AFFORDABLE BROADBAND

FCC Could Improve Performance Goals and Measures, Consumer Outreach, and Fraud Risk Management

What GAO Found

The Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Affordable Connectivity Program offers eligible low-income households discounts on the cost of their broadband service and certain devices. FCC reimburses participating internet service providers for providing these discounts. Since launching, the program has grown to include over 14-million subscribers.

FCC established some performance goals and measures for the program. However, the goals and measures do not fully align with key attributes of effective performance management. For example, FCC’s goals and measures lack specificity and clearly defined targets, raising questions about how effective these goals and measures will be at helping FCC gauge the program’s achievements and identify improvements.

FCC has also engaged in various outreach efforts to raise ACP’s awareness and translated its outreach materials into non-English languages to reach eligible households with limited-English proficiency. However, GAO reviewed a selection of these materials and the process to translate them and found that they did not fully align with leading practices for consumer content or for developing translated language products. For example, the translations’ quality varied due to lack of clarity and incompleteness. Also, FCC’s translation process lacked elements that could have improved the materials, such as testing with the target audience. FCC has also not developed a plan to guide its overall outreach efforts. Quality translations are key to informing eligible households with limited-English proficiency, which may include communities FCC has indicated are important to reach. A comprehensive plan to guide its outreach efforts would help ensure funds dedicated to outreach are used most effectively.

FCC has taken steps to manage fraud risks in the program, but FCC’s efforts do not fully align with selected leading practices in GAO’s Fraud Risk Framework. For example, FCC has conducted a fraud risk assessment but has not developed an antifraud strategy to address the identified risks. It also has not developed a process to conduct such risk assessments regularly. Further, FCC has not developed processes to monitor certain antifraud controls. GAO identified weaknesses in these controls, including potential duplicate subscribers, subscribers allegedly receiving fixed broadband at PO Boxes and commercial mailboxes, and subscribers with broadband providers’ retail locations as their primary or mailing addresses. Without regular fraud risk assessments, an antifraud strategy, and sufficient monitoring of controls, FCC may not be able to effectively prevent and detect fraud in this over $14 billion program.