

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-103514](#), a report to the Secretary of the Interior

Why GAO Did This Study

Indian tribes and their members hold considerable energy resources and may use these resources to provide economic benefits and improve the well-being of their communities. To develop energy resources, tribes and their members work with multiple federal agencies involved in regulating development of Indian energy resources and distributing royalty payments.

GAO and others have previously found that developing Indian energy resources has been hindered by Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs' inefficient management. In fiscal year 2015, Interior established the Indian Energy Service Center to improve its management of energy development in Indian country and increase collaboration between federal agencies.

This report examines (1) the Service Center's activities since 2015 toward improving management of Indian energy resources, and (2) the extent to which the Service Center has followed performance management practices. GAO examined agency documentation and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, including that Interior establish performance goals and measures for the Indian Energy Service Center's activities. Interior agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-22-103514](#). For more information, contact Frank Rusco at (202) 512-3814 or ruscof@gao.gov.

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INDIAN ENERGY SERVICE CENTER

Support Activities Have Been Provided, but Goals and Performance Measures Should be Defined

What GAO Found

Since the Department of the Interior established the Indian Energy Service Center in fiscal year 2015, the Service Center has undertaken efforts to improve federal management of Indian energy resources through three major activities:

- **Processing support.** The Service Center provided staff assistance and funding to support some Interior offices involved in the management of Indian energy resources. For example, Service Center staff conducted engineering reviews for oil and gas drilling permits and processed backlogged revenue-sharing agreements that had delayed distribution of oil and gas royalties to tribes and individual Indian mineral owners.
- **Collaboration.** The Service Center helped establish federal partner groups to improve coordination among federal agencies involved in Indian energy development. These groups were established in six areas of the country where Indian energy development is located.
- **Guidance and training.** The Service Center developed and delivered training on the roles and responsibilities of Interior agencies involved in energy development to encourage consistency among agencies and field offices (see figure).

The Indian Energy Service Center Provides Training on Oil and Gas Operating Procedures



Source: Indian Energy Service Center. | GAO-22-103514

The Service Center has a comprehensive mission statement to guide its activities at a high level, but GAO found that the Service Center does not have shorter-term performance goals with related performance measures. GAO's prior work highlights how goals and measures are important performance management practices because they help to focus activities and resources on achieving mission results. According to Service Center officials, they primarily track the Service Center's progress through project completion reports and an annual accomplishments list, which includes outputs such as the number of tasks the Service Center completed for field offices. However, without performance goals and measures, it is not possible to tell whether the number of tasks completed exceeds or falls short of desired results. Establishing performance goals and measures should help the Service Center better assess how effectively it is performing and whether its actions have improved processes or outcomes for Indian energy development.