

Highlights of [GAO-13-217](#), a report to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

In January 2010, the President announced the goal of doubling U.S. exports over 5 years. The President's plan in the National Export Initiative included prioritizing exports by small businesses and called for improved coordination among agencies involved in federal export promotion activities. Recently, Congress has also directed SBA to expand its export counseling and financing activities. This report (1) describes SBA's role within federal export promotion efforts, (2) assesses the extent to which SBA collaborates with other agencies in its export promotion activities, and (3) assesses the extent to which SBA is meeting requirements under the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 to expand export promotion training and staffing. GAO analyzed agencies' documents and interviewed agency officials, including those in six selected field office locations serving areas with high export potential and where staff from at least two agencies were colocated.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that SBA (1) consult with Commerce and Ex-Im and clearly define export entities' roles and responsibilities; (2) consult with Commerce and Ex-Im and identify ways to increase, where possible, sharing of client information; and (3) update its plan for meeting mandated staffing requirements to include funding sources and time frames, as well as possible efficiencies from improved collaboration. SBA agreed with our recommendations and noted it is taking steps to address them. We also received technical comments from other key export promotion agencies, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

View [GAO-13-217](#). For more information, contact Loren Yager at (202) 512-4347 or [yagerl@gao.gov](mailto:yagerl@gao.gov).

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## EXPORT PROMOTION

### Small Business Administration Needs to Improve Collaboration to Implement Its Expanded Role

## What GAO Found

The Small Business Administration (SBA) and five other key agencies provide a variety of export promotion services to small businesses. In addition to outreach, which all six agencies conduct, SBA's primary activities include counseling and training, provided mainly through nonfederal partner entities called Small Business Development Centers, and export financing, provided through SBA's Office of International Trade (OIT).

While SBA collaborates to some extent with other key agencies on its export promotion activities, additional collaboration could enhance agency efforts and reduce overlap. SBA, Department of Commerce (Commerce), and the U.S. Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im) coordinate some export promotion activities at headquarters and at field locations, but some services overlap. For example, Small Business Development Centers and Commerce both assist companies new to exporting as well as more experienced exporters, despite intentions to divide responsibilities for those types of firms. Additionally, OIT and Ex-Im offer similar financial products for small businesses, such as export working capital loan guarantees. Overlapping services may cause confusion for small businesses and result in inefficient use of government resources. SBA and other agencies developed a joint strategy to increase small business exports and, to varying degrees, the agencies have included collaborative efforts in the performance evaluations of staff with export promotion responsibilities. However, SBA and other agencies have not clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and efforts to leverage resources have not included regularly sharing client information where possible. Such sharing could help agencies improve client services and clarify each agency's impact in promoting U.S. exports. Enhancing collaboration could help agencies ensure they are working toward the goal of increasing exports by small businesses in a way that maximizes limited resources and mitigates overlap.

SBA has made some progress in increasing export training of Small Business Development Center counselors but has experienced challenges in meeting increased OIT staffing requirements under the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010. The law required a certain number or percentage of staff working for the 63 Small Business Development Center networks to obtain export counseling certification. As of the end of September 2012, 73 percent of the networks had met this requirement, for which SBA set a 2013 deadline. To meet another requirement under the law, SBA needed to increase its OIT field staff, who primarily provide export financing assistance, from 18 to 30 staff, by the end of September 2012. However, SBA has only advertised for four temporary positions and filled two of them. SBA officials noted challenges in finding qualified candidates and lack of continued funding for additional OIT field positions. In a recent report to Congress, SBA stated its plans to hire the additional OIT staff but did not include funding plans or updated time frames to fill the positions. Furthermore, the plan did not discuss how SBA would overcome the hiring challenges or discuss the potential to leverage resources of other export promotion entities that also provide export assistance.