

Nueces County Initial Recovery Plan Performance Report

American Rescue Plan

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds

August 31, 2021



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General Overview

I. Executive Summary

On May 19, 2021, Nueces County, Texas (County) received 50% of its allocation (\$35,185,681.00) from the United States Department of the Treasury (Treasury) under the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (CSLFRF). The County is taking a methodical, forward-thinking approach by creating a Strategic Fiscal Recovery Plan that is designed to maximize the impact of ARP funds on its COVID-19 economic recovery. This Plan supports the County's ongoing efforts to stabilize their communities, stimulate economic growth, and enable an inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The **Strategic Fiscal Recovery Plan** describes the key proactive steps that County leaders can take to create a deliberately planned and comprehensive spending framework. This strategic plan is divided into three phases:

- **Internal Needs Assessment:** Nueces County incurred large deficits in 2020. To remedy this, an internal needs assessment was conducted by meeting with County leaders to identify funding priorities for the use of Fiscal Recovery Funds. The County's priorities will be organized into a preliminary spending framework and used to guide engagement with community stakeholders.
- **Community Engagement:** County leaders recognize the importance of engaging with the community to collect feedback on the identified funding priorities and to explore how the funding can best align with local priorities. Nueces County aims to pursue community engagement in a variety of ways, including posting an online survey, meeting with local government officials and business and nonprofit leaders, holding public workshops, and hosting a community event. Feedback gathered during these events will help guide the development of an equitable and informed spending framework.
- **Final Eligibility and Compliance Review:** The projects identified by County leaders and community stakeholders will be reviewed to assess whether they meet the eligibility standards set forth in the FRF reporting and compliance guidance provided by Treasury.

II. Uses of Funds

This Initial Recovery Plan covers the period ending July 31, 2021. Therefore, this document includes high-level descriptions of the proposed uses based on conversations and meetings to date that have been held with County Commissioners Court and other County leadership as part of the **Initial Needs Assessment**. A more specific, detailed plan will be shared with the Treasury after completion of the next two phases that involve community engagement and a final vote by the County's governing body, the Commissioners Court. In preliminary discussions regarding funding priorities, it is the intent of the County to utilize CSLFRF under all eligible expenditure categories.



- **Public Health/Negative Economic Impacts:** The County continues to support the public health response to COVID-19, especially as the number of deaths and hospitalizations increase locally. With the recent surge, it is expected that the County will be performing vaccinations, including booster doses, for the foreseeable future. Medical staffing has been a particular challenge locally, as it has been an issue nationwide.
- **Revenue Replacement:** Recovering lost revenue is of particular interest to the Commissioners Court as the pandemic continues to affect the housing market and tourism in the area; this can certainly assist the County in temporarily offsetting some general government services costs so that the focus can remain on the COVID-19 response. Adding staff to our County and District Attorney offices can greatly assist in providing much needed legal services to minimize any backlog of cases caused by the inability to conduct civil and criminal trials due to the pandemic.
- **Premium Pay:** The County Commissioners Court recognizes the hard work and dedication of its employees throughout this unprecedented time. These employees continue to support the community as the public health emergency continues. The Court is currently working to identify eligible employees.
- **Services to Disproportionally Impacted Communities:** Implementing mental health programs to alleviate the current burden in both the justice system and law enforcement/jail agencies is an additional priority. The County Jail frequently experiences overcrowding, which becomes a public health hazard as well, so the County is seeking jail diversion options for those who need mental health services rather than incarceration. Risk assessment staff in the County Jail can also greatly reduce the jail population issue. Due to the diverse population of the County, social determinants of health are another potential priority for the final recovery plan.
- **Water, Sewer, and Broadband Infrastructure:** The County Commissioners Court also has a great interest in necessary investments to water and sewer infrastructure. Recent rain events have highlighted the increased needs for such improvements and the County has been awarded grant funds to conduct a comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional drainage/hydrology study that will assist in identifying priority projects. Broadband infrastructure is also a priority as the County has many underserved areas, as evidenced by recent rain events and the need for internet access when remote learning began.
- **Administrative:** A disaster recovery consulting firm has been engaged to support the County's efforts in for initial planning, assistance with community engagement, and development of the **Strategic Fiscal Recovery Plan**. Once the plan is finalized, the County intends to release a solicitation for competitive bids for program management and performance reporting to assist the County in the completion of the projects included in the final recovery plan. In addition, the County Auditor will be seeking a third-party certified accountant/accounting firm to ensure compliance and proper management of CSLFRF.



III. Promoting Equitable Outcomes

The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating to all, but it has not impacted Nueces County residents equally. Instead, it has exacerbated long-standing inequities. This is evidenced in the April 2021 report conducted by the Texas Health Institute titled “Advancing Health Equity in Nueces County: Amid and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic” (Health Equity report). With this equity framework, the County will ensure an equity lens is applied to investments made possible by CSLFRF. The availability of these funds provides an unprecedented opportunity to invest in and improve broader social, economic and health circumstances across the County, particularly for those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. In doing so, County leaders will work to ensure the equitable distribution of funds and opportunities across communities and organizations. The need for more equitable distribution of funds was a recurring theme voiced by several stakeholders within the Health Equity report.

IV. Community Engagement

The County serves a diverse population, and therefore it is in the best interest of the citizens to ensure that all community input activities are performed in an inclusive and mindful manner and capture the needs of all populations served. Such engagement requires extensive planning and translation, which is currently being developed at the submission of this initial recovery plan. As part of the second phase of the Strategic Fiscal Recovery Plan, the County is adopting a multifaceted approach to direct community engagement that will include an online survey, meetings with local government officials, businesses, and nonprofits, public workshops, and a local community event. This approach will allow a broad reach into the community while building intercommunity partnerships to allow current and future recovery needs to be addressed.

V. Labor Practices

Whenever federal funds are involved in construction projects, it is standard practice for the County to incorporate 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Appendix II to Part 200, which includes, but is not limited to, the Davis-Bacon Act, Contract Work Hours and Safety Standards Act, Clean Air Act, and Byrd Anti-Lobbying Amendment. The inclusion of such contract provisions in the County’s competitive bid documents promote effective and efficient delivery of high-quality construction projects while also supporting the economic recovery through strong employment opportunities for workers.



VI. Use of Evidence

The County has invested time, materials, effort, and dollars in recent years to identify significant gaps in services and to also identify certain needs that had not been previously addressed. In September 2020, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute released the “Nueces County Comprehensive Behavioral Health Community Needs Assessment” (Meadows Foundation report). The report emphasized the need for improvement in the jail diversion workflow, which is being considered as a proposed use for ARP funds. Such improvements would have a variety of benefits such as providing much needed mental health services to those who need it, reducing rapidly growing jail population, and alleviating the backlog within the criminal justice system. In April 2021, as previously mentioned, the Texas Health Institute completed the Health Equity report. This report revealed the fact that the pandemic has left low-income and communities of color facing a disproportionate burden of disease, death, and loss. Finally, in May 2021, the County finalized the Capital Improvement Plan, which outlines a five (5) year plan of methodically selected projects that must be completed for the betterment of the community.

VII. Table of Expenses by Expenditure Category

Expenditure Category		Vendor	Cumulative Expenditures to Date (\$)	Amount Spent Since Last Recovery Plan
1	7.2 Evaluation and Data Analysis	Hagerty Consulting	\$VERIFYING AMOUNT	\$0

Project Overview

To support the County’s efforts, the County has enlisted the assistance of Hagerty Consulting, an emergency management consulting firm. Hagerty Consulting was procured through competitive bid for disaster recovery management. A subsequent work authorization was issued under said contract for initial planning, assistance with community engagement, and development of a strategic framework for the use of funds for a not-to-exceed amount of \$174,951.00. This is the only expense the County has obligated as of July 31, 2021.

Project Inventory

As of July 31, 2021, the County has not made final determinations on intended or proposed projects under CSLFRF. This will be updated upon final adoption of a strategic framework/plan adopted by the County Commissioners Court.



Performance Report

A strategic approach will be embedded throughout the lifecycle of each ARP-funded project and across the full ARP program as follows:

- **Capacity Building:** Identify resources to provide training and technical assistance on program development to support ARP working groups, relevant department staff, and project administrators.
- **Project Development:** All project proposals will incorporate responses received during Phase 2: Community Engagement.
- **Project Selection:** After Phase 3 completion, the County Commissioners Court will be tasked with voting on the funding priorities.
- **Project Monitoring & Evaluation:** Once funding priorities are identified, the County will seek a consultant(s)/consulting firm(s) for related project/program management to ensure consistency with the original project intent and identify opportunities for improvement.
- **Program Evaluation & Accountability:** Program-wide financial analyses will be conducted by the County Auditor and/or related outside auditing firm(s) to determine ARP funding impact on targeted populations and geographies, where feasible. Reporting on investment relative to social vulnerability, reporting on investment by race, ethnicity, gender, and/or other specific populations where available, and/or other program-level equity analyses will be provided to Commissioners Court as information is made available.

Performance Indicators and Programmatic Data

The County will employ the following strategies when developing, selecting, and delivering ARP programs.

- Include community representatives of groups disproportionately impacted by the pandemic throughout program development, delivery, and evaluation.
- Target resources and strategies to minimize incremental burdens on groups most affected by the pandemic while maximizing their access to relief.
- Evaluate the performance of projects through defined metrics and provide opportunities for reflection, creating space for continual improvement throughout implementation.
- Publish transparent program results via a publicly available website and other outlets, ensuring performance information reaches disproportionately impacted groups.