



# OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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Essex County Executive

## County of Essex 2025 Recovery Plan

### Summary

Since the inception of the COVID-19 public health emergency, Essex County has demonstrated our capability and capacity to service the entire county through a comprehensive, strategic, and inclusive public health preparedness and communicable disease prevention approach. Some key elements of our strategy included.

- Coordination with state and local public health agencies, including county and local OEMS, municipal health departments, and elected officials.
- Disseminating information to the public about COVID-19, including but not limited to personal hygiene, safety, the importance of mask-wearing and social distancing, testing locations, vaccine locations, etc.
- Ensuring a competent cultural approach to sharing information and providing services by making resources available in multiple languages and having translation services available.
- Coordinating testing and vaccine sites with numerous communities, faith-based, and housing organizations, as well as hospitals, businesses, and other stakeholders.
- Established contract tracing protocols and coordinated contact tracing teams.
- Ensured the availability of testing and vaccines, and related personnel and infrastructure.
- Created the organizational infrastructure and partnerships to support surges in need for vaccinations and boosters while enhancing and expanding continued testing.
- Improving and upgrading recreational facilities, to allow the residents of Essex County and the State of New Jersey to enjoy these facilities while maintaining a safe environment.
- Made available to the Essex County Improvement Authority funds to help with their revenue shortfall during the Covid-19 period.

Essex County had experienced many positive cases of COVID-19 and many deaths. Cases and deaths have had a disproportionate impact on our urban centers where the social determinants of health adversely impact low-income and minority populations. These communities include Belleville, Bloomfield, East Orange, Irvington, Newark, Orange, and West Orange.

Given that cases and deaths have had a disproportionate impact on low-income individuals, minority populations, and other vulnerable groups, our pandemic response operations are especially important when considering the demographic makeup of Essex County. Among our

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population, 38% are Black/African American, 24% are Hispanic/Latinx, 30% are White/Non-Hispanic, 5% are Asian, and 3% are Other or Two or More Races.

In addition, racial disparities from the pandemic have been well documented. According to data published by the CDC, minorities are more likely to require hospitalization from COVID-19.

Among the County's diverse population, limited English proficiency and cultural norms create further challenges when trying to advertise and properly inform residents about vaccinations. A total of 15% of Essex County's population has limited English proficiency, totaling more than 120,000 people, and 30% speak a language other than English.

In addition to demographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers, financial barriers are also prevalent across our region. Essex County's poverty rate is higher than the nation's average. Over 100,000 people are living in poverty. Financial disparities presented by poverty create barriers to healthcare access, such as increased difficulties in taking off work to receive a vaccination or having transportation to vaccination sites. Countywide, more than 66,000 households have no vehicle access.

The County of Essex has utilized various grants and funding opportunities to implement key programs throughout the pandemic. Funding to initiate and sustain these programs will continue on an ongoing basis until it is determined that they are no longer needed. Most of the funding streams have been exhausted by the end of year 2021 and the County has continued these programs through the use of the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). These programs included but may not be limited to:

- Vaccination distribution and COVID testing including communication and transportation efforts to reach vulnerable populations.
- Outreach program to keep all the citizens of the County informed of the pandemic and the steps the County is taking to mitigate the virus.
- Purchase of PPE to mitigate the threat and spread of the COVID-19 virus.
- Food Distribution to ensure vulnerable populations are provided with nutritious supplements.

## **SLFRF Expenditures**

### **Public Health**

Vaccinations The County has been funding its robust vaccination program through State and Federal funding. A majority of this funding has come from the CARES Act which expired on December 31, 2021. The County had supported a fixed site for vaccinations and testing. While this site had served a crucial role in administering vaccines along with the other two sites in 2021 and in 2022, they have had their limitations. For instance, all were not located in or close to vulnerable communities in Essex County. In addition, given these are fixed locations, there are barriers to access for those who are financially vulnerable and do not have a viable form of transport to reach the facility or who cannot afford to miss considerable time at work to attend. SLFRF funding is being directed to support and increase our mobile pop-up vaccine clinic, where we have administered vaccinations at over sixty mobile sites and partnered with over fifty community groups and organizations. Our locations have had a particular emphasis on vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups, such as areas in Orange, Newark, East Orange, West Orange, Irvington, and Montclair. To reach a wider range of communities, we have to work with a diverse group of partner

organizations, including housing authorities, places of worship, apartment complexes, schools, women's shelters, nursing homes, businesses, and others. Some of our partners have included the Newark Emergency Services for Families, the Irvington Housing Authority, Washington School in West Orange, Orange Park Apartments/Oakwood Towers in Orange, and St. Paul Baptist Church in Montclair.

Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Sites, Schools, etc.) Phase I mitigation planned for County congregate settings included initial vaccinations for residents and staff of the jails and youth house as well as installation of isolation rooms, plexiglass, PPE, and enhanced sanitation and disinfection policies and procedures. This was accomplished through funding provided by the CARES Act. Phase II of this plan has been funded through SLFRF and offered vaccinations to those who request in addition to the complete installation of an electronic video system so that residents of these facilities can effectively and safely communicate with lawyers, the courts system as well as family members.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – The County purchased the appropriate PPE to mitigate the threat and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Included in these purchases are masks, gloves, protective wear, hand sanitizer, etc. The County has purchased PPE through FEMA and CARES Act funding and supplemented these expenditures under SLFRF.

Capital Investments or Physical Plant Changes to Public Facilities that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency - The County of Essex has completed a dedicated building, located in Cedar Grove NJ, to house all COVID operational supplies and services. This building was designed and constructed based on the guidance from the CDC and NJ Department of Health. The County of Essex has opted to utilize a “hub and spoke system” for the storage and distribution of its COVID-19 vaccine. Due to the “cold-chain storage” requirements, special freezers and refrigerator storage units were purchased and are located at the new facility. The storage area for the new building was designed to receive, route, load, and launch multiple shipments of vaccines to individual vaccination sites as well as COVID-related medical supplies, PPE, and sanitation supplies to all county-owned and operated facilities.

Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine) – SLFRF funding has been used to increase awareness, further inform, and decrease vaccine hesitancy among vulnerable groups, through a comprehensive, targeted advertising campaign. The County had sought to create a diverse range of types of advertisements to cover more ground, including full page ads, robocalls, mailing, cable television ads, and social media ads. In addition, the County had considered racial, language, and cultural diversity in our advertisement content and campaign targets to better reach vulnerable populations. This robust communications effort has included but not be limited to:

- Full page ad in *The Positive Community* (monthly magazine reaching minority populations throughout Essex County)
- Cost to film video for TV commercials and social media
- Robocall to cell phones and landlines
- Mailing to urban communities (including printing and postage)
- Mailing to Spanish communities (includes printing and postage)
- Cable TV buy (30 second commercial. Also includes streaming services, such as Netflix, and social media.)

Upgrade to Recreational Facilities – The County has continued upgrades to many facilities to allow the residents to enjoy and use the facilities the County has to offer. The County has and will continue to upgrade these facilities to offer safe and local places for the residents to go to without worry.

Administrative Expenses – The use of consultants has been needed for the purposes of proper and transparent reporting of all expenditures related to the SLFRF funding.

Social Distancing – Modifications are being implemented regarding online record access.

Information Technology – Upgrades to the Counties computer systems to allow a safe environment when accessing the systems.

Revenue Shortfall – The County of Essex utilized strategic management practices to avert the need for a reduction in staff during the COVID pandemic. Telework policies and procedures were put into place and technological advances were purchased and utilized so that there was little to no disruption of vital County services during this period. The redeployment of staff to operate the COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites was critical to the overall mitigation mission and was funded through the CARES Act. Where the County experienced a revenue shortfall in the following areas:

1. Reduction in the expected revenue realized by Sheriff tax sales and evictions.
2. Reduction in the expected revenue of motor vehicle fines due to the closure of the courts.
3. Reduction in the expected revenue generated through the County Parks Department which operates the County Golf Courses, the wildly popular Turtle Back Zoo, and numerous county-sponsored concerts, events, and fairs that were all canceled due to the pandemic.

The County also made available funds to the Essex County Improvement Authority to aid with their revenue shortfall during the COVID-19 period.