



Highlights of [GAO-10-141](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Financial investigations are used to combat money laundering and terrorism financing, crimes that can destabilize national economies and threaten global security. The Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) within the Department of the Treasury supports law enforcement agencies (LEAs) in their efforts to investigate financial crimes by providing them with services and products, such as access to financial data, analysis, and case support. As requested, GAO examined the extent to which the law enforcement community finds FinCEN's support useful in its efforts to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. GAO analyzed statutes governing FinCEN's mission and documentation describing the support it provides to LEAs, such as annual reports. Using FinCEN data, GAO selected a sample of 29 LEAs, including primary users of FinCEN's services and products, and obtained their opinions through a survey and interviews. While the results of the survey and interviews are not generalizable, they provide insights about the usefulness of FinCEN's support.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommends that FinCEN improve communication with LEAs about the support it can provide, establish processes for soliciting input and complete a plan outlining the actions FinCEN will take to better meet LEAs needs. The FinCEN Director concurred with the recommendations.

[View GAO-10-141 or key components.](#)
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ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING

Improved Communication Could Enhance the Support FinCEN Provides to Law Enforcement

What GAO Found

The majority of LEAs GAO surveyed reported finding FinCEN's support useful in their efforts to investigate and prosecute financial crimes, but FinCEN could enhance its support by better informing LEAs about its services and products and actively soliciting their input. Of the 20 LEAs that responded to a question GAO posed about which FinCEN services they found most useful, 16 LEAs cited direct access to Bank Secrecy Act data—records of financial transactions possibly indicative of money laundering that FinCEN collects—as the most valuable service FinCEN provides. Additionally, 11 federal LEAs cited a tool that allows federal LEAs to reach out, through FinCEN, to financial institutions nationwide to locate financial information related to ongoing investigations as a key service offered by FinCEN. To further enhance the value and relevance of its analytic work to LEAs, FinCEN has sought to increase development of complex analytic products, such as reports identifying trends and patterns in money laundering. Sixteen law enforcement agencies GAO surveyed reported that they generally found these complex analytic products useful.

However, three of five LEAs that FinCEN identified as its primary federal customers reported that FinCEN does not provide detailed information about the various types of products it can provide. They also stated that they would like more information about when completed products become available. Communicating more detailed information to LEAs could help FinCEN ensure that it is effectively carrying out its mission to support the investigation and prosecution of financial crimes. Moreover, two of these LEAs reported that FinCEN does not communicate to LEAs why it accepts some requests for support and rejects others. Furthermore, FinCEN does not actively seek LEAs' input about ongoing or planned analytic work, though doing so could improve the quality and relevance of its products to its LEA customers. Actively soliciting stakeholder input and providing transparency with regard to decision making are GAO-identified best practices for effectively meeting stakeholder needs. Incorporating these best practices could help FinCEN maximize the usefulness of its support. In October 2009, senior officials in one of the divisions that provides support to LEAs reorganized the division in order to realign resources to better serve law enforcement. The division also developed a planning guide to improve communication with LEAs which includes general descriptions of the types of processes to be implemented. While the development of this guide is a step in the right direction, it does not include detailed information on the specific actions FinCEN plans to take to become more transparent to their law enforcement customers about the division's operations. Completing the plan, including identifying the specific actions FinCEN plans to take to better assess law enforcement's needs, could help FinCEN ensure that its operations are designed in a way so as to maximize their usefulness to its law enforcement customers.