

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a United Nations (UN) body that assesses scientific and other aspects of climate change. Interest in IPCC's activities increased after the theft of e-mails among IPCC scientists was made public, and with the discovery of several errors in its 2007 set of reports. In 2010, the InterAcademy Council (IAC), a body representing the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and its international counterparts, recommended IPCC enhance its management and quality assurance processes. IPCC is funded by the UN and member nations, including the United States through the Department of State. In addition, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), on behalf of itself and the 12 other federal agencies that participate in the U.S. Global Change Research Program (USGCRP), supports IPCC activities.

GAO was asked to report on (1) U.S. financial support to IPCC from 2001 through 2010, (2) conditions the United States places on its financial support to IPCC and how they help ensure these funds are spent accordingly, and (3) the IPCC quality assurance processes and IPCC's steps to address related IAC recommendations. GAO reviewed documents and interviewed officials from federal agencies and IPCC.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) State and NSF coordinate and inform Congress annually with accurate and consistent information on U.S. funding for IPCC and (2) NSF conduct timely project reviews as required by its cooperative agreement. State, NSF, and USGCRP generally concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-12-43](#). For more information, contact David C. Trimble at (202) 512-3841 or [trimbled@gao.gov](mailto:trimbled@gao.gov).

# INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE ASSESSMENTS

## Federal Agencies Should Improve Reporting and Oversight of U.S. Funding

### What GAO Found

The United States provided a total of \$31.1 million (in constant 2010 dollars) to IPCC for fiscal years 2001 through 2010, with average annual funding of about \$3.1 million. State provided \$19 million for administrative and other expenses. USGCRP agencies provided \$12.1 million through NSF for a technical support unit that helps develop IPCC reports. GAO identified two key challenges with assembling the data on U.S. support for IPCC. First, the information was not available in budget documents or on the websites of the relevant federal agencies, and the agencies are generally not required to report this information to Congress. Second, the funding data that GAO obtained from State and NSF were inconsistent with data that State had previously reported to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce in June 2010. Regarding State funding, GAO determined that the information it provided to the committee incorrectly included about \$3.5 million (in constant 2010 dollars) that was passed through the IPCC account but was not used for IPCC activities. Regarding the funding for the technical support unit, the information provided to the committee was consistent for fiscal years 2001 through 2008. However, GAO determined that data for the last 2 fiscal years provided to the committee were incorrect because funding for fiscal year 2009 was incorrectly labeled as fiscal year 2010 funding.

The United States places conditions on the funding that NSF provides for the technical support unit on behalf of all USGCRP agencies, including a project review required in a 2010 NSF cooperative agreement to help inform budgeting for 2011. However, required oversight of that funding was not completed on time in fiscal year 2010 because NSF officials said it was redundant with ongoing strategic planning for 2012 to 2021. As a result, NSF and USGCRP agencies did not have additional information to help inform decisions about funding needs for fiscal year 2011. State has not placed conditions on IPCC's funding because IPCC's activities have not triggered such restrictions. According to State officials, IPCC does not engage in restricted activities that are tied to the State account providing the funding. State officials provide input and monitor IPCC Trust Fund funding by approving annual IPCC budgets and reviewing audits.

IPCC uses several quality assurance processes for its assessment reports, including an expert selection process for report authors and review editors, a report review process, and a review of the quality and validity of literature and data used to support its findings. IPCC has begun to take steps to implement 14 of 15 IAC recommendations related to quality assurance, according to IPCC documents and officials. For example, IPCC changed its guidance to better specify the selection criteria for report authors and the roles and responsibilities of its leadership and author teams in response to IAC concerns regarding a lack of transparency in the report scoping and expert selection processes. In addition IPCC developed a draft conflict-of-interest policy to respond to IAC's concerns regarding, among other things, the independence of IPCC participants. While IPCC is fully implementing 14 of the recommendations, it is partially implementing 1 recommendation to enhance the scrutiny of non-peer-reviewed literature underlying its findings. According to IPCC officials, it will not identify each finding in the assessment report that was based on non-peer-reviewed literature, because there is no standardized way to differentiate between peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources.