

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-494](#), a report to Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

According to DHS's CBP, Arizona and South Texas represent some of the highest-threat areas along the southwest border for illegal entrants and smuggling. DHS and CBP coordinate border security with interagency partners, including other federal, state, local, and tribal entities. DHS established collaborative mechanisms in Arizona and South Texas to integrate CBP operations and improve interagency coordination.

GAO was asked to review DHS efforts to coordinate resources along the southwest border. This report (1) describes how DHS uses collaborative mechanisms in Arizona and South Texas to coordinate border security efforts, and (2) examines the extent to which DHS has established performance measures and reporting processes and how, if at all, DHS has assessed and monitored the effectiveness of the collaborative mechanisms in Arizona and South Texas. GAO analyzed documentation, such as campaign plans for the mechanisms; conducted visits to Arizona and South Texas; and interviewed CBP components and interagency partners selected on the basis of agency type and level of participation in the mechanism. Information from these interviews cannot be generalized to all components and partners, but provided insights into the mechanisms.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP assess the JFC and STC, and that DHS, among other things, establish written agreements with ACTT and the STC Unified Command partners. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-14-494](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or [gablerr@gao.gov](mailto:gablerr@gao.gov)

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## BORDER SECURITY

### Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Collaborative Mechanisms along the Southwest Border

## What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has coordinated border security efforts using collaborative mechanisms in Arizona and South Texas, specifically (1) the Joint Field Command (JFC), which has operational control over all U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) resources in Arizona; (2) the Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats (ACTT), which is a multiagency law enforcement partnership in Arizona; and (3) the South Texas Campaign (STC), which integrates CBP resources and facilitates coordination with other homeland security partner agencies. Through these collaborative mechanisms, DHS and CBP have coordinated border security efforts in (1) information sharing, (2) resource targeting and prioritization, and (3) leveraging of assets. For example, to coordinate information sharing, the JFC maintains an operations coordination center and clearinghouse for intelligence information. Through the ACTT, interagency partners work jointly to target individuals and criminal organizations involved in illegal cross-border activity. The STC leverages assets of CBP components and interagency partners by shifting resources to high-threat regions and conducting joint operations.

DHS and CBP have established performance measures and reporting processes for the JFC and ACTT in Arizona and the STC in South Texas; however, opportunities exist to strengthen these collaborative mechanisms by assessing results across the efforts and establishing written agreements. Each collaborative mechanism reports on its results to DHS or CBP leadership through a variety of means, such as accomplishment reports and after-action reports. However, CBP has not assessed the JFC and STC mechanisms to evaluate results across the mechanisms. JFC and STC components GAO interviewed identified challenges with managing resources and sharing best practices across the mechanisms. For example, officials from all five JFC components GAO interviewed highlighted resource management challenges, such as inefficiencies in staff conducting dual reporting on operations to CBP leadership. Best practices for interagency collaboration call for federal agencies engaged in collaborative efforts to create the means to monitor and evaluate their efforts to enable them to identify areas for improvement. An assessment of the JFC and STC could provide CBP with information to better address challenges the mechanisms have faced. In addition, DHS has not established written agreements with partners in the ACTT and STC Unified Command—the entity within STC used for coordinating activities among federal and state agencies—consistent with best practices for sustaining effective collaboration. Officials from 11 of 12 partner agencies GAO interviewed reported coordination challenges related to the ACTT and STC Unified Command, such as limited resource commitments by participating agencies and lack of common objectives. For example, a partner with the ACTT noted that there have been operations in which partners did not follow through with the resources they had committed during the planning stages. Establishing written agreements could help DHS address coordination challenges, such as limited resource commitments and lack of common objectives.