

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information technology (IT) can be a key element of management reform, dramatically reshaping government to make it more responsive and efficient. The rapid pace of technological change and innovation offers unprecedented opportunities for government to use IT to enhance service to citizens through improved performance and at reduced costs. With these opportunities, however, come vulnerabilities to unauthorized access to and disclosure of information. The Information Technology Team is leading GAO's efforts to address these issues, on both an agency-specific and a governmentwide basis.

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DESCRIPTION OF

Along with a focus on information security and mitigating continuing vulnerabilities to critical government operations and assets, we seek to assist the Congress in assessing and improving agencies' management of their substantial IT investments, including modernization efforts that continue to be at risk at several agencies. We are concerned with how the government collects and manages its information as well as with privacy concerns in a world of instant Internet communication. We also focus on structural improvements, such as the creation of a governmentwide chief information officer position.

Our information systems specialists perform their work across the country. Examples of agencies we have reviewed include the Federal Aviation Administration, Small Business Administration, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Our staff are located primarily in Washington, D.C., with additional concentrations in Atlanta, Dallas, and Denver.

Specifically, we are focused on achieving the following results:

- strengthening information security and critical computer-supported infrastructure protection;
- enhancing the collection, use, and dissemination of government information;
- pursuing opportunities for electronic (e-) government;
- constructing sound enterprise architectures;
- fostering mature systems acquisition, development, and operational practices;
- ensuring sound agency IT investment practices; and
- developing IT human capital strategies.

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IMPACT OF

our work

Beginning in 1997, we focused heavily on helping agencies prepare for the year 2000 conversion, with the result that few major problems were encountered. We have also assisted many agencies in addressing IT management challenges in the areas of information security, systems development and acquisition, and IT investment practices. For example, we and agency inspectors general have made scores of recommendations to agencies regarding specific steps they should take to make their security programs more effective. Most agencies have heeded these recommendations and taken at least some corrective actions. In addition, for the past several years we have published executive guides — on a variety of information technology topics — to provide agency managers with an understanding of the approaches used by leading organizations at all levels of government and in the private sector.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT and *future projects*

- Evaluate the vulnerability of federal assets to cyber attacks
- Evaluate weaknesses in the security of aviation operations
- Analyze Internet use of FTC Fair Information Principles
- Evaluate strategies for conducting business electronically
- Assess the risks and returns of agency IT investments
- Evaluate the effects of the Government Paperwork Elimination Act
- Assess opportunities and challenges involved in the FirstGov web gateway
- Assess the Defense Department's software process improvement programs
- Evaluate the Customs Service's computer modernization
- Evaluate the processes of the Small Business Administration