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GRANT PROGRAMS

Design Features Shape Flexibility, Accountability, and Performance Information



General Government Division

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The Honorable William H. Frist
Chairman, Education Task Force
Committee on the Budget
United States Senate

The Honorable Fred Thompson
Chairman, Committee on Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

Congress today faces the difficult question: Can grant programs be designed to promote flexibility at the state or local level as in traditional block grants, yet still provide the information needed to ensure accountability and support federal policy decisions? With block grant proposals on the horizon in education and other areas and the first performance plans now in under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA or the Results Act), this topic could hardly be more timely.

In response to your request, we conducted a comparative study of block grants and similar programs that give state or local governments substantial flexibility in determining how funds are to be used. The study covered 21 programs in diverse policy areas, from transportation to community mental health. Our objectives were to (1) examine the design characteristics of these programs that have implications for flexibility, accountability, and programs' ability to collect information about performance as envisioned in the Results Act; (2) identify the kinds and sources of performance information that programs with various characteristics have utilized and the strengths and weaknesses of this information; and (3) provide guidance to legislators and agency officials concerning the information collection options available for programs with various designs.

Results in Brief

Flexible grants—block grants and similar programs that give state or local governments the flexibility to adapt funded activities to fit the state or local context—are an adaptable policy tool and are found in fields from urban transit to community mental health. Flexible grant programs vary greatly in the kind and degree of flexibility afforded to state or local entities, distribution of accountability across levels of government, and availability of direct measures of program performance. Program variation reflects differences in three key design features: whether national

objectives for the grant are primarily performance-oriented or primarily fiscal; whether the grant funds a distinct “program” with its own operating structure or contributes to the stream of funds supporting state or local activities; and whether it supports a single major activity or diverse activities.

Flexibility is narrowest, but accountability to the federal level clearest, in programs that focus on a single major activity and pursue national performance objectives through a distinct operating structure. Flexibility is broadest in programs designed with the fiscal objective of adding to the stream of funds supporting diverse state or local activities. In these broadly flexible programs, the federal agency’s role is limited to providing funds. Program direction and accountability are assigned to the state level.

Design features also have implications for the availability of performance information. Although most reported simple activity or client counts, relatively few flexible programs collected uniform data on the outcomes of state or local service activities. Collecting such data requires conditions (such as uniformity of activities, objectives, and measures) that do not exist under many flexible program designs, and even where overall performance of a state or local program can be measured, the amount attributable to federal funding often cannot be separated out. Accordingly, flexible programs drew on other sources, including program evaluation studies, research and demonstration studies of service delivery methods, and aggregate data, to obtain an overall picture of performance.

Understanding grant design features and their implications can assist policymakers in applying the Results Act and in designing or redesigning grant programs. Considering a particular program’s national purpose, the federal agency role, and prospects for measuring performance attributable to the program can help agency officials and policymakers understand what program-generated information on results they can realistically expect and when alternative sources of information will be needed. This report closes with a design framework to assist policymakers in ensuring that accountability and information needs are met, whatever the type of design selected for a new or revised grant program.

Background

Categorical Programs, Block Grants, and Flexibility

Grants to state and local governments have historically been classified as either categorical grants or block grants. In terms of this historic classification, the typical categorical grant permits funds to be used only for specific, narrowly defined purposes and populations and includes administrative and reporting requirements that help to ensure both financial and programmatic accountability. These features, on the one hand, can make it easier for Congress to ascertain how funds have been used, and with what result. On the other hand, a grant system comprising numerous and overlapping specific programs, each with its own target populations and requirements, can create difficulties at the service delivery level. The combined coverage of related specific programs may be poorly matched to local needs, and differing eligibility and reporting requirements complicate program administration for service providers who receive funds from multiple grants.

The block grant approach can avoid these disadvantages.¹ In principle, block grants award funds to state or local governments, to be used at their discretion to support a range of activities aimed at achieving a broad national purpose. Consistent with their historic aim of devolving federal program responsibilities to, or supporting programs at, the state or local level, the block grants of the past (such as those of the 1980s) had limited administrative and reporting requirements. These features avoid many of the rigidities and burdens associated with multiple categorical grants. However, as our past reports have observed, these features also make it difficult for federal policymakers to ascertain how funds are being used and to verify that programs are achieving their intended purpose.²

In practice, the “categorical” and “block” grant labels and their underlying definitions represent the ends of a continuum and overlap considerably in its middle range. Some block grants have from their inception covered only a single major activity, and thus offer flexibility within a narrow range. The addition of constraints over the years has moved others toward the categorical end of the spectrum. Conversely, some initially categorical

¹Waivers from individual program requirements that enable a jurisdiction to combine funds from several programs more effectively can provide flexibility as well. For a report on the Department of Education’s waiver program, see *Education Programs: Information on the Ed-Flex Demonstration Project* (GAO/HEHS-98-61R, Dec. 15, 1997).

²Block Grants: Characteristics, Experience, and Lessons Learned (GAO/HEHS-95-74, Feb. 9, 1995) and Block Grants: Issues in Designing Accountability Provisions (GAO/AIMD-95-226, Sept. 1, 1995).

grants (such as Special Programs for Aging—Supportive Services and Senior Centers) have broadened and increased local flexibility over time and now look much like block grants. We use the term “flexible programs” to include all programs, however labeled, whose features put them in the block grant range.

The Results Act,
Performance
Measurement, and
Accountability

The Results Act embodies the current interest in holding federal agencies accountable for program performance. It requires each federal agency to develop a multiyear strategic plan that (1) states the agency’s mission; (2) identifies long-term strategic goals for each major function or operation; (3) describes how the agency intends to achieve those goals; (4) shows how annual performance goals relate to strategic goals; (5) identifies key factors beyond the agency’s control that could affect achievement of strategic goals; and (6) describes how program evaluations informed the plan and provides a schedule of future program evaluations. Agency strategic plans are the starting point for agencies to set annual goals for programs and to measure the performance of programs in achieving those goals.

Program goals and performance measures covering each program activity set forth in the agency’s budget are to be presented in annual performance plans.³ The first such plans, covering fiscal year 1999, were submitted to Congress in the spring of 1998. Each performance plan will be followed by a performance report that compares actual performance with the goals set forth in the performance plan and explains the reasons for slippage in cases where goals were not met and, if the goal was impractical or not feasible, the reasons for that and the actions recommended. Finally, the report is to include the summary findings of program evaluations completed during the fiscal year covered by the report.

Reviewing the Results Act’s requirements in light of traditional block grant design, we identified several questions that would likely arise in applying the Act to flexible programs.

- How can the Act take account of the federal goal of supporting state or local efforts and objectives and the limited agency role that accompanies this goal in traditional block grant design?
- When design features limit the federal agency’s ability to collect information through grantee reports, what performance measures can

³Agencies may use the program activities currently listed in their budget, or may aggregate, disaggregate, or consolidate program activities for performance plan and reporting purposes as long as these actions do not minimize the significance of any major agency function or activity.

broadly flexible programs reasonably be expected to provide under the Act, and by what means?

- How can programs that contribute to a variety of measurable goals—goals also served by other programs—be fit into the reporting structure?

In addition, we foresaw potential difficulties in discussing the “results” of flexible programs. The Results Act emphasizes measuring results in terms of program outputs, service levels, or outcomes, as opposed to the resources (inputs) and processes required to meet performance goals. (These terms and their relation to one another are explained in greater detail under Scope and Methodology, below). At the same time, the Act defines “outcomes” in terms of a program’s intended purpose, whatever that may be.

This purpose-based definition is a source of potential confusion over terminology. For example, the resources available to a program would ordinarily be considered inputs. But if the program’s purpose was to leverage resources available to an activity, an increase in inputs would be that program’s intended output, outcome, or result. The potential for confusion increases when programs at more than one level of government are involved—for example, when a federal program supports state programs that, in turn, deliver services to clients. Although federal funds ultimately result in client outcomes, the federal program may focus on an intermediate outcome, such as increasing the quantity of state services or the number of clients served.

Applying the Results Act to Flexible Programs

Studies of the early implementation of the Act suggest that programs that do not deliver a readily measurable product or service are likely to have difficulty meeting Results Act performance measurement and reporting requirements.⁴ Intergovernmental grant programs—and particularly those with the flexibility inherent in classic block grant design—may be particularly likely to have difficulty producing performance measures at the national level and raise delicate issues of accountability. We set out to examine these potential difficulties and how they might be addressed.

⁴Managing for Results: Analytic Challenges in Measuring Performance ([GAO/HEHS/GGD-97-138](#), May 30, 1997) and The Government Performance and Results Act: 1997 Governmentwide Implementation Will Be Uneven ([GAO/GGD-97-109](#), June 2, 1997).

Scope and Methodology

Definition and Selection of Flexible Programs

Drawing on the background materials summarized above, we defined a flexible grant program as one that offers state and local governments flexibility to define and implement a federal grant program in light of local needs and conditions. To identify flexible programs, we reviewed studies by GAO, the Congressional Research Service, and others on the block grants of the 1980s and program descriptions in the Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance and privately published grant catalogues. After creating a list of programs that appeared to offer flexibility, we eliminated programs that were narrow in scope, subject to detailed regulation, or relatively small in federal dollar terms (less than \$100 million). Programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) that were too new to have produced performance reports or evaluation data were also eliminated from consideration. This winnowed the list to 21 programs, administered by 12 agencies located in 6 cabinet departments, as listed in table 1. A summary of each program is included in appendix I.

Table 1: Programs Included in Our Study

Department	Agency	Program
Education	OESE	Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities—State Grants ^a
		Title VI Innovative Education Program Strategies
Health and Human Services (HHS)	ACF	Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
		Child Welfare Services State Grants ^a
		Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)
		Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
		Social Services Block Grant
	AOA	Special Programs for the Aging—Nutrition Services ^a
		Special Programs for the Aging—Supportive Services and Senior Centers ^a
	CDC	Preventive Health and Health Services (PHHS) Block Grant
	HRSA	Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant
	SAMHSA	Community Mental Health Services Block Grant
Housing and Urban Development (HUD)	CPD	Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant
		Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)—Entitlement Program
		Community Development Block Grants—States
Justice	BJA	Byrne Formula (Drug Control and System Improvement) Grants ^a
Labor	ETA	Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)—titles II-A and II-C
Transportation (DOT)	FHWA	National Highway System (NHS) ^a
		Surface Transportation Program (STP)
	FTA	Urbanized Area Formula Program ^a
	NHTSA/FHWA	State and Community Highway Safety Grants

Legend:

ACF - Administration for Children and Families
 AOA - Administration on Aging
 BJA - Bureau of Justice Assistance
 CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
 CPD - Community Planning and Development
 ETA - Employment and Training Administration
 FHWA - Federal Highway Administration
 FTA - Federal Transit Administration
 HRSA - Health Resources and Services Administration
 NHTSA - National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
 OESE - Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
 SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

^aNot formally designated a block grant.

Source: GAO analysis based on grant program directories.

These 21 programs were listed in the Appendix to the Budget for FY 1999 as follows:

- 3 grant programs (LIHEAP, Child Care and Development, and Social Services) each constituted a budget account,
- 11 were listed individually as a program activity within a budget account,
- 1 (Aging—Nutrition) was divided into two program activities (congregate meals and home-delivered meals), and
- The remaining 6 grant programs (2 SAMHSA grants, 2 CDBG grants, JTPA, and Child Welfare) were not listed as separate program activities.

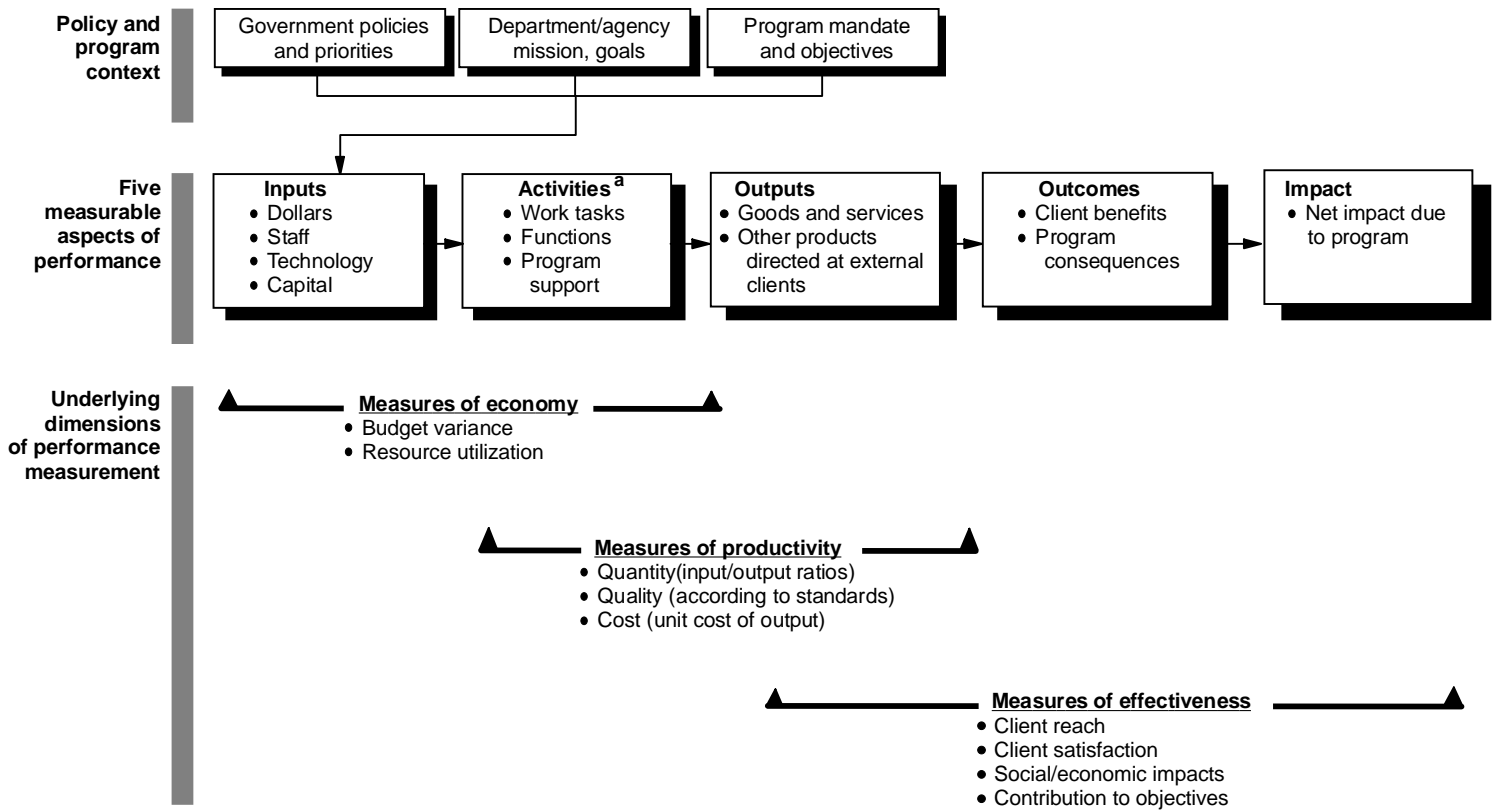
Aspects of Performance

Our identification of performance-related program objectives and measures was guided by Office of Management and Budget (OMB) documents prepared to assist agencies in meeting the performance measurement requirements of the Results Act. OMB identified five aspects of performance, each representing a major step in the process of converting program resources into program results. These are

- inputs: the resources (dollars, staff, technology, capital) the manager has available to carry out the program or activity;
- activities: the actions through which program purposes are carried out (OMB uses the term “service delivery,” but we prefer “activities” because not all programs deliver services and because “allowable activities” listed in grant statutes are typically the basis for reporting.);
- outputs: goods, products, or services produced (amount, quality, quantity or other attributes, cost);
- outcomes: the results of a program (e.g., client benefits or program consequences) compared with its intended purpose; and
- impact or net impact: direct or indirect effects or consequences; outcomes that would not have occurred in the absence of the program.

How these aspects of performance relate to each other in the typical service program is depicted in figure 1. As the lower part of the figure indicates, performance can be measured in terms of several underlying dimensions or criteria, such as quantity, quality, cost, or client reach (coverage of the targeted population).

Figure 1: Performance Spectrum and Measurement



^aOMB uses the term "service delivery."

Source: Adapted from OMB.

As mentioned previously, the meaning of any given measures is contingent on a program’s purpose. For example, if a program’s purpose is to leverage resources, its output would be measured in terms of dollars or other resources—units that are ordinarily considered inputs and that may indeed be inputs for a related program or activity. To avoid linguistic confusion, we base our terminology on what is being measured at the operating or service delivery program level. For example, we consistently call dollars to support service delivery an “input.” If such dollars function as output from the federal program perspective, we make this clear.

Data Sources and Data Analysis

We consulted the authorizing statute, regulations (if any), and other official guidance for each program. We obtained copies of reporting forms; examples of completed grantee and federal agency reports; information on databases utilized by the program; a report from each mandated national evaluation; and copies of other program evaluations, research or demonstration studies, or effective practice documents referenced in program literature. We also spoke with agency staff concerned with program management, evaluation, and performance measurement. Information from these various sources was converted to numeric codes accompanied by a text summary of design features (including flexibility and accountability) and of performance information, by source, for each program. We conducted our review from January through November 1997 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Our review focused solely on the federal level. We did not consult state or local officials of the programs we studied. Although we asked agency officials about, and noted the existence of, substantial variation across states in program implementation, we did not pursue these differences in any detail. It is also important to note that our analysis of program objectives and measures reflects conditions predating the submission of performance plans under the Results Act. Officials for several of the programs were in the process of rethinking objectives and measures in light of Results Act requirements but had not framed specific plans, and some programs were approaching reauthorizations that might result in major changes. Finally, in noting the strengths and weaknesses of information sources, we relied on comments by reviewers who had examined those sources and on our knowledge of such sources in general. We did not conduct independent evaluations of the data.

We asked agency staff to review the program summaries prepared for the draft of this report for accuracy and completeness and incorporated corrections into the summaries as appropriate.

Grant Programs Vary Considerably

Our review of flexible grant program features revealed that these programs differ substantially from one another. We found variation in the level of government to which key program decisions were delegated, management flexibility and constraints with respect to grant-funded activities, funding and related constraints, and availability of performance information. (A summary of each program, organized in terms of these characteristics and other key features, is included in app. I.)

Flexibility Takes Many Forms

Flexibility varies in terms of who gets it (states, local units, or both) and the types of decisions covered and applicable constraints. Each of the programs we studied offered flexibility in at least one decision area of key importance for performance and accountability, and some offered flexibility in several areas. The performance-related decision areas we considered were

- distribution of funds to subrecipients: What entities will receive funds to carry out activities, and in what amounts?
- choice of activities: What allowable activities will funds support?
- allocation of grant funds across activities: How much will be spent on each?

Flexibility Is Delegated to States, Local Entities, or Both

Although funds went first of all to the state in 19 of our 21 programs, 9 of them required that the bulk of state grant funds be further distributed to specified local entities. In some, like the two Special Programs for the Aging, the local entities operated under the umbrella of state planning and supervision. In others, such as the two education grants, activity selection and resource allocation decisions were lodged at the local level and the state was given a minimal supervisory role. Only two of our programs—Community Services and CDBG Entitlement—awarded funds directly to regional or local units of government.

Delegated Decisions Are Subject to Various Constraints

As is typical of federal grants, each of our programs listed allowable activities—that is, activities for which grant funds could be used. The activities listed were of a broad, general nature for some programs and quite specific in others, and in a few cases even included transferring funds to another grant program. State or local choice with respect to these activities, however, was subject to a variety of constraints. Some of the constraints we found placed on choice of activities included

- allowing only one major activity or group of related activities (e.g., Job Training Partnership Act programs);
- allowing only specified activities for which approaches of proven effectiveness were available, with exceptions permitted only when supported by data and analysis (e.g., State and Community Highway Safety);
- requiring one particular activity (e.g., specific activities to reduce access to tobacco products by persons under the age of 18 under the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Grant, or laws requiring sex offenders to be tested for human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) if the victim requests it

under the Byrne Formula grants) while allowing choice among other allowable activities; and

- requiring that each allowable activity be undertaken somewhere in the state (e.g., Community Services Block Grant).

Discretion over funds allocation for many programs was constrained by caps (limits on the percentage of funds that could be spent on a given activity) or set-asides (required minimum percentages to be used for a specific activity). A number of programs also included fiscal provisions that constrained states' use of their own funds—for example, by requiring that states “match” federal dollars with state dollars, maintain former levels of state spending, or use federal funds to supplement rather than replace or supplant state funds.

Table 2 summarizes conditions of limited, moderate, and broad state flexibility for each decision area with respect to those areas and constraints discussed thus far.

Table 2: Variations in Flexibility in Three Decision Areas

Flexibility	Distribution to subrecipients	Choice of activities	Allocation of grant funds across activities
Limited	Grant specifies substate recipients and amounts per recipient (7 programs)	Grant allows only one major activity (7 programs)	Caps or set-asides apply to two or more activities (7 programs)
Moderate	Recipients are specified, but state sets amounts (4 programs)	Grant allows at least several activities, but places constraints on choice among them (9 programs)	Caps or set-asides apply to one activity (5 programs)
Broad	State selects recipients and determines amounts (10 programs)	Grant allows unconstrained choice among a broad range of activities (5 programs)	No caps or set-asides (9 programs)

Source: GAO analysis of program features.

Among the programs we reviewed, only two (Social Services and Preventive Health) granted states broad flexibility on all three dimensions. The title VI Innovative Education Program delegated similarly broad flexibility over activities and resource allocation to the local level. Seven additional programs had at least moderate flexibility in all three areas, and no program was limited in all three decision areas. Combinations of flexibility and constraint took many different forms. For example, the Maternal and Child Health Services Program allowed broad flexibility with respect to subrecipients and activities, but included set-asides that directed the majority of funds to children's services.

Accountability Provisions Present a Mixed Picture

The delegations of decision power that define each level of government's role in managing program-funded activities also identify the aspects of program performance for which each can be held accountable. As we have seen, flexible programs in our study lodged decision power (and thus accountability) at the state and local levels to varying degrees and with varying constraints. We investigated whether the lines of delegation downward were accompanied by provisions (such as standards or reporting requirements) that established accountability for performance to the federal funding agency, and we found a mixed picture.

We first looked for the inclusion of objectives, standards, and criteria for performance in program provisions. Fifteen of the 21 programs incorporated national operational standards, objectives, or criteria concerning some aspect or dimension of performance. Such objectives focused most commonly on activities (e.g., the requirement that the National Highway System meet federal approved design standards). However, six programs included service output objectives or standards (such as job retention standards under JTPA), and nine included outcome objectives (e.g., energy savings from home weatherization activities under LIHEAP). Thirteen programs, including those in the health areas, incorporated reference to state standards or required states to set objectives. Four included no reference to standards or objectives at any level of government.

Finally, we examined data collection and reporting provisions, which establish who must report what to whom. Among our programs, four lacked authority to collect uniform data on performance from grantees. Eight did not require an agency performance report to Congress on the program, and two did not require state or local program or performance reports to the funding agency.⁵ Fifteen programs, including two that awarded decision powers to local entities, required state, but not local, reports.

Program-Specific Measures of Performance Are Limited

As past studies and our findings on data collection and reporting suggested might be the case, we found that among our programs, the program-specific performance information collected through program operations was limited. All but one, Child Welfare Services, collected data on some aspect of performance. However, about one-third reported only aggregate client counts and dollars spent on each allowable activity.

⁵All agencies and programs must submit certain standard government reports, such as reports under the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990.

Fourteen programs had service output data, and of these, only five obtained outcome data from program operations.

Variation Reflects Key Design Features

In addition to varying in the ways just described, the programs in our study differed greatly from each other in terms of a few key design features—national objectives, nature of operations, and diversity of activities—each representing an important policy choice. We found that these features, singly and in combination, defined the flexibility given to grantees, accountability for performance, and likely availability of performance information.

National Objectives: Performance-Related or Fiscal

Our first key feature concerns the nature of the national objectives to be served through the federal grant program. We are not speaking here of such broad, ultimate national purposes as decreasing poverty, but rather of the more immediate, direct, and concrete objectives to be attained through the provision of grant funds. Grant programs' objectives can be characterized as either performance-related or fiscal.

Performance-related objectives focus on service or production activities and their results. In our study, we found objectives representing many aspects of performance measurable under the Results Act, including

- leveraging resources (input),
- improving service quality (activity),
- increasing coverage of targeted populations (client reach), and
- achieving specified service outputs or outcomes.

For example, the central objective of the grants for Special Programs for the Aging—Nutrition Services is to provide nutritious meals (activity) to needy older Americans (client reach) so as to improve nutrition and reduce social isolation (outcomes).

Fiscal or financial assistance objectives focus on providing dollars to support or expand activities. Typical fiscal objectives include increasing support for meritorious goods or underfunded services and targeting grant funding to needy jurisdictions.⁶ For example, the objective of the Title VI Innovative Education grants is to provide funds to support local educational reform efforts. In performance measurement terms, fiscal

⁶These and other fiscal objectives are discussed in *Federal Grants: Design Improvements Could Help Federal Resources Go Further* (GAO/AIMD-97-7, Dec. 18, 1996).

objectives translate into an emphasis on increasing inputs so as to increase the quantity of activities or outputs in general or to targeted clients or areas.

The presence of performance objectives and provisions that implement them constrains flexibility, provides the basis for performance measurement and accountability, and signals a federal role in managing performance under the grant. When objectives are purely fiscal, accountability to the federal agency focuses on fiscal matters. For example, if the national objective is to encourage states to provide more of a nationally important service (like substance abuse prevention and treatment), states may be held accountable for using grant funds to supplement rather than to supplant their own spending on that service.

Nature of Operation: As a Program or a Funding Stream

A second critical feature concerns whether national objectives are to be achieved through a grant-specific operating program or simply through adding to the stream of funds supporting ongoing state or local programs. An operating program is a program in the commonsense meaning of the term. It has performance requirements and objectives and carries out distinct programwide functions through a distinct delivery system in such a way that grant-funded activities, clients, or products are clearly identifiable. Several of the programs we studied, such as the Aging—Nutrition Services program, were of this nature.

Grants in our study that operated as a funding stream were not federal “programs” in this sense. Here, the federal agency provided funds that were merged with funds from state or local sources (and sometimes from other federal sources as well) to support state or local activities allowable under the flexible grant. The grant was one funding source among many, and the programs supported were state or local programs. For example, the Child Welfare Program supports state foster care, child care, child protection, and adoption and related services, the bulk of whose funding comes from other federal and nonfederal sources.

Like performance objectives, we found that operation as a national program gave the federal agency a role in managing performance under the grant. Operation as a program also simplified the task of getting uniform information about performance attributable to grant funds. It made it possible to identify which activities were supported, the amount of federal funds allocated to each, and to various extents, the results of federal support.

By contrast, we observed that in programs that operate as a funding stream, the activities supported were managed at the state or local level. In the words of agency staff, quoting state officials, “These aren’t federal programs, they are state programs that receive federal funds.” The federal agency’s role was limited accordingly, and it sometimes involved little more than seeing that applications for funding were properly submitted, compliance or audit issues were resolved, and money was disbursed in a timely fashion. Where grant-funded activities were managed at the local level, as in the two education programs we studied, title VI Innovative Education and Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, the state’s role was similarly limited.

Operation as a funding stream complicates the task of getting uniform, program-specific information. We found that when grant funds were part of a stream, it was possible to identify which activities federal funds supported and the amount allocated to each. But once added to the overall budget for a state or local activity, federal dollars lost their identity, and their results could not be separated out—particularly when the federal share was small. Thus, the only program outcome measures available were likely to be for the state or local service delivery program, not the federal funding program.

Activities: Single or Diverse

The third key feature concerns diversity of activities. Having only one major activity, as in the Aging—Nutrition program, narrowed the scope of flexibility but eased the task of measuring and holding grantees accountable for performance. Finding a common metric for performance was rarely feasible for programs that funded activities that had little in common with each other from state to state.

We found that these features tend to occur in four major combinations that have important implications for flexibility, accountability, and performance information.

Design Features Form Four Major Combinations

Examining how the design features were used in the 21 diverse programs we studied, we identified four major combinations or design types. We have summarized them in table 3, which shows design features, examples, and summary comments associated with each type. As the last column indicates, state or local flexibility and control over performance objectives and performance management increase as you move down the table.

Table 3: Grant Design Features in Combination

National objectives	Nature of operations	Diversity of activities	Examples	Comments
Performance-related	Program	Single major activity	Job Training Partnership Act, titles II-A and II-C	Federal role is substantial. State or local flexibility is narrowest.
			Special Programs for the Aging—Nutrition Services	Most likely to include national service outcome objectives. Most likely to have program performance information at the national level.
	Funding stream	Single major activity to diverse activities	Child Care and Development Block Grant	Federal-state balance is established case by case. Flexibility varies with diversity of activities.
			Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant	Performance objectives and measures may be state or local. Less likely to have national performance information.
Fiscal	Program (or project)	Diverse activities	Community Development Block Grant—Entitlement	State or local level is dominant. Flexibility is broad.
			Byrne Formula Grants	Likely to have performance and evaluation information at the project level.
	Funding stream	Single major activity to diverse activities	Title VI: Innovative Education Program Strategies	Federal role is confined to providing funds. Flexibility varies with diversity of activities.
			Social Services Block Grant	Gives broadest discretion to grantee. Least likely to have performance information.

Source: GAO analysis of program features.

Grants of our first type pursue performance-related objectives through a distinct operating structure (top row). Grants in our study that exemplified this type were closest to the conventional notion of a “program.” They focused on a single major activity and included programwide performance objectives and, sometimes, service outcome objectives. Because of this, the agencies that administered grants in this group were able (with proper authorization) to collect nationally uniform information about performance from grantees. For example, the national objectives of the Job Training Partnership Act are to provide job training that leads to increases in employment and earnings of youths and adults facing serious barriers to participation in the work force. To evaluate the results of the

program in achieving these objectives, the terms of the grant require recipient organizations to provide counts of activities provided, demographic characteristics of individuals served, employment outcomes, and program costs.

Our second grant design type covers performance-related, funding stream grants (second row), which involve national performance objectives yet operate through state or local programs. Most programs of this type in our study covered a state or local function or delivery system (such as preventive health) involving various activities. National performance objectives typically concerned system improvement or capacity-building, ensuring access to services, service quality, and targeting of activities to priority populations. Several grants in this group require state or local grantees to set their own performance objectives of various kinds. Provisions of the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant, for example, require each state to fund activities related to Healthy People 2000 objectives and to measure and report the progress of the state in meeting the objectives selected.⁷ About half of the programs in this group provided information on program outputs.

Our third type includes grants with fiscal objectives (third row) that provide support for program-like—rather than ongoing—state or local activities. These activities often take the form of projects—similar to operating programs in having clear boundaries, but with a clear start and finish as well. Grant provisions for some of our programs in this group included national criteria for selecting activities, such as the benefits test that applies to projects supported by Community Development Block Grants—Entitlement. Otherwise, performance objectives and measures were set at the operating level. Under the Byrne Formula (Drug Control and System Improvement) Grant Program, for example, states are required to set performance objectives for activities that are funded and to evaluate the success of these activities in achieving those objectives.

Our fourth type concerns fiscal funding stream grants (bottom row). They allow a broad range of activities and represent the classic block grant design of the early 1980s. Consistent with their purpose, grants of this design in our study required only the information needed to determine how much was spent on each activity and to verify that funds were used

⁷Healthy People 2000 is a national cooperative effort by government, voluntary, and professional organizations to improve the health of all Americans. It has established some 300 specific health objectives and uses more than 200 data systems and data sets to measure progress toward those objectives. Many states set objectives linked to the Healthy People framework, but targeted to local concerns and issues.

for allowable purposes and that any requirements related to fiscal objectives (such as maintenance of effort) were met. Some of these programs made an effort to get service output information (such as client counts), but even this could be difficult. For example, where actual counts of recipients served are not available, the Social Services Block Grant program accepts counts based on estimation procedures that may vary in their statistical validity.

Balancing Flexibility and Accountability and Implications for Information

These four design types present very different situations with respect to grantee accountability—what grantees are held accountable for and the level of government that is accountable for performance—and the information needed to support it. They also differ with respect to the information needed to support program decisions at the national level and prospects for getting this information through grantee reporting, as opposed to other means.

Grantee Accountability to the Federal Level and the Information Needed to Support It

As our previous report has noted, accountability is an elusive concept whose meaning depends on the context.⁸ At a minimum, all state grantees are accountable to the federal level for financial management and for using funds to support allowable activities, as verified through annual audits. Beyond that, the accountability of grant recipients to the federal level varies from grant to grant. We observed that the variation reflected the type of objective, and if performance objectives were involved, whether the federal level managed the program or merely added to the stream of funds supporting state or local programs. We describe the situation for each type of grant below, with a focus on performance issues.

Accountability for performance to the federal level was most extensive in grants we studied that included national performance objectives and operated as distinct programs—grants with the most limited flexibility. As mentioned previously, programs of this type collected and reported information in line with their performance objectives, which were concerned with program implementation, outputs, or (when possible to measure) direct outcomes of services. (End outcomes are another matter, which we discuss in the next section.)

Objectives, information, and reporting were similarly lined up in programs we studied that had primarily fiscal objectives and operated as funding streams. But here, accountability focused on fiscal matters. The funding

⁸See [GAO/AIMD-95-226](#), Sept. 1, 1995.

agency was accountable for ensuring compliance with fiscal objectives. However, the activities funded were under state or local direction, and accountability for the conduct and outcomes of funded activities was to state or local authorities under whatever arrangements they had put in place. Federal reporting requirements were minimal, and performance information did not necessarily flow to the federal funding agency.

The grants that combine federal performance objectives with operation through state or local programs present puzzling performance measurement and accountability issues, particularly for service outcome objectives. Activities supported with federal funds and the information collected about performance generally differed from state to state. (This difficulty affected fiscal-objective operating programs as well.) While state or local program outcomes in total were measurable for some programs, the component attributable to federal funding could not be separated out. Thus, measuring performance at the level of the federal program through grantee reporting was not feasible. For accountability purposes, measuring overall performance of the state or local program would not necessarily be appropriate, particularly when the federal grant contributes only a small fraction of the cost. However, state program data or even statewide indicators were sometimes adopted as performance measures, as in the Preventive Health program.

**Strengthening
Accountability and
Information at the State
Level**

Assuming that operation through state or local programs is feasible, how can national grant programs encourage the achievement of national performance objectives and encourage accountability for performance, yet respect state and local authority, interests, and differences? We found several approaches to this dilemma among our programs. Some approaches sought to strengthen accountability to the state or local agency that received federal funds. (They were designed to mitigate the risk that existing state or local oversight and management arrangements might be insufficient to ensure strong performance.) For example, the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which has a national objective of increasing service quality, directs states or localities to set service delivery or quality standards and monitor whether their own standards are being met. States and localities are then accountable to the federal agency for implementing these provisions.

The Department of Education has been experimenting with a different approach. The Department grants temporary exemptions (waivers) from certain federal program requirements to states or school districts that

demonstrate that the waiver will lead to educational improvements. These waivers are intended as a tool to expand the flexibility available to local school districts in exchange for increased accountability for student achievement. The results of this experiment are not yet in.⁹

One final example of an approach to serving national objectives through state or local activities relies on the techniques embodied in the Government Performance and Results Act—that is, requiring states or localities to set performance objectives for the activities or projects they choose to support with federal funds and to report to the federal funding agency on progress toward meeting those objectives. Provisions of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act, for example, require states and local education agencies to establish drug use and violence prevention-objectives, report the outcomes of state and local programs, and assess their effectiveness toward meeting the objectives.

Under this “results” approach, accountability for performance remains at the level of the state or local agency doing the reporting, not the federal or state agency to whom the report is directed. The federal or state agency receives the information but does not use it for program management.¹⁰ This information, however, can be useful in assessing the degree to which national objectives for the program are being met, a subject to which we now turn.

Information to Support Program Decisions at the Federal Level

To make decisions about the programs they oversee, congressional committees are likely to need evaluative information—information that tells them whether, and in what important respects, a program is working well or poorly, as well as whether performance objectives are being met. As we noted previously, performance data collected from grantees can be an important source of information. Uniform data from program operations have the advantage of being program specific. However, collecting reliable uniform data at the national program level requires conditions—such as uniformity of activities, objectives, and measures—that are unlikely to exist under many flexible grant program designs. Even where overall performance can be measured, the amount attributable to federal funding often cannot be separated out. Additionally, some programs have ultimate outcome goals, such as increasing highway

⁹Education Programs: Information on the Ed-Flex Demonstration Project (GAO/HEHS-98-61R, Dec. 15, 1997).

¹⁰See Safe and Drug-Free Schools: Balancing Accountability With State and Local Flexibility (GAO/HEHS-98-3, Oct. 10, 1997).

safety, which are measurable only through aggregate data. Finally, the time frame over which performance data are collected, typically 1 year, may be inadequate to capture long-term outcomes.

More importantly, performance data from program operations cannot answer the full range of questions that are likely to arise during congressional oversight. We have found that Congress is also likely to need

- descriptive information that goes beyond the general summary level to convey a sense of the variety of conditions under which the program operates and how federal funds are actually being used—for flexible grants, information that shows how grant funds fit into the context of other programs is of particular interest;
- information about program implementation, including whether feasibility or management problems are evident and whether the methods used to deliver services are of known or likely effectiveness;
- information concerning positive or negative side effects of the program; and
- information that will help determine whether this program’s strategy is more effective in relation to its cost than others that serve the same purpose.¹¹

Some of this information is likely to be available from federal agency staff, particularly if the agency plays an active oversight or technical assistance role. But much of it comes from other sources, including program evaluations, research and demonstration studies, and aggregate data. We found that agencies made use of these sources, both singly and in combination.

Program Evaluation Studies Answer a Variety of Questions

Program evaluations are defined as individual, systematic studies conducted periodically or on an ad hoc basis to assess how well a program is working. Evaluations can address the extent to which program activities conform to requirements, how successfully a program meets its objectives, or the net effect it has on participants. Other types of evaluations can address program outcomes or impacts in comparison to the cost of producing them. Typically, evaluations gather performance information from a sample of sites under controlled conditions and are conducted by experts outside the program.

¹¹Program Evaluation: Improving the Flow of Information to the Congress (GAO/PEMD-95-1, Jan. 30, 1995).

Eight of the programs we studied have been evaluated on a national basis. Evaluations were done for programs of every type and purpose and focused on a variety of questions, as these examples illustrate.

- A 1994 evaluation measured the impact of the JTPA titles II-A and II-C programs by comparing program outcomes with estimates of what would have happened in the absence of the program. The study found that access to JTPA produced gains in earnings for adult men and women but did not significantly increase youths' earnings or decrease their welfare benefits. The authors of the study concluded that youths might need more intensive services than adults or services of a different type.¹²
- Using information from interviews, on-site reviews, and nutritional analysis of meals provided, a 1993-95 evaluation of the Aging—Nutrition program demonstrated that it had succeeded in targeting elderly who were at risk for poor nutrition and that participants had higher daily intakes of nutrients and more social contacts per month than a comparable group of nonparticipants.¹³
- A study of a sample of district-level Safe and Drug-Free Schools programs in the early 1990s found that while some school-based drug prevention programs had small positive effects on student outcomes, implementation was characterized by variability in the services actually delivered, limited funds, competing demands on staff time, and the use of approaches that have not shown evidence of effectiveness.¹⁴
- A 1994 evaluation of the CDBG—Entitlement Program examined data from 96 communities and concluded that they had the capability to implement the program effectively and were making beneficial use of the flexibility it afforded, as Congress intended.¹⁵

In addition to conducting programwide evaluations, nine agencies evaluated particular aspects of their programs, such as the injury prevention component of the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

¹²Larry L. Orr and others, Does Training for the Disadvantaged Work? Evidence from the National JTPA Study (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1996).

¹³Michael Ponza, James C. Ohls, and Barbara E. Millen, Serving Elders at Risk: The Older Americans Act Nutrition Programs, National Evaluation of the Elderly Nutrition Program, 1993-1995, Executive Summary (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

¹⁴E. Suyapa Silvia and Judy Thorne, School-Based Drug Prevention Programs: A Longitudinal Study in Selected School Districts, Executive Summary (Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute, 1997).

¹⁵Christopher Walker and others, "Federal Funds, Local Choices: An Evaluation of the Community Development Block Grant Program" (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute Press, 1994).

National program evaluations have the potential to answer questions about program performance in depth and provide an overall assessment of how effectively and efficiently a program operates in terms of its implementation, outcomes, impacts, and cost-effectiveness. However, national programwide evaluations are expensive in terms of dollars and time and frequently require capacities and resources beyond those provided for program management. Also, programwide evaluation data are typically periodic and often cover too few sites to support national estimates of performance.

Although many programs encourage state and local evaluations, only one program we examined mandated programwide state-level evaluations, and only three mandated programwide local evaluations. Although these evaluations are potentially useful for state and local program managers and providers, we found they were limited in their ability to provide information on program performance on a national level. Reviews of state and local evaluations under the programs we studied indicated that such evaluations varied widely in scope and sophistication. In many cases, resources and capacities for conducting formal evaluations were limited. Programs tended to find these evaluations more helpful in identifying successful practices than in providing information about overall program effectiveness. Also, differences in evaluation questions and methodologies made it difficult to aggregate results to provide a national picture or to systematically compare the effectiveness of alternative projects aimed at the same objective.

Research Provides Information on the Effectiveness of Methods

Information on the effectiveness of service delivery methods comes largely from research and demonstration studies. Knowledge to support effective practice is well established in some of the subject areas covered in our sample of grants and was incorporated into program provisions (such as service standards) or in companion technical assistance or knowledge dissemination programs.

Information based on research can be used very effectively by programs when links between activities and outcomes are known. Among our programs, those related to the physical and biological science areas, such as health and transportation, had the most direct links to research and demonstration studies. For example, the Federal Highway Administration has approved standards and guidelines for construction projects to help build in safety and efficiency for the projects it helps support and funds activities to increase the knowledge base in areas related to transportation

safety and efficiency. The Maternal and Child Health Program makes extensive use of research for all aspects of program operation, including training requirements for providers and the nature and extent of activities provided. Programs in the human services areas included in our study were less directly tied to research findings.

**Aggregate Measures
Provide Indirect Evidence
of Performance**

Aggregate measures are survey or record-based data that describe the general status of a population or the availability of a product or service. Some of these data used by programs in our study, such as state vital statistics records, were developed independently but have proven to be useful indicators for related programs. Others, such as those developed by DOT, were developed expressly to serve as outcome indicators for federal programs.

About half of the programs we examined (10 of 21) used aggregate data for purposes other than formula allocation. Programs in health and transportation, with objectives that address building or strengthening an entire service delivery system, have particularly drawn on such data. To assess state progress toward meeting the Healthy People 2000 health goals, for example, the Preventive Health program uses state-level data from a wide variety of federal and state reporting systems, including national health, transportation, and education surveys, and state records, such as cancer registries and vital statistics. DOT makes extensive use of aggregate data, including federal data from the Bureau of the Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Environmental Protection Agency, as well as data from private organizations, such as the American Automobile Manufacturers Association's Motor Vehicle Facts and Figures and the Eno Transportation Foundation's Transportation in America.

Aggregate measures of social, environmental, educational, or health outcomes can be useful in assessing the combined results of related programs whose individual impact cannot be readily disaggregated. Additionally, they allow uniform and independent comparisons over time and place little or no burden on service providers and resources. However, data collected by these measures have the disadvantage of not being program specific, and their connection to any particular program may be difficult or impossible to determine. In addition, programs that provide a relatively small contribution to overall resources in an area, no matter how well they operate, are likely to have very little effect on aggregate results.

Many Programs Use Sources in Combination

Thirteen programs used information from other sources along with, or as a substitute for, performance measures collected through program operations. The programs using these multiple sources had information that covered more aspects of program performance than programs that relied upon a single source. Data from different sources complemented each other in interesting ways. For example:

- DOT draws on data from a large array of sources to assess the state of the transportation system and the comprehensive results of its programs. For example, data from the Fatal Accident Report System, compiled by DOT from multiple sources, including state police accident reports, vehicle registration files, and emergency medical reports, are used to monitor DOT's progress in meeting the national safety goals of its highway programs, including the Surface Transportation Block Grant and the State and Community Highway Safety Program. Data from HHS' Health, United States, the National Safety Council's Accident Facts, and the European Council of Ministers of Transit's Statistical Report on Road Accidents are used with DOT data to measure trends and to compare accident severity in the United States with that in other countries. DOT uses findings from engineering research to approve design standards and to provide safety guidelines for construction and rehabilitation projects. Findings from human resource research are disseminated to encourage states and communities to fund education and prevention programs that have been successful.
- The Child Care and Development Block Grant has used information from a variety of sources to augment program data. For example, data from the Bureau of Census' Survey of Income and Program Participation, including statistics on child care arrangements, population coverage, and costs, have been used to address the availability and affordability of child care resources. Findings from research and their practical applications for state-level child care policymakers are disseminated through symposiums to improve the quality of child care.
- Energy assistance questions of direct relevance for LIHEAP have been included in two national surveys, the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey and the Department of Energy's Residential Energy Consumption Survey. Program officials use these data to determine the characteristics of families participating in the LIHEAP program and to compare the energy consumption and expenditure patterns of all households, non-low-income households, low-income households, and LIHEAP recipient households.
- HHS' Administration on Aging drew information on performance in the Aging—Nutrition program from a program implementation evaluation

conducted by AOA and the Office of Inspector General that examined how well nutrition and client targeting objectives were being addressed; from compliance reviews conducted by regional office administrators that examined how states assess Area Agencies on Aging and service providers; from a major review of the research literature on nutrition and the elderly; and from the congressionally mandated national evaluation. AOA also developed a new, congressionally mandated database and standard reporting system that was designed to support an outcome orientation and develop definitions and reporting practices that could be used across an array of federal programs.

Using data from different sources for these purposes can involve technical difficulties. Definitions and data collection conventions may vary from one source to another. Additionally, data are likely to have been collected at different points in time. Such differences must be taken into account when data from diverse sources are used together, or results might be misleading.

We found that all of the information sources we described were more likely to be available when backed by statutory authorization and budget resources than when they were not. As we observed in our earlier study, Congress is more likely to get the information it asks for and pays for.¹⁶

Concluding Observations and Design Framework

Our study was prompted by interest in determining how existing flexible programs obtain information about performance as envisioned under the Results Act and what guidance we might offer with respect to (1) the treatment of such programs under the Results Act and (2) the design of future flexible programs—or redesign of existing programs—to help ensure that adequate information about performance is available.

Applying the Results Act to Flexible Programs

In summarizing the Results Act's requirements, we noted three aspects of the Act that seemed of particular importance for flexible programs. They are its emphasis on (1) defining results in terms of program purpose, (2) aggregating activities sensibly for planning and reporting, and (3) employing alternative sources of information where performance was difficult to measure through program operations. We offer concluding observations on each of these points.

¹⁶See [GAO/PEMD-95-1](#).

In applying the Results Act, it is important to clarify whether federal objectives for a flexible grant program extend only to the initial stages of performance—enhancing resources or increasing the quantity of state or local services—or include the production of end results (such as client outcomes). The funding agency’s ability to influence or control state or local activities and their outcomes, given the program design, is also an important factor to consider in deciding whether the program can reasonably be linked to the achievement of end results in an agency’s performance plan.

With respect to aggregation, the primary question is whether a given flexible grant program can reasonably be treated as a free-standing activity that contributes to a particular agency performance goal. A few of the programs we studied had performance goals unlike those of other agency-funded activities and could appropriately be treated in this manner. However, a number of others contributed toward client outcome goals or indicators that receive support through other agency-funded activities as well. In shared-goal situations, aggregation or consolidation seems preferable to treating the individual grant program as the unit of analysis. Aggregation and disaggregation decisions are likely to be particularly complicated for grants that contribute toward a wide variety of end-outcome goals.

As we have seen, some flexible programs’ designs inherently limit the prospect of collecting programwide performance data through program operations. In applying the Results Act, it is important to recognize these limitations and to provide for information to be gathered through program evaluations and other sources, such as those we have illustrated.

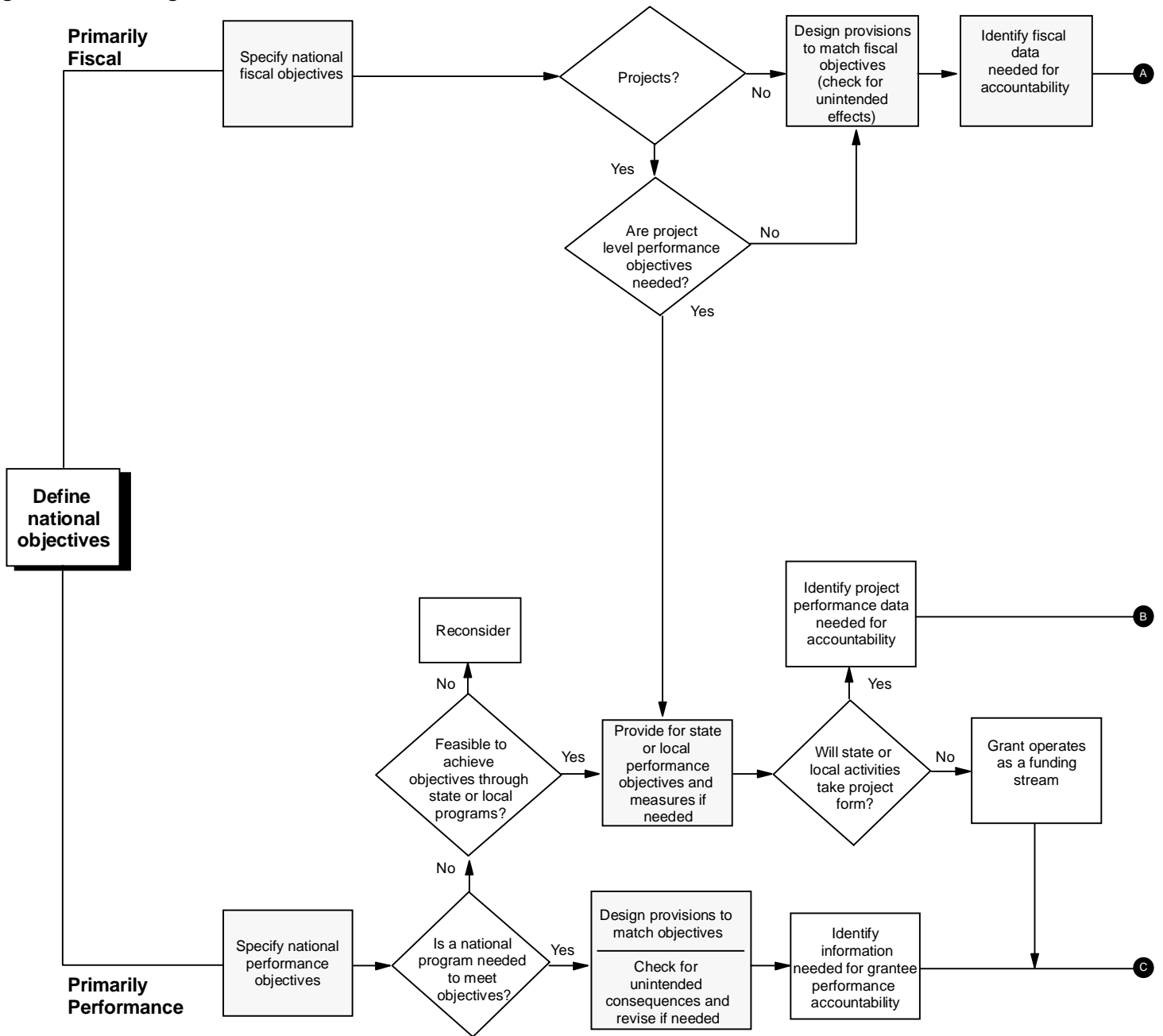
A Framework for Grant Design

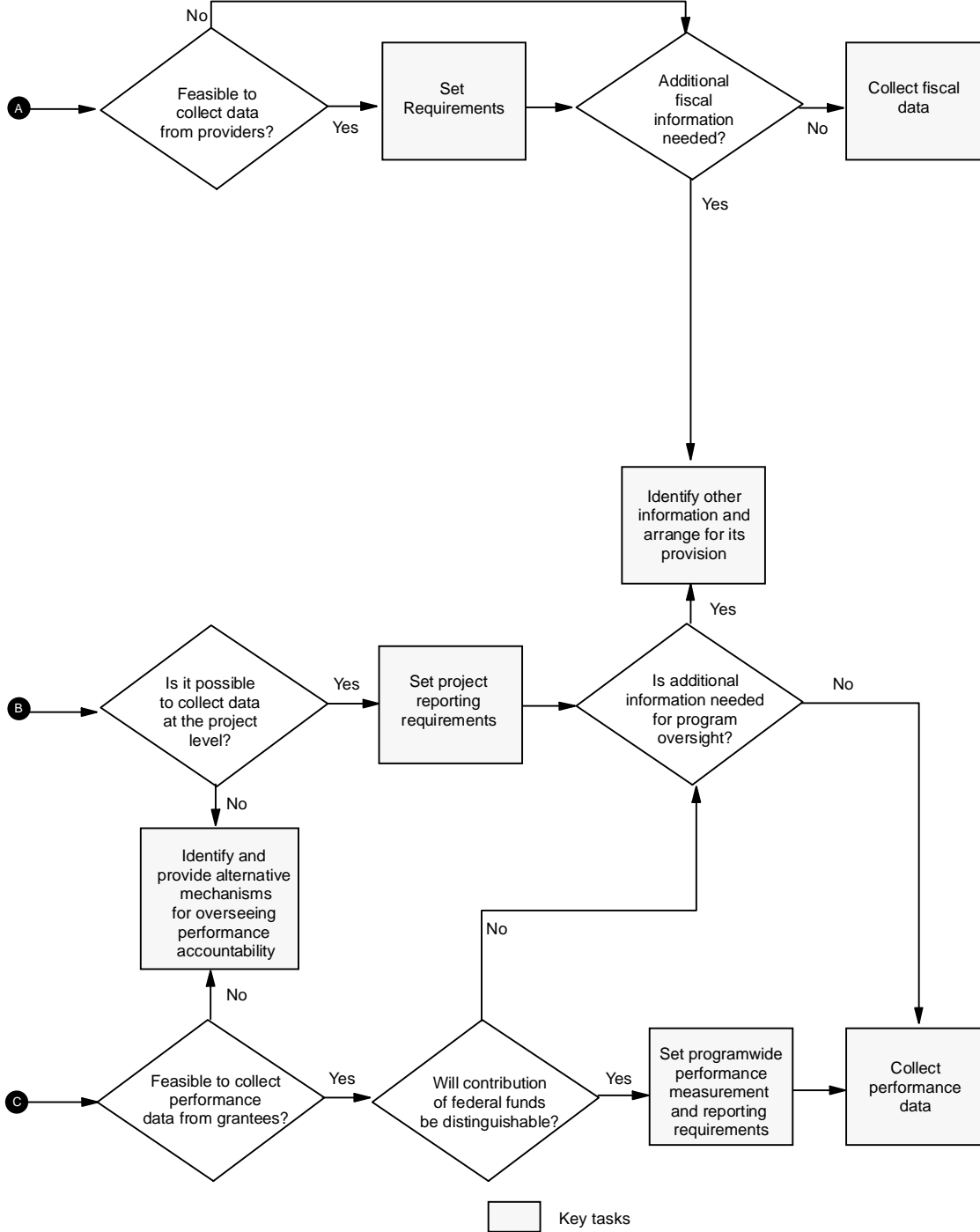
Our findings suggest that the design of a flexible grant program involves choosing among policy options that, in combination, establish the degree of flexibility afforded to states or localities; the relevance of performance objectives for grantee accountability; whether accountability for performance rests at the federal, state, or local level; and prospects for measuring performance through grantee reporting.

Considering design features and their implications can help policymakers ensure that accountability and information are adequately provided for, whatever type of design is selected. To assist in this process, we have developed a framework that depicts the grant design policy choices discussed in this report and factors that might be considered at each point

in the form of a decision tree (see fig. 2). Each choice has implications regarding the degree of flexibility provided to states or local entities, the type of performance information that can be collected through program operations, and the level at which this information is used for accountability purposes.

Figure 2: Grant Design Framework





Source: GAO analysis of grant program features and information sources.

The critical choice points in each decision path can be framed as questions, such as:

- Are national objectives primarily fiscal or performance-oriented? If objectives are of both types, both decision paths should be followed.
- What are these objectives?
- If there are national performance objectives, is a national program needed to achieve them, or could they feasibly be attained through state or local programs? This question is particularly relevant to new service outcome objectives, such as decreasing drug use among students. State and local programs designed with different objectives in mind may have difficulty incorporating this new objective. Or conditions that enable achievement of that outcome (such as solid knowledge of how to produce it) may not be met.
- What implementing provisions are needed to support attainment of these objectives? Implementing provisions might include constraints on activities and funds distribution or operational objectives, standards, and criteria for performance. These can be set for the program as a whole or delegated to the level of government responsible for program management.

For state or local programs, the next question would be whether the program would operate as a funding stream or support distinct projects. This having been decided, the next general questions are:

- What data are needed for grantee accountability, and is it feasible to collect these data from providers? As we have seen, diverse activities and funding stream operation may make the collection of uniform data difficult. The answers to these questions provide the basis for setting grantee reporting requirements.
- Is additional information needed for program oversight? If so, the logical next step is to provide for such information to be gathered and reported through program evaluation studies or other relevant, cost-effective means.

We use the title VI Innovative Education Program Strategies grant program to illustrate how figure 2 flows. The objectives of the grant, to support local education reform and innovation, are primarily fiscal, putting us on the upper decision path on our diagram. Funds may be used to support local projects (such as magnet schools), but the title VI program's purpose

does not require that project-level performance objectives be set, so we continue to the step of designing provisions to match fiscal objectives.

Title VI has such provisions, stating that grant funds may not be used to supplant funds from nonfederal sources and that the state must maintain prior levels of fiscal effort. To obtain information required for accountability, the program requires local districts to describe their intended use of the funds and how this will contribute to the grant's objectives of supporting education reform. States, drawing on district records, must report biennially on general uses of funds, types of services furnished, and students served. As these data are of limited utility for program oversight, Congress mandated national evaluation reports on this program in 1986 and 1994. The 1994 report provided information about federal share, the size of state and local grants, how funds were used, the minimal performance accountability requirements imposed by states, and the difficulty of evaluating a program that provides supplemental resources for other activities.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities grant provides a further illustration. Funds support local activities that serve national performance objectives to prevent violence in and around schools and the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. The presence of these objectives puts us on the lower, performance-oriented path of the flow chart. Funded activities are not implemented through a national operating program but, rather, through state and local programs, reflecting at least the hope that national objectives could be achieved through these programs. However, some national program provisions do apply. Local programs must be comprehensive and convey the message that the illegal use of alcohol and other drugs is wrong and harmful. These national requirements notwithstanding, the local education agencies are responsible for setting performance goals, deciding how to pursue them, and reporting to the state in terms of those goals.

Moving along the state and local path on our diagram, we come to the question of whether drug and violence prevention programs function as distinct projects or as funding streams. The recent evaluation study suggests the latter.¹⁷ Examining what appeared to be comprehensive school-based drug prevention programs, this study found so much variation within districts in what was being done that local activities hardly met our definition of a "program." As to the feasibility question on the diagram, collecting performance data—beyond student counts—for

¹⁷Silvia and Thorne, School-Based Drug Prevention Programs (1997).

drug prevention programs has proven difficult. Reporting requirements make reference to local program outcomes, but states are simply asked to provide whatever relevant data they can. Reflecting these limitations, provision has been made to gather data from other sources, including state-level data from national surveys of youth drug use, for program oversight. Although the Department of Education is required to report on the national program every 3 years, the lack of uniform information on program activities and effectiveness may limit the report's usefulness. The evaluation study, which covered the period 1990-1995, provided insight into the adequacy of resources, the extent to which activities reflect research findings, implementation issues, student outcomes, and state and local evaluations. Further evaluation studies are planned.

We are sending copies of this report to the Ranking Minority Member of each of your Committees and the Chairman and Ranking Minority of the House Committee on Budget and Committee on Government Reform and Oversight. We will also make copies available to others on request.

Please contact me or Gail MacColl, Assistant Director, at (202) 512-7997 if you or your staff have any questions.



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Abbreviations

AAA	Area Agency on Aging
ACF	Administration for Children and Families
AOA	Administration on Aging
BJA	Bureau of Justice Assistance
CCDBG	Child Care and Development Block Grant
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CPD	Community Planning and Development
CSBG	Community Services Block Grant
DOT	Department of Transportation
ETA	Employment and Training Administration
FHWA	Federal Highway Administration
FTA	Federal Transit Administration
GPRA	Government Performance and Results Act
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HRSA	Health Resources and Services Administration
HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
LEA	Local education agency
LIHEAP	Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program
NHS	National Highway System
NHTSA	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
OESE	Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
PHHS	Preventive Health and Health Services
RDA	Recommended daily allowance
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SDA	Service Delivery Area
SEA	State education agency
STP	Surface Transportation Program
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Program Summaries

Byrne Formula (Drug Control and System Improvement) Grants

Federal Agency	Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Department of Justice
Objectives	To reduce and prevent illegal drug activity, crime, and violence and to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system.
Nature	Provides funds to state and local governments to carry out specific programs designed to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system, with an emphasis on violent crime and serious offenders.
Activities and Related Constraints	Funds are to be used to support activities in 26 areas that address the objectives cited above. These include education activities for law enforcement officials that are designed to reduce the demand for illegal drugs, multijurisdictional task force activities, improving correctional institutions, and prevention and enforcement programs related to gangs. States are required to allocate at least 5 percent of funds to improve criminal justice records. Beginning in 1994, states that don't have a law requiring sex offenders to be tested for HIV if the victim requests such testing will lose 10 percent of their formula allotment. States are required to establish measurable objectives and evaluate projects in terms of achieving these objectives.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending for 1997 was about \$497 million, of which \$25 million was made available for a drug-testing initiative. Each state receives the greater of either \$500,000 or 0.25 percent of the amount available for the program. Remaining funds are distributed according to state population. In 1996, state awards ranged from \$500,000 to \$52 million. A 25-percent match on a project or on a governmental unit basis is required from state or local funds. Generally, locals are guaranteed a specified percentage of funds, based on the total share they contribute to state and local criminal justice expenditures. Regarding the remaining funds, states must give priority to localities with the greatest needs. The Byrne Program has

contributed less than 1 percent of state and local criminal justice expenditures.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

No uniform provider data are required except for descriptions of funded activities, funding levels, and names of subgrantees. BJA generates national program information from on-site monitoring.

**Other Sources of
Information**

A 1996 BJA programwide study analyzed the extent to which projects supported by Byrne Formula funds in fiscal year 1991 continued after Byrne funding ceased and identified factors associated with institutionalization. Project institutionalization rates were used to indicate how well the program was meeting its primary goal of supporting state and local law enforcement agencies. Other studies have included a BJA and National Institute of Justice analysis of state strategic planning efforts and evaluations of 56 projects. Many state and local evaluations have been conducted, but their results are difficult to aggregate owing to differences in methodologies and outcome measures.

**Child Care and
Development Block
Grant (CCDBG)**

Federal Agency

Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To make grants available to states, territories, and tribes to increase the overall quality, affordability, and supply of child care. Direct services are targeted to children in low-income families with parents who work or attend job training.

Nature

Provides funds to states, territories, and tribes for child care services and quality improvement and to increase the supply of child care.

Activities and Related Constraints

States must allow the full range of parental choice of child care providers, including center-based, group home, family, and in-home care, by offering certificates that parents can give to the provider of their choice. States are required to set health and safety standards and monitor providers. States must ensure that parents have unlimited access to their child and child care providers, provide consumer education services, and maintain public records of complaints made against child care providers. Not less than 4 percent of funds must be used for quality improvement activities and to increase the supply of child care.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal fiscal 1997 funding for the block grant was about \$956 million. Historically, CCDBG did not require state matching funds or maintenance of fiscal effort. In fiscal year 1997, three other child care programs were repealed and their funding was consolidated under the provisions of CCDBG. Three separate funding sources for CCDBG were initiated. The new Mandatory Fund and the Discretionary Fund (formerly CCDBG) require no state match. The new Matching Fund provides federal dollars to match state spending according to a formula reflecting the proportion of children in the state under age 13, if the state complies with various fiscal requirements. The fiscal year 1997 funding from the three sources, collectively known as the Child Care and Development Fund, was about \$3 billion.

Program-Specific Performance Information

State reports provide state-level data specific to CCDBG as well as data on other federal child care and preschool programs. Information is reported on the number of children assisted according to the category of provider, how assistance is made available to families (i.e., through grants, contracts, or certificates), and estimates of the number of families receiving various forms of consumer education. Information on income, size, structure of, and reasons for families receiving services is also collected and reported. Formerly, counts of child care programs, caregivers, salary data, partnership activities to promote business involvement, results of state monitoring, and reductions in child care standards were collected.

Other Sources of Information

Information on national child care needs, costs, availability, and quality is available from the Bureau of the Census, the Department of Education, and many private research and advocacy organizations. No programwide evaluation has been conducted.

Child Welfare Services State Grants

Federal Agency	Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services
Objectives	To establish, extend, and strengthen child welfare services provided by state and local agencies to enable children to remain in their own homes or, when this is not possible, to provide alternative placements.
Nature	Supports state child welfare programs. States may provide services directly or through subgrantees.
Activities and Related Constraints	Funds may be used for a broad array of child protective services, including costs of personnel to provide services, licensing, and standard-setting for child care agencies and institutions, homemaker services, return of runaway children, child abuse prevention, and reunification services. Funds for foster care, day care, and adoption services are capped to the amounts received by states in fiscal year 1979 for child welfare programs. States must provide assurances that all children in foster homes receive certain specific protections, including maintaining a statewide information system for children in foster care, establishing due process protections for families, and conducting periodic case reviews. States are required to submit a description of the quality assurance system they will use, but not the data produced by the system. ACF reviews of the foster care systems in each state are no longer required to verify the implementation of foster care protections.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was about \$292 million. Each eligible jurisdiction receives a base amount of \$70,000. Additional funds are allocated by formula. States receive federal matching at a rate of 75 percent of their expenditures up to the limit of the state's allocation. In fiscal year 1996, state grants ranged from about \$118,000 to \$21.4 million. The average amount was \$4.4 million. Amounts from this grant program are small in comparison with child welfare funding from other federal and nonfederal sources.

Program-Specific
Performance Information

Performance reports are not required, and program-specific performance data are not available. State consolidated plans include descriptions of the services to be provided and of the geographic areas where these services will be available.

Other Sources of
Information

All states administering related programs under title IV-B, Subpart 1: Family Preservation, and Subpart 2: Support Services, or title IV-E: Foster Care and Adoption Assistance are required to maintain data systems to track cost, type, and level of care; staff management and training; entry and exit rates of children in substitute care; and intake information. These data cover the state program, not just services funded by this grant. Before 1995, states were not required to submit data to ACF.

Community
Development Block
Grants
(CDBG)—Entitlement
Program

Federal Agency

Community Planning and Development (CPD), Department of Housing and Urban Development

Objectives

To develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanding economic opportunities, principally for persons of low and moderate income. To foster well-planned, coordinated housing and community development activities by providing a consistent source of federal assistance to cities and urban counties.

Nature

Provides funds to central cities and urban counties. Entitlement communities develop their own programs and funding priorities.

Activities and Related
Constraints

Communities may undertake a wide range of activities directed toward neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and provision of

improved community facilities and services. Activities must either benefit low- and moderate-income persons, help eliminate slums or blight, or meet other community development needs having a particular urgency. Funds can be used as the nonfederal share of other federal program grants. Restrictions on the percentage of funds used to establish or expand public services apply.

**Funding and Related
Constraints**

Federal funds allocated in fiscal year 1997 were about \$3.06 billion. In that year, 975 entities were eligible to receive funds according to a statutory formula. No matching funds are required. Targeting requirements ensure that communities use program funding to benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Grantees have to certify that at least 70 percent of program funds, over a period of 1, 2, or 3 years, will benefit low- and moderate-income persons. Aggregate and individual public benefit tests are applied to economic development activities. Generally, for each activity, at least one job must be created per \$50,000 of CDBG aid or one low- or moderate-income person must be served for each \$1,000 of aid. Additionally, on an annual basis, the aggregate of a grantee's economic development activities must create one job per \$35,000 of CDBG aid or serve one low- and moderate-income person per \$350 of CDBG funds used.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

Grantees complete an annual performance and evaluation report that includes project-level information on accomplishments, costs incurred by participating entities, indications of how a grantee would change projects as a result of its experience, and an evaluation of how funds were used to benefit low- and moderate-income persons.

**Other Sources of
Information**

External data (e.g., the Bureau of the Census' Population and Housing Survey) are used for formula allocations and benchmarking purposes. Several evaluation studies were conducted. A 1994 national evaluation by the Urban Institute addressed the capacity, flexibility, and political effects of the program. Other evaluations have focused on specific activities, such as revolving loan funds.

Community Development Block Grants—States

Federal Agency	Community Planning and Development (CPD), Department of Housing and Urban Development
Objectives	To develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expanding economic opportunities, principally for persons of low and moderate income. To foster well-planned, coordinated housing and community development activities by providing a consistent source of federal assistance to units of general local government.
Nature	Provides funds to states, which develop their own programs and funding priorities. These priorities guide states' redistribution of funds to units of general local government that are not populous enough to receive entitlement funds. Forty-eight states and Puerto Rico participate in this program. Most funds are distributed competitively, though four states distribute a portion of their funds according to a state-developed formula. (Two states have chosen not to participate in this program. In New York and Hawaii, HUD continues to distribute funds directly to units of general local government through the HUD-administered Small Cities CDBG Program.)
Activities and Related Constraints	CDBG encompasses a wide range of activities directed toward neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and provision of improved community facilities and services. Activities must either benefit low- and moderate-income persons, help eliminate slums or blight, or meet other community development needs having a particular urgency. Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas are statutorily required to set aside 10 percent of their funds for projects in colonias—communities in the U.S.-Mexico border region that lack sanitary water, sewage facilities, and housing, and that existed as colonias before this program was created.

Funding and Related Constraints

Fiscal year 1997 spending was about \$1.2 billion. Seventy percent of the aggregate use of funds, over a period specified by the state of 3 years or less, must benefit low- and moderate-income individuals.

Program-Specific Performance Information

States are required to establish objectives consistent with the national objectives and to report progress in meeting these goals. State annual performance reports include a description of the use of funds during the program year, an assessment of the relationship of that use to the states' objectives, the reason for any changes in the plan, and indications as to how the program would change as a result of this experience. States determine how they collect information from units of general local government receiving grant funds.

Other Sources of Information

In the early days of the state CDBG program, HUD conducted several studies on state takeover of small-city CDBG funding. These studies examined changes states made in program priorities and processes, analyzed the effects of these changes on funding patterns, and compared states' initial experiences and performances. A later study evaluated the success rates of economic development loans made under this program to businesses to guide future investment strategies.

Community Mental Health Services Block Grant

Federal Agency

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To enable states and territories to plan, carry out, and evaluate state plans for providing comprehensive community mental health services to adults with a serious mental illness and to children with a serious emotional disturbance.

Nature

Provides financial assistance to states to be used at their discretion consistent with program objectives and requirements.

**Activities and Related
Constraints**

Services are to be provided only through community mental health centers that meet certain criteria and through other appropriate, qualified community programs. State plans must provide for an organized community-based system of care that considers all available resources and services (however funded), including rehabilitation, employment, housing, educational, medical and dental, and other support services needed to enable clients to function in the community. Plans must also provide for case management services for clients that receive substantial amounts of public funds or services, integrated services for children, and outreach to and services for the homeless. Inpatient services are not eligible for support. States must review 5 percent of service providers each year and establish a Mental Health Planning Council to review the state plan and monitor and evaluate the allocation and adequacy of mental health services annually.

**Funding and Related
Constraints**

Federal spending for fiscal year 1997 was \$275 million. Awards range from about \$50,000 to \$33 million, with an average of \$4.4 million. As of 1993, block grant funds were around 5.6 percent of state mental health agency revenues for community programs. Maintenance of fiscal effort provisions apply to expenditures for children as well as to overall expenditures for community mental health services.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

State reports (included in the application) describe achievements in relation to state objectives (including quantitative targets) for the year just completed, which are to cover each of the program criteria summarized above. Applications include incidence and prevalence data on mental illness among the target populations using standard definitions; standard measures are not yet available but are under development. Data on community mental health services, treatment options, and resources are also included.

**Other Sources of
Information**

There has been no national evaluation of this program. Annual program reviews are conducted by State Mental Health Planning Councils, but Council members are generally not experts in evaluation, and their reviews may or may not be accompanied by backup information. The funding agency sponsors research on prevention and service delivery models in mental health and conveys findings to grantees as part of its technical assistance activities.

Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)

Federal Agency	Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services
Objectives	To provide services and activities that have a measurable and major impact on the causes of poverty. Objectives include assisting low-income individuals to obtain adequate jobs, education, and housing; make better use of available income; obtain emergency assistance when needed; remove obstacles to self-sufficiency; and achieve greater participation in community affairs. Other objectives include establishing coordination between social service programs and encouraging private sector entities to ameliorate poverty.
Nature	Provides funds to support local activities and projects. Goals and objectives are set by states, but states are required to subgrant at least 90 percent of their allotment to locally based community action agencies or organizations that serve migrant or seasonal farmworkers.
Activities and Related Constraints	Activities that fall within seven broad service categories, reflective of the program's objectives, are eligible for funding, provided that the principal beneficiaries are persons of low and modest income levels. At least one activity of each type must be provided within a state.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending in fiscal 1997 was \$490 million. States are required to ensure that any agency or organization that received funds previously under this program will not have future funding terminated or proportionally reduced unless the state can determine cause under conditions and procedures set by federal mandate. Five percent of funds can be transferred to certain other federal block grants. No maintenance of effort or state matching funds are required. In fiscal year 1996, CSBG financial assistance to states ranged from \$2.2 million to \$346 million. Overall, CSBG has contributed less than 10 percent of the resources managed, leveraged, and coordinated by the community action agencies.

Program-Specific
Performance Information

States and local entities are not required to provide uniform performance data. ACF has relied on contracted private entities to survey states on a voluntary basis to obtain information describing state allocations, local activities, operations of state CSBG administering agencies, state managerial and programmatic accomplishments, and counts of dollars spent and individuals served. At present, a contract is in place to establish a new data collection system.

Other Sources of
Information

No national program evaluations have been conducted. We found no ties between external, aggregate income data or research findings and program operations and assessments.

**Job Training
Partnership Act
(JTPA)—titles II-A
and II-C**

Federal Agency

Employment and Training Administration (ETA), Department of Labor

Objectives

To establish programs to prepare disadvantaged adults (title II-A) and youths (title II-C) for participation in the labor force by providing job training and other services designed to increase employment and earnings, develop educational and occupational skills, and decrease welfare dependency.

Nature

States receive formula grants and, in turn, subgrant funds to Service Delivery Areas (SDAs)—geographical areas that include one or more local governments or a state that has been designated to provide job training—according to a federal formula that reflects unemployment and poverty rates. Within each SDA, a private industry council works with local governments to develop job training plans that meet local needs, select groups that will receive grants, and act as the administrative agency for the SDA. States have responsibility for the approval of the plans and monitoring for compliance. Minimum performance standards and measures for SDAs are set at the federal level.

Activities and Related
Constraints

Funds support direct and on-the-job training, education, job counseling, and supportive services. States are required to set aside 5 percent of funds to provide incentive payments to SDAs that exceed performance standards and 8 percent to support state education coordination and grants. At least 50 percent of each state's allotment must fund direct training services. Additionally, 5 percent of title II-A funds are set aside to support activities for older individuals. Services are targeted to economically disadvantaged individuals who face serious barriers to employment.

Funding and Related
Constraints

Federal spending in program year 1997 was about \$895 million for title II-A and \$127 million for title II-C. Matching is required for 100 percent of the 8-percent state education grants.

Program-Specific
Performance Information

States, administrative entities, and recipients are required to report information, including descriptions of activities provided and the length of time participants were engaged in them; characteristics of participants; and outcome measures, such as the occupations in which participants were placed.

Other Sources of
Information

These programs have been the subject of several nationwide and state-level evaluations. For example, a 1994 national evaluation examined program impacts on the earnings and employment of adult men and women and out-of-school male and female youth. This study found that effects for adults were positive but that the program did not increase the earnings of male and female youths, which suggested that new ways were needed to serve some groups. Other evaluations have studied differences in cost-effectiveness between programs in urban and rural areas and the effectiveness of adult work-place literacy techniques.

**Low-Income Home
Energy Assistance
Program (LIHEAP)**

Federal Agency

Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives	To provide funds to states so that they can subsidize the home energy costs of low-income persons, including the elderly and disabled.
Nature	Awards funds to states, which, in turn, either distribute them to eligible households or to an energy supplier on behalf of such households.
Activities and Related Constraints	<p>In addition to providing direct and indirect subsidies, up to 15 percent of funds may be used for low-cost residential weatherization. Another 10 percent may be allocated for weatherization if states can demonstrate that they meet three statutory requirements, including that the proposed weatherization services will produce savings in energy costs.</p> <p>States may use up to 5 percent of their total allotment to encourage and enable households to reduce their heating and cooling needs. Leveraging Incentive Funds may be awarded to states that supply additional benefits to eligible households beyond those provided through federal funds. Up to 25 percent of the incentive funds may be set aside for grantees that provide LIHEAP services through community-based nonprofit organizations to help eligible households reduce their energy vulnerability under a program known as the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge. States are required to provide the highest level of assistance to households with the lowest incomes and the highest energy costs, taking family size into account.</p>
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending for fiscal year 1997 was about \$1.2 billion. No matching funds are required.
Program-Specific Performance Information	<p>An annual report is required on the number and income level of households served; the number of participating households with individuals who are elderly, disabled, or with young children; and the number and income level of families who applied for assistance. An additional report identifying services that were provided, number of households served, level of benefits provided, and number of unserved households is required from grantees that expend up to 5 percent of funds for services designed to reduce home energy needs. To supplement program information, HHS has used voluntary state surveys to gather estimates of households to be served, funds available, funds to be obligated, and income eligibility cutoffs. To qualify for leveraging incentive</p>

funds, grantees must report on the leveraged resources provided to low-income households during the previous base period.

Other Sources of Information

No programwide evaluations have been conducted. Specific energy assistance questions have been included in two national surveys, the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey and the Department of Energy's Residential Energy Consumption Survey. These data are used to determine the socioeconomic characteristics of LIHEAP participants and energy consumption and expenditure patterns of all non-low-income, low-income, and LIHEAP recipient households. (Project-level evaluations are required for activities funded by the Residential Energy Assistance Challenge option.)

Maternal and Child Health Services Block Grant

Federal Agency

Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To enable states to maintain and strengthen their role in planning, promoting, coordinating, and evaluating health care for pregnant women, mothers, infants, and children (particularly children with special health care needs) and in providing health services for mothers and children who do not have access to adequate health care, particularly those from low-income families.

Nature

Primarily, the grant assists states in building a maternal and child care health service infrastructure that ensures needed services are in place for and readily accessible to vulnerable populations. States have the flexibility to allocate resources.

Activities and Related Constraints

Fifteen percent of the block grant is set aside for special projects of regional and national significance and for integrated community service system programs. States may use block grant funds to develop systems of

health care and related services, such as health education, case management, training, and the evaluation of maternal and child care services, and to deliver clinical care to the target population. At least 30 percent of funds must support preventive and primary care services for children, and an additional 30 percent must be used for services to children with special health care needs.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was about \$681 million. Any amount appropriated over \$600 million is retained by the Secretary of Health and Human Services to fund specialized projects and activities in areas with high infant mortality rates. In fiscal year 1996, assistance to states ranged from around \$155,000 to \$41.9 million. The average state grant was \$9.7 million. States must ensure that \$3 of state and local funds or resources will be expended for maternal and child health for each \$4 of federal program funds. State and local contributions are generally twice that of the federal contribution, but large variations among states exist. In general, state contributions have to equal at least the amount paid in 1989.

Program-Specific Performance Information

States are required to report annually. Program-specific state-level data reported include number served by population category, proportion of each category with health insurance, type of services provided, and expenditures by service and population type. Beginning in fiscal year 1999, all states must report on 18 national performance measures.

Other Sources of Information

State annual reports also include statewide data on the number of medical service providers by category, number of births, infant mortality by race and ethnicity, percent of low-weight births by race and ethnicity, perinatal death rates, rates of fetal alcohol syndrome, rates of infant drug dependency, percentages of women without prenatal care by trimester, and immunization rates for 2-year-old children. No programwide evaluation has been completed, although various components of the program, such as injury prevention, have been evaluated. A large research base supports grant activities.

National Highway System (NHS)

Federal Agency	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation
Objectives	To provide for the construction and improvement of interconnected principal arterial routes that serve major population centers, international border crossings, ports, airports, public transportation facilities, and other major transportation facilities and destinations; meet national defense requirements; and serve interstate and interregional travel.
Nature	Assists state transportation agencies in developing an integrated, interconnected transportation system. States can transfer up to 50 percent of NHS funds to the Surface Transportation Program (STP), and if the Secretary of Transportation approves, up to 100 percent.
Activities and Related Constraints	Funds may support 14 categories of transportation and transportation-related activities on roads designated as part of the Interstate System or other principal arterial highways. Activities include highway construction, safety and operational improvements, reconstruction, resurfacing, highway research and development, fringe and corridor parking, and wetland mitigation projects related to highway projects. States are required to perform a life-cycle cost analysis and a value engineering analysis for each NHS project segment that costs over \$25 million and to meet design standards approved by FHWA. A state may request exemption from FHWA's detailed oversight of design and construction activities, including approval of preliminary plans, specifications, and estimates; concurrence in the award process; construction reviews; and final inspection. Projects have to comply with the Clean Air Act and meet DOT and Environmental Protection Agency targets. Ten percent of funds must be expended through contracts with small businesses owned by disadvantaged persons.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was about \$3.3 billion. Generally, federal funds can be used to cover up to 80 percent of project costs, but certain projects can be funded at higher federal shares. State

apportionments of federal funds are affected by a variety of incentives and sanctions.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

Financial information is compiled on individual projects as well as the overall program. Performance information is compiled as part of the biennial assessment of the nation's highway conditions.

**Other Sources of
Information**

DOT compiles aggregate information from other agencies on transportation facilities, services, flow, context, and the unintended consequences of transportation (safety, energy use, and environmental impacts). No national programwide evaluations of this program have been conducted. Projects and particular program components have been evaluated.

**Preventive Health and
Health Services
(PHHS) Block Grant**

Federal Agency

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To provide states, territories, and certain tribal governments with the resources to improve the health status of their populations.

Nature

Contributes funds toward the support of state-directed preventive health services. Funds go to state health departments, which have discretion to make awards to local health agencies and community-based organizations.

**Activities and Related
Constraints**

Supports activities to improve the health status of the population so as to meet Healthy People 2000 national health promotion and disease prevention objectives; rodent control and community fluoridation programs; planning, establishing, and improving (but not simply operating) emergency medical services; services to the victims of sex offenses and prevention of sex offenses; and related administrative and evaluation

activities. Each state selects the Healthy People 2000 objectives to be addressed with grant funds. Most states use funds for cardiovascular prevention, community-based health promotion activities, and rape prevention. Beyond that, each state does things differently.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal funding for state grants for fiscal year 1997 was about \$148 million. State awards ranged from about \$31,500 to \$10 million, with an average of \$1.4 million. Maintenance of fiscal effort is required. Although PHHS grant funds constitute about 1 percent of federal and state public health expenditures overall, they are a major source of funding for preventive health activities.

Program-Specific Performance Information

For each activity funded, the state reports activity or output data, such as number of community programs supported or number of clients served by the state program.

Other Sources of Information

For each Healthy People 2000 objective selected, the state also reports statewide data as measured by Healthy People 2000 indicators drawn from such uniform data sets as vital statistics, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, or the state cancer registry. A federal contractor collects the data from federal sources and sends them to the states, which then fill in state-generated information. No national program evaluation has been conducted. However, CDC has assessed the effectiveness of and published guidelines for numerous preventive health services. Such guidelines on effective preventive health practice get incorporated into this program through professional, rather than administrative, channels. Standards of practice are very concrete for some areas, such as immunization, and less fixed in others, such as health promotion.

Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities—State Grants

Federal Agency

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), Department of Education

Objectives

To support programs aimed at meeting the national education goal of preventing illegal drug use among students and violence in and around schools.

Nature

Funds are awarded to state education agencies (SEAS), but not less than 91 percent of the SEA money is then distributed by formula to local education agencies (LEAS) to support drug and violence prevention programs under their direction. For some LEAS, the grant is one of several sources of funds for drug prevention activities; for others, it is the sole source of funds. Both SEAS and LEAS must identify goals and objectives for drug and violence prevention.

Activities and Related Constraints

LEA funds can be used for comprehensive drug and alcohol prevention programs (including instruction, family counseling, early intervention, referral to rehabilitation, staff development); for educational, cultural, and recreational activities before and after school; and for evaluation. Not more than 20 percent of the funds can be spent on safety-related activities, such as "safe zones of passage," school metal detectors, and security personnel. SEA funds may be used for administration, technical assistance, demonstration projects, evaluation and other supporting activities, or to meet special needs. All programs supported under the grant must convey the message that illegal use of alcohol and other drugs is wrong and harmful.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was about \$531 million, of which \$415 million went directly to SEA and LEA activities. Awards ranged from \$2 million to \$46 million, with an average of \$8 million. In the districts included in the national evaluation study, LEA drug prevention program funding averaged \$6-\$8 per pupil from grant funds and \$10 per pupil from all sources. Maintenance of fiscal effort provisions apply.

Program-Specific Performance Information

States are required to report triennially on activities funded and number of LEAS, schools, and students participating. State reports also cover program effectiveness and progress toward achieving SEA measurable goals and objectives, using whatever outcome information the state can provide. LEAS provide information the SEA needs to complete its report.

Other Sources of Information

SEA reports also include data on violent incidents in all schools and state-level survey data on the incidence and prevalence of drug use among students. A national evaluation study conducted during 1990-95 examined drug prevention program activities (comparing them with research-based evidence of effective practice) and local program evaluations and collected data on student outcomes in 19 school districts. The program statute requires an independent biennial evaluation of the national impact of the program.

Social Services Block Grant

Federal Agency

Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To assist states to provide social services that are directed toward one of the following broad goals: (1) achieving or maintaining self-support to prevent, reduce, or eliminate dependency; (2) achieving or maintaining self-sufficiency to reduce or prevent dependency; (3) preventing or remedying neglect, abuse, or exploitation of children and adults; (4) preventing or reducing inappropriate institutional care; and (5) securing admission or referral for institutional care when other forms of care are not available and providing services to individuals in institutions.

Nature

Assists each state to furnish social services according to state-determined priorities.

Activities and Related Constraints

States can use funds to support any of a broad range of social services. For example, funds may be used to provide activities needed to operate or improve other social service programs; pay for administrative, staff, and training costs; or support agency operations. Some restrictions, including prohibitions regarding the use of funds to provide cash payments as a service, apply. There are no set-asides or caps.

Funding and Related
Constraints

Federal funding for fiscal year 1997 was about \$2.5 billion. Ten percent of funds may be transferred to support activities funded by related federal block grants (Preventive Health and Health Services, Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment, Community Mental Health, Maternal and Child Health, and Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program). Additionally, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 allows states to transfer up to 10 percent of the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Block Grant to this grant. At the federal level, there are no performance criteria or standards. In fiscal year 1996, allocations to states ranged from \$97,000 to \$333 million. The average allotment was \$50 million.

Program-Specific
Performance Information

States are asked to provide counts of services provided, number of adults and children served, expenditures by service type, and type of organizations that provide the services. These data may be actual, sampled, or estimated. No outcome or impact data are available.

Other Sources of
Information

A major programwide qualitative evaluation, published in 1992, addressed the first 10 years of the grant. This evaluation examined, within the context of flexibility, the perceptions of state and county officials regarding the effectiveness of the program and identified innovative and successful state practices. Other evaluations examined specific activities funded by the grant, such as one that compared services provided to senior citizens under this grant with services furnished under the Administration on Aging's Supportive Services and Senior Centers Program.

Special Programs for
the Aging—Nutrition
Services

Federal Agency

Administration on Aging (AOA), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To support nutrition services to older Americans, including meals, nutrition education, facilitating access to meals, and providing

nutrition-related supportive services to maintain health, independence, and quality of life.

Nature

Provides grants to State Agencies on Aging. States, using their own formulas (which AOA must approve), distribute funds to state-designated Area Agencies on Aging (AAAS). States are responsible for ensuring that AAAS and service providers meet program requirements and assurances as set out in their area plans and comply with state and local laws regarding food handling and the like.

Activities and Related Constraints

Local projects funded by this title III-C program must provide at least one hot or other appropriate meal, which provides one-third of the recommended dietary allowance (RDA) at least once a day, 5 days a week (except in rural areas, where a lesser frequency is determined feasible), to eligible people over age 60 and their spouses. AAAS must reasonably accommodate participants' special dietary needs. Meals may be provided in a congregate setting or delivered to the home. For home-delivered meals, priority is given to serving frail elderly, the homebound, or the isolated. Projects must conduct outreach and nutrition education activities. They may solicit voluntary contributions. States must utilize the advice of dietitians in program planning and provide technical assistance and training for program staff.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal spending for fiscal year 1997 included \$364.4 million for congregate meals and \$105.3 million for home-delivered meals. For the two meal types combined, awards ranged from around \$126,000 to \$43.7 million, averaging about \$8 million. This program has maintenance of fiscal effort requirements. States may transfer up to 30 percent of their funds between their congregate and home meal programs. They may also transfer 20 percent of their funds to title III-B: Supportive Services and Senior Centers Program.

Program-Specific Performance Information

Under a system developed in response to 1992 legislation, states report uniform data, including number of congregate and home-delivered meals served, program income and expenditures, number of persons served, and number who were at high risk for poor nutrition. Client characteristics such as age; poverty; and, for home-delivered meals, client's extent of impairment in performing activities of daily living are also reported. Client

and service counts are totals for the service as a whole, not just the portion funded from this grant.

Other Sources of Information

A national evaluation of this program for 1993-95 described the participants, assessed how well the program reached the disabled and poor elderly, and estimated the impact on nutritional intake and social contacts of participants as compared with nonparticipants with similar characteristics. The RDA requirements are based on research, which also supports the premise that good health requires adequate nutrition.

Special Programs for the Aging— Supportive Services and Senior Centers

Federal Agency

Administration on Aging (AOA), Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To encourage states and area agencies on aging to develop and implement comprehensive and coordinated community-based services for older individuals through the planning and provision of supportive services, including multipurpose senior centers.

Nature

Provides grants to State Agencies on Aging. States, using their own formulas (which AOA must approve), distribute funds to state-designated Area Agencies on Aging. States are responsible for ensuring that AAAs and service providers meet program requirements and assurances as set out in their area plans.

Activities and Related Constraints

This title III-B program covers a wide range of supportive services from homemaker and chore services to recreation and crime prevention. Special priority is given to providing services that provide access to other services (such as transportation, outreach, information and assistance, language, and case management); in-home services; and legal services, such as legal representation for wards in guardianship proceedings. Funds can also be used for renovation, acquisition, and construction of

multipurpose senior centers. AAAS must set specific objectives for providing services to individuals having the greatest economic or social need, particularly low-income minority individuals. States must support an effective ombudsman program.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal spending for fiscal year 1997 was \$291 million. Awards ranged from around \$70,000 to \$27.1 million, with an average of \$5.1 million. Each state is guaranteed a minimum allotment; beyond that, funds are allotted based on the proportion of individuals aged 60 and older in each state. Within-state distribution formulas must also reflect the proportion of individuals 60 and over. Federal funds cover 85 percent of the cost of supportive services statewide; the state must contribute not less than 25 percent of the nonfederal share from state or local public sources. The amount states may set aside for conducting outreach demonstration is capped at 4 percent of funds allotted, after paying for area plan administration. Maintenance of fiscal effort provisions apply, and program funds are to supplement, not supplant, other sources. States may transfer up to 20 percent of funds between this program and the senior nutrition program. Service providers can solicit voluntary contributions, but the contributions must be used to increase services.

Program-Specific Performance Information

Under a reporting system developed in response to 1992 legislation, states now report service unit counts, unduplicated client counts, and expenditures by type of service and detailed client characteristics (including indicators of ability to perform activities of daily living). Client and service unit counts are totals for the service as a whole, not just the portion funded from this grant.

Other Sources of Information

There has been no national evaluation of this program, and program documents incorporate little reference to research.

State and Community Highway Safety Grants

Federal Agency	National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)/Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation
Objectives	To reduce traffic accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting from accidents.
Nature	These grants help state safety agencies develop programs to further national and state highway safety objectives. At least 40 percent of a state's allocation must be passed through to its subdivisions or used by the state on behalf of localities.
Activities and Related Constraints	NHTSA/FHWA have identified nine highway safety program areas of national priority for which effective countermeasures have been developed. Activities in these areas (including alcohol and drug countermeasures, occupant protection, emergency medical services, and roadway safety) are eligible for funding. Before fiscal year 1998, states proposing such activities had to describe the problem, identify the countermeasure designed to stabilize or reduce it, and provide supporting trend data. If states funded identified countermeasures for priority problems, funding was expedited. If funds were to be used for other problems, additional data and analysis had to be submitted to NHTSA or FHWA for approval. NHSTA funds, accounting for about 90 percent of the grant, were used for projects related to human behavior, and FHWA funds were used for roadway safety. Pedestrian, bicycle safety, and speed control programs were jointly administered by both agencies. Beginning in fiscal year 1998, a new performance-based process was established. States are now responsible for setting highway safety goals and implementing programs to achieve them.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was \$140 million. Matching funds in amounts that vary by activity and circumstances are required. No match is needed for the U.S. territories and Native American programs. If states do

not have a highway safety plan that conforms to statutory provisions, formula funds are reduced by not less than 50 percent. A state may receive additional funds under a related incentive program if specific criteria are met. In 1997, financial assistance to states ranged from \$340,000 to \$13 million, with an average of \$2.2 million. The federal share of funding for all state and local highway traffic safety programs is relatively small, generally ranging from 1 to 3 percent.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

Before fiscal year 1998, states were required to submit annual evaluation reports on activities and projects funded under this program. For each funded program area, states were to describe each project, project-level costs, accomplishments, and status. Beginning in fiscal year 1998, states were required to submit annual reports describing progress in meeting highway safety goals, using identified performance measures.

**Other Sources of
Information**

States collect and report aggregate data on highway deaths and injuries. NHTSA's first national evaluation of its state grants programs is now in progress. The evaluation will examine whether projects focused on major safety and program needs, the consequences of removing federal highway safety grants, and whether results were compared with planned objectives.

**Substance Abuse
Prevention and
Treatment Block
Grant**

Federal Agency

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA),
Department of Health and Human Services

Objectives

To provide financial assistance to states and territories to support alcohol and other drug abuse prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation activities.

Nature	Provides funds to be used at the state’s discretion to achieve statutory objectives, including the fulfillment of certain requirements. States set criteria for particular treatment services.
Activities and Related Constraints	At least 35 percent of the state’s grant funds must be used for prevention and treatment activities related to alcohol, at least 35 percent for activities related to other drugs, and at least 20 percent for primary prevention services. States must increase the availability of treatment services for pregnant women and women with dependent children, establish a treatment capacity management program to facilitate admissions of intravenous drug users, make tuberculosis services available to individuals receiving substance abuse treatment, establish and maintain a revolving loan fund for group homes for recovering substance abusers, and improve referrals to treatment. “Designated states” must provide early intervention services for HIV-positive substance abusers. States must also make it unlawful for any manufacturer, retailer, or distributor of tobacco products to sell or distribute any such product to persons under the age of 18; enforce the law by unannounced, random inspections; and substantially meet target inspection failure rates negotiated with the Secretary of Health and Human Services.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending for fiscal year 1997 was about \$1.3 billion. Awards ranged from \$70,000 to \$181 million. Maintenance of fiscal effort requirements apply, and failure to maintain effort may result in the reduction of a state’s allotment by an equal amount. A state’s grant may be suspended or terminated for material noncompliance with conditions required for the receipt of the grant. States that fail to comply with the tobacco requirement face possible loss of 10 to 40 percent of their award.
Program-Specific Performance Information	The state annual report includes a description of services provided; information on needs and treatment capacity, entities funded, and amounts expended per activity; and a statement of progress toward reaching objectives identified for the year. It must include outcome data on under-18 tobacco enforcement activities. Work has begun on identifying data for prevention activities.
Other Sources of Information	SAMHSA collects national and state-level data on provider organizations (however funded), services, resources, and clients. It also supports a

national survey of substance abuse among the general population. There have been some state-level evaluations of this program, but no national evaluation. SAMHSA has evaluated the effectiveness of publicly funded prevention strategies and treatment methods. It has also developed treatment and prevention protocols and disseminated them through technical assistance activities.

Surface Transportation Program (STP)

Federal Agency	Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Department of Transportation
Objectives	To assist state and local transportation development and improvement.
Nature	Helps fund state and local activities and projects.
Activities and Related Constraints	Permits a wide array of transportation projects, including construction, mitigation of environmental damage, transit, carpool projects, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Funds cannot be used for local roads and rural minor collectors. Once the funds are distributed to the state, each state must set aside 10 percent for safety construction activities (i.e., hazard elimination and rail-highway crossings) and 10 percent for transportation enhancements, which encompass a broad range of environmental-related activities. The state must divide 50 percent (62.5 percent of the remaining 80 percent) of the funds by population between each of its areas over 200,000 and the remaining areas of the state. The remaining 30 percent (37.5 percent of the remaining 80 percent) can be used in any area of the state.
Funding and Related Constraints	Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was \$3.9 billion. In general, the federal share is 80 percent, and the state share is 20 percent. For interstate highway projects, the federal share ranges from 86.5 to 90.7 percent. Each state must receive at least 90 percent of every dollar it is estimated to have contributed to the Highway Account of the Highway Trust Fund. States can transfer funds from other transportation formula grants to STP. States are required to contract 10 percent of funds with small businesses owned

by disadvantaged persons. The 1991 authorizing legislation contained incentives and sanctions, many of which were rescinded, including those pertaining to national speed limits and motorcycle helmet laws, in 1995. Sanctions for states that fail to have a mandatory seat belt law remain, but DOT has waived penalties for states that meet an alternative standard.

**Program-Specific
Performance Information**

For large projects of over \$1 billion, comparisons of accomplishments with objectives, including explanations for slippages, cost overruns, or high unit costs, are reported. Where output can be quantified, a computation of cost per unit of output may be required. Financial information is compiled on individual projects as well as the overall program.

**Other Sources of
Information**

DOT reports aggregated transportation information collected from national surveys, other federal agencies, states, state subdivisions, and private entities. These data are compiled into basic layers of information: facilities data (the location and connectivity of transportation facilities); service data (carrier locations and services provided); flow data (freight, weight, and vehicular movement); geographic and economic context data; and data on consequences of transportation, such as safety, energy use, and environmental impacts. No national programwide evaluations of this program have been conducted. Projects and particular program components have been evaluated.

**Title VI Innovative
Education Program
Strategies**

Federal Agency

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE), Department of Education

Objectives

To assist state and local education agencies in the reform of elementary and secondary education.

Nature

Provides funds to support local education activities. The grant award is administered by the state. However, not less than 85 percent of funds are distributed by formula to LEAs. Responsibility for program design and implementation rests with local educational agencies and school personnel. SEAs are expressly prohibited from influencing LEAs' decisions regarding use of funds, and state oversight is generally restricted to reviewing compliance and fiscal accountability.

Activities and Related Constraints

Funds can be used for local projects and programs in eight broad areas: technology-based reform approaches; acquisition and use of instructional materials; education reform projects, including magnet schools; programs to improve higher order thinking skills among disadvantaged students; adult and student literacy programs; programs for the gifted and talented; school reform programs consistent with the Goals 2000 Educate America Act; and school improvement programs related to the federal title I program of education for the disadvantaged. LEAs have complete discretion in allocating funds across the allowable activities. If its service area includes private schools, the LEA must ascertain whether those schools wish to participate, and if so, it must ensure the equitable participation of private school students.

Funding and Related Constraints

The fiscal year 1997 appropriation was \$310 million. In the prior year, with a total of \$275 million, amounts per state ranged from about \$1.4 million to \$32 million. In 1991-92, the appropriation of \$450 million constituted less than 0.5 percent of state education budgets. At that level, the median award for small districts was \$5,200; for very large districts, the median was \$360,000. Maintenance of fiscal effort and supplement, not supplant, provisions apply.

Program-Specific Performance Information

SEAs must report biennially on use of funds, type of services provided, and number of children served. LEAs must provide the state with the information required for fiscal audit and program evaluation.

Other Sources of Information

There have been two national evaluation studies of this program, with reports in 1986 and 1994. Both focused on program implementation. States have also conducted evaluations in past years and must again evaluate the effectiveness of statewide and local programs in fiscal year 1998. The Department of Education's nonregulatory guidance encourages LEAs to use

approaches that are consistent with principles of effectiveness established through research.

Urbanized Area Formula Program

Federal Agency

Federal Transit Administration (FTA), Department of Transportation

Objectives

To assist in financing the acquisition, construction, leasing, planning, and improvement of facilities and equipment for use in mass transportation service and the payment of operating expenses to improve or continue mass transport.

Nature

Provides funds to support public and private mass transportation projects in urbanized areas of over 50,000. Key decisionmaking rests with designated public transit entities or with the governor, depending on the size of the area's population.

Activities and Related Constraints

Funds can be used for transit projects for urbanized areas of 50,000 or more people. All major transit capacity expansions must be preceded by a major investment study that justifies projects based upon a comprehensive review of its mobility improvements, environmental benefits, cost-effectiveness, and operating efficiencies. Funded projects must be included in the urbanized area's transportation improvement program and the state transportation improvement program and approved by FTA and FHWA.

Funding and Related Constraints

Federal spending in fiscal year 1997 was about \$2 billion. The federal share ranges from 50 to 90 percent, depending upon the type of activity supported. Authorizing legislation allows for the transfer of funds among various transit and highway transportation programs. Program income cannot be used to refund or reduce the local share of the grant from which it was earned, but may be used for the local share of other transit projects.

Program-Specific Performance Information

Transit authorities or states are required to provide milestone, financial, and final project reports and to report significant events that affect the

schedule, costs, capacity, or usefulness of funded activities. Milestone reports track performance in terms of goals, reasons for slippage or high unit costs, and outcomes stated in terms of costs per unit. At least every 3 years, the Secretary of Transportation reviews and evaluates the performance of the recipient in carrying out the program, including the extent to which program activities are consistent with proposed activities and the planning process required.

**Other Sources of
Information**

All grant recipients must maintain and report systemwide financial and operating information on a quarterly basis. DOT maintains a reporting system, by uniform categories, to accumulate mass transportation financial and operating data. Information includes service descriptions, ridership information, expenditure data, information on funding, descriptions of fleet size and composition, and counts of revenue miles and hours. Outcome measures include uniform calculations of service efficiency, cost efficiency, and service effectiveness.

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Appendix II
Major Contributors to This Report

Related GAO Products

Program Evaluation: Agencies Challenged by New Demand for Information on Program Results ([GAO/GGD-98-53](#), Apr. 24, 1998).

Performance Measurement and Evaluation: Definitions and Relationships ([GAO/GGD-98-26](#), April 1998).

Balancing Flexibility and Accountability: Grant Program Design in Education and Other Areas ([GAO/T-GGD/HEHS-98-96](#), Feb. 11, 1998).

Federal Education Funding: Multiple Programs and Lack of Data Raise Efficiency and Effectiveness Concerns ([GAO/T-HEHS-98-46](#), Nov. 6, 1997).

The Government Performance and Results Act: 1997 Governmentwide Implementation Will Be Uneven ([GAO/GGD-97-109](#), June 2, 1997).

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Block Grants: Characteristics, Experience, and Lessons Learned ([GAO/HEHS-95-74](#), Feb. 9, 1995).

Program Evaluation: Improving the Flow of Information to the Congress ([GAO/PEMD-95-1](#), Jan. 30, 1995).

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