

Why GAO Did This Study

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act), the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) awarded nearly \$2 billion in 4-year Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) funds to state and local governments for criminal justice activities. As requested, GAO examined: (1) how Recovery Act JAG funds are awarded and how recipients in selected states and localities used their awards; (2) challenges, if any, selected recipients reported in complying with Recovery Act reporting requirements; (3) the extent to which states shared promising practices related to use and management of funds, and how, if at all, DOJ encouraged information sharing; and (4) the extent to which DOJ's JAG Recovery Act performance measures were consistent with promising practices. GAO analyzed recipient spending and performance data submitted as of June 30, 2010; interviewed officials in a nonprobability sample of 14 states and 62 localities selected based on the amount of their awards, planned activities, and their reported project status; assessed 19 JAG performance measures against a set of key attributes; and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOJ (1) continue to revise Recovery Act JAG performance measures and consider, as appropriate, including key attributes of successful performance measurement systems, and (2) develop a mechanism to validate the integrity of self-reported performance data. DOJ concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-11-87](#) or key components. For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

RECOVERY ACT

Department of Justice Could Better Assess Justice Assistance Grant Program Impact

What GAO Found

Recipients of Recovery Act JAG funding in the 14 states GAO reviewed received more than \$1 billion either through direct allocations from DOJ or through an indirect "pass-through" of funds that states originally received from the department. These recipients reported using their funds for a variety of purposes, though predominantly for law enforcement and corrections, which included equipment purchases or the hiring or retaining of personnel. More than half of the funding that state administering agencies (SAA) passed-through to localities was reported to be specifically for law enforcement and corrections activities, while localities receiving direct awards more often reported planning to use their funds for multiple types of criminal justice activities. Officials in all 14 states and 19 percent of localities in GAO's sample (12 of 62) said that without Recovery Act JAG funding, support for certain ongoing local law enforcement programs or activities would have been eliminated or cut. Overall, about \$270 million or 26 percent of Recovery Act JAG funds had been reported as expended as of June 30, 2010, but the expenditure rates of funds awarded through SAAs showed considerable variation, ranging from 5 to 41 percent of SAA's total awards.

State officials cited challenges in meeting quarterly Recovery Act reporting time frames. Officials from the majority of states in GAO's sample said that workload demands and personnel shortages made meeting Recovery Act deadlines within the prescribed reporting period difficult; however, all states reported that they were able to do so.

States reported sharing information and promising practices related to JAG activities in a variety of ways and DOJ encouraged this sharing through a number of programs. More than half of state agencies in GAO's sample generally reported sharing promising practices or lessons learned on topics, such as grant management and administration, with other states and localities through participating in law enforcement and government association conferences, DOJ training, and Web postings, among other methods.

DOJ established new performance measures to assess the Recovery Act JAG program and is working to refine them; however, these measures lack key attributes of successful performance assessment systems that GAO has previously identified, such as clarity, reliability, a linkage to strategic or programmatic goals, and objectivity and measurability of targets. Including such attributes could facilitate accountability and management's ability to meaningfully assess and monitor Recovery Act JAG's results. DOJ officials acknowledge that weaknesses exist and they plan to improve their performance measures. For example, the department already took initial steps to incorporate feedback from some states with regard to clarifying the definitions of some performance measures; however, its assessment tool lacks a process to verify the accuracy of the data that recipients self-report to gauge their progress. By including attributes consistent with promising practices in its performance measures, DOJ could be better positioned to determine whether Recovery Act JAG recipients' programs are meeting DOJ and Recovery Act goals. In addition, by establishing a mechanism to verify the accuracy of recipient reports, DOJ can better ensure the reliability of the information that recipients provide.