INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Additional Agency Actions Can Improve Assistance to Small Businesses and Inventors

Why GAO Did This Study
Small businesses employ about half of the U.S. private workforce and create approximately two-thirds of the nation’s jobs. For many small businesses, intellectual property aids in building market share and creating jobs. Among the federal agencies assisting small businesses with intellectual property are USPTO, which grants patents and registers trademarks, and SBA, which assists small businesses on a variety of business development issues, including intellectual property.

GAO was asked to review resources available to help small businesses and inventors protect intellectual property, and their effectiveness. This report examines, among other things, (1) the extent to which USPTO evaluates the effectiveness of its efforts to assist small businesses and (2) SBA’s coordination with USPTO to assist small businesses. GAO analyzed agency documents and interviewed officials who train and assist small businesses. GAO also interviewed stakeholders, including small businesses, and, among other things, reviewed federal internal control standards and selected leading practices for enhancing interagency collaboration.

What GAO Recommends
GAO is making four recommendations, including that USPTO develop an agency-wide approach to evaluate the effectiveness of its efforts to help small businesses and inventors, and that SBA document its partnership agreement with USPTO and clarify roles and responsibilities for coordinating with USPTO to provide training. Both agencies agreed with GAO’s recommendations.

Figure: The Small Business Administration (SBA) and the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) Coordinate at the Local Level, but Are Inconsistent

Source: GAO analysis of agency documents and interviews. | GAO-20-556

View GAO-20-556. For more information, contact John Neumann, (202) 512-6888, NeumannJ@gao.gov.