



Highlights of [GAO-06-106](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

STATE DEPARTMENT

Stronger Action Needed to Improve Oversight and Assess Risks of the Summer Work Travel and Trainee Categories of the Exchange Visitor Program

Why GAO Did This Study

Exchange programs, which bring over 280,000 foreign visitors to the United States annually, are widely recognized as an effective way to expose citizens of other countries to the American people and culture. Past GAO and the Department of State (State) Office of Inspector General reviews have reported that some exchange visitors have participated in unauthorized activities and cited problems in the management and oversight of the programs. Strong management oversight is needed to ensure that the programs operate as intended and are not abused.

This report examines how State manages the Summer Work Travel and the Trainee programs to ensure that only authorized activities are carried out under the programs and identifies potential risks of the programs and the data available to assess these risks.

What GAO Recommends

This report recommends that the Secretary of State take strong action to enhance the overall management and monitoring of the Summer Work Travel and Trainee programs, including fully implementing a compliance unit to monitor exchange activities; updating and amending regulations; and developing strategies to obtain data on overstays, program abuses, and other risks associated with the programs. State acknowledged weaknesses in the programs and described actions it is taking to address our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-106.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jess Ford (202) 512-4128 or fordj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

State has not exerted sufficient management oversight of the Summer Work Travel and the Trainee programs to guard against abuse of the programs and has been slow to address program deficiencies. State attempts to ensure compliance with program regulations through its processes of approving and annually reviewing the organizations that sponsor exchange visitors. These processes, however, are not sufficient to ensure that visitors participate only in authorized activities because the procedures consist primarily of document reviews, and State rarely visits the sponsors or host employers of the exchange visitors to make sure they are following the rules to investigate complaints. Moreover, some sponsors have asserted that the program regulations need updating. Further, State officials believe that the sanctions provided in the regulations are difficult to enforce. State acknowledged that it has been slow to address identified deficiencies and update the regulations, but had indicated that it is beginning to revise the regulations and is establishing a unit to monitor exchange activities. However funding of the unit has not been secured.

A number of potential risks are associated with the programs, including that exchange visitors might use it to remain in the United States beyond their authorized time. There is also the potential for the Trainee Program to be misused as an employment program. Further, negative experiences for exchange participants could undermine the purpose of the programs. However, State has little data to measure whether such risks to the program are significant. As a result, State cannot determine if additional management actions are needed to mitigate the risks.

Summer Work Travel Participants and Trainee Participants, 2003 and 2004

Program	2003	2004
Summer Work Travel	88,000	89,453 ^a
Trainee	31,084	27,475

Source: The Department of State.

^aAs of November 2004.