



Highlights of [GAO-10-476](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA), citizens covered are permitted to register and vote absentee. The Secretary of Defense has the primary responsibility for federal UOCAVA functions, and the Department of Defense's (DOD) Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) facilitates absentee voters' participation in federal elections. Since 2001, the DOD Office of Inspector General and GAO have reviewed FVAP's efforts and recommended improvements to its procedures and the direction FVAP provides to the services. In response to a congressional request, this report evaluates how FVAP (1) addresses its mission and evaluates efforts to conduct it, (2) aligns budget priorities with strategic goals, and (3) implemented DOD Office of Inspector General and GAO recommendations made from 2001 through 2009. GAO analyzed FVAP's performance measures, relevant DOD directives, FVAP's strategic plans, budgets, and past audit reports. Also, GAO interviewed agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) assess its current evaluation methodologies, (2) implement additional methodologies, and (3) evaluate methods for training voting assistance officers. DOD concurred or partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-476](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Jack Edwards (202) 512-8246 or [edwardsj@gao.gov](mailto:edwardsj@gao.gov).

## ELECTIONS

### DOD Can Strengthen Evaluation of Its Absentee Voting Assistance Program

#### What GAO Found

FVAP has efforts under way to address requirements identified in DOD guidance, but FVAP's evaluation of those efforts yields data of varying quality. FVAP's efforts to address requirements include obtaining and distributing state-specific voting information and developing forms to request absentee voting materials. To assess the effectiveness of FVAP's efforts, GAO used criteria (e.g., data credibility, reliability, and consistency) that it had previously identified. While FVAP improved some of its evaluative methodologies during this decade, GAO identified concerns with findings for FVAP's postelection surveys and "measures of success." The concerns include low response rates and not following governmentwide guidance to conduct nonresponse analyses as well as credible but limited measures to assess some efforts. Also, FVAP has not evaluated its Voting Assistance Officer training even though Voting Assistance Officers are crucial to FVAP's voter outreach efforts. GAO noted the need for training programs to have an evaluative component. FVAP's new Director commented on reasons for GAO findings, explaining that many organizations focus on implementation instead of impact, but he plans to add more evaluations in the future. Better evaluative information on its efforts and an assessment of its Voting Assistance Officer training would allow FVAP to enhance its efforts to be effective and efficient.

While a detailed analysis was not possible because FVAP does not budget by strategic goals, FVAP's recent budgets and current strategic goals appear to be generally aligned. GAO's review found linkages between FVAP's recent annual budgets that have averaged about \$4 million and its strategic goals. The strategic plan for 2008 and 2009 contained four general goals, including encouraging adoption of FVAP legislative initiatives in order to facilitate UOCAVA voting and improving marketing and outreach efforts. The linkages to the goals were most readily apparent for the budget categories of travel and contracts. For example, FVAP's travel budget was higher during years with federal elections, in large part due to travel to conduct Voting Assistance Officer training workshops and in support of FVAP's objective to enhance training products and services. In addition, FVAP's contracts budget for products and services, such as improving the Web site and exploring new technology methods for Internet voting, are linked to goals involving the improvement of the FVAP's marketing and outreach efforts with stakeholders.

FVAP and the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness fully or partially implemented most UOCAVA-related audit recommendations from 2001 through 2009. FVAP and the Under Secretary fully or partially implemented 11 of 16 DOD Office of Inspector General and GAO recommendations for improvements in the oversight and direction it provides to the services. These included several changes to DOD guidance to specify the number of Voting Assistance Officers needed and emphasize the services' responsibilities in monitoring and overseeing their programs. Also, FVAP fully or partially implemented six of the seven recommendations for improvements in its processes, such as improving the security of its electronic initiatives.