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NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Progress and Risks in Implementing its Electronic Records Archive Initiative

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-10-222T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Information Policy, Census, and National Archives, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2001, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has been working to develop a modern Electronic Records Archive (ERA) system, a major information system that is intended to preserve and provide access to massive volumes of all types and formats of electronic records. The system is being developed incrementally over several years, with the first two pieces providing an initial set of functions and additional capabilities to be added in future increments. NARA plans to deploy full system functionality by 2012 at an estimated life-cycle cost of about $550 million.

NARA originally planned to complete the first segment of ERA in September 2007. However, software and contracting problems led the agency and its contractor Lockheed Martin to revise the development approach. The revised plan called for parallel development of two different increments: a "base" ERA system with limited functionality and an Executive Office of the President (EOP) system to support the ingestion and search of records from the outgoing Bush Administration.

GAO was asked to summarize NARA's progress in developing the ERA system and the ongoing risks the agency faces in completing it. In preparing this testimony, GAO relied on its prior work and conducted a preliminary review of NARA's fiscal year 2010 ERA expenditure plan.

View GAO-10-222T or key components. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

NARA has completed two of five planned increments of ERA, but has experienced schedule delays and cost overruns, and several functions planned for the system's initial release were deferred. Although NARA initially planned for the system to be capable of ingesting federal and presidential records in September 2007, the two system increments to support those records did not achieve initial operating capability until June 2008 and December 2008, respectively. In addition, NARA reportedly spent about $80 million on the base increment, compared to its planned cost of about $60 million. Finally, a number of functions originally planned for the base increment were deferred to later increments, including the ability to delete records and to ingest redacted records. In fiscal year 2010, NARA plans to complete the third increment, which is to include new systems for Congressional records and public access, and begin work on the fourth.

GAO's previous work on ERA identified significant risks to the program and recommended actions to mitigate them. Specifically, GAO reported that NARA's plans for ERA lacked sufficient detail to, for example, clearly show what functions had been delivered to date or were to be included in future increments and at what cost. Second, NARA had been inconsistent in its use of earned value management (EVM), a project management approach that can provide objective reports of project status and early warning signs of cost and schedule overruns. Specifically, GAO found that NARA fully employed only 5 of 13 best practices for cost estimation that address EVM. Further, NARA lacked a contingency plan for ERA to ensure system continuity in the event that normal operations were disrupted. For example, NARA did not have a fully functional backup and restore process for the ERA system, a key component of contingency planning for system availability.

To help mitigate these risks, GAO recommended that NARA:

- include details in future ERA expenditure plans on the functions and costs of completed and planned increments;
- strengthen its earned value management process following best practices; and
- develop and implement a system contingency plan for ERA.

NARA reported in its most recent expenditure plan that it had taken actions to address these recommendations.