

Berkshire Funding Focus:

An Initiative to Maximize Utilization of Government Stimulus Funds in Berkshire County

Objective

To provide information, coordination and capacity-building support to Berkshire County municipalities, nonprofit organizations, schools, and businesses seeking federal stimulus funds to aid with their pandemic-related recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Strategic Opportunity

Federal stimulus funds, beginning with the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and followed by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, provide an opportunity for Berkshire County to draw down an unprecedented amount of government investment in the coming years. Considering ARPA alone, the Commonwealth will have nearly \$10 billion to invest locally, with federal funds coming directly to municipalities and schools as well through state agencies and their intermediaries.

These available federal resources can be activated for longer-term investments in workforce development, education, business development, housing, and infrastructure improvements (e.g., broadband). Established regional plans including [1Berkshire's Blueprint 2.0](#), the [Berkshire County CEDS](#), [Sustainable Berkshires](#), and [MassHire's Workforce Skills Cabinet Blueprint](#), can help galvanize and guide partnerships across sectors to identify and secure high-priority investments to achieve shared goals in partnership with elected officials at the local and state level.

Cross-Sector Approach to Capitalize on Opportunity

The initiative will leverage the expertise of countywide organizations with deep relationships with constituencies that can be mobilized to act on this once-in a generation opportunity for Berkshire County: to make strategic investments that can bolster resilience, advance equity, foster economic opportunity, and enhance long-term prosperity in the region.

Toward these goals, the initiative will include the following functions:

- Consolidating and organizing information about available grants on a web-based platform with separate sections dedicated to nonprofits, municipalities, businesses, and public schools.
 - A specialist/navigator will identify high-value funding opportunities, synthesize guidelines and applicant requirements, and make efforts to publicize these high-value opportunities to stakeholders through partners.
- Offering regular training programs to help potential applicants develop grant writing skills, assess and build internal capacity to administer a federal grant, and develop systems for reporting and compliance responsibilities.
- Providing technical assistance through consultations to help potential applicants determine if their proposed project and capacities are in alignment with grant program requirements.
- Provide grantwriting assistance through a pool of consultants for strategic grant opportunities that have the potential for significant impact on the region.

This project will be developed and implemented through a strategic and operational collaboration involving four sector-specific sets of partners through a “hub and spoke” model. The hub function will be responsible for consolidating and organizing information through research and coordination, developing and maintaining a website with information on government stimulus funding opportunities, responding to general inquiries, and implementing large trainings and convenings for all sectors. Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) will serve as the hub and a full-time specialist/navigator will be hired.

The spoke organizations will work collaboratively with BRPC to provide sector-specific coordination and technical assistance to support specific stakeholders for which they have established relationships and the ability to reach and serve:

- *1Berkshire* will be responsible for activities focused on private sector businesses and larger economic development projects and will assist with marketing efforts.
- *Berkshire Education Resources K-12 (BERK, formerly Berkshire Education Task Force)* will be responsible for activities focused on education and schools, from early childhood to K-12.
- *The Nonprofit Center for the Berkshires*, in partnership with the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, Berkshire Bank Foundation, and Berkshire United Way, will be responsible for activities focused on the nonprofit sector.

The online resources will be intentionally connected to the expanded [Berkshire Benchmarks](#) community indicators site which was re-launched this spring, allowing stakeholders to access information on data and trends to identify strategic opportunities to leverage federal funding to address critical issues and gaps, convene collaborations, and prepare applications.

An Advisory Committee representing partners and sectors will be responsible primarily for guiding strategy, monitoring progress toward agreed-upon goals, and fundraising for central operations.

Operating Principles

In serving the community, the core partners will seek to plan and implement the initiative with these shared values:

1. **Equity:** Ensuring a “level playing field” for all as well as an equitable distribution of resources;
2. **Inclusion:** Actively engaging and ensuring access to information and support to all interested parties —especially ones representing residents historically marginalized or excluded from funding processes;
3. **Transparency:** Explaining and openly sharing processes related to applying, receiving, and reporting on federal stimulus grants;
4. **Neutrality:** Being impartial to all stakeholders in brokering access to information and funding sources, fostering collegiality over competitiveness, and protecting against any real or perceived favoritism or conflicts of interest;
5. **Collaboration:** Fostering inter-agency partnerships and collaborative proposals/applications, and learning together through knowledge-sharing and convening;
6. **Supportive Service:** Providing complimentary technical assistance and administrative capacities to agencies around prospecting, grantwriting and reporting, etc.; and,
7. **Long-term Impact:** Adding strength and building capacities for organizations and sectors that yield sustainable benefits (beyond grantmaking periods).