

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-105869](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Oversight and Accountability, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In February 2021, Executive Order 14008 directed federal agencies to take action to address the disproportionately high and adverse human health, environmental, climate-related, and other cumulative impacts on disadvantaged communities. As part of this effort, the executive order established the Justice40 Initiative. The initiative is led by EOP, specifically the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), Office of Management and Budget, and Climate Policy Office. It currently covers more than 500 federal programs at 19 agencies, which involve billions of taxpayer dollars.

GAO was asked to review implementation of the Justice40 Initiative. This report examines the extent to which (1) EOP collaborated with federal and nonfederal entities to develop guidance and tools for implementing the initiative; (2) pilot programs found EOP's guidance and tools useful; and (3) EOP established a process for assessing federal efforts to achieve the goal of the initiative.

GAO reviewed executive orders and EOP documents; interviewed EOP staff, agency officials, and nonfederal entities; analyzed survey responses from 20 of 21 Justice40 pilot programs; and compared EOP efforts with leading practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 15 recommendations, including that the EOP entities leading the initiative incorporate leading practices for collaboration into their Justice40 efforts. EOP neither agreed nor disagreed, but CEQ stated that it anticipates taking steps to implement our recommendations.

View [GAO-24-105869](#). For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202)-512-3841 or GomezJ@gao.gov.

January 2024

JUSTICE40

Use of Leading Practices Would Strengthen Efforts to Guide Environmental Justice Initiative

What GAO Found

The Justice40 Initiative's goal is for 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to flow to disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized and overburdened. To develop guidance and tools for implementing the initiative, the Executive Office of the President (EOP) took steps to collaborate with federal and nonfederal entities. EOP worked with the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council, an advisory council, 21 Justice40 pilot programs at nine agencies, and others to develop interim guidance, a tool to identify disadvantaged communities, and a scorecard to track progress. EOP's efforts partially reflected leading practices for collaboration. For example, EOP included relevant entities in its collaboration efforts but has not clarified the roles and responsibilities of the Interagency Council.

Seven Investment Areas of the Justice40 Initiative



Sources: Justice40 Interim Implementation Guidance; Soonthorn/stock.adobe.com (top left photo); Alpegor/stock.adobe.com (top center photo); Robert Herhold/stock.adobe.com (top right photo); Monkey Business/stock.adobe.com (bottom left photo); diegorayaces/stock.adobe.com (bottom center-left photo); AKGK Studio/stock.adobe.com (bottom center-right photo); Tryfonov/stock.adobe.com and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (bottom right photo). | GAO-24-105869

Additionally, over half of the Justice40 pilot programs that GAO surveyed answered that the guidance and tools in place at the time were useful. However, some programs faced challenges, such as unclear guidance. According to GAO's analysis, EOP did not systematically gather feedback on programs' experience with the guidance and tools. By more fully incorporating leading practices for collaboration, such as by systematically gathering feedback and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the Interagency Council, EOP can better ensure that its guidance and tools provide an effective, timely, and consistent framework for Justice40 implementation.

EOP took initial steps to collect some data on agencies' Justice40 actions and published the first annual scorecard. However, EOP has not established a process for assessing implementation of the Justice40 Initiative. By incorporating key practices for effectively managing and assessing the results of federal efforts as it establishes such a process, EOP can better ensure accountability, transparency, and progress toward achieving the goal of the initiative.