

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. international broadcasting is intended to communicate directly with audiences in countries with limited journalism alternatives and to inform, engage, and connect people around the world. BBG oversees two U.S. government entities—Voice of America and the Office of Cuba Broadcasting—and three nonprofit grantees that act as surrogates for local media—Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc.; Radio Free Asia; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. In 2003, GAO found overlap among BBG's language services. In its strategic plan for 2012–2016, BBG recognizes the need to reduce language service overlap.

GAO was asked to review issues related to international broadcasting. This report examines the extent to which (1) BBG language services overlap with one another and (2) BBG broadcasts in the same languages as other international broadcasters. GAO reviewed laws, reports, and other documents related to U.S. international broadcasting; analyzed information on the BBG entities; and interviewed representatives of the five BBG entities and international broadcasters.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that BBG systematically consider in its annual language service reviews (1) the cost and impact of overlap among BBG entities' language services and (2) the activities of other international broadcasters. BBG agreed with GAO's recommendations and reported taking initial steps to implement them.

View [GAO-13-172](#). For more information, contact Timothy J. DiNapoli at (202) 512-3665 or DiNapoli@gao.gov.

January 2013

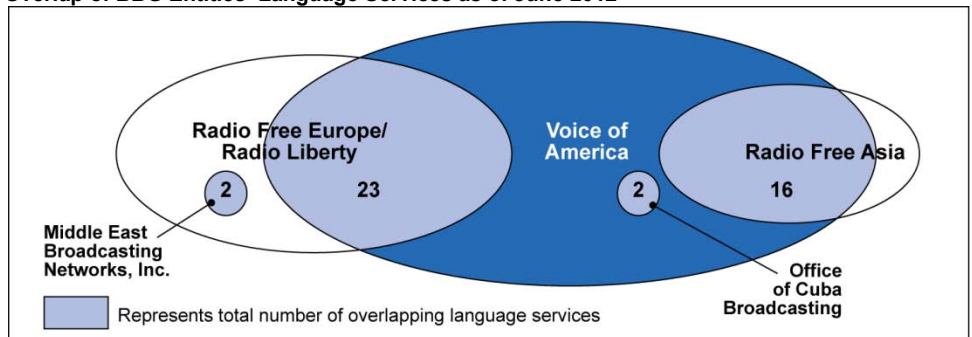
BROADCASTING BOARD OF GOVERNORS

Additional Steps Needed to Address Overlap in International Broadcasting

What GAO Found

Nearly two-thirds of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) language services—offices that produce content for particular languages and regions—overlap with another BBG service by providing programs to the same countries in the same languages. GAO identified 23 instances of overlap involving 43 of BBG's 69 services. For example, in 8 instances involving 16 services, a Voice of America service and a Radio Free Asia service overlapped. Almost all overlapping services also broadcast on the same platform (i.e., radio or television). BBG officials noted that some overlap may be helpful in providing news from various sources in countries of strategic interest to the United States; however, they acknowledged that overlap reduces the funding available for broadcasts that may have greater impact. BBG budget information indicates that BBG spent approximately \$149 million in fiscal year 2011 to maintain language services broadcasting in the same countries and languages—nearly 20 percent of its total appropriations. However, BBG has not estimated the potential savings and efficiencies from reducing unnecessary overlap. Further, BBG's annual language service review—its primary means of prioritizing broadcast languages and planning resource allocations—does not systematically consider the cost and impact of overlap. As a result, BBG may be missing opportunities to reduce overlap as appropriate, strengthen impact, and improve BBG entity coordination.

Overlap of BBG Entities' Language Services as of June 2012



Source: GAO analysis of Broadcasting Board of Governors information.

More than half of BBG's broadcast languages are used by other international broadcasters—U.S. commercial international broadcasters and other major democratic nations' government-supported international broadcasters—although these broadcasters' objectives differ from BBG's. The U.S. commercial broadcasters that GAO identified transmit in seven of the BBG languages and target different audiences, with for-profit aims. Other democratic nations' broadcasters, including Germany's Deutsche Welle and the United Kingdom's BBC, transmit in 35 of the 59 BBG languages, although each broadcaster represents the unique perspectives and interests of its respective country. BBG's annual language service review generally considers the broadcast alternatives available to targeted audiences by identifying the most significant broadcasters in each market BBG serves. However, the review process does not systematically identify the languages used and the countries served by other international broadcasters, and it does not assess the extent to which these broadcasters provide similar or complementary alternatives to BBG broadcasts. As a result, BBG risks missing additional opportunities to better allocate its resources.