

Pandemic-Related Challenges for US Mayors

Boosting Local Efforts with Federal Aid

The 2021 annual [Menino Survey of Mayors](#) focused on a variety of pandemic related issues concerning mayors across the country, such as fiscal and economic impacts of COVID and long-term effects on residents' mental health and learning loss among young people. The mayors surveyed indicated that federal funds via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will help cities combat these issues as well as address long standing issues of housing and homelessness, infrastructure, and equity. Here is a summary of four key areas of focus throughout the US.

COVID-19 & ARPA - In response to the impacts of COVID-19, federal ARPA funds provided over \$65B to cities across the nation. Over ¾ of mayors surveyed saw this money as an opportunity to accomplish transformative aims and to work on large-scale projects, with homelessness (21%), transportation infrastructure (18%), and social services (15%) as the top three areas of investment. Childcare (4%), education (2%), and sustainable development (2%) were among the lowest ranked for planned investments.

Data & Equity - A lack of racial/ethnic data available to cities became apparent as communities rushed to distribute aid during the pandemic. This shortcoming made it difficult to distribute funds in an equitable manner. While the vast majority (84%) of mayors agreed that federal reporting requirements on racial/ethnic data collection was at least moderately important, strict federal standards limit what kind of data is collected, which has led to inconsistencies and incomplete datasets.

Housing - While the majority of mayors agree that the pandemic has worsened the housing market crisis, there was no solid agreement on the best way to combat this issue. Mayors note a higher cost of housing as well as dealing with evictions as top concerns. Other paths to take to address housing concerns include increasing housing density in popular established neighborhoods and protecting tenants from eviction no matter the cost.

Small Business - Noting the impact of the pandemic on businesses, 71% of surveyed mayors agreed that significant changes needed to occur to support small businesses in the future. However, the lack of equitable distribution of resources has made it difficult for certain minority-owned businesses to receive aid. As the pandemic continues, access to the workforce is expected to be the biggest challenge that small businesses will encounter.

The [Menino Survey of Mayors](#) is produced by Boston University's Initiative on Cities.

BOSTON'S FOCUS

ARPA FUNDING - With ARPA funding, Boston addressed major policy areas such as equitable data collection, the housing market and the struggles of small businesses. Boston received \$558M in ARPA Funds and budgeted \$144.5M of it as of February 2022 across 48 projects. The top three most invested projects include FY22 revenue replacement for the operating budget (\$55M), the Acquisition Opportunity Program (\$20M) and Fare Free Bus Pilot (\$8M).

HOUSING - With ARPA funding, Boston allocated \$22M to increase the number of affordable housing units, protecting the housing market stock and preventing displacement across neighborhoods. The city also used the money to hire short-term employees to expand housing services for newly-housed individuals.

SMALL BUSINESS - Boston invested \$16.5M of ARPA funds for economic assistance to small businesses, including money to keep small businesses afloat and maintain their shops, investing in tourism, hospitality and travel, as well as helping restaurants rehire their employees. In January 2022, Mayor Wu allocated an additional \$5M to continue supporting local businesses. Since April 2020, Boston has provided over \$28.6M in grants to more than 5,600 businesses to provide financial support or to support expansion.