



Sample Media Materials for October 30th Release of Data on Stimulus Spending

This document contains ideas and sample materials to use in media outreach around the October 30, 2009 release of stimulus spending data.

Coverage is likely to lean toward a frame of government waste or discussions of whether or not the funds stimulated general growth. It will take proactive efforts to ensure coverage includes an angle about equity and overlooked groups and communities. These tips are meant to be low-cost options for achieving this goal.

This document includes the following sample media materials:

- Sample Media Advisory
- Online Comment Suggestions
- Sample Blog Post

Sample Media Advisory

We recommend releasing a media advisory that includes questions to guide the media as they generate their coverage.

On October 30, 2009, the public will get the first look at how recipients of grants and loans distributed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are spending the funds, completing this current stage of stimulus spending reporting. Spending for contracts was reported on October 15th. Although this reporting is by no means comprehensive, it will give us all a snapshot of the spending's impact on communities and the nation's economic recovery. (Please see the attached fact sheet for more background on the stimulus bill and reporting requirements.)

While many questions will surround the release of this information, it is likely that a critical angle of this story will be lost unless the right questions are asked. Namely, are these funds reaching communities and populations in ways they really need, and who is being left behind?

This is an important consideration given that many communities—particularly people of color, women, and immigrants—were missing out on key gateways to opportunity even before the economic downturn began to affect everyone else. Unless stimulus investments reach these communities, we are likely to perpetuate ongoing inequalities while hurting our chances for a full and equitable economic recovery. Further, the law requires in varying degrees that agencies spending these funds take into account equal opportunity laws designed to ensure the inclusion of these groups.

Following are some questions reporters can ask of government officials to round out this coverage:

- What evidence do you have that stimulus funding projects in your city/state are reaching communities on an equitable basis as required by law?
- What is the distribution of stimulus funded or created jobs, specifically, among men and women, and among different racial groups?
- Do all of the stimulus-funded projects in your city/state offer materials and services in languages that are accessible to the [immigrant group] community?
- Your city/state website does not provide enough specific information for residents to identify the precise jobs and other beneficial projects that they might access. What other ways are there, if any, for the public to obtain that information?
- What plans do you have to ensure that future stimulus spending supports the types of investment your city/state needs to prepare its communities to participate in the global economy?

To speak with experts in creating an equitable recovery, contact:

[Organization and Contact Name; Title; Email; and Phone Number]

Online Comment Suggestions

Commenting on articles about stimulus spending online is another effective way to get a message out. Following are some quick examples of the types of points that could be made in response to such articles.

- Any efforts to create a positive economic recovery need to do more than just return us to the conditions that existed at the beginning of this economic crisis. Even then too many communities and groups were experiencing ongoing and structural barriers to opportunity and economic growth. For instance, even before the worst of the downturn in 2007, African American individual income was only 75.2% of white income. If we don't spend funds to help address these types of disparities, we'll just be setting ourselves up for growing inequalities.
- Something that appears to be missing in this coverage is the fact that even before the economy started tanking, different groups of Americans experienced starkly different levels of economic opportunity. We can't just spend money in an effort to return us to those inequitable conditions, but instead need to think about how to spend it in ways that help to create an economy in which everyone really has a chance at the American dream.
- What I don't see in this story is any discussion of how this spending will affect communities that need investment the most. Even before the downturn, our economy did not serve everyone, creating and sustaining inequalities that hurt our ability to grow our economy and compete globally. The challenges faced by communities of color, for instance, have led to stark disparities in income and assets that can't be addressed by considering our pre-crisis economy the goal to reach. We need solutions for an economic recovery that is transformative and prepares us for the challenges of a global economy, or we will continue to see sharply growing levels of inequality right in our back yards.

Sample Blog Post

We recommend this type of post for progressive and partner blogs who might not be covering this angle of recovery. Many persuadable audiences are likely caught up in their own issues around the recovery, but will be sympathetic to these arguments, and perhaps even likely to adopt them.

On October 30, 2009, the public will get a look at how funds distributed through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 are being spent when the reports from agencies receiving these stimulus funds are released.

While many questions will surround the release of this information, it's likely that a critical part of this story will be lost unless we ask the right questions about this spending. Namely, is this stimulus really creating a recovery for everyone?

This is an important consideration given that many groups of Americans have consistently been left behind in ways that hard work and personal achievement alone cannot address. This was true even before the economic downturn began to affect everyone else, and it's likely that the crisis has further worsened gaps in income and assets that existed already.

To get an idea of what some Americans faced before the crisis, just look at 2007, the year before the crisis began affecting everyone:

- Of those living in poverty, 10.9% worked year-round, full-time;
- The African American male unemployment rate (11.4%) was more than twice as high as the white male unemployment rate (5.5%), and the Latino male unemployment rate was also much higher (7.6%); and
- Women made only 78.2% the median income of men, African Americans only 75.2% of whites, and Latinos only 72.6% of whites.

These are just a few examples of the unequal reality many communities faced back when some felt we were all riding high. The economy these statistics illustrate, though, is not exactly a portrait of the American Dream in action, and it's not the kind of economy to which the stimulus money should be returning us. With thoughtful investments in opportunity—such as expanding skill-building job training, investing in education, and rebuilding our crumbling infrastructure—we can both restore consumer confidence and help struggling folks to catch their stride. Such investments would not only address the country's short-term woes but also invest in our long-term strength.

Some will say we have to concentrate on stabilizing the economy first, and address the challenges described here second. But that simply won't work. We need to have trained and ready workers at all levels of our workforce; we need to ensure that all communities experience investment and growth; and we need to protect all consumers from the kinds of financial products that have destabilized our economy in the first place. We are all part of a greater whole – both economically and morally. Overlooking struggling communities won't work, but it also is simply wrong to allow the inequalities our economy has perpetuated to continue.

So our goal for recovery has to be bigger than turning back the clock to 2007. If we ask the right questions now, and make the right investments, we have a real shot at a future in which American opportunity is within reach of everyone here.