

City of Auburn
Proposed State of Alabama Community Development Block Grant–CV Program
FY2020 Application

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020, is an economic relief package to protect the American people from the public health and economic impacts of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

HUD allocated funds to the State of Alabama (State) to expend additional federal grant dollars on health, educational, and economic distress needs incurring throughout the State. Alabama Governor Kay Ivey responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic by issuing a safer-at-home order in April, followed by the declaration of a stay-at-home (shelter-in-place), which was later replaced by a safer-at-home that provide more direction to minimizing the impacts of COVID-19. The orders addressed "social distancing" guidelines, school and university campus closures, business closures, beach closures, emergency healthcare operations, self-quarantines, travel restrictions/reductions, working-from-home/conference-call networking, home-schooling, and an overall slowdown of the U.S. economy.

To prevent, prepare for, and respond to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases, Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds are authorized to be expended on activities designated by HUD, and waivers of HUD program requirements may be allowed when requested by the States with the exceptions being the requirements pertaining to "fair housing, nondiscrimination, labor standards, and environmental requirements" that have not been waived by HUD.

The State's plan for allocating the CDBG-CV Program funds comprises providing a block of funds to each of the 15 qualifying entitlement communities (Anniston, Auburn, Bessemer, Birmingham, Decatur, Dothan, Florence, Gadsden, Huntsville, Mobile, Montgomery, Opelika, Tuscaloosa, Jefferson County, and Mobile County) and the 65 remaining counties that do not include Jefferson County and Mobile County, based on the population group under which each community falls. The State allocated the City of Auburn (City) \$750,000 in State CDBG-CV Program funds. The Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) will distribute CDBG-CV Program's grant funds to the entitlement community and county grant applicants through a noncompetitive allocation process.

Each county and entitlement community that received State CDBG-CV Program's grant funds must:

- Submit one State of Alabama Community Development Block Grant – CV Program FY 2020 Application to the ADECA by April 1, 2021. The Application may contain one or more eligible activities designed to prevent, prepare for, and/or respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases to meet a single need or multiple needs.
- Application must contain required certifications, assurances, and other documentation that show that the City provided the public an opportunity to review and comment on the local government grant applicant's plan for expenditure of the CDBG-CV Program funds.
- Include documentation that shows consultation and input from the local emergency management agency (EMA), county public health department, and other local health care officials and providers during the planning process for the CDBG-CV grant-funded activities.

ADECA format for submitting the Application for State's CDBG-CV Program grant funds, including the following narrative sections: Impact Assessment, Proposed Actions, Local Official Involvement, Activity Description, Beneficiary Information, Community Support, and Additional Activities.

Impact Assessment

Covid-19 has been a dramatic global health and economic shock and has impacted communities throughout America, including Auburn.

Healthcare Crisis: Coronavirus cases have increased in all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam since January 1, 2021.

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) Infectious Diseases & Outbreaks Division, Alabama's COVID-19 Data and Surveillance Dashboard, provides data and surveillance information about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Alabama. Data used to produce this dashboard is updated daily from the Alabama NEDSS Base Surveillance System, Alabama's disease reporting and surveillance system. The data as of February 1, 2021, indicate the following:

- State of Alabama Cases – 460,860
- State of Alabama Deaths – 7,688
- Lee County Confirmed Cases – 13,878
- Lee County Confirmed Deaths – 128

Total cases above include both confirmed and probable cases.

The East Alabama Medical Center, one of the few hospital providers in East Alabama, reported on January 16, 2021, that they continue to see ten or more COVID admissions a day. Their testing positivity rate remains in the 20-25 percent range, and that they are still postponing elective procedures that require a hospital stay.

Economy: The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching economic consequences beyond the disease's spread and efforts to quarantine it. The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly damaging for small businesses, representing most businesses in the United States. Auburn small businesses were not spared from the downturn, including declining revenue among the leisure and hospitality and education and health services sectors. Some sectors where employees could not work remotely and where businesses were not deemed essential to be open fared, particularly poorly.

To provide much-needed assistance to Auburn's small business community during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City developed and implemented The City of Auburn Working Capital Loan Interest Subsidy Program. The Program provides an interest subsidy to applicants who have been approved for a loan with a participating lending institution. This Program gives the City the potential to provide subsidies supporting up to 160 businesses, assuming a maximum amount of \$25,000 per loan, to remain viable during the COVID-19 crisis. The City developed the Program in coordination with the Auburn Chamber of Commerce and a group of financial institutions in Auburn. They committed a minimum of \$500,000 to provide eligible businesses with working capital loans.

Housing: As stay-at-home measures are implemented to limit the spread of COVID-19, increases in layoffs and reductions have been financially challenging for many renters in Auburn. Renters tend to have fewer savings to cover the cost of housing in the event of lost income. Those seeking rental assistance from the City have increased significantly. The City alone has expended over \$100,000 in COVID-CV funds during the COVID-19 pandemic for emergency rental grants.

Homelessness: The City has experienced a steady increase in those identifying as homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless. Many people who have contacted the City for emergency homeless assistance have been evicted during the coronavirus crisis. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the typical person seeking homeless assistance was a single-person household, chronically homeless, and requesting 1-2 nights of emergency shelter at a local hotel. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the typical person seeking homeless assistance is head of a household of 3-5 people, recently homeless, and requesting a minimum of 7 nights of emergency shelter at a local hotel.

Food Insecurity: In many ways, America is the land of plenty. But for 1 in 6 Americans, hunger is a reality. Many in Auburn believe that the problems associated with hunger are confined to small pockets of society, certain areas of Auburn, or specific neighborhoods, but the reality is much different. People affected by hunger, even though we might not be aware of it, are:

- Often hard-working adults.
- Children.
- Seniors who cannot make ends meet and are forced to go without food for several meals or even days.

Food insecurity has increased in Auburn during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Feeding America has projected that 1 in 6 people (50.4 million) in the U.S. could be food insecure in 2020 in the wake of the pandemic—up from 1 in 9 people (35 million) in 2019. Alabama is rated number three among states with the highest projected food insecurity rates for 2020. Alabama projected 2020 food insecurity (FI) rate is 22.2% or 1,084,390 people.

Feeding America conducts Map the Meal Gap annually to improve our understanding of how food insecurity and food costs vary at the local level. The study estimates overall and child food insecurity and shows the following data for Lee County, Alabama, the location of Auburn:

- Food Insecurity Rate – 15.5%
- Food Insecure People – 24,680
- Additional Money Required to Meet Food Needs - \$14,861,000

The East Alabama Food Bank, located in Auburn, works to create a safety net of community partners, programs, and direct services to meet the needs of those who struggle with hunger across a seven-county service area. With a network of more than 200 community partners, the East Alabama Food Bank get nutritious food directly into the hands of those in need through agencies embedded in their communities.

Proposed Actions

The City proposes to undertake the following measures to address and minimize the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases.

Food Bank/Pantry Programs: Support the local food bank and pantries scrambling to keep up with demand in response to COVID-19. Food banks act as food storage and distribution depots for member agencies. They distribute food and grocery items through food pantries, mobile pantries, and meal programs that serve families, children, seniors, and individuals at risk of hunger. State CDBG-CV Program funds will support the Food Bank of East Alabama and the Auburn Community Development Corporation's efforts to cope with an increase in hungry Americans amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Homelessness Prevention: Support individuals or families facing the possibility of eviction or utility disconnection make them particularly vulnerable to homelessness and susceptible to illness during the COVID-19 pandemic. State CDBG-CV Program funds will support cost-burdened and severally cost burden LMI citizens by combating the risk of eviction and homelessness. The City will use State CDBG to provide temporary emergency assistance grants

(Utility and Rental) made up to three consecutive months to the provider of such services on behalf of an individual or family. The City will use HUD's FY 2021 Auburn-Opelika, Alabama Metropolitan Statistical Area Fair Market Rents to determine the amount for housing assistance payments. To avoid duplication of benefits, the City will enter all applicants' names for emergency grant payments in Charity Tracker. Other local agencies and non-profits use Charity Tracker when offering emergency grant payments (primarily utility assistance) to LMI persons.

Youth Programs: Support youth programs. Many agencies that offer these services have continued to provide significant support to youth and families, including facilitating educational enrichment materials and meals. State CDBG-CV Program funds will support local non-profits that provide critical youth support services to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19.

Senior Programs: Support senior programs. Public health officials identified senior citizens as an at-risk population related to COVID-19 -- those over 60 years of age and those whose immune systems are compromised. The "Stay-at-home" directive significantly affects senior citizens who rely on public services and senior centers for essentials like daily meals and social interaction. State CDBG-CV Program funds will also support senior supportive services in response to COVID-19, including enrichment activities for seniors that they can enjoy at home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local Official Involvement

The Cities of Auburn and Opelika, and Lee County, collaborated with the Lee-Russell Council of Governments to obtain input from the Lee County Health Department, Lee County Alabama Emergency Management Agency, and the East Alabama Medical Center in the planning process for their CDBG-CV Program project activities. The agencies listed above were consulted regarding their needs during the COVID-19 crisis and informed of what activities the Cities of Auburn and Opelika, and Lee County were considering for inclusion in their State of Alabama Community Development Block Grant – CV Program FY 2020 Applications.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and with the determination of good cause, HUD waived the following regulatory provision:

- Citizen Participation Plan Comment Period – This waiver grants a reduction of the required 30-day comment period to no less than five (5) days to provide public comments on each substantial amendment.
- Citizen Participation Reasonable Notice and Opportunity to Comment – This waiver grants the City the ability to determine, outside the adopted Citizen Participation Plan, what constitutes reasonable notice and opportunity to comment given its circumstances.

The City revised and updated its Citizen Participation Plan in May 2020 to allow for social-distancing guidelines wherein public hearings can be conducted remotely (such as via Zoom) rather than in-person. The revised CPP also allows public comment acceptance over a five-day public comment period instead of a 30-day public comment period.

Per the Citizen Participation Plan, the City published a notice in the February 4, 2021 edition of *The Auburn Villager* regarding the City’s proposed State of Alabama Community Development Block Grant – CV Program FY 2020 Application. The Notice included the following:

- A virtual public hearing on February 25, 2021, at 6:00 p.m.;
- Availability of an Executive Summary for public review on the City’s website at <http://www.auburnalabama.org/community-development/resources/>; and
- A Public comment period - February 26, 2021, to March 5, 2021.

Activity Description

The City’s proposed program activities will, at the least:

1. Be eligible and will address a CDBG Program National Objective. The City’s proposed activities will benefit low-income and moderate-income persons, of which at least 51% must be from low-income and moderate-income households, except for single-family housing activities which must benefit 100% low-income and moderate-income households;
2. Meet the CDBG-CV Program’s performance goals of preventing, preparing for, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and other infectious diseases; and
3. Be financially and operationally feasible.

The City’s proposed program activities also met one of the long-term and short-term objectives in the State of Alabama PY2020-PY2024 Five-Year Consolidated Plan – “Provide assistance to address local community emergency needs.”

Below is a summary of the City’s proposed program activities that provide a public service to prevent, prepare for, assist with, and respond to infectious diseases, such as COVID-19.

#	Activity	State CDBG-CV Program Funds
1	Equipment	\$ 413,000
2	Rental Assistance	\$ 100,000
3	Utility Assistance	\$ 50,000
4	Food Distribution	\$ 57,000
5	Public Services	\$ 80,000
6	General Program Administration	\$ 50,000
TOTAL		\$ 750,000

In the event there are unspent State CDBG-CV Program funds that were allocated to the City, the following activities will utilize the additional funds:

Equipment and Food Distribution (Food Bank of East Alabama)

Activity Name: Equipment

Subrecipient: Food Bank of East Alabama

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$413,000

Description:

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges for food banks across America. As the economic impact from the coronavirus impact continues to be felt, more Americans turn to food banks — many for the first time. The pandemic has presented a "triple whammy" of increased need for food, declines in food donations, and disruptions to the charitable system's operating model for the Food Bank of East Alabama (Food Bank).

The following are some of the critical challenges the Food Bank faces regarding the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic:

- In the 12 months before COVID-19 hit, the Food Bank provided 64 mobile food pantries at 11 sites, distributing 409,030 pounds of food. Once the pandemic hit, the Food Bank ramped up the mobile food pantry program and provided 259 mobile food pantries at 36 sites (distributing 508,332 pounds). This program increased by 304 percent.
- Right around the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Bank relocated to a much larger building. Warehouse capacity more than tripled, from 13,000 to 42,000 square feet of warehouse space. The pallet storage space increased 33 percent, 509 to 678 pallet storage positions.
- The Food Bank inventory typically includes 800,000 to 950,000 pounds of food, and the distribution area, receiving area, and reclamation area all require a forklift to carry out daily operations.
- The Food Bank has seen a 49.3 percent increase in the amount of product from grocery stores, impacting the amount of product distributed through its agency network.
- The Food Bank's fleet of four (4) refrigerated trucks puts nearly 100,000 miles on the vehicles each year. One of the trucks in their fleet is nearing the end of its lifespan, and increasing repairs are forcing the Food Bank to replace the vehicle with a more reliable truck.

The challenges listed above have necessitated new equipment. The Food Bank of East Alabama is proposing to purchase the following equipment to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food-insecurity levels in the community and expand outreach efforts to meet the greater need:

- One refrigerated trailer to store perishable product that cannot be safely stored in the freezer and cooler (\$97,000)
- Refrigerated van, "food pantry on wheels," that is designed to distribute nutritious product directly to disadvantaged residents in a community (\$60,000)
- Two (2) pallet straight-bed, single axel truck with a lift-gate and a roll-up rear door for large-scale mobile food pantry distributions, deliveries to member agencies, and for picking up food donations from various donors - most notably

the Walmart Distribution Center (\$146,500)

- Coolers/freezers for Food Bank and Community Market to store greater quantities of perishable food because of the high demands caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (\$63,500)
- Electric forklift (battery and charger included) for warehouse operations (\$40,000)
- Electric pallet jack with built-in weighing capability to streamline the receiving process, daily or every other day, pick-ups from 18 grocery stores (\$6,000)

Activity Name: Food Distribution

Subrecipients: Food Bank of East Alabama (Food Bank) and Auburn Community Development Corporation

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$57,000 – Food Bank (\$37,000) and Auburn Community Development Corporation (\$20,000)

Description: The challenges listed in the Equipment Activity above have also necessitated the need to upgrade food distribution systems. The Food Bank will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to update the following food distribution systems to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on food-insecurity levels in the community and expand outreach efforts to meet the greater need:

- Foodbank inventory software to track increased product distribution and inventory due to pandemic outreach.
- Development of upgraded Food Bank website to a "food finder" where people seeking food assistance can find local food pantry resources in their zip code.

The Auburn Community Development Corporation will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to purchase supplies for the new pantry and nonperishable food from the Food Bank of East Alabama.

Activity Name: Rental Assistance

Subrecipient: City of Auburn

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$100,000

Description: The City, a CDBG entitlement community, received \$379,956 in CDBG-Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds, CDBG-CV1, from the HUD in April 2020. Of this total, the City allocated \$105,193 to rental assistance. As of February 1, 2021, the City has expended \$105,180 and benefited 242 persons. The City will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to continue its efforts to provide rental assistance to cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened LMI citizens and help combat the risk of eviction and homelessness. The City will coordinate emergency grants for rental assistance to the provider on behalf of an LMI individual or family at risk of homelessness.

Activity Name: Utility Assistance

Subrecipient: City of Auburn

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$50,000

Description: The City, a CDBG entitlement community, received \$379,956 in CDBG-Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds, CDBG-CV1, from the HUD in April 2020. Of this total, the City allocated \$25,956 to utility assistance. As of February 1, 2021, the City has expended \$20,757 and benefited 224 persons. The City will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to continue its efforts to provide utility assistance to cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened LMI citizens and help combat the risk of eviction and homelessness. The City will coordinate emergency grants for utility assistance to the provider on behalf of an LMI individual or family at risk of homelessness.

Activity Name: Public Services

Subrecipients: Auburn Day Care Centers, Inc., Joyland Child Development Center, Lee-Russell Council of Governments, and Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$80,000 - Auburn Day Care Centers (\$20,000), Inc., Joyland Child Development Center (\$20,000), Lee-Russell Council of Governments (\$20,000), and Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County (\$20,000)

Description:

Auburn Day Care Center, and Joyland Child Development Center. COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated Auburn Day Care Center, and Joyland Child Development Center struggles to meet the childcare needs of low-to-moderate income families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Auburn Day Care Center operates at 61 percent capacity (approximately 78 children). Under normal circumstances, there would be around 127 children enrolled in the Auburn Day Care Center. The Joyland Child Development Center is operating at 67 percent capacity (approximately 92 children). Under normal circumstances, there would be around 137 children enrolled in the Joyland Child Development Center.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Auburn Day Care Center and the Joyland Child Development Center have implemented policies such as using high-grade sanitizing and cleaning procedures, restricting parents' movement in their centers, and requiring staff and parents to wear a face mask. Auburn Day Care Center and the Joyland Child Development Center will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to continue efforts to observe coronavirus safety guidelines, provide remote learning opportunities for children unable to attend in-person, and provide additional resource materials to allow for social distancing.

Lee-Russell Council of Governments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Auburn Senior Center is closed for in-person services. However, the staff is available onsite for resource referrals, senior welfare checks, and to answer older adult-related questions. Under normal circumstances, there would be approximately 50 seniors who attend the Center daily.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lee-Russell Council of Governments has tried new and creative ways to stay connected with its seniors who attend the Auburn Senior

Center. Lee-Russell Council of Governments will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to continue remote programming for seniors and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Boys and Girls Club of Greater Lee County. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Boys and Girls Club Auburn Unit operates at 34 percent capacity (approximately 45 members). Under normal circumstances, there would be around 131 members. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Boys and Girls Club has implemented policies such as using high-grade sanitizing and cleaning procedures, curbside drop-off services, social distancing, and requiring staff and members to wear a face mask. Boys and Girls Club will utilize State CDBG-CV Program funds to continue efforts to observe coronavirus safety guidelines, provide e-learning opportunities to its members, and meet the immediate needs of at-risk youth after-school programs.

Activity Name: General Program Administration

Subrecipient: City of Auburn

State CDBG-CV Program funds: \$50,000

Description: The City will use State CDBG-CV Program funds to administer the State grant according to program objectives and regulations.

Beneficiary Information

The City's methodology involved the use of data from the data sources below.

American Community (ACS) survey 2015-2019 5-Year ACS. The ACS shows the population for Auburn, Alabama as 64,054 and the following percent from the total population for the race/ethnicity, disabled, and female-headed households:

Race/Ethnicity, Etc.	Percent
White	68.6%
Black or African American	18.4%
Asian	8.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0%
Other Multi-Racial	0.9%
Hispanic	3.3%
Disabled	7.5%
Female-Headed Household	33.0%

The City used the percentages above to determine the "Total People" by Race, Ethnicity, etc., for each activity from the estimated total beneficiaries identified on the "Project Beneficiary Table." The City used the percent Hispanic above to determine the "Total Hispanic People" for each activity.

A percent (36.68%) of "Total Households" was determined by calculating the total occupied housing units and the total population in Auburn, Alabama. The 36.68 percent above were used to determine the "Total Head of Household" and "Total Hispanic Household" for total beneficiaries and by race and ethnicity for each activity.

The 2013-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) "CHAS data." The City used the ACS to determine the number of "Very Low Income," "Low Income," and "Moderate Income" ("People") for each activity. The City expects all of the beneficiaries of the City's State COVID-CV funds to be either very low, low, or moderate-income people.

Below is a summary of the proposed beneficiaries associated with each activity.

Activity	Total Beneficiaries
Equipment	4,000
Rental Assistance	220
Utility Assistance	209
Food Distribution	4,000
Public Services	400
General Program Administration	N/A

Community Support

This section is applicable to County or Joint Applications only.

Additional Activities

No activities proposed in this application require additional funds to be made available outside the allocated amount.