



Highlights of [GAO-04-541](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member of the Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 1967, the Congress created the National Park Foundation (Foundation)—a nonprofit organization with the sole purpose of providing private support to the National Park Service (Park Service). However, some Park Service officials have raised concerns that the Foundation's support is not meeting parks' priority needs. In this context, congressional requesters asked GAO to review the activities of the Foundation by determining the (1) Foundation's roles and responsibilities for raising funds to support the Park Service, (2) amount and kinds of donations the Foundation has raised between fiscal years 1999 and 2003, and (3) extent to which the contributions obtained by the Foundation assisted the Park Service in addressing park priorities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made several recommendations to improve communication between the Park Service and the Foundation. The Park Service generally agreed with the recommendations. The Foundation disagreed with a recommendation calling for an overall written agreement with the Park Service. However, GAO believes that such an agreement is needed, as does the Park Service, given that communication problems exist in the Park Service regarding the Foundation's roles and responsibilities.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-541.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry T. Hill at (202) 512-3841 or hillbt@gao.gov.

NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION

Better Communication of Roles and Responsibilities Is Needed to Strengthen Partnership with the National Park Service

What GAO Found

In accordance with its legislative charter, the Foundation raises private donations from a variety of sources and has broad discretion in how it distributes these donations to support the Park Service. In general, the Foundation's policy is to support systemwide projects that serve the Park Service and are not otherwise federally funded, such as supporting temporary transportation advisors to help alleviate congestion at national parks.

Overall, annual private donations to the Foundation have more than doubled—from \$18 million in fiscal year 1999 to \$41 million in fiscal year 2003. Much of this increase has stemmed from the Foundation's concerted effort to target corporate donations, which accounted for the bulk of the donations received. Most of the corporate donations are noncash or "in-kind," such as providing expertise to renovate the red bus fleet in Glacier National Park or providing electric vehicles to parks in California. Corporate donors typically specify how their donations are to be used. For example, one corporation donated funds to renovate a national monument in the District of Columbia. The Foundation, in consultation with the Park Service, decided to use these funds to renovate the Washington Monument. Because the majority of the Foundation's donations are restricted by the donors for a specific use, there are limited funds available to respond to some parks' requests, such as for fund-raising assistance or support for local nonprofit groups. Consequently, some park officials question the usefulness of Foundation donations and believe support should be directed at park priorities. In an effort to raise more discretionary funds and possibly better support individual park needs, the Foundation is expanding its fund-raising approach to attract more donations from individuals.

The Foundation's efforts to assist the Park Service are hampered by poor communication and documentation problems. First, unlike most other partner relationships with the Park Service, the Foundation and the Park Service do not have a comprehensive written agreement that clearly describes the Foundation's fund-raising strategy and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each partner. Second, the Foundation and the Park Service sometimes enter into verbal rather than written fund-raising agreements, thereby making it more difficult to determine the responsibilities of each party and whether commitments were met. Third, Foundation and Park Service officials disagree about the fund-raising strategy as well as the objectives for one of the Foundation's key fund-raising programs. Both parties have taken initial steps to address these and other communication problems.