



Highlights of [GAO-10-41](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Information is a crucial tool in securing the nation's borders against crimes and potential terrorist threats, with the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and the FBI, having key information sharing roles. GAO was asked to assess the extent to which (1) local and tribal officials in border communities received useful information from their federal partners, (2) federal agencies supported state fusion centers'—where states collaborate with federal agencies to improve information sharing—efforts to develop border intelligence products, and (3) local and tribal agencies were aware of the suspicious activities they are to report. To conduct this work, GAO analyzed relevant laws, directives, policies, and procedures; contacted a nongeneralizable sample of 20 agencies in border communities and five fusion centers (based on geographic location and size); and interviewed DHS and FBI officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS and the FBI more fully identify the information needs of and establish partnerships with local and tribal officials along the borders; identify promising practices in developing border intelligence products within fusion centers and obtain feedback on the products; and define the suspicious activities that local and tribal officials in border communities are to report and how to report them. DHS agreed and the FBI did not comment.

[View GAO-10-41 or key components.](#)

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INFORMATION SHARING

Federal Agencies Are Sharing Border and Terrorism Information with Local and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies, but Additional Efforts Are Needed

What GAO Found

Officials from 15 of the 20 local and tribal law enforcement agencies in the border communities GAO contacted said they received information directly from at least one federal agency in the vicinity (Border Patrol, ICE, or the FBI) that was useful in enhancing their situational awareness of border crimes and potential terrorist threats. Nine of the 20 agencies reported receiving information from all three federal agencies. Overall, where federal officials had discussed local and tribal officials' information needs and had established information sharing partnerships and related mechanisms to share information with them—consistent with the *National Strategy for Information Sharing* and best practices—the majority of the local and tribal officials reported receiving useful information. However, most local and tribal officials that reported federal agencies had not discussed information needs and had not established partnerships with them also said they had not received useful information. By more fully identifying the information needs of local and tribal agencies along the borders and establishing information sharing partnerships, federal agencies could be better positioned to provide local and tribal agencies with information that enhances their situational awareness of border crimes and potential terrorist threats.

Federal officials at two of the five state fusion centers we visited were supporting fusion center efforts to develop border intelligence products or reports that contained information on border crimes and potential terrorist threats, as discussed in the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. DHS recognizes that it needs to add personnel to other fusion centers in border states to, among other things, support the creation of such products, and is developing plans to do so, but cited funding issues and competing priorities as barriers. The creation of border intelligence products—such as those developed by two of the fusion centers we visited—represent potential approaches that DHS and the FBI could use to identify promising practices that other fusion centers could adopt. Identifying such practices is important because of the central role the federal government places on fusion centers to facilitate the sharing of information. Also, DHS had not obtained feedback from local and tribal officials on the utility and quality of the border intelligence products that its analysts in fusion centers have helped to develop. Additional efforts to obtain such feedback would support DHS and FBI efforts to improve the utility and quality of future products.

Officials from 13 of the 20 local and tribal agencies in the border communities we contacted said that federal agencies had not defined what suspicious activities or indicators rise to the level of potential terrorist threats and should be reported to federal agencies or fusion centers. Recognizing this problem, federal agencies are participating in national efforts to standardize suspicious activity reporting. Until such efforts are implemented, defining suspicious activity indicators and current reporting processes would help better position local and tribal officials along the borders to identify and report incidents indicative of criminal activity associated with terrorist threats.