Dear [*ARP Lead Office (e.g., County Clerk, Budget Office, Finance Office, etc.*]

As [*jurisdiction*] continues its work to leverage American Rescue Plan Fiscal Recovery Fund (FRF) resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, I write to request that funding be provided to increase [*department’s*] capabilities to operate effectively in a remote environment. Specifically, [*department*] is requesting [*dollars*] to [*enable/improve department’s*] [*electronic permitting/plan review/process management/remote virtual inspection/zoning capability/online access to codes and standards*].

[*Include additional background and justification for the request. Short summaries of some benefits from different investments are included below*:

* *Electronic permitting software can increase departmental efficiencies through permit, plan review, and inspection management, and mobile inspection modules, which can eliminate the need for subsequent office data entry. This software can also provide public access to the permitting records and scheduling process which, like mobile inspection software, can minimize unnecessary office visits.*
* *Electronic plan review software allows for the remote submission of construction documents and for multiple reviewers to provide input on a proposed plan remotely. This software can both speed construction document review and minimize unnecessary office visits.*
* *Remote virtual inspection (RVI) is a method of inspection in which the inspector or inspection team performs the inspection remotely using a video link through the assistance of an onsite owner or contractor. Where appropriate, RVI can eliminate inspector travel time, enabling departments to conduct more inspections, particularly in congested or rural areas. RVI also minimizes unnecessary in-person contacts between inspectors and contractors and property owners.*
* *Where hardcopy books are shared among staff, remote work is not possible. Online access to construction codes and standards enables remote work and facilitates collaboration. It also enables faster access to important updates and new errata postings. Where a community needs to adopt local amendments to model building codes, custom local building code services help integrate local amendments with model I-Codes and publish custom local codes online*.
* *Software can connect zoning regulations and GIS mapping assets to help property owners, realtors and business developers better understand what they can do with their property and where they can open a business; confirm zoning details that are essential for streamlining plan approvals; and allow residents and businesses to stay up to date with updated zoning requirements.*]

These investments should be prioritized for American Rescue Plan funding because they help [*department*] to minimize in-person contacts while increasing [*department’s*] efficiency in conducting its important work, which is essential to [*jurisdiction’s*] pandemic response, disaster response, and the construction economy.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and [*state*] have determined construction and code enforcement as essential to the U.S. response to the coronavirus pandemic. Code officials—including building, fire, plumbing, mechanical, and electrical plan reviewers and inspectors and code enforcement officers—implement regulations that require disinfection of ventilation through mechanical systems in hospitals, adequate facilities to ensure handwashing, and safe and sanitary plumbing systems that mitigate the spread of contagions. They also ensure healthcare centers are constructed and renovated safely, a critical function given the call for temporary healthcare facilities to create additional medical surge capacity. Code officials protect the health and welfare of building occupants by identifying and ensuring remediation of dangerous or unsafe sanitary, air quality, structural, and electrical hazards, and substandard housing conditions (like the loss of heat or running water).

With [*hurricane, tornado, and wildfire*] season upon us, highly functioning code departments are vital. [According to FEMA](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-11/fema_building-codes-save_brochure.pdf), modern and well enforced building codes are the most effective means to prepare communities for natural hazards. Strong code enforcement can reduce losses by [15 to 25 percent](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/rmir.12086).

Fiscal Recovery Fund resources can be used to [*enable/improve department’s*] [*electronic permitting/plan review/process management/remote virtual inspection/zoning capability/online access to codes and standards*] through two distinct American Rescue Plan sections:

1. As part of a jurisdiction’s efforts to “respond to the public health emergency.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The U.S. Department of Treasury has interpreted this term to include “funding uses eligible under [the CARES Act’s Coronavirus Relief Fund] as a response to the direct public health impacts of COVID-19.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Per the Treasury Department, eligible uses of the CARES Act’s Coronavirus Relief Fund include “Expenses to improve telework capabilities for public employees to enable compliance with COVID-19 public health precautions” and “Any other COVID-19-related expenses reasonably necessary to the function of government.”[[3]](#footnote-3)
2. “[F]or the provision of government services to the extent of the reduction in revenue . . . due to the COVID–19 public health emergency.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

At a time when social distancing helps slow the pandemic’s advance, the lack of remote capabilities can lead to health risks stemming from avoidable interactions with property owners and the construction industry or instances where, due to coronavirus concerns, a property owner or tenant declines a necessary safety inspection.

Modernizing [*department’s*] systems, would address these concerns, allowing [*department*] to continue its necessary functions, while protecting both code officials and the public. By enabling remote work, these improvements would increase [*department’s*] disaster response capabilities and, through efficiencies produced by moving from paper-based to digitized systems, produce lasting reductions in departmental operation costs and permitting timelines.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request,

[*Signature*]

1. 42 U.S.C. §§ 802(c)(1)(A), 803(c)(1)(A). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, 86 Fed. Reg. 26,786 (May 17, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Coronavirus Relief Fund for States, Tribal Governments, and Certain Eligible Local Governments, 86 Fed. Reg. 4,182 (Jan. 15, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 42 U.S.C. §§ 802(c)(1)(C), 803(c)(1)(C). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)