

# The Stimulus Package: What's in it for Low-Income Children and Families?

Hosted by Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families

Friday, March 27, 2009, 1 PM

Union Station – Bailey Conference Center

NOTE: These notes are organized by topic and not necessarily in the same order as the discussion.

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS** – Candice Smith (AACF)

AACF worked with our federal delegation on elements of the stimulus package, which now moves to state implementation. AACF will now work to keep track of stimulus priorities and decisions at the state level and also provide continued feedback to state and federal officials about its impact. Now AACF's federal work turns to the federal budget. We hope partners will also help us keep vulnerable kids and families at the forefront of budget discussions. The budget continues the work of the stimulus and makes additional strides on some of our most challenging—and most critical—issues such as health care reform. Those interested in learning more about AACF's federal tax and budget work can contact Candice at 501-371-9678 or [csmith@aradvocates.org](mailto:csmith@aradvocates.org)

## **MEETING OVERVIEW AND STIMULUS HIGHLIGHTS** – Elisabeth Burak (AACF)

Why are we here? We and many of our partners have raised questions with one another about the status of the stimulus in AR, and where we can gather more information. AACF felt, at a minimum, we could bring partners together to share what we know.

But more importantly we also wanted to provide an opportunity to hear from Administration officials and agencies about their plans and decision making processes with these funds. We see this meeting as a starting point.

*NOTE: The purpose of this meeting is NOT to come up with a common agenda. Rather share what we know and identify gaps in our understanding.*

AACF also seeks to gain a sense of your thoughts about what you need, what kind of resources we can provide or put together to best paint the landscape of ARRA here in Arkansas, and helping find places we can provide feedback to our federal delegation and state officials. AACF have a series of papers and other work planned, and partner perspectives and input will certainly be helpful as we move forward.

What do we know about ARRA? (see attached ARRA chart, handed out at meeting).

ARRA is BIG with many moving pieces- many partners in the room are experts and particular areas, hard to get a handle on the entire thing, everyone is still learning.

The chart provided offers a starting place to put together some of the funds that have the most impact in low-income families, but is not exhaustive. It will be updated for more accurate information as projections and information are more readily available.

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*Framing the beast:* AACF offers the following framing questions for how to approach our thinking and information-gathering moving forward, based on your organization's particular areas of interest – WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW- where are the levers of influence?

1. For each “pot” of money received, what is the decision making process for decisions concerning the spending of stimulus funding?
2. Where are the opportunities for outside groups to get involved in funding decisions to date? In the future? What is the state's process for soliciting public input into stimulus spending decisions?
3. What are administration and agency priorities in terms of how stimulus will be spent and why, especially in the areas of education, Medicaid/health care, other human services, and other areas impacting children and families?
4. In what ways will the money be spent to support vulnerable children and families?
5. What process will the state use to make sure that spending decisions around the stimulus are transparent and how will spending decisions be tracked?

**PRIORITIES AND DECISION MAKING PROCESSES** - Administration and some agency representatives discussed progress and the process to date and answered questions (indicated by **Q** below).

- Keesa Smith ([keesa.smith@governor.arkansas.gov](mailto:keesa.smith@governor.arkansas.gov) or 501-683-6416) and Frank Scott ([frank.scott@governor.arkansas.gov](mailto:frank.scott@governor.arkansas.gov)), Office of Governor Mike Beebe
- Dawn Zekis ([dawn.zekis@arkansas.gov](mailto:dawn.zekis@arkansas.gov), 501-683-0173), Department of Human Services
- Dick Nugent, Arkansas Department of Health

*Note: The Departments of Workforce and Education were invited but unable to attend. Participants also expressed interest in including the Department of Higher Education in the future.*

Immediately after passage of ARRA, Gov. convened Arkansas Recovery Cabinet, consisting of the heads of state agencies that are directly affected by Stimulus funds. Chris Massengill, Director of the Office of External and Governmental Affairs, is the head of Recovery Cabinet.

**Distribution of funds.** For the most part, money goes directly to the state agencies through existing formulas and structures. The governor's office is working to make sure all communication lines are open they are notified when funding is received, even if it is not coming directly to a state agency. The Obama Administration has made it clear that governors are the ones ultimately accountable for funds and their transparency, even though not all organizations and entities receiving funds fall directly under the governor (e.g. Highway Commission, airports).

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The Department of Finance and Administration (DFA) will act as the centralized reporting agency and handles all project requests (in addition to agency contacts on specific areas). Ann Purvis is the lead contact at DFA.

**Ongoing communication.** Next week (week of 3/31) the governor's office staff will begin weekly meetings with state agency heads to go over ARRA funds.



## General Information

- ❖ Funds will go more toward one time projects – will not commit funds to general improvement funds for ongoing projects because money is not guaranteed long term.
- ❖ [Website](#) provides up-to-date information on funds and a mechanism for Arkansans to offer ideas and feedback (Visit [www.recovery.arkansas.gov](http://www.recovery.arkansas.gov))
- ❖ State agencies are required to list the state's recovery logo (see left) on their web site alongside programs or projects that receive funding

## Outstanding questions or information to come

- Still identifying: How do you measure the impact of these dollars (direct and indirect)? (For example, what constitutes a job for the purposes of ARRA?)
- What are the allowable expenses? What is the specific federal guidance? Just received Medicaid guidance on March 25, still waiting on education and other funding guidance, etc.
- What will the reporting requirements look like?

**Q: Has any money already been disbursed?** We have received increased Medicaid FMAP (matching funds, see below), transportation funds, and some others. Beginning on February 28, 2009, Department of Workforce Services (DWS) began to issue a \$25 weekly stimulus payment for individuals who had failed qualified claims for unemployment insurance, emergency unemployment compensation or trade readjustment allowances. These payments have come in the form of a separate check since that date. DWS qualification requirements are reviewed each week and a person must continue to qualify for the above referenced forms of assistance to receive this payment.

**Q: How can organizations like ours help to publicize and shine a positive light on stimulus spending?** Send information, press releases, positive stories to the governor's office, and they can distribute to partners and federal organizations. The website includes a timeline for when money is coming into the state and being released. Happy to correlate with press releases, plans, etc.

**Q: How does the public provide input on spending decisions?** Place for feedback on the web site, as well as agency contact for each funding source and project. For example, DHS has received many

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proposals via email, in conversation, etc. and DHS is reviewing proposals to ensure that they align with priorities and strategic plans.

**Q: Will there be public meetings or forums for public education and input? Yes.**

The Governor's Office will hold Public Forums in each of the state's eight planning district. The town hall events will be open to the public. Once scheduled, information on the forums will be available on the Arkansas Recovery [web site](http://www.recovery.arkansas.gov) at: [www.recovery.arkansas.gov](http://www.recovery.arkansas.gov)

## **INFORMATION ON SPECIFIC FUNDS (by area/department)**

**Governor's Funds.** Governor Beebe has discretion over many pots of money, largely because he is also ultimately accountable. In addition, governor's offices receive flexible, dedicated funds to use at their discretion (not named, this is not the same as the State Fiscal Stabilization Fund). The governor's office has not designated any of these funds and is still gathering information about this flexible funding use and amount.

- **Q: Will the public have input about how these flexible funds will be used?** It is unclear, but the governor's office hopes to have more information on these funds by the time public forums are held (see below).

**EDUCATION** – Large amount of funds going directly to districts, higher education (see table). Still waiting on federal guidance (Expected week of 3/30)

- **Q: Many districts already carry large amounts of money from year-to-year. To what degree will districts be encouraged to spend education stimulus funds sooner rather than later? And can Education funds be used for new, ongoing projects?** Because Arkansas does not have education cuts to restore, the governor's office and ADE are particularly interested in guidance on this issue because of the large amount of money going to districts. Hope to know more soon.

**WORKFORCE** (see table): \$12.2 Million for Adult and \$5.2 Million for Youth. Funding will be distributed by local Workforce Investment Boards (10) and governor's office will have strong input.

## **DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

**Medicaid** - Some Medicaid funding has been distributed to DHS through an increased FMAP, or federal matching rate of 6.2 percent. These have not yet been spent.

**Health Information Technology** – An advisory group (leaders at DHS, Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, ADH) is meeting with governor's office staff to identify the most strategic use of HIT funds. Funds for infrastructure, broadband, system enhancements. Considering investments in technology for school-based services, electronic records database, school nurses, etc.

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**State Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps)**– these funds will support a 13.6 % increase in the benefit levels for recipients. Still awaiting federal guidance on increased eligibility and benefit levels; agency does not want to extend and then cut support later without sufficient notice. Funds will also support food purchasing and ramp-up administrative/eligibility support to ensure those eligible get in the door quickly.

**Child Care** - \$25 million to the state through the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG), administered by the Division of Child Care. These funds go predominantly to child care vouchers for working low-income families and will initially be used to get eligible families off the current waiting list. A percentage of funds can be used for quality enhancement activities and may be used flexibly. DHS is putting together a draft of potential projects for these funds. Ideas may include: Implementation of a Quality Rating System (QRS) to improve quality of care, target resources to prevention pilot projects(e.g. infant mental health), After School pilots, based on [recommendations](#) of the Governor's Afterschool Task Force. DHS is still in discussions and considering ideas based on its fit the governor and agency's priorities.

**Commodities** – specific programs, such as Elderly nutrition (e.g. Meals on Wheels)

**Community Service Block Grant** – outreach and coordination of local services and activities for low-income Arkansans

**AmeriCorps – Funds to DHS to** Expand current program (recruitment of additional volunteers), expand services in communities through existing grantees.

**Weatherization Assistance Program** (DHS, CAAs) - administered by [Arkansas Community Action Agencies](#) –Although the funding has not been received, [local agencies](#) have received the green light to start expanding the program (Rose Adams provided information on available assistance).

## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Supplemental Nutrition Program for **Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** (ADH, from federal Department of Agriculture) – funds for new information technology system (SPIRIT), fill budget shortfalls.

**Immunizations** (ADH, from the federal Centers for Disease Control) – funds for additional immunization.

- **Q: Could these stimulus funds be used in instead of funds dedicated to immunizations in Governor Beebe's Healthcare Initiative** (especially since revenue estimates may be under what was originally expected with the federal tax)? Unclear.

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## **NEXT STEPS** - Paul Kelly (AACF)

Participants discussed possibility of future forums like this one.

### What do we still not know?

- ❖ How do we balance the short term funding with long term needs?
- ❖ Where does the accountability lie? For each funding stream.
- ❖ How is the Recovery Cabinet looking at how funds are distributed collectively that “connects the dots” among the agencies? Helps them collaborate?
- ❖ How can we also ensure transparency on front-end decision making (with stakeholder input) rather than the back end after decisions have been made?
- ❖ What are the spending timelines and limits? Spending limits. When does money start? When does it have to be spent? Can it carry over?
- ❖ Evaluation and outcomes – What are we looking at? What about health outcomes and other indirect impacts of the stimulus (i.e. not just jobs). Establish direct and indirect effects on local economy. Identify proxy measurements that show impact of nonprofit sector on specific programs.
- ❖ Ways to support short-term planning among local organizations?

### How and where can we mobilize local organizations to encourage government agencies and organizations to have impact on decisions?

- Gather more information and share it - Identify public pots of money that could have impact.
- Forums like this

### **Next Steps – participant suggestions**

- ❖ Ongoing Communication as information is being sent.
- ❖ Opportunity to help format public forums by the governor's office
- ❖ Keeping track of federal guidance as it comes out
- ❖ Invite Higher Education to future discussions
- ❖ Audio conference with Department of Education and Workforce to fill in gaps
- ❖ President's Budget – Lead to long term priorities – how it fits

### **Resources**

Governor's Website - [www.recovery.arkansas.gov](http://www.recovery.arkansas.gov)

Federal Website - [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov)

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## Meeting Participants

Adams	Rose	Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association (ACAAA)
Anderson	Trish	HIPPY
Barker	Patty	Arkansas Public Policy Panel
Baro	Shanta	Argenta CDC
Berry	Aimee	Arkansas Chapter - Amer. Association of Pediatricians
Copley	Steve	JFON
Golden	Marq	City of Little Rock
Goodman	Hunter	Arkansas Coalition for Excellence
Harris	Jennifer	ASU
Howell	DeAnna	Head Start
Kumpe	Barbara	Amer. Heart Assn
Love	Chris	Arkansas Coalition for Excellence
McCarthy	Suzanne	Arkansas Center for Health Improvement
Nash	Creshelle	Minority Health Commission
Nugent	Richard	Arkansas Department of Health
Reeves	Kim	Southern Good Faith Fund
Roebuck	Tommy	AACF Board
Sanders	Rhonda	Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance

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Scott	Frank	Office of Governor Mike Beebe
Smith	Keesa	Office of Governor Mike Beebe
Smith	Rosi	Arkansas Children's Hospital
Vogler	Mike	New Futures for Youth
Williams	Stacey	Little Rock CDC

## **AACF Staff**

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