BROADBAND PROGRAMS

Agencies Need to Further Improve Their Data Quality and Coordination Efforts

Why GAO Did This Study

Access to broadband is critical for employment, education, health care, and other daily activities. Yet millions of Americans lack broadband access, despite at least $44 billion in federal investment over the past decade across myriad programs managed by different agencies. Information on where broadband is not available is key to expanding access.

GAO was asked to review federal broadband efforts. This report examines (1) agencies' use of broadband availability information and the extent to which FCC ensures the quality of data in its National Broadband Map; and (2) the extent to which agencies' coordination of broadband funding programs aligns with GAO's leading practices for interagency collaboration, among other issues.

GAO reviewed documents and interviewed officials from FCC and other broadband funding agencies. GAO compared (1) FCC's practices for ensuring the quality of information in its National Broadband Map against relevant federal internal control standards and (2) interagency coordination efforts with leading practices for interagency collaboration.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 14 recommendations, including that FCC document and evaluate the effectiveness of its processes for ensuring the quality of the National Broadband Map's data, and that FCC, NTIA, USDA, and Treasury clearly define and document certain aspects of their coordination. FCC, NTIA, and Treasury agreed with GAO's recommendations; USDA neither agreed nor disagreed.

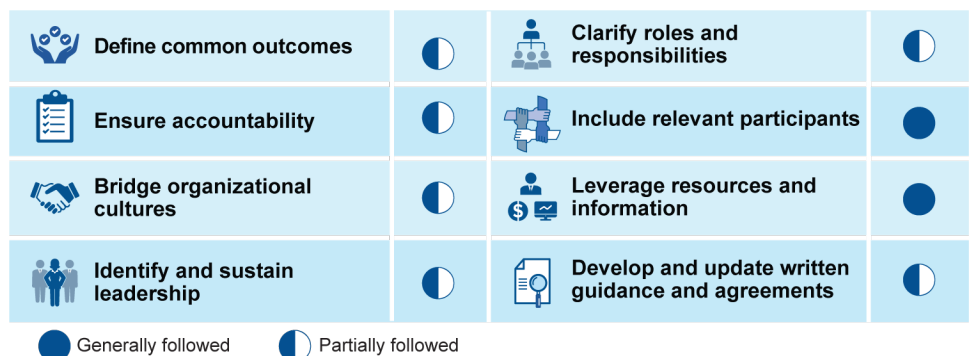View GAO-25-107207. For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at vonaha@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Federal agencies rely on the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) National Broadband Map as a key information source to target tens of billions of dollars in federal broadband funding by knowing where high-speed internet is already available. However, the accuracy of the broadband availability data on the map is uncertain. FCC has not documented or assessed the sufficiency of its processes for ensuring the information's accuracy. Without taking these steps, FCC cannot be assured its processes are sufficient to ensure the data's quality or that its staff are carrying out these processes consistently, increasing the risk that inaccurate data appear on the map. Inaccurate data could jeopardize agencies' ability to make the most efficient and effective funding decisions.

FCC, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), and the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and the Treasury coordinate with each other to administer the bulk of federal funding for broadband deployment. GAO found that coordination efforts between these agencies generally followed two and partially followed six of eight leading collaboration practices (see figure).

Assessment of Interagency Coordination Efforts to Administer Federal Broadband Funding Compared with Leading Practices for Interagency Collaboration

Define common outcomes	◑	Clarify roles and responsibilities	◑
Ensure accountability	◑	Include relevant participants	●
Bridge organizational cultures	◑	Leverage resources and information	●
Identify and sustain leadership	◑	Develop and update written guidance and agreements	◑

● Generally followed   ◑ Partially followed

Sources: GAO analysis of agency documentation and interviews; GAO icons. | GAO-25-107207

In particular, the agencies use various coordination methods, including regularly meeting and leveraging maps to share data to help avoid duplicate funding. The agencies also have some written agreements to guide coordination, such as an information-sharing memorandum. However, GAO found areas where the agencies have not clearly documented the scope of how coordination efforts will be implemented. For example, they have not clearly defined or documented key areas of their collaborative efforts, such as what "covered data" include when sharing information about their broadband deployment projects, as referenced in the memorandum. The agencies also have not established timelines for providing data on funded projects to the map used to display information on federally funded broadband projects, or documented a formal process for avoiding duplicate funding. Clearly defining, agreeing upon, and formally documenting guidance would better position the agencies to sustain their collaborative efforts, especially should changes in leadership or staff occur. It would also help ensure that billions of dollars in federal funding are spent efficiently and effectively to expand broadband access, including to areas with the greatest need.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**