

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106164](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2022, federal aid to tribal, state, local, and territorial governments—primarily through grants—totaled roughly \$1.2 trillion. Tracking federal grants spending can be difficult because data are sometimes not consistent government-wide. The GREAT Act seeks to strengthen management and oversight of federal grants through the establishment of governmentwide data standards.

GAO was asked to evaluate progress in creating grant reporting data standards as required by the GREAT Act. This report, part of a series reviewing federal grant management, examines (1) the steps OMB and HHS have taken to implement the GREAT Act and meet the act's deadlines, (2) the extent to which grant data elements developed by OMB and HHS met the act's requirements and followed leading practices, and (3) the extent to which OMB and HHS have consulted grant stakeholders.

GAO reviewed implementation documents and guidance; assessed the grant data elements against statutory requirements; assessed a sample of data elements against leading practices; and interviewed OMB staff, HHS officials, and grant stakeholders, among others.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to OMB and HHS, including that they ensure the grant data elements are consistent with the definition of being machine readable and incorporate leading practices for the formulation of data definitions. HHS concurred with all the recommendations, and OMB did not have any comments on the report.

View [GAO-24-106164](#). For more information, contact Jeff Arkin at (202) 512-6806 or arkinj@gao.gov.

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GRANTS MANAGEMENT

Action Needed to Ensure Consistency and Usefulness of New Data Standards

What GAO Found

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have partially met one of three elapsed deadlines in the Grant Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency Act of 2019 (GREAT Act) related to data standards. OMB and HHS partially met the deadline to establish government-wide data standards by identifying and defining 540 grant data elements in June 2021. This deadline is partially met because 501 of these elements are not fully operationalizable data standards since they do not include important technical specifications that describe their format and structure.

Figure: Extent to Which OMB and HHS Met Select Statutory Requirements in the Grants Reporting Efficiency and Agreements Transparency Act of 2019 as of December 2023

Statutory requirement	Requirement due date	GAO assessment
Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) shall publish and submit a report to Congress explaining the reasoning for the determination of whether to use nonproprietary identifiers	December 30, 2020 ^a	
OMB and HHS shall establish government-wide data standards for information reported by grant recipients	December 30, 2021	
OMB and HHS shall jointly issue guidance to all agencies directing the agencies to apply the data standards	December 30, 2022	

Key: Not met Partially met Met

Source: GAO analysis of Pub. L. No. 116-103, 133 Stat. 3266 (2019) and Office of Management and Budget and Department of Health and Human Services data. | GAO-24-106164

^aFulfillment of this requirement shall occur not later than the earlier of one year after enactment or after data standards establishment. Pub. L. No. 116-103, § 7(c), 133 Stat. 3266, 3271 (2019).

Also, these data elements were fully consistent with five of eight statutory requirements but partially consistent with the other three. For example, 501 of the 540 data elements were not machine-readable. OMB and HHS acknowledged the need to develop technical specifications to achieve machine-readability.

GAO also found that some of these data elements did not reflect five of 13 leading practices for formulating data definitions. GAO reviewed 50 of the 540 data elements—randomly selected from a subset of the elements identified by experts—and found that 20 of the 50 sampled elements did not meet at least one of the 13 leading practices. For example, the definitions of several data elements were ambiguous. Unclear definitions can lead to inconsistent application and result in data that are not comparable.

Although OMB and HHS conducted stakeholder consultation early in the development of the grant data elements, GAO found that they did not have a plan for such engagement moving forward nor a process to ensure regular, timely communication with Congress regarding GREAT Act implementation. Many grant stakeholders informed GAO that OMB and HHS had not consulted them, and congressional staff said that OMB and HHS had not consistently communicated with them. Effective consultation with stakeholders can improve the development and implementation of data standards. Timely communication with Congress can help ensure it has the key facts needed for oversight of the GREAT Act and to address issues involving grant stakeholders and agencies.