

Three Key Objectives and One Important Date: Picking a Stimulus Reporting Vendor

Tracking stimulus dollars is quickly becoming job one for state and local government leaders. The marketplace is filled with tools that perform one or two of the three key tasks: reporting data to OMB, sharing progress with citizens and internally managing the spending. None of the available products offer a complete solution, so how can jurisdictions pick the right one?

EQSP Trend #1: Environmental managers are faced with traditional environmental issues threatening air, water and land, but are now also expected to respond to quality of life issues such as climate change and sustainability. Leaders must rethink their responsibilities to solve all these challenges with budgets that are either stagnant or decreasing.

As in most nascent markets, there are clusters of vendors with distinct views about the needs of state and local departments to report on their spending of stimulus dollars. Some users, driven by very tight timeframes, are focused on what they must do, which is report their spending to appropriate entities in a timely fashion. Buyers who see this as their greatest need likely will be looking at **CGI's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Reporting Gateway**, **Acumen's Stimulus Tracking and Recipient Transparency (START)** and **IBM's Economic Recovery Fund Tracking**. OMB and other Federal departments have not provided defined guidelines for exactly what data needs to be reported, which makes many of these tools works-in-progress. Other users have determined that their most important requirement is to tell their stories to the public about their expenditures. They are most likely to consider **Microsoft's Stimulus360**, **Visible Strategies' See-It** or **NIC's transparent.gov**. Still others will be concerned with wise management of the funds made available through various stimulus opportunities. These users will find that **MicroStrategy's Stimulus Dashboard** will meet their needs the best. Acumen and IBM are moving towards combined offerings and include dashboard capabilities in their OMB-compliant reporting systems. The problem is that all three objectives are equally critical, but buyers have neither the money to address each need with a

separate purchase, nor the time to wait for the inevitable market consolidation when a final short list of vendors will have adequate capabilities in reporting to the authorities, making information available to the public using web paradigms and managing expenditures.

CGI's ARRA Gateway is modeled after the company's work with **EPA's Central Data Exchange (CDX)** and focuses on compiling, reviewing and reporting the required data to OMB. The gateway can report the data through **federalreporting.gov**, a web site which OMB is building to track grantee reports. The tool also can collect data at the contractor or subcontractor level, especially important for large implementation projects with a team of companies. Acumen's entry into the market is **START**, which is based on **Salesforce.com's** web interface, compiles reports from state and local governments as well as federal contractors and sends them automatically to **federalspending.gov**. Local leaders, especially those in large jurisdictions that are responsible for significant stimulus funds, will benefit from **START's** ability to track data submissions for all departments and agencies that have received federal dollars. Federal agencies can use **START** to pull grantee reports from OMB's site and compile them into mandated submissions. Acumen recognizes the importance of public outreach and will soon offer

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tools to allow jurisdictions to publish their results using Salesforce.com's new **Sites** tool. Acumen is in discussions with a number of federal agencies about managing their reporting gateways.

IBM has unveiled its Economic Recovery Fund Tracking technology, which also can generate OMB-compliant reports. This tool includes a dashboard view of spending on stimulus projects that includes receipt and disbursement of funds, as well as jobs created and retained. It includes an alert feature that notifies program managers when the percent of budget spent on a project exceeds its level of completion. The dashboard allows jurisdictions to benchmark their progress against those of other agencies and states, which will become an increasingly important tool as stimulus funds continue to be spent slowly by all parties and jurisdictions look for ways to put their performance in the best light possible.

Microsoft's Stimulus360 was initially designed as a tool to help governments communicate to the citizenry and recently was revised to include tracking tools for states and localities that have received funds. The fact that many jurisdictions already have licenses to and familiarity with this software – which is built off the **SharePoint** platform – may make it a less expensive and resource-intensive choice. The reporting component for federal agencies is still being developed as is the OMB reporting tool. NIC's transparent-gov also focuses on information dissemination and includes tools to help governments develop their own tracking websites. The company has primarily worked with states; for example, it created a portal for **Virginia's stimulus tracking site** that allowed public comment on potential projects. At this point, transparent-gov won't report to federal authorities but it can aggregate data to increase public awareness. The company may offer tools to generate OMB-required reports in the near future.

Visible Strategies has been offering its See-It technology to jurisdictions that want to communicate progress on environmental projects to the public and solicit feedback. To capitalize on the availability of stimulus funds, Visible Strategies is offering a \$7,500

stimulus starter hosting package for one-year. This system does not make calculations and data must be input by a user or via a database upload. It won't generate the forms required by the federal agencies, but it may expedite the reporting process by compiling all the relevant information in one place. The technology is useful for public dissemination but won't replace other reporting tools needed for mandated submissions.

MicroStrategy's Stimulus Dashboard provides dynamic views of federal agency spending of the stimulus, but lacks detail on state and local funds. It was submitted to OMB as a tool to allow citizens to track federal spending, but it won't help states and localities that need to track and report their spending. Onvia's Recovery.org is a gateway product for vendors that want to sell to governments and includes information on all the stimulus allocations and projects by state, type of project and the federal agency that provided the funding. The data enters Onvia's system with almost no latency and will be used to populate some of the systems offered by the other vendors. Onvia tracks projects until the time the funds are awarded, but does not include information on project performance. The tool does not generate reports, but government officials can register on the site for free and receive information on stimulus funds as they are made available.

Because of their ability to interface directly with OMB's reporting web site, the offerings from CGI, Acumen and IBM could become the preferred tools for state and local governments. Sharing information with the public and employing a dashboard to manage stimulus spending are both useful, but they should not take precedence over the time-sensitive and federally required task of providing data to federal authorities. In the near future, jurisdictions can look forward to systems that offer all three capabilities in a single product. In the meantime, arrangements could be reached with the vendors that provide OMB-compliant products to include solutions to manage the spending internally and/or spread the word among the citizenry. Acumen and IBM already have started to do this.

Action Item: State and local governments should invest in a system that provides OMB-compliant reporting capabilities, the most time-sensitive and only required task. Some vendors offer tools that perform additional tasks and those are most likely to fit the needs of state and local leaders.