

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-605](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2008, Congress has appropriated more than \$100 million each year to the Department of Justice (DOJ) that may be used, among other things, to reduce DNA backlogs and enhance crime laboratory capacity. NIJ, within DOJ, is responsible for, among other things, providing awards for DNA analysis and forensic activities. NIJ's DNA Backlog Reduction Program was established to provide grants to state and local governments with the intent, in part, of reducing the backlog of DNA samples. The conference report accompanying the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2012, mandated GAO to examine, among other things, DNA analysis funds. This report addresses (1) how NIJ has allocated its DNA and forensic program appropriation over the past 5 fiscal years, (2) the extent that NIJ has a process to determine its funding priorities for its DNA and forensic program appropriation, and (3) the extent that NIJ verifies data on grant results submitted by grantees and measures the outcomes of the DNA Backlog Reduction Program. GAO reviewed relevant appropriations, NIJ funding documentation, and data from fiscal years 2008 through 2012, and interviewed NIJ officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NIJ clearly document the rationale for annual funding priorities, develop a cost-effective approach to verify the reliability of grantee performance data, and revise its performance measure to reflect actual completed cases. DOJ agreed with GAO's recommendations and outlined steps to address them.

View [GAO-13-605](#). For more information, contact Michele Mackin at (202) 512-4841 or MackinM@gao.gov.

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JUSTICE GRANT PROGRAMS

DOJ Could Improve Decision-Making Documentation and Better Assess Results of DNA Backlog Reduction Program Funds

What GAO Found

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) allocated funding for various DNA and other forensic science activities, with the majority of the available \$691 million from fiscal years 2008 through 2012 going to state and local governments to reduce the DNA backlog. Specifically, over this 5-year period, 64 percent was allocated through initiatives that directly benefit state and local efforts to reduce DNA backlogs and build DNA analysis capacity. The largest initiative was NIJ's DNA Backlog Reduction Program, and other DNA backlog initiatives included DNA analysis of cold cases, among others. A smaller portion (31 percent) went to other forensic sciences initiatives, such as research and development and training, although NIJ officials stated that funding these initiatives may have long-term benefits for reducing the DNA backlog. The remainder of the funding went toward other activities, such as management and administration.

NIJ has a process in place to determine DNA and forensic program funding priorities, but its decisions regarding these priorities are not clearly documented. According to NIJ officials, the rationale for funding the DNA Backlog Reduction Program versus other initiatives is documented in briefing slides, but these documents do not show NIJ's rationale for how funding priorities are determined. For example, while the budget documents for fiscal years 2012 and 2013 show the final amounts NIJ decided to allocate to various initiatives, these documents do not provide details on the justifications for how funding levels were determined for each initiative. Without a clearly documented process that demonstrates the rationale for NIJ's annual funding priorities, there is limited transparency regarding how and why the agency is allocating its funding.

NIJ could verify data and revise its performance measure to better assess the DNA Backlog Reduction Program. NIJ assesses performance of this program by requiring grantees to submit reports every 6 months that, in part, outline their progress in meeting program goals and objectives. However, NIJ does not have an approach to verify the reliability of the data—testing data to ensure data quality—and as a result, faces continuing data errors. Verifying these data would help ensure that the data are reliable enough to show that the program is successfully meeting its goals. In addition, NIJ has a performance measure to assess the results of this program—percent of reduction in DNA backlog casework—but it is a projection of DNA casework that grantees expect to complete as opposed to an actual tabulation of completed cases. While measuring annual performance for multiyear grants can be challenging because the completed number of cases is not known until after the grant period closes, taking steps to analyze performance data on actual cases completed could help NIJ to better assess actual results.