



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

Prior to our review, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did not have comprehensive information describing each of its partnership programs. We conducted this evaluation to collect current and consistent information about EPA's headquarters partnership programs.

Background

Over the last few years, EPA has worked to develop new types of environmental solutions. The Agency now relies more heavily on partnership programs to help protect the environment. EPA's 54 headquarters partnership programs are diverse, providing a variety of benefits to several different customer groups, including some nongovernmental organizations and the public.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20061114-2007-P-00003.pdf

Partnership Programs May Expand EPA's Influence

What We Found

Partnership programs may expand EPA's environmental influence. These programs may achieve this effect by broadening EPA's potential participant base and addressing environmental problems not governed by regulations. Partnership programs are diverse in staff size and budget levels. The number of EPA's partnership programs has grown in the last few years.

We found that partnership programs reported contributing to EPA's overall environmental mission. The majority of the programs also reported having annual goals and program outputs or outcomes. All 54 headquarters partnership program managers we spoke with stated that their program contributed to at least one EPA strategic goal. Thirty-eight managers reported that their programs contribute to more than one goal. In a few cases, managers said they work together to solve a large environmental problem. Partnership programs build on the Agency's traditional regulatory efforts, but are not intended as substitutes for regulations. Instead, some partnership programs work together with regulatory efforts to help participants go beyond compliance with existing regulations. Other programs work to address environmental concerns that are not governed by Federal regulations, such as recycling and climate change.

Many partnership program managers said they collect complete and reliable data that they then use to make changes to their programs. However, barriers to data collection, including data collection costs, exist. Partners and participants contribute to some partnership programs by sharing program tasks. In a few cases, this includes participants undertaking program management roles. However, this type of collaboration may make it difficult to determine the outcomes of individual programs.

Next Steps

The Agency has had difficulty in defining, identifying, and characterizing these programs. Managers claim that their programs help to achieve EPA strategic goals, but we have not yet gathered sufficient measurement and outcome data to verify that partnership programs are achieving these claims. Since as many as half of the programs receive marketing assistance through collaboration, as well as other in-kind services and occasional participation fees, we will need to conduct further evaluation work to determine:

1. How partnership programs manage their collaborative relationships.
2. How those collaborative relationships support program outcomes.