

Cobb County  
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)  
**Investment Guidance Report**

May 2022

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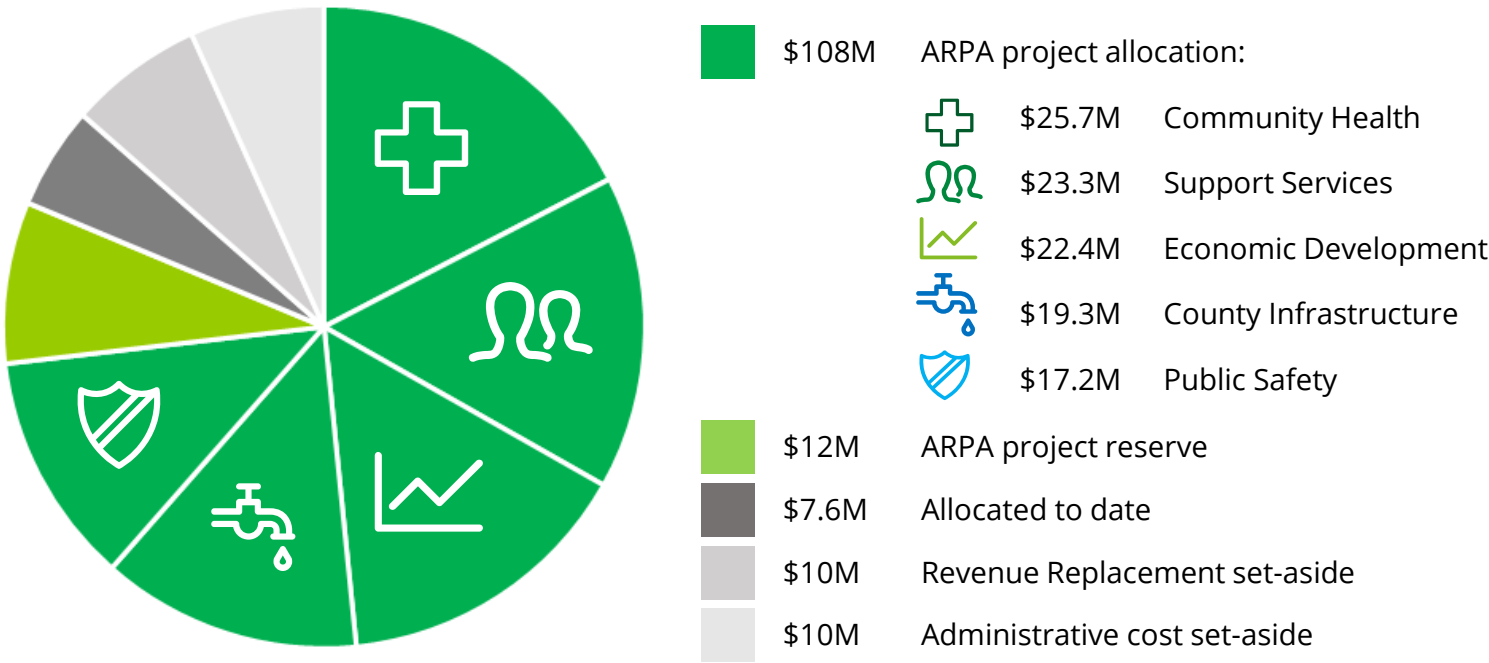


# Executive Summary

The federal government passed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) in March 2021. It established the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and provided \$350B in funding for state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments to bolster their responses to the COVID-19 emergency and its economic impacts. ARPA emphasizes that funding should be allocated with equity, transparency, and engagement in mind.

Cobb County was awarded \$147.6M in ARPA funding. Multiple initial investments were made in the areas of food security and court operations. From November 2021 to March 2022, the County took steps to engage the community and prioritize its remaining \$140M of ARPA funds. Based on that work, the Board of Commissioners has approved the following investment guidance, detailed in this report:

## ARPA Investment Guidance



In the next phase of work, the County will establish a public process to submit ARPA project proposals in line with this investment guidance approved by the Board of Commissioners. The principles of financial continuity, impact, leverage, equity, transparency, and engagement will inform that process. The County will evaluate proposals and make funding recommendations to the Board of Commissioners. It is anticipated that project funding decisions will be made beginning in the Summer of 2022.

More information on Cobb County's ARPA process and next steps is available at [www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA).

# Introduction & Context

The United States detected its first COVID-19 case on January 20, 2020. Since that date, the country has experienced more than 985,800 deaths, 80.4 million COVID-19 infections,<sup>1</sup> and a peak unemployment of 14.7% in April 2020 - the highest unemployment rate seen since the late 1940s.<sup>2</sup>

The first case of COVID-19 in Cobb County was detected on March 7, 2020.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the pandemic has adversely impacted county businesses, families, organizations, and government services. The County has recorded more than 174,000 infections from COVID-19 and 1,750 confirmed deaths.<sup>4</sup>



**174,000**  
infections

**1,776**  
confirmed  
deaths

**Figure 1.** COVID-19-related statistics for Cobb County

## Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)

As a response to the pandemic, the federal government provided cities and counties with COVID-19 stimulus recovery funds. Cobb County received \$132M in immediate relief funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). The County directed this funding towards immediate needs, including assistance to small businesses and non-profit programs, COVID mitigation and safety programs, school assistance programs, assistance for local municipalities, housing and rental assistance programs, food assistance programs, public health measures, and job training.

<sup>1</sup> The New York Times, "Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count," <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>, April 14, 2022

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate [UNRATE], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/UNRATE>, retrieved April 11, 2022

<sup>3</sup> Georgia Department of Public Health, "New Cases of COVID-19 Identified in Georgia," <https://dph.georgia.gov/press-releases/2020-03-07/new-cases-covid-19-identified-georgia>, March 7, 2020

<sup>4</sup> The New York Times, "Coronavirus in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count," <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/cobb-georgia-covid-cases.html>, April 14, 2022

# Introduction & Context

## American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)

In March 2021, the federal government passed another COVID-19 stimulus package, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). ARPA included financial assistance for state, local and Tribal governments to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, promote equitable economic recovery, and accelerate infrastructure improvements. ARPA included specific guidance on how communities should prioritize impacted, disproportionately impacted, and socially disadvantaged and/or vulnerable populations. U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) guidelines also require the use of ARPA funds in ways that reflect community priorities and promote transparency.

Cobb County has been allocated \$147.6M in relief and recovery funding through ARPA. This amount was determined based on a Treasury funding formula that considered population, unemployment, and poverty levels. The County has until December 31, 2024 to commit the funding and December 31, 2026 to spend the funding. Cities within Cobb County and the school system also received allocations of ARPA funding.

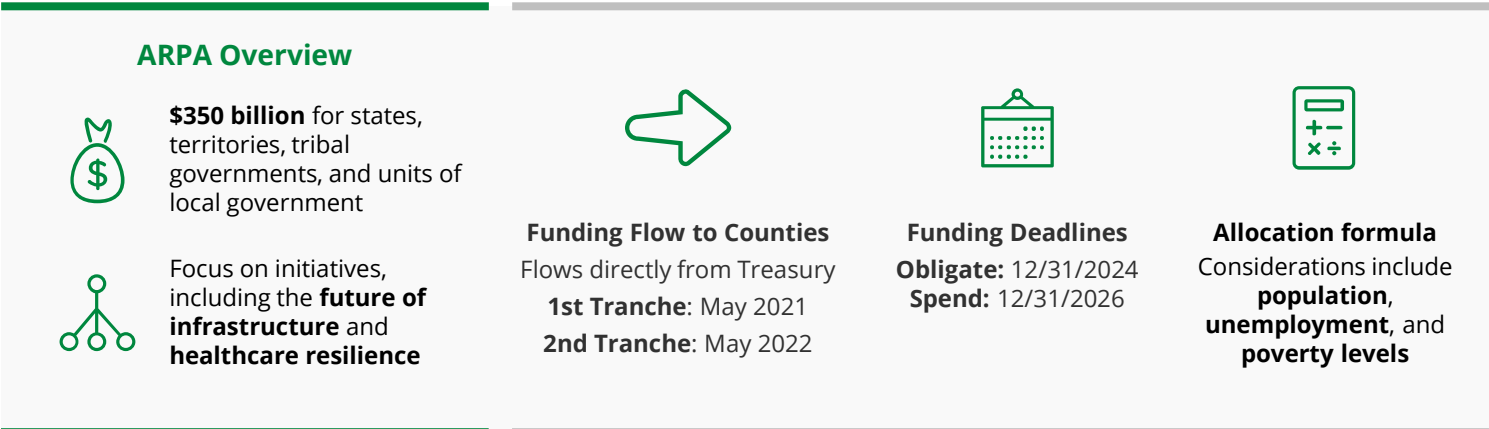


Figure 2. ARPA overview



Figure 3. ARPA-eligible spending areas

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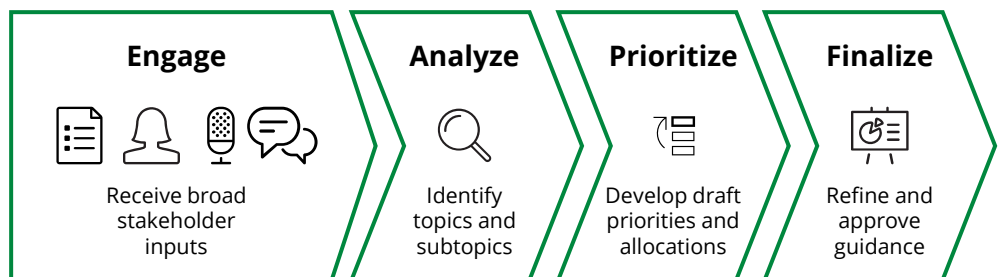
# Introduction & Context

This report is intended to provide residents with an overview of the County's planned ARPA investment approach and the process taken to develop investment guidance for the benefit of the community. It first describes how the County engaged the community, identified areas of need, and allocated funding in specific investment areas. It then lays out the path that the County will take over the coming months to identify specific projects that can aid an equitable recovery and provide lasting benefits to the community. Deloitte Consulting has been engaged to assist the County to develop and implement its ARPA investment approach.

More information on the County's ARPA process can be found at [www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA).

# ARPA Investment Guidance Development Process

The County used a multi-step process to engage a broad range of stakeholders, analyze the needs that were identified, prioritize the resulting areas of need, and finalize investment guidance through a formal vote of the Board of Commissioners. These steps are detailed further in this section.



**Figure 4.** Cobb County ARPA investment guidance development process

## Engage

The ARPA legislation emphasizes that local governments should include a broad set of perspectives when developing investment decisions.<sup>5</sup> This input is required for ARPA investments to effectively target the areas of need in the community and help with an equitable recovery from the pandemic. The first step that the County took to develop its investment guidance was to engage the public to identify the specific areas of need of Cobb residents. This stakeholder engagement included a community needs survey, one-on-one interviews, focus groups, and listening sessions. In total, the County heard from nearly 3,000 stakeholders through these engagement activities.



### Community Needs Survey

The County conducted a survey in November 2021 to gather input from a broad group of residents and organizations on needs created by the pandemic and potential investments. The survey was offered in English and Spanish and made available to the public online and through hard copies that were distributed at County facilities.

<sup>5</sup> Department of the Treasury, "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Final Rule," <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Final-Rule.pdf>, p. 189

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# ARPA Investment Guidance Development Process

The County raised awareness of the survey and encouraged participation by residents and organizations through press releases, social media, flyers handed out at community events and county facilities, and through County newsletters. This information was also shared through several local media channels during the survey period.

The County received more than 2600 survey responses in total. Responses were received from each part of Cobb County. The results were organized and analyzed to identify common themes.



## *One-on-one Interviews*

One-on-one interviews were conducted with County leaders to understand their perspectives on the impacts from COVID-19 on the community, their experiences with the prior allocation of CARES Act funding, and the areas of need to target with ARPA funds. Interviews were also conducted with County agency directors to learn more about how, and to what extent, the County's operational functions and capacity were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was consolidated with other stakeholder engagement feedback.



## *Focus Groups*

The County facilitated focus groups with approximately 80 community leaders from non-profit, business, public safety, public health, economic development, social services, and legislative sectors. Many of these leaders work for and work with organizations that are on the front lines of Cobb County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they shared their insights on gaps and challenges created by the pandemic, as well as how ARPA dollars could be allocated for the community's benefit.



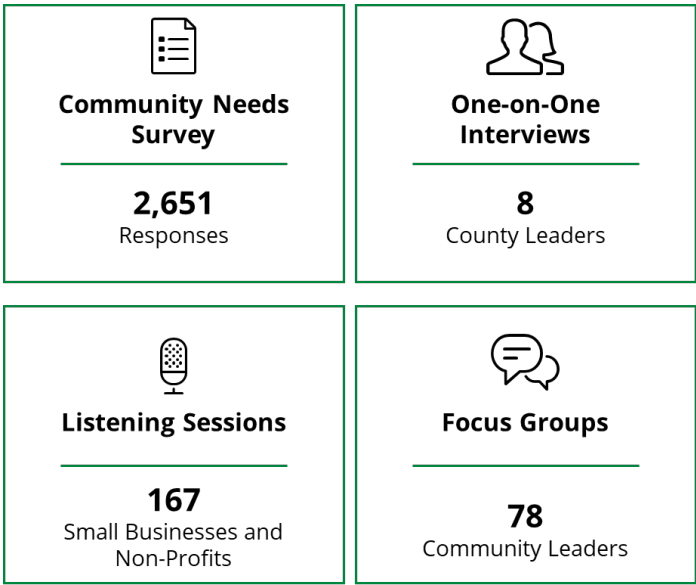
## *Listening Sessions*

To gather non-profit and small business perspectives in the County's stakeholder engagement process, the County held a series of listening sessions with small business and non-profit leaders. The County used these listening sessions to provide an overview of ARPA, gather feedback on areas of need and potential investments, and answer participants' questions about ARPA and the County's process for developing its ARPA investment guidance.

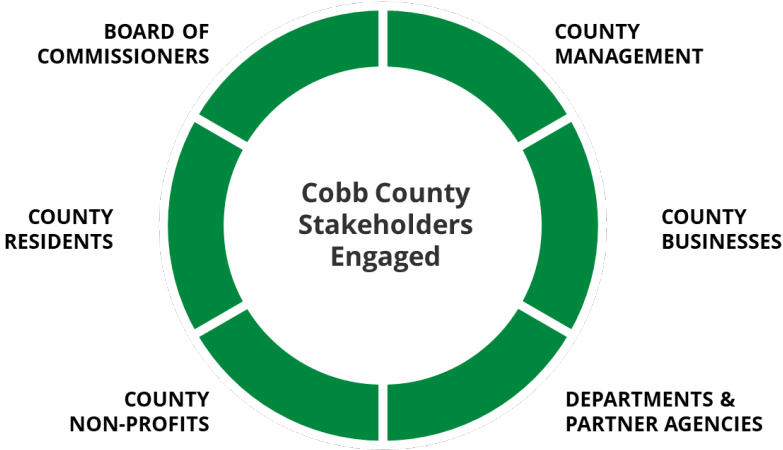
The County hosted two listening sessions for the small business community and two sessions for non-profits. A total of 167 small businesses and non-profit representatives participated in the four events. The County conducted outreach through a variety of communications channels to notify small business and non-profit leaders about these listening sessions and encourage their participation.



# ARPA Investment Guidance Development Process



**Figure 5.** Stakeholder engagement summary








**Figure 6.** Stakeholder types engaged throughout the process

## Analyze

At the conclusion of these stakeholder engagement efforts, the County took the feedback received and analyzed it to identify the common themes and specific areas of need that were raised by participants. A total of 21 discrete areas of need were identified. These are discussed in more detail below. Each of these 21 subtopics aligned within the priority areas of Community Health, Support Services, Economic Development, County Infrastructure, and Public Safety.

Figure 7 outlines the priority areas and subtopics resulting from this analysis.

# ARPA Investment Guidance Development Process

	<b>COMMUNITY HEALTH</b>	Healthcare Capacity	COVID-19 Mitigation	Public Health Disparities	Mental Health	Substance Abuse
	<b>SUPPORT SERVICES</b>	Rental & Mortgage Assistance	Homelessness	Food Security	Affordable Housing	
	<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT</b>	Workforce Development	Small & Minority-Owned Business	Employee Retention	Hospitality & Tourism	
	<b>COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	County Facilities	Stormwater	Transportation	Broadband & Digital Equity	
	<b>PUBLIC SAFETY</b>	Court Backlog	Public Safety Hiring, Retention & Staffing	First Response	Mental Health Response	

**Figure 7.** Topics and subtopics resulting from analysis

## Prioritize

The County then invited a group of community representatives from the non-profit, business and government sectors to come together to review information gathered on the areas of need, evaluate trade-offs, and make recommendations for the County to allocate its ARPA funding between the various subtopics. The community leaders also identified several investment principles to guide future phases of the process that will help to identify projects that align with each of the funding areas.

## Finalize

The proposed ARPA investment principles and guidance resulting from this analysis was socialized with the Board of Commissioners in March 2020. A work session in late March was conducted with the Board to review the process and the recommendations arising from that work. The investment principles and guidance were then approved by the Board of Commissioners in April 2022.

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# ARPA Investment Guidance

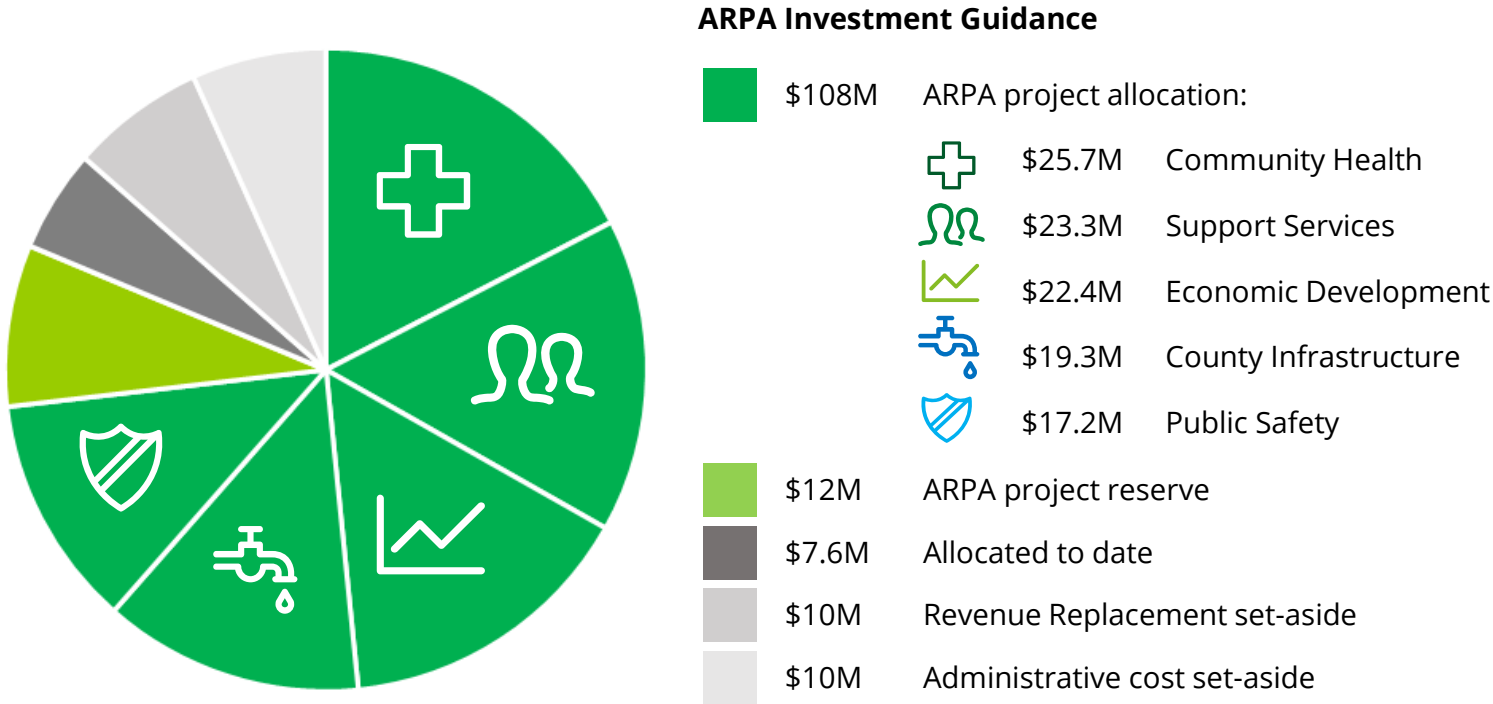
The investment guidance in this report reflects the stakeholder engagement efforts, the focus areas of equity, transparency, and community engagement that are emphasized in the ARPA regulations, and the specific allowable expenses to which ARPA funds can be applied.<sup>6</sup> It includes specific allocations for each priority area and subtopic and sets aside some funds for future investment.

After the County received the first tranche of ARPA dollars, County Leaders made multiple short-term investments in the areas of food insecurity and Court operations. These allocations accounted for \$7.6M of the County's ARPA funds. The investment guidance is as follows:

- **\$108M** for yet-to-be-identified projects in the **five priority areas**:
  - **Community Health – \$25.7M** to enhance mental, physical, and behavioral healthcare services
  - **Support Services – \$23.3M** to enhance programming and services for vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community
  - **Economic Development – \$22.4M** to aid economic recovery through the business sector and workforce investments
  - **County Infrastructure – \$19.3M** to enhance its physical and/or structural capacity to meet operational responsibilities
  - **Public Safety – \$17.2M** to assist in keeping Cobb County residents safe
- **\$12M** to be **reserved** for future allocation to County priorities
- **\$10M** to **replace lost revenue** and fund general county operations
- **\$10M** to cover **administrative** costs associated with project development and implementation
- **\$7.6M allocated-to-date** on ARPA-eligible spending

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds: Overview of the Final Rule," <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Final-Rule-Overview.pdf>, January 2022

# ARPA Investment Guidance



**Figure 8.** Visual breakdown of Cobb County ARPA investment guidance.

The following pages provide more information on how the County will invest in each of the five priority areas to address the 21 subtopics identified through the stakeholder engagement process.

In the coming weeks and months, there will be a public process to gather ARPA-eligible project ideas that will be evaluated for eligibility and alignment with the investment principles and guidance. More details are available on Cobb County’s website at [www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA).

# ARPA Investment Guidance



## COMMUNITY HEALTH – \$25.7M

The County will make investments in Community Health initiatives to enhance mental, physical, and behavioral healthcare services. The figure below shows how this allocation will be invested to address five Community Health subtopics.

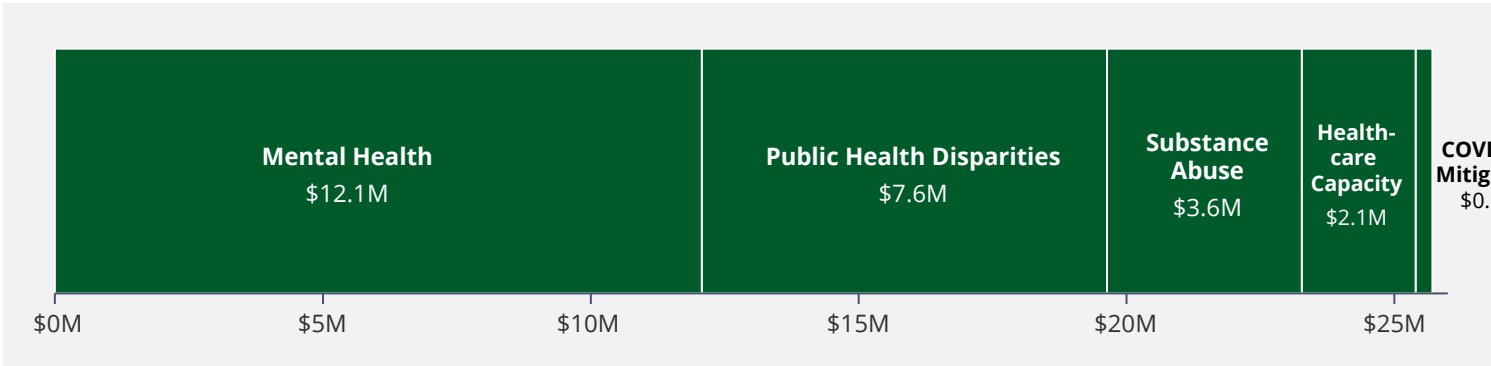


Figure 9. Community Health ARPA allocations

Mental Health	\$12,072,000	Funding that addresses mental health and the provision of mental health services for the public, including services for seniors and youth
Public Health Disparities	\$7,564,000	Funding that addresses public health particularly for underserved communities
Substance Abuse	\$3,637,000	Funding that addresses substance abuse prevention, rehabilitation, and/or community education
Healthcare Capacity	\$2,128,000	Funding that addresses access and availability of healthcare
COVID-19 Mitigation	\$310,000	Funding for ongoing efforts to reduce transmission of COVID-19
Total	\$25,711,000	

# ARPA Investment Guidance



## SUPPORT SERVICES – \$23.3M

The County will make investments in Support Services to enhance programming and services for vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community. The figure below shows how this allocation will be invested to address four Support Services subtopics.

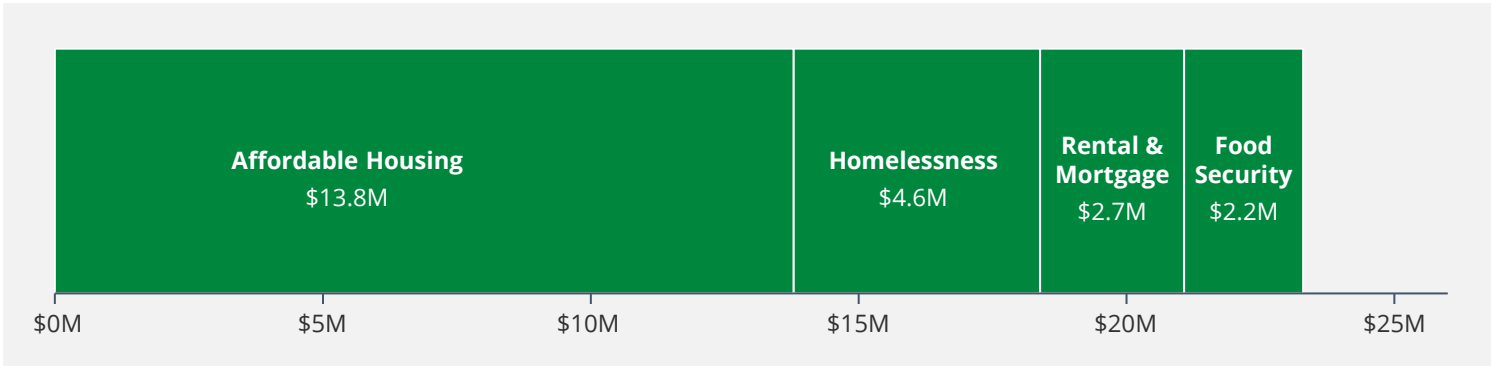


Figure 10. Support Services ARPA allocations

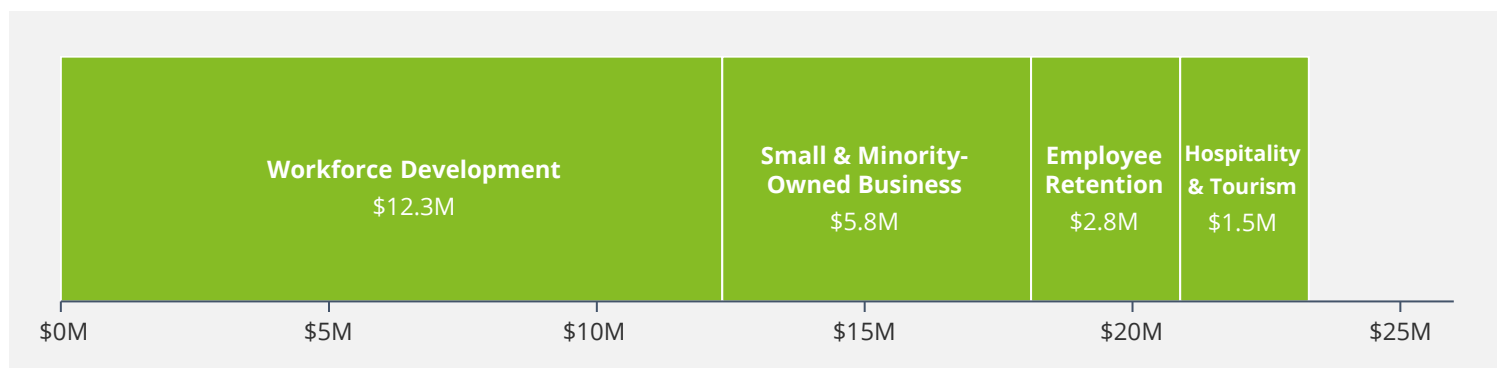
Affordable Housing	\$13,787,000	Funding that addresses the supply and availability of affordable housing in Cobb County
Homelessness	\$4,604,000	Funding that addresses services for the homeless population and underlying factors contributing to housing insecurity
Rental & Mortgage	\$2,683,000	Funding to address either targeted rental or mortgage assistance
Food Security	\$2,225,000	Funding to provide food options for vulnerable residents
Total	\$23,299,000	

# ARPA Investment Guidance



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – \$22.4M

The County will make investments in Economic Development to aid economic recovery through the business sector and workforce opportunities. The figure below shows how this allocation will be invested to address four Economic Development subtopics.



**Figure 11.** Economic Development ARPA allocations

<b>Workforce Development</b>	\$12,343,000	Funding to address training, skills development, placement, and other measures to increase labor participation
<b>Small &amp; Minority-Owned Business</b>	\$5,765,000	Funding to address the negative economic impacts to small and minority-owned businesses that have been hardest hit by the pandemic
<b>Employee Retention</b>	\$2,786,000	Funding to address talent and retention for businesses and organizations
<b>Hospitality &amp; Tourism</b>	\$1,548,000	Funding to address the negative economic impacts to the hotel and tourism businesses impacted by the pandemic
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$22,442,000</b>	

# ARPA Investment Guidance



## COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE – \$19.3M

The County will make investments in County Infrastructure to enhance its physical and/or structural capacity to meet operational responsibilities. The figure below shows how this allocation will be invested to address three County Infrastructure subtopics.<sup>7</sup>

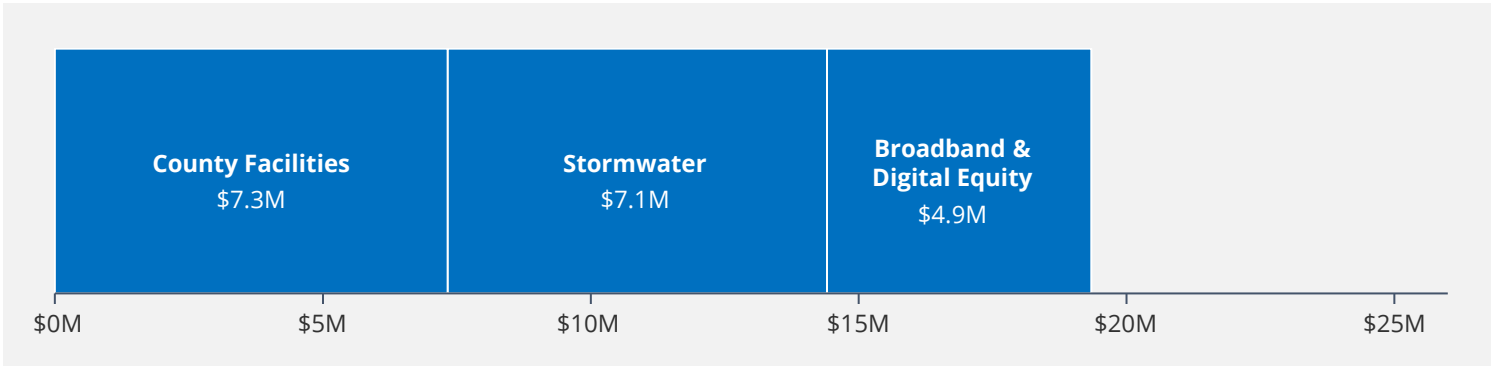


Figure 12. County Infrastructure ARPA allocations

County Facilities	\$7,332,000	Funding to keep Cobb County facilities functional and safe for residents and County employees in light of the pandemic
Stormwater	\$7,081,000	Funding to address stormwater infrastructure maintenance and upgrades
Broadband & Digital Equity	\$4,933,000	Funding to address the accessibility, affordability, and quality of broadband services, particular for residents who are experiencing a digital divide in access or services
Total	\$19,346,000	

<sup>7</sup> Transportation was identified by a number of stakeholders as an area of need for the County to invest in, and so it was included in the earlier stages of development of this ARPA investment guidance. However, the County is not able to include transportation in its \$108M project allocation due to the parameters of the ARPA legislation.

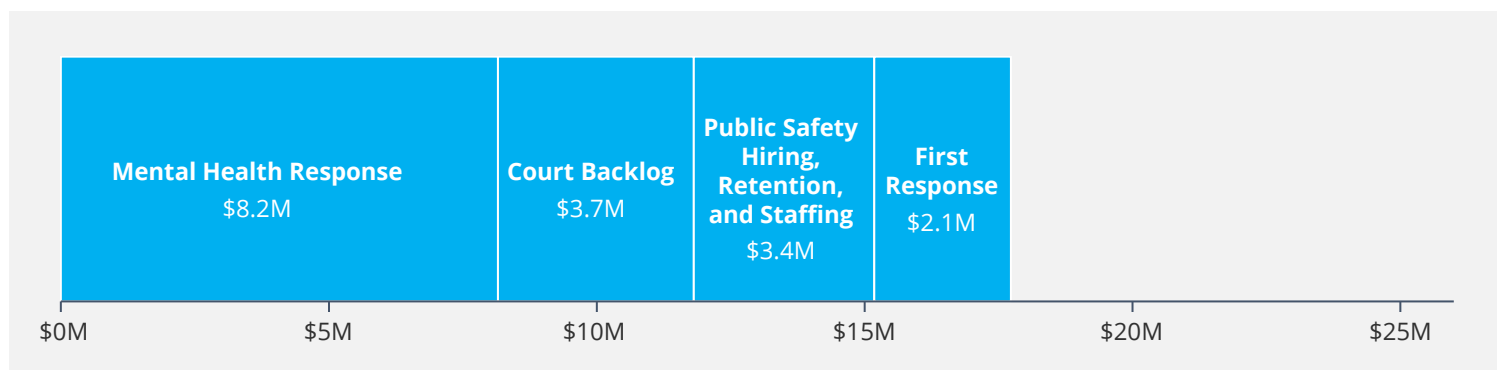


# ARPA Investment Guidance



## PUBLIC SAFETY – \$17.2M

The County will invest in Public Safety to assist in keeping Cobb County residents safe. The figure below shows how this allocation will be invested to address four Public Safety subtopics.



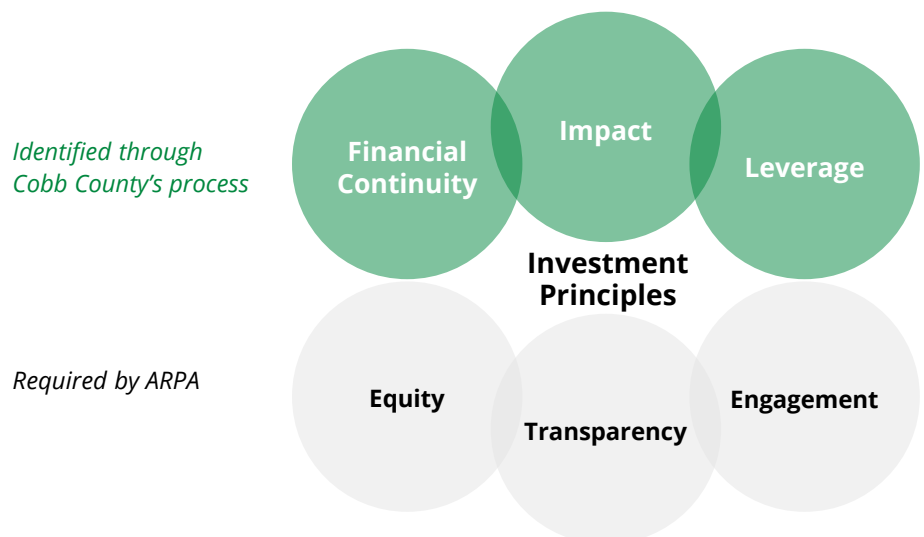
**Figure 13.** Public Safety ARPA allocations

<b>Mental Health Response</b>	\$8,158,000	Funding to address mental health-oriented emergency response capabilities, e.g. increased scope of services for Cobb Partnership for Assistance, Treatment, and Health (PATH) team or other mental health response unit
<b>Court Backlog</b>	\$3,656,000	Funding to address the backlog in the County courts resulting from the pandemic, to enable them to handle cases safely and in a timely manner
<b>Public Safety Hiring, Retention, and Staffing</b>	\$3,366,000	Funding to address the current and future pipeline of Cobb County's public safety workers
<b>First Response</b>	\$2,051,000	Funding to address the increased demands of first responders to meet Cobb County's emergency response due to the pandemic
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,231,000</b>	

# Investment Principles

To enable the County to move forward with implementation, a set of ARPA investment principles have been approved by the Board of Commissioners to guide the project evaluation process. These investment principles will sit alongside those reflected in the ARPA legislation (equity, transparency, and engagement) and will provide consistent criteria for evaluating ARPA-eligible project ideas during the next phase of work. The additional board-approved investment principles that will guide Cobb County's ARPA project evaluation process are:

1. **Financial continuity** – Prioritizing investment opportunities that do not impose ongoing operating and maintenance costs on the county beyond the term of the ARPA grant.
2. **Impact** – Emphasizing opportunities with high returns on investment for the Cobb County community.
3. **Leverage** – Valuing opportunities where external resources can reduce or offset the County's funding obligation or expand the reach of the opportunity beyond what the County can achieve itself.



**Figure 14.** Cobb County and ARPA Investment Principles

# Investment Principles

## Equity

As noted throughout this report, equity is an important consideration throughout the management of ARPA funds. Equity is embedded in the ARPA legislation and will be a point of consideration for the County in selecting projects that can aid an equitable recovery. ARPA guidance explicitly encourages programming to benefit impacted, disproportionately impacted, and historically disadvantaged populations.<sup>8</sup>

Like many other communities around the country, the County is putting equity at the forefront of its ARPA investment approach. The County has taken the following steps to embed equity in its ARPA investment process to date:

- The County engaged a wide range of community stakeholders .
- The County facilitated conversations with service providers (e.g., non-profits, public safety personnel, health care workers, etc.) to identify how ARPA funds could be applied for equitable impact.
- The County is making equity an important consideration in the next phase of work to identify and evaluate projects. Project applicants will be required to identify how and to what extent their efforts will advance equity and develop key performance indicators.
- The County will regularly report to the U.S. Department of the Treasury on how, and in what ways, ARPA projects are impacting impacted and disadvantaged populations.

## Transparency

ARPA provides guidelines encouraging transparency to the communities that will receive and benefit from ARPA funds. To promote awareness and accountability of Cobb County's ARPA process and expenditures, Cobb County will provide regular information and reporting to the community through its ARPA website:

- The County will publicly publishing its quarterly and annual reporting to U.S. Treasury.
- The County will provide information on how the public can propose projects, what the evaluation criteria are, and the status of how funding is being allocated.
- The County will conduct public meetings (via the Board of Commissioner meetings) when making decisions regarding its ARPA funding.

## Engagement

ARPA guidance encourages community engagement throughout the ARPA investment process to gather input and community needs and help to ensure that broad input and feedback is considered:

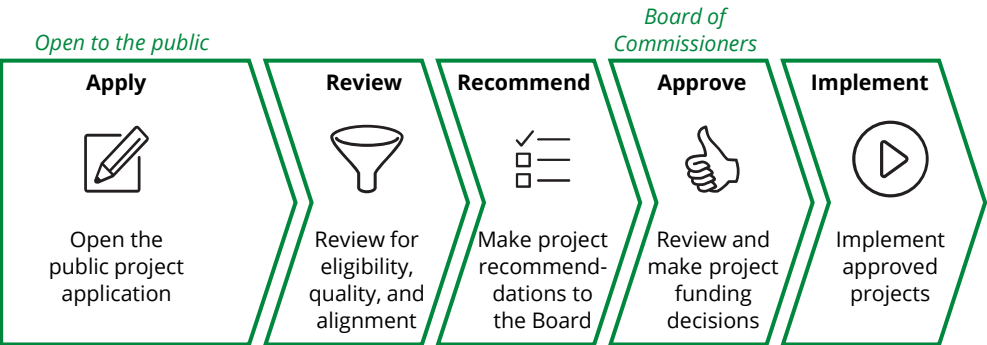
- The County engaged a broad range of County officials, community leaders , and the public in order to understand needs and define priorities for the funding.
- The County will provide an open, public application for proposals on specific projects to be funded, and conduct communications and outreach to share the application.
- For future allocation and decision-making, the County will undertake similar engagement efforts.

<sup>8</sup> Department of the Treasury, "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds Final Rule," <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRF-Final-Rule.pdf>, p. 98, 116, 125, 136, 138, 139, 141, 189, 380, 398  
Cobb County

# Next Steps

The County will begin to identify eligible project opportunities that align with each of the subtopics noted in this report. To identify ARPA-eligible project ideas, the County will establish a process for community organizations and County departments to submit project proposals. Applicants will be required to submit project proposals that detail how ARPA funds will be used, in what ways ARPA funds will address the County's priorities, how they align with the Investment Principles, and how impacts will be measured. More information on the application process can be accessed at [www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA).

Project applications will be evaluated by the County and the Board of Commissioners will be provided with recommendations on project-level funding. It will be up to the Board of Commissioners to make funding decisions on project applications. The process that will be followed to select projects is illustrated below.



**Figure 15.** Process overview for ARPA project identification and approval

The project development process described above will begin in June 2022. Project funding decisions are anticipated to begin in Summer 2022.

The County has established an ARPA website at [www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA) for residents to view information on its ARPA process. As projects are identified and begin to be implemented, the website will include more information on funding and projects.

## Thank You

The County extends its gratitude to the residents and organizations who contributed to the development of this report.

**For more information:**

[ARPA@cobbcounty.org](mailto:ARPA@cobbcounty.org)  
[www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA](http://www.cobbcounty.org/ARPA)

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