

Highlights of [GAO-12-144T](#), a statement for the record to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

A breakdown in information sharing was a major factor contributing to the failure to prevent the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Since then, federal, state, and local governments have taken steps to improve sharing. This statement focuses on government efforts to (1) establish the Information Sharing Environment (ISE), a government-wide approach that facilitates the sharing of terrorism-related information; (2) support fusion centers, where states collaborate with federal agencies to improve sharing; (3) provide other support to state and local agencies to enhance sharing; and (4) strengthen use of the terrorist watchlist. GAO's comments are based on products issued from September 2010 through July 2011 and selected updates in September 2011. For the updates, GAO reviewed reports on the status of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) efforts to support fusion centers, and interviewed DHS officials regarding these efforts. This statement also includes preliminary observations based on GAO's ongoing watchlist work. For this work, GAO is analyzing the guidance used by agencies to nominate individuals to the watchlist and agency procedures for screening individuals against the list, and is interviewing relevant officials from law enforcement and intelligence agencies, among other things.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making new recommendations, but has made recommendations in prior reports to federal agencies to enhance information sharing. The agencies generally agreed and are making progress, but full implementation of these recommendations is needed.

View [GAO-12-144T](#). For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-8777 or larencee@gao.gov.

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INFORMATION SHARING

Progress Made and Challenges Remaining in Sharing Terrorism-Related Information

What GAO Found

The government continues to make progress in sharing terrorism-related information among its many security partners, but does not yet have a fully-functioning ISE in place. In prior reports, GAO recommended that agencies take steps to develop an overall plan or roadmap to guide ISE implementation and establish measures to help gauge progress. These measures would help determine what information sharing capabilities have been accomplished and are left to develop, as well as what difference these capabilities have made to improve sharing and homeland security. Accomplishing these steps, as well as ensuring agencies have the necessary resources and leadership commitment, should help strengthen sharing and address issues GAO has identified that make information sharing a high-risk area.

Federal agencies are helping fusion centers build analytical and operational capabilities, but have more work to complete to help these centers sustain their operations and measure their homeland security value. For example, DHS has provided resources, including personnel and grant funding, to develop a national network of centers. However, centers are concerned about their ability to sustain and expand their operations over the long term, negatively impacting their ability to function as part of the network. Federal agencies have provided guidance to centers and plan to conduct annual assessments of centers' capabilities and develop performance metrics by the end of 2011 to determine centers' value to the ISE. DHS and the Department of Justice are providing technical assistance and training to help centers develop privacy and civil liberties policies and protections, but continuous assessment and monitoring policy implementation will be important to help ensure the policies provide effective protections.

In response to its mission to share information with state and local partners, DHS's Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) has taken steps to identify these partner's information needs, develop related intelligence products, and obtain more feedback on its products. I&A also provides a number of services to its state and local partners that were generally well received by the state and local officials we contacted. However, I&A has not yet defined how it plans to meet its state and local mission by identifying and documenting the specific programs and activities that are most important for executing this mission. The office also has not developed performance measures that would allow I&A to demonstrate the expected outcomes and effectiveness of state and local programs and activities. In December 2010, GAO recommended that I&A address these issues, which could help it make resource decisions and provide accountability over its efforts.

GAO's preliminary observations indicate that federal agencies have made progress in implementing corrective actions to address problems in watchlist-related processes that were exposed by the December 25, 2009, attempted airline bombing. These actions are intended to address problems in the way agencies share and use information to nominate individuals to the watchlist, and use the list to prevent persons of concern from boarding planes to the United States or entering the country, among other things. These actions can also have impacts on agency resources and the public, such as traveler delays and other inconvenience. GAO plans to report the results of this work later this year.