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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-326](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996 (NAHASDA) changed how the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides housing assistance to Native Americans. Congress created NAHASDA to recognize self-determination for tribes in addressing their low-income housing needs. In NAHASDA's 2008 reauthorization, Congress asked GAO to assess the program's effectiveness. This report discusses (1) how tribes have used NAHASDA funds, (2) how NAHASDA has improved the process of providing tribes with funds for housing, and (3) the extent to which NAHASDA has contributed to infrastructure improvements in tribal communities. GAO analyzed agency documentation, surveyed all tribes receiving grants in fiscal year 2008, conducted site visits with select tribes, and interviewed officials at HUD and other agencies.

What GAO Recommends

To better assess program impact and help grantees identify their infrastructure needs, GAO recommends that HUD (1) incorporate reporting on infrastructure in its planned revisions for grantee reporting on uses of block grant funds and (2) obtain IHS data on housing-related infrastructure deficiencies on Indian lands. HUD agreed with the report's conclusions and recommendations.

[View GAO-10-326 or key components.](#)
For more information, contact William B. Shear at (202) 512-8678 or shearw@gao.gov.

NATIVE AMERICAN HOUSING

Tribes Generally View Block Grant Program as Effective, but Tracking of Infrastructure Plans and Investments Needs Improvement

What GAO Found

Native American tribes have used NAHASDA block grant funds to develop new housing and to provide other types of housing assistance to eligible members (see figure below), but fewer small grantees have developed new housing. Out of 359 grantees in fiscal year 2008, 102 received less than \$250,000, with 22 of those reporting that they had developed new housing over the life of their participation in the program. Smaller grantees often provide tenant-based rental assistance and other such services to members, but HUD neither tracks activities that are not unit-based (units built, acquired, or rehabilitated) nor reports those activities to Congress. However, HUD is revising its reporting to track more activities, which should help efforts to assess the impact of NAHASDA.

NAHASDA Grantee Replacing a Log Cabin Using Block Grant Funds



Source: GAO

Most grantees that we surveyed and interviewed view NAHASDA as effective, largely because it emphasizes tribal self-determination. Grantees feel the program has helped to improve housing conditions and increase access to affordable housing, but they reported that developing housing finance mechanisms and increasing economic development remain as challenges.

Housing-related infrastructure development is an affordable housing activity under NAHASDA, but HUD does not collect grantees' infrastructure plans or measure their infrastructure investments. Indian Health Service (IHS) data show an acute need for sanitation-related infrastructure in Indian housing, and 85 percent of grantees responding to our survey reported that developing infrastructure, such as providing homes with access to drinking water, was a continuing need. According to IHS officials, HUD can access IHS data on sanitation deficiencies under a 2007 memorandum of understanding between the agencies. HUD could use this data to track grantees' efforts to address a key need in their communities and broaden the scope of accomplishment data it reports to Congress. This data could also help grantees identify any unmet sanitation needs they might address with their NAHASDA grants.