



Highlights of [GAO-07-137](#), a report to congressional committees

HEALTH CAREERS OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

Process for Awarding Competitive Grants Included Independent Review

Why GAO Did This Study

To support the education and training of health professionals, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), administers health professions education programs authorized under title VII of the Public Health Service Act. One of these programs, the Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP), provides grants to health professions schools and other entities to help students from disadvantaged backgrounds prepare for health professions education and training. Funding preference is given to grant applications that demonstrate a comprehensive approach involving other educational or health-related partners.

Congressional committees have encouraged HRSA to give priority to applications from schools with a historic mission of educating minority students for health professions. In 2004, the appropriations conference committee asked GAO to review HRSA's process for awarding grants. This report addresses, for fiscal years 2002 through 2005, (1) HRSA's process for awarding HCOP grants and (2) the number and characteristics of HCOP applicants and grantees.

GAO reviewed data from HRSA, interviewed HRSA officials, and reviewed relevant federal laws and agency documents from HHS and the Department of Education.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-137.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Leslie G. Aronovitz at (312) 220-7600 or aronovitzl@gao.gov.

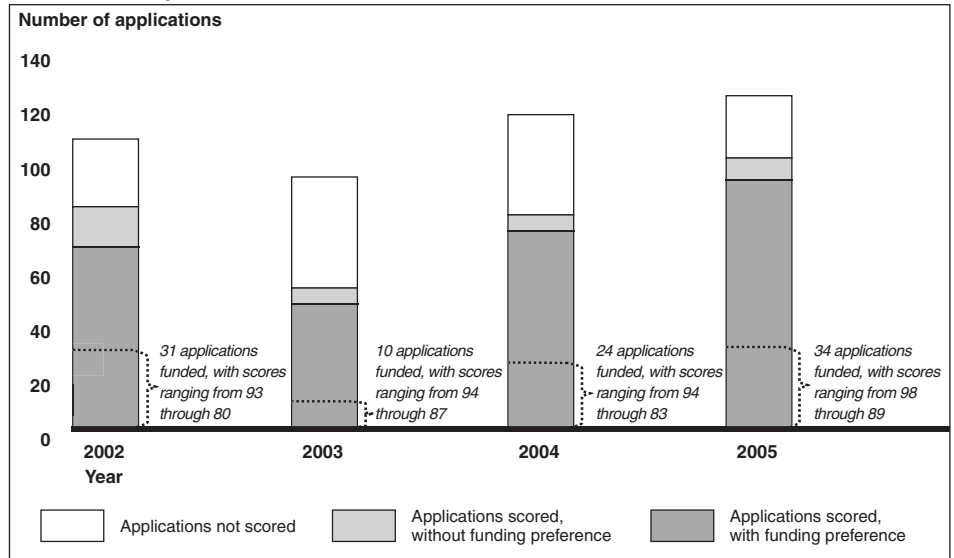
What GAO Found

HRSA followed a standard process to award HCOP grants, distributing funds on a noncompetitive basis to continue funding existing HCOP grants within their approved project periods, and then awarding the remaining funds on a competitive basis. For each of fiscal years 2002–05, HRSA competitively awarded between \$4 million and \$15 million from the approximately \$34 million annually available for HCOP. To award competitive grants, HRSA used independent reviewers who assessed applications against published criteria, scored applications that met minimum criteria, and determined if they qualified for the funding preference. HRSA ranked the applications from highest to lowest score—putting those with the funding preference first—and awarded grants in decreasing rank order until the available funds were exhausted. Although HRSA had discretion to award grants out of rank order, the agency did not do so for fiscal years 2002–05.

For fiscal years 2002–05, HRSA awarded a total of 99 competitive HCOP grants from 439 grant applications reviewed. Overall, minority-serving institutions submitted about 25 percent of the applications reviewed and received about 30 percent of the competitive grants; historically black colleges and universities were the most numerous grantees among minority-serving institutions, followed by Hispanic-serving institutions.

HRSA commented that a draft of this report met the goals of describing the award process and outlining the number and characteristics of HCOP applicants and grantees.

Results of Competitive HCOP Process, Fiscal Years 2002–05



Source: GAO analysis of HRSA data.

Note: The reviewers did not score applications they found were not responsive to the review criteria.