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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-335](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awards grants to provide shelter and services to runaway and homeless youth through the Basic Center, Transitional Living and Street Outreach Programs. In response to a mandate for a review of the grant award process for these programs in the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act of 2008 (Pub. L. No. 110-378), GAO examined (1) grant announcements and application requirements, (2) technical assistance for grant applicants, (3) how grant award decisions are made, and (4) notification of grant award decisions. GAO reviewed requirements, documents, and records associated with this process for fiscal years 2007 and 2008, observed the grant evaluation portion of this process, and interviewed applicants, peer reviewers, and agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

HHS should take steps to ensure a fair and transparent award process, including clarifying evaluation criteria; selecting better qualified reviewers; better documenting agency guidance to reviewers and its rationale for grant decisions; and providing this rationale to applicants in a timely manner.

HHS agreed to improve its process in response to all of GAO's recommendations except the ones related to clarifying evaluation criteria and better documenting agency guidance to reviewers.

View [GAO-10-335](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Kay Brown at (202) 512-7215 or brownke@gao.gov.

RUNAWAY AND HOMELESS YOUTH GRANTS

Improvements Needed in the Grant Award Process

What GAO Found

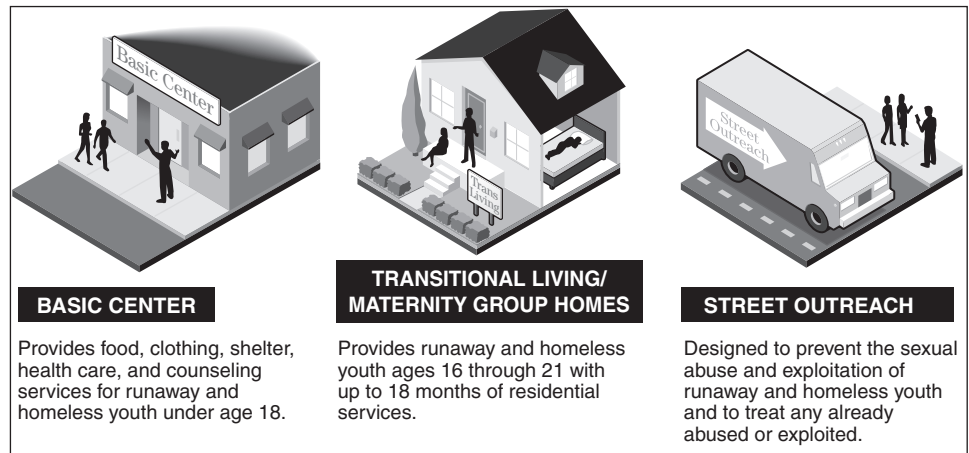
Based on GAO's review of past grant announcements for these programs, GAO found that the criteria upon which grant applications were evaluated were not clearly identified or presented in a single location in the announcement. Rather, GAO found that criteria were scattered throughout various sections of the announcement, had multiple labels, and were not presented in an orderly manner. As a result, applications that did not address the criteria from all sections were likely to receive lower evaluation scores, decreasing their chances of receiving a grant.

HHS provides technical assistance to potential applicants for runaway and homeless youth grants, as required by statute. Of the 20 applicants GAO interviewed who sought technical assistance, 17 were satisfied with the help they received.

Grant award decisions are primarily based on the results of the peer review process, and internal controls in place to ensure that applications are evaluated consistently were not always adequate. GAO found weaknesses in four out of the six procedures the agency relies on to ensure consistent evaluation of applications. For example, although HHS policy requires peer reviewers to be experts in the field of runaway and homeless youth programs, about one-quarter of the reviewers who evaluated applications for 2009 Street Outreach grants had little or no experience in this area.

With regard to notification of grant award decisions, GAO found that they have not always been communicated to applicants in a timely manner, which can delay the start of new programs and present planning challenges for existing ones. GAO also found that the information in notification letters to applicants who were not awarded grants was not always clear or complete.

HHS's Grant Programs for Runaway and Homeless Youth



Source: GAO analysis of ACF documents.