

## ARPA Task Force

### Talking Points – October 19, 2021

Q: Why create the ARPA Task Force?

- Milwaukee County Board Chairwoman Marcelia Nicholson established the ARPA Task Force to make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on how to spend funding we received through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and ensure that the public has an active role in the process.
- The Task Force is also charged with creating a process to broadly engage the public and ensure diverse input from the community. Public participation in budgeting is something we do every year, and the public should be included in how we spend a significant boost of federal funding.
- In Milwaukee County we try to be a model of good government. You can't have good government without transparency and accountability, and the Task Force will ensure the public has full access to our decision making when it comes to how we spend our ARPA funds.

Q: Why is public engagement in the process so important?

- Public engagement is essential to making local government function.
  - There is a saying that “Local government is closest to the people.” We are the direct link between federal spending and the people we serve.
  - We have a responsibility to the people we serve to listen to them and involve them in our decision-making, because that's how we can ensure we are providing the public services and support that people need the most.
- We have an opportunity to involve the public with this funding that wasn't there with the CARES Act in 2020
  - With the CARES Act, we had a short time frame to spend the money (by the end of this year), but with ARPA we have until the end of 2024. This gives us more time to be deliberate and intentional about how we spend these resources.
- In Milwaukee County we have a proud tradition of involving the public in our decision-making.
  - We are one of the few local governments that created a way for the public to continue to provide live public input at our committee meetings during the pandemic despite being virtual for all our meetings
  - Every year during the county's budget process the Board and many individual Supervisors hold multiple town hall meetings to solicit public input

Q: Do you have an established framework for how to spend the ARPA funds?

On September 2, 2021, the ARPA Task Force unanimously approved a [strategic framework](#) providing guidelines for how to allocate Milwaukee County's \$183.6 million in ARPA funding. The proposal, introduced by Director of Grants & Special Projects Ashley Adsit, recommended that:

- **63% of ARPA dollars (\$115,728,599) be allocated to “revenue loss recovery.”** Sample expenditures could include stabilizing government services; addressing the county’s backlog of capital projects and deferred maintenance; investing in technology, service delivery or facilities to realize cost-savings or efficiencies; and investing in new revenue generating strategies.
- **20% of ARPA dollars (\$36,739,238) be allocated to “community support.”** Sample expenditures could include immediate, limited-term financial assistance for individuals; evidence-based strategies to address targeted social determinants of health; and collaborative initiatives that match other private and public funds.
- **13% of ARPA dollars (\$23,880,505) be allocated to “COVID-19 mitigation.”** Sample expenditures could include responding to COVID-19 mitigation needs (vaccination administration, PPE, testing, physical distancing measures); culturally-relevant and effective communications planning to support COVID mitigation; prevention of spread in congregate settings and other dense work sites; and payroll expenses for public health, safety and other staff responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **4% of ARPA dollars (\$7,347,848) be allocated to “fund administration.”** Sample expenditures could include complying with fiscal, programmatic and federal reporting requirements; sponsoring project-level evaluation and community.

Everything we do at Milwaukee County is guided by our vision of achieving racial equity and becoming the healthiest county in Wisconsin.

- We are focused on being intentional about our processes and decision making.
- Our ARPA Task Force is just one example of how we are intentional in all our work (another example is that every department submits a detailed racial equity budget tool...)
- We know that the Covid-19 pandemic has had hit people of color the hardest: that includes the disease itself but also the loss of access to public services.
- We can build on our work to achieve racial equity by creating intentional process to distribute ARPA funds in an equitable way.
- The ARPA funding we received will help us recover but it is much less than the estimated \$300 to \$400 million we lost in revenue.
- Milwaukee will receive half of its allocation this year (~\$92M) and we’re expecting to receive the other half in May of 2022.

### **Addressing counter arguments**

- We plan to distribute ARPA dollars in an efficient and effective way to accelerate Milwaukee County’s strategic plan.
- As a county we’ve been focused on fiscal sustainability for years because we have to be: We have been struggling with a structural deficit that forces us to cut spending every year.
- The ARPA funds will be a boost to our recovery but it doesn’t match the amount of revenue we’ve lost and doesn’t undo the bind of the structural deficit – for that we need action from the State Legislature to provide us with the ability to tap into new, additional sources of revenue such as an increase in the local sales tax

**For questions that drill down on “What does ‘being intentional’ about racial equity when budgeting mean?”**

“Being intentional about racial equity means that we ask ourselves tough, probing questions about how our spending choices actually promote racial equity, and then critically evaluating those choices and taking the time to answer those questions honestly, so we are always making better decisions as we move forward.

(the following is borrowed from the R.E. budget tool)

**1. Create Intentional Inclusion**

Reflect the full diversity of Milwaukee County at every level of County government.

Create and nurture an inclusive culture across the Milwaukee County government.

Increase the number of Milwaukee County contracts awarded to minority- and women-owned business.

**2. Bridge the Gap**

Determine what, where, and how we deliver services based on the resolution of health disparities.

Break down silos across Milwaukee County government to maximize access to and quality of services offered.

Apply a racial equity lens to all decisions.

**3. Invest in Equity**

Invest “upstream” to address root causes of health disparities.

Enhance Milwaukee County’s fiscal health and sustainability.

Dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities.