

May 2022



American Rescue Plan Equity Learning Agenda

On his first day in office, on January 20, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. Through this Executive Order, the President affirmed that the government has a responsibility and a role to play in delivering equitable outcomes for the American people. His action directed staff to recognize and work to advance equity through the tools of the federal government, including for "people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." Upon signing, federal agencies were tasked with assessing current practices and developing a plan to address any barriers that underserved communities and individuals may face in accessing federal programs, procurement, and contracting opportunities.

Less than two months later, on March 11, 2021, President Biden signed the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) that provided funding for over 200 programs and services designed to counteract the public health, economic, and broader societal harms of the pandemic. Furthermore, major components of ARP were explicitly designed to respond to the disproportionate negative impacts of the pandemic on underserved communities.

For example, ARP temporarily expanded the long-standing Child Tax Credit in multiple ways, including by making it fully refundable in 2021. This change opened up access to more than 26 million children—including many Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian American and White children—who did not previously qualify because their family's income was too low. Meanwhile, the ARP Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund provides \$122 billion in pandemic relief funds to the country's education system over more than four years, and is designed to help schools safely reopen while addressing student learning loss and wellbeing. Included in ARP ESSER is a first-ever *Maintenance of Equity* provision, designed to shield the nation's highest poverty schools and school districts from disproportionate pandemic-related funding cuts.

Alongside these actions, on January 27, 2021, President Biden issued the Presidential Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Evidence-Based Policymaking, stating that it is the policy of his Administration to make evidence-based decisions using the best available data and science.² The combination of ARP programs and services specifically designed and implemented to deliver equitable outcomes, together with President Biden's mandate for the government to work to achieve equity and promote evidence-based policymaking, creates a unique opportunity to learn what types of government actions work to build an equitable recovery. Further, the significant variation among ARP-funded programs—from direct economic payments to individuals and families, to new competitive grants to improve and modernize public benefits programs, to \$350 billion in flexible relief funds to states, localities, territories, and Tribal governments—allows for a deep exploration of how various program features and approaches impact equity.

PURPOSE OF AN ARP EQUITY LEARNING AGENDA

This ARP Equity Learning Agenda provides an overarching framework to guide the evaluation and related evidence-building activities of ARP investments on questions of equity over the lifespan of the various programs, and beyond.³ In order to coordinate and prioritize relevant



evidence-building activities, this document highlights common questions that apply across multiple ARP programs and lifts up examples of agency evidence-building efforts, including evaluations, related to ARP implementation. This document does not represent every question that could be asked when trying to understand equity outcomes related to ARP investments, but instead prioritizes core questions and highlights selected program questions that are most closely related to the original goals of ARP investments.

Fundamentally, the Learning Agenda asks:

- To what extent did ARP investments support equitable outcomes for those they were designed to serve?
- What strategies contributed to equitable outcomes, and where are different strategies needed?

The ARP Equity Learning Agenda is intended to help inform the direction of federally-funded ARP equity-related research and analysis. In addition, academics, researchers, community organizations, state and local governments, and other external stakeholders are encouraged to use this Learning Agenda to shape and inform relevant external evaluation and related evidence-building activities. Ultimately, the goal is to encourage research that generates evidence about the degree to which ARP investments contributed to producing equitable outcomes and what, specifically, caused any improvements in equitable outcomes where they occurred.

Based on the methods used, certain evaluations and evidence-building activities may also pilot innovative approaches to generate actionable knowledge. While experimental evaluation is an appropriate evidence-building strategy for several questions in the ARP Equity Learning Agenda, other types of evidence building also may be appropriate. These evidence-building activities may include foundational fact finding, data collection, performance measurement, policy analysis, and various forms of evaluation, including process and impact evaluations, among others.

In the short term, evaluation findings and evidence-building activities related to this Learning Agenda can be used to improve implementation of current ARP programs. Beyond that, findings can generate evidence that informs future government investments and approaches to improving equitable outcomes. Ultimately the findings from ARP evaluation activities—where focused on questions of equity—can help policymakers understand the impact of particular investments on building an equitable recovery.

HOW THE ARP EQUITY LEARNING AGENDA RELATES TO OTHER LEARNING AGENDAS

As part of the Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act), CFO Act agencies are required, and all agencies are encouraged, to develop Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans that align with each agency's mission and operations. Agency Learning Agendas are multi-year plans that are part of agency strategic plans. For most agencies, 2022 represents the first time a Learning Agenda has been developed and implemented. Other agencies, such as the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, developed learning agendas prior to the Evidence Act, and have since worked to bring their plans in line with the Act's requirements.



Agency Learning Agendas are designed to prioritize key questions that an agency needs to answer to deliver on their mission and be most effective in their operations. For some agencies, ARP investments represent a small portion of their funding and activities, whereas in other cases, ARP programs play an outsized role in the agency's overall operations. The ARP Equity Learning Agenda amplifies examples of known ARP evidence activities occurring within and among agencies, and encourages new research on important questions that otherwise may not be studied.

In addition to individual agency Learning Agendas, on December 21, 2021 a draft Presidential Management Agenda (PMA) Learning Agenda was released by the Office of Management and Budget for public input.⁶ This first ever government-wide management Learning Agenda identifies key questions to answer in support of the Biden-Harris Administration's governance priorities of equity, effectiveness, and accountability. Evidence-building activities conducted in support of the PMA learning agenda, therefore, may also be relevant and supportive of the ARP Equity Learning Agenda.

EQUITABLE IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

The framework for this Learning Agenda comes directly from the equitable implementation principles developed and used by the White House ARP Implementation Team. The framework includes the following principles:

- Goals: Program goals and measurable targets are established. Programs track progress against these goals and targets.
- Awareness & Access: People are aware of and can easily access eligible programs and services, including underserved individuals and communities.
- Allocating & Leveraging Resources: Funds and other resources are allocated, leveraged, and spent equitably.
- **Measuring Results**: Sufficient data is collected and analyzed to determine whether and how disparities change across key outcome measures, including for underserved populations.
- **Feedback**: The program undergoes regular internal review, including soliciting feedback from underserved individuals and communities for continuous improvements.
- Evidence: Programs are designed and implemented based on existing evidence of what works to advance equity. Data are collected and strategies are evaluated to build new evidence.

ARP EQUITY LEARNING AGENDA

ARP funded a wide variety of programs with a range of policy goals in order to address the public health and economic harms of COVID-19. While the specific goals vary across ARP programs, a consistent priority of all funds is to seek to achieve equitable outcomes. The fundamental question driving the ARP Equity Learning Agenda is:

To what extent did ARP investments support equitable outcomes for those they were designed to serve?



What follows are selected examples of how this overarching question may be applied to various ARP investments.

- To what extent did **Health and Human Services**' ARP-funded programs and policies strengthen early childhood development and expand opportunities to help children and youth thrive equitably within their families and communities?
- To what extent did pregnancy-related mortality and morbidity outcomes improve for underserved populations in states that opted into the **12 months of continuous postpartum coverage** in Medicaid and CHIP under ARP?
- To what extent are **Treasury's** ARP-funded programs (including Capital Projects Fund, Emergency Rental Assistance, Homeowner Assistance Fund, State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund, State Small Business Credit Initiative) being implemented equitably, and what barriers to equitable implementation exist?
- What effects did the **Small Business Administration's** ARP-funded recovery programs (COVID-Economic Injury Disaster Loan, Targeted EIDL Advance, Shuttered Venue Operators Grant, and Restaurant Revitalization Fund) have on small business outcomes (e.g., survival, employee retention, revenue, etc.), and how did these vary by industry, geography, and owner demographics?
- To what extent did the ARP-funded innovations in Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP) demonstrate impact on equitable WIC participation?

The questions listed below focus on exploring which specific implementation strategies, if any, contributed to or detracted from achieving equitable outcomes associated with ARP investments. The questions are structured according to the equitable implementation principles established for ARP Programs, discussed above. Included alongside the core implementation questions are specific examples of selected program questions. These program questions reflect areas where the Administration and federal agencies have an interest in building evidence. The associated evidence-building activities remain undetermined and may not be studied by federal agencies or external stakeholders due to various constraints, including data availability and quality, resources, and prioritization, among others.

Equitable Implementation Goals	Core Questions	Selected Program Questions
Awareness & Access: People are aware of and can easily access eligible programs and services, including underserved	To what extent did programs attempt to increase awareness of available programs, resources, and eligibility among underserved	Did the Small Business Administration's Community Navigator pilot program increase awareness and enrollment in federal programs? How, and for whom? What leading practices in customercentric design and program delivery



Equitable Implementation	Core Questions	Selected Program Questions	
individuals and communities.	individuals and communities? To what extent did programs attempt to increase access to program resources among underserved groups? What were the effects of those efforts?	have been identified in the implementation to date, and how might those practices be integrated into other SBA programs? • Did national and local campaigns increase awareness and sign-ups of the Child Tax Credit among new non-filers? Were there differences in impact for direct mailings, traditional media, text messages, and social media campaigns and, if so, for whom? • What is the effect of Code for America's mobile friendly, bilingual non-filer Child Tax Credit portal on increasing access for new filers? • To what extent did low income renters benefit from the administrative flexibilities (such as self-attestation) that Treasury made available to Emergency Rental Assistance grantees? What effect did the use of these administrative flexibilities have on preventing evictions among underserved renters?	
Allocating & Leveraging Resources: Funds and other resources are allocated, leveraged, and spent equitably.	• To what extent were ARP funds and other resources allocated in a manner that advances equitable outcomes or ensures an equitable distribution of funds?	How did the resources made available to schools and districts serving the greatest share of low-income students change after the introduction of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds' Maintenance of Equity provision?	
	 Which strategies are more or less effective 	How has funding for the smallest business owners – many owned by	



Equitable Implementation Goals	Core Questions	Selected Program Questions	
_	at ensuring funds are distributed equitably (e.g. first come, first served; dedicated funding amounts; block grants)? To what extent, and how, did programs attempt to leverage complementary resources to increase investments in advancing equitable outcomes? How do these leveraged resources compare in scale to the original government investment? What were the effects of these efforts?	underserved groups – in the Restaurant Revitalization Fund impacted the equitable distribution of funds? How have small business owners fared in comparison to others who received these funds? • How have states, localities, Tribal governments, and territories used State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to address disproportionately impacted individuals and communities, and what were the effects on targeted outcomes? • Are small child care providers— often owned by women of color— equitably receiving Child Care Stabilization grants? What contributed to equitable grant receipts, where they existed? • How did Public Housing Authorities and Continuum of Care groups partner to administer their allocation of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) and what were the outcomes of tenants who secured a lease with an EHV? • In what ways are Tribal governments	
		• In what ways are Tribal governments leveraging the Capital Projects Fund for broadband investments with other broadband funding available through State & Local Fiscal Recovery Funds and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration? To what effect?	



Equitable Implementation Goals	Core Questions	Selected Program Questions		
Measuring Results: Sufficient data is collected and analyzed to determine whether and how disparities change across key outcome measures, including for underserved populations.	 What successes and challenges have programs encountered in their attempts to collect disaggregated data? To what extent have efforts to collect disaggregated program data improved programs' abilities to better deliver programs and services and to measure performance or impact? 	 What equity metrics have been piloted by selected states through the Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance equity grants? What have these metrics revealed about the equitable distribution of unemployment insurance? To what extent does required reporting data indicate whether the Economic Development Administration's investments made under the American Rescue Plan led to an increase in services delivered to previously underserved communities impacted by COVID-19? 		
Feedback: The program undergoes regular internal review, including soliciting feedback from underserved individuals and communities for continuous improvements.	 How did programs seek opportunities for continuous improvement, including by soliciting and incorporating feedback from underserved communities? What were the effects of these efforts? 	Has user research among people who do not normally file taxes because their income is too low changed how the Child Tax Credit program is administered to non-filers? To what effect?		
Evidence: Programs are designed and implemented based on existing evidence of what works to advance equity. Data are	What evidence- informed strategies were used to advance equity, for which people, and under which circumstances?	Did states effectively implement evidence-informed Mobile Crisis Intervention Services for Medicaid beneficiaries? Did the services reduce disparities among people with		



Equitable Implementation Goals	Core Questions	Selected Program Questions
collected and strategies are evaluated to build new evidence.	 To what extent were such programs implemented with fidelity to the evidence-based models? What were the effects of those efforts? 	serious mental illness or substance use disorders? • What interventions did school districts plan to fund with Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds to address student learning loss? Which interventions did districts report were informed by existing evidence? How were those programs directed to address the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic? Were the investments associated with reducing or eliminating the pre-existing achievement gaps among historically disadvantaged students?

EXAMPLES OF ARP EQUITY EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Included here are examples of federally funded equity-relevant evaluation and evidence-building activities that are funded by ARP, or whose findings are relevant to ARP programs. Agency Learning Agendas and FY 23 Annual Evaluation Plans may include additional activities that address questions on the ARP Equity Learning Agenda.⁷

Agency Program	Area of Inquiry	Status	Link to More Information
Census Household Pulse Survey	How the coronavirus pandemic is impacting households across the country from a social and economic perspective	Underway	https://www.census.gov/ programs- surveys/household- pulse-survey/research- presentations.html
Congressional Research Service analysis of the Department of Treasury's Child Tax Credit	Estimate the impact of the ARP-expanded child credit on family financial wellbeing	Complete	https://crsreports.congres s.gov/product/pdf/R/R46 839



Department of Labor Multiple programs	How federal labor policies, protections and programs reach traditionally underserved communities	Complete	https://www.dol.gov/age ncies/oasp/evaluation/cu rrentstudies/Department- of-Labor-Summer-Data- Challenge
Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance	U.S. unemployment insurance system—including its effects on workers, employers, and local communities—with a crosscutting focus on equity in program administration and outcomes	Planned	https://www.grants.gov/ web/grants/search- grants.html?keywords=F OA-CEO-22-01
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Department of the Treasury's State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLFRF)	Identify and recommend data sources and evaluation opportunities to build evidence about ARP funds spent through the SLFRF program	Underway	https://oes.gsa.gov/colla borations/state-local- fiscal-recovery-fund/
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Department of the Treasury's Capital Projects Fund (CPF)	Identify and recommend data sources and evaluation opportunities for the CPF program	Underway	https://oes.gsa.gov/colla borations/capital- projects-fund/
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences Multiple programs	How to improve awareness, access, and allocation of ARP programs and resources, focusing on ARP programs with equity goals	Planned	https://www.gsa.gov/blo g/2021/12/15/gsa-to- build-evidence-to- advance-equitable- outcomes-through-the- american-rescue-plan



General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and the Office of Management and Budget's Evidence Team Multiple programs	Multi-year national evaluation of a cross-section of priority ARP-funded programs, using an independent third-party research firm to answer questions on where and how ARP programs helped advance equity	Planned	https://www.gsa.gov/blo g/2021/12/15/gsa-to- build-evidence-to- advance-equitable- outcomes-through-the- american-rescue-plan
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Department of Education's Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF)	Design an impact evaluation to help answer the question: What is the effect of providing HEERF aid on short- and medium-term student outcomes?	Complete	https://oes.gsa.gov/colla borations/HEERF-eval- design/
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Small Business Administration	The likelihood of successfully applying for COVID-19 small business relief	Complete	https://oes.gsa.gov/proje cts/business-relief- distribution/
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Small Business Administration	 To what extent were applicant businesses located in underserved communities and did they have underserved owners? How businesses from different groups and geographic areas would fare under different methods cities could use to prioritize businesses for funding. 	Complete	https://oes.gsa.gov/colla borations/sb- counterfactual-equity/
General Services Administration's Office of Evaluation Sciences and Small	What strategies can be implemented to help women, minority, and other underserved entrepreneurs	Complete	https://oes.gsa.gov/colla borations/sba-equity- report/



Business Administration	recover from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?		
Treasury's Office of Tax Policy (OTP), with support from the IRS Research, Applied Analytics and Statistics (RAAS) Division analysis of Economic Impact Payments (EPI)	The composition of EIP recipients, including estimates of race and ethnicity and other demographic characteristics	Planned	https://home.treasury.go v/news/featured- stories/advancing- equity-analysis-in-tax- policy

SELECT AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN PROGRAMS

Of the more than 200 ARP-funded programs, the following ones are featured in the White House's report, <u>Advancing Equity through the American Rescue Plan</u>. This report describes how the Administration is working to advance equity through the lens of 32 case studies of ARP programs, selected to represent a range of initiatives that support the advancement of equitable outcomes for underserved communities. The ARP programs featured in the report are listed here for ease of reference, however equity-focused evidence-building activities need not be limited to these programs.

AmeriCorps:

• Investments in AmeriCorps (Section 2206)

National Endowment for the Arts:

• National Endowment for the Arts (Section 2021)

U.S. Department of Agriculture:

- Extension and Expansion of Pandemic EBT (Section 1108)
- USDA Assistance and Support for Farmers, Ranchers, Forest Landowners, and Operators, and Groups (Section 1006)
- WIC Modernization (Section 1106)

U.S. Department of Commerce:

• Economic Adjustment Assistance (Section 6001)

U.S. Department of Education:

- Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (Section 2001)
- Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (Section 2003)
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Section 2014)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (U.S. Department of Homeland Security):



• COVID-19 Funeral Assistance (Section 4006)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:

- Child Care Stabilization (Section 2202)
- Community-Based Mobile Crisis Intervention (Section 9813)
- Family Violence Prevention and Services Program (Section 2204)
- Funding for Water Assistance Program (Section 2912)
- Health Insurance Premium Tax Credit (Section 9661)
- Increase in Access to Home and Community Based Services (Section 9817)
- Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (Section 2911)
- Medicaid and CHIP Coverage for Pregnant and Postpartum Individuals (Sections 9812 and 9822)
- Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse (Section 2702)

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development:

- Emergency Housing Vouchers (Section 3202)
- Housing Assistance and Supportive Services for Native Americans and Native Hawaiians (Section 11003)

U.S. Department of Labor:

• Unemployment Insurance (Section 9032)

U.S. Small Business Administration:

- Community Navigator Pilot Program (Section 5004)
- Paycheck Protection Program (Section 5001)
- Restaurant Revitalization Fund (Section 5003)

U.S. Department of the Treasury:

- Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (Section 9901)
- Emergency Rental Assistance (Section 3201)
- Enhancements of the Child Tax Credit (Section 9611)
- Homeowner Assistance Fund (Section 3206)
- Permanent Expansion of Tax Relief to Puerto Rico Families
- State Small Business Credit Initiative (Section 3301)
- The Earned Income Tax Credit for Workers without Dependent Children (Section 9621)



https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/5687

¹ President Biden's directive to advance equity through ARP was further communicated in Office of Management and Budget memos OMB M-21-20 and OMB M-21-24.

² The White House. (2021, January 27). *Memorandum on Restoring Trust in Government Through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking*. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/; President Biden's action was further emphasized through https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/; President Biden's action was further emphasized through https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/memorandum-on-restoring-trust-in-government-through-scientific-integrity-and-evidence-based-policymaking/; President Biden's action was further emphasized through https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/

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⁴ H.R.5687 - 101st Congress (1989-1990): Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. (1990, November 15).

⁵ U.S. Small Business Administration. (2021, May 28). FY 2018-2022 Enterprise Learning Agenda: FY 2021 Update. Retrieved from https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/2021-06/FY2021 Enterprise Learning Agenda-508.pdf; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2022). HUD's Learning Agenda FY 2022-2026. Retrieved from https://www.huduser.gov/portal/about/pdr learningagenda.html

⁶ General Services Administration & The Office of Management and Budget. (2022). *Learning Agenda: In Support of the President's Management Agenda*. Retrieved from https://assets.performance.gov/PMA/DraftPMALearningAgenda.pdf
⁷ Visit https://www.evaluation.gov to find published agency Learning Agendas and Annual Evaluation Plans.