

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Tracking the Stimulus: Resources for Providing Information on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)

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One of the key issues during the 2010 mid-term elections was whether the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was successful in jump-starting the United States economy. ARRA was signed into law by President Barack Obama on February 17, 2009 in response to the most severe economic downturn since the Great Depression. The bill includes federal tax cuts, expansion of unemployment benefits and other social provisions including increased domestic spending in education, health care and infrastructure (most notably in the energy sector). Such massive, sweeping legislation will surely elicit questions from patrons as to how ARRA will affect their financial welfare. Other patrons, more skeptical of the law, might be interested as to how, where and to whom stimulus funds were distributed and how the funds are being used. Here are a few resources to assist you in helping your patrons.

Recovery.gov

<http://www.recovery.gov>

Recovery.gov is the United States government's official website for accessing data related to ARRA spending. Through the use of charts, graphs and maps, Recovery.gov shows funding usage data reported by agencies and recipients. The creation of this site was mandated by the law itself to foster accountability and transparency in the distribution of funds. Jobseekers have access to a listing of job, contract, grant and loan opportunities made available by ARRA.

WhiteHouse.gov

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/recovery>

WhiteHouse.gov is the official website of the White House. Citizens can download the PDF version of the entire bill, read "recovery stories" of how the Act has saved or created jobs and monitor milestones in the economic recovery. There is also a Tax Savings Tool that taxpayers can use to determine their potential eligibility for various tax benefits. CAUTION: Taxpayers are warned not to rely on the Tool to determine their actual benefits. Final authorization can only be determined by consulting the appropriate IRS forms and instructions or a tax professional.

United States Department of Labor

<http://www.dol.gov/recovery/>

The Department of Labor, through the use of ARRA funds, provides worker training for newly created jobs and extended and expanded unemployment benefits. The DOL also assists and educates workers regarding expanded access to continued health benefits. The DOL site also includes a video that explains premium

reductions and how to get assistance and a fact sheet that lists the changes under ARRA and eligibility requirements for premium reductions.

Small Business Administration

<http://www.sba.gov/recovery>

The Small Business Administration received \$730 million in ARRA to help unlock the small business lending market and get capital flowing to small businesses. The SBA received an additional \$305 million to continue some ARRA programs through May 2011. The site lists the SBA recovery efforts up to date, including \$29 billion in Recovery Loans to small businesses and the various SBA program, including two new programs that expand loan eligibility for more than 70,000 small businesses and inventory financing for vehicle dealerships.

United States Department of Education

<http://www2.ed.gov/gen/lag/recovery>

According to the DOL website, approximately \$84 billion in ED Recovery Act grants have been awarded. Grant recipients have reported that over 300,000 education jobs have been saved or created, as of May, 2010. Education programs that are funded by ARRA include Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation, Teacher Incentive Fund, the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund, to name a few.

United States Department of Energy

<http://www.energy.gov/recovery/index.htm>

Included is an explanation of ARRA's extension of consumer tax incentives which were introduced in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPACT) and amended in the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008. ARRA provides tax credits for consumer who purchase and install energy efficient windows, doors, insulation and roofs and tax credits for installing solar energy and small wind systems. ARRA also provides tax credits for geothermal and residential microturbine systems and for individuals and businesses that buy or lease hybrid gas-electric vehicles.

United States Government Accountability Office (GAO)

<http://www.gao.gov/recovery>

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an independent, nonpartisan agency that investigates how the federal government spends taxpayer dollars. The GAO helps ensure accountability in federal spending by providing information to the Congress that is accurate and fair and balanced. The GAO investigates allegations of illegal or improper activities and reviews how states and local governments use ARRA funds. The GAO website includes an overview of the GAO's findings and recommendations and tracks spending of ARRA funds.

FedBizOpps.gov

<http://www.fbo.gov>

FedBizOpps.gov is a federally-sponsored website that lists more than 32,000 opportunities for vendors to do business for the government. Vendors may search, monitor and retrieve opportunities and awards funded by ARRA. Vendors can monitor the decision-making process at this website as well.

In difficult economic times, librarians have the opportunity to help our patrons develop financial and political literacy. These resources provide teachable moments for the Reference Librarian to show the patron how easily accessible and highly useful these resources are. Librarians teach patrons how to critically evaluate print and electronic resources for accuracy, authority, bias, coverage and currency. These resources are excellent tools

for those seeking opportunities to improve their financial welfare and for that skeptical patron who wants to make sure that his or her taxes are being used wisely.