

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-513](#), a report to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

To protect the government's interests, agencies can use suspension and debarment to exclude individuals, contractors, and grantees from receiving future contracts, grants, and other federal assistance due to various types of misconduct. In 2011, GAO reviewed ten agencies and found that agencies issuing the most procurement related suspensions and debarments shared common characteristics: dedicated staff, detailed policies and procedures, and an active referral process. GAO recommended that six agencies—the Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, Justice, State, the Treasury, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency—incorporate those characteristics, and that OMB issue guidance to improve oversight and government-wide suspension and debarment efforts.

GAO was asked to review actions taken to implement the 2011 recommendations. This report examines (1) actions taken by the six agencies to incorporate characteristics of active suspension and debarment programs; (2) changes in the level of suspension and debarment activity; and (3) actions taken to improve oversight and government-wide efforts. To do so, GAO reviewed suspension and debarment programs, interviewed agency officials, verified the accuracy of agency data, and reviewed government-wide efforts.

GAO is not making any new recommendations in this report. OMB commented that it is pleased with the progress that agencies have made and with the work of the ISDC. The other agencies did not provide substantive comments.

View [GAO-14-513](#). For more information, contact William T. Woods at (202) 512-4841 or woodsw@ga.gov.

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FEDERAL CONTRACTS AND GRANTS

Agencies Have Taken Steps to Improve Suspension and Debarment Programs

What GAO Found

The six agencies GAO reviewed all took action to incorporate characteristics associated with active suspension and debarment programs. Since GAO made recommendations to do so in 2011, the agencies have addressed staffing issues through actions such as defining roles and responsibilities, adding positions, and consolidating suspension and debarment functions. The agencies also have issued formal policies and promulgated detailed guidance. Finally, the agencies have engaged in practices that encourage an active referral process, such as establishing positions to ensure cases are referred for possible action, and developing case management tools.

The number of suspension and debarment actions government-wide has more than doubled from 1,836 in fiscal year 2009 to 4,812 in fiscal year 2013. The number of suspension and debarment actions for the six agencies increased from 19 in fiscal year 2009 to 271 in fiscal year 2013 (see table below). The six agencies generally experienced a notable increase starting in fiscal year 2011 when the agencies began to take action to incorporate the characteristics associated with active suspension and debarment programs.

Suspension and Debarment Actions Reported for Fiscal Years 2009-2013

Agency	Total number of suspension and debarment actions				
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Department of Commerce	0	0	9	34	8
Department of Health and Human Services	3	6	10	1	47
Department of Justice	8	5	50	37	64
Department of State	8	7	17	50	96
Department of the Treasury	0	1	4	8	4
Federal Emergency Management Agency	0	0	14	8	52
Total	19	19	104	138	271

Source: GAO presentation of agency data reported to the Interagency Suspension and Debarment Committee.

Note: Total number of suspension and debarment actions includes procurement and nonprocurement-related suspensions, proposed debarments, and debarments.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Interagency Suspension and Debarment Committee (ISDC) have taken action to strengthen government-wide suspension and debarment efforts. In November 2011, OMB directed agencies to address weaknesses and reinforce best practices in their suspension and debarment programs. The ISDC reported to Congress in September 2012 that, per OMB direction, the 24 standing member agencies of the ISDC had

- an accountable official in place responsible for suspension and debarment;
- taken steps to address resources, policies, or both; and
- procedures to forward matters to the suspension and debarment official for possible action.

The ISDC has promoted best practices, coordinated mentoring and training, and helped coordinate lead agency responsibility when multiple agencies have an interest in pursuing suspension and debarment of the same entity. Reported increases in the number of suspension or debarment actions suggest that its efforts have been effective. ISDC officials emphasized that increased activity has been coupled with an increased capability to use suspension and debarment appropriately while adhering to the principles of fairness and due process.