



# Bell County **Recovery Plan**

## **State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds**

### 2022 Report

**Bell County**  
**2022 Recovery Plan**

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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 the economic fallout and lay the foundation for a strong and equitable recovery. The County has received the complete allocation of \$70,493,732.

Per Treasury guidance, the Recovery Plan Performance Report provides the public and Treasury information on the projects that recipients are undertaking with program funding and how they are planning to ensure program outcomes are achieved in the effective, efficient, and equitable manner. Bell County will create a new report in the following years that will include key performance indicators and some mandatory indicators identified by Treasury. The Recovery Report will grow each year, as the County increases its spending, projects, and reporting.

Bell County has focused SLFRF on several key areas that have either been affected by or identified as a lacking resource due to COVID-19. SLFRF will be utilized to address these areas in addition to ensuring the programs selected address equity, economic recovery, and pandemic resiliency.

### **Uses of Funds**

As Bell County began the process of planning how to use SLFRF, it started by analyzing the negative economic impacts within the County caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many areas of need that were a direct result of COVID-19, such of PPE, testing, and vaccine clinics, were already being addressed by other resources. Because of this, the County chose to focus on more long-term needs within the County to develop priority areas. These priority areas focus on public safety, mental health, individual assistance, technology and digital infrastructure, small business assistance, tourism, child welfare, childcare, substance abuse, behavioral health, housing, homelessness, and workforce development. All these areas have either had a negative impact or have been identified as having a lack of resources caused by COVID-19.

Treasury requested that recipients show how they are prioritizing specific Expenditure Categories (EC), listed below. Bell County can point to how their list of projects explicitly promote certain Expenditure Categories, as defined by the Treasury.

#### **a. Public Health (EC 1)**

- Bell County has coordinated several projects to promote testing, vaccinations, and public health. While these projects have been funded by other programs such as CARES and/or FEMA, they are important to include to provide a broader context on the overall approach for pandemic recovery.
- Bell County's plan focuses on enhancing facilities and technology to ensure safe and healthy operations within its public safety and judicial functions.
  - 1.4 – Prevention in Congregate Settings. Current public safety facilities are not adequately designed, constructed, or operated to prevent or mitigate a

pandemic. Quarantining measures that have had to be implemented continually result in overcrowding and less than safe 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 plans to redesign and expand jail facilities to address the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate any future pandemics. This expansion will also include a mental health ward within the jail facility and a separate facility which will house a mental health diversion program. Bell County will be partnering with Central Counties Services and local mental health providers to staff the diversion program.

- 1.4 – Prevention in Congregate Settings. 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 in order to promote public health and mitigate any future pandemics.

b. Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2)

- 2.29 – Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship. Bell County focused on small business assistance and workforce development. Utilizing CARES funds in the past, the County contracted with Central Texas Council of Governments to operate a grant program that would assist local small businesses that were forced to close due to the state shutdown. With ARP funds, the County continued this program to reach more small businesses in the community. This has strengthened the local economy and helped to establish stability in the local workforce.

c. Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3)

- Bell County is focusing on individuals that have had a negative financial impact from COVID-19. To accomplish this, Bell County has partnered with a local agency, Hill Country Community Action Association, to provide rental and utility assistance to these citizens. Funds for this program are being provided by the Emergency Rental Assistance program 1 included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and by the Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 included in the American Rescue Plan Act. Again, while this funding is not included in SLFRF, it is important to include to see Bell County's overall approach for pandemic recovery.
- Bell County is focusing on housing, homelessness, substance abuse, behavioral health services, child welfare and childcare. By focusing on these goals, Bell County expects long-term positive affects to homelessness, unemployment, judicial recidivism, mental and physical health as well as pandemic resiliency. Planned projects that will support these goals are:
  - 2.11 – Healthy Childhood Environment: Child Care. Partnering with local Boys and Girls club to expand facilities and operations to provide a safe after school program for students. This program will promote academic success, healthy lifestyles, character and citizenship development in addition to both individual and group mental and behavioral health counseling services.
  - 2.16 – Long-Term Housing Security: Services for Unhoused Persons. Partnering with local Habitat for Humanity to build and operate a Homeless to Housing program. This program will provide transitional, supported housing and will teach and facilitate independent living with oversight along with job training and mental health services.

- d. Premium Pay (EC 4)
  - o Bell County Commissioners Court approved premium pay during the beginning of the pandemic, which was funded by CARES. No further premium pay is being considered at this time.
- e. Water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure (EC 5)
  - o 5.21 – Broadband: Other Projects. Bell County Commissioners Court is focusing on the digital infrastructure needs in their community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the lack of infrastructure to support digital work and school efforts was identified within the County. To meet this need, Bell County initiated meetings of all local jurisdictions to discuss the issues and to ensure efforts are not duplicated. The outcome of these meetings is a contract with Foresite Group, LLC. to document and develop a plan to build broadband infrastructure that will cover Bell and surrounding counties in the most efficient, effective, and financially feasible method. Once the plan is complete, Bell County will work with local jurisdiction to identify funding and implement the plan. This will ensure most rural and metropolitan areas within the County and surrounding areas have adequate access to digital infrastructure.
- f. Revenue Replacement (EC 6)
  - o 6.1 – Provision of Government Services. Bell County has calculated the FY 2021 revenue loss, based on the Treasury provided calculations and will continue to calculate this revenue loss at the end of each Fiscal Year. The County's focus of these funds is on tourism with the Bell County EXPO Center.

### **Promoting equitable outcomes**

Bell County has selected several priority areas that promote equitable outcomes. While Bell County had several non-profit agencies request SLFRF funding, The Commissioners Court chose projects that will serve these priority areas. These projects will focus on historically underserved and/or marginalized sections of the population. Bell County will strive to ensure all targeted populations are aware of and have access to these programs. Future annual reports will provide updates to these projects as they develop along with how they promoted equitable outcomes.

Bell County's overall equity strategy translates into specific services or programs in the following Expenditure Categories:

- Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2): assistance to households to address impacts of the pandemic, which have been most severe among low-income populations. This includes assistance with rent and utilities. The funding for this program is being provided by the Emergency Rental Assistance program 1 included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and by the Emergency Rental Assistance Program 2 included in the American Rescue Plan Act.
  - a. Bell County has contract with Hill Country Community Action to manage this program. Since the beginning of the program, 4,377 unique households have received assistance for rental and/or utility expenses.
- Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3): services to reach children, the majority of which are designated as "Low Socio-Economic Status", by giving them a safe, healthy environment that will provide mental and behavioral health services, promote health

lifestyles, provide resources for academic success, and promote a passion for civic engagement. These services will address educational disparities and promote healthy childhood environments.

- a. Bell County has partnered with a local Boys and Girls Club to explain their program to provide additional services to children and families in areas with “Low Socio-Economic Status”. This project is still in the design phase with construction planned to start in the next quarter.
- Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3): services to reach the unhoused, a disadvantaged group, by giving them a safe community that will provide substance abuse counseling and mental health resources while promoting stability, self-reliance, and health lifestyles. This program will also provide access to education, jobs, and opportunities with a support structure for continued success and integration into society.
  - a. Bell County has partnered with a local Habitat for Humanity to build and operate a Homeless to Housing program. This project is still in the planning phase as the local Habitat for Humanity continues to identify additional funding.

## **Community Engagement**

Bell County understands how COVID-19 impacted its community, and they continue to listen to their residents, medical providers, businesses, and non-profits to best respond to their needs. The Bell County Commissioners Court has already accomplished the following:

1. Held public workshops with the Commissioners Court to hear local non-profit requests for funding
2. County Judge and Commissioners engaged with their communities to better understand current needs

## **Labor Practices**

Bell County will ensure strong labor standards to promote effective and efficient delivery of high-quality infrastructure projects, to support the local economy and local employment. Once infrastructure projects are started, Bell County will report policy or measurements in following Recovery Plan Reports.

## **Use of Evidence**

Evidence based program evaluations are incorporated into two projects by Bell County. These two projects were not active during this reporting period.

## **Performance Report**

During this reporting period, the only project with metrics to report was:

- a. EC2 Small Business Grants
  - 71 grants issued

In the future, Bell County will report the following metrics, at a minimum, for the following projects:

- b. EC3 Boys & Girls Club
  - Number and demographics of youths participating in after school prevention programs
- c. EC3 Habitat for Humanity
  - Number and demographics of unhoused persons participating in housing community

Additional metrics may be identified in future reports as projects develop.

### Table of Expenses by Expenditure Category

Per Treasury guidance, once Bell County completes applicable contracts and an amount is incurred as a liability, Bell County will report on the projects or programs.

Category		Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
1	Expenditure Category: Public Health		
1.4	Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Sites, Schools, Childcare facilities, etc.)	585,457.02	585,457.02
2	Expenditure Category: Negative Economic Impacts		
2.11	Healthy Childhood Environment: Childcare	250,000.00	250,000.00
2.16	Long-Term Housing Security: Services for Unhoused persons	0.00	0.00
2.29	Loans or Grants to Mitigate Financial Hardship	947,509.00	947,509.00
3	Expenditure Category: Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities		
5	Expenditure Category: Infrastructure		
5.21	Broadband: Other projects	197,335.00	197,335.00
6	Expenditure Category: Revenue Replacement		
6.1	Provision of Government Services	1,000,000.00	1,000,000.00

### Project Inventory

*EC1 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 in order to promote public health and mitigate any future pandemics.

*Use of Evidence:* The goal of this project is to ensure that Court operations can be performed virtually. This will ensure that, if faced with another pandemic, the Court operations will continue. This will also ensure these services can be offered in situations where a person or persons cannot attend Court in person.

*Performance Report:* At the time of this report, the systems have been designed for each Courtroom and all material has been ordered. Due to supply chain issues, some of the material has not arrived which has delayed the installation of the system.

### *EC1 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 a pandemic. Quarantining measures that have had to be implemented continually result in overcrowding and less than safe 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 affects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate any future pandemics. This expansion will also include a mental health ward within the jail facility and a separate facility which will house a mental health diversion program. Bell County will be partnering with Central Counties Services and local mental health providers to staff the diversion program.

*Use of Evidence:* This expansion will provide both medical, mental health and general population space to address future pandemics. Not expanding the facility would, in turn, cause strain on local medical facilities during future pandemics. It will also exacerbate the negative financial impact that Bell County continues to have with jail overcrowding caused by the pandemic. At the time of this report, Bell County has over 200 inmates housed at facilities outside of Bell County at a substantial cost to Bell County. This overcrowding is a direct result of the pandemic and will continue until the Courts are able to process all outstanding cases. It is anticipated that it will take several years for the Courts to process all these cases.

*Performance Report:* This project has been designed and construction began late June 2022.

### *EC2 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 funds in the past, the County contracted with Central Texas Council of Governments to operate a grant program that would identify local small businesses that were forced to close due to the state shutdown during the pandemic. With these funds, the County continued this program to reach more small businesses identified in the first program by offering additional grants.

*Use of Evidence:* Bell County set criteria to be met in order to qualify for a small business grant. In order to qualify for a grant, they must have been forced to shut down during the state closure, have been negatively financial impacted by the pandemic and be owned locally. There were 71 small business grants issued to businesses that met this criterion.

*Performance Report:* The funds for this project were sufficient to fulfil the remaining grant applications identified in the first round of small business grants funded by CARES funds. This project is not complete.

#### *EC3 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 a local Boys & Girls club to expand facilities and operations to provide an expansion of their after-school program for students. This program will promote academic success, healthy lifestyles, character, and citizenship development in addition to both individual and group mental and behavioral health counseling services. In addition, this expansion will allow the facility to address the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic and to mitigate any future pandemics.

*Use of Evidence:* This program is focused on students from low-income households and communities and in addressing and improving services to populations most affected by the pandemic. Once the addition is open, Bell County will report the number and demographics of youths participating in the after-school prevention program and all their services.

*Performance Report:* This project is still in the design phase with construction planned to start in the next quarter.

#### *EC3 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 a local Habitat for Humanity to build and operate a Homeless to Housing program. This program will provide transitional, supported housing, and will teach and facilitate independent living with oversight along with 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 local Habitat for Humanity continues to identify additional funding needed for the project.

#### *EC5 Broadband*

*Funding Amount:* \$ 3,811,623.00

*Project Expenditure Category:* 5.21 Broadband: Other projects

*Project Description:* Bell County Commissioners Court wants to focus on the digital infrastructure needs in their community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this was identified as a lack of resources within the County. To accomplish this, Bell County initiated meetings of all local jurisdictions to ensure efforts were not duplicated. The outcome of these meetings is a contract with Foresite Group, LLC. To document and develop a plan to build broadband infrastructure that will cover Bell and surrounding counties in the most efficient, effective, and financially feasible method.

*Use of Evidence:* The goal of this project is to ensure most rural and metropolitan areas within the County and surrounding areas have adequate 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 is currently working on a recommendation for the design of an infrastructure system to cover Bell County and surrounding areas. This recommendation will also include potential funding methods to complete this design.

*EC6 Revenue Replacement*

*Funding Amount:* \$ 1,000,000.00

*Project Expenditure Category:* 6.1 Provision of Government Services

*Project Description:* To support projects at the Bell County EXPO that couldn't be funded due to loss of tourism during the pandemic.

*Use of Evidence:* The goal of this project is to provide funds to the Bell County EXPO to ensure continuing services to the community.

*Performance Report:* Bell County has provided these funds to the Bell County EXPO to provide for deficits attributable to the pandemic.