

## **Strategies for Providing Input on American Rescue Plan Act Funds for Counties and Municipalities**

Based on an initial reading of the U.S. Treasury Final Interim Rule for the use of these funds, there are five things that you need to know in developing your strategy for input on their use.

- A) There is a very broad range of potential uses for these funds.
- B) Ideally, decisions will be made based on a comprehensive community planning process.
- C) At the same time, we know that counties, cities, and towns will want to get the funds out quickly. Some uses will need to be given priority like paying themselves back for past expenses that are eligible and ensuring that direct costs are covered related to COVID-19 testing, vaccinations, and treatment. We anticipate that elected officials will also have their own longstanding lists of projects. Our hope is that these projects will be shared and considered along with suggestions from citizens about any additional priorities.
- D) The U.S. Treasury Final Interim Rule includes several requirements to use the funds to address the impacts of the pandemic. These requirements related to specific purposes include using the funds to address needs of individuals, families, small businesses, and communities that are struggling to make ends meet, including underserved low income, minority, and rural communities.
- E) The Final Interim Rule encourages public participation but does not require it. This means that part of your advocacy may need to focus on ways to participate in the planning and decision-making related to these funds.

You need to have a voice in the use of these funds. This is not a done deal, no matter what elected officials and others may say about their own plans. You have a right as a citizen to speak out and have your voice heard.

The key question to ask is: How can these funds best be used to help those individuals, families, small businesses, and communities that are most affected by the pandemic?

These funds can make a big difference in the lives of individuals, families, small businesses, and local communities. In relationship to infrastructure like water, sewer, and broadband, you can advocate to target funds to the last mile first to extend their reach to underserved low income, minority, and rural communities.

Below are specific steps to consider to make your voice heard.

1. Call the county commission or mayor's office and ask how you can have input on the use of the funds. Also request to be put on a list to receive notices of meetings related to the funds, draft and final plans, and reports on how they are used. Build on existing relationships with elected officials or staff where possible to make these requests.
2. Identify other individuals and groups to include in outreach about having input. Include representatives of the community, including minority groups and programs that address a broad range of interests, like children, women, seniors, low-income families, people with disabilities, minorities, rural communities, and interests based on gender and gender orientation.
3. Share materials with these individuals and groups including dates for Senator Manchin's remaining information sessions, his zoom meeting, and any meetings to be convened by the county, city, or town. Reach out to Senator Capito and the Congressperson from your district to give them input on local needs and inquire about and seek involvement in any meetings they are having.
4. Distribute the community survey to local organizations and email lists and print out copies to hand out at in person events. Collect and return any print responses for entry onto the online forms. Once this information is collected and compiled, use the results, where possible, to document the priority needs in your area.

5. Work with local community groups and individuals to convene your own town halls in person and online to discuss priority community needs. Where feasible, agree on shared needs to present to the county and city or town. These needs may also go beyond these new federal funds that are being sent to counties and municipalities.
6. Write op eds and letters to the editor of local papers and use social media and other outlets to share information, needs, and concerns.
7. Develop information sheets on uses of funds you are advocating for and provide them to the local media and distribute online and in person.
8. Distribute information as it evolves related to future meetings about the use of the funds, draft and final plans, and reports on how they are used.
9. Develop additional strategies to advocate for the use of the ARPA funds that go directly to the Governor and/or involve the legislature and/or county school boards and other institutions that they flow down to.
10. Continue to monitor and advocate on how projects are planned for and how money is spent in county and municipal budgets.