

American Rescue Plan State Fiscal Recovery Fund Recommendation Cover Sheet

Please submit this document with any recommendations for funding from Rhode Island's allocation of federal fiscal recovery funds available through the American Rescue Plan Act. This information will be made available to the public along with any detailed documents submitted that describe the proposal. It is encouraged that such documents identify clear goals and objectives and quantifiable metrics.

This is not a formal request for funds, and submission of recommendations does not guarantee a response, public hearing, or appropriation from the General Assembly.

Name of Lead Agency: THE SAMARITANS OF RHODE ISLAND

Additional agencies making recommendation (if applicable): _____

Contact Person / Title: DENISE PANICHAS, EX.DIR. Phone: 401-721-5220

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Email Address (if available) INFO@SAMARITANSRI.NECOMAIL.COM

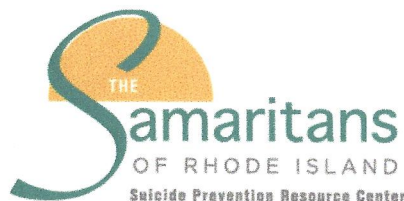
Brief Project Description (attachments should contain details)
COMMERCE / SUICIDE PREVENTION / COVID-19 RESPONSE INITIATIVES

Total request: \$ 300,000

One-time or Recurring Expense? \$150,000 PER YEAR FOR TWO YEARS

ARPA Eligibility Category (check all that apply) – See link for further information
<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/arpa/commdocs/Treasury%20-%20Quick-Reference-Guide.pdf>

- Respond to the public health emergency and its economic impacts X
- Premium pay to eligible workers _____
- Government services/state revenue replacement _____
- Water/sewer/broadband infrastructure _____



Crisis Hotline: 401-272-4044 Toll Free: 800-365-4044 Business Line: 401-721-5220 Fax: 401-753-7938 www.samaritansri.org

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to Rhode Island
1977- 2021

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Denise Panichas
Executive Director

November 5, 2021

His Excellency Daniel McKee

Honorable K. Joseph Shekarchi, Speaker and Honorable Dominick J. Ruggerio, President
State House, 82 Smith Street
Providence RI 02903

Reference: ARP Public Health Emergency/Economic Impact

Cc: Rep. Jean Phillipe Barros

Dear Governor McKee, Speaker Shekarchi and President Ruggerio:

Commerce, Suicide Prevention and COVID-19

On behalf of our Board of Directors, we are grateful for the opportunity to present this request for ARP support of The Samaritans of RI's COVID-19 Response initiatives.

Our humanity was tested in the past two years. And, in the years ahead, the impact of COVID-19 will also reveal the depths of our ability to empathize with the full spectrum of what the pandemic has done to our lives individually, as a community, and as a nation.

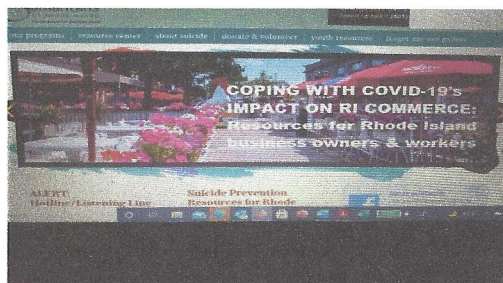
From the issuance of Governor Raimondo's stay at home orders, Rhode Islanders in the business community turned to The Samaritans as a trusted resource in how to deal with pandemic-related suicide issues. The collective knowledge and experiences of our COVID-19 Response Leadership Team, in collaboration with community resources, allowed us to step up quickly and create pathways to care.

But the strain and stress from COVID-19 is far from over and with this request, we propose to build upon the adaptive paradigm created so we may continue to serve our citizens as the gateway to the state's medical and behavioral health community. We also want to be responsive and supportive to Rhode Islanders, who feel isolated because they find the state's system of care not accessible, not responsive nor useful or for whatever reason, not an option. We care about everyone, and until our callers are ready to reconnect with professional care, no should feel so alone and that they have no one to share their pain. As always, every caller has access to trained, empathetic Samaritans listener.

We respectfully request a program support grant of \$150,000 per year for two years to fortify and enhance our COVID-19 Response initiatives. Annually, all grants and gifts to The Samaritans are matched by volunteer hours. In 2020, a total of 85 Hotline program volunteers donated more than \$274,081+ in volunteer time. Thank you for your consideration.


Denise Panichas, Executive Director

THE SAMARITANS OF RHODE ISLAND
ARP – State Fiscal Recovery Fund Request/Public Health Emergency & Its Economic Impact



SAMSRI Website – Supporting Economic Impact of COVID-19
www.samaritansri.org

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Address/Telephone: P.O. Box 9086, Providence RI 02940 (401) 721-5220
Contact/Email: Denise Panichas, Executive Director info@samaritansri.necoxmail.com

1. Summary of Our Request:

The Samaritans requests a Public Health Emergency/Economic Impact grant in the amount of \$150,000 per year for two years to support and enhance our COVID-19 Response initiatives begun in March 2020 at the onset of the pandemic. Details provided below.

2. Vision Statement/ Organizational Capability

Vision Statement: To have a suicide free Rhode Island - A Suicide Prevention Resource for Rhode Islanders
The Samaritans will be the “agency of choice” for individuals, families and other community stakeholders who seek information relating to suicide prevention, grief support, education and resources.

Established in 1977, The Samaritans of Rhode Island is an independent, statewide, volunteer-based philanthropic, 501(c)(3) organization. Utilizing the internationally recognized “befriending” model created by the Samaritans of the United Kingdom (est. 1953 – see www.samaritans.org) and used by Samaritan/befriending organizations in more than 40 countries, our volunteer-based programs help the hopeless, alone, suicidal, grieving as well as family, friends and professionals who care for them. Our programs include our Crisis Hotline/Listening Line, Safe Place Grief Support, Youth and Teen Education and Community Education which includes our website, public presentations, Lifeline Prison Befriending Program at the Men’s Intake Center of the RI Adult Correctional Institution and our Forget-Me-Not Galley and Community Education Center. By our mission, volunteer supported services are provided for free, without regard to market share; health/mental health status; third party reimbursements; and ability to pay.

The Samaritans does not replace professional medical, mental health, social service or pastoral care. We do provide interim support between medical appointments or when family and friends are unavailable. In addition, the Samaritans Hotline/Listening Line support is also available to callers **when professional services are no longer an option.**

Our legion of 1,719 current and alumni volunteers represent a cross-section of local, national and international students including undergraduate pre-med, medical school students and medical residents from Brown University and area colleges as well as adults of all ages and professional backgrounds, who after meeting volunteer requirements and training receive no accolades for service other than the satisfaction of knowing they tried to make a difference in the world. They are truly remarkable people who, after learning their “befriending” skills, at The Samaritans of Rhode Island carry those skills with them for a lifetime. As recommended by the FBI and Scotland Yard, we have long partnered with law enforcement on crisis negotiator training. .

We are proud to note that our 40+ year partnership with the Brown University community and area colleges has resulted in students inspired to become nurse practitioners, primary care physicians and most notably psychiatrists.

Important COVID-19 volunteer note: Our current COVID-19 Response Team volunteers of adults and students have stepped up and continue to volunteer while dealing with their own COVID-19 related issues including displacement from school, online studies and work requirements, social distancing requirements, caring for family members, testing positive for COVID and fears for family and friends.

3. Basis for our Pandemic Response – 2008-2009 federal SAMHSA Grant:

In 2008/2009, with the sponsorship of U.S. Senator Jack Reed, The Samaritans of RI was the recipient of and successfully managed a \$200,000 grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The purpose of the grant was to increase our statewide capacity to reach Rhode Islanders across the age spectrum - in all of 39 cities and towns - who are hopeless, alone, suicidal and to also reach those who care for them.

With SAMHSA funding, we not only designed updated Crisis Hotline/Listening Line training and recruitment, we created a statewide outreach/marketing model that included partnerships across all municipalities and spectrum of care. This project culminated with the creation of our website that remains today Rhode Island's most comprehensive referral source for local, state, national and international suicide prevention education resources.

Interestingly, the issues which challenged The Samaritans then and today are strikingly similar in that this project was initiated and completed during the Global Financial Crisis/Great Recession of 2008 and 2009. The issues of the day included access to care, particularly for at-risk populations and medically underserved areas, substance use, the unemployed and the state's worsening housing market.

4. COVID-19 and its Public Health/Economic Impact on The Samaritans/Rhode Islanders:

On March 11, 2020 Brown University halted all student volunteerism which was followed by RI stay-at-home advisories.

On 3/16, restaurants closed and by the next week Denise Panichas, Ex. Director received personal calls about suicidal restaurant owners as well as other business sectors. Given our previous experience responding to September 11th, the Station Nightclub Fire and the 2008/2009 Global Financial Crisis, Ms. Panichas understood the immediate social and economic impact required more than a passive, listening line SAMSRI response. Collaborating with RI E-911, Congressional offices, RI Commerce, RI Hospitality Association, Office of RI Medical Examiner, and our medical volunteers, we updated our website banners to address employer/employee related inquiries from the public and local media and additionally disseminated same information and resources via social media statewide. [See www.samaritansri.org](http://www.samaritansri.org).

Critical agency program and public safety needs had to be addressed. A remote COVID-19 Response Leadership Team was quickly assembled comprised of Denise Panichas, M.Ed. Ex. Director (since April 2001) and board vice-president, Chief Joseph Tavares, former chief East Providence Police Dept, in consultation with Chief David Smith, Ex. Director of RI 911 and former Chief Westerly RI Police Department as well as other our physician and nurse volunteers; with input from representatives of state departments and agencies as well as key Brown University student volunteers. Key general operating and program support funding was provided by the RI Foundation and the Office of Health Commissioner.

- From March – June 2020, with assistance of Brown University grad student volunteer, blended telephone technologies were created enabling volunteers to answer calls remotely no matter where they lived in the USA.
- Recruited and trained more than 50 of our existing, trained volunteers (adults and students) to be part of our remote COVID-19 Response Team.
- SAMSRI was listed as COVID-19 resource line through numerous sources and accordingly, we trained volunteers in the state's new COVID-19 protocols including the use of emergency, urgent and primary care as well as behavioral health options.
- From January – December 2020, volunteers donated more than 15, 075 hours answering answered 4,224 calls (3,019 contact/conversations calls)
- In addition to befriending; provided 2,182 callers with 2,559 referrals to local resources.
- Requested by Black Lives Matter (Rhode Island) to assist in identifying options in lieu of calling 911/police for those are suicidal or have substance abuse issues. Resources are listed on the Providence page of website: www.dontcallthepolice.com
- Promoted Hotline/Listening Line and state care resource options on our Facebook page, Twitter, through Constant Contact and on the Providence Journal COVID-19 resource page.
- Our total contacts for all programs sources/outreach were 5,807,619 (including RI, USA and more than 150 countries).
- Our website visitors totaled 11,705 of which 56% were mobile users and the balance desktop/tablet users.



5. General Description of our Recovery Act Request:

In response to the anticipated and unanticipated social and economic impact of COVID, The Samaritans is requesting support to replicate the success of our community outreach and website development elements of our 2008/2009 SAMHSA grant.

After September 11th, RI's Station Nightclub Fire and 2008/2009 banking crisis experience, we know anecdotally, caller stress increased months and years later. We anticipate COVID-19's impact will be painfully exacerbated as:

1. New resources are unsustainable and end because of loss federal support;
2. Existing systems/resources are strained by volume and unable to meet need;
3. Rhode Islanders continue to fall out of care because of lack of resources/insurance;
4. New at-risk populations grow to include individuals, family and friends impacted by COVID-19 experiences;
5. Rhode Islanders continue to be impacted by the myriad features of isolation created by the COVID-19 pandemic*;
6. Rhode Islanders continue to be impacted by the economic challenges of the COVID 19 including the business and job climate.
7. Rhode Islanders impacted by suicide attempts and suicides during the COVID-19 pandemic

**We cannot forget our daily supported callers – the chronically hopeless, alone and suicidal who call us every day for emotional support – some of whom have been calling since we opened.*

In the height of the COVID-19 emergency, remote volunteer befriending telephone access was achieved. However, limited funding was received to promote the Crisis Hotline/Listening Line across media platforms and there was no funding available at that time for website enhancements. Accordingly, we were unable to be a responsive platform for newer, COVID needed user experiences and critical care information, especially from mobile devices – the largest percentage of our website visitors (and the largest percentage of callers to RIE-911).

Please note: We launched our website in 2003, then undated and redesigned the site using our 2008/2008 SAMHSA grant. Since 2003, we have hosted more than 1M visitors.

Our board president, a senior corporate marketing executive, who guided the creation of the first website in 2003 and its updates in 2008/2009 will be working with Executive Director, Denise Panichas, as the volunteer, creative director. She notes in order to offer newer features, the current website must be updated to address user access; appearance; coding integrity so we may facilitate the user experience across multiple devices including mobile, laptop/desktop and tablets; re-access our content management system, graphics, photography, functionality, navigation tools/appearance, usability, loading times, browser compatibility, security and more.

Of particular importance on the to-do list of our proposed website updated is to incorporate website translation abilities; online befriending options and options for interfacing online with the disability community. Partners in this endeavor include Befrienders Worldwide and Bob Cooper, Executive Commission on Disabilities along with small grant funding to jumpstart this internet project.

Total Funding Requested: \$150,000 per year for two years.