

## Coronavirus Relief: Oversight Model

Congress will provide Trillions of dollars in coronavirus relief. These funds will be disbursed through multiple federal agencies to individuals and businesses, as well as state and local governments. It is critical to require an oversight model for this multi-agency effort that provides concurrent oversight (rather than review actions months or years after funds are disbursed).

**Oversight for Coronavirus Relief** should follow the very successful model used to monitor stimulus funding after 2008. The "[government's most groundbreaking anti-fraud unit](#)" - the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board - was set up in 2009 to track itemized spending of an \$840 Billion economic stimulus package that was disbursed by 29 agencies.

The [RAT Board issued quarterly and annual reports to Congress](#), as well as "flash reports" for anything requiring immediate attention. The Board was a multi-agency group of IGs (critical for multi-agency funding), as well as an advisory panel appointed by the president. It reported on how money was spent and jobs created (in the coronavirus example, this could be jobs saved).

The Recovery.gov website has been shut down but this archived screenshot shows the [dashboard of "Where is the Money Going?"](#) It tracked projects by zip code, agency, recipient and funding category. The [archived website is maintained by POGO](#). GAO noted the RAT Board [provided significant analytical services](#) and preserving its capabilities could help sustain oversight of federal expenditures. The RAT Board's accomplishments included:

- Completed nearly 3200 audits, inspections and reviews;
- Recommended better use of \$8 Billion in funding and questioned costs of \$5 Billion;
- Resulted in 1665 convictions, pleas and judgments and more than \$157 million in recoveries, forfeitures, seizures and estimated savings.

**An alternative and more limited oversight model** is SIGTARP - the [Special Inspector General for the Troubled Asset Relief Program](#). SIGTARP targets financial institution crime and other fraud, waste and abuse related to TARP. While SIGTARP's work is commendable, it is limited to issuing recommendations to the Treasury Department and relies on a backward looking audit approach (rather than concurrent monitoring).

The RAT Board's multi-agency IG approach, coupled with its innovative use of data analytics, frequent reports to Congress, and public-facing dashboard make it the better model for over \$1 Trillion of coronavirus relief funds that will be disbursed throughout the nation. The recent addition of a data analytics team at GAO could further enhance this model, ensuring Congress and the public have access to real-time data to monitor coronavirus relief.

Recovery.gov was built from scratch in 12 weeks in 2009. In 2020, a similar effort could quickly be built, relying on institutional knowledge, modern technology and GAO's data analytics team. 130,000 prime and sub-recipient grant reports were collected in the first quarter and displayed on Recovery.gov by Oct 30 - the first of 17 consecutive quarterly reporting deadlines the RAT Board met. Oversight for coronavirus relief should meet the same standards.