

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-388](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Mérida Initiative is a bilateral U.S.-Mexico partnership to address crime and violence and enhance the rule of law in Mexico. Through this initiative, managed by State/INL and USAID, the United States has provided a wide range of assistance, including training and equipment. Since fiscal year 2008, U.S. funding for the Mérida Initiative has totaled about \$3 billion. GAO has identified key practices for monitoring foreign assistance programs that agencies should implement to address impediments, effectively manage foreign assistance, and meet assistance goals. These practices are generally consistent with policies of State, USAID, and the Office of Management and Budget.

GAO was asked to review issues related to Mérida Initiative implementation and objectives. This report examines the extent to which State/INL and USAID follow key practices in monitoring Mérida Initiative projects and track project performance against established measures. GAO reviewed State and USAID documents and data for a nongeneralizable sample of 20 high-dollar value projects, and interviewed officials from State; USAID; and other U.S. agencies in Washington, D.C., and Mexico City.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, including that State establish procedures to verify monitoring staff follow key practices, and that USAID ensure that monitoring plans address risks. State and USAID concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-20-388](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney Gurkin at (202) 512-2964 or gurkinc@gao.gov.

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U.S. ASSISTANCE TO MEXICO

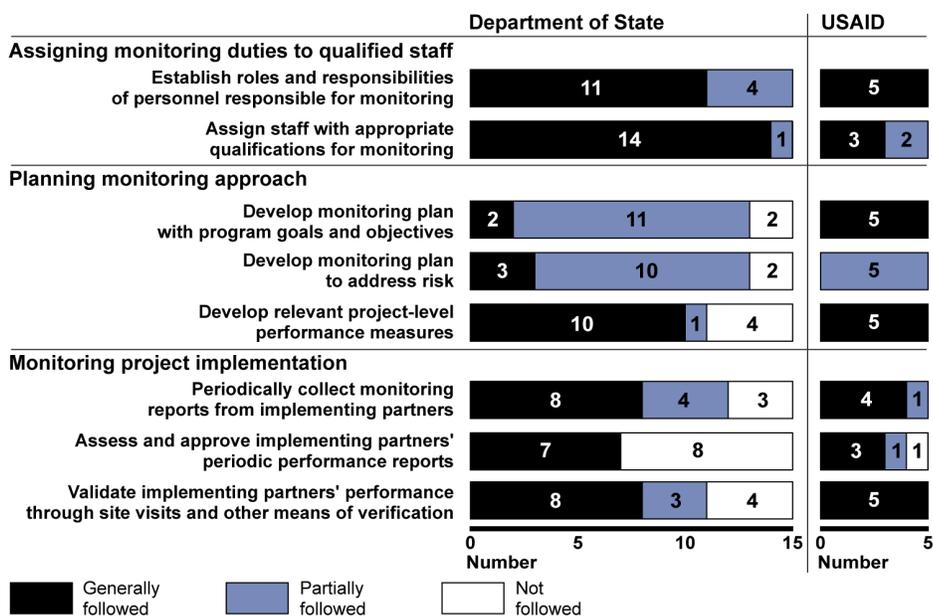
State Department Could Improve Its Monitoring of Mérida Initiative Projects

What GAO Found

For the 15 Department of State (State) Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (State/INL) projects GAO reviewed, State/INL generally followed key monitoring practices about half of the time. (See figure.) For example, State/INL almost always assigned staff with appropriate qualifications to monitor Mérida Initiative projects. However, for most projects, State/INL did not generally follow the key practices for developing monitoring plans that identify project goals and objectives and address risks to achieving them. Furthermore, State/INL did not consistently track project performance data. By establishing procedures for following key monitoring practices, State/INL would be better positioned to stay well informed of its projects' performance, take corrective action when necessary, and help ensure that projects achieve intended results.

For the five United States Agency for International Development (USAID) projects GAO reviewed, USAID almost always followed key monitoring practices and tracked performance data. USAID established procedures, such as periodic portfolio reviews, to ensure its staff consistently monitored projects. While USAID identified risks to implementing projects, it did not address those risks in its monitoring plans. (See figure.) Developing monitoring plans to address risks could help USAID determine the appropriate level of oversight for each Mérida Initiative project and manage monitoring resources more cost effectively.

Extent to Which State/INL and USAID Follow GAO Key Practices for Selected Mérida Initiative Projects



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State/Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) documents. | GAO-20-388