



GAO at a Glance

Current for fiscal year 2013

Agency Head
Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

Staff
2,869 employees

Budgetary Resources
\$507.2 million

**Financial Benefits
from GAO Work**
\$51.5 billion
(about a \$100 return on every
dollar invested in GAO)

GAO Headquarters
Washington, D.C.

Other Locations
Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL;
Dallas, TX; Dayton, OH; Denver, CO;
Huntsville, AL; Los Angeles, CA;
Norfolk, VA; San Francisco, CA; and
Seattle, WA

For more information, go to GAO's
website at www.gao.gov

www.gao.gov

About



Image sources: front cover from left to right: Art Explosion, GAO, the Architect of the Capitol; back cover: all images GAO except for the Jefferson Memorial (Art Explosion); inside photos: top row, House Committee on Education and the Workforce, bottom row, House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

441 G STREET, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

Employee Locator
(202) 512-3000

Public Affairs
(202) 512-4800



GAO

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CONGRESS AND THE NATION

GAO's MISSION

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an independent agency in the legislative branch of the federal government. Commonly known as the “investigative arm of Congress” or the “congressional watchdog,” GAO examines how taxpayer dollars are spent and advises lawmakers and agency heads on ways to make government work better.

GAO exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. It provides Congress with timely information that is objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, nonideological, fair, and balanced. GAO is unique among legislative branch support agencies in that its reports often present original data and professional analyses drawn from extensive fieldwork.

Every GAO report reflects three core values: accountability, integrity, and reliability. The agency also operates under strict professional standards of review and referencing; all facts and analyses in GAO work are thoroughly checked for accuracy.

Most GAO work is done at the request of congressional committees or subcommittees or is mandated by public laws or committee reports. GAO also undertakes research under the authority of the Comptroller General. GAO supports congressional oversight by

- auditing agency operations to determine whether federal funds are being spent efficiently and effectively;
- investigating allegations of illegal and improper activities;
- reporting on how well government programs and policies are meeting their objectives;
- performing policy analyses and outlining options for congressional consideration; and
- issuing legal decisions and opinions, such as bid protest rulings and reports on agency rules.

GAO firmly believes in transparency and keeping the American people as informed as possible about their government’s performance. To that end, GAO publicly reports what it finds. Almost every GAO report and testimony is available on the agency’s website on the day it is made public. GAO also continues to expand its presence on digital and social media.

Agency HISTORY

Concerned by the mounting national debt from World War I, Congress sought better information on and greater control over government spending. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 required the President to issue an annual federal budget and established GAO as an independent agency to investigate how federal dollars are spent.

In its early years, GAO mainly did voucher auditing. Audit clerks reviewed stacks of paperwork documenting agency payments and purchases. After World War II, GAO began to do more comprehensive financial audits that examined the economy and efficiency of government operations. In the 1960s, the agency began to get into the type of work it is known for today—performance audits—which examine whether government programs are meeting their objectives.



GAO’s senior officials regularly testify before Congress on a wide range of key issues.

Recent GAO reports have looked at mortgage foreclosures, drug shortages, health insurance exchanges, rail safety, airline mergers, intelligent transportation systems, postal operations, virtual economies and currencies, cybersecurity, wind energy, elder justice, food safety, Haiti reconstruction, major weapons programs, polar weather satellites, and the drawdown in Afghanistan. GAO has earned a reputation as one of the world’s leading accountability organizations—one that is well equipped to handle Congress’ toughest assignments.

GAO's WORKFORCE

GAO is headed by the Comptroller General of the United States, who is appointed to a 15-year term—one of the longest in government. Gene L. Dodaro became the eighth Comptroller General of the United States on December 22, 2010, when he was confirmed by the Senate after having been chosen by the President from a list of candidates proposed by Congress. A career civil servant, Mr. Dodaro previously held a number of key executive posts at GAO.

GAO’s independence is further safeguarded by the fact that its workforce consists of career employees hired on the basis of their knowledge, skills, and ability. GAO’s diverse staff includes economists, social scientists, accountants, public policy analysts, attorneys, and computer experts as well as specialists in fields ranging from foreign policy to health care.

Oversight **Insight** AND FORESIGHT

GAO provides Congress with oversight of federal programs, insight into ways to improve government, and foresight into long-term trends. Although much of its work reviews the effectiveness of day-to-day government operations, GAO also stays alert to emerging issues that warrant lawmakers’ attention. For example, GAO has analyzed the challenges posed by new security threats and globalization and has raised concerns about the nation’s growing fiscal imbalance and the problems plaguing our health care and retirement systems. GAO’s strategic plan for fiscal years 2014-2019 identifies a number of key trends that provide a context for the agency’s efforts to serve Congress and the American people during a period of major change.

Agency **Performance** MEASURES

Financial benefits from GAO work in fiscal year 2013 totaled \$51.5 billion—about a \$100 return on every dollar invested in GAO. The agency’s budgetary resources were \$507.2 million. GAO also recorded 1,314 other benefits that shaped legislation and improved services to the public.

In fiscal year 2013, GAO issued hundreds of reports and other products, many suggesting ways to strengthen government programs and policies. At the end of fiscal year 2013, 79 percent of the recommendations GAO made in fiscal year 2009 had been implemented. Last year, GAO witnesses testified 114 times before various congressional committees and subcommittees.