

# ACF Learning Exchange: Optimizing the Use of American Rescue Plan Act Funds

## Facilitator Guide

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) has issued slightly over \$46 billion of the \$47.5 billion in relief funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) to provide critical and unprecedented support to children, families, and communities impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic downturn. ACF is committed to working with grantees to optimize the use of all of their COVID-19 supplemental relief funding based on differing deadlines, flexibilities, and expiration dates. One way that ACF is assisting grantees with these decisions is by facilitating roundtable sessions for grantees to brainstorm, problem-solve, and discuss ideas for how to use supplemental funds and regular appropriations strategically to help their communities and reduce systemic inequities. These sessions will also help ACF understand the challenges that state and county grantees are facing, and ACF will use the information shared to inform future technical assistance.

**PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT OF 1995 (Pub. L. 104-13) STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BURDEN:** The purpose of this information collection is to advance the roundtable session discussions and identify the technical assistance needs to support grantees as they determine how to make the most out of their ARP funding according to their community's needs. The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated at 80 minutes per grantee, including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and reviewing the collection of information. These questions will be asked during the roundtable sessions at one meeting at the beginning of August 2021, so the total estimated time for all participating grantees is one hour.

This is a voluntary collection of information. An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB # is 0970-0531 and the expiration date is 7/31/2022. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Natasha Wright, Senior Advisor in IOAS at [natasha.wright@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:natasha.wright@acf.hhs.gov).

## Purpose

The facilitated roundtable sessions will be used to do the following:

- **Assemble states and counties from across the nation to initiate a peer exchange designed to generate ideas for taking full advantage of ARP funding in the following areas:**
  - o **Equity**
  - o **Economic Mobility**
  - o **Strengthening Crisis Response**
  - o **Cross-System Collaborations**
- **Hear directly from states and counties to increase ACF's understanding of the training and technical assistance needed to support grantees' use of ARP funds in their communities and learn their success stories.**

# The Facilitator Role

The role of the facilitator is to:

- encourage active engagement among the participants;
- keep the discussion moving in a direction that is constructive;
- identify common topics or subjects in discussion to focus the discussion;
- ask questions to clarify comments and restate if members are confused; and
- summarize and organize the ideas discussed.

The facilitator uses their various skills, tools, strategies, and natural abilities to create a positive exchange of ideas and experiences among the participants. Above all else, facilitators should model performance standards, active listening, and trust-building behaviors. They should also remain neutral or objective and create an environment for all to have a chance to participate.

These questions have been purposefully developed and approved by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget in order to obtain the necessary information.

## Facilitator Guidance

Below is some information, and suggested language, that may be useful to facilitators as they prepare for these discussions.

### Logistics and Overview

Enter in the following information to help you prepare.

**Roundtable session title:** [insert title]

**Start time:** [insert time]

**End time:** [insert time]

**Facilitator:** [insert name]

**Co-Facilitator:** [insert name]

**Note taker:** [insert name]

**Duration:** One hour and 20 minutes

**Purpose:** ACF is facilitating roundtable sessions for grantees to brainstorm, problem-solve, and discuss ideas for how to use COVID-19 supplemental funds and regular appropriations strategically to help their communities and reduce systemic inequities. These sessions will also help ACF understand the challenges that state and county grantees are facing, and ACF will use the information shared to inform future technical assistance.

### Facilitator Introduction

**[State the following to start the dialogue.]**

*Hello and welcome to the roundtable session about optimizing the use of American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funds for [insert roundtable session title]. My name is [insert name], and I will be facilitating our conversation.*

*My colleague [insert name of co-facilitator] will also help facilitate this discussion and [insert name of note taker] will be taking notes for us.*

*One goal of this session is to hear from you and your colleagues about how they have used or plan to use ARP funds to advance [insert title of roundtable session] in their jurisdictions. Although our focus today is on ARP funding, we are interested in hearing about promising strategies or models that you have successfully developed and implemented with the use of other COVID-19 supplemental relief funding to promote [insert title of roundtable session]. Learning what is possible in other jurisdictions may help you think about what components*

*you can apply in your own communities. A secondary goal of this session is for ACF to learn what types of tools and training opportunities would be helpful to you in to support of your use of ARP funds. Over the next 40 minutes, we want to hear about your challenges and what supports are most important to you. As we talk, I may ask some follow-up questions.*

*There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions posed during this discussion. Please share openly and honestly so that we can fully understand your experiences, concerns, and needs.*

**[Please read this paragraph in verbatim to participants.]**

*Your participation is completely voluntary. These questions have been approved by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. We are taking notes that will be used to inform our development of technical assistance and support tools. We may also follow up with those of you who share success stories to learn more about what works well.*

*Are there any questions or concerns before we get started?*

**[Plan to devote a few minutes to answer participants' questions.]**

## Facilitation Questions

**Facilitate the group discussion by asking the following questions based on the topic of the roundtable session. Reserve time to allow responses to each question.**

### EQUITY

#### ICEBREAKERS

- ❖ **Please indicate on the map where you are from.**
- ❖ **Please select how long you have worked in government (in a career or elected position) at the [state or county level].**
- ❖ **On a scale of 1-10, please rank how well you believe your jurisdiction has promoted equity in your communities over the last 3 years. [1=terrible and 10=great.] (Note: while asking this question, we will show the definition of equity from EO 13985: “the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.”)**

#### Strategies:

**Rationale:** These questions are icebreaker activities to have participants interact and learn where their colleagues are from. This will help provide context for the lens that participants are using when engaging in discussion.

## UNDERSTANDING PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS TO-DATE

- ❖ **Is there anything you heard from the Equity Spotlight section of today’s program that piqued your interest, you would like to learn more about, or that you would consider implementing in your jurisdiction?**
- ❖ **A. Anonymous poll question: Does your agency actively measure equity?**  
**B1. Verbal follow-up questions: If you selected “Yes,” please share which metrics your agency tracks.**  
**B2. How did you identify those metrics and use the data you collect?**
- ❖ **Has your agency or any others in your jurisdiction prioritized equity in your plans for using ARP funds or any other recovery funds you received? If so, please share how.**

### Strategies:

**Rationale:** The first question is designed to gather information about what resonated with session participants during the Equity Spotlight portion of the convening and why. The second and third questions are designed to obtain an understanding of how grantees have already used or plan to use COVID-19 supplemental relief funds to advance equity and how they are measuring impact. All three questions are intended to promote a learning exchange among session participants.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- ❖ **What barriers have you encountered in your efforts to advance equity in your communities? How did you overcome these barriers? If these barriers are still present, let’s brainstorm potential solutions.**
- ❖ **What strengths or existing resources in your jurisdiction can you leverage to use ARP funds most effectively to advance equity?**
- ❖ **Think about a successful program or initiative in your jurisdiction to date, not necessarily related to equity. What actions or factors made it a success? How can you apply these to using ARP funds to advance equity?**

### Strategies:

**Rationale:** These questions are designed to identify common barriers to advancing equity and to collectively think through potential solutions including how to apply strategies from past successes and leverage existing strengths and resources within their jurisdictions.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACF

- ❖ **Is there anything that we have not discussed in this session that you would like the federal government to know about your efforts to advance equity in your communities or about managing COVID-19 supplemental relief funds in general?**

### Strategies:

**Rationale:** This question is designed to capture anything that the participants would like to raise about equity and/or COVID-19 supplemental relief funding that was not mentioned in the preceding discussion.

## ECONOMIC MOBILITY

### ICEBREAKERS

- ❖ Please indicate on the map where you are from.
- ❖ Please select how long you have worked in government (in a career or elected position) at the [state or county level].
- ❖ On a scale of 1-10, rank the success of your jurisdiction's efforts to promote economic mobility during the COVID-19 pandemic. [1=terrible and 10=great.]

### Strategies:

**Rationale:** These questions are icebreaker activities to have participants interact and learn where their colleagues are from. This will help provide context for the lens that participants are using when engaging in discussion.

### UNDERSTANDING PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS TO-DATE

- ❖ Is there anything you heard from the plenary session today that you may be able to apply to your agency or jurisdiction' further your efforts to improve the economic mobility for members of your communities?
- ❖
  - A. What have your agencies prioritized in your plans to foster upward economic mobility and increase financial security? Some examples include housing supports, small business relief, food security, child care etc.
  - B. How would you rate the success of these plans?
- ❖
  - A. What metrics did your communities use to determine your priorities for improving economic outcomes in your communities?
  - B. How will you measure success?
  - C. How will you use this data to inform future efforts?

### Strategies:

**Rationale:** The first question is designed to gather information about what resonated with session participants during the plenary session and why. The second and third questions are designed to learn what grantees have prioritized in their economic recovery and which related metrics they are tracking. All three questions are intended to promote a learning exchange among session participants.

## PROBLEM SOLVING

- ❖ **What barriers do you anticipate may hinder your ability to effectively use ARP funding to improve economic mobility in your jurisdiction? Let's brainstorm potential solutions.**
- ❖ **What strengths or existing resources in your jurisdiction can you leverage to use ARP funds most effectively to promote economic mobility?**
- ❖ **Think about a successful program or initiative in your jurisdiction to date, not necessarily related to furthering economic mobility.**
  - A. **What actions or factors made it a success?**
  - B. **How can you apply these to using COVID-19 supplemental relief funds for your economic recovery?**

### **Strategies:**

**Rationale:** These questions are designed to identify common barriers to economic recovery and to collectively think through potential solutions including how to apply strategies from past successes and leverage existing strengths and resources within their jurisdictions.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ACF

- ❖ **Is there anything that we have not discussed in this session that you would like the federal government to know about your economic recovery efforts in your communities or about managing COVID-19 supplemental relief funds in general?**

### **Strategies:**

**Rationale:** This question is designed to capture anything that the participants would like to raise about economic recovery and/or COVID-19 supplemental relief funding that was not mentioned in the preceding discussion.

## STRENGTHENING CRISIS RESPONSE

### ICEBREAKERS

- ❖ Please indicate on the map where you are from.
- ❖ Please select how long you have worked in government (in a career or elected position) at the [state or county level].
- ❖ On a scale of 1-10, rank your jurisdiction's crisis response capacity at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. [1=terrible and 10=great]
- ❖ On a scale of 1-10, rank your jurisdiction's current crisis response capacity. [1=terrible and 10=great]

#### Strategies:

**Rationale:** These questions are icebreaker activities to have participants interact and learn where their colleagues are from. This will help provide context for the lens that participants are using when engaging in discussion.

### UNDERSTANDING PRIORITIES AND PROGRESS TO-DATE

- ❖ The moderated panel discussion honed in on the infrastructure systems that states and counties have improved during the COVID-19 pandemic.  
A. Which activities shared resonate with you, or have any of you implemented anything similarly in your jurisdictions?  
B. What else did you implement that may offer new avenues of support for your peer states and counties?
- ❖ What does your agency prioritize when developing a crisis response plan? Are your current crisis response priorities different from those you prioritized before the COVID-19 pandemic? Please elaborate on why or why not.
- ❖ What metrics do you use to measure your crisis response capacity?

#### Strategies:

**Rationale:** The first question is designed to gather information about what resonated with session participants during the plenary session and why. The second and third questions are designed to learn what grantees have prioritized in their economic recovery and which related metrics they are tracking. All three questions are intended to promote a learning exchange among session participants.

### PROBLEM SOLVING

- ❖ What metrics do you use to measure your crisis response capacity?
- ❖ Please share your experience shifting from immediate crisis response to building a sustainable infrastructure in preparation for future emergencies. What lessons from your COVID-19 response have adjusted/informed your thinking about your communities' needs during an emergency?
- ❖ What strengths or existing resources helped your community during the COVID-19 pandemic? How do you plan to use your ARP funding to further build on these strengths and resources or build additional capacity for your crisis response?

#### Strategies:

## **Wrap Up the Discussion**

**Reserve a few minutes at the end to respectfully wrap up this discussion before moving on to the next meeting segment.**

## **Thank You and Next Steps**

**[Please read this paragraph in verbatim to participants.]**

*This has been a very rich discussion. Thank you all for sharing so openly. ACF staff will use this information to inform technical assistance to support your use of ARP funds.*

**[Help participants transition to the next meeting segment.]**