Military Department Excellence in Leadership Award Winners Named

The Department of Administrative Services expanded nominations to include teams as well as individuals in the annual Excellence in Leadership Awards. As such, one COVID-19 team of eight (from multiple sections) was selected as well as one individual at the state level. As an agency, the individual runner up was also recognized. The team award winners are: pictured above from left, Tim Diedrichsen, human resources (HR); Molly Bargmann, NEMA; Sue Spence, HR; Phyllis McCown, NEMA; Polly Putney, HR; Shawn Fitzgerald, finance; Deb Kai, NEMA; and (inset) Donny Christensen, NEMA.

The individual award winner is: far left, Chris Schroeder, long term recovery program specialist from NEMA, and immediate left, the runner up is Chris Ulrich, exercise training officer at NEMA. The state-level recognition event has been rescheduled to a later date.

Maj. Gen. Daryl Bohac extended his congratulations to all of those recognized saying: “Thank you for not only what you do, but how you do it.”
A Message from NEMA Assistant Director

Bryan Tuma

We envision safer, less vulnerable communities in Nebraska made possible through effective collaborative partnerships committed to saving lives and reducing the impact of disasters.

Our mission is to coordinate, support and serve Nebraska through an effective and relevant emergency management agency.

In recent weeks, we were grateful to hear announcements that at least three companies have developed vaccines for COVID-19. Center for Disease Control (CDC) representatives are continuing their work with health departments and partners to develop vaccination distribution plans for when those vaccines are available. They are planning for many possibilities and contingencies as vaccines are approved and readied for distribution.

CDC is working with partners at all levels, including healthcare associations, on flexible COVID-19 vaccination programs that can accommodate different vaccines and scenarios. CDC has been in contact with Nebraska’s public health departments and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to help with planning. State, tribal, local, and territorial health departments are critical to making sure vaccines are available to communities.

Recently, DHHS included Nebraska Emergency Management Agency in discussions on vaccine distribution and the state’s plan. NEMA has advocated a position that local emergency management officials be included as the vaccination plan is refined and implemented. Nebraska urges all local emergency management officials to establish dialogue with their respective local public health district offices regarding vaccination planning efforts.

The U.S. vaccine safety system ensures that all vaccines are as safe as possible. At first, the COVID-19 vaccines might be used under an Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) from U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). An EUA is a mechanism to facilitate the availability and use of medical countermeasures during a public health emergency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Once submitted, FDA will evaluate an EUA request and determine whether the relevant statutory criteria are met.

There may be a limited supply of COVID-19 vaccines before the end of 2020, but supply will continually increase in the weeks and months that follow.

The goal is for everyone to be able to easily get a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as large quantities are available. The plan is to have several thousand vaccination providers available, including doctors’ offices, retail pharmacies, hospitals, and federally qualified health centers.

If there is limited supply, some groups may be recommended to get a COVID-19 vaccine first. For instance, healthcare workers are likely to be among the first to receive vaccines. Experts are working on how to distribute these limited vaccines in a fair, ethical, and transparent way. CDC makes vaccination recommendations, including those for COVID-19 vaccines, based on input from the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.

Cost will not be an obstacle to getting vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. However, vaccine providers will be able to charge administration fees for giving or administering the shot to someone. Vaccine providers can get this fee reimbursed by the patient’s public or private insurance company or, for uninsured patients, by the Health Resources and Services Administration’s Provider Relief Fund.

The roll-out of a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is our goal and it has never been more urgent. We will all work together to rapidly distribute vaccines once they are approved.

Sincerely,

Bryan Tuma
FEMA Training Opportunity
Purchasing Under a FEMA Award Training

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) provides financial assistance to state, local, tribal and territorial governments, non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education, and other non-federal entities. All FEMA grant programs are subject to federal procurement standards found at 2C.F.R. §§ 200.317-327 (effective Nov. 12).

This one-hour training delivers guidance to FEMA award recipients and sub-recipients on the federal procurement rules applicable when purchasing under a FEMA award and discusses recent changes and additions to those rules. This training also points out the most frequent findings of procurement noncompliance as reported by the Office of Inspector General and provides available tools and resources to help avoid these mistakes.

Target Audience
This training is appropriate for FEMA employees and FEMA award recipients and sub-recipients, which include state, territorial, tribal and local government personnel, nonprofit organization staff, eligible private entities and other non-Federal entities.

Topics Include
- Federal procurement rules for states and non-state entities
- Full and open competition
- Sole sourcing
- Time-and-materials contract types
- Contract provisions
- Contractor responsibility determination
- Documentation requirements
- Tools and resources for procurement under grants

Delivery Format
Online training through Adobe Connect. If you have never used this platform, test your connection in advance here. Training dates and access information are provided below in the Training Schedule.

Procurement Under Grants Training Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Training link</th>
<th>Telephone Conference Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 1</td>
<td>11 a.m. (ET)</td>
<td>CLICK HERE</td>
<td>Phone Number: 1-800-320-4330 Access Code: 428092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>2 p.m. (ET)</td>
<td>CLICK HERE</td>
<td>Phone Number: 1-800-320-4330 Access Code: 428092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>3 p.m. (ET)</td>
<td>CLICK HERE</td>
<td>Phone Number: 1-800-320-4330 Access Code: 428092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 10</td>
<td>11 a.m. (ET)</td>
<td>CLICK HERE</td>
<td>Phone Number: 1-800-320-4330 Access Code: 428092</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Resources
PDAT Website
PDAT Field Manual
Public Assistance Policy, Guidance and Fact Sheets

How to Avoid the Top 10 Procurement Mistakes
PDAT Contract Provisions Template
State Entity FAQs

For additional information and trainings on the federal procurement standards, visit the Procurement Disaster Assistance Team website at www.fema.gov/grants/ procurement
Department of Health and Human Services — For the first time in more than a century, Nebraskans will grapple with celebrating December holidays (including Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa) during a global pandemic. It’s natural to want to gather in-person for the holidays — and realizing that might not be possible can be emotionally tough for adults and kids alike.

“This year’s celebrations will certainly look different than those in years past, but with a little creativity, holiday celebrations can still be meaningful this year,” said Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). “Consider using a video conference service such as Zoom, Skype or FaceTime to carry out your traditions, like singing holiday songs, wrapping presents, baking cookies, or having a special dinner together virtually. And remember that this time won’t last forever. Stay in the moment, but by supporting each other in new ways.”

Steps to Help Provide Stability and Support to Children During the Holidays

- Reach out to friends and family via phone or video chats. Help children to write cards or letters to family members they may not be able to visit.
- Talk, listen, and encourage expression.
- Give honest and accurate information.
- Teach simple steps to stay healthy.
- Be alert for any change in behavior.
- Reassure children about their safety and well-being.

Tips to Help Adults Deal With Emotions During the Holidays

- Allow people to feel their feelings, rather than urging them to be in a celebratory mood. Don’t inadvertently fault them for how they feel.
- Consider a virtual celebration via Skype or Zoom.
- Be realistic. This year’s holidays will be different; avoid judgment or unrealistic expectations.
- Set time aside for yourself. Spending just 15 minutes alone, without distractions, may refresh you enough to handle everything you need to do.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol, drugs and overeating.

Other Strategies for Staying Safe

- Celebrate with people in your household.
- Wear a mask with two or more layers to stop the spread of COVID-19. Wear the mask over your nose and mouth and secure it under your chin and make sure the mask fits snugly against the sides of your face.
- Stay at least 6 feet away from others who do not live with you. Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread COVID-19 or flu. Keeping 6 feet (about 2 arm lengths) from others is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Keep hand sanitizer with you and use it when you are unable to wash your hands. Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.

Need to talk or get immediate help in a crisis?

- Nebraska Family Helpline, (888) 866-8660
- Rural Response Hotline, (800) 464-0258
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 (press 2 for Spanish), or text TalkWithUs for English or o envíenos un mensaje de texto con “Hablamos” para español al 66746
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 or text LOVEIS to 22522
- National Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-4AChild (1-800-422-4453) or text 1-800-422-4453
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-HOPE (4673)
- The Eldercare Locator: 1-800-677-1116
- Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Public Service Commission — The Nebraska Public Service Commission has entered an order (NUSF-92 PO#10) that will continue to allow carriers to seek reimbursement for providing broadband service to low-income families affected by the COVID-19 emergency.

In March, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the commission allocated $1 million through the NUSF Broadband Adoption Program (NUSF-92) to assist carriers in providing low-income subscriber’s access to broadband services to facilitate online learning. The new order approved Nov. 4 will extend the program through the end of 2020.

“As we enter the fall, we find Nebraska consumers continue to face many of the same challenges associated with the pandemic as they did in the spring,” said Commission Chair Mary Ridder. “We hope extending this program will help carriers to continue to provide affordable broadband service to facilitate online learning for low-income subscribers.”

During the initial program which ran from mid-March through May 31, the commission approved reimbursements to carriers totaling nearly $205,000 providing support to roughly 2,000 consumers.

“With three-quarters of a million dollars remaining in the program, we hope to incentivize carriers to continue to seek ways to insure that the families most likely to have difficulty paying for internet, receive the service they need as we continue to cope with the effects of this health emergency,” Ridder said.

The continuation of the Broadband Adoption support will apply to low-income families added between Aug. 1 and Dec. 31. Telecommunications carriers certificated as a local exchange carrier or registered with the commission as a communications provider seeking reimbursement for this extended period may file requests consistent with the parameters of the program adopted in March at: https://tinyurl.com/PSCNUSF92PO10.

Federal Emergency Management Agency has rolled out its National Risk Index (NRI), a new online resource that visually shows communities most at risk to natural hazards. The NRI analyzes 18 natural hazards, in addition to social vulnerability, community resilience, and expected annual losses to better depict a community’s level of risk. The data are available in a visual, interactive map and are free and available for download.

The NRI can help communities better prepare for natural hazards by providing standardized risk data for mitigation planning. The NRI is intended to help users understand and prioritize actions to increase mitigation investments, especially for communities that have limited mapping and risk assessment capabilities. Data are available at the county and census tract levels. Identifying the location of potential risk areas is more accessible now than ever.

The NRI data are free and easy to use, and you can try it for yourself by visiting https://www.fema.gov/nri.

Nebraska Air National Guard — The U.S. Air Force has recognized two Nebraska Air National Guard units with organizational awards for sustained outstanding performance over a two year period of time. The 155th Air Refueling Wing won the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award, which is awarded by the Secretary of the Air Force to numbered units that have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service or outstanding achievement that clearly sets the unit above and apart from similar units. The wing has received this award on 13 previous occasions in its 74-year history.

Headquarters, Nebraska Air National Guard won the Air Force Organizational Excellence Award, which is awarded to Air Force organizations that are entities within larger organizations, such as the Joint Force Headquarters of a state’s National Guard. This is Nebraska’s fourth such award.

“These awards are national recognition of what we in Nebraska already know, which is that the men and women of our National Guard are the best in the nation,” said Gov. Pete Ricketts. “They consistently go beyond the call of duty to serve our state and country.”

Both awards cover the period of time from Jan. 1, 2018 to Dec. 31, 2019, where nearly 500 Nebraska Airmen deployed in support of federal missions overseas or activated in response to natural disasters across the United States, including historic flooding in Nebraska, or both.

Overall, the Nebraska Air National Guard has consistently maintained 100% of its authorized personnel strength and demonstrated high levels of operational readiness.
As the winter months approach, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District encourages the public to keep an eye towards the 2021 run-off season in the Missouri River Basin.

Although significant strides have been made in repairing the over 350 miles of levees across the Lower Missouri River Basin that were damaged following the historic floods of 2019, a heightened level of flood risk remains for the communities and landowners behind these damaged levee systems as repair efforts remain ongoing. This risk is higher than it was prior to the flood event because the levees are comprised of a series of components that all function together to create a complete levee system, and until all of these components, (such as seepage berms and relief wells) are repaired, the system does not fully provide the same level of flood risk reduction as it did in its pre-flood condition.

“A lot of work has been done by the levee sponsors, other stakeholders, and USACE team to repair the levee systems that were decimated by the 2019 flooding. However, there is still a significant amount of work to be done. The levees in their current conditions do not offer the same level of risk reduction as they did prior to the 2019 floods,” warned Matt Krajewski, director of emergency operations, USACE-Omaha. “There is still work to be done up and down the system to restore the levees to their full protection level. I urge everyone to remain vigilant this upcoming flood season.”

To date, USACE has awarded nearly $500 million in levee repair construction contracts and more than $375 million of the work has been accomplished to include 15 projects that have been substantially completed, 12 active construction projects (including all the levees on the left bank of the Missouri River within Omaha District's area of responsibility) and five projects that are still working through the design process. While it is anticipated that all levee systems will be at full height by March 1, repairs on various other components of the levee systems will continue throughout much of the 2021 construction season. Until these repairs can be completed the USACE, levee sponsor and local communities need to remain vigilant.

The Omaha District remains focused on ensuring the safety of citizens and remain positioned to provide flood fight assistance to state, local and tribal government agencies, as appropriate. We will also continue working with our other federal partners to communicate the conditions on the river systems as we look towards the 2021 run-off season. When severe weather and/or heavy precipitation is forecasted, the public is encouraged to keep in contact with their local emergency managers for the latest conditions in their area.

For regular updates on the repair efforts to flood control structures in the Missouri River Basin, visit the Omaha District’s System Restoration web page at: https://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/Omaha-District-System-Restoration-Team/.

Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles is reminding customers that most of the services offered by DMV can be safely done online as state DMV and county offices seek to de-densify and reduce in-person interactions. Dozens of services are available online, including common services such as renewing a driver’s license, state ID card and vehicle registration, ordering specialty plates, applying for handicap permits and more.

“By providing these services online, we are able to ensure the health and safety of our customers and team members,” said Rhonda Lahm, DMV “It is important to limit the risk of exposure to COVID-19 as the number of hospitalizations increases in Nebraska.”

A full list of all services provided online with links to each is available at dmv.nebraska.gov/services.
Nebraska Strong Recovery Project to Offer Outreach to Connect People in Need with Crisis Counseling Services

An effort known for helping Nebraskans struggling to recover from last year’s flooding has new funds to deal with a different kind of disaster: COVID-19.

The Nebraska Strong Recovery Project, funded in 2020 with $6.7 million in new federal grants, offers outreach to connect people in need with crisis counseling services and other resources.

With the novel coronavirus, the outreach methods have changed. Instead of going door-to-door in flood-damaged communities, outreach workers had to find ways to get the word out across the state without making risky personal contacts.

“We had to find new and innovative ways to reach people, and we did. In fact, Nebraska was used as a model for other states requesting information,” said Mikayla Johnson, administrator of the behavioral health division at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

The recovery project is a collaboration of the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center, the Nebraska DHHS, the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency and the state’s six behavioral health regions. Seventy-three outreach workers are divided among the six regions.

The project plans to distribute 650,000 printed materials advertising, among other things, the Nebraska Family Helpline (888-866-9660) and the Rural Response Hotline (1-800-464-0258). The brochures so far have been distributed at outdoor events, during drive-by parades and at local businesses.

The project also is getting the word out through online coffee chats, YouTube videos, Facebook, Twitter and a website, https://nebraskastrongrecoveryproject.nebraska.edu.

Senior living facilities, where residents faced the isolation of lockdowns that ended visitations and excursions for their safety, have gotten a special focus.

One outreach worker in southeast Nebraska’s Region V, worried about people in isolation, decided to visit a retirement home weekly. She came across a woman sitting at a corner window, and they had “an instant connection.”

“It started with a wave and now it is the highlight of my week, and she seems to beam with excitement when she spots me coming,” the outreach worker said. “We can have entire conversations through the glass.”

Lately, the woman has had more and more friends sitting with her at the window.

“It warms my heart to see that she is no longer alone at the window,” the outreach worker said. “Building connections and strengthening our communities is what our project is all about.”

A team in northeast Nebraska’s Region IV found assisted-living facilities and other programs clamoring for more materials for its Rock It Forward project. People in the community used donated rocks, paint, markers and brushes to paint the rocks, often including inspirational words. The rocks were collected and set out in walking areas for others to find and take.

The Nebraska Strong project also has found needs among frontline workers, including public health workers doing contact tracing. They are notified of each new COVID case and are responsible for documenting, reporting and tracking all the cases in their area. They take calls at all hours. Some are clocking 70-hour workweeks.

“It’s amazing to see relief in the faces of worn-out staff when we say something as simple as, ‘How can I support you this week?’” one outreach worker said. “More often than not, we just need to be given permission to take care of ourselves.”

The Region V team now talks weekly with public health workers and helps prioritize ever-changing workloads.

Stress-management and self-care workshops are planned.

In west-central Nebraska’s Region II, an outreach worker described a young nurse and mother sharing how stressful life had become with all the uncertainties surrounding COVID-19. They talked about taking time for self-care. Then the project team put a thank-you sign in the nurse’s yard.

“She was actually overjoyed,” the outreach worker said.

Small-business owners have been welcoming. A Region V outreach worker said a bar owner whose place was a hub for three small towns and area farmers welcomed her flyers and, while chatting, opened up about his frustrations. He talked about the struggle to stay open when public policies discouraged crowds, the staffers lost because of quarantines, the need to deliver dinners to nearby towns for elderly couples not comfortable dining in.

He was relieved to have a listening ear and to learn of resources for small-business owners.

“He story makes my work more personal,” the outreach worker said. “I know that he is doing so much more for his community than just serving a great steak.”

Nebraska Strong’s goal is to double the outreach of the flood recovery effort, and it’s on track to do that over the next nine months, said Stacey Hoffman, senior research manager at the University of Nebraska Public Policy Center.

So far, crisis counselors have referred more than 500 people on to other services, including 132 for mental health services and five for substance abuse help, according to the center. More than 200 were referred to community services, such as COVID-19 testing, daycare to enable working from home, or assistance with reduced income for such needs as utility services.

The hotlines’ 676 calls as of last month were up 50% from the flood recovery phase, a reflection of how different the disasters are.

“COVID is everywhere,” Hoffman said. “And we’re delivering services while the event is still happening.”

With holidays approaching and the prospect of traditional celebrations being disrupted, project workers expect to see stress in communities, with reactions varying from annoyance to major distress.

The Nebraska Strong Recovery Project has people who want to help. A program manager with the Nebraska Family Helpline said it’s been an honor to be part of responding to children and families struggling because of the pandemic. Longtime partners and new colleagues have worked together to provide crisis counseling.

“While most would agree it has been a terrible year,” he said, “we have been encouraged by the way Nebraskans have responded to the needs of their neighbors.”
Heather Silver joins NEMA Grants Unit

Heather Silver joined Nebraska Emergency Management Agency on Nov. 30 as a federal aid administrator II/grants manager in the grants unit.

Silver previously worked with Nebraska Department of Transportation as a project coordinator. While there she earned her project management professional certification.

Silver earned a bachelor of arts from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln with a major in English and a minor in theater arts.

She has two teenage children and an elderly dog.

In her spare time she enjoys yoga, kayak polo and gardening.

COVID-19 is spreading in Nebraska
Here is what you can do to stay safe and stop the spread

At work, at school, at small and large gatherings

Avoid the Three Cs

1. Crowded Places
2. Close Contact
3. Confined Spaces

Avoid gathering in groups where you can't maintain 6 feet distance from others.
Wear a mask or maintain 6-feet distance when you're with people you don't live with.
Avoid enclosed spaces with poor ventilation.

NEMA is charged by Nebraska statute to reduce the vulnerabilities of the people and communities of Nebraska in terms of injury, loss of life and property damage resulting from natural, technological or man-made disasters and emergencies.

NEMA is responsible for coordinating the state response in any major emergency or disaster including the support of local governments as needed or requested, and coordinating assistance with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and other federal partners.

The Beacon includes emergency management news and activities from across the state. Please forward story ideas or photos for inclusion in the newsletter to: Public Information Officer Jodie Fawl, 402-471-7428 or jodie.fawl@nebraska.gov.