

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-794](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD conducts community relations activities—such as aircraft flyovers, exhibitions by DOD jet and parachute demonstration teams, and performances by military bands—to expand the public’s understanding of the military’s mission and capabilities, among other goals. During sequestration in fiscal year 2013, DOD restricted its community relations activities—for example, placing travel restrictions on bands. DOD reinstated community relations activities at a reduced capacity in fiscal year 2014.

Senate Report 114-49 included a provision for GAO to examine DOD’s community relations activities. GAO (1) evaluates the extent that DOD follows sound management principles in its approach for determining which community relations activities to undertake and (2) describes what is known about the resources that DOD has used for community relations activities.

GAO assessed DOD and military service guidance and processes against management principles in federal internal control standards; identified resources (personnel, equipment, and funding) that DOD and the military services planned to use in fiscal years 2014-17 for community relations activities; and interviewed public affairs officials at DOD and the military services.

GAO is not making any recommendations in this report. GAO provided DOD with a draft of this report for comment, DOD did not provide formal comments in response.

View [GAO-16-794](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (213) 830-1011 or vonaha@gao.gov.

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COMMUNITY RELATIONS

DOD’s Approach for Using Resources Reflects Sound Management Principles

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense’s (DOD) approach for determining which community relations activities to undertake reflects sound management principles—both for activities requested by non-DOD entities and for activities initiated by the department. DOD and military service guidance on community relations activities is consistent with management principles in federal internal control standards, such as delegating authority by assigning responsibilities and establishing mechanisms to enforce directives. In addition, DOD and the military services have processes for reviewing and approving which activities to undertake based on factors such as the level of resource commitment required, the possibility of any interference with other official duties, and the nature of the event. Since fiscal year 2014, DOD’s and the military services’ public affairs offices have coordinated to prepare an annual Outreach Planning Document to provide an overview of and direction on community relations activities they are to undertake each year. According to officials, this annual planning effort has been beneficial and this concept is included in a draft update of community relations guidance that is expected to be issued by the end of fiscal year 2017. GAO notes that by conducting this annual effort and producing this document, DOD is better able to record and communicate information on community relations activities.

DOD has leveraged resources from across the department to support community relations activities and has generally relied on the military services’ annual Operation and Maintenance appropriations to fund them. Within these appropriations, there is no single budget activity group dedicated to these activities. Almost all of the leveraged personnel and equipment also support other DOD missions. For example, DOD has used pilots and equipment to conduct flyovers for community relations purposes from widely dispersed units that are primarily dedicated to support other missions. Likewise, musicians from DOD’s 137 bands have performed other missions, including ceremonial and funeral support, in addition to performing at community relations events. In the Outreach Planning Documents for fiscal years 2014-17, DOD provided not-to-exceed amounts for community relations activities ranging from about \$130 million in fiscal year 2014 to about \$191 million in fiscal year 2017. According to a DOD official and DOD documents, these amounts provide a general picture of resources to be leveraged and help set a reasonable upper limit on the number of activities the services conduct annually.

Examples of Community Relations Activities



Flyovers



Aerial demonstrations



Speaking engagements



Bands and ceremonial units



Military-hosted events

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense information; Defense Video and Imagery System (photos). | GAO-16-794