TAPPING ARPA FOR OLDER YOUTH

TOOLKIT FOR ADVOCATES

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), passed by Congress in March 2021, is a historic $1.9 trillion investment in states and communities. Designed to help families and individuals recover from the global pandemic, ARPA is already successfully lifting millions of children and families out of poverty across the nation. Notably, the bill did not include any funds specifically directed toward older youth, ages 16 to 24, who are not connected to school or the workforce. However, ARPA allocated $350 billion in flexible State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) to help states and localities address their unique priorities.

As advocates, we know that historically marginalized U.S. young people—including more than 4.9 million Opportunity Youth ages 16-24 who are not in school or the workforce—need and deserve investment in their well-being and recovery. Without it, millions are at risk of being left farther behind. There is plenty of data to show that Opportunity Youth are eager for opportunities.

It’s not too late to understand and influence how some ARPA funds are spent in our communities.

We hope this quick guide helps advocates tap into and leverage available SLFRF funds to support crucial programs that serve older youth, Opportunity Youth, and those who are systems-involved.

Understanding ARPA: We suggest you start at bit.ly/arpa-youth, a section of the Forum’s SparkAction site, with data and tools from the Forum and our partners.

Is there still time to influence state and local ARPA spending decisions?

The answer as of August 2022, is probably yes, according to Kylie Wheeler, applied research and policy manager at the Children’s Funding Project: “There is likely an opportunity to influence the direction of these funds.” Here’s what you need to know:

Children’s Funding Project is a nonprofit social impact organization that helps communities and states expand equitable opportunities for children and youth through strategic public financing. childrensfundingproject.org

The Forum for Youth Investment is a nonprofit action tank working with national, state, and local leaders to ensure all young people are ready for college, work and life. forumfyi.org

bit.ly/arpa-youth
2 How do I track how much funding my state and community is receiving through ARPA, and how much is already obligated or spent?

One way you can find out how much money your community received is through Children’s Funding Project’s online ARPA tracker: Flexible Funding for Children and Youth in the American Rescue Plan.

Another great tool is the Local Government ARPA Investment Tracker from the National Association of Counties, National League of Cities, and Brookings Metro.

The good news: In larger counties and cities, only about 33.4 percent of SLFRF funding had been budgeted as of June 30, 2022 (according to the above tracker, which is based on Recovery Plan Performance reports). That means there is a good chance you can still influence some funding!

3 How can I take action to influence the funding and whom do I contact?

The flexible SLFRF funds flow through different agencies and offices in different states. In most cases, your official state government website will include a link to ARPA funding resources. Many local communities similarly have a dedicated ARPA site. These are great places to start when you’re determining which official and/or governing body handles ARPA implementation in your state or community.

Once you know which agency has decision-making power over ARPA spending in your state or community, you can:

- figure out where your jurisdiction is in the implementation process,
- launch an outreach campaign to engage decision-makers with a clear request,
- organize members of your community who can speak to the impact of solutions that ARPA dollars can support, and
- work with state and local elected officials to make sure that eligible community organizations know about the funding and how to apply.

State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds – Timeline

Time to work toward sustainable, equitable funding models!