

ORGANIZING STIMULUS COMMAND CENTERS: 10 STEPS FOR LOCAL DECISION MAKERS

This memo focuses on the portion of the American Rescue Plan that is not being distributed as state and local flexible formula grants. This memo is followed by two detailed appendices guiding organization and sequencing.

Although the federal government has provided a historic amount of funding, with more on the way, the success of the recovery will rise or fall on the effectiveness of local deployment. Two competing approaches shape how a package as large and complex as the American Rescue Plan (ARP) is deployed: **(1)** funds can be spread so a small amount of funding reaches a large variety of local projects, places and people — this is the infamous **peanut butter method**; and **(2)** funds can be deployed strategically, in a way that invests a large amount into a small number of impactful projects, places, and people. We favor the second approach.

Operationalizing this strategic approach requires organizing for impact. Effectively deploying the ARP in locally transformative ways will require cities to organize for long-term success. To inform local strategy, we created a user-friendly **Federal Investment Guide** of \$1.85 trillion in city-relevant investments that the federal government is making across 84 programs in the ARP. Operationalizing this strategy will require leaders to:

1. Establish **“Stimulus Command Centers”** that engage **internal and external** city government stakeholders;
2. Set three-to-five **clear local priorities** for fund deployment that utilize *the whole of the ARP* beyond flexible formula grants to cities and counties; and
3. Connect the funding dots between **federal sources and local uses**.

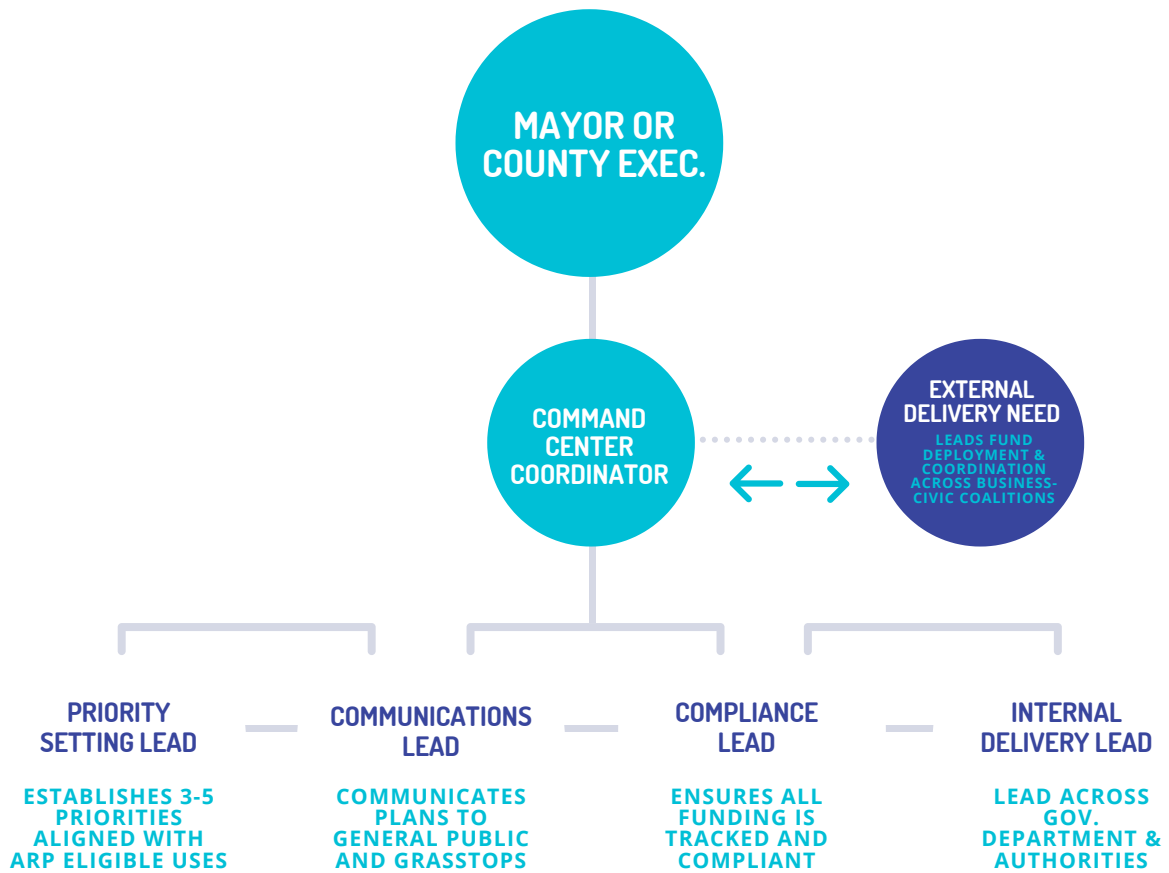
City Halls should take the first steps in organizing but should not be moving alone. We recommend 10 steps that cities should take to establish Stimulus Command Centers to drive a local inclusive recovery. Because much of the ARP runs through the public sector, City Halls must take the first steps to convene and coordinate recovery efforts. However, given the scale of funds and recipients in the ARP, city government going it alone is inadvisable.

Deploying the whole of the ARP across cities and metros requires City Halls to simultaneously play an “inside game” that deeply engages government stakeholders and an “outside game” that deeply involves business, civic, and community groups. Mayors and their staffs may have a holistic understanding of ARP funds flowing to the city, but they likely have little bandwidth to coordinate the entire deployment process (navigating a budget through the “inside game” of City Council and government departments will be taxing enough). It’s therefore imperative that City Halls quickly engage in an “outside game” that enlists business chambers, philanthropies, and, ideally, business-civic coalitions to help deploy the *entire* ARP. Involvement should include parties that are necessary to maximize funding coordination, drawdown, and leveraging. This inside-outside strategy is doubly important for deploying ARP funds across whole metros.

Precedents exist for this type of all-hands-on-deck local effort in the 2009 Recovery and Amazon HQ2 pitches. In short order, city leaders should examine what their leadership did during the last moments of intense crisis and intense opportunity. They should examine their city government’s organizing efforts in 2009 to deploy the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). They should also examine the coalitions that came together for their Amazon HQ2 proposals. In many ways, deploying the American Rescue Plan will require merging these approaches. Stimulus Command Centers are a vehicle to facilitate this.

10 STEPS FOR THE NEXT 100 DAYS

- 1** **NOW: Examine what the city did in 2009 to deploy ARRA** and use that as a starting point alongside existing guiding strategic documents and recovery plans developed during 2020.
- 2** **NOW: Examine the networks of actors that came together in 2016** to generate an Amazon HQ2 pitch to inform coalition engagement.
- 3** **NOW: Make a list of key non-government decision-makers to engage.** This list should be bounded by the leaders of local institutions who are receiving resources or whose support will be necessary for maximizing the local drawdown of funds that do not directly pass through City Hall. It should be informed by the Amazon HQ2 process. Community groups should be engaged to the extent that their members must apply for relief provisions (i.e., "individual relief" in the **Federal Investment Guide**).
- 4** **NOW: Develop a first-brush sequencing plan.** This short plan should focus on ARP priorities for the next 100 days, the next 6 months, and the next year and beyond. It should be updated as additional information is released and the Command Center is expanded. See appendix II on page 6 of this document for further guidance.
- 5** **SOON: Appoint a Command Center Coordinator.** This person will coordinate across specific recovery tasks and engagement. They should be trusted by the Mayor, have a track-record of successfully managing complex projects, and have the operational capability to run a "war room-like" process for 18 months.
- 6** **SOON: Designate a Priority Setting Lead.** This person should have experience in cross-sector coalition management. Their team should understand key local civic, business, philanthropic and labor leaders, and strengths. Priorities must be bounded by eligible ARP uses and should focus on funding that supplements the flexible formula grants received by cities and counties, which are already the subject of lots of competing priorities.
- 7** **SOON: Designate a Communications Lead.** The Mayor should designate a communications lead who will build and execute a strategy to communicate with the general public and grassroots leaders about the city's plans to maximize drawdown of the entire ARP for local impact. This person should have a close working relationship with the Mayor as a key communicator.
- 8** **SOON: Designate an internal ARP Delivery Lead.** This person should have strong relationships across key public institutions in the city, county, and state, be experienced at utilizing federal funding, and have project management experience. They will work closely with department heads, along with the Command Center team.
- 9** **SOON: Ensure an external ARP Delivery Lead has been designated.** The majority of the ARP opportunity is outside of City Hall. The Mayor and Command Center Coordinator should encourage coalitions outside of city government to organize and take full advantage of the ARP. They should ensure whatever designated institution or coalition is leading the external efforts has designated and empowered a lead that will work closely with the Command Center Coordinator and should have good relationships across key business, community, and labor organizations.
- 10** **LATER: Designate a Compliance Lead to track ARP uses.** This person will most likely sit within the Office of Finance or Budget to ensure compliance and tracking. They will be supported by the communications lead to liaise with the public.



Schematic of Command Center organization once all roles have been designated. This organization should be up-and-running by mid-summer 2021. Note the close relationship between the external delivery lead and the Command Center Coordinator. Some cities may opt to have an advisory council that supports the Mayor in decision-making.

APPENDIX I: TACTICS FOR ORGANIZING A COMMAND CENTER

Command Centers should be **18-month initiatives** that **work across three main tasks** and have a Coordinator, designated by the Mayor, to coordinate the moving parts of strategy and operations. Early indications from on-the-ground are that every place will develop a unique adaptation of the Command Center model based on local needs, prior history, and existing cross-sector relationships.

APPOINT COMMAND CENTER LEADERSHIP

To ensure that all Command Center work is coordinated and local uses are aligned with federal sources of the American Rescue Plan, the Mayor should designate a Command Center Coordinator. This coordinator should have close working relationships with the Mayor and his or her senior staff, be experienced with policy deployment strategy and project management, have a deep understanding of the holistic sources with the ARP and their deployment timing, and have the operational capacity to run an intense war-room-like process for 18 months. They should be experienced in working with senior staff to coordinate across departments — and across sectors — to execute a plan.

Cities have run a similar play before. In 2009, many cities designated recovery leads and recovery teams during the deployment of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. More recently, some cities receiving direct fiscal aid under the CARES act in 2020 have already designated lead Recovery Officers. Philadelphia is emblematic: in 2009, Mayor Nutter **established a Recovery Office**, with a steering committee chaired by the CFO, and **designated a Recovery Officer** to lead the efforts; in 2020, Mayor Kenney ran a similar playbook for CARES Act funding, **designating a Recovery Officer** to lead the process of deploying funds. What the city must do now is expand the remit to prepare for a larger amount and broader scope of funds for the city.

This moment differs from previous efforts is the sheer magnitude of funding and the complexity of the crises we're facing. This will require efforts that engage more than just city government. The ARP is more than double the size of the ARRA and is being distributed across a wider range of actors over longer periods of time. We also have the benefit of 12 years of learning how to run public-private-civic partnerships. The 2021 recovery must draw on the lessons learned from organizing for **Amazon HQ2 and Opportunity Zones**. Stimulus Command Center leads must quickly build local capacity to respond to the moment and achieve the transformative potential of the vast infusion of federal investment.

COMPLETING THIS TASK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- NOW: Examine what the city did in 2009** to deploy ARRA and use that as a starting point.
- NOW: Examine the networks of actors that came together in 2016** to generate an Amazon HQ2 pitch to inform coalitional engagement.
- SOON: Appoint a Command Center Coordinator.** This person will coordinate across specific recovery tasks and engagement. They should be trusted by the Mayor, have a track-record of successfully managing complex projects, and have the operational capability to run a “war room-like” process for 18 months. This person will quickly need to advise on a list of key external stakeholders to engage, a first-brush internal priorities list, and a first-brush ARP sequencing strategy.

TASK 1: PRIORITY SETTING

To achieve a big local impact, the ARP must respond to local priorities. Command Centers must establish a set of 3-5 local priorities first for the American Rescue Plan. They will likely develop a separate set of priorities for the American Jobs Plan following its eventual passage. These priorities should be cross-cutting and responsive to local needs (e.g., equitable neighborhood recovery, inclusive small business growth, maximizing the social safety net). Distributional equity, eligibility, and effectiveness should drive priorities. ***This is not a pie-in-the-sky visioning process, it is a clear-eyed, rapid prioritization of local uses within the eligible bounds of federal funding sources.***

City Hall should make an internal first-brush set of priorities based on local needs and early understandings of eligible uses of ARP funds. They should quickly involve external stakeholders in a process of identifying key recovery priorities for the whole of the ARP beyond flexible formula grants to cities and counties. Whomever runs this process must focus on communicating the wide variety of ARP provisions to relevant local stakeholders.

Stakeholders should be engaged based on the role they will play in maximizing the drawdown and deployment of ARP funds. For example, community-based organizations should be engaged so they reach out to local members to encourage them to file taxes and qualify for the various individual relief provisions. Importantly, this is not the place for community visioning for new programs, which a one-time infusion of constrained federal funding will likely not support.

COMPLETING THIS TASK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- NOW: Make a list of key non-government stakeholders to engage.** This list should be bounded by the leaders of local institutions who are receiving resources or whose support will be necessary for maximizing the local drawdown of funds that do not directly pass through City Hall. It should be informed by the Amazon HQ2 process. We recommend structuring this list based on recipients highlighted in the Federal Investment Guide. We suggest including only those parties who are necessary to maximizing the deployment of funding that will not be distributed through the city.
- SOON: Designate a Priority Setting Lead.** This person should have experience in cross-sector coalition management. They should have authority to build a small team that understands key local civic, business, philanthropic, and labor leaders and their needs/means. Priorities must be bounded by eligible ARP uses and should focus on funding that supplements the flexible formula grants received by cities and counties. Once priorities are established, the Priority Setting Lead should closely advise the deployment team to ensure priorities remain intact. Since the priority setting process must occur within an abbreviated timeframe given the urgency of funding, the Mayor and Command Center Coordinator might consider engaging a trusted third-party convening organization (a foundation or nonprofit) to help set the table and avoid overextending City Hall capacity. The Rhode Island Foundation is playing an analogous role for the state of Rhode Island as it deploys its funding.

THIS PROCESS WILL PRODUCE THREE SEPARATE DOCUMENTS:

- A manageable list of key external stakeholders to engage, highlighting their necessary role in maximizing and deploying ARP funding.
- An *internal* first-brush list of top priorities situated within eligible uses.
- A list of local priority uses for the city, situated within 3-5 articulated top priorities. These priorities must be set within the confines of eligible ARP funding uses.

TASK 2: COORDINATED DELIVERY

ARP funds will arrive in waves across a range of public institutions, private firms, and individuals. To maximize the impact of the ARP, cities will need to coordinate internally across different government agencies and public authorities and externally across different private, philanthropic, civic, and community institutions. While some funding flows through the local government, a large proportion will go directly to firms, individuals, and non-governmental institutions. Ensuring effective, efficient, and equitable deployment across this fragmented landscape will take work. Delivery efforts will work best when the internal and external stakeholders coordinate amongst themselves and then work in concert. These efforts should focus on strategically maximizing the funds that flow to the city from multiple sources and will be the bulk of the Command Center's efforts over the next 18 months.

COMPLETING THIS TASK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- SOON: Designate an internal ARP Delivery Lead.** This person should have strong relationships across key public institutions in the city, county, and state, be experienced at utilizing federal funding, and have project management experience. They will work closely with department heads, along with the command center team.
- SOON: Ensure an external ARP Delivery Lead has been designated.** The Mayor and Command Center Coordinator should ensure coalitions outside of city government are organized to take full advantage of the ARP. Whichever institution or coalition is leading "outside game" efforts should designate and fund a lead who will work in close concert with the Command Center Coordinator. They should have good relationships across key business, community, and labor organizations.

TASK 3: COMMUNICATION & COMPLIANCE

Maximizing ARP deployment will ultimately require a large communications campaign. Currently, confusion abounds about what provisions are in the bill. Mayors will quickly need to correct this to ensure that allocated federal funds are used. Likewise, key success stories will need to be communicated to constituents and the federal government. In addition to this, the city should continue to take close care to track how money is spent internally and to encourage external partners to do the same (as they have been doing with funds received from the CARES Act).

COMPLETING THIS TASK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- SOON: Designate a Communications Lead.** The Mayor should designate a Communications Lead who will build and execute a strategy to communicate with the general public and grassroots leaders about the city's plans to maximize drawdown of the entire ARP for local impact. This person should have a close working relationship with the Mayor as a key communicator. They should also work closely with the Command Center Coordinator to ensure a comprehensive understanding of ARP provisions.
- LATER: Designate a Compliance Lead to track local ARP uses.** This person will most likely sit within the Office of Finance or Budget to ensure compliance and tracking. They will be supported by the Communications Lead to liaise with the public. They should have a counterpart in the external command center coalition. The designation of internal and external compliance leads is a key place where philanthropy can engage (through seconded time from local accounting and law firms, for example).

APPENDIX II: SEQUENCING COMMAND CENTER ACTIONS

Funding will arrive and be expended in waves. The most immediate funding opened up for applications in April. Some funding will remain available until 2030. A full depiction is available in the [Federal Investment Guide summary spreadsheet](#). It is likely that American Rescue Plan funding will be deployed alongside an infrastructure bill passed later in 2021. Command center leadership should develop a plan for sequencing ARP deployment in three waves.

COMPLETING THIS TASK REQUIRES THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- NOW: Develop a first-brush sequencing plan.** This short plan should focus on ARP priorities for the next 100 days, the next 6 months, and the next year and beyond. It should be updated as additional information is released and the Command Center is expanded.

NEXT 100 DAYS

This time period should focus on urgent and time-sensitive needs as key priority uses are being fully established. For example, some funds require residents to file taxes to fully receive the benefit. Taxes are due on May 17. Outreach efforts to citizens around these time-limited funds should take top priority. Urgent needs include:

- **Outreach and support campaigns before May 17** to ensure that individual relief (EITC, UI, Rental Relief, CTC) are fully utilized by the most in-need community members. Taxes must be filed to qualify for the full EITC and CTC benefits. This deadline is fast approaching, and outreach campaigns are needed to ensure benefits are maximized. These campaigns are low-cost and high impact in the mold of existing [EITC campaigns](#). They should focus on clarifying eligibility criteria and application processes. See our [short guide](#) on ARP funding for individuals and families.
 - **Capacity building and communications efforts** to ensure that vulnerable businesses are fully able to take advantage of small business relief (rental relief for landlords, PPP, shuttered venues fund, restaurant relief fund, airport relief fund for concessions, etc.)
 - **Filling public fiscal holes:** Much of the ARP is intended to ensure that governments, schools, and public authorities have enough funding to operate coming out of the pandemic. The appropriation of this funding should be publicly communicated accordingly so the general public is aware of how the funds “rescued” cities from crushing budget cuts.
 - **Crisis relief deployment** to ensure that those suffering acutely right now can access the resources the ARP makes available to them. This includes quickly distributing funds for emergency shelters, SNAP, healthcare access, and other social safety net provisions.
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NEXT 6 MONTHS

This time period should focus on capacity building efforts that clearly match identified local priority uses to ARP sources and infrastructure sources as they become clear. Task 2 above (coordinated deployment) will drive this section in close coordination with Command Center leadership. This area should focus on key strategic investments, including:

- **Capacity building** for grant applications, community navigation, compliance reporting, and other requirements needed to fully activate the ARP and future infrastructure funding. Business groups, law firms, and philanthropy should be strategically engaged to support this work.
- **Strategic predevelopment activities** including planning, permitting, and other activities that will help identified priority infrastructure projects become shovel-ready when the infrastructure funding arrives. This is especially needed given the broader-than-usual definition of infrastructure used in the American Jobs Plan.
- **MBE pipeline building and business development** so these firms are poised to take advantage of ARP and infrastructure investments. This includes building out MBE construction firm capacity, procurement reform to favor more diverse enterprises, supporting child care business formalization, and strategic neighborhood investments to stabilize and grow commercial corridors, among others.

NEXT 12 MONTHS AND BEYOND

This time period should focus on applying for additional federal funding made available by the ARP and infrastructure package. It should focus on deploying the bulk of federal investments against identified local priorities. It will also align with the second tranche of the flexible formula grants received by cities and counties.
