

Summary of Panel 2 Notes – Equity Data Elements: View from the States

Nick Johnson, Moderator, Analyst (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities)

- Recovery Act data needs three things to be successful:
 1. Data needs to be useful – provides the right info
 2. Data needs to be meaningful – tell a story and be able to trust
 3. Data needs to be cheap – states are grappling with gigantic budget gaps

Chris Keeley, Associate Director (Common Cause NY)

- In an effort to advance fairness within the Recovery Act, the NYS Stimulus Oversight Working Group, convened by Common Cause NY, has developed a set of common principles that:
 1. Fairness
 2. Effectiveness
 3. Used in honest and ethical principles
- The Working Group advocated for an independent stimulus monitor to check on funds dispersed within the state.
- State government agencies cried foul, arguing the state did not need an independent monitor because the state agencies involved with the stimulus already provide oversight.
- The Working Group wrote legislation that called for an independent federal stimulus ombudsman appointed by the governor. The group called for the official to have subpoena power and issue reports regarding agency performance.
- The Working Group charged the position with the responsibility of designing performance metrics of spending stimulus funds based on principles in recovery act.
- The stimulus monitor should focus on best practices across different categories in order to leverage future funding opportunities, and be proactive versus reactive against waste, fraud and abuse.

Wendy Patton, Analyst (Policy Matters Ohio)

- Compared to the efforts of New York, Ohio is not that far along yet. Coalitions throughout Ohio are just getting together.
- Four groups recently came together to discuss federal stimulus issues. Two of these organizations published an op-ed on principles of equity and fairness for the dispersal of Recovery Act funds.
- Each group has a policy area of expertise that they work within, and then the groups come together on a monthly basis and share comprehensive best practices.
- The process has been difficult, as each group faces a lack of resources. Moreover, the groups have not decided what the unifying questions should be and there is an internecine feud to lead the effort.

- Policy Matters Ohio took a poll of nonprofits throughout the state working on these issues. The poll found that many groups are working on legislative issues post hoc as money comes into the state and lawmakers decide where to use the funds.
- Some of the major concerns of these groups include stimulus funds replacing regular state funds, and the state not having strong enough unemployment compensation systems to allow stimulus dollars to work.
- There is not a common understanding of mission or purpose among the groups.

Tony Romano, Co-Founder (Miami Workers Center)

- Whereas the country is currently in a recession, black and brown communities in South Florida have been in recession for many years, and the area is now going into a depression. It is a struggle to survive for many members of these communities.
- The current situation is an opportunity to reframe the debate. It is an opportunity to supplant current ideas with our ideas; it is an opportunity to move to a much greater scale, as the left has normally kept itself localized and defensive of its work.
- Miami Workers Center is going to launch a new campaign to affect state spending of stimulus funds. The scope of the campaign is going to be statewide, a first for the Miami Workers Center.
- For the first portion of the campaign, Miami Workers Center will collaborate with a polling firm to perform a statewide study to demonstrate the existing disparities between the different classes of Floridian communities. The effort will also track the current stream of money to help reinforce the findings.
- The campaign will further engage in focus group research and use town-hall-style meetings to engage the public, so there will be both qualitative and quantitative aspects to the research.
- The potential output of these efforts will produce a long list of categories for stimulus fund reform, including transportation, education, housing, employment, etc.
- The campaign will create alternative models of how changed stimulus spending could affect the targeted communities.
- Finally, the Miami Workers Center will pilot a collectively owned green company; it will be a waste management company.
- Using metrics to expose where the money is and is not going is just one tool in the fight. Just showing these things will not change the distribution of the money, per se. It will help create a progressive machine that will push for change.