

THE SOUTHERN ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT PROJECT

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# HOW TO TELL YOUR CITY'S RECOVERY STORY

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The ARP Toolkit: Guidelines for ARP Reporting and Outreach





## **ARP is sending \$130 billion in federal funds to 19,000 local governments.**

- This unprecedented size and flexibility of American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds create significant opportunities to support substantial changes in every community.
- ARP is more vital and forward-looking than CARES.
- Federal guidance promotes using ARP to build equitable recovery strategies.
- Making smart decisions about ARP spending requires community input and buy-in.

## **SEAP's ARP assistance team is here to help.**

- The ARP Toolkit can help cities of all sizes make strategic spending choices.
- The Model Resolution will affirm cities' commitments to equity and accountability.
- Online resources will help jump-start community engagement and policy ideas.
- The team will serve as a hub to share ideas and strategies with other cities working on ARP.



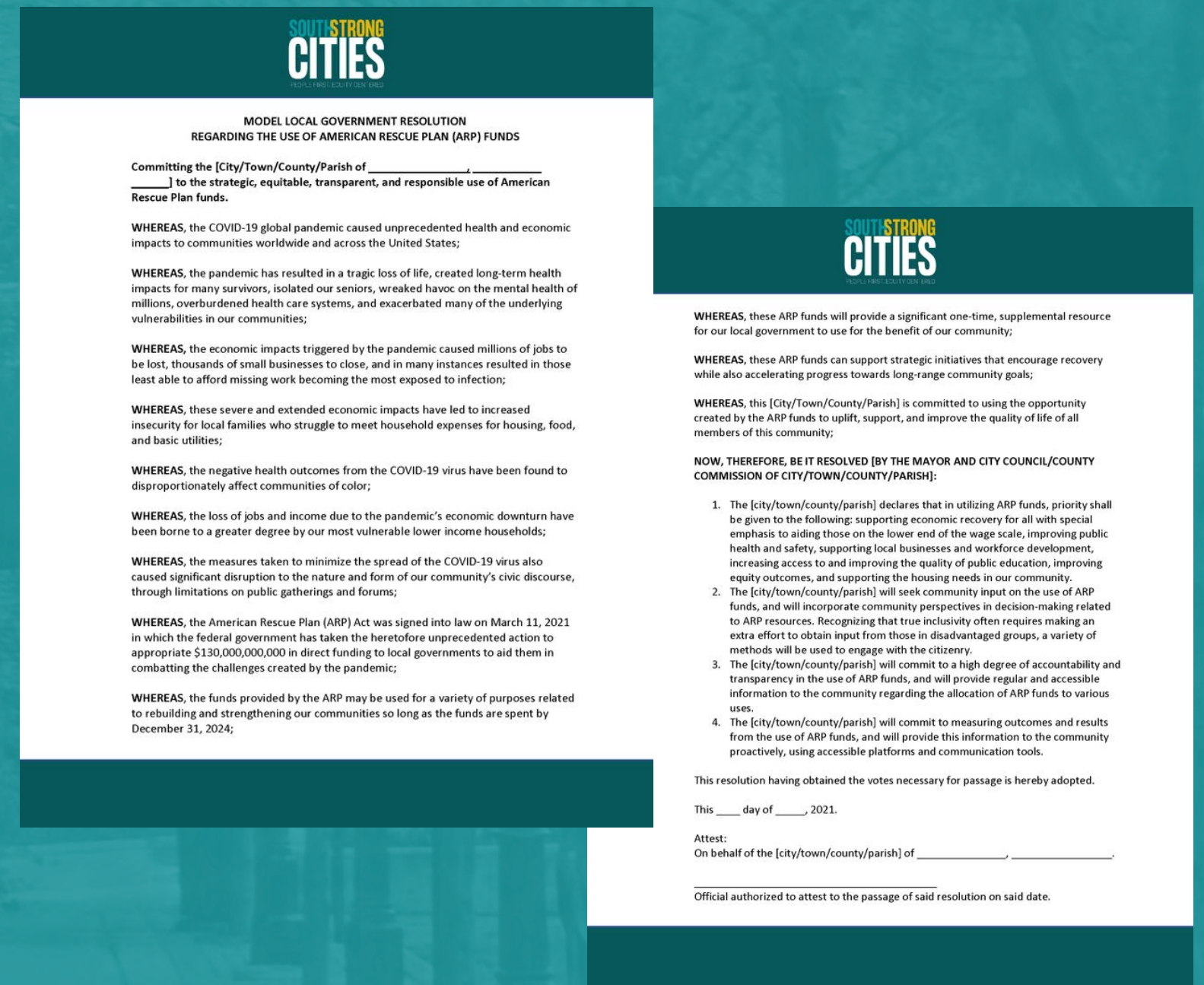
## ARP Model Resolution

The South Strong Cities' Model Resolution is designed to help governments define their ARP approach. The resolution articulates commitments to use ARP funds for sustainable and equitable recovery and focuses on accountability and community engagement:

- Prioritizes the use of ARP funds for initiatives that drive sustainable and equitable recovery.
- Commits to community engagement as part of the decision-making for ARP funds, emphasizing obtaining input from disadvantaged groups.
- Commits to developing measures that allow the community to assess outcomes and results from ARP funds usage.

[Contact Our Team](#)

[Download the Model Resolution](#)





# Telling Your ARP Recovery Story Will:

Explain the significance of ARP.



Confirm community priorities and needs that matter most.



Promote public support for ARP spending plans.



Help city leadership make smart, informed decisions.



# 6 STEPS TO TELLING YOUR STORY

- STEP 1** — How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?
- STEP 2** — Framing the Opportunity
- STEP 3** — How Will We Make ARP Spending Decisions?
- STEP 4** — How Did the Pandemic Affect Our Community?
- STEP 5** — How Will Our ARP Funds Be Spent?
- STEP 6** — What Were the Results/Impact of our ARP Spending?





**STEP ONE:**  
**How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?**



## STEP 1: How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?

**How much ARP funding will we get? This is where the conversation often starts and with good reason;**

- Local governments are receiving significant allocations.
- For many smaller communities, ARP allocation is roughly \$300 per resident.

**For comparison, talk about your allocation as a percent of your city's General Fund.**

For many cities, ARP funds = 25% to 50% of annual GF.

This is a **substantial** opportunity. How will you maximize the impact?

**Talk about ARP dollars in terms of people and projects.**

Could these funds fully support an existing program for 2 or 3 years?

Could you expand or accelerate priorities that are already planned?



## STEP 1: How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?

**The goal is to make strategic, smart choices.**

Invest ARP funds in projects and programs that support sustainable recovery, long-term priorities and equitable outcomes.

- ARP provides wide latitude for how cities can use the funds, particularly in hardest-hit communities.
- Unlike CARES, ARP funds have an extended, multi-year timeline.
- Unlike CARES, federal guidance **encourages** cities to engage with residents about spending choices and to include the community's voice in decisions.
- Unlike CARES, federal guidance **encourages** a focus on equity and support for the most vulnerable community members.



## STEP 1: How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?

### Don't dilute the potential impact of ARP.

- Unlike CARES, ARP funds are not driven by COVID reimbursements. City pandemic expenses are/were real, but ARP can be used for a wide range of initiatives.
- Local budgets were built and balanced before ARP's arrival. That means ARP funds are supplemental and so deserve **intentional decision-making** about best use.
- Your ARP story should respond to your city's **overall** financial experience, not just individual revenue streams.

For more detail, see this [South Strong Cities brief](#) about why good ARP decisions start with community engagement and how a focus on revenue replacement is the wrong approach.



## **STEP 1: How Much ARP Funding Will We Get?**

### **Know the basic ARP rules.**

- Your local ARP allocation is determined at the federal level, then distributed by the state.
- The first half will arrive in mid-2021, while the second half is expected to arrive in mid-2022. The arrival of funds should kick off planning and dialogue, but there is ample time for thoughtful decisions and spending.
- There are accounting and reporting requirements, which may seem cumbersome for smaller cities unaccustomed to federal funding. State and nonprofit resources can help with support/technical assistance.

**Useful NLC Resource:** [What Small Cities Need To Know to Access ARPA Local Relief Funds](#)

**Our [ARP Toolkit webpage](#) includes resources and links and our project staff can assist if you have additional questions.**





**STEP TWO:**  
**Framing The Opportunity**



## STEP 2: Framing The Opportunity

### How to think about choices?

An understanding of local needs should lead spending priorities.

### Options Will Include:

Launch new or “big” ideas.

These investments can be transformative, igniting projects that would not exist without ARP.

Initiate or expand regional collaboration.

These options help smaller communities get “more bang for the buck” through shared resources and planning.

See this NLC overview on collaboration: [City/County Coordination is Vital for America’s Recovery Plan](#)

Supplement or accelerate existing or planned projects and programs.

These choices will be quicker to implement and more familiar to stakeholders.



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## **STEP THREE:**

# **How Will We Make Our ARP Spending Decisions?**



## **STEP 3: How Will We Make Our ARP Spending Decisions?**

### **Build an outreach plan for public participation.**

See the SEAP ARP Toolkit for why this is critical and how to start:

[Local ARP Spending Plans Should Begin with a Community Engagement Commitment:](#)

[Focus on Revenue Loss is the Wrong Approach for Most Cities](#)

**Who are existing  
community partners we  
can access?**

**Who else should  
help/participate?**

**How will we engage  
hard-to-reach and  
disadvantaged  
community members?**

**When/how  
can the public  
participate?**



## **STEP 3: How Will We Make Our ARP Spending Decisions?**

**Publicize when and how ARP spending decisions will happen.**

### **Establish the timeline for key steps:**

- Public input
- Council consideration
- Public feedback
- Final decisions/approve ARP spending plans

### **Share widely and loudly:**

- Via City website and social media
- Use in-person outreach
- Engage community stakeholders to grow outreach



## STEP 3: How Will We Make Our ARP Spending Decisions?

City Communication → Community Engagement → Support & Momentum

### Keep ARP decisions on the front burner

- Where are we now
- Status and milestones
- What happens next

### Recognize and share community input

- What have we heard and learned so far?





**STEP FOUR:**  
**How Did the Pandemic Affect Our Community?**



## STEP 4: How Did the Pandemic Affect Our Community?

### The direct financial impact to your City – Revenue Loss.

- This is an allowed use for ARP, but there must be a decline across the entire city, not just one or two revenue streams.
- Utilities are not included in your calculation, just general government.
- See the [NLC guidelines and revenue loss calculator](#) for more detail.

### The direct financial impact to your City – Pandemic Expenses.

- Expenses are forward-looking, so only consider costs since March 11, 2021.
- Eligibility is more limited than with CARES, so only consider expenses that specifically mitigate pandemic impacts.
- Guidance is provided in the US Treasury Interim rule and other FAQ's:
  - [US Treasury Interim Rule](#)
  - [US Treasury FAQ](#)

### Community impacts on the economy, health and education.

- These are the pandemic effects that matter most.
- ARP is intended to help structure meaningful, strategic responses to these needs.
- Ask Community partners to help identify, quantify and describe.
- Public input on ARP options will likely align with these impacts.

**Your final ARP spending decisions should connect to these impacts.**



## STEP 4: How Did the Pandemic Affect Our Community?

### Telling Your Story Through Data

Storytelling itself is a strong and effective way to communicate a message. Pairing the stories with data and analytics can help elicit the intended reactions to drive the message home. Think of it this way: **Use the data to tell the story rather than telling a story about the data.** When gathering perspectives to tell your community's story, start with answering, then expanding on the following:

- How many small businesses closed due to the pandemic?
- How many residents faced utility shut-offs and/or evictions?
- What was the strain like on health care workers?
- How many families in your community lost loved ones?
- What were the difficulties in getting vaccines to your community?
- How many residents faced unemployment?

**How should you collect the data?** [SEAP's Propel survey](#) is a great example of asking the community what they need and the challenges they are facing.





**STEP FIVE:**  
**How Will Our ARP Funds Be Spent?**



## STEP 5: How Will Our ARP Funds Be Spent?

Final ARP spending choices should reflect a combination of factors.



Good communication and engagement should create community buy-in and support.



## **STEP 5: How Will Our ARP Funds Be Spent?**

### **Presenting ARP investments to the community.**

#### **Think about spending choices by category of need**

- Who is helped?
- What problem is solved?

#### **Think about spending choices by recipient**

- ARP funding to City
- ARP funding to community partners
- ARP funding to regional collaboration

#### **Continue to communicate**

- Track progress on spending
- Publicize program and project milestones
- Connect with community partners along the way



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**STEP SIX:**  
**What Were the Results and Impact of  
our ARP Spending?**



## **STEP 6: What Were the Results and Impact of our ARP Spending?**

### **Measuring results and impact helps validate your ARP choices.**

- What problems or issues were addressed?
- What goals or projects have moved forward?

### **How did ARP make a difference?**

- What plans moved faster?
- What initiatives were able to take on a wider reach?
- What new ideas or projects were launched?

**Look for future SEAP ARP Toolkit resources to help your city think ahead on measuring ARP impact and results.**