



# OIG

## Office of Inspector General

U.S. Department of State • Broadcasting Board of Governors

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Mission and Responsibilities

**Q:** *What is the Office of Inspector General (OIG)?*

**A:** Congress established the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to be an independent office that operates under the direction of an Inspector General. OIG is required to keep the Secretary of State, the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG), and Congress currently and fully informed on matters affecting the U.S. Department of State (Department).

**Q:** *What is the purpose of OIG?*

**A:** The mission of OIG is to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the programs and operations of the Department and BBG. OIG accomplishes this mission by conducting independent and objective audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations. The findings from OIG's work help the Department and BBG improve programs and operations, as well as prevent and detect fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement.

**Q:** *How is the Inspector General for the Department and BBG chosen?*

**A:** The President nominates an individual, without regard to political affiliation, who must be confirmed by the U.S. Senate. The individual is selected based on integrity and ability in one or more of the following areas: auditing, financial analysis, law, management analysis, public administration, and investigations.

**Q:** *What are fraud, waste, and abuse?*

**A:** **Fraud** is a wrongful or criminal deception that unlawfully deprives the United States of something of value or secures from the United States a benefit, privilege, allowance, or consideration to which an individual is not entitled.

**Waste** is the extravagant, careless, or needless expenditure of government funds, or the consumption of government property that results from deficient practices, systems, controls, or decisions.

**Abuse** is managing ineffectively, incompetently, carelessly, or wrongly, and includes making poor decisions and breaking rules for personal gain.

**Q:** *Is OIG independent?*

**A:** Yes. The Inspector General Act of 1978 (IG Act), as amended, provides broad discretionary authority to OIG and mandates the following:

- The Inspector General must have access to all records or other materials available to the Department.
- The Inspector General may conduct any audit, inspection, evaluation, or investigation that he or she deems necessary.
- The President's budget contains a separate budget estimate for OIG, including comments from the Inspector General if the President's budget submission would substantially inhibit the performance of OIG's duties.

**Q:** *How can OIG be independent and also be part of the Department?*

**A:** Congress established OIG to be an independent office under the direction of the Inspector General. These are some examples of OIG independence:

- OIG has direct access to all Department and BBG records and information. The Department does not have an attorney-client or deliberative-process privilege regarding OIG requests for information.
- The Inspector General has sole discretion to carry out audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations without interference.
- Department and BBG personnel are required to cooperate with OIG in all audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations. They cannot be retaliated against for providing information to or cooperating with OIG.
- OIG responds directly to requests from Committees, Members of Congress, and invitations to testify at congressional hearings.
- OIG has a separate appropriation from the Department and makes its own budgetary decisions. The office hires and controls its staff, manages its contract resources, and maintains and develops its own policies.

**Q:** *What are the responsibilities of the Department and BBG to OIG?*

**A:** The Department and BBG are required to provide re-

requested information and documents to OIG in a timely manner. There is no attorney-client or deliberative-process privilege regarding OIG requests for information.

**Q:** *What are the responsibilities of Department and BBG employees to OIG?*

**A:** Department and BBG employees are required to cooperate with OIG in all audits, inspections, evaluations, and investigations. They shall report known or suspected fraud, waste, or abuse to OIG's Office of Investigations in a timely manner, and they will not be retaliated against for their assistance.

**Q:** *What are OIG's responsibilities to the Department and BBG?*

**A:** OIG is required to keep the Department Secretary, the BBG Board, and the Congress fully and currently informed concerning fraud and other serious problems, abuses, and deficiencies in programs and operations.

**Q:** *What is a Seven-Day Letter?*

**A:** The Inspector General can use a Seven-Day Letter to inform the Department, BBG, and Congress of particularly serious or flagrant programmatic or administrative problems that contribute to fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement in agency operations and programs. Upon receipt of the Seven-Day Letter from the Inspector General, the Department Secretary or BBG Chairman must send it within 7 days to the appropriate oversight committees of Congress with a report on the subject of the letter.

## Audits and Inspections

**Q:** *What professional standards apply to OIG's audits, inspections, and evaluations?*

**A:** OIG's audits conform to the Government Accountability Office's *Government Auditing Standards: 2011 Revision*, also known as the "Yellow Book." Inspections and evaluations conform to the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation (January 2012)*, also known as the "Blue Book."

**Q:** *What is an audit objective?*

**A:** Audit objectives may vary widely, and audits may have more than one objective. Objectives can include the following:

- assessments of the effectiveness, economy, and efficiency of a bureau, office, or program
- internal controls, including the plans, policies,

- methods, and procedures adopted by management to meet its missions, goals, and objectives
- compliance with laws and regulations
- prospective analysis

**Q:** *How does OIG decide what to audit?*

**A:** OIG may decide to perform an audit based on a number of factors:

- **High-priority issues.** Some audits are based on issues the OIG has determined to be high priority for the Department or BBG, as communicated in the annual *Inspector General's Assessment of Management and Performance Challenges* report to the Department, BBG, and Congress.
- **High-risk issues.** OIG may initiate an audit if it uncovered significant issues during a previous review, or if it identifies a high risk of fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement in a program or office.
- **Interest.** If the issue or program is of interest to Congress, the Secretary, senior Department officials, BBG officials, or the current administration, OIG may be asked to perform an audit.
- **Internal Input.** Information from OIG's Offices of Investigations and Audits also helps prioritize OIG's inspections.
- **Legal mandate.** The audit may be required by law. For example, every year OIG assesses the effectiveness of the Department's information technology security controls under the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002.

**Q:** *What is an inspection?*

**A:** The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State and Congress with independent evaluations of the operations of the Department, its more than 270 posts abroad, and related activities. The office provides BBG with independent reviews and evaluations of its domestic and overseas operations. OIG schedules an inspection of each overseas post, domestic bureau, and BBG operation under the Foreign Service Act of 1980, which sets forth three broad areas for inspections:

- Is the post or bureau achieving the U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives?
- Are resources being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy?
- Does the administration of operations meet the requirements of applicable laws and regulations, and have internal management controls been implemented and maintained to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of fraud, waste, and abuse?

**Q:** *How does OIG decide what to inspect?*

**A:** OIG may decide to perform an inspection based on a number of factors:

- **High-priority issues.** OIG bases some inspections and thematic reviews on issues of high priority for the Department or BBG, as communicated annually in the *Inspector General's Assessment of Management and Performance Challenges* report to the Department, BBG, and Congress.
- **High-risk issues.** OIG uses a risk-based approach when selecting inspection locations and thematic review topics. OIG assigns top priority to locations and programs that are critical to achieving the Department's strategic objectives, performing inspections on areas such as high-threat, sensitive overseas posts and programs with significant diplomatic challenges. OIG also considers other risk assessment factors, such as funding (including foreign assistance) and staffing levels; results of a worldwide survey distributed to all Department direct hires; security threat levels; other available data from sources, such as the Integrated Logistics Management System, Global Financial Management System, and Consular Consolidated Database; and the corruption ratings of Transparency International.
- **Interest.** If a mission or program is of interest to Congress, the Secretary, senior Department officials, BBG officials, or the current administration, OIG may be asked to perform an inspection.
- **Internal Input.** Information from OIG's Offices of Investigations and Audits also helps prioritize OIG's inspections.
- **Follow-up work.** OIG also conducts compliance follow-up reviews to determine the level of compliance with prior inspection report recommendations.

**Q:** *Does OIG have the authority to inspect BBG broadcasting grantees (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Radio Free Asia, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks)?*

**A:** Yes. OIG is authorized to exercise the authorities of the IG Act with respect to the grantees under the grantee's grant agreement, Article XII.

**Q:** *Does OIG inspect or audit broadcasting content for BBG operations?*

**A:** OIG is prohibited from evaluating the content of BBG broadcasting entities under the U.S. International Broadcasting Act of 1994 (P.L. 103-236), Section 304(a)(3)(B). The section, Respect for Journalistic In-

tegrity of Broadcasters, states that "the Inspector General shall respect the journalistic integrity of the broadcasters covered by this title and may not evaluate the philosophical or political perspectives reflected in the content of broadcasts."

**Q:** *Does the Department, BBG, bureau, or office have a chance to respond to and rebut OIG findings in an audit, inspection, or evaluation?*

**A:** Yes. During the fieldwork stage, OIG will usually discuss preliminary findings with staff associated with the unit being reviewed. It is important that Department or BBG staff work with OIG while it conducts fieldwork to ensure that all information is factually correct and to quickly resolve any issues or miscommunications.

After fieldwork is completed, OIG will issue the draft report. Usually, the organization being reviewed has 10 business days to return written comments. The response is an opportunity to provide updates on steps already taken to address a proposed action or to point out areas of disagreement with OIG findings or recommendations. While writing the final report, OIG will consider the response to the draft and will revise the report as appropriate.

**Q:** *What happens when the final report is issued?*

**A:** The principal of the operating unit or office being examined, along with other stakeholders, receives an electronic copy of the report via email. A small number of hard copies may also be sent to primary stakeholders. OIG also sends electronic copies of reports to staff on pertinent Congressional Committees or Subcommittees. Finally, an electronic copy of the report is posted on the OIG website. If the report contains proprietary information or other information that is not appropriate for public release under applicable law, it may be redacted, or OIG may clear only the abstract of the report for public release.

## Investigations

**Q:** *Who are OIG investigators?*

**A:** OIG's Office of Investigations comprises trained, credentialed, and sworn special agents—criminal investigators who are Federal law enforcement officers. They are responsible for conducting criminal, civil, and administrative investigations of fraud and a variety of other allegations affecting the operations or administration of programs, contractors, and grantees of the Department and BBG.

**Q:** *What is an OIG investigation?*

**A:** Generally, an investigation is conducted to resolve specific allegations, complaints, or information concerning possible violations of law, regulation, or policy. In contrast, an OIG audit, evaluation, or inspection is conducted to examine organizational program performance or financial management matters, typically of a systemic nature.

**Q:** *What does OIG investigate?*

**A:** OIG investigates a variety of matters, including allegations of fraud involving Department and BBG grants and contracts, improprieties in the administration of programs and operations, and serious allegations of employee misconduct. Along with the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC), OIG investigates alleged reprisals against whistleblowers.

OIG initiates investigations based on information received from a variety of sources, including referrals from the OIG fraud, waste, and abuse hotline; referrals from the Department, Government Accountability Office, and DOJ; congressional requests; and inspection, evaluation, and audit work.

**Q:** *What is an employee's obligation during an OIG investigation?*

**A:** Employees must provide accurate and complete information to OIG. To prevent even the appearance that they are withholding pertinent information, employees should avoid narrowly construing interview questions or record requests and promptly provide requested records. Even when only a general question or issue is posed, the employee should still respond with specific information that could be relevant.

The IG Act authorizes OIG to "have access to all records, reports, audits, reviews, documents, papers, recommendations and other material available to the Department that relate to Department programs and operations." The same authorization applies to BBG. OIG is authorized to access electronic records and data systems, such as computers.

## Whistleblower Protection

**Q:** *Who can be a protected whistleblower in the U.S. Government?*

**A:** To be a protected whistleblower under the Whistleblower Protection Act, you must be a current employee, former employee, or applicant for employment to a position in the executive branch of

government in the competitive service, excepted service, Foreign Service, or in the career Senior Executive Service, that makes a protected disclosure.

An employee of a contractor, subcontractor, or grantee can also be a protected whistleblower under the *Pilot Program For Enhancement of Contractor Protection From Reprisal For Disclosure of Certain Information*.

**Q:** *What is whistleblower retaliation?*

**A:** Whistleblower retaliation is personnel action in response to a protected disclosure of information and includes actions that could adversely affect the whistleblower:

- non-promotion
- disciplinary action
- detail, transfer, or reassignment
- unfavorable performance evaluation
- decision concerning pay, benefits, or awards
- significant change in duties, responsibilities, or working conditions

**Q:** *Where can I report a whistleblower complaint or a complaint of whistleblower retaliation?*

**A:** Complaints can be made to OIG or the Office of Special Counsel (OSC), an independent Federal investigative and prosecutorial agency with the responsibility to receive, investigate, and prosecute allegations of whistleblower retaliation. Unlike OIG, OSC has authority to seek corrective action from the Department and BBG by filing a complaint with the Merit Systems Protection Board to enforce corrective action for the whistleblower and initiate disciplinary action against the individual responsible for the retaliation. Corrective action could include ordering a promotion, cancelling a disciplinary action, payment of back pay, compensatory damages, and attorney's fees.

**Q:** *What protections do I have if I report a questionable or suspicious activity to OIG?*

**A:** Federal law prohibits government personnel from retaliating against an employee who acts as a whistleblower by reporting suspected wrongdoing or mismanagement to OIG. Agency officials may not "take or fail to take, or threaten to take or fail to take, a personnel action with respect to any employee or applicant for employment" because the person has disclosed information that he or she reasonably believes is evidence of (1) a violation of any law, rule, or regulation or (2) gross mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority, or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety. The law also protects employees of Federal contractors and grantees from reprisal if they make such a disclosure.



## Evaluations and Special Projects

**Q:** *What does the Office of Evaluations and Special Projects do?*

**A:** In 2014, OIG established a new office—the Office of Evaluations and Special Projects (ESP)—to strengthen OIG’s oversight of the Department and BBG, and to improve OIG’s capabilities to meet statutory requirements of the Whistleblower Protection Enhancement Act of 2012. ESP is also responsible for reviewing allegations of administrative misconduct by senior officials and issuing management alerts to highlight urgent need for corrective actions and capping reports on thematic areas of concern. ESP is also responsible for special evaluations and reviews, including responses to congressional inquiries. The work of this new office complements the work of OIG’s audits, investigations, and inspections by developing a capacity to focus on broader systemic issues.

**Q: What are Management Alerts and Management Assistance Reports?**

**A:** Management Alerts and Management Assistance Reports are memorandums sent to senior officials of the Department or BBG that address high-risk or systemic issues identified in multiple OIG audits or inspections or other oversight entities, such as the Government Accountability Office. Management Alerts often address matters that require immediate attention to mitigate a high risk of financial loss or a serious threat to the safety or security of Department or BBG personnel, facilities, or other resources. Management Assistance Reports include recommendations to take specific steps to mitigate the risks OIG identified.

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**[OIG.state.gov/HOTLINE](https://oig.state.gov/HOTLINE)**

If you fear reprisal, contact the OIG Whistleblower Ombudsman to learn more about your rights:

**[OIGWPEAOmbuds@state.gov](mailto:OIGWPEAOmbuds@state.gov)**

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