



Highlights of [GAO-04-961](#), a report to the Secretary of Education

LOW-INCOME AND MINORITY SERVING INSTITUTIONS

Department of Education Could Improve Its Monitoring and Assistance

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress has expanded the number of low-income and minority serving institutions eligible for grants under Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act and nearly doubled funding for these grants in the last 5 years to about \$432 million in fiscal year 2004. Institutions eligible for funding under Titles III and V include Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges, Hispanic Serving Institutions, Alaska Native Serving Institutions, Native Hawaiian Serving Institutions, and other postsecondary institutions that serve low-income students. Given the recent expansion, we examined these programs to determine (1) how institutions used their Title III and Title V grants and the benefits they received from using these grant funds, (2) what objectives and strategies the Department of Education (Education) has developed for Title III and Title V programs, and (3) to what extent Education monitors and provides assistance to Title III and Title V institutions.

What GAO Recommends

We recommend that Education take steps to ensure that monitoring and technical assistance plans are carried out and targeted to at-risk grantees.

In commenting on a draft of this report, Education generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-961.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cornelia M. Ashby, (202) 512-8403, ashbyc@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Grantees most commonly reported using Title III and Title V grant funds to strengthen academics, and they reported a wide range of benefits. Most grantees reported using their grants to fund efforts designed to strengthen academics, and we estimate that over three-quarters of the grantees reported initiatives that focused on improving student services (e.g., tutoring) and outcomes for students (e.g., course pass rates). The most commonly reported benefits were related to improvements in academic quality and student services and outcomes. While grantees reported a wide range of benefits, most also reported challenges in implementing their projects that sometimes resulted in the need for additional time at the end of the grant to complete their efforts.

Percentage of Grantees Reporting Benefits, by Grant Program

Benefit	Title III				Title V
	Strengthening Institutions	Tribal Colleges	Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian	Historically Black Colleges and Universities	Hispanic Serving Institutions
Academic quality	91	75	100	100	89
Student services and outcomes	82	63	100	96	63
Institutional management	64	63	88	96	85
Fiscal stability	18	75	13	82	56

Source: GAO analysis.

Education has developed objectives and strategies designed to strengthen Title III and Title V institutions by improving financial sustainability, technological capacity, academic quality, student services and outcomes, and institutional management. While Education has developed data to determine its progress in four of these areas, it is still in the process of developing data for measuring increased technological capacity.

Education has developed plans and tools to enhance its monitoring of and assistance to Title III and Title V grantees, but it has made limited progress in implementing these initiatives. Specifically, Education has not fully implemented its monitoring plan or completed its new electronic monitoring tools, and a new training curriculum to enhance the monitoring skills of staff. We found that only one-quarter of staff conducted two required site visits, and most visits that were conducted were not selected based on the requisite risk criteria. Also, staff were not aware of updated department guidance and, as a result, did not always properly monitor grantees. We also found that Education's ability to provide technical assistance was limited. For example, Education has acknowledged that its failure to provide information on eligibility criteria has resulted in uncertainty about the eligibility of over three-quarters of Title V grantees.