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DOJ GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Justice Has Made Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations

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Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-806T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

OJP is DOJ's largest grant-making agency, with multiple bureaus and offices and a fiscal year 2016 enacted discretionary budget of about \$1.8 billion. OJP provides grants that support victims' assistance, policing, and a range of other activities. GAO's prior work on DOJ and OJP grants management has identified a number of approaches that could enhance the effectiveness, oversight, and accountability of grant administration practices. These include improving tracking and evaluating performance, streamlining grants management processes; and strengthening internal controls.

This testimony highlights DOJ's efforts to address prior recommendations from three GAO reports related to: (1) DOJ's overall grant administration practices, (2) OJP's management of the body armor program, and (3) OJP's management of the Victims of Child Abuse Act grant program. These reports were issued from 2012 through 2015. To prepare these reports, GAO analyzed key DOJ documents, interviewed DOJ officials, and reviewed grantee files. GAO also obtained selected recommendation status updates from DOJ through early July 2016. For recommendation updates, GAO reviewed DOJ documentation and held discussions with agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made 17 recommendations to DOJ to enhance department-wide and OJP-specific grant administration. DOJ has implemented 13 of them, and is taking steps to address the remaining 4 recommendations.

View [GAO-16-806T](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov.

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What GAO Found

In three reports issued from 2012 through 2015, GAO made 17 recommendations to the Department of Justice (DOJ) related to improving grants management. Specifically, these recommendations related to enhancing the department's overall grant administration practices, as well as enhancing the management of two specific grant programs that DOJ's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) administers: the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program for law enforcement body armor, and the Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCA) program for children's advocacy centers. As of early July 2016, DOJ and OJP have implemented 13 of these recommendations, and they have actions underway to address the rest.

DOJ's Overall Grant Administration Practices. In July 2012, GAO found that DOJ had not assessed its grant programs department-wide to identify overlap—which occurs when multiple agencies or programs have similar goals, engage in similar activities or strategies to achieve them, or target similar beneficiaries. GAO also found that DOJ did not routinely coordinate grant awards to avoid unnecessary duplication, which occurs when two or more agencies or programs are engaged in the same activities or provide the same services to the same beneficiaries without being knowledgeable about each other's efforts. Further, GAO reported that DOJ could take steps to better assess the results of all the grant programs it administers. As result, GAO made 8 recommendations to DOJ to enhance its overall grant administration practices. DOJ has implemented 7 as of early July 2016, and is making progress on the final recommendation related to codifying new policies and procedures.

OJP's Management of the BVP program. In February 2012, GAO found that OJP's Bureau of Justice Assistance could enhance grant management controls and better ensure consistency in BVP grant program requirements by improving grantee accountability in the use of funds for body armor purchases, reducing the risk of grantee noncompliance with program requirements, and ensuring consistency across its efforts to promote law enforcement officer safety. As a result, GAO made 5 recommendations to OJP. OJP has implemented all 5.

OJP's Management of the VOCA program. In April 2015, GAO found that OJP's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) had several administrative review and approval processes in place that contributed to delays in grantees' ability to begin spending their award funds. For example, for the 28 VOCA grants awarded from fiscal years 2010 through 2013, grantees had expended less than 20 percent, on average, of each grant they received during the original 12-month project period. In particular, GAO found that OJJDP's processes for reviewing grantees' budgets and conference planning requests were contributing to delays in grantees' ability to begin spending their funds. GAO also found that OJJDP did not have complete data to assess VOCA grantees' performance against the measures it had established because the tools it used to collect this information did not align to the measures themselves. As a result, GAO made 4 recommendations to OJP. OJP has implemented 1 as of early July 2016, and is making progress on the 3 recommendations related to examining its administrative processes and project period length and establishing and enforcing clear requirements.

Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our prior work examining the Department of Justice's (DOJ) grant administration practices, with particular attention to the management of grants within DOJ's largest grant-making agency (granting agency), the Office of Justice Programs.

Grants are an important tool that the federal government uses to provide program funding to state and local governments. In fiscal year 2016, the federal government is expected to provide states and localities more than \$666 billion in grants to fund a wide range of public policies related to health care, transportation, income security, criminal justice, and education. Approximately \$2.4 billion of DOJ's fiscal year 2016 appropriation is available to fund grants across its three granting agencies—the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW), and the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office. OJP is the largest of these three, with multiple bureaus and offices. It operates with an enacted discretionary budget of about \$1.8 billion in fiscal year 2016 and more than 750 authorized positions. Its mission is also far reaching, with grants supporting gang reduction efforts, advocacy centers for victims of child abuse, research related to teen dating violence, and initiatives related to protecting law enforcement officers with body worn cameras and bulletproof vests, also known as body armor.

In our prior work on grants management efforts across the government, we have identified various strategies intended to address challenges to grants management effectiveness, oversight, and accountability. These include tracking and evaluating performance, including increasing the transparency of grants spending; streamlining grants management processes; enhancing collaboration among intergovernmental participants and nonprofit entities; improving oversight by strengthening internal controls and improving the single audit process; and recognizing that building sufficient capacity may involve significant costs or tradeoffs. Our recommendations on DOJ and OJP grants in particular reflect the importance of these approaches.

My testimony today summarizes DOJ and OJP's progress addressing more than a dozen recommendations from earlier GAO reports. In particular, I will highlight our key findings, recommendations, and the department's efforts to address prior recommendations in three areas:

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1. DOJ's overall grant administration practices,
 2. OJP's management of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program, and
 3. OJP's management of the Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCA) grant program.

My statement is based on three reports that we issued from February 2012 through April 2015, as well as information DOJ and OJP provided from September 2012 through early July 2016 on their progress in implementing recommendations from those reports.¹ A table summarizing the status of DOJ's and OJP's progress is included in appendix I. For our past work on the department's overall grant administration practices, we assessed DOJ's fiscal year 2010 announcements of grant award funding; categorized them according to key justice areas to identify any overlap; and interviewed DOJ officials about their grant making practices, systems, and assessment methods. Further, we interviewed officials from 11 states receiving DOJ grants, selected, in part, for the amounts and types of funding received. Though not generalizable, these interviews provided officials' perspectives on funding. For our February 2012 work on BVP grants, we reviewed information on OJP's efforts and interviewed officials from OJP, 6 vest manufacturers, 2 laboratories, 3 law enforcement associations, 10 state and local jurisdictions, and 12 stakeholders in and outside of government—which we selected based, in part, on their size and location. We also examined literature on key factors affecting body armor's use and effectiveness and reviewed OJP's efforts to address these factors. For our April 2015 report on VOCA grants, we analyzed OJP documentation—such as program guidelines, grantee progress reports, and expenditure data—from fiscal years 2010 through 2013. Additionally, we interviewed OJP officials and the universe of VOCA grantees about their experiences with the program. Further

¹See GAO *Justice Grant Programs: DOJ Should Do More to Reduce the Risk of Unnecessary Duplication and Enhance Program Assessment*, [GAO-12-517](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2012); GAO, *Law Enforcement Body Armor: DOJ Could Enhance Grant Management Controls and Better Ensure Consistency in Grant Program Requirements*, [GAO-12-353](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2012); GAO *Victims of Child Abuse Act: Further Actions Needed to Ensure Timely Use of Grant Funds and Assess Grantee Performance*, [GAO-15-351](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 29, 2015). A fourth report related to the status of recommendations from [GAO-12-353](#) is also of relevance. See GAO, *Law Enforcement Body Armor: Status of DOJ's Efforts to Address GAO Recommendations*, [GAO-14-610R](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 14, 2014).

details on the scope and methodology for the previously issued reports are available within each of the published reports.

To determine DOJ's and OJP's progress in implementing the recommendations from our prior work, we reviewed DOJ and OJP documentation and held follow-up discussions with agency officials. We conducted the work on which this statement is based 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.

Background

Federal financial assistance to state and local governments, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, tribal jurisdictions, and educational institutions can take the form of discretionary grants, formula grants, cooperative agreements, and payment programs, which all are generally referred to as grants. Grant programs are generally created by statute and funded through annual appropriations. As such, Congress has a central role in determining the scope and nature of federal financial assistance programs. In addition, the Office of Management and Budget establishes general guidance that governs administration of all such federal financial assistance. DOJ has flexibility in how to administer assistance that is discretionary in nature.

DOJ Grants Management

Through its three granting agencies, DOJ provides grants that support victims' assistance, technology and forensics, juvenile justice, mental illness and substance abuse, policing, and a range of other activities. The funding can be provided for direct services or for technical assistance, research, and data collection.

In general, the grants that OJP, OVW, and the COPS Office award will follow a similar life cycle, including pre-award, award, implementation, and closeout stages. During the pre-award and award stages, the granting agencies announce the funding opportunity with a solicitation, receive and review applications, and make the award decision and notification. In the implementation stage, the granting agencies disburse payment and oversee the use of funds. After the end date of a grant, the granting agencies engage in a closeout process that should ensure each recipient has met all of the grant's financial requirements, returned any

unused funds, and provided final reports. Effective internal control systems are important at each stage in the life cycle; however, the grants management practices occurring during the implementation stage are key to ensuring that awards are being implemented as intended and that grantees are compliant with statutory or regulatory requirements as well as any applicable policy guidelines. OJP's Office of Audit, Assessment, and Management (OAAM) serves as the central source of grants policy for OJP and the COPS Office programs, as well as any other DOJ grant program the Attorney General considers appropriate, and OJP's Office of the Chief Financial Officer provides fiscal policy guidance and financial monitoring of grantees for all three agencies.

Our prior work has examined DOJ's grant administration practices overall and the specific management of two OJP discretionary grant programs—those that support law enforcement body armor and those that support victims of child abuse.

The BVP Program

As we reported in 2012, nearly 60 law enforcement officers were killed in 2010 as a result of firearm-related assaults. Data also showed that body armor had saved the lives of more than 3,000 law enforcement officers since 1987.² Recognizing body armor as an effective tool in helping to protect law enforcement officers, OJP—through its Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and its National Institute of Justice (NIJ)—has implemented initiatives, such as direct grants to states and localities to support their body armor use, as well as research and testing for compliance with standards to continuously improve body armor effectiveness.

With respect to grants, OJP has two separate programs that support, either directly or indirectly, state and local law enforcement's body armor purchases: (1) the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) program, and (2)

²Body armor for law enforcement applications includes ballistic-resistant and stab-resistant body armor—usually worn in the form of a vest—that provides coverage and protection primarily for the torso.

the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program.³ The BVP program offers grants on a competitive basis to state and local law enforcement agencies to assist in their purchasing of ballistic-resistant and stab-resistant body armor that complies with NIJ body armor standards. Currently, funds available for the BVP program are awarded to each qualifying unit of local government with fewer than 100,000 residents and any remaining funds available are awarded to other qualifying applicants.⁴ Appropriations for BVP funding are provided under “no-year authority,” but the BVP program gives state and local jurisdictions 2 years to use their awards. The program has generally funded, on a reimbursable basis, up to 50 percent of the cost of the body armor a jurisdiction procures with its available BVP funds.⁵ As we reported in 2012, from the inception of the BVP program in fiscal year 1999 through fiscal year 2011, the program awarded about \$340 million to help state and local jurisdictions procure nearly 1 million vests to protect their law enforcement officers.

As we reported in 2012, the JAG program is the leading source of federal justice funding to state, tribal, and local jurisdictions. Appropriations for JAG funding also are provided under no-year authority and the JAG program gives state and local jurisdictions 4 years to use their awards. JAG funds can support a range of program areas, and among other things, grantees can use JAG funding to procure body armor. As we reported in 2012, from fiscal years 2006 through 2011, the JAG program awarded about \$4 billion to grantees for a variety of criminal justice activities, including body armor purchases.

³DOJ created the BVP program following enactment of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Act of 1998. See Pub. L. No. 105-181, 112 Stat. 512 (1998). DOJ established the JAG program following enactment of the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005, which merged the Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program with the Local Government Law Enforcement Block Grants program. See Pub. L. No. 109-162, § 1111, 119 Stat. 2960, 3094-3102 (2006).

⁴See 42 U.S.C. § 3796I(g).

⁵See [GAO-12-353](#) for more details concerning statutory authority and specific provisions of the BVP program.

The VOCA Grant Program

OJP administers the VOCA grant program through its Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The grants are designed to help improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases, largely by providing funding, training, and technical assistance to Children's Advocacy Centers (CAC) throughout the nation. CACs are child-friendly facilities in which law enforcement, child protection, prosecution, mental health, medical, and victim advocacy professionals work together to investigate abuse, help children heal from abuse, and hold offenders accountable. As we reported in 2015, there were 777 CACs nationwide in 2014 that collectively served about 322,000 child victims of physical and sexual abuse. OJJDP has traditionally awarded the VOCA grants to large national and regional nonprofit organizations, which are charged with providing training and technical assistance to local CACs and state chapters—organizing bodies for CACs within states. As we reported in 2015, from fiscal years 2010 through 2013, OJJDP awarded about \$74 million in funding under five VOCA grant programs established in response to the Victims of Child Abuse Act.⁶

⁶See Pub. L. No. 101-647, §§ 211-214, 104 Stat. 4789, 4792-94 (1990) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C §§ 13001-04) (authorizing the grant programs). See also [GAO-15-351](#) for a complete description of the distinct VOCA grant programs funded.

DOJ Has Implemented Seven of Our Eight Recommendations for Enhancing Overall Grants Management

In July 2012, we reported on the extent to which (1) overlap existed across DOJ grant programs and how it contributed to the risk of unnecessary duplication in grant awards, (2) steps DOJ had taken to reduce overlap and the potential for unnecessary duplication in its grants awards, and (3) how DOJ used monitoring and assessment to determine grant program effectiveness and used the results to enhance its grant programs.⁷ We found that DOJ had not assessed its grant programs to identify overlap and that DOJ did not routinely coordinate grant awards to avoid unnecessary duplication. We also reported that DOJ could take steps to better assess the results of its grant programs.⁸ Stemming from our findings, we made 8 recommendations to DOJ, 7 of which have been implemented as of early July 2016.

Recommendation 1:
Conduct an assessment to better understand the extent to which grant programs overlap with one another and determine if grant programs may be consolidated to mitigate the risk of unnecessary duplication *[implemented]*

In July 2012, we found overlap across DOJ's fiscal year 2010 grant solicitations. For example, in some instances, DOJ awarded funding to the same applicants for the same or similar purposes. We recommended that DOJ conduct an assessment to better understand the extent to which its grant programs overlap with one another and determine if grant programs may be consolidated to mitigate the risk of unnecessary duplication. In response, in December 2013, DOJ completed the first of a two-phase assessment to better understand the extent to which its grant programs overlap.

- In the first phase, a team of representatives from DOJ's three granting agencies completed a final report documenting the extent of overlap they identified across their respective grant programs.

⁷Overlap occurs when multiple granting agencies or programs have similar goals, engage in similar activities or strategies to achieve them, or target similar beneficiaries. Duplication occurs when two or more granting agencies engage in the same activities or provide the same services to the same beneficiaries. Duplication thus stems from overlap. When granting agencies do not identify overlap, assess its impact, or coordinate their activities in acknowledgment of the overlap, there is a heightened risk of unnecessary duplication because one granting agency may not be knowledgeable of the ways in which its funding decision duplicates another's.

⁸We first reported on duplication and overlap across DOJ grant programs in February 2012. See GAO, *2012 Annual Report: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap, and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue*, [GAO-12-342SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2012). We expanded on this work and published [GAO-12-517](#) in July of that year.

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- In March 2016, OJP's OAAM completed the second phase of the assessment, which focused on the grant programs previously identified in phase one as potentially overlapping and included an assessment of any unnecessary duplication.

DOJ also developed an automated tool to continuously monitor and assess the degree of overlap among its programs. In fiscal year 2015, DOJ used this tool to compare the three granting agencies' annual solicitations and analyze the extent of overlap in four key areas: 1) subject matter, 2) activities, 3) target beneficiaries, and 4) eligible recipients. According to DOJ officials, findings from this analysis should help them enhance coordination among complementary programs (such as developing joint programs or consolidating funding solicitations); leverage resources across components; and/or collaborate on award decisions to avoid unnecessary duplication. DOJ plans to continue using this tool in fiscal year 2016 and annually thereafter with planning grant programs and coordinating activities. As a result, DOJ is better positioned to determine if consolidation of its programs may be warranted to mitigate unnecessary duplication risk.

**Recommendation 2:
Coordinate within and
among granting agencies
before awarding grants
and establish written
policies and procedures to
govern this coordination
[open]**

In July 2012, we found that DOJ's three granting agencies were not coordinating within and among themselves on a consistent basis to review potential or recent grant awards before awarding grants. Therefore, we recommended coordination among granting agencies to review the potential for overlapping grant awards, and for DOJ to establish policies and procedures to codify relevant coordination practices and help ensure they continue to occur. DOJ has taken some steps in response to this recommendation but its policies are not yet final. For example:

- In July 2014, DOJ said that OJP made its existing data infrastructure available to allow DOJ's granting agencies to access DOJ-wide applications and grant award data. Additionally, according to DOJ, the DOJ-wide Grants Management Challenges Workgroup, comprised of officials from all three of DOJ's granting agencies, continues to meet to share information and develop consistent practices and procedures in a wide variety of grant administration and management areas.
- In February 2015, DOJ told us that OJP has taken the lead on drafting procedures for collaboration and coordination among DOJ's granting agencies to address findings from the overlap study, and that these procedures were on target to be finalized in the spring of 2015. However, in August 2015, DOJ reported that, due to competing

priorities, its efforts to develop and implement policies and procedures to govern grants management and support functions among the DOJ granting agencies had not progressed as originally planned.

In early July 2016, the department reported that it had drafted policies and procedures and had sent them to management for signature. However, the policies and procedures are not yet final. Finalizing such policies and procedures will provide guidance to DOJ granting agencies to help ensure they take action to mitigate the risks of unnecessary duplication before finalizing award decisions.

**Recommendation 3:
Require its grant
applicants to report all
current or prospective
federal funding sources
when applying for DOJ
grants [*implemented*]**

In July 2012, we found that DOJ's three granting agencies were not routinely aware of other federal funding that their applicants had applied for during the pre-award phase because their applications generally did not require this information. Since DOJ had focused on monitoring for unnecessary duplication after grants were made, instead of before, officials made multiple grant awards to applicants for the same or similar purposes without always being aware of the potential for unnecessary duplication, or whether funding from multiple streams was warranted.

We recommended that DOJ require its grant applicants to report all current or prospective federal funding sources when applying for DOJ grants. In response in November 2014, DOJ officials informed us that OJP began requiring applicants to report all federal grants in support of identical cost items, and OVW requires reporting of grants with similar purposes. In addition, OJP, OVW and the COPS Office included language in their fiscal year 2015 grant solicitations which required grant applicants to disclose the receipt or potential receipt of other federal funding of a similar or identical nature. As a result, DOJ is better positioned to target limited financial resources before it finalizes new grant awards and enhance its ability to identify and mitigate the risk of unnecessary overlap and duplication.

Recommendation 4:
Expand granting agencies'
access to disparate grants
management systems to
enhance program
coordination
[implemented]

In July 2012, we found that DOJ's granting agencies used separate grant management systems, a fact that limited award coordination. Specifically, OJP and OVW used one system, the Grants Management System (GMS), while the COPS Office used a separate system, called the COPS Management System (CMS). Use of these two systems limited the sharing of grant award information across the granting agencies because GMS and CMS were not linked and each agency had only been able to access the individual system it operated. For example, OJP and OVW could access information through GMS about grants awarded by each other, but they could not access CMS to see the grantees that had received COPS grants. As a result, DOJ's granting agencies were unable to use the two systems to inform themselves of all of the funding DOJ had awarded or was preparing to award to a recipient and consider this information before making additional awards.

We recommended that the Attorney General provide appropriate OJP and COPS Office staff with access to both GMS and CMS and appropriate OVW staff with access to CMS. In response, in July 2014, DOJ reported that while the granting agencies continued to work toward a more permanent shared solution for grants management, OJP and the COPS Office had jointly established an interim collaboration database with expanded agency access to grant information across agency lines. Specifically, this database provided OJP, OVW, and COPS Office grant managers' equal access from their respective office locations to examine the grant applications and grant awards that all three granting agencies processed from fiscal year 2010 through 2014. This database is updated no less than daily for OJP and OVW data using GMS as a source, and is updated monthly with COPS data from CMS. As a result of this expanded access, DOJ's granting agencies now have a mechanism to check what funding DOJ has awarded to a recipient before making a decision about awarding additional grant funds, a process which will improve coordination and help mitigate the risk of unnecessary grant award duplication.

**Recommendation 5:
Assess the feasibility,
costs, and benefits of
moving to a single grants
management system,
including the steps needed
to harmonize DOJ grant
processes [*implemented*]**

Given DOJ's use of separate grants management systems, in July 2012, we found that the three granting agencies were limited in their ability to share information on the funding they had awarded or were preparing to award to a grant recipient. We recommended that the Attorney General should, as part of DOJ's evaluation of its grant management systems, ensure that DOJ assess the feasibility, costs, and benefits of moving to a single grants management system, including the steps needed to harmonize DOJ grant processes, so that any variation in how the granting agencies manage their portfolios is not an encumbrance to potential system unification. In response, DOJ's granting agencies completed a study in August 2012 that documented each agency's grant making business requirements. In 2015, after considering several options, DOJ determined that the most appropriate solution to achieve harmonization across the granting agencies was to implement an integrated shared services approach, referred to as GrantsNet, which leverages existing DOJ systems, tools, and services. According to DOJ, GrantsNet addresses the major grants management activities, including grant assessment pre- and post-award, auditing, monitoring, programmatic and peer review of applications, conference cost reporting, and grants payment. Further, it uses a common platform to enhance granting agencies' collaboration and minimize risk of overlap and duplication at both the program and grant award levels. As a result, DOJ has enhanced information and data sharing and harmonized grant processes across its three granting agencies.

**Recommendation 6:
Ensure the most timely
reporting possible of grant
award information to
USASpending.gov
according to established
guidelines [*implemented*]**

In July 2012, we found that DOJ was not submitting grant award information in a timely manner to USASpending.gov, which is a single, searchable website containing key information about federal grants that both federal agencies and the grantees themselves provide.⁹ Because the website does not permit grantee data entry until the cognizant federal agency first makes its data submissions, DOJ's delayed data entry resulted in grantees' delayed data entry. As a result, information was not available in a timely manner regarding the extent to which grantees sub-granted their award funds and for what purposes. In accordance with statutory requirements, the Office of Management and Budget established USASpending.gov to increase transparency and accountability in federal funding, such as grants. It also required agencies to submit grant award data to populate the site and to resolve any data discrepancies that the site's data validation tools identify within specified timeframes.

Our analysis showed that more than a quarter of the grant award information that DOJ submitted to USASpending.gov in fiscal year 2011 was rejected for data validation errors. Further, DOJ's error resolution and resubmission of the information took longer than the time frames allowed. We recommended that the Attorney General ensure the most timely reporting possible of grant award information to USASpending.gov according to established guidelines.

In response, in July 2014, DOJ officials reported closer adherence to these guidelines. Specifically, DOJ showed evidence that between January 2013 and July 2014 it had submitted all 28 of its reports to populate the website in accordance with existing parameters for timeliness, including those reports that were adjusted to resolve data errors. As a result of this timelier reporting, DOJ has facilitated data entry amongst its grantees and helped improve the transparency of overall award data.

⁹The Office of Management and Budget established USASpending.gov in 2007 to comply with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA) of 2006. See Pub. L. No. 109-282, 120 Stat. 1186 (2006). FFATA required the office to ensure the existence and operation of a single searchable website that includes for each federal award: (1) the name of the entity receiving the award, (2) the amount of the award, (3) information on the award including transaction type and funding agency, (4) the location of the entity receiving the award and the primary location of performance under the award, and (5) a unique identifier of the entity receiving the award, among other information.

Recommendation 7:
Expand capacity to
provide program
assessments
[implemented]

In July 2012, we found that OAAM was overseeing monitoring of individual grantees' compliance and also conducting grant program assessments to gauge overall program effectiveness. However, program assessments yield richer information of the two approaches because they identify programmatic improvement areas. OAAM acknowledged that additional grant program assessments could be beneficial, but told us they lacked resources to conduct more.

We recommended that DOJ assess whether OAAM could support additional program assessments, once it determined whether the office relies on an appropriate mix of program assessments and grant monitoring. In response, in February 2014, OAAM posted announcements to hire additional program analysts to support its Program Assessment Division. As of December 2015, DOJ had hired two additional analysts and brought them on duty specifically to expand the program assessment function. As a result, DOJ has enhanced its overall oversight and contributed to the improvement of its department-wide grant programs and operations.

Recommendation 8:
Assess the benefits of
OAAM providing
assessments for OVW as
well as OJP and the
COPS Office, and if
feasible, extend OAAM's
oversight to include OVW
[implemented]

In July 2012, we found that DOJ provided monitoring oversight and grant program assessments through OAAM for OJP and COPS Office grant programs, but did not provide program assessments for OVW grant programs.¹⁰ As a result, OVW did not benefit from the monitoring oversight and grant program assessments, which included potential recommendations for improving grant programs that OAAM provided to the other granting agencies. We noted that OAAM program assessments could provide OVW with more substantive information on its grant programs, and we recommended that DOJ assess the benefits of OAAM providing assessments for OVW as well as OJP and the COPS Office. We also recommended that if DOJ determines that these assessments are a more cost effective approach for providing better insight into OVW grant program effectiveness than the current approach, the Attorney General should extend OAAM's oversight to include OVW. In response, DOJ reported that OAAM extended its oversight in February 2015 to

¹⁰The statute establishing OAAM gave the office authority specific to OJP and COPS, but also provided the Attorney General with discretion to expand OAAM's scope beyond the OJP and COPS Office programs to any other grant program considered appropriate. See 42 U.S.C § 3712h.

include OVW by adding an OVW assessment to its 2015 plan. Further, in March 2015, OAAM informed OVW that it would conduct an assessment of sexual assault victim services provided across programs to determine if OVW's recent efforts in prioritizing its provision of services to sexual assault victims have been successful. As a result, DOJ has enhanced its ability to better gauge program effectiveness

OJP Has Implemented All Five of Our Recommendations to Improve the BVP Program

In February 2012, we reported on (1) the body armor efforts OJP had underway, (2) the extent to which OJP had designed controls to manage and coordinate these efforts, and (3) the factors that had affected body armor's use and effectiveness and steps OJP had taken to address them. We found that OJP could enhance grant management controls and better ensure consistency in grant program requirements by improving grantee accountability in the use of federal funds, reducing the risk of grantee noncompliance with program requirements, and ensuring consistency across its efforts to promote law enforcement officer safety. As a result, we made 5 recommendations to OJP, all of which have been implemented.

Recommendation 1: Deobligate undisbursed funds [*implemented*]

In February 2012, we found that BJA had not deobligated undisbursed funds from BVP program grant awards whose 2-year terms had ended, which is an important final point of accountability for grantees and allows agencies to identify and redirect funds to other priorities. To strengthen fund management, we recommended that OJP deobligate these undisbursed funds. In response, in May 2013, OJP reported that BJA had deobligated approximately \$31 million in undisbursed funding from BVP grants whose terms had ended. This total includes the undisbursed funding from BVP grants that were first awarded from fiscal years 2002 through 2009 that we identified in our February 2012 report, as well as undisbursed funds from fiscal year 2010 grants whose terms ended subsequent to the issuance of our report. Further, in May 2014, OJP officials told us that they had implemented a process to review all undisbursed funds on a yearly basis in order to routinely deobligate undisbursed BVP funds. These officials noted that, as a result of this process, in April 2014, BJA had deobligated an additional \$7.8 million in undisbursed funds from 3,283 awards whose terms had ended. As a result of these actions, OJP has enhanced fund management within the program.

Recommendation 2:
Expand information
available to grantees on
documentation retention
requirements
[implemented]

In February 2012, we found that the BVP program rule requiring that grantees maintain documentation of their vest purchases for 3 years was not as well publicized as it could be. This requirement appeared in “frequently asked questions” guides and was provided when grantees called for technical assistance in administering their grants. However, the requirement did not appear in the grantee instructional manual or in the online system that grantees and BJA used to manage the grant funds, thus increasing the risk that grantees would not be aware of it. As a result, we recommended that OJP expand the information available to grantees on this requirement. In response, OJP reported that BJA began including information on the documentation retention requirement on the website for the BVP program and in the fiscal year 2012 BVP program application, which was issued in May 2012. In addition, the applications for fiscal years 2012, 2013, and 2014 required applicants to certify their acknowledgment and acceptance of the requirement. As a result, OJP has enhanced the information available to grantees and clarified the retention requirements.

Recommendation 3:
Ensure consistency in
JAG and BVP programs’
body armor requirements
[implemented]

In February 2012, we found that the JAG program and the BVP program had different policies for the use and purchase of DOJ-funded body armor. Unlike the BVP program, the JAG program did not require that grantees purchasing body armor have policies in place mandating that officers wear the armor or that the grantees purchase body armor that is NIJ compliant. As a result, we recommended that OJP establish requirements within the JAG program that grantees using the money for body armor purchases have written mandatory wear policies in place and that they are permitted to purchase only body armor that is compliant with NIJ standards. In March 2012, OJP reported that BJA established requirements for JAG recipients purchasing body armor with fiscal year 2012 awards to certify that (1) they had a written mandatory wear policy in effect and (2) the body armor complied with applicable NIJ ballistic- or stab-resistant standards. As a result, OJP has ensured greater consistency across the programs.

Recommendation 4:
Document pertinent
monitoring procedures
[implemented]

In February 2012, we found that BJA grant managers had performed desk reviews, in which officials reviewed grant documentation off-site, to assess grantees’ compliance with general programmatic requirements. However, BJA had not documented its procedures to monitor JAG grantees’ compliance with the requirement prohibiting recipients from using JAG funds toward the match portion of any BVP grants they might also receive. As a result, we recommended that OJP document pertinent

monitoring procedures. In April 2012, OJP reported that BJA began developing guidance for conducting and documenting desk review checks of compliance with JAG program requirements, and in October 2012, fully implemented these new procedures. At that time, OJP officials noted that the new guidance would aid BJA staff in completing their desk reviews for fiscal year 2013 and beyond. As a result, OJP has improved documentation of critical monitoring procedures.

Recommendation 5: Track the JAG grantees' stab-resistant body armor purchases [implemented]

In February 2012, we found that BJA had limited ability to see which JAG grantees intended to use their awards for body armor purchases. BJA, along with several other bureaus and offices within the department, used its GMS to track JAG spending across more than 150 specific categories. At the time of our report, each category was associated with a "project identifier." Although "bulletproof vest" was among the project identifiers, no project identifier existed that could be used for stab-resistant vests. As a result, we recommended that OJP establish a project identifier to track stab-resistant body armor. In February 2012, OJP reported that BJA added a project identifier called "Body Armor-Stab-Resistant" within GMS. As a result, OJP has improved its data collection capacity.

OJP Has Implemented One of Our Four Recommendations to Enhance VOCA Administration and Has Actions Underway to Address the Other Three

In April 2015, we reported on the extent to which OJP's OJJDP (1) ensured the timely expenditure of VOCA grants and (2) assessed the performance of VOCA grantees. We found that OJJDP had several administrative review and approval processes in place that contributed to delays in grantees' ability to begin spending their award funds. We also found that OJJDP did not have complete data to assess VOCA grantees' performance against the measures it had established. As a result, we made 4 recommendations, and OJP has implemented 1 of these as of early July 2016.

Recommendation 1:
Examine whether any administrative processes contribute to unnecessary delays in grantees' ability to expend VOCA funds within the established 12-month project period and make modifications to these processes as appropriate [*open*]

In April 2015, we found that OJJDP had several administrative review and approval processes in place that had contributed to delays in grantees' ability to begin spending their award funds. For instance, grantees could not access their funds until OJJDP had completed its internal review of grantees' budgets—a step that had taken more than 2 months, on average, after the grantees' project period had begun. Further, OJJDP's guidance on grant extensions was unclear and irregularly enforced. For example, one document stated that generally only one extension per award was permissible, while another stated that multiple extensions may be granted for up to a total of 5 years. OJJDP guidance further required grantees to submit a narrative justification with their requests. However, OJJDP approved 72 of 73 extension requests from fiscal years 2010 through 2013 without such justification.

We recommended that OJP examine its processes and, if appropriate, make modifications to prevent unnecessary delays in grantees' ability to expend VOCA funds within the established project period. In March 2016, OJP reported that OJJDP had not yet completed a study of its processes, but expected to do so by June 2016. OJP also explained that the study would document the current administrative processes; identify any inefficiencies, delays, or bottlenecks in the processes; and develop recommendations for new or improved processes as appropriate, keeping in mind potentially constraining factors, such as legal requirements, regulations, or impacts on other OJP offices and bureaus. Further, OJP stated that OJJDP would not issue a formal report, but rather planned to present a written summary of its analysis and resulting recommendations to its stakeholders, including other affected OJP program and business support offices. In early July 2016, OJP told us that OJJDP had recently completed the study in June and was working with OAAM, among others, to review the results and determine whether any administration changes would be needed. OJP also indicated that OJJDP plans to complete its review and draft a summary of its analysis and possible recommendations by October 2016 in order to discuss next steps with relevant internal parties. Examining the delays associated with its administrative review processes and clarifying and enforcing the extension policy for VOCA grants will help OJP ensure the effective administration and timely use of grant funds.

Recommendation 2:
Examine whether the current 12-month project period is realistic in light of any administrative processes that cause delay but cannot be modified and extend the project period if necessary [open]

In April 2015, we found that VOCA grant activities were not being completed within the time parameters OJJDP established for the grant program, and that this may affect the ability of grantees to complete their grant goals and objectives. Specifically, we found that for the 28 VOCA grants that OJJDP awarded from fiscal years 2010 through 2013, grantees had expended less than 20 percent, on average, of each grant they received during the original 12-month project period. In particular, we found that OJJDP's processes for reviewing grantees' budgets and conference planning requests were contributing to delays in grantees' ability to begin spending their funds.

We recommended that OJP examine whether 12 months is an appropriate project period length to ensure that VOCA grantees are well positioned to fully expend their grant funds. However, as of early July 2016, OJJDP had not yet completed its assessment of whether or not the 12-month project period is realistic and had not yet decided whether to extend the initial project period. Once OJJDP examines its administrative delays, makes any necessary changes, and reviews the original project period length, OJP will be better positioned to ensure that grantees have an appropriate period in which to expend VOCA grant awards.

Recommendation 3:
Establish and enforce clear requirements for approving no-cost grant extensions [open]

In April 2015, we found that OJJDP routinely approved VOCA grantees' requests for no-cost extensions to the original grant period, but often did so without adhering to extension approval guidelines, which we found to be inconsistent.¹¹ For example, one guidance document stated that generally only one extension per award would be permissible, while another stated that multiple extensions could be granted for up to a total of 5 years. Further, OJJDP guidance required grantees to submit a narrative justification with their requests. However, OJJDP approved 72 of 73 extension requests from fiscal years 2010 through 2013 without such justification.

We recommended that OJP establish and enforce clear requirements for OJJDP's provision of no-cost extensions. In response, in July 2015, OJP

¹¹By carrying over unexpended grant funds beyond the terms of their initial project periods, grantees use prior years' awards to pay for current activities. Thus, grantees may be delaying implementation of more recently approved planned projects and activities to improve the investigation, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse.

reported that OJJDP would provide training to supervisors and grant managers not later than November 2015 to ensure that justifications supporting no-cost grant period extensions meet the requirements of the new DOJ Financial Guide, which was released in June 2015. In addition, OJP reported that OJJDP would review and update its internal grant management policies and procedures, as appropriate, and communicate all changes during OJJDP all-staff meetings. In March 2016, OJP reported that OJJDP had briefed supervisors in 2015 on the updated Financial Guide's guidance regarding grant extensions and provided documentation of e-mails that officials sent to all grantees and all OJJDP staff emphasizing the criteria for grant extension request submissions and grant extension approval guidance. In early July 2016, OJP reported that final steps to close this recommendation were contingent on ongoing analysis of the study OJJDP conducted on its administrative review processes and project period length. Establishing and enforcing clear requirements for approving no-cost grant extensions will better enable OJP to ensure that VOCA funds are being used in a timely manner to support those directly assisting victims of child abuse.

**Recommendation 4:
Enhance performance
measurement practices
*[implemented]***

In April 2015, we found that OJJDP did not have the data necessary to assess VOCA grantees' performance because the measures it had established to assess performance did not fully align with the tools it had created to collect this information from grantees. We recommended that OJP ensure that the performance measures outlined in OJJDP's VOCA grant solicitations correspond to existing measures in its Data Collection and Technical Assistance Tool (DCTAT) and clarify to VOCA grantees that they are to report on such measures using the DCTAT system. If existing DCTAT measures do not provide ample coverage for the specific measures that the VOCA program wishes to collect when posting the solicitation, then we also recommended that OJP ensure that the VOCA program provides clear, written instruction requiring VOCA grantees to use their semiannual progress reports for reporting on the specific performance measures that the solicitation outlines that are not available in the DCTAT system.

In response, in July 2015, OJP reported that OJJDP would provide training to existing VOCA grantees on the collection and reporting of performance measurement data by July 31, 2015, and that OJJDP would train new VOCA grantees within the first year of receiving funding. In addition, OJP noted that OJJDP would conduct an extensive review of the performance measures in the fiscal year 2015 VOCA solicitations and would update the DCTAT system to include these performance measures

for grantee submission, by December 31, 2015. In March 2016, OJP reported that OJJDP was developing training materials for staff and working with its contractor to ensure necessary changes were made to the DCTAT system—and that both the training and the changes would be in place by July 2016. In early July 2016, OJP provided documentation that OJJDP had updated its measures, revised DCTAT accordingly, and delivered the training to grantees. As a result of improvements to its performance measurement capacity, OJP is now better positioned to ensure that VOCA grant funds are being used effectively to support improvements in the investigation and prosecution of child abuse.

Chairman Meadows, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

GAO Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions about this statement, please contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or goodwing@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals who made key contributions to this statement include Joy Booth (Assistant Director); Willie Commons, III; Michele Fejfar; Winchee Lin; Thomas Lombardi; and Jeremy Manion. Key contributors for the previous work on which this testimony is based are listed in each product.

Appendix I: Status of Recommendations Related to the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Overall Grant Administration and the Office of Justice Programs’ (OJP) Bulletproof Vest Partnership Act (BVPA) and Victims of Child Abuse Act (VOCA) Grant Programs

Table 1: Status of Recommendations Related to DOJ’s Overall Grant Administration and OJP’s BVP and VOCA Grant Programs

	Recommendations	Implemented	Open
Overall grant administration recommendations	1. Conduct an assessment to better understand the extent to which grant programs overlap with one another and determine if grant programs may be consolidated to mitigate the risk of unnecessary duplication	Yes	No
	2. Coordinate within and among granting agencies before awarding grants and establish written policies and procedures to govern this coordination	No	Yes
	3. Require its grant applicants to report all current or prospective federal funding sources when applying for DOJ grants	Yes	No
	4. Expand granting agencies’ access to disparate grants management systems to enhance program coordination	Yes	No
	5. Assess the feasibility, costs, and benefits of moving to a single grants management system, including the steps needed to harmonize DOJ grant processes	Yes	No
	6. Ensure the most timely reporting possible of grant award information to USASpending.gov ^a according to established guidelines	Yes	No
	7. Expand capacity to provide program assessments	Yes	No
	8. Assess the benefits of OJP’s Office of Audit, Assessment, and Management (OAAM) providing assessments for DOJ’s Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) as well as its Office of Justice Programs and its Community Oriented Policing Services Office, and if feasible, extend OAAM’s oversight to include OVW	Yes	No
BVP recommendations	1. Deobligate undisbursed funds	Yes	No
	2. Expand information available to grantees on documentation retention requirements	Yes	No
	3. Ensure consistency in the Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program’s and the BVP program’s body armor requirements	Yes	No
	4. Document pertinent monitoring procedures	Yes	No
	5. Track the JAG grantees’ stab-resistant body armor purchases	Yes	No
VOCA recommendations	1. Examine whether any administrative processes contribute to unnecessary delays in grantees’ ability to expend VOCA funds within the established 12-month project period and make modifications to these processes as appropriate	No	Yes
	2. Examine whether the current 12-month project period is realistic in light of any administrative processes that cause delay but cannot be modified and extend the project period if necessary	No	Yes
	3. Establish and enforce clear requirements for approving no-cost grant extensions	No	Yes
	4. Enhance performance measurement practices	Yes	No

Source: Recommendations from [GAO-12-517](#), [GAO-12-353](#), and [GAO-15-351](#) | GAO-16-806T.

^aUSASpending.gov is a searchable website that includes for each federal award: (1) the name of the entity receiving the award, (2) the amount of the award, (3) information on the award including transaction type and funding agency, (4) the location of the entity receiving the award and the primary location of performance under the award, and (5) a unique identifier of the entity receiving the award; among other information . See [GAO-12-517](#) for more detail.

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