

Recovery Plan Performance Report  
State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds  
(SLFRF)

2024 Report  
(July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024)

Berks County, PA

Recipient UEI: L4M3SH5GTHF7

**Berks County, PA**  
**2024 Recovery Plan Performance Report**

Table of Contents

**General Overview.....2**

- Executive Summary.....2
- Uses of Funds .....2
- Promoting Equitable Outcomes .....3
- Community Engagement .....4
- Labor Practices .....5
- Use of Evidence .....5
- Performance Report .....5

**Project Inventory.....5**

- Grants Coordinator Project Overview and performance .....5

## **GENERAL OVERVIEW**

### **Executive Summary**

As of June 2022, the County of Berks received its total allocation of \$81,806,170. At this time the County has documented, obligated, and spent these funds on grant coordination and Lost Revenue. Funds were allocated to grant coordination in 2021 and 2022, and for government services in 2021, 2022, and 2023 based on the 2020, 2021, and 2022 lost revenue calculations. The funds were primarily used to continue to provide general government public safety services at pre-pandemic levels. The amount of actual lost revenue is above and beyond the Treasury's allocation to the County.

### **Uses of Funds**

The County committed to the effective and purposeful deployment of these resources to provide general government public safety services at pre-pandemic levels. The County oversaw the use of these funds through Senior Leadership of the Commissioner's Team which included the Department of Budget and Finance and the Department of Community and Economic Development under the administrative direction of our Chief Operations Officer. This professional approach allowed us to fund general government operations that successfully and strategically addressed critical community needs, supported our vulnerable populations, and prepare for the future in the event another wave of the pandemic occurs.

Through the due diligence of Senior Leadership, it was discovered that the best course of action was to utilize these funds under the Revenue Loss/ Revenue Replacement (EC 6) eligible use category to stabilize the County's operating budget through the end of 2024 and deficits to governmental services with the intent to lessen any negative impact on County residents. These efforts focused on how to make the most of this historical federal funding opportunity created to ignite economic recovery.

Senior Leadership assessed and documented the negative financial impact on the County budget and operations as a result of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Regular operations meetings were held to ensure transparency with the public on the County's negative economic impact from COVID-19 and its recovery strategies.

This oversight also allowed the County to focus on leveraging all other available resources and collaborate with community partners to ensure that funds create a positive, lasting impact in our community for all residents.

Through the Berks County Redevelopment Authority (BCRA), the County administered the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) which was funded by the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. ERAP has provided payments for rent, rent arrears, utility, and utility arrears for eligible applicants. Applicants must have experienced financial hardship directly or indirectly by COVID or during the COVID pandemic. Priority was given to people at or below 50% of the area median income and to one or more members of the applicant household that have been unemployed for a least 90 days. The County served a total of 4,886 families with funds from the US Treasury in the amount of \$22,271,706 and from the Commonwealth of PA DHS in the amount of \$ 25,748,159. The program is completed.

The County's Certified Economic Development Organization (CEDO) - Greater Berks Development Fund (GBDF) was allocated \$2,877,000 through the Statewide Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI) in November 2022. Known as the Pennsylvania Catalyst Fund these funds are offered at a below market rate and are intended to be in a subordinate position to other financing – especially impactful for small businesses. GBDF continues to administer this program and is expecting that additional funds may be available under this program.

### **Promoting equitable outcomes**

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, it became increasingly clear that having reliable and affordable Internet service is a crucial utility service for everyday life. There are still many residents within Berks County that do not have the ability to access quality Internet service. With that in mind, the County conducted a feasibility study of broadband access throughout the county that will help to focus efforts at filling those gaps and advocating for further funding. As part of the study, a survey of residents was conducted and made available in English and Spanish to have the greatest possibility of engaging all residents and to garner the best representation of the community. Through the study, need for broadband education was highlighted and the County allocated \$600,000 to this effort. The first program was funded in Summer 2023 in the amount of \$300,000 through The Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) to fund a Digital Navigator program to provide digital literacy. Other broadband education funds have been provided to the Berks Community Health Center (BCHC) for a self-monitoring blood pressure program to improve wellness and to Connections Work to improve digital literacy for those who have been involved in the justice system.

The BCRA who administered the ERAP also administers the County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG), HOME funds and other federal support programs for Berks County. Due to their extensive involvement in the housing support continuum, they are able to effectively partner and deploy these funds into our community to support vulnerable populations whose housing stability was more severely impacted as a result of the pandemic. With the coordination of other federal and state funds including the newly designated Whole Home Repair program (WHRP), the outreach to vulnerable populations is continuing to provide a safety net for those most economically challenged.

Through the WHRP low-income homeowners whose household income does not exceed 80 percent of the area's median income may be eligible for forgivable loans. Pennsylvania small landlords who own no more than five properties and no more than fifteen rental units of affordable housing may be eligible for loans if they rent (and continue to rent) to tenants whose income does not exceed 60 percent of the area's median income. A total of \$3.6 Million will be made available under this program and the application period began in July 2023.

The BCRA hired a Housing Planner on board in May 2023 to help address the critical housing needs of the County to provide accessible and attainable housing for all Berks Countians. That person has been promoted to be the Deputy Director of the BCRA and continues to commit his knowledge and leadership to implementing the housing strategy outlined in IMAGINE Berks.

The County's Strategic Economic Development Action Plan – IMAGINE Berks was formally adopted in August 2022. The planning process for this strategy purposefully brought together community members who were not part of previous traditional planning efforts to engage a broader audience of residents. The plan includes the identification or and support for the creation of “opportunity jobs” – those jobs that provide benefits and wages great than or equal to the County's living wage of \$78,374 – in present numbers. The plan also includes a focus on Housing and Economic Mobility and the ability to track strategic investments in its implementation.

### **Community Engagement**

The County's commitment to community engagement in pandemic recovery efforts began with the distribution of CARES Act funding. The Berks County Board of Commissioners wanted to find the best ways to allocate these important funds to maximize every dollar. In order to get a snapshot of the true need, the Commissioners conducted an online Community Needs Assessment during the summer of 2020. More than 150 community partners responded, helping to direct available resources at that time and the necessary funds for relief, response, and support efforts. That commitment to engagement has continued.

Since the pandemic, public meetings have a virtual interactive component allowing our citizens greater ease of access to information and the ability to actively participate in public meetings and conversations. These virtual options will continue.

Based on the demographics of our community, the County prioritized making services and information available to residents in both English and Spanish. This includes the previously discussed broadband study survey and ERAP program. The County is committed to filling this gap and making sure all our residents can take advantage of the various services and programs offered through County government.

The County's commitment is further evident in the high level of community involvement through planning efforts like the one mentioned above for IMAGINE Berks (adopted August 2022) and the County's Greenway, Parks, and Recreation Plan (adopted in December 2022) – actively engaging a broad representation of county residents through informal conversations, meetings and in some instances formal public hearings. Citizens are actively working with County staff on the implementation of these plans and the deployment of resources to all areas of the County. There is a focus on the Boroughs and redevelopment to ensure that we are positively affecting our rural residents experiencing economic challenges.

With a dearth of access to local news and community reporting, the County committed funds to Berks Community Television (BCTV) which provides an interactive platform for news and citizen reporting. Shared information includes social support services, business support services and access to local government meetings. With the support of the County, BCTV's position as the “go to” place for community information has been enhanced and The HUB is fully functional.

## **Labor Practices**

The County is not currently utilizing project labor agreements or community benefits agreements. For any infrastructure or capital expenditure utilizing county funds, recipients are contractually required to comply with all federal, state, and local laws and ordinances which are applicable. The County encourages and supports the use of local contractors.

## **Use of Evidence**

The County maintained a public facing fund tracking dashboard on the County website that allowed the community to track distribution of funds. Funds were primarily used to continue to provide general government public safety services at pre-pandemic levels. Direct project expenditures are noted below for a Grant Coordinator.

## **Performance Report**

The County had one direct expense which was the Grants Coordinator position under the Administrative Expense category. The Project is completed. Oversight of SLFRF funds is the responsibility of the CFO, the Director of Community and Economic Development, the Deputy Director of Budget and Finance and the Controller's Office for the County.

## **PROJECT INVENTORY**

### **Project**

Project 11314: Grants Coordinator Position

Funding amount: \$69,951.16 – Adopted Budget, Total Cumulative Obligations, Total Cumulative Expenditures

Project Expenditure Category: 7-Administrative - 7.1-Administrative Expenses

### **Project Overview**

The Grants Coordinator position assisted in ensuring that funds were utilized effectively and appropriately to comply with all federal requirements and reporting and to assist the County to fulfill its purpose to oversee a cross-community collaborative approach for impactful investment in Berks County.

### **Use of Evidence**

The Grants Coordinator Project is complete. As noted above, Oversight of SLFRF funds is the responsibility of the CFO, the Director of Community and Economic Development, the Deputy Director of Budget and Finance and the Controller's Office for the County.

**Performance Report**

Payroll for Grants Coordinator:

From 07/1/2022 – 9/30/2022:

Salary - \$12,947.72

Training- \$199.00

Total: \$13,146.72

Total Cumulative Expenditures to Date: \$69,951.16

This project is completed. There will not be ongoing expenses.