

Congressional Oversight Training Series (COTS) - February 2009

Checklist of Places to Turn to During an Investigation

- √ Go beyond the agency congressional liaison, which is likely to mean meeting people out of the office.
- √ Check to see if there is a whistleblower who can help direct you to documents or other witnesses – if there is, try to corroborate the whistleblower’s story.
- √ Do a Lexis-Nexis search to see what information is already available/known.
- √ Talk to reporters who have written about the issue—tell reporter to tell their sources that you want to talk.
- √ Get a briefing from CRS.
- √ Get a briefing from GAO, and make sure to talk to GAO auditors to find out what is in their work papers but didn’t make it into report. (You can find the name and phone number of the auditors on the last page of a GAO report on your subject or a related subject if they have not issued one on your topic yet.)
- √ Consider consulting the GAO Forensics and Special Investigations Unit (FSI) that can actually do undercover work.
- √ Talk to agency Inspector General, but be aware that there are different cultures in IG offices, see if they are going to be helpful for your investigation. Ask the IG to investigate or keep an eye on ongoing investigation, you can get access to IG records after investigation is done.
- √ Check in with OMB budget examiner who handles this area – they have fantastic insights into weaknesses of programs.
- √ Talk to other congressional committees, Members with overlapping jurisdiction/interest for information or contacts.
- √ Check with Non-Governmental Organizations (e.g. public interest groups like POGO, unions, trade associations) that may have worked in this field.
- √ Find and talk to former agency officials, technical staff, program managers for background information and tips for possible current government officials who are still there that could give you valuable insights.
- √ Find and talk to former contractor and subcontractor employees to get background information and possible tips for sources who are still at contractor.
- √ Talk to competing contractor representatives.
- √ Talk to lobbyists familiar with this program/contractor.
- √ Get a copy of the contract, contract file, and bidding information.

- √ If documents are classified, and you don't have proper clearance, see if someone on the Committee who does have clearance can brief you on the unclassified portions of the report, or ask GAO to negotiate with agency so they can provide an unclassified version of document, briefing, or report.
- √ Go to company's publicly available information, their newsletters, speeches, etc.
- √ Look at SEC 10-k filings of publicly-traded companies. Filings will indicate if company is under investigation, has pending litigation against it, or is in danger of overrunning on government contract affecting their financial statement if government doesn't bail them out.
- √ Remember that unless statutes specifically prohibit Congressional access to information, Congress is entitled to the information, including "Proprietary" information.
- √ Consult the blogosphere, it can be especially helpful for "big brother" issues (helpful blog search engines include technorati.com, blogsearch.google.com, blogdigger.com, icerocket.com).

If dealing with weapons:

- √ Get Pentagon Office of Operational Test and Evaluation briefing and annual reports.
- √ Look at dtic.mil (The Defense Technical Information Center), which has a great search engine, especially good for descriptions of programs.
- √ Check out Select Acquisition Reports (SARs).
- √ The GAO puts out an excellent annual report on major weapons systems. CRS and CBO prepare reports on weapons on a recurring basis. Staffers for all of these organizations are excellent resources themselves.
- √ Very useful sites are the DoD's Statistical Information Analysis Division site <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/> and the DoD Comptroller's Budget site <http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/defbudget>
- √ Also look at Lit Int (Literature intelligence), a government compilation of open source material and pieces together classified information.

If dealing with homeland security or any other matter that involves agents on the ground:

- √ Go to location where there are agents on the ground and talk to them.
- √ Establish contact with reporters covering the issue—both national and local reporters.
- √ Go to prison/local law enforcement agencies and associations to talk to people who might know people involved.
- √ Contact unions representing agents.
- √ Contact former agents, ask how supervisors and others should work to be able to find any irregularities in their behavior.
- √ Consult with local community groups affected or monitoring the problem.