

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-265](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2007, the America COMPETES Act required the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to take actions to enhance the integrity of federal scientific research. In 2010, OSTP provided guidance to federal agencies on developing scientific integrity policies. The guidance states that, among other things, agencies are to ensure that political appointees should not suppress or alter scientific findings.

GAO was asked to review agencies' scientific integrity policies and actions taken to implement them. This report examines, among other things, the extent to which selected agencies (1) have taken actions to achieve the objectives of their scientific integrity policies and (2) have procedures for identifying and addressing alleged violations of their scientific integrity policies. GAO selected the following nine agencies for review: Agricultural Research Service, Environmental Protection Agency, FAA, FE, National Institutes of Health, NASA, NIST, NOAA, and USGS. GAO analyzed the selected agencies' scientific integrity policies and interviewed agency officials, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 10 recommendations to six agencies to address specific issues related to educating staff, providing oversight, monitoring and evaluating policy implementation, and developing procedures to identify and address policy violations. The six agencies agreed with GAO's recommendations and identified actions they plan to take to address them.

View [GAO-19-265](#). For more information, contact John Neumann at (202) 512-6888 or neumannj@gao.gov.

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SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY POLICIES

Additional Actions Could Strengthen Integrity of Federal Research

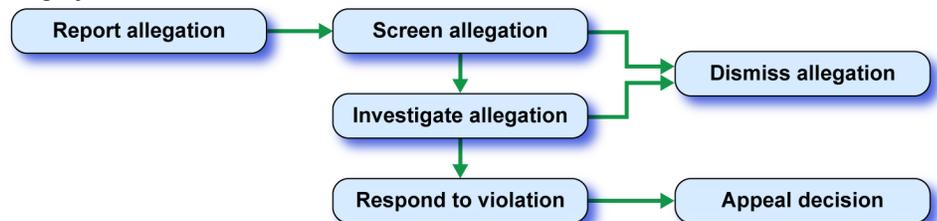
What GAO Found

The nine selected agencies GAO reviewed have taken various actions to help achieve the objectives of their scientific integrity policies in three areas:

- **Educating staff.** Seven of the nine agencies have taken some actions to educate and communicate to staff about their policies, consistent with the 2007 America COMPETES Act. However, the Office of Fossil Energy (FE), which follows the Department of Energy's (DOE) policy, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have not taken action.
- **Providing oversight.** Eight of the nine agencies have a designated official, or the equivalent, to oversee implementation of their scientific integrity policies. However, FE does not have such an official because DOE has not appointed one and currently has no plans or timeframe to do so, although DOE policy states that DOE will appoint an official for oversight.
- **Monitoring and evaluating implementation.** Four of the nine agencies have monitored and evaluated implementation of their scientific integrity policies, consistent with federal standards that call for such control activities. However, FE, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), NIST, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) have not undertaken such activities.

Seven of the nine agencies have specific, documented procedures for identifying and addressing alleged violations of their scientific integrity policies. Although the details of agencies' procedures vary, they generally include the steps shown below. However, two agencies—FE, following DOE's policy, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)—do not have documented procedures for identifying and addressing alleged violations. A 2009 presidential memo on scientific integrity states that agencies should have procedures to identify and address instances in which the scientific process or the integrity of scientific and technological information may be compromised. Without procedures, FE and NASA do not have assurance that their staff understand how to report allegations and that investigations are conducted consistently.

General Procedure for Identifying and Addressing Alleged Violations of Agencies' Scientific Integrity Policies



Source: GAO analysis of selected agencies' information. | [GAO-19-265](#)

Note: The seven agencies that have procedures similar to this figure are the Agricultural Research Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Aviation Administration, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Standards and Technology, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and U.S. Geological Survey.