

## **BACKGROUND**

### **About the Meeting**

The \$787 billion Recovery Act presents new opportunities to address community needs. But will the money go to areas most in need? Will jobs retained or created offer health benefits and decent wages? And will those most in need be the ones to benefit?

Without setting benchmarks and measures for assessing those benchmarks for programs funded under the Recovery Act, there will be no way to know how well the Recovery Act serves struggling families and communities. The first report on how recipients of Recovery Act funds are using the money will be available October 10, and the Obama administration is now preparing to tell states, grantees, and contractors what to report. It is expected that the information reported by recipients of Recovery Act funds will be publicly available through [www.recovery.gov](http://www.recovery.gov). This meeting is designed to influence what is reported and ensure we have access to that information.

The day-long meeting will discuss definitions, programmatic benchmarks, useful measures, and transparency issues with an explicit equity lens applied. People who attend should be knowledgeable about some combination of equity issues, programs funded under the Recovery Act, transparency, and government spending and performance measures. While we do not intend to define “equity,” we include providing support to struggling families and addressing issues such as race, ethnicity, gender, and disability.

The draft agenda starts with a demonstration and discussion on how new Internet technologies can empower us to address social justice and equity issues. We want that to guide our day-long discussion since our objective is to put to use the metrics we advocate for. We will then turn to a discussion of what we mean by equity measures and the type of metrics that should be applied to all Recovery Act programs. Following that we will work in breakout groups to address metrics that should be put in place for specific programs funded under the Recovery Act, and discuss how we can use them in our work.

Based on interest expressed by some of you, we have established four breakouts on transportation, energy, education, and housing. Finally, we will end the day with a discussion of next steps. Examples of questions to be addressed: Can we jointly encourage the Obama administration to embrace our ideas or, at least coordinate our efforts? Can we coordinate transparency efforts to assist community organizing and policy change?

### **About the Co-hosts**

There are two factors that brought the co-hosts together. First, we are concerned that the Recovery Act is being implemented without adequate tools to assess its social justice success. For example, the guidance from the Office of Management and Budget to federal agencies still has not provided clarity on how a “job” is defined – yet funds are now beginning to be spent on “shovel ready” projects. Similarly, in areas such as transportation, energy, education, and housing, where large investments are being made, there is concern about how the money will be used and what will be accomplished. Some of the spending is for new programs, while other Recovery Act money is added to expand existing programs that have never had adequate equity measures applied. In this context, the Recovery Act presents an opportunity to advocate for the right type of benchmarks and performance measures that have a central focus on equity.

Second, President Obama has promised unprecedented transparency about how Recovery Act money has been spent. We expect there will be many who use the data to highlight wasted

spending, argue economic recovery is occurring despite Recovery Act spending, and bash the Obama administration and Congress for passing the Recovery Act in the first place. This will be part of a strategy to elevate deficit reduction as a national priority. Without the right type of data collection system, there will be no way for the Obama administration or any of us to tell the story about how Recovery Act funds have helped families and communities in a progressive, sustainable manner. And if we do not effectively talk about how the spending helped, it is nearly certain that national priorities will not change, that future funding opportunities will evaporate, and that this reinvestment effort will be short-lived.

With these factors in mind, we decided to quickly convene this meeting to focus on what data needs to be collected and how we can put such data to use in organizing and advocacy efforts.