

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-396](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

As part of its efforts to meet yearly recruitment goals for the military, DOD requested almost \$575 million in fiscal year 2017 to conduct advertising intended to increase awareness of military service and ultimately generate leads for potential recruits.

Senate Report 114-49 included a provision for GAO to assess DOD's advertising activities. This report examines the extent to which DOD (1) has coordinated advertising activities among the military service components, (2) has followed commercial best practices to assess the effectiveness of advertising activities, and (3) has oversight of its components' advertising activities.

GAO identified best practices for assessing the effectiveness of advertising in consultation with advertising industry experts and reviewed DOD and service policies and the most recent version of each military service components' advertising plans, from fiscal years 2014-16.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop a formal process for coordination among its components on crosscutting advertising issues; ensure that the components fully measure the performance of advertising activities; and issue department-wide policy that, among other things, defines DOD's oversight role in advertising. DOD generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-16-396](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (213) 830-1011 or vonaha@gao.gov.

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DOD ADVERTISING

Better Coordination, Performance Measurement, and Oversight Needed to Help Meet Recruitment Goals

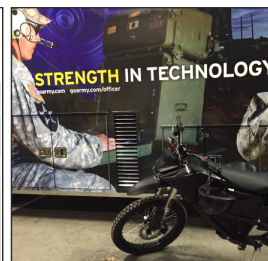
What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has taken steps to coordinate some advertising activities among the military service components, but it has not developed a formal process for coordination. DOD conducts joint market research and service officials responsible for advertising at times share some information about lessons learned. However, there is no formal process for addressing inefficiencies and to ensure information sharing among the services. GAO found examples of possible unnecessary duplication, overlap, and fragmentation that may result from the absence of coordination. For example, the Air Force has three advertising programs that contract with three advertising agencies, but officials could not provide a rationale for requiring separate programs. In the absence of a formal process for coordination, the services may be missing opportunities to effectively leverage advertising resources.

While DOD has generally followed commercial best practices GAO identified to assess the effectiveness of advertising, DOD's components vary in their ability to determine whether their activities are generating leads for potential recruits. For example, while the Marine Corps has developed a framework to assess the effectiveness of its advertising including leads generated from advertising activities at the local level, Army officials stated they do not have reliable data to evaluate whether locally executed advertising activities are generating leads, and the Army National Guard does not require state units to report on the performance of their advertising activities. Without fully measuring advertising performance, especially at the local levels, DOD may be unable to ensure advertising dollars are used efficiently to help meet recruiting goals.

DOD does not have comprehensive oversight of the components' advertising activities; instead, DOD's components oversee their own programs. However, examples identified by GAO and others of some components paying sport teams to provide recognition ceremonies for servicemembers—a practice later deemed unacceptable by DOD—suggest that the absence of DOD oversight may have contributed to some activities of questionable appropriateness. Further, GAO observed discrepancies in how recent sports advertising guidance was being interpreted and in service officials' understanding of regulations that direct digital advertising. Without a department-wide policy that clearly defines its oversight role, DOD lacks reasonable assurance that advertising is carried out in an appropriate manner.

Examples of military service social media advertising, mobile assets for advertising, and print advertising.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-396