

Why GAO Did This Study

Since the SBIR and STTR programs began in 1982 and 1992, respectively, federal agencies have awarded at least 162,000 contracts and grants totaling around \$46 billion to help small businesses develop and commercialize new technologies. Eleven agencies participate in the SBIR program and five of them also participate in the STTR program. Each agency issues a solicitation requesting proposals at least once a year. Agencies then review proposal submissions and issue awards using grants or contracts. The SBIR and STTR policy directive recommends that most agencies issue awards no more than 180 calendar days from solicitation close.

The John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 included a provision for GAO to report on the timeliness of agencies' SBIR and STTR proposal review and award issuance. This report examines the time agencies spend issuing SBIR and STTR awards and the factors that affect the time spent, among other things. Within the 11 agencies, GAO reviewed 28 component agencies that participate in these programs. GAO analyzed agency-provided award data from fiscal years 2016 to 2018 for 15,453 awards and interviewed officials from the Small Business Administration and 26 of the component agencies.

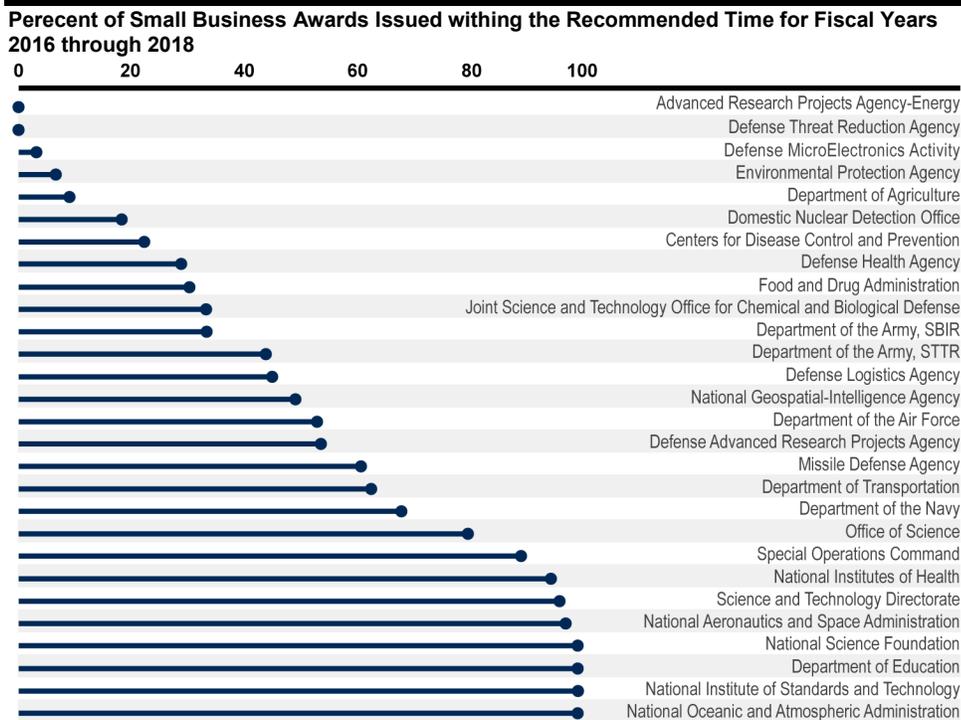
View [GAO-19-620](#). For more information, contact John Neumann at (202) 512-6888 or neumannj@gao.gov.

SMALL BUSINESS RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Many Agencies Took Longer to Issue Small Business Awards than Recommended

What GAO Found

In fiscal years 2016 through 2018, agencies issued 11,710 of the 15,453 Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) awards we reviewed (76 percent) within the recommended time period. However, component agencies varied in the percentage of awards that they issued within the recommended time (see figure).



Source: GAO analysis of Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer award data. | GAO-19-620

Note: The policy directive for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs recommends agencies issue awards within 180 days, except for the the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation, which should issue awards within 15 months.

Agency officials described a number of factors that can affect award issuance timelines, including:

- Some agencies use cost reimbursement contracts, which require additional agency review under federal acquisition regulations.
- Some contracting officers have limited expertise in issuing SBIR and STTR awards and their overall workloads can be heavy.
- Small businesses may be slow to respond to agency requests for information, such as requests for information needed to meet government contracting requirements.