

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-552](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 began moving the federal government toward a more results-oriented culture, and in 2010, GPRAMA established a new framework for taking a more integrated approach to focusing on results and improving government performance by establishing requirements for government-wide and agency-wide goals. Reporting progress on these and other goals may include grant performance information. GAO was asked to review grant performance reporting. This report examines (1) the extent to which OMB provides guidance to agencies on collecting, validating, and reporting performance data that demonstrate progress toward agency-wide and federal goals; and (2) how the selected agencies collect and validate data on the performance of selected grant programs and use those data to report progress toward agency-wide performance goals. For this review, GAO selected two grant programs each at Justice and FEMA. GAO reviewed OMB guidance on grant performance and relevant legislation, interviewed officials at OMB, Justice, and FEMA, and conducted a literature review to identify performance measurement issues.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA ensure, in accordance with OMB Circular No. A-11, that there are consistent procedures in place at the program office and regional level to validate and verify grant performance data that allow FEMA to attest to the reliability of EMPG and AFG grant data used to report progress toward goals. DHS, of which FEMA is a part, concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-13-552](#). For more information, contact Stanley J. Czerwinski at (202) 512-6806 or czerwinski@gao.gov.

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GRANTS PERFORMANCE

Justice and FEMA Collect Performance Data for Selected Grants, but Action Needed to Validate FEMA Performance Data

What GAO Found

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) provides detailed guidance in Circular No. A-11 for the agency goal development and the performance data verification and validation processes. OMB Circular No. A-11 directs agencies to have a data validation plan for performance reporting and cost-effective validation and verification techniques in place to ensure the completeness and reliability of all performance measurement data used in annual performance plans. In 2012, OMB revised Circular No. A-11 to incorporate the requirements of the Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA), which requires agencies to establish 2-year agency priority goals for areas where they seek to achieve near-term performance results but provides agencies with discretion to select their goals and the performance data used to show progress towards achieving these goals. Agencies must ensure that the data they use to report progress toward performance goals is accurate and reliable.

The Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program at the Department of Justice (Justice) collects performance data quarterly and qualitative summary narrative information annually. Justice's Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG) program collects quantitative and qualitative performance data annually and financial performance data quarterly. For both JAG and JABG, performance data are passed up from the grant program offices to the Office of the Chief Financial Officer within the Office of Justice Programs and are ultimately made available to the Justice Management Division. JAG's data collection tool has an edit-check function to improve the reliability of data entered into the system, and Justice has established a policy to implement a new data validation tool for future use with JABG grantees. Justice established four agency priority goals for 2012 to 2013, but it does not use JAG and JABG performance data as part of its evaluation of progress towards agency priority goals, as is allowed under GPRAMA and incorporated into Circular No. A-11.

The Federal Emergency Management Administration's (FEMA) Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG) and Assistance to Firefighters Grants (AFG) programs collect performance information through a variety of reporting mechanisms. These mechanisms collect performance data used by FEMA regional offices and headquarters for different purposes. For example, headquarters focuses on the development of future program priorities and reporting progress toward the National Preparedness Goal, while regions use program information to monitor primary grant recipients. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), of which FEMA is a part, developed agency priority goals that reflect agency-wide, near-term priorities. According to FEMA officials, the EMPG and AFG programs have an indirect link to a DHS agency priority goal, as well as the National Preparedness Goal, because they support states' level of preparedness for disasters. According to FEMA officials, neither program has a standardized tool with which to validate the performance data that are self-reported by recipients; additionally, the regions are inconsistent in their approaches to verifying program performance data. The absence of a formal established validation and verification procedure, as directed by Circular No. A-11, could lead to the collection of erroneous performance data.