



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Hall of Records, Room 405, Newark, New Jersey 07102

973.621.4400 --- 973.621.6343 (Fax)

www.essexcountynj.org

Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr.

Essex County Executive

County of Essex 2021 Recovery Plan

Executive 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 approach include:

- 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 culturally competent 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 community, 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

Essex County has experienced 89,408 positive cases of COVID-19 and 2760 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 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.

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In addition, racial disparities from the pandemic have been well documented. According to recent data published by the CDC, black individuals are almost three times more likely to require hospitalization and two times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to White individuals. Hispanic individuals are three times more likely to require hospitalization and over two times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to White individuals. Essex County's population is 40% Black and 24% Hispanic, which are higher percentages than the national demographics of 13% and 20%, respectively.

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 14% 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 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 grant and funding opportunities to implement key programs throughout this pandemic. Funding to initiate and sustain these programs will continue, on an ongoing basis until it is determined that they are no longer needed during this pandemic. Most of the funding streams currently sustaining these vital programs will be exhausted at the end of calendar year 2021 at which time the County intends to have funding continuity through the State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). These programs include but may not be limited to:

- Vaccination distribution and COVID testing including communication and transportation efforts to reach vulnerable populations
- Purchase of PPE to mitigate the threat and spread of the COVID 19 virus
- Rental Assistance and Eviction Prevention
- Food Distribution to ensure vulnerable populations are provided with nutritious supplements

SLFRF Expenditures

1. 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 will expire by year-end. Currently, the County is supporting three (3) fixed sites for vaccinations. While these sites have served a crucial role in administering vaccines, they have had their limitations. For instance, all are 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 significant time at work to attend. Initial SLFRF funding is being directed to support and increase our mobile pop-up vaccine clinic, where we have administered vaccinations at over 60 mobile sites and partnered with over 50 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 sought 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.

1.4 Prevention in Congregate Settings (Nursing Homes, Prisons/Jails, Dense Work Sites, Schools, etc.) Phase I mitigation plan for County congregate settings included initial vaccinations for residents and staff of the jails and youth house as well as installation of isolation rooms, plexi glass, PPE and enhanced sanitation and disinfection policies and procedures. This was accomplished through funding provided from the CARES Act. Phase II of this plan is being funded through SLFRF and will continue to offer 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.

1.5 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – The County continues to purchase the appropriate PPE to mitigate the threat and spread of the COVID 19 virus. Included in these purchases is: masks, gloves, protective wear, hand sanitizer etc. The County has purchased PPE through FEMA and CARES Act funding and will supplement this expenditure under SLFRF for the foreseeable future.

1.7 Capital Investments or Physical Plant Changes to Public Facilities that respond to the COVID-19 public health emergency - The County of Essex is in the construction phase of a dedicated building, located in Cedar Grove NJ, to house all COVID operational supplies and services. This building was designed and being 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 will be located at the new facility which should be operations by year-end. The storage area for the new building is 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.

1.8 Other COVID-19 Public Health Expenses (including Communications, Enforcement, Isolation/Quarantine) – SLFRF funding will be used to increase awareness, further inform, and decrease vaccine hesitancy among vulnerable groups, through a comprehensive, targeted advertising campaign. The County has 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, we have considered racial, language, and cultural diversity in our advertisement content and campaign targets to better reach vulnerable populations. This robust communications effort will include but may 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
- Robocall to landlines
- Mailing to urban communities (includes 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.)

7.1 Administrative Expenses – The use of consultants will be required for the purposes of proper and transparent reporting of all expenditures related to the SLFRF funding.

Revenue Shortfall – The County of Essex utilized strategic management practices to avert the need for a reduction in staff during the COVID pandemic. Tele work 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 of time. The redeployment of staff to operate the COVID 19 testing and vaccination sites was critical to the overall mitigation mission and were funded through the CARES Act. Where the County experienced revenue shortfall was 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