

Highlights of [GAO-11-262](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Each year the federal government spends billions of dollars on information technology (IT) investments. Given the importance of oversight, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) established a public Web site, referred to as the IT Dashboard, that provides detailed information on about 800 federal IT investments, including assessments of actual performance against cost and schedule targets (referred to as ratings). In the second of a series of Dashboard reviews, GAO was asked to (1) determine OMB's efforts to improve the Dashboard and how it is using data from the Dashboard, and (2) examine the accuracy of the Dashboard's cost and schedule performance ratings. To do so, GAO analyzed documentation on OMB oversight efforts and Dashboard improvement plans, compared the performance of 10 major investments from five agencies with large IT budgets against the ratings on the Dashboard, and interviewed OMB and agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that selected agencies take steps to improve the accuracy and reliability of Dashboard information and OMB improve how it rates investments relative to current performance and schedule variance. Agencies generally concurred with the recommendations; OMB did not concur with the first recommendation but concurred with the second. GAO maintains that until OMB implements both, performance may continue to be inaccurately represented on the Dashboard.

View [GAO-11-262](#) or key components. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

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## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

# OMB Has Made Improvements to Its Dashboard, but Further Work Is Needed by Agencies and OMB to Ensure Data Accuracy

## What GAO Found

Since GAO's first review, in July 2010, OMB has initiated several efforts to increase the Dashboard's value as an oversight tool, and has used the Dashboard's data to improve federal IT management. These efforts include streamlining key OMB investment reporting tools, eliminating manual monthly submissions, coordinating with agencies to improve data, and improving the Dashboard's user interface. Recent changes provide new views of historical data and rating changes. OMB anticipates that these efforts will increase the reliability of the data on the Dashboard. To improve IT management, OMB analysts use Dashboard data to track investment changes and identify issues with performance. OMB officials stated that they use these data to identify poorly performing IT investments for review sessions by OMB and agency leadership. OMB reported that these sessions and other management reviews have resulted in a \$3 billion reduction in life-cycle costs, as of December 2010.

While the efforts above as well as initial actions taken to address issues GAO identified in its prior review—such as OMB's updated ratings calculations to factor in ongoing milestones to better reflect current status—have contributed to data quality improvements, performance data inaccuracies remain. The ratings of selected IT investments on the Dashboard did not always accurately reflect current performance, which is counter to the Web site's purpose of reporting near real-time performance. Specifically, GAO found that cost ratings were inaccurate for six of the investments that GAO reviewed and schedule ratings were inaccurate for nine. For example, the Dashboard rating for a Department of Homeland Security investment reported significant cost variances for 3 months in 2010; however, GAO's analysis showed lesser variances from cost targets for the same months. Conversely, a Department of Transportation investment was reported as on schedule on the Dashboard, which does not reflect the significant delays GAO has identified in recent work. These inaccuracies can be attributed to weaknesses in how agencies report data to the Dashboard, such as providing erroneous data submissions, as well as limitations in how OMB calculates the ratings (see table). Until the selected agencies and OMB resolve these issues, ratings will continue to often be inaccurate and may not reflect current program performance.

### Reasons for Agencies' Dashboard Rating Inaccuracies

Department	Agency practices				Dashboard calculations	
	Inconsistent program baselines	Missing data submissions	Erroneous data submissions	Unreliable source data	Current performance not emphasized	Schedule variance understated
Homeland Security	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Transportation		✓			✓	✓
Treasury	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Veterans Affairs	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Social Security Administration			✓		✓	

Source: Agency officials and GAO analysis of Dashboard data.