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Public Administration | Meeting Government Needs During COVID-19 and Beyond

Rescue Plan Can Support COVID-19 Tech Challenges and Future Needs

Revenue loss and the rapid transition to remote operations have been among top governmental challenges during the COVID-19 crisis. In response to these ongoing issues, the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 includes $350 billion in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) for state, local, territorial, and tribal governments.

These federal dollars can free up funding to support local governments' investment in technology that has allowed them to respond to the public health emergency with respect to COVID-19. Local governments that have invested in technology during the pandemic have used software to:

- Enable remote work
- Keep operations running
- Engage community members
- Build operational efficiencies
- Improve cybersecurity
- Provide data insights

Based on their experience during COVID-19, local governments are increasingly recognizing the importance of remote capabilities and digital workflows. They include citizen engagement, process automation, and infrastructure modernization, among top priorities, according to e.Republic.[1]

Whether it's enabling a hybrid work model, eliminating paper workflows, or creating remote community and employee digital access, software has proven its value. In this article we will explore how technology has kept communities connected and how technology will meet future needs.

ARPA's Support for Local Government

Established by ARPA, SLFRF is specifically designated to help governments "respond to the COVID-19 emergency and bring back jobs."

Treasury guidelines for spending funds provide recipients with "broad flexibility to decide how best to use this funding to meet the needs of their communities." Funds are available until Dec. 31, 2024, and must be expended by Dec. 31, 2026.

Connecting Communities During COVID-19 and Beyond

Tyler's ERP, Civic Services, and Property and Recording solutions are integrated with Tyler's comprehensive software ecosystem that connects operations and processes for employees, constituents, and communities.

The most likely sources providing funding for technology are SLFRF categories that support:

- Replacing lost public sector revenue
- Responding to the far-reaching public health and negative economic impacts of the pandemic
- Modernizing cybersecurity, including hardware, software, and protection of critical infrastructure

Local governments should refer to evolving spending and reporting guidance from the Treasury Department.

"Employees submit their timesheets online, and supervisors are able to approve anytime, from anywhere. We no longer have to worry about payroll, which was a huge relief when we found ourselves working remotely."

— Jill Cunningham, Database Staff Support Manager, City of Auburn, Maine

How Tyler Has Helped Increase Community Access and Operational Efficiency

During the pandemic, Tyler Technologies has worked hand in hand with local governments throughout the United States to keep city halls' virtual doors open. Tyler has helped the public sector adapt to the crisis and prepare for future challenges with a wide range of proven solutions that allow remote operations. Tyler's integrated public administration solutions have helped communities with two critical aspects of the response to COVID-19: social distancing and remote work.

Tyler's cloud-based enterprise resource planning (ERP) and civic services solutions have been beneficial for organizations that have needed to transition their workforces rapidly to remote work. Because of inherent scalability, the cloud is well poised to help in times of crisis, whether enabling remote work or scaling up to meet the community's evolving engagement needs. Cloud-based solutions take the pressure off IT departments to manage servers and make it easier to connect securely with remote workers.

Tyler's ability to deploy software remotely has made it possible to add needed solutions despite social distancing constraints. Tyler has helped clients with self-service portals, implementing remote payroll changes, launching mobile applications, COVID-19-specific financial reporting, and more during the pandemic.

Finally, Tyler's cybersecurity services have helped IT departments protect networks against cyberattacks while assisting with managing an evolving network footprint, keeping communities focused on critical needs.

Now and for the Future: Enabling Remote Work

Employees' ability to work remotely has been at the heart of government response to COVID-19. While the transition has been challenging, local governments have managed to transform familiar in-person workflows to new digital solutions such as:

- **Employee access:** From updating personal information to making benefit selections, employees are empowered to update information remotely, eliminating paper forms and redundant data entry.
- **Virtual timesheets:** Inefficient paper processes and in-person handoffs and signoffs are replaced with digital workflows.
- **Content management:** Digital documents are available to remote workers throughout workflows, putting critical information a keystroke away rather than in multiple file cabinets, which may not be readily accessible.

Investing in the future: With many local governments anticipating hybrid staffing scenarios going forward, remote work capabilities will remain important.

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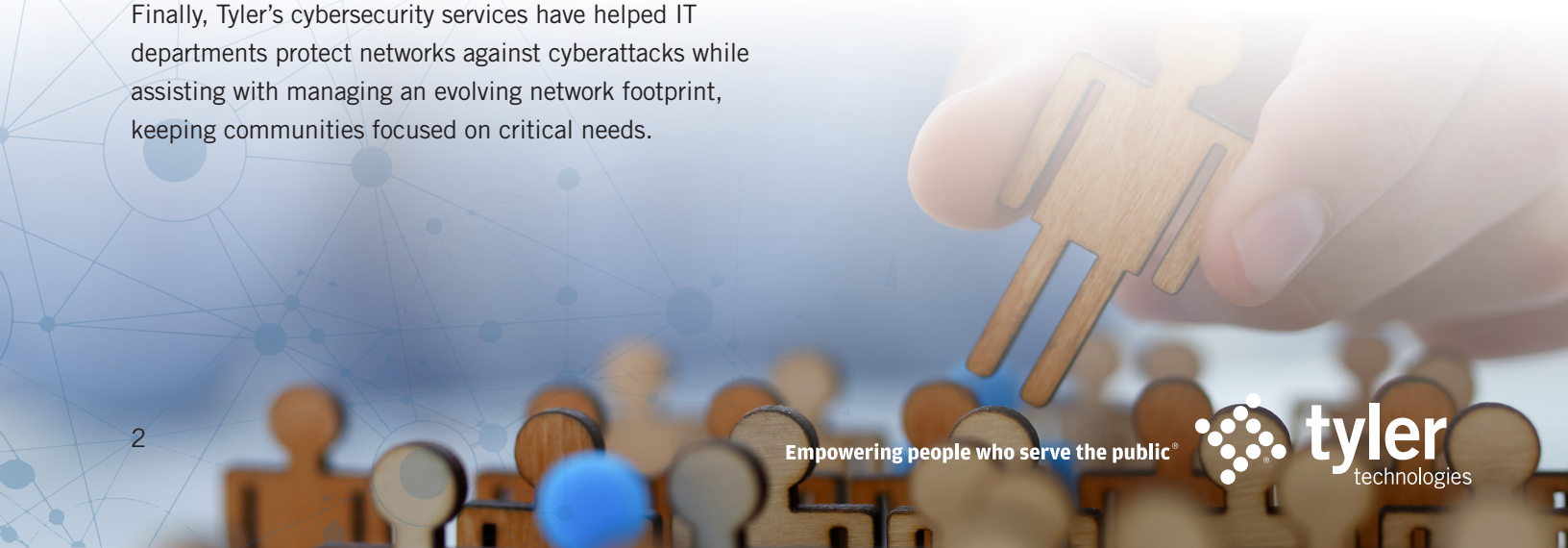

"When COVID-19 hit and city hall was closed, our employees were able to connect remotely from home and enter their timesheets. Employee self-service (software) granted our employees secure access to their personnel data and — in a time where nobody had much control — put the control back in their hands."

— Jason Jaurigue, Director of Information Services, City of Rancho Mirage, California

Now and for the Future: **Keeping Government Running**

Despite social distancing guidelines, government operations have continued to function thanks to technology that has bypassed the need for in-person meetings and paper-based workflows. Software has helped with:

- **Meeting management:** From remote meeting scheduling and agenda creation to minute generation, software has made it possible to hold meetings that meet organizational and transparency guidelines.
- **Permitting and licensing:** From applications to fee payments and more, community members can complete vital tasks remotely, avoiding prolonged waits because of office closures.
- **Vendor access:** Despite a reduction in one-on-one staff availability, vendors can conveniently access payment and invoice information through online portals.
- **Data and insights:** The ability to monitor and share information about the health and performance of an organization is critical. A data and insights solution provides easy access to key performance indicators, enables improved analysis, and simplifies report creation and delivery. The ability to access economic indicators through leading industry data sources extends valuable insights beyond any one organization, allowing for comprehensive analysis, measurement, and benchmarking.

Investing in the future: The convenience of remote task completion has sped up community adoption of remote options, and data and insights solutions have helped local governments monitor and analyze performance to meet current and future challenges.

Now and for the Future: **Supporting Civic Engagement**

Software has made it possible for a community to engage with its government despite the curtailment of in-person engagement. Using home computers and mobile devices, community members have continued to access services and keep informed through:

- **Incident reporting software:** Users can make non-emergency inquiries and complaints and follow their requests' progress.
- **Resident access portals**: Community members can pay utility bills, perform permitting and licensing tasks, and more 24/7/365.
- **Notification software:** Important information is shared with the community through multiple channels, such as social, mobile, email, and phone.

Investing in the future: Governments have implemented successful solutions for connecting with the communities they serve. In times of crisis, these connections are invaluable, as proven during COVID-19.

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Possible SLFRF Funding Routes for Technology Investments

Treasury guidelines for spending funds provide recipients with "broad flexibility to decide how best to use this funding to meet the needs of their communities." The most likely sources for paying for technology are SLFRF funding categories that: Replace lost public sector revenue; and/or respond to the far-reaching public health and negative economic impacts of the pandemic.

Treasury does NOT pre-approve expenditures. Entities should follow Treasury's Final Rule and evolving guidance.[2] Here are details about two possible technology funding tracks.

Replace Lost Public Sector Revenue: Providing Government Services

The most relevant and streamlined path for funding technology projects is likely to be funds Treasury has earmarked to replace lost revenue. Governments have great flexibility in how these replacement funds may be used. Treasury's broad guideline is that replacement funds can "pay for 'government services' in an amount equal to the revenue loss experienced by the recipient due" to the pandemic.

The amount of funding to replace lost revenue is either determined by a Treasury formula that ascertains negative revenue impact over time or by a standard allowance of up to $10 million. (The $10 million option, which streamlines reporting, is aimed at smaller local governments.)

Once a recipient identifies the reduction in revenue and available funding, Treasury is providing "broad latitude to use funds for the provision of government services."

Respond to Health & Negative Economic Impacts: Effective Service Delivery

Enabling effective service delivery is another option for funding technology. However, this route is less flexible than the track to replace lost revenue. In its final guidelines for this track, Treasury specifically mentions using funds for tech that supports "a local government's specific pandemic response" that aligns with SLFRF guidelines.

It's important to understand that "effective service delivery" funding needs to be used to "improve the efficacy of public health and economic programs through tools like program evaluation, data, and outreach, as well as to address administrative needs caused or exacerbated by the pandemic."

In other words, a technology purchase would need to be tied to specific programming that meets ARPA's public health or economic requirements.

Treasury's Final Rule offers "non-exhaustive" examples of tech that could be purchased under this category. These include "supporting program evaluation, data, and outreach through:

- "Data analysis resources to gather, assess, share, and use data"
- "Technology infrastructure to improve access to and the user experience of government IT systems, as well as technology improvements to increase public access and delivery of government programs and services"
- "Community outreach and engagement activities"
- "Technology infrastructure"

[1] e.Republic. First Look: 2021 Local Government Tech Priorities & Budget Outlook. December 2020. webinars.govtech.com/First-Look-2021-Local-Government-Tech-Priorities-Budget-Outlook-133041.html
[2] Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds: Final Rule. Department of the Treasury. January 2022. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-27/pdf/2022-00292.pdf

To learn more about ARPA funding, please visit
https://empower.tylertech.com/arpa.html