



Highlights of [GAO-09-638T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2003, the Financial Literacy and Education Improvement Act created the Financial Literacy and Education Commission, which comprises 20 federal agencies and which the Department of the Treasury's (Treasury) Office of Financial Education coordinates. Responding to a mandate in the act, GAO assessed the Commission's effectiveness and in December 2006 recommended that the Commission (1) incorporate additional elements into its national strategy to help it serve as a true implementation plan, measure results, and ensure accountability; (2) expand current efforts to cultivate sustainable partnerships with states, localities, nonprofits, and private entities; (3) obtain independent reviewers for the required assessments of overlap in federal activities and the availability and impact of federal materials; and (4) measure customer satisfaction with its Web site and test its usability.

This statement discusses the Commission's progress in implementing GAO's recommendations and key challenges the Commission faces. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed annual reports, meeting minutes, budget, and other information from the Commission, Treasury, and related entities, and interviewed selected representatives.

View [GAO-09-638T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Richard J. Hillman at 202-512-8678 or hillmanr@gao.gov.

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND EDUCATION COMMISSION

Progress Made in Fostering Partnerships, but National Strategy Remains Largely Descriptive Rather Than Strategic

What GAO Found

The Financial Literacy and Education Commission has addressed some of GAO's recommendations and not others:

- *The National Strategy remains largely descriptive.* GAO's 2006 report noted that the Commission's National Strategy for Financial Literacy largely was descriptive rather than strategic, generally did not include a plan for implementation, and only partially addressed or defined elements such as performance measures, resource needs, and roles and responsibilities. Revisions to the strategy made since GAO's last report include new "calls to action," but do not represent a fundamental shift in approach that incorporates specific recommendations on roles, funding, and activities. As a result, the document still does not serve as a true functional strategy.
- *Progress has been made in fostering partnerships.* The creation of the National Financial Education Network, which focuses on the state and local level, and the President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy, which focuses on the private and nonprofit sectors, has been a positive step toward developing mutually beneficial partnerships that are sustainable over the long term.
- *Independent reviews have been partially initiated.* Treasury has enlisted a volunteer doctoral student to conduct independent reviews on overlap of federal activities and availability of financial literacy materials, but the student will not assess the impact of the materials, as called for in the act. Treasury staff told GAO that they used a volunteer because they lacked the funds to hire a paid professional.
- *Commission has measured customer satisfaction with its Web site, but has not yet tested usability.* Responding to GAO's recommendation, the Commission conducted a survey of users of its MyMoney.gov Web site, although only 144 surveys were completed. The Commission has not conducted usability testing, a recommended best practice for federal public Web sites, although it says it is looking into doing so later this year.

One challenge faced by the Commission has been limited resources. It has no independent budget and Congress has not provided funds targeted to the Commission since 2005, although the Commission is able to draw upon some financial and in-kind resources from its member agencies. For the past several years, Treasury's Office of Financial Education has had about five staff members to conduct its own and Commission activities. The Commission's multiagency governance structure offers benefits—such as the ability to address crosscutting issues—but also is inherently challenging because it involves coordinating 20 individual federal agencies, each with its own set of interests, resources, and constituencies.