



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine whether the National Center for Environmental Research, within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Office of Research and Development (ORD), makes EPA program offices aware of Science to Achieve Results (STAR) grants. We also wanted to know whether STAR grant results advance the agency's mission to protect human health and the environment. To accomplish this, we sought information on ORD's STAR goals and objectives, communication mechanisms, and information on the grant review and award processes.

STAR has awarded over \$1 billion through grants and fellowships since 1995. While STAR grants cannot serve EPA program offices directly because they are not for the direct support or benefit of the agency, STAR grants can provide incidental benefits. This report focuses on incidental benefits.

This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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EPA Offices Are Aware of the Agency's Science to Achieve Results Program, but Challenges Remain in Measuring and Internally Communicating Research Results That Advance the Agency's Mission

What We Found

Our survey of STAR grant users within the EPA found that over 75 percent of respondents were very familiar with the STAR program, and 74 percent reported having an awareness of the impacts of STAR research on mission-oriented work within the EPA's program offices.

Although the EPA awards an average of over \$46 million annually in STAR grants, challenges remain in measuring and communicating research results.

While survey respondents were aware of the STAR program and its impacts, they suggested that ORD needs to enhance the review and award process, as well as communication associated with STAR grant research results. Process enhancements in these areas should improve the likelihood that STAR research results incorporate program office input and advance the EPA's mission.

While federal and agency requirements exist for setting goals and objectives, program accountability and reporting, ORD has not officially established defined goals and objectives for the STAR program. ORD also has not developed mechanisms beyond its current process indicators (i.e., output measures) to capture, evaluate and report on incidental benefits to the EPA from STAR research. As a result, ORD cannot demonstrate how the STAR program advances the agency's mission.

This is the fourth report to the EPA since 2000 on the need to better measure and communicate research results.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for ORD create pre-award procedures that ensure consideration of program office input. We also recommended that the Assistant Administrator for ORD develop and implement communication procedures that ensure updated public reporting and clearly defined internal roles and responsibilities. Further, we recommended that the Assistant Administrator for ORD formally establish goals and objectives, and establish performance measures or a mechanism to capture how completed grants have met their performance goals and provide incidental research support to program offices. The Assistant Administrator for ORD agreed with all recommendations, which are resolved and open with corrective actions pending.