

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2011, the Department of Transportation (DOT) determined that the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) had violated federal appropriations statutes in awarding some grants for 1 of its 10 grant programs from fiscal years 2006 to 2010. This was caused in part by weaknesses in FMCSA's internal controls and may have affected FMCSA's ability to carry out its mission to reduce motor carrier (large truck and bus) accidents and fatalities. To the extent that these weaknesses existed in FMCSA's other grant programs, it is possible that FMCSA also incorrectly awarded other grant funds.

As requested, this report examines (1) internal control weaknesses in FMCSA's other grant programs prior to fiscal year 2010 that could have increased the risk of irregularities in grant awards and (2) FMCSA's actions to improve grants management, and remaining challenges. GAO analyzed FMCSA grants management documents related to internal controls over grants both before and after fiscal year 2010 and recent actions, and interviewed FMCSA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FMCSA (1) conduct a strategic workforce analysis for its grants management staff; (2) add details to its grants management policy manual; (3) improve its tracking of staff taking grants management training; and (4) set and track metrics related to grants management goals and objectives. DOT generally agreed with GAO's recommendations and provided technical comments, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-12-158](#). For more information, contact Susan Fleming at (202) 512-2834 or flemings@gao.gov.

FEDERAL MOTOR CARRIER SAFETY ADMINISTRATION

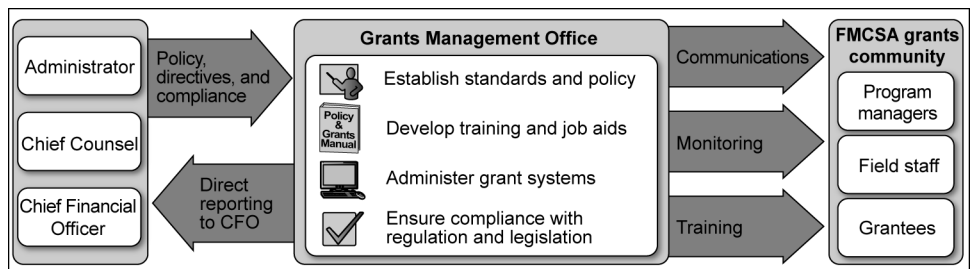
Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Grants Management

What GAO Found

Prior to fiscal year 2010, FMCSA's internal controls over management of all of its grant awards were weak, which increased the risk that FMCSA awarded grants that violated laws or FMCSA policies. Internal controls like those related to workforce training and policies and procedures can help provide assurance that operations, including grants management, are efficient and transactions comply with laws. However, FMCSA had only limited formal grants management training, limited documentation of grants management policies and procedures, and, according to FMCSA grants management staff, did not require legal review to help ensure that all awards complied with governing laws and regulations. As a result, FMCSA could not be certain that staff were trained in managing grant awards or followed relevant policies and laws in awarding grants, increasing the risk for mismanagement.

Since fiscal year 2010, FMCSA has taken a number of actions to transform its grants management practices, including planning to centralize oversight through a Grants Management Office, standardizing policies and procedures, developing grants management training, and implementing grants management systems to manage award processes and documentation. While these actions help address some existing internal control weaknesses—for example, clearly documented and standardized policies and procedures should help ensure that grants management staff follow policies when awarding grants—some challenges remain. Specifically, FMCSA has not conducted a strategic workforce analysis that could help it identify and fill gaps in expertise, as well as support its budget request to staff a Grants Management Office. Also, FMCSA's grants management policies and procedures lack details on some grant program staff's roles and responsibilities, and the agency does not have a system to easily track and ensure that staff complete required training. The agency also has not set metrics related to its grants management program or developed a method to measure progress in meeting those metrics. Further, since FMCSA has only recently implemented these actions, it is unclear how effective these new initiatives will be in improving its grants management. Regardless, it will be important that the agency have leadership in place that can continue to drive its transformation, as well as metrics to measure its progress in achieving its grants management goals.

FMCSA's Proposed Grants Management Office



Source: GAO analysis of FMCSA data.