



**THERE IS STILL
TIME TO ACT**

YOUR VOICE. YOUR RECOVERY.

The ARP Activist Playbook:
Connecting & Engaging with Local Leaders

NEW EDITION FOR MARCH 2023

A how-to guide designed by the Southern Economic Advancement Project to assist community activists and nonprofits in connecting and engaging with their local leaders and elected officials (mayor's office, city council, county commissioner, governor's office) as they strategize how their communities will use the incoming American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding.

OVERVIEW: THE ACTIVIST ARP PLAYBOOK

In March of 2021, President Biden introduced the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP or ARPA), designed to stimulate the economy further as Americans recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Along with several other recovery initiatives, the act includes \$350 billion in direct funding for state and local governments through the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program.

The SLFRF program allows spending to “address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic” and includes guidance from the US Treasury to consider spending that focuses on equitable outcomes.

Key aspects of the state and local recovery funds include:

- **Small cities get money as well.** SLFRF are provided to every town and county in the US, no matter how small. This may be the first time receiving and administering federal funds for many smaller cities (local governments serving under 50,000 people, labeled as Non-Entitlement Units or NEUs).
- **There’s a longer timeline than previous pandemic assistance.** The flexible timeline for spending the money is notable. Officials have until the end of 2024 to make spending decisions/plans and until the end of 2026 to spend the funds.
- **There’s greater flexibility in funding categories.** Leaders can use SLFRF for a tremendous range of recovery programs and projects. Examples of expenditure categories in the Treasury’s guidance include public health, mental health, food programs, direct cash transfers, rent aid, eviction prevention, cash assistance to the unemployed, job training assistance, aid to nonprofit organizations, education aid to high poverty districts, child care, affordable housing, violence interventions, early learning, and community health navigators. Other eligible uses include water and sewer infrastructure, broadband expansion to underserved areas, or revenue replacement to offset pandemic impacts on local budgets.

With so many options and competing needs, setting spending priorities and ensuring equitable outcomes is critical. Although many states, cities, and towns have already set their spending priorities, significant work remains to hold leaders accountable. To secure an equitable, community-based pandemic recovery, activists must be informed about the SLFRF opportunity, engage their representatives to understand implementation plans, and stay energized to be effective and successful advocates.

STEP ONE: KNOW YOUR STUFF

KNOW YOUR STUFF - Staying up to date is the first line of defense when the nudge to make a difference hits your heart. Before you or your organization try to apply for funding or suggest where or what sector you would like prioritized for funding, there are a few things to keep in mind.

- **How much is your city receiving in funding?** Knowing how much money your city or state receives will help shape your spending ideas. You'll also have insight into how much you can comfortably request or propose an idea. This [interactive online tool from the National League of Cities \(NLC\)](#) provides a complete list of the allocations headed to metropolitan cities and non-entitlement local government units.
- **Are your proposed areas/sectors/ideas already in the city's spending plans?** Many cities, counties, and states have already decided how to spend ARP funding, and your suggested area of concern may or may not have received funding. Browse your city's website for the latest ARP planning and spending decisions. Doing your homework allows you to frame your ideas within the context of current ARP plans. If no information is available, transparency should be your first concern when contacting your leaders.
- **Be engaged! Build relationships!** Beyond attending community events and city council meetings, try to build relationships with the government staff responsible for leading ARP implementation and organizations that received SLFRF grants.



Sidebar Note: One main goal of ARP is to promote equity and community engagement, so information should be readily available to the public. Don't hesitate to ask your officials about the current process regarding ARP for your community. Questions to ask include, but are not limited to:

- How are funding decisions made?
- Where can residents go to get information?
- How and when can communities engage in the process?

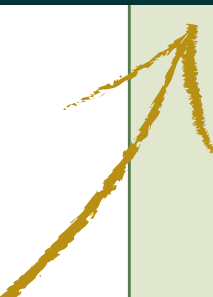
HOW MUCH LOCAL ARP MONEY IS LEFT?
VISIT SEAP'S LOCAL FUNDS SPENDING TRACKER

STEP TWO: FIND YOUR VOICE

FIND YOUR VOICE - Before you ask for funding or head to your local officials with your ARP spending ideas, please find ways to strengthen your voice. Doing so will help you come across boldly, clearly, and strategically.

- **Data is your best friend** when setting out to connect with local leaders. Being able to hit them with solid points as to why your proposed area or sector deserves priority spending will make a real difference.
 - **Example: Advocating for a Recreational Center in Low-Income Housing Communities** - *Going to your leaders and requesting a recreational hub is one thing; going to them with data showing that - "x" number of low-income children lack outlets for expression or stimulation of their social development, which contributes to "y data" (lower health outcomes, school performance, etc.) in "blank" neighborhood - makes a stronger case for your proposal.*

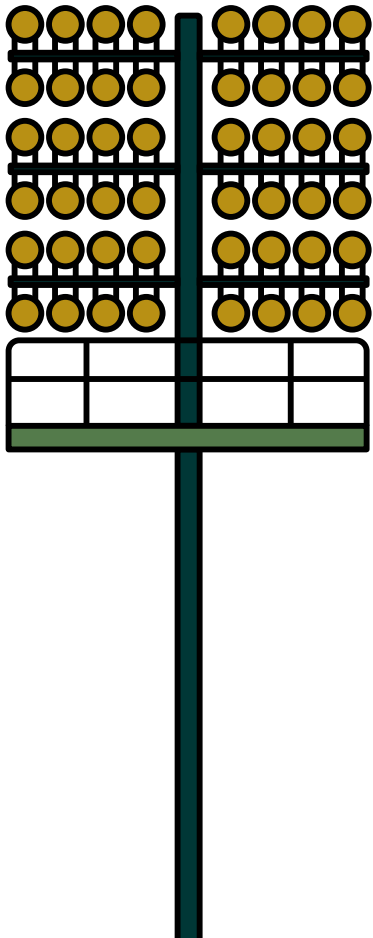
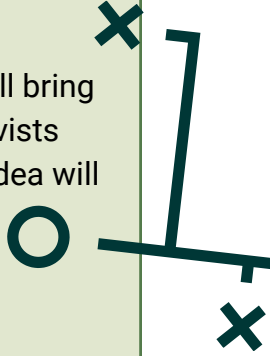
Tip: Recently, the SEAP, Fair Count, and the National Conference on Citizenship released their 2023 Q1 edition of the Pandemic to Prosperity: South report. The report is packed with current and reliable data that can be highly supportive of your proposals.

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- **Storytelling has power.** The pandemic impacted many we call family, friends, and neighbors. Stories are a great way to remind elected officials that they serve real people facing real problems. Tell stories on all appropriate platforms available and in creative ways that capture the attention of your intended audience. Questions to consider in your storytelling may include, but are not limited to:
 - Did the pandemic make it harder for you to feed your family?
 - Did your neighbor lose their home due to the housing/eviction crisis?
 - Did someone close to you pass away due to unsustainable healthcare policies in your city/state?
 - **Provide examples** of how other leaders have engaged their communities around ARP spending and planning. Sharing best practices and ideas from cities and towns comparable to yours can help lift what is and isn't working. Visit Page 8 of this guide for examples of how other communities are spending local recovery funds across the South. If your city and county leaders can see examples of similar programs or policies succeeding, they may be more receptive to adopting them. Find examples around the South here.

STEP THREE: FORM YOUR TEAM

FORM YOUR TEAM - Whether tackling your ARP spending advocacy solo or with a team, collaborating with like-minded individuals or local community organizations can help you build the power you need to succeed!

- **Assembling allies** will help you pave your agenda, and working with others will bring a fresh perspective and strengthen your proposal. Connecting with other activists and community members gives you direct insight into how your proposal or idea will impact the community you seek to help.
 - See the 'Action From Orgs Like Yours' section of this guide.
- **Gathering resources** will help support your plan. There are tons of resources available right at your fingertips regarding ARP. Whether you're looking for quick FAQs to learn more or technical assistance, the SEAP has you covered with an [ARP Toolkit](#). The SEAP has also published a model resolution that holds leaders accountable for spending ARP funds justly and equitably.



Playbook Spotlight: The Committee for a Better New Orleans helped introduce the model resolution to the New Orleans City Council. The board unanimously passed the resolution!

STEP FOUR: PRESENT YOUR TEAM

PRESENT YOUR VOICE - Here is where the rubber meets the road - presenting your ideas and proposals to local officials and leaders. This is your or your organization's opportunity to make a substantial difference in your community's pandemic recovery.

- **Letters** are an excellent way to convey the needs of the community formally. When drafting a letter of your ARP spending proposal, clearly state your wants and needs (don't forget the supporting stories and data) and submit them to all necessary leadership and committee members. [See an example letter from Legal Aid of North Carolina here.](#)
- **Community Meetings** that activists strategically plan out have a better chance of sticking with officials. Don't get discouraged that many local leaders and elected officials are not hosting in-person meetings, as virtual meetings are an option. Invite them to join and listen and participate! While planning how to present your proposals, take time (holidays, local events...) into consideration - it can make a real difference in how, when, or even if they follow up with you.
- **Social Media** is powerful. Many of your local leaders and elected officials are social media users. If you can't reach them through letters, emails, or even community meetings, make some noise on social media. Even after meeting with them, tell the public on social media. It can serve as an extra layer of transparency and put a fire under elected officials to respond or make moves.
- **Organize** your community members who may need to know how to engage or may seem disconnected from the matter. Try accessing a voter file platform to utilize various means of organizing like phone banking, texting, postcards, or mail (to name a few) and reach others who may want to join!
- **Testify** to your local officials more formally through public testimony. If your local council or board offers a public comment period during their meetings, use that as an opportunity to share any collected stories, data, and proposals you or your organization may have. These meetings are often recorded and live-streamed, and your remarks are also logged in their official record!

EXTRA! EXTRA! Reaching out to your local media outlets is another excellent way to amplify your voice and ideas. You can easily catch the attention of both the public and local leaders.



STEP FIVE: REACH BEYOND THE LOCALS

REACH BEYOND THE LOCALS - Taking your voice to the next level - the state, regional, and federal levels - may seem daunting; however, effective advocacy requires work at every level of government. Rule #1: don't be intimidated. Your officials work for you!

- **Build relationships** with someone in your community who has experience connecting with elected officials. Start by researching and networking with your inner circle, community leaders, local elected leadership and their staff. Ask them for advice about whom to contact and how to communicate your message effectively. Remember that many representatives and senators often return home after their time in Washington. Stay in the know to build your opportunity to connect!
- **Connect with Intermediaries** like professional associations, community development financial institutions, community development corporations, Councils of Governments, Universities, and other organizations that provide technical assistance to government leaders. By understanding how they are engaged in the federal funding process, you can find opportunities to attend events, add your perspective, and push for more transparency and equitable implementation.
- **Cold Calling & Emailing** is not dead, although it is not the first choice in connecting with someone you have never met. ARP spending is a top priority for America, and federal leaders expect to hear from the public. To increase your chances of a response, have each person from your gathered team/organization send separate emails. Also, research the official you hope to have to support your idea. Doing this will ensure you aren't contacting someone whose focus is healthcare or asking for support on crime mitigation.



CONNECT WITH U.S. TREASURY

If your team or organization has concerns regarding the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds program, please email US Treasury officials at slfrp@treasury.gov.

Note: *Even if you are still waiting to receive a response, Treasury will review your email and determine whether or not to take action.*

EXAMPLES FROM PLACES LIKE YOURS



Buncombe County, NC

Summer Youth Work Readiness Program \$960,000 Budget

In collaboration with Partners for Youth Foundation and Fayette County Public Schools, the Summer Youth Job Training Program provides workforce training opportunities for 300 high school youth to develop interpersonal skills and explore career interests while gaining work experience and earning income in the summer. This program runs for three weeks in June and three weeks in July. Over 100 local businesses and community organizations provide job site supervisors/mentors to participating youth. Youth are compensated at a \$15 per hour rate, working 20 hours per week for 6 weeks. The program prioritizes youth who have economic, educational, and social needs.



Lexington-Fayette Urban County, KY

Permanent Supportive Housing Expansion \$3,000,000 Budget

Homeward Bound of WNC aims to expand permanent supportive housing by acquiring a motel to renovate into 85 affordable housing efficiency units to serve the chronically homeless. The plan is to renovate the facility into permanent supportive housing apartment units, office space for case managers and program staff, and spaces for community partners to deliver onsite supportive services. Activities may include establishing a plan for facility operations and delivery of onsite case management, 24-hour staffing, onsite security, and individualized, supportive services focused on housing stabilization, independence, and improving quality of life, including sustainable financing for operations.



Collier County, FL

Food Security for Residents \$5,115,000 Budget

This project addresses food access, affordability, and healthy, fresh food infrastructure. Funds will bolster emergency food operations, strengthen local food distribution systems, expand nutrition education, and reduce hunger. The primary delivery mechanism will be a sub-grantee agreement with the Community Foundation of Collier County to support local food banks. Outcomes will include greater food security and nutrition for disadvantaged Collier County residents.

ACTION FROM ORGS LIKE YOURS

Pittsburgh, PA



The Pittsburgh United coalition organized a petition with other community groups after learning the city council began making ARP spending plans without community input.

The petition called for an “equitable, transparent, community-centered, community-driven process that results in an equitable outcome.”

They both delivered the petition to the City Council and organized an event/press availability on the steps of the city's council building.

Durham, NC

The Back in the Black coalition was organized around research by activists in Durham to hold steadfast to the Biden Administration's dedication to equity through Executive Order 13985, the legislation of ARP, and independent research on closing the racial wealth gap.

The coalition has centered around demanding that local leaders spend 45% of ARP funds on Black-led projects. They also organized existing community groups in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood to join, used online resources, and went directly to city and county governments with their demands.

Southwest, GA



With SEAP's microgrant and toolkit, SOWEGA Rising and Georgia ACT criss-crossed Southwest Georgia counties to coordinate and educate around ARP. In Dougherty County, they fought to ensure money was spent on COVID relief and won \$5M for housing/energy. In Grady County, they helped local groups craft a proposal and secured funds for summer and afterschool programming. In Waycross, they helped create a housing proposal...and they're still going!

RESOURCES FOR YOUR TEAM: LETTER TEMPLATE

Dear [official name],

I am [name], [position/title] of the [organization name]. I hope this email finds you well and serves as a springboard for advancing conversations regarding the [city/town name] community's use of federal recovery funds.

We would like to show our support [or propose an idea] on how we believe local leaders of [city/town name] can allocate our share of incoming State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) through the American Rescue Plan (ARP).

Recent data from the [source] shows that [data on the issue] in our state/town. These unprecedented funds will help us change the narrative for our communities.

We support the spending opportunity of allocating [dollar amount] toward [issue/initiative/program]. [Explanation of support 2-3 sentences].

OR

We've gathered community input on this issue, and our results/proposal are/is as follows:
[Proposal Idea/Supportive Description]

My team would be honored to discuss our proposal either in person or via an online conference call. We know the [data support: x amount of residents] can benefit from our proposal. Your support of allocating SLFRF to this initiative will create a more sustainable community that will equitably recover from the pandemic.

My team is available [provide open dates/times]
We look forward to hearing from your office.

With the community in mind,
[Sign Off]

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE WORD DOCUMENT](#)

RESOURCES FOR YOUR TEAM: TALKING POINTS

Our organization is aware that [data/statistics]. We feel this impacts our community in a way that doesn't justly represent what our community needs. OR These numbers only prove that the [city/town name] community is/isn't in support of [issue].

We would like to seek a change through the equitable and transparent spending of incoming ARP allocated to our town in the amount of [SLFRF amount].

We know that with your support of [issue/proposal idea], we can create a recovery for our [city/town name] residents that places people before politics.

[Quote or overall statement that drive home's your organization's mission]

Call to Action: For our team, connecting with your office is a top priority to ensure SLFRF spending opportunities and plans represent every community of [city/town name] during this pandemic's recovery.

[CLICK HERE TO DOWNLOAD THE WORD DOCUMENT](#)

RESOURCES

SEAP:

[ARP Equity and Engagement Map](#)

[ARP Local Funds Tracker](#)

[ARP Toolkit](#)

[ARP in Action Across the South One-Pagers](#)

[Public Engagement Memo](#)

[Community Engagement Guide](#)

National League of Cities:

[Local Fund Calculator: By Municipality](#)

National Association of Counties:

[Allocation: County by County](#)

State Nonprofit Associations ARP Resources:

[National: National Council of Nonprofits](#)

[Florida: Florida Nonprofit Alliance](#)

[Georgia: Georgia Center for Nonprofits](#)

[Kentucky: Kentucky Nonprofit Network](#)

[North Carolina: North Carolina Center for Nonprofits](#)

[South Carolina: Together SC](#)

More state-based nonprofit associations that do not feature a resource page for ARP funding but exist as outreach opportunities:

[Alabama: Alabama Association of Nonprofits](#)

[Louisiana: LANO](#)

[Mississippi: Mississippi Alliance of Nonprofits and Philanthropy](#)

[Tennessee: Momentum Nonprofit Partners](#)

[Virginia: Center for Nonprofit Excellence](#)

[West Virginia: West Virginia Nonprofit Association](#)

Selected Local Nonprofits that are active on ARP:

[Atlanta, GA area: Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta](#)

[New Orleans, LA: Committee for a Better New Orleans](#)

[Across West Virginia: West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy](#)

[Across North Carolina: NC Justice Center](#)

[Durham, NC: Communities in Partnership](#)

US Treasury Guidance for State/Local Fund:

[State Funding](#)

[Guidance Page](#)

[Interim Final Rule](#)

[Fact Sheet](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Quick Reference Guide](#)



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