

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-58](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The sensitive nature of taxpayer-funded travel necessitates that federal agencies have strong internal controls in place to help ensure that travel complies with rules and regulations.

GAO was asked to review the Division's travel controls. This report examines the extent to which the Division effectively implemented internal controls and complied with travel policy in key areas, including appropriate (1) authorization and reimbursement of travel and (2) use of travel charge cards.

GAO analyzed Division travel data for all trips associated with investigations resulting in a court case and completed investigations not resulting in a court case ("closed investigations"), and travel charge card use from October 2011 through June 2013, the most recent data available at the time of GAO's data request. GAO did not analyze travel data associated with ongoing investigations. GAO also analyzed a generalizable sample of travel documents for 105 of the 3,157 trips within the period of its review. GAO also reviewed relevant federal and agency-specific travel rules and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that the Division strengthen controls related to prior authorization of travel and timely submission of vouchers, evaluate whether new controls for noncontract airfares are functioning properly, and improve how it documents oversight of delinquent travel card accounts. The agency concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-16-58](#). For more information, contact Seto Bagdoyan at (202) 512-6722 or bagdoyans@gao.gov.

November 2015

DOJ CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION TRAVEL

Division Strengthened Controls over Travel, but Additional Areas for Improvement Identified

What GAO Found

GAO tested the implementation of internal controls and compliance with key policies in nine areas of the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Civil Rights Division (Division) travel authorization and reimbursement process for the period from October 2011 through June 2013 and found indications that controls functioned effectively in four of those areas. Weaknesses existed in the remaining five areas. Two of these weaknesses should be addressed by the design of a new travel system the Division began using in August 2013. Although the new travel system was in use during GAO's review, the Division had used the new system for too few trips for GAO to analyze its data. The four areas of travel in which the Division complied with policy and controls were generally functioning effectively included appropriate levels of per diem reimbursement, presence of required receipts, prior approval of higher-than-per-diem lodging, and appropriate length of trip for certain oversight activities (related to ensuring compliance with fair-housing laws). GAO identified weaknesses in three areas including the following:

- GAO found that 16 percent of travel authorizations did not include documentation of approval prior to travel, contrary to DOJ policy, which could hinder the effective management of travel funds. Although unanticipated travel may require flexibility for travelers, strengthening controls to promote prior written authorization could help the Division better ensure that travel is necessary and funds are available.
- GAO estimated that 14 percent of Division airfares were on noncontract carriers, and none of the eight highest cost vouchers in GAO's sample had documentation of prior approvals as required by DOJ policy. The new DOJ travel system has controls designed to document approval of noncontract airfares but not if travelers book flights outside the system. The department has not yet evaluated whether this is occurring, yet doing so would confirm whether the new configuration of controls are functioning as intended.
- GAO estimated that 42 percent of Division travel vouchers were not submitted within required time frames per DOJ policy, which could result in difficulties in managing travel funds.

Most Division travel charge card use appeared appropriate indicating effectively functioning controls and compliance with certain travel policies—for instance, more than 97 percent of purchases on Division travel cards aligned with evidence of official travel and appeared appropriate. GAO found three weaknesses related to travel card controls. First, cash advance transactions did not always comply with travel policies, as 19 percent of transactions did not align with evidence of official travel. Second, travel cards were not closed timely in 29 percent of cases reviewed. The Division has implemented new procedures since the start of GAO's audit, implementing new controls whose design should address these two issues. Third, the Division did not maintain documentation of communication with delinquent cardholders, a key component in addressing delinquent accounts. Without this documentation, the Division will not be able to determine whether staff are implementing this control, and thus, if delinquencies persist, it will be hindered in determining if the underlying cause is lack of implementation of this control or the need to strengthen controls or implement different processes.