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Pennsylvania county expands childcare

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Allegheny County, Pa. is expanding access to childcare as part of a broader initiative to better support families through the primary obstacles they're facing today, including in health, employment, education and housing. Through its "Forward with Families" initiative, Allegheny County is aiming to create an additional 5,000 childcare and after-school slots across the county over the next five years.

Forward with Families is "about something very simple, but also very important — making sure that working families across Allegheny County have what they need to succeed," Allegheny County Executive Sara Innamorato said at a recent press conference. "Because right now, families are doing everything right and they're still struggling.

"They're working hard, they're raising kids, they're giving back to their community, but they're facing real barriers, especially when it comes to finding affordable and reliable childcare."

Allegheny County is leveraging a mix of public, private and philanthropic funding to build out the childcare and after-school slots. That short-term investment will pay off

in dividends for the community, according to Chris Watts, CEO of Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania.

"We're not growing population as a county, so [Innamorato] has the foresight to see the more kids we have that can thrive, the better our county is going to be for the long-term," Watts said. "And it's hard to make that case when there are budget demands and short-term gaps, but these are things that are going to pay off — not just today for the safe places and the ability for parents to work, but in the long term for these kids that have the mentorship and the programs to help them figure out what they want to do in their lives."

The county's Department of Children Initiatives is leading the work, which will focus on the most pressing childcare needs, including infant and toddler care and care outside of typical 9-to-5 working hours, such as before, after-school and weekend programming, according to Becky Mercatoris, director of the Department of Children Initiatives.

In its 2025 budget, Allegheny County allocated \$2.5 million to the Department of Children Initiatives to increase childcare affordability, which created an addition-

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Children riding in a 4-H hay wagon participate in the annual Memorial Day Parade last week in Sullivan County, N.Y. to honor members of the military who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The 4-H program is partially funded by the county. Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images

BUILD America 250 Act looks good for county bridge funding prospects

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Counties stand to receive a healthy infusion of funding to address bridges under the surface transportation bill, BUILD America 250 Act (H.R. 8870) passed May 22 on a bipartisan basis by the House Transportation and In-

frastructure Committee. The five-year reauthorization includes a total of \$580 billion, \$30 billion more than 2021's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Estimates show that counties and other local governments will have access to 22 percent of funding in the bill, through formula set-asides, suballocation and discre-

tionary grant opportunities, adding up to a 270% increase in funding for county-owned bridges, which could not come too soon, because more than 40,000 county-owned bridges are structurally deficient.

The bill, sponsored by House Transportation and In-

See **BUILD** page 5

County leverages \$50k in seed money for \$1 million for industrial park project

by **Charlie Ban**
senior writer

Holmes County, Miss. was tired of just being for homes.

Without any major employers based in the county, many residents travel 40-50 minutes to go to work, in other counties. While they're there,

they're eating and shopping in those other counties, generating tax revenue in those other counties and then coming home, tired and full.

When Supervisor Debra Mabry and County Administrator Tiffany Williams saw the opportunity to apply for technical assistance and a \$50,000

planning grant through the NACo Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility program, they saw an opportunity to pave the way for local jobs. The program is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and chose 10 teams that in-

See **PARK** page 4

'Forward with Families' invests in childcare providers

From **CHILDCARE** page 1

al 500 childcare spots that filled up quickly. That smaller scale work helped inform the county's vision for how it could best support childcare providers through Forward with Families, Mercatoris noted.

"One of our big takeaways was that there are lots of providers who are very ready to expand," Mercatoris said. "They know what they need to have to be able to do that, they are very clear about where they would like to expand and where they're maintaining wait lists and they are really in tune with the families who are coming to them, who are looking for care."

Adding 5,000 childcare and after-school time slots will

'One of our big takeaways was [finding out] there are lots of providers who are very ready to expand.'

—Becky Mercatoris

be a "game changer" for the community, where many providers, including the Boys and Girls Clubs, are struggling, Watts said.

"And it's not because of the demand," Watts said. "The demand is there. It's that the needs are changing in our communities, and we can't respond fast enough with the resources to deliver, even though the intention's there, and the quality's there and we



Children make crafts at a Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania's Northern Area Clubhouse afterschool program. Photos courtesy of Hersh Merenstein

want to do the work.

"So, this enables us to focus on what we do best, which is bringing on awesome, trained, qualified staff to be able to fulfill the needs in the community."

Allegheny County has released request-for-proposals regarding childcare capacity expansion, out-of-school-time program capacity expansion and early care education for out-of-school-time workforce support, according to Watts.

Funding would enable the Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania to max out capacity at its current facilities and build stronger relationships with schools and families, Watts noted.

"Having county government that you can rely on and look to for leadership is such a momentum builder for organizations that are doing the work in communities," Watts said. "Because they have the platform, they have the data, they have the knowledge, they have the access."

"And us not just feeling seen, but them starting initia-



County Executive Sara Innamorato announces the Forward with Families initiative at the Northern Area Clubhouse of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Western Pennsylvania.

tives that we feel truly can impact the future of the county ... it makes me want to do my job better, and it makes this organization stronger."

Allegheny County also launched a re-tooled online program finder, where residents can find options for childcare, after-school programming and summer camp personalized to their needs. The tool will give officials better targeted insight into what areas — such as age and location — might have the largest gaps, according to Mercatoris.

"We need to take a step

forward; this is the first place that we're going to start," she said. "Our hope is that as the five years go on, we're able to be far more nuanced, and specifically, we're building slots, 'Now, we're down to a shortage of 200 in this community, 400 in this community.'

"We're really committed to making sure that we're taking the data and information that we have, focusing it and sharpening it and being able to make adjustments specifically around the county as the years go on." **EN**

SNAP/STATS

2026 Hurricane Season (June 30-Nov. 30)

Below normal:.....	55%
Near normal:.....	35%
Above normal:.....	10%
Named storms:.....	8-14 (average is 14)
Hurricanes:.....	3-6
Major hurricanes:	1-3 (Category 3, 4 or 5/winds 111 MPH or higher)

Source: NOAA predictions released May 21, 2026

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CEO INSIGHTS | BY MATTHEW D. CHASE

Telling the County Infrastructure Story

Every five years, Congress rewrites the rules for how the federal government invests in roads, bridges, transit and safety. The surface transportation reauthorization is now upon us. It will either solve a long-standing structural problem for counties or deepen it.

Our job together is to make sure every member of Congress and the White House understand the imperative of investing in county-based infrastructure.

Counties maintain 44 percent of all public road miles and nearly 40 percent of the nation's 620,000-plus bridges.

We connect farms to markets, factories to ports, families to jobs. We support the transit systems that residents depend on. And we bear significant responsibility for the safety of the roads and bridges

people drive every day.

Yet, county budgets are being eroded from three sides at once: unrelenting cost inflation, federal permitting delays that stall ready

projects and competition for labor and materials often directed to federally subsidized state projects.

In Mississippi, a county supervisor recently noted asphalt has jumped from \$87 to \$145 per ton. In New York, the budget that once paved 40 road miles each year now covers 10. A small bridge in Minnesota cost \$1.5 million in 2019. Today: \$2.7 million. Same structure. Almost double the price.

This is not just a county problem. It is a national



problem. County roads and bridges carry the freight, the commuters and the commerce that drive the American economy. When our infrastructure fails, the costs

ripple outward — to farmers, manufacturers, energy producers, tourists and every community connected by a county road.

NACo is making a straightforward ask of Congress: Invest in county infrastructure that keeps America moving and competitive. That means robust federal funding for locally owned roads and bridges, both through formula funding and discretionary grants. It means a greater county voice in statewide transportation plans and lo-

cal project selection. And it means streamlined project delivery so that when federal dollars arrive, inflation doesn't erode them before shovels hit the ground.

Every sector of the American economy — agriculture, energy, logistics, manufacturing, tourism — runs on infrastructure that counties own and maintain. This has a price tag for us all. The reauthorization is the moment for Congress to match this reality with real investment.

Now is our moment. County officials across the country are urged to engage their congressional delegations today. Share your local numbers. Showcase your local projects. Ask your business and community partners to discuss the consequences of inaction.

The story is ours to tell. Let's tell it together.

Share your county infrastructure story with NACo

Read more about NACo advocacy for transportation issues by scanning the QR code:



Find out more about your county's transportation profile on the NACo County Explorer website by scanning the QR code:



Share your infrastructure story with County News! Contact Editor Mary Ann Barton: mbarton@naco.org.

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From urban to rural, large to small, America's **3,069 COUNTIES**, parishes and boroughs keep our communities healthy, vibrant and safe.

Mississippi county's first strategic plan opens opportunities for industrial park

From PARK page 1

clude county elected officials and staff.

"We're not necessarily looking for 500 or 600 jobs all at once, but just 50 jobs will make a difference for Holmes County," Mabry said. "If we have these jobs, you'll see other business open to support them. You'll have a hotel, then a restaurant, then a service station."

Since its peak of 40,000 residents in 1940, the population of Holmes County has declined 57% to 17,000 in 2020, due in large part to disinvestment. Its poverty rate of 40.2% is more than double the 10% statewide average, and only 44% of the working-age population participates in the labor force.

"Our county has a sort of apathy," Mabry said. "The citizens feel that we're not going to get anything here. They've seen jobs move out of town and feel like we're bleeding."

The county's greatest opportunity lies in its 330-acre industrial park, close to an interstate, a state highway, an airport and rail lines.

"The county has been in possession of the property well over 20 years with little to no development," Williams said. "Whenever there's development nearby, it's happening somewhere else."

The county contributed some money on top of the program grant to develop a master plan for the site, assessing its infrastructure needs and other measures necessary to make it "shovel ready," and that plan has already persuaded state legislators to allocate



Holmes County, Miss. Supervisor Debra Mabry and County Administrator Tiffany Williams present their industrial park development plan May 27 at the Rural Leaders for Economic Mobility Capstone in Washington, D.C. Photo by Charlie Ban

\$1 million to the project.

"This is the first time we've ever had a master plan for the site," Williams said. "It's something that shows the thought and the work that we've put into it and that we are willing to direct to it."

The park is going to need about \$15 million more — the water treatment plant needs maintenance that has been deferred for years, the water storage tank needs extensive rehabilitation and the city's wastewater treatment plant will be insufficient to support much growth.

"Our goal is to have this site looking good, get everything certified and prepared to the point where it's a place the governor would want to recommend to industry looking to locate in Mississippi," Williams said.

The site is best suited for advanced manufacturing and logistics, and the county's work-

force has timber experience, making the area well-suited for wood product manufacturing. Nissan automotive has a strong presence regionally, too.

'...just 50 jobs will make a difference in Holmes County.'

*— Debra Mabry
supervisor
Holmes County, Miss.*

Mabry and Williams have been vocal about the RLEM program and the learning opportunities it entails, bringing home stories from other participating counties and recipes for growth.

"I got excited because I could see how communities brought themselves out of poverty," Mabry said "And even though I knew we might not be able to produce the

same results, we could learn from them and bring some of the ideas home.

"When we came back and had a meeting with the mayors, the local citizens, the business owners and all those people we brought together, when they got excited, that just made me more excited for the possibilities of what we could do."

Williams sees the potential for young people, like her 13-year-old, to stay in Holmes County in adulthood.

"I often see my generation leave home because they don't see, they don't see hope, they don't see things for their children to do," she said. "Our kids deserve great education, great places to play, to feel safe in their environment. And what excites me the most is that we actually have something that can actually change the future for our children," so they aren't leaving for Texas or

Atlanta.


The engineering plan maps out a seven-year timeline to prepare the site, and a range of targets for fundraising, including the Appalachian Regional Commission and Delta Regional Authority, the state Legislature, congressional earmarks and USDA Rural Development programs. The biggest challenge, the report says, will be coming up with a local match for some of these funding opportunities.

Mabry knows that Holmes County residents form a workforce that's ready to make the most of the opportunity to build industry at home.

"They already drive almost an hour each way to go to work, so you know they're dedicated," she said. "If we could make Holmes County a place to live and work, we're going to change some things."

From other RLEM counties, the pair learned to use what their county has and capitalize on it. Participants went on three site visits over the course of 22 months in the program.

"We have so much history here, but nobody will want to come and see it if they're just going to be looking at markers," Mabry said. "We need things for them to do, restaurants and stores. Those are things that grow once you have people in town during the workday, and that makes the industrial park our key to all of this — growing out of poverty and becoming the county where people want to live and work."

"This industrial park is our Field of Dreams. If we build it, they will come." 



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Current federal funding won't be enough when county bridges age

From BUILD page 1

Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves (R-Mo.) and Ranking Member Rick Larsen (D-Wash.), would also protect the Safe Streets for All and PROTECT grant programs, both of which are prized by counties.

Counties maintain 38% of bridges, totaling 229,334. The \$9 billion in annual bridge funding is up from \$5.4 billion annually in the last surface transportation reauthorization, and 25% of that is reserved for locally owned bridges. The bill would also establish a 95% cost-share for locally owned bridge projects, helping rural counties afford the required funding to complete those projects. It all adds up to a 272% increase in federal bridge funding open to counties.

Mike Pniewski feels pretty good about the current state of the nearly 300 bridges in Lucas County, Ohio, where he is the elected county engineer. But look a few years down the road and that changes.

"They're in relatively good shape, but they're aging quickly," he said. "The majority of my inventory is between 60 to 80 years old, so in the next 5 to 10 years, their condition is going to start to fade."

"Probably 20% to 30% of my bridges will be in fair to poor condition by then."

Increased demands on the roads, coupled with Ohio's winters, accelerate infrastructure deterioration. As trucks get heavier, even once-durable structures are liable to crack, and water that gets inside brings the freeze-thaw cycle into the structure of the bridge, which speeds the deterioration.

"Over the last 20 to 30 years, you've seen a lot more freight, heavier freight," he said. "Cars aren't the ones causing a lot of damage to bridges. It's the heavy loads on trucks that are the majority of your loads that cause the most damage and cause the most deterioration."

Most bridges built in the World War II era have a 75-year lifespan, Pniewski said.

"For every year after the end of your useful life, you're just



Lucas County, Ohio Engineer Mike Pniewski speaks to Rep. Kristen McDonald Rivet (D-Mich.) May 19 during the Business Roundtable's Infrastructure Week Signature Event in Washington, D.C. Photo by Charlie Ban



NACo President J.D. Clark (second from left) stresses the need for local control in land use decisions while participating in a panel May 19 on data centers at the Business Roundtable. Photo by Charlie Ban

trying to do your best to keep it going before you have to do a full replacement. You can replace the deck, which gives you another 25 years, and that's a lot cheaper than doing a full replacement, but you're only kicking the can down the road to when it'll be more expensive to replace everything.

"I only get federal funding to do a full replacement every four years."

Lucas County is doing two deck replacements in 2026, with a full bridge replacement scheduled for 2027. Most bridges in the county are single span, which simplifies repairs and replacements.

"If you have a multi-span bridge, the price goes up significantly."

In the meantime, that means rating the bridges that can't handle full loads.

"You try to look at your bridges and look at it as a system and determine what your priorities are and do the cheapest repairs you can to try to extend their useful life as much as you can. But there comes a time when you just can't do that anymore. And you have to eventually replace the bridge."

With a 27% increase in federal bridge funding?

"That doubles or even tri-

ples the amount of bridges that I can do per year," Pniewski said.

Bridging the gap for surface transportation

NACo has published a report examining the state of county-owned road and bridge infrastructure, the limitations counties face in raising revenue to address repair and replacement needs and the inequities inherent in federal funding formulas.

The report traces the inequities in how federal funding is distributed to local governments and the increasing

demands on county-owned infrastructure. Although counties own 28% of federal-aid highway miles, states direct only about 14% of transportation funding to local governments overall, including counties, cities and towns. In 40 states, counties are limited in their ability to raise their own revenue. Congress can help through three specific actions:

- Increase the share of formula funds available for local use to 25% from 15%
- Simplify and accelerate access to federal grants and remove administrative burdens
- Strengthen planning and project selection to ensure that counties can access intended funding.

The report also illustrates how insufficient support for local infrastructure will cause economic hardship that will radiate from local residents to the regional and national economies. [CN](#)

Scan the QR code to read *Bridging the Gap for Surface Transportation: Why Counties Need a Stronger Federal Investment Partnership*:



SALUTE TO COUNTY LEADERS:

Debbie Bell

When Debbie Bell was 16 years old, she encouraged her father, who she thought as unfailingly pragmatic and wise, to run for the Fremont County, Colo. Commission. He responded that if anyone in the family was running for county office, it would be her, to which she replied she couldn't because she was a girl.

He told her "Don't you ever let anyone else tell you what you can or cannot do," and in 2011, she took office as Fremont County's first female commissioner after years of reporting on the county for the *Cañon City Daily Record*. In the almost 16 years since, she has been an active Rural Action Caucus and Western Interstate Region member and will end her term this year.

When did you know county government was your calling?

Day one. I had been reporting in Fremont County for years, but when I was running, I watched every meeting and every budget session to prepare. But it had been a goal of mine for decades. In every job that I've held or any community activity or philanthropic

work, I've always thought of what I can take from this to be a better county commissioner.

What is your proudest achievement in Fremont County?

Establishing Pathfinder Park, named after John C. Fremont. We built an entire events center and in that time the other events center closed



Fremont County, Colo. Commissioner Debbie Bell asks a question during the 2026 WIR Conference. Photo by Charlie Ban

down, so we've been able to hold 800 events a year there, including in our rodeo arena.

What did you learn from NACo that you brought home to Fremont County?

I learned to partner with others in the same boat that we are in so we can go to the federal government as a unified voice. When I started, I thought we'd be able to work through our state officials, but there is such a value in joining forces with other communities across the country.

How did you change as a county leader over your tenure?

I learned that you don't have to do everything on your own. If you hire the right people and lay out your expectations and let them do what they do best, they'll do better than you could have on your own.

Why are you optimistic about the future of county government?

The candidate running for my seat is decades younger, and even though he'll have a

steeper learning curve than I did considering how long I wanted to do this work, it's so exciting to see young people taking on leadership in the county. We have so many great people working for the county, I know they'll help him adjust quickly and turn that new energy into results.

What advice do you have for your successors?

Get involved in your state association and NACo on day one. When I started, one commissioner was very involved in Colorado Counties, Inc. and I didn't even really learn about it for a few years, but once I did, things took off. You need to go to conferences, you need to network, you need to talk to people. The people you meet through these organizations will do everything in their power to help you.

SPONSORED CONTENT

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACADEMY

Measure What Matters – Only What Matters

by Tim Rahschulte, Ph.D.

Metrics are part of the performance management system and if not used properly, they can do as much harm as good.

If you're going to focus on action to accomplish something, anything, you're going to want to measure it.

How else will you know if you're making progress, getting better, achieving what's possible and staying on track to reach your aiming points and realize your envisioned future state?

You've got to be careful, though, as you go about making sense of your work by using metrics and measures. Russ Martinelli, Jim Waddell and I wrote the book *Program Management for Improved Business Results*.

In it, we note, "Metrics are powerful; or perhaps more precise, for better or worse, metrics are powerful. Metrics are

part of a larger organizational construct —the performance management system — and if not used properly, they can do as much harm as good. Hence, the 'for better or worse' caveat."

You see, measuring in and of itself isn't hard. To measure, you've got to have data and in today's data age, that's not a problem.

There's more data available to us today than ever before, and its availability is growing. So, accessing data isn't the problem. Interpreting data, on the other hand, can get really tricky, real fast.

The goal with data and the use of metrics is to make sense of what's happening and forecast what's next.

Or as mentioned by some leaders over the years, you've got to "collect the dots and then connect the dots."

You need to understand all of what's going on, make



sense of what's going on and figure out how it all affects your business goals and vision. You want to be able to use data to gain clarity and insights regarding what's currently happening based on actions taking place and what may happen because of the actions and resultant outputs and outcomes.

In his article "The ABCs of Analytics," David Meer, a partner at Booz Allen, wrote, "Any analysis of data that stops after asking 'what,' which is already a big undertaking, isn't analytics. You have to ask 'why?' and 'what next?'"

Connecting the dots for intelligence helps to understand what's next for decision making and the actions that follow.

When it comes to true in-

sights and intelligence, most organizations struggle. They either try to measure too much, measure the wrong things, measure without specific cadence, or measure to create bureaucracy — the list goes on, and none of it creates clarity, let alone intelligence. Instead, it actually creates confusion, frustration, and disengagement from action.

Just because data are easy to collect doesn't mean they're useful. Remember this rule from earlier in this article series: Don't confuse effort with progress or output with outcomes. You've got to measure what matters most.

Performance management isn't about finding the "perfect" metrics to measure and manage. Perfect metrics don't exist.

Find the measures and metrics that explain your business — those you can use to tell a story and make decisions that lead

you to your next aiming point and critical outcome. The best metrics are simple, with data that are easily accessible, understandable, and consistently useable.

It's common knowledge that what gets measured gets managed and what gets managed is most likely to improve over time.

Anything we do and anything we think is worth doing is also worth measuring. Partha Srinivasa, the chief information officer at HCC Insurance Holdings Inc., reminds us of this fact: "If you don't measure it, it doesn't exist." But you've got to collect the right data to measure the right things for any improvement to be realized.

Instead of getting access to more data, the most relevant question for most of us is 'What should we measure?' You and

See LEADERSHIP page 7

ON THE MOVE

NACo MEMBERS

- South Region Representative **Ron Berry** attended the Tennessee County Services Association Legislative Conference in Sevier County.
- Mercer County, W.Va. Commissioner **Greg Puckett** was named to the Emerging Drug Trends Task Force with the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Puckett, who served on the NACo/NLC Joint Opioid Task Force and as Rural Action Caucus chair, is the only county official on the task force.



Berry



Puckett

NACo STAFF

- **Gael Abboud** has joined NACo as an AI fellow. She is an adjunct faculty member at George Mason University, where she earned a master's degree in systems engineering and a bachelor's degree in cybersecurity engineering.
- Program Associate **Alex Waskiewicz** earned his Master of Public Health degree from The George Washington University.



Abboud



Waskiewicz

- PPI Managing Director **Alex Herrera** and PPI National Program Director **Christopher Blanchette** attended the California State Association of Counties Legislative Conference in Sacramento County.
- Research Director **Jonathan Harris** presented

NACo's property tax research at the Michigan Association of County Administrative Officers Annual Conference in Benzie County.

GET TO KNOW...

West Carroll Parish, La.

by Meredith Moran
staff writer

West Carroll Parish, La., established in 1877, is named for Charles Carroll, the last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence. It was formed from the separation of the original Carroll Parish into two parishes, East and West, with Bayou Macon serving as the dividing line.

The county seat of Oak Grove hosts the North Louisiana Sweet Potato Festival each year, which offers carnival rides, live music and sweet potato cooking contests. In the town, which has fewer than 1,500 residents, court is still called to order with a bell that was once used to guide lost travelers out of the swamp.

The Fiske Theatre, located in downtown Oak Grove, is the oldest operating movie theater in Northeast Louisiana. Tony Joe White, who pioneered the "swamp rock" music genre, which

blends rock and roll and country with Southern soul music and New Orleans R&B, is a West Carroll Parish native.

Oak Grove is a gateway to the Bayou Bartholomew Paddling Trail, the longest bayou in North America and offers access to the High Delta Safari Park.

The parish is also home to Poverty Point State Historic Site, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site with Native American earthworks built before the Mayan pyramids.

The ancient ceremonial and trading center features massive, hand-built mounds (including one of the largest in North America) and six concentric ridges, which are estimated to have taken five million hours of labor to build in



the pre-agricultural society. At its peak 3,000 years ago, Poverty Point was part of a trading network that stretched hundreds of miles across North America.

Poverty Point was abandoned around 1100 BCE, and aside from a Native American group that lived in a small portion of the site for a brief period around 700 CE, the land was only intermittently used by humans until Europeans settled in the area in the 1800s.

Get to Know feature new NACo member parishes, counties and boroughs.

From LEADERSHIP page 6

everyone on your team should know the answer to that question. To know what to measure, you have to know what's important. Don't confuse important things with just those things that you value. Things you value may be important, but they may not be.

Register now for NACo Leadership Academy programs launching this July at [naco.org/skills](#).

The things to measure are those relative to critical outcomes and those that prove assurance that you're aligned with your aiming points and vision.

To understand these metrics and measures means that you may need to ask others who are across the enterprise what's most important for them relative to working toward your joint purpose and vision.

Many leaders say, "I measure what you treasure." This is

an often-used phrase and one Tom Schuman wrote about in his article "Measure What You Treasure." It's good advice. It encourages us to look beyond what we value to the interests of those we're reporting to and serving through our actions.

Learn what matters most to them. Learn the business through the perspective of others. Measure what they treasure. Measure what matters most.

This article is an excerpt from My Best Advice: Proven Rules for Effective Leadership co-authored by Tim Rahschulte, Ryan Halley and Russ Martinelli.

Register now for NACo Leadership Academy programs launching this July! Scan the QR code to get all the details:



The Fiske Theatre in West Carroll Parish, La., is the oldest operating theater in northeast Louisiana.

BRIGHT IDEAS | COOK COUNTY, ILL.

County Invests in Suburban Art Groups for Long-Term Community Impact

PROBLEM: Some areas outside of the urban area were neglected when it came to the arts.

SOLUTION: With a goal of making a long-term impact, Cook County made grants available to suburban arts organizations.

by **Meredith Moran**
staff writer

Chicago is renowned for its arts and culture: It is home to one of the oldest and largest museums in the nation, has a lively theater scene and is widely considered to be the birthplace of improvisational comedy. Now, Cook County, Ill. is working to cultivate an arts community outside city lines.

During the coronavirus pandemic, when the federal government provided localities with relief funding, Cook County set aside \$5 million in American Rescue Plan Act dollars to establish Cook County Arts in the hopes of mitigating the pandemic's blow to the arts and culture sector, and building avenues to strengthen the arts in the county's suburban areas long-term, according to Christine Nappo, director of sector strategies for Cook County Bureau of Economic Development.

"The arts sector was the first to close and the last to open [during COVID-19]," Nappo said. "We had not invested in the arts, and given that dire need, we wanted to find a series of investments that would help holistically support this sector."

Cook County Arts' first initiative was to distribute \$790,000 among 100 suburban art nonprofits, with micro-grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per organization. Art funding in the area has been historically concentrated in the city of Chicago, so the county set funding aside spe-



Vivian Piña, one of Brookfield Shops' featured artists, poses with her family in front of the panel she created of Kiwanis Park. The funding was made possible through the county's Creative Placemaking grant.

cifically for the surrounding suburbs, according to Irene Sherr, deputy bureau chief of the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development.

"One of the things we've observed across the county is that, in many cases, the ecosystems in the suburbs are just not as sophisticated, they're not as developed," Sherr said. "There are the same number of people that live in suburban Cook [County] that live in the city of Chicago ... and the county has not previously invested in support of the arts in any way at all."

Cook County Arts' next phase of funding is being distributed through its Creative Placemaking program. While the nonprofit relief grants were created out of urgency, this new funding stream is intended to have "long-term, permanent impact" and be a pathway to community development, according to Sherr.

"This is at the intersection of community revitalization and art," Nappo said. "It's an improvement in quality of life, bringing people together. It's a very unique concept and very much in demand."

In July 2025, the county economic development bu-

reau awarded Creative Placemaking grants ranging from \$50,000 to \$250,000 to 14 of the more than 100 organizations that applied. Thirteen projects are moving forward, according to Nappo.

'This is at the intersection of community revitalization and art.'

– Christine Nappo,
Cook County

"In the beginning, we were like, 'Do you think we'll get any applications?'" Sherr said. "So, we were really surprised, and it proves the point of the absolute need in suburban Cook [County] for this type of support and these types of opportunities for the creative sector."

The Creative Placemaking grantees function as a cohort, which meets monthly to exchange ideas, discuss best practices and address challenges. National and regional subject matter experts are also brought in to provide technical assistance in fine-tuning

project plans and budgets, according to Nappo.

"The cohort is helpful, because we have such disparate expertise in the awardees," Nappo said. "So, bringing everyone together and learning from each other and from the experts, who will be providing leadership and guidance, is integral to the success of the program."

One of the grant recipients, the Homewood Science Center, is supporting its installations, which include a pollinator garden and bird exhibit, through the funding. High school students on a STEAM (Science Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Team are also helping design a new mural.

"I feel like this project is an opportunity to collaborate with artists, with youth, with educators," Edie Dobrez, executive director Homewood Science Center Executive, told Cook County. "And really get the community more involved in deciding what is done here, instead of it just being executive director-driven or board-driven."

"It's more inclusive. Community ownership is one of the more powerful outcomes


of creative placemaking."

Brookfield Shops, another Cook County Arts Creative Placemaking grant recipient, is using the funding to hire local artists to create display panels, improve landscaping and build an outdoor stage for performances.

"By activating the Brookfield Shops space through art, we're not only adding beauty," Brookfield Manager Village Manager Tim Wiberg told Cook County. "We're creating connection, an opportunity for artists to shine and for residents to experience something vibrant and meaningful."

Illustrator Vivian Piña, one of the featured artists, painted a community park onto her panel. "I painted Kiwanis Park because it was my favorite place growing up," Piña told Cook County. "I want my daughters to have a public space where children are seen, respected and able to play and learn together."

A team member working on one of the Creative Placemaking projects noted how, in the wake of the pandemic, there's been a large uptick in participation for their arts and culture events, which speaks to a broader collective desire to share ideas and experiences together, Nappo said.

Art "brings people together," Sherr said. "It can be a unifier in a way that nothing else is, I think, and sometimes it can cross boundaries that normally separate people. We're done with Covid, and there was isolation then, but the current climate we're in with the country and the world, people are feeling isolated, and need a sense of community as well, so I think it's still really relevant." 

Cook County's creation of Cook County Arts was a 2025 NACo Achievement Award winner in the "Arts, Culture and Historic Preservation" category.

WORD SEARCH

MAUI COUNTY, HAWAI'I

Created by Mary Ann Barton

C X E J F W P I Q L C X M B I Q X A M S
 F J Y S V W H I H B H Y A S K C R Q E E
 E N I S I U C A S C H U C G I G M G P O
 W X N T J F N W L K V I J V P R Y I Y N
 G N I F R U S A Y E B I I S A D U A B A
 U H U M J R I H L O S U S L R B P O Q C
 B M L T A U Y L A H A I N A K U M W T L
 F Y R T C R L F T M Q L M Q K K W U K O
 A L I J O A S R Y P A D E U N C I H U V
 J V J T Z O Y Y O C J U L L K B U A G A
 N R S E G O B P W C M I I N S J K V L W
 V I E U G R U D S L A Q G Q M R Y O Z U
 H J B A A L L C K W R B C E K W H O E M
 U I X W A T E R F A L L Z Q T A Y A C I
 N D T T N K D Q A S V O Y T N R A X Y W
 Z S I C C P O G T Q L E J N F O L N P V
 Q O L S L J J N Z G P H G M J W B O A S
 N H U W B A L F I Y U F Z B W L R I E H
 T A D W S K M B T T A U Z G B T O U D R
 S K R Q K O L Q I I E N H X W Q I O G O

ALOHA: Typically used to say “hello” and “goodbye” it’s a Hawaiian word meaning love, compassion and peace.

CUISINE: If you visit Maui be sure to try Poke (raw ahi tuna); Kalua Pig (roasted pork) and Poi (mashed taro root).

HANA: The Road to Hana is a legendary 64.4-mile scenic drive along Maui’s coastline featuring more than 600 hairpin turns.

HAWAII: The word Hawaii, also spelled Hawai’i, traces its roots to Proto-Polynesian, likely originating from the word Sawaiki, which translates to “homeland” or “place of the gods.”

HISTORY: The county was formed July 1, 1905 after the territorial legislature passed laws to establish counties.

LAHAINA: The historically significant town evolved from a royal Hawaiian capital into a vibrant hub. Site of the deadly 2023 wildfires, it is rebuilding with a significant county-led effort.

MAUI: The Maui County name comes from the primary island that encompasses it; the name comes

from Polynesian mythology, referring to a revered demigod and culture hero who appears in various legends throughout the Pacific Islands.

PARK: Haleakalā National Park makes up about 75% of Maui and features a dormant volcano.

POPULATION: The population of the county is about 159,000.

SURFING: Maui is a surfing mecca and often sees massive swells from 60 to 80 feet in the winter on its north shores.

TOURISM: The main economic driver in the county accounts for 40% of the GDP.

VOLCANOES: The island is made up of two distinct volcanic mountains, one extinct and one active.

WAILUKU: The county seat is located at the base of the West Maui Mountains.

WATERFALL: The tallest waterfall on the island is 1,100 feet Honokohau Falls and can only be seen by helicopter.

WHALES: The waters off Maui are home to large populations of humpback whales in the winter.

PROFILES IN SERVICE

LAURIE-ANNE SAYLES

NACo Board Member
 Montgomery County, Md.
 At-Large Councilmember

Number of years active in NACo: Four

Years in public service: 10-plus years

My first NACo event: 2023 Legislative Conference

NACo committees: Health Policy Steering Committee, LUCC

Occupation: County Councilmember At-Large

Education: MPA

The hardest thing I’ve ever done: Leave my government contractor role to run for countywide office four years ago to represent over 1 million residents

Three people (living or dead) I’d invite to dinner: Jesus, President Barack Obama and my Grandma

A dream I have is to: End wars for world peace.

You’d be surprised to learn that I: Am a history-making public health professional who worked at the Nature Conservancy and became the first Black person elected to the Gaithersburg City Council



SAYLES

before going on to leave the FDA to make countywide history in Montgomery County.

My favorite way to relax is: Spa day with a sauna, cold plunge and deep tissue massage — plus prayer and positive affirmations to survive whatever comes next.

I’m most proud of: Breaking barriers, building pathways and creating a pipeline for the next generation of leaders.

Every morning, I read: Faith first, headlines second. I begin each day with Our Daily Bread and the full armor of God, my daily defense against the news cycle and an overflowing inbox.

My favorite meal is: As a pescatarian, my favorite meal is Jamaica’s beloved national

dish, ackee and saltfish, a comforting and flavorful reminder of my heritage, often enjoyed with fried dumplings, boiled green bananas, callaloo, yams, roasted breadfruit, bammy and fried plantain.

My pet peeve is: Bad hygiene.

My motto is: God makes no mistakes; everything happens for a reason. It’s either a lesson or a blessing.

The last book I read was: “The Let Them Theory” by Mel Robbins

My favorite movie is: “The Godfather I” and “The Godfather Part II” are my go-to movies, and I’m also a “Game of Thrones” fan, so I tend to like stories about strategy, power and way too much drama.

My favorite music is: Bob Marley to Beyoncé, gospel to dancehall (depends on the mood).

My favorite U.S. president is: President Barack Obama

My county is a NACo member because: Leveraging national collaboration to address local problems more effectively to ensure the county is not navigating federal policy and fiscal challenges alone.

The most adventurous thing I’ve ever done is: Escaped to Costa Rica, where I rode horseback up a mountain, tubed down rapids (holding onto the tube after falling out against the rules), zip-lined through the rainforest, covered myself in volcanic mud and relaxed in hot springs. It felt like an action movie with stunning scenery.



BEHIND THE SEAL

BRYAN COUNTY, GA.

The Bryan County, Ga. seal features the county’s Neo-Classical Revival courthouse in the county seat of Pembroke. The courthouse, designed by Walter E. Marshall and built in 1938-1940, houses the County Superior Court, County State Court, County Juvenile Court, County Probate Court and County Magistrate Court of the 1st Judicial District.





NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

ARKANSAS

The **BAXTER COUNTY** Library is inviting readers of all ages to “**Unearth a Story**” this summer with reading challenges, hands-on activities and special events running through July, the Mountain Home Observer reported.

The library kicked off the summer reading program May 16, with a giant bounce house obstacle course, a dig pit, themed crafts and an activity table from the Mid-America Science Museum. The youth summer reading program runs through July 18 and is open to ages from babies through 12th grade.

CALIFORNIA

• **Participatory Budgeting** is back in **MARIN COUNTY**, giving community members the power to decide how to spend \$2.5 million on equi-

ty-centered projects. Led by the county’s Office of Equity, the process invites residents to share ideas, help develop proposals and vote on which projects receive funding. The

initiative is designed to ensure historically marginalized communities have a strong voice in how public dollars are invested locally.

“Equity is at the heart of participatory budgeting,” said County Equity Director Jamillah Jordan, emphasizing that community members are best positioned to identify local priorities and guide spending decisions in their neighborhoods. From May through August 2026, residents are encouraged to share ideas on how \$2.5 million could improve their communities and advance racial equity across Marin County.



CALIFORNIA

• Students in **ORANGE COUNTY** will soon have access to “**Project Zero Waste**,” kindergarten-through-12th-grade free curriculum focused on recycling, composting and environmental sustainability through a program launched by OC Waste & Recycling and the Orange County Department of Education, KNBC-TV reported.

Officials said the digital curriculum is designed to align with California science and social science standards and will be offered in English, Spanish and Vietnamese to schools and homeschool families countywide.

The program includes age-appropriate lessons ranging from basic waste sorting and composting concepts for younger students to climate science, methane emissions and food recovery systems for older students.

FLORIDA

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY recently unveiled a non-binding memorandum of understanding with the Rays baseball team and the city of Tampa for a **proposed \$2.3 billion stadium** project, Axios reported. The team hopes to open a new ballpark by the 2029 season.

Under the proposal, the county would provide \$796 million, including \$360 million from its half-cent sales

tax, while Tampa and the Drew Park Community Redevelopment Agency would contribute \$180 million. The county would own the stadium, making it exempt from property taxes, though the surrounding mixed-use development would remain taxable.

MICHIGAN

LENAWEE COUNTY is launching the **Lenawee**

County Home Improvement Partnership Program, a new initiative designed to help eligible low-to moderate-income residents make critical home repairs and improvements that support safe, stable housing and strengthen neighborhoods across the county.

The county was awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Homeowner Rehabilitation Grant through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority’s MI Neighborhood Program. The total project budget is \$1.5 million, with funding expected to support up to 75 homeowner improvement projects, which may include: Roof replacements and repairs; HVAC and heating system improvements; window and door replacements; siding repairs, accessibility improvements and other health and safety-related home repairs

NEW JERSEY

CAPE MAY COUNTY is launching a season-long tour-

See NEWS page 11



NEW YORK

A new program partly funded with county dollars is preparing residents of **OSWEGO and CAYUGA counties** for **careers in the construction trades**, a field sure to grow when Micron Technology begins building a mammoth semiconductor plant in the area. Daniel Petty, program manager of Oswego Build and senior employment specialist with Oswego County Workforce New York, said the goal of the new program is to improve local residents’ chances of getting into union apprenticeship programs.



OREGON

CLACKAMAS COUNTY is investing in its **tourism economy** by launching a new, one-time Tourism Business Grant Program, providing \$1 million in grant funding to support tourism-related businesses across the county.

Administered by Clackamas County’s Office of Economic Development and funded through Transient Lodging Tax dollars allocated by the county’s Office of Tourism, the program was created to address a long-standing challenge for the tourism industry: Securing long-term investments in business growth. For tourism businesses, whether a tour operator, lodging provider, attraction or hospitality-related service, traditional grant opportunities are few and far between. This program was designed to help fill that gap.

From NEWS page 10

ism campaign to celebrate **America’s 250th anniversary** under the banner “Celebrate America’s 250th in Cape May County. All Season Long. Every Shore Town. One Celebration.” The campaign highlights the Jersey Cape’s historic connection to George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware and aims to attract visitors throughout the summer season.

The initiative targets families, couples and multigenerational travelers from key East Coast markets including Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Northern Virginia and Connecticut. With major regional events like the FIFA World Cup, MLB All-Star Game and America 250 celebrations expected to drive tourism, the county hopes to capture a share of the more than 30 million potential visitors within an easy drive.

TEXAS

• **BRAZOS COUNTY** is launching a new specialty court designed to help individuals in the criminal justice system whose underlying **mental health conditions** may be contributing to repeated legal trouble, KBTX-TV reported.

The Brazos County District Attorney’s Office announced the official launch of the RESTART Court this month.

RESTART stands for Rehabilitation Skills for Transformation, Adaptation, and Resiliency.

According to the District Attorney’s Office, the specialty court is intended to serve individuals with serious mental illness, intellectual disabilities, and those on the autism spectrum who are involved in the criminal justice system.

• **VICTORIA COUNTY** is accepting applications for the second year of its Victoria County 360 program, a comprehensive **citizen engagement** initiative designed to give residents an inside look at local government operations, KAVU-TV reported.

The free six-week program invites approximately 25 participants to attend weekly ses-



TEXAS

• Not sure where to get your vaccines? What about colon cancer screenings? Health Confianza has launched a new one-stop shop **health literacy program** aimed at providing everything **BEXAR COUNTY** residents need to know about preventive health, according to *San Antonio Report*. The new county-funded initiative is the organization’s latest effort to boost health literacy in a culturally relevant and accessible format.

“It is overwhelming how much information is out there,” said Jason Rosenfeld, co-director of the organization. “What we’ve tried to do is give a one-stop shop: here is the information that is most important around preventive health [including] vaccines, health screenings, when to visit your doctor, lifestyle issues and even maintaining your mental wellness.”

sions from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. every Monday, beginning in September. This year’s program has been expanded from two-hour to three-hour sessions based on feedback from last year’s participants. Applications for the program opened in May and will be accepted through the end of July. The Victoria County 360 reviews all applications in August, with selected participants notified in early September.

UTAH

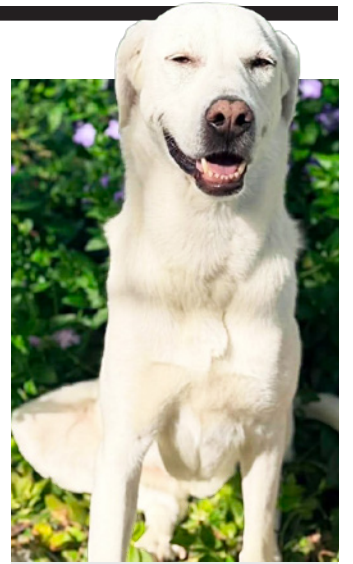
• The **SALT LAKE COUNTY** Council has adopted an ordinance allowing unincorporated parts of the county to join the **Community Clean Energy Program**, a partnership with Rocky Mountain Power and 18 other Utah communities to expand access to net-100% clean energy. The program gives the power company’s customers in unincorporated areas of the county a way to support clean energy without installing rooftop solar or switching providers.

“Through the Community Clean Energy Program, we are investing in new energy resources that will deliver hundreds of megawatts to the grid ultimately helping close Utah’s energy gap and advancing clean energy power for Utah,” said Salt Lake County Councilmember Suzanne Harrison, the sponsor of the ordinance. The county has been working toward this since 2019, when it joined a statewide effort to expand clean energy access.

VIRGINIA

FAIRFAX COUNTY is exploring the possibility of building a new Centreville Regional Library, combined in one building with **affordable housing**, FFXNow reported.

“The project could be built through a partnership with a private developer and it may include new homes and an updated library in one building, featured amenities for residents and the greater Centreville community, Allyson Pearce, marketing and outreach manager for the county’s Department of Housing



Mama Otter and several of her puppies were rescued and placed in permanent homes.

UTAH

• A **DAVIS COUNTY** judge sentenced a man to 120 days in jail, five years of probation and ordered him to pay \$5,329 in restitution after he pleaded guilty to four felony counts of **torture of a companion animal**. The sentencing stems from an incident involving the death of two puppies. The puppies were killed, while two surviving puppies and their mother were rescued. The surviving animals received medical treatment and have since been placed in permanent homes.

Animal Care of Davis County and local officials emphasized that the sentence reflects the seriousness of animal cruelty and the community’s commitment to protecting vulnerable animals. Director Michelle Hickey described the abuse as an intentional and violent act that endangered both the puppies and the public. Officials also thanked first responders, veterinarians, rescue staff, volunteers and the Davis County Attorney’s Office for helping secure justice and care for the surviving animals.

and Community Development told the news organization.

Send your news to Editor Mary Ann Barton: mbaron@naco.org

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