

Highlights of [GAO-13-79](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS and DOJ have responsibility for training state and local law enforcement and community members on how to defend against violent extremism—ideologically motivated violence to further political goals. Community members and advocacy organizations have raised concerns about the quality of some CVE-related training that DOJ and DHS provide or fund. As requested, GAO examined (1) the extent to which DHS and DOJ have identified and communicated topics that CVE-related training should address to their components and state and local partners, (2) any concerns raised by state and local partners who have participated in CVE-related training provided or funded by DHS or DOJ, and (3) actions DHS and DOJ have taken to improve the quality of CVE-related training. GAO reviewed relevant documents, such as training participant feedback forms and DHS and DOJ guidance; and interviewed relevant officials from DHS and DOJ components. This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in September 2012. Information that the FBI deemed sensitive has been redacted.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOJ identify and communicate principal CVE-related training topics and that FBI field offices and USAOs consider soliciting feedback more consistently. DOJ agreed that it should more consistently solicit feedback, but disagreed that it should identify CVE training topics because DOJ does not have primary responsibility for CVE-related training, among other things. GAO believes this recommendation remains valid as discussed further in this report.

View [GAO-13-79](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-8777 or larencee@gao.gov.

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COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Additional Actions Could Strengthen Training Efforts

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has identified and is communicating to its components and state and local partners topics that the training on countering violent extremism (CVE) it provides or funds should cover; in contrast, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has not identified what topics should be covered in its CVE-related training. According to a DHS official who leads DHS's CVE efforts, identifying topics has helped to provide a logical structure for DHS's CVE-related training efforts. According to DOJ officials, even though they have not specifically identified what topics should be covered in CVE-related training, they understand internally which of the department's training is CVE-related and contributes either directly or indirectly to the department's training responsibilities under the CVE national strategy. However, over the course of this review, the department generally relied upon the framework GAO developed for potential CVE-related training topics to determine which of its existing training was CVE-related. Further, because DOJ has not identified CVE-related training topics, DOJ components have had challenges in determining the extent to which their training efforts contribute to DOJ's responsibilities under the CVE national strategy. In addition, officials who participated in an interagency working group focusing on ensuring CVE-related training quality stated that the group found it challenging to catalogue federal CVE-related training because agencies' views differed as to what CVE-related training includes.

The majority of state and local participant feedback on training that DHS or DOJ provided or funded and that GAO identified as CVE-related was positive or neutral, but a minority of participants raised concerns about biased, inaccurate, or offensive material. DHS and DOJ collected feedback from 8,424 state and local participants in CVE-related training during fiscal years 2010 and 2011, and 77—less than 1 percent—provided comments that expressed such concerns. According to DHS and DOJ officials, agencies used the feedback to make changes where appropriate. DOJ's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other components generally solicit feedback for more formal, curriculum-based training, but the FBI does not require this for activities such as presentations by guest speakers because the FBI does not consider this to be training. Similarly, DOJ's United States Attorneys' Offices (USAO) do not require feedback on presentations and similar efforts. Nevertheless, FBI field offices and USAOs covered about 39 percent (approximately 9,900) of all participants in DOJ CVE-related training during fiscal years 2010 and 2011 through these less formal methods, yet only 4 of 21 FBI field offices and 15 of 39 USAOs chose to solicit feedback on such methods. GAO has previously reported that agencies need to develop systematic evaluation processes in order to obtain accurate information about the benefits of their training. Soliciting feedback for less formal efforts on a more consistent basis could help these agencies ensure their quality.

DOJ and DHS have undertaken reviews and developed guidance to help improve the quality of CVE-related training. For example, in September 2011, the DOJ Deputy Attorney General directed all DOJ components and USAOs to review all of their training materials, including those related to CVE, to ensure they are consistent with DOJ standards. In addition, in October 2011, DHS issued guidance that covers best practices for CVE-related training and informs recipients of DHS grants who use the funding for training involving CVE on how to ensure high-quality training. Since the departments' reviews and efforts to implement the guidance they have developed are relatively new, it is too soon to determine their effectiveness.