

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-96](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

To compete in the global economy, the United States relies heavily on innovation through research and development. The Small Business Innovation Development Act of 1982 initiated SBIR programs across federal agencies in an effort to stimulate innovation through small businesses. DOD spends over \$1 billion annually to support SBIR awards. The Conference Report accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 mandated that GAO assess the transition of technologies developed through the DOD SBIR program. This report examines (1) practices the military department SBIR programs use to facilitate the transition of SBIR technologies, and (2) the extent to which SBIR technologies are transitioning to DOD users, including major weapon system acquisition programs. GAO reviewed SBIR program documentation and data. GAO also interviewed officials from DOD's Office of Small Business Programs and the military departments to determine the practices used to facilitate technology transition and assess SBIR transition outcome data.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD establish a common definition of technology transition for SBIR projects, develop a plan to track transition that will improve the completeness, quality, and reliability of transition data, and report to Congress its plan for meeting new SBIR technology transition reporting requirements. DOD partially concurred with these recommendations, but cited challenges to improving transition data. GAO believes options are available to address the challenges.

View [GAO-14-96](#). For more information, contact Michael J. Sullivan at (202) 512-4841 or [sullivanm@gao.gov](mailto:sullivanm@gao.gov).

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## SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION RESEARCH

### DOD's Program Supports Weapon Systems, but Lacks Comprehensive Data on Technology Transition Outcomes

## What GAO Found

The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) programs within the military departments use a variety of practices and tools to facilitate technology transition—the act of passing technologies developed in the science and technology environment on to users such as weapon system acquisition programs or warfighters in the field. GAO identified some common transition practices and tools across SBIR programs. For example, specific initiatives, such as the Commercialization Readiness Program, are used by each SBIR program and focus resources on enhancing technology transition opportunities. Transition facilitators are also used by each program to provide a network of personnel who manage SBIR activities that support technology transition. GAO also found some different practices and tools used to support technology transition efforts, such as the Navy Transition Assistance Program, which provides consulting services and helps showcase SBIR projects in an effort to improve small businesses' abilities to transition their projects. Transition facilitation efforts are supported by administrative funds provided through each program's SBIR budget and from other funds received from their respective military department. A recent increase in the amount of administrative funding that can come from SBIR budgets is expected to help the programs enhance their transition facilitation efforts.

GAO was unable to assess the extent of technology transition associated with the military department SBIR programs because comprehensive and reliable technology transition data for SBIR projects are not collected. Transition data systems used by DOD provide some transition information but have significant gaps in coverage and data reliability concerns. The military departments have additional measures through which they have identified a number of successful technology transitions, but these efforts capture a limited amount of transition results. SBIR transition reporting requirements recently established by Congress have led DOD to evaluate its options for providing transition data. GAO identified several challenges to attaining complete and accurate technology transition data. For instance, the lack of a common definition for technology transition across SBIR programs could cause reporting inconsistencies. Additionally, tracking transition can be challenging because of the sometimes lengthy period between SBIR project completion and transition to a DOD user. DOD initially plans to use transition data from Company Commercialization Reports—viewed by DOD as the best available source—to meet the new transition reporting requirements. However, SBIR officials indicated that addressing transition reporting requirements is a longer-term effort, and there is no specific plan including a time line for when DOD will be able to support those requirements. Without a plan that establishes a time line, it is unclear how and when DOD will begin to provide the technology transition information expected by Congress. Although Congress did not specify when reporting was to begin, it expects DOD to report new transition-related information to the Administrator of the Small Business Administration to meet the new reporting requirements. However, unless DOD communicates its plan and accompanying time line, the congressional committees to whom the Small Business Administration reports may be unaware of the data quality issues with the transition-related information DOD plans to use to support reporting in the near term.