American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Recommendations for Fox Valley Communities

Thriving Communities: Early Childhood Investment Fund

Calumet County Fiscal Recovery Fund: $9,729,201.00 15% = $1,459,380

The How:
Earmark 15% of all ARPA funds into a Thrive Communities: Early Childhood Investment Fund

Support innovative ideas while investing in transformative changes. Using an established funder like the local Community Foundations to distribute funds, a variety of innovative programs and projects can become a scaled effort across communities.

The Why:
We know the Fox Valley prospers when all children are healthy, valued and thriving. In order to provide children with an equal start in life, strengthen our economy in a way that also reduces racial, gender and income inequality in our communities, and meet the needs of working parents, it is time to support a robust vision to make the high-impact investment in children’s readiness for school, work and life. Thriving communities depend on the well-being of all members. By providing families with equitable access to the early child development resources they need, we ensure all enjoy more vibrant years ahead. The need is urgent. The time for action is now!

Growing our local economy: and doing so equitably- requires a dramatically different approach to supporting our youngest children: one that recognizes early childhood development as a public good which requires public investment. Many parents are struggling to meet their basic needs and are also experiencing a growing number of mental and physical health issues. A survey of Wisconsin working parents identified 42% of women cut back on hours or quit a job because of child care issues. The early years present an incredible opportunity to build a strong foundation as the brain experiences the most rapid development during the first five years of life. Failure to address the toll of the Covid-19 pandemic on the next generation means that vulnerable children will miss out on the learning environments, structure and stability that help to set them up for education success, optimal earnings and long-term health and well-being.

Local Data tells the story of challenges to postive long-term outcomes of child well-being. In 2016, the State of the Fox Valley Child Birth to 5 Report answered questions regarding the extent to which children in the tri-county areas of Outagamie, Calumet and Winnebago are safe, healthy and ready to learn. The report revealed inequities in child outcomes. The disparities in health, geography, economics and race presented a picture of an unequal access to services depending on the county in which you lived. In 2019, a First-time Parent Support Program Pilot Project, identified many barriers facing families. A surprising number of parents who qualified for home visiting or for developmental screenings did not participate for a variety of reasons, one of which was the stigma surrounding accessing services. Though the community has shown a commitment to early childhood efforts over the years, the network of education, social services and health care accessed by families has been managed in silos and difficult to navigate.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted just how critical early education and child care is to families. Community leaders were met with the toughest challenges- for businesses, families and essential workers. Building back our local economy requires a dramatically different approach to supporting our youngest children.

- Stabilizing and growing child care
- Expanding programs that support Thriving Families such as: Home Visiting, Welcome Baby, Early Intervention and Help Me Grow.

1 UW-Extension survey of Wisconsin Parents (2020).
American Rescue Plan Act allows for communities to:

- Replace lost public sector revenue to strengthen support for vital public services and help retain jobs
- Support immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses
- Address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations

Creating Transformative change

Use of Funds:
Addressing the negative impacts caused by the public health emergency, including public health surveillance like Developmental Screenings, Home Visiting programs, Early Intervention services and services or outreach to promote access to health and social services like Help Me Grow. ARPA funds can also be used to employ a broad array of loan, grant, in-kind assistance to support small businesses such as child care. Local Child Care Resource & Referral agencies support the business savvy work needed to expand child care options to include center and home-based options for parents. Funds are also available to address education disparities through new or expanded early learning services and promoting healthy childhood environments including high-quality child care facilities and services that address social, emotional and mental health needs such as parenting classes and Family Resource Centers.  

Stabilize and Grow Child Care

1. Provide loans and grants for new buildings or remodeling existing child care centers. Encourage natural outdoor play spaces, adding more infant & toddler classrooms, purchasing new equipment, employer supported on-site programs, renovating existing commercial property and expanding much needed child care slots.
2. Develop a substitute provider pool that child care centers can access to support when caregivers take leave from work.
3. Expand home-based programs, seeking culturally relevant options for families.
4. Stipends for programs who expand slots for infants and toddlers.
5. Fund child care slots in local programs earmarked for families who are at 200% of poverty (just above state guidelines).

Grow the Early Childhood Workforce

7. Create a HR benefits pool for low-cost health care, retirement funds and family leave.
8. Introduce wage parity for early childhood caregivers and teachers for equivalent pay of local business salaries.
9. Provide supplemental funding for child care programs seeking to pay staff higher wages without charging parents more.
10. Create a mentoring or apprentice program for those entering into the early care field- including wages, CDA credential work and mentors to support learning on the job.
11. Community Health Workers that support the child care field.

Thriving Families

12. Expand Help Me Grow throughout the Fox Valley area with additional navigators including bi-lingual, expanded developmental screening, and data collection.
13. Develop Thriving Community Family Resource Centers
14. Expand the Welcome Baby projects to include all parents having babies- not just first-time parents.
15. Expand evidence-based programs and fully fund early childhood providers doing intensive support for special health care needs, Home Visiting, parent education, Early Intervention, family support, special education, county health programs, etc.
16. Support non-profit community cultural and learning opportunities for children ages 0-5. Include hands-on learning, libraries, and inclusive parks as examples.

Collaboration among Community Partners

17. Create a commission to examine ways to create transformational change for the benefit of early child well-being. Developing recommendations and strategies to scale efforts across the Fox Valley Region.
18. Create the Thriving Communities Early Childhood Investment Fund where innovative ideas can be vetted and funded through a mechanism that can braid both public and private dollars for maximum social benefits.

Community-based innovation: Early Childhood Care and Education

New Orleans – ECHO Fund The ECHO Fund is the Early Childhood Opportunity Fund, an innovative grant program that seeks to increase access to high-quality early care and education for New Orleans children, birth through age four, through directly funding early child care center needs. The ECHO Fund is made possible through the generous support of several local educational partners and leaders in the Greater New Orleans area. The Quality & Recovery Grant program provides $2500-$5000 to ECE programs aimed to improve program quality.

Kent County, MI (Grand Rapids) passed a millage (property tax) to support early childhood 0-5 years. First Steps Kent is the fiscal fiduciary and works very closely with the city of Grand Rapids. They are very outcomes focused. Fund are used to support a host of items within the span.

The City of Oakland and Alameda County’s ballot measures were B-5 and not PreK specific. Oakland uses a Results based leadership approach. Oakland Starting Smart & Strong is their public/private partnership.

The City of Pittsburgh has a $2million Childcare Quality Fund, which provides grants to providers to improve facilities, programming and increasing the number of high-quality slots.

The City of Seattle has $106 million out of the total funds from an education levy are dedicated for education and early learning (FY 2020).

Tarrant County, TX is implementing the Help Me Grow system model within the community. A region-wide approach across 18 counties in the major metropolitan area, with a population of over 8 million people fits perfectly with the prenatal-to-three goals.

Helpful Resources:
Counties for Kids-Counties play a major role in shaping early childhood systems and investing in core services for infants and toddlers that help to support a thriving community and positively impacting outcomes into adulthood. Every county in the United States administers and funds part of the cost of strengthening communities and families with young children. Counties routinely provide an array of programs and services to an estimated 16 million children ages zero to three in the United States and are responsible for addressing the needs of young children, and their families, by administering and coordinating PN-3 services including child care, health and prenatal care, early intervention, home visiting, maternal health screenings, parent classes and early literacy programs.

Start Early has released Leveraging ARPA Child Care Funds for Equitable Systems Change by Mina Hong that discusses how to utilize multiple funding systems to create more equitable child care systems blending funding sources that include better support for the child care workforce.

National Association of Counties Overview on the U.S. Treasury Interim Final Rule & Guidance for State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds identifies how cities and counties can support the child care infrastructure in your local communities.

First 5 Fox Valley has gathered information on the local city, town, village and county ARPA fund allotments and what a 15% or 10% Early Childhood Investment would calculate to be.