

**NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE**

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13 October 2020

MEMORANDUM FOR DIRECTOR, NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE  
PRINCIPAL DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE  
OFFICE  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE

SUBJECT: (U) Final Report: Evaluation of the National Reconnaissance  
Office's COVID-19 Pandemic Response  
(Project Number 2020-003 S)

(U) The National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), Office of Inspector General (OIG) provides its memorandum report on the Evaluation of NRO's Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Pandemic Response. The OIG conducted this evaluation to identify any best practices implemented or challenges encountered by NRO Headquarters and selected field sites in responding to the pandemic. Areas of evaluation contained in this report include mission sustainment, policy, leadership, facilities and logistics, health and safety, communications, and human resources. This report is fundamentally informational and contains COVID-19 perspectives and opinions of NRO's leadership and workforce. The evaluation was directed by the NRO Inspector General (IG) and was not part of the OIG FY 2020 Annual Work Plan.

(U) I appreciate the courtesies extended to my staff in the execution of this important effort. Please direct any questions you may have regarding this memorandum report to [redacted] Assistant Inspector General for Inspections, at [redacted].

Susan S. Gibson  
NRO Inspector General

## Attachment:

(U) Evaluation of the National  
Reconnaissance Office's COVID-19  
Pandemic Response (U//~~FOUO~~)

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**(U) Evaluation of the National Reconnaissance Office's  
COVID-19 Pandemic Response  
(Project Number 2020-003 S)**

**(U) INTRODUCTION**

(U) Pandemics are disease occurrences that are spread across an exceptionally high proportion of the population in a regional or global area. They are infrequent occurrences throughout history with varying degrees of severity. The novel Coronavirus Disease 2019, better known as COVID-19, emerged in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan, China and quickly spread across the globe. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) determined that individuals infected with COVID-19 could spread the virus from two days prior to experiencing symptoms to approximately ten days after symptoms first appear.<sup>i</sup> Between 21 January and 2 February 2020, the first 11 cases of COVID-19 were detected in the U.S. in Arizona, California, Illinois, and Massachusetts.<sup>ii</sup>

(U) The CDC suggested that the best way to prevent contracting COVID-19 was to avoid potential exposure to the greatest extent possible.<sup>iii</sup> The CDC noted that COVID-19 could be spread through respiratory droplets between individuals who are less than roughly six feet apart or by touching infected surfaces and then touching one's mouth, nose, or eyes.<sup>iv</sup> The CDC recommended tactics to mitigate exposure, including staying at home, increasing hand washing, wearing a facial covering, and covering the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.<sup>v</sup> It also recommended regularly cleaning frequently touched surfaces and instituting self-isolation measures for anyone displaying potential COVID-19 symptoms.

(U) The NRO held its first COVID-19 Working Group<sup>2</sup> meeting on 28 February 2020 in response to the pandemic and made the determination to implement Phase 1 of its Infectious Disease Response Plan (IDRP). Subsequently, on 2 March 2020, the NRO Director held a Town Hall with the workforce to provide additional COVID-19 information and guidance. On 16 March 2020, the NRO initiated Phase 2 of its IDRP and instituted a blue and gold team workforce strategy to reduce the daily NRO workforce footprint and mitigate the likelihood of COVID-19 workplace transmission. Unlike other federal government agencies, the NRO workforce requires access to classified networks to fully execute the NRO's core mission and cannot successfully fulfill its obligations working from home. The NRO COVID-19 Recovery Plan, which was published on 29 April 2020, prescribed a phased recovery approach, and allowed the NRO to increase its staffing levels while continuing to protect the workforce. Over the following weeks and months, NRO leadership implemented a variety of COVID-19 safeguards in response to CDC guidance across Headquarters (HQ) and field sites to address this emergency condition and further protect the workforce.

(U) The NRO Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted this evaluation of the NRO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to identify any best practices implemented or challenges encountered by NRO HQ and selected field sites in responding to the pandemic. Areas of

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<sup>1</sup> (U) Individuals may take up to 14 days to become symptomatic, with a typical incubation period of 5 days.

<sup>2</sup> (U) The NRO COVID-19 Working Group consisted of the Top 3; Directorate and Office (D and O) senior leaders; military representatives; and legal, policy, contracts, and medical professionals.

evaluation included mission sustainment, policy, leadership, facilities and logistics, health and safety, communications, and human resources. The OIG's evaluation team reviewed the NRO's contingency planning documentation and engaged the NRO workforce through multiple methods, including (1) interviews with the NRO Top 3,<sup>3</sup> NRO senior leaders and representatives from the Ds and Os, and Site Commanders and their representatives from the Aerospace Data Facilities (ADFs); (2) interviews with a sample group of industry partners; and (3) a survey hosted on the NRO Management Information System (NMIS).<sup>4</sup> Appendix A describes the OIG's methodology for conducting this evaluation, and Appendix B contains the demographic information pertaining to the pandemic response survey.

## (U) EVALUATION RESULTS

(U) Overall, the NRO successfully accomplished its satellite imagery, signals intelligence, and special communications collection, processing, and distribution mission while also ensuring the health and safety of the NRO's workforce from initiation of the IDRP Phase 1 on 28 February 2020 through the close of this report's evaluation period on 24 August 2020. The NRO senior leaders and workforce developed responsive, yet innovative, solutions to ensure the nation's intelligence and the NRO workforce's needs were met. Interview and survey comments showed the Top 3 regularly communicated meaningful updates to the workforce, delegated responsibilities to the lowest possible level to meet unique mission and field site requirements, and ensured the effective implementation of protective measures in response to the pandemic. NRO leadership and the workforce heralded the Management Services and Operations Directorate (MS&O) employees as the "heroes" of the pandemic response for quickly implementing an extensive list of safety precautions to ensure the health and safety of the NRO workforce. Indeed, several interviewees and survey respondents reported "feeling much safer" in NRO facilities than anywhere else—other than their own homes. In addition, many of these employees attributed the NRO's reported low number of positive virus cases and zero incidences of workplace transmission to the proactive and effective health and safety measures put in place. The OIG's evaluation identified several best practices and some challenges that should be addressed throughout the course of this pandemic and during planning for any future emergencies.

(U) Best practices included ADF-East (ADF-E) leadership's establishment of "neighborhoods" at the site to reduce exposure between work units through the creation of three non-traversable zones or "neighborhoods." Other best practices included the Office of Contract's dissemination of Notice to Industry Partners (NOTIPs) announcements to effectively communicate pertinent information to the contractor workforce and the Corporate Secretariat's use of the [ ] system to satisfy recruitment and hiring requirements through virtual engagements with potential candidates. Further, NRO senior leadership's timely and effective communication of pandemic-related updates and decisions via multiple platforms (e.g., virtual Town Halls, NRO-All emails,

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<sup>3</sup> (U) The NRO Top 3 consists of the Director, National Reconnaissance Office; Principal Deputy Director, NRO; and Deputy Director, NRO

<sup>4</sup> (U) NMIS is the NRO's Top Secret enterprise computer network.

etc.) and the establishment of the COVID-19 Command Center<sup>5</sup> were touted by many employees at all levels as “outstanding.”

(U) In addition to the effective response strategies and best practices highlighted above, the NRO encountered several challenges throughout the pandemic. The NRO faced some challenges in the initial phases of its response, such as aligning a reduced workforce to the organization’s most important mission functions. As the response to the pandemic progressed, several additional challenges emerged, including (1) the lack of sufficient and clear telework guidance for government civilian and military employees; (2) confusion regarding the inconsistent application of human resource policies across the Intelligence Community (IC); and (3) workforce concerns regarding a lack of adherence to established protective measures (e.g, missing face coverings, assembled groups not maintaining minimum social distancing guidelines, etc.). Further, the evaluation uncovered limitations to the NRO’s [REDACTED] Some [REDACTED] messages sent during the pandemic were delivered to the entire organization instead of being targeted to specific HQ or field locations—resulting in confusion at some locations and an additional communication burden for some site leaders. The evaluation also highlighted the need for an unclassified remote workspace capability to provide telework options and facilitate the processing of unclassified information outside of government spaces. NRO leaders should address these challenges to ensure sustained mission accomplishment and continued workforce health and well-being throughout the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic and for future emergencies.

(U) The following narrative provides detailed descriptions and summations for each of the evaluated areas. The areas of evaluation included mission sustainment, policy, leadership, facilities and logistics, health and safety, communications, and human resources. In addition, the OIG added a miscellaneous (or other) category to capture information shared by respondents unrelated to the seven key areas. Under each evaluation area, this report includes an overall summary statement of survey and interview results, observations identified based on analysis of data, considerations to address any areas of concern, and best practices revealed during the evaluation.

(U) The report contains graphics representing statistics from the workforce survey.<sup>6</sup> The colors in the graphics are explained in the legend at the top of the following page and represent employee feedback for a particular survey item.



Chart is UNCLASSIFIED.

<sup>5</sup> (U) Also referred to as the COVID-19 Operations Center and the COVID-19 24/7 Operations Center, this center was created on 19 March 2020 to help answer workforce questions and to centralize COVID-19 reporting. NRO employees—government, support contractors, and employees from federally funded research and development centers (FFRDCs)—were required to report COVID-19 testing or diagnosis to the Command Center. Employees were also required to coordinate with the Command Center, which included NRO medical personnel, before returning to work.

<sup>6</sup> (U) Portions of the graphics intentionally do not have percentages assigned, as those values would overlap and become unintelligible. Further, neutral responses were not regarded as positive or negative.

## 1. (U) MISSION SUSTAINMENT

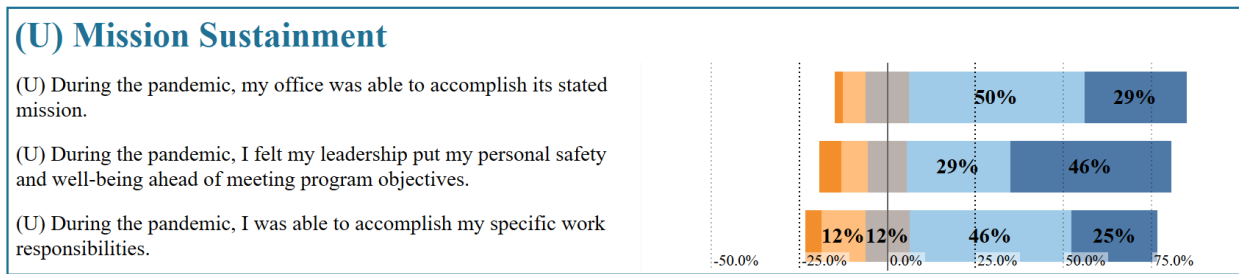


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(U) Overall, the NRO successfully accomplished its mission of operating overhead satellite systems and related data processing facilities and reported that it continued to meet all of the organization's data collection obligations to the IC and Department of Defense (DoD) throughout the pandemic. The Director, NRO (DNRO), Dr. Chris Scolese, highlighted this achievement in several of his weekly emails to senior DoD and IC officials. Although he expressed satisfaction with the current state of mission accomplishment, the DNRO also expressed concerns regarding "...missions or capabilities that will be delivered 12 months out." Similarly, some survey respondents and interviewees reported mission sustainment challenges that emerged at the beginning of the NRO's pandemic response that may have implications throughout the pandemic and during future contingency situations.

(U) Through the publication of its Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) on 19 September 2019, the NRO identified its mission essential functions (MEFs) and mission critical functions.<sup>7</sup> However, during the NRO's initial response to the pandemic, there was confusion regarding which specific programs and functions comprised the organization's most pressing priorities. This confusion abated when NRO senior leadership implemented a multi-tier structure to categorize mission functions: Tier 1 consisted of mission essential functions; Tier 2 included functions that supported launches over the next 12 months; Tier 3 provided an opportunity for the Ds and Os to identify their unique critical operations and maintenance functions; and Tier 4 included all remaining functions. While this approach provided a framework to assist leaders with staffing determinations and mission prioritization decisions, it was not consistently applied across the enterprise and led to occasional confusion or disagreements.

(U) Survey respondents, representing multiple Ds and Os, reported being asked to return to work when there were no work activities for them to perform. At the same time, the NRO was attempting to minimize the number of personnel in the workspace to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Still, the following representative survey comments reflect that confusion regarding mission and staffing determinations persisted within the NRO workforce ranks:

<sup>7</sup> (U) The NRO defines mission essential functions as those functions that (1) maintain geospatial intelligence and signals intelligence services and products, and (2) maintain integrated space, special program, and terrestrial communications capabilities to ensure timely delivery of critical national reconnaissance data. The NRO defines mission critical functions as those functions necessary to first execute the NRO's mission essential functions and then to protect or preserve developmental flight hardware or related ground systems and software.

(U) *“At no time has leadership at the group, SPO [System Program Office], or directorate level communicated to us why we are here, what we are expected to be doing, or how long the exception from reduced occupancy requirements was granted.”*

(U) *“It seems that ‘mission essential’ is not uniformly applied for very similar missions, and some offices were maximizing the amount of time people can be in the office while others maximized time spent at home.”*

(U) *“It would have been very helpful if the NRO MEFs had been consistently adhered to. There seemed to be confusion about how far into the future we should be looking.”*

(U) **OBSERVATION:** The NRO did not consistently align its MEF priorities with blue/gold staffing adjustments. This resulted in workforce confusion and stress. Some personnel who were identified as mission essential occasionally found themselves performing non-essential and non-critical tasks.

(U) **CONSIDERATION:** The NRO should evaluate its mission priorities and business functions and subsequently adjust its contingency staffing strategy to align with those objectives.

(U) In an effort to reduce the risk of exposing the workforce to the virus through social contact and to maintain its mission, ADF-E instituted a concept of establishing “neighborhoods” within the site whereby the facility was segregated into three non-traversable zones or “neighborhoods” to reduce exposure between work units. Personnel were required to stay in their work neighborhood unless leadership permission was granted. ADF-Colorado (ADF-C) also implemented a similar strategy for its watch standers to ensure minimal likelihood of cross-contamination of COVID-19.

(U) **BEST PRACTICE:** ADF-E’s implementation of work “neighborhoods” was quickly recognized as an effective approach by multiple NRO facilities, and variations of this concept were implemented to limit potential cross-contamination of COVID-19.

(U) In general, leadership put the safety and well-being of the workforce ahead of programmatic and mission objectives, but some survey respondents indicated that they occasionally felt pressure from management to report to the office to ensure program progress. Given that most NRO mission activities require connectivity to NMIS and access to a full team of experts, several survey respondents and interviewees indicated that they were not able to accomplish their work responsibilities during the pandemic. Contractor program managers faced personnel and workspace challenges for staff members who were relocated to their corporate offices when the NRO implemented measures to minimize the daily workforce footprint in its facilities. This action shifted a considerable amount of workforce health and safety risk to the corporations that were previously managing their space requirements based on contract funding for individual billets. Many contractor employees who remained at an NRO facility and were placed on a blue or gold team schedule of alternating weeks of work (primarily Systems Engineering and

Technical Assistance support) indicated that they were encouraged or forced to work 80 hours at an NRO facility during their assigned week to maintain billable hours. Survey comment data also indicated there were scheduling misalignments across the enterprise, and oftentimes a contract support person would be in the office with no government personnel to provide day-to-day oversight and guidance. According to one survey respondent, “We were at work but had nothing to do.” The workforce commented that the blue/gold<sup>8</sup> schedule was challenging but manageable. Several respondents suggested that proposing realistic milestones and expectations associated with reduced staffing would help reduce stress and negative effects on morale that they sensed the workforce was enduring.

**(U) OBSERVATION:** Reduced staffing and implementation of the blue/gold work schedule, without communicating corresponding changes to expectations, led to some instances of increased stress and reduced workforce morale.

**(U) CONSIDERATION:** Evaluate, optimize, align and communicate achievable mission goals and expectations consistent with the available workforce.

## 2. (U) POLICIES/GUIDANCE

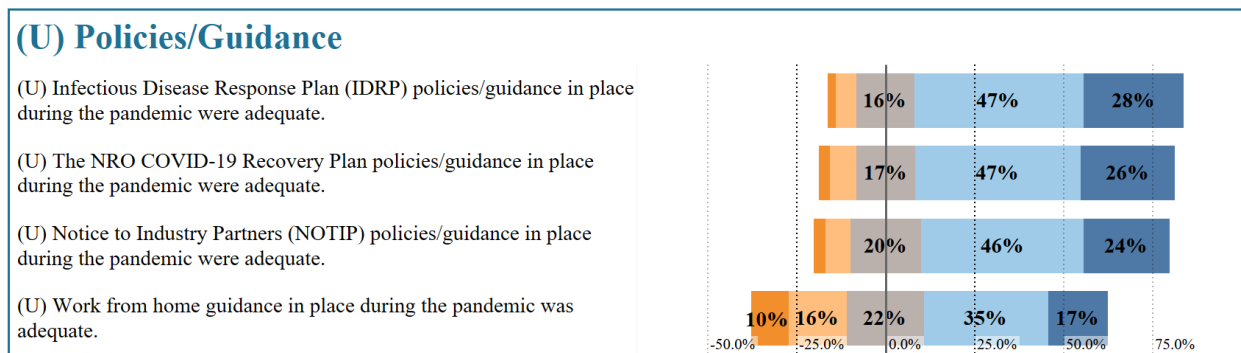


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(U) The OIG’s evaluation included reviews of the following policies, guidance, or information: IDRP, NOTIPs, NRO COVID-19 Recovery Plan, and telework guidance. Specifically, Ds and Os stated that the IDRP, signed in November 2019, and the COVID-19 Recovery Plan, published on 29 April 2020, provided a framework from which leaders and Ds and Os could make strategic and tactical decisions for the enterprise while ensuring the health and safety of the workforce. However, an interviewee noted some struggles associated with the execution of the IDRP and its phasing mitigation strategy because NRO leadership would occasionally implement changes that were out of alignment with the IDRP’s phasing construct. For example, one person stated, “...we would be in Phase 2 but then implement actions from the next phase, but only call it Phase 2+ instead of moving to Phase 3.” Several survey and interview responses also indicated confusion among the workforce and a lack of insight as to why the plan was out of alignment

<sup>8</sup> (U) The NRO assigned most members of its workforce to a blue or gold team work schedule on alternating weeks to reduce the daily workforce footprint inside its facilities and minimize the potential spread of COVID-19.

with leadership's decisions. A primary theme noted from the survey and interview responses was the challenge of keeping all levels of the workforce informed of the NRO's current mission and staffing posture during Phases 1 and 2 of the pandemic response. Despite the survey comments about policy and guidance confusion, 73 percent and 75 percent, respectively, found the COVID-19 Recovery Plan and IDRPs adequate.

(U) Per an NRO senior leader: *"The COVID-19 Recovery Plan is a living and adaptable document that is unique to this situation. The IDRPs, created in November 2019, provided guidance, but it was built for short-term responses and does not include D and O annexes."*

(U) Another positive measure adopted in response to the pandemic was the release of NOTIPs by the Director of the Office of Contracts (OC) to disseminate critical information to the contractor base via the NRO Acquisition Resource Center (ARC) and the OC website announcements. These actions were seen as positive across all interviews and surveys for effectively communicating information to the contractors and contractor workforce in a centralized location. Specifically, 70 percent of survey respondents found NOTIPs useful, and the majority of interviews conducted with Ds and Os, as well as contractor representatives, echoed the same sentiment. While the initial NOTIPs were confusing, further NOTIPs and COVID-19 Contractor FAQs improved with time, offering better clarity in addressing contractor questions and concerns, as evidenced by the following representative quotes from interviews with contractor and government managers:

(U) *"NOTIPs are fantastic and provide a lot of information. CARES [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security] Act implementation was smooth, with specific instruction given."*

(U) *"NOTIPs were fantastic since [ ] percent of [the] workforce are contractors. Once CARES and NOTIPs were released, there [were] marked changes in [the] attitude of contractors."*

(U) **BEST PRACTICE:** NOTIPs provided a means of communicating critical information to the contractor workforce in a centralized location.

(U) Across the spectrum of survey and interview responses, telework guidance for government and military employees was identified as inadequate or confusing. Twenty-six percent of survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that work-from-home guidance was adequate (the highest combined strongly disagree and disagree percentage of the workforce survey). NOTIPs specifically stated that contracts would not be modified to allow unclassified work to be conducted from home, leaving most contractors unable to perform unclassified telework. Government staff without the proper government-furnished equipment generally only had the option to complete professional development or training from their personal computers. The blanket telework guidance was most useful for professional development rather than conducting unclassified work due to potential cybersecurity risks. The Deputy Director, NRO stated that a telework policy was being developed to address these limitations.



(U) Per an NRO senior leader: *“Much of the NRO’s work can’t be accomplished from home because it’s classified. We need to examine how the NRO workforce can perform some basic tasks from home so that we are better prepared for future pandemics.”*

(U) Per an NRO respondent: *“There needs to be better implementation of telework; only current options are ‘professional development’ and not work related to the NRO mission.”*

(U) **OBSERVATION:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for a comprehensive telework policy for the remainder of the current pandemic and for future events.

(U) **CONSIDERATION:** The NRO should draft and promulgate a comprehensive telework plan in the event of a prolonged workforce absence or disruption.

### 3. (U) LEADERSHIP

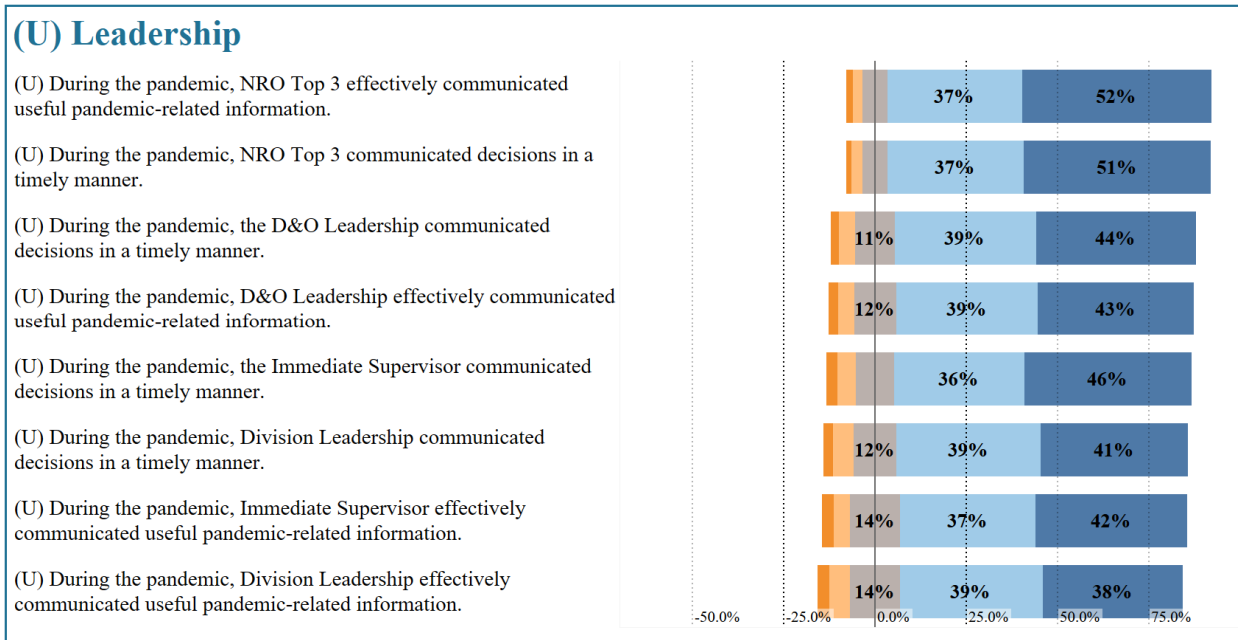


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(U) Survey responses revealed that at least 88 percent of the NRO workforce is in agreement that the NRO Top 3 leadership communicated useful information and decisions in a timely manner. In addition, throughout the OIG’s evaluation, the team consistently heard or observed the words “outstanding,” “phenomenal,” “great,” and “A+” associated with NRO leadership’s handling of the overall pandemic response. Many interviewees and survey respondents praised the NRO for executing a speedy and early response to COVID-19 while other agencies/organizations were still evaluating the threat. In addition, many comments noted that timely and effective information was consistently relayed to the workforce through the use of virtual Town Halls, SharePoint, and email. Notwithstanding these positive comments, at times, the workforce thought leadership acted too quickly to make policy changes—occasionally with little warning or in conflict with prior guidance. For instance, NRO employees on a blue/gold work schedule who had a single-person office were told to return to work full-time with only a few days’ notice to arrange for alternative solutions for child and elder care, or other personal needs.

(U) Site Commanders and D and O leaders expressed appreciation for the Top 3’s flexibility, enabling them to effectively manage their sites and organizations. However, some comments noted confusion when information received at Town Halls conflicted with site guidance and required additional follow-up communication with clarifying guidance. According to several D and O leaders, the early establishment of the COVID-19 Command Center provided a valuable centralized resource for information and guidance for their specific workforce needs.

(U) The COVID-19 Working Group met regularly to ensure the workforce had as much information as possible. However, several interview and survey comments noted that guidance and updates from immediate supervisors, both contractor and government, were lacking. Several survey respondents also mentioned that employees did not always receive guidance and updates during the times they were at home. This vacuum of immediate and midlevel leadership communication potentially impacted the workforce’s ability to know and fully understand policy and guidance specific to their geographical location and organization.

(U) **BEST PRACTICE:** The use of Town Halls, conference calls, NRO-all emails; the establishment of the COVID-19 Command Center; and other enterprise communication strategies helped to keep the NRO workforce educated and informed.

#### 4. (U) FACILITIES AND LOGISTICS

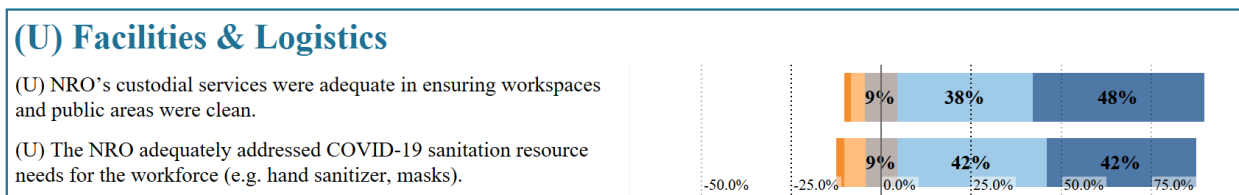


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(U) The Facilities and Logistics section of the Pandemic Response Survey revealed that over 84 percent of respondents agreed that MS&O adequately addressed NRO sanitation resource needs (e.g., hand sanitizer, masks, etc.) and kept public areas of NRO facilities sufficiently clean. In

addition, all NRO leaders reported receipt of ample cleaning supplies to respond to the pandemic, which met workforce expectations, and ensured NRO facilities complied with CDC guidelines. Further, the Top 3 and D and O leaders praised MS&O for responding to the pandemic quickly and effectively through its implementation of a variety of health and safety precautions, while also navigating a challenging contracting atmosphere, to acquire materials and supplies that were in high demand and short supply.

**(U) COMMENDABLE:** MS&O and its industry partners worked with agility and diligence to meet NRO's immediate workforce requirement for face masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning products, and other unexpected safety needs.

**(U) COMMENDABLE:** The overwhelming opinion conveyed by the workforce in survey comments and interviews was that MS&O personnel are the true heroes of NRO's response to the pandemic.

## 5. (U) HEALTH AND SAFETY

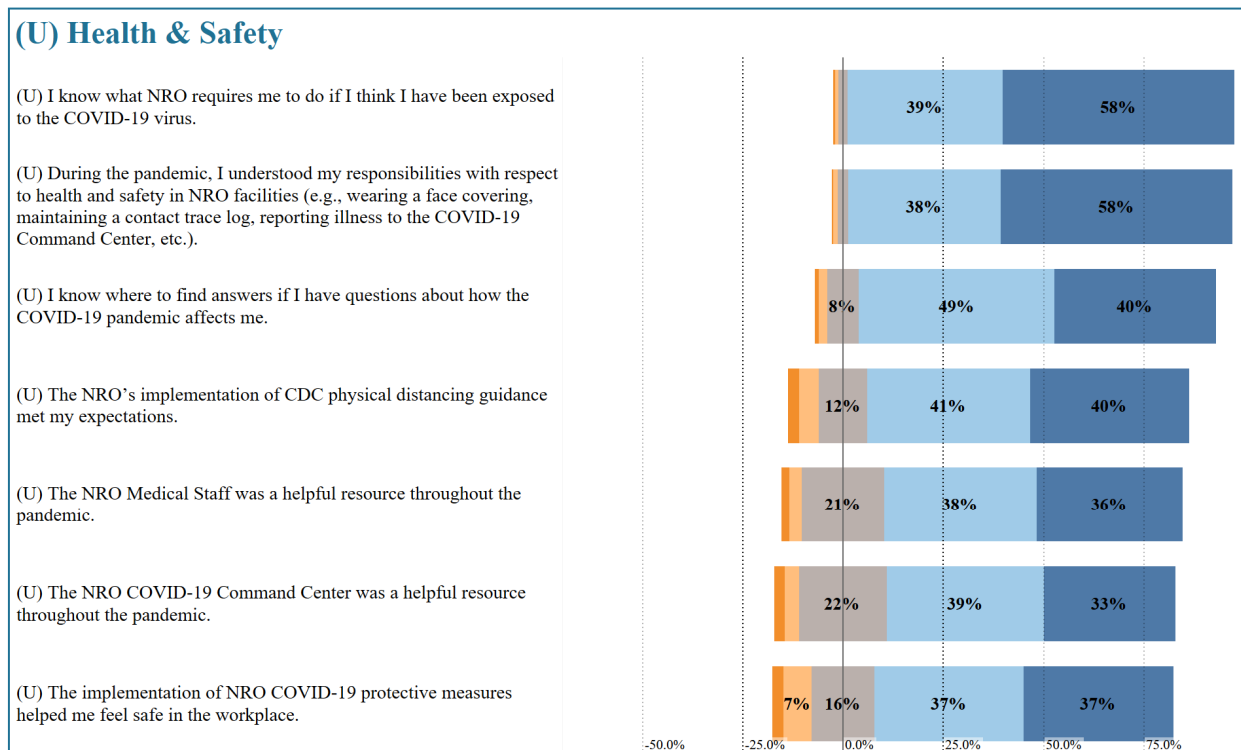


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(U) Analysis of survey and interview data revealed that the majority of the workforce feels safe in NRO facilities. Many survey respondents and interviewees commented that they felt safer in an NRO facility than anywhere else—other than their own home. The protective measures implemented by NRO leadership generally erred on the side of caution and exceeded CDC guidelines. The health and safety survey responses showed that 96 percent of the NRO workforce understood their responsibilities with respect to health and safety in NRO facilities (e.g., wearing a face covering, maintaining a contact trace log, reporting illness to the COVID-19 Command Center, etc.). Ninety-seven percent of the workforce conveyed knowledge regarding what the NRO requires them to do if they think they have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus. One interviewee stated, “I felt like the COVID Command Center was great. I’m not a doctor, but they were adhering to everything the CDC directed. Industry was following it as well. It was nice having a dedicated doctor to the cause and a central hub.” One contractor stated they were so impressed with the contact trace log that they implemented one in their own contractor facility.

(U) Even though interview and survey responses were extremely positive, the majority of relevant survey comments noted some colleagues not following the proper guidelines by either not wearing a mask at all or not wearing a mask properly, not maintaining proper social distance, or not enforcing the guidelines.

**(U) OBSERVATION:**

While guidance for wearing masks and maintaining social distancing were clearly communicated by leadership, there were numerous reports of safety measures not being followed or enforced.

**(U) CONSIDERATION:**

NRO leadership should consider the use of signed policy memorandums when setting workforce expectations for safety-related guidance and documenting consequences for repeated policy infractions or violations.



(U) Full-size cutouts of NRO leadership designed to encourage the use of hand sanitizer stations. Picture is UNCLASSIFIED.

## 6. (U) COMMUNICATIONS

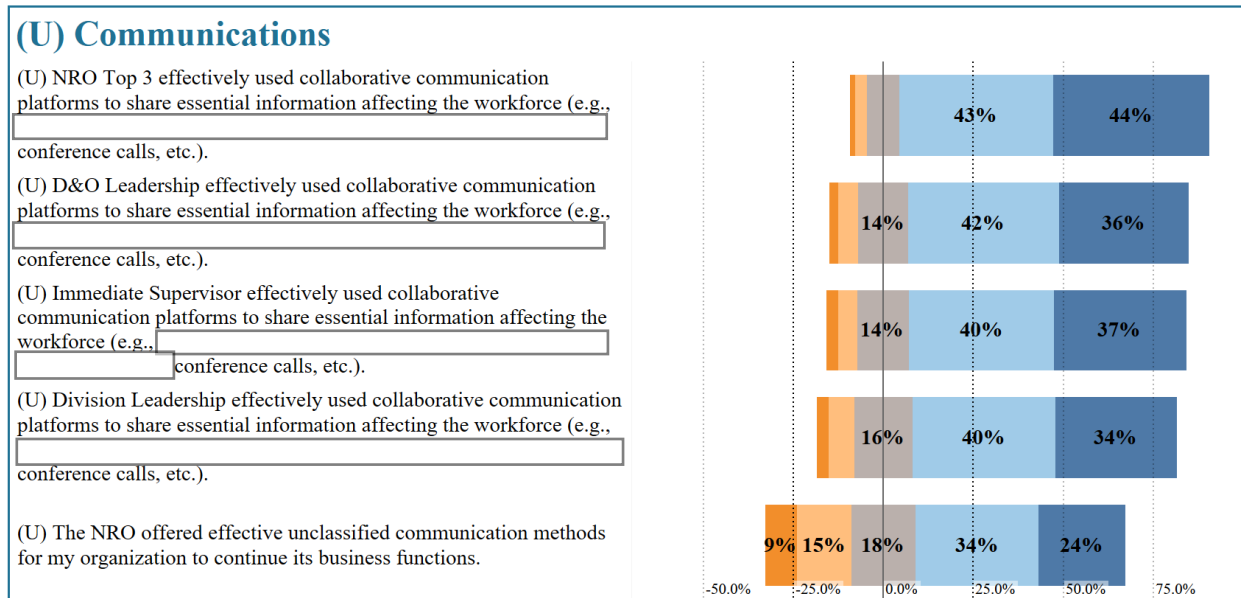


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(U) The NRO Top 3 gave ADF Site Commanders and D and O leaders the autonomy to implement and communicate guidance to their individual workforces based on their unique mission requirements. As such, site leaders managed their messaging needs through site-specific All-Hands and a variety of communications mediums, including email, telephone, and [redacted]

(U//~~FOUO~~) In the early stages of the pandemic response, the NRO relied heavily on supervisors, the chain of command, and the [redacted] to communicate with the NRO workforce. According to many survey respondents, a heavy reliance on the [redacted] and its untargeted audience application (i.e., NRO-All) caused confusion amongst the NRO workforce, especially for those personnel located at field sites. Feedback from site personnel revealed that the [redacted] messages were specifically related to NRO HQ and National Capital Region (NCR) and rarely applied to personnel outside the NCR. Site personnel commented that the [redacted] messages often required additional site leadership communications after the fact to alleviate confusion and clarify guidance.

(U//~~FOUO~~) The OIG noted [redacted]  
[redacted] In addition, survey respondents and interviewees indicated an unclear understanding of who may or may not receive messages. Many contractors were not included in the [redacted] distribution and required additional communication solutions to convey relevant information. However, sites and Ds and Os leveraged the [redacted] to great effect to communicate targeted messages to their specific workforces. This provided great efficiency to senior leaders to quickly communicate specific information on a mass scale.

(U//~~FOUO~~) **OBSERVATION:** The current implementation of [ ] does not recognize how individual ADFs use the system for their unique messaging needs. Confusion may result when members of the workforce receive duplicate or conflicting notifications from HQ and the field and are unsure as to whom the messaging applies. [ ]

(U//~~FOUO~~) **CONSIDERATION:** The NRO should consider an evaluation of [ ] to ensure it is appropriately sized, scoped, and customizable for the remainder of the current pandemic and for future emergencies.

(U//~~FOUO~~) Respondents voiced concerns about the need for an unclassified remote workspace capability. However, the NRO currently lacks the physical infrastructure to support a robust telework capability or unclassified communications network outside the workplace. An interviewee stated, "...COMM [Communications Systems Directorate] has never received any kind of funding or guidance to communicate and work over unclassified networks...". Twenty-four percent of survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the NRO offered effective unclassified communication methods. This survey question drew the second highest percentage of strongly disagree and disagree scores, consistent across NRO HQ and field sites. Many interview and survey comments identified the lack of a remote unclassified workspace platform as a concern related to their mission effectiveness during the pandemic. One survey respondent commented, "I believe the pandemic has highlighted shortfalls in the NRO unclassified communications infrastructure and concepts of operations." Other interviewees and survey respondents noted that the lack of this platform has limited the ability of both the government and contractor workforce, at all levels outside of the work center, to perform basic unclassified NRO business or mission functions.

(U//~~FOUO~~) **OBSERVATION:** The NRO lacks the capability for its workforce to receive and process unclassified information on government-sponsored platforms outside government spaces.

(U//~~FOUO~~) **CONSIDERATION:** The NRO should implement an effective remote communications platform capability to receive and process unclassified government information.



## 7. (U) HUMAN RESOURCES

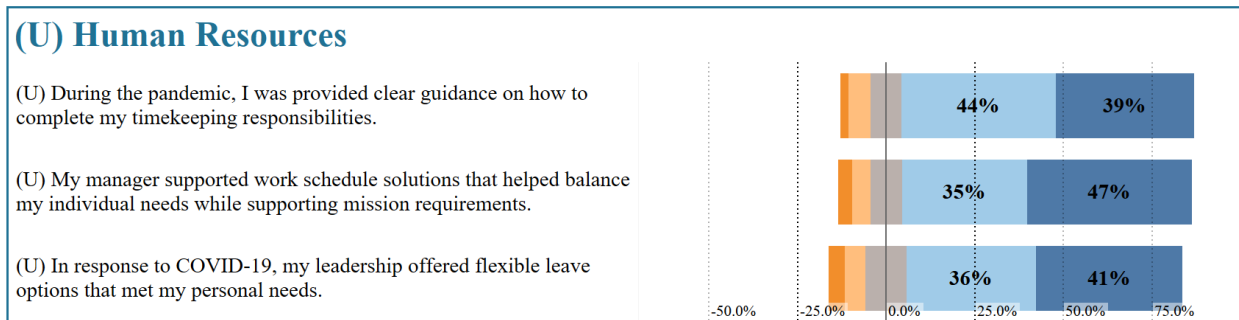


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(U) Interviews with D and O leaders and contractor representatives revealed that core human resource (HR) responsibilities, including payroll and timekeeping management, as well as the implementation of flexible schedule options, continued with minimal disruption throughout the pandemic. When asked whether they received clear guidance regarding how to complete their timekeeping responsibilities, 83 percent of survey respondents replied favorably. Similarly, 82 percent of survey respondents agreed their managers supported work schedule solutions that satisfied both the needs of the employees and the organization, while 77 percent of respondents agreed their leadership teams offered flexible leave options.

(U) According to interviewees, another core HR activity—hiring and onboarding—continued during the pandemic, but not without some challenges. Several NRO contractor leads and government managers reported instituting creative solutions to address the hiring challenges precipitated by the inability of qualified candidates to travel or attend in-person interviews. For instance, the Corporate Secretariat utilized the [ ] software application on the Unclassified Management Information System to facilitate virtual engagements with potential candidates. The system enabled job seekers to provide a recorded video response to questions that interview panel members sent to them in advance. In addition, HR professionals from multiple sites, including ADF-C, ADF-Southwest, and ADF-E, joined forces to conduct high-priority HR functions such as payroll and hiring when HR units at partner facilities were short-staffed. This type of creativity and solidarity among HR professionals was touted by many interviewees and survey respondents as the norm vice the exception.

(U) **BEST PRACTICE:** The Corporate Secretariat's use of the [ ] system to facilitate virtual engagements with potential candidates contributed significantly to NRO's ongoing recruiting efforts throughout the pandemic.

(U//~~FOUO~~) Even as the NRO—by multiple accounts—succeeded in accomplishing essential, traditional HR functions, NRO workforce members raised several HR-related concerns. A primary concern spanning all NRO personnel groups (contractor, cadre, military, and Central Intelligence Agency [CIA]) involved the inconsistencies surrounding HR rules enacted across the IC. For instance, several CIA survey respondents (detailed or assigned to the NRO)

[ ]

submitted comments expressing confusion as to why their CIA counterparts (not supporting the NRO) were permitted to record ten hours of excused absence (EA) every week to assist with child and elder care responsibilities when CIA personnel detailed or assigned to the NRO were not afforded the same option. To address this concern, the Director, Office of Human Resources (OHR) released a message to the workforce on 9 September 2020 recommending the use of telework “as a viable option to increase flexibility for employees who may have child care, elder care, or other issues due to the COVID pandemic.” In addition, in response to an “Ask the DNRO” question on the same topic, the DNRO explained,

*...if you are a CIA employee working at the NRO, you are subject to NRO policies and guidance during COVID. I realize that can be frustrating because CIA is offering Excused Absence as an additional flexibility; however, NRO is following guidance from the Department of Defense. To date, there is no approval to use Excused Absence for child care, elder care, or other COVID issues. Talk with your supervisor to discuss other flexibilities that may be available based on mission critical requirements.*

(U) NRO contractors accounted for more than 70 percent of survey respondents. Many contractor respondents voiced frustrations regarding unclear telework options, their inability to use/charge Weather and Safety Leave (WSL), and concerns regarding unsustainable work schedules under the blue/gold framework (i.e., some contractors were expected to work 80 hours during their one week “on” to maintain billing rates and project schedules). In addition to those frustrations, contractor survey comments reflected contractor sentiments that they are not fully valued at NRO. One respondent captured the concern in this way:

*I feel like the contractors got the short end of the stick here. [Contractor] Leadership and NRO leadership did do what they could to accommodate contractors, but with no telework available to us, no WSL, and then bringing all us back, at contract sites, to work 100% of the time, it definitely felt like we didn't count as people.*

(U) The NRO Top 3 engaged on a biweekly basis with top leadership from industry beginning on 19 March 2020 to discuss the inherent differences in government and contractor HR policies and address any perceived disparities between the NRO government and contractor workforce. One NRO leader explained that it was unclear how much information company leaders were providing to their employees given the steady stream of questions posed by contractors to NRO leaders regarding HR benefits and policies. NRO leaders reported that not all segments of the NRO's contractor base expressed confusion regarding HR guidance. Nonetheless, interviewees characterized portions of the NRO contractor workforce as perhaps the most “confused and aggrieved” over the course of the pandemic. The NRO embodies a “one team” approach in its efforts to support the workforce and accomplish the mission. This approach can inadvertently lead to confusion when information provided to the NRO workforce is not explicitly directed to specific workforce segments—contractor, CIA, cadre, and military. The “blended” nature of NRO's joint mission and staffing provides extraordinary benefit to the IC and DoD but also introduces challenges due to the varying and unique HR systems, policies, benefits, and guidelines characteristic of a “purple” organization.



(U) **OBSERVATION:** Some NRO contractors felt unvalued and unappreciated due to a perceived lack of HR accommodations or leadership communications.

(U) **CONSIDERATION:** In leadership and HR messages to the workforce, clearly delineate which policies and guidelines apply to each unique segment of the workforce, particularly during contingency or emergency situations. Include rationale for any differences in guidance.

## 8. (U) MISCELLANEOUS (OR OTHER)

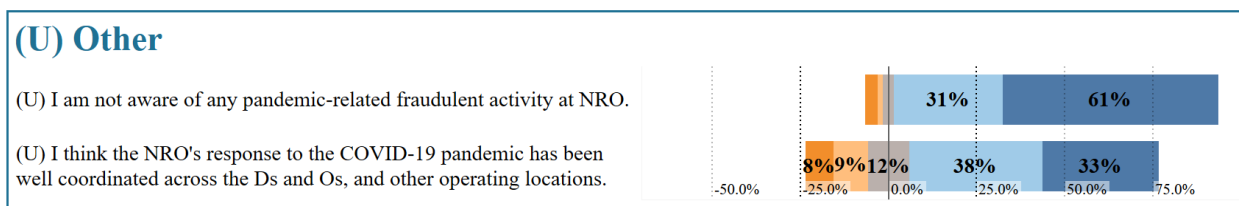


Chart is UNCLASSIFIED

(U) The majority of respondents were unaware of any pandemic-related fraud, waste, or abuse. However, interviewees and survey comments indicated a view that some NRO employees abused the option to self-identify as being in one of the CDC high-risk categories and remain at home as the pandemic ensued. They suggested NRO leadership should require a doctor's note from an affected employee, essentially certifying the employee's health condition. Other agencies have implemented similar measures, and a portion of the workforce believes NRO should do the same.

(U) Seventy-one percent (one of the lowest combined agree and strongly agree scores) of survey respondents agreed the NRO's response to COVID-19 was well coordinated across the Ds and Os and operating locations. This relatively low score could be attributable to multiple factors, including confusion caused by poorly targeted  messages. In addition, unique site work schedules and safeguards may not be well understood across sites and could potentially introduce questions regarding consistent application of pandemic-related guidelines. The following representative survey comments capture the concern in greater detail:

*It would be helpful if what is expected of those who work at NRO HQ (to include the surrounding area)...was located in ONE location... We get emails from any one of the Top 3 with some information, from our D and O leadership, then maybe also from our office leadership, and all of this guidance is NOT consistent.*

*As a [field site] employee, the mixed guidance between NRO leadership and site leadership was very confusing.*

**(U) APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY**

(U) Fieldwork for this evaluation was conducted from 25 June through 24 August 2020, allowing for interview and survey feedback on Phases 1, 2, and 3 of the National Reconnaissance Office's (NRO) Infectious Disease Response Plan (IDRP) as well as Stages A (Increase Staffing) and B (Increase Hours) of the NRO COVID-19 Recovery Plan. The OIG evaluation team engaged the NRO workforce through multiple methods, including (1) interviews with the Director, NRO; Principal Deputy Director, NRO; Deputy Director, NRO; Directorate and Office leadership and their representatives; and Aerospace Data Facility Site Commanders and their representatives; (2) interviews with a sample group of industry partners; and, 3) an NRO Management Information System (NMIS) workforce survey. These engagements included questions or discussions pertaining to the following COVID-19 subject matter:

- Mission Sustainment
- Policy
- Leadership
- Facilities and Logistics
- Health and Safety
- Communications
- Human Resources
- Miscellaneous (or Other)

(U) The OIG initially selected 21 industry partners from the NRO [redacted] database report of active contracts and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act invoice report. Other factors were considered to ensure an appropriate enterprise sampling of NRO's industry partners. An unclassified randomizer tool, [www.randomizer.org](http://www.randomizer.org), was utilized to select 10 of 21 industry contractor partners from the [redacted] database, including a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC) partner based on size and scope of its NRO support. The OIG's evaluation also included a review of contingency planning documentation (IDRP and NRO COVID-19 Recovery Plan), OIG "Hot Link" complaints, a physical review of workforce protective measures, and a review of pandemic-related notes and announcements (Office of Human Resources notes, COVID-19 Working Group slides, "Ask the DNRO" questions and answers, and weekly NRO COVID-19 updates). The OIG invited the NRO workforce (cadre, military, Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], FFRDCs, and contractor) with access to NMIS to participate in the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Survey from 8 July to 6 August 2020. The survey was hosted by the Media Services Center (MSC) and received [redacted] complete responses. OIG Analytics provided the subsequent survey statistics and prepared the graphical representations contained in this report. The evaluation team also reviewed, analyzed, and summarized over [redacted] survey comments to assist with the identification of themes and trends. The OIG also benchmarked or collaborated with OIGs from Health and Human Services, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency, as well as the CIA Office of Medical Services' Behavioral Research Staff regarding survey design, execution, analysis, and reporting.

**(U) APPENDIX B: SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS**

(U) The OIG received a total of  survey responses. The following table shows the number of responses by each D and O. COMM and MOD accounted for approximately 36% of the survey participants.

D&O	Total Responses	% of Total	D&O	Total Responses	% of Total
COMM		21%	BPO		3%
MOD		15%	OSL		3%
SED		8%	SCO		3%
GED		7%	OHR		1%
MS&O		7%	OTHER		1%
SIGINT		7%	OC		1%
GEOINT		5%	OIG		1%
MID		4%	ODIR		1%
SAO		4%	OP&S		0%
OS&CI		4%	OE&I		0%
AST		4%	OGC		0%
			<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Table is UNCLASSIFIED

(U) The majority of the NRO workforce is located at NRO Headquarters (HQ). Accordingly, the preponderance of survey responses, 63 percent, were also from NRO HQ.

Primary Location	Total Responses	% of Total
HQ		63%
OTHER		13%
ADF-C		10%
ADF-E		9%
ADF-SW		5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Table is UNCLASSIFIED

(U) The NRO's contractor workforce had the highest survey participation rate, as shown below.

Employee Type	Total Responses	% of Total
CONTRACTOR		69%
CIA		11%
MILITARY		7%
CADRE		7%
FFRDC		4%
OTHER-GOVT		2%
OTHER		0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100%</b>

Table is UNCLASSIFIED

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/symptoms/flu-vs-covid19.htm>, accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>ii</sup> [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6905e1.htm?s\\_cid=mm6905e1\\_w](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6905e1.htm?s_cid=mm6905e1_w), accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>, accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>, accessed 16 September 2020.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>, accessed 16 September 2020.