



Highlights of [GAO-04-31](#), a report to the Honorable Richard C. Shelby, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2001, federal agencies provided \$19 billion for university research, a vital part of the nation's research and development effort. GAO was asked to examine federal agencies' actions to ensure that (1) the results of the university research grants they fund are made available to the public and (2) universities receiving such grants implement policies for identifying and managing possible financial conflicts of interest. GAO reviewed the actions of eight federal agencies and conducted a Web-based survey of 200 leading research universities. GAO also met with officials in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to discuss the National Science and Technology Council's role in coordinating federal science policy.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Education post the final technical reports of the research it funds on its Web site. GAO also recommends that the National Science and Technology Council coordinate the development of a uniform federal requirement for identifying and resolving financial conflicts of interest in federally funded research. In commenting on the draft report, Education agreed with the recommendation to post research results on its Web site. OSTP agreed with the recommendation for developing a federal requirement.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-31](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-31).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robin Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841 or [nazzaror@gao.gov](mailto:nazzaror@gao.gov).

## UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

# Most Federal Agencies Need to Better Protect against Financial Conflicts of Interest

## What GAO Found

Each of the eight federal agencies GAO examined relies on university scientists who receive federally funded research grants to make the results available to the public. Although university scientists customarily seek to publish their research results in peer-reviewed journals, agencies cannot require such publication as a condition for funding because it is impossible to ensure in advance that the results will be accepted for publication. Agencies do, however, explicitly encourage funding recipients to make results public. The Departments of Agriculture, Defense, and Energy; the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) also disseminate the results of their funded research by posting them on their Web sites (see table below). Officials from these agencies said that posting the results is an effective way to share information among scientists, as well as with the public. In contrast, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF) do not post research results on their Web sites. According to NIH officials, the risk associated with posting researchers' final reports before they have been validated by peer review is too great in the biomedical field. The Department of Education is considering how best to widely disseminate the results of research it funds.

NIH and NSF are the only federal agencies that require universities to implement policies for identifying and managing possible financial conflicts of interest for the research they fund. The other six agencies do not have financial conflict of interest standards for university research grants. Of the 171 universities that responded to the GAO survey, 148 (87 percent) reported that all of their federally funded research is covered by financial conflict of interest policies that are consistent with either NIH's or NSF's standards. However, 17 universities reported that they do not extend either agency's requirements to cover research grants from other federal agencies. Unless federal agencies uniformly require that universities implement conflict of interest policies, the government cannot properly safeguard against financial conflicts of interest that might bias federally funded research.

### Agencies That Post Research Results on Their Web Sites

Agency	Web-based information system	Information posted
Agriculture	Current Research Information System	Annual and final technical reports
Defense	Defense Technical Information Center	Final technical reports
Energy	Information Bridge	Final technical reports
EPA	National Center For Environmental Research	Annual and final report summaries
NASA	Scientific and Technical Aerospace Reports File	Abstract of final technical reports

Sources: Agriculture, Defense, Energy, EPA, and NASA.