



# More about Federal COVID Relief Funds

## *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Funds*

With the passage of federal COVID-19 relief packages passed by Congress in 2020 and 2021, over \$3 billion has been allocated to South Carolina (SC) to address the impacts of the pandemic on K-12 education through Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds. Of this total, 90% of SC's ESSER funds are to be regranted to local school districts; and 10% will be retained by the SC Department of Education (SCDE) to address impacts on a state level.

There are three types of ESSER funds. The first type of federal relief money is ESSER I allocated through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March 2020. The second type of federal relief money is ESSER II allocated through Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA) in December 2020. The third type of federal relief money is ESSER III allocated through the American Rescue Plan (ARP) in March 2021. For more information about the requirements for ESSER funds view the SCDE Fact Sheet [here](#).

Generally speaking, ESSER funds can be used for a range of activities that support reopening schools safely, sustaining their safe operation, and addressing student social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs resulting from the pandemic. These funds are critical for schools and districts to address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on underrepresented student subgroups, including each major racial and ethnic group, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, English learners, gender, migrant students, students experiencing homelessness, and children and youth in foster care.

Districts have already submitted ESSER I spending plans to SCDE but many schools and districts are in the process of developing their ESSER II and III spending plans. They need to hear from their stakeholders about the best use of these funds to address specific needs in each school community. ESSER funds allocate a significant amount of money to local schools and districts and this is an opportunity for educators and school stakeholder teams to think outside the box to create transformational educational programs that engage students from all backgrounds in the learning process.



"This is a very critical time to gather ideas from local school-family-community partnerships convened by local school improvement councils to identify what they recommend to reengage students/families/communities and recover from the learning losses and disruptions from the pandemic." **Co-Chair of the national board of the Afterschool Alliance and Senior Fellow to the Riley Institute at Furman University, Terry Peterson**

# School Improvement Council Community Stakeholders Meetings Project

Summer 2021

## Stakeholder Voice in Decision-Making on Expenditure of COVID Relief Funds *Framework*

This framework calls for SICs in a CFEC participating district to serve as sponsors for a series of three one-hour community meetings to be held in relatively quick succession. Each SIC would be responsible for scheduling three meetings for their school and inviting additional folks (teachers, parents, students, community members, etc.) to participate in a discussion that will focus on COVID recovery for their students and teachers. CFEC will provide technical and administrative support as needed including having additional Regional Family Engagement Liaisons available for facilitating questions and recording responses.

The first 2 meetings in the series will be devoted to small group discussions of questions developed in advance by CFEC and vetted by the districts and SICs to be responsive to the needs of the districts and schools participating in the project. The first session will focus on education recovery. The second session will focus on safety and health, including mental health, and SEL (*See sample questions on next page*). The third meeting will be devoted to reviewing a summary of responses from the first two meetings with time for additional questions and clarification as well as a discussion of next steps including delivery of the summaries to the district.

“Essentially, we will be implementing a pilot project based on a previously successful initiative with the hopes of developing a Toolkit that schools can use across South Carolina to solicit input and feedback from their stakeholder community on important education initiatives.” **CFEC Project Director, Karen Utter**



## Benefits to Schools and Districts

- Opportunity to acknowledge the important role that families have played in their child’s continued learning and development during school closures and disruptions despite the multiple challenges they faced as a result of the pandemic.
- Opportunity for the district to demonstrate that it values stakeholder voice and will take it into account as part of the decision-making process.
- Evidence that stakeholders played a meaningful role in decision making that can be included in justification for ESSER II spending plan.
- Discover unknown challenges and “outside of the box” solutions by listening to a variety of school stakeholders.
- Build consensus for school and district initiatives in response to Covid-19 challenges.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION

### MEETING ONE: EDUCATION RECOVERY

1. How can we most effectively use in-school time to help our students re-engage and make up any losses in learning resulting from the recent disruptions in school?
2. How can we most effectively use out-of-school time (e.g., summer and after-school programs, arts/music, sports programs, student clubs and interest groups, and other community initiatives) to support and enhance student learning?
3. What are the most important things that we can do to help our teachers, families, and community (e.g., large and small employers, faith based and voluntary groups of tutors and mentors, community and youth organizations, arts and cultural groups, public libraries, museums, parks, health and mental health organizations, colleges and universities, etc.) understand how to support students in the education recovery process?

### MEETING TWO: HEALTH AND SAFETY

1. What are the most important health and safety supports that students need to (1) safely learn in-person, and (2) recover from the health impacts of the pandemic (including impacts on mental health/SEL)?
2. What are the most important health and safety supports that teachers need to (1) return to in-person teaching safely, and (2) recover from health impacts of the pandemic (including impacts on mental health/SEL)?
3. What is the most important thing we can do to help our families (1) recover from the impacts of the pandemic on the health of parents (including mental health/SEL), (2) support their children in recovering from the health impacts of the pandemic, and (3) access safe and engaging adult supervision and learning for their children and youth in afterschool and summers so parents can work and earn a living?



# MEETING ONE SAMPLE AGENDA

Location: Address or Virtual Link

Date: Date

Time: Time

Facilitator: Name(s)

## TOPIC: Education Recovery

- 5:00 p.m. – 5:05 p.m.    ■ Welcome
- 5:00 p.m. – 5:05 p.m.    ■ Local SIC Introductions
- 5:05 p.m. – 5:10 p.m.    ■ CFEC Introductory Video
- 5:10 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.    ■ Small Breakout Groups
- Maximum 10 participants per group
  - One lead facilitator per group
  - One note taker per group
- 5:15 p.m. – 5:20 p.m.    ■ Review Discussion Ground Rules
- 5:15 p.m. – 5:20 p.m.    ■ Introduce the Three Questions that will Frame the Discussion
- 5:20 p.m. – 5:55 p.m.    ■ Open Discussion on Three Questions
- Stay focused on education recovery
  - Identify issues for the parking lot\*
- 5:55 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.    ■ Wrap up Small Group Discussion
- Review questions for Meeting Two
  - Take quick poll about meeting effectiveness

**\*Parking Lot Issues:** Relevant comments that aren't related to the topic of discussion.

# MEETING TWO SAMPLE AGENDA

Location: Address or Virtual Link

Date: Date

Time: Time

Facilitator: Name(s)

## TOPIC: Health and Safety

- 5:00 p.m. – 5:05 p.m.    ■ Welcome and Introductions
- 5:05 p.m. – 5:10 p.m.    ■ Review Meeting Purpose and Instructions
- 5:10 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.    ■ Small Breakout Groups
- Maximum 10 participants per group
  - One lead facilitator per group
  - One note taker per group
- 5:15 p.m. – 5:20 p.m.    ■ Review Discussion Ground Rules
- Introduce the Three Questions that will Frame the Discussion
- 5:20 p.m. – 5:45 p.m.    ■ Open Discussion on Three Questions
- Stay focused on health and safety
  - Identify issues for the parking lot
- 5:45 p.m. - 5:55 p.m.    ■ Discussion of Parking Lot Issues
- From Meeting One
  - From Meeting Two
- 5:55 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.    ■ Wrap up Small Group Discussion
- Review Meeting Three agenda
  - Take quick poll about meeting effectiveness

# MEETING THREE SAMPLE AGENDA

Location: Address or Virtual Link

Date: Date

Time: Time

Facilitator: Name(s)

## TOPIC: Review Findings

- 5:00 p.m. – 5:05 p.m. ■ Welcome and Introductions
  
- 5:05 p.m. – 5:10 p.m. ■ Review Meeting Purpose and Instructions
  
- 5:10 p.m. – 5:25 p.m. ■ Review Summary of Past Two Meetings
  - No small breakout group
  
- 5:25 p.m. – 5:50 p.m. ■ Open Group Discussion of Responses
  - Comments on responses
  - Unanswered questions
  
- 5:50 p.m. – 5:55 p.m. ■ Next Steps
  - Report how summary will be used
  
- 5:55 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. ■ Closing Remarks
  - Thank you for participation
  - Take quick poll about meeting effectiveness

# Before, In Between, and After Meetings

## Steps Along the Way

### Getting Ready for Action

To generate excitement for engaging in this process, CFEC will help your district produce a short promotional video that is aimed at building community interest and enthusiasm around this project and recruiting participation by a broad and representative cross-section of stakeholders. We can also help you develop other strategies to help all members of your school community become aware of this opportunity and feel welcome to participate in the discussion process.

### Preparing Stakeholders and School Leaders

CFEC will provide interested parents, teachers, community members, and students with an optional virtual orientation focused on training in how to participate in shared decision-making processes. This training is derived from Family Connection's workshop: "Our Seat at the Table: A Parent Leader Training." The training will build participant understanding about advisory groups; inform participants about the principles that guide advisory groups and the processes these groups use; and suggest strategies that participants can use to help them confidently and actively participate in discussions like the ones proposed here.

At the same time, CFEC will provide interested school and district leaders with an optional virtual orientation focused on developing meeting strategies that invite equitable and engaged participation from their stakeholders. This training will include recourses and protocols adapted from School Reform Initiatives and will help school leaders have meaningful conversations with their stakeholders like the ones proposed here.

### Actions Between Meetings

The following actions will need to occur between Meeting One and Meeting Two as well as between Meeting Two and Meeting Three.

- Review and compile feedback.
- Use feedback from prior meeting to make any adjustments needed to the format and questions for the next meeting.
- Make sure your district and schools continue to publicize and encourage community participation in the next meeting.

### Sharing Stakeholder Voice

CFEC and SIC representatives will work to combine summaries across your district into three groups (1) Pre-K - Grade 5 schools, (2) Middle Schools, and (3) High Schools. We will give you the tools you need to successfully share the feedback you've collected from your stakeholder groups about the best use of federal COVID relief funds with your district leaders.



*"The parents, educators, community leaders, and students of our 1,100-plus SICs lend their unique perspectives, expertise, and voices to the conversation as key education stakeholders, and through thoughtful dialogue help us to generate new, vibrant, and creative thinking. Sometimes such exercises in shared decision-making may be seen as messy, critical, or even oppositional, and two monologues do not make a dialogue. But in the long run, this process is much more likely to strengthen mutual trust and understanding, and generate a true feeling of consensus and buy-in. It is well worth the effort."*

**SC-SIC Executive Director, Tom F. Hudson**



For additional support with using this guide to respond to your school's needs, please contact Tom F. Hudson at the Carolina Family Engagement Center and the SC School Improvement Council.

Email: [HUDSONTF@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:HUDSONTF@mailbox.sc.edu)

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Retrieved from <http://cfec.sc.gov> from SIC Community Stakeholders Meeting Project.pdf



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