

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105426](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Broadband access is critical for economic opportunity, healthcare, and civic engagement. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, established two new broadband grant programs—TBCP and BIP. NTIA issued a notice of funding opportunity for BIP in May 2021 and for TBCP in June 2021. NTIA allocated \$2.98 billion (from two separate appropriations) for TBCP and \$288 million for BIP.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, includes a provision for GAO to review the grants awarded under these programs. This report examines the extent to which NTIA's administration of TBCP and BIP aligned with relevant practices for (1) awarding grants, (2) performance management, and (3) fraud risk management.

GAO reviewed NTIA program documentation. GAO also interviewed program officials, industry associations, and a non-generalizable sample of program participants selected to reflect a variety in project types, geography, and other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 15 recommendations to NTIA to better measure TBCP and BIP performance and to complete fraud risk management activities. NTIA agreed with the recommendations and outlined actions to address them.

View [GAO-23-105426](#). For more information, contact Andrew Von Ah at (202) 512-2834 or vonaha@gao.gov.

January 2023

BROADBAND FUNDING

Stronger Management of Performance and Fraud Risk Needed for Tribal and Public-Private Partnership Grants

What GAO Found

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) management of the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program (TBCP) and Broadband Infrastructure Program (BIP) was generally consistent with recommended practices for awarding grants. However, NTIA took longer than expected to announce awards. For example, NTIA expected to announce TBCP award decisions in November 2021 but, as of September 2022, was continuing to announce awards on a rolling basis. NTIA officials said that the agency received many more applications than expected and needed to return more than three-quarters of TBCP applications for additional information. This step lengthened evaluation and selection. As of September 2022, NTIA had announced \$726 million in TBCP awards and had announced all \$288 million in BIP awards.

NTIA developed some performance goals and measures for TBCP and BIP, but they did not include all primary functions nor were they fully quantifiable. (See table). For example, NTIA set a TBCP goal to extend reliable, affordable broadband to 200,000 households, but did not include a goal related to funding broadband use and adoption projects, a key program function. Moreover, NTIA's goals for both programs included terms such as "reliable" and "affordable" that are not defined and therefore are not fully quantifiable. NTIA officials said that the agency was still developing goals and measures. Without comprehensive goals and measures, NTIA will be unable to track its progress.

Program Alignment with Selected Key Attributes of Successful Performance Goals and Measures

| Key attributes of successful performance goals and measures | Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program | Broadband Infrastructure Program |
|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Objective: free of significant bias or manipulation | ✓ | ✓ |
| Primary function: reflect the program's main functions | ✗ | ✓ |
| Measurable and quantifiable | ✗ | ✗ |
| Linkage: reflect the agency's strategic goals | ✓ | ✓ |

✓ indicates goal and measure fully aligned with key attribute

✗ indicates goal and measure did not fully align with key attribute in which some or all aspects were not met

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Agriculture documentation. | GAO-23-105426

NTIA's fraud risk management activities did not fully align with selected leading practices. Several offices in the Department of Commerce have roles in fraud risk management, but none was designated as lead. Additionally, NTIA did not conduct a fraud risk assessment, as called for by leading practices, by comprehensively identifying fraud risks, assessing the likelihood and impact of fraud, setting fraud risk tolerance, examining current antifraud controls, and documenting the fraud risk profile. Without designating an entity to oversee fraud risk management activities and conducting a five-step fraud risk assessment, NTIA lacks assurance that it is sufficiently positioned to combat fraud.