American Rescue Plan Act funds are intended to help the nation recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and can be used for many purposes. This can make it difficult to follow how governments are spending these funds.

Since January, Carolina Public Press has been looking into how Western North Carolina's local governments are spending their portion of the nearly $2 trillion federal funding stream.

Through the project, we discovered that ARPA has been used in WNC in ways such as supplementing a local farmers market, repairing outdated sewer systems and providing employee pay.

But there's still ARPA money to be spent before the December 2026 deadline. Here are some tips for how to stay up-to-date on their local ARPA spending.

**Know the basics**

North Carolina governments received $8.6 billion in ARPA funding — $3.2 billion to county and city governments, and $5.4 billion to the state government.

All funds must be appropriated by December 2024 and spent by December 2026, or the money is returned to the federal government.

**Remember how ARPA funds can be used**

Before signing ARPA into law, President Joe Biden said the purpose of the funding was to rebuild “the backbone of this country.” ARPA would provide stimulus payments, child tax credits and money funneled through local and state governments.

ARPA funds can only be used to provide premium pay, improve infrastructure, address public and social health concerns, and replace lost government revenue.

Local governments can claim up to $1 million in “revenue loss” regardless of whether the community actually experienced lost revenue due to the pandemic. ARPA funds claimed as revenue loss are moved to the government’s operating budget and can be used for any governmental purpose.

Governments report ARPA expenditures to the U.S. Department of the Treasury quarterly.
Know what to ask

Though there's no limitation on what citizens can ask government officials, that doesn’t mean it’s always easy to do so. Knowing what questions to start with is often daunting. The following are questions that could help start the ARPA conversation with your local leaders.

**What projects are being funded by our local ARPA monies?**
- Why were they selected?
- How long did the selection process take?
- What projects weren’t selected and why?

**Who in the community is impacted by local ARPA-funded projects?**
- What research was conducted to decide which projects to fund?
- Do the projects address immediate community needs?
- Will anyone in the community be negatively affected by the local government’s ARPA spending decisions?

**When will we see results?**
- Has the money been disbursed? If not, why?
- Is additional funding needed for the selected projects?
- What is the timeline for the projects?
- When will they be finished?

**How is the government communicating about ARPA with the community?**
- What community outreach is being done to inform citizens about spending decisions?
- Was or is community input involved in ARPA decision-making?
- What is the best way to relay ARPA funding ideas to the government?
For basic ARPA knowledge: Treasury, National League of Cities and the White House.

Additional resources can also be found here:
- U.S. Economic Development Administration
- National League of Cities
- University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Resources for Spanish-speakers:
- Preguntas Frecuentes
- Declaración del IRS – Ley del Plan de Rescate Estadounidense de 2021

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