

Buncombe County Recovery Plan



Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

2021 Report

May 10, 2021 – July 31, 2021

Executive Summary

Buncombe County is thoughtfully creating a plan for the use of Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) that will promote an impactful, sustainable, and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in our community. The County is committed to investing these funds in projects that:

- Align to county strategic plan and community priorities
- Support equitable outcomes for most impacted populations
- Leverage and align with other governmental funding sources
- Make best use of this one-time infusion of resources
- Have a lasting impact

Upon notification of the American Rescue Plan Act and SLFRF infusions, Buncombe County immediately took action to create a recovery response that would engage the local community and provide an inclusive process for fund distribution. Since March 2021, the County has worked closely with the Board of Commissioners to establish a process for the distribution of funds, put forth a community survey seeking input regarding COVID recovery priorities as they align with the County's newly established strategic plan focus areas, developed and implemented a request for proposals (RFP), hosted workshops for community partners and county departments to provide information about ARPA, SLFRF, and the RFP process, and identified initial time-sensitive needs for immediate funding. This currently includes COVID-19 vaccination support led by Buncombe County Emergency Services, and fund administration (hiring a position to manage the recovery funding process for Buncombe County).

Buncombe County and its Board of Commissioners are currently in the process of establishing the first round of initial SLFRF awards, which will be announced at a Commissioner's Special Meeting on August 31, 2021. The County plans to make awards on a rolling basis, as we learn more about evolving community needs and opportunities.

Though still in the beginning phases of managing our first tranche of funding, we have discovered a couple noteworthy challenges. Due to the Delta-variant and the constant struggle to vaccinate our community, we are still facing the ongoing challenge of operating in a pandemic versus a recovery period. Additionally, we have been faced with trying to balance the need to move swiftly with this funding in order to address urgent needs with going at a pace that allows us to be strategic about decision making, especially as we continue to learn about ways to potentially leverage additional ARPA funding and State funds.

Uses of Funds

Buncombe County has been working diligently to design and implement a process to help support a strong and equitable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn in our jurisdiction. This one-time infusion of flexible funds has provided a unique opportunity to offer direct support to projects, programs, and services that align with pressing needs in our community and the County's strategic plan.

We began our process by engaging the community through a survey seeking input regarding COVID-19 recovery priorities (April 2021). The survey yielded over 7,600 responses identifying the top ten categories for consideration, which included: Affordable Housing; Mental Health; Homelessness; Workforce Development; K-12 Education Support; Early Childhood Education; Business Relief; Infrastructure & Broadband; Food System; and Environmental Preservation.

Buncombe County issued a request for proposals (RFP) In compliance with our procurement policy and in order to create an open and inclusive process for distributing funds. The RFP invited proposals from any municipal corporation or public body, and bodies politic and corporate of the State of North Carolina, as well as nonprofit organizations whose principal place of business is located in Buncombe County. The RFP opened on June 1, 2021 and closed on July 15, 2021, providing a six-week period for submission. During the RFP process, the County hosted a virtual workshop for community partners and county departments interested in applying for funding (June 2021). This workshop provided an overview of ARPA and SLFRF requirements, as well as an opportunity for potential applicants to ask questions about the funding and RFP processes. A recording of the workshop and catalog of all questions and answers were posted on the County's recovery funding webpage (www.buncombecounty.org/recoveryfunding).

As of July 15, 2021, we received a total of 141 individual proposals requesting \$243.8 million. The proposals fall under the SLFRF expenditure categories as follows:

- Public Health (EC 1)
 - 24 proposals
 - \$42,980,643 requested
- Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2)
 - 36 proposals
 - \$16,687,226 requested
- Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3)
 - 58 proposals
 - \$112,938,492 requested
- Premium Pay (EC 4)
 - 3 proposals
 - \$2,358,000 requested
- Infrastructure (EC 5)
 - 5 proposals
 - \$17,671,681 requested
- Does not qualify based on RFP requirements
 - 15 proposals
 - \$51,178,982 requested

An internal county-led review team was established to evaluate all requests for proposals post RFP deadline. The review team was comprised of 21 individuals representing 16 Buncombe County departments. Upon completion of evaluations based on a standardized review tool, all proposals, reviewer scores and comments, and fund eligibility research were presented to the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners for their review (August 2021).

As of July 31, 2021, the County has utilized SLFRF allocations for fund administration as well as COVID-19 Vaccination Support led by Buncombe County Emergency Services.

Public Health (EC 1)

Organization: Buncombe County Emergency Services

Project: COVID-19 Vaccination Support

Award Amount: \$543,714

Description: Buncombe County Emergency Services (ES) will partner with Buncombe County Health and Human Services (HHS) to support COVID vaccination planning and implementation during County Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). HHS is the lead department with responsibility for managing the public health response to the pandemic in Buncombe County, and ES is providing medical, logistical and planning support for the vaccination efforts. The primary goals are: an effective and efficient COVID vaccination program; equitable COVID vaccine access with emphasis on historically underserved communities and vulnerable populations; high community rates of vaccination, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Commissioners will recommend a round of initial awards for projects during their Special Meeting on August 31, 2021, with additional rolling awards being determined upon further vetting of proposals, conversations with applicants, and community input.

Buncombe County has received additional COVID-related funds, including Emergency Rental Assistance. We are doing our due diligence to stay apprised of further funds made available through ARPA and the State of North Carolina to help leverage SLFRF awards.

Promoting Equitable Outcomes

Buncombe County elevates equity as a priority area for our governmental institution and community. Equity has been established by County Leadership as a “Foundational Focus Area” and “Organizational Value” in the County’s 2020-2025 strategic plan (www.buncombecounty.org/2025) with the goals of ensuring that policies and practices eliminate barriers to allow for equitable opportunity, as well as ensuring that representative and inclusive practices are reflected in decision making.

We chose to design a request for proposals (RFP) process in order to maximize participation from historically marginalized and underrepresented populations. The RFP has a dedicated section for “Equity Impact” that asks all applicants to identify how this effort will help build toward a just, equitable, and sustainable COVID-19 recovery, as well as describing how the root causes and/or disproportionate impacts of inequities are addressed. Buncombe County promoted the RFP through both traditional marketing and grassroots outreach to community-based organizations. We hosted a virtual workshop for community partners to field all questions or concerns about the application process and made recordings and notes from the workshops public on our Recovery Funding webpage, as well as emailing all community partners who registered for the workshop or reached out to us individually about SLFRF funds to share this information. The workshops included simultaneous Spanish interpretation for limited English proficiency participants.

Our internal review team was comprised of 21 Buncombe County employees across 16 departments with varying roles/levels of position (ranging from salary grade 69 to grade 84), gender identities (57% female, 43% male), ages, (5% under 30, 52% ages 31 to 40, 24% 41 to 50, 14% 51 to 60, and 5% age 65 or over) and races/ethnicities (14% Black or African American, 14% Hispanic or Latino, 5% Multiracial, and 62% White). Before beginning the proposal evaluation process, the review team met to discuss the meaning of equity and the role it plays in the evaluation process.

As we move forward with the SLFRF planning and distribution process, equity continues to be at the forefront of all conversations. The County will work closely with all sub-recipients to ensure the administrative components of funding will not be a hindrance to their project or programmatic success. We plan to create a public dashboard to track specific performance measures, including populations served and their demographic distributions. Buncombe County is committed to supporting equitable outcomes for its most impacted populations.

Buncombe County is dedicated to advancing racial equity through SLFRF funding and in our daily work. Effective July 1, 2021, our Board of Commissioners adopted a Racial Equity Action Plan (2021-2025) that will advance our strategies surrounding racial equity throughout the SLFRF process (www.buncombecounty.org/equity). While inequities and lack of inclusion exist across all areas - race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, and more, the County is focusing on racial equity because of pronounced disparities in this area. Because we know that there are the largest disparities by race across all sectors, focusing on racial equity helps us to get our systems and structures in place in order to improve all types of equity.

Additionally, we are constantly staying apprised of opportunities to learn more about racial equity as it pertains to the SLFRF process through resources such as the Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE), Race Forward, and the National Association of Counties (NACo). We will continue to keep racial equity top of mind as we further develop how we enable and track equitable outcomes.

Community Engagement

When Buncombe County learned that flexible recovery funding for local governments would be included in the American Rescue Plan Act, Commissioners quickly began priority setting.

Commissioners began their discussions in March 2021 with the county's Strategic Plan Focus Areas because those priorities were recently established with extensive community engagement.

In April 2021, Buncombe County issued a community survey seeking input about COVID recovery priorities, in alignment with the County's strategic plan focus areas. By the time the survey closed in May 2021, more than 7,600 survey responses were submitted. The top ten categories were: Affordable Housing; Mental Health; Homelessness; Workforce Development; K-12 Education Support; Early Childhood Education; Business Relief; Infrastructure & Broadband; Food System; and Environmental Preservation.

In June 2021, the County hosted a virtual workshop for community partners interested in participating in the request for proposal process. Spanish interpretation services were offered for this workshop for limited English proficiency attendees. We received 187 registrations for this

workshop and published an RFP addendum on our Recovery Funding webpage with all asked and answered questions from the workshop, as well as all questions submitted in writing to the County.

Labor Practices

Buncombe County is not utilizing SLFRF funds for infrastructure projects at this time.

Use of Evidence

Buncombe County is not utilizing SLFRF funds for evidence-based interventions at this time.

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	7,832.27	
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.)		
1.5	Personal Protective Equipment		
1.6	Medical Expenses (including Alternative Care Facilities)		
1.7	Capital Investments or Physical Plant Changes to Public Facilities that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency		
1.8	Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine)		
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		

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
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		
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		

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
4.2	Private Sector: Grants to other employers		
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		
7.1	Administrative Expenses	8,601.07	
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

001: COVID Vaccination Support

Funding amount: \$543,714

Project Expenditure Category: 1.01, COVID 19 Vaccination

Period of Performance: July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

Project overview

Buncombe County Emergency Services (ES) will partner with Buncombe County Health and Human Services (HHS) to support COVID vaccination planning and implementation during County Fiscal Year 2022 (July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022). Buncombe County Health and Human Services is the lead department with responsibility for managing the public health

response to the pandemic in Buncombe County, and Emergency Services is providing medical, logistical and planning support for the vaccination efforts.

Emergency Services will:

- Employ grant-funded staff positions to include: COVID Operations Paramedics; and Emergency Management Specialists.
- Provide medical support, to include: vaccine preparation; and direct medical monitoring of patients after receiving their vaccines.
- Provide logistical support for both fixed and mobile vaccination sites (pop-ups), to include: transporting supplies between the warehouse and vaccination sites; towing and setting up the vaccination trailer; restocking the trailer between events; inventorying vaccination supplies and personal protective equipment at warehouse; and maintaining generators and other equipment.
- Provide planning support, to include: developing a readiness checklist for long-term care facilities; and assisting with outreach and evaluation for mobile (pop-up) sites.
- Provide other direct COVID response support as needed, such as: assisting with homebound vaccination and testing efforts.

The primary goals of this project are:

- Implement an effective and efficient COVID vaccination program
- Provide equitable COVID vaccine access with emphasis on historically underserved communities and vulnerable populations
- Produce high community rates of vaccination, particularly among vulnerable populations.

Use of Evidence

The use of evidence-based interventions is not applicable for this project.

Performance Report

Project: 001: COVID Vaccination Support

- Performance Indicator (PI) 1: # of service recipients (people receiving a vaccine at a County site during the reporting period) = 788 as of 7/31/21
- PI 2: # of sites, including fixed and mobile (pop-up) where vaccine was administered = 1 fixed site & 15 vaccine outreach events as of 7/31/21
- PI 3: # of hours of operation of vaccination clinics = 184 as of 7/31/21
- PI 4: # of first doses administered = 409 as of 7/31/21
- PI 5: # of second doses administered = 379 as of 7/31/21
- PI 6: # of third doses administered = 0 as of 7/31/21
- PI 7: % of eligible Buncombe County population that has received at least one dose = 54% as of 7/31/21
- PI 8: % of eligible Buncombe County total population that is fully vaccinated = 52% as of 7/31/21