

# ONE-TIME SPENDING FOR LONG-TERM IMPACT: EVALUATING WASHTENAW COUNTY'S AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT ALLOCATIONS

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By Amanda Nothhaft

## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on Black and other non-White communities illustrated existing economic and health disparities, not only nationally, but also in Washtenaw County. Mirroring national trends, Black people in Washtenaw County had higher rates of COVID-19 infection and were more likely to die from COVID-19 than White people due to economic and health disparities that increased their risk for severe disease.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the pandemic, Washtenaw County and health care organizations within the county had begun to take steps to mitigate unequal outcomes by race and income on education, employment, and health by intentionally creating policies and targeting resources to address those inequities.

In the wake of the public health crisis and the negative economic impacts it created, the federal government allocated money in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to provide local governments money to address the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic on families and businesses, maintain services amidst declines in revenue due to the crisis, and create a strong, equitable recovery by making investments that support long-term growth and opportunity. These funds provide Washtenaw County with a unique chance to bolster current efforts to eliminate gaps in opportunity. This memo outlines the programs funded through the initial allocations of ARPA funding and discusses core themes county officials should bear in mind in determining how to spend the second installment of federal funds. In particular, county officials should: 1) ensure programs funded in their initial allocation are adequate to achieve program success; 2) be cautious in funding programs requiring a permanent funding source; and 3) prioritize spending on one-time investments that are likely to yield long-term impacts.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TARGET FUNDING TO KEY PROGRAMS AND PRIORITIES.

While it may be tempting to spread a relatively large amount of discretionary dollars across many initiatives, this risks diluting the impact of this one-time spending. County officials should focus on achieving specific, measurable goals that focus on reducing social inequities by race and income and ensure the allocations are large enough to achieve them.

### ENSURE CURRENT FUNDING LEVELS ARE ADEQUATE FOR PROGRAM SUCCESS.

The first two rounds of allocations created a myriad of programs. The county should revisit the funding for these initiatives to ensure current allocations are sufficient to be effective.

### CONSIDER LONG-TERM IMPACTS.

Focusing on long-term versus short-term impacts when designing funded programs will help guarantee these funds have a lasting impact.

### PRIORITIZE ONE-TIME INVESTMENTS.

Because ARPA dollars must be spent by the end of 2024, the county should prioritize one-time spending, rather than creating initiatives that will need ongoing support from general funds once ARPA dollars are spent.

### FOCUS ON PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION.

Many of the funded interventions require thoughtful distribution of grants to community organizations and careful implementation of new programming. County officials should be sure to rely on evidence-based research and best practices in funding community organizations and designing new programs.

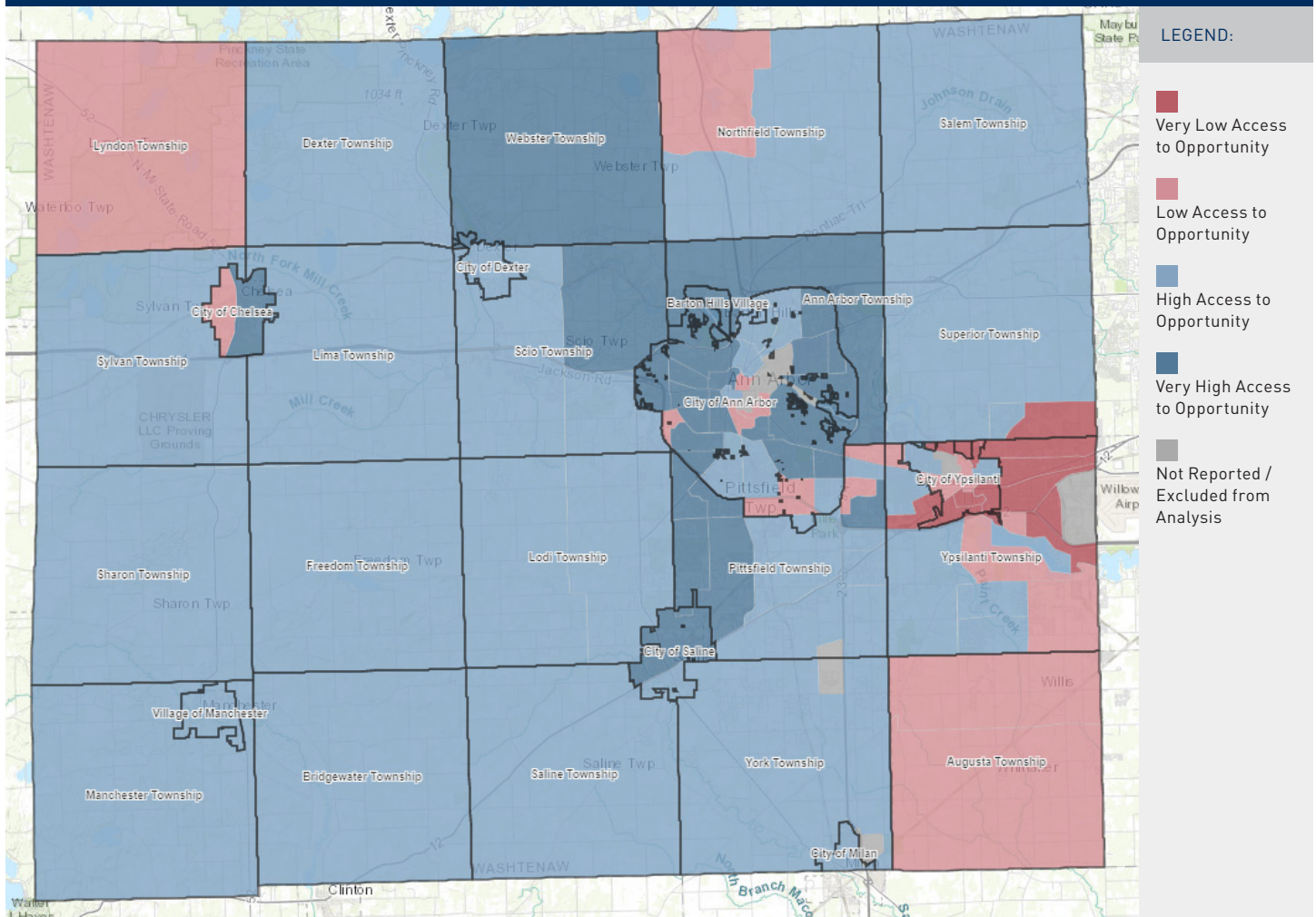
## MEASURING ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY ACROSS WASHTENAW COUNTY

On average, Washtenaw County residents have high educational attainment, high incomes, good health outcomes, and a high standard of living. However, these overall outcomes hide wide disparities that exist within the county. Despite the high overall outcomes, Washtenaw County ranks 81st out of 83 counties in the State when it comes to income inequality.<sup>2</sup> A couple of years ago, the county and Poverty Solutions partnered to develop a unique tool to address inequality within the county, known as the 2020 Opportunity Index. Using census tract data, the index uses 16 measures of five areas of opportunity—health, job access, economic well-being, education and training, and community engagement and stability—to identify where opportunity does and does not exist within the county. The Opportunity Index categorized

ten census tracts as having very low access to opportunity and another twenty with low access to opportunity. Most of these tracts are concentrated in the Ypsilanti area where the population consists of mostly Black and other non-White residents. The Index gives policymakers a framework to guide policy decisions and prioritize resource allocation that promotes racial equity and economic opportunity.

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) provides \$350 billion in funding for state and local governments, with approximately \$65 billion going to county governments, allocated based on the county’s population. Washtenaw County has received \$71 million in two equal allotments (May 2021 and May 2022). The funds must be spent by the

**FIGURE 1: OPPORTUNITY INDEX MAP**



end of calendar year 2024 and are intended to assist small businesses, households, and hard-hit industries and replace lost revenue for government services due to the pandemic, with an emphasis on assisting disadvantaged populations whose circumstances were exacerbated by the pandemic. They can also be used to make investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. While there are few restrictions on how this funding can be spent, its temporary nature means that care should be taken in creating new programs that will require ongoing financial support. These funds will be substantial not only in aiding the county’s pandemic recovery efforts but, spent wisely, could be used to build a more equitable county for all residents.

### HOW HAS WASHTENAW COUNTY ALLOCATED ARPA FUNDS

The Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners has obligated about \$35 million of the \$71 million anticipated ARPA funding. These funds were ear marked in two resolutions, the first in

September 2021 and the second in February 2022. The first resolution focused on child care, Children’s Savings Accounts, broadband expansion and access, and expanding access to weatherization services. The second resolution was largely focused on improving equity within the county by investing in the Washtenaw County Health Department, launching a Mobile Services Support Initiative, and creating a Community Priority Fund. The details of these allocations and the impacts on county residents are explored below.

### FIRST RESOLUTION: \$ 24,746,642 IN ARPA FUNDS

#### CHILD CARE ACCESS

The resolution directs up to \$1 million to provide navigation and financial assistance to help families find child care, provided that the county can find a partner or partners that are able to lead this work. In 2019, the most recent year data are available, there were about 24,000 households with children aged 12 and under, the typical age when families need child care. Of these households, about 6,100 had incomes below

**TABLE 1: THE COUNTY HAS ALLOCATED ABOUT \$36 MILLION IN ARPA FUNDS**

INITIATIVE	TOTAL AMOUNT ALLOCATE	ARPA	ARPA RECOVERED LOST REVENUE	COUNTY GENERAL FUND
Child care Access	2,000,000	1,000,000		1,000,000
Children’s Savings Account Program	6,700,000	2,914,500		3,785,500
Expanding Broadband Infrastructure	14,672,270	4,890,757	-8,781,513	1,000,000
Address Broadband Affordability	800,000	800,000		
Expanding Weatherization Services	1,400,000	1,400,000		
APRA Lost Revenues	13,741,385	13,741,385		
Leading with Data for Equity	399,721	399,721		
Healthy Homes	192,466	192,466		
Healthy Neighborhoods	383,981	383,981		
Healthy Places	92,132	92,132		
ADA Compliance and Signage at Health Department Facilities	1,200,000	1,200,000		
Mobile Services Support Initiative			-729,572	
Community Priority Fund	8,000,000	8,000,000		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$40,800,442</b>	<b>\$35,014,942</b>	<b>-\$8,781,513</b>	<b>\$5,785,500</b>

185% of the Federal Poverty Line and would benefit from financial assistance to pay for care.

The pandemic highlighted the challenges families face in accessing child care and underscored long-standing, systemic issues in finding child care within the county. This resolution could temporarily help improve one side of the problem—affordability—while also making it easier for families to locate care. However, a larger issue through much of the county may be a lack of supply. While there is adequate availability in Ann Arbor, Saline, Chelsea, and Dexter, there are also areas of the county that are considered “child care deserts,” where there are more than three children under five per child care slot. Many of these deserts are concentrated in the areas the Opportunity Index identified as having low opportunity on the east side of the county while others are in rural portions of the county. To truly improve child care access and have a lasting impact, the county should consider efforts to improve supply by using ARPA dollars to recruit and train child care workers and encourage the creation of family care homes and child care centers in partnership with the State’s efforts to improve the child care landscape. Otherwise, the current spending will not address the underlying problem of low supply and will only be a temporary fix if not supported through general funds once ARPA spending ends.

#### **CHILDREN’S SAVINGS ACCOUNT PROGRAM**

The Children’s Savings Account (CSA) program is intended to help close the gap of educational attainment between the low opportunity and high opportunity areas within the county.<sup>3</sup> While every child attending a public school within the Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) would receive an account, the initial amount deposited will differ based on need. All children will receive \$25 while children who qualify for free or reduced price lunch will receive \$500. CSAs can impact educational opportunity not only by providing funding for education but also by changing families’ views that post K-12 education is a realistic, obtainable goal.<sup>4</sup> Around 38,000 children in the county would receive CSAs in the initial year, with close to 11,000 of those children receiving the \$500 amount. About 40% of the children receiving the \$500 contribution attend in the Ypsilanti, Lincoln, and Whitmore Lake school districts where the Opportunity Index shows there are lower rates of educational attainment and opportunity than in the county overall. To fund this initiative, the county is obligating \$2.9 million dollars in ARPA funds and \$3.8 million in general funds for a total of \$6.7 million.

Right now, the program only contains this initial framework of a one-time payment by the county to start an account. Beyond this initial investment, it is unclear how the program will be administered, whether the program will match parental

contributions, or if the county will make future investments in the program via the general fund. Research on CSA programs suggests a number of factors, beyond the existence of an account, impact the effectiveness of these initiatives. Universal eligibility, automatic enrollment, initial deposit, and use of a centralized savings plan, such as Michigan’s 529 plan, are four ways to streamline administration and reduce the risk of excluding disadvantaged children.<sup>5</sup> Evidence from Oklahoma’s OK-SEED program suggests a large initial deposit is most effective and that progressive matching, such as additional deposits when a child reaches a milestone, can help disadvantaged families save more.<sup>6</sup> These are additional things WISD may want to take into account when designing and implementing the CSA program.

In the next and final allocation of ARPA funds, the county could consider adding a matching component and/or making the initial investment larger to maximize the utility of the CSA accounts. Additionally, ARPA funds could be used to invest in educational supports such as high-dosage tutoring and extended day programs to address pandemic learning loss and ensure the impact of these accounts are maximized by families with low-incomes.

#### **EXPANDING BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE**

The pandemic made the importance of having access to broadband internet clear when it became all but essential for households to work, attend school, and access services. Expanding this infrastructure has been a long-term goal of the county and, prior to this ARPA allocation, it was estimated that within the next six years all but 3,317 households in the county would be connected to wired high-speed broadband infrastructure. This initiative allocates nearly \$13.7 million dollars to ensure that these remaining 3,317 households gain wired broadband access. This decision has received scrutiny since it means that almost 20% of ARPA dollars would serve 2% of households in the county, the majority of which are high income and can access high speed broadband through their cellular connection.<sup>7</sup> This investment is costly when the expansion of 5G networks and the availability of fixed wireless connections are rapidly changing the nature of broadband access and the need for wired connections. In the face of these potential changes in broadband, it is crucial that this investment builds a system that will be able to accommodate advances in and compete with future technology. The initial requests for proposals required minimum speeds that are 25 Mbps download speeds, which is half as fast the entry level internet package currently offered by Comcast. Requiring download speeds above 300 Mbps, the level Comcast labels “fast,” would guarantee that the infrastructure will not become obsolete upon implementation.

### **ADDRESS BROADBAND AFFORDABILITY, LITERACY, AND ACCESS**

Access to broadband is not just limited by availability, but also affordability. This provision is designed to address affordability of broadband access for those with the lowest incomes in the county. There are about 34,000 households with incomes below 185% of the Federal Poverty Line (the threshold to qualify for reduced price school lunch) in Washtenaw County and 4,500 of these households do not have broadband internet.<sup>8</sup> To help make broadband affordable to these households, the commissioners have allocated up to \$800,000 to improve financial accessibility. However, if we were to assume that all 34,000 households needed a subsidy, the \$800,000 allocation would amount to a subsidy of just \$23.50 for one year for each household. Even a modest subsidy of \$10 a month would only serve about 6,700 households for one year, providing a very short-term solution for a small number of households. Subsidizing internet access is a worthy investment, and the commissioners should consider providing additional ARPA funds for this program to ensure it has an impact. Additionally, creators may want to allow participants to choose between a wired broadband and a cell phone subsidy (which may be preferable for some households) to maximize the utility of this program for low-income households. Alternately, instead of trying to subsidize so few households, the county may want to consider directing these and additional funds toward helping households access the federal Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), which provides a discount of up to \$30 a month.

### **EXPANDING WEATHERIZATION SERVICES IN WASHTENAW COUNTY**

Weatherization programs are seen as a win-win proposition, helping households reduce energy usage and spend less on energy bills while also supporting local businesses contracted to do the weatherization work. The existing weatherization program serves households with incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (about \$53,000 for a family of four). This expansion would provide \$1.4 million to make the weatherization program available to households that earn up to 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI), which is \$78,500 for a family of four. These households have low incomes, but not low enough to qualify under the current rules. There are currently about 10,000 homeowners with incomes low enough to qualify for the program; the expansion to include homeowners with incomes that are 80% of AMI would make close to 16,000 additional homeowners eligible.<sup>9</sup> It is important to expand this program to reach these families that are just beyond the eligibility threshold, but the program should also consider other factors that prevent people from taking advantage of weatherization programs. Research has shown that many homeowners are unable to qualify for weatherization

programs because their homes need repairs prior to weatherization.<sup>10</sup> To ensure households do not face this issue, the county could use additional ARPA funds to provide home repair grants or supplemental funding for the Office of Community and Economic Development’s Home Rehabilitation Program to be used in tandem with weatherization services.

### **SECOND RESOLUTION: \$10,268,300 IN ARPA FUNDS**

#### **BUILDING AN EQUITY DRIVEN HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

The commissioners allocated almost \$2.3 million to the Washtenaw County Health Department, with \$1.2 million ear-marked to make health department facilities compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act and improve signage at health department facilities. The remaining \$1.1 million is allocated to making investments to promote health equity through a variety of initiatives described below.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of data and data analytics to track and respond to disease spread and social determinants of health. To this end, about \$400,000 of these funds are allocated to support existing community health data collection and expand data analytic capacity within the health department. Through this allocation, the county will continue to support the Health for All website which helps direct health policy on multiple levels and for multiple entities throughout the county. These data improvements will help the health department implement data-driven interventions to respond to public health needs and address inequality.

Additional funds are allocated for three programs designed to promote healthier environments within the county: Healthy Homes, Healthy Neighborhoods, and Healthy Places. The Healthy Homes program addresses environmental and home health hazards such as lead, failing septic systems, bedbugs, and fall prevention. The Healthy Neighborhoods program establishes a network of community health workers to focus on root causes of chronic disease and improve access to health care services. And lastly, this funding re-establishes Healthy Places, the health department’s community-based grant program promoting structural change through the built environment, such as efforts to improve pedestrian access.

The \$192,000 allotted to Healthy Homes creates a new program that supports changes needed to create healthy homes for children and older adults. As part of this effort, the county will work with healthcare providers to connect eligible families to the Children’s Special Healthcare Services Program (CSHS), which provides vulnerable families with supports for children with special needs and the Maternal Infant Health Program (MIHP), which helps address disparities in birth outcomes within the county. This program will also

strengthen efforts to eradicate lead, treat asthma, and correct other home hazards.

While providing better connections between providers and CSHS and MIHP will be relatively inexpensive, the rest of the effort focused on correcting home hazards could be much more costly and difficult to implement. Care should be taken in determining the program’s scope. For example, a targeted effort to address lead paint will have a larger measurable impact than one that seeks to address all household hazards and repair needs. If this program targeted lead paint abatement, used the same income eligibility as the weatherization program and focused on households with children under 5 living in housing with high risk of lead hazards, nearly 3,400 households would be eligible, about one-third of whom are home owners. While targeted efforts like this may seem like it would reach fewer households, the program will have a more refined purpose, will be able to invest more money per household, and will likely have a clear impact. Coupling this part of the Healthy Homes program with other efforts such as OCED’s Home Rehabilitation Program and/or the weatherization program would also prevent duplication of programming and create synergies that would be beneficial for all of these efforts.

The board allocated \$384,000 to create the Healthy Neighborhoods program establishing a network of community health workers to focus on root causes of chronic disease and improve access to healthcare services. This program could have a substantial impact on the disparate rates of chronic disease within the county which could be amplified by working in tandem with other efforts—such as the mobile RV clinic. Research shows that community health worker programs are more successful when they couple flexible methods with clear goals and are able to develop lasting relationships with community members and become part of individual’s medical provider network, providing them with concrete connections to services.<sup>11</sup> Relying on evidence-based research and best practices, this program could make dramatic changes in health care access and utilization especially if it targets low-opportunity areas of the county.

The board has allocated \$92,000 to reestablish the health department’s community-based neighborhood grant program, Healthy Places, which promotes public health via the built environment. Efforts stemming from these grants could be as simple as making improvements to a neighborhood park or as complex as projects that improve pedestrian access. Projects that involve large upfront costs and lasting change are an ideal use of ARPA funding; however, \$92,000 is a very small amount to make large changes to the built environment. Infrastructure investments that promote walking and biking, farm markets, and place-making in the communities where the lowest opportunity

tracts are located would not only improve health but could also help encourage economic growth and investment in these areas. The board may want to consider increasing funding for this program or creating a separate pot of funding for improving the built environment in the next round of allocations.

**LAUNCHING MOBILE SUPPORT SERVICES INITIATIVE**

The Mobile Support Services Initiative (MSSI) will be a new program designed to bring social and health services to high-need communities. Many residents are unable to access services due to difficulty in traveling to where those services are provided. This initiative will provide the physical space and associated resources to allow services to be delivered anywhere the MSSI vehicles are parked. The goal is to provide flexible space for programming where services are needed and, while it would be operated by the county, the buses could be used by any entity providing services to the public. The commissioners allocated \$730,000 to this program, which is intended to support two vehicles for three years, including their retrofitting, operation, and maintenance, and a grant status position responsible for coordinating and publicizing the location and services to be offered.

**TABLE 2: RESIDENTS IN LOW-OPPORTUNITY TRACTS HAVE LESS ACCESS TO CARE DESPITE HIGHER HEALTH NEEDS**

MEASURE	LOWEST OPPORTUNITY TRACTS	COUNTY
Does not have health Insurance	6.30%	3.20%
Visited a dentist in past 12 months	60.30%	74.80%
Physical health not good for more than 14 days	16.40%	10.30%
CHRONIC CONDITIONS FOR ADULTS 18 AND OLDER		
Chronic kidney disease	3.40%	2.40%
Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	9.00%	5.60%
Coronary heart disease	7.30%	5.50%
Current asthma	12.90%	9.90%
Diagnosed diabetes	13.30%	8.70%
High blood pressure	33.60%	25.30%
High cholesterol	32.80%	30.90%

Source: Centers for Disease Control, PLACES: Local Data for Better Health, 2021 Release (2018-2019 data).

The concentration of economic, health, and educational disparities within the county is problematic and this program is an innovative strategy to close these gaps by bringing services to high-need communities. Deciding what department should manage this program, creating criteria to determine eligible uses, and determining whether the program will provide additional resources to groups using the MSSI are all issues that will require research to make this initiative successful. Current funding allocates \$121,650 to operate each bus per year, not including the cost of retrofitting nor the grant position to manage and promote the program. The commissioners should revisit budgeting for this program and potentially provide more funding to ensure this effort succeeds. If this program proves to be successful, the county will need to use general funds to support it and should begin to plan for that now.

### **CREATING A COMMUNITY PRIORITY FUND**

The county has allocated \$7.2 million to a community priority fund investing in under-resourced and underserved communities and communities of color, with an additional \$800,000 for evaluation. These funds will be used to support community agencies operating programs that address community violence, educational disparities, early childhood education, direct assistance to households, and housing and homelessness. This fund aims to have low barriers to entry so that all organizations, regardless of size, are eligible and can submit requests for funds. The process for accessing funds will require vetting for basic eligibility by Washtenaw County staff prior to more substantive reviews by an advisory body and the county administrator, after which the proposals will be subject to approval by the Board of Commissioners.

The Community Priority Fund is an opportunity for the county to make high impact investments in the community while supporting local organizations if these dollars are used to expand and deepen proven existing efforts or create new evidence based programs. Additionally, the quality of programming matters much more than the quantity of programming funded, so the county needs to carefully consider the proposal evaluation criteria to make sure that the most effective interventions are being funded. To do this while ensuring smaller organizations can access these funds, the county may need to provide technical assistance to these smaller organizations to develop proposals and implement programs. This will help guarantee that smaller groups, who may be led by and/or serve people of color and may not have the funds or expertise to navigate the grant process can fully participate and compete in the grant program. Including a policy specialist with both technical expertise and knowledge of best practices in the field of the intervention on the grant review board should be considered to help accomplish this goal.

### **CONCLUSION**

Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act have the potential to transform Washtenaw County’s lowest opportunity tracts as identified by the Opportunity Index. While initial allocations have used the index to target spending to promote racial and economic equity within the county, the final outcomes will depend on more than just dollars spent. Now that half of the funding is allocated, the county should step back and think more concretely about and evaluate potential impacts of the initiatives they have funded so far to ensure success.

Although most of the funding is targeted toward addressing one issue—equity—the list of initiatives is fairly expansive. The goals of closing gaps in educational, economic, and health outcomes by bringing services to people in need and providing funding to organizations that work in under resourced communities can only be met if these programs are fully funded and carefully implemented. While it is tempting to support as many initiatives as possible, the impact of the ARPA funding will be diluted if programs are not funded well enough to accomplish their mission. Prior to considering any more new initiatives, the number of people eligible for the currently funded initiatives should be taken into account and supplemental funding added where necessary. For example, at the current funding level, the broadband subsidy program would be able to provide a \$10 monthly subsidy for 6,700 households for a year, supporting only a tiny fraction of the total number of low-income households eligible for and in need the subsidy. Similarly, the range of proposed uses for some initiatives, such as the Healthy Homes program, is very broad. Trying to address many issues under the umbrella of one program complicates the implementation and limits the larger impact of the program. Targeting this funding to address a few specific issues will have a deeper, more lasting impact on the county.

There are a number of initiatives that will be implemented in partnership or via grants with smaller organizations. The largest, the Community Priority Fund, has the potential to be truly transformational for organizations and the communities they serve in the county. While it is important to give access to small organizations, evaluators need to ensure the organizations have the capacity and track record to accomplish what they propose to do. Additionally, evaluators need to ensure this money is spent on evidence based interventions. This applies not just to the Community Priority Fund, but to other programs, such as the Healthy Neighborhoods program, where implementation is the key to success. The county should include policy area experts who have knowledge of the best practices landscape as reviewers

and advisors to provide expert technical assistance to help guide spending and program implementation.

For the programs already funded and any new programs the county is considering funding with the remaining ARPA dollars, the board needs to consider whether the program will contribute to the long-term resolution of an issue or whether a program will be a temporary fix. For example, funding for a child care navigator and subsidies may help families find child care in the short-term, but it does not address the shortage of child care providers within the county. Whereas, allocating these dollars to efforts to expand the child care workforce, create more child care home providers, and establish new child care centers will have a lasting impact on access to child care in the county. Making small adjustments to how this spending is implemented could ensure these funds have a lasting impact.

Related to this, the temporary nature of the funding needs to be considered more fully. Many of the initiatives are programs that will need permanent spending to have a long-term impact on racial and economic equity within the county. The Mobile Support Services Initiative is an innovative program that brings services into the community, but it is unclear whether it will continue after the ARPA dollars are spent. While this program will help organizations and communities for the next few years, if this program is not provided additional funding past the ARPA spend down period, any impact it has will be temporary. Furthermore, it may take some time for organizations to develop programs, refine implementation, and conduct outreach using the Mobile Support Services Initiative. The program could potentially be over by the time it has gained the momentum to have any meaningful impacts. Implementing new programs without plans for their perpetuity minimizes the effect of the interventions.

In addition to ensuring the current allocations are sufficient for successful implementation of the programs described above, with the final round of ARPA funding the board may want to turn its attention toward funding projects that could have a long-term impact with a single infusion of funds. Aging HVAC systems and inadequate technology infrastructure in schools are just two problems that were highlighted during the pandemic. While ARPA provided separate funding for schools, supplementing these funds to help the districts and schools in low-opportunity tracts update school infrastructure would improve educational equity. Additionally, investments in aging water infrastructure would prevent these capital costs from being borne by customers on their bills, helping customers with low incomes. Lastly, access to transportation limits where people can live and work. ARPA funds, along with

money from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, provides the county a unique opportunity to explore transportation models that are more flexible and potentially more cost-effective than the current bus system. Improving access to transportation would foster growth and improve economic equity within the county. Using ARPA and Infrastructure funds to test a micro transit system, a responsive on-demand transit service that offers a highly flexible routing and/or highly flexible scheduling, would allow the Ann Arbor Area Transportation Authority to expand who it serves and where it operates. This could modernize public transportation in the county while saving money in the long-term. Using ARPA funds to pilot innovations to improve upon current services that would promote long-term growth and economic equity within the county is money well-spent in the long-term.

Thus far, Washtenaw County has allocated half of its ARPA dollars, most of which have been targeted toward improving racial and economic equity within the county. As the commissioners move forward and spend the second half of the funding, the county can safeguard its investments by examining initial allocations and bolstering funding where necessary to maximize the impact. Further ARPA spending should consider projects that require a one-time investment while providing the county with a long-term benefit; investments in infrastructure are an especially good use of ARPA funds in this regard. Lastly, having allocated these funds, implementation is key to the success of these programs. Designing evidence-based, data-driven interventions with measurable impacts will provide the county with the most benefit from this unprecedented opportunity to invest in equity.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Amanda Nothhaft** is a senior data and evaluation manager at the University of Michigan's Poverty Solutions, a university-wide initiative that aims to prevent and alleviate poverty through action-based research.



## ENDNOTES

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