Medical Reserve Corps

2023 Operational Readiness Awards

Interim Report

September 2023

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Summary of the 2023 Operational Readiness Awards

What are the Operational Readiness Awards?

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) distributes Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) Operational Readiness Awards through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response (ASPR) Medical Reserve Corps Program Office.
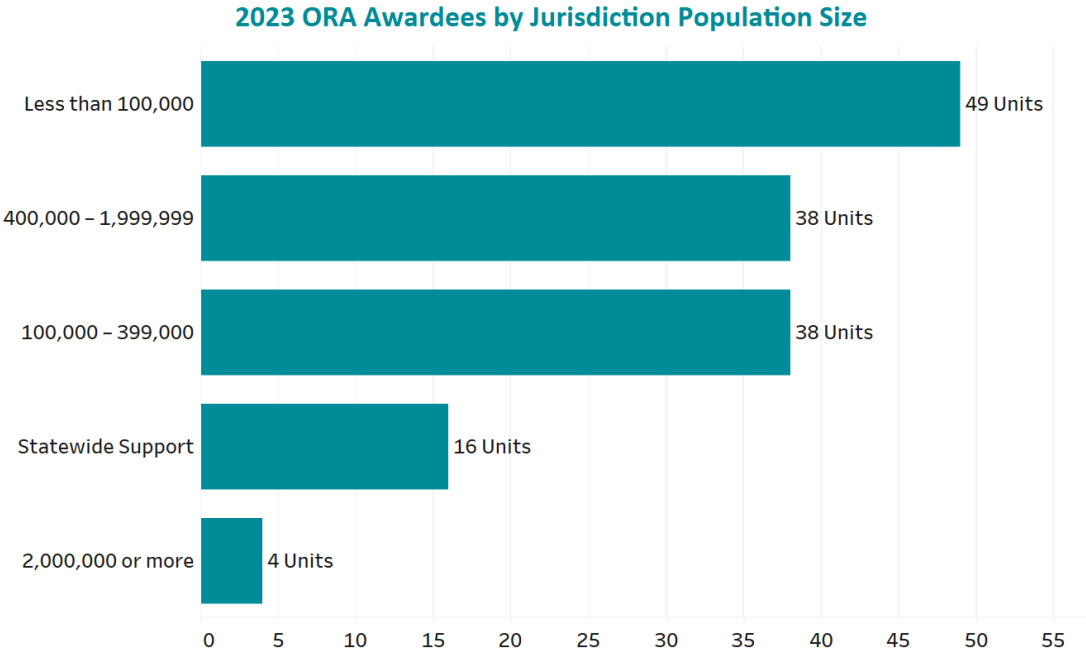
In 2020, NACCHO transitioned from the previous Challenge Awards format to providing Operational Readiness Awards (ORAs). The ORAs were designed to provide seed money for MRC units to build and strengthen volunteer and unit response capabilities. These awards aim to build the operational readiness capabilities of MRC volunteers and units to meet the emergency preparedness and response needs of their local, regional, or statewide stakeholders.

This report includes an overview of the 2023 MRC ORAs and the results of the Interim Project Survey. The interim project evaluation is typically completed by awardees approximately six months after they receive notice of award. The survey provides an opportunity for MRC units to share progress or challenges on planned activities and provide feedback on the award process.

Award Tiers

In 2023, NACCHO awarded **145 MRC Operational Readiness Awards**, totaling $1,245,000, via two funding tiers:

- ❖ **(41 units) Tier 1: $5,000** – Projects designed to build MRC response capabilities.
- ❖ **(104 units) Tier 2: $10,000** – Projects designed to strengthen MRC response capabilities.

2023 ORA Awardees by Jurisdiction Population Size

Jurisdiction Population Size	Units
Less than 100,000	49 Units
400,000 – 1,999,999	38 Units
100,000 – 399,000	38 Units
Statewide Support	16 Units
2,000,000 or more	4 Units

2023 Operational Readiness Awards Impacts and Outcomes

Fast Facts

140 awardees, or **97% of all awardees, completed the interim report survey** which informed this report.	Of responding units, **28,434 MRC volunteers** are anticipated to directly **benefit** from the 2023 Operational Readiness Award activities.
Units plan to develop **296 mission sets** as part of their Operational Readiness Award activities.	**93%** of respondents **have started** their Operational Readiness Award activities, at the time of the survey.

n=114

ASPR Priorities for the MRC

2023 Operational Readiness awardees were expected to align their project goals and activities to support at least one of the four ASPR priorities for the MRC which include:

1. **Medical screening and care in emergencies**
   a. Including medical support at shelters, clinics, mobile disaster hospitals, alternate care sites, evacuee resource centers, and community outreach sites; medical screening and surveillance during infectious disease outbreaks; and patient movement support.
2. **Points of dispensing (PODs), mass vaccinations, and other mass dispensing efforts**
   a. Including medical countermeasure PODs, mass vaccination clinics, and commodity distribution support (e.g., N95 masks, water, and/or food).
3. **Deployment of volunteers outside of local jurisdiction**
   a. Including activation across city and/or county lines (e.g., to assist a response in a neighboring community – potentially with other local MRC units) and Emergency Management Assistance Compact deployments across state lines.
4. **Community response outreach and training**
   a. Including STOP THE BLEED® and CPR/AED training events.

MRC Mission Sets

Released in 2019 and updated in 2021, the MRC Deployment Readiness Guide outlines a number of deployment readiness tools for unit leaders and training resources for MRC volunteers. The Deployment Readiness Guide also introduced the concept of mission sets. A mission set is "a scalable response and recovery capability for MRC units and volunteers that is organized, developed, trained, and exercised prior to an emergency or disaster for local, state, and/or regional deployment purposes." While Tier 1 awardees were funded to develop volunteer-level capabilities, Tier 2 awardees were funded to develop unit-level capabilities,

including to identify new or evolving response missions and draft corresponding mission sets. A template and examples of Mission Sets developed through ORAs are featured on NACCHO's MRC website.

In the 2023 ORA Interim Evaluation Survey, NACCHO asked units how many mission sets or response capabilities they expected to develop or strengthen because of the ORA project. More than half of units (96) expected to develop at least one mission set or response team capability with the 2023 ORA. All 96 units were in Tier II and on average plan to develop three mission sets per unit. The minimum number of mission sets a unit planned to develop was one, and the maximum number of mission sets a unit plans to develop is 14. The breakdown of number of mission sets and number of units is shown in the table below.

| Table 1: Mission sets planned to be developed from 2023 ORA funds		
# of Mission Set	# of Units	Total Mission Sets Planned to be Develop
1	19	19
2	33	66
3	26	78
4	5	20
5	3	15
6	6	36
9	1	9
10	1	10
14	2	28
Total	96	296

Delayed Projects

Of the 140 interim survey respondents, 93% reported they have started their activities at the time of the interim project survey, 1% higher than 2022 ORA awardees at the same point in time. Few units reported not yet starting their planned activities (7%).

Ten Units (7%) have not yet started their planned activities. The bar graph below displays the breakdown of reasons what has prevented them from beginning. Seven units responded, "Other" as the reason that has prevented them from beginning. Other text included:
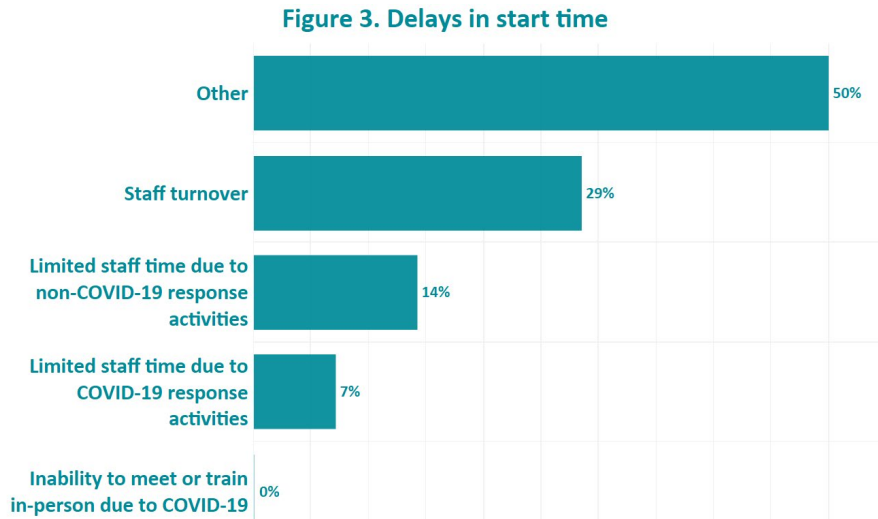
Percent of Units Project Started

- Budget uncertainties end of fiscal year challenges by sponsoring entity
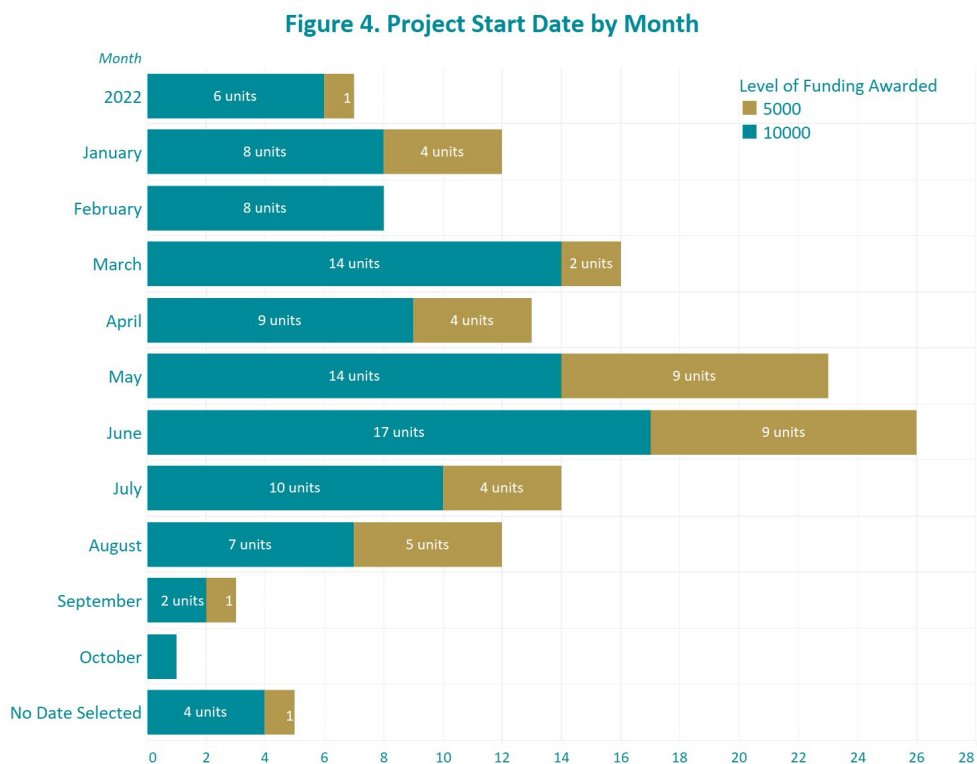- Check arrived late
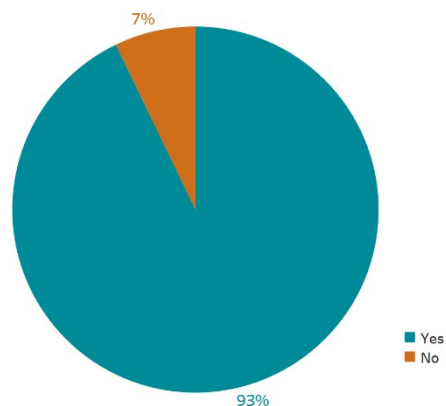
- Coordinator on short-term disability
- End of fiscal year hold on purchases related to equipment
- Finishing activities from RISE extension
- Limited time due to end of year grant activities
- Waiting on approval to spend funds

Units also reported the following reasons preventing them from beginning their planned activities, staff turnover (four units), limited staff time due to non-COVID-19 response activities (two units), and limited staff time due to COVID-19 response activities (one unit), Figure 3.

Figure 3. Delays in start time

| Category	Value
Other	50%
Staff turnover	29%
Limited staff time due to non-COVID-19 response activities	14%
Limited staff time due to COVID-19 response activities	7%
Inability to meet or train in-person due to COVID-19	0%

Despite the challenges, 97% of units reported an actual or anticipated project start date. Figure 4 shows anticipated start dates by month in 2023, all projects started in 2022 were combined.

Figure 4. Project Start Date by Month

Month	10000	5000
2022	6 units	1
January	8 units	4 units
February	8 units	
March	14 units	2 units
April	9 units	4 units
May	14 units	9 units
June	17 units	9 units
July	10 units	4 units
August	7 units	5 units
September	2 units	1
October		
No Date Selected	4 units	1

MRC Volunteer Engagement

ORA awardees were asked how many MRC volunteers were expected to contribute to the implementation of ORA projects and how many MRC volunteers were expected to directly benefit from the projects. The average number of volunteers contributing per project is 99, which is higher than the average number of volunteers contributing per project for the 2022 ORA project. The average number of volunteers that are expected to benefit from the ORA project is 205 volunteers per project. Overall, the number of volunteers benefiting from the ORA project is twice as much as the number of volunteers who will be contributing to the project.

Figure 5. Volunteers Benefiting vs Volunteers Contributing to Projects
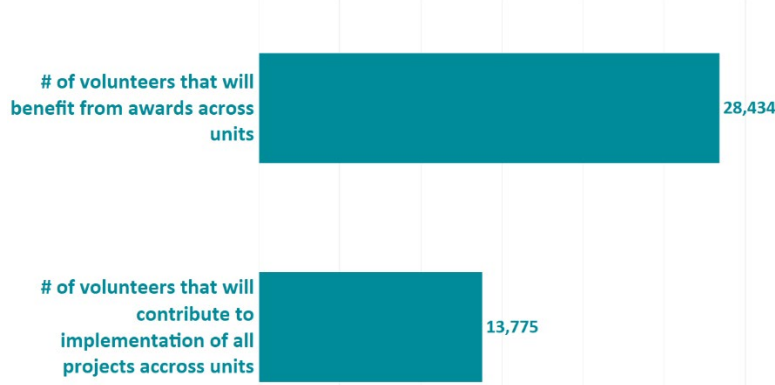
Feedback on Award Process

ORA awardees were asked a series of questions to help NACCHO's MRC staff evaluate the usefulness and ease of the MRC ORA process from extremely satisfied to extremely dissatisfied. Respondents were extremely satisfied with the award process. Figure 6 and 7 below show the satisfaction rates of the request for application (RFA) process, timeline of application period, online application, communication with/from NACCHO staff, completing and submitting the first deliverable, and contract processing.

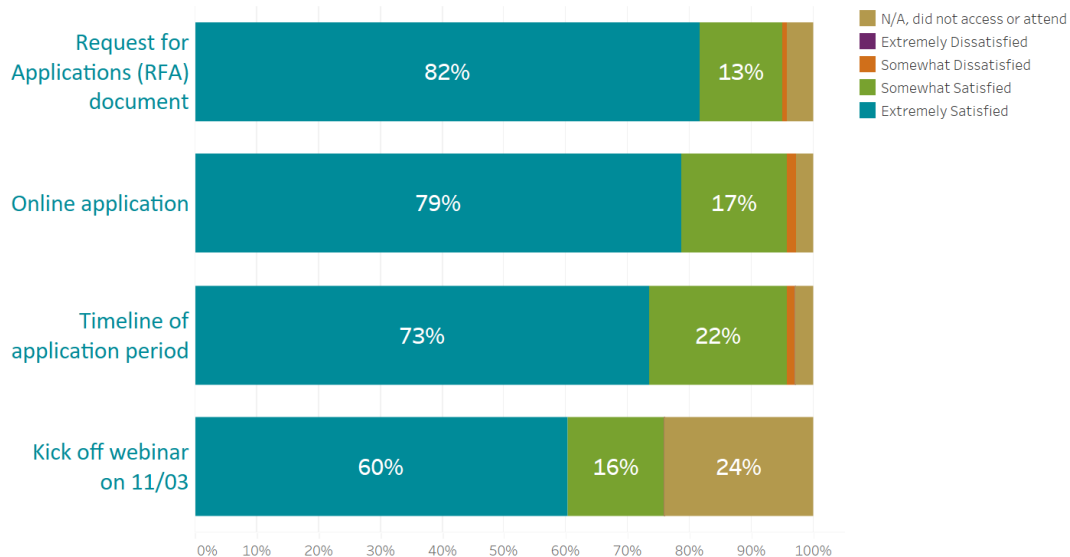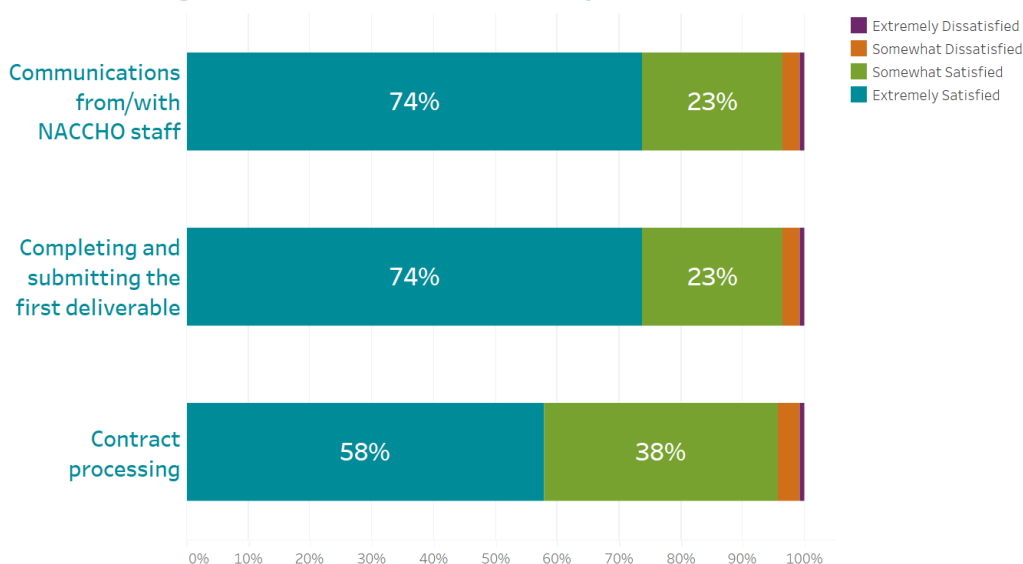Figure 6: Satisfaction with award process

Figure 7: Satisfaction with award process

Awardees reported being extremely satisfied with the Request for Application (RFA) document, 82% and 13% somewhat satisfied. A majority of awardees (79%) were extremely satisfied with the online application and 17% somewhat satisfied with the online application. A majority (73%) were also extremely satisfied with the timeline of the application period and 22% were somewhat satisfied with the timeline of the application period. Satisfaction with the kickoff webinar on 11/03/2022 was the lowest, with 60% of respondents extremely satisfied, 16% of respondents somewhat satisfied, and 24% N/A, did not access or attend. The 24% of respondents who reported not attending the kickoff webinar may also include new unit leaders who started after the award was granted or change in staffing.

Both communications from/with NACCHO staff and completing and submitting the first deliverable had a 74% extremely satisfactory rating with 23% somewhat satisfactory rating, 3% somewhat dissatisfied rating, and 1% extremely dissatisfied rating. The lowest satisfaction of all award process categories was contract processing, with 58% extremely satisfied, 38% somewhat satisfied, 4% somewhat dissatisfied, and 1% extremely dissatisfied.

Room for improvement is available in all aspects of the ORA award process but most importantly the contract processing and kick off webinar attendance and awareness. However, it is important to note that overall awardees are satisfied with the award process and communications with NACCHO staff has improved since the 2022 interim report with 53% extremely satisfied and 31% somewhat satisfied. The timeline of the application period has also had a slight increase in satisfaction from 2022, with an increase of 5% more of awardees being satisfied with the timeline of the application period.

Success Stories from the Field

Respondents were asked to share success stories thus far, that have captured the impact of their Operational Readiness Award activities on the people and communities that their MRC unit serves. Examples of these stories are shared below within four main categories: training in action, volunteer recruitment and retention, public health, and capacity to serve.

Training in Action

Dallas County Alabama MRC, Tier II Awardee

"Our MRC operates a clinic were volunteers come and see actual patients. We do this weekly and the benefit to our patients is pretty easy to see. The real benefit I see is the life experience the volunteers get. So many times we all see the world through our regular routines. These volunteers have been able to affect the lives of people they would not ordinarily interact with. The level of personal growth and empathy they develop is hard to calculate. NACCHO funding allows not only the improved emergency capabilities of our unit but also the long term personal growth of our volunteers."

Northwest Vermont MRC, Tier I Awardee

"We've been distributing cooling towels and tick kits at public events since mid-March. So far, we've distributed about 1,000 cooling towels and 700 tick kits. We also provided a warm weather preparedness training to about 20 volunteers. The training included information on ticks, mosquitos, poison ivy, and sun safety."

Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Northeast Region Tennessee MRC, Tier II Awardee

"Our MRC Unit invited the Sullivan County (TN) MRC Unit to collaborate on putting on a day-long conference for MRC volunteers on Saturday, April 15. The conference was titled, "2023 MRC Conference: Where Superheroes Hangout." Four volunteers worked side-by-side with our unit's Spring Intern and both MRC Coordinators to plan and carry out the conference. Forty-one volunteers and staff attended the first-ever educational and recognition conference for MRC volunteers in this region. Written evaluation surveys from the day's participants showed it was very well received and greatly appreciated."

Central District Health Indiana MRC, Tier I Awardee

"We had 60 MRC volunteers participate in a Training Needs Assessment which helped to outline which trainings we should prioritize funding from the ORA. Early planning has helped to write out clear expectations over the next project period as defined by the ORA."

Public Health

Berkshire Massachusetts MRC, Tier II Awardee

"The use of our Art and Creative Healing group and our Support K9s have seen huge positive responses from our vulnerable populations."

Colorado Muslim Society MRC, Tier II Awardee

"We have had at least 10 families who came to the facility refusing the COVID vaccine and ending up realizing the benefits and getting their vaccine."

MRC of SW Vermont, Tier II Awardee

"We have two Oral Health Ambassadors (dentists) working with us to recruit 5-10 hygienists to join our MRC and work at our oral health pediatric popup clinics. Our clinics will be place-based, bringing these critical services to those participating in local kids' camps. We will be outside under tents doing assessments, fluoride application, education and SDF as needed. Our dentists will also be providing some basic referrals for the worse cases. We also partnered with our Federally qualified health centers to provide free dental products for the kids to take home with them. Our first clinic is this Friday, we are ready to roll this pilot out!"

Increased Capacity to Serve

San Mateo County California MRC, Tier I Awardee

"The San Mateo County Medical Reserve Corps has had early success in enhancing our disaster and response related capabilities. One notable achievement was the collaboration with our neighbors at the Alameda County MRC, where they generously offered to teach 11 SMC MRC volunteers and prospective members the vital skills of "Stop the Bleed." This valuable training has given community members and MRC volunteers the skills needed to confidently treat bleeding injuries and has strengthened our existing relationship with a nearby MRC unit. Another success story was our active participation in the Menlo Park and North Fair Oaks Disaster Preparedness Day fairs, which served as excellent platforms for recruitment and spreading awareness about the MRC's mission. Through these events, the MRC successfully engaged with the local community, fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience. The ORA grant has undoubtedly been instrumental in these achievements, strengthening the MRC's ability to protect and serve their community during times of crisis."

OKMRC Oklahoma County MRC, Tier II Awardee

"…The Stress Response Team led this training and taught 16 OKMRC volunteers how to provide medical and psychological first aid at a trauma scene. This training expanded volunteer capabilities, so they feel prepared to provide medical and psychological support at disaster sites. Members of the Stress Response Team led a de-escalation training to Homeless Alliance employees and OKMRC volunteers as the second training course to support the Resiliency Mission Set. Eighty-five individuals were in attendance online and in-person, including nine OKMRC volunteers. In class, OKMRC volunteers and Homeless Alliance employees had the opportunity to discuss self-calming techniques that can be employed during tense situations. Our volunteers can utilize these skills at disaster sites. The training also provided a space for OKMRC volunteers to become more familiar with the Homeless Alliance, one of our partners."

NACCHO Award Improvements

Award Improvement Comments:

- Similarly, to previous years, awardees reported delays in contract and check processing which meant many units did not receive award payments until the project year was already underway.
- Awardees found it very helpful when NACCHO provided examples for the application, especially for those who have never applied for an award.
- 2023 ORA Awardees thought "NACCHO's award system is consistent, fair, and easy to navigate. The NACCHO staff are always available to assist if needed." – *OKMRC Stress Response Team, Tier II*
- Three awardees stated they would be interested in a tracking system to track outstanding deliverables and due dates.

NACCHO is actively working to streamline future ORAs for future project years and improve internal coordination with the contracts and grants team.

Acknowledgements

1. Lorain County MRC, Tier II Awardee

2. Pike County MRC, Tier I Awardee

3. Upper Merrimack Valley MRC, Tier II Awardee