

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-1002](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Strengthening marriages and relationships in low-income families has emerged as a national strategy for enhancing the well-being of children. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) appropriated \$150 million in discretionary grants each year from 2006 through 2010 to implement the Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Initiative. To provide insight into how these programs are being implemented and monitored, GAO is reporting on (1) how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awarded grants and the types of organizations that received funding; (2) what activities and services grantees are providing, including those for domestic violence victims; (3) how HHS monitors and assesses program implementation and use of funds; and (4) how program impact is measured. GAO surveyed grantees, interviewed HHS staff, reviewed HHS records and policy, and visited several programs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that HHS employ a risk-based approach to monitoring grantees and conducting grantee site visits, using its planned management information system and information from both progress reports and performance indicators to help identify those grantees at risk of not meeting performance goals or not in compliance with grant requirements. HHS also should create clear, consistent guidance and policy for monitoring Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grantees. HHS is in the process of developing a risk-based approach to monitoring, but disagreed that they lacked clear, consistent monitoring guidance. GAO believes that its recommendations remain valid.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1002](#). For more information, contact Kay Brown at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov.

HEALTHY MARRIAGE AND RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE

Further Progress Is Needed in Developing a Risk-Based Monitoring Approach to Help HHS Improve Program Oversight

What GAO Found

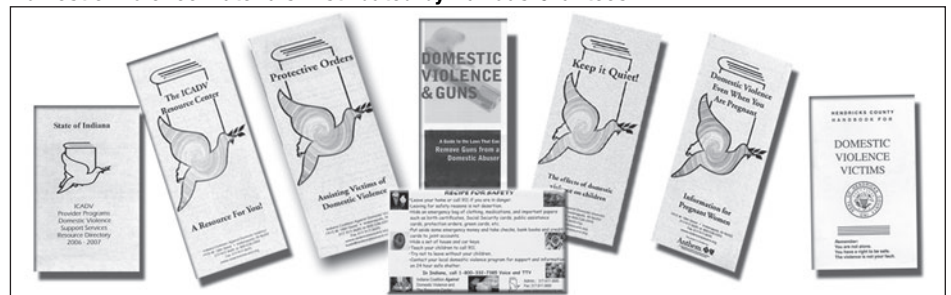
Operating under a deadline that allowed HHS 7 months to award grants, HHS shortened its existing process to award Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood grants to public and private organizations. During this process, HHS did not fully examine grantees' programs as described in their applications, including the activities they planned to offer, and this created challenges and setbacks for grantees later as they implemented their programs. For example, some grantees told us that they were informed that certain activities were not permitted months into program implementation even though HHS had approved these same activities described in their grant applications.

The Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood programs provide similar activities, but their focus and target populations differ. Healthy Marriage programs are more likely to provide marriage and relationship activities, while Responsible Fatherhood programs are more likely to provide parenting skills. Additionally, both programs serve low-income and minority groups, but Healthy Marriage grantees are more likely to target teenaged youth, and Responsible Fatherhood grantees are more likely to target incarcerated parents. Both programs' grantees reported that they refer domestic violence victims to specialists in their communities.

HHS uses methods that include site visits and progress reports to monitor grantees, but it lacks mechanisms to identify and target grantees that are not in compliance with grant requirements or are not meeting performance goals, and it also lacks clear and consistent guidance for performing site monitoring visits. Moreover, HHS's ability to readily identify which grantees are not in compliance or not meeting goals is hindered because it currently lacks uniform performance indicators and a computerized management information system that would enable HHS to more efficiently track key information on individual grantees. HHS told us that it is in the process of developing a management information system and has submitted uniform performance indicators for review.

HHS has established a rigorous research agenda to gauge the long-term impact of healthy marriage and responsible fatherhood activities on diverse, low-income populations. HHS is sponsoring three multiyear impact evaluations of the Healthy Marriage program and one of the Responsible Fatherhood program.

Domestic Violence Materials Distributed by Various Grantees



Source: GAO photo.