

Know your stimulus

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), aka “the stimulus,” offers many opportunities for academic libraries and higher education, but interested parties should note that the money will not be handed to them.

Research and action will be necessary.

Yet, many who are inexperienced with pursuing federal funding may be unsure of how to proceed.

The inexperienced need not worry, however, as this unprecedented process of obtaining stimulus funding is an entirely new ballgame for everyone—and one for which the rules are still being determined.

The following provisions of the ARRA may benefit academic libraries:

- **\$53.6 billion for the state stabilization Fund.** The purpose of this fund is to provide fiscal relief to the states to prevent tax increases and cutbacks to critical services. ARRA directs governors to use 81.8 percent of the state’s allocation to support elementary, secondary, and higher education. This funding is flexible, and the control rests in the hands of the governor as to how the funding is allocated in the state. Although new construction is excluded, repairing or modernizing buildings is not.

- **\$7.2 billion for broadband programs.** There are tremendous opportunities for libraries to benefit from the broadband provisions of ARRA. \$4.5 billion has been designated for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and \$2.5 billion for the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), which includes no less than \$200 million set aside for community computing centers, including public libraries and community colleges.

Now comes the “action” part. Here are some steps academic libraries can take now, even as details from the agencies are shared.

- **Talk with your campus administrators, other higher education institutions,**

university system, and other types of libraries. What plans do they have for ARRA? What plans do they have for broadband? Will you have to work through them or will your college or university be able to apply directly for ARRA programs?

- **Work with key administrators on your campus to contact potential partners—public and private.** Connect with your university system, consortium, higher education associations (e.g., EDUCAUSE), etc., to explore opportunities to collaborate on grants for ARRA funding.

- **Think creatively, collaboratively and aggregate.** Contact other libraries of all types (including public and school libraries in your area) to find out what they may be planning. Can you work together to aggregate demand for broadband, for example?

- **Connect with your state library agency.** Find out what the state librarian is doing, as he or she may be aware of other initiatives to collaborate. Also, contact any regional or multitype library cooperatives and other higher education institutions. As you learn more about what other libraries are doing, identify potential models that you may want to adapt for your institution.

- **Help all libraries in your community—public, school, and other academic libraries—to get better broadband connectivity.** Most academic libraries already benefit from broadband connectivity. However, academic libraries can help the public and school libraries in their communities and region by advocating for “fiber to the library” and other advanced technologies to enhance library connectivity. Contact your local libraries to see how you can help.

As more information becomes available, the ALA Washington Office will provide updates at www.ala.org/knowyourstimulus. With a little preparation, collaboration and follow-through, academic libraries and students across the country can play a significant role in this historic opportunity to help America recover. ♪

Jenni Terry is press officer at ALA’s Washington Office, e-mail: jterry@alawash.org