatly lowered rankings of states such as Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio and South Carolina do not derive from major downgrades in their web features. These states were mainly impacted by changes in our scoring system. Their relative positions were also affected by the upward movement of states that enriched their sites.

A summary table on page 5 displays the scores alphabetically by state name and by rank.

Here are highlights of the state scores for specific criteria:

- Most states do a good job of providing information on the composition of their ARRA spending, both in broad program categories (energy, housing, transportation, etc.) and in narrower ones. Some states show only broad or narrow categories, but only the District of Columbia provides no program allocation information at all.
- Geographic breakdowns (by county or other division) are less common than summaries of spending by program category. Twenty-seven states provide such information, in many cases through the use of interactive maps.
- Only three states—Kentucky, Maryland and Wisconsin—juxtapose the geographic distribution of spending with patterns of economic distress or need within the state.
- Apart from overall spending amounts, 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. More than half the states (28) now have some kind of project mapping feature on their ARRA site. Of these, 14 have interactive maps with significant project details, while 13 have such maps with more limited details. One has only a static map.
- Whether via maps or otherwise, 41 states provide one or more of the following types of detail on projects funded through ARRA grants and contracts: description, dollar amount, recipient name, status, and the text of the contract or grant award.

Four states—Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts and New Hampshire—have all five elements.

- Despite the ready availability of Recovery.gov ARRA employment data, 10 states have no jobs data on their websites: Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina and the District of Columbia. By contrast, sixteen states have jobs data on individual projects as well as totals by program area and for the state as a whole.
- No state provides comprehensive data on wage or benefit levels in ARRA jobs or on the demographics of the workers in those jobs.
- Only five states—Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi and New Hampshire—provide the full texts of at least some ARRA contract awards.
- No state shows what percentage of ARRA contracts is going to minority, women-owned or other disadvantaged business enterprises, though Pennsylvania is expected to begin doing so soon.
- Only 16 state sites have comprehensive search engines, and only 15 provide a data download capability. Six states—California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York—have both of these features.
- One two states—Colorado and Pennsylvania—provide data feeds with information on new ARRA contracts or projects.

Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations for state governments:

- 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 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 table showing how overall ARRA spending and the amounts in key categories are being distributed among counties (or other geographic division) around the state.
- Also show how the spending is distributed across the state in comparison to patterns of economic distress such as local unemployment and foreclosure rates.

- Along with information on spending streams, provide details on individual projects— such as a particular transit improvement or weatherization effort— funded by an ARRA grant or contract. These details should include a description of the project, the dollar amount, the name of the recipient entity, the status of the project, and the number of jobs generated by the project, along with the text of the contract or grant award.
- Where possible, display the location of the projects on maps. Interactive displays that allow one to drill down for details are better than static maps.
- 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. Sites should have standard web features such as a search engine and a site map as well as the ability to download project data. Including data feeds makes it easier for users to keep track of new ARRA projects.

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. Taxpayers have a right to know how and where their money is being spent. With the explosion of data available on the web, people have rising expectations about government transparency. Whether state governments like it or not, they are being brought into the 21st century by the Recovery Act, and there is no going back.

Here are the states' scores:

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

Rank	State	Score
1	Maryland	87
2	Kentucky	85
3	Connecticut	80
4 (tie)	Colorado	72
4 (tie)	Minnesota	72
4 (tie)	Wisconsin	72
7 (tie)	California	69
7 (tie)	Illinois	69
9	Oregon	67
10	Massachusetts	65
11 (tie)	Georgia	64
11 (tie)	West Virginia	64
13 (tie)	New Mexico	62
13 (tie)	New York	62
13 (tie)	Pennsylvania	62
16	Montana	61
17	Arkansas	60
18	New Hampshire	58
19	Washington	54
20	Iowa	52
21 (tie)	Arizona	49
21 (tie)	Delaware	49
21 (tie)	Virginia	49
24	Utah	46
25 (tie)	Nevada	42
25 (tie)	Rhode Island	42
25 (tie)	South Dakota	42
28 (tie)	Maine	39
28 (tie)	Michigan	39
30	Indiana	37
31	Kansas	36
32	North Carolina	35
33 (tie)	Ohio	33
33 (tie)	Tennessee	33
35 (tie)	Florida	29
35 (tie)	Hawaii	29
35 (tie)	New Jersey	29
38	Nebraska	28
39	Alabama	23
40	Wyoming	21
41	South Carolina	19
42 (tie)	Idaho	18
42 (tie)	Oklahoma	18
42 (tie)	Texas	18
45	Mississippi	17
46	Louisiana	16
47 (tie)	Alaska	13
47 (tie)	Vermont	13
49	Missouri	10
50	District of Columbia	6
51	North Dakota	5

State	Score	Rank
Alabama	23	39
Alaska	13	47 (tie)
Arizona	49	21 (tie)
Arkansas	60	17
California	69	7 (tie)
Colorado	72	4 (tie)
Connecticut	80	3
Delaware	49	21 (tie)
District of Columbia	6	50
Florida	29	35 (tie)
Georgia	64	11 (tie)
Hawaii	29	35 (tie)
Idaho	18	42 (tie)
Illinois	69	7 (tie)
Indiana	37	30
Iowa	52	20
Kansas	36	38
Kentucky	85	2
Louisiana	16	46
Maine	39	28 (tie)
Maryland	87	1
Massachusetts	65	10
Michigan	39	28 (tie)
Minnesota	72	4 (tie)
Mississippi	17	45
Missouri	10	49
Montana	61	16
Nebraska	28	38
Nevada	42	25 (tie)
New Hampshire	58	18
New Jersey	29	35 (tie)
New Mexico	62	13 (tie)
New York	62	13 (tie)
North Carolina	35	32
North Dakota	5	51
Ohio	33	33 (tie)
Oklahoma	18	42 (tie)
Oregon	67	9
Pennsylvania	62	13 (tie)
Rhode Island	42	25 (tie)
South Carolina	19	41
South Dakota	42	25 (tie)
Tennessee	33	33 (tie)
Texas	18	42 (tie)
Utah	46	24
Vermont	13	47 (tie)
Virginia	49	21 (tie)
Washington	54	19
West Virginia	64	11 (tie)
Wisconsin	72	4 (tie)
Wyoming	21	40

INTRODUCTION

It is now nearly one year since President Obama signed the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, or ARRA. There is ongoing debate on the effectiveness of ARRA, especially with regard to job creation and retention.

The pressure on ARRA to deliver is 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 last February, President Obama called it “a plan that will be implemented with an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability.”

At the federal level, that goal is definitely being achieved. As part of the implementation of ARRA, an entirely new system for tracking the details of a major federal spending program has been created. Tens of thousands of state and local government agencies, for-profit companies, non-profit organizations, and other entities have been reporting on how they have been spending billions of dollars in ARRA grants and contracts, including to what extent that spending has created or retained jobs.

This vast amount of information is being disseminated to the public through the Recovery.gov website, managed by the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board, a new federal entity created by ARRA to handle online disclosure as well as the investigation of fraud or abuse.

Recovery.gov is not meant to be the sole conduit for ARRA information. The Obama Administration created special stimulus web pages at each of the federal agencies handling the 200-plus spending streams encompassed in the Act. ARRA contract and grant data have also been integrated into the USASpending.gov system.

Not only the federal government is involved. Recognizing that more than \$200 billion of ARRA spending is passing through state and local government agencies, the Administration persuaded each of the states to construct its own website to inform residents about their share of the stimulus pie. These state ARRA websites are the subject of this report.

When Good Jobs First published its initial report on this topic last summer, the role of the state ARRA sites was in part to make up for the fact that Recovery.gov was not yet reporting recipient data.

Now that Recovery.gov has presented the first quarterly data (last October) and is about to release the second quarter's, the responsibility of the state sites has shifted. Now their role is more about providing details not available through Recovery.gov. This study assesses their progress. (See box on page 8 for more details on the relationship between state sites and Recovery.gov.)

Whether ARRA is succeeding or failing in its mission of economic recovery, states have an obligation to inform residents on how their tax dollars are being used. We have made it our mission to assess how well they are doing that online.

The Study

In this report Good Jobs First analyzes and ranks the stimulus websites created by the 50 states and the District of Columbia. We look at content of the sites as of mid-January 2010, about eleven months after the enactment of ARRA. Our focus is on how effective the sites are in explaining the different aspects of state-level stimulus spending and the extent to which they provide information on individual projects, including their employment impact.

Specifically, we rate the sites based on whether they include the following features:

- Statewide ARRA spending totals by broad categories (energy, housing, transportation, etc.) as well as more detailed subcategories;
- Data on the distribution of spending among the state's counties (or other geographic divisions);
- Data on the geographic distribution of spending within the state juxtaposed with patterns of economic distress such as local unemployment and foreclosure rates;
- Details on specific ARRA contracts and grants, including dollar amount, recipient name, project description and status, and the full text of award documents;
- Data on the number of jobs created or retained by the project;
- Maps showing the location of contract and grant projects; and
- User aids such as search engines, data downloads and data feeds.

We also give "extra credit" if a state provides data in three equity areas: job quality, worker demographics and the share of contracts going to disadvantaged businesses.

Overall, we use seven categories to rate the ARRA websites of the states and the District of Columbia on a scale of 0 to 100.

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 first appendix at the end of this report describes the changes in methodology for this report compared to our previous survey. The second appendix lists the web address for each state's ARRA website.

State ARRA Websites versus Recovery.gov

When the state ARRA websites first appeared in Spring 2009, the federal government was not yet presenting much information on individual stimulus grants and contracts. The first round of recipient data did not appear on Recovery.gov until October, as mandated by the Recovery Act. That site now makes available a huge amount of material, including an interactive national map of federal ARRA contracts and grants, along with extensive details—such as job numbers—on each. Data on stimulus contracts and grants have also been integrated into the federal government’s USASpending.gov system.

One might ask whether state ARRA websites are still needed, in light of the richness of these federal web pages. Or, even if the state sites are maintained, must they do anything more than point users to the federal resources?

This is exactly what the ARRA website of Alabama, for example, does. Its home page—<http://stimulus.alabama.gov>—has a prominent graphic headlined “Where is the Money Going?” that links to a Recovery.gov map displaying stimulus grants and contracts in the state. By clicking on the dots, you get project details, including job creation and retention.

There is certainly nothing wrong with linking to Recovery.gov. In fact, it is surprising that more state ARRA sites don’t do so. But putting up a link to the federal site does not, in the view of Good Jobs First, satisfy all of a state’s stimulus reporting obligations to its residents. That’s why Alabama receives a low score of 23 in our survey and is ranked 39th among the states.

We base this position on the limitations of the Recovery.gov reporting system, especially the recipient data from which the maps are derived. Under that system, authorized by Section 1512 of ARRA, the federal government collects information on the grants and contracts it directly awards. Yet many of those grant recipients are state governments that use the funding to award their own contracts and to make subgrants to localities, which may in turn also award contracts and grants.

The Recovery.gov system is not currently designed to capture all levels of sub-recipients. It is thus possible that many state and local contracts and subgrants are not reflected in its data.

Moreover, not all ARRA programs are subject to the Section 1512 reporting requirements. Among those excluded are safety net programs such as food stamps and expanded unemployment benefits that go directly to individuals. Some state grants, such as expanded Medicaid payments, are also not included.

The recipient data on Recovery.gov thus cannot give a full picture of ARRA activity. States should fill in the gaps by providing additional spending data. They can also give more detail on their individual projects than Recovery.gov and USASpending.gov can be expected to offer.

Sorry, Alabama, there is no shortcut to comprehensive ARRA reporting.

FINDINGS

Overall, our finding is that state ARRA websites are improving, yet many states are still not making adequate use of readily available online technology to educate residents about the impact of the Recovery Act. Some state sites are now quite impressive, while others remain disappointing.

On a scale of 0 to 100, the average state score is 44, and the median is 42. Although changes in our scoring system limit the ability to make direct comparisons, it is notable that in our previous survey the average was significantly lower at 28 and the median 25.²

In this new survey, 20 states score above 50: Maryland (87), Kentucky (85), Connecticut (80), Colorado (72), Minnesota (72), Wisconsin (72), California (69), Illinois (69), Oregon (67), Massachusetts (65), Georgia (64), West Virginia (64), New Mexico (62), New York (62), Pennsylvania (62), Montana (61), Arkansas (60), New Hampshire (58), Washington (54) and Iowa (52).

At the other end, there are 11 states with scores below 20, reflecting the absence of adequate data on ARRA programs and projects. Starting from the bottom, they are: North Dakota (5), District of Columbia (6), Missouri (10), Alaska (13), Vermont (13), Louisiana (16), Mississippi (17), Idaho (18), Oklahoma (18), Texas (18) and South Carolina (19).

Again keeping in mind the change in methodology, there are cases in which states experienced major changes in the rankings from our previous survey to this one. The biggest Cinderella stories are Kentucky, which soared from 47th place to 2nd (an increase of 45 places); Illinois, which jumped from 50th to 7th (43 places); Minnesota, which climbed from 34th to 4th (30 places); and Utah, which rose from 50th to 24th (26 places).

The improved standings of these four states all reflect substantial enhancements to their sites. By contrast, the greatly lowered rankings of states such as Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio and South Carolina do not derive from major downgrades in their web features. These states were mainly impacted by changes in our scoring system, and their relative positions were affected by the upward movement of states that enriched their sites (for more, see the box on page 11).

The following page has a summary of the state scores by rank and alphabetically by state name.

². These were the results for the scoring of each state's main ARRA website. We had also separately scored the states' ARRA highway data, which was often on their Department of Transportation website, but that was not repeated in the new survey.

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

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4 (tie)	Wisconsin	72
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7 (tie)	Illinois	69
9	Oregon	67
10	Massachusetts	65
11 (tie)	Georgia	64
11 (tie)	West Virginia	64
13 (tie)	New Mexico	62
13 (tie)	New York	62
13 (tie)	Pennsylvania	62
16	Montana	61
17	Arkansas	60
18	New Hampshire	58
19	Washington	54
20	Iowa	52
21 (tie)	Arizona	49
21 (tie)	Delaware	49
21 (tie)	Virginia	49
24	Utah	46
25 (tie)	Nevada	42
25 (tie)	Rhode Island	42
25 (tie)	South Dakota	42
28 (tie)	Maine	39
28 (tie)	Michigan	39
30	Indiana	37
31	Kansas	36
32	North Carolina	35
33 (tie)	Ohio	33
33 (tie)	Tennessee	33
35 (tie)	Florida	29
35 (tie)	Hawaii	29
35 (tie)	New Jersey	29
38	Nebraska	28
39	Alabama	23
40	Wyoming	21
41	South Carolina	19
42 (tie)	Idaho	18
42 (tie)	Oklahoma	18
42 (tie)	Texas	18
45	Mississippi	17
46	Louisiana	16
47 (tie)	Alaska	13
47 (tie)	Vermont	13
49	Missouri	10
50	District of Columbia	6
51	North Dakota	5

State	Score	Rank
Alabama	23	39
Alaska	13	47 (tie)
Arizona	49	21 (tie)
Arkansas	60	17
California	69	7 (tie)
Colorado	72	4 (tie)
Connecticut	80	3
Delaware	49	21 (tie)
District of Columbia	6	50
Florida	29	35 (tie)
Georgia	64	11 (tie)
Hawaii	29	35 (tie)
Idaho	18	42 (tie)
Illinois	69	7 (tie)
Indiana	37	30
Iowa	52	20
Kansas	36	38
Kentucky	85	2
Louisiana	16	46
Maine	39	28 (tie)
Maryland	87	1
Massachusetts	65	10
Michigan	39	28 (tie)
Minnesota	72	4 (tie)
Mississippi	17	45
Missouri	10	49
Montana	61	16
Nebraska	28	38
Nevada	42	25 (tie)
New Hampshire	58	18
New Jersey	29	35 (tie)
New Mexico	62	13 (tie)
New York	62	13 (tie)
North Carolina	35	32
North Dakota	5	51
Ohio	33	33 (tie)
Oklahoma	18	42 (tie)
Oregon	67	9
Pennsylvania	62	13 (tie)
Rhode Island	42	25 (tie)
South Carolina	19	41
South Dakota	42	25 (tie)
Tennessee	33	33 (tie)
Texas	18	42 (tie)
Utah	46	24
Vermont	13	47 (tie)
Virginia	49	21 (tie)
Washington	54	19
West Virginia	64	11 (tie)
Wisconsin	72	4 (tie)
Wyoming	21	40

Ups and Downs

Several states received dramatically higher rankings compared to our previous report because they made major overhauls of their ARRA websites. Kentucky and Illinois, for instance, went from having minimal data on stimulus programs and projects to employing state-of-the-art interactive maps with abundant information.

It is not, however, the case that the states with biggest ranking declines—Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio and South Carolina—lowered their sites' quality in a major way. The rankings of these states were, instead, affected by changes we adopted in our scoring system to reflect the fact that more projects are up and running, and the federal government's Recovery.gov recipient reporting system is operating. See Appendix A for details on the scoring changes.

For example, these five states all lost 10 points when we eliminated the category Centralization. This was meant to reward states for keeping more of their information on the main ARRA site rather than dispersing it to agency websites, such as the transportation department web pages we rated separately in the previous report. We used that dual-rating system because highway spending was then moving faster than most other categories. This time around we looked only at the main ARRA sites.

Most of these states also no longer received 5 points for another category we removed: Currency of Information. Given that project data are now tied to the Recovery.gov quarterly reporting system, it no longer makes sense to rate states individually on how fast they post new information.

Of course, other states were also affected by these scoring changes, but many of them compensated for those point losses with substantive improvements in other categories. The states that plunged in the rankings did not follow suit. They still lack key features such as project details, jobs data or project maps.

Our ratings reflect the belief that state governments should not just be keeping pace with federal ARRA reporting. States should also be practicing continuous improvement in transparency, learning from each other's best practices such as those we collect here. As the technology and cost barriers to transparency continue to fall, taxpayers will continue to expect more and better government spending data.

Two other points of clarification regarding states with large drops in rankings: Although it has a useful site called Missouri Accountability Portal (linked from the ARRA page) with a great deal of disclosure on ARRA and other kinds of spending, Missouri does not get credit for Contract/Grant details, given that the information on the Portal cannot be linked to specific stimulus projects. Ohio's site has a clickable map that links to web pages summarizing spending information relating to each county. However, we award points only for maps that provide details on individual ARRA projects. Other states such as Tennessee are also denied points for clickable maps that simply contain links to summary information on counties.

RESULTS BY SCORING COMPONENTS

Spending Breakdown by Program Area

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 or narrow categories are used.

This is a basic educational feature that should be prominently displayed on every state ARRA website. States such as Maryland, Texas and Virginia do just that on their home pages, while some other states make you hunt for the information.

Overall, 42 of the states have spending breakdowns by both broad and narrow program areas. Eight states—Alabama, Florida, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming—provide one or the other (in all cases but Michigan and North Dakota it is the narrow categories). Only the District of Columbia provides no program allocation information at all.

Average score: 9.0 of 10

This is an improvement from the average of 7.7 in our previous survey.

Spending Breakdown by Geography

Residents have an interest in knowing how stimulus spending is distributed across different parts of their state. We examine whether ARRA websites provide a breakdown of spending by county—or another geographic unit, such as towns in New England. We also consider whether those totals are then broken down by spending categories.

We give the highest score (15) to states that provide *both* spending totals for geographic units and breakdowns by category within the unit; 10 points when only one type is made available. Note that not all forms of ARRA spending can be easily tracked by geography.

Geographic breakdowns are less common than summaries of spending by program category. Twenty-seven states provide some sort of geographic breakdown, with 22 of those including both unit totals and sub-amounts. Many of these states use interactive maps to provide the data.

Five states provide unit totals or sub-amounts but not both: Kansas provides county totals only, while Colorado, Delaware, Michigan and Pennsylvania offer details on specific spending areas segregated by county but not county totals.

Average score: 7.5 of 15.

In our previous survey, in which we scored geographic breakdowns a bit differently, the average state score was 3.8 of 15. See Appendix A for details on the scoring changes.

Geographic Distribution of Spending Compared to Economic Distress

While the economic crisis is affecting the entire country in one way or another, some areas are being hit much 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 local unemployment, foreclosure or poverty levels. The maps on Recovery.gov can display unemployment rates by state or by county along with ARRA contracts and grants, but as discussed above, the Recovery.gov data do not give a complete picture of ARRA activity.

We give 10 points to state ARRA sites when they display spending distribution compared to one distress variable; 15 points when they use two or more variables. We also give 5 points of “extra credit” if a state shows what percentage of its ARRA contract spending is being awarded to disadvantaged business enterprises.

Surprisingly, only three states show any geographic distribution of spending compared to distress or need: Kentucky, Maryland and Wisconsin.

Kentucky’s interactive map can display icons showing overall stimulus spending by county against a backdrop of color-coded county rates of unemployment or poverty. Maryland’s interactive map uses a variety of need measures for different subcategories of spending. For example, education spending is mapped against data showing the portion of the population over the age of 25 lacking a high school diploma. Transportation spending is mapped against data showing the portion of the population without a vehicle and thus dependent on public transit. Workforce spending is mapped against unemployment rates.

Wisconsin takes a simpler approach: a table showing each county’s unemployment rate alongside its ARRA funding.³

³. Note that the Wisconsin table does not display when using the Firefox browser.

Unlike our previous survey, we do not consider those cases in which the locations of highway projects compared to economic distress patterns are made available but no other types of projects are analyzed in that way.

No state received extra credit for showing what percentage of its ARRA contract spending is being awarded to disadvantaged business enterprises (though Pennsylvania is expected to begin doing so soon, pursuant to an executive order issued by the governor last October). Several states such as Indiana and Maryland provide disadvantaged business data relating to at least some individual contracts but no state totals.

Average score: 0.8 of 10.

Grant/Contract Details

Taxpayers have a right to know the details of how stimulus dollars are being spent, including data on individual grants and contracts. We give 3 points each for the inclusion of the following details: description of contract/grant projects, the dollar amount of the contract or grant, the name of the recipient entity (whether government agency, for-profit contractor or other), the text of the contract or grant document, and the status of the project. Including all of these elements would yield a score of 15.

Forty-one of the states provide at least one of these five elements. Four states—Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts and New Hampshire—get a perfect score in this category. Fifteen states have four of the five elements; 12 states have three; 7 have two; and 3 have one.

The element that appears most frequently is dollar amount, in all of the 41 states. Thirty-six states provide project descriptions, 30 provide recipient name, and 21 provide project status. Least common is the inclusion of the text of the grant or contract award. Five states—Connecticut, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi and New Hampshire—provide the full texts of at least some ARRA contract awards. Kentucky, Massachusetts and Mississippi seem to provide more complete collections of contract documents than Connecticut and New Hampshire, but we give them all the same score.

We give credit for details and contract documents that are made available via links to separate state databases that also cover non-ARRA spending and procurement activities. But the information on those databases has to be tied to specific ARRA contracts to get points. Missouri, for instance, loses out because the ARRA vendor payment data shown on its Missouri Accountability Portal do not indicate which projects are involved.

One complaint we have is that the links to separate state spending databases are not always obvious. For example, the fact that contract details from the New York Comptroller's Open Book website are available on the state's ARRA site becomes evident only after drilling down numerous levels in the interactive project map.

Average score: 7.8 of 15.

Recipient Jobs Data

The paramount objective of the Recovery Act is to address unemployment through job creation and retention. Reporting on the effectiveness of ARRA spending in generating jobs is one of the most important things states can do to inform residents about the impact of the Recovery Act.

At this stage it is also one of the easiest things for states to do. They are already required to report to the federal government about the job impact of most (but not all) of the ARRA grants they are receiving. The results are on the federal Recovery.gov website.

We give 7 points for reporting jobs data relating to individual grants and contracts; 5 points for job totals by different program spending areas; and 3 points for a statewide job total. Given that actual jobs figures are being collected, we abandoned the practice in our previous survey of giving points for providing job projections only.

We give extra credit for providing two types of information not collected as part of the Recovery.gov system but which would help in understanding the economic impact of stimulus spending and aid in equity analyses: 5 points for data on job quality (mainly wage rates) and 5 points for data on worker demographics (race, gender, etc.). This category thus allows for a maximum score of 15, with 10 more in potential extra credit.

Despite the ready availability of Recovery.gov employment data, ten states have no jobs data on their websites: Hawaii, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina and the District of Columbia.

Of the other 41 states, 16 get the maximum score of 15, while four—Alaska, New Jersey, Vermont and Virginia—get the lowest score by providing only a state total.

Not a single state earns extra credit for providing comprehensive data on wage levels in ARRA jobs or for providing data on the demographics of the workers in those jobs.

Average score: 8.5 of 15.

Although our job scoring system has changed, it is clear that states are doing a better job in reporting on the employment impacts of ARRA.

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.

In our previous survey we awarded only 5 points for mapping. This time we give it more weight. Recovery.gov is mapping federal contracts and grants—including most of those going to state and local governments—so there is less justification for a state ARRA website to be without a detailed state map of ARRA projects that should also incorporate information not displayed by Recovery.gov. We acknowledge that some types of stimulus projects do not have a single physical location and thus cannot be easily mapped.

We give 15 points for interactive maps that allow users to drill down and find significant details on individual projects, and 10 points for interactive maps with more limited details. Static maps are worth 5 points. We give equal points whether the details show up right on the map or are linked from the map to a web or PDF page.

We give no points for maps of ARRA highway projects that are located only on state Department of Transportation websites. We also give no points for maps, whether interactive or not, that display data on the geographic distribution of spending programs but not on specific grants and contracts. Points for such geographic spending breakdowns are awarded in a separate category described above.

More than half the states (28) now have some kind of project mapping feature on their ARRA site. Of these, 14 have interactive maps with significant project details, 13 have such maps with more limited details, and one state (Hawaii) offers static maps.

For more details on the different approaches states are taking to interactive mapping, see the box on page 17. In the future, we intend to evaluate the mapping practices of the state ARRA websites in more detail.

Average score: 6.8 of 15.

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 in more than half the states include maps that illustrate where stimulus funds are being spent.

Most significant are maps that use interactivity to provide details on individual contract and grant projects. More than two dozen state sites currently have such maps. Some of the best ones are based on interfaces developed by ESRI, a California-based company that pioneered the use of geographic information systems (GIS). More than a dozen states are using ESRI interfaces, including the five highest scorers in our survey—Maryland, Kentucky, Connecticut, Colorado, and Minnesota. ESRI does business with every state and has made its original and enhanced ARRA templates available at no additional cost.

ESRI is not the only game in town. Five states (Arizona, Delaware, New Hampshire, New York and Pennsylvania) use Google Maps, while two (Indiana and Wisconsin) use Bing maps. A number of states use maps from other sources.

States such as Illinois and California feature their project maps prominently on the home page, while others such as Iowa bury them within the site.

Some state maps directly display individual projects, while others show totals for counties or other geographic units that can be clicked to provide project details. Among the states with the most extensive project details are Arizona, Illinois, Maryland and Minnesota. Arizona has a nice arrangement in which the project details appear in a separate panel alongside the map rather than being superimposed, which on some state maps impairs readability.

Our two top-scoring states—Maryland and Kentucky—also use their maps to show how the distribution of ARRA spending compares to patterns of economic distress or need. Using a Need tab at the bottom of info boxes that appear superimposed on the ESRI maps, Kentucky displays unemployment and poverty rates compared to overall ARRA spending, while Maryland uses a variety of need measures in the spending subcategories.

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

User Aids

In our previous survey we recommended that states make their ARRA websites more useful through the inclusion of features such as search engines, but we did not score them in this area. This time we do so by looking at three key features relating to a user's ability to collect and analyze information from the site.

We give 5 points for the inclusion of a search engine that covers all the content on the site, including the grant and contract data, 5 points for allowing the user to download that data in spreadsheet form, and 5 points for including a feed that provides updated data on new contracts or grants. This category thus has a maximum possible score of 15.

Only 16 state sites have comprehensive search engines, and only 15 provide a data download capability. Six states—California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York—have both of these features.

Numerous states have feeds for the general news section of their site, but only two states—Colorado and Pennsylvania—have a feed that provides updates on data relating to specific contract and grant projects.

Average score: 3.2 of 15.

In all of the categories for which broad comparisons can be made with our previous survey, there is improvement among the state ARRA websites. The greatest progress is in mapping the geographic distribution of stimulus spending, and in providing project details and job numbers. More states are using interactive maps to convey information about ARRA activities, yet only a few are presenting that data juxtaposed with geographic patterns of economic distress. Nor are states improving on Recovery.gov by offering data on job quality or worker demographics. Many are also lagging when it comes to web features such as comprehensive search engines and data downloading.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of states have made substantial improvements in their ARRA websites over the past six months, and others that already had impressive sites have generally maintained their standards.

These states deserve credit for helping residents understand a stimulus plan that has a large number of components. Using charts, graphs, maps and databases to convey the information, they are living up to the Recovery Act's objective of unprecedented transparency and accountability.

At the other end, some states still give the impression of having put up their ARRA sites reluctantly. Their web pages are often lacking details on spending programs and individual grants and contracts. Some are even failing to use the websites to provide access to data collected by the states themselves for the federal government's Recovery.gov reporting system.

In between are numerous states that score well by some measures but fall short in other categories. The fact that the average and median scores are only in the low 40s (out of 100) shows that many states are still in need of significant improvement in the quantity and quality of information presented on their ARRA websites.

To assist all states in improving their sites, 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 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 table showing how overall ARRA spending and the amounts in key categories are being distributed among the counties (or other geographic division) around the state.
- Show how the spending is distributed across the state in comparison to patterns of economic distress such as local unemployment, foreclosure or poverty rates.
- Along with information on spending streams, provide details on individual projects— such as a particular transit improvement or weatherization effort— funded by an ARRA grant or contract. These details should include a description of the project, the dollar amount, the name of the recipient entity, the status of the

project, and the number of jobs generated by the project, along with the text of the contract or grant award.

- Where possible, display the location of the projects on maps. Interactive displays that allow one to drill down for details are better than static maps.
- 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 state-agency web pages. Sites should have standard web features such as a search engine and a site map as well as the ability to download project data. Including data feeds makes it easier for users to keep track of new ARRA projects.

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. Taxpayers have a right to know how and where their money is being spent. With the explosion of data available on the web, people have rising expectations about government transparency. Whether state governments like it or not, they are being brought into the 21st century by the Recovery Act, and there is no going back.

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Appendix A: Changes in Methodology from Our Previous Study

This is the second survey by Good Jobs First of state ARRA websites. The first was published in July 2009. We updated our methodology for this report, especially to reflect the fact that ARRA activities are further along and the federal government's Recovery.gov website now contains extensive recipient data.

The biggest change is that we no longer rate the reporting of ARRA highway spending data separately from the evaluation of each state's main ARRA website. We did so previously because highway spending was on a faster track than other categories. Thus each state now has one score and rank rather than two.

Here are the other differences for each scoring category:

Spending Breakdown by Program Area: We give 5 points for including data by either broad or narrow categories, and 10 points for both. Previously, we gave 5 points only for broad categories alone.

Spending Breakdown by Geography: We give 10 points for either county (or other geographic unit) totals for all types of spending combined or for totals only of individual types; and 15 points for both. Previously, we gave 10 points when geographic unit totals were displayed either for individual units separately or all units in one place; and 15 points for both.

Geographic Distribution of Spending Compared to Economic Distress: We give 10 points for using one variable and 15 points for using two or more variables. We also give 5 points of extra credit for including data on the portion of contracts going to disadvantaged businesses. Previously, we gave 10 points when any comparison to distress or need was made, and there was no opportunity for extra credit.

Grant/Contracts Details: We give 3 points each for the inclusion of five different elements: project description, dollar amount, recipient name, contract or grant award document and project status—for a maximum of 15 points. Previously, we looked only at contracts (not grants) and we considered only three elements: dollar amount, contractor name and contract text. We had a separate category for project status for which we awarded up to 5 points.

Recipient Jobs Data: We give 7 points for data on individual contracts and grants, 5 points for data on program areas, and 3 points for data on geographic units or the entire state—for a maximum of 15 points. We also give 5 points of extra credit for the inclusion of data on job quality (especially wage rates) and the same amount for worker demographics.

Previously, we gave 15 points for the inclusion of any project jobs data, and there was no opportunity for extra credit.

Mapping of Projects: We give 15 points for interactive maps that contain extensive project details, 10 points for interactive maps with limited project details, and 5 points for static maps. Previously, we gave 5 points for any kind of project map.

User Aids: We give 5 points each for the inclusion of a search box that covers project data, data download capability and a data feed on new projects—for a maximum of 15. We previously did not rate the sites by these measures.

Two categories from our previous survey were eliminated: Centralization (the extent to which ARRA data can be found on the state's main site rather than agency sites) and Currency of Info (how up-to-date project data are said to be). Our decision to discontinue separate ratings of highway data also meant the elimination of the category relating to data about spending on repairs versus new roads.

Appendix B: State ARRA Website Addresses

State	URL	State	URL
Alabama	http://stimulus.alabama.gov/	Montana	http://www.recovery.mt.gov
Alaska	http://www.alaska.gov/recovery	Nebraska	http://www.recovery.nebraska.gov/
Arizona	http://az.gov/recovery/	Nevada	http://nevada.gov/recovery/
Arkansas	http://recovery.arkansas.gov/	New Hampshire	http://www.nh.gov/recovery/
California	http://www.recovery.ca.gov/	New Jersey	http://www.nj.gov/recovery/
Colorado	http://www.colorado.gov/recovery/	New Mexico	http://www.recovery.state.nm.us/
Connecticut	http://www.recovery.ct.gov/	New York	http://www.recovery.ny.gov/
Delaware	http://recovery.delaware.gov/	North Carolina	http://www.ncrecovery.gov/
District of Columbia	http://recovery.dc.gov/	North Dakota	http://www.nd.gov/recovery/
Florida	http://flarecovery.com/	Ohio	http://recovery.ohio.gov/
Georgia	http://stimulusaccountability.ga.gov/	Oklahoma	http://oklahoma.gov/recovery/
Hawaii	http://hawaii.gov/recovery	Oregon	http://www.oregon.gov/recovery/
Idaho	http://www.accountability.idaho.gov/	Pennsylvania	http://recovery.pa.gov
Illinois	http://recovery.illinois.gov/	Rhode Island	http://www.recovery.ri.gov/
Indiana	http://Invest.in.gov	South Carolina	http://www.stimulus.sc.gov/
Iowa	http://www.iowa.gov/recovery/	South Dakota	http://recovery.sd.gov/
Kansas	http://www.governor.ks.gov/recovery	Tennessee	http://tnrecovery.gov/
Kentucky	http://kentuckyatwork.ky.gov	Texas	http://window.state.tx.us/recovery/
Louisiana	http://www.stimulus.la.gov/	Utah	http://www.recovery.utah.gov/
Maine	http://www.maine.gov/recovery/	Vermont	http://recovery.vermont.gov/
Maryland	http://recovery.maryland.gov	Virginia	http://www.stimulus.virginia.gov/
Massachusetts	http://www.mass.gov/recovery	Washington	http://recovery.wa.gov/
Michigan	http://www.michigan.gov/recovery	West Virginia	http://www.recovery.wv.gov/
Minnesota	http://www.recovery.mn	Wisconsin	http://www.recovery.wisconsin.gov/
Mississippi	http://stimulus.ms.gov/	Wyoming	http://www.wyoming.gov/recovery/
Missouri	http://transform.mo.gov/		