GETTING IT DONE
The American Rescue Plan Way

The American Rescue Plan (ARP) represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to significantly reduce homelessness in some communities and end it in others. These historic resources should be prioritized for the most vulnerable people, including the rising unsheltered population living in tents and cars.

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) interviewed several communities about how they're implementing ARP funding. The resulting guidance is intended to help other communities maximize the impact of this funding to prevent and end homelessness.

For more information, view USICH's guide to American Rescue Plan funding that impacts homelessness and "10 Strategies to Reduce Homelessness With the American Rescue Plan."

Click on a link below to jump to that section.

Using Emergency Rental Assistance

Using Emergency Housing Vouchers

Using Health Center Funding

GETTING IT DONE
Using Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) in Louisville, Kentucky

The Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program makes funding available to households that are unable to pay rent or utilities.

- **ERA1** provides up to $25 billion under the **Consolidated Appropriations Act**, 2021.
- **ERA2** provides up to $21.55 billion under the **American Rescue Plan Act** of 2021.
- For a side-by-side comparison between ERA1 and ERA2, visit the National Council for State Housing Agencies.
- The Treasury Department started reallocating ERA funding in fall 2021.

For more guidance and resources about ERA funding, visit the Treasury Department website.

Louisville (Kentucky) Metro Government (LMG) received more than $84 million in ERA funding. The money has so far assisted more than 17,000 people, and 3,000 more are expected to receive emergency rental assistance.

The Louisville Way

To make the most of this funding, Louisville prioritized people facing eviction and the lowest-income renters. They reached them through the following four programs:

➢ **Neighborhood Places:** Community service agencies are strategically located in lower-income neighborhoods. For the first tranche of ERA1 funds, they only allowed households at or below 50% of AMI to apply for the first 30 days and then allowed households at or below 80% of AMI to apply.

➢ **Court Eviction Diversion Program:** The Office of Housing provides support for households at or below 80% of AMI to prevent the immediate threat of homelessness from eviction. LMG has a person in court every day reporting to judges the status of all cases—whether the tenant has applied for ERA, been approved, and when the payment is made.

➢ **Community Service Provider Program:** Any third-party public service provider can assist the landlord and the tenant with the ERA application, processing, and payment. To meet the requirement for prioritization, they only accepted applications for households less than 50% of AMI until March 15, 2021.

➢ **Landlord-Tenant Rental Assistance Program:** This helps landlords submit one application for all delinquent tenants in a project.
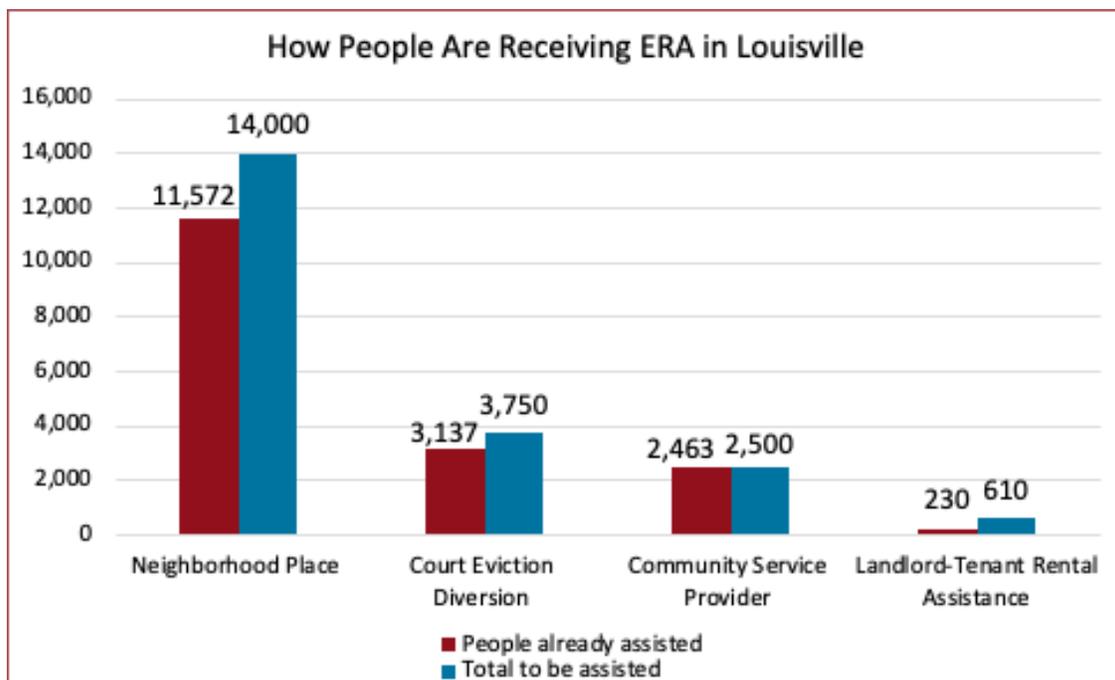
Process

May 2020 – LMG began providing $1,000 per household in rental assistance through the OneLouisville philanthropic fund

July 2020 – Received federal CARES funding and launched the Landlord-Tenant Rental Assistance Program

August 2020 – Launched the Court Eviction Diversion Program when the courts reopened

Spring 2021 – Received, obligated, and depleted ERA1 funding, then began discussions with the Commonwealth of Kentucky to see if they could transfer some of their funds (Eventually received $27 million of ERA1 from Kentucky)

May 2021 – Received first tranche of ERA2 and high-need funds

July 2021 – Louisville Metro Council allocated $10 million of ARP to be used to continue to fund the Court Eviction Diversion Program as well as the launch of the Landlord-Tenant Rental Assistance Program

Key Players

In June 2020, the city's Office of Housing and Office of Resilience and Community Services joined virtual weekly meetings with multiple service and homeless providers. This group grew and eventually became known as the **Eviction Prevention Task Force**, hosted by the Louisville Coalition for the Homeless. Participants include:

- Office of Resilience and Community Services/Neighborhood Places (city office)
- Office of Housing
- Louisville Rapid Access
- Office of Women
- Jefferson County Sherriff's Office
- Coalition for the Homeless
- Kentucky Court of Justice
- Office of Jefferson Circuit Court Clerk
- Jefferson County District Court Judges
- Kentucky Equal Justice Network

Keys to Success

While these steps may seem small on their own, collectively they are huge steps forward for the Louisville community:

➢ The Office of Resilience and Community Services/Neighborhood Places **hired 25 full-time temporary staff** to handle the cases through their program.

➢ The Office of Housing **partnered with local colleges and universities** to provide 25 full-time interns.

➢ The Louisville Rapid Access Network **launched StopMyEviction.org** to help funnel people to the correct portals for assistance. In Louisville, anyone facing eviction can go there and get access to the programs.

➢ The Office of Women worked with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office to get a **bright green sheet attached to every posted Forcible Detainer notice and every mailed Forcible Detainer**. The green sheet includes all the information people need to get assistance, including Legal Aid, StopMyEviction.org, and contacts for the Coalition for the Homeless.

➢ Legal Aid of Kentucky **began accepting all cases involving non-payment of rent** to ensure people were provided legal representation. They hired additional staff to cover the workload.

➢ The Coalition for the Homeless **began an aggressive door-knocking campaign** that targeted every tenant facing eviction that hadn't reached out for help. In many instances, the tenants had already moved out, and the Office of Housing reports this back to the courts. As a result, judges now require landlords to provide proof of continued occupancy or sworn testimony two days prior to court.

➢ The Kentucky Supreme Court issued Order 2020-59, which **provided any tenant facing eviction for non-payment a two-week period to apply for emergency rental assistance** through the Office of Housing or the Office of Resilience and Community Services.

➢ The Office of Jefferson Circuit Court Clerk/Administrative Office of the Court provided access to CourtNet so the offices of Housing and Women could **see court dockets ahead of time and contact tenants prior to their hearings**.

➢ Judges in Jefferson County District Court **allowed the Office of Housing to be present and report on every case** that they were involved in.

➢ Kentucky Equal Justice Network (KEJC) took on cases concerning instances where the courts or the landlords were not cooperating. For example, they filed suit when the court changed their video conferencing system, but did not provide proper notice to tenants. The KEJC also helped make sure that when a tenant did not appear the court contacted not just the lawyer, but the tenant as well.

Biggest Barriers and How They Were Overcome

Little Faith in Government
The power dynamic in eviction cases is often one-sided, and historically, there were no funds available to help tenants behind on their rent. Cases would often be reviewed and ruled on in less than a minute—even though the consequences would last a lifetime. Due to this reality, overcoming the wide-held belief that tenants will never get a break was a major challenge. People simply did not believe there were resources available to help. So, a lot of effort was dedicated to getting the word out. Once the judges and landlords became aware of ERA and saw it being distributed, "it became a different ballgame."

Landlord Resistance
Numerous landlords did not want to cooperate with ERA programs, so Louisville paid the tenants directly if the tenant followed the process and showed up in court as instructed. Louisville also had an issue with tenants at the last minute

pulling out of the ERA process, right before the funds were issued to the landlord. Now the landlord will get that money, so they are made whole until they can find another tenant.

Advice for Others

"The real thing that has made our program work is a unified coordination from every aspect of our community. We all work together to get this done. We disseminate information and gather information from our partners weekly, so we can stay abreast of the changes in the community."

GETTING IT DONE
Using Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) in Austin, Texas

The American Rescue Plan invested $5 billion in emergency housing vouchers (EHV) for nearly 700 communities. The money can fund approximately 70,000 emergency housing vouchers, as well as the provision of services, for:

- People at risk of or experiencing homelessness;
- People fleeing or attempting to flee domestic or dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking; or
- People who recently exited homelessness and need rental assistance to prevent experiencing it again.

Public housing authorities (PHAs) are required to partner with the local Continuum of Care (CoC) or other homeless or victim services providers to connect people to EHVs through a direct referral process. EHVs can't be reissued after September 30, 2023, but households issued EHVs before that will continue to receive them.

For more guidance and resources about EHV funding, visit the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) website.

The Austin and Travis County housing authorities were awarded 276 emergency housing vouchers. As of November 2021, they were issued to 133 households—41 of which signed leases.

The Austin Way

Austin's mayor and city council made ending homelessness a top priority in 2018. They increased resources dedicated to strategies that are proven to meet the immediate needs of people experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

The community aims to issue all their EHVs by January 1, 2022, and to issue approximately half of them to the households that are "hardest to find, hardest to engage, hardest to serve, and hardest to house."

To reach these goals, Austin has taken number of steps, including:

➢ **Conducting system-level strategic planning** with CoCs, city and state officials, PHAs, service providers, and Austin's Homeless Strategy Division.

➢ **Building a team** that included a new program specialist—whose primary role is to certify EHV eligibility, complete intakes, issue vouchers, and process Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contracts—and a new tenant-landlord liaison—who provides housing search assistance to clients and coordinates service fee spending with their support services case managers.

➢ **Pairing American Rescue Plan resources with other local funds** to create new support services that will fund permanent supportive housing case management and housing stability supports for up to 50 EHV participants.

➢ **Using IT systems** to set up general ledger accounts to comply with new requirements, to set up the EHV waitlist and automated workflows, to get estimates and pay for software customization, and to set local policy for eligible service fee expenses.

➢ **Signing up for the *House America* Initiative,** which Mayor Steve Adler said, "puts Austin within striking distance of achieving the financial goals necessary to create housing at a scale that is transformative and life-sustaining." Through *House America*, Austin set goals to rehouse 3,000 families and add 1,500 units of affordable housing into the development pipeline by December 31, 2022.
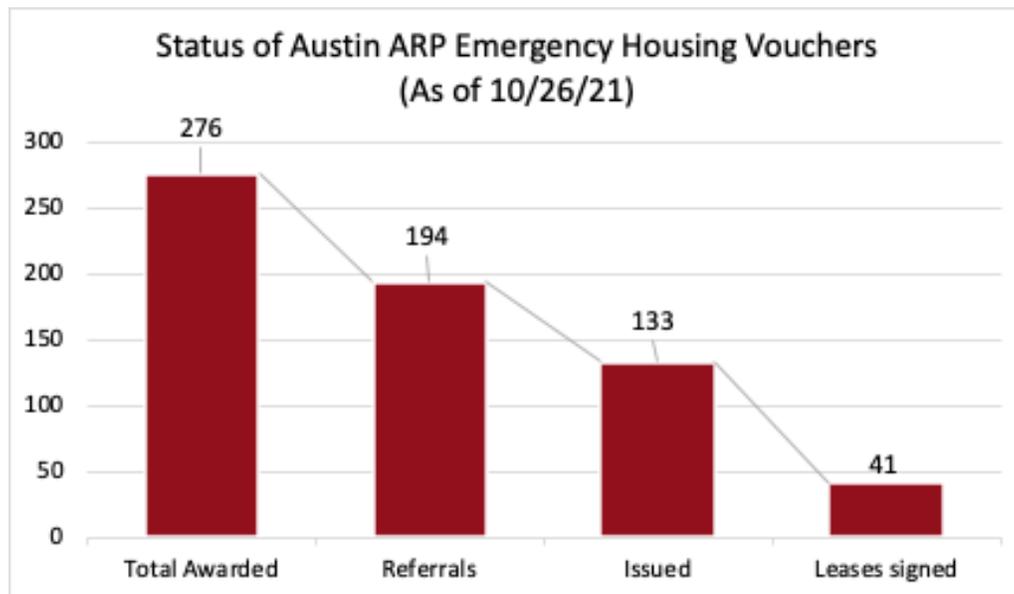
Process

The Housing Authority of the City of Austin (HACA) convened the first EHV meeting in May 2021 with the Travis County Housing Authority, the Continuum of Care (CoC)—ECHO, city officials, and the primary local victim service provider (SAFE) to prepare for the funding award.

Since then, that same group has met on a weekly basis and invited equity advocates and people with lived experience of homelessness to discuss local policy decisions, negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding, create a logic model, set program goals, debrief after HUD's EHV Office Hours, and explore new partnership opportunities.

Key Players

The primary stakeholders are local:

➢ **ECHO, the CoC,** onboards new providers with the coordinated entry system (CES), identifies clients prioritized by the CES, and links them to a service provider. It also sets up HMIS projects and provides technical assistance to new providers.

➢ **Service providers** include Lifeworks, Caritas of Austin, Downtown Austin Community Court, Travis County Mental Health Public Defenders Office, Front Steps, SAFE, Integral Care, Austin Area Urban League, Family Eldercare, and Foundation for the Homeless.

➢ **Austin's Homeless Strategy Division** ensures EHV's strategic direction aligns with that of local government and secured additional funding for permanent supportive housing services to pair with EHV subsidies.

➢ **Austin's new Continuum of Care (CoC) Board** is rebuilding the governance structure and in the process of seating new committees and work groups. The governance charter requires at least three people with lived experience and three equity advocates to have voting seats on all committees and to be compensated for their time and expertise. The CoC's Permanent Housing, Equity, and Performance Oversight committees will all interact with EHV program monitoring and strategy going forward.

Keys to Success

➢ Having an **explicit racial and gender equity focus** with engagement advocates and people with lived experience, combined with a commitment to align with best practices and community strategies to end homelessness

➢ Implementing the EHV program with the **lowest barriers to admission, highest payment standards, and most flexible documentation requirements** allowed by the operating requirements

➢ Engaging a **wide scope of community stakeholders** to create new partnerships with a focus on equity, including one between the Travis County Mental Health Public Defenders and the Travis County Housing Authority

➢ **Training new providers** and including them in ongoing case staffing meetings with the CoC and partnering PHAs

Biggest Barriers and How They Were Overcome

Affordable Housing Shortage

Austin has rapidly rising rents and low vacancy rates. According to ApartmentTrends.com, 95.72% of units in the area were occupied in the third quarter of 2021—the highest rate in over two years. The same report shows a sharp increase

in average rent that far outpaces Fair Market Rents (FMR). Additionally, gentrification means many EHV holders are priced out of the rental market, which is already flooded with rental assistance voucher holders who are competing for a dwindling number of affordable units. The housing authority also provided 20% more than what they outlined as fair market rent in their published guidelines to EHV beneficiaries and hired staff to help locate housing.

Landlord Engagement

Many property owners are unwilling to lease to EHV participants, and Texas prohibited local governments from passing source-of-income ordinances that could ban landlords from discriminating against EHV holders. In an effort to entice landlords, HACA uses service fees to pay for damages in excess of the security deposit and offers a retention bonus for lease renewals after one year of occupancy by an EHV family. These measures have helped leverage EHV families into housing, but the challenges remain. HACA and EHV planning partners are considering amending EHV policies to dedicate service fees for additional landlord incentives. ECHO recently recommitted to centralized landlord engagement strategies to secure housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness across the CoC.

Advice for Others

"Conduct frequent meetings to discuss system-level impacts … assess the potential for transformative system-level impact from the EHV program … and implement changes as needed."

"Utilize the same group to assess performance and recalibrate strategies."

"Engage all stakeholders (providers, CoC, people with lived experience, people with equity lens)."

"Ensure people with lived experience are compensated for their time and expertise."

"Find ways to convince or compel landlords to accept vouchers at local level. Collaborate with apartment associations."

"Advocate for source-of-income protections at the local, state, and national level."

"Align your EHV strategy with local and national efforts to end homelessness and your performance measures with local, state, and federal metrics."

GETTING IT DONE
Using Health Center Funding in Harris County, Texas

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) supports nearly 300 Health Care for the Homeless Health Centers that provide primary care and substance use disorder services to children, youth, veterans, and other people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

The American Rescue Plan awarded health centers $7.6 billion to support and expand the following efforts:
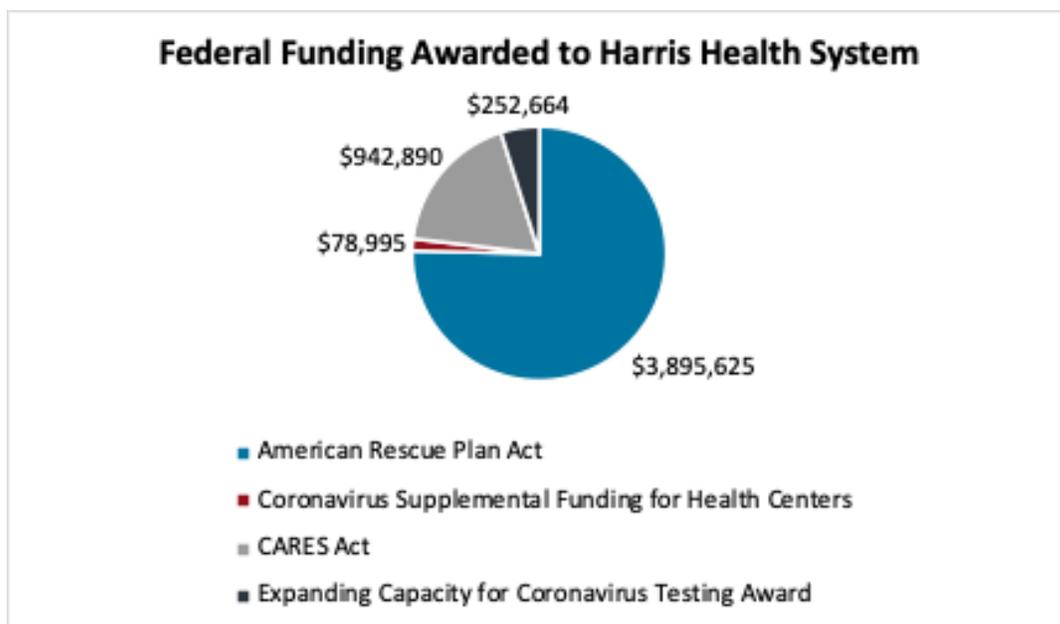
- COVID-19 vaccination, testing, and treatment for vulnerable populations;
- Preventive and primary health care delivery for those at higher risk for COVID-19; and
- Expansion of operational capacity during the pandemic and beyond.

For more guidance and resources about health center funding, visit the HRSA website.

Harris Health System received **$3.8 million** from the **American Rescue Plan and spent $865,000** through September 2021 and **served 888 telehealth patients.**

The Harris County Way

Harris County, in partnership with the City of Houston, used a portion of its ARP funds, combined with portions of the other HRSA funds outlined in the graphic below, to establish a telemedicine program for people experiencing homelessness. The rest of the funds were used for COVID-19 outreach, testing, and vaccinations and for primary care for people experiencing homelessness.

Federal Funding Awarded to Harris Health System

- $252,664
- $942,890
- $78,995
- $3,895,625

- American Rescue Plan Act
- Coronavirus Supplemental Funding for Health Centers
- CARES Act
- Expanding Capacity for Coronavirus Testing Award

Key Players

- Houston Office of Homeless Initiatives
- Houston Health Department
- Harris County Public Health
- Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County
- Coordinated Homeless System Response to COVID-19 Committee
- COVID Vaccine Coordination Planning-Homeless/Housing Response System Committee

Keys to Success

➢ **Collaborating**: The effort required buy-in from various partners and stakeholders to establish goals and objectives, staffing models, timelines, budgets, and grant proposals.

➢ **Creating Systematic Processes:** Two local committees have been established to provide regular opportunities for collaboration and coordination resulting in more efficient use of resources for targeting services. They are: the Coordinated Homeless System Response to COVID-19 Committee and the COVID Vaccine Coordination Planning-Homeless/Housing Response System Committee.

➢ **Starting Small**: Harris County initially only offered telemedicine via phone. Then, they completed assessments of space availability in each of the shelter-based clinics and the "face-to-face" telemedicine capacity at each site.

➢ **Going Electronic:** By incorporating tablets into outreach, staff streamlined the process of connecting unsheltered patients to telemedicine appointments and improved their follow-up communication with them about medications, lab results, and referrals.

Biggest Barriers and How They Were Overcome

Supply-Chain Chaos

The supply-chain chaos caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, economic shutdowns, worker shortages, and lack of materials caused many delays. For example, the Harris County outreach mobile medical unit has been out of service for months because it needs a part that's on backorder; and three mobile units that were to be purchased using ARP funds are similarly delayed for about a year. To overcome these challenges, Harris County has been using a smaller unit that's typically used for vaccine delivery instead for primary health-care services and telemedicine.

Advice for Others

"Hire a telehealth manager or director. Having a leadership position with experience in telehealth will allow for smoother implementation and adaptation of telemedicine services, while allowing other leadership positions to focus on other program operation needs related to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the health-care needs of people experiencing homelessness."

"IT members should review IT equipment to ensure that IT can support the requirements and that the equipment can function with the organization's server and electronic medical record system."