

Middlesex County, NJ
Recovery Plan

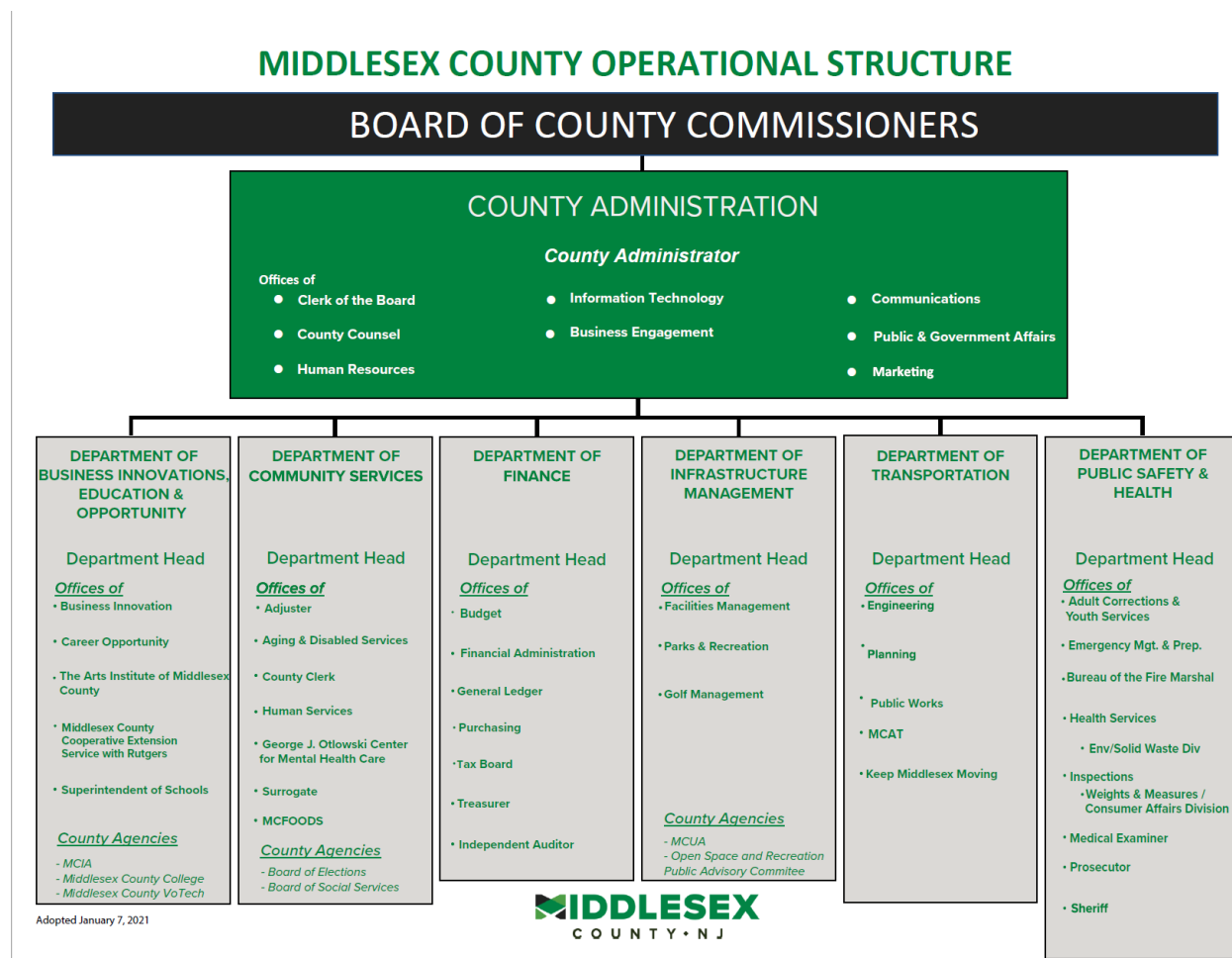
**State and Local Fiscal Recovery
Funds**

August 2021 Report

The County of Middlesex New Jersey (“County”) is pleased and fortunate to have been awarded more than \$161M, in necessary State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (“Funds”) to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus far, the County has received the first allotment of those funds, in the amount of \$80,129,310.50.

As with all other counties in the United States, Middlesex County has been adversely impacted by the current health crisis. As such, the County is judiciously approaching the utilization of these critical Funds. The County will be leveraging its existing “Strategic Leadership Team” (“Team”) to research and arrive at well-calculated recommendations to County officials on the usage of the Funds for the greatest benefit of the County and its constituents.

The aforementioned Team is comprised of all County department leaders, including the office of information technology, legal counsel, human resources, communications, marketing, and public & government affairs. This group will provide valuable input to the deliberations regarding the management and disbursement of such Funds (see Middlesex County organizational chart below).



Additionally, the County's Board of Commissioners are also tasked with the development of the strategic plan along with the County's Utility Authority and Improvement Authority (MCIA).

Outreach to various community groups, elected officials, and the public has already started to solicit recommendations from the broadest universe of constituents on how to leverage the Funds. Moreover, the Team has engaged and are currently communicating with the private sector, and separately the County's public College and Vocational Schools are working on a number of efforts that are underway (e.g., telemedicine in the health care sector).

The County's main objective, and biggest challenge, is to ensure that the broadest universe of individuals, including County staff, community groups and the public, are able to voice their ideas and are represented in the process applying the Funds for the greatest benefit of the County.

As we continue to identify areas of targeted expenditures for the use of the Funds in the Public Health category, the following are examples, but not limited to, of what we are evaluating:

- 1. Salaries of County staff (public safety, public health, health care, human services) who have been working in response to the pandemic. For example, Health Office staff members who worked on testing, monitoring and contact tracing. Others worked on vaccinations programs and operations, including the management of supplies, equipment, facilities, administrative expenses, and the call center.**
- 2. County staff also worked on the emergency medical response to the pandemic, including transportation expenses, supplies and equipment.**
- 3. The staff at the County's Office of Sheriff manned testing facilities, vaccination sites, and aided in other public safety related efforts in response to the pandemic.**
- 4. Communications and marketing expenses to publicly promote the availability of COVID testing and vaccinations.**
- 5. Ventilation improvements in congregate settings, public health facilities, or other public facilities.**
- 6. Purchase of PPE and disinfection supplies for facilities and public areas.**
- 7. Capital investments towards public facilities such as hospitals and health clinics.**
- 8. Enhanced services that address the mental health needs of the community exacerbated by the pandemic.**
- 9. Expand the use of telehealth services to assist our most vulnerable populations.**

The County utilized CARES Act funds for two Small Business Emergency Grant programs aiding businesses employing less than 50 employees most impacted by the pandemic. More than \$25M was distributed to over 1,000 businesses and the County is currently evaluating the need to assist these small businesses further with SLFRF funds.

The County is examining the potential financial support needed for small businesses to adopt safer operating procedures (e.g., enhanced cleaning methods, barriers and partitions, alterations to the facility for social distancing); to withstand periods of closure (considering the Delta variant and the fall and winter upon us), and determining other financial hardships driven by the pandemic (e.g., loss of revenue). The County is also evaluating new ways to help transform business community to be more resilient during events like the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent the disruption of services should the pandemic continue longer than anticipated, and/or in the event there are future emergency situations/pandemics.

The County intends to investigate the disproportional impact that COVID-19 has had on its communities, to offer proper attention in the various areas of with the greatest need. For example, housing instability and service needs; childcare and child welfare services; access to health services; education; lead paint remediation; expanded use of telehealth in the impacted communities, etc. The County's Office of Public and Government Affairs, in conjunction with the Finance Office and Information Technology Office, are spearheading collaborative efforts to conduct studies regarding these issues, supported by the Strategic Leadership Team.

The County anticipates utilizing SLFRF funds for a variety of improvements to the existing infrastructure including water and sewer. There is an opportunity to improve and repair wastewater treatment plants; improve resilience of infrastructure to severe weather conditions; protect waterbodies from pollution; improve flood control; ensure compliance with federal and state environmental safety requirements; improve and address those conditions that causes the most risk to human health, etc.

Additionally, the County seeks to address the insufficient broadband capabilities across the County, but in particular, identifying the disparities for those unserved and underserved households who do not have adequate broadband capabilities or access. This inadequacy can ultimately impact their connection to the internet and adversely affect the education of children.

The pandemic has severely impacted Middlesex County, with millions of dollars lost in revenue from a variety of areas. For example, the lack of real estate transactions, decreased motor vehicles fees, sheriff's revenue, Adult Correction Center revenue, reimbursement of elections expenses from municipalities, etc. It is anticipated that the County will employ SLFRF funds towards revenue lost during the past 18 months, and future periods of budget cycles. The reimbursement of loss revenue will contribute directly to our annual capital improvement program in future years.

Lastly, the County has successfully received Emergency Rental Assistance Program ("ERA" or "Program") funding, \$24M from ERA 1 and \$28M from ERA 2. It has engaged the services of an outside consultant to assist in the development, management and oversight of the Program and has enlisted a digital web portal provider to enable applications to be processed and managed electronically to facilitate payments, track important data and to maintain a robust audit trail. Multiple community-based organizations have also been engaged to provide case managers to assist applicants and landlords in completing their applications, determining eligibility, and providing recommendations on rental and utility assistance payments to County officials. To date, the County has distributed more than \$1,963,046.55 in rental and utility assistance to more than 172 applicants.

While there have been no infrastructure projects identified thus far, when identified, the County will utilize appropriate labor practices to maximize employment opportunities and wages and other benefits for workers.

For future infrastructure projects utilizing SLFRF funds, vendors must comply with the following 'workforce' related requirements by state statutes:

- EEO/Affirmative Action compliance
- Americans with Disabilities Act
- NJ Anti-Discrimination Provisions
- Prevailing Wage (when applicable)
- Public Works Contractor Registration

In conclusion, the County is deeply committed to addressing the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on low-income and marginalized communities. The County will continue examine and assess this issue closely and ensure that SLFRF funds are utilized to address the greatest areas of impact identified from this investigation.