May 28, 2020 Progress Reporting "Office Hours" Webinar Transcript

Slide 2 - Introductions:

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to progress reporting office hours. My name is Ginger Baran. I'm a senior analyst at the Justice Department's Office on Violence Against Women where I manage OVW's performance measurement portfolio and our research and evaluation initiative. I am joined by my colleague, Emma West Rasmus, who is working with me to ensure we get you answers to your questions whether on this call today or on a follow-up email.

Slide 3 - Goal of today's call (minute 0:30):

Before we start I would like to invite team members from the VAWA Measuring Effectiveness Initiative to introduce themselves. I think that will be Tara Wheeler today.

>> Yes, Hi. This is Tara Wheeler. I work at the Violence Against Women Measuring Effectiveness Initiative. My responsibilities include working closely with OVW and grantees on reporting and collecting data. I am also accompanied by my colleague Julia Bergeron-Smith who has been working directly with trying to compile all the questions that have come in and who works on technical assistance and training matters. Thank you, Ginger.

Thank so much, Tara and thank you to Julia as well. The OVW long-standing partnership with MEI has helped document the life-saving work that OVW grantees do to address domestic and sexual violence in their communities.

Last and certainly not least, a hearty thanks goes to all of you participating today. Even if the best of circumstances, you regularly encounter people during the toughest times and you routinely work to make your communities places where safety and justice are within reach. Now, with the upheaval brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, your work may be much more challenging than usual, and you might be finding yourselves struggling to maintain the public safety and victim services strategies you've put in place with your grant funds. That you've taken the time out of your busy day to be on this call is a testament to your commitment to maintaining integrity and success in your OVW-funded work, even when times are tough.

Slide 4 - General Data Reporting Guidance (minute 2:10):

So, we went through the questions that you submitted and grouped them in general categories. Rather than address every question individually, I will explain the gist of the questions and provide you with an answer. Then we will open things up for whatever questions are on your mind today. Please note that I will not answer questions in the chat box as they come in, but you're welcome to type your questions whenever and Tara is going to keep track of them and q them up for me to get through after this first part of the webinar.

Before we start I want to let you know a few things up front. First, as a general rule, before, during and after the pandemic, OVW strives to support our grantees in being successful. We understand many of you are facing uncertainty and new challenges right now. There are many topics for which we have not and probably will not issue across-the-board guidance. But we are here to support you, work with you on modifying your projects, and link you up with resources and technical assistance that may be helpful.

You will hear me say several times, that communication is the key. Let us at OVW know what is going on and what you need.

Second, please be sure to check the resources and FAQs for grantees that you will find on the OVW website. Whatever we are able to issue written guidance to help grantees navigate challenges that the pandemic presents, we post the post the guidance there.

Third, we received a lot of questions for which the answer is very program- or grant-dependent. The most frequent response I have to the questions submitted is: "It depends, and best to check with your OVW Program Specialist." I'll get more into the reasons for that, but wanted to give you fair warning and emphasize that Emma, I, and the MEI team are happy to help and we encourage you to contact us after this webinar if you need assistance getting in touch with your Program Specialist.

Fourth, we received many questions about the status of 2020 grant applications. The vast majority of those applications remain under review at OVW, and applicants can expect to be notified of funding decisions before October 1st. In the meantime, your best bet is to contact the person listed in the solicitation under which you applied.

Finally, just as many of the challenges presented by the pandemic are new to you all, they're new to us at OVW as well. I fully expect you'll have questions for me today for which I simply don't know the answers. However, by you asking those questions it gives us a sense of what's presenting difficulty for grantees and what OVW might be able to do to further support you. And, when I don't know something, I can take your questions back to my colleagues and put you in touch with whomever is best equipped to answer your question.

So, without further ado, let's dive into your questions.

Some of you have asked for general tips on reporting right now, about deadlines and what to do if you or your project partners are missing data or you just cannot physically access it at the moment. So, per the March 26 memo from our acting director, the March 30th deadline for STOP and SASP progress reporting, those are the two largest formula programs, and this includes the subgrantee reports, was extended to May 29, which is tomorrow. The deadline for quarterly financial reports for all grantees that were normally do on April 30th are now due June 30th. **Other deadlines have not been extended** but if that changes, we will notify grantees.

OVW understands that grantees may be hindered in reporting complete and accurate information, especially if they or their project partners do not have access to files. Therefore, we recommend the following: Recipients should complete progress report to the best of their ability and submit it before the deadline. Every progress report form includes a narrative field, or multiple narrative fields, where grantees can provide additional information about the data. Use that space to explain any incomplete or missing data. Grantees are also encouraged to use the narrative field that asks for additional information about the effectiveness to describe COVID-19-related adjustments to programming and other activities not captured elsewhere in the form.

Grantees who cannot provide accurate counts for numerical progress report fields because they or their project partners do not have access to files are encouraged to leave those fields blank, rather than providing estimates.

Note too that OVW will maintain its standard grant monitoring practices, focusing on grantees' progress toward project-specific goals while recognizing that victim services providers, justice agencies, and all the other types of grantees must be flexible and adaptable, even under ideal circumstances. We recognize that a pandemic presents tremendous challenges, and we anticipate those challenges will be reflected in progress reports. We encourages grantees to communicate their setbacks and successes to OVW through progress reports and correspondence with their program specialist.

We also had question about data having been lost due to a system crash, and staff are stretched so thin right now with trying to keep services up and running safely that trying to retrieve or recreate that data before the deadline just isn't feasible. If this is your situation, leave those fields blank for the data you lost. Keep your program specialist informed about efforts to retrieve or restore the lost data. We can change-request the report back to you to enter data if/when you're able to get it back. However, if the data aren't retrievable, explain as much in your progress report. And you'll want to discuss with your program specialist what source documentation you DO have, and which can support your drawdowns during the reporting period. Continue to prioritize serving your clients in crisis, and OVW can work with you on the rest of it.

Slide 5 – Delayed or revised activities due to COVID-19 (minute 7:50):

Next, we had questions about how to report on activities and deliverables that are delayed or may need to be revised as a result of COVID-19. Also about the need to train staff and partners on providing services remotely. People asked how to account for this in progress reports, and how to determine if the changes they intend to make are allowable and if they require OVW approval. There were also questions about how these delays might reflect on a grantee.

What these inquiries described sounds like what a lot of grantees are navigating right now. You want to continue to reach your target population, but without jeopardizing people's health. I suggest you do a few things. First, re-read your grant award and the terms and conditions therein. That way you're clear on the scope of your project, meaning the types of activities you can do with the funds.

Second, take a look at the COVID-19 resources on OVW's Resources & FAQs page. In the March 26th memo posted there you'll see that our acting director outlined some administrative flexibilities that are in effect for the time being. And bear in mind that we continue to offer grantees the latitude that we normally afford you to revise project plans, extend project periods, extend timelines and so forth. The extent of that latitude hinges on the program you're funded under, the terms of your specific grant, and your own policies and procedures as well as like your approved budget, your project performance up until now, and other factors.

So, whether or not to adjust your deliverables and whether or not it requires a GAN are questions best directed to your Program Specialist.

We understand that adaptability and flexibility are necessary for the work you do, even under the best circumstances and especially now. However, we still have to do our due diligence in considering your requests against federal regulations, OVW policies, and what is a good use of grant funds. To give you a concrete example as to why we cannot issues a completely across the board yes or no on a lot of questions. A grantee might ask if they can use grant funds to purchase personal protective equipment (PPE) for SANE nurses, and if it requires a GAN. There's no across-the-board answer here. A grantee whose award doesn't support SANE programs probably should not be using funds for PPE. However, a

grantee already using funds for SANE programming can most likely use funds for PPE. Whether or not that requires a GAN depends on the estimated costs, and the approved budget. So that gives you kind of an idea why we are working with you to be flexible but have to look at your own award to get approval on those requests.

Please know that OVW remains focused on supporting our grantees in meeting their communities' needs during these challenging times. Just as we did prior to the pandemic, we can work with you to adjust a lot of the different features of your grant and walk through your options.

This same thing goes for those of you who anticipate having large balances of unspent travel funds that you might want to hang onto, or you might want to reprogram. Nobody knows what the coming weeks and months will bring, so we understand you can't necessarily plot out the rest of your project at this time. But, as you make changes to your plans, it's important to consult OVW to ensure what you're doing is permissible under your grant, and so you can secure formal approval via a GAN when a GAN is necessary. Your OVW contact can also advise you on obtaining a no-cost extension. Please remember grantees are encouraged to use the narrative fields as much as possible to explain anything about progress or changes or delays in your work and also any limitations to the data that you report.

Slide 6 – Reporting data related to remote activities (minute 11:35):

Moving on. We got some questions about how to report activities now that they've been shifted to online remote platforms, and also when you haven't been collecting detailed data on victims served like you did during face-to-face services. The short answer to all of this is: do the best you can and make ample use of those narrative fields.

As I said before, do not report estimates for numbers of victims served, demographics, or any other numerical fields. Any numbers you report should be those for which you have adequate source documentation. Use the narrative fields to explain any missing or unavailable data, and to explain activities that you're not able to quantify right now. The main point of your report is to give OVW information we need to monitor your grant, so please keep that in mind and reach out to your OVW Program Specialist as needed. If what you supply in your report is insufficient, we can always change-request the report back to you for edits or more details.

For those grantees who report information on protection orders requested and granted but you don't have access to that information right now because the courts are closed, just leave the fields blank and provide an explanation in a narrative field as to why you do not have that information.

Also, to the extent it makes logical sense, continue to report services provided remotely just as you would have when they were conducted face-to-face. For example, a grantee asked about documenting supervised visits that were previously at their center but are now done on Zoom. In this case, you would virtual visits in the Supervised Visitation section just as you would normal visits at your center, but then use a narrative field--in the Supervised Visitation section or at the end of the form--to note changes to your services. Also, many of the questions in your forms have an "Other (Specify)" option, which you can use to record services that don't fit neatly into any of those other categories.

I would encourage you to check out materials from our Crafting Narratives webinar series that can all be found on MEI's website. It offers examples for how grantees can use narratives to illustrate the impact of their OVW funded work beyond what those numbers convey. And please remember that the

important thing here is that you use your progress report to explain and account for your work during the six-month period.

Some grantees asked how to document policy changes that they've implemented as a result of the pandemic. Best to use the Policies section of your form, and just describe the policy changes in the narrative box there. This is a good way to document things like permitting longer shelter stays, obtaining victim consent to release information through remote means, etc.

We had some questions about tracking training numbers for trainings that were switched to online platforms. You can report webinar registration and participation numbers as people trained. You can collect information on registrants' professional fields (e.g., law enforcement, advocate, etc.) in your online registration form, too. Be sure to retain whatever documentation you use to track these numbers, just as you would for an in-person training. However, do keep in mind that if you can't or don't track something, you probably can't report it numerically. In that case, you should provide a sufficient narrative description of the work you're doing, and any evidence you have of its reach.

Related to that, there were questions came in about reporting trainings that were supposed to be convened in person but were either canceled or moved online. For trainings and TA that were planned and later canceled due to COVID-19, describe it in a narrative section, ideally in the section where you note your progress toward goals and objectives, that would be a good section to put that in. For convenings that were shifted from in-person formats to online forums, continue to report them as you would an in-person event, and note in whichever narrative field seems most appropriate that you changed the format of the event.

Moving on. Some questions pertained to counting and documenting recipients of community education now being provided through social media or passive education online.

So, because you cannot verify how many people participated in training, it is best not to report website hits or views in any of the numerical fields in your progress report. Rather, you can mention those numbers in a narrative section if you think they help illustrate the reach of your online resources. Please keep in mind that community education and training numbers can be audited, and auditors may ask to see source documentation to support the numbers you report. That's why I urge caution here. Again, the important thing to convey in your report is the work you're doing and how it's changed, and we expect there are accomplishments you are having and changes in your work that means you just cannot quantify things as you normally would and that's fine.

Slide 7 – Other general questions (minute 16:45):

There were some questions related to using grant funds for administrative and sick leave during the pandemic.

If you have those types of questions, please refer to the March 26th memo issued by OVW's Acting Director, which has a section on salaries and leave which you will likely find helpful. I can tell you that, even if you haven't looked at the memo yet, the guidance in that memo refers grantees to their own policies and procedures. How you treat leave is in accordance with your policies and procedures, not your approved budget. If you are not clear on charging salaries and leave to the grant after reading through the memo, definitely reach out to your program specialist and the OVW Grants Financial Management Division for assistance.

We were also asked for guidance for programs using the Paycheck Protection Program to cover personnel costs of grant-funded staff.

OVW has not and will not issue guidance for programs using the Paycheck Protection Program because this falls outside our purview: we don't administer the PPP and we are not in a position to advise you on that matter. If you have specific questions about what's allowable to charge to your OVW grant, best to contact your Program Specialist. Furthermore, I'd urge you to contact your lender and/or the Small Business Administration to make sure that whatever you do now doesn't jeopardize your loan forgiveness.

I am going to read a question that was pretty similar to some of the earlier questions we went over. This grantee wrote that their "grant requires quarterly meetings with partners as well as an annual meeting. We have had to delay and cancel these meetings this year so far due to the pandemic. Will we be deemed non-compliant?" So please rest assure that OVW will not penalize anyone for forgoing in-person gatherings while it's unsafe to convene. And we're well-aware that "unsafe" is relative and subjective--what is and isn't safe changes as this pandemic goes on, and may vary from community to community and person to person. Many grantees are adapting their collaborative work to online platforms, and others are just pausing their work for the moment. As you've heard me say already and you'll hear me say again today, communication is key. Talk with your program specialist and let them know what we at OVW can do to support you. OVW's monitoring duties have not changed--it is still our responsibility to ensure that grantees are spending their funds prudently and as intended, and in keeping with the terms and conditions of their grants--but this responsibility doesn't preclude us from supporting grant modifications, extending project timelines, and so forth.

On a related note, there were questions about whether grantees will be penalized if their victim services numbers have taken a dip during the pandemic.

Again here, communication. Use your report to explain changes to your case volume. Use narrative fields to explain anything that isn't captured elsewhere in the form, including fluctuating numbers. Furthermore, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) and other national organizations that provide training and technical assistance to OVW grantees have posted some really helpful resources to help victim service providers continue serving their communities during this time. I definitely urge you to check out those resources.

There were questions about data security and confidentiality when using client databases remotely, and whether survey apps are a good way to capture data?

Please remember that maintaining victim confidentiality is of paramount importance, so grantees need to track data in a manner that does not jeopardize confidentiality. At times--before, during, and after the pandemic--this may mean you don't report complete data in your progress reports and that is OK. Use narrative fields to explain missing data and data collection challenges. As for survey apps, I'm not sure about that. But I recommend against using web-based survey platforms to collect data from victims, as they might not provide adequate safeguards for personally identifying information.

There were other questions that came in that were focused on technology safety, confidentiality, and relocation during this time.

All of these matters are certainly more challenging than normal right now. I recommend you check out those resources I mentioned from NNEDV and Futures Without Violence, and other national organizations with expertise that have put some really helpful and responsive materials out for victim service providers. If you have questions about how to navigate these challenges while maintaining compliance with your OVW grant, again best to reach out to your program specialist. Furthermore, we understand that securing written consent during the pandemic is tough. An effective practice that avoids the need for written consent is for the advocate to secure a three-way call with the victim and the third-party, and allow the victim to provide the consent or information directly to the third party and allow the victim to provide the consent directly. If a victim receiving remote services has the appropriate equipment, the service provider may text or email a consent form to the victim, who could print it, sign it, and return a photo or scanned copy of the signed consent form. The victim also may sign the consent form using an electronic signature. Notwithstanding these options, recipients may still struggle to secure written consent and should contact OVW to discuss additional options.

We are getting to the end here and I am not sure I said it earlier but there is going to be a webinar recording posted and a transcript, I am guessing sometime next week. I know what I am going over is dense and some is complex and you might need to go back and look at that information. So please know that you will have this information available soon.

A couple questions came in about whether MEI will be updating the Access databases for tracking data.

Those databases will not be updated. We surveyed grantees several years ago and learned that very few grantees use those databases, and grantees are increasingly using other solutions. Techsafety.org, which is a project of the National Network to End Domestic Violence, has information to help victim services providers select a database: https://www.techsafety.org/selecting-a-database.

We had questions about how to apply for grants during this time?

OVW will continue to post grant solicitations on our website as they're available. Most, if not all, of our solicitations for this fiscal year have closed, and we won't start soliciting FY 2021 proposals until the fall.

Another question is how do we get MOUs or letters of commitment signed while social distancing continues. An e-signature affixed to an MOU, and/or an email or letter from the authorizing official for the partner organization is perfectly sufficient.

The last question I am going to hand off to Tara. And that question is how should grantees who are working on Macs from remote places submit their report?

Hello. Yes, thank you Ginger. Unfortunately I cannot test a Mac at this time since we are not at the office. From our understanding, there is a Mac usability PDF, you know Adobe Reader or Adobe Acrobat, you should be able to fill out the form like you would on a PC. If you are finding that is not the case, we recommend looking at your version and maybe updating your version and it could be that your IP department has a security setting because the Adobe forms are full of JavaScript that sometimes, depending on your IT settings, your computer looks at it like a virus. You may need to reach out to your I.T. department to see if they can make sure your form is able to work and validate on your computer. I hope that answer that question.

>> Great, thank you.

Does it make sense for me to start running through the list of questions that you all have been tracking? As I have been talking?

>> Absolutely. And I have a question I can answer. And, I can do that while you look at the chat questions.

So, there was a general question, and it says ICJR progress reporting form's Section F Community Measures, which is where you report protection order data, will those protection order fields still validate if they are blank? This is an important question. I'm some glad it was asked. So, if you have an instance where you cannot report on data and that interferes with validation, we would recommend you put in a 1 in those fields that need to be validated. Then in the last question of your Narrative question of your form, so on every single form, the last narrative question is about additional information about the data. And that last question we would recommend that you explain that, you know, so, in this case, she can explain she was not able to compile the data but needed to put data in for the form to validate. And then you program specialist will see that and then, on our end, when the data comes to us, we can remove that information.

>>Great, thank you, Tara.

I will just start going through some of these questions. A few of them are items that I think I already spoke to but some people may have joined late or I may not have been clear. Forgive me if I repeat myself. One question was about the ICJR progress report form in the community measures section that focuses on protection orders. It was asked if those fields will accept a blank entry and if the form will validate. Tara, I may need your help. I said earlier to leave the fields blank and explain why there is no data in their Narrative. Do you happen to know, and no worries if you do not, will the form still validate if those fields are blank?

>>Yes. So, well, no, the form will not validate. And, as I mentioned, we recommend putting in 1 and explaining that in the last narrative question of the form.

>> I'm sorry that is the same question. Sorry I was…

>>It's okay you were concentrating on reading over the chat as I spoke about that.

>>Okay. Are we allowed to reprogram travel funds? Generally, yes, especially in these unprecedented challenges. It may make sense and is most likely approvable to reprogram your travel funding. But it is something that you need to speak with your program specialist about. I know, for grantees that I work with, some are saying, we will reprogram those funds. Others are saying, I think we want to extend our project for a while, see what happens and see if some of our planned travel becomes doable at some point, well into the future. And I support that as well. So just work with your program specialist to decide what is going to work best for your situation. As I said, we are here to support you. In many cases, that is certainly to make sense, that you will take some of those travel funds and put them toward some other, like, within the scope of your grant use. That is a great question.

There is a clarifying question about funding by October 1st. And another question, from somebody who has a current OVW grant and I think apply for some continuation funding or a new grant in this fiscal year 2020. So, the short answer that probably covers it here is that, our grant cycle is running, normally,

as it always would, which means that we are gearing up to make awards or issue non-funded letters by October 1. Typically, you start getting those notifications sometime in September, but, October 1 is our cutoff date. So you should expect to hear about whether you're going to receive funding or whether it was not selected for funding by October 1st.

There were some questions about no-cost extensions. I want to make sure that by trying to answer questions here I do not cause any confusion. So, some of you, particularly grantees who have project end dates in 2020, many of you in fact have those project end dates in this year, were contacted by your program specialist about receiving an administrative no-cost extension. So you would not have had to put in a GAN. We were just going to go into the system and extend those awards. That is partly because, it has to do with our data migration and data retention that is not really tied to the pandemic. We just want to make sure we have those projects set up so that when we move some things to a new system, we will be able to process your closeout and all of that. So, if you did not hear from your program specialist, there is nothing you need to do. If you did, you should expect to see that extension coming through soon. You should get a notice in GMS.

And if you're a grantee in the situation of thinking that you will need an extension, which many, many grantees are typically, and especially right now, please know you want to check with your program specialist. The general way that we issue those extensions is that you take a look at your budget and where you are with your project between 30 and 90 days before your current end date. And then think about how long of an extension you might need to go to carry your project on at full capacity. And, then you would send a letter to the program specialist or put it in GMS and change the project period at the end. In that letter, it needs to be signed by the authorizing officials and briefly justify the extension, say what will be done in the extension period, and also state the balance of funds. That is the method for getting the extension. If you have questions about whether is the time to do that or anything else, which might be needed for your extension, do contact your program specialist.

There was a question about, is it okay to provide services to individuals outside of your service area? So, my cautious answer to that is yes. If you have services available and the capacity to serve somebody coming to you for help but is outside your service area, I would say the answer to that question should be yes. I would say, just again, check in with your program specialist. Make sure there is not something I am not thinking of here but that ought to be fine. Did I cover everything from the chat questions?

>>I think so. From what I can tell, you have, yes.

>>Great. I see one thing I will quickly address. It is kind of tied to this, if you applied for new funding. So, nothing has changed for us if you get a grant award for an application you submitted this year. Chances are that start date is October 1st. That does not change for us. So, you should expect it would be just like any other year applying for grants, at least from an administrative perspective.

So, that is all I have. I really hope that you all found this helpful. Please know that we at OVW have so much respect for all the work that our grantee community is doing to address violence against women and to serve victims and to hold offenders accountable. And, we, again, want to do anything we can to support you through these difficult times. So, thank you for your time today. Our contact information is on the next slide. But, you can feel free to reach out to me or Tara or Emma, to put her information in the chat box as well. We are happy to answer questions and point you in the right direction. With that, thank you so very much. And, let us know how we can help. Take care.