

County of Hudson
Recovery Plan

**State and Local Fiscal Recovery
Funds**

2025 Report

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GENERAL OVERVIEW

Executive Summary

The County of Hudson is pleased to be a recipient of the American Rescue Plan, State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). These funds are to assist government agencies in responding to the impact that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on County residents, businesses, activities and the general economy. The County received a total of \$130,604,069 in SLFRF funding. High level discussions regarding the use of the funds were regularly discussed during the grant period as there were so many competing needs and the window to obligate the funds closed at the end of 2024, (although the funds can be expended through 12/31/2026). Moreover, the County elected to provide additional assistance to six municipalities in the County, also known as Non-Entitlement Units (NEU's), by leveraging the amounts they were directly allocated from the SLFRF. The six NEU's are East Newark, Guttenberg, Harrison, Kearny, Secaucus and Weehawken. A total of \$8,455,810 was allocated to these towns. At the close of the obligation period, 12/31/2024, the County has either expended or obligated the entirety of the funds.

The COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency ended on May 11, 2023. However, Over the course of the years affected by the pandemic, an all-out effort was made to vaccinate, educate and encourage those that resisted or lacked convenient access to vaccinations by contracting with a group that specializes in engaging hard to reach communities on a massive scale. Mobile vaccination and testing sites were operated to accommodate all residents and constituents throughout the County.

A "healthy buildings" project was implemented to protect the more than 3,000 County employees, inhabitants and visitors to County buildings that consisted of completely overhauling the air filtration systems and installing UV systems in all County buildings to destroy germs and bacteria that may be circulating in the environment.

Infrastructure programs are completed or underway to upgrade and repair the water and sewer infrastructure throughout the County.

County parks have been provided with upgraded fiber optic networks for improved Wifi available to the public and Blue Light Stations to improve safety and security.

There are ongoing projects, many of which began through the CARES Act. These projects respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic by providing services to disproportionately impacted communities and address issues such as food insecurity, sustainable food programs, support services for individuals with disabilities, nutritional and physical wellness programs, mental health services for youth and adults, distance learning for youths, support to shelters including screening for behavioral health needs and case management, legal services for seniors, technology training for seniors and non-senior adults with disabilities, home health aides and, of course, personal protective equipment (PPE).

Under the SLFRF program there are seven broadly designated expenditure categories (EC), each containing at least two sub-categories. Any use of the funds must fall into at least one of these categories. County programs have utilized six of the categories which are listed in an appendix to this Plan. One of the categories known as "Revenue Replacement" allows an

amount of the funds, calculated by formula, to be used for an array of government services not specifically listed in the other six categories. For the most part, the County will use this funding for one-time expenditures so that structural holes are not created in the budget.

EXPENDITURE CATEGORIES (EC)

Public Health – EC 1 – Mitigation and Prevention

ECs 1.1 and 1.2 – COVID-19 Vaccination and Testing

To date, the County has expended \$9,390,936 towards COVID vaccinations, COVID testing and COVID outreach services. A dedicated site was established in Kearny, NJ for drive-thru services, and mobile operations were deployed throughout the County. More than 85,000 shots were administered through the County program.

An outreach campaign was conducted that included a mobile vaccine program, social media campaigns, physical knocking on doors and distribution of flyers and other media providing public information throughout each of our 12 municipalities, especially those hard-to-reach populations (Hudson County is one of the most diversely populated counties in the country). Conducting a major outreach and public information program over an extended period netted positive results in terms of the number of vaccines administered. The mobile vaccination program that traveled to all 12 municipalities offering on the spot vaccines was well received by those communities. The public outreach and information program also helped residents connect to other resources such as childcare, rental assistance, food pantries and transportation, many of which were also funded with the SLFRF.

EC 1.4 – Prevention in Congregate Settings

To date, the County has obligated \$15,452,808 and expended \$11,430,380 towards this category. Since March of 2021, continuing many of the projects that commenced with the CARES Act funding, the County has invested heavily in specialized maintenance services, equipment and products to mitigate and protect the more than 3,000 public employees that serve the public without interruption as government services were needed more than ever to combat this pandemic with no or minimal interruption. Moreover, the County has several 24/7 operations including two congregate facilities—a correctional center and a hospital. Intensive cleaning and disinfecting services are employed on a regular basis to prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus or other communicable disease. The Correctional Center is disinfected daily as are all common areas in County buildings and selected offices as needed.

EC 1.5 – Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

To date, the County has obligated and expended \$105,154 towards this category. The County ensured that all employees had sufficient PPE to feel safe and comfortable in carrying out their service to the public. This included masks, gloves and whatever clothing or uniform items were necessary depending on their particular job function.

EC 1.7 – Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses

To date, the County has obligated \$67,491 to this category. These expenditures were for the purchase of various supplies, including disinfectants, needed to address the epidemic. The County also engaged consultants with expertise in the fields of religion and medicine to evaluate staff claiming exemptions from taking the vaccine during the time it was mandatory.

EC 1.12 – Mental Health Services

The County has obligated \$3,320,591 to this category and expended \$2,448,580 to date. Non-profit agencies were contracted to offer behavioral health and wellness assistance to mitigate the devastating economic, physical, social and emotional effects the pandemic had on County residents.

The pandemic had a dire effect on those with or prone to substance use. In this regard, we are addressed the behavioral, and mental health of the public.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Division of Children and Youth Services has funded numerous initiatives through ARP to ameliorate the negative consequences of COVID-19 upon the mental health and well-being of the County's residents. To date, these services have assisted thousands of young people and their families. The County plans to continue funding these initiatives through the end of 2026.

Although children and young people in the United States have, for the most part, been able to avoid the worst of the immediate physical impacts of COVID-19, the long-term consequences of the pandemic on their mental health have been formidable. The then United States Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued an advisory at the end of 2021 noting the "urgent need to address the nation's mental health crisis."ⁱ On a local level, New Jersey has experienced alarming rates of youth suicidality, depression and anxiety as a result of COVIDⁱⁱ.

Access to clinical services is vital and difficult to obtain for many families because of increased need and demand. Low-income families have an even more difficult time accessing mental health resources because of finances. In response, the County has utilized ARP funds to establish a clinical mental health resource at three family centers throughout the County and has augmented mental health and respite services at another family serving center with a specific focus on families with an incarcerated parent. Many families have been served through these services since the Spring of 2022.

In addition to clinical mental health services, research has established that physical activityⁱⁱⁱ, social connections^{iv} and creative outlets and activities^v are significant protective factors against depression, anxiety and psychiatric disorders during the pandemic. With this in mind, the County has funded several programs that foster mental wellness through these factors. Programming includes positive peer connections including mentorships and other leadership opportunities; activities that foster resiliency and social and emotional learning skills; physical and health-related activities including overnight camping; and creative and arts programming.

Research shows that domestic violence intensified during the Pandemic, particularly because of isolation and financial stress. Although the isolation of COVID-19 is over, the trauma of that

period continues to impact many women. Hudson County has used ARP funding to establish a Spanish-speaking women's support group for domestic violence survivors.

EC 1.13 – Substance Use Services

The County has obligated \$234,403 to this category and expended \$230,328. Non-profit agencies were contracted to provide substance abuse harm reduction services to persons affected by the pandemic. In addition to mental health, the pandemic adversely impacted those who engage in substance use. Overdose deaths since the pandemic began are on the rise, which reflects studies indicating that individuals are turning to substance use to combat isolation, fear and economic and health-related stress brought on by the pandemic. As a result of this alarming information, harm reduction services have been funded with American Rescue Plan funds and numerous individuals have received support and case management as they work towards achieving recovery from substance use. Harm reduction is a Substance-Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) endorsed strategy to help address the public health emergency created because of the opioid epidemic and is a monumental aspect of the Biden-Harris Administration's approach to addressing substance use disorders.

EC 1.14 – Other Public Health Services

To date, the County has obligated \$12,882,969 to this category with expenditures of \$12,828,965. The County implemented a "Health Buildings Project" in which air purifiers and UV sanitizers were installed in all County facilities. The improved infrastructure includes strengthening the Wi-Fi in all county facilities and the installation of RFID software. During the pandemic, especially during quarantine, employees required the ability to work remotely. Some of the expenditures in this category were to upgrade or IT infrastructure to facilitate remote work and minimize service interruptions.

Negative Economic Impacts - EC 2

EC 2.1 – Household Assistance – Food Programs

To date, the County has obligated \$9,844,493 to this category and \$1,324,905 has been expended to date. The expenditures under this category provide supplemental assistance for the distribution of meals to the most vulnerable residents, seniors, individuals with disabilities and other populations. Vendors were contracted to deliver the food and the grant covers the related costs. The county is also providing capital for the development of food pantries and an agricultural hub in the County. Design and construction capital costs are included here.

The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on food insecurity has affected every state in our country and every city and county in New Jersey has experienced greater hardship due to the pandemic. According to a White Paper prepared by the Community Food Bank of New Jersey, COVID-19 is expected to drive food insecurity rates beyond levels seen during the Great Recession of 2008. Hudson County is one (1) of six (6) New Jersey counties with the highest numbers of food insecure residents.

To address food insecurity, the County established a Food Security Task Force to develop and implement a sustainable plan to assure that the long-term food needs of residents are met. ARP

funds have been utilized to address a couple of action items identified in the plan. Such action items include the hiring of a Food Security Navigator who is responsible for creating a food security strategic plan and coordinating food insecurity and access activities for the County. The Food Security Navigator is responsible for the coordination of all aspects of food access in Hudson County. Another action item includes launching learning gardens to empower residents to grow their own food and to learn about healthy eating. The learning garden was launched in the spring of 2022 through a contract with Rutgers University 4-H.

To date, much of what has been done to address food insecurity in Hudson County has been done through a collaboration with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey. However, the County is preparing to earmark ARP funds to execute additional action items that have been identified as a result of a countywide survey that yielded over 10,000 responses and focus group discussions conducted by the County's Food Security Task Force. Such action items that will lead to future projects include, but are not limited to increasing access to food benefits by acquiring kiosks and electronic devices to make it easier for residents to learn about available resources and apply for food benefits, such as, SNAP and WIC; creating resource guides, palm cards and other items to educate residents about available resources, increasing the number of food pantries affiliated with the Community Food Bank of New Jersey to ensure a steady supply of food resources in Hudson County, implementing mobile pantries, establishing community kitchens, etc. The County will use ARP funds to address food disparities as well as other social determinants of health.

Negative Economic Impacts – EC 2

EC 2.15 – Long-Term Housing Security: Affordable Housing

The County has obligated and expended \$1,713,850 to assist two housing projects with recapitalizing reserves and to provide stability and support their long-term sustainability.

EC 2.18 – Housing Support: Other Housing Assistance

The County has allocated \$12,700,000 towards the acquisition and rehabilitation of a property to use as a homeless transitional facility that will include a medical component and the provision of social services.

Public Sector – Negative Economic Impact: Public Sector Capacity – EC 3

EC 3.4 and EC 3.5

The County has obligated \$741,913 to this category. Funds were used to purchase a mobile van for the outreach program in order to provide better service delivery and for resources to allow for remote work, supplies and other support resources.

Premium Pay – EC 4

EC 4.1 – Public sector Employees

The County obligated \$2,920,761 for this category and has expended \$1,530,000. To date. Additional compensation was granted to those who performed essential services during the Public Emergency and allowed for the continuation of government services..

Infrastructure – EC 5

EC 5.18 – Water and Sewer: Other

The County has obligated \$13,671,089 towards this category and expended \$11,023,137 to date. Due to the age of many of the County properties and the infrastructure thereon, the County has experienced several failures of that infrastructure, including water, sewer and storm piping. The failure of these facilities has and continues to cause damage to the roads, buildings and other facilities on the sites. The County has undertaken a project to locate and replace these infrastructure facilities. The intent of this project is to replace, to the extent possible the known underground utilities at various sites owned by the County. Work will include water, storm sewer and sanitary sewer, as indicated.⁸

Revenue Replacement – EC 6

EC 6.1 – Provision of Government Services

To date, the County has obligated \$38,641,966 to this category and has expended \$34,424,313 to date.. SLFRF allows a certain portion of the funds to be used for the provision of any service that the government might provide. The County has selected projects that are considered one-time expenditures, for the most part, so that the revenue will not be required to support future operating budgets. However, \$14,256,734 million was used towards Corrections overtime costs that are considered to be temporary in nature due to an anticipated increase in staff. Some of the other projects are Upgrade Sheriff's Radio and Dispatch System; New Voting Machines for Superintendent or Elections; Demolition of old Public safety Building; Historic Brennan Courthouse Roof Restoration and Emergency Blue Light Phones in County Parks.

Administrative – EC 7

EC 7.1 – Administrative Expenses

To date, \$445,001 has been obligated to this category. These expenditures are basic administrative expenses of managing and administering the grant including grant staff salaries, advertising and cost of issuing bids and RFPs.

EC 7.2 – Transfer to Other Units of Government

The County has obligated \$8,455,810 toward this category. As mentioned in the Executive Summary, the County committed a portion of its allocated SLFRF funds to six county municipalities that are considered NEUs. The six municipalities are East Newark, Guttenberg, Harrison, Kearny, Secaucus and Weehawken. There are twelve municipalities that make up the

County of Hudson. Eleven of these jurisdictions are categorized as an “Non-Entitlement Units” (NEU) under the ARP Federal guidelines and received their allocation through the State of New Jersey (as opposed to the County and Jersey City who received allocations directly from the Federal government). Under any circumstance, all 12 municipalities were the recipient of ARP funds, based on population. When the County learned that 6 of the towns had their originally scheduled allocations reduced by the time the ARP legislation was finalized, the County made the decision to provide additional ARP resources to six of these municipalities from its own allocation for the purpose of supplementing their SLFRF allocations. Under this arrangement and to extent of the funds the County allocated (not their total allocation), these 6 towns must adhere to the same spending policies and guidelines that the County has adopted and none of the funds can be used under the category of Revenue Replacement since the County will use its full allocation. Individual Agreements have been executed with each of these 6 municipalities. To ensure compliance, their plan for the use of the funds must be approved in advance and all Federal guidelines for procurement of vendors and expenditure of funds must be observed. An agreement has been executed with each town setting forth these requirements and agreeing to hold the County harmless should they fail to comply. Below, I am reporting how those municipalities plan to use the ARP funds to date. I should note that not all towns have completed the planning for the use of the funds at this time.

- **Secaucus**
Prevention in Congregate Settings (EC 1.4). Secaucus plans to use its County allocation, to install Air Filtration and UV systems that kill airborne germs and bacteria, towards the construction of a new Senior Center
- **Kearny**
Community Violence Interventions (EC 1.11). Pending evidence to support expenditure.
Broadband (EC5.21)
- **Weehawken**
Assistance to Small Business (EC 1.8)
Assistance to Non-Profits (EC 1.9). Weehawken plans to use part of the County allocated funds to aid small businesses and non-profits that have been negatively impacted by COVID to offset costs for business closures and business interruptions.
Public Sector Workforce Payroll & Benefits for Public Health, Public Safety & Human Service Workers (EC 3.1). Services are directly related to mitigating COVID 19
- **East Newark** – Plan under development
- **Harrison** – Water and Sewer Infrastructure Improvements (EC 5)
- **Guttenberg** – Public Sector Workforce (EC 3.1)

Additional Funding

In addition to the SLFRF received under the American Rescue Plan, the County has received more than \$35 million under the Emergency Rental Assistance Programs. These funds are earmarked to prevent homelessness and assist residents who are experiencing difficulties with rent and utility payments. The County networks with the courts and various nonprofit agencies that service immigrants, undocumented residents and other minority groups to reach those and other vulnerable populations. The County has dispatched staff to many of the municipalities to provide application support and counseling.

ARP funds have also been made available to the County for other targeted programs through HUD, HHS and the USDOL.

ⁱ <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/12/07/us-surgeon-general-issues-advisory-on-youth-mental-health-crisis-further-exposed-by-covid-19-pandemic.html>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nj.com/education/2022/03/we-cant-wait-nj-must-tackle-surging-mental-health-crisis-now-experts-warn.html>; <https://projects.nj.com/features/depression/index.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ McGuine, T. A., Biese, K. M., Petrovska, L., Hetzel, S. J., Reardon, C., Kliethermes, S., Bell, D. R., Brooks, A., Watson, A. M. (2021). Mental health, physical activity, and quality of life of US adolescent athletes during COVID-19–related school closures and sport cancellations: A study of 13 000 athletes. *Journal of Athletic Training*, 56(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.4085/1062-6050-0478.20>

^{iv} Zengin, M., Yayan, E. H., Vicnelioğlu, E. (2021). The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s lifestyles and anxiety levels. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 34, 236–242. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcap.12316>

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