



Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-436](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Legislative, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress created the Russian Leadership Program in 1999 as a pilot project to promote mutual understanding by exposing emerging Russian leaders to the American economic system and democratic institutions. In 2003, Congress renamed the program the Open World Leadership Center, expanded its scope, and extended eligibility to a number of other countries. Because Open World had not been independently evaluated, GAO was asked to review (1) the program's progress toward achieving its overall purpose and (2) whether it has appropriate financial management and accountability mechanisms in place.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Open World establish strategic and performance plans, strengthen assessing and reporting on program performance, and improve its financial management and accountability mechanisms. Open World generally concurred with 7 of our 8 recommendations and is proceeding to implement some of them. Open World took issue, however, with our emphasis on performance measures, noting that its success is only measurable in the medium or long term. GAO believes that measuring incremental progress—a capability that will become more important as Open World expands—is critical to ensuring the program is on course, and there are valid methodologies for doing so.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-436.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

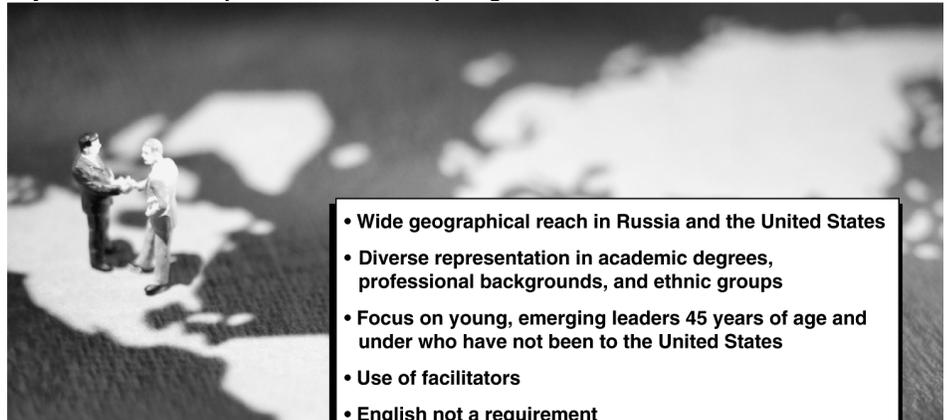
INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Open World Achieves Broad Participation; Enhanced Planning and Accountability Could Strengthen Program

What GAO Found

Open World has exposed a large, broad, and diverse group of Russians to U.S. economic and political systems. As of December 2003, the program brought about 6,800 men and women from Russia's seven geographic regions to more than 1,200 U.S. communities. Our analysis found that most delegates generally hold highly favorable views of their experience in the program. Many found ways to adapt what they learned to the Russian environment. Also, embassy officials said Open World complemented U.S. mission activities. However, because the program does not have formalized strategic and performance plans with measurable indicators, it is difficult to determine the extent to which it is targeting and reaching the right people and giving them experiences that result in improved mutual understanding. While Open World does survey delegates about their experiences, it has not yet conducted a full program evaluation to determine progress toward its long-term goals. Open World officials agree that such an evaluation is necessary and hope to conduct one in the near future.

Key Features of the Open World Leadership Program



- Wide geographical reach in Russia and the United States
- Diverse representation in academic degrees, professional backgrounds, and ethnic groups
- Focus on young, emerging leaders 45 years of age and under who have not been to the United States
- Use of facilitators
- English not a requirement
- Home hosting in U.S. communities

Sources: GAO (data); Photodisc (images).

Open World does not have the formalized financial management and accountability mechanisms that would provide Congress and other decision makers with timely and reliable information about its cost and performance. Now that Open World has permanent status and is expanding its scope, it is appropriate for the program to turn its attention to enhancing these mechanisms. Its procedures for reviewing program transactions and analyzing financial reports have neither been evaluated for their adequacy nor formalized in writing; and it does not prepare financial statements that can be subject to an independent audit. In addition, Open World does not have an audit or financial management advisory committee to advise the Board of Trustees on financial management, accountability, and internal control issues. Finally, Open World is not disclosing the value of services contributed by U.S. volunteers who support the program—information that generally accepted accounting principles encourage entities to disclose, if practicable.