

Proposal for an ARPA Social Services Fund (ARPA-SSF)

(Submission date 21 March 2022)

Note: This proposal replaces the proposal submitted by Michael Cressman in January 2022 which was subsequently revised using Chester ARPA Committee format and submitted with Rosie Bininger as the Submitter on 04 March 2022. The current proposal incorporates suggestions by reviewers and replaces all previously submitted ARPA-SSF proposals.

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Proposal Information

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Description of project:

Background: The Town of Chester (the Town) will receive a total of \$1,246,840 from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (ARPA-SLFRF) program; half has already been received. The Town currently employs a Social Services Director (SSD) to assist residents in need. Assisting town residents with applications for funding from currently available federal, state or local funding programs is one of the

key responsibilities of the SSD. Qualification for many of these programs requires disclosure of confidential information such as income, assets or both. Despite the availability of this funding, some Chester residents are struggling in a major way to make ends meet.

This proposal is designed to address needs of the “most disadvantaged households” in Chester. For the purpose of the proposal, the most disadvantaged households are considered to have a level of “need” at or above the 95th percentile of need for the Chester population. Recognizing that there is no perfect way to quantify level of “need”, assuming, that there are 1725 households in Chester, approximately 86 would have needs at or above the 95th percentile of need.

With this background in mind, the current proposal is: **“To establish an ARPA Social Services Fund (ARPA-SSF) and provide assistance to the most disadvantaged households in Chester”**. The request is for \$100,000 which is approximately 8% of the total amount ARPA-SLFRF funds that the Town will receive.

Program Overview: The SSD will administer the ARPA-SSF program (the Program) and utilize a risk-based, sequential approach to accrual of fund beneficiaries. Residents in the Cherry Hill Apartments (a subsidized, affordable housing complex for seniors with 23 one-bedroom units) will be in first group of Program participants. The Program would proceed with sequential enrollment of groups which are identified in Table 1.

Table 1 Groups of town residents eligible for inclusion in the Program

Group	Group Description
1	Cherry Hill Apartment residents
2	Seniors with household income at or below Federal Poverty level
3	Seniors with household income at or below 185% of Federal Poverty level
4	Any household with income at or below Federal Poverty level
5	Any household with income at or below 185% of Federal Poverty level

The Federal Poverty Guideline Limits from March 2022 will be used through the duration of the program. Limits for household sizes up to five are displayed in Table 2. Limits progressively increase for larger households (Source: Connecticut Department of Social Services). An expanded table of poverty levels is available at <https://uwc.211ct.org>.

Table 2: Federal Poverty Levels (3/2021 – 3/2022)

Household Size	100% Limit (dollars)	185% Limit (dollars)
1	12,880	23,828
2	17,420	32,227
3	21,960	40,626
4	26,500	49,025
5	32,040	57,424

Program implementation. The ARPA-SSF program can be initiated as soon as it is funded. Activities during the first 6 months will include 1) development of a manual of operations 2) assessment and planning for Program fund distribution among Cherry Hill Apartment residents 3) identification of potentially eligible “clients” who have recently used the Town’s Social Services offerings and 4) development of a communications plan geared toward residents who may be eligible but have not utilized the Town’s Social Services program.

Although the Program is primarily designed to provide a supplement to funds available through other social services programs, it is expected that there will be situations that arise that require “emergency” assistance in people who are not receiving any social services funding. Should this occur, funds from the ARPA-SSF could be used if the SSD determines that funds requested are actually needed and wouldn’t be wasted. The same assessment is used to select people and amounts of funding available through the Town’s Emergency Assistance and other programs funded locally through donations.

Eligible uses of ARPA-SSF funds: The ARPA-SSF Overview of the Final Rule includes a list of allowable uses of ARPA-SLFRF funds. The list includes, but is not limited to 1) rental assistance, 2) mortgage assistance, 3) utility assistance, 4) assistance paying property taxes and 5) payment for devices or fees for internet access. It is anticipated that most of the funds from ARPA-SSF will be used for one of these purposes. Food assistance could be added to this list if deemed necessary.

The specific method of payment for eligible expenses will be selected on a case-by-case basis but not utilize cash payments unless absolutely necessary.

Duration of funding and funding limits: Funding for an individual household would be capped at a cash equivalent of \$1000 per household (irrespective of household size) over the life of the Program. With this limit, the Program could provide support to 100 disadvantaged Chester households. The SSD believes that a program of this size could be managed using resources already available through Town Social Services.

Timing and tracking of ARPA-SSF distributions: The Program is designed to have a gradual but steady flow of applicants for funding. The duration of the Program would be until the \$100,000 in funds from the Program are expended or until December 31, 2026 (the end date for ARPA-SLFRF expenditures).

Tracking and auditing: Tracking and auditing of ARPA-SSF distributions will utilize “Charity Tracker” which was recently acquired through a grant awarded to the Chester Community Partnership. This method of fund tracking will be useful when the program is audited.

Advantages and limitations of the ARPA-SSF Program

Advantages of the proposed ARPA-SSF Program include 1) use of currently existing resources 2) presence of existing processes to preserve confidentiality 3) flexibility in use of funds to meet needs of individual people and 4) targeting of funding towards our most disadvantaged Chester residents. The chief limitation of the program is that it only addresses needs of a small percentage (approximately 5%) of Chester residents and only provides a maximum benefit of \$1000 per household.

ARPA funds requested:

The request is for allocation of \$100,000 in ARPA funds to establish the ARPA-SSF. The project fits into the “government services” eligible use category as described in the ARPA-SLFRF Overview of Final Rule document. All funds for the program will go directly to eligible Chester residents.

Who would most benefit from the project if approved:

The Town’s most disadvantaged residents would be the primary beneficiaries of the ARPA-SSF program. Initiating the program in Chester residents who live in a senior affordable housing complex sends a signal that Chester cares about the lives of its most disadvantaged residents.