

CARES ACT FUNDING: PUBLIC SAFETY



A once-in-a-century pandemic has placed new demands on public safety agencies. From first responders dealing with more emergency calls to police enforcing evolving public health orders and jurisdictions pivoting their emergency command center operations, state and local governments have had to mobilize public safety personnel in novel ways. All these challenges exist on top of the health risks public safety personnel also face — leading to additional resource constraints at a time of unprecedented need for public services.

The CARES Act, which Congress passed in March 2020, provided a \$2.2 trillion life-line for the country. More than \$150 billion of this was sent to state and local governments to help them respond to greater demand for public services. In December, Congress passed another stimulus bill. Though this secondary bill didn't provide additional funding specifically for state and local governments, it did extend the deadline to Dec. 31, 2021, for recipients to use their original CARES Act funding. This extension gives states another year to use these funds, which is critical because our research indicates state, local and county governments still have billions of dollars left to spend.

Over the past year, the Center for Digital Government has tracked several CARES Act federal funding streams, including the Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Education Stabilization Fund, the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the Governor's Emergency Relief Fund.

Our research indicates state and local governments have applied federal funding — particularly from the Coronavirus Relief Fund and Department of Justice — to address several public safety challenges.

However, with a substantial amount of funding remaining, government organizations may need more guidance for how they can effectively use federal funds to address not only short-term needs associated with the pandemic, but also long-term priorities that could significantly improve public safety in their communities.

This briefing provides an overview of remaining federal funding streams, how state and local governments have already leveraged available funding and key information they need to know to take full advantage of any remaining federal aid this year.

CARES ACT APPROPRIATIONS FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Federal reporting data provides interesting insights into how recipients are using funding and how much they've spent so far. These recipients have mostly tapped the Department of Justice's Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program (CESF) and the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) — which funds grants, direct payments and contracts administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and other federal, state and county agencies — to address various public safety needs.

Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF)

How much funding is left: According to oversight data reported to the federal government in February, there is \$26.15 billion remaining in this fund across 48 states. The states with the most funding remaining include:¹

1. **California:** \$5.4 billion
2. **Texas:** \$2.6 billion
3. **North Carolina:** \$1.9 billion
4. **Oregon:** \$1.5 billion
5. **Florida:** \$1.2 billion

Allowable uses: Federal data indicates public safety needs have accounted for only 33 CRF expenditures out of the nearly 20,000 expenditures reported so far. Though CARES Act federal guidance is broad, state and local governments can use CRF money for a variety of public safety use cases, including:

An array of public health needs: Any necessary expenses related to medical or public health needs incurred because of — and during — the pandemic.

- **Pandemic Response:** Expenses for public safety measures enacted in response to COVID-19.

- **Payroll:** Payroll expenses for public safety employees whose roles are largely dedicated to COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts.

- **Technology needs:** Technology expenses incurred by local authorities and other entities related to COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts.

It's important to note that each state or awarding agency also has its own additional guidelines that are often more specific than the guidance the federal government issues. For example, in Massachusetts, eligible costs include expenses related to emergency command center operations, communications efforts to disseminate public health and safety information and technical assistance related to emergency management and immediate threats to public safety.²

Next steps: Award recipients have until Dec. 31, 2021, to use these funds. Primary recipients of this funding — generally, state and local governments with populations of at least 500,000 — may have specific guidelines for how sub-recipients can use their allocation. Therefore, sub-recipients should follow up with their awarding agencies for

more information on the application process and specific guidance as they decide where to invest these funds.

Department of Justice Coronavirus Emergency Supplemental Funding Program (CESF)

The Department of Justice (DOJ) made \$850 million available through its CESF program to help public safety agencies deal with the pandemic.³

How much funding is left: To date, 2,000 funding recipients have spent nearly \$485 million.⁴

Allowable uses: Grant recipients can use the funds to cover the costs of personal protective equipment (PPE), to hire personnel, pay overtime costs, provide medical care to inmates and offset the costs of distributing more resources to areas hard-hit by COVID-19.

Next steps: The application period for the fund closed on May 29, 2020, but recipients have 24 months from January 20, 2020, to use their award.⁵

HOW STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES ARE USING CARES ACT FUNDING

Funding recipients have leveraged CARES Act funding for a range of public safety initiatives.

In Hays County, Texas, officials plan to implement a self-service online system that

allows constituents to report non-emergency incidents, which will help to reduce contact between the public and public safety personnel.⁶ The Paducah Police Department in Kentucky is leveraging federal aid from the DOJ for a drone that will be used for search and rescue missions, crowd control for public gatherings and for responding to hazmat incidents.⁷

Other recipients have used funding for pandemic-related expenses in jails and to combat the spread of the virus in these settings, to fund security services and additional resources for fire and EMS departments, for portable 9-1-1 dispatch technologies, for radio equipment related to increased patrols during the pandemic, to retrofit agency vehicles, to subsidize phone and communications costs and for electronic monitoring services for court-ordered probation.⁸

One of the most important aspects of emergency management is an effective communications infrastructure. As public safety agencies deal with these increased challenges and looming budget constraints, Washington isn't the only potential source of new funding for staying connected. Many agencies have also successfully tapped into private-sector assistance programs, such as T-Mobile for Government's Connecting Heroes initiative, which has pledged \$7.7 billion over 10 years to provide first responder agencies with free

5G service, enabling them to react and respond to events with lightning-fast speed.

Hundreds of police, fire and EMT departments, as well as 9-1-1 communications centers, have already applied for and received service through Connecting Heroes. Leveraging the T-Mobile for Government program in tandem with a separate grant for smartphones from the Spirit of Blue Foundation, a nonprofit, the police department in Bay Minette, Ala., for example, was able to equip its entire force with 5G access without spending a dime.

As these examples show, state and local governments are investing a significant share of federal and private-sector funds in technology modernization. These strategic investments will serve them well not just in times of crisis, but long after the pandemic is over.

Endnotes

1. CDG Research Team: CRF Spending Data - Summary Tables
2. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/eligible-costs-for-covid-19-federal-disaster-declaration>
3. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/department-justice-makes-850-million-available-help-public-safety-agencies-address-covid-19>
4. <https://www.pandemicoversight.gov/track-the-money/funding-charts-graphs/pandemic-response-funding>
5. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/cesf-faqs.pdf>
6. <https://www.spartnerships.com/funding-from-the-cares-act-now-flowing-to-state-local-governments/>
7. https://www.paducahsun.com/news/police-department-moving-forward-with-drone-acquisition/article_5fe23956-4702-5cd4-acb4-759ab17e031d.html
8. CDG Research Team: CRF Spending Data - Spending Categories

This piece was developed and written by the Center for Digital Government Content Studio, with information and input from T-Mobile.

Produced by

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