



Highlights of [GAO-06-1049](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 1998, Congress passed the Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act to establish a linked network of locations, such as parks, historic seaports, or museums—known as gateways—where the public can access and experience the bay. The National Park Service (Park Service) provides support to the gateways through a related grant program. In 2005, congressional concerns were raised about the Park Service's management of the program.

GAO was asked to determine the extent to which the (1) criteria for selecting gateways are transparent and consistently applied; (2) grants have been awarded to support the program goals of conserving and restoring, interpreting, and accessing bay-related resources; and (3) Park Service has taken action to improve program management and oversight. To conduct this work, GAO, among other things, examined Park Service files and interviewed Park Service officials, as well as other officials involved in the program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a number of recommendations aimed at ensuring that accountability and oversight is improved. In commenting on a draft of this report, Interior stated that it concurred with GAO's recommendations and described actions it plans to take to implement them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-1049.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robin M. Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841 or nazzaror@gao.gov.

CHESAPEAKE BAY GATEWAYS PROGRAM

National Park Service Needs Better Accountability and Oversight of Grantees and Gateways

What GAO Found

The Park Service and the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network (CBGN) working group—an advisory body of 17 bay-related agencies and organizations, including the Park Service—use criteria in selecting gateways for the network that are not always transparent and may not be consistently applied. As a result, the Park Service cannot be assured that its process for selecting gateways is always fair and open. Regarding transparency, applicants are not always aware of all the criteria that the Park Service and the CBGN working group use to select gateways because not all the criteria are published. The Park Service and CBGN working group also may not be consistently applying the criteria used to select gateways. For example, some applicants were denied gateway status although they had met all the selection criteria included in the checklist the Park Service uses to review gateway applications, while others were approved although they did not meet all these criteria.

The Park Service awarded almost all of its fiscal years 2000 through 2005 grants, totaling \$6.28 million, to support the grant program goals of interpretation of and access to bay-related resources but does not yet have a process in place to evaluate whether grants are effectively meeting these program goals, as well as the other program goal of conservation and restoration. During this period, the Park Service awarded 189 grants: 117 for interpretation, 68 for access, and 4 for conservation and restoration. Of the 189 grants, 110 went to 39 gateways that received more than 1 grant for either interpretation or access, with several gateways receiving up to 4 grants for interpretation. According to Park Service staff, several grantees, and GAO's analysis, these grants are for distinct projects or phases of larger projects. Although the Park Service records the program goal(s) associated with each grant project, it does not yet have a process in place to determine the effectiveness of its grants in meeting these goals. The Park Service has a strategic plan that describes program priorities and effectiveness measures, but GAO found several weaknesses in the plan.

The Park Service has made progress in outlining and implementing a number of actions to respond to management and oversight concerns first identified in February 2005, but accountability and oversight weaknesses continue. In March 2005, the Park Service developed an action plan that outlined 27 corrective actions and associated time frames to improve program management. The Park Service has implemented 16 of these actions—such as holding a financial management workshop for new grantees and contracting for an external audit of 10 percent of past grants to determine compliance with financial requirements—but 11 actions, mostly to improve oversight, have not been fully implemented. In addition, the following management problems remain: inadequate training, lack of timely grantee reporting, inappropriate grant awards to applicants with incomplete projects or lack of capacity to complete projects on time, a backlog of uncompleted grants, and underperforming gateways.