

Feds Giving SC More Covid Money – Without Clear Spending Instructions

Published: Monday, 24 May 2021 12:21

By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Local governments in South Carolina are expected to collectively receive hundreds of millions more in federal COVID-19 relief funding, though what exactly that money can be spent on is unclear.

The U.S. Department of Treasury last week adopted an “interim final rule” on the American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding. But local government spokespersons told The Nerve this week their municipalities haven’t yet received the funds or specific guidance on how the money can be used, though the law authorizing the funding is more than two months old.

Under the \$1.9 trillion ARP signed on March 11 by President Joe Biden, state and local government agencies in South Carolina would receive a total of \$3.8 billion, according to an estimated breakdown of funding in March provided by the Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC) to cities and towns.

The Nerve’s review of those records found that counties collectively would receive nearly \$1 billion, while “non-entitlement” cities and towns would get a total of about \$442 million, with “metropolitan” cities getting approximately \$145 million overall.

The federal government classifies “metropolitan” cities as having populations of at least 50,000, and “non-entitlement” cities and towns as having populations of less than 50,000.

The ARP money is in addition to federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) funds awarded to South Carolina government agencies last year under then-President Donald Trump’s administration.

The Nerve’s review of records provided last month by the S.C. Department of Administration under the state’s open-records law found that counties, cities, towns, special purpose districts and other regional government agencies collectively were awarded at least \$72 million in CARES funding.

The ARP funds to local governments will be split in two installments, according to the MASC. “Metropolitan” cities will receive funding directly from the U.S. Treasury Department; money to the smaller “non-entitlement” cities and towns will first go to the state, which would have 30 days to distribute it. The funds must be spent by Dec. 31, 2024.

On its website, the MASC said it is “continuing to learn and evaluate the ARP as the federal government releases details,” recommending that municipal officials “carefully review” the information and “closely consult” with their municipal attorneys.

Generally, towns and cities can use ARP money to provide, according to a summary published by the MASC:

- Assistance to households, small business, and nonprofits; or aid to impacted industries

Feds Giving SC More Covid Money – Without Clear Spending Instructions

Published such as tourism, travel and hospitality.

By Rick Brundrett, The Nerve

Hits: 1326

- “Premium” pay to “essential” workers or grants to employers with “essential” workers.
- “Premium” pay or “essential” workers wasn’t defined.
- Government services affected by revenue reductions.
- “Necessary” investments in water, sewer or broadband infrastructure.

Contacted this week by The Nerve, spokespersons for the cities of Charleston and Greenville and Horry County said their agencies have not yet received any of the estimated ARP funds or specific instructions on how that money can be spent.

City of Charleston spokesman Jack O’Toole said the city was awarded \$21 million in ARP funds, noting in a written response, “The mayor, council and staff are waiting for further guidance before considering any possible expenditures.”

Horry County spokeswoman Kelly Moore in an email response said the county is expecting a “direct allocation” of about \$69 million in ARP funds, and already received approximately \$14 million for a rental assistance program, which she noted will be “announced shortly.”

Greenville city spokeswoman Beth Brotherton in her written response said the city was awarded \$17.9 million in ARP funds for “general City funding,” and that the city council has “not yet been given an opportunity to review proposed use” of that money.

The Nerve this week also submitted written questions to the city of Columbia, as well as to the counties of Greenville, Lexington and Richland, but received no answers by publication of this story.

The latest ARP allocation list published by the National League of Cities shows that the city of Columbia would receive \$27.1 million – the highest listed amount among “metro” cities in the state – followed by North Charleston (\$24.3 million), Charleston (\$21 million) and Greenville (\$17.9 million).

The top-10 estimated ARP awards among counties as of March, according to the MASC, were as follows:

- Greenville: \$101.5 million
- Richland: \$80.6 million
- Charleston: \$79.7 million
- Horry: \$68.6 million
- Spartanburg: \$62 million
- Lexington: \$57.9 million
- York: \$54.4 million
- Berkeley: \$44.2 million
- Anderson: \$39.2 million

Feds Giving SC More Covid Money – Without Clear Spending Instructions

Published on Monday, 24 May 2021 12:21

By Rick Brundrett - The Nerve

Brundrett is the news editor of The Nerve (www.thenerve.org). Contact him at 803-254-4411 or rick@thenerve.org. Follow him on Twitter @RickBrundrett. Follow The Nerve on Facebook and Twitter @thenervesc.