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Surveying Community Needs and Priorities

The City and County of Honolulu, which are home to two-thirds of the state's population, went to the people to ask their views on where [the \\$386 million from its Fiscal Recovery Fund \(FRF\) should be spent](#). The results are informing nonprofit advocacy to help shape grant and other programs. But perhaps the greater impact is the lesson demonstrated once again: The more input solicited from the public, the better prepared policymakers are to understand and determine how to drive relief and recovery.

The governments' [FRF Community Engagement Survey Report](#), which outlines ARPA spending priorities, opened by recognizing the importance of hearing directly from residents. "Community engagement is critical to sound public policy and decision-making... In order to better understand the priorities and concerns of O`ahu residents, the Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) administered the FRF Community Engagement Survey to gain insight into the community prioritization of FRF focus areas." Nearly 1,200 residents completed an online survey between January and February 2022 to rank eight priorities for using the local governments' ARPA funds within their community.

Each of the priorities identified in the [City's 2021 Initial Recovery Plan](#) highlight the need for investment in and funding for services typically provided by charitable

nonprofits. The eight priority areas are: (1) Economic and Workforce Development; (2) Public Health; (3) Housing Access; (4); Individual and Family Support; (5) Public Safety; (6) Climate Change & Environment; (7) Vulnerable Populations; and (8) Arts and Culture. Respondents “made the connection between these priorities” with understanding how each sector needs investment and must be addressed, particularly between public health, public safety, and vulnerable populations. See [graphic breakdown of survey data results](#).

With the vital information of what the needs are and how they should be prioritized, Mayor Rick Blangiardi went right to heart of the solution in his opening message: “We are currently designing a multi-million dollar grant program to address community needs through direct and indirect investments, including investments that will build capacity in our thriving nonprofit sector.” The survey results are being used by the Department of Community Services (DCS) to design the grant program.

The report concludes with the City and County promising to “continue the conversation” through follow-up surveys to “gauge community priorities and interests” and receive more feedback.

Here, the governments went to the people and their greatest concerns matched the missions of local nonprofits, providing policymakers with keen insights “from the real world.” Other governments should try it.