

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress has long recognized the importance of providing quality data to the public to ensure the transparency of federal spending, including subawards. This is critical during national emergencies when federal emergency relief funds, such as those appropriated in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, must be distributed to the public quickly.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to monitor and oversee funds used to prepare for, respond to, and recover from the pandemic. This report (1) assesses the quality of grant subaward data available on USAspending.gov, including COVID-19-related awards; and (2) examines the extent to which guidance governing subaward reporting supports the quality of the subaward data.

GAO conducted a series of tests on roughly 6 million grant subaward records available on USAspending.gov; reviewed the legal framework that governs subaward reporting; and interviewed officials from selected agencies to understand how they support subaward data quality.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to GSA, including that it incorporate data validation controls into its plan for modernizing the reporting system; one recommendation to Treasury to improve grant subaward data quality disclosures on USAspending.gov; and one recommendation to OMB to clarify agency roles for supporting grant subaward data quality. GSA and Treasury concurred with the recommendations, and OMB did not have any comments on the report.

View [GAO-24-106237](#). For more information, contact Jeff Arkin at (202) 512-6806 or ArkinJ@gao.gov.

FEDERAL SPENDING TRANSPARENCY

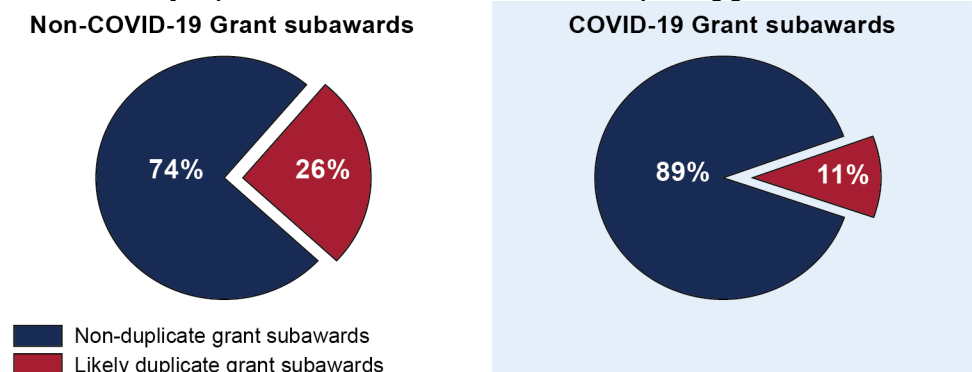
Opportunities Exist to Improve COVID-19 and Other Grant Subaward Data on USAspending.gov

What GAO Found

Federal grant award recipients, such as nonprofit organizations, can pass on a portion of their awards to another entity as a subaward to carry out a portion of the work. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance directs recipients of federal grants (prime recipients) to report grant subawards they make to the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) for display on USAspending.gov, with exceptions. Prime recipients are legally responsible for the quality of the reported data. OMB guidance directs federal agencies to support overall subaward data quality.

GAO's analysis of grant subaward data available from USAspending.gov identified data quality issues, including grant subawards with missing information, impossibly large amounts, and likely duplicative records. GAO found that 26 percent of non-COVID-19 grant subawards and 11 percent of COVID-19 grant subawards reported by prime recipients are likely duplicate records (see figure).

Percent of Likely Duplicate Grant Subaward Records on USAspending.gov



Source: GAO analysis of USAspending.gov data from October 1, 2010, to August 1, 2023. | GAO-24-106237

Note: A "subaward" is an award provided by a recipient to a subrecipient to carry out part of a federal award. Grant subawards cover subawards that are made under federal grant awards. The term does not include subawards made under other forms of federal financial assistance awards (i.e., loans) or subawards made under federal contracts (subcontracts). COVID-19 grant subawards refer to subawards reported to USAspending.gov that were made after April 1, 2020, and are associated with a prime award with a disaster emergency fund code indicating it received COVID-19 funding.

FSRS includes some built-in data entry tools, such as mandatory data fields, but there are few validation tests to alert prime recipients about potential data entry errors during the reporting process. The General Services Administration (GSA), which administers FSRS, plans to address some known reporting challenges as part of its plan to modernize FSRS. In the interim, the Department of the Treasury, which administers USAspending.gov, could more clearly disclose subaward data limitations by putting them where users are likely to see them.

OMB guidance delineates agency responsibilities for communicating prime award recipients' subaward data reporting requirements. However, OMB guidance is unclear on what processes agencies are expected to implement to support subaward data quality. Without clear expectations from OMB, agencies may not consistently or adequately support subaward data quality, which could affect the usability of subaward data.