



Highlights of [GAO-07-1241T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment

## Why GAO Did This Study

In general, a fusion center is a collaborative effort to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal and terrorist activity. Recognizing that fusion centers are a mechanism for information sharing, the federal government—including the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE), who has primary responsibility for governmentwide information sharing, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and the Department of Justice (DOJ)—is taking steps to partner with fusion centers.

This testimony is based on GAO's draft report on state and local fusion centers. It addresses (1) the status and characteristics of the centers and (2) to what extent federal efforts help alleviate challenges fusion centers identified. In conducting this work GAO reviewed center-related documents and conducted interviews with officials from DHS, DOJ, and the PM-ISE, and semistructured interviews with 58 state and local fusion centers.

## What GAO Recommends

In its draft report, GAO is recommending that the federal government determine and articulate its long-term fusion center role and whether it expects to provide resources to centers to help ensure their sustainability. GAO's draft report is currently at DHS, DOJ, and the PM-ISE for review and comment.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1241T](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-8777 or [larencee@gao.gov](mailto:larencee@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

### Preliminary Information on Federal Actions to Address Challenges Faced by State and Local Information Fusion Centers

#### What GAO Found

Most states and many local governments have established fusion centers to address gaps in information sharing. Fusion centers across the country vary in their stages of development—from operational to early in the planning stages. Officials in 43 of the centers GAO contacted described their centers as operational, and 34 of these centers had opened since January 2004. Law enforcement entities, such as state police or state bureaus of investigation, are the lead or managing agencies in the majority of the operational centers GAO contacted. However, the centers varied in their staff sizes and partnerships with other agencies. At least 34 of the 43 operational fusion centers we contacted reported that they had federal personnel assigned to their centers. Products disseminated and services provided vary.

DHS and DOJ have several efforts under way that begin to address some of the challenges fusion center officials identified. DHS and DOJ have provided many fusion centers access to their information systems, but fusion center officials cited challenges accessing and managing multiple information systems. Both DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have provided security clearances for state and local personnel and set timeliness goals. However, officials cited challenges obtaining and using security clearances. Officials in 43 of the 58 fusion centers contacted reported facing challenges related to obtaining personnel, and officials in 54 fusion centers reported challenges with funding, some of which affected these centers' sustainability. They said that these issues made it difficult to plan for the future, and created concerns about the fusion centers' ability to sustain their capability for the long term. To support fusion centers, both DHS and FBI have assigned personnel to the centers. To help address funding issues, DHS has made several changes to address restrictions on the use of federal grant funds. These individual agency efforts help address some of the challenges with personnel and funding. However, the federal government has not clearly articulated the long-term role it expects to play in sustaining fusion centers. It is critical for center management to know whether to expect continued federal resources, such as personnel and grant funding, since the federal government, through an information sharing environment, expects to rely on a nationwide network of centers to facilitate information sharing with state and local governments. Finally, DHS, DOJ, and the PM-ISE have taken steps to develop guidance and provide technical assistance to fusion centers, for instance by issuing guidelines for establishing and operating centers. However, officials at 31 of the 58 centers said they had challenges training their personnel, and officials at 11 centers expressed a need for the federal government to establish standards for fusion center analyst training to help ensure that analysts have similar skills. DHS and DOJ have initiated a technical assistance program for fusion centers. They have also developed a set of baseline capabilities, but the document is in draft as of September.