

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



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Staffing Shortages Limited IHS's Capacity To Effectively Administer Much-Needed Sanitation Projects Funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act

Why OIG Did This Review

- A substantial number of American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) homes lack essential water and waste disposal facilities, putting many AI/AN people at higher risk for disease.
- In 2021, Congress appropriated \$3.5 billion in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding to [IHS](#) for Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) projects for AI/AN people.
- The IIJA appropriation necessitated that IHS expand its staffing and other capacity to administer the rapid influx of project funds. In 2022, OIG identified difficulties with this expansion. We conducted this study in 2023 and 2024 to further examine IHS's capacity, including its progress in addressing previously identified challenges.

What OIG Found

At the time of our review, IHS reported taking several promising steps to address the challenges OIG identified in 2022. Despite these efforts, IHS struggled to overcome some of the challenges, which threatened its ability to complete projects and meet essential sanitation needs in a timely manner.



Inadequate Staffing: IHS implemented a new SFC hiring plan, but some IHS officials said the plan rolled out slowly. Officials also said that having to compete with the private sector and other Federal agencies over a limited pool of applicants, staff having difficulty finding housing, and other barriers made it challenging for IHS to resolve high staff vacancy rates.



Heavy Workload: The high volume of SFC projects coupled with staffing shortages resulted in heavy workloads for existing staff and was expected to extend project durations.



Hesitancy to Outsource: IHS procured engineering services through contractors and Federal partners to reduce its workload, but some IHS Area Offices said higher costs and other limitations made these options less desirable.

What OIG Recommends

The challenges facing IHS have impeded efforts to ensure that AI/AN communities have access to water and can appropriately dispose of waste, which calls for further action from the agency. We recommend that IHS:

1. assess the relative benefits of its current recruitment and retention strategies to guide future staffing plans, as well as exploring new tools to address staffing shortfalls; and
2. explore options for expanding housing for Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction staff.

IHS concurred with both recommendations.