



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

In response to a congressional request, the Office of Inspector General examined the execution of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grants awarded to the National Rural Water Association (NRWA). To address the request, we sought to answer four specific questions.

Background

The NRWA is a non-profit organization that provides technical assistance, training, and legislative representation to water providers serving rural communities. NRWA is a federation consisting of 48 State associations representing 49 States. Since October 2000, NRWA has received over \$70 million from EPA to provide training and technical assistance to rural water systems.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2006/20060530-2006-S-00003.pdf

Congressional Request Regarding EPA Grants to the National Rural Water Association

What We Found

We found the following regarding the four questions we sought to answer:

What environmental benefits result from the EPA grants to NRWA?

Under its grants, NRWA is not required to measure the environmental outcomes of the technical assistance activities it provides. As a result, the environmental benefits could not be determined. EPA grants awarded to NRWA, after January 1, 2005, include outputs but do not link the outputs to environmental outcomes and measures.

What improvements can be made in NRWA's administration of the program?

NRWA's administration of the grants can be improved to more effectively meet the needs of rural water systems. The number of organizations eligible to perform work for NRWA can be expanded to include non-member organizations. Rather than distributing funds equally to all States, NRWA could take into consideration the individual needs of rural water systems in each State in determining funding and the required activities and outputs.

Are there other options for awarding some rural water assistance funds?

Rather than earmarking funds for NRWA, Congress has other options for ensuring rural water systems receive needed assistance. Congress could require EPA to award the grants through a competitive process. Congress could incorporate into the appropriation language requiring NRWA to award funds to technical assistance providers based on State needs. Another option would be to consolidate grants awarded to NRWA.

How does NRWA develop white papers and policy positions?

NRWA prepares white papers to address the challenges facing rural water systems. NRWA and its contractor determine the topics for the white papers. The State associations' participation is limited to the development of white paper and policy positions through their representatives on NRWA's board of directors. According to NRWA officials, non-Federal revenue (e.g., investments, member services, and other revenues) is used to finance the white papers.