



Bell County  
Recovery Plan

**2024 Performance Report**  
State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

# Bell County Recovery Plan 2024 Performance Report

## Table of Contents

<b>General Overview.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Executive Summary.....	3
Use of Funds.....	3
Public Health (EC 1) .....	3
Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2).....	5
Premium Pay (EC 4).....	6
Infrastructure (EC 5) .....	6
Revenue Replacement (EC 6) .....	7
Promoting Equitable Outcomes .....	7
Community Engagement.....	8
Labor Practices .....	9
Use of Evidence .....	9
<b>Performance Report.....</b>	<b>9</b>
Expenses by Expenditure Category.....	10
<b>Project Inventory.....</b>	<b>10</b>
EC 1: Courts Technology.....	10
EC 1: Jail Expansion .....	11
EC 2: Boys & Girls Club .....	11
EC 2: Habitat for Humanity.....	12
EC 2: Small Business Grants .....	12
EC 5: Broadband.....	12
EC 6: Revenue Replacement .....	13

# 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 \$53,087,469 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 2024 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 as a result of COVID-19 across eight key areas:

- 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 six 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 in 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 is in the process of expanding its Jail facility to decrease the spread of disease, improve inmate and staff health outcomes, and protect against the damage of future pandemics.

Judicial facilities did not contain adequate technology to support virtual activities, including magistration and 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 wing will open in the Spring of 2025 to provide specialized mental health services for justice-involved individuals. The mental health wing will offer 54 beds and allow for the provision of a jail-based competency restoration program facilitated by the local mental health authority, Central Counties Services (CCS). The mental health wing will also encourage inmate and staff safety as specific, appropriate, and timely care will be provided to those experiencing a mental health crisis.

Bell County has also partnered with CCS, local law enforcement agencies, and two hospital systems to establish the Bell County Diversion Center. Set to open in the Fall of 2024, the Diversion Center will provide mental health triage, crisis respite, and outpatient competency restoration services. The development and opening of the Diversion Center further supports Bell County's commitment to addressing the mental health, substance abuse, and behavioral health needs of the community. The facility will be funded

primarily by the Bell County general fund, the CCS general fund, and several non-SLFRF federal and state 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 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 of 2024, but does not yet have sufficient participant data.

#### **EC 2.16 Long-Term Housing Security: Services for Unhoused Persons**

Bell County is actively seeking to provide support to unhoused persons. Originally, Bell County had planned to partner with Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity to build and operate a Homeless to Housing program. The program intended to provide transitional and supportive housing, independent living classes, job training, and mental health services to those in need. However, Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity has reprioritized projects and is in the process of determining timelines and next steps for its reprioritized list. For this reason, Bell County is exploring alternative projects to support unhoused persons.

The first alternative project is in partnership with CCS. CCS was recently awarded a state grant to develop a 16-bed permanent supportive housing program. The program will serve individuals with mental health illnesses who are at risk of homelessness and who require mental health support services. The second alternative project is in partnership with the Greater Killeen Community Clinic. The Clinic provides an array of medical services to the unhoused, uninsured, and indigent populations of western Bell County. The Clinic regularly sees patients who are afflicted by COVID-19. Both projects support the unhoused community and overall community resilience. Other projects may be proposed and pursued to support the unhoused community. The final project(s) will be selected and obligated by the end of the 2024 calendar year.

### **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 but has since ceased. No further premium pay is being considered at this time.

### ***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 will begin accepting applications on August 1, 2024. Bell County intends to partner with a third-party consultant to ensure the sub-award recipients stay on track and provide accurate and timely deliverables.

### ***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.

### **Homeless to Housing Program**

Though it has not yet begun, the Homeless to Housing Program will provide substance abuse counseling, mental health resources, lifestyle skills, and supportive housing to the unhoused population of Bell County. The Program aims to support integration, housing stability, and workforce development for formerly unhoused individuals. Once additional funding has been secured by the partner agency, Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity, the Program will open to the public. Alternative programs with the same goal of assisting unhoused persons have been developed in the event that additional funding is not secured.

### **Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas**

The Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas recently completed a construction project that allows 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 Bell County youth with a low socioeconomic status. 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 early 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 two projects: the Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas and the Homeless to Housing Program projects. The Boys and Girls Club of Central Texas recently began service provision and therefore does not have sufficient performance data to evaluate. The Homeless to Housing Program was not active during the 2024 Performance Report period.

## Performance Report

No new metrics were available during the 2024 Performance Report period due to the ongoing or completed nature of many projects. However, the following metrics will be available in the next reporting period:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
Boys and Girls Club	Number and demographics of youths participating in after-school prevention programs.
Homeless to Housing	Number and demographics of unhoused persons participating in the housing community.
Broadband Expansion	Number and location of rural households receiving broadband access post-expansion activities.
Jail Expansion	Number and average occupancy of beds in the mental health pod.

Additional metrics may be identified in future reports as projects develop. The following table details metrics to date for SLFRF-funded projects:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Metrics</b>
Small Business Grants	71 grants issued.
Broadband	4 rural areas identified and prioritized through 1 field-based study by Foresite Group, LLC.
Revenue Replacement	\$1 million to the 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	\$ 50,192,453.00	\$ 27,098,197.00
Negative Economic Impacts			
2.11	Healthy Childhood Environments: Child Care	\$ 750,000.00	\$ 500,000.00
2.29	Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship	\$ 947,509.00	\$ 0.00
Infrastructure			
5.21	Broadband: Other Projects	\$ 197,507.00	\$ 0.00
Revenue Replacement			
6.1	Provision of Government Services	\$ 1,000,000.00	\$ 0.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$ 53,087,469.00</b>	<b>\$ 27,598,197.00</b>

**Project Inventory**

**EC 1: COURTS TECHNOLOGY**

*Funding Amount:* \$590,000.00

*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.

## **EC 1: JAIL EXPANSION**

*Funding Amount:* \$63,113,730.00

*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. At the time of this report, Bell County has over 100 inmates housed at external facilities at a substantial and largely unsustainable cost.

*Performance Report:* This project is in the construction phase and should be complete in the Spring 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 and the services provided.

*Performance Report:* This project recently concluded the construction phase and will begin programmatic evaluation in the 2025 reporting cycle.

## **EC 2: HABITAT FOR HUMANITY**

*Funding Amount:* \$280,870.00

*Project Expenditure Category:* 2.16 Long-Term Housing Security: Services for Unhoused Persons

*Project Description:* Bell County is partnering with the Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity to build and operate the Homeless to Housing Program. This program will provide transitional supportive housing and will teach and facilitate independent living. Program staff will provide housing oversight, job training, and mental health services.

*Use of Evidence:* This project is focused on reducing homelessness and equipping clients for independent living. Once the community is open, Bell County will report the number and demographics of unhoused persons participating in the housing community.

*Performance Report:* This project is still in the planning phase as the Fort Hood Area Habitat for Humanity continues to identify additional funding needed for the project. The project may be reprioritized and substituted with a project that similarly serves the unhoused population of Bell County.

## **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:* \$3,811,623.00

*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, in conjunction with Foresite Group, LLC, developed a plan to expand broadband infrastructure in rural Bell County. Bell County will open a sub-award solicitation on August 1, 2024, to initiate the building process with local wireless internet service providers.

*Use of Evidence:* The goal of this project is to ensure 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 has been used to inform the Bell County Broadband Expansion Sub-Award solicitation, wherein one or more entities will be awarded SLFRF funds to carry out broadband infrastructure expansion projects.

#### **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.