

Hennepin County Recovery Plan

State and Local Fiscal
Recovery Funds

2021 Report



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General Overview

Executive Summary

Hennepin County will allocate its receipt of American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act funding in alignment with its mission and vision to support residents who are adversely affected by disparities; to support innovative, equitable and sustainable changes in service delivery; to leverage private and public partnerships within our community, and to seek other funding sources to maximize our investments and best position Hennepin County for the future.

Through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program, Hennepin County has a total award of \$245.9 million to respond to the economic and public health impacts of COVID-19 and to mitigate its impacts on the community, residents, and businesses. The first half of Hennepin County's allocation has been received and totals \$122.9 million.

In 2020, Hennepin County leveraged \$220 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funding to support residents in a variety of areas, including:

- Businesses
- Education
- Housing
- Homelessness
- Food security
- Community-based organizations
- Jobs
- Essential services
- Public health outreach
- Technology access
- Youth programs

Through SLFRF, Hennepin County will continue to support residents through the pandemic and beyond as residents and communities work to recover. Key principles and priorities have been set to build upon the county's approach to disparity reduction and to support pandemic recovery efforts. Hennepin County is committed to utilizing a racial equity lens to target resources and focus outcomes on reducing disparities in the following domains: education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation. Hennepin County will pursue and leverage other available federal and state funding before using CARES or SLFRF funding to support the recovery of residents, communities, and businesses. Funding priorities established by Hennepin County link back to the disparity reduction domain goals of education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation.

This Recovery Plan includes planned and actual use of Hennepin County's SLFRF from March 2021 through July 31, 2021. As of this reporting timeframe, Hennepin County has planned allocations for just over \$32 million of its \$245.9 million in SLFRF funds. A project inventory for each effort is included in this report, many of which do not have expenditures during the report timeframe.

Use of Funds

The SLFRF program supports the use of funds in the following expenditure categories:

1. Public Health (EC 1)
2. Negative Economic Impacts (EC 2)
3. Services to Disproportionately Impacted Communities (EC 3)
4. Premium Pay (EC 4)
5. Water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure (EC 5)
6. Revenue Replacement (EC 6)

Hennepin County has established the following principles and priorities to build upon the guidance set forth by the SLFRF program.

Principles

- Hennepin County embraces and embodies core values of continuous improvement, customer service, diversity and inclusion, employee engagement, and workforce development as we serve our residents.
- Hennepin County is committed to utilizing a racial equity lens to target resources and focus outcomes on reducing disparities in the following domains: education, employment, health, housing, income, justice, and transportation.
- In response and recovery efforts, Hennepin County embraces opportunities for transformative change including lasting investments and more efficient, effective, and accessible service delivery for residents in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- Hennepin County will pursue and leverage other available federal and state funding before using CARES or SLFRF funding to support the recovery of residents, communities, and businesses.
- Hennepin County is committed to a people-centered, inclusive, and equitable approach in policymaking and service delivery.

Priorities

- Fund health programs to respond to COVID-19.
- Ensure legally required functions of county government can continue during COVID-19 pandemic.
- Invest in capital resources and infrastructure that help improve service delivery, remove barriers, and mitigate health risks.
- Strategic investments that will have long-term value or cost reductions.
- Support the recovery of communities, residents, small businesses, and nonprofits impacted by COVID-19 in ways that will help our region emerge from this crisis with an even stronger, more inclusive and resilient economy over the long-term.
- Expand support and outreach to culturally specific human services and health care providers to strengthen their long-term ability to meet community needs.

Hennepin County expenditures and plans for this reporting timeframe have focused on continuing efforts that were established through the use of CARES funding. Efforts will include:

- Hennepin County Public Health staff work with health-care systems, government agencies and community partners to inform and support ongoing vaccination efforts. Priority populations for vaccination continue to be individuals and communities without access to the vaccine. Funds are also being used to offer incentives for individuals to receive the vaccine. (EC 1)

- Hennepin County will continue to provide communities with funding to address food insecurity. These investments specifically focus resources on low-income residents and communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, with an emphasis on the delivery of culturally appropriate food. (EC 2)
- Hennepin County will provide housing-focused case management services and direct assistance to persons transitioning to permanent housing and will contract for employment and training services for people experiencing and exiting homelessness. (EC 2 and EC 3)
- The Education and Support Services Program was created in June 2020 to provide educational services and supports to Hennepin County-involved youth impacted by COVID-19. The creation of this department ensures that this work continues to advance countywide efforts to support and align the educational stability, outcomes, health and well-being of students involved in county systems. (EC 3)
- Hennepin County will provide services to prevent, reduce, and mitigate gun violence. (EC 3)
- During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Fourth Judicial District operated at a significantly reduced capacity with few in-person proceedings, and that significantly impacted the government's ability to effectively administer justice-related services and to process these cases in a fair and efficient manner. Hennepin County will provide adequate staffing and resources to address the COVID-related court backlog. (EC 2)
- Hennepin County will coordinate with federal, state, and local government partners, internet service providers, and community organizations to develop and implement a digital equity plan. In response to the digital divide exacerbated by COVID-19, the county created a new program to provide devices and internet connectivity for youth involved in county programs or services. (EC 2)

Since April 2020, Hennepin County has allocated over \$78 million in state and federal funding towards emergency rental assistance, including from the CARES Act and Emergency Rental Assistance, and have distributed over \$38 million to 8,000 renting households. To support struggling homeowners not served by the State's Homeowner Assistance Fund program, Hennepin County allocated \$2 million from CARES Act Community Development Block Grant. CARES funds were also used to shelter more than 500 vulnerable adults experiencing homelessness in hotels. While emergency relief efforts continue, Hennepin County will also start to use federal funds to build up our affordable housing infrastructure to be more equitable and resilient than before the pandemic.

In addition, as part of Hennepin County's response to COVID-19, a robust, comprehensive, and timely set of on-demand data reports and analyses were created to inform and support the county's response activities. This includes the County's targeted approach towards traditionally marginalized communities which includes Qualified Census Tracts (QCTs). Analysis and reports are under development as the county moves forward with SLFRF plans.

COVID-19 public dashboard | Hennepin County

The public dashboard supports effective communication with county residents and includes easy to understand visuals. The public dashboard is also used as a tool to share key summary data between county programs and with city partners. In addition to these specific examples, the use and availability of these reports helps data to be used more regularly and broadly across the county response efforts. The county will continue to leverage data and use dashboards to proactively share data between programs and with the public.



Promoting Equitable Outcomes

The work of Hennepin County deeply focuses on the people of the county. While many of our residents enjoy the great quality of life this region gets recognized for, we cannot be blind to the fact that stark disparities exist—particularly for our residents of color.

- Hennepin County defines disparities as differences in areas of life that result in one group having a disproportionate burden of negative life outcomes. It's our commitment that we will reduce these disparities.
- Here, in Hennepin County, inequities in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation are starkest between residents of color and their white counterparts. When we start our work from this shared perspective, shifting our guiding lens to one that is focused on a commitment to addressing these disparities, we can see the places, partnerships, programs and services where we have a responsibility to act.
- Disparity reduction strategy and efforts continue to mature and develop across programs in all areas of the county. We are intentionally bringing resident voices forward, building partnerships and using data to inform decisions and measure outcomes.
- We know there is more work to do and continue to work to position the county and our residents for the future. Our domain goals set long-term outcomes for residents versus looking at just solving immediate needs for food, shelter and other emergency supports.

Communities thrive when everyone thrives

Reducing any individual disparity can leverage positive change and help reduce disparities in other areas. If one gear turns, they all move. These seven domains are interconnected and integral to reducing disparities. Hennepin County's goal is to reduce disparities in the seven domains. Below are the goals for each domain area.

Education

Develop youth-, family- and community-driven initiatives to support the educational success of youth in Hennepin County, especially those connected to county services.

We are investing in resources to strengthen academic skill development, financial empowerment, independent living skills and career readiness to improve holistic well-being outcomes for youth and families.

Employment

Provide racial and economic equity for all individuals in need of program services while ensuring economic competitiveness for Hennepin County workers.

We are focusing on addressing the benefits cliff. A benefits cliff occurs for low-income residents when small increases in earned income result in a reduction or loss of essential public assistance benefits. As a result, a resident's net income, when looking across employment and benefits, can actually decrease. Residents do not have the economic resources required to meet even basic needs and employers are hampered in their attempts to hire and promote employees or offer additional work hours.

Health

Reduce health disparities by bringing together community partners, developing action plans, and using data to define and measure progress.

We have improved access to culturally responsive mental health services using a series of mini-grants, and we are developing strategies to increase healthy births and create positive early starts for children. We are also empowering communities to reduce chronic disease.

Housing

Decrease racial disparities in housing and homelessness where people of color are more likely to be cost-burdened and disproportionately represented.

Capital investments decrease disparities in people most housing-cost-burdened, which disproportionately affects people of color. We are also moving more people out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

Income

Reduce income disparities by investing in strategies that provide greater financial inclusion. We believe that income is part of the foundation to achieving self-sufficiency. Income helps people meet basic needs, establish wealth and grow assets—all key components of well-being. We know income is a vital component of self-reliance.

The income domain focuses on efforts that generate income and increase financial wellness of residents. We will also focus on income systems and the connection they have to other domains.

Justice

Develop strategies that are grounded in reforms and respond to growing community safety concerns while strengthening community-based partnership and representation across the justice system. We will listen and learn while evaluating practices through a lens of equity and effectiveness.

We are focusing on reforms that support the whole person to successfully exit the justice system and work toward community-led early intervention and prevention.

Transportation

Have a successful regional transportation system that effectively and equitably delivers public services, using a racial equity lens in deciding future public projects so we do not create further disparities.

We also envision a future where all residents are able to fully participate in the digital world, and have universal access to affordable broadband, personal technology and the digital skills needed to thrive.

Racism as a Public Health Crisis

In June 2020 the Hennepin County Board passed a resolution that declares racism a public health crisis that affects the entire county. This declaration supports the county's foundational work to develop strategies that mitigate personal bias and prejudice in the community, create systems that build equity and create a future where all residents are healthy and successful, and all communities thrive. Hennepin County will support local, regional, state and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism and seek partnership with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism. The county will promote community efforts to amplify issues of racism that engage actively and authentically with communities of color.

Community Engagement

Hennepin County Communications and Engagement Services plays an integral role in the COVID-19 response through messaging and public outreach into local communities, specifically engaging and supporting Black, Indigenous, people of color and priority populations. Similar to the use of CARES funding, SLFRF funding will be used to expand the scope of work, innovative media strategies, translation services, the Trusted Messenger program and staffing to meet the demands of the pandemic. Staff listen to community needs and build upon engagement efforts and relationships to act as a conduit to provide resources to communities in need. CARES funding resulted in the distribution of 210,000 masks and 1,800 computer devices, countless individuals referred for Wi-Fi programs, and the promotion of vaccine distribution, among others.

- **Trusted Messengers:** CARES funding was used to contract with nonprofit organizations and individuals who are trusted messengers in their communities. Trusted messengers help with translations, design messages that resonate with each community, help ensure that individuals and families are engaged and have accurate and timely information to prevent the spread of COVID-19, provide additional information and education on improving health-care outcomes, identify immediate needs of community members, assist with obtaining public and private support services, and promote Hennepin County events and campaigns.
- **Take Care campaign:** In response to the pandemic, Hennepin County launched a broad, multi-faceted public awareness campaign encouraging mask wearing and emphasizing other prevention behaviors. The campaign was targeted to Black, Indigenous, and people of color media outlets and relied upon trusted messengers.

Hennepin County will build upon these successful strategies through the use of SLFRF. The goals and outcomes of the county's use of SLFRF will be available to the public on the Hennepin County webpage: hennepin.us/arpa. Direct outreach and notification of funding opportunities will be made available to community providers through official county procurement and communication channels including social media and the County's Trusted Messenger Group.

Labor Practices

Hennepin County is not pursuing any infrastructure projects during this reporting timeframe.

Here is general information on how Hennepin County Purchasing and Contract Services uses a variety of innovative, disparity-reduction-focused procurement tools. These tools are in use and are available in the future if/when Hennepin County develops a plan for infrastructure projects using SLFRF.

- Contract goals for small, minority, women-owned businesses
- Emerging Small Business Enterprise Program: Targeting opportunities to the smallest of the small businesses, including set-aside contracts
- Sheltered Markets: Unbundling larger procurements to create right-sized small business opportunities
- Best-value construction procurement that incentivizes the use of small-business subcontractors and suppliers
- Mandatory Subcontracting: Requiring firms to subcontract a percentage of work to subcontractors
- Construction employment goals: 32% minority and 20% female
- Employ county clients, including probationers and graduates of local training programs, on construction projects
- Expedite payments made to small businesses (including subcontractors and suppliers)
- Educate vendors and providers on how to do business with Hennepin County: mitigate/eliminate barriers and create opportunities for diverse vendors and providers to meet and build relationships with county staff.
- Hennepin County is a national leader in prevailing wage.

Use of Evidence

Hennepin County will employ a combination of evidence-based interventions and will complete rigorous program evaluation to build evidence where it is not available. Embedded within the county's approach to disparity reduction is the vision to foster a culture of innovation and excellence across all county departments. Continuous improvement is a key component to how the County can build upon existing structures and processes, seek to make them more efficient and effective, and build organizational capacity. This approach extends to the county's use of SLFRF funding.

In this beginning stage of SLFRF funding, Hennepin County has yet to identify use-of-evidence plans for all projects. When available, the use of evidence is included in the project inventory.

Expenses by Expenditure Category

	Category	Cumulative expenditures to date (\$)	Amount spent since last Recovery Plan
1	Expenditure Category: Public Health		
1.1	COVID-19 Vaccination	\$132,387	\$132,387
1.9	Payroll Costs for Public Health, Safety, and Other Public Sector Staff Responding to COVID-19	\$321,519	\$321,519
1.12	Other Public Health Services	\$78,843	\$78,843
7	Administrative and Other		
7.1	Administrative Expenses	\$50,983	\$50,983
	TOTAL	\$583,732	\$583,732

Project Inventory

Through SLFRF, Hennepin County will continue to support residents through the pandemic and beyond as residents and communities work to recover. This Recovery Plan includes planned and actual use of Hennepin County's SLFRF from March 2021 through July 31, 2021. A project inventory for each effort is included in this report, many of which do not have expenditures during the report timeframe. Projects are in the planning phase and therefore the use of evidence and performance measures are under development. The inventory includes the following details for each project:

- Name
- Funding Amount
- Expenditure Category
- Project Overview
- Use of Evidence
- Performance Measures

The projects included in this inventory are:

- Vaccine Incentives
- Food Insecurity
- Housing Focused Case Management
- Employment and Training
- Educational Services
- Gun Violence Prevention
- Court Backlog
- Digital Divide

Vaccine Incentives

Funding amount: \$350,000

Project Expenditure Category: 1.1, COVID-19 Vaccination

Project Overview

Hennepin County's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic currently includes significant efforts to provide vaccines to our community, and this incentive program is using this federal funding for vaccine incentives to support those efforts. The research is mixed on the overall effectiveness of vaccine incentive programs, but a widely accepted strategy to increase vaccination uptake involves a focus on rebuilding trust in communities: partnering with communities that have historically experienced medical exploitation, unconsented experimentation, and marginalization is most effective at decreasing vaccine hesitancy¹. Thus, the vaccine incentive programs proposed will be designed to build trust between Hennepin County and its residents with the goal of increasing vaccination rates.

The vaccine incentive program includes:

- Partnering with trusted community groups to host vaccine events and support the provision of free meals, groceries, and/or entertainment;
- Distributing "Thank You" packs to residents who receive vaccinations, the contents of which will be tailored to the targeted population and event location;
 - Community-based businesses may be prioritized for the contents of the "Thank You" packs, e.g., gift cards to local businesses and youth-specific contents such as sports-related items and technology-focused gifts
- Hosting a lottery program; or
- Other incentives for individuals who get vaccinated, tailored to the needs of the communities served.

Use of Evidence

The vaccine incentive program is being evaluated on an ongoing basis to determine the extent to which incentives were accompanied with an increase in vaccine doses. Key evaluation questions include:

- Did the number of people being vaccinated at Hennepin County Public Health (HCPH) events and partner clinics change during the incentive program?
- How did HCPH dose trends compare with other jurisdictions?
- Did the proportion of people being vaccinated in high SVI (social vulnerability index) zip codes change during the incentive program?
- Did the proportion of people identifying as Black, Indigenous or persons of color being vaccinated change during the incentive program?

Analysis is underway and ongoing to determine the extent to which the incentive program achieved the goals as stated. The evaluation is taking into consideration a number of confounding factors in the analysis, including controlling for or considering clinic characteristics and number of clinics; accounting for or explaining (when possible) external factors leading to more or less vaccinations (rise of Delta variant, external information or messaging about vaccines, \$100 gift cards offered by the State of Minnesota).

Performance measures for the vaccine incentive project are under development.

¹ *National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Framework for Equitable Allocation of COVID-19 Vaccine. National Academies Press; 2020.*

Food Insecurity

Funding amount: \$1,500,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.1, Household Assistance: Food Programs

Project Overview

The purpose of the Food Insecurity project is to provide financial support to organizations providing food access to communities impacted by COVID-19. Awards will be made through an application process. Organizations must meet the following criteria:

- Provide for the food insecurity needs of Hennepin County residents through the distribution of perishable and non-perishable food items including culturally specific food to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 public health crisis for people of color and low-income communities, since the organizations' services prioritize racial equity, inclusion, and culturally specific outreach.
- Be registered as "active/good standing" with the Minnesota Secretary of State.
- Have the capacity to serve Black, Indigenous, and people of color in a manner that considers culturally specific foods.
- Deliver healthy food items whenever possible.
- Be a trusted faith-based organization, community organization, educational institution or nonprofit.
- Be part of a longer-term strategy to address food insecurity issues in Hennepin County.

Use of evidence and performance measures for food insecurity project are under development.

Housing Focused Case Management

Funding amount: \$10,520,000

Project Expenditure Category: 3.11, Housing Support: Services for Unhoused Persons

Project Overview

The purpose of this project is to provide housing-focused case management services and direct assistance to persons transitioning to permanent housing. Case management is at the heart of housing focused shelter. The Street Voices of Change Shelter Bill of Rights includes the right to case management, and, in the County's previous re-visioning work, they directed that case management should be the number one funding priority. This project sustains the efforts that have expanded as a result of the pandemic operation to work with people in shelters and unsheltered settings year-round.

Case managers work with those who are chronically homeless, unsheltered, seniors, veterans, those with physical, mental and chemical health needs. While the primary focus is housing, assistance with benefits, accessing healthcare and all manner of personalized supports is provided.

Use of evidence and performance measures for housing focused case management are under development.

Employment and Training

Funding amount: \$3,580,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.7, Job Training Assistance (e.g., Sectoral job-training, Subsidized Employment, Employment Supports or Incentives)

Project Overview

Sustainable employment can make a difference in people's ability to pay for housing. The Employment and Training project is focused on people who are experiencing homelessness and want to work. In some cases, many are already working but with limited skills and education, earning an income still doesn't meet basic needs. Access to meaningful employment services with intentional focus on readiness, skills training and occupational learning will enhance a person's ability to not only find a job but keep a job.

In partnership with Hennepin County Workforce Development, these employment services will supplement the case management and housing related supports with targeted assistance to leverage existing employment readiness services within the community. The intentional incorporation of an employment focus will be targeted for individuals who already have some level of employment experience and are ready to grow their skills. Services under this project include, but are not limited to, employment coaching, skills development through training and education, and assistance with placement and retention.

Use of evidence and performance measures for the employment and training project are under development.

Educational Services

Funding amount: \$775,000

Project Expenditure Category: 3.3, Education Assistance: Academic Services

Project Overview

Hennepin County's Education Support Services provides support and resources to county-connected youth negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The department strives to address the racial and educational disparities faced by youth who receive county services, counterbalance the negative impacts of remote schooling due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and address the academic achievement gap of county-connected youth. Educational support services specialists provide support and resources to youth who received county services with a focus on student empowerment, skill building, and collaboration with families, schools and support professionals. The program strives to increase engagement, academic skills and educational outcomes for county-connected students in grades K-12, who are disproportionately youth of color.

A key component of the Education Support Services Program is academic tutoring provided by Huntington Learning Center. Around half of the active students in the program receive academic tutoring. Students are assessed when they enter the program and then again after receiving 30-50 hours of tutoring. Average Word Attack Level at the initial test is 38% below grade level. Average retest results have students less than 7% below grade level.

Huntington Learning Center tutors have degrees from four-year colleges, plus either state or Huntington certification. Centers are accredited by either Middle States Association or Western Association of Schools and Colleges—the same organizations that accredit the vast majority of U.S. schools.

Use of Evidence

In the past two decades there have been studies and empirical reviews of the efficacy of before-school, after-school or summer programs that include some type of academic support. Although the reviews vary in their conclusions regarding academics, the most reliable reviews show that, on average, academic tutoring programs have positive impacts on important academic, social, and emotional outcomes of at-risk youth.¹

Performance measures for educational services project are under development.

¹ *Bodilly & Beckett, 2005; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Crank, Crank, & Christensen, 2003; Flynn, Marquis, Paquet, Peeke & Aubry, 2012; Harper & Schmidt, 2012; Hock, Pulvers, Deshler & Schumaker, 2001; Hollister, 2003; Lauer et al., 2006; Leeker, 2017; Little & Harris, 2003; Ritter, Barnette, Denny & Albin, 2009; Woodland, 2008*

Gun Violence Prevention

Funding amount: \$5,000,000

Project Expenditure Category: 3.16, Social Determinants of Health/Community Violence Interventions

Project Overview

The vast majority of gun violence within the County is happening in the City of Minneapolis, where there was a 126% increase in reported gun shots from 2020 to 2021. Black and African American residents of Hennepin County are disproportionately impacted by gun violence, with firearm-related deaths rates that are more than twice that of white residents. Hennepin County is committed to the health and safety of its residents and to using a holistic approach to reduce gun violence, by identifying drivers of the violence, addressing risk and protective factors, adopting evidence-based policies and programs, and ensuring adoption of effective strategies that improve outcomes in key communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence, including communities of color.

The short-term goals of the Gun Violence Prevention program include the following:

- Support “on the street” violence interruption/intervention services and supportive services through trusted community providers.
- Implement trauma-focused services and programming for clients who are Black, Indigenous or persons of color in Adult Probation.
- Increase resources supporting the investigations of violent crime cases.
- Build capacity through a competitive bid process for community violence intervention programs, neighborhood revitalization efforts, youth programming and mentoring, and services and restorative practices for those experiencing trauma.
- Identify and focus on services and supports that address the root causes of violence (poverty, access to services, education, employment).

Access to benefits and services under this program are intentionally directed at communities most at risk of gun violence including communities of color. Requests for Application for Services under the program intentionally seek community-based organizations equipped to improve outcomes for communities impacted by gun violence, including organizations that are uniquely situated to serve communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, as well as Black and African American communities that are disproportionately impacted by gun violence.

Use of evidence and performance measures for gun violence prevention project are under development.

COVID-19 Related Court Backlog

Funding amount: \$990,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.4, Household Assistance: Internet Access Programs

Project Overview

This project aims to support costs, operations and services for the Public Defender's Office to provide adequate staffing and resources to address the COVID-related court backlog. During the COVID-19 public health emergency, the Fourth Judicial District operated at a significantly reduced capacity with few in-person proceedings, and that significantly impacted the government's ability to effectively administer justice-related services and to process these cases in a fair and efficient manner. To address the backlog, the Fourth Judicial District will assign additional judicial officers to criminal cases and add more court calendars. This, in turn, will stretch the resources of the Public Defender's Office, whose caseloads swelled during the pandemic, as cases continued to be charged but could not advance toward resolution. The Public Defender's Office will need additional staffing on an interim basis to meet the demands of the additional court calendars and increased court appearances to process the backlog of cases.

A large percentage of the clients represented by the Public Defender's Office are Black, Indigenous or people of color. Increased staffing, which ensures that clients have attorneys adequately prepared to handle their matters in a timely manner, reduces disparities in the justice system. A judge appoints public defenders to juveniles and to adults that are unable to afford a private attorney. Access to the services (legal representation) provided under this program is limited.

Use of evidence and performance measures for COVID-19 Related Court Backlog project are under development.

Digital Divide

Funding amount: \$10,000,000

Project Expenditure Category: 2.4, Household Assistance: Internet Access Programs

Project Overview

The “Connecting Hennepin” initiative aims to eliminate the digital divide in Hennepin County. This funding continues the most successful parts of the initiative and will leverage the county’s fiber-optic infrastructure on behalf of the community to resolve broadband gaps. Staff will be assigned to coordinate with federal, state, and local government partners, internet service providers, and community organizations to develop and implement a digital equity plan for Hennepin County. Programmatic work includes an all-of-the-above approach, including:

- Office and digital equity plan
- Connectivity
- Digital literacy and navigation
- Devices
- Community-based digital adoption/navigation programs
- Community engagement and coalition building
- Metrics and evaluation

Data from the American Community Survey and the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development, among other sources, show geographic, racial and economic disparities in digital equity. Households that are Black, Indigenous, Hispanic or other people of color are less likely to own PCs and have home broadband. There are geographic, racial, housing and economic disparities in access to technology, which, among other effects, causes an inherent disparity in the awareness of new public programs. To overcome these barriers, we plan to invest SLFRF funds in community engagement, public and nonprofit partners and multimedia communications to ensure that all residents in need are aware of and able to engage with our programs. The goal is to ensure universal access across Hennepin County to quality, affordable broadband choices, technology tools and equipment and training and digital literacy. Use of evidence and performance measures for the digital divide project are under development.



Hennepin County

300 South 6th Street
Minneapolis MN 55487

hennepin.us