



Highlights of [GAO-12-548](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Guard's State Partnership Program is a DOD security cooperation program that matches state National Guards with foreign countries to conduct joint activities—including visits between senior military leaders and knowledge sharing in areas such as disaster management—that further U.S. national security goals. The program has partnerships between 52 U.S. state and territory National Guards and 69 countries. In fiscal year 2011, program expenditures were at least \$13.2 million. The 2012 National Defense Authorization Act directed GAO to study the program. GAO determined (1) the extent to which State Partnership Program activities are meeting program goals and objectives; (2) the types and frequency of activities and funding levels of the program; and (3) any challenges DOD faces in the program's implementation. GAO collected written responses to questions from State Partnership Program Coordinators at the state level, Bilateral Affairs Officers at the U.S. embassies in the partner nations, and officials at the combatant commands, reviewed documents, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD complete its comprehensive oversight framework for the State Partnership Program, develop guidance to achieve reliable data on the program, and issue guidance and conduct additional training on the appropriate use of funding for program activities, including those involving civilians. DOD concurred with all recommendations.

View [GAO-12-548](#). For more information, contact John Pendleton at (202) 512-3489 or pendletonj@gao.gov.

May 2012

STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

Improved Oversight, Guidance, and Training Needed for National Guard's Efforts with Foreign Partners

What GAO Found

Many State Partnership Program stakeholders, including State Partnership Program Coordinators, Bilateral Affairs Officers, and combatant command officials, cited benefits to the program, but the program lacks a comprehensive oversight framework that includes clear program goals, objectives, and metrics to measure progress against those goals, which limits the Department of Defense's (DOD) and Congress' ability to assess whether the program is an effective and efficient use of resources. The benefits described by all stakeholders focused on the program's contributions to meeting their specific missions, such as building security relationships, providing experience to guardsmen, and supporting combatant commands' missions. Goals, objectives, and metrics to measure progress are necessary for management oversight, and National Guard Bureau officials told GAO that they recognize the need to update the program's goals and develop metrics and have initiated efforts in these areas. Officials expect completion of these efforts in summer 2012. Until program goals and metrics are implemented, DOD cannot fully assess or adequately oversee the program.

State Partnership Program activity data are incomplete as well as inconsistent and funding data are incomplete for fiscal years 2007 through 2011; therefore GAO cannot provide complete information on the types and frequency of activities or total funding amounts for those years. GAO found that the multiple data systems used to track program activities and funding are not interoperable and users apply varying methods and definitions to guide data inputs. The terminology used to identify activity types is inconsistent across the combatant commands and the National Guard Bureau. Further, funding data from the National Guard Bureau and the combatant commands were incomplete, and while the National Guard Bureau provided its total spending on the program since 2007, it could not provide information on the cost of individual activities. Although the National Guard Bureau has initiated efforts to improve the accuracy of its own State Partnership Program data, without common agreement with the combatant commands on what types of data need to be tracked and how to define activities, the data cannot be easily reconciled across databases.

The most prominent challenge cited by State Partnership Program stakeholders involved how to fund activities that include U.S. and foreign partner civilian participants. Activities involving civilians, for example, have included subject-matter expert exchanges on military support to civil authorities and maritime border security. Although DOD guidance does not prohibit civilian involvement in activities, many stakeholders have the impression that the U.S. military is not permitted to engage civilians in State Partnership Program activities and some states may have chosen not to conduct any events with civilians due to the perception that it may violate DOD guidance. DOD and the National Guard Bureau are working on developing additional guidance and training in this area. Until these efforts are completed, confusion may continue to exist and hinder the program's full potential to fulfill National Guard and combatant command missions.