

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding in Addison County

Research conducted by Middlebury College
PSCI0213 class (with Professor Teets)





Methodology

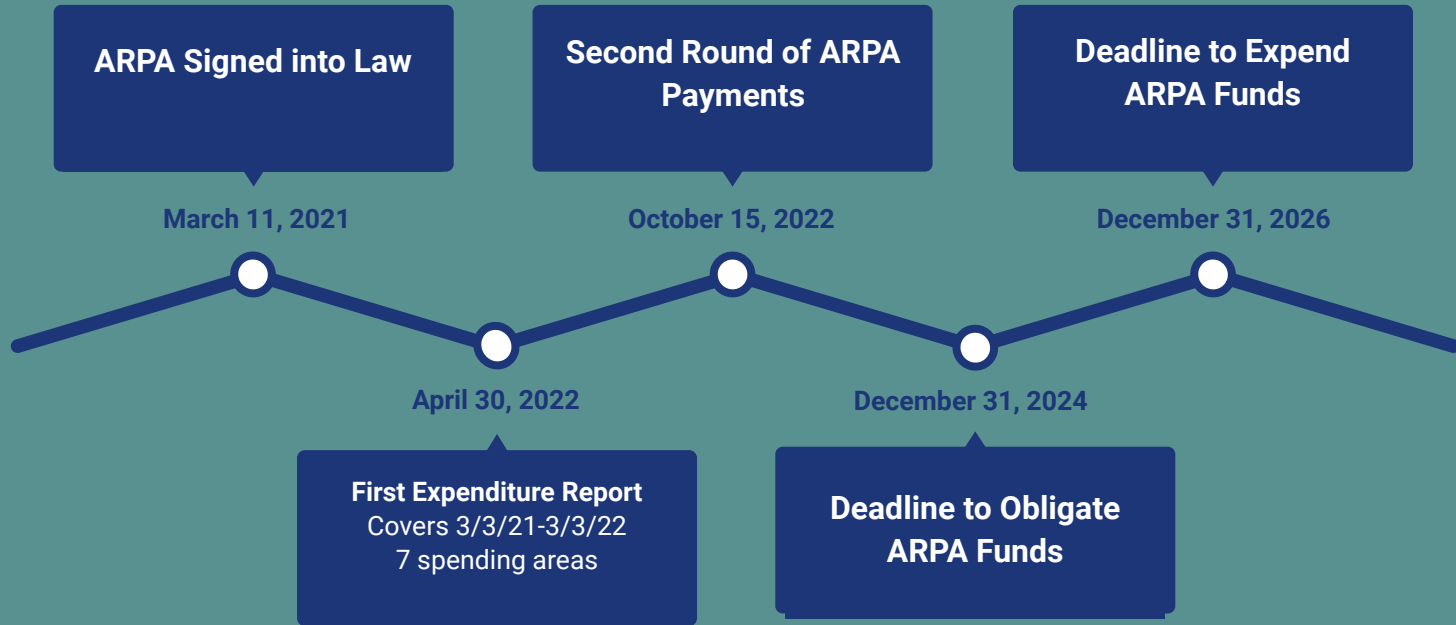
Research Questions: what role does public participation play in funding decisions?

- HOW - Mechanisms whereby public input was solicited
- WHEN - At what stage was public input solicited
- WHO - Who participated
- WEIGHT - What needs were identified and how were priorities decided

Methods

- Process tracing: traced process of funding in Vermont & in Addison County
- Interviews: Middlebury, Bristol, Vergennes, and Weybridge Selectboard members
- Surveys: 1) Selectboard members in Addison County and 2) citizens in Addison County

American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Timeline



April 4, 2022:

Bristol Takes the Standard Allowance of \$1,148,473.80

April 12, 2022:

Middlebury Takes the Standard Allowance of \$2,624,570.51

October 25, 2022:

Vergennes Takes the Standard Allowance of \$772,125.93

Interview Findings by Town: Middlebury, Vergennes, Bristol, and Weybridge



Middlebury

- Priorities:
 - Infrastructure and deferred maintenance*
- Challenges:
 - More requests for ARPA allocation than funding allows
 - Restrictions that come with 2026 spending deadline
- Public Outreach/Cross Town Contact:
 - No public participation beyond selectboard subcommittees and communication with town staff
 - Nonprofits have requested
 - Funds have already been set aside for Maple Broadband
 - Support to nonprofits is secondary to previously listed priorities

*Much of Middlebury's ARPA decision-making is going through town staff, namely the Town Manager and the Public Works Department

Vergennes

- Priorities:
 - Infrastructure, but
 - Want something more to show for it
- Challenges:
 - The longer the money sits, the more value it loses (7 ½%).
 - How to prioritize
 - Small drop in bucket of needs
- Cross Town Contact/Public outreach:
 - No public participation sought and no official cross communication between towns
 - Many groups reached out however their requests are not currently in consideration, like Vergennes Panton water district request

Weybridge

- Priorities:
 - Yet to be determined, need to conduct more public outreach
- Challenges:
 - Logistics of inviting and analyzing public opinion
 - Distilling themes and projects so that fund spent on time
- Cross Town Contact/Public outreach:
 - Will conduct public outreach but not determined method
 - Contacted Orwell and Bristol
 - Already allocated to Maple Broadband, but will need more information from Turning Point before decision can be made for that request

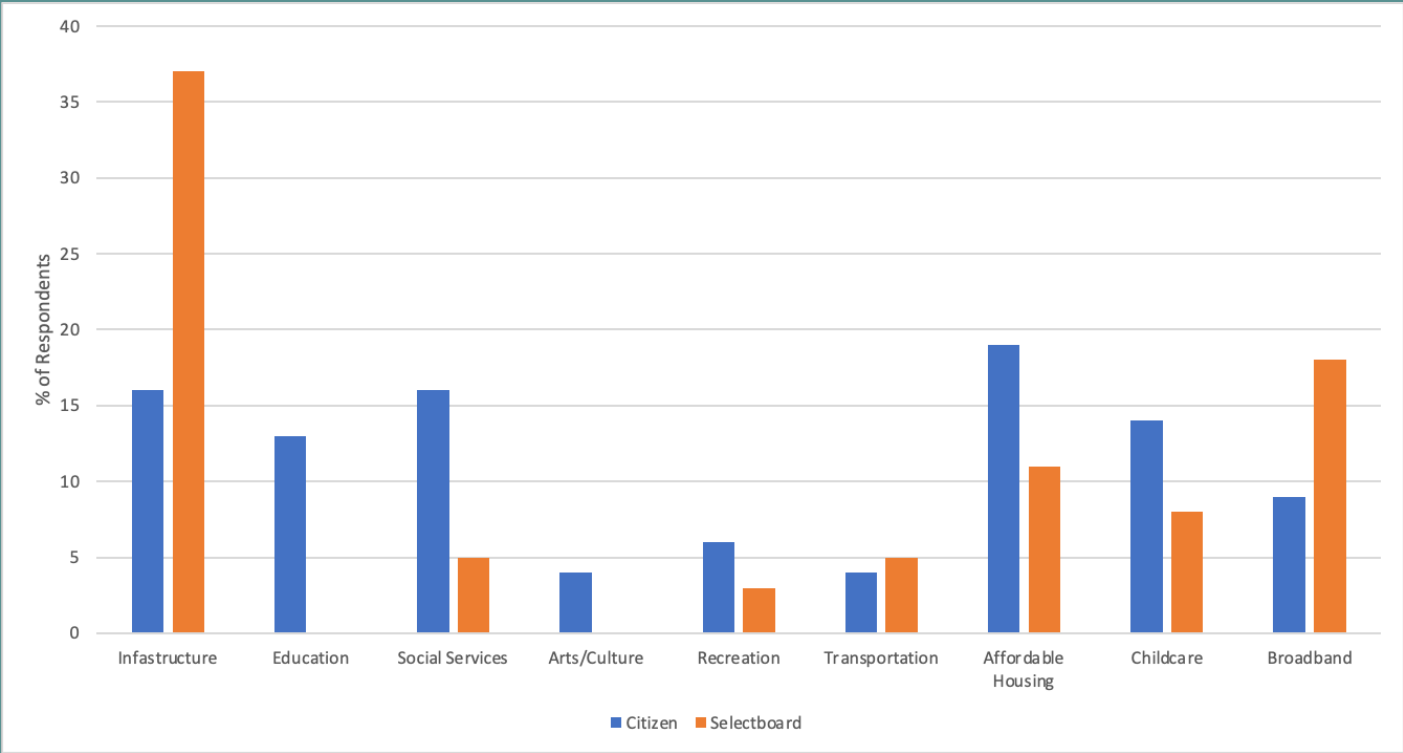
Bristol

- Priorities:
 - Decide on projects that benefit most
 - Balance with feasibility
- Challenges:
 - Deciding on projects that align with intent of funds (COVID recovery)
- Cross Town Contact/Public Outreach:
 - Established committee that conducted public outreach through surveys, public forums, focus groups, etc.
 - Sought public input throughout process
 - Have received formal proposals from Turning Point, Maple Broadband, Willowell but have not committed

Survey Findings: Selectboard and Citizen Surveys



Selectboard vs. Citizen opinion on priority for ARPA spending

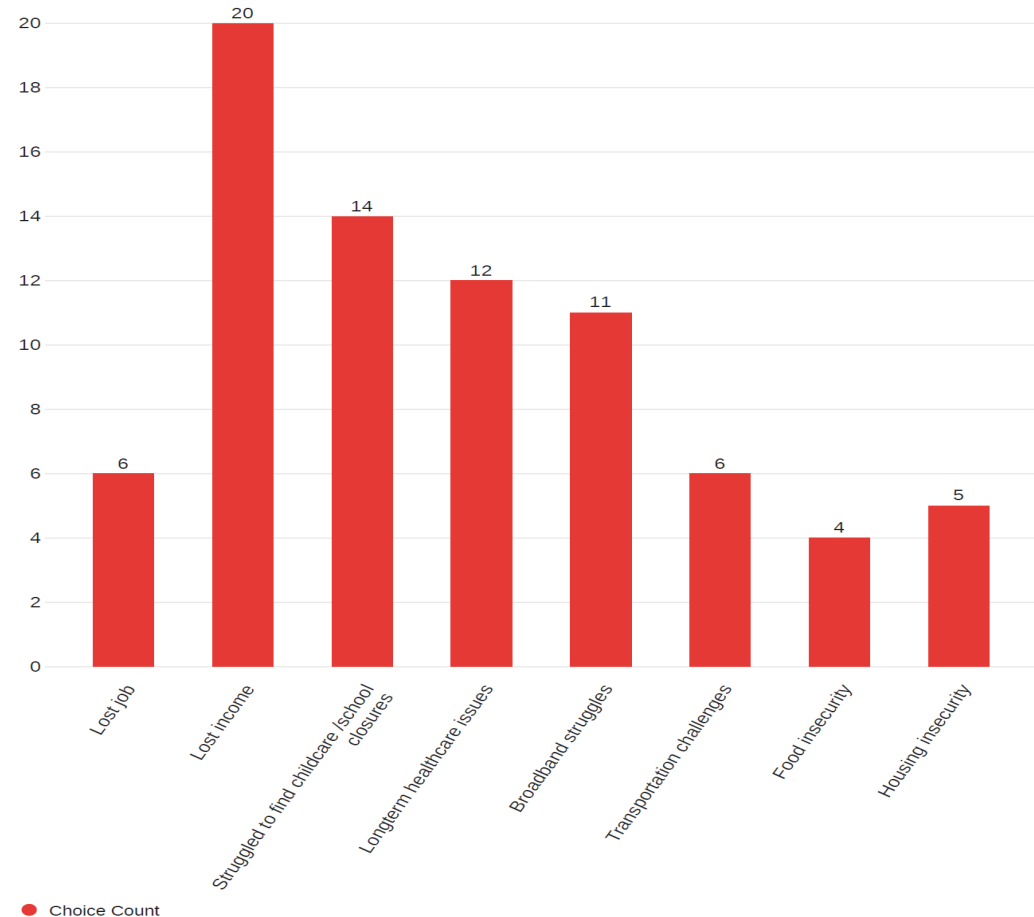


Note: Citizen survey asked respondents to list “all that apply,” while Selectboard opinion references first choice priority.

Covid Harm in Community

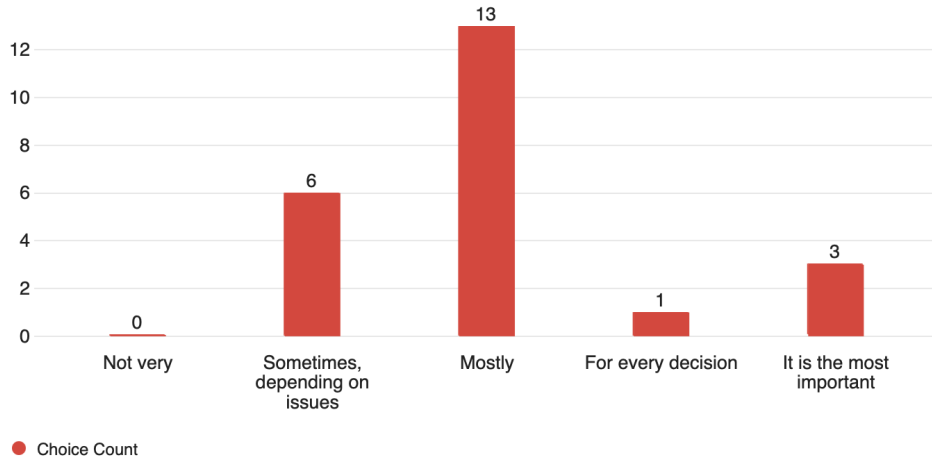
- Many “harms” interacted - often parents pay to keep childcare spots even with lost jobs and lost income

Q1 - How did the covid pandemic impact your family? Select any that apply.

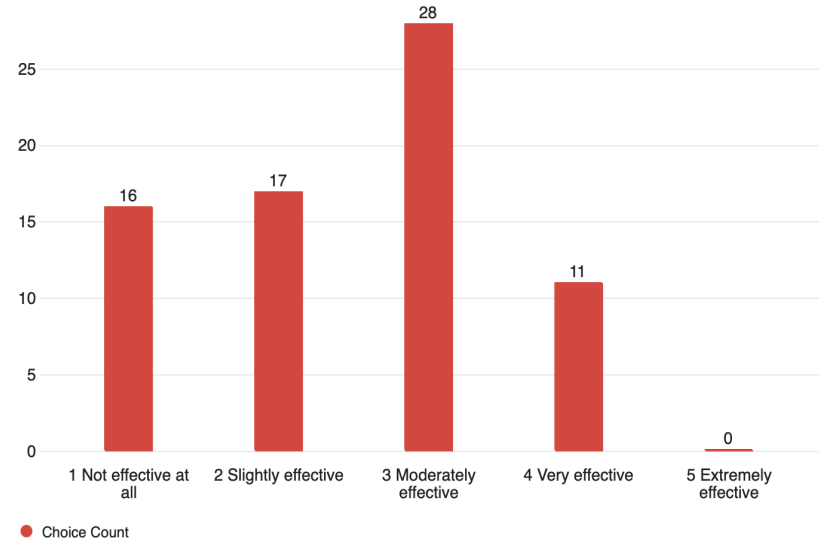


Selectboard prioritization of public participation vs resident opinion on selectboard effectiveness

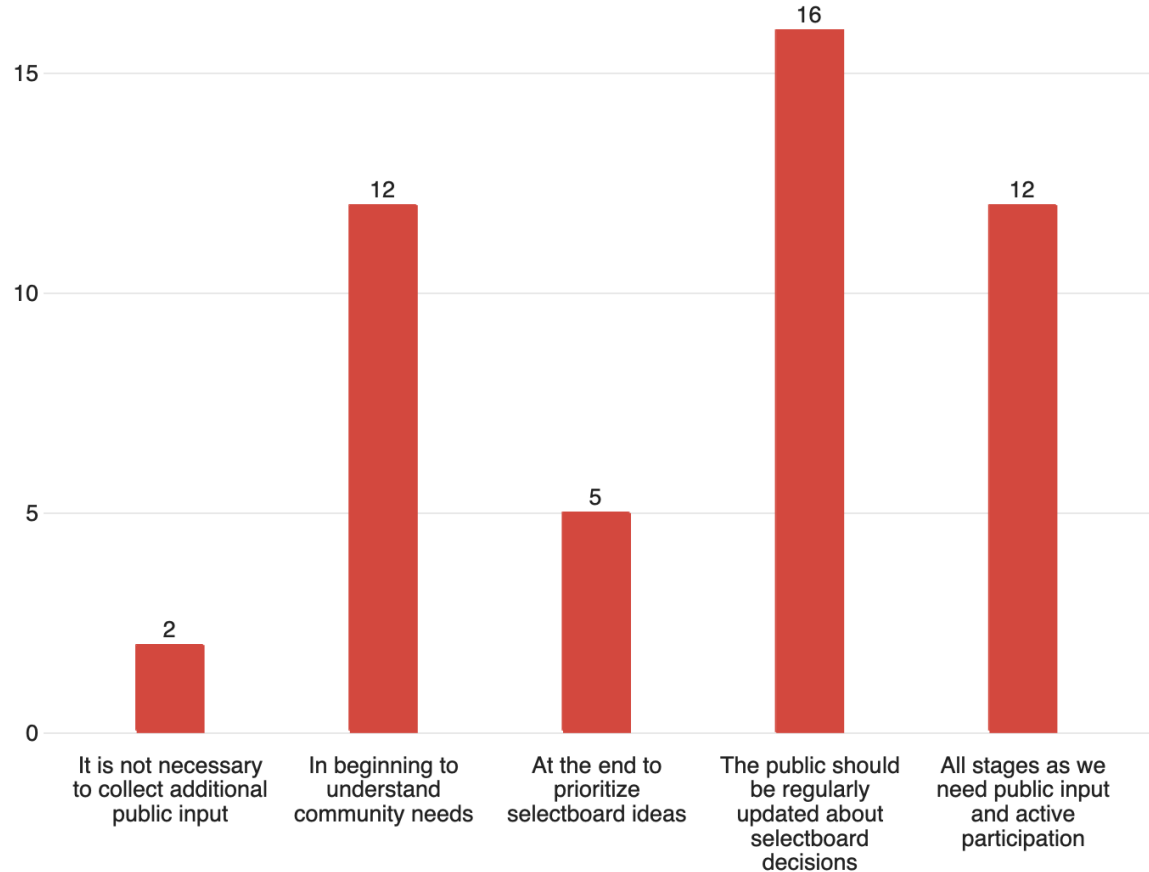
Selectboard - In general, do you think public participation is essential to policy making?



Citizen survey - How effective would you rate the Town for soliciting public opinion for the distribution of ARPA funds?

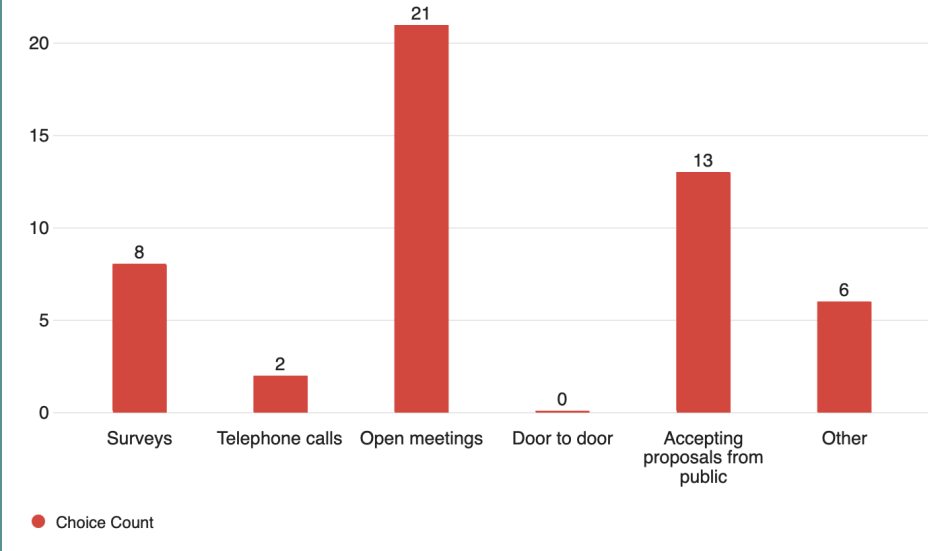


Where in the process should public opinion be used?

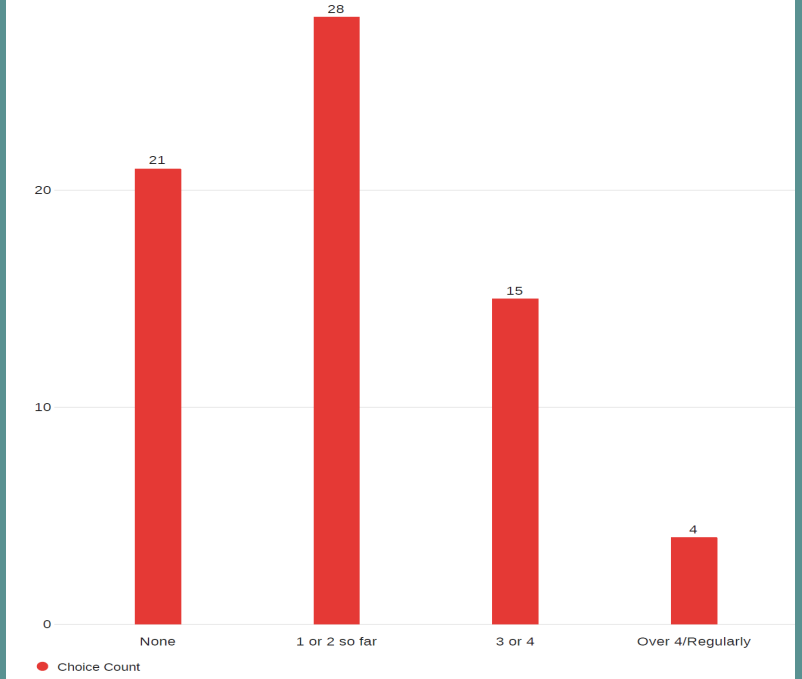


Outreach from the selectboard to the public

Selectboard survey - What type of outreach have you done/do you plan to do regarding ARPA funds? -



Q5 - How many updates about the process of ARPA have you received from the town/city?





Recommendations

- ❑ Solicit more public input about specific harms from covid and priorities
 - ❑ Help address mismatch between selectboard/citizen opinion on priorities
 - ❑ Would increase public trust in the process
 - ❑ Few residents have shared opinions, so more public outreach would be valuable

- ❑ Active communication between citizens and town officials (beyond adding it to existing Selectboard meeting agendas)
 - ❑ Also helpful for other town governments