

Highlights of [GAO-13-35](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Service, and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government has made some progress addressing previously identified issues with managing federal real property. This includes establishing the Federal Real Property Council (FRPC) and creating the FRPP database to identify and report agencies' real property, including attributes such as historic status. GAO was asked to assess issues related to historic preservation at nondefense agencies. GAO's review focused on—GSA, NPS, and VA—three nondefense agencies that hold significant numbers of historic buildings. This report identifies (1) actions these agencies have taken to manage historic federal buildings, and (2) any challenges they have faced. GAO selected and visited a sample of 31 historic buildings managed by the three agencies. The results of these site visits cannot be generalized but provide important insights. GAO interviewed agency officials and reviewed agencies' efforts to preserve, use or lease, and improve the sustainable performance of those buildings. GAO also interviewed officials from the selected agencies about their agencies' preservation programs, including actions to identify and report on their historic buildings.

## What GAO Recommends

GSA—in collaboration and consultation with NPS, VA, and FRPC member agencies, and others—should ensure that the action plan being developed to improve FRPP also addresses the need for improved data on historic buildings. GSA agreed with GAO's recommendation and further reported that it has, in part, already taken action to rectify inconsistencies GAO found between GSA's FRPP data and its internal data sources.

View [GAO-13-35](#). For more information, contact David Wise at (202) 512-2834 or [wised@gao.gov](mailto:wised@gao.gov).

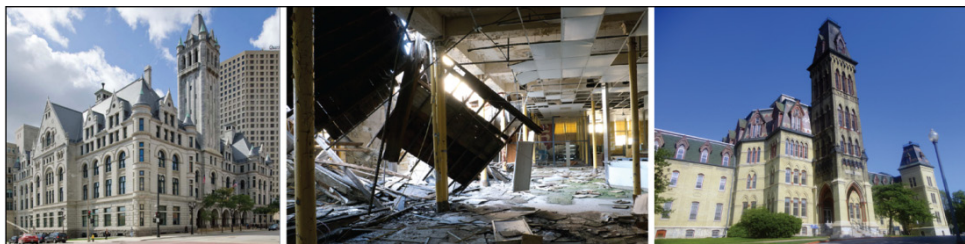
## FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

### Improved Data Needed to Strategically Manage Historic Buildings, Address Multiple Challenges

## What GAO Found

The General Services Administration (GSA), the National Park Service (NPS), and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have undertaken portfolio-wide efforts in recent years to identify historic buildings they hold, nominate some of those buildings to the National Register of Historic Places, and manage their historic buildings in an effort to comply with the requirements in the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and relevant executive orders. While these agencies use and preserve some of their historic buildings to meet mission needs, others are excess or unsuited for current mission needs. GAO found several instances in which these agencies leased part or all of some historic buildings to non-federal entities that could use and preserve the buildings. GAO also found that these agencies had implemented projects in some of their historic buildings to improve their sustainable performance, such as installing green roofs and energy-efficient heating and cooling systems.

GSA, NPS, and VA face an array of challenges in managing historic buildings, including functional limitations of older buildings in relation to contemporary mission needs and current building codes, budgetary limitations, and competing stakeholder interests. Competing stakeholder interest can become apparent during the required consultation with stakeholders, such as the state historic preservation officers, prior to implementing projects that may affect a historic building. Compounding these property management challenges, the selected agencies' data on historic buildings in the Federal Real Property Profile (FRPP) are not complete. GSA and VA are still working to evaluate many buildings that are over 50 years old. Also, GSA and NPS have not reported complete and consistent historic-building data to the FRPP—in comparison to data they track within their agencies' historic-building databases. GAO reported its concerns with the reliability of FRPP data in 2012. This review emphasizes the relevance of these concerns to the historic-building data included in the database. In June 2012, GAO recommended improvements to the FRPP database to enhance its consistency, completeness, and usefulness in federal decision making. Such improvements are also necessary to increase the consistency and completeness of historic-building data in the FRPP.



Sources: GSA (left) and GAO (center and right).

In Milwaukee, the U.S. Federal Building and Courthouse, built in 1899, was recently rehabilitated by GSA (left), while VA's "Old Main" building, built in 1869, is at risk of collapse (center and right).