



Highlights of [GAO-03-733](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Ninety-three U.S. Attorneys serve 94 judicial districts (the same U.S. Attorney serves the District of Guam and the District of the Northern Mariana Islands) under the direction of the Attorney General. Among other things, the Attorney General expects U.S. Attorneys to lead or be involved with the community in preventing and controlling crime including efforts to secure Department of Justice (DOJ) grant funds and work with grantees.

This report provides information about the guidance U.S. Attorneys are given in carrying out their responsibilities with regard to DOJ grants. It makes recommendations to assess compliance with guidance and to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys take steps to further mitigate the risk associated with U.S. Attorney involvement in grant activities by (1) assessing and overseeing compliance with the DOJ guidance and (2) requiring staff that work on grant-related matters to certify they are free from conflicts of interest.

DOJ reviewed a draft of this report and had no comments.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-733](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-733).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Paul L. Jones at (202) 512-8777 or [jonespl@gao.gov](mailto:jonespl@gao.gov).

# U.S. ATTORNEYS

## Controls Over Grant-Related Activities Should Be Enhanced

### What GAO Found

U.S. Attorneys' grant activities are guided by legal and ethical considerations. General guidelines established by the Attorney General in 1994 and revised in 2001 outline how U.S. Attorneys and their staff can be involved in their community's crime prevention and control efforts, including DOJ grant activities. Last year, DOJ issued guidance in response to U.S. Attorneys' questions about their role in relation to two DOJ grant programs—Project Safe Neighborhoods and Weed and Seed. In addition, through its Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys (EOUSA), DOJ provided training on ethical considerations in dealing with grant applicants and grantees under both grant programs.

Although EOUSA has an evaluation program to assess and oversee the overall operations of each U.S. Attorney's Office, the evaluations are not designed to assess whether U.S. Attorneys and their staffs are following the recently established guidelines. Without a mechanism to make this assessment, EOUSA does not have assurance that DOJ guidance

- is adequately understood,
- has reached all those who are covered by it, and
- is correctly applied.

In addition, federal regulations and procedures call for systematic financial disclosure reporting to facilitate the review of possible conflicts of interest and ensure the efficient and honest operation of the government. However, while GAO did not identify any incidences of conflicts of interest, certain individuals—staff in U.S. Attorneys Offices that work with grantees and nonfederal members of committees that are appointed by each U.S. Attorney to, among other things, assess the merits of grant proposals—are not required to disclose whether they are free from actual or apparent conflicts of interest. Based on the merits of GAO's work, DOJ officials stated that they would issue a directive to require members of these committees to sign a self-certified conflict of interest statement that is to be held on file subject to DOJ grant monitoring.