

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-768](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The overarching goal of ForeignAssistance.gov is to enable a variety of stakeholders—including U.S. citizens, civil society organizations, the U.S. Congress, federal agencies, partner countries, and other donors—to research and track U.S. government foreign assistance investments in an accessible and easily understood format.

GAO was asked to review the collection and reporting of ForeignAssistance.gov data. GAO examined (1) State's data collection and publishing process; (2) key impediments, if any, that agencies face in collecting and reporting data to State; and (3) the data published on ForeignAssistance.gov. GAO reviewed agency documents, assessed ForeignAssistance.gov data for completeness by comparing them to USAID's Foreign Aid Explorer data on U.S. foreign assistance for fiscal year 2014, and conducted semistructured interviews with the 22 agencies on their data collection and verification processes. GAO also interviewed OMB officials.

## What GAO Recommends

To improve the transparency and quality of the data on ForeignAssistance.gov, State (1) should provide guidance to agencies on identifying data limitations and clearly disclose those limitations on the website; and (2) in consultation with the OMB Director and the USAID Administrator, undertake a review of efforts to ensure data quality and develop guidance on improving the quality of ForeignAssistance.gov data. State, OMB, and USAID concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-768](#). For more information, contact David B. Gootnick at (202) 512-3149, or [GootnickD@gao.gov](mailto:GootnickD@gao.gov).

August 2016

## FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

### Actions Needed to Improve Transparency and Quality of Data on ForeignAssistance.gov

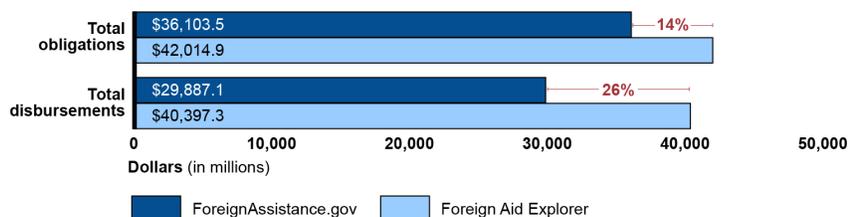
## What GAO Found

Since 2013, the Department of State (State) has collected and published quarterly data on ForeignAssistance.gov from 10 agencies that provide the majority of U.S. foreign assistance and more recently has initiated a process to prepare the 12 remaining agencies to collect and report data. The 2012 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Bulletin No. 12-01 outlined requirements for collecting and publishing data from 22 agencies and designated State as the lead agency for implementing ForeignAssistance.gov.

GAO's survey showed that most of the 10 agencies reporting data for ForeignAssistance.gov identified limitations in their information technology systems and data availability as key impediments in collecting and reporting data, while most of the 12 agencies not yet reporting data identified lack of staff time as a potential key impediment.

GAO found that the data on ForeignAssistance.gov were incomplete and that State was not fully transparent about such limitations on the website. In addition, State has not updated ForeignAssistance.gov with verified annual data to ensure quality. GAO's analysis of fiscal year 2014 data showed that ForeignAssistance.gov did not report over \$10 billion in disbursements and about \$6 billion in obligations provided by the 10 reporting agencies, compared to U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-verified data (see fig.). A 2009 OMB memorandum requires agencies to improve transparency in published information, which includes identifying high-value information not yet available online. However, State, as the publisher of this information, does not provide agencies with guidance to identify data limitations that it can clearly disclose on the website and noted that it relies on agencies to report these. The absence of clear information on data limitations may undermine the goal of ForeignAssistance.gov to improve public knowledge and accountability of U.S. foreign assistance. Moreover, State, as the lead agency, has not updated ForeignAssistance.gov with verified data even though OMB Bulletin No. 12-01 indicates that these data should be updated annually using USAID-verified data. State and USAID officials told GAO that they are unable to update ForeignAssistance.gov with verified data because of differences in their datasets. OMB also noted that a review to assess whether agencies had sufficient internal data quality controls did not take place, although it was required by the bulletin. In the absence of a review or additional guidance to address the quality of the data on ForeignAssistance.gov, data will likely remain incomplete.

**Comparison of Foreign Assistance Funding Data Reported by 10 U.S. Agencies and Published on ForeignAssistance.gov and Foreign Aid Explorer, Fiscal Year 2014**



Source: GAO analysis of ForeignAssistance.gov (<http://www.foreignassistance.gov>) and Foreign Aid Explorer data. | GAO-16-768