![National League of Cities logo — NLC, CITIES STRONG TOGETHER]

TOWARD AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY

AN ANALYSIS OF ARPA FUNDS TO METROPOLITAN CITIES

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Introduction

T he American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), signed into law on March 11, 2021, delivered $65.1 billion of direct federal aid to all cities, towns and villages across the country through the Coronavirus State and Local Government Fiscal Relief Fund (SLFRF). The funding helps local governments invest in critical infrastructure, protect the health and safety of residents, and provide aid to workers, families and businesses as they continue to recover from the pandemic.

In addition to the eligible expenditures categorized in the bill, the Biden Administration has urged recipients to spend grant funds in ways that address longstanding racial disparities, inequities and disproportionate harm caused or exacerbated by the pandemic. The Interim Final Rule, developed by the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury), cites a significant body of research documenting how communities of color and other marginalized populations experienced greater direct effects from the pandemic in the form of higher case fatality rates and other negative externalities, such as higher levels of unemployment and job loss.[1,2,3]

To better understand the extent to which SLFRF funds provide cities with the opportunity to bridge these equity gaps, NLC analyzed whether communities with higher levels of unemployment, COVID-19 fatality and poverty received greater allocations per resident.

This analysis focuses on "metropolitan cities," or "entitlement communities" under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD's) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. These communities are cities with populations greater than 50,000 or principal cities of Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs).[4] The vast majority (70%) of SLFRF funds allocated for cities, towns and villages flow to metropolitan cities due to their higher populations. ARPA bases the metropolitan cities' allocations on a formula that accounts for community and population distress factors. Given this formula, it would be assumed that

$65.1 billion
in direct federal aid to municipalities across the nation

those metropolitan cities with greatest need would receive a larger proportional share of funding. However, federal programs with this formula design and goal have not always accurately targeted need. So, to establish whether its distribution is equitable, NLC conducted an intentional examination of metropolitan cities' SLFRF funding allocations.[5]

On average, SLFRF allocates metropolitan cities $301 per resident; however, the range of per capita allocations spans widely from $71 per resident in Maple Grove City, MN to $1,563 per resident in East Cleveland City, OH. Like the allocations, the health, economic and fiscal impacts of the pandemic and the resulting needs of communities also vary. In this report, NLC analyzes the alignment between distribution of funds and community need.

The analysis finds that:

◆ **Metropolitan cities that experienced higher annual unemployment rates in 2020 received, on average, higher SLFRF funds per resident** when compared with metropolitan cities with lower annual unemployment rates

◆ **Metropolitan cities that experienced higher COVID-19 case fatality rates received, on average, more per capita SLFRF allocations**, compared with metropolitan cities with lower COVID-19 case fatality rates

◆ **Metropolitan cities with higher levels of poverty and lower median household incomes received, on average, more SLFRF funds per capita**, compared with metropolitan cities with lower levels of poverty and higher household incomes

Overall, NLC's findings indicate an equitable distribution of SLFRF funds to metropolitan cities. This research report discusses the analysis and results for each indicator, details the implications for an equitable recovery and demonstrates early-stage use of funds that target closing equity gaps.
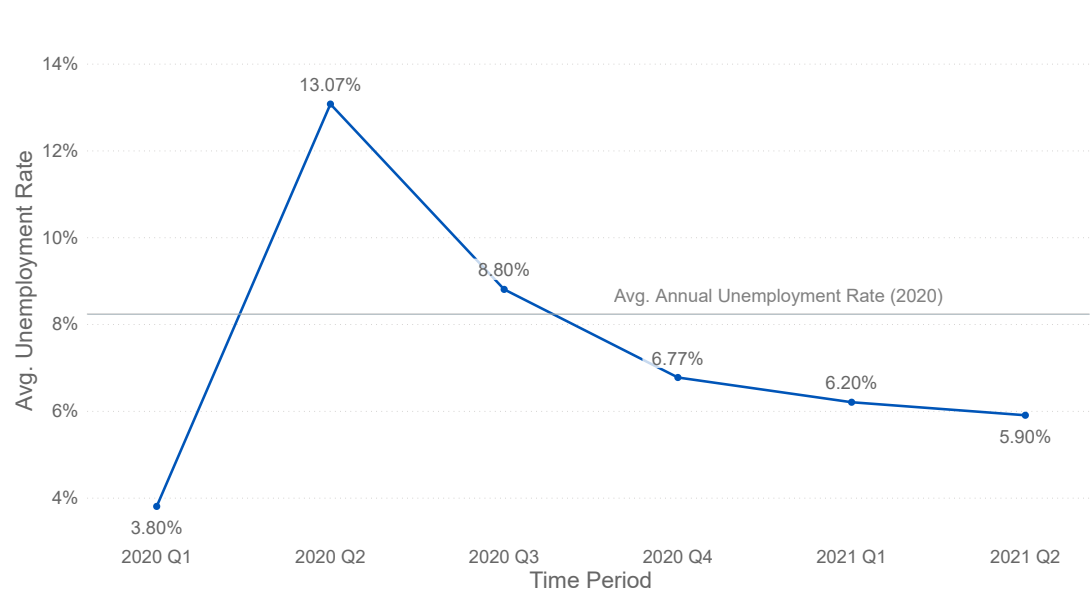
Unemployment

13%
Unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2020

In March 2020, businesses began closing to act against the spread of COVID-19.[6] As a result, the U.S. unemployment rate reached its highest quarterly average ever during the second quarter of 2020.[*, 7] The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) recorded that the unemployment rate rose from 3.8 percent in the first quarter to 13 percent in the second quarter of 2020, or an average of 20.6 million Americans unemployed (Figure 1).[8] Comparatively, the unemployment rate after the Great Recession reached a peak of 9.9 percent, or 15.2 million Americans unemployed.[9]

Rising unemployment rates induced by the pandemic disproportionately impacted communities of color. In 2020, the national annual unemployment rate was 8.1 percent, with an average unemployment rate of 8.7 percent for Asian workers, 11.5 percent for Black or African American workers, 10.6 percent for Hispanic workers, and 7.3 percent for white workers.[10]
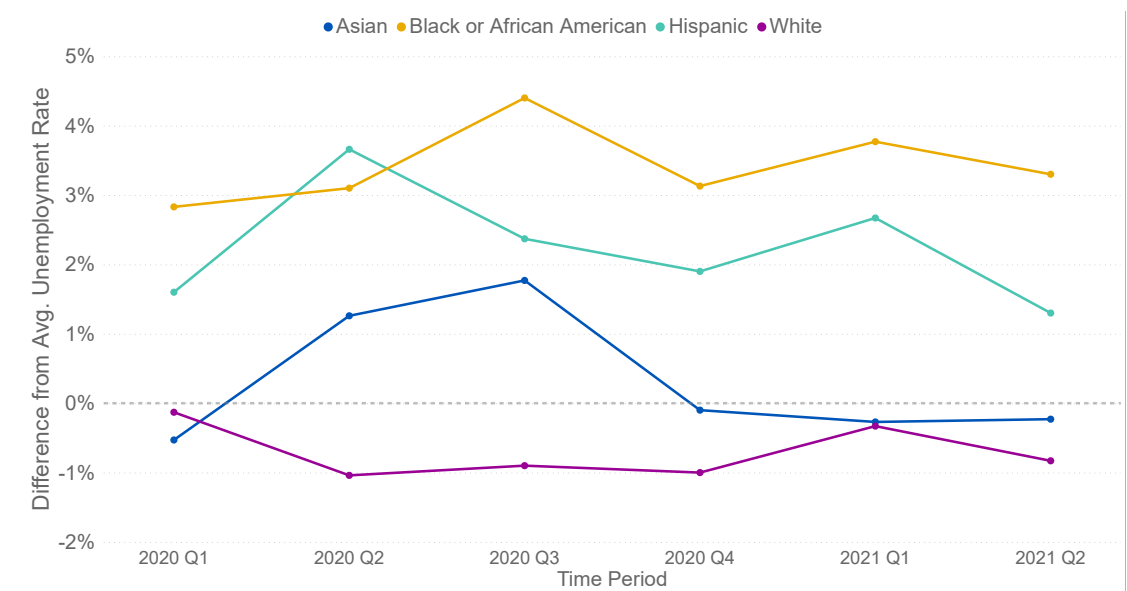
One contributing factor for the difference in unemployment rates is that communities of color represent a greater proportion of workers in industries that were more likely to close during the pandemic, such as restaurants and other service-based industries.[11] Occupational segregation existed long before the pandemic, and the unemployment gap only continued to widen after the second quarter of 2020 (Figure 2).[*] Before the pandemic, workers of color had less access to paid sick leave and paid leave

2020
Unemployment rates

8.1% for all workers

8.7% for Asian workers

10.6% for Hispanic workers

11.5% for Black or African American workers

7.3% for White workers

for childcare, both of which played a major role in wage and unemployment disparities in 2020 and beyond.[12] While the national average unemployment rate significantly declined after the second quarter of 2020, communities of color continue to experience persistently high levels of unemployment.

FIGURE 1 | Quarterly 2020-2021 Unemployment Rate

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey unemployment rates by race and Hispanic ethnicity.

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[*] The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics began collecting unemployment data in 1948.

FIGURE 2 | Difference from Average Quarterly Unemployment Rate by Race or Ethnicity

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey unemployment rates by race and Hispanic ethnicity. Note- data on American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander were not available.

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[*] See appendix for unemployment data tables.

This analysis examines the relationship between unemployment rates and SLFRF funding allocations. Metropolitan cities that experienced higher annual unemployment rates in 2020 received greater SLFRF funds per resident, compared with metropolitan cities with lower annual unemployment rates. On average, every one percentage point increase in the 2020 unemployment rate resulted in an additional $23 per capita received by metropolitan cities.[*] For cities that experienced unemployment levels above 9 percent in 2020 (upper 25th percentile), the average allocation was $379 per resident. Comparatively, cities that experienced unemployment levels less than 6.3 percent (lower 25th percentile) received an average of $214 per resident (Figure 3).

COVID-19 Case Fatality Rates

750,000+
Americans died from COVID-19
as of November 2021

Since January 21, 2020, more than 46.5 million Americans have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and, as of November 2021, over 750,000 Americans died from COVID-19.[13] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that COVID-19 case and fatality rates vary across race and ethnicity, with disproportionate impacts on communities of color.[14] For example, compared with white people, American Indian or Alaska Native people are 1.7 times more likely to contract COVID-19 and 2.4 times more likely to die from COVID-19. These high rate ratios persist among other communities of color, as seen in Figure 4.[15]

FIGURE 3 | 2020 Average Annual Unemployment Rate Compared with Metropolitan Cities' SLFRF Per Capita Allocation
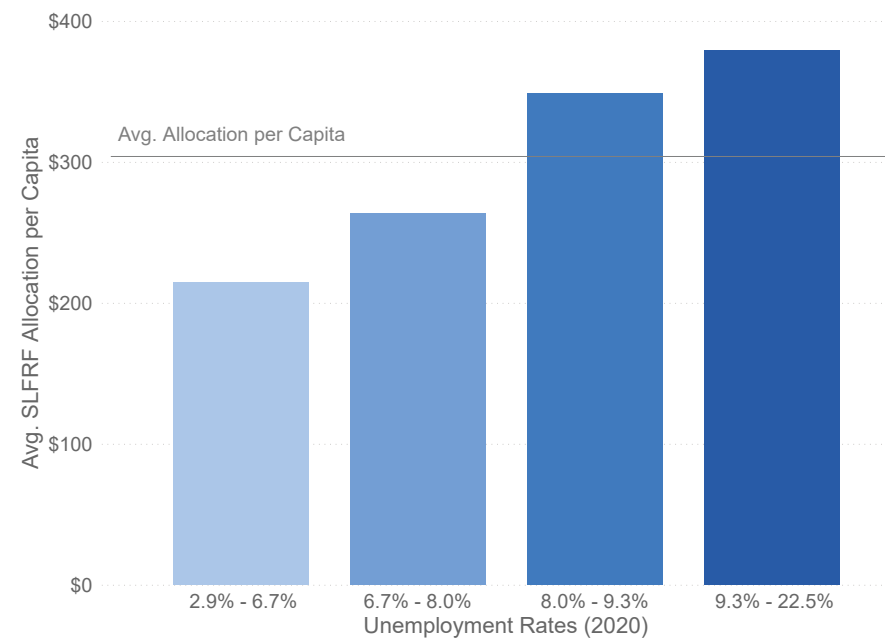
Source: NLC analysis of the data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Allocations for Metropolitan Cities) and US. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Local Area Unemployment Statistics)

[*] See methodology section for further details.

FIGURE 4 | Risk for COVID-19 Infection and Death by Race or Ethnicity Compared with White, Non- Hispanic People

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This analysis examines the relationship between COVID-19 case fatality rates and SLFRF funding allocations. On average, metropolitan cities that experienced higher COVID-19 case fatality rates received greater per capita SLFRF allocation when compared with metropolitan cities with lower COVID-19 case fatality rates. The average local case fatality rate is 1.7 percent.* On average, for every one percentage point increase of the COVID-19 case fatality rate, metropolitan cities received an additional $124 per resident. Metropolitan cities with the highest case fatality rates (cities with over 2% of confirmed cases resulting in death) received an average allocation of $411 per resident. Metropolitan cities with the lowest case fatality rates (cities with less than 1.2% of confirmed cases resulting in death) received an average allocation of $213 per resident.

FIGURE 5 | Average Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita by COVID-19 Case Fatality Rate
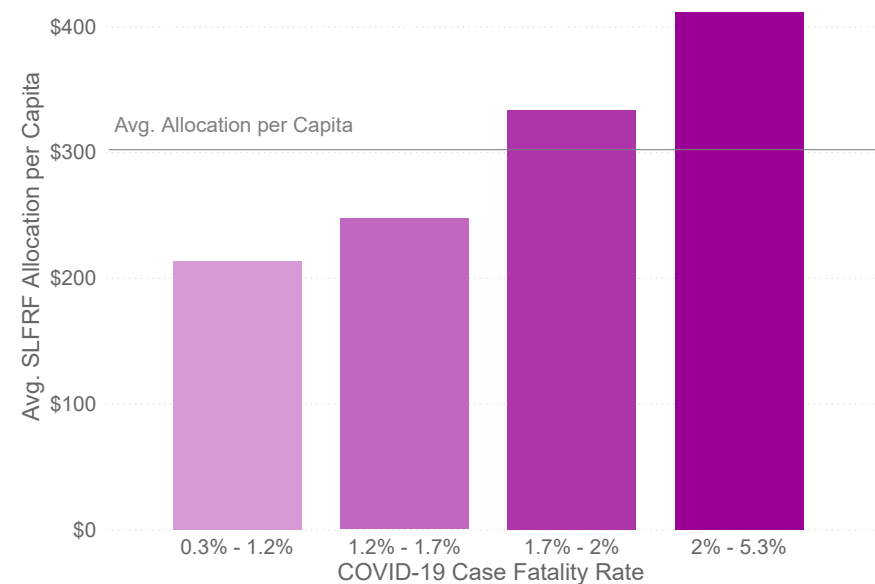
Source: NLC analysis of the data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Allocations for Metropolitan Cities) and USA Facts COVID-19 confirmed case data (COVID-19 fatality rate).

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*County case fatality rates of the counties that contain metropolitan cities are used since this is the most granular level at which data are consistently available.

Poverty and Household Income

$67,521 Median income for American households

$45,870 Median income for Black or African American households

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted household income and increased rates of poverty across the U.S. for many marginalized populations. In 2020, the median income for Black or African American households was $21,651 less than the national median and $12,200 less than the national median for Hispanic households (Figure 6).* The Census's Household Pulse Survey (HSP) found that the largest proportion of households that lost employment income were those with children and low incomes.[16]

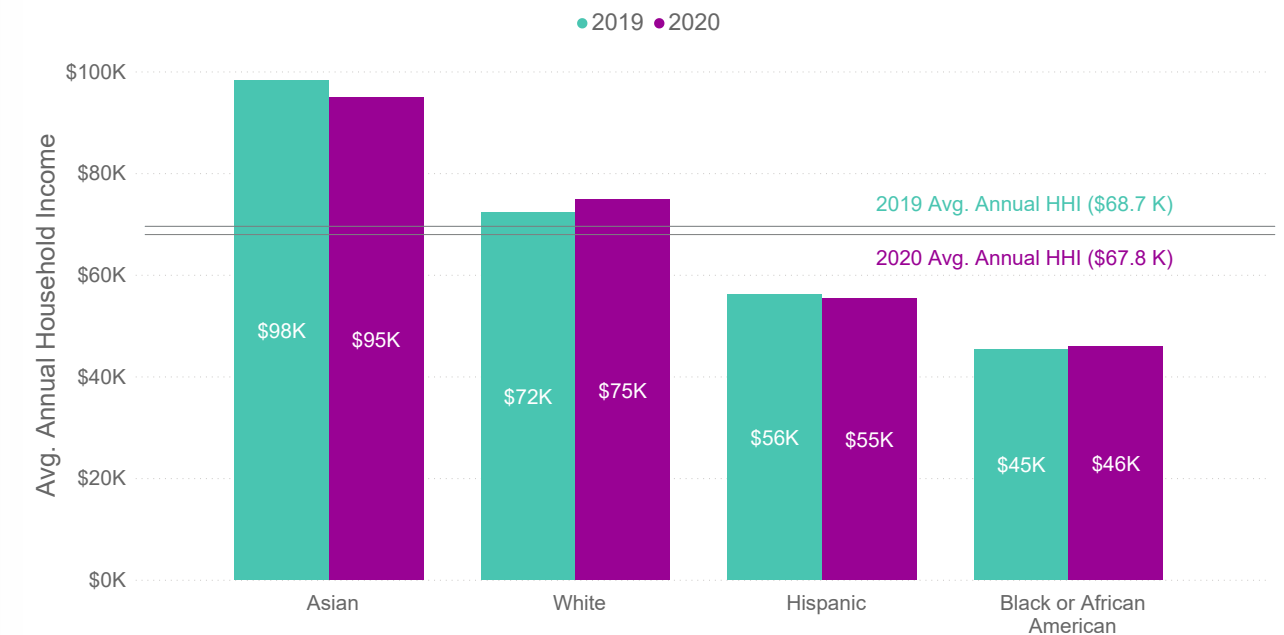**FIGURE 6** | 2019-2020 Household Income by Race or Ethnicity

● 2019 ● 2020

Source: United States Census, Table A-2 Households by Total Money Income, Race, and Hispanic Origin of Householder from 1967 to 2020.

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*See appendix for household data tables.

Additionally, the HSP found that "Black adults in households where someone had lost employment income since the start of the pandemic were more likely than white adults to report uncertainty about their ability to pay for housing."[17] While the 2020 Economic Impact Payments (or stimulus checks) helped many low-income households replace some lost wages, many U.S. households continue to struggle to make ends meet. Through SLFRF funding, cities can address systemic poverty in their communities by implementing programs and policies that assist individuals and families most in need.

This analysis examines the relationship between poverty, household income and SLFRF funding allocations. On average, 21 percent of residents in metropolitan cities have incomes that are less than 125 percent of the federal poverty line, which ranges from $16,100 for a household of one to $89,875 for a household of 14.[18] Additionally, 8 percent of residents, on average, have incomes that are less

than 50 percent of the federal poverty line, defined as severe poverty. Households that live in severe poverty have incomes that range between $6,440 for one to $35,950 for 14.[19] Metropolitan cities with higher levels of poverty and lower median household incomes received, on average, more SLFRF funds per capita, compared with metropolitan cities with lower levels of poverty and higher household incomes.

On average, for every one percentage point increase of residents whose income is less than 125 percent of the federal poverty line, SLFRF allocations increased by $25 per resident. On average, for every one percentage point increase of residents whose income is less than 50 percent of the federal poverty line, SLFRF allocations increased by $49 per resident. Overall, metropolitan cities with the highest rates of severe poverty received an average allocation of $660 per resident while metropolitan cities with the lowest rates of severe poverty received an average allocation of $154 per resident.
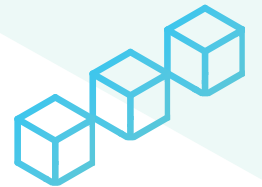
21%
of residents in metropolitan cities have income that falls 125% below the poverty line

FIGURE 7 | Average Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita by Percentage of Population in Severe Poverty
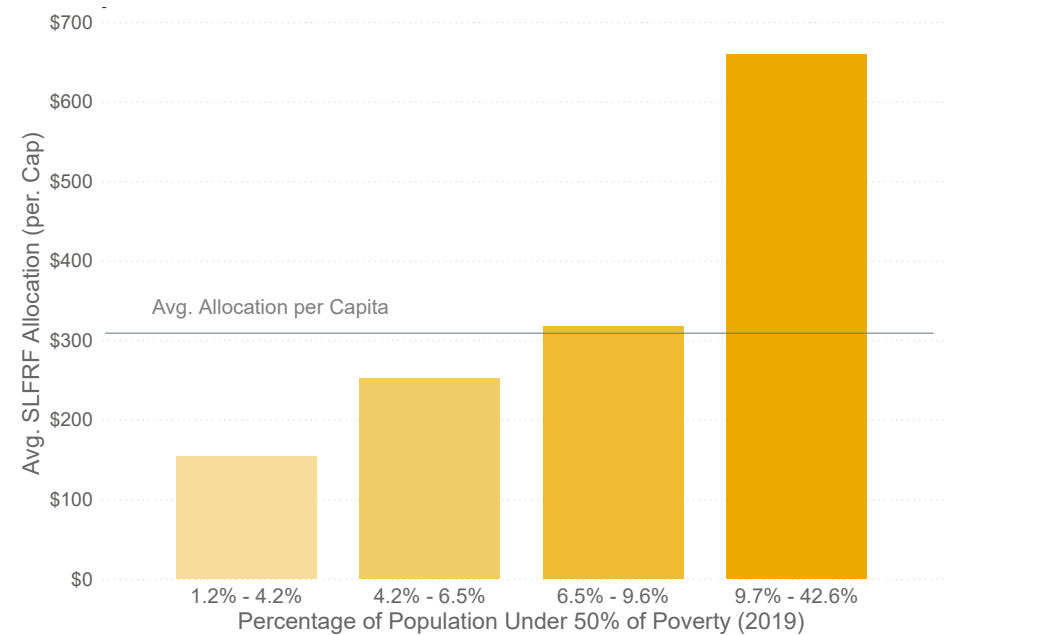
Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. Cap)

Avg. Allocation per Capita

Percentage of Population Under 50% of Poverty (2019)

Source: NLC analysis of the data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Allocations for Metropolitan Cities) and American Community Survey 2019, 5-year estimate (Poverty rates)

FIGURE 8 | Average Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita by Percentage of Population in Poverty
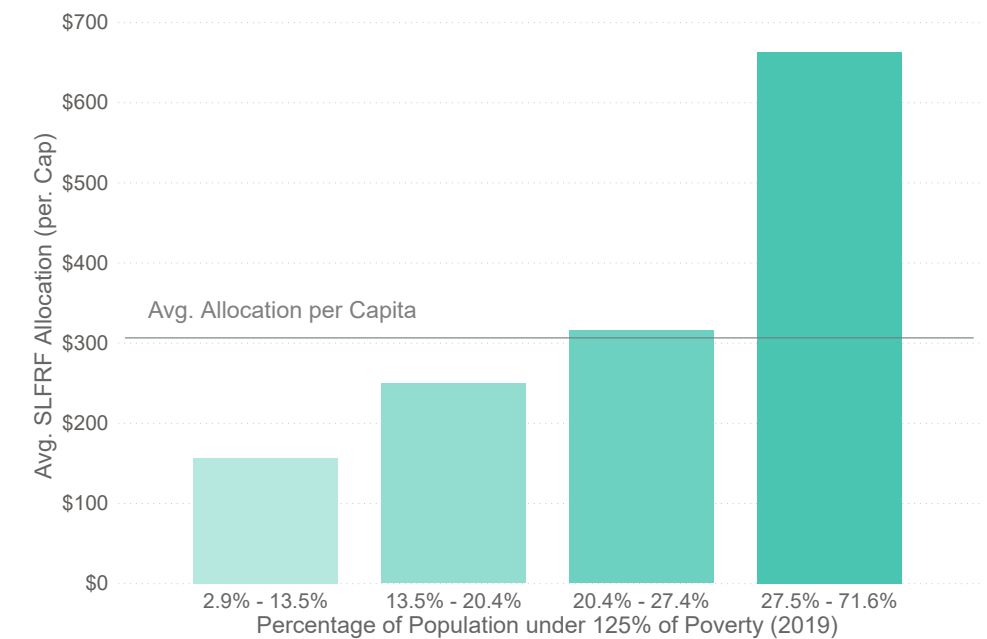
Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. Cap)

Avg. Allocation per Capita

Percentage of Population under 125% of Poverty (2019)

Source: NLC analysis of the data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Allocations for Metropolitan Cities) and American Community Survey 2019, 5-year estimate (Severe poverty rates)

Equitable Recovery in Action

The goal of SLFRF funding is to address the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its disproportionate effects on communities of color and those with low incomes, while helping communities envision and rebuild a better, more equitable future. To address these negative impacts and the conditions that exacerbate inequities, SLFRF funds provide local governments with resources to aid the households, small businesses, nonprofits and industries most impacted by the pandemic.[20]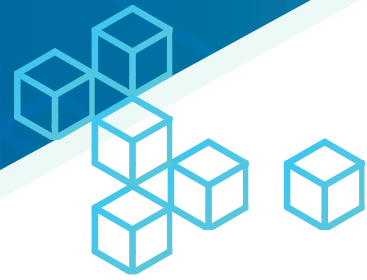 The examples below demonstrate the eligible uses of SLFRF funds and how communities are using the program to bridge equity gaps.

Unemployment

For those who experienced unemployment during the pandemic, metropolitan cities can provide aid through numerous efforts, such as food, rent, mortgage and utility assistance. Additionally, SLFRF funds allow local governments to create programs for unemployed or underemployed workers, including public jobs programs, subsidized employment and training programs.

PHOENIX, AZ allocated $40 million of its SLFRF funds to arts, business and employee assistance programs. Of the allocated amount, $10 million will go towards a workforce apprentice program and associated tuition costs "to promote training and job placement in high-growth, in-demand industries and occupations while addressing barriers to accessing training and employment." Another $1 million will fund the Artists to Work program, which will allow the city to collaborate with local artists by installing a variety of art projects across public spaces in Phoenix.[21]

BUFFALO, NY allocated $27 million of their SLFRF funds to "promote inclusive economic development and targeted workforce training." The funds will be used to create programs that provide residents with new skills, first-time work experience, education, minority business grants and entrepreneurial coaching. The city expects these programs to increase wages, especially among communities of color, by addressing historical economic disparities that worsened as a result of the pandemic.[22]

COVID-19 Response

To address the disproportionate COVID-19 fatality rates, SLFRF funds allow cities to invest in programs that target health disparities, social determinants of health and a variety of services needed to reduce the spread of the virus. These include directing resources towards vaccination programs, medical care, testing and contact tracing, medical services for vulnerable populations, enforcement of public health orders, addressing vaccine hesitancy and more.

SPOKANE, WA allocated $500,000 towards a local vaccination program at three of the city's fire stations. The City Council delegated the funds to especially encourage 12 to 18-year-olds to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. Spokane city officials hoped that the increased number of vaccination clinics in a safe community space would reassure hesitant individuals.[23]

LITTLE ROCK, AR allocated $700,000 for "COVID-19 mitigation, vaccine distribution and community education." Some of the funds are going towards vaccine incentives where residents can obtain up to $100 in Rewards Cards for receiving the vaccine at a local clinic. Little Rock city officials hoped that the reward would incentivize individuals to become fully vaccinated.[24, 25]
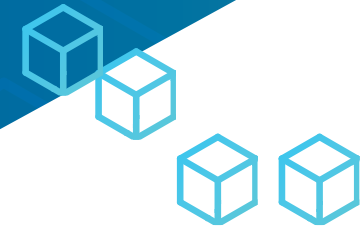
Poverty

To address the impact of COVID-19 on household income and poverty, SLFRF funds allow cities to aid households by implementing programs that increase child-welfare and childcare services, premium pay for lower income workers, rental and utility assistance, and housing vouchers for relocating people to areas with higher economic opportunities. To assist low-income communities and individuals experiencing homelessness, cities can use SLFRF funds to develop supportive and affordable housing. To aid low-income school districts, cities can increase resources to high-poverty school districts by funding programs like tutoring and afterschool care.[26]

ALEXANDRIA, VA allocated $3 million of their SLFRF funds to a guaranteed basic income pilot program. The total allocation will be split amongst 150 families, guaranteeing them a monthly cash transfer of $500 on a pre-loaded debit card for 24 months. Participants will receive additional support through case management to help the families establish financial goals, navigate systems, and fully participate in the pilot.[27]

DULUTH, MN allocated over $20.5 million in their SLFRF funds to address the affordable housing needs in their community. The city will use the funds to work within their designated "Core Investment Areas" to develop affordable housing, which aligns with the city's 2035 comprehensive plan.[28]

Conclusion

While all cities, towns and villages receive SLFRF funds, this research demonstrates that the program allocates a greater share of funding per resident to metropolitan cities most in need. On average, cities that experienced higher unemployment rates, higher COVID-19 case fatality rates, and have a larger share of residents living in poverty, received more funds per resident. Providing greater equity – not equality – in funding support will not only help struggling cities recover but will support the rebuilding of entire regions and beyond.[29]

Cognizant of the strong correlation between pre-existing racial inequities and disproportionate harm from the pandemic, NLC supported Congressional efforts to target more funding to communities with higher needs and those who experienced greater harm caused by the pandemic. Targeting these federal funds to communities in greatest need is a necessary first step for equitable recovery. However, allocating some level of funds to all communities acknowledges that all places must work to rectify historic inequities. Even communities with lower average unemployment, poverty and COVID-19 case fatality rates experience disparities in which these averages mask disproportionate impacts on people of color, individuals with low incomes and other marginalized populations. For example, there are many cities that have high average household incomes, but also have growing underserved homeless populations and overrepresentation of minority groups for COVID-19 fatalities.

Communities need to take additional considerations to put this new funding opportunity into action in ways that support an equitable recovery. Strategies to meet the needs of underserved people include strong community engagement, disaggregating data by race and strengthening municipal capacity and operations.[30] All cities nationwide, no matter their makeup or circumstance, have a tremendous opportunity to use SLFRF funds to quell systemic inequalities both onset by the pandemic and those that were present before.

Appendix:
Data and Methods

This research relies on data provided by U.S. Federal Government agencies and statistical methods, including regression and quartile analysis, to understand the relationship between unemployment, COVID-19 fatality and poverty on per capita SLFRF allocations. For each of the three variables of interest, the researchers used an ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions analysis, with per capita SLFRF allocations as the dependent variable (Table 3). For the quartile analysis, the researchers divided the variables of interest into four ranges based on the distribution of each variable among metropolitan cities. The researchers then calculated the average per capita allocations within the four quartile ranges to illustrate differences in per capita allocations (Tables 4 and 5).

Data Sources and Results Tables

◆ Metropolitan SLFRF Allocations- U.S. Department of the Treasury, Allocations for Metropolitan Cities

◆ 2020 Annual Unemployment Rates – U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

◆ COVID-19 Cases - USA Facts COVID-19 confirmed case data. COVID-19 case fatality rates were calculated using the COVID-19 cases and COVID-19 related deaths per county.

◆ Poverty and Household Income - American Community Survey 2019 (5-year estimate)

TABLE 1 | Quarterly 2020-2021 Unemployment Rate by Race or Ethnicity.

Race or Ethnicity	2020 Q1	2020 Q2	2020 Q3	2020 Q4	2021 Q1	2021 Q2
Asian	3.3%	14.3%	10.6%	6.7%	5.9%	5.7%
Black or African American	6.6%	16.2%	13.2%	9.9%	10.0%	9.2%
Hispanic	5.4%	16.7%	11.2%	8.7%	8.9%	7.2%
White	3.7%	12.0%	7.9%	5.8%	5.9%	5.1%
Average	3.8%	13.1%	8.8%	6.8%	6.2%	5.9%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Survey Unemployment Rates by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity. Note- data on American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander was not available.

TABLE 2 | 2020 Median Household Income by Race or Ethnicity.

Time Period	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic	White, Not Hispanic	Median, across all races or Ethnicities
2020	94,903	45,870	55,321	74,912	67,521

Source: U.S. Census, Table A-2 Households by Total Money Income, Race, and Hispanic Origin of Householder from 1967 to 2020.

Analysis Results

TABLE 3 | Regression Results of Variables of Interest by Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita

Metro City Allocation Per Capita

Unemployment Rate	23.706*** (3.116)				
COVID-19 Case Fatality Rate	124.231*** (10.276)				
Median Household Income	-0.007*** (0.001)				
Percent of Pop. Under 125% of Fedural Poverty Line				24.160*** (1.556)	
Percent of Pop. Under 50% of Fedural Poverty Line					48.767*** (3.113)
Observations	1077	1134	1157	1091	1091
R Squared	0.051	0.114	0.082	0.181	0.184
Adjected R Squared	0.05	0.114	0.081	0.18	0.183
Notes			*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01		

Source: NLC analysis of data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Allocations for Metropolitan Cities; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics; USA Facts COVID-19 Confirmed Case Data; and American Community Survey 2019

TABLE 4 | Quartile Results of Unemployment and COVID-19 Case Fatality by Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita

	Unemployment		COVID-19 Case Fatality	
Quartile	Unemployment Rates (2020)	Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. cap)	COVID-19 Case Fatality Rate	Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. cap)
Q1 (0-25th percentile)	0% - 6.7%	$214.47	0.3% - 1.2%	$213.61
Q2 (25th–50th Percentile)	6.7% - 8.0%	$263.59	1.2% - 1.7%	$247.27
Q3 (50th–75th Percentile)	8.0% - 9.3%	$348.50	1.7% - 2%	$333.17
Q4 (75th–100th Percentile)	9.3%	$379.48	2% - 5.3%	$411.23

Source: NLC analysis of data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Allocations for Metropolitan Cities; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics; and USA Facts COVID-19 Confirmed Case Data

TABLE 5 | Quartile Results of Poverty and Severe Poverty by Metropolitan City Allocation Per Capita

	Poverty		Severe Poverty	
Quartile	Percentage of Population under 125% of Poverty (2019)	Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. cap)	Percentage of Population Under 50% of Poverty (2019)	Avg. SLFRF Allocation (per. cap)
Q1 (0-25th percentile)	2.9% - 13.5%	$156.18	1.2% - 4.2%	$153.91
Q2 (25th–50th Percentile)	13.5% - 20.4%	$249.23	4.2% - 6.5%	$252.54
Q3 (50th–75th Percentile)	20.4% - 27.4%	$314.86	6.5% - 9.6%	$317.06
Q4 (75th–100th Percentile)	27.5% - 71.6%	$662.60	9.7% - 42.6%	$659.38

Source: NLC analysis of data from the U.S. Department of the Treasury, Allocations for Metropolitan Cities; and American Community Survey 2019

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