



Bell County Recovery Plan

2025 Performance Report State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

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General Overview

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government created the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF) to address local economic fallout and lay the foundation for a strong, equitable recovery. Bell County, Texas, received an allocation of \$70,493,732 and has expended \$67,989,262 to date. Focusing on equity, economic recovery, and resiliency, Bell County has concentrated its SLFRF allocation across several key areas that have been negatively impacted by or identified as resource-deficient during COVID-19, including public health, business, housing, broadband infrastructure, and more.

Guided by the standards set forth by the United States Department of the Treasury, the Bell County Recovery Plan 2025 Performance Report details the status and key performance indicators of Bell County's SLFRF-funded projects. The report serves as a critical accountability measure to ensure the effective, efficient, and equitable use of funds in economic relief activities.

USE OF FUNDS

Bell County began its SLFRF project planning by analyzing the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the local community. Many public health-related needs such as personal protective equipment, testing supplies, and vaccination clinics were funded through other avenues, leading Bell County to identify and pursue long-term needs that were highlighted or exacerbated by the pandemic. Bell County determined significant gaps in impact, accessibility, and resources across eight key areas as a result of COVID-19:

- Public Safety
- Mental Health and Substance Abuse
- Individual and Business Assistance
- Digital and Broadband Infrastructure
- Tourism
- Housing and Homelessness
- Workforce Development
- Childhood Environment

Bell County has since developed and implemented a diverse set of projects to address the key areas and maximize economic recovery under five Expenditure Categories (EC). By utilizing SLFRF funds to improve, expand, and correct the negative impacts of COVID-19, Bell County has further demonstrated its commitment to building a more sustainable and equitable community.

Public Health (EC 1)

Bell County has coordinated a number of projects that promote public health, including testing centers and vaccination clinics. Though the testing and vaccination projects were largely funded

by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020, they are integral components of Bell County's overall approach to public health and pandemic recovery. Further, Bell County has enhanced facilities and technology to support safe and healthy operations across public safety and judicial functions.

EC 1.4 Prevention in Congregate Settings

Public safety facilities were not adequately designed, constructed, or operated to prevent the spread of disease. Quarantining measures in the Bell County Jail continually resulted in overcrowding, creating an unsafe environment for both inmates and staff. In addition to the health risks, the unsafe Jail environment caused substantial financial hardship to the County as medical and outside placement costs soared. To address the problem, Bell County expanded its Jail facility to decrease the spread of disease, improve inmate and staff health outcomes, and protect against the damage of future pandemics. The Jail expansion project is nearing completion, with occupancy anticipated in the Fall of 2025.

Judicial facilities did not contain adequate technology to support virtual activities, including magistration and other critical court functions. Bell County designed and equipped judicial spaces with audiovisual equipment – screens, speakers, cameras, microphones, and more – that promoted the continuity of judicial operations. The technology allowed magistrates, legal teams, and the Commissioners Court to conduct their activities virtually, thereby preventing congregation and promoting public health. Judicial technology improvements have been extremely successful and have encouraged Bell County to increase the number of virtual judicial services with the Jail expansion. Additional technology improvements have been supported through Bell County's general fund and designated fees.

EC 1.12 Mental Health Services

A critical piece of the Bell County Jail expansion project, a designated Mental Health Unit will open in the Fall of 2025 to provide specialized mental health services for justice-involved individuals. The Mental Health Unit totals 54 beds and allows for the provision of therapeutic mental health interventions, including a jail-based competency restoration program facilitated by the local mental health authority, Central Counties Services (CCS). The Mental Health Unit will further encourage inmate and staff safety, as specific, appropriate, and timely care will be provided to those experiencing a mental health crisis in confinement.

Bell County has also partnered with CCS, local law enforcement agencies, and two hospital systems to establish the Bell County Diversion Center. The Bell County Diversion Center opened its doors in November 2024, providing mental health triage, crisis respite, and resource connectivity services to adults with mental illness who have committed or are at risk of committing non-violent, low-level offenses. Services support a

continuum of care from diversion to recovery in the least restrictive environment and through trauma-informed best practices. Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, the Diversion Center further highlights Bell County's commitment to addressing recidivism and the growing mental and behavioral health needs of the community. The Bell County Diversion Center is funded by the Bell County general fund, the CCS general fund, and several non-SLFRF federal, state, and nonprofit grants.

Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2)

Individuals and businesses alike experienced significant financial hardship during COVID-19 and are still navigating the path toward full recovery. The burden on the local economy has reduced following childhood environment, homelessness, small business, and workforce development projects. Bell County anticipates that the associated projects will provide a long-term positive impact on homelessness, unemployment, recidivism, mental and physical health, business success, and overall community resilience.

EC 2.2 Household Assistance: Rent, Mortgage, and Utility Aid

Bell County partnered with Hill Country Community Action Association to provide rental assistance to residents who experienced serious financial hardship as a result of the pandemic. Though the project was funded by Emergency Rental Assistance Program 1 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and by Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), funds were fully expended in Fiscal Year 2023 and served over 4,300 residents.

Bell County also partnered with the local board of the Temporary Emergency Relief Fund to aid in the facilitation of Phase ARPA-R. Phase ARPA-R provided emergency rental, utility, and food assistance funds to local nonprofit organizations for further distribution to residents. Though the project was not funded by SLFRF funds, it displays Bell County's diverse approach to pandemic recovery.

EC 2.11 Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care

Partnering with the Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas, Bell County sought to expand academic success, promote a healthy lifestyle, and develop character and citizenship among the youth population. The Boys and Girls Club developed a program that prioritized education, community, and mental and behavioral health services. The program launched in March 2024 and has become a popular program for youth of all ages. Since the program's start, a total of 447 youth are enrolled, with 336 elementary-aged members and 111 middle and high school-aged members. The combined average daily attendance is 181 youth, the majority of whom participate in the Free or Reduced Lunch program. Boys and Girls Club leadership has expressed the positive impacts of the program and the interminable value to the families served.

EC 2.29 Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship

In conjunction with the Central Texas Council of Governments, Bell County utilized CARES Act funds to operate a financial assistance program for small businesses that were forced to close due to state lockdown requirements. Bell County continued the project with ARPA funds to reach more small businesses in the community. The project concluded after two rounds of funding. The assistance has effectively strengthened the local economy and helped to re-establish stability in the local workforce.

Premium Pay (EC 4)

The COVID-19 pandemic placed a strain on the Bell County workforce. Many County employees worked overtime and in dangerous conditions to ensure the continuity of operations and to maintain a high level of service delivery.

EC 4.1 Public Sector Employees

Funded by the CARES Act, the Bell County Commissioners Court approved premium pay at the beginning of the pandemic. Premium pay ceased in 2020.

Infrastructure (EC 5)

As the world shifted to an almost entirely digital environment, many Bell County residents found themselves without reliable internet connectivity. The pandemic highlighted the lack of broadband infrastructure, particularly in rural areas of the County.

EC 5.21 Broadband: Other Projects

Bell County initiated meetings with all local government jurisdictions to discuss broadband infrastructure, identify area-specific needs, and prevent duplication in projects. Following the preliminary meetings, Bell County contracted with Foresite Group, LLC., a technology and infrastructure consulting firm, to document and develop a plan to expand broadband infrastructure. The plan was completed in late 2022 and provided recommendations for cost-effective, efficient, and sustainable broadband infrastructure, including high-speed fiber optic cabling and wireless antenna towers, across four key areas.

Using the recommendations from Foresite Group, LLC., Bell County developed a request for proposal that would address one or both broadband expansion options. Bell County has instead opted to pursue a sub-award under the same guidelines. The Bell County Broadband Expansion Sub-Award solicitation began accepting applications in August 2024, and a single sub-award was made to AMG Technology Investment Group, LLC (dba Nextlink), in October 2024. Under the sub-award, Nextlink will construct 16 towers and install 124,199 feet (23.52 miles) of fiber across rural Bell County, resulting in 2,629 new wireless locations and increased speeds at more than 120,000 locations.

Bell County partnered with a third-party consultant to audit sub-award activities, including design and engineering review, construction oversight, quality assurance and speed testing, and regulatory compliance. The consulting contract allows subject matter experts to evaluate and confirm that the sub-award's activities and deliverables align with those of the funded project and SLFRF guidelines.

Revenue Replacement (EC 6)

The Cadence Bank Center, formerly the Bell County Expo Center, experienced an unprecedented decrease in activity throughout the pandemic. Bell County sought to keep the Cadence Bank Center as a tourism hub.

EC 6.1 Provision of Government Services

Bell County utilized \$1 million in Fiscal Year 2023 to offset the revenue loss experienced by the Cadence Bank Center. The County's focus for revenue replacement remains on tourism. Bell County will continue to calculate revenue loss at the end of each Fiscal Year using the formula provided by the United States Department of the Treasury.

PROMOTING EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

The priority areas in Bell County's relief strategy have translated into collaborative projects that focus on historically underserved and marginalized populations. Working closely with community partners, Bell County has successfully communicated and made accessible the projects supporting the local community in its recovery. Bell County's approach to equity is apparent across the following categories and through an array of funding sources.

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted housing stability, primarily the result of financial hardship. Housing stability was most severe among low-income households in Bell County. To support low-income households experiencing housing instability, Bell County initiated several housing assistance programs that offered rental and utility assistance, as well as youth services.

Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and ARPA, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program provided rental assistance to households with an income at or below 80% of the Area Median Income (\$64,700). The Program prioritized households that were at risk of homelessness and that were living in unsafe or unhealthy housing conditions. Facilitated by Hill Country Community Action Association, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program supported more than 4,300 unique households before funding was fully expended. The Program helped secure safer and more stable housing options and reduced pandemic hardship-related evictions for the low-income and marginalized population of Bell County.

Temporary Emergency Relief Fund

Funded by FEMA, the Temporary Emergency Relief Fund provided rental, utility, and food assistance to underserved populations, including low-income households, individuals experiencing homelessness, and individuals experiencing domestic abuse, among others. The program aided in curbing hunger through served meals, reducing evictions through rental assistance, and decreasing housing instability through utility and other bill assistance throughout the Bell County community. The program was carried out by local non-profit organizations, addressing the needs of hundreds of Bell County households.

Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas

The Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas completed a construction project that allowed the organization to serve more at-risk Bell County youth and expand the number of services offered. The facility provides educational, recreational, and behavioral services to an average of 181 low socioeconomic youth per day. Promoting a healthy lifestyle and resources for academic and civic success, the Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas is dedicated to addressing childhood disparities and reducing the incidence of adverse childhood experiences.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Bell County has made a concerted effort to engage and listen to its community to fully understand how COVID-19 impacted the area. Residents, businesses, medical providers, and non-profits organizations alike have expressed their needs to the Bell County Commissioners Court. The Commissioners Court has:

- Engaged with the community to identify and better understand acute and ongoing needs;
- Held public workshops to hear local non-profit organization requests for funding; and
- Provided additional relief from the Bell County General Fund to projects that support the changing needs of the community.

LABOR PRACTICES

Bell County has maintained strong labor standards to promote efficient and effective service delivery. The County's adherence to the labor standards under the Davis-Bacon Act has positively impacted local employment, the regional economy, and the quality of infrastructure projects. All contracted labor rates and labor requirements outlined in the request for proposal process are compliant with federal labor standards.

USE OF EVIDENCE

Evidence-based program evaluations are incorporated into the Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas project. The Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas maintains programmatic fidelity and

reports independently to the appropriate credentialing bodies. All other projects were informed by local needs and best practice recommendations, including evidence-based considerations for preventing the spread of disease.

Performance Report

PROJECT METRICS

New metrics became available during the 2025 Performance Report period. The following metrics are not final, as many projects are still ongoing.

Project	New Metrics
Boys and Girls Club	Number of youths participating in after-school programs • 336 elementary-aged youth • 111 middle and high school-aged youth Demographics of youths participating in after-school programs • 89% Hispanic or African American • 58% from a single parent household • 84% receive a Free or Reduced Lunch
Broadband Expansion	Number of rural locations anticipated to receive access • 2,629 Number of locations anticipated to receive increased speed • 123,351 Locations of rural households receiving access • North Bell County • East Bell County • Southeast Bell County • Southwest Bell County
Jail Expansion	Number of beds in the Mental Health Unit • 54 Average bed occupancy in the Mental Health Unit • <i>Unavailable</i>
Small Business Grants	Number of grants issued • 71
Revenue Replacement	Revenue amount replaced • \$1,000,000.00 Revenue replacement category • Cadence Bank Center

EXPENSES BY EXPENDITURE CATEGORY

The following table details Bell County's expenses by Expenditure Category. The expended amounts include completed and applicable contracts, per the United States Department of the Treasury's guidance.

Expenditure Category		Expenditures, To Date	Expenditures, Since the Last Recovery Plan
Public Health			
1.4	Prevention in Congregate Settings	\$ 63,412,599.00	\$ 13,220,146.00
Negative Economic Impacts			
2.11	Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care	\$ 750,000.00	\$ 0.00
2.29	Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship	\$ 947,509.00	\$ 0.00
Infrastructure			
5.21	Broadband: Other Projects	\$ 1,879,154.00	\$ 1,681,647.00
Revenue Replacement			
6.1	Provision of Government Services	\$ 1,000,000.00	\$ 0.00
Total		\$ 67,989,262.00	\$ 14,901,793.00

Project Inventory

EC 1: COURTS TECHNOLOGY

Funding Amount: \$586,202.00

Project Expenditure Category: 1.4 Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Site, Schools, Childcare facilities, etc.)

Project Description: Current judicial facilities do not contain adequate technology to support virtual activities. Bell County is designing and installing technology that will allow multiple judicial activities to be carried out virtually. Virtual judicial activities promote public health and help mitigate the spread of disease.

Use of Evidence: The goal of this project is to ensure judicial operations can be performed virtually. If faced with another pandemic, judicial processes and operations will be able to continue. Virtual judicial services can also be offered as an option to those who cannot attend judicial processes in person.

Performance Report: Technology has been installed in all District and County courts to allow for virtual activity. This project is complete.

EC 1: JAIL EXPANSION

Funding Amount: \$63,406,864.00

Project Expenditure Category: 1.4 Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Site, Schools, Childcare facilities, etc.)

Project Description: Current public safety facilities are not adequately designed, constructed, or operated to prevent or mitigate the spread of disease. Quarantining measures that have had to be implemented continually result in overcrowding and unsafe operating conditions for both inmates and staff. In addition to the health risk, these conditions have caused substantial negative financial impacts to the County. Bell County is redesigning and expanding jail facilities to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate the spread of disease among and between inmates and staff. This expansion also includes a mental health ward.

Use of Evidence: The expansion will provide additional space for medical care, individuals with mental health illnesses, and the general jail population to decrease the transmission of communicable diseases. Not expanding the facility would, in turn, cause strain on local medical facilities during future pandemics. The expansion will also exacerbate the negative financial impact that Bell County continues to have with jail overcrowding caused by the pandemic. Jail overcrowding is a direct result of the pandemic and will continue until the Courts process all outstanding cases, which could take several years to complete.

Performance Report: This construction project is finalizing punch list items and will be complete in the Fall of 2025.

EC 2: BOYS & GIRLS CLUB

Funding Amount: \$750,000.00

Project Expenditure Category: 2.11 Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care

Project Description: Bell County is partnering with the Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas to expand facilities and operations. The Boys and Girls Club will expand its after-school program for students, including activities that promote academic success, healthy lifestyles, character, and citizenship development. Opportunities for individual and group mental and behavioral health counseling services will also be available. The expansion will allow the facility to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigate the spread of disease while providing the youth population with a safe space to learn, grow, and play.

Use of Evidence: The program is focused on students from low-income households. The focus is on addressing and improving services to populations most affected by the pandemic. Once the expansion is complete and data is available for analysis, Bell County will report the number and demographics of youths participating in the after-school prevention program.

Performance Report: Youth and their families are actively engaging with and participating in the available programs. This project is complete.

EC 2: SMALL BUSINESS GRANTS

Funding Amount: \$947,509.00

Project Expenditure Category: 2.29 Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship

Project Description: Bell County has focused on small business assistance and workforce development. Utilizing CARES Act funds in the past, the County contracted with the Central Texas Council of Governments to operate a grant program that would identify local small businesses that were forced to close due to state shutdowns. With these funds, the County continued this program to reach more small businesses.

Use of Evidence: Bell County set qualification criteria for small business grant applicants. To qualify for a grant, small businesses must have been forced to shut down during the state closure, have been negatively financially impacted by the pandemic, and be owned locally. There were 71 small business grants issued to businesses that met the criteria.

Performance Report: The funds for this project were sufficient to fulfill the remaining grant applications identified in the first round of small business grants funded by CARES Act funds. This project is complete.

EC 5: BROADBAND

Funding Amount: \$3,803,157.00

Project Expenditure Category: 5.21 Broadband: Other Projects

Project Description: During the COVID-19 pandemic, broadband infrastructure was identified as a critical infrastructure area that lacked resources. Bell County initiated meetings with all local jurisdictions and developed a plan to expand broadband infrastructure in rural Bell County via a sub-award. Bell County sub-awarded funds to AMG Technology Investment Group, LLC, to expand wireless internet service via towers and fiber in four rural priority areas.

Use of Evidence: The goal of this project is to ensure that more rural and metropolitan areas within the County and surrounding areas have affordable and reliable access to digital infrastructure. In the event of another pandemic, citizens will have the ability to work and attend school from home.

Performance Report: Foresite Group provided a recommendation for the design of an infrastructure system to cover Bell County and surrounding areas. The recommendation was used to inform the Bell County Broadband Expansion Sub-Award, which was awarded to one entity to carry out broadband infrastructure expansion projects. This project will be complete in the Spring of 2026.

EC 6: REVENUE REPLACEMENT

Funding Amount: \$1,000,000.00

Project Expenditure Category: 6.1 Provision of Government Services

Project Description: The project supports the Cadence Bank Center (formerly the Bell County Expo Center) and any necessary improvements that could not otherwise be funded due to the loss of tourism during the pandemic.

Use of Evidence: The project provides funds to the Cadence Bank Center to continue service provision and maintain a tourism hub in the community.

Performance Report: Bell County provided the funds to the Cadence Bank Center to account for deficits attributable to the pandemic. This project is complete.