In October of 2022, MNADV provided Domestic Violence Service Providers with an opportunity to give feedback on interactions with the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy via an online survey. This survey was also shared with Rape Crisis Centers by our sister coalition MCASA. A summary of the findings was provided to the then Interim Executive Director of GOCPP with the intention of sharing information that may inform priorities of a new permanent Executive Director.

Now, two years later, MNADV has been asked to readminister this survey and open it up to a larger audience of victim service providers beyond the core domestic violence and sexual assault programs supported by MNADV and MCASA. Below is a summary of responses to the three questions surveyed in October - December 2024. Answers have been combined and organized by theme for ease of reading and edited to ensure anonymity. We acknowledge the overlapping and sometimes repetitive nature of the answers to each question but include duplicate information to be faithful to the full inclusion of participants' responses.

In total, 52 organizations participated in the second administration of this survey. Participating organizations fell into the following categories:

42.5%        Nonprofit Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Victim Service Provider

37.5%        Nonprofit General Victim Service Provider

17.5%        Government-based Victim Service Provider

10%           Culturally Specific Victim Service Provider

12.5%        Other:

- Non-profit child maltreatment provider/ Nonprofit child abuse service provider
- Advocacy support of minors
- Government based multiple service provider to include victim services
- Local health department (gov) providing DV, SA and emergency shelter services

2.5%         Prefer not to answer

Please note that organizations could select more than one category so the percentages do add up to more than 100%. For example a Nonprofit Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault Victim Service Provider could also be a Culturally Specific Victim Service Provider.

**Question 1:**     **What problems have you experienced with GOCPP within the past year?**

**Summary**

The feedback highlights key problems and concerns that have impacted subgrantees, including issues with communication, delays in the grant process, inconsistent application of policies, and challenges with the GMS platform. However, it also reflects a general acknowledgment of improvements in certain areas, such as responsiveness and organizational structure.

**Key Themes and Findings**

1. **Delays in Grant Processing and Award Notifications**

    o   A recurring theme is the **delay in award notifications**, often arriving after the grant period has started or even during the middle of the grant cycle. Several respondents reported receiving notices in the second or even last month of the first quarter, which severely affected budgeting, spending, and program planning.

    o   Similarly, **late grant applications** and delays in **processing of awards** have caused financial hardship, staffing delays, and in some cases, furloughs. There have also been reports of **delayed reimbursements**, which further impacted financial management and the ability to meet deadlines.

    o   Additionally, the **timing of Notices of Funding Availability (NOFAs)** was highlighted as problematic. Delays in posting NOFAs have contributed to confusion and funding delays, making it difficult for organizations to plan effectively.

2. **Communication Issues**

    o   One of the most consistently mentioned concerns was **inconsistent communication**. Subgrantees reported that some staff members were **unresponsive** to emails and phone calls, while others provided **conflicting or unclear information** regarding reporting requirements, compliance, and grant modifications. Many subgrantees felt that they were **not informed of staff changes**, leaving them uncertain about who to contact for specific issues.

    o   Several respondents noted the **lack of clear guidance** or helpful responses when asking for clarification. Requests for more detailed information or support were often met with generic replies or no response at all, leading to frustration among grant recipients.

    o   **Abrupt or rude responses** from staff were also cited as a significant issue, with some subgrantees feeling that their concerns were dismissed or not taken seriously.

3. **Staffing and Turnover**

    o   The issue of **staff turnover** and **staff shortages** at GOCPP was a significant concern. Subgrantees noted that high turnover made it difficult to maintain continuity and consistency in communication and support. Additionally, new staff

members were often unfamiliar with the specifics of ongoing grants, leading to confusion and delays.

- o Many respondents expressed frustration with the **lack of timely information about staff transitions**, leaving them to navigate the system without clear guidance on who was responsible for their cases.

4. **Inconsistent Application of Policies and Guidelines**

- o **Inconsistent decision-making** and **conflicting information** about allowable expenses, budget modifications, and other grant requirements were frequently mentioned. Some respondents reported that their requests for budget modifications or adjustments were **denied or delayed** despite meeting the criteria. Additionally, certain expenditures were deemed **unallowable** without clear explanations, causing confusion about what was covered under the grant terms.

- o One example cited was the denial of food expenses after they had been approved in previous years, leaving subgrantees struggling to cover already-incurred costs without reimbursement.

- o The **application of grant conditions** was also inconsistent. For example, some subgrantees reported being asked to submit **excessively detailed budget breakdowns** or make changes that were not required in previous years, leading to additional administrative work and delays.

5. **Problems with the GMS Platform**

- o Several subgrantees reported technical difficulties with the **Grant Management System (GMS)**, including issues with saving and accessing information, submitting reports, and managing grant applications. The platform was described as **cumbersome** and **unreliable**, often causing delays in processing and difficulties in tracking grants and compliance requirements.

6. **Lack of Transparency and Guidance**

- o There were reports of **poor transparency** regarding the reasons for denied requests or modifications, with some subgrantees feeling that decisions were made **subjectively** or without clear justification. For example, some budget modifications were denied without clear explanations, while others were accepted but took months to process.

- o **Unclear performance measures** and mismatched reporting requirements also contributed to confusion.

7. **Positive Feedback and Areas of Improvement**

- o Despite the challenges, a number of respondents reported improvements in **responsiveness** and **overall organization** compared to previous years. Some appreciated the **Technical Assistance (TA) calls** and acknowledged that, although delays remained, communication had become more consistent over time.

- o Subgrantees also noted that the staff members they worked with were generally **helpful and supportive**, though this did not always extend across the board due to turnover and inconsistent staffing.
- o A few organizations expressed gratitude for the **partnership and support** they had received from GOCPP, noting that the past year had seen improvements in management and communication.

8. **Financial and Operational Challenges**

- o The delay in grants and reimbursements, combined with inconsistent decisions about allowable expenses, created significant **financial hardship** for organizations. The inability to access funds in a timely manner often left subgrantees scrambling to meet operational needs, and some were forced to make adjustments or cut services due to funding delays.

- o **Overarching administrative burdens** such as frequent requests for the same information, confusing reporting tools, and the need for constant budget modifications added to the operational difficulties of managing grants.

**Conclusion**

The feedback provided by subgrantees highlights several persistent challenges in working with GOCPP, particularly in the areas of **timeliness**, **communication**, and **consistency** in grant management. While there have been notable improvements, particularly in responsiveness and support from staff, the issues identified suggest that there is still work to be done to streamline processes, enhance transparency, and improve the user experience for grant recipients.

Addressing these concerns could lead to a more effective partnership between GOCPP and its subgrantees, ultimately benefiting the organizations that rely on timely and accurate funding to serve their communities.

**Question 2:      What suggestions/recommendations would you make to GOCPP to improve the grants award and administration process?**

**Summary**

The feedback reveals a series of common themes and recommendations aimed at improving the grants award and administration process. Key areas for improvement include better communication, consistency in staffing, transparency in processes, timeliness of awards, clarity in reporting, and enhanced support for subgrantees. The suggestions reflect the challenges faced by organizations relying on GOCPP funding and highlight opportunities to streamline operations and enhance collaboration.

**Key Themes and Recommendations**

1. **Timeliness and Communication of Grants Awards**

- o **Earlier Notification of Awards**: A consistent concern among survey participants is the delayed communication of grant awards, often received after the grant period

begins. Respondents recommend that GOCPP issue grant awards **prior to the start of the grant period** (at least 30 days in advance) to allow organizations adequate time for financial planning and program preparation.

- o **Timely Issuance of NOFAs**: Many respondents indicated that **Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA)** announcements are released too close to application deadlines, especially during times when staff may be on vacation or occupied with other duties (e.g., holidays). Survey participants recommended **earlier release of NOFAs** to provide sufficient time for applicants to gather necessary information and submit comprehensive applications.

- o **Clear and Proactive Communication**: Survey participants highlighted the need for **clear and timely communication** regarding grant requirements and expectations, particularly when delays occur, or information is missing. **Regular updates on the status of NOFAs** and **acknowledgment of questions** can improve transparency and reduce confusion.

2. **Consistency and Transparency in Staffing and Processes**

- o **Stable and Transparent Staffing**: Frequent changes in staff and inconsistent communication have been a significant source of frustration. Respondents recommend establishing **clear points of contact** for subgrantees and ensuring that **staff roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated**. Additionally, subgrantees would benefit from a **staff contact list** and the ability to **easily identify who manages which grants**.

- o **Clear Role Definitions and Introductions**: To improve clarity and accountability, subgrantees suggested that GOCPP staff introduce themselves more proactively to their assigned subgrantees and clearly state their roles in email correspondence. This would help avoid confusion when multiple staff members are involved in a single process.

- o **More Transparency on the Grant Review Process**: Survey participants expressed a desire for greater insight into GOCPP's internal processes, particularly in the areas of **grant reviews and decision-making**. Understanding how awards are evaluated, and which staff are involved can help build trust and foster a stronger partnership between GOCPP and its subgrantees.

3. **Flexibility and Responsiveness**

- o **Increased Flexibility in Reporting and Budget Modifications**: There is a strong call for **greater flexibility in budget modifications** and **extensions** due to delays in grant awards. Subgrantees requested that GOCPP be more accommodating when modifications are needed and provide **no-cost extensions** when grants are awarded late.

- o **Faster Processing of Invoices and Payments**: A recurring issue raised by subgrantees was the **delay in processing invoices and payments**, which can create financial strain, particularly for smaller nonprofits. Respondents recommended **faster invoicing processes** to ensure timely reimbursement of

funds, reducing the burden on organizations to float large sums before receiving payment.

4. **Improved Training and Support**

   o **Training on the Grant Management System (GMS)**: Several respondents pointed out that the **grant management system (GMS)** is difficult to navigate, particularly for new staff. A suggestion was made to provide **more comprehensive training** for subgrantees and new staff members, including guides, tips, and resources that can be referred to throughout the grant cycle.

   o **Trauma-Informed Training for Staff**: Given the nature of the services provided by many subgrantees, there was a recommendation for GOCPP staff to undergo **trauma-informed training** to better understand the challenges faced by organizations serving vulnerable populations, specifically victims of crime. This would help staff engage more empathetically and effectively with subgrantees.

5. **Simplification and Streamlining of Reporting**

   o **Reduced and Simplified Reporting Requirements**: Subgrantees expressed concern over the **complexity and redundancy of reporting requirements**, particularly with performance measures and supplemental reports. Respondents recommended simplifying these reports to focus on key outcomes and metrics, rather than gathering excessive data. In particular, subgrantees suggested **changing performance measure questions** to more meaningful percentages instead of raw numbers.

   o **Streamlined Renewal Process**: The renewal process for grants can be cumbersome, with some respondents suggesting that GOCPP make it easier to transition from **renewals to new applications** and reduce the need for re-submitting redundant information.

6. **Building Stronger Relationships and Partnerships**

   o **Site Visits and Relationship Building**: A significant number of survey participants emphasized the importance of **building stronger relationships** between GOCPP staff and subgrantees. This could be achieved through **regular site visits** or check-ins, allowing program officers to better understand the work being done and the challenges faced by subgrantees. This would help GOCPP staff better assess subgrantee needs and provide more effective support.

   o **Shift Toward Partnership**: Subgrantees expressed a desire for GOCPP to view them more as **partners** rather than simply as recipients of funds. A shift in organizational culture toward greater collaboration, empathy, and understanding could help enhance the effectiveness of the grants program.

7. **Improving Internal Processes and Operational Efficiency**

   o **Streamlined Administrative Processes**: A recurring theme among subgrantees was the need for **improved internal communication and consistency** across departments. This includes ensuring that all staff have access to the same

information and avoid requesting duplicate documentation from subgrantees. Additionally, streamlining administrative procedures would reduce the burden on both GOCPP staff and subgrantees.

- o **Proactive Communication About Grant Requirements**: Survey participants noted that GOCPP could be more **proactive in communicating grant requirements** before the start of each grant cycle, helping organizations plan and implement their projects more effectively.

**Conclusion**

The feedback received from survey participants underscores the importance of improving communication, consistency, and flexibility in the grants award and administration process at GOCPP. Key recommendations include ensuring timely award notifications, simplifying reporting requirements, providing better training and support, and fostering stronger relationships between GOCPP and its subgrantees. Implementing these suggestions could enhance the efficiency of the grants process, reduce administrative burdens, and ultimately support the success of programs that rely on GOCPP funding.

By addressing these concerns, GOCPP can strengthen its partnerships with subgrantees, enhance its credibility, and improve the overall impact of its funding initiatives.

**Question 3:      What else would you like to say about working with GOCPP?**

**Summary**

The feedback from survey participants regarding their experience working GOCPP provides a nuanced perspective on both positive aspects and areas that require attention. While there is significant appreciation for GOCPP's funding support and its staff, there are notable concerns regarding communication, transparency, administrative burdens, and perceived adversarial processes. A clear theme emerges around the need for stronger partnerships, improved consistency in staff engagement, and a more transparent, flexible approach to managing grants. Survey participants also highlight the importance of continued improvements in responsiveness and understanding of the unique challenges faced by service organizations.

**Key Themes and Insights**

1. **Positive Relationships and Staff Appreciation**

   - o **Responsive and Knowledgeable Staff**: Many respondents praised GOCPP staff for their professionalism, responsiveness, and willingness to assist. Staff members like Terri Ricks, Erika Wells, and Aubrey Gerhardt were specifically commended for being particularly helpful in answering questions and providing clear, timely guidance.

   - o **Improvement in Communication**: Over the past couple of years, there has been a noticeable improvement in communication and transparency, with many Survey participants highlighting that GOCPP has been **more accessible** and **better at providing updates**. The **pre-application webinars** and other efforts to streamline

the application process have been particularly well-received, contributing to a more positive experience for subgrantees.

2. **Challenges with Communication and Bureaucracy**

   o **Need for Clearer and More Frequent Communication**: While there have been improvements, survey participants continue to emphasize that **communication remains a key area for improvement**. Subgrantees expressed frustration with the **lack of regular updates**, especially during times of delays or when important decisions are pending. Respondents suggested that GOCPP implement **monthly or other regular email updates** with all subgrantees or other communication channels to keep subgrantees informed, even if there are no significant developments.

   o **Inconsistent Staff Engagement**: While many found GOCPP staff to be helpful, others expressed concerns about the **lack of continuity** due to frequent staff changes. In particular, **staff turnover** and **reassignments** of grant monitors led to difficulties in building stable, long-term relationships. Several respondents recommended **meetings with new staff** to ensure they are properly introduced to key personnel in grantee organizations and can gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by those organizations.

3. **Administrative Burden and Bureaucratic Processes**

   o **Increased Complexity and Compliance Burden**: A significant portion of the feedback highlighted frustrations with the **administrative complexities** involved in managing grants, especially with regards to VOCA and other highly regulated funding streams. Subgrantees expressed concerns about the **stringent compliance requirements** and **bureaucratic red tape**, which are perceived as unnecessarily burdensome, especially given the **limited resources** of many grantee organizations.

   o **Perceived Lack of Flexibility**: Survey participants mentioned a lack of **flexibility in meeting deadlines** or adjusting reports when unforeseen challenges arise. The **"gotcha" mentality** was referenced, where the perception exists that GOCPP is looking for mistakes rather than collaborating to solve problems. Subgrantees suggested that **more transparency** and **clarity around expectations** would help reduce anxiety about the process.

   o **Rigid Processes During Transition Periods**: There was a call for more **flexibility** when **staff transitions** occur, particularly when new staff take over grants. Ensuring a smooth handoff and understanding the needs and nuances of the subgrantee organization were seen as key areas for improvement.

4. **Transparency and Trust Issues**

   o **Concerns Over Perceived Adversarial Approach**: Some respondents felt that GOCPP's processes were adversarial, with a focus on finding mistakes and withholding funding rather than fostering collaboration. This has led to **distrust** and a feeling that GOCPP does not see subgrantees as **essential partners**. The **lack of**

**transparency** in certain processes, such as why certain costs are deemed unallowable, was also mentioned as a contributing factor to these tensions.

- o **Expectations for Greater Transparency**: Several subgrantees called for **clearer explanations** of why certain decisions are made, especially regarding **unallowable costs** and **budget adjustments**. Respondents emphasized the importance of **advance notice** and examples to help subgrantees better prepare for such decisions. There were also calls for **greater clarity** in how GOCPP communicates funding changes, guidelines, and the reasoning behind certain funding cuts or restrictions.

5. **The Importance of GOCPP Funding**

- o **Critical Support for Victim Services**: Acknowledgment of the **vital role** GOCPP plays in funding services for victims was a central theme in the responses. Without GOCPP's financial support, many organizations would struggle to deliver crucial programs or would be forced to scale back their services. Despite challenges, survey participants expressed **deep gratitude** for the funding and the positive impact it has on the communities they serve.

- o **Concerns Over Reduced Funding and Restrictions**: Several respondents voiced concern over **cuts to GOCPP funding** and the **increased restrictions** that are making it more difficult to provide services to those in need. The **uncertainty about future funding** was another significant concern. Subgrantees requested that GOCPP **better communicate plans** to address potential funding gaps and help organizations plan accordingly.

6. **Opportunities for Improvement**

- o **Streamlined Processes and Reduced Complexity**: While GOCPP has made strides in improving efficiency, subgrantees suggested **simplifying the application and reporting processes** further to reduce the administrative burden. This includes **minimizing redundant requirements** and making the process less daunting for organizations that are already stretched thin.

- o **Flexibility in Reporting Deadlines and Funding Adjustments**: Subgrantees requested that GOCPP be more **flexible in terms of report deadlines** and **budget modifications**, particularly in cases where challenges arise that are outside of the grantee's control. They emphasized the importance of understanding the realities of nonprofit operations and providing **reasonable accommodations** when unexpected circumstances arise.

7. **Staff Training and Knowledge**

- o **Training for New Staff on Grantee Needs**: Several respondents suggested that new staff members at GOCPP undergo training to better understand the challenges faced by grantee organizations, particularly in the context of victim services. There was a strong desire for **new staff to meet with key personnel** at grantee organizations to establish a clear understanding of their work and the specific challenges they face.

**Conclusion**

The feedback provided highlights that while there are several positive aspects of working with GOCPP, including improved staff responsiveness, a growing emphasis on transparency, and the critical funding support they provide, there are also significant concerns that need to be addressed. Key areas for improvement include enhancing **communication and transparency**, reducing **administrative burdens**, ensuring **greater flexibility** in grant management processes, and fostering a **more collaborative relationship** between GOCPP and its subgrantees. Implementing these suggestions would help rebuild trust, reduce operational strain on grantee organizations, and ultimately improve the impact of GOCPP's funding programs.

In closing, MNADV hopes that the sharing of this feedback will lend itself to greater transparency regarding the experience of victim service providers in receiving grants from the Governor's Office on Crime Prevention and Policy.  As the State Domestic Violence Coalition, MNADV is committed to partnering with both victim service providers and GOCPP to ensure that grant administration of victim services monies is effective, efficient and impactful to the benefit of crime survivors in Maryland.