



# Equitable Implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act in Los Angeles County



January 2023

## BACKGROUND

### The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' Emphasis on Equitable Distribution of Resources

Since January of 2020 when the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Los Angeles County (County), the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the lives of many residents and disproportionately impacted low-income communities and communities of color. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) recognized the immense opportunity afforded by the estimated \$1.9 billion in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to address these inequities and transform the lives of millions of County residents by centering equity and providing proportional resources to address the needs of the communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to a Board motion on July 13, 2021, that directed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to propose equity principles and a formula that all departments must apply to ensure all ARPA funds are expended, to the greatest extent possible, on residents and areas of the County most impacted by COVID-19 and most affected by poverty.

Case and death rates at the time of the Board motion revealed that approximately 1.2 million County residents had contracted COVID-19 and over 24,000 lost their lives. While the societal and economic impacts are still being calculated and continue to rise to this day, data from July of 2021 showed the enormous losses faced by individuals and their families, with low-income communities and communities of color bearing the brunt of the negative outcomes. County neighborhoods experiencing concentrated poverty (i.e., areas with higher percentages of residents under 200 percent of the federal poverty level) had nearly three times as many COVID-19 cases than communities with higher incomes. Furthermore, our Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Black, Latino/Latinx populations and low-income communities had most consistently faced housing, food, and economic insecurity during the pandemic. For example:

- Black and Latino/Latinx workers faced 1.6 to 2.0 times the unemployment rates of their White counterparts (as of November 2020)
- Households with less than \$30,000 in annual income faced double the unemployment rates of higher income households
- Residents living in communities where there are high rates of housing vulnerability, poverty, unemployment, and underinsurance make up a greater share of the essential workforce and experienced higher adjusted death case rates.

Based on this data, communities hit the hardest by the pandemic require a greater amount of ARPA resources to recover.

### American Rescue Plan Act Equitable Implementation

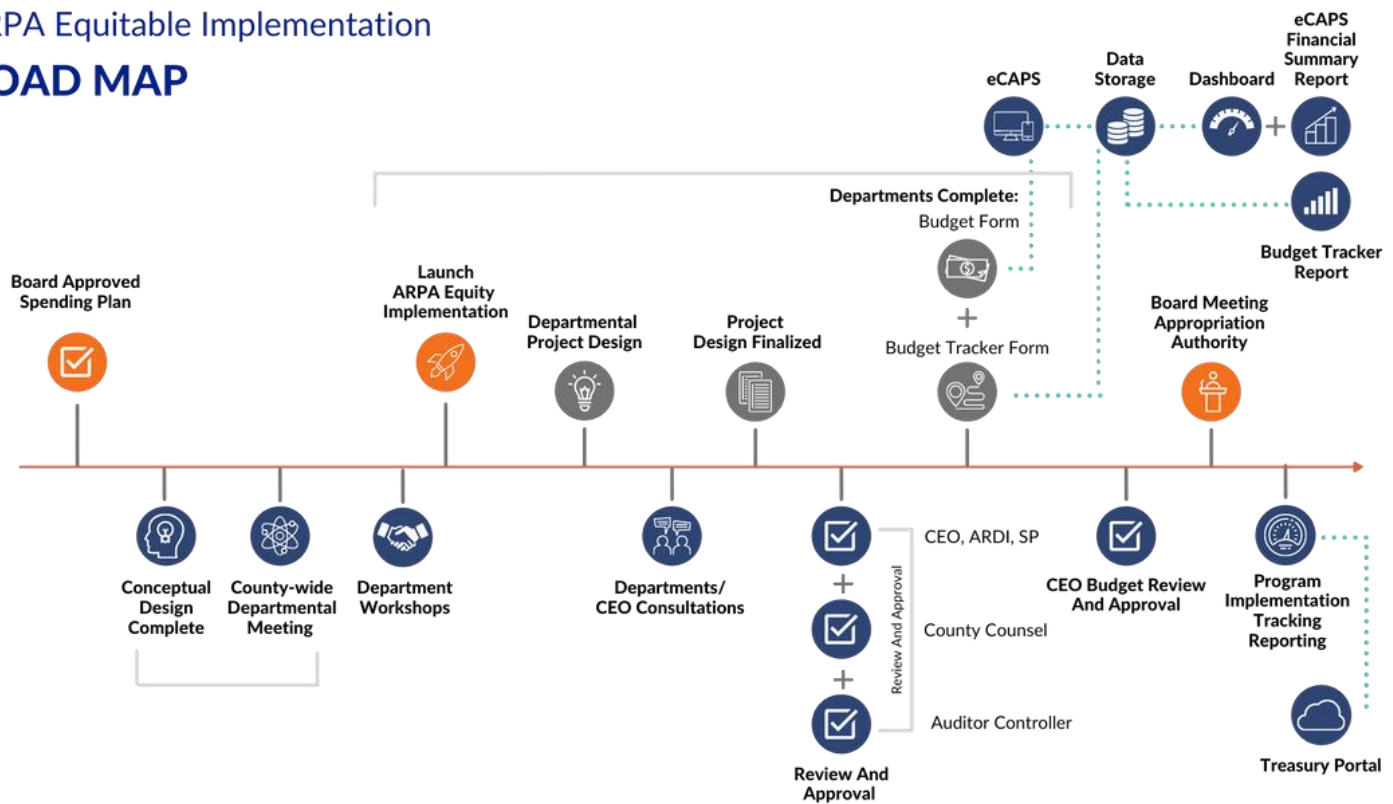
The Chief Executive Office's Anti-Racism, Diversity, and Inclusion (ARDI) Initiative worked collaboratively with Esri ArcGIS and other County departments to design an automated workflow to support departmental project design, compliance, and reporting for ARPA. Refer to Figure 1 for the ARPA Equitable Implementation Road Map. This automated workflow helps streamline department efforts and is essential to strengthening County



infrastructure for dashboarding and spend tracking for ARPA and future County expenditures.

*Figure 1: ARPA Equitable Implementation Road Map*

## ARPA Equitable Implementation ROAD MAP



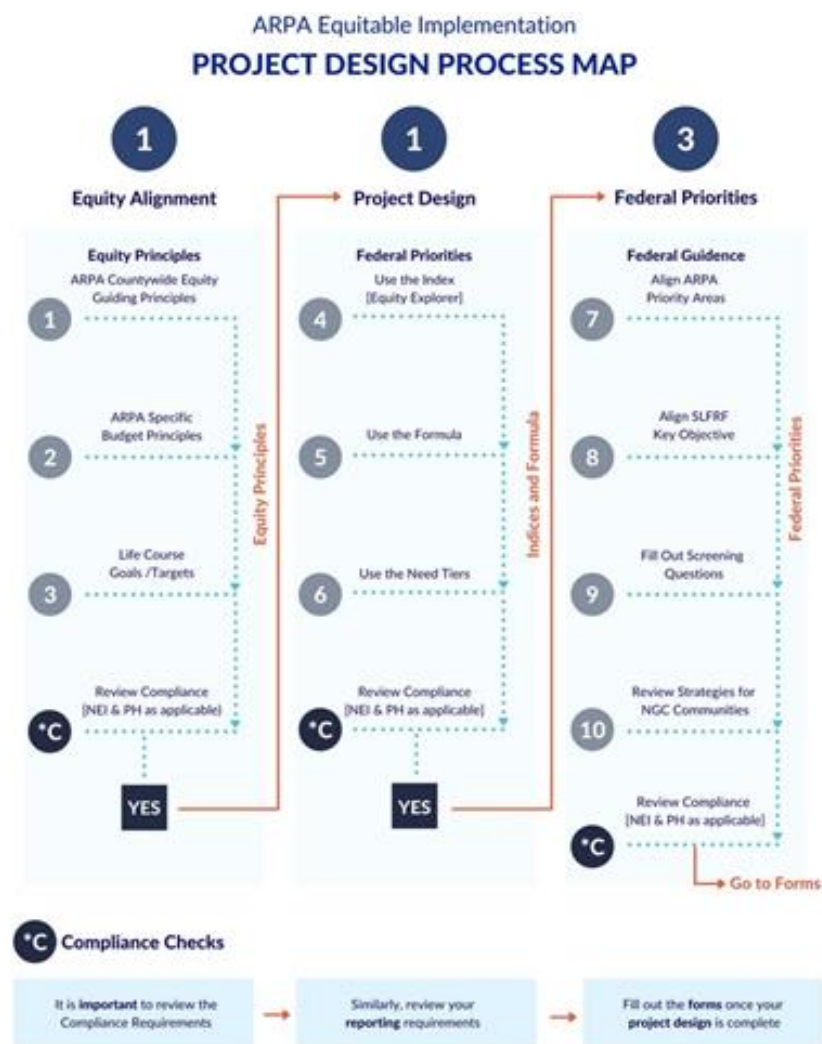
The purpose of the Recovering Better than Before: Equitable Implementation of the American Rescue Plan Act Project Design Guidance is to support departments through the project design process, including use of the Equity Principles, Life Course outcomes and the functionality of the Equity Explorer. By using this guidance document, Departments will achieve the Board's mandate of allocating ARPA funds to the most impacted communities and meet the Federal project design and reporting requirements detailed in the following sections. ARDI has since developed additional guidance documents to facilitate the use of the required reporting and tracker tools and a platform automating the tracking system.

## PROGRAM DESIGN PROCESS

To ensure the equitable implementation and allocation of ARPA funding, ARDI works closely with departments to review project designs and assist project managers with identifying and applying Countywide Equity Guiding Principle(s), ARPA Budget Equity Principle(s), and Life Course Outcomes; developing project goals, objectives, activities, target populations, and outcomes that consider equity; and using the Equity Explorer Mapping Tool as well as applying the Board's approved funding formula.

The ARDI review process in Figure 2 includes a set of screening questions, identification of geographic need, the incorporation and utilization of metrics, and alignment of budget resources with communities most impacted by COVID-19 to ensure project design and implementation have an equity focus. This process benefits Departments by ensuring their projects uphold the commitment to incorporate equity; support program tracking, quality assurance and performance; guide adherence to federal ARPA requirements; automates ARPA reporting; and ensures that communities most in need recover more quickly.

*Figure 2: ARPA Equitable Implementation Project Design Process Map*





## The Equity Framework

The Equity Framework supports Departments in developing their project designs with an equity focus by aligning it with equity principles and life course outcomes. This allows the projects to have the highest prevalence and potential impact in achieving equity.

The set of principles are:



These principles were identified based on the following criteria:

- Inherently actionable (accountability)
- Can be evaluated (data collection)
- Can be documented (reporting out)
- Can be assessed (for course correction)

To ensure that the Project aligns with the County-wide Equity Principles, the ARPA Budget Equity Principles and Life Course (LC) Outcomes, Departments are asked to select as many principles and LC Outcomes as are appropriate for the Project. Principle(s) and LC Outcomes selected for their project must:

- Align with the Project and its results, goals, and outcomes
- Be aspirational
- Be achievable long-term

The County-wide Equity Principles and ARPA Budget Equity Principles are below.

### COUNTYWIDE EQUITY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Reduce racial disparities in life outcomes as well as disparities in public investment to shape those outcomes.
2. Develop and implement strategies that identify, prioritize, and effectively support the most disadvantaged geographies and populations.
3. Authentically engage residents, organizations, and other community stakeholders to inform and determine interventions (e.g. policy and program) and investments.

4. Seek to improve long-term outcomes both intergenerationally and multi-generationally.
5. Use data to effectively assess and communicate equity needs and support timely assessment of progress.
6. Disaggregate data and analysis within racial/ethnic and other demographic subgroup categories.
7. Work collaboratively and intentionally across Departments as well as across leadership levels and decision-makers.
8. Act urgently and boldly to achieve tangible results.
9. Align policies, processes, and practices to effectively address equity challenges throughout the County of Los Angeles' workforce (personnel, contractors, and vendors).
10. Intervene early and emphasize long-term prevention.

## ARPA BUDGET EQUITY PRINCIPLES

1. Dedicate ARPA funds and resources to programs and services that reduce and close race and gender equity gaps and address root causes and drivers of inequity.
2. Lead with transparency and accountability during critical stages of program implementation by reporting out program process and seeking community input and engagement in delivering services.
3. Ensure immigrants of all statuses and system-impacted communities, including those with criminal histories, are eligible for any new or existing programs funded by ARPA dollars.
4. Ensure new and existing programs and services are accessible to disadvantaged communities without the fear of intimidation or judgment.
5. Services must be culturally and linguistically accessible, near transit, available in-person/over the phone, during days and hours when working individuals can access services and delivered by trusted messengers.
6. When possible, offer opportunities and the technical assistance needed to support CBOs in accessing County of Los Angeles funds. Leverage existing contracting reform strategies and third-party administrator programs.
7. Prior to the allocation of additional ARPA funding, assess the impact of the initial round of allocated ARPA funding and programs.
8. ARPA funds and resources should be used to support and uplift the health and wellness needs of communities who have experienced historic disinvestment, over-policing, and been impacted most by the pandemic. Funds should not be used to advance suppression-based efforts via incarceration and policing.



## Identifying Highest Need Communities

### *The COVID Vulnerability and Recovery Index*

Due to the health, social, and economic circumstances experienced by economically vulnerable communities of color that pre-dated and were exacerbated by the pandemic, COVID-19 infection patterns demonstrated a shift in the spread of COVID-19 from wealthier, predominantly White communities towards non-White, low-income communities early in the pandemic. To account for this inequitable impact and to help guide ARPA investments where they are needed most, the County of Los Angeles partnered with Advancement Project California to adapt its initial statewide index to develop the COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index (Index) for the County that identifies the communities most disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and at greater risk of adverse outcomes. The Index includes COVID-19-related risk, severity, and recovery need indicators that stratifies County cities and communities into five need tiers, ranging from highest to lowest need.

### *The COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Indicators*

The COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index uses census tract-level data to identify communities most in need of immediate and long-term pandemic and economic relief interventions based on relative risk using indicators that assess risk factors for COVID-19 infection, vulnerability to severe outcomes if infected, and ability to recover from the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic. See Table 4: *COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index Indicators, Including Non-Geographically Concentrated Population Indicators and Community Outreach Strategies for a current list of the indicators.*

### *Non-Geographically Concentrated Population Strategies*

As stated in the Board's motion, there is a need to ensure that non-geographically concentrated communities disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are identified and prioritized within departmental ARPA allocations and projects. These communities include, but are not limited to, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, and immigrant communities. To address this need, ARDI consulted with several subject matter experts (SMEs) to identify strategies to collect data, use indicators, and adopt practices to be inclusive of non-geographically concentrated communities highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The indicators included in the Recovery Index include:

- Homeless Status
- Community Business Enterprise Status Limited English-Speaking Households Health Insurance Status
- Internet and Computer Access Status Without Vehicle Status
- Foreign Born Population
- Area Agency on Aging Services Child Welfare Services
- Substance Abuse Treatment Program Location GAIN/GROW enrollment

The following supplemental approaches are designed to capture non-geographically concentrated communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 that may not otherwise be identified by the index indicators:



- Leveraging community-based organizations and internal County programs that predominantly serve non-geographic concentrated communities to identify and reach them in the communities where they live.
- Partnering with trusted messengers is particularly crucial for immigrant communities who may experience heightened fears of government institutions or violating public charge rules.
- Engaging in participatory mapping efforts to capture data in collaboration with community leaders and other stakeholders.
- Building in robust and targeted outreach and engagement services in funded programs and aligning these efforts in departmental community engagement plans.
- Developing a workgroup to explore and implement relevant strategies based on stakeholder input and expertise.

## EQUITABLE CONTRACTING

To ensure smaller organizations serving underserved communities could fairly compete for available funds through our solicitation process, the County developed an expedited contracting and procurement process for the ARPA funding consistent with Federal Treasury guidelines. This new streamlined process decreases the standard contracting timeline by four to ten months from the County's usual solicitation timeline. Standard contract provisions required by Board Policy, County Code, or local practice were also waived, resulting in simpler solicitation and contract documents that are more accessible to smaller businesses or organizations seeking to partner with the County. While these policies and standard provisions serve important interests and minimize risks to the County, waiving these requirements assists in getting support out to communities suffering from the economic and health effects of the pandemic more quickly and allows for more small businesses and community-based organizations (CBOs) to participate in the process with minimal risk.

### ARPA Support Services Master Agreement

Since modifying the contacting processes, the County developed a new, streamlined ARPA-compliant Request for Statement of Qualifications (RFSQ) to establish a master agreement with a diverse pool of qualified contractors to bid on subsequent ARPA projects. Eligibility criteria to qualify as a contractor for the ARPA Support Services Master Agreement was expanded to provide additional contracting opportunities for small businesses, CBOs, and first-time proposers, yet remains in compliance with critical federal, State and County requirements. Service categories for solicitation include, but are not limited to, as-needed language, evaluation, third-party administration, and training services.

The RFSQ was released on April 29, 2022 and remains open and continuous to ensure vendors have the opportunity to qualify as a contractor under the Master Agreement. A virtual Proposer's Conference was held on May 11, 2022. The Conference was offered in multiple languages in addition to English, including Armenian, Mandarin (Chinese), Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, and Thai. The conference provided background on ARPA, an explanation of the streamlined solicitation process and general vendor information on how to receive future solicitation opportunities with all County departments. As of the end of 2022, 57 applications have been received and reviewed with 27 vendors deemed qualified to provide services. Information about this funding opportunity remains posted on the ARPA Recovery website: <https://ceo.lacounty.gov/recovery/contract-opportunities>.

### Equitable Recovery Initiative





In addition to efforts to streamline and simplify the solicitation and application processes, the County has partnered with the California Community Foundation, Center for Non-Profit Management, and BDO FMA on the Equitable Recovery Initiative to provide equitable access to ARPA funding opportunities through capacity building support for organizations led by and that predominately serve communities highly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiative offers a variety of services based on needs identified by organizations, such as resources to help organizations understand what is required, tools to assess organizational capacity to pursue ARPA-funded and other County contracts, and supports for those who decide to apply for funds.

County co-sponsored a session in August 2022, which targeted community and faith-based organizations interested in learning more about potential ARPA funding and pursuing contract opportunities with the County. The session was offered in English with Spanish interpretation. More than 60 percent of participants represented small to very small organizations with operating budgets of one million dollars or less, and of the 77 percent of attendees who responded to an in-session poll, more than one-third (35 percent) had no prior experience with County funding. Engaging these organizations will continue to diversify the pool of qualified contractors and support the County's goal of equitably distributing ARPA and other County funds to become more inclusive of smaller organizations that tend to serve underserved communities highly impacted by the pandemic.

Finally, in December 2022, ARPA-funded County departments attended an Equitable Recovery Initiative briefing to learn the most common challenges faced by small and medium sized organizations when pursuing ARPA and other government funding, the most frequently asked questions about working with the County, and the types of technical assistance requested by LA County nonprofit organizations. The session also provided an opportunity for County participants to inform the Initiative's efforts to provide capacity strengthening services by sharing common pitfalls faced by new applicants and administratively inexperienced contractors.

### Notification of Contracting Opportunities

The County continues to increase notification of available funding opportunities to small businesses and CBOs using a more proactive outreach strategy. The goal has been to leverage multiple communication channels that expand the County's reach and increase the visibility of solicitation opportunities. Efforts have included:

- A broader and ongoing strategy to effectively prioritize, engage, and offer technical assistance on contracting to small businesses and CBOs. This work aims to ensure that eligible businesses, organizations, and community members are aware of, have access to, and can successfully apply for ARPA contract, grant, and subrecipient opportunities;
- A social media toolkit with sample tweets, posts, and graphics to promote and guide audiences to the American Rescue Plan Act and Care First Community Investment: Contracting Opportunities website for more information. The toolkit was translated into six additional languages, including Armenian, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Tagalog, and Thai, to expand the communication's reach to limited English proficient communities. See Figure 3 below for an example of a social media post; and
- One-page fact sheets on ARPA-related contracting and grant opportunities and a companion social media toolkit to raise awareness among potential vendors on the steps needed to become eligible and begin the process of responding to a contract solicitation from the County.

***Figure 3: Example of Contracting Opportunity Social Media Post***



## PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE DATA TOOLS

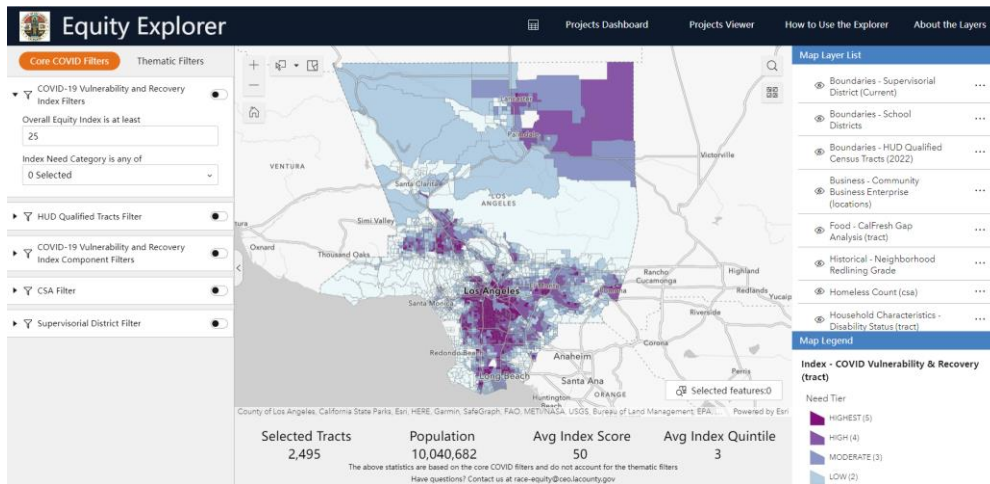
The County developed a series of public tools to make data available that identifies communities most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. These tools help County departments comply with federal mandates and the Board's vision for equitable implementation of ARPA and increase the transparency of ARPA implementation.

### Equity Explorer Mapping Tool

The Equity Explorer Mapping Tool allows users to identify areas of greatest need by census tract using the *COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index* to indicate areas of highest, high, moderate, low, and lowest need based on risk factors for COVID-19 infection, severe illness, and a slower recovery from the pandemic's adverse impacts. The purpose of the tool is to inform decision-making and better align program investments with the geographic areas of greatest need by visually depicting multiple information sources to support data-driven approaches to County investments. The index is the primary map layer in the Equity Explorer and uses census tract-level data to help stratify populations into five (5) need tiers, ranging from highest to lowest need, to identify communities most impacted by the pandemic and in need of immediate and long-term pandemic and economic relief interventions. These need tiers are based on a formula that calculates relative risk using indicators that assess factors related to the communal risks of COVID-19 infection, vulnerability to severe illness if infected, and the ability to recover from the health, economic, and social impacts of the pandemic. The need tiers also relate directly to a funding formula designed to ensure greater concentrations of resources are allocated to higher need communities based on their disproportionate need, so that highest, high, and moderate need populations receive a higher concentration of targeted resources due to the intensity of the pandemic experienced in those communities.

The Equity Explorer shown in Figure 4 below depicts this data visually, which shows users where communities with the greatest needs due to COVID-19 are located and how great the needs are to help determine equitable investments. The mapping tool also features economic, health, environmental, education, demographic, and justice filters that allow users to identify and use other validated indicators that target communities most impacted by the pandemic, as well as non-geographically concentrated populations. The Equity Explorer is now publicly accessible at [Equity Explorer \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).

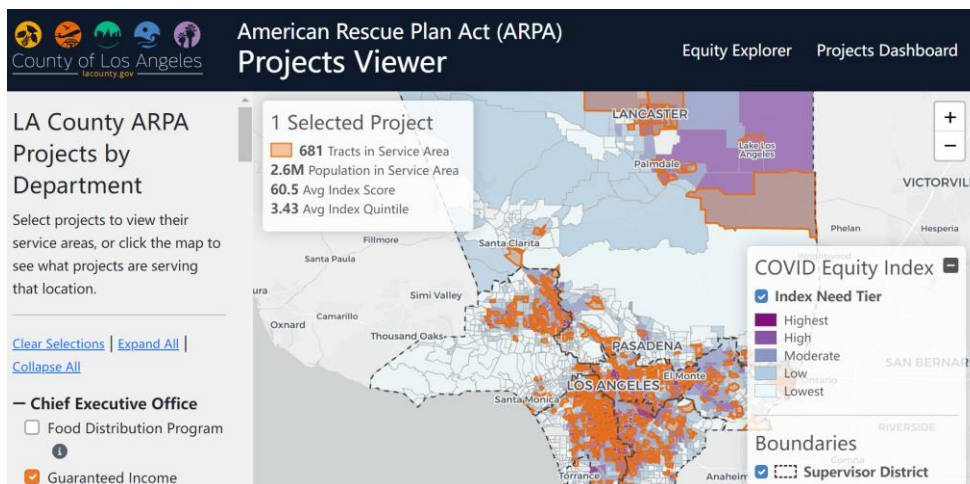
**Figure 4: Equity Explorer Mapping Tool**



## ARPA Projects Map

The ARPA Projects Map features the service areas and locations of ARPA projects that have been approved to launch. Users may select one or more projects from the program list on the left-hand side of the webpage to view where they are targeting services and serving clients by census tract. The map allows users to see what projects are serving a specific geographic location, where the projects are located by supervisorial district, and the need tier in which they fall based on the COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index. This map shown in Figure 5 ensures greater transparency about available services in communities and where individuals and their families can access them. The box on the upper left of the map reflects summary statistics, including the number of tracts served, the selected tract(s)' population, the average index score, and average quintile for the program(s) selected. The higher the average index score and quintile, the higher the need tier reflecting COVID-19-related risk, severity, and recovery needs. The map is updated weekly with new projects as they launch and can be accessed publicly at [American Rescue Plan Act Projects Map \(lacounty.gov\)](https://lacounty.gov/arpa-projects-map).

**Figure 5: ARPA Projects Map**

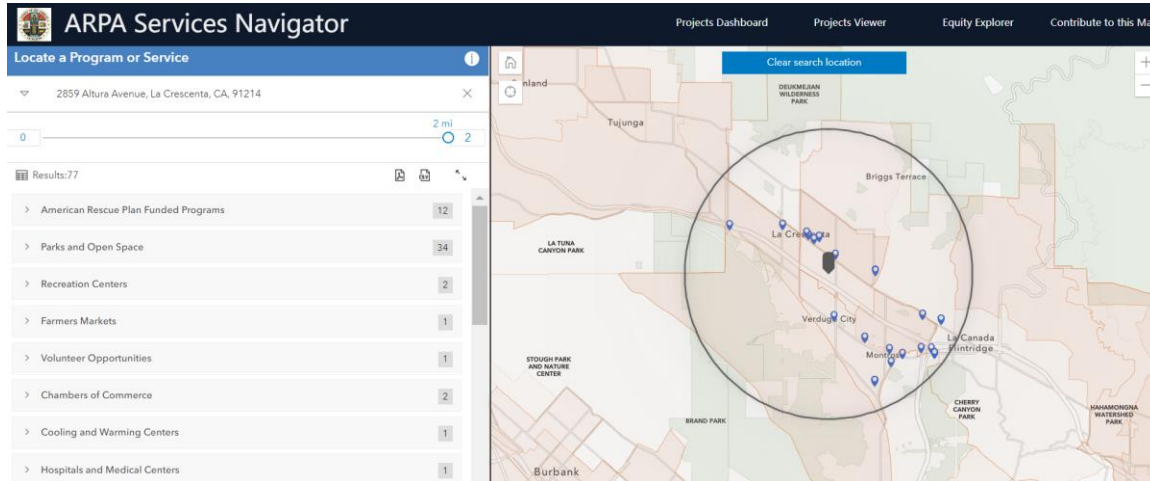


## ARPA Services Navigator

The County most recently developed the ARPA Services Navigator shown in Figure 6, which geolocates both

ARPA-funded and other County services within a 2-mile radius of a given address. In addition to the ARPA-funded projects, the tool includes approximately 30 different service categories across existing County services on the map, from parks and health clinics to job training resources. For each of these service categories, the Service Navigator shows the number of available services in the area, while each service features a description and more detailed program information. An exciting new component of the tool allows users to suggest updates to existing service locations and new community assets for inclusion. The ARPA Service Navigator can be accessed at: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/7eb655e6b42d44cca87b99b6de7c356d>.

**Figure 6: ARPA Service Navigator**



## ONLINE PUBLIC PORTAL

To further increase public awareness of ARPA-related activities and ensure accountability for how ARPA funds are allocated and spent, the County launched the American Rescue Plan Public Portal (Public Portal). The Public Portal includes an updated ARPA dashboard that provides statistics on several aspect of the ARPA initiative, including:

- The number of ARPA projects;
- The total allocation and funds expended;
- Fund allocations by spending pillar;
- Expenditures by service category;
- Target and actual investments by need tiers determined by the COVID-19 Vulnerability and Recovery Index; and
- The number of projects serving target populations (e.g., people experiencing homelessness and small businesses).

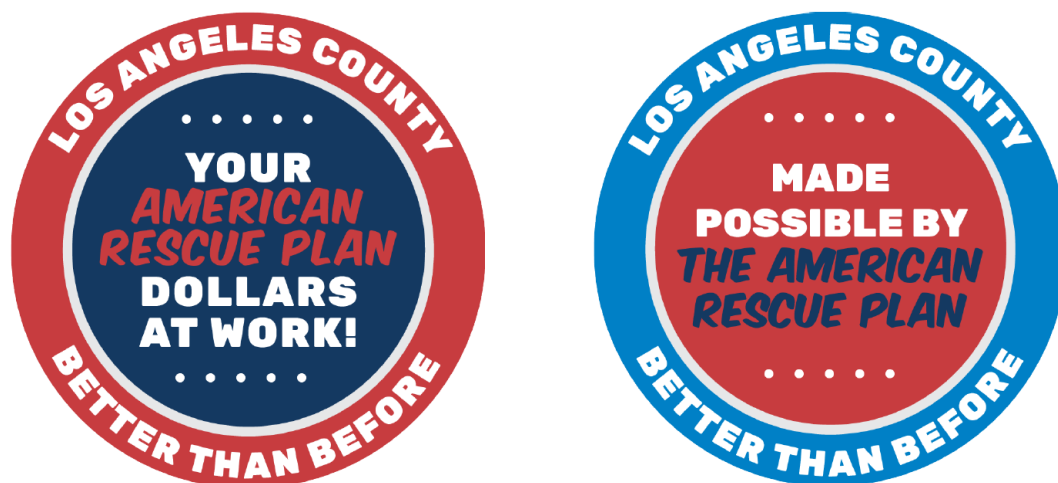
The new page also has a search function allowing users to look up specific ARPA projects for more detailed information. This function connects to the ARPA Projects webpage, which allows the user to view the project list and filter by spending and expenditure categories. Each project is hyperlinked to detailed information, including how to apply for any applicable funding opportunities. The Public Portal can be accessed at: <https://arptracking.ceo.lacounty.gov/Public>.



## OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

County departments continue to leverage Countywide Communications, their networks, and social media platforms to support the promotion of ARPA funding opportunities and resources by reaching out and notifying participants of available grants, contracts, and services. To ensure a unified branding strategy for all ARPA-funded County efforts, an official ARPA Branding and Style Guide and ARPA logos were created to ensure a consistent look and feel for ARPA related communications. The logos shown in Figure 7 below are used on ARPA-funded graphics, social media, and websites, as well as ARPA-branded products used as outreach incentives. These include car magnets, stickers, EZ-ups, podium signs, step-and repeats, and business window clings.

*Figure 7: ARPA logos*



This unified branding strategy is designed to enhance the multiple outreach communication efforts to raise awareness of and ensure access to ARPA-funded contracts, grants, and services. Examples of communication channels currently being leveraged to inform qualified small businesses, community-based organizations, and community members of ARPA-related opportunities include, but are not limited to newsletters, social media engagement, and news coverage. Below are some examples:

- The Countywide Communications Recovery Newsletter with 15,700 internal and external subscribers;
- The Department of Economic Opportunity's biweekly newsletter with 155,000 subscribers that provides updates on its ARPA activities and available resources;
- Office of Small Business (OSB) direct email communications to 10,800 businesses within local economically distressed communities;
- Communication assets and other ARPA-related posts shareable via social media. Related Countywide Communications' social media accounts have generated more than 170,000 impressions and over 2,000 engagements. See Figure 8 below for an example of a social media post; and
- News media coverage of the Los Angeles County Development Authority's Childcare Provider Recovery Grant opportunity in November 2022.

*Figure 8: Example of ARPA Service Social Media Post*





To promote ARPA-funded contracts and grants, several departments have also hosted community events to directly engage stakeholders. Several departments were collectively involved over the past several months in more than 100 sessions focused on ARPA funding opportunities, business and contracting information, and/or technical assistance for businesses and individuals. In addition to the recent sessions on navigating ARPA funding opportunities co-sponsored by the Center for Non-Profit Management, BDO FMA, County departments hosted or participated in more than 40 events focused on government contracting. They additionally partnered with over 20 development and educational institutions to provide business and contracting information and technical assistance to increase awareness of and access to funding opportunities. OSB's Procurement Technical Assistance Center also conducted 34 online training events and nine in-person contracting-related events for businesses and individuals.

Moving forward, efforts are underway to expand outreach activities to engage more diverse and non-geographic communities. The County plans to host an ethnic media briefing to promote ARPA-funded grants, contracts, and services among limited English proficient communities. This briefing is expected to occur in early 2023.



**Chief  
Executive  
Office.**



County of Los Angeles

**Anti-Racism,  
Diversity,  
& Inclusion**

ANTI-RACISM, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (ARDI) INITIATIVE



For more information email: [race-equity@ceo.lacounty.gov](mailto:race-equity@ceo.lacounty.gov)

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