

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies and state and local governments have established field-based entities (e.g., centers and task forces) nationwide that share terrorism-related information, among other things. GAO was asked to assess these entities. This report addresses (1) the extent to which these entities are distinct, fragmented, overlapping, or duplicative; (2) the extent to which DOJ, DHS, and ONDCP hold entities accountable for coordinating and have assessed coordination opportunities; and (3) how, if at all, DOJ, DHS, and ONDCP incorporate information on the results entities achieve when making funding decisions. GAO analyzed entities' missions, activities, and coordination efforts in eight selected urban areas that range in geographic dispersion and risk. Although not generalizable, this analysis provided insights. This is a public version of a sensitive report GAO issued in March 2013. Information the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) deemed sensitive has been redacted.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that ONDCP work with HIDTA officials to establish time frames to connect systems; DHS, DOJ, and ONDCP develop measures to hold entities accountable for coordination and assess opportunities to enhance coordination; and the PM-ISE report on the results of the agencies' efforts to assess coordination. DHS, ONDCP, and the PM-ISE concurred. DOJ generally agreed with the intent of the recommendations, but disagreed with their underlying premises that DOJ was not already taking such actions. GAO believes these actions do not fully address the recommendations as discussed further in this report.

View [GAO-13-471](#). For more information, contact Eileen R. Larence at (202) 512-8777 or [larencee@gao.gov](mailto:larencee@gao.gov).

## INFORMATION SHARING

### Agencies Could Better Coordinate to Reduce Overlap in Field-Based Activities

## What GAO Found

Five types of field-based information-sharing entities are supported, in part, by the federal government—Joint Terrorism Task Forces, Field Intelligence Groups, Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS) centers, state and major urban area fusion centers, and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Investigative Support Centers—and have distinct missions, roles, and responsibilities. However, GAO identified 91 instances of overlap in some analytical activities—such as producing intelligence reports—and 32 instances of overlap in investigative support activities, such as identifying links between criminal organizations. These entities conducted similar activities within the same mission area, such as counterterrorism, for similar customers, such as federal or state agencies. This can lead to benefits, such as the corroboration of information, but may also burden customers with redundant information. GAO also found that RISS centers and HIDTAs operate three different systems that duplicate the same function—identifying when different law enforcement entities may be conducting a similar enforcement action, such as a raid at the same location, to ensure officer safety—resulting in some inefficiencies. RISS and HIDTA have taken steps to connect two of the systems, but HIDTA does not have target time frames to connect the third system. A commitment to time frames would help reduce risks to officer safety and potentially lessen the burden on law enforcement agencies that are currently using multiple systems.

Agencies have neither held entities accountable for coordinating nor assessed opportunities for further enhancing coordination to help reduce the potential for overlap and achieve efficiencies. The Departments of Justice (DOJ) and Homeland Security (DHS), and the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)—the federal agencies that oversee or provide support to the five types of field-based entities—acknowledged that entities working together and sharing information is important, but they do not hold the entities accountable for such coordination. A mechanism that enables agencies to monitor the results of coordination efforts could encourage more coordination, help reduce any unnecessary overlap and leverage resources. Officials in the eight urban areas said that practices such as having representatives from other agencies on governance boards and colocating entities where possible enhanced coordination, information sharing, and efficiencies—in their view, reducing the potential of unnecessary overlap. Federal agencies have not assessed the extent to which such practices could be further implemented and, therefore, may be missing opportunities to maximize benefits. The Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE)—which manages efforts to enhance sharing governmentwide—has not reported on specific coordination efforts across the entities. Including agencies' assessment progress in the annual reports to the Congress would enhance accountability.

The agencies collect information on entities' results, but vary in the extent to which they consider the results when they make decisions about future funding. For example, agencies may consider other factors—such as risk and threats—rather than results, or funding decisions may be determined by state grant recipients or set in part by statutory or other requirements.