

County of Hudson
Recovery Plan

**State and Local Fiscal Recovery
Funds**
2022 Report

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

Executive Summary

The County of Hudson is pleased to be a recipient of the American Rescue Plan (ARP), State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to assist in responding to the impact that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on County residents, businesses and activities. The County received direct funding in the amount of \$130,604,069.00. The County continues to be in high level discussions regarding the overall Plan for the use of the funds as there are so many competing needs, all of which are worthy of attention. Moreover, the County has elected to provide additional assistance to six of the NEUs in the County by leveraging the amounts they were directly allocated from the SLFRF.

The County has conducted an all-out effort to vaccinate residents and to educate and encourage those that have resisted or lack convenient access to vaccinations by contracting with a group that specializes in engaging hard to reach communities on a massive scale. We have established vaccination and testing sites including mobile operations.

Contact tracing infrastructure and software is being installed in all County facilities to help arrest the spread of the virus.

A massive outreach program is in place to connect with vaccine hesitant communities with low vaccination rates or other barriers to access.

A “healthy buildings” project was implemented to protect the more than 3,000 County employees, inhabitants and visitors to County buildings that consisted of completely overhauling the air filtration systems and installing UV systems in all County buildings to destroy germs and bacteria that may be circulating in the environment.

The County is also exploring ideas to provide economic support to County residents and businesses in an efficient and productive manner that will result in long term economic health such as down payment assistance for new homeowners to encourage and increase home ownership.

Infrastructure programs are being developed to upgrade and repair the water and sewer infrastructure throughout the County.

County parks will be provided with upgraded fiber optic networks for improved Wi-Fi available to the public and Blue Light Stations to improve safety and security.

There are ongoing projects, many of which began through the CARES Act as responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic to address services to disproportionately impacted communities including food insecurity, sustainable food programs, support services for individuals with disabilities, nutritional and physical wellness programs, mental health services for youth and adults, distance learning for youths, support to shelters including screening for behavioral health needs and case management, legal services for seniors, technology training for seniors and non-senior adults with disabilities, home health aides and of course, PPE.

The County plans to use the Revenue Loss provision to provide an array of government services that will improve the integrity of public buildings and other infrastructure. These will be one-time expenditures that won't create structural holes in the budget.

The County Administration will continue to research how best to use these funds for the betterment of its citizens, businesses and workforce and expects to solidify many of the plans not already implemented in the very near future.

Uses of Funds

a. Public Health (EC 1)

The county has committed a significant portion of its funding to date in the category of public health. We are addressing the physical impact of COVID-19 through the provision of testing to the Hudson County staff and greater community at large along by offering vaccinations to the more than 3,000 County employees and every single County resident that could be reached. This outreach included a mobile vaccine program and a public outreach program using social media, physical knocking on doors and flyers with public information widely distributed throughout each of our 12 jurisdictions, especially those hard to reach populations (Hudson County is one of the most diversely populated counties in the country). Conducting a major outreach and public information program over an extended period of time netted positive results in terms of the number of vaccines administered. The mobile vaccination program that traveled to all 12 municipalities offering on the spot vaccines was well received by those communities. The public outreach and information program also helped residents connect other resources such as childcare, rental assistance, food pantries and transportation.

Since March of 2021, continuing many of the projects that commenced with the CARES Act funding, the County has invested heavily in services, equipment and products to mitigate and protect the more than 3,000 public employees that served the public without interruption as government services are needed more than ever to combat this pandemic. The County has several 24/7 operations including two congregate facilities—a correctional center and a hospital. Law enforcement is also an around the clock function. We ensured that all public servants had sufficient PPE, that congregate facilities were cleaned, disinfected and sanitized thoroughly on a regular basis. For on-going sanitization, the County retrofitted all facilities with new ventilation systems and UV sanitizers to keep the air germ free.

The County is presently installing the infrastructure in all County facilities to support an extensive contact tracing software program. This will assist in reducing the spread of the virus should a County employee contract the virus while having been in close contact with other staff. The improved infrastructure includes strengthening the Wi-Fi in all county facilities and the installation of RFID software.

Mental Health

The pandemic also had a dire effect on those with or prone to substance use. In this regard, we are addressing the behavioral, and mental health of the public.

Over the last year, the Division of Children and Youth Services has funded thirteen initiatives through ARP funding to ameliorate the negative consequences of COVID-19 upon the mental

health and well-being of the County's residents. To date, these services have assisted 2,167 young people and their families. The County plans to continue funding these initiatives through the end of 2023.

Although children and young people in the United States have, for the most part, been able to avoid the worst of the immediate physical impacts of COVID-19, the long-term consequences of the pandemic on their mental health have been formidable. The United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued an advisory at the end of 2021 noting the "urgent need to address the nation's mental health crisis."ⁱ On a local level, New Jersey has experienced alarming rates of youth suicidality, depression and anxiety as a result of COVIDⁱⁱ.

Access to clinical services is vital and difficult to obtain for many families because of increased need and demand. Low-income families have an even more difficult time accessing mental health resources because of finances. In response, the County has utilized ARP funds to establish a clinical mental health resource at three family centers throughout the County and has augmented mental health and respite services at another family serving center with a specific focus on families with an incarcerated parent. Approximately 28 families have been served through these services since the Spring of 2022.

In addition to clinical mental health services, research has established that physical activityⁱⁱⁱ, social connections^{iv} and creative outlets and activities^v are significant protective factors against depression, anxiety and psychiatric disorders during the pandemic. With this in mind, the County has funded 9 programs that foster mental wellness through these factors. Programming includes positive peer connections including mentorships and other leadership opportunities; activities that foster resiliency and social and emotional learning skills; physical and health-related activities including overnight camping; and creative and arts programming.

Domestic Violence

Research shows that domestic violence intensified during the Pandemic, particularly because of isolation and financial stress. Although the isolation of COVID-19 is over, the trauma of that period continues to impact many women. Hudson County has used ARP funding to establish a Spanish-speaking women's support group for domestic violence survivors. Twenty-eight women have been served by this program since May 2022.

b. Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2)

Food Insecurity

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on food insecurity has affected every state in our country and every city and county in New Jersey has experienced greater hardship due to the pandemic. According to a White Paper prepared by the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, COVID-19 is expected to drive food insecurity rates beyond levels seen during the Great Recession of 2008. Hudson County is one (1) of six (6) New Jersey counties with the highest numbers of food insecure residents.

To address food insecurity, the County established a Food Security Task Force to develop and implement a sustainable plan to assure that the long-term food needs of residents are met. ARP funds have been utilized to address a couple of action items identified in the plan. Such action items include the hiring of a Food Security Navigator who is responsible for creating a food

security strategic plan and coordinating food insecurity and access activities for the County. The Food Security Navigator is responsible for the coordination of all aspects of food access in Hudson County. Another action item includes launching learning gardens to empower residents to grow their own food and to learn about healthy eating. The learning garden was launched in the spring of 2022 through a contract with Rutgers University 4-H.

To date, much of what has been done to address food insecurity in Hudson County has been done through a collaboration with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey. However, the County is preparing to earmark ARP funds to execute additional action items that have been identified as a result of a countywide survey that yielded over 10,000 responses and focus group discussions conducted by the County's Food Security Task Force. Such action items that will lead to future projects include, but are not limited to increasing access to food benefits by acquiring kiosks and electronic devices to make it easier for residents to learn about available resources and apply for food benefits, such as, SNAP and WIC; creating resource guides, palm cards and other items to educate residents about available resources, increasing the number of food pantries affiliated with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey to ensure a steady supply of food resources in Hudson County, implementing mobile pantries, establishing community kitchens, etc. The County will use ARP funds to address food disparities as well as other social determinants of health.

Homeowner Assistance

The County is in the planning stages for the development of a down payment assistance program for low-income residents. Partnering with a local non-profit agency, criteria will be established to help those eligible to strengthen their credit scores, reduce debt and provide grant funds to assist with home ownership.

c. Public Health-Negative Economic Impact: Public Sector Capacity (EC 3)

Public Health

The COVID-19 Pandemic has adversely impacted Hudson County residents not only in terms of their physical health but their overall mental health and wellness. A study from the CDC released in August 2020 stated that an increased number of young adults between the ages of 18-24 have considered suicide in the past month because of the pandemic. Further, 27% of parents reported their own mental health worsening and 14% of their children's mental health worsening due to the pandemic. Evidenced-based research has sited that behavioral health initiatives that address multiple outcomes such as stigma reduction and coping skill development rather than interventions that only target symptomology of a disorder are largely more effective in improving overall wellness. The Hudson County Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services has utilized American Rescue Plan funds to create different events that promote mental health and wellness as a preventative measure to achieve the goal of mitigating these concerns before residents are in a behavioral health crisis. Since August of 2021, 877 families, couples and youth have attended activities and events and 64,239 families, couples and youth have received targeted educational messaging through social media to normalize conversations around mental health, ways to combat stigma, resources to access services and enhance protective factors to mitigate these mental health concerns. Further, since January 2022, 64 adults who reside in different shelters across the County have received in-community case management services to

ensure that in addition to their housing needs, their behavioral health needs that have been adversely impacted due to the COVID-19 Pandemic are also being addressed.

In addition to mental health, the pandemic has also adversely impacted those who engage in substance use. Overdose deaths since the pandemic began are on the rise, which reflects studies indicating that individuals are turning to substance use to combat isolation, fear and economic and health-related stress brought on by the pandemic. As a result of this alarming information, harm reduction services have been funded with American Rescue Plan funds and over 20 individuals have received support and case management as they work towards achieving recovery from substance use. Harm reduction is a Substance-Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) endorsed strategy to help address the public health emergency created because of the opioid epidemic and is a monumental aspect of the Biden-Harris Administration's approach to addressing substance use disorders.

Moving forward, the goal is to utilize American Rescue Plan funding to continue working to decrease stigma towards mental health, increased accessibility to both mental health and substance abuse services and outreach to the most vulnerable populations including youth, those working towards recovery and those without stable and affordable housing across Hudson County.

d. Premium Pay (EC 4)

The County has not utilized any of its funding for the purpose of premium pay as of this date and presently has no plans to use the funds in this manner although we reserve the right to revisit this issue at a future date.

e. Water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure (EC 5)

The County hired professional engineers to conduct a survey of its underground infrastructure in response to constant underground pipe emergencies occurring causing damage to its facilities and parks. Constantly responding to emergencies is an inefficient way of funding long standing infrastructure needs. Presently, there are several projects being procured to upgrade the County's deteriorating sewer and stormwater systems. This will be done in various locations county wide including the county parks. Additionally, the Wi-Fi systems in all County parks are being upgraded to support, among other things, enhanced communication generally, camera systems and a blue light emergency call system that will be installed to assist the public in the case of an emergencies. The blue light call system will connect directly to first responders and make for a safer environment to giving the public a greater sense of security.

f. Revenue Replacement (EC 6)

Of the County's SLFRF funding, approximately \$58 million has been calculated for Revenue Replacement under the Federal formula. From the \$58 million, in the 2022 County Budget, \$26 million is being allocated for Revenue Replacement items. Of the \$26 million, \$22.8 million is being used for one-time capital expenditures as noted below.

- Sheriff's Office Radio and Dispatch System Upgrade
- Preliminary Expenses Related to Construction of New County Public Works Garage
- Sheriff's Office 911 System Upgrade

- New Voting Machines for Superintendent of Elections
- Demolition of Existing Public Safety Building for New Public Works Garage
- Restoration of Roof on Historic Brennan Courthouse
- Emergency Blue Light Phones in County Parks
- Overtime Costs in Corrections While Transitioning to Increased Staffing

g. Administrative (EC 7)

Transfers to Other Units of Government

There are twelve municipalities that make up the County of Hudson. Eleven of these jurisdictions are categorized as an “Non-Entitlement Units” (NEU) under the ARP Federal guidelines and received their allocation through the State of New Jersey (as opposed to the County and Jersey City who received allocations directly from the Federal government). Under any circumstance, all 12 municipalities were the recipient of ARP funds, based on population. When the County learned that 6 of the towns had their originally scheduled allocations reduced by the time the ARP legislation was finalized, the County made the decision to provide additional ARP resources to six of these municipalities from its own allocation for the purpose of supplementing their SLFRF allocations in the total amount of \$8.9 million dollars. Under this arrangement and to extent of the funds the County allocated (not their total allocation), these 6 towns must adhere to the same spending policies and guidelines that the County has adopted and none of the funds can be used under the category of Revenue Replacement since the County will use its full allocation. Individual Agreements have been executed with each of these 6 municipalities. Below, I am reporting how those municipalities plan to use the ARP funds to date. I should note that not all towns have completed the planning for the use of the funds at this time.

- **Secaucus**
Prevention in Congregate Settings (EC 1.4). Secaucus plans to use its County allocation, to install Air Filtration and UV systems that kill airborne germs and bacteria, towards the construction of a new Senior Center
- **Kearny**
Community Violence Interventions (EC 1.11). Pending evidence to support expenditure
Broadband (EC5.21)
- **Weehawken**
Assistance to Small Business (EC 1.8)
Assistance to Non-Profits (EC 1.9). Weehawken plans to use part of the County allocated funds to aid small businesses and non-profits that have been negatively impacted by COVID to offset costs for business closures and business interruptions.
Public Sector Workforce Payroll & Benefits for Public Health, Public Safety & Human Service Workers (EC 3.1). Services are directly related to mitigating COVID 19
- **East Newark** – Plan under development
- **Harrison** – Plan under development
- **Guttenberg** – Plan under development

h. Other Federal Recovery Funds

In addition to the SLFRF received under the American Rescue Plan, the County has received more than \$35 million under the Emergency Rental Assistance Programs. These funds are earmarked to prevent homelessness and assist residents who are experiencing difficulties with rent and utility payments. The County networks with the courts and various nonprofit agencies that service immigrants, undocumented residents and other minority groups to reach those and other vulnerable populations. The County has dispatched staff to many of the municipalities to provide application support and counseling.

ARP funds have also been made available to the County for other targeted programs through HUD, HHS and the USDOL.

Finally, to better serve and identify the impacted communities that could benefit from programs that will be designed using the ARP funds, the County is creating an office of Data Analytics.
