



Impact and Legacy of ARPA Funding in Bellevue

2021-2024



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“With the additional resources, we have been able to expand our programs, offer more comprehensive support to our community, and enhance the overall effectiveness of our services. The ARPA funds have enabled us to build a stronger foundation, making us better equipped to address emerging needs and challenges in the future.”

~ Local Agency

Executive Summary

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided \$350 billion to support state and local governments in their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This landmark legislation delivered urgent and targeted aid to communities across the country, including Bellevue, Washington.

In Bellevue, COVID-19 disproportionately affected low- and moderate-income households, straining existing safety nets and intensifying the need for housing, food, behavioral health, and culturally responsive services. In response, the Bellevue City Council acted swiftly, allocating 85% of the city's ARPA resources to communities hardest hit by the pandemic. \$17 million of ARPA funds were dedicated to residents experiencing housing instability, financial hardship, food insecurity, limited access to healthcare and mental health services, and the escalating harms of systemic racism and other forms of discrimination.

With deep gratitude, the City of Bellevue recognizes the essential role of the 31 nonprofit agency partners, including five agencies new to contracting with the City, who rapidly mobilized to meet extraordinary community needs. These partners formed a coordinated network of support that ensured resources reached those most impacted. Their tireless commitment, innovation, and compassion were the backbone of Bellevue's human services pandemic response.

From 2021–2024, City of Bellevue ARPA funding made a transformative impact:

- 58 human services programs were funded to serve the community.
- Over 48,000 Bellevue residents received critical services.

- ~\$12M in rental and mortgage assistance prevented displacement and homelessness of Bellevue residents.
- 101,407 shelter bed nights.
- 1 million+ meals were provided.
- Agencies delivered thousands of hours of legal aid, counseling, youth mentoring, and advocacy.

ARPA investments also strengthened Bellevue's human services infrastructure. Agencies expanded internal capacity, improved service delivery, and enhanced crisis response systems, investments that continue to shape how Bellevue supports its most vulnerable residents. Importantly, ARPA enabled new forms of culturally specific outreach, community trust-building, and accessible service models that will inform future equity-centered efforts.

The ARPA experience showed that Bellevue is capable of meeting a crisis with expediency, compassion, and equity. It also revealed that the systems built under pressure can and should become permanent fixtures of our public response infrastructure.

The investment of the city's ARPA funding demonstrated what is possible when public investment is flexible, equitable, and community led. Essential services, especially in housing stability, behavioral health, food access, and well-being for marginalized community members remain vital for communities still recovering from the pandemic and facing new challenges. Now that ARPA funding has been depleted, many providers report that they will be forced to scale back programs that have proven essential.

The City's bold and timely investment in human services, alongside the dedication of every agency, staff member, and community partner, made a profound impact during an unprecedented crisis. The collective action not only prevented homelessness, hunger, and isolation, it also built a model for what community care can look like during times of hardship and beyond.

Bellevue has demonstrated what is possible when government, nonprofits, and community work together. This investment has left a legacy that suggests opportunities for further exploration:

- How can the region sustain investment in the human services infrastructure?
- How do funders sustain cross-sector collaboration and shared leadership?
- How can jurisdictions continue to streamline processes and prioritize impact?
- How can community-driven solutions that center equity and lived experience be effectively supported?

The opportunity now is to turn short-term relief into long-term resilience, ensuring every resident has access to the resources they need to thrive, not just survive.



Acknowledgements

The Bellevue City Council provided bold leadership and investment in human services infrastructure and community well-being.

Nonprofit partners, community leaders, and frontline staff offered dedication, compassion, and resilience that carried the community through a time of extraordinary hardship. These community leaders met the moment with care, creativity, and deep commitment, ensuring that critical support reached those who needed it most. Their efforts laid the foundation for a more equitable and responsive human services system in Bellevue.

City staff and the Human Services Commission offered steady guidance, collaboration, and shared vision. These individuals worked behind-the-scenes, providing thoughtful input, and unwavering dedication which helped turn emergency response into a meaningful, long-lasting impact.

Together, through collective action and compassion, the groundwork for lasting community resilience was established.

With deep gratitude,

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Impact and Legacy of ARPA Funding in Bellevue | 2021-2024

Overview

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided \$350 billion to support state and local governments in their recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation delivered immediate and targeted aid to communities across the country.

In Bellevue, COVID-19 disproportionately impacted low- and moderate-income households, straining safety nets and increasing demand for essential services. In response, the City Council allocated ARPA funds in two phases, dedicating 85% of the city's ARPA funding to communities experiencing housing instability, financial hardship, food insecurity, racial and ethnic discrimination impacting well-being and limited access to healthcare and mental health services.

To ensure an inclusive and equitable recovery, the City of Bellevue prioritized culturally specific services for communities most affected by the pandemic, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, people with disabilities, older adults, and youth. These efforts were intentionally designed to address the needs of disproportionately impacted groups and deliver meaningful, community-centered support that reflected their unique experiences.

Bellevue strategically leveraged ARPA resources to strengthen its human services infrastructure and respond to urgent community needs. Investments were directed toward housing assistance, food

security, behavioral health services, domestic violence prevention, childcare access, and fostering well-being in the face of racial and ethnic discrimination.

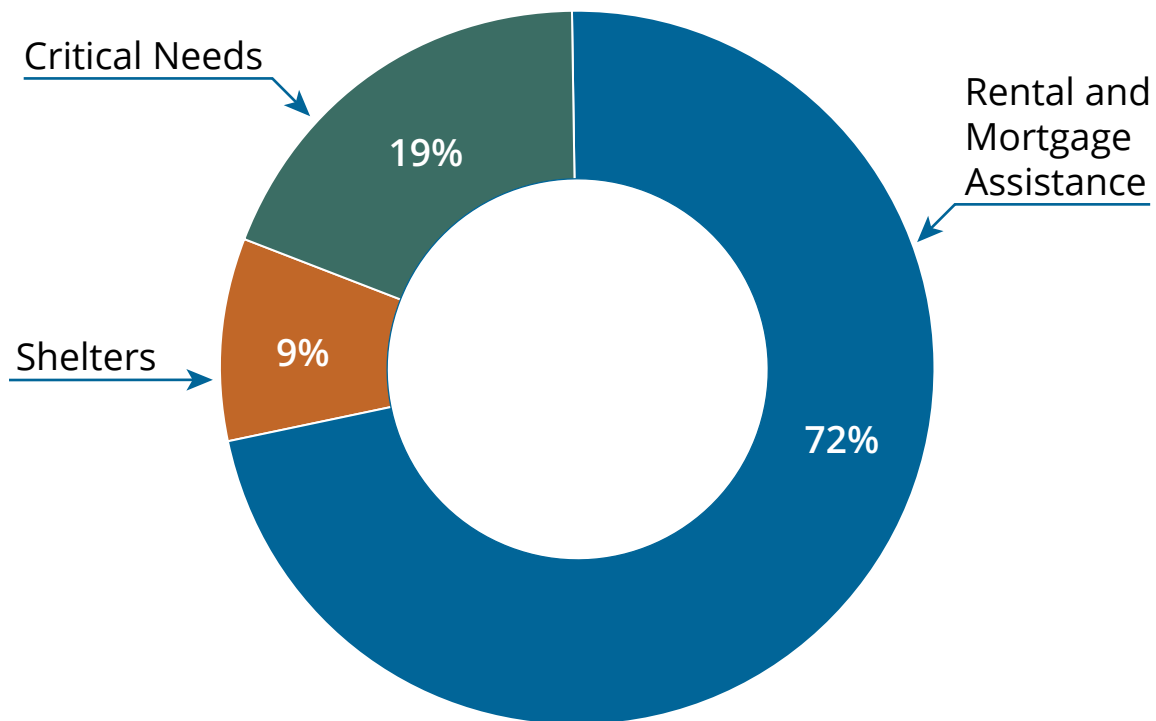
These targeted investments played a critical role in stabilizing Bellevue's most impacted residents, helping secure housing, expand access to vital services, and reinforce support systems for individuals and families in crisis.

Funding Allocation

- **Phase 1:** \$7 million directed toward rental and mortgage assistance to prevent housing displacement and/or homelessness.
- **Phase 2:** \$10 million invested in human services (less than 5% dedicated to city administrative costs). These funds were distributed as follows:
 - ◆ \$1.6m to the Eastside's four 24/7 shelters.
 - ◆ \$5.1m for rental and mortgage assistance.
 - ◆ \$3m to support critical human services.
 - ◇ Basic Needs: \$115,804
 - ◇ Behavioral Health Services: \$277,154
 - ◇ Child Care: \$387,903
 - ◇ Civil Legal Aid: \$83,719
 - ◇ Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Survivor Services: \$228,594
 - ◇ Food Insecurity: \$294,961
 - ◇ Homelessness Services: \$842,890
 - ◇ Fostering Well-Being in the Face of Racial and Ethnic Discrimination: \$819,560

ARPA 2021-2024 Key Metrics

ARPA Funds Distributed



Reach and Scope:

- 31 Agency partners
 - ◆ including 5 partners contracting with Bellevue for the first time
- 58 Programs funded
 - ◆ including 26 programs contracting with Bellevue for the first time
- 48,033 residents served

“We received a large influx of applications from Bellevue residents who had either lost their jobs due to COVID, or who had missed large amounts of work due to sickness amidst the pandemic. ARPA funding was able to ensure those households remained housed during a challenging time...ARPA allowed our agency to greatly expand our services, ultimately serving 65 Bellevue households comprised of over 200 household members between 2023-2024.”

~ Housing Support Agency

Cross-Sector Support

The Bellevue City Council took swift action to address the level of need in the community due to COVID-19, by investing 85% of the city’s ARPA funding into human services.

The success of ARPA-funded programs in Bellevue was deeply supported by the strong partnership between nonprofit agencies, City of Bellevue Human Services staff, and the Human Services Commission. Their collective commitment ensured both the effective distribution of funds and the advancement of equity throughout the process.

The Human Services Commission played a vital role in shaping the ARPA funding process through an equity-centered lens. Recognizing the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on marginalized communities, the Commission worked closely with City staff to reduce barriers and expand access to critical funding. Key strategies included:

- **Simplified Application:** Designed an accessible application that required only essential information to determine funding eligibility while minimizing the administrative burden on providers.

- **Targeted Outreach:** Held one-on-one meetings with agencies, particularly small and grassroots organizations, to guide them through the application process and answer questions.
- **Equity-Centered Deliberations:** Prior to reviewing applications, the Diversity Advantage Team provided an overview of the City’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging initiatives. Additionally, each deliberation meeting began with a “Creating a Culture of Equity” moment to reinforce these principles.
- **Technical Assistance:** Offered ongoing support to providers throughout the application and contract process, including help with identifying service units and outcomes, completing budget forms, and addressing agency concerns.

These efforts ensured a fair and inclusive process, fostering equitable access to ARPA funding for organizations serving the most affected communities.

Funding by Service Area & Community Impact

Rental and Mortgage Assistance:

~\$12m distributed

- 6,045 months of rent paid

Shelters: ~\$1.5m distributed

- 101,407 shelter bed nights
- 54,272 day center visits, providing access to food, hygiene and case management for not only shelter residents but also other unhoused residents

Critical Needs: ~\$3m distributed

Counseling & Case Management

- 7,851 hours of counseling
- 1,016 hours of counseling for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault
- 212 hours of domestic violence case management

Legal & Advocacy Services

- 3,276 hours of legal services
- 162 hours of advocacy

Outreach & Mentorship

- 1,647 hours of outreach
- 4,258 hours of youth mentoring

Youth & Family Support

- 81 youth support groups
- 1,028 childcare vouchers

Food & Basic Needs Assistance

- 1,097,650 meals provided
- 24,072 bundles of basic need items

The Conclusion of ARPA Funding

With the depletion of ARPA funds, the City of Bellevue has surveyed agencies contracted with ARPA funds and gathered data to understand the impact of the funds. In addition, agencies shared about their operations and the level of community need now that ARPA funds have been spent down.

Agency Survey Results

A substantial majority of surveyed agencies reported positive impacts from the ARPA funding:

- **Service Expansion:** 76% of agencies reported that ARPA funding allowed them to expand the range of services offered to the community
- **Preparedness for Future Challenges:** 76% of agencies reported they are better prepared for crisis due to experience and resources gained through ARPA funding. This readiness included enhanced capacity for emergency responses, service adaptation, and interagency collaboration.

Surveyed agencies also identified the ongoing level of community need in the face of a reduction in services:

- **Operational Continuity:** 65% of agencies noted that with the loss of ARPA funds, they would need to cut back either completely or partially on those expanded services.

What Agencies Learned: Managing and Maximizing ARPA Funds

1. Cross-Sector Coordination and Compliance with Federal Funding

Agencies highlighted the critical importance of close coordination with the City of Bellevue and internal teams to ensure consistent fund management and administration.

- “It is vital to have coordinated efforts with the City and to train compliance and program staff to monitor the financial capacity of grants alongside the fiscal team.”

2. Strengthened Organizational Capacity

Many agencies reported being better prepared for future challenges due to increased organizational capacity and improved internal processes:

- “ARPA funds, beyond immediate relief, were instrumental in building our organizational service capacity. We enhanced our case management systems, improved direct service outreach, and learned to work more effectively with diverse stakeholders, including applicants, landlords, and city officials.”
- “With the additional resources, we expanded programs, deepened our scholarship and mental health initiatives, and enhanced our ability to respond to emerging community needs.”
- “We are better prepared because we now know we can handle larger-scale funding and operations, if the funds are available.”
- “The experience allowed us to streamline workflows for care coordination and identify areas of operational efficiency.”

“We used the ARPA funding to provide culturally appropriate food bags, gift cards, recipes approved by a registered dietitian, and encourage them to participate in-person nutritional workshops and cooking classes. Not only they got the proper nutrition, they were socially connected with others and overcame the fear of integrating back to the community.”

~ Local Agency

3. Improved Processes and Infrastructure

Several agencies made long-term improvements to administrative and service delivery systems:

- “We developed strong processes for rental assistance, gathering tenant and landlord information, coordinating with finance, and distributing funds responsibly.”
- “The pandemic helped us establish telehealth models and contingencies we can now rely on.”
- “We created protocols for maintaining safe shelter spaces in our 24/7 facility and day center.”
- “We learned to implement contactless services, which we can now activate as needed in the future.”

4. Increased Community Trust and Responsiveness

ARPA support helped agencies foster deeper engagement and build trust within the community:

- “ARPA enabled us to connect meaningfully with our community, addressing case-by-case issues and discovering unmet needs in real time.”
- “The trust we built through ARPA-funded services continues to shape our direct-service approach.”
- “The funds helped us launch food rescue operations, giving us deeper insight into addressing food insecurity.”

5. Experience with Government Funding

For some agencies, ARPA marked their first experience managing government contracts, leading to significant institutional learning:

- “We learned how to work within a government contract, which has prepared us to pursue and manage future public funds.”
- “Receiving ARPA funding helped us prove our ability to quickly and effectively distribute support, making us more visible and trusted in our community.”

6. Partial or Limited Preparedness

Not all agencies experienced long-term gains; some programs remained vulnerable without continued investment:

- “ARPA sustained one of our two programs, but we’re now searching for funds to replace the lost support.”
- “We are prepared to handle rental assistance again, but current funding opportunities are limited, and the program is unlikely to continue.”

7. Administrative Burden and Reporting Challenges for Federal Funds

While many agencies had prior experience with complex funding, ARPA introduced new compliance and reporting demands that strained capacity:

- “We had to change how and what we report to the City of Bellevue, which was challenging. Additional support to bridge these administrative gaps would be beneficial.”

8. Equity and Accessibility Practices

To ensure inclusive service delivery, agencies emphasized reducing participation barriers through adaptive strategies:

- “We often met individuals where they were, provided documents in different formats, and used translation services to ensure accessibility.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on youth mental health. We provide behavioral health services to Bellevue School District students. The isolation youth experienced during the pandemic impacted learning, social connections, and much more. As a result, the already taxed behavioral healthcare system was further strained with not enough providers for the amount of young people seeking services. Navigating this over-taxed, complex system is especially challenging for families with higher barriers to health, educational, and social justice.”

~ Behavioral Health Support Agency



Lessons for the Next Crisis: City of Bellevue's Investment in Human Services

The City of Bellevue's experience managing ARPA funds offers several critical lessons for future crisis response, particularly regarding the city's investment in human services:

1. Prioritize Equity from the Start

Bellevue's equity-centered approach, intentionally directing resources to BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, people with disabilities, and low-income residents, proved vital for reaching those most impacted. Future crisis response efforts must continue to embed equity in funding decisions, application processes, and service delivery to ensure that the most marginalized communities are not left behind.

2. Invest in Long-Term Human Services Infrastructure

ARPA investments were instrumental in stabilizing Bellevue's underserved residents during a time of crisis. The expiration of this funding has exposed a critical service gap, especially in rental assistance, behavioral health, food access and support for the well-being of marginalized community members. A key takeaway is the urgent need for sustainable, long-term funding strategies in the region to preserve and build on the progress made, ensuring community resilience beyond emergency relief periods.

3. Strengthen Cross-Sector Collaboration

The success of Bellevue's ARPA rollout was rooted in strong partnerships between city staff, the Human Services Commission, and nonprofit providers. Continued investment in these relationships is essential for rapid, coordinated crisis responses and for maintaining community trust and resilience.

4. Build Organizational Capacity for Emergency Response

ARPA funding enabled agencies to improve internal systems, expand services, and adopt new technologies (e.g., telehealth, contactless services). These capacity gains should be preserved and enhanced through ongoing support and technical assistance, preparing agencies for future crises.

5. Simplify Funding Processes and Reduce Administrative Burden

While many agencies successfully managed federal funds, the complexity of reporting requirements was a barrier. Future funding models should explore opportunities to streamline application and compliance processes wherever possible, particularly for smaller and grassroots organizations, so more energy can be directed toward service delivery.

6. Foster Community-Led Solutions

Agencies emphasized the value of meeting clients where they are, offering translation and accessibility tools, and involving community voices in shaping services. Future efforts should expand these practices by co-designing crisis responses with community members and frontline providers.

7. Secure and Diversify Future Funding Sources

With many services now at risk due to the loss of ARPA funds, agencies stressed the need to diversify funding sources, engage private and philanthropic partners, and advocate for local, state, and federal investment in human services.

8. Document, Share, and Institutionalize Lessons Learned

The systems, workflows, and relationships built through ARPA must be captured, institutionalized, and scaled. This includes creating playbooks, data systems, and funding frameworks that can be activated in future emergencies.

“One of the major things we witnessed during Covid were increased instances of Domestic Violence in the family court filings, as well as in our family law parentage cases. The ARPA funds that we received allowed us to advocate for the children from these families who didn’t have attorney representation, nor ability to hire their own parent evaluator. The work of our staff and volunteer advocates helped to illuminate the complex issues that parents were dealing with and how it was impacting the stability of their homes and their children.”

~ Legal and Advocacy Agency

Conclusion: Building on the Legacy of ARPA in Bellevue

The American Rescue Plan Act served as a lifeline for thousands of Bellevue residents during a time of unprecedented crisis. Through intentional, equity-centered investments, the City of Bellevue and its nonprofit partners helped stabilize lives, sustain services, and strengthen systems. The impact of this funding, measured not just in meals provided or rent paid, but in resilience, trust, and community capacity, has left a lasting legacy.

Yet, with ARPA funding depleted, the region faces a pivotal moment. The end of these emergency resources has revealed how essential these services remain, particularly for communities still recovering from the health and economic effects of the pandemic. The progress made risks erosion, and many disproportionately impacted residents continue to face barriers to housing, behavioral health care, food access, and culturally responsive services.

Bellevue's ARPA experience clearly demonstrates that when funding is responsive, community-led, and equity-focused, the human services system can meet a crisis with competence and compassion. The challenge now is to transform this emergency response into sustainable infrastructure.

As the city looks forward, the following priorities can help guide the city's approach:

- **Long-term investment in human services**, with particular attention to rental assistance, behavioral health, basic needs, and support for the well-being of marginalized community members.
- **Partnerships across sectors**, recognizing the essential role that nonprofits, grassroots organizations, and lived experience leaders play in reaching those most affected.
- **Simplified administrative processes** so providers can focus on what matters most, supporting people.
- **Institutionalized crisis-ready frameworks** to ensure future responses are swift, coordinated, and inclusive.
- **Community support and diversified funding sources** to ensure that no one is left behind.

The City of Bellevue now has a tested model for equitable crisis response. Nonprofit partners, community leaders, and frontline staff showed up with dedication and care during a time of profound uncertainty. Their efforts created a foundation that can now be strengthened, transforming short-term relief into long-term resilience for every community member, while honoring the lessons, relationships, and shared commitment that made this response possible.



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