

Highlights of [GAO-12-274](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2009, about 39 million foreign-born people lived in the United States. Immigrant integration is generally described as a process that helps immigrants achieve self-sufficiency, political and civic involvement, and social inclusion. The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is responsible for a key activity that fosters political and civic involvement—the naturalization and citizenship process. USCIS's Office of Citizenship (OoC) supports this process mainly through grants to immigrant-serving entities, but also with outreach activities and education materials. Other governmental and nongovernmental entities play a role in immigrant integration as well. GAO was asked to determine (1) the steps USCIS has taken to implement its integration programs and the extent to which it has assessed its grant program in particular, and (2) what federal mechanism exists to coordinate integration efforts. Among other things, GAO examined documentation on mission objectives and performance measures on immigrant integration and conducted interviews with officials in a nongeneralizable sample of cities and community-based organizations as well as senior USCIS officials about their immigrant integration efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USCIS set interim milestones for an internal and external evaluation of its immigrant integration grant program, to the extent that it receives fiscal years 2012 and 2013 appropriations for the program. DHS concurred with our recommendation.

View [GAO-12-274](#). For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

December 2011

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Could Better Assess Its Grant Program

What GAO Found

USCIS has implemented immigrant integration efforts through outreach activities, educational materials, and a grant program, and established various measures for assessing its grant program, but has not yet set interim milestones for planned evaluations of the program. From 2008 to 2011, OoC reported conducting more than 300 significant outreach events to promote citizenship awareness and civic integration. Further, nearly half of OoC's funding over the past 3 fiscal years—about \$19.8 million—was spent on grants aimed at preparing immigrants for the naturalization process. The grants were made to a myriad of governmental and nongovernmental organizations, including public school systems and community and faith-based organizations. OoC has established various measures for assessing grantees' performance under its grant program. These measures include, for example, the number of participants enrolled in grantees' citizenship instruction and naturalization preparation programs, the number of participants who passed their naturalization examinations, and the proportion of participants who received grantees' services and self-reported that they naturalized during the year of the grant program. However, USCIS has identified inherent limitations with these measures, such as that its data were incomplete in part because data were self-reported by program participants, and not all program participants reported to grantees whether they passed the naturalization examination and naturalized. In January 2011, USCIS drafted a statement of work for a contractor to develop an evaluation plan that would allow USCIS to measure the grant program's performance and long-term impact, and this may help address these limitations. According to USCIS, it did not complete this statement of work or award a contract for an evaluation plan because, at that time, the agency was uncertain whether it would receive appropriations in fiscal year 2011 to continue the grant program, and the program has no authorizing statute. The final fiscal year 2011 law, enacted in April 2011, did allow the use of appropriations to fund the grant program, but USCIS did not proceed with developing an evaluation plan. In November 2011, USCIS reported that it plans to conduct an internal and external evaluation of the program in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, respectively, contingent on appropriations for the grant program. However, USCIS has not yet set interim milestones for these evaluations. Setting such milestones, contingent on the receipt of funding, could help USCIS strengthen its planning for conducting those evaluations, consistent with program management standards.

No federal agency has been tasked with coordinating immigrant integration efforts, but actions are under way to provide strategic direction and guidance for immigrant integration. Local government and nongovernmental officials told GAO that federal direction was lacking, which created challenges in program coordination. In response to a 2010 OoC report to the Office of Management and Budget, which called for developing a federal strategy on immigrant integration, in June 2010 the White House Domestic Policy Council formed the Interagency Working Group on the Federal Role of Immigrant Integration to assess the roles and equities of the federal government in promoting immigrant integration and to better coordinate integration efforts across agencies. Because the work of this group has not yet been completed, it is too early to know if, and to what extent, it will provide leadership for a national immigrant integration capability.