



Project Description

Project Name:

Hidalgo County Public Safety COVID-19 Response

Project Number:

ARPA-24-115-377

Department Name:

Budget and Management

ARPA Expenditure Category:

3: Public Health-Negative Economic Impact: Public Sector Capacity

ARPA Eligibility Category:

3.1: Public Sector Workforce: Payroll and Benefits for Public Health, Public Safety, or Human Services Workers

Project Description:

Law enforcement agencies were faced with the challenge of maintaining operational levels of service while keeping officers, employees, and the community safe during COVID-19.¹ Daily activities required in-person work and community interaction. Law enforcement, as first responders, continued to work at increased levels of exposure whilst implementing and enforcing COVID-19 safety measures, outreach services, assisting the health department, and responding to public safety needs to name a few. As COVID 19 has evolved, law enforcement has made significant changes in routine activities.² The pandemic influenced law enforcement in three primary areas: 1) interventions to minimize and slow the spread of COVID-19; 2) nature of interactions; 3) responses to changes in crimes.³ To combat the virus, law enforcement has shifted operations to address healthcare and public health needs in addition to traditional security and public safety priorities.⁴ The same holds true for Hidalgo County. To uphold public safety, the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office continues to implement COVID-19 operational preparedness and prevention of disease transmission strategies to preserve the health, safety, and well-being of employees as first responders including but not limited to patrol and field operations as a result of the pandemic and in preparation for future health responses in real-time, including infectious diseases. Furthermore, Sheriff's Office employees continue to respond to situations exacerbated by the pandemic including domestic violence and mental health incidents utilizing strategies to build trust and positive relationships with the community

¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8689991/>

² <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9549130/>

³ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8689991/>

⁴ https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/30/13/23-0776_article



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thus improving community safety outcomes. For these reasons, Hidalgo County has determined that Sheriff's Office employees are continuously dedicated to responding to the long-term effects of COVID-19. As such, Hidalgo County aims to dedicate ARPA funds for payroll and benefits for Sheriff's Office employees as permitted in the Final Rule to restore and bolster public sector capacity and support the County's ability to deliver uninterrupted critical services with the continuous implementation of prevention and mitigation strategies. This project will retroactively reimburse the County beginning January 1, 2024.

Under the interim final rule, funds may be used for payroll and covered benefits for public safety, public health, health care, human services, and similar employees of a recipient government, for the portion of the employee's time that is spent responding to COVID-19. For administrative convenience, the recipient may consider public health and safety employees to be entirely devoted to responding to COVID-19, and therefore their full payroll and covered benefits eligible to be covered, if the employee, or his or her operating unit or division, is "primarily dedicated" to responding to COVID-19, meaning that more than half of the employee, unit, or division's time is dedicated to responding to COVID-19.⁵ Public safety employees include sheriffs and deputy sheriffs, emergency medical responders, correctional and detention officers and those who directly support those employees. In the final rule, Treasury is clarifying that recipients will be permitted to fund the full payroll and covered benefits of public health and safety staff primarily dedicated to COVID-19 response throughout the period of performance for the SLFRF program, though recipients should periodically reassess their determination of primarily dedicated staff, including as the public health emergency and response evolves.⁶

Fiscal Impact: \$7,162,259.74

⁵ Department of the Treasury. (2022). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. *Federal Register*, 87(18), p. 4384

⁶ Department of the Treasury. (2022). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. *Federal Register*, 87(18), p. 4385