



# THE STATE OF COUNTY EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT SITUATION ANALYSIS | JUNE 2021

# COUNTIES ARE DEEPLY ENGAGED IN THE LABOR MARKET

County governments are critical to the nation's workforce, employing more than **1 in every 50 American workers**. As with many economic downturns, the pandemic's toll on the county workforce has not been muted. In April and May 2020, the local government workforce experienced significant disruptions, underscored by a more than **1.3 million job loss**.

With the responsibility of over two-thirds of local health departments, numerous social safety net services and ensuring local economic health, county resources have been strained. Despite the consistent shortage of over 900,000 local government jobs throughout the pandemic, counties have been focused on addressing residents' needs and laying the groundwork for economic revival.

As the pandemic wanes and priorities shift, county leaders are optimistic in counties' capacity to support – and drive – efforts to rehabilitate the national economy.

“**we know there are people out there that we need to get into the workforce,** and we want to be able to raise them up [through] training and education and bring them into the workforce.”

Allegheny County, Pa.

## COUNTIES EMPLOY 3.6 MILLION INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING:

**328,000** hospital workers



**374,000** law enforcement officers



**93,000** fire protection workers



**259,000** human services workers

**200,000** public health workers



# SUMMARY OF THE COUNTY EMPLOYMENT SITUATION



*County governments are collectively one of the largest employers in the nation, employing 3.6 million workers*



*Nationally, the unemployment rate is 5.9 percent - 2.4 percentage points above pre-pandemic levels*



*The impact of the pandemic on the local government workforce remains acute, with over 798,000 jobs yet to recover*



*As funding from the American Rescue Plan Act's (ARPA) State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund begins to be invested in local communities, counties are prioritizing the needs of residents and constructing a foundation for sustained resiliency*



*County leaders are leveraging ARPA funding to bolster the local workforce*

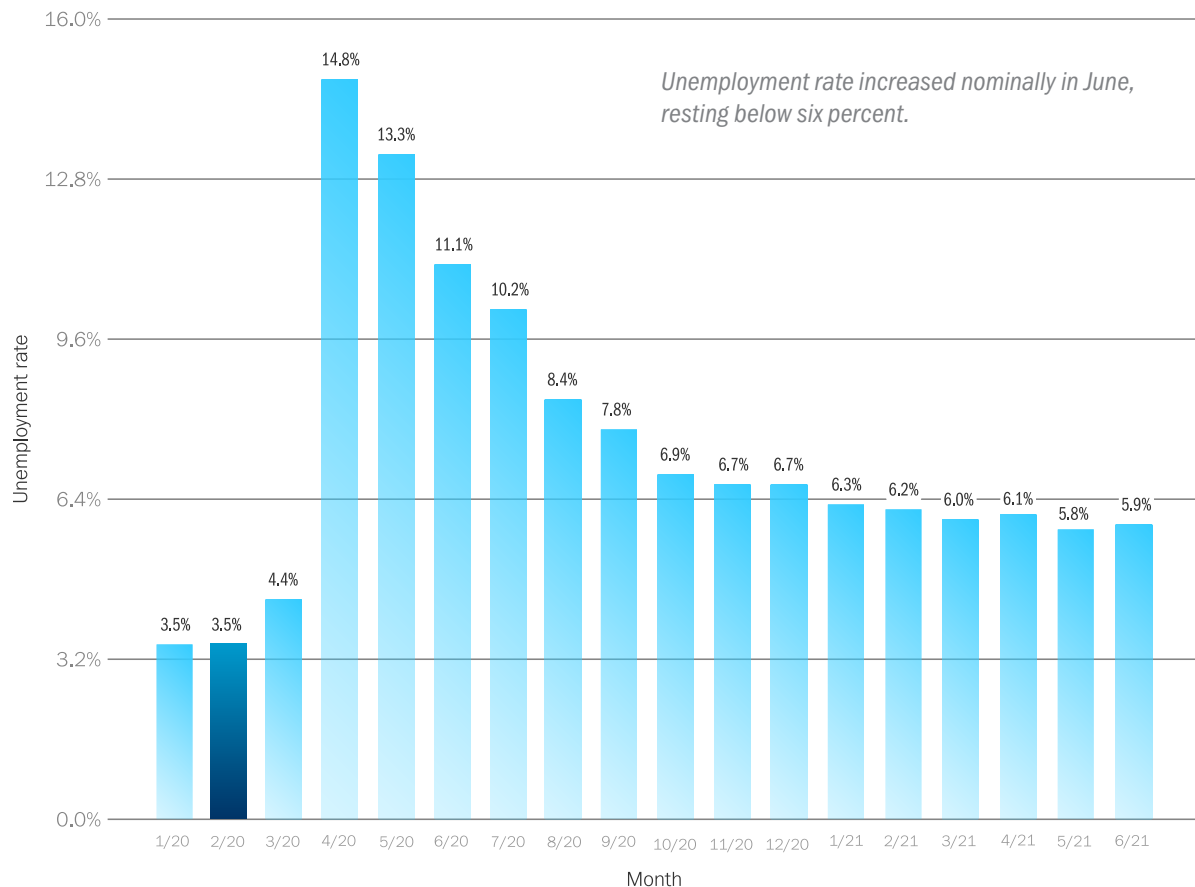


*Local leaders form the closest government to the people, directly facilitating the implementation of public policy and services which have tangible ramifications in the lives of residents*

# COUNTIES WORK TO ENSURE AN EQUITABLE RECOVERY

Unemployment experienced marginal changes in June and the economy gained 850,000 jobs as counties foster recovery

In April 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate skyrocketed to 14.8 percent. This date marked the highest peak since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Over 23 million American workers lost their jobs or could not find work due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Over subsequent months, jobs slowly returned to the economy. In June 2021, the unemployment rate rose by .1 percentage points, 2.4 percentage points above its pre-pandemic level. Nearly 18 months into the pandemic, the landscape is changing, but **9.5 million American workers remain unemployed.**

As the worst of the pandemic subsides, county leaders are transitioning from reactive problem-solving to proactive planning with an eye towards residual impacts such as increases in remote work, significant small business failure and an increased number of young people not connected to work.

**Local leaders are focused on policies that elevate recovery efforts and establish long-term solutions for residents.**

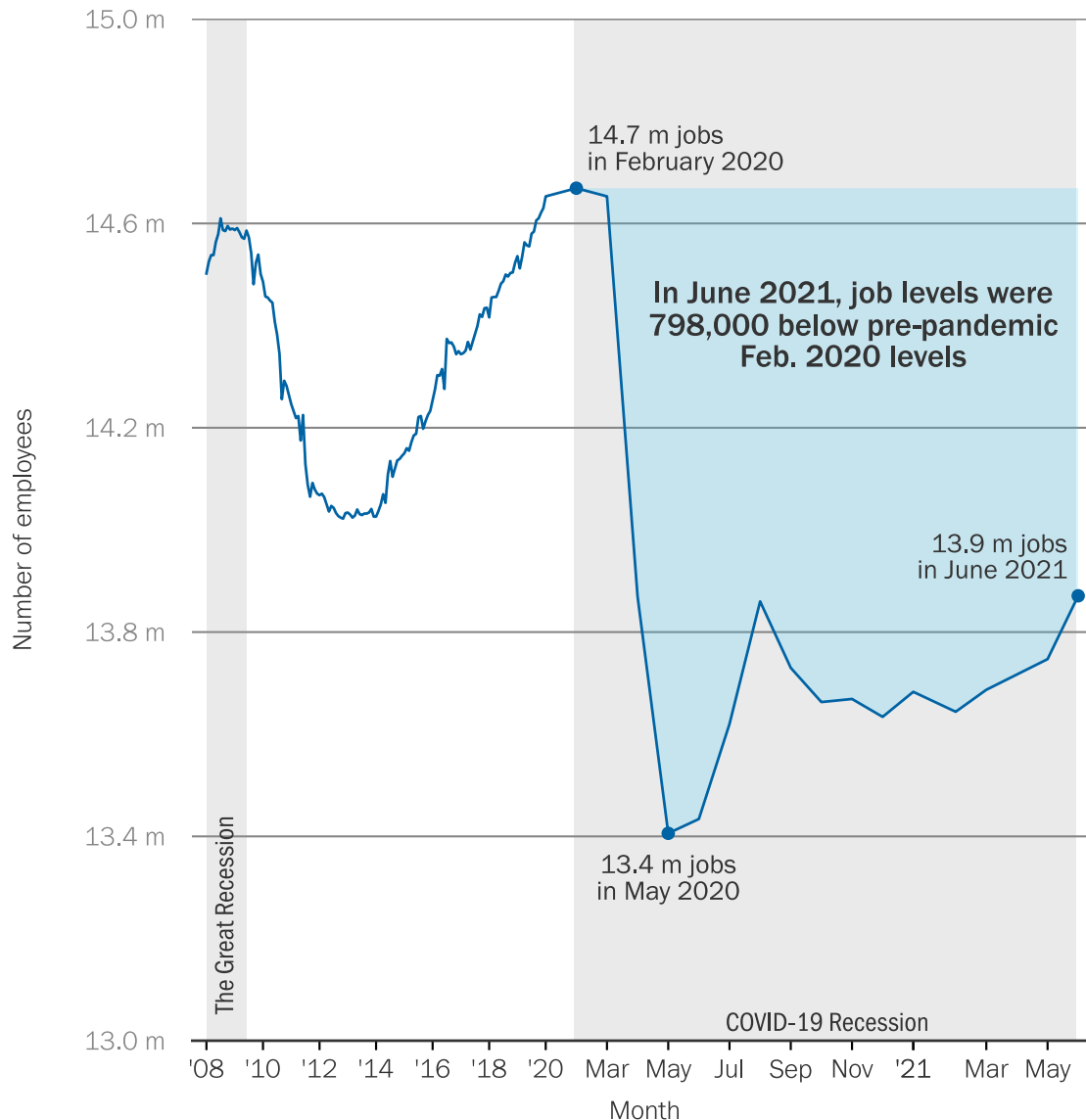
“WE’VE BEEN FACING [ECONOMIC] TRIALS FOR THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS AND THE PANDEMIC IS ANOTHER BUMP IN THE ROAD, BUT WE’RE HOPEFUL TO COME OUT STRONGER BECAUSE OF [THEM].”

*Harlan County, Ky.*



# THE PANDEMIC HAS INDUCED SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTIONS ON COUNTY WORKFORCES

Local government employment rebounds slowly in June, with 798,000 jobs yet to recover



The local government workforce has faced significant strain throughout 2020 and 2021. Within the first few months of the pandemic, local governments lost over 1.3 million jobs.

With county services more in-demand than ever before, workforce disruptions attributed to revenue loss and a diminished ability to attract and retain employees only served to exacerbate challenges.

Many sectors have experienced a strong recovery in recent months. Still, local government employment remains **798,000 jobs below its pre-pandemic level**, recovering 36.8 percent of the jobs lost since May 2020.

Non-education employment in local government remains over 387,700 jobs below pre-pandemic levels. These jobs include healthcare practitioners, social workers, law enforcement officers, court clerks, sanitation workers, librarians, transit employees, utility workers, maintenance crews and construction workers. These jobs collectively provide essential services and resources to communities.

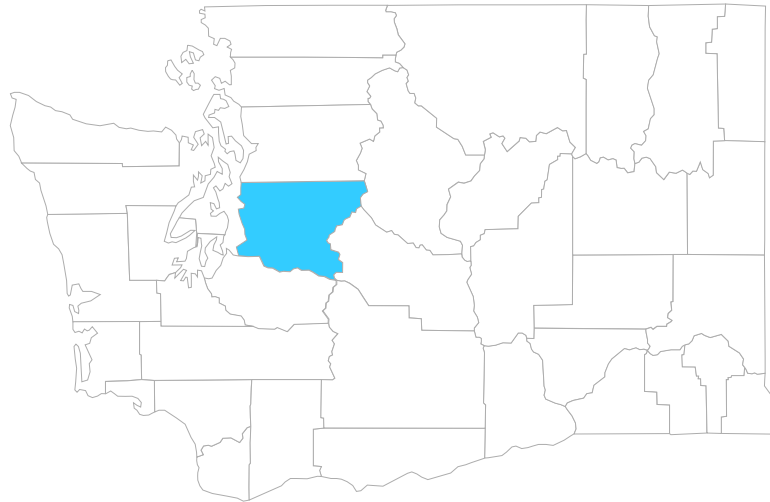


“

I'VE BEEN IN THE INDUSTRY  
FOR OVER 20 YEARS, AND  
THIS [PANDEMIC] IS THE  
FIRST TIME I CAN'T CRYSTAL  
BALL MY WAY OUT OF THIS.”

————— *Montgomery County, Pa.* —————

# COUNTIES ARE PRIORITIZING RESIDENT NEEDS AND BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINED RESILIENCE



## KING COUNTY, WASH.

King County plans to allocate \$25.6 million towards a BIPOC business and economic resiliency fund, which will distribute funding through a community-led process and invest in economic opportunities for residents who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color. Additionally, \$10.4 million will fund new construction apprenticeship and job training programs that support cities, school districts, and colleges in creating local hire programs in under-served areas throughout the county.

For more information, [see here](#).



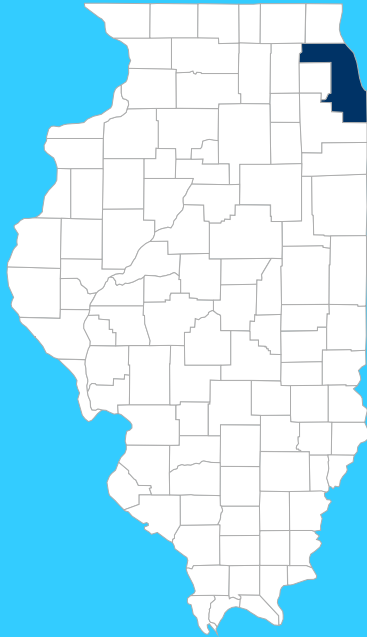
## KERN COUNTY, CALIF.

With the use of a portion of new funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, Kern County Calif. plans to invest \$2.45 million in restaffing county library employees. County libraries lost staff due to COVID-19, creating a strain on the abilities to provide library services to the public such as broadband and technology support. In total, the county aims to allocate \$179 million dollars towards recovery and resiliency.

For more information, [see here](#).



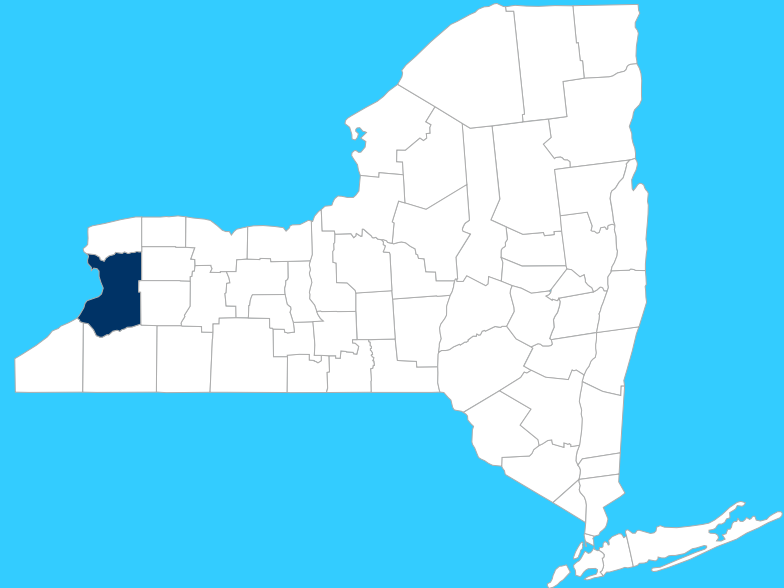
## COUNTIES ARE LEVERAGING FUNDING TO REBUILD THE WORKFORCE



### COOK COUNTY, ILL.

Cook County, led by Board President Toni Preckwinkle, plans to allocate a portion of the \$1 billion American Rescue Plan allocation towards re-staffing the workforce. Throughout the pandemic, the county was forced to layoff several employees, now leaving the employment level at about 21,000. Leveraging this federal funding to rehire workers will allow Cook County to respond more robustly to residents' needs and foster broader economic recovery within the county.

For more information, [see here](#).



### ERIE COUNTY, N.Y.

Erie County plans on using ARPA funds to hire for 26 positions and restore an additional 107 that were lost during the pandemic. The new positions will be in the Parks Department, Division of Emergency Medical Services, Cancer Services Program, Purchasing and the District Attorney's Office. The plan also establishes staffing for a new Office of Health Equity within the County Department of Health.

For more information, [see here](#).



**HELP  
WANTED**

### **DATA SOURCES:**

NACo Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau - Census of Individual Governments: Finance, 2017.  
The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) - National Profile of Local Health Departments (Profile) Study, 2019.  
NACo Analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics - Employment Situation: June 2021.  
National Association of Counties, Planning for the Future of Work Amid a Global Pandemic (June 2021), available at [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).

For more information, contact  
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## **NACo's MISSION**

Strengthen America's counties.

## **NACo's VISION**

Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.

## **ABOUT NACo**

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America's counties, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- **Advocate county priorities** in federal policymaking
- **Promote exemplary county policies** and practices
- **Nurture leadership skills** and expand knowledge networks
- **Optimize county and taxpayer resources** and cost savings, and
- **Enrich the public's understanding** of county government.

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