Inspector General Can’t Tell If DOJ Offender Reentry Grants Are Effective

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Attorney General Eric Holder may be a fan of the Justice Department’s prisoner reentry programs, but an audit released Wednesday by the DOJ’s Inspector General found the department is doing a poor job monitoring the effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing recidivism.

According to the report, the Inspector General’s office could not determine if Office of Justice Program [3] grants were successful in reducing recidivism rates because the office does not effectively track how the programs that receive grants spend their funds.

The report included an audit of 10 grant programs worth $17.9 million from January 2005 through November 2009 which questioned how $5.2 million of that money was spent. The Inspector General found in the overall report, which covered three separate grant programs spanning from fiscal year 2002 through January 2010, that in many cases there was little documentation showing the office followed up with grantees after awarding them with funding.

More than 50 percent of those released from prison will be in legal trouble again within three years, according to OJP. The grant programs provide services to high-risk offenders — such as substance abuse prevention and employment and training assistance — in the hopes of reducing the rate of recidivism.

The Inspector General found that the office had not established an effective system to assess whether offender reentry programs were meeting their goals and called on OJP to improve the management and oversight of the programs.

The audit recommend 11 changes to OJP’s grant process, including establishing baseline recidivism data, developing a program to analyze the performance of programs, and identifying best practices.

Justice Department officials said in a statement that they already had taken steps to address many of the issues raised in the audit.

OJP officials said the office will implement a new system, called the performance measurement tool, to collect data on reentry grant programs. The new system would be in place by Oct. 1.

They said the findings would inform the implementation of the Second Chance Act Offender Reentry Initiative, which is a top priority for the administration.

The full report from the Office of the Inspector General is embedded below.

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