



Highlights of [GAO-08-636T](#), a testimony before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on State, Local, and Private Sector Preparedness and Integration, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Following the September 11 terrorist attacks, state and local governments formed fusion centers, collaborative efforts to detect, prevent, investigate, and respond to criminal or terrorist activity. Recognizing that the centers are a critical mechanism for sharing information, the federal government—including the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Department of Justice (DOJ), and the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment (PM-ISE), which has primary responsibility for governmentwide information sharing—is taking steps to partner with fusion centers.

This testimony focuses on (1) the characteristics of fusion centers as of September 2007 and (2) federal efforts to help alleviate challenges centers identified. This testimony is based on GAO's October 2007 report on 58 fusion centers and related federal efforts to support them as well as updated information GAO obtained in March 2008 by reviewing plans describing selected federal efforts and attending the second annual national fusion center conference.

## What GAO Recommends

While this testimony contains no new recommendations, GAO has recommended that the federal government define and articulate its long-term fusion center role and whether it expects to provide resources to help ensure their sustainability. PM-ISE agreed with the recommendation and is in the process of implementing it.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-636T](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-8777 or [larencee@gao.gov](mailto:larencee@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

### Federal Efforts Are Helping to Address Some Challenges Faced by State and Local Fusion Centers

#### What GAO Found

Almost all states and several local governments have established or are in the process of establishing fusion centers that vary in their characteristics. Centers were generally established to address gaps in information sharing, and the majority of the centers GAO contacted had adopted broad missions that could include both counterterrorism and law enforcement–related information. While law enforcement entities, such as state police, are the lead or managing agencies in the majority of the centers GAO contacted, the centers varied in their staff sizes and partnerships with other agencies. The majority of the operational fusion centers GAO contacted had federal personnel, including from DHS or the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), assigned to them as of September 2007.

DHS and DOJ have several efforts under way that begin to address challenges fusion center officials identified.

- DHS and DOJ have provided many fusion centers access to their information systems, but fusion center officials cited challenges accessing and managing multiple information systems.
- Both DHS and the FBI have provided security clearances for state and local personnel and set timeliness goals for granting clearances. However, officials cited challenges obtaining and using clearances.
- DHS, DOJ, and the PM-ISE have also taken steps to develop guidance and provide technical assistance to fusion centers, for instance, by issuing guidelines for establishing and operating centers. However, officials at 21 centers cited challenges with the availability of training for mission-specific issues. DHS and DOJ have continued providing a technical assistance program for fusion centers and disseminated a baseline capabilities draft in March 2008 that outlines minimum operational standards for fusion centers. While this support and guidance is promising, it is too soon to determine the extent to which it will address challenges identified by officials contacted.
- Finally, officials in 43 of the 58 fusion centers contacted reported facing challenges related to obtaining personnel, and officials in 54 centers reported challenges with funding, some of which affected these centers' sustainability. To support fusion centers, both DHS and the FBI have assigned, and continue to assign, personnel to the centers. To help address funding issues, DHS has provided funding for fusion-center related activities.

The National Strategy for Information Sharing, issued in October 2007 by the President, states that the federal government will support the establishment of fusion centers and help sustain them through grant funding, technical assistance, and training. However, some fusion center officials raised concerns about how specifically the federal government was planning to assist state and local governments to sustain fusion centers as it works to incorporate fusion centers into the ISE and to implement the strategy.