

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-155](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Fusion centers play a key role in sharing threat information among all levels of government and the private sector. Federal agencies support these centers by providing personnel, funding, and other assistance. GAO was asked to assess how federal agencies are accounting for ongoing support provided.

This report addresses the extent to which (1) DHS has helped centers assess capabilities and address gaps, (2) the federal government has defined its expectations for centers and assessed their contributions to homeland security, (3) federal agencies have deployed personnel to centers, and (4) DHS grant reforms have improved accountability for federal funds that support centers.

GAO analyzed the results of center assessments, documents on center expectations, guidance for deploying personnel, and grant requirements. GAO also interviewed DHS and FBI officials who work with centers, and directors, staff, and deployed personnel at 10 of 78 fusion centers. GAO selected centers based on geographic location and other factors. Interviews are not generalizable, but provided insights on center capabilities and federal support provided.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA develop a mechanism to verify that states act in accordance with proposed guidance, when implemented, to help ensure that data on fusion center projects are sufficiently accurate to provide a reliable accounting of the total amount of federal grant funding provided to centers. DHS concurred.

View [GAO-15-155](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-6510 or larencee@gao.gov.

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INFORMATION SHARING

DHS Is Assessing Fusion Center Capabilities and Results, but Needs to More Accurately Account for Federal Funding Provided to Centers

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is helping state and major urban area fusion centers assess baseline capabilities—such as the ability to receive, analyze, and disseminate threat information—and address capability gaps through an annual assessment process, resources it provides to centers to mitigate gaps, and an exercise program to evaluate capabilities in practice. Results of the 2013 annual assessment show that centers achieved an average score of about 92 out of 100, which generally indicates that centers have policies and procedures in place to implement key information sharing activities. The scores do not reflect if these activities have resulted in specific homeland security impacts. All 10 fusion center directors GAO contacted said that the annual assessment is a useful tool to identify capabilities and monitor progress.

Since 2004, the federal government has issued guidance and related documents that define its expectations and key roles for fusion centers and also has taken steps to assess their contributions to homeland security. For example, DHS has developed 45 performance measures to help assess fusion center contributions, which generally align with attributes of successful measures. The measures include outputs—such as the number of intelligence products—and outcomes, such as how products have influenced key partners' security decisions.

In 2013, federal agencies deployed a total of 288 personnel to fusion centers. The two agencies that provide the most support—DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)—have developed nationwide guidance to help these agencies make fusion center support decisions and generally identified key roles and responsibilities for personnel deployed to centers. Other DHS components, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, have not developed such guidance and generally defer to field-level management to make deployment decisions. However, in September 2014, DHS issued guidance that is designed to assist federal agencies in planning and tracking resource deployments to fusion centers.

DHS reforms to the Homeland Security Grant Program are helping to ensure that grant funds intended for fusion centers are used to build or sustain baseline capabilities, but DHS cannot accurately account for federal funds provided to states to support these centers. Specifically, in fiscal year 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)—the lead DHS agency responsible for grant funding—began to require that grant requests for fusion centers identify specific capabilities that proposed projects are to address. FEMA also requires that state grantees biannually report the amount of federal funds spent on fusion center projects. However, after further review of data provided to GAO, FEMA determined that states inaccurately categorized about \$60 million in projects as related to fusion centers in 2012. Thus, FEMA could not reliably report on the amount of federal grants used to support centers, which is needed to help inform future investment decisions. FEMA is developing guidance to help grantees better categorize fusion center projects and improve the reliability of grant reporting, but an additional mechanism to verify that states act in accordance with the guidance could help FEMA ensure that projects are properly classified and more accurately account for grant funding provided to centers.