May 19, 2011

Congressional Addressees:

Subject: Efficiency and Effectiveness of Fragmented Economic Development Programs Are Unclear

One of the areas included in our recent report on potential duplication among federal programs was economic development.\(^1\) If economic development programs are administered efficiently and effectively, they can contribute to the well-being of our nation’s economy at the least cost to taxpayers. Absent a common definition for economic development, we had previously developed a list of nine activities most often associated with economic development.\(^2\) These activities include planning and developing strategies for job creation and retention, developing new markets for existing products, building infrastructure by constructing roads and sewer systems to attract industry to undeveloped areas, and establishing business incubators to provide facilities for new businesses’ operations, among others.

Our recent work included information on 80 economic development programs at four agencies—the Departments of Commerce (Commerce), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Agriculture (USDA), and the Small Business Administration (SBA). This work examined (1) the potential for overlap in the design of the programs, (2) the extent to which the four agencies collaborate to achieve common goals, and (3) the extent to which the agencies have developed measures to determine the programs’ effectiveness. According to the agencies, funding provided for these 80 programs in fiscal year 2010 amounted to $6.2 billion, of which about $2.9 billion was for economic development efforts, largely in the form of grants, loan guarantees, and direct loans.\(^3\) Some of these 80 programs can fund a variety of activities, including those focused on

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\(^3\)In March 2011, we reported that the funding provided for these 80 programs in fiscal year 2010 amounted to $6.5 billion, of which about $3.2 billion was for economic development efforts, according to the agencies (See GAO-11-318SP and GAO, List of Selected Federal Programs That Have Similar or Overlapping Objectives, GAO-11-474R (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 18, 2011). We are reporting different funding figures in this product because SBA revised the original information they provided to us in December 2010.
noneconomic development activities, such as rehabilitating housing and building community parks.

In February 2011 we briefed staff of the House and Senate Small Business Committees on the results of this work to date. See enclosure III for the briefing presented to the congressional staff. We will perform additional analysis of some of these programs and will report on them at a later date.

Summary

Our work to date suggests that the design of each of these 80 economic development programs appears to overlap with that of at least one other program in terms of the economic development activity that they are authorized to fund. For example, as shown in figure 1, the four agencies administer a total of 54 programs that can fund “entrepreneurial efforts,” which includes helping businesses to develop business plans and identify funding resources.

Figure 1: Number of Programs by Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic activities</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>HUD</th>
<th>SBA</th>
<th>USDA*</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurial efforts</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans and strategies</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial buildings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New markets</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business incubators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial parks</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO analysis of information from Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA.

*In December 2010, USDA officials provided us information on the economic activities that each of their economic development programs can fund, which we reported in our March 2011 report (GAO-11-318SP). In April 2011, they provided revised information for six of their programs and we incorporated the information into this product. We identify these six programs in Enclosure V.

Enclosure IV lists the specific programs in figure 1 that can fund each economic activity, grouped by agency and activity type.
We have also identified the ways each agency is able to distribute economic development funding, as well as the geographic regions based on population density that the agencies target (see figs. 2 and 3).

**Figure 2: Program Award Distribution Type by Agency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Grant or direct payment</th>
<th>Loan (direct or guaranteed)</th>
<th>Advantages for federal contract competition</th>
<th>Grant and loan</th>
<th>Grant and services/technical assistance</th>
<th>Services/technical assistance and advantages for federal contract competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUD</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>47%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO analysis of information from Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA.

**Figure 3: Percentage of Programs Designated toward Urban and Rural Communities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Not specified</th>
<th>Urban only</th>
<th>Rural only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUD</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USDA</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO analysis of information from Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA.

Enclosure V provides additional details on each of the 80 economic development programs, including administering agency, funding received in fiscal year 2010, economic activities eligible for funding, area served based on population density, primary recipients targeted by program, and award type.

To address issues arising from potential overlap and fragmentation in economic development programs, we previously identified collaborative practices agencies should consider implementing in order to maximize performance and results of federal
programs that share common outcomes. Results from our work to date show that Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA appear to have taken actions to implement some of the collaborative practices, such as defining and articulating common outcomes, for some of their related programs. However, the four agencies have offered little evidence so far that they have taken steps to develop compatible policies or procedures with other federal agencies or to search for opportunities to leverage physical and administrative resources with their federal partners.

In addition, a lack of information on program outcomes is both a current and long-standing concern. We identified such weaknesses at the four agencies we reviewed. Better information on program outcomes is needed to determine whether this potential overlap and fragmentation are resulting in ineffective or inefficient programs. See our March 2011 report for more information on our preliminary results related to the extent to which these four agencies collaborate and how they determine the effectiveness of some of their programs.

**Actions Needed and Potential Financial or Other Benefits**

In previous reports we identified areas of concern related to the extent to which agencies collaborate and assess the effectiveness of their programs. These areas can benefit from continued attention.

- Agencies need to further utilize promising practices for enhanced collaboration. We first made this recommendation to SBA and USDA in September 2008, but these agencies have taken only limited steps to fully address our concerns. The actions that the four agencies should consider include seeking more opportunities for resource sharing across economic development programs with shared outcomes and identifying ways to leverage each program’s strengths to improve existing collaborative efforts. Continuing to explore the extent to which these agencies collaborate could help identify promising practices that may result in more effective and efficient delivery of economic development programs to economically distressed areas.

- Agencies need to collect accurate and complete data on program outcomes and use the information to assess each program’s effectiveness. In June 2008 we made a similar recommendation to SBA about its HUBZone program, but the agency has taken limited action thus far.

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5GAO-11-318SP, 44-45.

6GAO-08-1123.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to Commerce, SBA, USDA and HUD for review and comment. Commerce’s Assistant Secretary for Economic Development and SBA’s Assistant Administrator for Congressional and Legislative Affairs provided written comments that are presented in Enclosures I and II. In addition, Commerce, SBA, and USDA provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. HUD did not provide written or technical comments.

Commerce’s Assistant Secretary states that prior GAO reports have focused on the types of investments made without an appropriate definition of economic development. Because federal agencies do not have a standard definition of what constitutes economic development, we used a list of activities as criteria for identifying programs that are generally accepted as being directly related to economic development. Our list includes economic activities that we first identified for our 2000 report on economic development issues and then updated for our 2006 report on rural economic development. The list was developed based on a general consensus of officials, including officials from the Department of Commerce’s EDA, along with other federal agencies involved with economic development and several national associations familiar with economic development. In general, we focused on activities that directly affected the overall development of an area, such as job creation, rather than on activities that improved individuals’ quality of life, such as housing and education. The Assistant Secretary also stated that only an evaluation of programs that considers goals and the outcomes of each program can accurately identify duplication. We agree that accurate program outcomes are critical to evaluating the impact of federal economic development efforts. Our report states that these programs appear to overlap in terms of their design and authorization; it does not state that programs overlap in terms of outcomes. We have not concluded that duplication exists among programs and plan to address these issues in our future work on overlap and duplication, which will further examine the services that each program provides, program outcome measures, and collaborative procedures.

SBA’s Assistant Administrator for Congressional and Legislative Affairs made a similar point. He wrote that while our report provides an initial starting point by presenting a road map for further investigation into individual programs, it does not attempt to set forth specific data about the differences in focus, target recipients, delivery mechanisms, and other features of each program. We agree that more work is required before concluding that duplication and related waste or inefficiencies exist. In this report, we took an initial step to differentiate the 80 programs by identifying the primary targeted recipient for each program. In our work going forward, we plan to take further steps to identify the unique value that each program provides. The Assistant Administrator also stated that he disagreed with our finding related to the extent to which SBA collaborates with other agencies. He noted, for example, that SBA’s HUBZone program office recently signed a memorandum of understanding with HUD on sharing geocoding services related to its HUBZone map. The new information that the Assistant Administrator provided does not change our finding. We found that the agencies, including SBA, appear to have

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taken actions to implement some of the collaborative practices, such as defining and articulating common outcomes. However, SBA has offered little evidence to date that it has implemented some of the other key collaborative practices, such as developing compatible policies or procedures that help to facilitate collaboration between its federal partners. As we continue work in these areas, we plan to, for example, further monitor and assess SBA’s collaborative practices. SBA also provided revised fiscal year 2010 funding figures for each of their programs. These revised figures were significantly different from the ones they provided to us in December 2010, which we incorporated into our March 2011 reports. SBA officials could not identify the source for the inaccurate figures. They did state that the majority of their programs do not receive program-specific appropriations and that they rely on estimates provided by SBA staff to determine the costs associated with each program. We noted the programs for which this is the case. As stated in our scope and methodology, we relied on the agencies for program-specific funding data because the agencies are the only source for that information. Although we assessed the reliability of program-specific information that we used to support our findings (such as, the primary targeted recipient), we did not verify the reliability of either the original or revised program-specific funding figures because we did not rely on them to support any of our findings. However, as we continue our work, we plan to obtain a better understanding of how the agencies that we review, including SBA, determine the costs of their programs.

USDA’s Director of the Office of Budget and Program Analysis provided comments to our report and emphasized that the President’s fiscal year 2012 budget proposes the termination of several Rural Development and Forest Service programs that have been determined to be duplicative of other programs as clarified in the terminations, reductions, and savings volume of the fiscal year 2012 budget. He said that these proposals demonstrate USDA’s commitment to reducing duplication and improving the program efficiencies of USDA’s economic development programs. In our work going forward we plan to continue to, for example, monitor and assess efforts made by the Administration to implement these and other proposals aimed at eliminating duplicative federal economic development programs. Among the technical comments USDA provided, officials made a number of revisions to the information they originally provided to us in December 2010, which was the information that we incorporated into one of our March 2011 reports. Specifically, they asked us to clarify the types of economic activities that six of their economic development programs can fund. We incorporated the changes to our report and noted the programs where this is the case.

**Scope and Methodology**

To identify areas of potential overlap and best practices to address the areas of concern, we utilized information from previous GAO products as well as our ongoing work following up on the recommendations from those previous products. We also relied on our recent evaluation of economic development programs at Commerce, HUD, SBA and USDA. During this recent evaluation, we compiled publicly available information on

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9 GAO-11-318SP and GAO-11-474R.

10 GAO-11-318SP.
each program to determine the economic activities that the programs can fund, the ways the agencies distribute economic development funding, as well as the geographic areas and primary recipients that the agencies target. We then relied on the agencies to review this information, confirm its accuracy, and provide clarifications as necessary. Based on the information we collected and the clarifications that the agencies provided, we determined that these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this review. Our report also includes self-reported data on program funds from the agencies for background and contextual purposes. We relied on the agencies for the program-specific funding data because the agencies are the only source for this type of information. We met with officials from each of the agencies to discuss each of the programs and the program missions. Because SBA officials view all of their programs as being related to economic development, we included all SBA programs in this review. Using the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance and other agency documents, we identified 80 federal programs administered by the four agencies that could fund economic development activities and determined the primary targeted recipients (that is, the end user that the agency is focused on serving) for each of the programs. Agency officials reviewed our determinations of the primary targeted recipients and they generally agreed with our assessments. We did not include tax credit programs aimed at economic development in this review. For information on how tax programs can contribute to duplication, see the report we issued in March 2011.\footnote{GAO-11-318SP, 75.} We conducted this performance audit from October 2010 through April 2011, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees and other interested parties. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at \url{http://www.gao.gov}. Should you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, please contact William B. Shear, Director, at (202) 512-8678, or shearw@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in Enclosure VI.

William B. Shear

\begin{center}
William B. Shear
\end{center}

Director, Financial Markets
and Community Investment

Enclosures (6)
List of Congressional Addressees

The Honorable Mary Landrieu
Chair
The Honorable Olympia Snowe
Ranking Member
Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship
United States Senate

The Honorable Samuel Graves
Chairman
The Honorable Nydia Velazquez
Ranking Member
Committee on Small Business
House of Representatives
Enclosure I: Comments from the Department of Commerce

April 26, 2011

Mr. William B. Shear
Director, Financial Markets and Community Investment
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Shear:

In response to your request for comments on the U.S. Government Accountability (GAO) Report 11-477R, “Efficiency and Effectiveness of Fragmented Economic Development Programs Are Unclear,” effectively evaluating Federal programs that support economic development requires a thorough understanding of, not only the types of investments that are made, but how, why, and to whom the investments are made. GAO has periodically issued several reports that analyzed potential overlap of Federal economic development activities. A glaring deficiency in this report, however, is GAO’s admission on page 1 that there is not a common definition of economic development used to guide its analysis. Rather, its analysis depends upon a listing of activities to make inferences regarding what economic development is, and by extension, whether there is duplication of programs.

Prior GAO reports have all focused exclusively on the types of investments made without considering the goals of each of the programs, as well. Without viewing Federal investments in economic development through the lens of an appropriate definition and development of outcomes arising from that definition, GAO may be incorrectly identifying duplication where none exists. As the country prepares to address the mounting deficit and reevaluate its investments, GAO’s new report could have offered important information to inform future budget discussions. Instead, this fundamental flaw in the methodology employed by GAO to identify duplication and examine performance limits the report’s value and usability.

Economic development is a common term used for many types of activities. From the perspective of the Economic Development Administration (EDA), in its most distilled form, economic development traditionally focuses on the creation or retention of jobs that support the growth of income, and by extension, the tax base in a geographic region. Creating these jobs, however, requires the engagement of a variety of actors at every level within the public and private sectors, as well as many inputs, including infrastructure, housing, social and community development, a skilled workforce, entrepreneurial talent, technology, and access to capital. In the Federal Government, the term economic development has become synonymous with all of these things.
Ensuring that the American public benefits from robust economic development requires investments in many economic activities, some of which GAO has identified, including business incubators, telecommunications, plans and strategies, infrastructure, industrial parks, etc. While Federal agencies may appear to make similar types of investments based on these categories, because the goals of each agency and program differ, their outcomes are ultimately distinct. At the same time, these investments complement each other in such a way as to maximize the economic potential of the United States.

GAO identified nine activities which they felt represented economic development. Using this lens, many of the Departments/Agencies examined appeared to be duplicative. However, EDA’s framework for investing in these economic development activities is substantially different from that of other Federal agencies as it is based on regional collaboration and innovation.

- Over the last several years, EDA has funded seminal research regarding regional collaboration and innovation, such as supporting Dr. Michael Porter and his team to identify and map regional innovation clusters across the Nation. Because of research such as this, EDA is focused on making strategic 21st century investments that help communities leverage their comparative strengths to spur innovation and investment that will ultimately lead to long-term economic prosperity. EDA’s regional bottom-up approach to economic development allows it to utilize its broad array of tools to most effectively address local needs in order to support economic development.

- Additionally, EDA plays a key role in shaping Federal policy for fostering collaborative economic development. In this leadership role, EDA has built upon its long practice of coordinating with other Federal agencies and its knowledge of best practices in economic development to create several new initiatives designed to more strategically advance regional economic development. These initiatives formally leverage each partner’s complementary activities to advance regional economic development in the broadest sense, including infrastructure, housing, social and community development, a skilled workforce, entrepreneurial talent, technology, and access to capital.

  - For example, EDA recently collaborated with the Small Business Administration, the Department of Labor, the Department of Energy, the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology on the Energy Regional Innovation Cluster Initiative to develop and implement a cross-cutting, collaborative approach built on best practices to stimulate sustainable economic development. Because all of these agencies have varying focuses, programmatic objectives, and eligible recipient entities, they all

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Adapted EDA-funded research examples: Unlocking Rural Competitiveness: The Role of Regional Clusters – Report & Interactive Website (2006 through present); Know Your Region Project – Curriculum & Interactive Website (2006-present); Crossing the Next Regional Frontier: Information and Analytics Linking Regional Competitiveness to Investment in a Knowledge-Based Economy – Occupational Clusters (10/2009-present)
have unique and complementary niches related to economic development. The strategic collaboration of these six agencies allows the Federal Government to support a more overarching vision for economic development.

- Another example is the recent release of EDA's Federal Funding Opportunity for the i6 Green Challenge, where EDA funding is coordinated with funding opportunities provided by other Federal partner agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy, the Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture, or the National Science Foundation. Each of these agencies will provide additional funding opportunities to i6 Green Challenge winners for complimentary activities resulting in the development of proof of concept centers for green technology. The funding from our partner agencies will not duplicate or overlap with EDA funding, but provide supplemental funding opportunities to winning grantees because the range of activities expected to be undertaken—from research and technology transfer to commercialization—is expected to be diverse, wide-ranging, and performed by multiple collaborating public and private entities at the local level.

With regard to outcome measurement, accurate program outcomes are critical to evaluating the impact of Federal economic development efforts. While GAO highlighted potential improvements that EDA could make to its performance measures, EDA was the only agency that GAO cited which collected, tracked, or reported data on long-term performance of their programs. EDA prides itself on its efforts to continuously improve its performance measures and validation processes. EDA's current performance metrics were founded on an independent study of EDA investments carried out by Rutgers in 1996. Unacknowledged in the GAO report is that this study was updated and validated in 2008 through a separate study conducted by Grant Thornton. The Grant Thornton study adopted EDA's method for conducting site visits to validate performance measures and validated the data in the 1996 Rutgers report.

EDA continues to work to strengthen its internal validation protocols and strives to conduct as many site visits as resources permit to verify performance outcomes. While EDA could always spend additional resources to conduct more site visits and take even more steps to further bolster its performance reporting, in fact, EDA's outcomes have been validated sufficiently. We believe that EDA budget proposals identify the appropriate level of support for performance reporting. Rather than increase salaries and expenses for unnecessary fine tuning of performance measures, we believe those funds are better allocated to the program account where they can help communities innovate their economies and create jobs.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John R. Fernandez
Enclosure II: Comments from the Small Business Administration

U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20416

April 29, 2011

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Andrew E. Finkel
Assistant Director
United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Finkel:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the draft GAO report on potential duplication among federal economic development programs ("Efficiency and Effectiveness of Fragmented Economic Development Programs Are Unclear") as it relates to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

SBA appreciates the opportunity to participate in GAO’s survey of economic development programs, and agrees that programs should be reviewed regularly to avoid waste and duplication. We agree that there is value in identifying the categories into which programs fall in order to target effective means at approaching the entrepreneurial development challenge in each category. At the same time, we believe the report (and any further similar study in the future) would benefit from having a sufficient number and breadth of categories or fields to properly capture the data necessary to differentiate between each program and its intended scope and target.

We encourage GAO to reconsider how it describes the results of this survey and to explain that this survey is limited to nine, very broad categories and that the survey did not attempt to set forth specific data about the differences in focus, target recipients, delivery mechanisms, and other features of each program. As a result, the only inferences one can reasonably draw from the survey are that the four agencies each provide programs that cover one of the nine areas and further investigation is necessary to truly determine where programs may be duplicative. Viewed in this light, the GAO survey provides an initial starting point by giving us a broad category road map for further investigation into individual programs.

With regard to specific findings made by GAO in the draft report, SBA respectfully submits the following comments.

Page 5: "Preliminary results from [GAO’s] work to date show that Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA appear to have taken actions to implement some of the collaborative practices, such as defining and articulating common outcomes, for some of their related programs. However, the four agencies have offered little evidence so far that they have taken steps to develop compatible policies or procedures with other federal agencies or to search for opportunities to leverage physical and administrative resources with their federal partners."
SBA Comment: Collaboration with HUD and USDA

SBA does not agree with these findings. In December 2010, SBA started a process of exploring collaborating with the Offices of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) and the Community Planning and Development Program (CPD) at HUD on the following issues:

- HUBZone and HUD recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU). In the MOU, HUD has committed to provide geocoding services to the HUBZone Program. This support will provide a standard, consistent source of geocoded data to SBA.

- Explore the possibility of outsourcing the HUBZone web base mapping to HUD (In the summer 2011 we will have an assessment of the cost and benefits of the effort).

- Cooperate with HUD in their development of a map with their own layers of places benefiting from HUD place-based economic development programs (e.g., Empowerment Zones, Community Renewal, etc.), providing them with layers of HUBZone designated areas. In this way, the public will be able to see areas that are benefiting from programs of both agencies.

- Develop a methodology to evaluate the impact of both agencies on the economic development of areas receiving funds or benefits from them.

Additionally, last year SBA and USDA entered into an MOU, under which SBA has facilitated meetings with USDA Rural Development and our major resource partners (Small Business Development Centers, Women’s Business Centers, and SCORE) to disseminate information about RD programs. This has led to the development of referral networks among these federal and non-federal entities. In addition:

- As a part of SBA’s ongoing efforts to coordinate outreach to local and national financial institutions, SBA and USDA have co-hosted several national and local lender forums around the country.

- SBA and USDA have collaborated in strategic outreach to tradeshows, conventions, Congressional members, and media outlets.

- USDA and SBA have developed working relationships with other Federal, state, county and local agencies, as well as private organizations, to facilitate and support the development of strong rural businesses.

- This collaboration is the model for SBA’s participation in the Appalachian Regional Development Initiative and several local working groups comprised of rural development organizations such as the Iowa Rural Development Council.

Page 6: "Agencies need to collect accurate and complete data on program outcomes and use the information to assess each program’s effectiveness. In June 2008 [GAO] made a similar recommendation to SBA about its HUBZone program, but the agency has taken limited action thus far."

Page 13
SBA Comment
SBA believes it has taken significant actions to collect accurate and complete data on HUBZone program outcomes that will help assess program effectiveness. For instance, SBA tracks a number of performance measures for the HUBZone program, including small businesses approved, denied and withdrawn from the initial certification process, in addition to previously certified firms that have recertified, voluntarily decertified and decertified by SBA. A key evaluation is based on the fact that the Congress has set a 3% federal government-wide goal for HUBZone federal contract dollars. A primary focus of the SBA has been on this outcome measure. In FY2006, 0.35% of federal contract dollars went to HUBZone contracts. That percentage has steadily increased to 2.81% by FY2009.

SBA believes evaluating this measure is critical to meeting the HUBZone program’s stated purpose which “is to provide federal contracting assistance for qualified SBCs located in historically underutilized business zones in an effort to increase employment opportunities, investment, and economic development in such areas.” Monitoring this measure enables SBA to proactively engage in activities that increase HUBZone contract dollars.

Although SBA expected to work towards finalizing more outcome measures that link to the mission of the HUBZone program, the circumstances and the Program’s focus has precluded us from doing so. The efforts of the HUBZone program for the FY2009 and FY2010 were focused on thoroughly reengineering the initial certification process, reviewing its portfolio of firms, expanding the number of site visits, and improving its monitoring of participating firms with dollars awarded.

In FY2011, SBA is undertaking a legacy portfolio review where we will be spending substantive resource doing an extensive full document review of HUBZone certified firms that have not yet received such a review. Once this initiative is completed, every HUBZone firm will have been analyzed for meeting the Program’s continuing eligibility requirements. In FY2011, SBA will also continue to spend significant time and resource enhancing the certification process and undertaking site visits. These efforts rigorously and systemically reduce fraud, waste and abuse.

Analyzing other outcome measures such as (1) the economic characteristics of the HUBZone areas and (2) contracts being counted under multiple socioeconomic subcategories are complicated matters which require careful setting up of the research methods and approaches as well as significant staff and budget. Given limited resources, SBA is not able to commit to finalizing the additional outcome measures and conduct a program evaluation using those elements at this time. Focusing resources on (1) initiatives that reduce fraud, waste and abuse as well as (2) activities that increase HUBZone federal contract dollars makes wise sense given the resources SBA has and the circumstances of the HUBZone program.
Page 16: “Although SBA continues to agree that evaluating program outcomes is important, to date the agency has not yet appeared to make a meaningful resource commitment for such an evaluation.”

SBA Comment
See comment above.

Enclosure II: SBA Technical Correction Requests

Page 1
Reference to OWBO (Office of Women’s Business Ownership) should be changed to “Women’s Business Centers” (to correspond to other programs noted, such as SBDC and SCORE).

Page 4
Reference to OWBO (Office of Women’s Business Ownership) should be changed to “Women’s Business Centers” (to correspond to other programs noted such as SBDC and SCORE).

Enclosure III
[See attached spreadsheet with SBA’s suggested edits.]

Should you or any of your colleagues at GAO have questions about SBA’s comments, please contact me at (202) 265-6335. Thank you again for this opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Sincerely,

Nicholas J. Coutos
Assistant Administrator
SBA Congressional & Legislative Affairs
Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue

Preliminary Results of GAO’s Review of Selected Economic Development Programs
Objectives

Our objectives for this briefing are to provide preliminary results of the extent to which

1. the design of 80 economic development programs administered by four federal agencies overlap in terms of the economic activities they can fund,

2. the four federal agencies GAO reviewed collaborate to administer economic development programs that share common outcomes, and

3. the agencies evaluate the outcomes of the economic development programs.
Why GAO Is Focusing on this Area

- Efficient and effective economic development programs can contribute to the well-being of our nation’s economy at the least cost to taxpayers.

- The federal government spent $6.5 billion in fiscal year 2010 on the 80 economic development programs that GAO is examining at U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), of which about $3.2 billion was for economic development efforts, largely in the form of grants, loan guarantees, and direct loans.
Definition of Economic Development

Absent a common definition for economic development, GAO has previously developed a list of nine activities most often associated with economic development that we relied on in this effort. These activities include:

- planning and developing strategies for job creation and retention,
- developing new markets for existing products,
- building infrastructure by constructing roads and sewer systems to attract industry to undeveloped areas, and
- establishing business incubators to provide facilities for new businesses’ operations.
Preliminary Results: Design of Economic Development Programs Appear to Overlap

- The design of each of the 80 economic development programs appears to overlap with that of at least one other program in terms of the economic activities they are authorized to fund.

- The most common economic activity that these programs (52 of the 80 programs) can fund is entrepreneurial efforts, which include
  - helping businesses to develop business plans and identify funding sources, and
  - providing marketing assistance.
### Potential Overlap and Fragmentation among Selected Agencies Authorized to Fund Economic Development Activities

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Source: GAO

Note: Numbers of programs by agency do not total to 80 since an individual program may fund several activities.
Smaller, Limited-Scope Economic Development Programs Appear to Overlap

- Sixty percent of the programs (46 of the 80 programs reviewed) are more limited in scope and can fund only one or two of the nine economic development activities.

- For example, many of these programs that are limited in scope appear to overlap because they can
  - fund only entrepreneurial efforts and
  - target similar geographic areas.
Legislative and Regulatory Reasons for Potential Overlap and Fragmentation

- Many of the economic development programs are differentiated by legislative or regulatory restrictions.

- These restrictions target funding on the basis of characteristics such as
  - geography,
  - income levels, and
  - population density (rural or urban).
Collaborative Practices Agencies Should Consider Implementing to Maximize the Performance of Federal Programs That Share Common Outcomes

- Define and articulate common outcomes.
- Leverage physical and administrative resources to address resource needs and potentially produce cost savings.
- Facilitate collaboration by establishing compatible standards, policies and procedures for the collaborative effort to operate across agency boundaries.
- Create the means to monitor and evaluate collaborative efforts and report on these activities to identify areas for improving policy and operational effectiveness.

Preliminary Results: Agencies Are Collaborating on a Limited Basis

- The four agencies appear to have taken actions to define and articulate common outcomes for some of their economic development efforts.

  - In response to a September 2008 recommendation that GAO made to SBA and USDA related to improving their collaboration, the two agencies entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2010 so they can use their respective resources to provide small businesses in rural areas with loan guarantees and technical assistance to achieve outcomes such as building diverse and sustainable rural economies, reversing population decline in rural areas, creating and sustaining jobs, and improving quality of life.

  - HUD, SBA, USDA, Commerce, and other federal agencies recently entered into a MOU in order to achieve outcomes that include strengthening and diversifying the Appalachian economy, improving the health and welfare of people in the Appalachian region, and protecting the environment of the region.

  - Several agencies, including Commerce and SBA, joined the regional innovation cluster effort initiated by President Obama in 2010 that focuses on outcomes that include creating and retaining jobs; accelerating the formation of new, high-growth businesses; and increasing regional prosperity.
Preliminary Results: Agencies Are Collaborating on a Limited Basis (Cont.)

- Agencies offered little evidence that they have taken steps to develop compatible policies or procedures or leverage physical and administrative resources with other federal agencies.

- Collaborative efforts identified to date appear to occur on a case-by-case basis in field offices.

- Agencies have not developed mechanisms to consistently and effectively monitor, evaluate, and report on the results of collaborative efforts.
Preliminary Results: A Lack of Information on Programs Outcomes Is a Long Standing Concern

- Commerce’s Economic Development Administration’s (EDA) estimates about the results of its grants may not be accurate.

- USDA does not collect data to measure the accomplishments of one of its largest rural business programs—the Business and Industry loan program.

- HUD does not track measures on the long-term performance of its Section 108 program.

- SBA has not developed outcome measures that directly link to the mission of its HUBZone program.
EDA Grants

- GAO first reported in March 1999 and then again in October 2005 that EDA relies on a potentially incomplete set of variables and self-reported data to assess the effectiveness of its grants.

- Agency progress:
  - In December 2006 EDA issued revised operational guidance that included a new methodology that regional offices use to calculate estimated jobs and private sector investment attributable to EDA grants.
  - EDA officials also stated that they now employ additional checks on the quality of the self-reported data.

- Next step:
  - GAO plans to assess the quality and adequacy of the methods the agency uses to assess the quality of the data.
USDA’s Business and Industry Loan Program

- In 2003 the USDA Inspector General (IG) recommended that USDA ensure data exist to measure the accomplishments of the Business and Industry loan program.

- Agency progress:
  - Agency officials stated that they have recently taken steps to address the open recommendation, including requiring staff to record actual jobs created rather than estimated jobs created.
  - An IG official said it is too early to tell whether these actions are sufficient to fully address the recommendation.

- Next step:
  - GAO plans to monitor the IG’s efforts to determine whether the agency fully addresses the recommendation.
HUD’s Section 108 Program

- In 2007 OMB found that HUD did not track long-term performance outcome measures for its Section 108 program.

- Agency progress:
  - To date, the agency has no long-term performance outcome measures for this program.

- Next step:
  - GAO plans to determine what, if any, actions the agency plans to take to address this weakness.
SBA’s HUBZone Program

• GAO reported in June 2008 that SBA does not track outcome measures that are directly linked to the program’s mission.

• Agency progress:
  ➢ Although SBA continues to agree that evaluating program outcomes is important, to date the agency has not yet appeared to make a meaningful resource commitment for such an evaluation.

• Next step:
  ➢ GAO plans to evaluate any actions the agency takes to develop outcome measures.
Preliminary Results

- Agencies need to further utilize promising practices for enhanced collaboration.

- Agencies need to collect accurate and complete data on program outcomes and use the information to assess each program’s effectiveness.

- Additional work to assess progress in collaboration and evaluation could identify areas for improvement, consolidation, or elimination. Further, programs that are designed to target similar economic development activities, locations, and applicants may not be adding unique value, and more analysis is needed by the agencies and Office of Management and Budget to determine the actual amount of any duplicative spending.

- Increased attention and oversight by OMB and the Congress could help to ensure needed actions are taken.
Framework for Analysis

The information contained in this analysis is based on

- results of prior GAO products,

- ongoing work following up on the status of recommendations from those products, and

- the preliminary results of GAO’s ongoing evaluation of economic development programs at four federal agencies.
Related GAO Products


Enclosure IV: Economic Development Programs Listed in Figure 1

The following table lists the specific programs that can fund each economic activity, grouped by agency and activity type. The information also appears as interactive content in figure 1 in the body of the report when the report is viewed electronically.

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Source: GAO analysis of information from Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA.
## Enclosure V: 80 Economic Development Programs

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<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<td>Schools and entities that manage public roads located in counties containing national forest lands</td>
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<td>Schools and Roads- Grants to Counties</td>
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<td>Community Facilities Loans &amp; Grants</td>
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<td>Solid Waste Management Grants</td>
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<td>Value Added Producer Grants</td>
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<td>Agricultural businesses</td>
<td>grant and services, technical support</td>
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<td>Agency/program name</td>
<td>Fiscal Year 2010 Enacted appropriation</td>
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<td>Commercial buildings</td>
<td>Business incubators</td>
<td>Industrial parks</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurial efforts</td>
<td>New markets</td>
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<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
<td>Primary Targeted Recipient</td>
<td>Award Type</td>
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<td>Current and prospective businesses located in rural communities</td>
<td>loan (direct or guaranteed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural Business Enterprise Grants</td>
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<td>Rural Only</td>
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<td>Business cooperatives located in rural communities</td>
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<td>Urban Only</td>
<td>Low and moderate income families</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency/program name</td>
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<td>Plans and strategies</td>
<td>Commercial buildings</td>
<td>Business incubators</td>
<td>Industrial parks</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurial efforts</td>
<td>New markets</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
<td>Primary Targeted Recipient</td>
<td>Award Type</td>
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<td>CDBG/Special Purpose/Insular Areas</td>
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<td>Low and moderate income families located in American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands</td>
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<td>Low and moderate income families</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDBG/Non-entitlement CDBG Grants in Hawaii</td>
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<td>Low and moderate income families located in Hawaii</td>
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<td>CDBG/ Brownfields Economic Development Initiative</td>
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<td>Low-income families</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rural Innovation Fund</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Rural Only</td>
<td>Low and moderate income families and businesses located in rural communities</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<td>CDBG Disaster Recovery Grants</td>
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<td>Low and moderate income families located in and around communities that have experienced a natural disaster</td>
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<td>Indian tribes and Alaskan Native villages</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<td>Hispanic Serving Institutions Assisting Communities</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>Low and moderate income families and small businesses located in communities surrounding Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency/program name</td>
<td>Fiscal Year 2010 Enacted appropriation</td>
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<td>Commercial buildings</td>
<td>Business incubators</td>
<td>Industrial parks</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurial efforts</td>
<td>New markets</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
<td>Primary Targeted Recipient</td>
<td>Award Type</td>
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<td>Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<td>Low and moderate income families and small businesses located in communities served by institutions for higher education in Alaska and Hawaii</td>
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<td>Community and regional planning grantees</td>
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<td>Small and disadvantaged businesses</td>
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<tr>
<td>7(j) Technical Assistance</td>
<td>$3,400,000</td>
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<td>Small disadvantaged businesses and small businesses operating in areas of low income or high unemployment</td>
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<td>Procurement Assistance to Small Businesses 7(j)</td>
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<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>Small businesses interested in government contracting opportunities</td>
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<td>Small Business Investment Companies 7(j)</td>
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<td>Small businesses in start up and growth situations</td>
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<td>7(a) Loan Program 7(j)</td>
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<td>Current and prospective small businesses</td>
<td>loan (direct or guaranteed)</td>
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<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>Current and prospective businesses</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small Business Development Centers</td>
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<td>Not Specified</td>
<td>Current and prospective businesses</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency/Program Name</td>
<td>Fiscal Year 2010 Enacted Appropriation</td>
<td>Plans and strategies</td>
<td>Commercial buildings</td>
<td>Business incubators</td>
<td>Industrial parks</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurial efforts</td>
<td>New markets</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>Urban/rural</td>
<td>Primary Targeted Recipient</td>
<td>Award Type</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans’ Businesses Outreach Centers</td>
<td>$2,500,000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Current and prospective veteran-owned small businesses</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microloan Program</td>
<td>$25,315,000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses and not-for-profit child care centers</td>
<td>grant and loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIME</td>
<td>$8,000,000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses owned by disadvantaged individuals</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Markets Venture Capital Program</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses located in areas with low income or high unemployment</td>
<td>grant and loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7(a) Export Loan Guarantees</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small business exporters in operation for at least 12 months</td>
<td>loan (direct or guaranteed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HUBZone</td>
<td>$2,200,000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses located in economically distressed areas</td>
<td>advantages for federal contract competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Technology Transfer Program</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses in technology industries and research institution partners</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Innovation Research Program</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses in technology industries</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal and State Technology Partnership Program</td>
<td>$2,000,000</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Not Specified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Small businesses in technology industries and research institution partners</td>
<td>grant or direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$6,238,641,707</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: GAO analysis of information from Commerce, HUD, SBA, and USDA.

According to agency officials, the programs listed above that did not receive funding in fiscal year 2010 are still active programs. They are denoted by “0” in the table.

Primary targeted recipient is the end user that the agencies are focused on serving. In some cases, the agencies provide the program dollars to an entity such as a nonprofit or local government that administers the funds to serve the primary targeted recipient.

This program funded the Recovery Act portion of the Water and Waste Disposal Loans and Grants program. USDA considered it as a separate program. Funds were available for obligation through September 30, 2010.
According to SBA officials, this program does not receive a specific line item appropriation. As a result, the specific program funding information is based on results from the agency’s cost allocation model.

In December 2010, USDA officials provided us information on the economic activities that each of their economic development programs can fund and we reported the information in our March 2011 report (GAO-11-318SP). In April 2011, they provided revised information for six of their programs that we incorporated into this product.

SBA officials provided revised fiscal year 2010 funding figures for 18 of their 19 economic development programs since their original submission to us in December 2010.
Enclosure VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

**GAO Contact**

William B. Shear (202) 512-8678 or ShearW@gao.gov.

**Staff Acknowledgments**

In addition to the contact named above, Andy Finkel (Assistant Director), Matthew Alemu, Aimee Elivert, Geoffrey King, Terence Lam, Triana McNeil, Marc Molino, Roberto Piñero, and Jennifer Schwartz made key contributions to this report.
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