

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal law requires federal agencies to provide a variety of services to tribes and their members. GAO refers to the need for these services—as defined by tribes, tribal members, and other tribal organizations that administer federal programs or grants for tribes and their members—collectively as tribal needs. In 2018, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that the federal government does not keep complete records of federal funding for programs serving tribes. OMB publishes a crosscut on federal funding for programs that benefit Native Americans, but tribal stakeholders have expressed concerns about its transparency.

This report examines (1) information the crosscut provides and reported challenges with using it and (2) the extent to which federal agencies obtain tribal input and reflect tribal needs during budget formulation. GAO reviewed relevant policies and procedures at OMB and five agencies that represent about 90 percent of proposed funding amounts reported in the crosscut. GAO also interviewed agency officials and selected tribal stakeholders—including a federal-tribal budget working group, federal-tribal advisory bodies, and tribal and other organizations—for their perspectives.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that OMB improve its crosscut guidance and that certain agencies develop a formal process to consult with tribes when formulating budget requests. OMB, Education, and DOT agreed or generally agreed with the recommendations. USDA neither agreed nor disagreed.

View [GAO-22-104602](#). For more information, contact Beryl H. Davis at (202) 512-2623 or davisbh@gao.gov or Anna Maria Ortiz at (202) 512-3841 or ortiza@gao.gov.

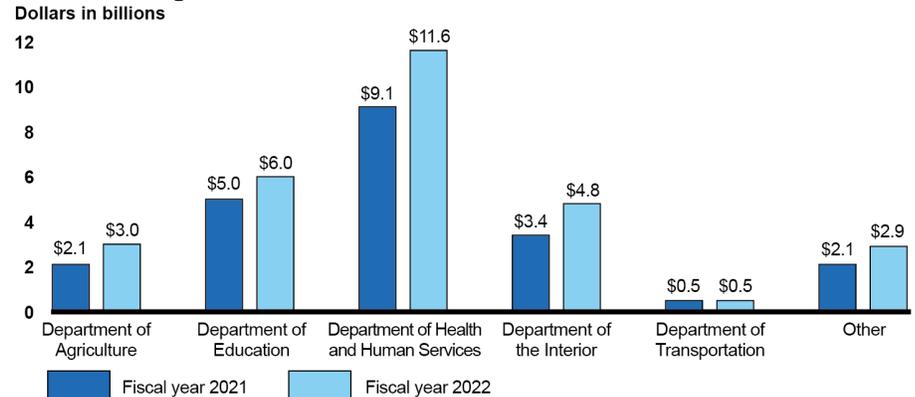
TRIBAL FUNDING

Actions Needed to Improve Information on Federal Funds That Benefit Native Americans

What GAO Found

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) provides information to tribal stakeholders and others on agency-reported federal funding for programs that benefit Native Americans (see figure). This information is known as the Native American Crosscut.

Proposed Funding for Programs That Benefit Native Americans, Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022 President's Budget
Dollars in billions



Source: GAO analysis of Office of Management and Budget data. | GAO-22-104602

GAO found that five selected agencies—the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Education, Health and Human Services (HHS), the Interior, and Transportation (DOT)—interpret OMB’s guidance differently when identifying programs and information on federal funding to include in the crosscut. They also take different approaches to reporting data to OMB for a variety of reasons. The crosscut lacks detailed information about what the agency-reported data represent. Tribal stakeholders stated that this lack of detail makes it challenging for them to leverage the data for decision-making. By improving guidance to collect more detailed information from agencies in its request for crosscut data, OMB could help to provide crosscut users with greater clarity about the data being reported and better meet their needs.

Two of the five agencies have formal processes for incorporating tribal input during budget formulation, and they develop budget information that reflects tribal needs to varying degrees. Specifically, HHS and Interior have processes for tribal leaders to provide input on initial budget submissions to OMB. Also, HHS’s Indian Health Service has a tribal budget work group that develops information on tribal needs—including unmet needs—that the agency provides to OMB. However, three agencies do not have formal processes for incorporating tribal input into initial budget submissions and do not develop budget information that reflects tribal needs. Establishing formal processes would enable agencies to obtain tribal input and develop budget information that reflects tribal needs, including unmet needs. This would better ensure that decision makers and Congress have information to (1) understand resources needed to achieve program objectives and (2) assess the federal government’s progress meeting its unique responsibilities to tribes and their members, in accordance with the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recommendations.