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Stimulus presents opportunities for green businesses

Birmingham Business Journal - by [Cary Estes](#) Staff

The recent stimulus package enacted by the federal government includes a significant amount of funds intended for sustainability.

But when determining who receives this money, the government will not be looking at proposals strictly through green-colored glasses.

“The likelihood of getting money is increased when you go beyond just green,” said Colin Coyne, managing principal of the **Coyne Group**, a Birmingham-based consulting firm that focuses on sustainable strategies.

“It’s not as simple as saying, ‘Hey look, I’m green.’

“The question is, what else can you do with the same dollars to get the maximum benefit? Those are the people who stand the highest likelihood of having funds allocated to them. If you can tell a more compelling story, I think there’s a much greater likelihood that funds will be awarded.”

Included among the funds the **Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs** expects to receive from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 is nearly \$137 million designated for energy issues.

Approximately \$71 million is allocated for weatherization assistance for low-income families, nearly \$56 million for general energy programs and projects, and slightly more than \$10 million for energy efficiency and conservation.

To receive a portion of these funds, however, Coyne said interested groups and business need “to be realistic about not just stopping at the green door.”

Instead, they need to promote both the social and economic benefits of their plans.

“The people who are going to dole out the funds will be looking at the extent to which the green efforts have a positive social consequence,” Coyne said.

“If you want to do green retrofitting of low-income housing, these are people who can least afford high utility bills. Now you have a meaningful program.”

Coyne said the stimulus will pay off for businesses that are creative with their dollars and can prove to offer an economic benefit, as well.

“For some reason, people seem to think that it’s shameful to talk about being profit-seeking and being good environmental stewards in the same breath,’ he said.

“That is where the thinking in the past has gone way off base. You need to show that you get a better bang for the buck.”

A new organization called the **Green Jobs Alliance** of Alabama wants to do just that.

The group, which consists of a wide variety of government and private-sector leaders from throughout the state, is seeking to apply for a \$25 million grant for green jobs training.

The goal is to create a larger pool of green electricians, carpenters, etc. in Alabama, thus increasing the ability of

the state to tap into the growing trend of sustainable building.

“(Members of the group) represent totally different segments, but we all have a common interest, and that’s to train green manpower for construction sites,” said Jeff Masters, executive vice president of the Alabama chapter of **Associated Builders** and Contractors and treasurer of the Green Jobs Alliance.

“Everyone is beginning to think of conservation and fuel savings. It’s about to boom. We could save millions of dollars in the state of Alabama by thinking green on a construction job site.”

Some businesses that are not applying for stimulus money still expect to receive an economic benefit from the allocation of funds to others.

For example, L&S Enterprises is a local company that distributes environmental supplies, and its business could increase if area organizations receive funds to work on green projects, said company president Chris Lewis.

“In this economy, most of the people who are looking to spend money are individuals who are going to be able to receive some money from the stimulus package,” Lewis said.

“What that does is make us look at our marketing strategy and begin to target those customers who are in the process of having some (stimulus) activity.”

Lewis said his company offers products that customers can receive tax credits for using, putting his business in an ideal position to benefit from sustainable initiatives in the act.

ADECA currently is accepting proposals from businesses and organizations interested in applying for stimulus funding. ADECA public information specialist Mike Presley said the organization has made substantial progress with preparations to expend energy-related stimulus funds.

He said ADECA has received the first installment of weatherization funds, about 10 percent of Alabama’s \$71 million allocation.

He said the organization expects to distribute funds within a few days to the **Community Action Agencies** and other organizations that perform weatherization activities.

“Right now it’s a matter of laying out a good framework and foundation so we can tie the green job money coming to the state to existing workforce development and career-track initiatives,” said Mark Rubino, an environmental consultant and former director of the **Green Resource Center** of Alabama.

“There’s still a lot of puzzle-building that has to go on for the stimulus to be effective.”

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