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Pulling Out the Stops for ARPA Funding

The once-in-a-generation opportunity presented by the ARPA State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds is causing nonprofits to do what they do best: innovate. Advocates around the country aren't just using every trick in the book, they are writing new chapters.

As background, the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) created a \$350 billion pool of resources to be spent by state, local, Tribal, and territorial governments to address COVID-related needs help communities recovery from the pandemic. The statute and the [Treasury Department regulations](#) make abundantly clear that governments can provide individual charitable nonprofits with aid as **recipients of financial assistance for their organizations** as well as hire nonprofits as **providers of assistance to others**. But governments can also allocate these resources to thousands of other uses, including covering government's lost revenue during the pandemic and providing pay raises to certain categories of public employees.

In short, nonprofits are eligible for but not automatically entitled to the funds; they have to make the case for why investing in charitable nonprofits is the best use of a government's allocation. That's where nonprofit innovation and advocacy come in. In many states, frontline organizations are coalescing through their state associations of nonprofits to promote specific programmatic asks. The **Minnesota**

Council of Nonprofits is leading a major push that calls for a \$200 million [Nonprofit Relief Fund](#) utilizing ARPA resources. A coalition led by the **Kentucky Nonprofit Network** is promoting a [Bridge to Sustainability & Recovery](#) that includes a \$150 million [Nonprofit Sustainability & Recovery Fund](#) and measures to [Address Nonprofit Workforce Crisis](#), among other things.

As for getting creative, the Kentucky state association launched the [Bridge to Sustainability & Recovery](#) via a well-attended virtual news conference. Speakers addressed specific challenges and explained how the legislative proposals provide the needed solutions.

Lawmakers in the **Nebraska** legislature have introduced half a dozen bills that would appropriate ARPA funds for various nonprofit subsectors in the state. These bills didn't just happen, they were the result of numerous roundtables held by the [Nonprofit Association of the Midlands](#) and strong advocacy making the case that funds should be invested in nonprofits to secure the greatest impact.

While it can take a lot of work, just about anyone can draw up an advocacy playbook or toolkit. The [ARPA Advocacy Toolkit](#) developed by the **Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Organizations** stands out because of the results it generated. Soon after the toolkit's release, nonprofits utilizing it had already generated more than 352 emails to 120 state Representatives and Senators. The state association of nonprofits called those tallies "A great start," and is continuing its call for action "to see those numbers continue to grow" in the campaign to get "state and local officials to allocate ARPA funding to nonprofits throughout the Commonwealth."

The **Montana Nonprofit Association** recognizes that many nonprofits don't regularly advocate before – or even know – their county commissioners. To remedy that, and to provide a new connection to decision makers, MNA is hosting a webinar, [Collaborating with your County Commissioners on ARPA Funding Town Hall](#) . It is also developing a user guide for nonprofits interested in applying for the state's ARPA Workforce Development funds.

In **South Carolina**, the nonprofit state association, Together SC, has created tools like this [sign-on letter](#) and [policy paper](#) for a major push to secure \$100 million in ARPA funds to support the work of charitable nonprofits. As a further sign of the leadership and support for the proposals, nonprofit and philanthropic leaders published three separate op-ed articles making the case that [nonprofits improve](#)

[lives](#), are [critical to economic development](#), and are [key to helping communities thrive](#).

On this theme of media advocacy, the title of an article from **Idaho Nonprofit Center**'s CEO Kevin Bailey, says it all: [Nonprofits will be vital to distributing federal funds efficiently](#).

Opportunity frequently breeds innovation. Add nonprofits and the chance to advance missions to the mix and the results are remarkable. Which is why we're remarking on them here.