BROADCASTING TO CUBA

Actions Are Needed to Improve Strategy and Operations

What GAO Found

OCB broadcasts Radio and TV Martí through multiple transmission methods that face varying levels of jamming by the Cuban government. While there are no nationally representative data and some surveys of recent Cuban émigrés suggest a larger audience, the best available research suggests that Radio and TV Martí’s audience is small. Specifically, less than 2 percent of respondents to telephone surveys since 2003 reported tuning in to Radio or TV Martí during the past week. Despite the importance of audience research, we found minimal sharing of such research among available sources. Because of limitations in the audience research data, decisionmakers lack basic information to help assess the relative success or return on investment from each of OCB’s transmission methods.

BBG’s IBB—which directly oversees OCB—has established an annual program review process that serves as the main mechanism for assessing OCB’s compliance with journalistic standards. While IBB officials report that the quality of OCB programming has improved in recent years, IBB reviews since 2003 have recommended improving adherence to certain journalistic standards, particularly in the areas of balance and objectivity. IBB’s process provides useful feedback, but we found weaknesses such as limited training and operational guidance for staff conducting the reviews.

OCB and IBB have taken steps to ensure that U.S. broadcasting adheres to relevant laws and standards, but some concerns remain. To comply with U.S. law, they have taken steps to minimize the domestic dissemination of OCB programming; however, OCB broadcasts reach U.S. audiences in several ways, such as through the Internet. In addition, a commercial TV station contracted to broadcast OCB programming showed some inappropriate advertisements during OCB programs. Furthermore, an international body found that OCB’s TV broadcasts cause harmful interference to Cuban broadcasts, but the U.S. government has not taken steps to address this issue.

Despite some efforts by BBG and OCB, oversight entities have identified problems such as poor communication by OCB management and low employee morale. For example, OCB lacks formal mechanisms for communicating with or obtaining information from employees.