

What is an impactful way to use a portion of the COVID-19 Relief Fund?

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached our town of Rapid City, it was the City employees who selflessly rose up to help carry our community through this uncharted territory. It was through their perseverance and resolve that Rapid City was able to endure this crisis. The City employees put themselves at risk and in harm's way because that is what our community does: we care about each other and we work hard for what we have.

To say that 2020 was a difficult year would be a severe understatement. COVID-19 impacted the world to a devastating degree, and our City employees were there every step of the way to lead our community in a time when many felt lost. Now is an opportunity to show how much we care about them and commit to allocating a portion of the COVID-19 Relief Funds as bonus payments to all full-time and part-time benefitted City employees.

Across our entire city we watched as our daily lives came to a sudden halt; businesses tried to adapt, schools went remote, and our citizens tried to cope as best they could. Unfortunately, we lost jobs, children fell behind in school, and most devastatingly our community lost a tragic number of its valued citizens. The negative impact this had on our community's mental health is unfathomable. While we watched our neighbors suffer and fight alongside us, we Rapid City employees banded together and came to work when needed to make sure our city had the resources and manpower to handle this crisis.

Our city employees were not immune to the loss and struggle that surrounded us. A Kaiser Family Foundation study¹ showed that a jump from 10% of adults in 2019 to 40% of adults in 2020 reported symptoms of anxiety and depression. That is a 400% increase and our City employees had to handle these types of burdens personally all while internalizing the responsibilities of keeping the community safe and secure. A city needs to operate seamlessly and care for the citizens it represents. This includes the upkeep of our streets, collecting garbage, maintaining water systems, providing public safety, collecting money that is owed and so much more. The City of Rapid City did just that. By choosing to grant our City employees with a one-time financial contribution at this time, we would show just how much we truly valued their sacrifices and dedication.

The City worked together and found innovative ways to provide services to its people and employees while still maintaining key safety protocols. Some worked from home to keep City provided services running smoothly, there were designated drop offs for contractors to provide bids to Community Development, employees were given the opportunity to act as volunteers for Feeding America, and the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) Division initiated a Coronavirus Response Hub; which our City employees launched quickly to provide resources on crucial City updates, broader community resources, COVID-19 virus updates, and more.

This type of action is not unprecedented in Rapid City. In December of 2020 the Rapid City Area Schools paid a stipend of \$525 for all full-time and part-time staff. Dr. Lori Simon is quoted in the Rapid City Journal as saying the payment is an "effort to show you just how much we appreciate you". This decision by the Superintendent and the RCAS Board sent a strong message to the employees of the District that they understood the mental and physical toll the pandemic was taking on them, and that a show of appreciation was in order.

¹ KFF.org 'The Implication of COVID-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use': During the pandemic, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder, a share that has been largely consistent, up from 1 in 10 adults who reported these symptoms from January to June 2019.

As we arrive in May of 2021, our state is offering vaccinations to our citizens, across the nation mandates are lifting, children are returning to school and things are finally starting to feel normal again. Yet, the repercussions of the prior year are still affecting our City staff today and will continue to do so. Providing monetary compensation to the employees of the City will be a direct and notable way to not only help our City employees during this period of recovery, but also act as a demonstration of thanks and appreciation to those who worked without hesitation. By allocating a portion of the COVID-19 Relief Funds to our City staff, it will directly impact our local economy, our city morale, and the lives of the citizens who supported our city every day to keep Rapid City thriving.

The proposed employee bonus plan would be to give a bonus to full-time employees who were employed in 2020 and are still employed by the City at the time of disbursement. We are asking for a bonus of \$1,000 for the members of our public safety departments, Police and Fire, and \$500 for all other full-time and part-time benefited employees. We wanted to make this distinction because even though all of our employees stepped up to the plate when they were asked; our public safety folks had to put themselves in the middle of countless situations where social distancing and contact avoidance were not an option. Whether it was wrestling a potentially infected person to the ground, or providing life saving medical attention to a coughing citizen, our public safety employees fulfilled their duty at the potential risk of their own health.

I would humbly ask that you consider this one time COVID bonus for our employees to show that our City Council and our community recognize the importance of the work that was performed during 2020 and early 2021 to keep our City operating in an efficient and safe manner.