Office of Inspector General

Why This Matters

The Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program is intended to screen passengers by observing their behavior in order to detect potential high-risk travelers. This program uses Behavior Detection Officers to detect passenger behaviors that may be indicative of stress, fear, or deception.

DHS Response

TSA agreed with our recommendations for improvements to the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

TSA's Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques

What We Determined

Since the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program began in fiscal year 2007, TSA data indicate that the program has expended an estimated $878 million and has more than 2,800 full-time equivalent positions, as of September 30, 2012. However, TSA has not implemented a strategic plan to ensure the program's success. For example, TSA did not (1) assess the effectiveness of the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program, (2) have a comprehensive training program, (3) ensure outreach to its partners, or (4) have a financial plan. As a result, TSA cannot ensure that passengers at United States airports are screened objectively, show that the program is cost-effective, or reasonably justify the program's expansion. In fiscal year 2012, TSA's Behavior Detection and Analysis Division developed a draft strategic plan that includes a statement of mission, goals, and objectives. However, the plan had not been approved and implemented at the time of our review.

What We Recommend

We made six recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program. These recommendations included developing and implementing: 1) a comprehensive strategic plan; 2) controls to ensure completeness, accuracy, authorization, and validity of referral data entered into the Performance Management Information System; 3) a plan that provides recurrent training to Behavior Detection Officers instructors and Behavior Detection Officers; 4) a plan to assess Behavior Detection Officers instructor performance in required core competencies on a regular basis; and 5) a process for identifying and addressing issues that may directly affect the success of the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program such as the selection, allocation, and performance of Behavior Detection Officers. Additionally, we recommended that TSA monitor and track the use of Behavior Detection Officers for non-Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program related duties to ensure Behavior Detection Officers are used in a cost-effective manner and in accordance with the mission of the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques program.