

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-373](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Members of Congress, the State Inspector General, and GAO have raised concerns about State's ability to adequately track and report its foreign assistance data. These concerns include State's ability to retrieve timely and accurate data necessary to provide central oversight, meet statutory and regulatory reporting requirements, manage resources strategically, and assess program performance. In response, State began an initiative in 2014 to improve the quality and availability of foreign assistance data. GAO was asked to review State's plan to improve the tracking and reporting of its foreign assistance data. This report assesses (1) the status of State's plan to improve the tracking and reporting of its foreign assistance data and (2) the extent to which State's plan adheres to sound planning practices.

GAO reviewed State documents on the plan to improve the tracking and reporting of its foreign assistance data. GAO reviewed implementation of the State plan against specific milestones in the plan. GAO also evaluated if the plan included key elements for sound management and strategic planning. In addition, GAO interviewed State officials in Washington, D.C.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State direct the Director of the Office of Foreign Assistance to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the FADR effort. State concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-21-373](#). For more information, contact Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or bairj@gao.gov.

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FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

State Department Should Better Assess Results of Efforts to Improve Financial and Some Program Data

What GAO Found

The Department of State has implemented most of the Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR) plan to improve the tracking and reporting of its foreign assistance data. According to State officials, they began developing the FADR plan in 2014 and focused on modifying State's existing agency-wide data systems to improve financial and related programmatic data for foreign assistance. As of December 2020, State had completed most of the activities detailed in the FADR plan, except for some FADR-related training initiatives that will continue in 2021. For example, State created the FADR Data Dictionary, which standardizes foreign assistance budget terminology and definitions across the agency, and added two data fields—benefitting country and program area—to its data systems. Other activities included updating system design; conducting integration testing between source systems and financial systems; and developing training materials.

State's FADR plan generally or partially addressed key elements of sound planning. GAO evaluated the FADR plan against nine key elements of sound planning it identified as relevant to implementation plans. GAO found that the plan generally addressed four elements and partially addressed five (see figure).

Evaluation of the Department of State's Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR) Plan by Key Elements of Sound Planning Identified by GAO

Element	Did the FADR plan address the element?
Purpose and scope	●
Desired results	●
Hierarchy of goals and subordinate objectives	●
Activities to achieve results	●
Roles and responsibilities	◐
Intra-agency coordination mechanisms	◐
Resources to implement the plan	◐
Milestones and performance indicators	◐
Monitoring and evaluation	◐

Legend: ● Generally addressed ◐ Partially addressed ○ Did not address

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State documentation. | GAO-21-373

Since State has nearly completed implementation of its FADR plan, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) component is the most critical remaining element of the partially addressed elements. GAO found that the M&E component of the plan was not well developed. The plan identifies some performance indicators and monitoring activities, but it does not clearly link those indicators to the desired results. The M&E component also does not identify how State plans to evaluate and use the monitoring data, such as better identification of benefitting country. Nor does it provide information on timeframes associated with the performance targets for the identified indicators. Identifying how the performance indicators link to desired results and the timeframes associated with performance targets, and periodically evaluating its monitoring data would help State assess the plan's effectiveness.