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# Highlights

Highlights of GAO-04-711T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Terrorism, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were a dramatic reminder of the importance of cultivating a better understanding of the United States and its policies with overseas audiences. U.S. public diplomacy activities include the efforts of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which oversees all nonmilitary U.S. international broadcasting by the Voice of America (VOA) and several other broadcast entities. Such broadcasting helps promote a better understanding of the United States and serves U.S. interests by providing overseas audiences with accurate and objective news about the United States and the world.

GAO has issued three reports over the past 4 years examining the organizational, marketing, resource, and performance reporting challenges faced by the Board. Our recommendations to the Board have included the need to address the long-standing issue of overlapping language services (i.e., where two services broadcast in the same language to the same audience) and to strengthen the Board's strategic planning and performance by placing a greater emphasis on results. The Board has taken significant steps to respond to these and other recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-711T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-711T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

## U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING

### Challenges Facing the Broadcasting Board of Governors

#### What GAO Found

The Broadcasting Board of Governors has responded to a disparate organizational structure and marketing challenges by developing a new strategic approach to broadcasting which, among other things, emphasizes reaching large audiences through modern broadcasting techniques. Organizationally, the existence of five separate broadcast entities has led to overlapping language services, duplication of program content, redundant newsgathering and support services, and difficulties coordinating broadcast efforts. Marketing challenges include outmoded program formats, poor signal delivery, and low audience awareness in many markets. Alhurra television broadcasts to the Middle East and Radio Farda broadcasts to Iran illustrate the Board's efforts to better manage program content and meet the needs of its target audiences. Although we have not validated available research data, the Board claims that the application of its new approach has led to dramatic increases in listening rates in key Middle East markets.

To streamline its operations, the Board has used its annual language service review process to address such issues as how resources should be allocated among language services on the basis of their priority and impact, what degree of overlap should exist among services, and whether services should be eliminated because they have fulfilled their broadcast mission. Since 1999, the Board has identified more than \$50 million in actual or potential savings through this process.

In response to our recommendations on the Board's strategic planning and performance management efforts, the Board revised its strategic plan to make reaching large audiences in strategic markets the centerpiece of its performance reporting system. The Board also added broadcaster credibility and audience awareness to its array of performance measures and plans to add a measure of whether VOA is meeting its mandated mission.

Alhurra's Broadcast Center in Springfield, Virginia



Source: GAO.