

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 20 federal agencies spend billions of dollars on U.S. foreign assistance each year. Six agencies—the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, and State; the Millennium Challenge Corporation; and the U.S. Agency for International Development—implement most of this assistance, using multiple strategies. State is responsible for coordinating their efforts. Questions have been raised about potential inefficiencies in implementing multiple foreign assistance strategies.

GAO was asked to review the alignment of U.S. foreign assistance strategies. This report examines the extent to which strategies include key elements GAO identified, related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress, that help ensure alignment. These elements are based on GAO's prior work on strategic planning and interagency collaboration. GAO reviewed 52 strategies related to health, security, and democracy assistance that were current in 2017. These included government-wide, agency, multi-agency, and regional strategies as well as strategies for two countries. GAO also reviewed agency guidance and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State lead an effort to establish, in collaboration with the five other agencies, guidance for developing foreign assistance strategies that addresses the key elements GAO identified related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress. State concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-18-499](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

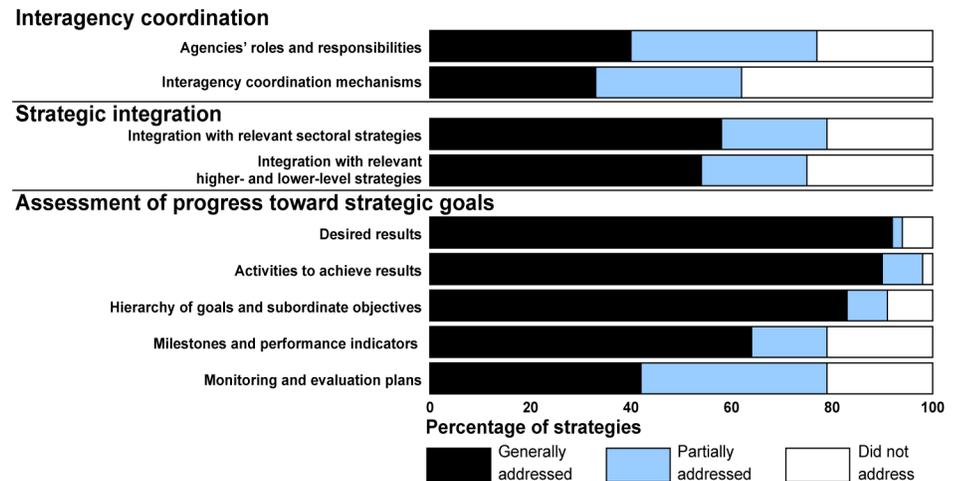
Better Guidance for Strategy Development Could Help Agencies Align Their Efforts

What GAO Found

Many foreign assistance strategies related to health, security, and democracy assistance that GAO reviewed at least partially addressed key elements GAO identified that help ensure the strategies are aligned. Prior work has found that consistently addressing these elements, related to interagency coordination, strategic integration, and assessment of progress, is important for, among other things, better managing fragmentation in strategic planning. However, some strategies did not address these elements (see figure). For example:

- **Interagency coordination.** Twenty-three percent of the strategies (12 of 52) did not address agencies' roles and responsibilities, and 38 percent (20 of 52) did not identify specific interagency coordination mechanisms.
- **Strategic integration.** Twenty-one percent of the strategies (11 of 52) did not address linkages with other related strategies, and 25 percent (13 of 52) did not address linkages with higher- or lower-level strategies.
- **Assessment of progress toward strategic goals.** Twenty-one percent of the strategies (11 of 52) did not include milestones and performance indicators, and 21 percent (11 of 52) did not outline plans for monitoring and evaluation.

Percentage of Foreign Assistance Strategies Addressing Key Elements Related to Interagency Coordination, Strategic Integration, and Assessment of Progress



Source: GAO analysis of 52 selected foreign assistance strategies. | GAO-18-499

Note: GAO rated a strategy as generally addressing an element if it provided sufficient detail to understand that element and as partially addressing an element if it mentioned the element but lacked sufficient detail.

The six agencies implementing most U.S. foreign assistance do not have consistent guidance for strategy development that could help ensure their strategies address these key elements. Some agencies' guidance addresses many of the elements but does not apply to all of their foreign assistance strategies, while other agencies have no such guidance. The Department of State (State) plays a significant role in interagency coordination. By collaborating with other agencies to establish guidance that addresses the key elements GAO identified, State could help the agencies improve their ability to align future strategies and identify and manage fragmentation in foreign assistance planning.