

Covering the Budget Beat

A State Economic and Fiscal Forum, co-sponsored by the Pew Center on the States and Capitolbeat
901 E Street, NW, 10th Floor, Washington, D.C.

Agenda

Thursday, September 24

Time

7:30-8:30 p.m.

Session

Welcome Dessert Reception

Speakers: Susan Urahn and Tiffany Shackelford, welcome

Friday, September 25

Time

7:45-8:15 a.m.

Session

Breakfast

8:15-8:45 a.m.

Keynote

Description: The Stimulus at Six Months – What Has It Meant for the States?

Speakers: G. Edward DeSeve, Special Advisor to the President and Coordinator of Recovery Implementation; Mark Binker, Capitolbeat board member; Susan Urahn, managing director, Pew Center on the States

8:45-10:00 a.m.

Morning Session I: State Budget and Finance: Trends and Challenges

Description: States' fiscal health is the weakest it has been in more than 50 years, and that poor health has very real consequences for the public. How are traditional tenets of state budgeting and finance playing out in this recession? Now that the budget debates for 2010 are (mostly) over, what do reporters need to know about covering the ongoing story of states' responses to the recession – and what comes next?

Speakers: Don Boyd, Rockefeller Institute of Government; Susan Urahn, Pew Center on the States; Stephen Fehr, Pew Center on the States

Attendees will learn:

- The state of state revenues
- How states balanced their budgets for 2010
- Difficult questions ahead

10:00-10:15 a.m.

Break

10:15 – 11:30 a.m.

Morning Session II: The States and the Stimulus

Description: The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act has helped states avoid some devastating budget cuts and is aimed at putting hundreds of thousands of people back to work. The \$787 billion package is full of stories—if you know where to find them. How do you learn more about how your state is using stimulus funds? How do you decide which pieces of the package to focus on? How do you give readers what they need without getting consumed by the minutiae of stimulus details?

Speakers: Pam Prah, Pew Center on the States; Chris Whatley, Council for State Governments; Jennifer LaFleur, ProPublica

Attendees will learn:

- Overview of the stimulus package, with key milestones
- More about the biggest pieces for states – transportation, energy, Medicaid, education
- How to track their states' spending
- What they need to follow on an ongoing basis
- How reporters are covering this story

11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Lunch

12:00 -12:45 p.m.

The National Economy and the Mid-Atlantic: A Snapshot

Description: Experts say the national recession may end later this year, but unemployment—and states' related difficulties—will continue to climb for months longer. What do regional and national forecasts mean for your state? An economist explains where we've been, and what to expect moving forward.

Speakers: Marisa DiNatale, Moody's Economy.com; Michele Mariani Vaughn, Pew Center on the States

Attendees will learn:

- The economic and fiscal situations of Mid-Atlantic states
- How to develop story ideas around this economic and fiscal information

12:45-1:45 p.m.

Afternoon Session I: From Where We Sit: A Panel Discussion with National Journalists

Description: How are other journalists covering what's come to be known as The Great Recession? A panel of distinguished national reporters discusses how they're breaking the stories down and making them their own.

Speakers: Laura Leslie, WUNC and Capitolbeat board member; Peter Harkness, PCS consultant and *Governing* group publisher; Michael Cooper, *The New York Times*; Lisa Lambert, Reuters

1:45-2:00 p.m.

Break

2:00-3:00 p.m.

Afternoon Session II: Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics

Description: You need data to analyze explain your state's fiscal condition, but finding the best numbers to use can be challenging. This session will cover strategies for finding data that are key to covering any beat in the statehouse, including how to track the data down and deconstruct it. Bring your laptops!

Speakers: Sarah Cohen, Duke University; Michele Mariani Vaughn

Attendees will learn:

- Sources of key state economic and fiscal data
- Using data correctly to analyze trends and serve as foundation for articles/projects

3:00-3:45 p.m.

Afternoon Session III: The Best State Fiscal Stories You're Not Covering

Description: Beyond the daily stories about your state's budget and revenue picture, there are trends developing that will set the course for states' fiscal health well into the future. How do you find and report them? Break into groups to discuss the budget stories you've broken and the ideas you're picking up today – and hear about more than bear watching.

Speakers: Michele Mariani Vaughn, Pew Center on the States; Tiffany Shackelford, Capitolbeat; Scott Pattison, National Association of State Budget Officers

Attendees will learn:

- Developing trends in state finance worth following
- How other reporters developed their stories/packages

3:45-5:00 p.m.

Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Breakout I: Bills Coming Due: State Pension and Health Care Costs

Description: States' pension and other post-retirement benefit bills stretch out 30 years – but they need to be saving for them now. Pensions coupled with escalating Medicaid costs that could increase through proposed federal health care reforms could break the bank. How will states stay solvent? Experts will discuss updated PCS research on pension and other post-retirement benefits and how health care reform may affect state budgets.

Speakers: Barb Rosewicz, Pew Center on the States; Kil Huh, Pew Center on the States; Robin Rudowitz, Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured

Attendees will learn:

- What states owe their employees and retirees in pension and other post-employment benefits
- The fiscal pressure Medicaid places on states
- How health care reform may affect states' budgets

Breakout II: Behind Bars and Breaking the Bank: State Corrections

Description: State corrections budgets are the second-fastest growing component of their general fund spending. How can they balance the need to protect public safety while containing corrections costs and investing in the rest of their population?

Speakers: Richard Jerome, Project Manager, Public Safety Performance Project; Alan Johnson, *Columbus Dispatch* and Capitolbeat board member

Attendees will learn:

- How states' corrections budgets are affecting their overall budgets, and steps they're taking to contain them
- Budget areas receiving reinvestment, including pre-k and K-12

5:00-5:15 p.m.

Closing and Thank You