



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Inspector General, conducted this audit to answer the questions:

1. Is EPA effectively monitoring Science to Achieve Results grant recipient activities?
2. Does EPA verify that STAR grant recipients take action to ensure that research misconduct is not associated with grant activities?

The STAR competitive grant program is the primary vehicle through which the EPA funds research at universities and nonprofit groups. From fiscal years 2010 through 2012, the EPA funded 220 projects totaling \$150,043,796 through the STAR grant program.

This report addresses the following EPA Goal or Cross-Cutting Strategy:

- *Advancing science, research and technological innovation.*

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130827-13-P-0361.pdf

EPA Needs to Improve STAR Grant Oversight

What We Found

We found that the EPA's project officers did not monitor STAR grant recipients in a manner consistent with the agency's policy and guidance. For example, project officers did not take action when recipients submitted annual reports late, did not follow baseline monitoring guidance, and did not routinely follow up when disclaimers about EPA's endorsement were not included in published articles. By not following policy, project officers increased the risk that issues would not be corrected in a timely manner and that projects might not meet specified goals.

During administrative advanced-monitoring reviews, the EPA did not ensure costs were allocable to the grant and did not request certified effort reports. We reviewed drawdowns totaling \$639,045 and found \$53,854 in costs that were not allowable. We also found that one grant recipient's certified effort reports did not comply with the recipient's own internal policies.

Project officers did not actively monitor STAR grant recipients for potential research misconduct, or review recipients for compliance with research misconduct terms and conditions. When the EPA does not monitor research misconduct, the agency puts grant funds at risk.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA provide mandatory training to STAR grant project officers. The training should include baseline monitoring performance and instructions to ensure baseline monitoring reports are accurately completed. For incrementally funded grants, the EPA should enforce the terms and conditions that allow withholding of funds for late or missing reports, and amend these requirements for all awards so that payment will be withheld when progress reports are missing or late. We recommend that the EPA require grant recipients to submit corrections to publications when acknowledgement of EPA funding and disclaimers of EPA endorsement are missing from articles.

To address unallowable costs, we recommend that the EPA follow up on the unallowable costs that we identified and issue guidance to grant specialists for improving administrative advanced-monitoring reviews. We also recommend that the EPA require project officers to verify grant recipients' awareness of research misconduct reporting requirements. The EPA's completed and planned corrective actions address all of the OIG's recommendations.

Noteworthy Achievements

The EPA immediately corrected a website containing outdated terms and conditions after we informed the agency about the problem. Grant recipients are now directed to the correct website for grant terms and conditions.