Key Insights: Contracts and Grants Workforce Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

September 28, 2023

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29 Federal Agencies Assess the Adequacy of their Staffing, Training, Information Technology, and Other Resources

The federal government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a series of unprecedented actions to protect public health and the country's economy. In fiscal years (FYs) 2020 and 2021, Congress passed six laws that appropriated more than $5 trillion for pandemic relief programs across dozens of federal agencies. The influx of federal COVID-19 funds in response to the extraordinary public health crisis created unique challenges across the federal government. Among these challenges, contracts and grants officials had to distribute funds swiftly to meet immediate needs, while also being aware of new and changing program requirements, creating new or repurposing existing programs, purchasing goods and services, and adapting oversight and monitoring strategies to a largely remote work environment given the health-related consequences of the pandemic.

As part of its oversight responsibilities, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act directed the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) to review:

1. Whether there are sufficient, qualified acquisition, grant, and other applicable personnel overseeing covered funds and the Coronavirus response; and

2. Whether personnel whose duties involve the Coronavirus response or acquisitions or grants made with covered funds or are otherwise related to the Coronavirus response receive adequate training, technology support, and other resources.

How We Conducted Our Review

Ten Offices of Inspectors General (OIG) formed a working group in early 2021 under the PRAC's Subcommittee on Audit, Inspections, and Evaluations to develop qualitative and quantitative measures to assist the PRAC in assessing the questions identified in the CARES Act.[1] PRAC staff finalized the questions and identified the 29 federal agencies that should receive the survey questions based on an examination of

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[1] In 2010, the Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board conducted a similar survey and issued a report that examined the impact on the acquisitions and grants workforce as result of increased funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. We applied lessons learned, findings, and recommendations from that survey, where practical, to inform the approach and methodology for this survey and report.

Ten OIGs joined to form a working group under the PRAC's subcommittee on Audit, Inspections, and Evaluations

USAspending.gov data for agencies that had awarded pandemic-related contracts and grants between March 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021. To disseminate the questions, we developed two web-based surveys— one for employees overseeing acquisitions and one for employees overseeing grants.[2] In the end, we sent the contract and grant surveys to 29 federal agencies/departments that awarded contracts and grants using COVID-19 funds.[3]

We requested the Chief Acquisition Officer, the Senior Procurement Executive, or the Chief Financial Officer of each agency provide a consolidated response from their agency for the contracts survey.[4] Similarly, for the grants survey we requested that the Chief Financial Officer (or the senior agency official responsible for grants activity) provide a consolidated response from their agency. Questions for both surveys focused on whether agencies had sufficient staffing, training, information technology (IT), and oversight and management resources to award, manage, and oversee COVID-19 response funding. While we strived to obtain a single, consolidated response from each agency for both surveys, we allowed responses at the subagency level on an exception basis where reasonable and practical.

For the contracts survey, 28 federal civilian agencies and 16 Department of Defense (DoD) subagencies (29 agencies in total) responded for a total of 44 survey responses.[5] Due to the size of the DoD, we reported on the DoD results separate from civilian agencies to ensure the overall results were not skewed and to better understand the similarities and differences between these two workforces. For the grants survey, 20 federal civilian agencies responded (the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) submitted nine responses and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) submitted two responses at the subagency level).[6]

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2   For the purposes of this report, acquisition refers to contracts workforce or contracting officials whose duties, and responsibilities, include awarding, administering, or managing contracts or procurements either full-time or part-time, including those personnel involved in any aspect of the contract life cycle. This includes personnel whose involvement in contracting or procurement work/activities is consistent and not conducted on an ad-hoc basis. See Appendix C for a full explanation of how we defined the contracts workforce for this survey.

3   Throughout the report, we refer to "agency" as both agencies and departments. Also, this review focused on those agencies that disbursed funds via "Grants," "Contracts," and "Contract IDVs" object classes, and does not include agencies that solely disbursed funds via "Loans," "Direct Payments," or "Other Financial Assistance."

4   We also provided the respective agency OIGs with the names of the respondents who completed the surveys to assist us in verifying whether they were cognizant officials.

5   The PRAC surveyed a total of 29 unique agencies—28 federal civilian agencies and DoD subagencies, which we collectively counted as one agency. Sixteen DoD subagencies that awarded contracts with COVID-19 funds responded to the survey; 10 others did not respond. DoD subagencies include defense agencies, commands, and field activities.

6   Senior agency officials for both the USDA and the VA provided responses at the subagency level due to the nature of how these agencies award and manage their grant programs (e.g., distribute grant funding at the subagency level).

We analyzed the survey responses and shared the results with the respective OIGs for their awareness and to inform potential future oversight work. We conducted our work in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspectors General.[7]

Survey Results in Brief

Our analysis of survey responses provides key insights into the challenges that 29 federal agencies' contracts and grants workforces experienced during the pandemic. Overall, survey responses show that staffing, IT, and training resources (including both resources to develop training and staff to conduct the training) were areas that caused the greatest challenges for grants and contracts workforces (see Figures 1, 2, and 3). Significantly, the contracts workforce did not report the same degree of challenges in these areas as the grants workforce.

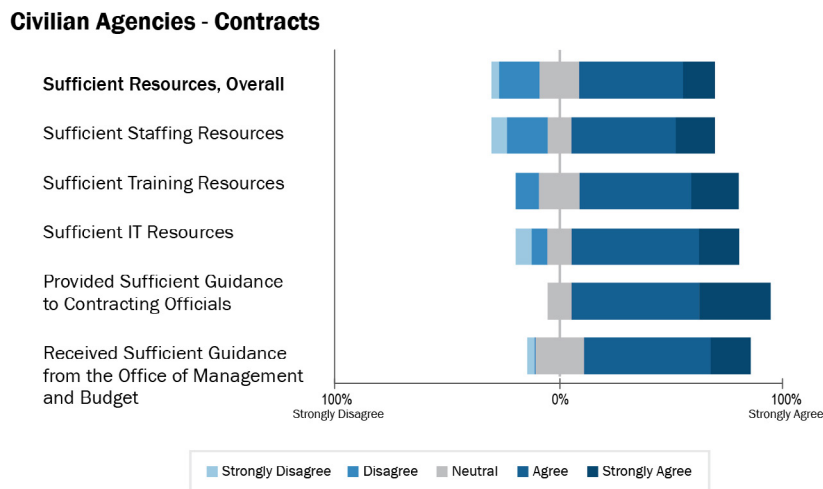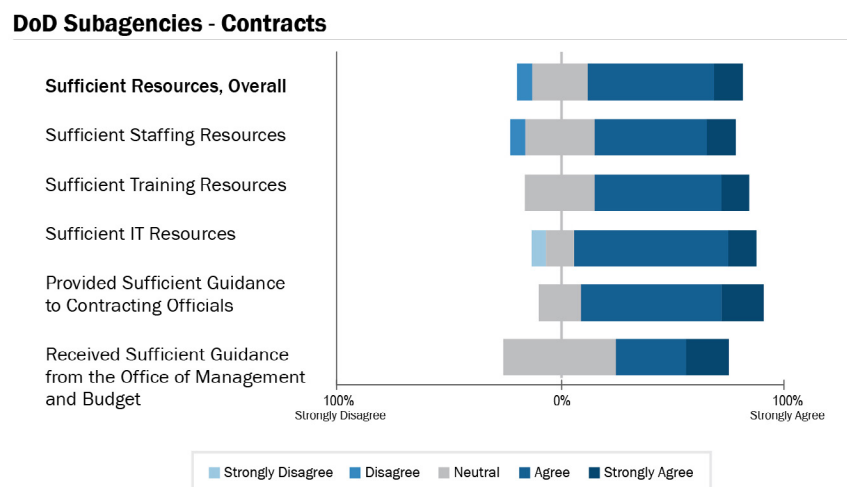*Figure 1: Summary Survey Responses for Civilian Agencies - Contracts*

Civilian Agencies - Contracts

Figure 2: Summary Survey Responses for DoD Subagencies - Contracts

DoD Subagencies - Contracts

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7   See Appendix A and B for the full list of agencies that responded to the surveys, Appendix C for the contracts survey questions and key definitions, and Appendix D for the grant survey questions and key definitions.

Figure 3: Summary Survey Responses for Civilian Agencies – Grants

Civilian Agencies - Grants
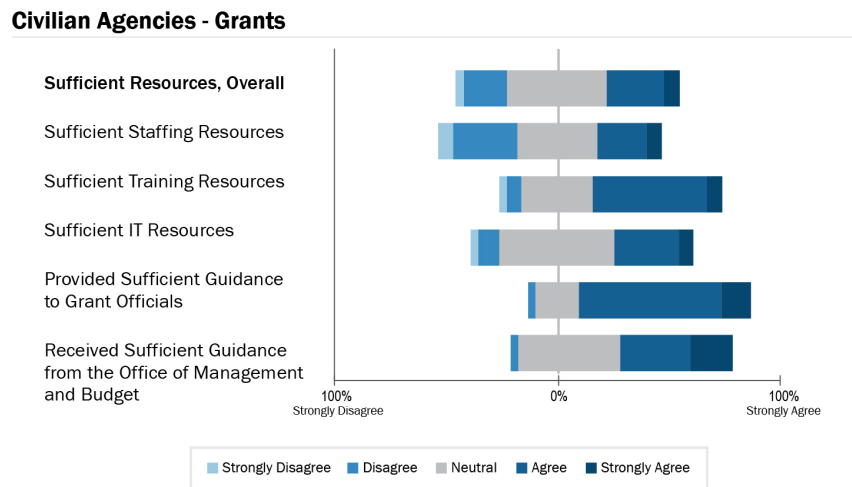
Contracts and grants respondents also identified challenges related to keeping pace with non-pandemic related work, attributing this to the volume of pandemic funding and urgency to award related contracts and grants. However, both the contracts and grants respondents reported that their workforces were successful in addressing the impacts of the pandemic on their operations. For example, these workforces:

- Instituted new ways to oversee and monitor awards remotely.

- Provided guidance and training within their agency and to grant and contract recipients.

- Increased staffing capabilities when needed.

- Several respondents said they leveraged existing programs within their offices to award COVID-19 grants, as opposed to creating new pandemic-related programs, in order to expedite the award process.

Background

In our Top Challenges Report, OIGs shared concerns about the large volume of grants awarded during the pandemic and the difficulties in ensuring that grantees used funds for their authorized purposes.[8] To put the scope of pandemic grant funding in perspective, for the federal agencies surveyed, obligations for federal grants increased by more than 76 percent from FY 2019 to FY 2021, from $3.6 trillion to $6.3 trillion. Comparatively, obligations for contractual services and supplies rose 24 percent from FY 2019 to FY 2021, from $902 billion to $1.1 trillion (see Figure 4).[9]

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8   [Top Challenges Facing Federal Agencies- COVID-19 Emergency Relief and Response Efforts](#) accessed May 18, 2023.
9   The dollar values for grants and contracts include pandemic and non-pandemic funding.

Figure 4: Contract and Grant Obligations for Federal Agencies Surveyed by Fiscal Year
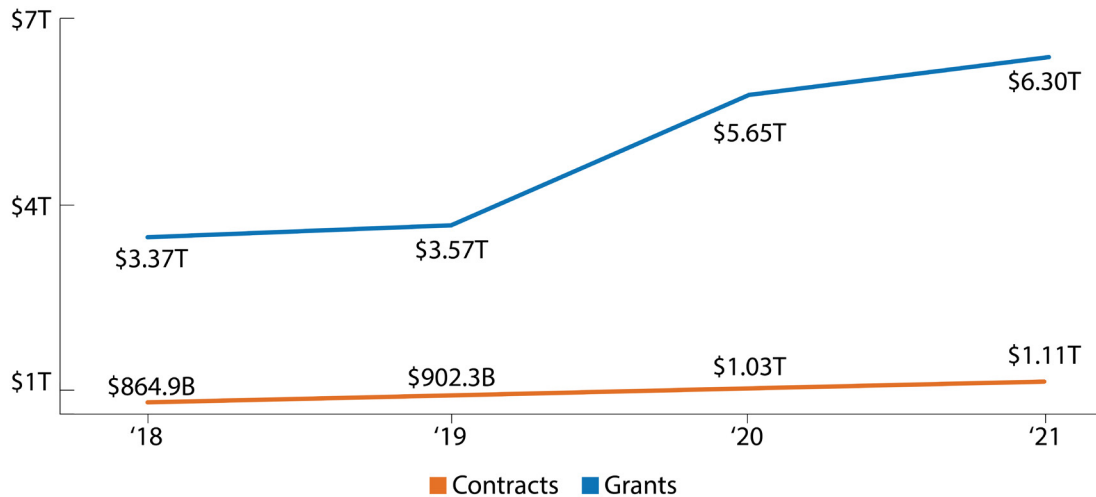
Source: Contractual Services and Supplies and Grant and Fixed Charge Obligations from FY2018 – FY2021 for the 29 federal agencies included in the surveys. Data pulled from USAspending.gov as of August 2022.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued guidance in 2020 to help the federal contracts and grants workforce manage the increase in funding and to combat the significant disruptions, both to the workforces' health and economic well-being caused by COVID-19. For example, OMB issued guidance on managing federal contract performance and on preserving the resilience of the federal contracting base during the pandemic, including the flexibilities provided in Section 3610 of the CARES Act. Section 3610 provides agencies discretionary authority to reimburse costs of paid leave to certain federal contractors and subcontractors due to pandemic-related disruptions. In addition, OMB also issued guidance regarding tracking COVID-19 related contracts.[10]

Specific to the grants workforce, OMB issued guidance to provide short-term, flexible administrative, financial, and audit requirements under 2 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 200, Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards, without compromising federal financial assistance accountability requirements.[11] The guidance also provided grants workforce information on the use of expanded flexibilities, supplemental COVID-19 funding, and emphasized priorities that agencies should consider in their implementation, including the following:

- Ensuring that qualified, skilled, and appropriately trained personnel are overseeing awards made under the relief legislation.
- Streamlining regulations and internal processes, including issuing waivers and delegating decision-making where appropriate to empower managed risk-taking and innovative thinking.
- Balancing the need for competition with timely execution of funding.
- Balancing the need for expediency with steps to mitigate the risk of fraud, waste, abuse, and improper payments.

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10 See OMB Memos M-20-18, M-20-22, and M-20-27 accessed May 18, 2023.
11 See Implementation Guidance for Supplemental Funding Provided in Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and M-20-26 accessed May 18, 2023.

Key Insights: 29 Federal Agencies' Assessment of the Adequacy of Contracts and Grants Staffing, Training, Information Technology, and Other Resources

Contracts Survey Responses

The PRAC received responses from 29 agencies—28 federal civilian agencies and DoD. DoD distributed the survey to their subagencies (e.g., defense agencies, commands, and field activities) to complete, and 16 responded for a total of 44 survey submissions. Respondents provided feedback on the following five critical areas of pandemic-related contract functions and processes:

1. Contract Obligations
2. Staffing Resources
3. Training Activities and Resources
4. IT Solutions and Resources
5. Resources for Effective Contract Oversight and Management

Overall, most respondents reported that the pandemic did not have a significant negative impact on their contracting offices or their ability to perform contracting functions. For example, respondents noted that contract staffing levels managing the increased workload during the pandemic were generally adequate.

Between March 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021, the 44 survey respondents had awarded 34,472 pandemic-related contract actions totaling more than $40 billion. The Department of Health and Human Services, DoD, and USDA accounted for 85 percent of the total COVID-19 contract obligations during this period.

Contract Obligations

Ninety-five percent of the contracts workforce applied the required National Interest Action (NIA) code to track pandemic contract costs. In March of 2020, OMB issued guidance requiring the use of the NIA code to track pandemic-related acquisitions.[12] Approximately 95 percent of respondents reported they provided their workforce with OMB and/or other guidance on how to determine if the NIA code applied to contracts within the agency.

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12   Implementation Guidance for Supplemental Funding Provided in Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) accessed May 18, 2023.

Even with the guidance, five civilian agencies and three DoD subagencies responded that there still was confusion as to when the NIA code should apply. For example, one respondent said there was "confusion early in the process whether the COVID-19 NIA code should be used only if CARES Act funds were being used, or if it should be used for actions taken in response to COVID-19 as well as actions taken as a result of the impacts of COVID-19."

To help support use of the NIA code, many respondents reported that their agencies/subagencies developed their own guidance and supporting documentation and distributed it internally to the contracts workforce. Civilian agencies and DoD subagencies employed different techniques to support the uniform implementation, including conducting training for the contracts workforce and/or providing memorandums, alerts, briefings, job aids, and other reference materials.

Staffing Resources

Contracts workforce staffing levels were generally adequate to manage the workload during the pandemic. Of the 28 civilian agency respondents, 75 percent indicated they had sufficiently qualified staff to process contracts during the pandemic. For the DoD subagencies, 94 percent responded that they had sufficiently qualified contracting officials. However, the respondents that indicated they did not have sufficient qualified staff (18 percent of total respondents) noted challenges such as workforce burnout and attrition, an inability to conduct proper oversight, and the need to divert resources to prioritize pandemic response contracts over non-pandemic contracts.

Top 5 Agencies, by COVID-19 Contract Dollar Value

1. **Department of Health and Human Services**
   $19 billion
2. **Department of Defense**
   $12.6 billion
3. **Department of Agriculture**
   $2.8 billion
4. **Department of Homeland Security**
   $2.3 billion
5. **Small Business Administration**
   $1.9 billion

Top 5 Agencies, by Number of COVID-19 Contracts

1. **Department of Defense**
   20,907 contract actions
2. **Department of Health and Human Services**
   5,076 contract actions
3. **Department of Homeland Security**
   2,155 contract actions
4. **Department of Agriculture**
   1,710 contract actions
5. **General Services Administration**
   1,153 contract actions

Source: USAspending.gov contract obligations between March 27, 2020 and September 30, 2021.
Note: For DoD, this only represents the DoD subagencies that received COVID-19 funding

Figure 5: As of September 30, 2021, did your agency have a sufficient number of qualified (e.g., certified) contracting officials available to plan for, award, and administer COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?
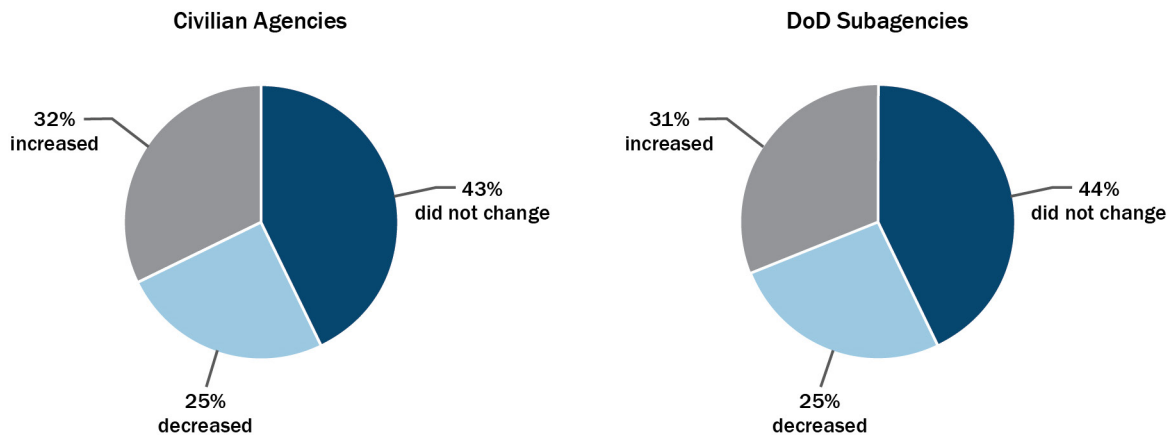
Civilian Agencies

25% insufficient staff

75% sufficent staff

DoD Subagencies

6% insufficient staff

94% sufficent staff
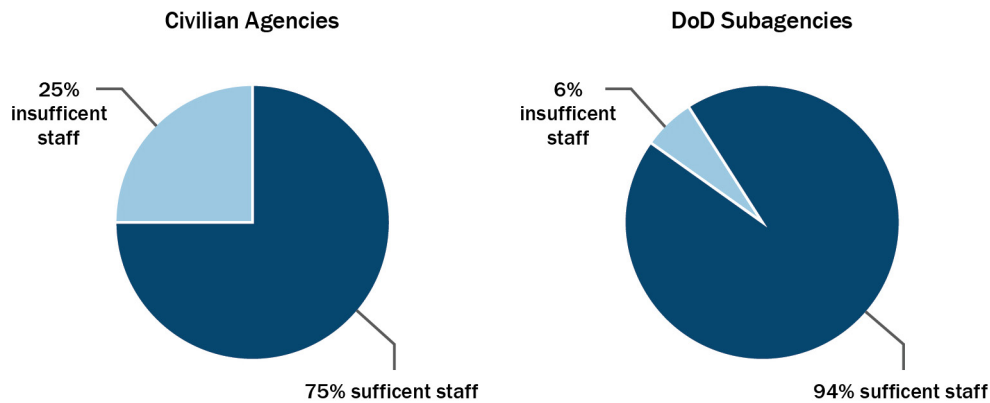
Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.

To ensure adequate staffing, the agencies that reported not having enough qualified staff reported they increased recruitment efforts, implemented liberal telework and flexible schedules, or offered overtime and/or other pay benefits. While adequate staffing was largely not a challenge for DoD subagencies, one respondent stated that their subagency transferred experienced staff to support critical COVID-related requirements, while staff leveraged existing contract vehicles to reduce the number of new procurements needed to meet emerging requirements.

Most respondents' contracts workforces did not increase during the pandemic, and about 60 percent of agencies/subagencies did not use supplemental staffing resources to assist. Of the 28 civilian respondents, 68 percent reported that their contracts workforce either did not change or decreased during the pandemic. Respondents from the 16 DoD subagencies answered similarly, with 69 percent reporting either no change or a decrease in the size of their workforce.

Figure 6: How does the size your agency's acquisition workforce compare to the size of the workforce prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., before March 27, 2020 and as of September 30, 2021)?

Civilian Agencies

32% increased

43% did not change

25% decreased

DoD Subagencies

31% increased

44% did not change

25% decreased

Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.

About 60 percent of all respondents did not use any supplemental staffing resources to assist in pandemic response contract planning and awarding, and performance management oversight activities. Agencies that needed additional staffing commonly reported using support services contractors and third-party contractors.

Training Resources

More than half of respondents offered training to the contracts workforce. Of the civilian respondents, 57 percent reported that their agencies offered training on contract management and performance oversight to their contracts workforce. Approximately 69 percent of DoD subagencies reported they provided training to their contracting officials. Several civilian respondents reported that their agencies used training offered through the Federal Acquisition Institute—a federally run institute that facilitates and promotes career development and strategic human capital management for the contracts workforce. The Federal Acquisition Institute facilitated a COVID-19 Acquisition Policy training course on understanding the flexibilities, guidance, and tools available to respond to the pandemic.

More than 70 percent of all respondents stated they did not require any additional training resources. However, a smaller group responded they needed additional training, with the most common resources needed being additional personnel and funding to help process the increased contract workload while concurrently conducting training and updating existing training materials based on emerging policy changes.

One DoD survey respondent said they needed additional training or information related on Section 3610 of the CARES Act, which permits federal agencies to reimburse contractors who provide paid leave to their employees and subcontractors who were unable to access work sites due to facility closures and other restrictions and who could not telework during the pandemic. The contracts workforce approves

reimbursement requests for paid leave costs. However, Section 3610 did not appropriate any additional funding to agencies to cover these expenses.[13] The same respondent also stated training or information on the use of the Defense Priorities and Allocation System, in accordance with an emergency declaration Under Title I of the Defense Production Act of 1950, would have been beneficial.[14]

IT Support Resources

A large majority of DoD and civilian respondents reported they had the IT resources and infrastructure to successfully operate in the remote environment during the pandemic. However, others needed additional resources. Of the civilian and DoD subagency respondents, 75 percent and 81 percent, respectively, responded that they did not require additional IT resources to administer and manage pandemic-related contracts, including contractor oversight activities.

Twenty-five percent of civilian agencies indicated a need for additional IT resources, such as additional laptops, cellphones, and IT personnel to support remote work. Other responses included needing software licenses to help transition to digitized forms and templates to streamline document approval procedures, and upgrades to newer contract management software solutions that provide full lifecycle management of the acquisition process. Nineteen percent of DoD subagencies indicated a need for additional IT resources, including Virtual Private Network (VPN) improvements for remote connectivity and improved camera-enabled government laptops and cell phones.

All 28 civilian agencies and 15 of the 16 DoD subagencies responded that at the time of survey completion they were not in the process of obtaining additional IT solutions to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of pandemic response contracts. One DoD subagency reported they were obtaining contract management software and collaboration solutions to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of pandemic response contracts.

Oversight and Management Resources

Many agencies reported that the pandemic did not have a major negative impact on the contracts workforce's ability to administer and manage contracts. Of the civilian and DoD subagency respondents, 71 percent and 75 percent, respectively, responded that the pandemic had minimal impact on their agencies' abilities to perform contract administration and management functions. Five civilian agency respondents and four DoD subagency respondents reported negative impacts in this area caused by the pandemic.

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13   COVID-19 Contracting: Contractor Paid Leave Reimbursements Could Provide Lessons Learned for Future Emergency Responses, Government Accountability Office, GAO-21-475 accessed May 18, 2023.

14   See here for more information on the Defense Priorities Allocations System Program (DPAS) accessed May 18, 2023.

Figure 7: Did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your agency's ability to perform contract administration and management functions?

Civilian Agencies

29% impact

71% no impact

DoD Subagencies

25% impact

75% no impact
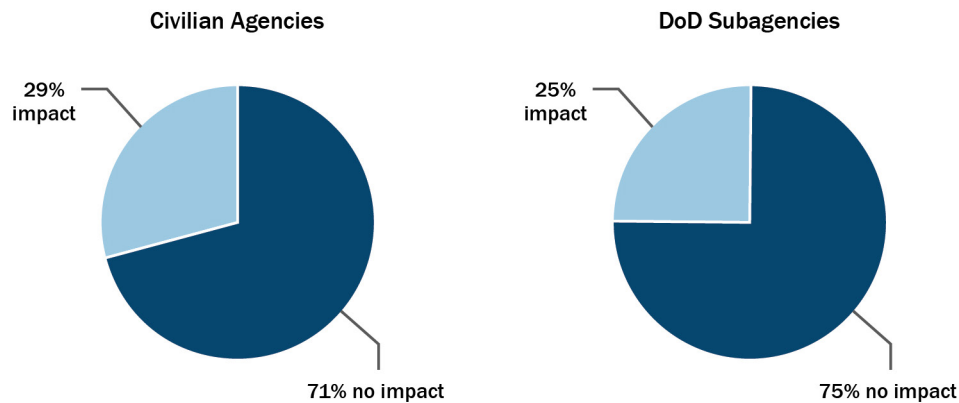
Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.

The following examples provide more details about the negative impacts raised by the survey respondents:

> *"Pandemic response requirements took precedence over the day-to-day mission operations contract requirements. This resulted in significant delays in much needed contract administration and management functions."*
>
> *"The pandemic further strained the already stretched thin contracts workforce as new requirements and tasks came with the pandemic. This led to burnout within the workforce but despite the foregoing, there was minimal impact."*
>
> *"COVID-19 pandemic created challenges in adjusting to remote monitoring and management of contracts in a telework environment."*
>
> *Supply chain constraints caused by the pandemic pitted agencies against each other in a battle for the same limited resources, and the lack of a nationwide acquisition planning strategy resulted in multiple contracting offices targeting the same items from the same vendors.*

Respondents reported using different procurement flexibilities in response to the pandemic. The pandemic enabled several procurement flexibilities for COVID-19 related contracts. More than half of the civilian respondents and half of DoD subagency respondents reported using the Special Emergency Procurement Authorities flexibilities (Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 18.202) provided as part of the response to COVID-19, which allowed for increasing the micro-purchase threshold, simplified acquisition threshold, and simplified procedures in conducting acquisitions.[15]

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15 To learn more about these and other acquisition flexibilities, see FAR Subpart 18.2 – Emergency Acquisition Flexibilities, specifically section 18.202 – Defense or recovery from certain events, Part-18#FAR_18_202, accessed May 26, 2023.

Only 36 percent of civilian agency respondents and 25 percent of DoD subagency respondents reported using flexibilities provided by Section 3610 of the CARES Act. These flexibilities permitted additional discretionary authority to modify the terms of existing contracts or other agreements and to reimburse costs of paid leave to contractors to keep their employees or subcontractors in a ready state.

Figure 8: Did your agency use any of the following contracting or procurement flexibilities provided by the CARES Act?
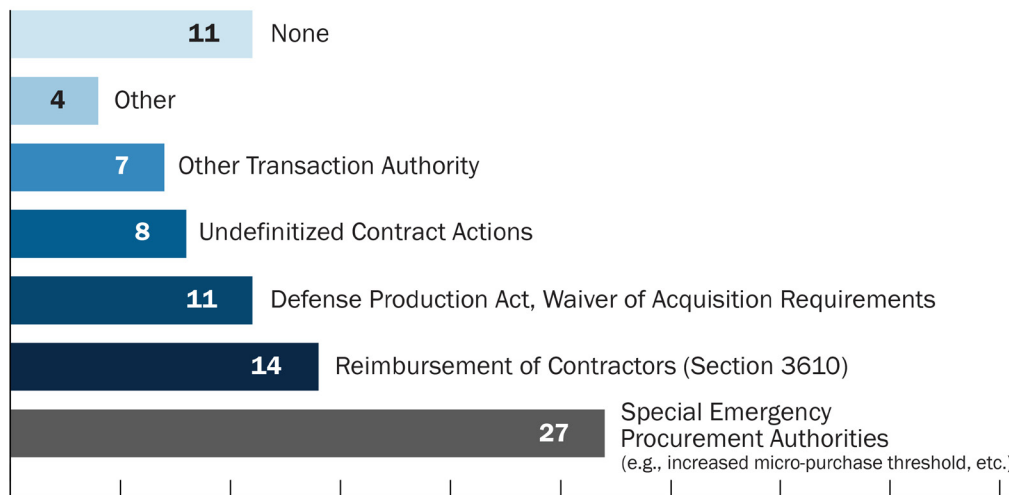
Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.
Note: Some agencies might have selected more than one answer while others selected none. The totals in the chart above depict how many respondents reported using each type of contracting flexibility with respondents selecting all that apply to them.

Respondents reported that contracting officials were to use sound judgment, weighing the best interests of the government, in making decisions regarding the approval of Section 3610 reimbursement requests. For example, one respondent noted they confirmed that their vendor did not receive any other CARES Act assistance for work associated with the specific contract that would be in noncompliance with receiving benefits under another program, such as the Small Business Administration's Paycheck Protection Program.

To help contracting officials assess contractor requests for Section 3610 reimbursements, civilian respondents reported that they used checklists, held virtual training sessions, issued "Policy Flashes" to provide guidance, and developed and shared answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs). Several DoD subagency respondents also reported providing virtual training and policy alerts.

Across all civilian and DoD respondents, 25 percent reported that they used the waiver of acquisition requirements in the Defense Production Act (DPA). The DPA is the primary source of presidential authorities to expedite and expand the supply of materials and services from the U.S. industrial base needed to promote the national defense.[16] Provisions in the DPA that agencies have leveraged during the pandemic include placing priority ratings on certain contracts to promote national defense, providing incentives

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16   National Strategy for the COVID 19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness accessed May 18, 2023.

or investments to private industry to expand domestic production and reduce foreign dependence, and entering into public-private agreements with industry to coordinate emergency responses.

The contracts workforce used several techniques and platforms to oversee and monitor pandemic-related contracts. Of the civilian agency respondents, 82 percent reported that they used remote monitoring platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx), telephone calls (79 percent), and reporting portals or tools (64 percent) to oversee and monitor contracts. DoD subagency responses were similar, with 81 percent using reporting portals or tools, and 75 percent using telephone calls and/or remote monitoring platforms. All but six agencies (across the 44 civilian agencies and DoD subagencies) used one or more remote monitoring platforms.

Agency guidance or bulletins and trainings were among the techniques that most civilian agency respondents reported offering their contracts workforce to assist with assessing risk. The guidance/bulletins and trainings focused on topics such as market research and conducting responsibility determinations. A majority of DoD subagency respondents also reported using agency guidance or bulletins and trainings. Both civilian agencies and DoD subagencies reported their workforces did not commonly use risk and control frameworks—with just 10 civilian agency respondents and five DoD respondents stating they leveraged these techniques.

Grants Survey Responses

We distributed the grants survey to the same 29 federal agencies that received the contracts survey and received 29 total responses from 20 distinct agencies (USDA submitted nine responses and VA submitted two responses at the subagency level). See Appendix B for a complete list of the grant survey respondents.

Between March 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021, these 20 agencies had awarded more than 65,000 pandemic-related grants totaling more than $229 billion. Notably, the Department of Education, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Transportation, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Housing and Urban Development accounted for 96 percent of the total COVID-19 grant award funding.

We asked the 29 survey respondents to provide feedback on several critical areas of federal grant functions and processes related to:

1. Grant Funding
2. Staffing Resources
3. Training Activities and Resources
4. IT Solutions and Resources
5. Resources for Effective Grant Oversight and Management

A lack of sufficient staffing, IT, and training resources created challenges across agencies and required the

grants workforce to use a variety of strategies to conduct their work. For example, several agencies brought on rehired annuitants. Respondents also reported using video conferencing and virtual collaboration platforms to perform remote monitoring.

Most respondents stated that their agencies or subagencies provided sufficient training to manage and administer their grants awards, however, almost half of respondents reported that they still needed additional training resources.

Grant Funding

Slightly more than half of the respondents reported that three or more components (e.g., bureaus, divisions, offices) within their agencies manage and administer pandemic response grants. Different agencies had different structures for how grant management occurs across their agencies. More than half of all respondents reported that their agencies used both agency-wide policy guidance and requirements along with individual component-level policy guidance and requirements. A few respondents relied solely on each individual component to develop their own policy guidance and requirements.

Top 5 Agencies, by COVID-19 Grant Dollar Value

1. **Department of Education**
   $273.6 billion

2. **Department of Health and Human Services**
   $89.4 billion

3. **Department of Transportation**
   $58 billion

4. **Department of Homeland Security**
   $29.7 billion

5. **Department of Housing and Urban Development**
   $15.5 billion

Top 5 Agencies, by Number of COVID-19 Grants

1. **Department of Health and Human Services**
   18,209 grants

2. **Department of Education**
   14,024 grants

3. **Department of Housing and Urban Development**
   11,116 grants

4. **Department of Transportation**
   10,531 grants

5. **Department of Homeland Security**
   2,092 grants

Source: USAspending.gov grant obligations between March 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021. See Appendix B for a complete list of agencies that responded to the grants survey.

Staffing Resources

Half of the agencies surveyed said they had adequate grants workforce staffing levels to manage the workload during the pandemic. Additionally, 59 percent of respondents reported that the number of grant officials at their agencies increased during the pandemic, 31 percent reported no change, and 10 percent of respondents reported a decrease.

Respondents reported that insufficient grants workforce personnel introduced risk to their agencies. Some of the risks included a proportional imbalance of the number of personnel to the amount of workload, use of the same grant personnel for both pandemic and non-pandemic grants, reduced time to work on grant administrative and monitoring activities, fatigue and burnout, and retention of experienced skilled grant personnel. These challenges occurred at various employee levels (i.e., managers, supervisors, and staff). The oversight community has also raised similar concerns about the increased risk associated with a constrained grants workforce.[17]

**About 76 percent of the grants survey respondents reported they used supplemental staffing resources.**
Grants obligations increased significantly during the pandemic as compared to pre-pandemic. To manage this increase, agencies used supplemental staffing to help award and administer COVID-19 related grants. The most common types of supplemental staffing resources included term employees, third-party contractors, and support services contractors. Respondents also listed using direct hiring authorities and detailing existing employees. However, despite the use of supplemental staffing, 59 percent of the respondents that used supplemental staffing resources reported that they did not have sufficient personnel to award and administer grant activities.

Agencies took a variety of actions to mitigate the impacts of not having sufficient grant personnel. The survey respondents who responded that they did not have enough qualified personnel (48 percent) to award and administer pandemic-related grants:

- Developed onboarding tools, increased internal staff trainings/meetings, created quarterly team building events, expanded online training for grantees, and deepened cross-collaboration with partners.

- Used non-competitive grants, which required less staff in the award process, allowing time for prospective grantees to build competitive grant applications.

- Supplemented existing awards instead of creating new awards for COVID-19 relief funds related to certain grant activities.

Of the total 29 respondents, more than half reported additional staffing challenges caused by the pandemic. These included resolving security clearances for contractors and new employees, finding sufficiently qualified candidates with federal grants management experience, and hiring specialized staff, such as financial analysts and grants specialists to monitor grants.

Figure 9: As of September 30, 2021, did your agency have a sufficient number of qualified personnel to award and administer COVID-19 pandemic response related grants?

14 reported no

15 reported yes
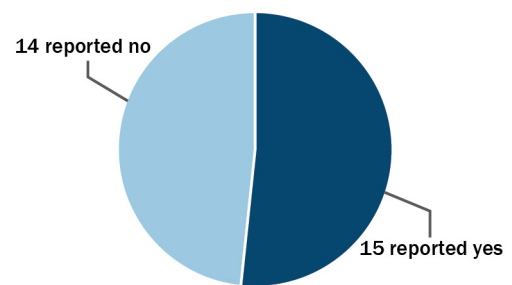
Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses

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17   TMPC Report accessed May 18, 2023. CIGIE, Top Management and Performance Challenges Facing Multiple Federal Agencies: February 2, 2021.

Significant staff turnover and new staff with limited experience overseeing grants at the federal level also created challenges. Additional challenges related to staffing that extended beyond issues with staff recruitment included the need for grants staff to work significant overtime to meet aggressive timelines for developing Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), processing grant awards, and diverting law enforcement and compliance activities to address core mission requirements. Furthermore, respondents reported having to pull permanent staff from their regular work assignments (i.e., grant monitoring, audit resolution, data management) to assist with processing COVID-19 grants.[18]

Training Resources

Nearly 80 percent of respondents said their agencies had provided training to grant-making employees. Many agencies reported providing training that was related specifically to COVID-19 rules and flexibilities provided under emergency and/or exigent circumstances. The frequency of the training varied across agencies, with some agencies offering one-time training and others offering ongoing training. For example, one respondent indicated their agency delivered 48 live trainings between March 27, 2020 and September 30, 2021, to over 12,000 participants across the U.S. and its territories.

Despite the training provided, many respondents reported they needed additional grants management training resources. Only 45 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the measures their agencies took to train grants officials while the remainder were neutral. For example, respondents reported needing specific training materials to help newer staff understand COVID-19 related flexibilities and needing designated staff or contractor support to create and facilitate grants management training sessions. Respondents reported that these types of training activities relied on existing overburdened grants management officials and further slowed processing times. This may have contributed to respondents noting staff fatigue and attrition among the workforce.

Risks Caused by Inadequate Staffing Resources for the Grants Workforce

- The influx of pandemic funds took time away from non-pandemic grant award and monitoring and oversight activities, and created staff fatigue, as the same staff worked on both pandemic and non-pandemic grants.

- Retention was a concern as there was uncertainty associated with temporary versus permanent appointments. Some staff left to accept permanent positions at other agencies and agencies with more manageable workloads.

- Agencies deferred or delayed other mission-critical tasks and program oversight activities to complete pandemic response activities, including developmental training of staff and investigations of administrative complaints.

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18   A Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is a formal announcement of the availability of Federal funding through a financial assistance program from a federal awarding agency. See 2 CFR § 200.204 Notices of funding opportunities, Section 200.204 accessed May 25, 2023.

IT Support Resources

Approximately 55 percent of the respondents reported needing additional IT resources. Of note, five respondents reported their agencies needed a grants management system or enhancements made to an existing system to manage grant reporting and payment processing, and/or needed customization to adapt to unique program requirements. OIGs have previously reported that their respective agencies rely on outdated IT systems to perform key functions and responsibilities, such as grants administration and management.

Another respondent reported that "Grants.gov representatives could not confirm if screen reader technology was compatible for applicants with disabilities...so [the agency] made accommodations to receive data outside of this system for [affected] applicants". This same respondent reported that the agency "lacked a secure, electronic solution to receive sensitive [bank information]" so "contractors collected the information by telephone, [which caused] a significant delay in the payment process."

Despite these additional IT resource needs cited by respondents, most respondents indicated that their agency provided video conferencing and virtual collaboration platforms (e.g., Teams, Skype, Zoom, WebEx,) to perform remote monitoring of pandemic response grants. Around 40 percent of respondents also reported using grant systems for the registration, application, and reporting processes connected to federal awards, such as SAM.gov or Grant Solutions.

Oversight and Management Resources

Approximately 60 percent of the respondents reported the pandemic had negative or other significant impacts on their agencies' abilities to administer and manage grants. Many respondents reported challenges and impacts associated with suspending or minimizing travel, shifting to or increasing remote work, or relying purely on virtual tools to conduct oversight activities. Others noted that engaging with customers exclusively through virtual channels (i.e., remote monitoring, webinars, and training sessions) prevented personal connections, limiting staffs' abilities to identify the most urgent needs or challenges recipients were facing and how best to support them. A few respondents reported that remote monitoring did not provide the same level of insight as being onsite and conducting in-person reviews, which created oversight concerns.

Respondents also highlighted that the increased workload due to pandemic-related grants stretched their workforce thin which impacted their ability to manage and oversee

Figure 10: Respondents reported whether the pandemic had a negative or other significant impact on their agencies' abilities to administer and manage grants.

40% reported no negative or significant impacts

60% reported negative or other significant impacts
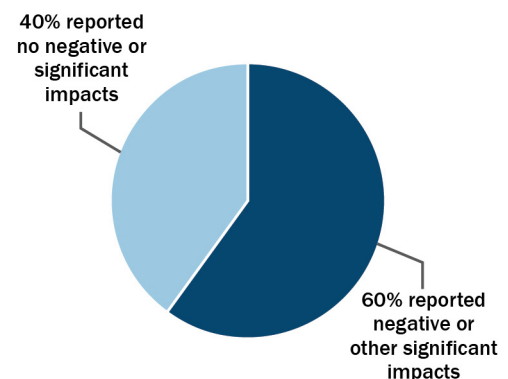
Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.

COVID-19 or previous grant actions. This also created burnout across the workforce. Relatedly, one respondent also noted that successful oversight of grants was already a long-standing challenge, which the significant increase in pandemic-related awards further exacerbated.

Of those that reported a minimal impact, several respondents noted that administration and management functions were already "telework ready," so moving them to a remote and/or virtual environment resulted in no impact to productivity.

Survey responses noted that agency guidance bulletins, training, and risk and control frameworks helped to assess grant and recipient risk. Several respondents also noted that their agencies enhanced or modified their databases or developed dashboards to better track, award, and/or report on COVID-19 grants. For example, one respondent described developing an online interactive COVID-19 "Cash Drawdown Tracker" that displayed information by component, pandemic legislation, Assistance Listing, and/or recipient. Other grant oversight techniques included deploying a COVID-19 task force, using decision matrices during program implementation, and leveraging different contracting vehicles to assist with oversight.

> **Challenges in Grant Administration and Management**
>
> - Challenges with integrating new staff into the office, collaborating, and identifying efficiencies within operations.
>
> - Complications with administrative and management work due to additional funding and program waivers.
>
> - Difficulty providing necessary training and technical assistance with no on-site visits to grantee offices.
>
> - Decreases in the scope of grant monitoring, levels of insight, and timelines with remote monitoring.
>
> - Negative impacts to applicants in areas with limited/no broadband access after moving to all-electronic grant application process.

The grants workforce used different techniques to oversee and monitor assistance awards funded with pandemic response funds. The techniques included regular internal meetings, engagement with external stakeholders,and portals, dashboards, and tools to track spending and activities. For example, almost all respondents stated that they used remote platforms, such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, and telephone calls to oversee and monitor grant awards. Additionally, more than 45 percent of respondents used desktop validation/reviews.[19] Other oversight activities reported by respondents included independent monitoring by third-party contractors, review of photographs or videos, and increased recipient reporting.

Respondents also used a variety of tools and resources that their agencies either developed or acquired to assist with oversight. For example, several agencies reported they held internal meetings and check-ins, and/or provided office hours to make sure grants offices were up to date with duties and expectations. Respondents also provided similar support to external stakeholders through conference calls, trainings, FAQs, and guidance documents to educate recipients on federal grantees' reporting requirements (i.e.,

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19   Desktop validation entails performing compliance monitoring and oversight procedures remotely from the auditor's/inspector's desk.

guidance for pass-through entities and federal requirements for managing and reporting subaward data in grant programs).

Agencies used a variety of tactics to quickly disburse pandemic response funds, but most relied on internal guidance to clarify grant flexibilities and other program requirements. Agencies responded that they used internal resources to help grant officials or external resources to aid grant applicants in applying and receiving grant funds. Respondents listed resources and actions, such as:

- Processing modifications that led to expedited review times.

- Providing templates to assist grant officials setting up new programs or to assist applicants in providing the proper documentation.

- Developing internal intranets that contained program-specific resources or external portals that contained policies, tutorials, or other resources to aid applicants.

- Developing both internal- and external-facing guidance to clarify program flexibilities.

- Implementing new administrative actions to manage the large influx of awards, such as offering grant officials credit hours or compensatory time or allowing the use of electronic signatures to expedite document approval processes for recipients.

Figure 11: Respondents reported whether they incorporated 2 CFR 200.202 planning and design into their programs.

40% did not incorporate program planning and design principles and practices into their programs

60% incorporated program planning and design principles and practices into their programs

Source: PRAC analysis of survey responses.

One respondent indicated that they were able to expedite pandemic funding by leveraging existing grant programs, adding that standing up new programs took additional time to consult with other participating federal entities and external stakeholders on program design. Additionally, one respondent indicated that they implemented a two-tier review structure that employed a scoring rubric based on established criteria to prioritize and expedite application reviews. After a panel reviewed and scored each application, the agency flagged applications for further review based on the standard deviation of the rubric scores assigned by evaluators, with priority given to applications with conflicting evaluator scores. This process ensured that staff brought forward applications requiring further review and discussion.

Approximately 60 percent of the respondents reported their agencies incorporated program planning and design principles and practices from federal regulations to develop and oversee COVID-19 programs. In November 2020, the Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR 200 subpart 200.202) introduced planning and design requirements to federal awarding agencies. As part of these requirements, agencies must create an Assistance Listing before announcing the NOFO.[20] Requirements include designing programs with clear

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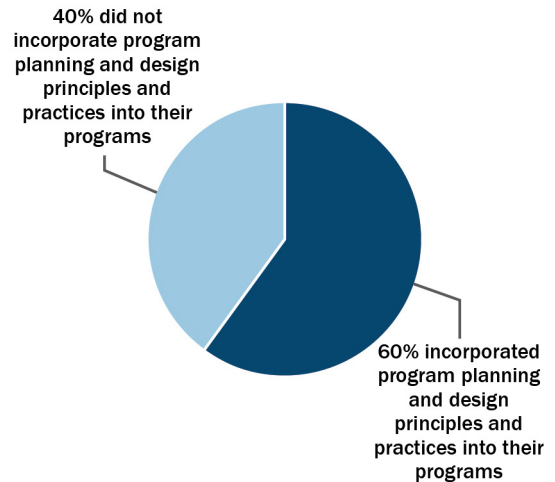
20 For more information on program planning and design, see § 200.202 Program planning and design, here: Section 200.202, accessed May 18, 2023.

goals and objectives that facilitate the delivery of meaningful results consistent with the legislative intent of the program.

About 60 percent of the respondents reported that they incorporated 2 CFR 200.202 planning and design into their programs. Additionally, several of these respondents noted that 2 CFR 200.202 was the foundation upon which their NOFO's were built.

Approximately 80 percent of the respondents said they used performance management practices in their programs; however, not all of these respondents cited 2 CFR 200 specifically. For example, one respondent reported that some pandemic-related grant programs were exempt from 2 CFR 200.202 planning and design requirements but focused on the administration of grant outcomes as part of their due diligence.

Respondents reported using the Performance Management Playbook practices and OMB guidance in the development and oversight of pandemic programs. Approximately 34 percent of respondents incorporated The Performance Management Playbook for Federal Awarding Agencies (Playbook) practices into their policies, guidance, program goals and more. The Playbook provides federal awarding agencies with promising practices for analyzing program and project results and individual award recipient performance, while maintaining and minimizing compliance efforts. [21]

Additionally, approximately 45 percent of respondents also stated that they either provided OMB guidance to their workforces or worked directly with OMB to provide guidance when standing up new programs, when applicable.

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21 Managing for Results: Performance Management Playbook for Federal Awarding Agencies accessed May 18, 2023.

Appendix A – Contracts Workforce Survey Respondents[22]

- Department of Commerce
- Department of Defense
  - Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency
  - Defense Commissary Agency
  - Defense Finance and Accounting Service
  - Defense Human Resources Activity
  - Defense Information Systems Agency
  - Defense Logistics Agency
  - Defense Media Activity
  - Defense Microelectronics Activity
  - Defense Threat Reduction Agency
  - Department of the Air Force
  - Department of the Army
  - Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Procurement
  - Missile Defense Agency
  - U.S. Transportation Command
  - Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences
  - Washington Headquarters Services, Acquisition Directorate
- Department of Education
- Department of Energy
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Homeland Security, Office
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Justice
- Department of Labor

- Department of State
- Department of the Interior
- Department of the Treasury
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Acquisition, Logistics & Construction
- Election Assistance Commission
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Federal Communications Commission
- General Services Administration
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Science Foundation
- Nuclear Regulatory Commission of the Chief Procurement Officer
- Office of Personnel Management
- Peace Corps
- Railroad Retirement Board
- Small Business Administration, Acquisitions Division, Office of the Chief Financial Officer
- Social Security Administration
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- U.S. Department of Agriculture

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22 The PRAC received a total of 48 responses to the contract's workforce survey, but after reviewing the responses and/or confirming with agency leadership, we determined that four responses were submitted erroneously by staff at subagencies not at the level intended to respond.

Appendix B – Grant Workforce Survey Respondents[23]

- Department of Commerce
- Department of Education
- Department of Health and Human Services , Assistant Secretary for Financial Resources, Office of Grants
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Housing and Urban Development
- Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs
- Department of Labor
- Department of State
- Department of the Interior, Office of Grants Management
- Department of the Treasury, Office of Recovery Programs
- Department of Transportation
- Department of Veterans Affairs
  - Veterans Health Administration, Grant and Per Diem Program
  - Veterans Health Administration, Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program

- Election Assistance Commission
- Environmental Protection Agency
- National Endowment for the Arts
- National Endowment for the Humanities
- National Science Foundation
- Small Business Administration, Office of Grants Management
- U.S. Agency for International Development
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - Agricultural Marketing Service
  - Agricultural Research Service
  - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service
  - Farm Production and Conservation Business Center
  - Food Safety and Inspection Service
  - National Institute of Food and Agriculture
  - Office of the Secretary, Marketing and Regulatory Programs
  - Rural Development
  - U.S. Forest Service

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23 The PRAC received a total of 35 responses to the survey, but after reviewing the responses and/or confirming with agency leadership, we determined that six responses were submitted erroneously by staff or submitted by agencies that indicated in their responses that they did not receive any pandemic related funding for grants. These responses were not included in the analyses for this report.

Appendix C – Acquisitions Workforce Survey

Section 15010 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act directs the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) to review whether there are sufficient, qualified acquisition personnel overseeing covered funds and the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) response as well as whether those personnel received adequate training, technology support, and other resources to perform their duties. The following questions and data requests seek to obtain information about individuals in the acquisition workforce who oversee, administer, and/or monitor covered funds and the COVID-19 response. The Chief Acquisition Officer (CAO), the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE), or the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) should please provide a unified response from your Department or agency, coordinating internally as necessary.

Key Definitions to Consider When Completing the Survey:

All covered funds—referred to as COVID-19 pandemic response funds—include those funds appropriated under the CARES Act; Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act; Families First Coronavirus Response Act; Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act; Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021; and American Rescue Plan of 2021.

The acquisition workforce—referred to as contracting officials—includes, for the purposes of this work, any agency personnel whose official job responsibilities include awarding, administering, or managing contracts or procurements either full-time or part-time, including those personnel involved in any aspect of the contract life cycle. This can include planning, awarding, managing, and reviewing performance of contracts or contracting processes. This should include personnel whose involvement in contracting or procurement work/activities is consistent and not conducted on an ad-hoc basis. Examples include, but are not limited to, program managers, requiring officials, contracting officers, contract specialists, contracting officer's representatives, and task monitors (and if applicable, any non-full time equivalents personnel serving in those roles, such as a third-party contractor or a retired annuitant).

Data Call Questions

1. Full Name:
2. Email:
3. Agency:

Contract Obligations

4. Did your agency use the National Interest Action (NIA) Code for COVID-19 contract reporting?
   a. Yes
   b. No

If No, go to question 8. If Yes:

5. Did your agency provide its workforce with OMB and/or other guidance on how to determine if the NIA applied?
    a. Yes
    b. No

6. Was there any confusion as to when the code should apply?
    a. Yes
    b. No

7. What steps were taken to support uniform implementation of use of the code across the agency?
    a. Text Response

8. How many components (e.g., bureaus, divisions, offices, etc.) within your Federal agency manage and administer COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?
    a. Numerical Response

Staffing Resources

9. As of September 30, 2021, please indicate the number of staff (include full-time and part-time) working as Contracting Officers
    a. Numerical Response

10. As of September 30, 2021, please indicate the number of staff (include full-time and part-time) working as Contract Specialists
    a. Numerical Response

11. As of September 30, 2021, please indicate the number of staff (include full-time and part-time) working as Contracting Officer Representatives (COR) (including alternate CORs or assistant CORs)
    a. Numerical Response

12. As of September 30, 2021, please indicate the number of staff (include full-time and part-time) working as Task Monitors (if applicable)
    a. Numerical Response

13. How does the size your agency's acquisition workforce compare to the size of the workforce prior to and after the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., before March 27, 2020 and as of September 30, 2021)? Note: This should be general characterization of the change in size.
    a. Our agency's acquisition workforce increased during the pandemic
    b. Our agency's acquisition workforce decreased during the pandemic
    c. Our agency's acquisition workforce did not change during the pandemic
    d. Other. (Please provide any additional information, if necessary.)

14. Select which of the following supplemental staffing resources were used by your agency to assist in COVID-19 pandemic response day-to-day contract planning, awarding, and performance management related contract oversight. (Select all that apply.)
    a. Third Party Contractors

    b. Personal Services Contractors

    c. Support Services Contractors

    d. Reemployed Annuitants

    e. Term employees

    f. Assisted acquisition staff

    g. AbilityOne

    h. None

    i. Other (explain)

15. As of September 30, 2021, did your agency have a sufficient number of qualified (e.g., certified) contracting officials available to plan for, award, and administer COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?

    a. Yes

    b. No

If Yes, go to question 19. If No:

16. How many additional contracting officials (full-time, part-time, support) does your agency need to work on COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?

    a. Numerical Response

17. What is the impact of not having sufficient contracting officials to award and manage COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?

    a. Text Response

18. What has your agency done to mitigate the impacts described above? Provide a brief description.

    a. Text Response

Training Resources

19. Between March 27, 2020, and September 30, 2021, did your agency provide training on contract management and performance oversight to contracting officials involved in COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?

    a. Yes

    b. No

If No, go to question 21. If Yes:

20. Please provide a list of all training activities and a brief summary/purpose of the training activity.

    a. Text Response

21. What additional resources, if any, are needed to provide training or maintain certification for contracting officials overseeing COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?

    a. Text Response

22. Overall, how satisfied are you with the measures that your agency has taken to train contracting officials working on pandemic response contracts? (Select a response below.)
    a. Dissatisfied
    b. Neutral
    c. Satisfied

If Neutral, go to question 24. If Satisfied/Dissatisfied:

23. Please elaborate as to why you are Satisfied/Dissatisfied with the measures your agency has taken to train acquisitions officials working on pandemic response contracts.
    a. Text Response

IT Support Resources

24. What technology solutions has your agency provided to contracting officials to appropriately manage contracts and contractor performance remotely? (Select all that apply.)
    a. Video Conferencing or virtual collaboration platforms (i.e., Microsoft Teams, Skype, WebEx, Zoom, etc.)
    b. Reporting capabilities or tools
    c. Other
    d. None

If none:

25. If none, is your agency in the process of obtaining/procuring additional IT solutions to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. N/A

If No or N/A, go to question 27. If Yes:

26. Please elaborate as to which additional IT solutions your agency is in the process of obtaining/procuring to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response contracts?
    a. Text Response
27. What additional IT resources, if any, would have assisted your agency in the administration and management (including contractor oversight activities) of COVID-19 pandemic response contracts? Please describe.
    a. Text Response

Contract Oversight and Management Resources

28. Please describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your agency's ability to perform contract administration and management functions, if at all.
    a. Text Response

29. Which of the following techniques did your agency use to provide oversight and monitoring of contracts funded with COVID-19 pandemic response funds? (Select all that apply.)
    a. Telephone calls
    b. Remote monitoring platforms (ex. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, etc.)
    c. Reporting portals or tools
    d. More frequent recipient reporting
    e. Photographs or video
    f. Independent monitoring from third parties
    g. Desktop validation
    h. None
    i. Other (Please explain)

30. Did your agency use any of the following contracting or procurement flexibilities provided by the CARES Act? (Select all that apply)
    a. Undefinitized Contract Actions (UCA)
    b. Other Transaction Authority (OTA)
    c. Special Emergency Procurement Authorities (e.g., increased micro-purchase threshold, increased Simplified Acquisition Threshold, etc.)
    d. Reimbursement of contractors (Section 3610)
    e. Defense Production Act, Waiver of Acquisition Requirements (e.g., revised notification requirements, use of electronic signature and notification, waived internal review/approval process, broad authority for urgent and compelling, etc.)
    f. None
    g. Other (Please describe)

31. Based on the selections in the previous question, please describe how your agency used those contracting flexibilities to assist contracting officials in performing duties as well as any guidance or resources provided to your agency's contracting officials to better understand or utilize those flexibilities.
    a. Text Response

32. Which of the following resources did your agency provide to contracting officials to assess risk (such as market research and responsibility determinations and program risk) related to COVID-19 pandemic response contracts? (Select all that apply.)
    Note: These resources could include fraud detection resources used for non-COVID-19 pandemic response contracts, and not necessarily new resources developed specifically for COVID-19 pandemic response contracts.
    a. Agency guidance or bulletins
    b. Training
    c. Risk and control framework
    d. None
    e. Other (Please specify and describe.)

Overall View of Resources for Contracting Officials

33. Overall, please respond to the statements below regarding your agency's response to providing oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response contracts and contract supported activities. Please respond with a unified response considering your agency's full acquisition workforce:

My agency:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Has sufficient resources, overall.					
Has sufficient staffing resources.					
Has sufficient training resources.					
Has sufficient IT resources.					
Provided sufficient guidance to contracting officials.					
Received sufficient guidance from the Office of Management and Budget.					

34. Please provide any additional information, that has not already been discussed, regarding resources available to your agency in managing COVID-19 pandemic response contracts.
    a. Text Response

Appendix D – Grants Workforce Survey

Section 15010 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act directs the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee (PRAC) to review whether there are sufficient, qualified grant personnel overseeing covered funds and the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) response as well as whether those personnel received adequate training, technology support, and other resources to perform their duties.

The following questions and data requests seek to obtain information about the grant workforce and those individuals overseeing, administering, or managing covered funds and the COVID-19 response. The CFO (or the senior agency official responsible for grants activity) should please provide a unified response from your Department or agency, coordinating internally as necessary.")

Key Definitions to Consider When Completing the Survey:

All covered funds—referred to as COVID-19 pandemic response funds—include those funds appropriated under the CARES Act; Paycheck Protection Program and Health Care Enhancement Act; Families First Coronavirus Response Act; Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act; Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2021; and American Rescue Plan of 2021.

The grants workforce—referred to as grants officials—includes any personnel (i.e., direct hire, staff employed through other hiring mechanisms, or contractor support) whose official job responsibilities include overseeing, administering, or managing grants, as well as developing, monitoring, and evaluating programs (i.e., federal financial assistance awards, grants, and cooperative agreements) either full-time or part-time, including those personnel involved in any aspect of the grant life cycle. This should include program management and oversight, grants execution and implementation, and administrative support and fiscal functions, as well as program aspects of the grant. This should include personnel whose involvement in grant work is consistent and not conducted on an ad-hoc basis. Examples of positions identified as grants officials may include, but is not limited to, grants manager, program manager, grants officers, grants officer representatives, financial officers, and grants specialists (and, if applicable, any non-full-time equivalent personnel serving in those roles). Where applicable, please reference the CFO Council Financial Assistance Management Career Roadmap (AM Career Roadmap Report) in your agency's assessment of staffing and training resources.

Data Call Questions

1. Full Name:
2. Email:
3. Agency:

Funding

For questions below, please include all funds provided by your agency through grants officials, including competitive grants, formula grants, or other means such as cooperative agreements.

4. How many components (e.g., bureaus, divisions, offices, etc.) within your Federal agency manage and administer COVID-19 pandemic response grants?
   a. 0
   b. 1
   c. 2
   d. 3+

If 0, go to question 6. If answer greater than 1:

5. If multiple components manage and administer COVID-19 pandemic response grants within your Federal agency, do they use agency-wide policy guidance/requirements or does each individual component develop its own policy guidance/requirements?
   a. Agency-wide policy guidance/requirements
   b. Component policy guidance/requirements
   c. Both
   d. None

Staffing Resources

6. Regarding personnel working on COVID-19 pandemic response grants, as of September 30, 2021, how many agency staff performed duties as grants officials, as described above, more than on an ad-hoc basis (i.e., people who generally spend more than 25% of their time on grants work)?
   a. Numerical Response

7. How does the number of grants officials at your agency compare to the number of grants officials prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., before March 27, 2020 and as of September 30, 2021)?
   Note: This should be general characterization of the change in size.
   a. The number of grant officials at our agency increased during the pandemic
   b. The number of grant officials at our agency decreased during the pandemic
   c. The number of grant officials at our agency did not change during the pandemic
   d. Other. (Please provide any additional information, if necessary.)

8. Select which of the following supplemental staffing resources were used by your agency to assist in COVID-19 pandemic response related grants oversight. (Select all that apply.)
   a. Third Party Contractors
   b. Personal Services Contractors
   c. Support Services Contractors
   d. Reemployed Annuitants
   e. Term Employees
   f. None
   g. Other (explain)

9. As of September 30, 2021, did your agency have a sufficient number of qualified personnel to award and administer COVID-19 pandemic response related grants?
   a. Yes
   b. No

If Yes, go to question 13. If No:

10. If no, how many additional personnel (full-time, part-time, support staff) does your agency need to work on COVID-19 pandemic response related grants? (Note: This can include direct hires and contractor support staff.)
    a. Numerical Response

11. What is the impact of not having sufficient personnel to work on the financial assistance award process for COVID-19 pandemic response related grants? Provide a brief description.
    a. Text Response

12. What has your agency done to mitigate the impacts described above? Provide a brief description.
    a. Text Response

13. Please provide any additional information on challenges you encountered related to your agency's staffing of grants officials due to the COVID-19 pandemic response funding.
    a. Text Response

Training Resources

14. Did your agency provide training(s) between March 27, 2020 and September 30, 2021 to grants officials working on COVID-19 pandemic response grants that would assist them in performing grants management and oversite activities?
    a. Yes
    b. No

If No, go to question 16. If Yes:

15. If yes, please provide the list of training(s) with a brief summary of the purpose of the training activities.
    a. Text Response

16. What additional resources, if any, are needed to provide grants management training for grants officials overseeing COVID-19 pandemic response funds?
    a. Text Response

17. Overall, how satisfied are you with the measures that your agency has taken to train grants officials working on pandemic response grants? (Select a response below.)
    a. Dissatisfied
    b. Neutral
    c. Satisfied

If Neutral, go to question 19. If Satisfied/Dissatisfied:

18. Please elaborate as to why you are Satisfied/Dissatisfied with the measures your agency has taken to train grants officials working on pandemic response grants.
    a. Text Response

IT Support Resources

19. What IT solutions has your agency provided to grants officials to perform remote monitoring for COVID-19 pandemic response grants? (Select all that apply.)
    a. Video conference or virtual collaboration platforms (i.e., Teams, Skype, Zoom, WebEx, etc.)
    b. Grants system (i.e., system for reporting progress)
    c. None
    d. Other. (Please describe.)

If A, B, or D, go to question 22. If None:

20. If none, is your agency in the process of obtaining/procuring additional IT solutions to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response grants?
    a. Yes
    b. No

If No, go to question 22. If Yes:

21. Please elaborate as to which additional IT solutions your agency is in the process of obtaining/ procuring to assist with remote monitoring and oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response grants?
    a. Text Response

22. What additional IT resources, if any, would have assisted your agency in the administration and monitoring of COVID-19 pandemic response grants? Please describe.
    a. Text Response

Grants Oversight and Management Resources

23. Please describe how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your agency's ability to perform grants administration and management functions, if at all. (If no impact, please note that no impact occurred in your response.)
    a. Text Response

24. The next two questions relate to efforts your agency has taken to increase focus on effective program management, including the establishment of clear goals and objectives and measuring progress against them.

    Please indicate the extent to which your agency has incorporated 2 CFR 200.202, Program planning and design, and the principles and practices of the Performance Management Playbook, in your agency's development and oversight of COVID-19 programs.
    a. Text Response

25. What resources did your agency, or OMB, provide to help your grants officials to stand up new programs (i.e., Playbook, OMB M-20-21, internally developed guidance, etc.).
    a. Text Response

26. What resources (guidance, policies, directions, etc.), if any, did your agency provide to grants officials to allow for or assist in awarding or disbursing COVID-19 pandemic response funds more quickly? (If none provided, please indicate that none were provided in your response.)
    a. Text Response

27. What monitoring activities did your agency's grants officials use to effectively oversee or monitor performance of COVID-19 pandemic response related grants? (Select all that apply.)
    a. Telephone calls
    b. Remote monitoring platforms (ex. Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, etc.)
    c. Reporting portals or tools
    d. More frequent recipient reporting
    e. Photographs or video
    f. Independent monitoring from third parties
    g. Desktop validation/reviews
    h. None.
    i. Other. (Please explain.)

28. Which of the following resources did your agency provide to grants officials to assess risk (such as program and recipient risk) related to COVID-19 pandemic response grants and recipients? (Select all that apply.)
    Note: These resources could include fraud detection resources used for non-COVID-19 pandemic response grants, and not necessarily new resources developed specifically for COVID-19 pandemic response grants.
    a. Agency guidance or bulletins
    b. Training
    c. Risk and control framework
    d. None
    e. Other (Please specify and describe.)

29. What additional tools or resources, if any, did your agency develop or acquire to assist with oversight of COVID-19 pandemic response grants?
    a. Text Response

Overall View of Resources for Grants Officials

30. Overall, please respond to the statements below regarding your agency's response to providing oversight of the COVID-19 pandemic response grants:

My agency:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Has sufficient resources, overall.					
Has sufficient staffing resources.					
Has sufficient training resources.					
Has sufficient IT resources.					
Provided sufficient guidance to grant officials.					
Received sufficient guidance from the Office of Management and Budget.					

31. Please provide any additional information, that has not already been provided, regarding resources available to your agency in managing COVID-19 pandemic response grants.
    a. Text Response

Appendix E – Acronyms

CARES Act	The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
DPA	Defense Production Act
DoD	Department of Defense
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question
FY	Fiscal Year
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IT	Information Technology
NIA	National Interest Action
NOFO	Notice of Funding Opportunities
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PRAC	Pandemic Response Accountability Committee
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs

For more information:

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To report allegations of fraud, waste, abuse, or misconduct regarding pandemic relief funds or programs please go to the PRAC website at PandemicOversight.gov.

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