

Implementing ARRA

Design Snapshot

Memphis Blueprint for a City of Choice: Advancing Joint City-County Recovery

July 2009

Memphis leaders have taken advantage of ARRA to advance an unprecedented partnership between the [city of Memphis](#) and [Shelby County](#), TN, to realize a shared recovery vision. “Memphis: A City of Choice” is a new blueprint, augmenting and advancing earlier private-sector plans, for transforming the core city into a prosperous, inclusive, sustainable area by channeling city and county stimulus spending, as well as other resources, to focus on “game-changers” in 12 economic development priority areas.

Memphis’s City of Choice Initiative	
Purpose:	Coordinate city and county recovery spending to achieve a joint vision for transforming the core city
Lead entity:	City agency
Partners:	City and county executives, City Council and County Board of Commissioners, Memphis City Schools superintendent, and area business leaders
ARRA focus (selected):	Build America Bonds, Community Development Block Grants, Weatherization Assistance Program
Scale:	City and county
Strategies:	Reflects a long-term regional vision; adopts multi-jurisdictional and multi-sectoral approaches; embraces integrated solutions; employs information management, data, and benchmarking
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Inter-jurisdictional leadership and vision, combined with private and philanthropic sector engagement, are central elements of the Memphis “City of Choice” initiative. Often working at cross-purposes historically, a cross-section of city and county leaders embraced the ARRA opportunity to create new momentum around coordinating economic recovery policy and program agendas with the aim of catapulting Memphis ahead of its peer cities. The effort involves public sector direction from the mayors of Memphis and Shelby County, Memphis City Council, [Shelby County Board of Commissioners](#), [Memphis Housing and Community Development Department](#), and the city superintendent of schools. Private sector leadership comes from the [Greater Memphis Chamber](#), the [Memphis Tomorrow](#) association of business executives, and the heads of [FedEx Global Supply Chain Services](#), [Methodist Healthcare](#), and [AutoZone](#).

Through the “City of Choice” initiative, these area leaders have developed an overarching framework to connect their separate pre- and post-ARRA efforts around human capital and talent development, government efficiency, lifetime learning, safety, economic growth, diverse housing options, and other Memphis issues that “have the potential to transform the trajectory of Memphis” and position it

as a competitive 21st century city. Specifically, the “City of Choice” effort intersects with and expands upon [“Memphis Fast Forward,”](#) a private sector-driven plan unveiled two years ago to improve the city’s present economic foundation. In the near future, “Memphis Fast Forward” and “City of Choice” will be integrated into a single, collaborative process, providing one framework to help inform how regional leaders might leverage and connect existing activities and develop new game-changing strategies for stimulus and other funding to amplify projects to their maximum benefit.

To extend the relatively large, one-shot injections of stimulus dollars to generate longer lasting returns, the “City of Choice” promotes human capital development as one broad overarching theme and eschews single, isolated stimulus-funded projects in favor of steering both city and county recovery efforts to advance the same goals for Memphis: clear pathways out of poverty; a growing base of middle class families; expanded opportunities for public school students; and the attraction and retention of talented workers. Both the city and county mayors adopted this transformative vision as their chief broad aim of stimulus spending.

The “City of Choice” strategy emphasizes spending recovery dollars wisely and purposefully, not just quickly, to fast forward city transformation. To this end, city and county leaders first identified five areas as the context for action: planning, policies, structure, service delivery, and government efficiency, accountability, and transparency. From there, broad agreement was reached on 12 priorities areas for new program and service delivery, including education, infrastructure, business and economic development, neighborhood redevelopment, and government efficiency and accountability. Within each of these priority areas, Memphis leaders then focused on identifying the “game changers” that have the potential to fundamentally transform the city. For example, increasing the college attainment rate by five percent to boost human capital; reducing recidivism by 30 percent to improve public safety; ramping up labor pool participation by 50 percent to grow the workforce, and right-sizing local government. By targeting key goals and identifying the resources available to reach them, the “City of Choice” initiative helps to guide short-term recovery spending toward those investments that lay the foundation for a successful 21st century Memphis and generate impact long after ARRA funding flows end.

As “City of Choice” plans move to implementation, some of the ARRA resources that may be tapped to realize its vision include [Neighborhood Stabilization Program 2](#) funding for a town center revitalization project; the [Public Housing Capital Fund](#) to upgrade multi-family and senior facilities; the [Weatherization Assistance Program](#) to incorporate upgrade housing for energy efficiency; and [Early Head Start](#) to boost child development. Also, ARRA’s [Community Development Block Grant](#) dollars are being targeted for both a 170-acre multi-use place-making project and a program that would provide in-school youth incentives to achieve certain goals in areas such as attendance, grades, conduct, and community service.

Additionally, pending some substantive regional discussion, ARRA-authorized [Build America Bonds](#) may be used to support some historic projects that could spark dramatic city turnaround and progress, such as adaptive reuse of a former arena that is a signature Memphis building, and an arts and culture corridor beginning on the banks of the Mississippi River and extending along the spine of the city to connect museums and colleges.

Starting with public sector leadership, and then expanding to include the private and philanthropic sectors, a newly built organizational structure supports the planning and eventual implementation of the “City of Choice.” A leadership team comprised of city and county executives coordinates strategic decisions and their directives are carried out by specific people responsible for planning, legal compliance, communications, community and business outreach, legislative liaising. Near-term actions

for the organizing body include issuing relevant joint executive and legislative orders, recommending uniform project selection criteria to local entities, creating measurement systems to track project impacts, developing GIS maps with detailed data, and convening groups of formula grantee agencies and potential competitive grantees. Also planned is the appointment of a single city-county recovery czar to oversee “City of Choice” implementation, including ARRA compliance through a single model checklist for ensuring that each project meets mandatory federal directives. Finally, a financial blueprint is being developed to fuel the overall agenda and a plan to institutionalize the process for maximum impact.

The Implementing ARRA Series

America’s current economic crisis is not only a national crisis. It is also a metropolitan crisis. Therefore, it is critical to monitor the progress of creative metropolitan leaders who are leveraging the myriad resources provided by the \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). To that end, the Metropolitan Policy Program’s Implementing ARRA Series is tracking the implementation work of metropolitan leaders, assessing their progress and struggles, and extracting from the innovators’ experiences ideas for short- and long-term federal policy reforms. Ultimately it is hoped the series will serve as a resource for best-practice exchange among regions and a source of ideas for designing the next generation of metro-friendly federal policies.

For More Information

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