

Benton County Government
Recovery Plan



**State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds
2021 Report**

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Executive Summary

President Joe Biden signed the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) on March 11, 2021. Within that Act, the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) provides urgent and targeted state and local funding for COVID-19 response and recovery efforts. Benton County was awarded approximately \$54 million of those funds to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and assistance with long-term recovery through 2024. An American Rescue Plan (ARP) Committee was formed internally to assist in planning how and where these funds should be appropriated.

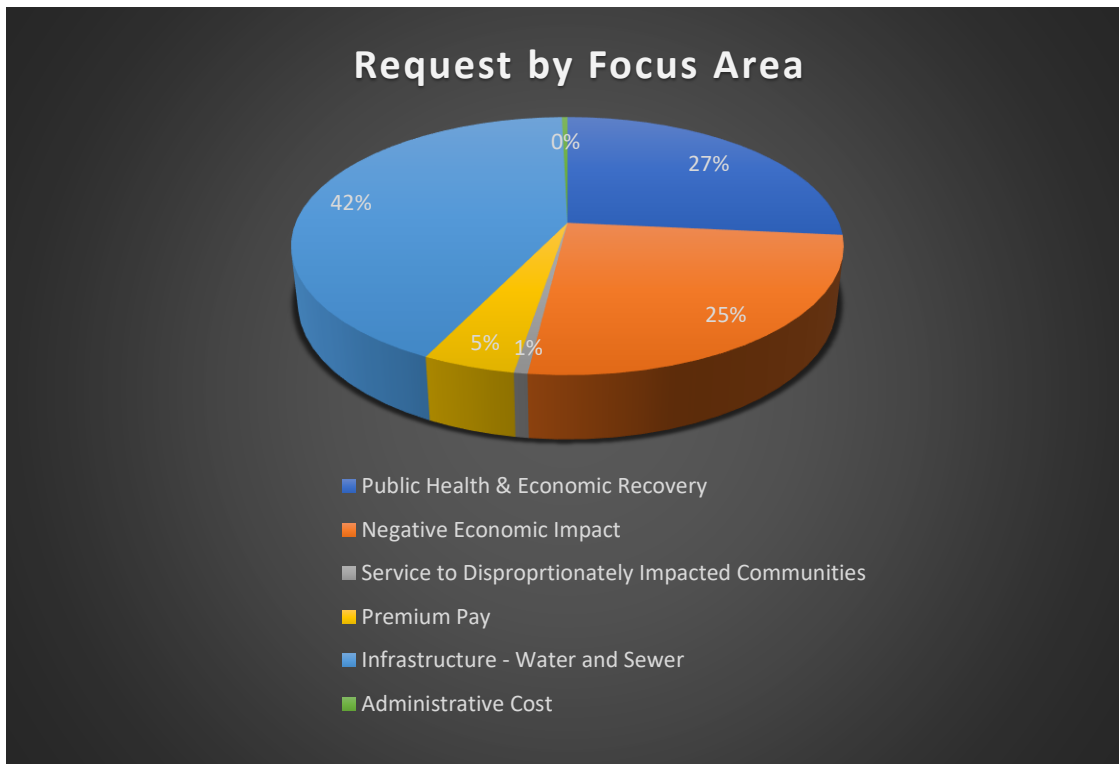
Benton County recognizes the importance of engaging with community stakeholders for feedback to identify funding priorities and how the funding could best complement existing county mitigation efforts for the COVID-19 pandemic. The County engaged the community by hosting an online survey on the Benton County website to obtain Request for Proposals (RFPs). The period for community stakeholders to submit requests opened on August 1st and closed on October 31st. Based on the U.S. Treasury's Final Rule and guidance, Benton County has developed a comprehensive plan to establish the framework for programming this funding into eligible use categories to address local needs.

- **Public Health & Economic Recovery:** Fund COVID-19 mitigation efforts, medical expenses, behavioral health care and certain county public health, public safety, human services and other related staff.
- **Negative Economic Impact:** Respond to economic harms to workers, families, small businesses, impacted industries and rehiring of public sector workers, including County staff.
- **Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities:** Education assistance, healthy childhood environments, housing support and community violence interventions.
- **Premium Pay:** Offer additional compensation, to those – both county employees and other essential workers in the community – who have faced and continue to face the greatest health risks due to their service.
- **Infrastructure – Water/Sewer:** Make necessary investments to improve access to clean drinking water, invest in wastewater and stormwater infrastructure and provide unserved or underserved locations with new or expanded broadband access.

The ARP Committee and Quorum Court elected officials are currently reviewing the proposals submitted by community stakeholders to ensure sufficient funding is appropriated, verify organizational capacity, and ensure plans to mitigate or overcome the negative impacts of the pandemic are sound.

Community presentation events are ongoing with businesses, non-profits and other partners that submitted proposals to provide opportunities for question-and-answer sessions prior to the final award decision. Feedback gathered during these events will help guide the development of an equitable and informed spending framework. Budget allocations will be adjusted within the above categories as additional proposals are identified and approved.

The charts below provide an overview of the request by focus area received for each category:



Project proposals currently approved include:

- Premium pay for essential county employees and enhanced sick pay in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
- Vaccination survey and clinics
- Constructing new pandemic emergency response related government facilities

- Emergency services equipment and communications systems upgrade

Project proposals under current consideration include:

- Assistance to small business and non-profit organizations negatively impacted by the pandemic
- Funding assistance for investments in water/sewer infrastructure

The County’s key goal in response to the pandemic is to expedite COVID-19 recovery by funding projects prioritized by community stakeholders and those that are likely to have the most significant positive economic impact. The County seeks to provide complete transparency of this budget framework via communications through its website, press releases, and partnering community organizations.

Uses of Funds

Benton County leadership is taking a systematic and deliberate approach to planning for the use of its allocation. This strategic approach allows Benton County to ensure that all spending decisions support an equitable and robust recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It further provides Benton County an opportunity to review alternate federal, state, and local assistance to avoid potential duplication of other available funding.

To date, Benton County has appropriated more than \$7.2 million for Public Health, Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities, Premium Pay and Administrative Costs. Funding will be utilized to address concerns such as vaccination clinics, testing, contact tracing, prevention in congregate settings, premium pay for essential workers, personal protective equipment, medical expenses, air quality improvements, improvements to public health and safety communication systems, and criminal justice facilities and equipment that will assist in combating crime and reducing the spread of COVID-19.

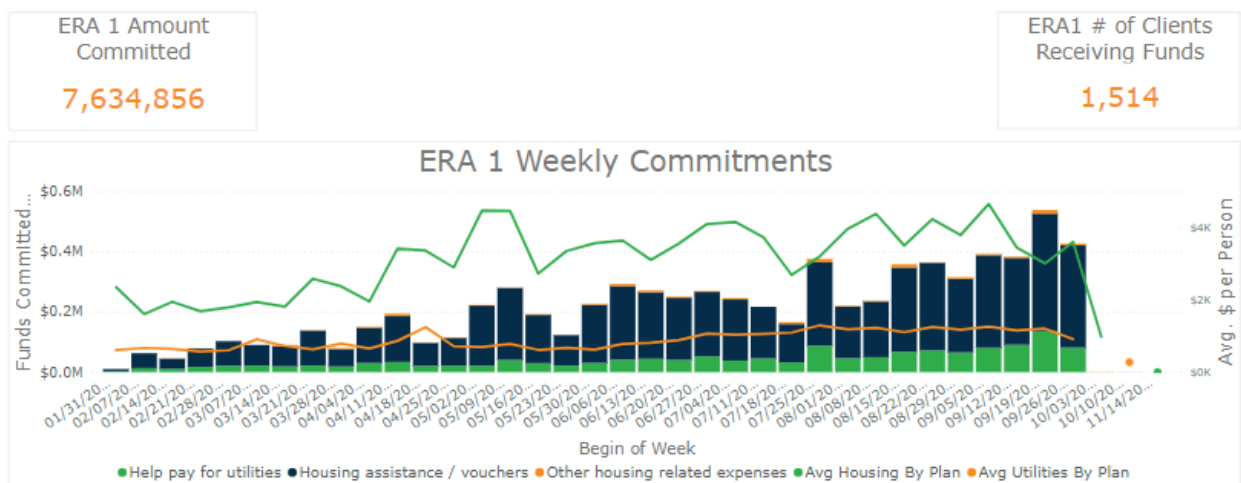
An overview of each individual project by eligible use category has been provided below.

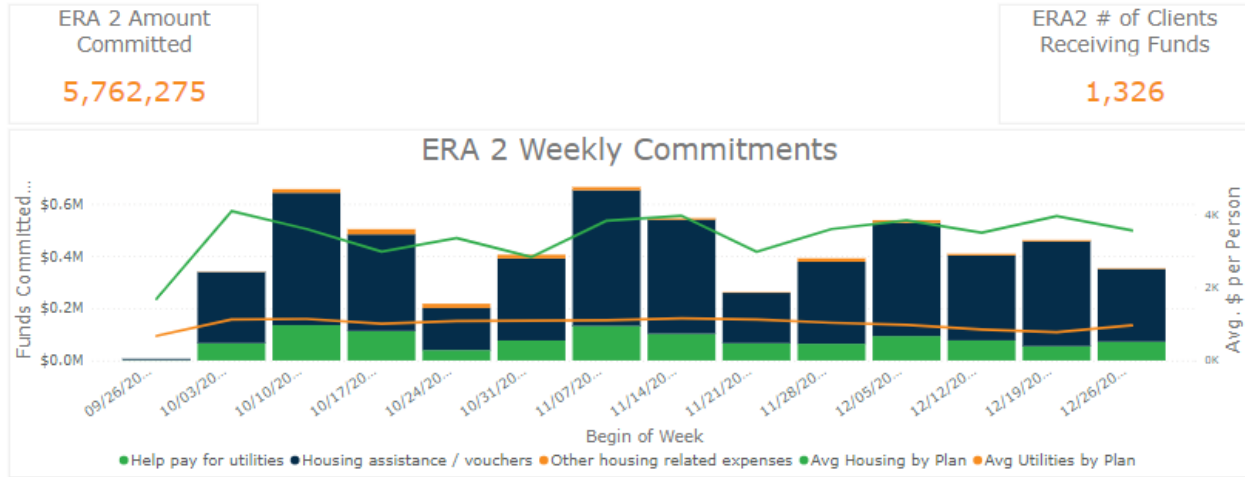
Public Health (EC 1)	
<i>COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics and Survey</i>	<i>\$213,000</i>
<i>AWIN Channel Expansion/CENCOM Backup Consolette</i>	<i>\$1,662,502</i>
<i>Personal Protective Equipment</i>	<i>\$120,000</i>
<i>County Jail HVAC Replacement</i>	<i>\$1,035,000</i>

<i>Phase I - Design - CJ Triage Intake Building</i>	<i>\$65,700</i>
<i>Volunteer Fire Departments</i>	<i>\$1,056,000</i>
<i>County Jail Annual expense for Medical Services</i>	<i>\$1,150,000</i>
<i>Benton County Sick Enhanced Payroll</i>	<i>\$200,000</i>
Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3)	
<i>Body and Vehicle Cameras</i>	<i>\$633,375</i>
Premium Pay (EC 4)	
<i>Premium Pay for Benton County Employees</i>	<i>\$1,500,000</i>
<i>Premium Pay for Public Sector</i>	<i>\$180,000</i>
Administrative	
<i>Administrative Expenses</i>	<i>\$408,516</i>

In addition to American Rescue Plan Funding, Benton County was also awarded federal recovery funds for **Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA)** and has partnered with Hark at Exellerate Foundation to offer rental assistance to residents within our jurisdiction.

Benton County received two installments of Federal Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) funds. The first through the Consolidated Appropriations Act (\$8,364,838.50 - ERA1) and the second through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) (\$6,618,705.40 - ERA2). Hark has provided assistance to more than 2,000 eligible recipients as of January 31, 2021. A more detailed overview of Hark Benton County ERA data can be accessed at <https://www.harknwa.com/benton-county-era/> and seen in the chart below.





The county continues to investigate ways to support local community-based non-profit organizations working to assist individuals and families impacted by the pandemic can continue meeting the needs of our most vulnerable populations.

Promoting equitable outcomes

Benton County will prioritize all competitive proposals that serve a disproportionately impacted community. Projects submitted for funding consideration through non-profit organizations and utility companies (water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure) will specify goals for moving historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected groups. Reviewers will also identify strategies for equitable access and distribution and specific, measurable goals for outcomes. This criterion will be a component of the merit review process for evaluating proposals.

Goals: Based on the variety of projects that have been submitted for consideration, the County’s recovery efforts will serve several historically underserved, marginalized, or adversely affected groups. Potential projects to reduce traditional barriers related to housing, food, education, transportation, employment, and water/sewer infrastructure for disadvantaged groups are all under consideration.

Awareness: Benton County is experienced in direct outreach and working with non-profit partners to create awareness of opportunities made available through federal funding programs. Depending on the program, outreach methods enacted by the County and its

partners include, but are not limited to, social media, press releases, county website postings, and outreach through non-profit organizations.

Access and Distribution: Project selection and design will dictate the precise nature of services and requirements for participation. However, all reasonable efforts will be made to remove any barriers to access. Benton County and any sub-recipients of beneficiaries will comply with all applicable non-discrimination regulations.

Outcomes: Programs will be selected based on its ability to satisfy the greatest need in effecting recovery. Program selection will ultimately focus on effective delivery of services to the intended recipients to create positive, long-term investment and foster lasting change. Addressing equity dimensions will be critical in meeting this goal and an essential factor in program selection.

Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2):

While program selection is still in the initial phases, many programs will address Negative Economic Impacts, including foreclosure prevention, food access, homelessness, job training, transportation assistance, and child care access. These proposed programs would fill specific needs for traditionally disadvantaged populations and represent long-term investments designed to promote equity.

Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3):

The proposed programs will address Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities, including affordable housing support, domestic violence shelters, mental health support, body/car cameras for law enforcement and critical water/sewer infrastructure. These offered programs would fill specific needs for traditionally disadvantaged populations and represent long-term investments designed to promote equity. Allocating significant funding to provide Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities is a critical component of an equitable recovery strategy. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have most affected those populations that traditionally have the fewest resources and the highest barriers.

Use of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The County distributed more than \$44 million in grants in assistance to vulnerable communities through Benton County with Treasury's Emergency Rental Assistance funding. The organization reports demographic information on services provided to recipients and qualitative data on the impact of grant funding. Benton County will take similar measures to manage sub-recipient awards, including determining outcomes that track how marginalized and underserved residents are impacted by funding.

Geographic and Demographic Distribution

With regards to geographic and demographic distribution of ARPA funds, implementing organizations set equity and racial equity strategies. Targets will vary based on the unique services and clientele served by individual organizations.

Community Engagement

Benton County created an ARPA Committee that has held open meetings where the public and business community leaders can attend. We have created an ARPA-specific webpage where information is continually updated and is easily accessible by community members. The Recovery Plan is published and accessible on the webpage. There is a community feedback link on the page where members of the public can provide comments that go directly to the ARPA Committee. The ARPA Committee uses various media outlets to keep the public informed.

Labor Practices

Potential infrastructure projects have not yet been determined and will be described in subsequent ARPA reports. Benton County will comply with all local, state, and federal labor practice laws, regulations, and directives. Including compliance with all laws and regulations on wages and hours, state and federal income tax, unemployment insurance, Social Security, disability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and discrimination in employment. The County, contractors, and subcontractors will comply with all applicable federal laws, including:

- Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq.) and Treasury's implementing regulations at 31 C.F.R. Part 22, which prohibit discrimination based on race, color, or national origin under programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. § 794), prohibiting discrimination based on disability under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance
- The Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 6101 et seq.), and Treasury’s implementing regulations at 31 C.F.R. Part 23, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of age in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance.
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq.), which prohibits discrimination based on disability under programs, activities, and services

Use of Evidence

The County will utilize evidence-based clearinghouses where appropriate to ensure funds achieve the desired outcomes proposed by the County or the sub-recipient. To provide an evidence-based approach when determining funding priorities, the County has and will continue to pursue a high level of community and stakeholder engagement. Following the U.S. Department of the Treasury’s guidance and common practice, evidence-based interventions and projects will receive preference in the final selection process for funding. Program and project data will be analyzed to help evaluate efficiency and effectiveness and determine if outcomes match intended goals.

Table of Expenses by Expenditure Category

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
1	Expenditure Category: Public Health		
1.1	COVID-19 Vaccination	\$81,500	\$81,500
1.2	COVID-19 Testing		
1.3	COVID-19 Contact Tracing		
1.4	Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Sites, Schools, etc.)	\$193	\$193
1.5	Personal Protective Equipment	\$3335	\$3335
1.6	Medical Expenses (including Alternative Care Facilities)	\$876,559	\$876,559
1.7	Capital Investments or Physical Plant Changes to Public Facilities that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency		

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
1.8	Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)	\$263,490	\$263,490
1.9	Payroll Costs for Public Health, Safety, and Other Public Sector Staff Responding to COVID-19		
1.10	Mental Health Services		
1.11	Substance Use Services		
1.12	Other Public Health Services		
2	Expenditure Category: Negative Economic Impacts		
2.1	Household Assistance: Food Programs		
2.2	Household Assistance: Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Aid		
2.3	Household Assistance: Cash Transfers		
2.4	Household Assistance: Internet Access Programs		
2.5	Household Assistance: Eviction Prevention		
2.6	Unemployment Benefits or Cash Assistance to Unemployed Workers		
2.7	Job Training Assistance (e.g., Sectoral job-training, Subsidized Employment, Employment Supports or Incentives)		
2.8	Contributions to UI Trust Funds*		
2.9	Small Business Economic Assistance (General)		
2.10	Aid to nonprofit organizations		
2.11	Aid to Tourism, Travel, or Hospitality		
2.12	Aid to Other Impacted Industries		
2.13	Other Economic Support		
2.14	Rehiring Public Sector Staff		
3	Expenditure Category: Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities		
3.1	Education Assistance: Early Learning		
3.2	Education Assistance: Aid to High-Poverty Districts		
3.3	Education Assistance: Academic Services		
3.4	Education Assistance: Social, Emotional, and Mental Health Services		
3.5	Education Assistance: Other		
3.6	Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care		
3.7	Healthy Childhood Environments: Home Visiting		

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
3.8	Healthy Childhood Environments: Services to Foster Youth or Families Involved in Child Welfare System		
3.9.	Healthy Childhood Environments: Other		
3.10	Housing Support: Affordable Housing		
3.11	Housing Support: Services for Unhoused persons		
3.12	Housing Support: Other Housing Assistance		
3.13	Social Determinants of Health: Other		
3.14	Social Determinants of Health: Community Health Workers or Benefits Navigators		
3.15	Social Determinants of Health: Lead Remediation		
3.16	Social Determinants of Health: Community Violence Interventions		
4	Expenditure Category: Premium Pay		
4.1	Public Sector Employees	\$1,418,896	\$1,418,896
4.2	Private Sector: Grants to other employers	\$67,171	\$67,171
5	Expenditure Category: Infrastructure		
5.1	Clean Water: Centralized wastewater treatment		
5.2	Clean Water: Centralized wastewater collection and conveyance		
5.3	Clean Water: Decentralized wastewater		
5.4	Clean Water: Combined sewer overflows		
5.5	Clean Water: Other sewer infrastructure		
5.6	Clean Water: Stormwater		
5.7	Clean Water: Energy conservation		
5.8	Clean Water: Water conservation		
5.9	Clean Water: Nonpoint source		
5.10	Drinking water: Treatment		
5.11	Drinking water: Transmission & distribution		
5.12	Drinking water: Transmission & distribution: lead remediation		
5.13	Drinking water: Source		
5.14	Drinking water: Storage		
5.15	Drinking water: Other water infrastructure		
5.16	Broadband: "Last Mile" projects		
5.17	Broadband: Other projects		
6	Expenditure Category: Revenue Replacement		
6.1	Provision of Government Services		
7	Administrative and Other		

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
7.1	Administrative Expenses	\$16,120	\$16,120
7.2	Evaluation and data analysis		
7.3	Transfers to Other Units of Government		
7.4	Transfers to Nonentitlement Units (States and Territories only)		

Project Inventory

Future recovery plans will include evidence and evaluation-based approaches for applicable programs and provide key performance indicators for each major project. Data collection will begin in January 2022, as referenced in the Department of Treasury SLFRF Compliance and Reporting Guidance manual.

Current Projects:

Project 1.1-1: COVID-19 Vaccination Clinics and Survey

Funding amount: \$81,500

Project Expenditure Category: 1.1, COVID-19 Vaccination

Project overview

Benton County has a high community transmission rate and is an area where the total number of people fully vaccinated is below 50% (<https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#county-view>). The County has partnered with Northwest Arkansas Council (<https://nwacouncil.org/nwavaccines/>) to host clinics in an effort to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19. Funds will allow healthcare professionals to provide additional testing and vaccinations to reduce the level of transmission.

Project 1.4-1: Phase I - Design - CJ Triage Intake Building

Funding amount: \$193

Project Expenditure Category: 1.4, Prevention in Congregate Settings

Project overview

Funds will be used complete the initial assessment for the proposed Triage Intake Facility to support quarantine of new inmates and isolation of those testing positive for COVID-

19 to mitigate the spread of the virus to the general population. Facility will also screen and identify inmates in need of additional mental health services.

Project 1.5-1: *Personal Protective Equipment*

Funding amount: \$3,335

Project Expenditure Category: 1.5, Personal Protective Equipment

[Project overview](#)

Access to and use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is a vital tool to mitigate the impact of the pandemic for those in the County’s direct care, for employees, and the public utilizing County services. Funds will be used to continue providing the County departments the ability to mitigate the impact of the pandemic through PPE purchases and utilization.

Project 1.6-1: *Benton County Healthcare Expenses*

Funding amount: \$876,559

Project Expenditure Category: 1.6, Medical Expenses

[Project overview](#)

This project provides Benton County funding to pay COVID-19 related healthcare expenses for employees. Funding reflects expenses incurred between March 3 – December 31, 2021.

Project 1.8-1: *ACT 833*

Funding amount: \$263,490

Project Expenditure Category: 1.8, Over COVID-19 Public Health Expenses

[Project overview](#)

Act 833 provides funding for improvements to qualified volunteer fire departments. Benton County will provide matching funds to ensure a sufficient level of qualified firefighters and equipment is available to respond to public health emergencies.

Project 4.1-1: Premium Pay

Funding amount: \$1,418,896

Project Expenditure Category: 4.1, Public Sector Employees

Project overview

The County has afforded premium pay to its eligible employees who continue to protect the health and well-being of the residents during the COVID-19 pandemic and now with emerging variants.

Project 4.1-1: Premium Pay

Funding amount: \$67,171

Project Expenditure Category: 4.2, Private Sector: Grants to Other Employers

Project overview

Funding for this project provides premium pay for fire and emergency medical service personnel. Participating organizations include the Beaver Lake Fire and Northeast Benton County Volunteer Fire Departments.

Project 6.1-1: Revenue Replacement

Funding amount: \$10,000,000

Project Expenditure Category: 6.1, Provision of Government Services

Project overview

Under the new Treasury Final Rule, Benton County has elected to enroll in the standard revenue replacement allowance. Recipients that select the standard allowance may use that amount for traditional government services.

Project 7.1-1: Administrative

Funding amount: \$16,120

Project Expenditure Category: 7.1, Administrative Expenses

Project overview

The County hired a grant administrator to handle all administration aspects of the ARP funds in October 2021. The administrator will be responsible for reporting and all other administrative functions for the entirety of the grant period. Funds will also be used to purchase other items as necessary to grant administration.

Performance Report

As of December 31, 2021, Benton County has not identified key performance indicators, but intends to identify these as part of each project agreement/contract with sub-recipients and beneficiaries. Performance measurement is a core part of the County's funding process.

Because the Quorum Court expects to fund a large and diverse set of organizations, we will provide guidance and resources to align applicants and beneficiaries with a shared understanding of performance management. As part of this effort, the Quorum Court has adopted the following **Guiding Principles**:

- **One-Time Funding** – There is no expectation that these funds would recur in the future and shall be treated as one time rather than funding on-going commitments.
- **Nexus to Pandemic** – to comply with restrictions on funding, a nexus to the pandemic should be clearly demonstrated. These may include:
 - Pre-existing gaps- Circumstances may have existed prior to the pandemic, but the impacts or negative outcomes are exacerbated by the pandemic.
 - Direct Impacts – Things that are necessary to respond to the present and immediate impacts associated with the pandemic. (may be characterized as disaster response.)
 - Recovery – Items that improve or accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 for the County and its citizens or better prepare the County against future disasters.
- **Needs Based / Data Informed** – Project or Programs funding request should contain a demonstrated need and available data must be provided to properly align the funding with the need.
- **Maximize Opportunity** – The county should partner to the extent possible with cities, state or other agencies to create or support broader regional programs to stretch the impact of county funding.
- **Avoid Duplication** – Significant disaster funding has been approved at the State and Federal Level. The county should not duplicate funding unless the need shows current funding is inadequate to meet that need.

- **Prioritize Transformational Projects** -The county should prioritize projects or programs that may be transformational in solving challenges or improving its ability to serve constituents.
- **Transparency** – establish ARP website, communication tools, clear process.

Applicants must provide performance measures and describe the intended successful outcome at the proposal stage. At the evaluation, Quorum Court members will score based on whether the proposal meets the established criteria for a successful and impactful project. Finally, quarterly performance reports from beneficiaries and support from Benton County will reinforce evidence-based, data-driven implementation.