



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

Based on a congressional request, we reviewed congressional earmark grants awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Specifically, the requestor asked us to determine the total number and dollar amount of earmark grants, including EPA's associated costs. The requestor also asked us to determine what impact earmarks had on advancing EPA's mission and goals.

Background

For this report, we define a congressional earmark as a numbered line item within a House Conference Report specifying a dollar amount, recipient, and a particular project. Since 2003, earmarks have represented about 4 to 6 percent of EPA's annual budget. While EPA awards the majority of earmark grants to States and local governments, it also awards earmark grants to universities and non-profit organizations.

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/2007/20070522-2007-P-00024.pdf

Number of and Cost to Award and Manage EPA Earmark Grants, and the Grants' Impact on the Agency's Mission

What We Found

Between January 1, 2005, and March 31, 2006, EPA awarded 444 earmark grants totaling \$454 million. Those earmarks accounted for about 13 percent of the grant dollars EPA awarded. During this same time, EPA spent about \$4.9 million to award and manage the 444 earmark grants.

Our review of work plans for 86 earmark grants found that 82 were for projects aimed at contributing to EPA's Strategic Plan mission and goals. Thus, we considered them to be helping to advance EPA's mission and goals. Grant work plans for the other four grants did not demonstrate how the projects would promote EPA goals:

- A non-profit organization used about half its grant funds to purchase computers for a high school and support student trips between the United States and U.S. Virgin Islands.
- A university studied noise levels from parked, idling trains.
- A local government did not identify how two of the earmark grants were going to achieve the objectives stated in the work plans or how the projects would impact the environment.

We are not making any recommendations in this report.

In responding to the draft report, EPA noted that the Office of Inspector General found that most earmarks have the potential to contribute to EPA's mission. Further, EPA believes that two of the four earmark grants we questioned (for the non-profit and the university) contributed to the Agency's mission. In comparing the work plans to the Agency's goals, we did not agree that the earmark grants contributed to the Agency's mission. EPA is conducting a compliance review of one of the grants to ensure funds were not used for unallowable activities. For the two grants to the local government, EPA is working with the recipient to revise the work plans.