



ARRA Simplified

Stimulus360 incorporates popular Microsoft tools for maximum efficiency in finding and tracking stimulus funds.

THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA) provides great opportunities for state and local governments, but it also brings tremendous challenges. How do agencies get the stimulus funds? How do they track the funds once they have them? How do they meet the stringent reporting requirements, and maintain unprecedented transparency and accountability?

There are a slew of questions, but one thing is certain: The money will be there, and every citizen is hoping that some of it comes to their town. Citizens expect their state and local governments to do all they can to obtain, track and report on stimulus funds.



But it's not easy. "It is an unbelievable challenge for governments to go find the money," said Stuart McKee, national technology officer of U.S. public sector for Microsoft. As a former CIO of Washington state, McKee brings a valuable perspective to how software can help government. And government can use the help with ARRA, since the federal government is placing a big burden on state and local agencies in exchange for funds. "Governments are going to face enormous political and financial risk in just managing the process," McKee said.

Government agencies need new software to meet the transparency and reporting requirements, and they don't have the time or money they'd need to develop it themselves.

McKee has spoken with numerous government leaders, and he repeatedly hears the same concerns about ARRA. "Everybody is facing the same challenges," he said. "Every single agency is trying to solve the same problem. That consists of finding and tracking money." The effort is made harder by geography and logistics. "Unfortunately, many local jurisdictions are trying to solve their problems alone," McKee said. "Every state is coming up with its own interpretation of ARRA requirements. In some cases, additional guidance has increased confusion, and local governments are left to solve these things independently."

Help Is Here

Microsoft Stimulus360 allows government agencies to easily manage, track, report and publish information related to ARRA economic stimulus programs. It was created in response to ARRA, but government agencies plan to continue using it even after stimulus funds have been spent. That's because it raises efficiency in a cost-effective manner. It's a powerful, out-of-the-box tool at a low cost. It's a solution-accelerator built on top of Microsoft's platform/technology, incorporating Microsoft tools that agencies have been using for years, such as Word and Excel.

With Stimulus360, agencies can track federal funding sources, requirements and grant submission processes; manage incoming and existing resources; facilitate downstream funding requests; and compile results, satisfy reporting requirements and publish content in a manner that's easy for citizens to understand.

With its information-rich dashboards, Stimulus360 provides easy-to-grasp views, so everyone involved can know the status of grant submissions, funds, projects and more. The dashboards make it easy for people to share information, collaborate, analyze data, and compare results to objectives.

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Leading the Way

Citizens win as San Francisco re-engineers its systems for greater accountability and transparency.

SAN FRANCISCO HAS ONE GOVERNMENT for both the city and the county. That unified structure serves citizens well. And as residents look to their government to secure ARRA funds, San Francisco takes a leading-edge approach in seeking those funds and in keeping citizens informed.

“The mayor wants the city to be one of the most proactive in transparency and accountability, especially when it comes to stimulus funding,” said Richard Robinson, chief operations officer for San Francisco’s Department of Technology.

But it’s not just about pleasing the mayor. It’s also about the citizens. San Francisco has a populace that’s highly engaged. “We get a lot of public information requests,” Robinson said. “Our community would start looking at ARRA and asking questions. Good questions. We wanted a system that, when we got these questions, was auditable. And when we gave answers, we understood where that data was coming from.”

The city chose Stimulus360 and never looked back. In fact, it’s looking ahead. “When we looked at this from an IT perspective, we looked at the short term, near term and long term of what we wanted to accomplish,” said Robinson. “In the long term in this department, we have an ambitious desire to promote transparency and accountability. Not just in this, but in everything — GIS data, public works data and things like this. We really want to open up and change the paradigm.”

Maximum Benefit

The ambitious plan for the future includes doing more than the minimum required by ARRA. Stimulus360 will help with that. “The expectation is that we will meet or exceed those reporting requirements,” Robinson said. “We’ve created a work plan that takes those dates for reporting, and rolls it back to make sure the infrastructure is in place, the training is in place, we’ve determined what the reporting requirements are, that they’re in place and

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that we can meet and exceed the expectations for the October reporting date.”

Once San Francisco began researching what would be expected from ARRA, it understood that the complexity was greater than it seemed at first. “As we got into this, we realized it wasn’t going to just be about reporting to the federal government,” said Robinson. “There were other agencies that the money was coming down to that had their own reporting requirements as well. So some agencies might have to not only report to Recovery.gov, but also to the state, and to the National Transportation Safety Board or the Department of Transportation, those types of things.”

San Francisco believes Stimulus360 has what it takes to handle ARRA. “If people aren’t using tools, they’re going to trip themselves and have a very difficult time reconstructing their audit trails,” Robinson noted. “This is a tool that we anticipate, to a large degree, will help facilitate our ability to capture data, audit that data, log it, create workflow and present it in an intelligible manner to the public. And also report it back out to the agencies that are requiring reporting.”

The dashboards work well for numerous government agencies. Whether it's the jobs dashboard or the projects view — or one of several others — a dashboard always gives decision-makers valuable data they need when they're determining next steps.

Spelling It Out

By incorporating data from other Microsoft tools, Stimulus360 keeps things simple. "If people use common systems and platforms, then they will be speaking the same language," said McKee. "When you spend dollars, some of the basic questions are: Is it a grant? Is it a program? A project? Or is it some other thing? Do you call it something else? Software does a great job of translating language, if you will. You can map things back and forth so you can speak in common terminology."

Stimulus360 also automates business processes and provides a central source for data and reports. And it provides a great deal of flexibility with regard to change. That's a key point, because the details of the ARRA process are still being sorted out by the federal government.

For many governments, the focus is on reporting. Since grants management and project management tools are easier to come by, it's the reporting capabilities of Stimulus360 that often make the difference for government agencies.

Better Processes

While the software makes the entire process easier, McKee said there's much more to it. "It's not just about the software; it's about how government is going to do business," he said. "The software is the easy part. The hard part is the business processes. So we presented Stimulus360 as an example of how government can organize itself and leverage software in multiple jurisdictions within and across state government. And how they can share information and collaborate. We've given them those tools and shown them how to use them."

Many governments see the ARRA challenge as a way to provide more accountability and transparency for the good of the citizens. So although ARRA creates more work for government agencies, it also gives them a reason to make changes for the better.



Stimulus360 helps government agencies share information with the public. It makes it easy to take accurate information and place it on a Web site for all constituents to see. That gives citizens a better understanding of the projects that are benefiting their communities. It also gives citizens the opportunity to provide feedback on projects — including those under consideration for the future.

McKee believes Stimulus360 will continue to be a valuable tool long after ARRA has come and gone. "The expectation of what transparency means has changed significantly, and that's because of technology and software," McKee said. "Citizens' expectation — that they're going to have access to real-time, meaningful information, in a way they can digest and understand — that's not going away. Welcome to the world of Gov 24/7."

Indeed, many government agencies are already planning for long-term use of Stimulus360. "CIOs and other thought leaders have said to us, 'We love these tools. We love Stimulus360. This is what we need right now. But we also are going to implement this with the intention and vision that we're going to use these tools to automate, modernize and change some other fundamental processes in government beyond stimulus.' That's their intent," said McKee.



For more information on Microsoft Stimulus360, visit www.microsoft.com/government/stimulus360